



"If I sit silently, I have sinned"
- Mohammad Mossadegh

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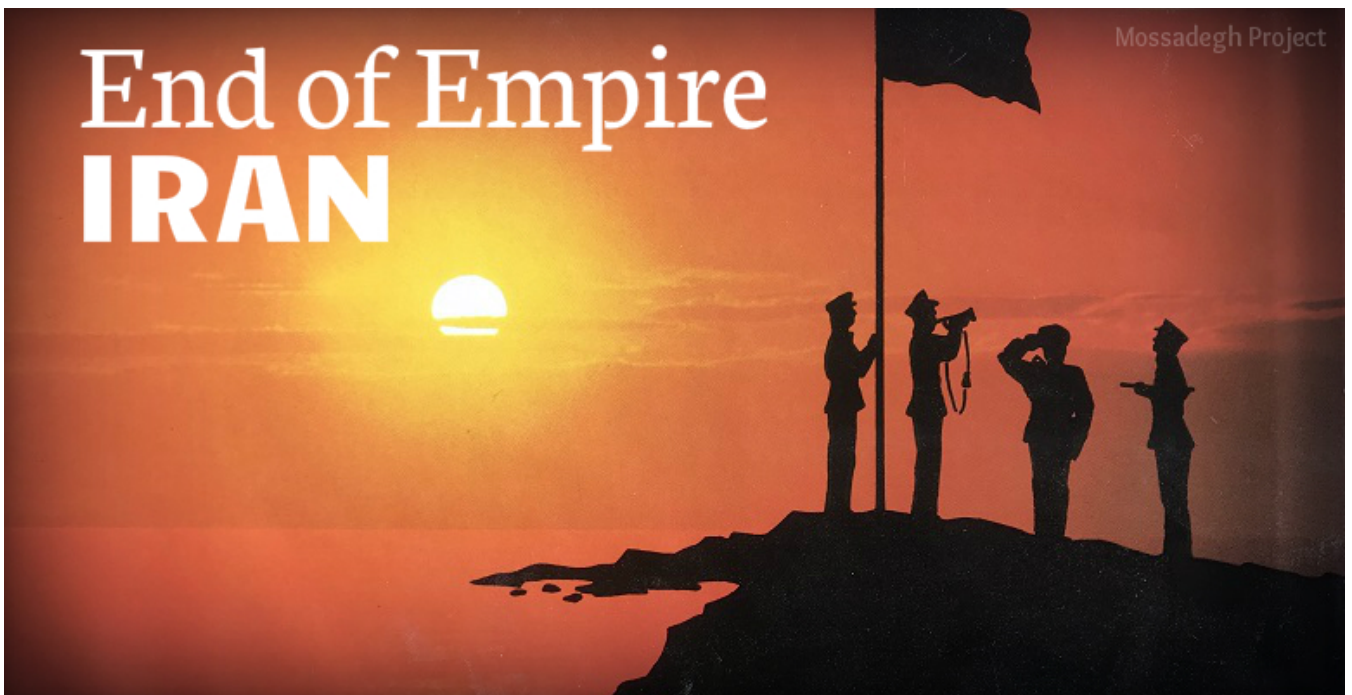
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End of Empire: Iran

1985 TV Program on British Imperialism In Persia

Arash Norouzi

The Mossadegh Project | February 22, 2020



End of Empire was a 14 chapter documentary series from Granada Television (ITV) broadcast on Channel 4 in Britain from April-July 1985. It chronicled the waning days of the British empire with segments dedicated to key Commonwealth assets throughout the world. Filmed over a five year period, each episode focused on a specific country¹ and had a largely separate production team of its own. A companion hardcover book was also produced.

The Iran episode, covering the nationalization of the British-owned oil industry and the subsequent Anglo-American coup that toppled **Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh** remains an important historical document, despite its short length. However, some of the unused interview footage,

possibly censored due to its sensitive nature, has since been resurrected in the documentary **Coup 53**.

Of course, even at around 12 hours long, *End of Empire* was far from comprehensive, so the producers selected its cases for both significance and their prototypical attributes. The sun may have set on the British empire, but England still retained some of its colonies and territories at the time (Hong Kong, Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, the Virgin Islands, etc.), and remains a major global power today.

The only country featured that was never a British colony or protectorate was Iran; although the colonial nature of Abadan, coupled with the strategic importance of the British oil concession, was undeniable. Iran was chosen for the program as an example of a nation under clear British control and subjugation, minus the colony status. Executive producer and former print journalist Brian Lapping clarified their selection process in a 1985 article:²

*“We decided to make one programme that is located mid-way between the Middle East and India. It is about Iran. The Empire, strictly defined, included only those territories directly ruled by a British Governor, wearing the Queen’s uniform and enforcing her laws. Yet to be constrained by this definition would mean leaving out a major part of Britain’s imperial role. Iran was, we considered, the best example of the many princely states under British sway. It contained, in the Anglo-Iranian oil company, the largest single British overseas investment; twice in the twentieth century the man who was to become its Shah was selected by the British; and the nationalisation of the **Anglo-Iranian Oil Company** by Dr. Mussadiq in 1951 produced an episode of major importance in the End of Empire story. Further, recent publications, particularly the memoirs of C.M. Woodhouse, provided the leads which would enable us to go further than any previous historians or journalists in describing British involvement in the coup that overthrew Mussadiq. Including Iran, however, meant making no programme on Britain’s extraordinary relationship with the Hashemite monarchies in Iraq and Jordan. This was a finely balanced choice. We decided on Iran because the Mussadiq*

episode, 1951-53, provided a coherent drama of British imperial activity that, in the closing years of the Empire, the Hashemites could not match.”

Since every statesman involved in the Mossadegh saga who was interviewed has since passed on, *End of Empire* is a useful record. As Lapping explained at the time, the purpose behind *End of Empire* was to “seize an opportunity”.

“Many of the people who had crucial responsibilities aboard the Empire as it sank live quietly in retirement”, he wrote in the book’s preface. “To film them and record their contrasting versions of the events that concluded with the lowering of the British flag seemed a worthwhile task of historical evidence-gathering.”

¹ Except for India, the jewel in the crown to which three episodes were devoted.

² *History Today* Volume 35, April 1985. *End of Empire*: “The British Empire was the largest in the history of the world. Brian Lapping explains how the end of that Empire was charted for television.” The issue also included an *End of Empire* book review.

Lapping’s piece was reproduced by permission as “Why we left out half the Empire” in *Commonwealth: The Journal of the Royal Commonwealth Society*, Vol. 28, No. 1, September 1985. The journal commented separately that “it was unwise to include a whole film on the Mossadeq episode in Iran and to have nothing about the Caribbean. It was, after all, in the Caribbean, with its slaves and its sugar, that the Empire story began and the independence of countries like Guyana and Jamaica were hardly uneventful.”

Password Required

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End of Empire: Iran (1985)

51 minutes. Password: empire

Interview subjects:

Sir Donald Logan

Foreign Office, Iran Desk, 1951-53

Nasrollah Fatemi

Iranian Delegate to United Nations 1951-53

Abolhassan Banisadr

President of Iran, 1980

[2] Mossadegh supporter, 1951

Lady Margaret Drake

[wife of Eric Drake]

Shapour Bakhtiar

Regional Director, Ministry of Labour, Iran, 1947-49

Homa Katouzian

Tehran student

Sir Eric Drake

Gen. Manager, Abadan, Anglo-Iranian Oil Company

[2] Chairman, BP, 1969-75

Sir Sam Falle

British Embassy, Tehran, 1949-52

Sir Peter Ramsbotham

Foreign Office Secretary, Persian Oil Committee, 1951

Fouad Rouhani

Legal Adviser, National Iranian Oil Company, 1951-1954

George McGhee

Assistant Secretary of State, USA, 1949-51

Averell Harriman

Special Assistant to President Truman, 1951

Richard Cottam

Central Intelligence Agency, 1953

Sir George Middleton

Chargé D'affaires, British Embassy, Tehran, 1951-52

Julian Amery

Conservative Member of Parliament

Mehdi Tehrani

Youth Organiser, Tudeh Party, 1951-53

Alireza Saheb

Mossadegh's aide

*[Interviewees listed in order of appearance as identified on screen. Some subjects have two labels. An audio only, off the record interview with **Norman Darbyshire (MI6)** was also conducted, according to Granada producers. An interview with his American CIA counterpart, Stephen Meade, was filmed but not included].*

Film credits:

Narrator

Robin Ellis

Composer

Mark Wilkinson

Historical Advisers

John Gurney

Heda Matin-Daftari

Production Assistants

Margaret Chatfield

Dorothy Friend

Cameraman

Humphrey Trevelyan

Sound Recordists

Harry Brookes

Martin Kay

Alan Bale

Rostrum Cameraman

Martin Kelly

Dubbing Mixer

Andy Wyatt

Graphic Designers

Murray Cook
Peter Clark

Film Researcher

Lisa Pontecorvo

Film Editors

Roland Coburn
Peter Hallworth

Researcher

Alison Rooper

Executive Producer

Brian Lapping

Producer-Director

Mark Anderson

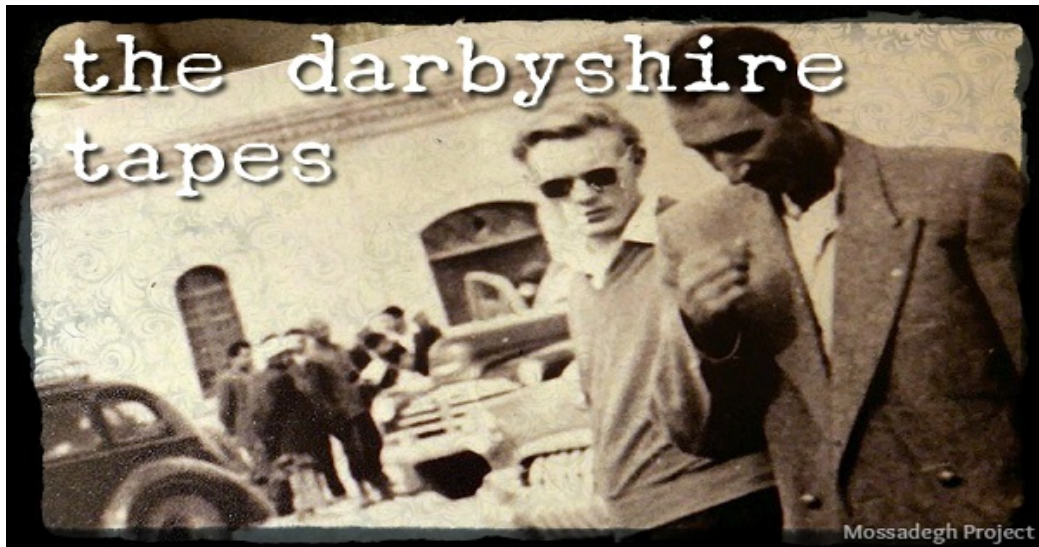
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End of Empire | Episode List:

1. The Beginning of the End [*Singapore*]
2. India: Engine of War
3. India: the Muslim Card [*India and Pakistan*]
4. Divide and Quit [*Indian Independence, Pakistan*]
5. Malaya
6. Palestine
7. Iran
8. Egypt
9. Aden [*Yemen*]
10. Cyprus
11. The Gold Coast [*Ghana*]
12. Kenya

13. The Rider and the Horse [*Rhodesia and Malawi*]

14. Rhodesia



Norman Darbyshire's Explosive Interview on 1953 Coup in Iran

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