



Article Type: Research paper

## The United States and the Strategy of Coup-Making for the Preservation of Hegemony: The 1953 Operation in Iran

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### Article Info.

Received: 30/04/2024

Accepted: 29/11/2025

Available Online: 11/9/2025

### Extended Abstract

After achieving the status of a global superpower following the Second World War, and particularly subsequent to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States of America established the preservation and permanence of its hegemony as the most critical objective of its foreign policy. To this end, the country has leveraged a diverse array of strategies and tactics; ranging from sweeping economic sanctions, threatening or executing military strikes, media demonization, and the securitization of rivals and opponents, to more covert and drastic strategies such as coup-making.

The present study addresses the central question: How and for what purpose was the coup-making strategy in Iran, targeting Mohammad Mosaddegh, placed on the agenda of United States foreign policy? The research attempts to elucidate the posi-

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### How to Site:

Ahmadinejad, Hamid and Rouhi, Mahbobh (2025). The United States and the Strategy of Coup-Making for the Preservation of Hegemony: The 1953 Operation in Iran. *The Fundamental and Applied Studies of the Islamic World*, 7(3), 13-16:



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tion of the coup as the ultimate, high-yield option within the hierarchy of tools used for maintaining American hegemony, by focusing on the Coup of 28 Mor-dad 1332 (August 19, 1953).

The research method is descriptive-analytical, relying on documentary and library data. For the first time, the theoretical framework of the study employs the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) from the field of managerial psychology, extending its application to International Relations and US foreign policy. According to this theory, actors (here, the US as the hegemon), when perceiving their valuable resources across three domains -personal (national self-esteem, American exceptionalism, ideological superiority), social (ally support, maintenance of unequal core-periphery relations), and structural (financial resources, military bases, access to oil and weaponry)- as being under threat or destruction, and when conventional tools (sanctions, military attack, demonization) lose their effectiveness, they resort to riskier and more aggressive behaviors.

The key principle of this theory, loss aversion, precisely aligns with the behavior of US foreign policy when facing potential resource depletion: the loss of existing resources is far more painful than the acquisition of new ones. Consequently, the hegemon is willing to accept the risk of a coup to prevent a key country from exiting its sphere of influence.

The research findings indicate that coup-making has been a structural and repetitive strategy in US foreign policy for the maintenance of hegemony, rather than an isolated or exceptional action. CIA documents, declassified in 2013, explicitly confirm that Operation Ajax was designed and executed “under CIA direction” and “as an act of U.S. foreign policy at the highest levels of government.”

The coup against Mosaddegh was placed on the table only after more overt tactics (negotiation, economic pressure, conditional aid, and securitizing Mosaddegh and his associates as communist-leaning) had reached a stalemate. The nationalization of Iran’s oil industry in 1330 (1951) and Mosaddegh’s Negative Equilibrium Policy simultaneously jeopardized the three categories of U.S. resources:

Personal Resources: Challenging American exceptionalism and ideological superiority, rejecting Washington’s mediation, and setting a precedent for inde-

pendence that could be exported to other peripheral states.

**Social Resources:** Threatening Iran's exit from the Western sphere of influence, thereby weakening the chain of US allies in the Middle East, and particularly undermining the position of the fledgling Israeli regime.

**Structural Resources:** Jeopardizing the access of American and British oil companies to Iranian oil resources, the potential loss of Iran as a military-espionage base against the Soviet Union, and a decrease in American arms sales.

When these threats could not be contained by conventional means, the U.S., adhering to the principle of loss aversion and accepting the high risk of a coup, executed Operation Ajax to reinstate the young Shah as a loyal ally. This move turned Iran into a primary platform for supplying the U.S. with economic, political, military, and geostrategic resources for three decades. Following the coup, 80% of Iran's oil marketing remained in the hands of the Consortium of Western companies, Iran became one of the largest purchasers of American weaponry, and served as the frontline of containment against Communism in the region.

The historical-comparative section of the study reveals that the 1953 coup was merely one instance of a recurring pattern. Since the nineteenth century, the United States has played a direct or supportive role in dozens of coups (some sources cite up to 81 successful and unsuccessful cases) across five continents: from Hawaii (1893), Cuba (1933), Guatemala (1954), Chile (1973), Venezuela (2002), Honduras (2009), Bolivia (2019), and many others. In all these instances, the common denominator has been the effort to prevent the exit of valuable resources from the hegemon's sphere of influence and to maintain the power imbalance in America's favor.

The final conclusion of the research is that coup-making is not the "last resort" in US foreign policy doctrine, but rather a prudent, low-cost (relative to full-scale war), and quick-yielding option. It is activated precisely when the hegemon feels its key resources at the personal, social, and structural levels are under severe threat and overt tools have lost their efficacy. The 1953 coup served as a turning point for this strategy in the Middle East and sent a clear message to other peripheral governments: any attempt at genuine independence from the American hegemonic core-periphery system will be met with a decisive and severe response from the hegemon. Therefore, recognizing the pattern of U.S.

coup-making is a strategic and scholarly imperative, not only for understanding contemporary Iranian history but also for any actor resisting U.S. hegemony.

**Key words:** United States of America, Conservation of Resources, Coup-Making, Survival of Hegemony, Coup of 1953 against Iran.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.