

1951 Man of the Year: Mohammed Mossadegh
January 7, 1952

1 Mohammed Mossadegh: Challenge of the East

Once upon a time, in a mountainous land between Baghdad and the Sea of Caviar, there lived a nobleman. This nobleman, after a lifetime of carping at the way the kingdom was run, became Chief Minister of the realm. In a few months he had the whole world hanging on his words and deeds, his jokes, his tears, his tantrums. Behind his grotesque antics lay great issues of peace or war, progress or decline, which would affect many lands far beyond his mountains.

His methods of government were peculiar. For example, when he decided to shift his governors, he dropped into a bowl slips of paper with the names of provinces; each governor stepped forward and drew a new province. Like all ministers, the old nobleman was plagued with friends, men-of-influence, patriots and toadies who came to him with one proposal or another. His duty bade him say no to these schemes, but he was such a kindly fellow (in some respects) that he could not bear to speak the word. He would call in his two-year-old granddaughter and repeat the proposal to her, in front of the visitor. Since she was a well-brought-up little girl, to all these propositions she would unhesitatingly say no. "How can I go against her?" the old gentleman would ask. After a while, the granddaughter, bored with the routine, began to answer yes occasionally. This saddened the old man, for it ruined his favorite joke, and might even have made the administration of the country more inefficient than it was already.

In foreign affairs, the minister pursued a very active policy—so active that in the chancelleries of nations thousand of miles away, lamps burned late into the night as other governments tried to find a way of satisfying his demands without ruining themselves. Not that he ever threatened war. His weapon was the threat of his own political suicide, as a willful little boy might say, "If you don't give me what I want I'll hold my breath until I'm blue in the face. Then you'll be sorry."

In this way, the old nobleman became the most world-renowned man his ancient race had produced for centuries. In this way, too, he increased the danger of a general war among nations, impoverished his country and brought it and some neighboring lands to the very brink of disaster.

Yet his people loved all that he did, and cheered him to the echo whenever he appeared in the streets.

The New Menace. In the year of his rise to power, he was in some ways the most noteworthy figure on the world scene. Not that he was the best or the worst or the strongest, but because his rapid advance from obscurity was attended by the greatest stir. The stir was not only on the surface of events: in his strange way, this strange old man represented one of the most profound problems of his time. Around this dizzy old wizard swirled a crisis of human

destiny.

He was Mohammed Mossadegh, Premier of Iran in the year 1951. He was the Man of the Year. He put Scheherazade in the petroleum business and oiled the wheels of chaos. His acid tears dissolved one of the remaining pillars of a once great empire. In his plaintive, singsong voice he gabbled a defiant challenge that sprang out of a hatred and envy almost incomprehensible to the West.

There were millions inside and outside of Iran whom Mossadegh symbolized and spike for, and whose fanatical state of mind he had helped to create. They would rather see their own nations fall apart than continue their present relations with the West. Communism encouraged this state of mind, and stood to profit hugely from it. But Communism did not create it. The split between the West and the non-Communist East was a peril all its own to world order, quite apart from Communism. Through 1951 the Communist threat to the world continued; but nothing new was added—and little subtracted. The news of 1951 was this other danger in the Near and Middle East. In the center of that spreading web of news was Mohammed Mossadegh.

A Matter of Conscience. The West's military strength to resist Communism grew in 1951. But Mossadegh's challenge could not be met by force. For all its power, the West in 1951 failed to cope with a weeping, fainting leader of a helpless country; the West had not yet developed the moral muscle to define its own goals and responsibilities in the Middle East. Until the West did develop that moral muscle, it had no chance with the millions represented by Mossadegh. In Iran, in Egypt, in a dozen other countries, when people asked: "Who are you? What are you doing here?" the West's only answer was an unintelligible mutter. Charles Malik, Lebanon's great delegate to the U.N., put it tersely: "Do you know why there are problems in the Near East? Because the West is not sure of itself." The East would be in turmoil until the West achieved enough moral clarity to construct a just and fruitful policy toward the East.

In the U.S., the core of the West, the moral climate was foggy. Scandal chased scandal across the year's headlines. Senator Estes Kefauver revived the Middle ages morality play, on television. Kefauver's reluctant mummeters were followed by basketball players who rarely threw games—just points, and West Pointers who were taught a rigid code of honor which did not seem to apply when the football squad took academic examinations.

None of 1951's scandals indicated thoroughgoing moral depravity, or even idiocy—just an inability to tell right from wrong if the question was put (as it usually was) in fine print. This uneducated moral sense led congressional committees through a sordid trail of mink coats and other gifts to Government officials. Casuistry reached a high point with the official whose conscience told him that it was proper to accept a ham under twelve pounds, but not a bigger one. Democratic Chairman William Boyle resigned his job under a cumulus cloud of influence peddling, and his successor was hardly in office before clouds gathered over him too. The public worked up quite a head of indignant steam over scandals in the Bureau of Internal Revenue, which was taking more of

its money than ever before. This indignation fell like a load of hay on Harry Truman. Perhaps it would be the understatement of the year to say that 1951 was not Truman's year.

Other Men of 1951. Nor was it Dean Acheson's year—except in the sense that he survived it. By his firm and skillful handling of the Japanese Treaty conference his forepaws out of the public's dog-house, and proved once again that he would be a masterful Secretary of State if all the U.S.'s enemies could be disposed of with a gavel. Yet all through 1951, Acheson's State Department was still caught as tight as Brer Rabbit in Tar Baby. The useless and impossible effort to justify its past mistakes consumed its energies. In this year-long waste of time, Senator Joe McCarthy, the poor man's Torquemada, played Tar Baby.

Credit for the big diplomatic achievement of the year goes not to the State Department but to a Republican—John Foster Dulles, who, step by careful step, won nearly all of the free world to accept the Japanese Peace Treaty, and thereby handed Communism a stunning diplomatic defeat. But the Japanese Treaty was more a beginning than an end. Whether it became the keystone of a more successful U.S. policy in the Far East would depend on how well U.S.-Japanese relations were handled in the future.

Matthew Ridgway and his valiant men in Korea did all that men could be expected to do—and more. But the Korean war had been in an uneasy stalemate since May.

France's General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny turned the tide against the Communist advance in Indo-China. At year's end, however, De Lattre lay ill in Paris, and the Indo-China war was far from won.

In 1951's first months, it looked as if Eisenhower would certainly be the Man of the Year. Never in recent history has Europe experienced such a lifting of heart as it got from Ike's inspiring presence and his skillful, patient incubation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In December 1950, NATO seemed just another paper plan doomed to failure. By April 1951 it was a psychological reality: Europeans began to believe that Europe could and would be defended. By year's end, NATO was a military reality, with six U.S. and twelve European divisions in the field. Defeatism faded, neutralism began to fade, because arms came into being; and the fading of defeatism made more arms possible. Europe, for a change, was moving in a virtuous circle.

Through no fault of Ike's, the heart-lift and the arming both slowed down. At year's end, Britain and France were in bad economic trouble. Headway had been made on the German problem, but the Germans, with the tragic consistency of their character, were again pushing and shoving into a bargaining position.

Ike in Europe registered a big net gain, although Europe was still in no position to beat off a Russian attack. Ike in the U.S. was a fascinating political riddle, and, to millions, the best hope in 18 years of replacing the New-Fair Deal. On the record, Ike was not the Man of 1951; 1952 might be his year. Or Robert Taft's. Or, in spite of 1951's scandals, Harry Truman's.

The outstanding comeback of 1951 was Winston Churchill's. In his first two

months of office he moved with the utmost caution, apparently trying to prove that he could be almost as colorless as a Socialist. This might be good politics, but it did not make big news.

The Old Soldier. Many thought Douglas MacArthur the logical choice for Man of the Year. The arguments were impressive: 1) he was winning the Korean war, in so far as he was permitted to win it, when he was fired; 2) his speech before Congress breathed a sense of high public duty long absent from U.S. affairs; 3) the Japanese Treaty was a monument to his bold and generous effort to find a new U.S. relationship with Asian peoples; 4) to millions of Americans, he remained the No. 1 U.S. hero, by no means faded away.

However, by year's end MacArthur had abdicated a position of national leadership to become spokesman for a particular group. Some passages in his later speeches were ambiguous and inconsistent with his own basic line of thought and action. These ambiguities, plus the distortion of MacArthur by his friends of the Hearst and McCormick press, led some to conclude that MacArthur was an isolationist; others, that he was an imperialist. Both tags were absurd, yet the figure of MacArthur in U.S. life was neither as clear nor as large in December as it had been in April.

Nevertheless, his Congress speech still sang in the nation's conscience. It contained a brilliant passage applicable to 1951's biggest news—the turmoil in the Middle East. Asian peoples, MacArthur said, would continue to drive for independence from the West and for material progress, and this drive "may not be stopped." The U.S. must "orient its policies in consonance with this basic evolutionary condition, rather than pursue a course blind to the reality that the colonial era is now past and the Asian peoples covet the right to shape their own destiny. What they seek now is friendly guidance, understanding and support, not imperious direction; the dignity of equality, and not the shame of subjugation."

No George Washington. The U.S. vaguely agreed with MacArthur's plea: it wanted to feel sympathy toward the aspirations of Asian peoples. After all, material progress and national independence are both classic American doctrines, and the U.S. could envision itself as playing Lafayette to Asian George Washingtons. But in terms of Asian realities, the Lafayette-Washington picture was sheer sentimentality, and, like all sentimentality, led to bad morals. MacArthur knew the discouraging facts of Asian politics. He wanted the U.S. to face the facts and build a policy upon them. The U.S.—or at least its official leadership—was appalled by the facts. Just as it had recoiled from Nationalist China, crying "Corruption," so in 1951 the U.S. recoiled from the corruption, hatred, fanaticism and disorganization of the Middle East.

Mossadegh, by Western standards an appalling caricature of a statesman, was a fair sample of what the West would have to work with in the Middle East. To sit back and deplore him was to run away from the issue. For a long time, relations with the Middle East would mean relations with men such as Mossadegh, some better, some much worse.

The Iranian George Washington was probably born in 1879 (he fibs about his age). His mother was a princess of the Kajar dynasty then ruling Persia; his father was for 30 years Finance Minister of the country. Mohammed Mossadegh entered politics in 1906. An obstinate oppositionist, he was usually out of favor and several times exiled. In 1919, horrified by a colonial-style treaty between Britain and Persia, he hardened his policy into a simple Persia-for-the-Persians slogan. While the rest of the world went through Versailles, Manchuria, the Reichstag fire, Spain, Ethiopia and a World War, Mossadegh kept hammering away at his single note. Nobody in the West heard him.

They heard him in 1951, however. On March 8, the day after Ali Razmara, Iran's able, pro-Western Premier, was assassinated, Mossadegh submitted to the Iranian Majilis his proposal to nationalize Iran's oil. In a few weeks a wave of anti-foreign feeling, assisted by organized terrorism, swept him into the premiership.

The Anglo-Iranian Oil Co., most of whose stock is owned by the British government, had been paying Iran much less than the British Government took from the company in taxes. The U.S. State Department warned Britain that Iran might explode unless it got a better deal, but the U.S. did not press the issue firmly enough to make London listen. Mossadegh's nationalization bill scared the company into concessions that were made too late. The Premier, whose mind runs in a deep single track, was committed to nationalization—and much to the surprise of the British, he went through with it, right down to the expulsion of the British technicians without whom the Iranians cannot run the Abadan refinery.

Results: 1) the West lost the Iranian oil supply; 2) the Iranian government lost the oil payments; 3) this loss stopped all hope of economic progress in Iran and disrupted the political life of the country; 4) in the ensuing confusion, Iran's Tudeh (Communist) Party made great gains which it hoped to see reflected in the national elections, due to begin this week.

Tears & Laughter. Mossadegh does not promise his country a way out of this nearly hopeless situation. He would rather see the ruin of Iran than give in to the British, who, in his opinion, corrupted and exploited his country. He is not in any sense pro-Russian, but he intends to stick to his policies even though he knows they might lead to control of Iran by the Kremlin.

The suicidal quality of this fanaticism can be seen in the two men closest to Mossadegh in politics. Ayatulla Kashani is a zealot of Islam who has spent his life fighting the infidel British in Iraq and Iran. He controls the Teheran mobs (except those controlled by the Communists), and his terrorist organization assassinated Razmara. Hussein Makki controls the oil-rich province of Khuzistan, in which the Abadan refinery lies. When the British got out, Mossadegh put Makki in charge of the oil installations. Makki's view on oil: close up the wells, pull down the refinery and forget about it. Neither Makki, Kashani nor Mossadegh has ever shown any interest in rational plans for the economic reform and development of their country.

Sometimes the crisis through which Iran is passing depresses Mossadegh to the point of tears and fainting spells. Just as often, he seems to regard the state of affairs with a light heart. When he came to the U.S. to plead his cause, mercurial Mossadegh was so ready with quips, anecdotes and laughter that Secretary Acheson thought the visitor should be reminded of the gravity of the situation. At a Blair House luncheon where Mossadegh was guest of honor, Acheson told a story: a wagon train, crossing the American West, was attacked by Indians. A rescue party found the wagons burned, and the corpses of the pioneers lying around them. The only man still alive lay under a wagon, with an arrow through his back. "Does it hurt?" he was asked. The dying man whispered: "Only when I laugh." Acheson looked pointedly at Mossadegh—who just doubled up with appreciative laughter.

Before he left the U.S., empty-handed, Mossadegh's name was thoroughly familiar knew just what the News meant when it reported his return to the Iranian Majilis and his victory there, under the headline:

2 MOSSY WINS, 0 TO 0, ON A WET FIELD

Five Grim Conclusions. The fact that Iranians accept Mossadegh's suicidal policy is a measure of the hatred of the West—and especially the hatred of Britain—in the Near and Middle East. The Iranian crisis was still bubbling when Egypt exploded with the announcement that it was abrogating its 1936 treaty with Britain. The Egyptian government demanded that British troops get off the soil of Egypt. Since the British were guarding the Suez Canal, they refused. The Egyptians rioted, perhaps in the belief that the U.S., which had opposed any use of force in Iran, would take the same line in Egypt. The U.S., however, backed the British, and the troops stayed. But now they can only stay in Egypt as an armed occupation of enemy territory. Throughout the East, that kind of occupation may soon cost more than it is worth.

Since Mossadegh's rise, U.S. correspondents have been swarming over the Near and Middle East. Their general consensus is that:

1) The British position in the whole area is hopeless. They are hated and distrusted almost everywhere. The old colonial relationship is finished, and no other power can replace Britain.

2) If left to "work out their own destiny" without help, the countries of the Middle East will disintegrate. The living standard will drop and political life become even more chaotic. (Half a dozen important political leaders in the Near and Middle East were assassinated during 1951.)

3) Left to themselves, these countries will reach the point where they will welcome Communism.

4) The U.S., which will have to make the West's policy in the Middle East, whether it wants to or not, as yet has no policy there. The U.S. pants along behind each crisis, tossing a handful of money here, a political concession there.

At the height of the Egyptian crisis (the worst possible moment), the U.S., Britain, France and Turkey invited Egypt to join a defense pact. The invitation was promptly rejected.

5) Americans and Britons in the Near and Middle East spend a large part of their energies fighting each other. No effective Western policy is possible without Western unity.

The word "American" no longer has a good sound in that part of the world. To catch the Jewish vote in the U.S., President Truman in 1946 demanded that the British admit 100,000 Jewish refugees to Palestine, in violation of British promises to the Arabs. Since then, the Arab nations surrounding Israel have regarded that state as a U.S. creation, and the U.S., therefore, as an enemy. The Israeli-Arab war created nearly a million Arab refugees, who have been huddled for three years in wretched camps. These refugees, for whom neither the U.S. nor Israel will take the slightest responsibility, keep alive the hatred of U.S. perfidy.

No enmity for the Arabs, no selfish national design motivated the clumsy U.S. support of Israel. The American crime was not to help the Jews, but to help them at the expense of the Arabs. Today, the Arab world fears and expects a further Israeli expansion. The Arabs are well aware that Alben Barkley, Vice President of the U.S., tours his country making speeches for the half-billion-dollar Israeli bond issue, the largest ever offered to the U.S. public. Nobody, they note bitterly, is raising that kind of money for them.

The Deep Problem. What is the right answer to the seething problem of the Middle East? It is much easier to see past U.S. mistakes, sins of omission and commission, than to plot a wise and firm future course. The U.S. success in Turkey, gratifying as it is, does not give much guidance on Western policy in the Arab countries and in Iran. Turkey had passed through a drastic process of modernization which in most of the Moslem world is still to come. But the U.S. cannot wait for Kemal Ataturks who are not in sight.

The West's new relationship with the East must start at a much deeper level than efforts at economic help or military alliance. Economic and military cooperation will be of little use unless they are part of a Western approach that involves the whole range of culture—especially religion and law.

In the current issue of Foreign Affairs, Lebanon's Malik brilliantly lays the groundwork for such a change in Western attitude. Malik sums up:

"The disturbing rise of fanaticism in the Near East in recent years is a reaction to the thoughtlessness and superficiality of the West...In all this we are really touching on the great present crisis in Western culture. We are saying when that culture mends its own spiritual fences, all will be well with the Near East, and not with the Near East alone. The deep problem of the Near East must await the spiritual recovery of the West. And he does not know the truth who thinks that the West does not have in its own tradition the means and the power wherewith it can once again be true to itself."

In its leadership of the non-Communist world, the U.S. has some dire respon-

sibilities to shoulder. One of them is to meet the fundamental moral challenge posed by the strange old wizard who lives in a mountainous land and who is, sad to relate, the Man of 1951.