

VI. THE FIRST TRY

The precise order of events of the night of 15 August 1953 has not yet been established in all detail. The early accounts of various participants differed widely enough to make it impossible to follow the slender thread of truth through the dark night. However, the main outline of this first try is clear, as are two basic facts connected with it. These facts are: that the plan was betrayed by the indiscretion of one of the Iranian Army officer participants--primarily because of the protracted delay--and that it still might have succeeded in spite of this advance warning had not most of the participants proved to be inept or lacking in decision at the critical juncture.

Not until the evening of 14 August were Tehran Station personnel informed that action had been postponed from that night until the next one. Station principal agent Colonel [REDACTED] was no longer in touch with events and the station was unable to guide General [REDACTED], Zabedi's Chief of Staff designate--if, indeed, it was he who had assumed the main responsibility.

According to a statement by Mossadeq's Chief of Staff, General Taghi Riahi, he was informed of all the details of the "plot" at five in the afternoon of 15 August. But curiously enough--and according to his own account--he did

not leave his house in Shimran, where National Frontists Zirakzadeh and Haqshenas were staying, until 2000 hours and then drove to the staff headquarters in Tehran. Riahi did, however, order the commander of the 1st Armored Brigade to have the brigade ready at 2300 hours. At 2300 hours Riahi sent his deputy, General Kiani, to the Bagh-i-Shah, the army barracks on the western side of Tehran which included the barracks of the Imperial Guard. Kiani was arrested there by Colonel [REDACTED] who had arrived at the Bagh-i-Shah sometime earlier with several officers who supported him.

In the meantime a number of truckloads of pro-Shah soldiers were making arrests. About 2330 hours they came to Riahi's house in Shimran and, finding him out, arrested Zirakzadeh and Haqshenas. Also about 2330 hours several officers and a considerable body of soldiers rushed into the home of Hoseyn Fatemi, Mossadeq's Foreign Minister, and took him away before he had a chance to put on his shoes. This meager haul of prisoners was driven to the guard house of the Imperial Palace (Saadabad) at Shimran.

Officers who were aware that Riahi had been alerted took no action, but others who were not, carried out their tasks.

Sometime before 2330 hours a limited attack had been made against the telephone system. Wires leading to the house of Fatemi and to the houses of others who were to be arrested were cut; the wires between GHQ (staff

headquarters) and the Bagh-i-Shah were cut; and Colonel [REDACTED] with a small armed force, occupied the telephone exchange in the Tehran bazaar.

When Riahi did not hear from General Kiani, who had gone to the Bagh-i-Shah, he (according to his own account) phoned Colonel Momtaz of the 2nd Mountain Brigade and Colonel Shahrokh of the 1st Armored Brigade and told them to take their forces to the Bagh-i-Shah. At or before this time he also alerted other officers, including Colonel Parsa of the 1st Mountain Brigade; Colonel Ashrafi, the Military Governor and Commanding Officer of the 3rd Mountain Brigade; and Colonel Novzari of the 2nd Armored Brigade. However, according to the accounts of Zahedi men engaged in their operation, Momtaz and Shahrokh were arrested at the Bagh-i-Shah and held there with Kiani for some time.

Government sources differ in their accounts as to what happened when Colonel [REDACTED] tried to deliver to Mossadeq the Shah's firman dismissing him. According to General Riahi, Colonel Momtaz was on his way to the Bagh-i-Shah when he ran into Colonel [REDACTED] in the street and thereupon arrested him. According to the official communique of the Mossadeq government, [REDACTED] showed up before Mossadeq's house at 0100 hours on 16 August with four trucks full of soldiers, two jeeps, and an armored car. He claimed that

he had a letter to deliver to Mossadeq, but was at once arrested by the guards at the house of the Prime Minister. Farzanegan had still another version, claiming that [REDACTED] was arrested at 2350 hours at Mossadeq's house. After his arrest, [REDACTED] is alleged to have said that a delay of two minutes in the arrival at Mossadeq's house of Lt. Colonel [REDACTED] with two truckloads of soldiers caused the plan to fail.

It does seem fairly certain that Riahi had been able before midnight to get detachments of soldiers to the strategic points most likely to be attacked. Just what incident or what reaction on the part of Riahi and others loyal to Mossadeq caused the pro-Zahedi officers to falter in their duties is not clearly known. It is known, however, that Zahedi's Chief of Staff, General [REDACTED], lost heart and went into hiding. This undoubtedly did much to lower morale at the crucial time, as did the rapidly circulated word of [REDACTED] arrest. Colonel [REDACTED] went to the Chief of Staff's office at 0100 hours on the 16th to meet [REDACTED] and it is known that General [REDACTED] did approach the GHQ with the intention of taking it over but was frightened off when he saw tanks and troops in readiness. He then rushed to Zahedi and told him to flee, but Zahedi only laughed at him. Even the trucks with the

prisoners had come down from Saadabad to the GHQ but, finding it in hostile hands, retreated to Saadabad. Those in charge of the trucks released the prisoners at dawn. Zahedi waited in vain for an escort to come and conduct him to the Officers' Club. By about 0230 hours those Persians who were still willing to carry out the operation were convinced that the cause was lost, as they saw strengthened detachments, more troops moving into the city, and vehicles being stopped for questioning. [REDACTED] and General [REDACTED] themselves, toured the town about 0230 hours; then presumably separated, since [REDACTED] was soon picked up, while [REDACTED] found sanctuary in station hands. At the Embassy the station personnel had spent a nerve-racking period of hours. The army radio-equipped jeep called for in the plan failed to arrive at the compound, and there was no way of knowing what was happening in the city.

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