

“Coup 1953” Documentary Opens Up Wounds Over Britain’s Criminal Role in Iran’s History

While the documentary's release has been blocked by British filmmakers, the truth of its story cannot be suppressed

By [Hamid Dabashi](#)

Global Research, November 23, 2020

[Middle East Eye](#) 19 November 2020

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#),
[USA](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

“Angry TV film-makers stop release of lauded Iranian documentary,” [ran the headline of a recent Guardian news story](#). What documentary exactly is this? We learn: “Coup 53, which charts MI6’s role in the shah’s restoration, has been blocked by makers of a 1985 show, who say it sullies their names.”

The makers of that show, the British TV series *End of Empire*, deny that the UK government put any pressure on them to remove an interview with an MI6 officer from their series (they say it was an off the record interview). For this reason they are preventing the release of a film that documents Britain’s treachery back in the 1950s, when a vicious act of state-sponsored terrorism was perpetrated against an entire nation.

The whole world knows how in 1953, the British MI6 and the American CIA staged a military coup to topple the government of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, and brought back to power a runaway monarch subservient to their oil companies and other economic and strategic interests. Winston Churchill, that [mass murderer](#) beloved by British elites, was prime minister of the UK at the time, while Dwight Eisenhower was the US president.

[Source](#)

In case you think this pernicious act was an isolated incident, three years later, in 1956, Anthony Eden’s British government, together with Israel and France, invaded Egypt to prevent Gamal Abdel Nasser’s nationalisation of the Suez Canal. On the other side of the Atlantic, the US did the same as they did in Iran, staging yet another coup in 1954 in Guatemala.

The UK and US – at this time, and before and after – thought the world was theirs to divide and rule as they pleased. As such, the coup in Iran was not an isolated incident, but rather an act that was definitive and integral to US and UK colonial and imperial violence around the globe. This begs the question: why block the release of a documentary detailing this despicable act of political chicanery?

The facts of the 1953 coup are well-known around the world. CIA [documents](#) have been released. Two decades ago, the New York Times reported in detail [on the secret history of the coup](#). Numerous scholarly books and articles in Persian and English have detailed the

horrors of what happened.

Former US President Barack Obama and the CIA itself [have confessed](#) to America's deeds. Two eminent historians, Ervand Abrahamian and Stephen Kinzer, are among the leading scholars who have written books on the subject. So why are British filmmakers blocking a major documentary on the subject?

'New mysteries'

In the new documentary, *Coup 53*, made by Taghi Amirani and edited by Walter Murch, more details of the British government's involvement are unearthed.

"Angry complaints from some of the biggest names in British television, including the veteran documentary-maker Brian Lapping, have blocked the general release of *Coup 53*," the Guardian article [notes](#).

"They allege the film undermines their reputations by suggesting they kept government secrets when they first told the story on television in 1985 in the landmark Channel 4 series *End of Empire*, made by Granada TV."

Filmmaking is a matter of perspective, priority and editorial choices – but the filmmakers' reaction to *Coup 53* today raises far more serious questions.

[According](#) to the Guardian, Lapping said that the new documentary implies his earlier series was compromised by government pressure – an allegation he denies. "We are consulting solicitors. We would much prefer not to go to the law," he said. "We will only do so if we do not get a positive response to our requests."

David Puttnam, a member of the House of Lords and a revered figure in the British film industry who mentored Amirani, said of the dispute. "I find it heartbreaking that a generation of film-makers that I revere should feel it necessary to block a wholly admirable new documentary made by a world class team."

Traumatic event

In this context, it is important to reflect upon the significance of this coup in the history of an entire nation. For Iranians, the criminal CIA-MI6 operation against the Mosaddegh government in 1953 is arguably the most traumatic event of the 20th century in their homeland.

Some of the masterpieces of modern Persian film, fiction and poetry revolve around the terrorising treachery perpetrated by the British and Americans. Shirin Neshat's acclaimed film *Women Without Men*, Shahrnush Parsipur's novel of the same title upon which it was based, and the iconic poem *Winter* by Mehdi Akhavan Sales are just a few examples.

At least two widely popular television series in recent years, *Shahzad* and *The Enigma of the Shah*, have brought the coup to a much wider audience. They have been dubbed and aired in Urdu, Arabic, Russian and other languages. The world is not waiting for British filmmakers to deign to help reveal the truth of their despicable government and what terror their empire has perpetrated upon the globe.

Iran is the home of the master Abbas Kiarostami and has a glorious cinematic history. Iranians themselves, the primary victims of this Anglo-American deception, do not need filmmakers outside their homeland to bring it to a much larger global viewership.

It is significant that an Iranian filmmaker who lives in the UK spent almost a [decade](#) putting together a documentary on the coup of 1953. The time that the British could rule the world and control the story of their treacheries is long over. To paraphrase the immortal words of Edward Said, we no longer need permission to narrate our own stories.

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Hamid Dabashi is Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in the City of New York. His latest books include [Reversing the Colonial Gaze: Persian Travelers Abroad](#) (Cambridge University Press, 2020), and [The Emperor is Naked: On the Inevitable Demise of the Nation-State](#) (Zed, 2020). His forthcoming book, [On Edward Said: Remembrance of Things Past](#), is scheduled to be released by Haymarket Books later this year.

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