How to cite this article:
Khodaii, G., Quorishi Karin, S. H., & Jadidi, H. (2024). The Failed Coup of a Gendarme: Colonel Pouladin and Shmuel Hayyim, the Conspiracy Against Reza Khan. *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy, 2*(2), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.61838/jhrlp.72

Article history:
Original Research

Dates:
Submission Date: 20 March 2024
Revision Date: 18 May 2024
Acceptance Date: 23 May 2024
Publication Date: 01 June 2024

The Failed Coup of a Gendarme: Colonel Pouladin and Shmuel Hayyim, the Conspiracy Against Reza Khan

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ABSTRACT

Colonel Mahmoud Pouladin (1885–1927), a former officer of the Gendarmerie and Cossack Brigade, served as the commander of the Pahlavi Regiment and special aide-de-camp to Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1926. Following the coronation of Reza Shah, Pouladin, in collaboration with several military officers—including Captain Ahmad Homayoun, Colonel Nasrollah Kalhor, and Captain Rouhollah Khan Nazer—as well as civilian figures such as Ahmad Pouladin (the colonel's brother) and Shmuel Hayyim, the Jewish representative in the Fifth National Consultative Assembly, plotted a coup and assassination attempt against Reza Shah. However, upon discovery of the conspiracy by the police apparatus and the subsequent referral of the detainees' case to a military tribunal under Reza Shah's command, the two principal conspirators met grim fates. Colonel Mahmoud Pouladin was executed by firing squad in Bagh-e Shah on February 14, 1928 (corresponding to 24 Bahman 1306 in the Persian calendar). Shmuel Hayyim, the former Jewish representative in the Fifth National Consultative Assembly of Iran, after serving five years in prison, was ultimately executed on December 30, 1931 (8 Dey 1310), despite numerous interventions and diplomatic efforts by the British Embassy. Thus, the case of these two political and military intellectuals who had conspired to overthrow Reza Shah was permanently closed.

Keywords: *Coup d'état, Reza Shah Pahlavi I, Colonel Pouladin, Shmuel Hayyim, Fifth National Consultative Assembly, British Embassy*

Introduction

In the modern history of Iran, the term *coup d'état* has generally been associated by historians with two major events of the past century: the *Coup of 3 Esfand 1299* (known as the "Black Coup") orchestrated by Seyyed Zia al-Din Tabatabaei and Reza Khan Mirpanj, and the Anglo-American coup (known as *Ajax* or *Boot*) against the National Movement of Iran and the premiership of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh on August 19, 1953. However, between these two well-known coups, another lesser-known coup was designed by Colonel Mahmoud Pouladin against the emerging monarchy and dictatorship of Reza Shah. This coup was discovered and thwarted before its execution.

Contemporary Iranian historians, due to the prominence of other major events during the reign of Reza Shah and for various additional reasons discussed in this article, have only made scattered and brief references to this important episode, usually in passing within the context of other events of the early Pahlavi period. Few have studied

the Pouladin coup in a concentrated and comprehensive manner. The present article, therefore, seeks to examine various accounts from available sources to provide a clearer understanding of the principal actors, outcomes, and motivations behind this attempted coup—which ultimately, through the direct pursuit and orders of Reza Shah himself, led to the swift execution of Colonel Pouladin, the delayed execution of Shmuel Hayyim, and the imprisonment of other participants.

The failure to fully disclose and document the detailed circumstances of this coup can be attributed to several factors: the atmosphere of repression imposed by the newly formed, ostensibly modern security and police apparatus under the direct command and supervision of Reza Shah; the king's personal inclination toward militarism, secrecy, and autocratic decision-making, which extended even to his handling of this conspiracy; and historians' reliance on Reza Shah's notoriously suspicious and distrustful character toward his close associates. Moreover, the Pouladin coup has been largely overshadowed in historical memory by the two aforementioned coups, leaving researchers with limited primary sources but multiple interpretations. Despite the scarcity of detailed historical texts and documents, this study employs a library-based research method and investigates the available archival evidence to explore the discovery process and analyze the political, security, and social dimensions of the coup.

Whether the British Embassy supported the execution of the coup against Reza Shah and his newly established Pahlavi monarchy—or, conversely, whether it discovered and informed Reza Shah of the planned coup—constitutes two key research hypotheses that have received minimal attention in historical scholarship. Considering the direct and undeniable involvement of the civilian and political actor Shmuel Hayyim, an Iranian Jew linked to the British Embassy who had long maintained intelligence and security connections with both the Embassy and Colonel Pouladin, these two hypotheses cannot be easily dismissed. Furthermore, future research could benefit from an examination of Soviet diplomatic archives and the writings or statements of Soviet nationals concerning this historical episode, although such documents remain inaccessible. It is hoped that future historians of modern Iran will give due attention to these two neglected hypotheses in their studies and publications on the significant historical events of the early Pahlavi period.

Coup d'État

The term *coup d'état* (from the French *coup d'État*) entered the Persian language through French and literally means "a sudden strike against the state." The same expression exists in other languages as well. The German word *Putsch* (from the Swiss dialect, meaning "blow" or "strike") carries a similar meaning and is sometimes used interchangeably (1).

In the political lexicon of the modern world, a coup d'état is a violent and often deadly phenomenon. Its purpose is the seizure of power from the ruling elite and their removal by a select group of military officers and politicians. Despite its outwardly abrupt nature, a coup is in reality a highly delicate and precise operation, where even the slightest error at any stage can lead to its exposure and ultimate failure (2).

The term *coup d'état* has been in use for more than 350 years in political culture, though its contemporary meaning is relatively modern—referring to the establishment of a new regime through the aid of military power and a professional bureaucratic apparatus prepared to serve the new government. The strength of such a regime largely depends on its military institution, which, by commanding experienced officers and possessing extensive records and intelligence, can pursue, suppress, and control political organizations and activists (3, 4).

A coup d'état is, therefore, a political maneuver and an unlawful attempt by a coalition to overthrow the existing leadership through violence or the threat of violence. This violence is typically limited and swift, executed by a small group—unlike a revolution, which involves mass participation. The agents of a coup are usually in control of, or have significant influence over, military forces (2).

Biography of Colonel Mahmoud Pouladin

Mahmoud Pouladin was born in 1885 (1264 SH) in Nakhichevan. His father, Hasan Khan, was a Caucasian immigrant who held the rank of colonel in the Cossack Brigade. Following preliminary education, Mahmoud entered the Cossack Military School but was expelled before completing his studies. His expulsion resulted from his and his family's pro-constitutional activities during the movement for constitutionalism.

During the *Minor Tyranny* period—the autocratic rule of Mohammad Ali Shah—Hasan Khan and his sons, Mahmoud and Masoud, joined the forces of Yeprem Khan and participated in the conquest of Tehran by the Constitutionalists. After the fall of Tehran and the deposition of Mohammad Ali Shah, Sepahdar Tonekaboni became Prime Minister and Yeprem Khan was appointed Chief of Police (Nazmieh). Yeprem Khan appointed Mahmoud Khan Pouladin as Police Chief of Qazvin, where Pouladin established two police precincts and improved local order (5, 6).

Later, Pouladin was summoned to Tehran and replaced by Avakim the Armenian. He then enrolled in the Gendarmerie Officer School and, after graduation, joined the Gendarmerie as a captain. Assigned to the Isfahan regiment, he commanded one of its companies, participating in two military expeditions: the suppression of rebellious Lur tribes in Borujerd, and the capture of a rebel leader named Seyyed Mohammad in Khansar. He successfully restored order in both regions (5).

During World War I, as foreign forces invaded Iran, several political figures fled first to Qom, then Kashan, Isfahan, and Kermanshah, forming a *Provisional National Government* led by Nezam al-Saltaneh. In Isfahan, the Gendarmerie regiment under Swedish commander Major Chilander joined the émigrés. Pouladin, an officer of the Isfahan Gendarmerie, joined this movement with several clerics and notables and was appointed military governor of Kermanshah (7, 8).

Reports from this period accuse Pouladin of executing five innocent Iranians without trial in the village of Qezelcheh to curry favor with the Ottoman Turks. Later, internal disputes among Gendarmerie officers in Qasr-e Shirin led the Ottoman commanders—supporting Mohammad Taqi Khan Pessian's faction—to exile opposing officers, including Pouladin, to Mosul. They were later released by Ottoman War Minister Enver Pasha and moved to Istanbul.

After the war, Prime Minister Vosough al-Dowleh issued a general amnesty for military officers who had joined the émigré government in Kermanshah, inviting them to return to service. Pouladin rejoined the Gendarmerie as a major, became commander of the Qazvin battalion, and remained there for three years. In addition to his command, he oversaw the tribes of Qazvin, suppressing local insurgents such as Mohammad Hasan Khan Zafar Nezam and Abbas Sultan Ziaabadi (5, 9).

Although Pouladin did not directly participate in the coup of 1921 (1299 SH), he later joined the coup faction and advanced in rank through military service. During the premiership of Seyyed Zia al-Din Tabatabaei—from February 1921 to June 1921, the so-called "Black Cabinet"—he served as Tabatabaei's special aide-de-camp (4, 6).

Following the 1921 coup, Prime Minister Seyyed Zia al-Din Tabatabaei dispatched Major Mahmoud Khan Pouladin to Kermanshah with full authority to suppress Akbar Mirza Sarem al-Dowleh, the rebellious governor of Kermanshah, and placed the local Gendarmerie under his command. By April 1921, Pouladin besieged the government citadel, defeated Sarem al-Dowleh's forces after fierce fighting, and sent him under arrest to Tehran. Pouladin was then transferred to Tabriz and appointed commander of the Sharfkhaneh Gendarmerie Battalion (5, 10).

The soldiers under his command were remnants of various disorganized battalions who had not received their pay. Pouladin's reportedly harsh and insulting treatment of his men provoked discontent. His deputy, Major Abolqasem Lahouti—previously convicted in absentia for misconduct and murder but later pardoned through the intercession of Mokhber al-Saltaneh Hedayat, the governor of Azerbaijan—rallied the troops against Pouladin, arrested him, and led a rebellion toward Tabriz (6, 11).

In his *Memoirs and Hazards*, Mokhber al-Saltaneh Hedayat recounts: "Two thousand tomans were given to Pouladin to take to Sharfkhaneh and distribute among the Gendarmerie. It was said that five hundred tomans were spent on revelry in Tabriz, and the rest taken to Sharfkhaneh. The soldiers were still owed fifteen days of pay and demanded back wages. Feeling deceived, they rebelled. It later emerged that Lahouti, having lost faith in me, was negotiating a coup in Tabriz to counter the Tehran coup, even contacting Ismail Agha. Pouladin insulted his officers, saying, 'It would be more honorable to command a group of prostitutes than to command you.' The troops, enraged, united against him, detained Pouladin, the governor of Sharfkhaneh, and the head of the telegraph office, cut communications, and marched overnight to Tabriz" (11).

After the Lahouti rebellion was suppressed, Pouladin was released and promoted to lieutenant colonel, becoming commander of the Gendarmerie Regiment of Azerbaijan. He later played a prominent role in the suppression of Simitqu (Ismail Agha) and the capture of the fortress of Chahriq under the command of Amanollah Mirza Jahanbani, for which he was promoted to full colonel (5, 9).

Following the merger of the Cossack Brigade and the Gendarmerie, Pouladin transferred to the national army and became Chief of Staff of the Western Division. He participated in numerous campaigns under Amir Lashkar Amir Ahmadi against the Lur tribes, serving effectively as the general's right-hand man. He also served as military governor of Borujerd and Khorramabad.

At the beginning of Reza Shah's reign, upon the recommendation of Brigadier General Amanollah Mirza Jahanbani, then Chief of the Army General Staff, Colonel Mahmoud Khan Pouladin was appointed commander of the Pahlavi Infantry Regiment, responsible for guarding the royal palaces. During Reza Shah's coronation ceremony, he was appointed as the Shah's aide-de-camp. As commander of the Pahlavi Regiment, he effectively led the royal guard and enjoyed the Shah's personal trust (5, 12).

Colonel Pouladin was considered a loyal officer to Reza Shah and had received the Medal of Bravery (13). He was fluent in Turkish, Arabic, and Russian and had working knowledge of French (14).

Description of Colonel Pouladin's Coup against Reza Shah

One of the most significant events of the early reign of Reza Shah, which occurred in the summer of 1306 SH (September 1927), was the conspiracy to carry out a coup against Reza Shah and assassinate him. Colonel Mahmoud Pouladin—one of the Shah's trusted officers, who at that time commanded the Pahlavi Regiment (the

royal guard)—was the leader and director of this plot. This bold and ambitious officer harbored aspirations to the throne (9, 15).

The details of the affair and the manner in which the conspiracy was uncovered in Shahrivar 1306 SH (September 1927) were never fully disclosed. However, the available writings and reports indicate that, in addition to several subordinate officers under Pouladin, a number of civilians—including "Hayyim" (Shmuel Hayyim), the Jewish representative in the Fifth National Consultative Assembly—participated in the plan. It appears that one of the officers involved—whose name was never revealed—disclosed the plot to Reza Shah, seeking favor and promotion. In characteristic fashion, Reza Shah chose not to pursue the matter through legal channels, but rather to neutralize the conspiracy personally and punish Pouladin and the others himself (6, 16).

According to Sardar Asʿad Bakhtiari, the coup plan was as follows: the operational forces were to attack the Shah's palace—the Marble Palace—from two directions. First, one group would draw the guards' attention by firing toward the palace gate; then, in the same instant, a second group would rush inside the palace and kill Reza Shah and his entourage, after which martial law would be declared in the city. A few days before the plan was to be executed, however, a member of the group named Aqa Mir Qafqazi divulged the plot to Reza Shah. By the Shah's order, Colonel Pouladin and his collaborators were immediately arrested. Beyond Colonel Mahmoud Khan Pouladin, those implicated included Samuel Hayyim (Shmuel Hayyim), Sheikh al-ʿIraqayn-zadeh, Ahmad Homayoun, Rouhollah Meshkin-Qalam, Nabi Khan, Behrouz Beyg Salari, and Nasrollah Khan Kalhor (17).

One of the most authoritative official sources on the event is the documentation of the United States Department of State, cited extensively by Mohammad Gholi Majd in *From Qajar to Pahlavi, 1919–1930*, which reproduces archival telegrams from the American Legation in Tehran. "Philipp," in his report dated September 23, 1926, wrote: "I respectfully inform you that confidential reports have reached me over the past three days concerning the arrest of several army officers and others on charges of involvement in a plot to assassinate the Shah. Among the arrested officers is Colonel Mahmoud Pouladin… These individuals were seized suddenly and in utmost secrecy; the public is not yet aware of the arrests, but their families and friends are deeply anxious." On October 2, 1926, the Department cabled Tehran: "*The New York Times*, in its October 1 issue, quoting the Associated Press from Tehran, reports the discovery of a plot to assassinate the Shah, the Crown Prince, and other state leaders. It is further reported that Colonel Pouladin and Major Rouhollah Khan have been executed. Please telegraph your clarification." "Philipp" replied on October 5, 1926: "… I am quite certain that none of the detainees has been executed thus far, although confidential information suggests that Colonel Pouladin is more exposed to such punishment than the others… The Prime Minister stated, on the authority of the Chief of Police, that the charges were extremely serious." He later added that at the time of the arrests the plot "was on the verge of being carried out." The attempted assassination of Sayyed Hassan Modarres at dawn on October 29, 1926 (7 Aban 1305 SH), and the spread of that news among the populace overshadowed the coup reports; as "Philipp" noted on November 6, 1926, there appeared to be no new developments, the tribunal had issued no ruling, the press was silent, and public attention had shifted entirely to the Modarres affair (7, 9).

Abbas Milani, in *The Shah*, briefly recounts the danger that confronted the young Crown Prince, without naming the coup's architect or detailing the involved officers, and focuses instead on Shmuel Hayyim, the civilian participant and Jewish deputy in the Fifth Majles. He writes that in October 1926 (Mehr 1305 SH) the government arrested twenty-six officers for attempting to assassinate Reza Shah and the Crown Prince; Soviet newspapers—then still supportive of Reza Shah, whom they regarded as Iran's "national bourgeois"—described the detainees as British

agents. Hayyim, a leader among Zionist Jews in Iran, was among those arrested. The British Embassy, wary of Reza Shah's "paranoid suspicions," stayed aloof. There is no indication that Reza Shah informed his young son of the episode's particulars (12).

Taj ol-Molouk, Reza Shah's first wife and mother of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, in her oral memoirs attributes Colonel Pouladin's intent to assassinate Reza Shah to his membership in a Bolshevik circle and his communist sympathies. She recounts that Colonel Ahmad Khan Foladi—whom she appears to have confused with Colonel Pouladin—had been drawn to Bolshevism and embraced collectivist ideas at a time when the Bolsheviks in Russia were dividing the properties of the wealthy among the poor. According to her account, the Security Department (Taminat) learned of a planned pistol attack and, on the appointed day, arrested Foladi outside the palace, finding a revolver concealed under files, after which he was sent to Qasr-e Qajar prison along with other Bolsheviks. Given the apparent misnaming and the lack of operational detail, her information seems general and filtered through personal interpretation and the frailties of memory; moreover, Reza Shah's secretive disposition likely limited what family members were told. As British Minister Sir Percy Loraine reported to the Foreign Office on December 31, 1925 (10 Dey 1304 SH), Reza Shah was "a man of independent judgment… who keeps his secrets far more than is commonly supposed" (8, 18).

Soleiman Behboudi, the Shah's private secretary and close aide—an eyewitness to the arrest of Pouladin and his associates—records in his notes that the royal household's annual move from summer quarters in Shemiran back to the city occurred on time, with luncheon taken in Tehran on September 6 (15 Shahrivar) each year. On that day, Reza Shah inquired who the duty adjutants were (Colonel Pouladin and Captain Mazini), requested the special German-made hundred-shot firearm, summoned the guard sergeant, and then called in Pouladin and Mazini. Facing them at the Marble Palace, the Shah confronted Pouladin directly: "Did you intend to carry out a coup against me?" Terrified, still standing at attention, Pouladin pleaded for mercy for his children—effectively confessing. The Shah ordered his epaulettes and insignia removed and had him taken away. He then summoned other implicated officers—Ahmad Homayoun and Rouhollah Khan (Nazer)—had their insignia removed, and ordered them confined separately and transferred after dark by police automobile. Subsequently, those involved were tried: Colonel Pouladin and Shmuel Hayyim were sentenced to death, and others received various long prison terms (19).

What Behboudi narrates as the course of events is, with some differences, almost consistent with the account of Mohammad Arjomand, who had served for six years at the court of the first Pahlavi and whose testimony follows. Arjomand recounts his memory of the day Colonel Pouladin was arrested as follows: "Among the officers who served as the Shah's adjutants, two were on duty each day. As noted earlier, one of them was a certain Colonel Ahmad-Khan Pouladin, who—according to what was heard—was involved in a highly secret plot woven by opponents against the Shah. It was said that these conspirators intended to eliminate the Shah and incite a revolution in the country, and they had also enlisted Colonel Ahmad-Khan Pouladin. It may also be true that he was tasked with assassinating the Shah; but before the group could begin their operations, I heard that one of its members betrayed his comrades and, whether directly or indirectly, informed the Shah of the plot laid against him and identified the conspirators. They said this person was Aqa-Mir Qafqazi—*al-uhda ʿala'l-rawi* (the responsibility rests with the narrator). On the day when Colonel Pouladin and Colonel Mazini were on duty at court, I entered the palace from home at two in the afternoon and, unmindful, headed toward my office. In front of the palace building, to the left, there was a pavilion. As I approached the pavilion, I suddenly glanced inside and saw the Shah seated on a bench with an iron table before him and a 'Mauser' [pistol] lying bare on the table. I did not understand what

was afoot; I bowed and passed before His Majesty and went to my office. A few minutes later I heard, from a distance, the Shah's shouting mingled with someone's sobbing. It later became clear that at that hour His Majesty had summoned Pouladin, who had been sitting in one of the rooms of the Private Office with his fellow duty officer, Colonel Mazini. At first, Mazini—being in uniform and supposing the Shah had summoned one of the adjutants—presented himself. The Shah asked, 'Where is your companion?' He replied, 'In the room.' The Shah said: 'I have business with him; go and bring him.' Mazini promptly returned to the room and informed Pouladin that he was to appear. Alarmed to an extreme by this unexpected summons, Pouladin had no choice but to present himself, and together with Mazini went to the Shah. In a state of great anger, the Shah looked him up and down and said, 'You scoundrel, you wanted to kill me?' Then, with much invective, he ordered Mazini to tear off [Pouladin's] epaulettes and, brandishing the hard Mauser that lay on the table before him, threatened to kill him. Pouladin began pleading and weeping, denying the matter, throwing himself at the Shah's feet; at last His Majesty ordered him arrested and sent to the garrison police or the city police. Soon the other members of the conspiracy were arrested one after another, and after trial in a court-martial, some were exiled and others—such as the Jew Hayyim [Hayyim]—were executed; and, after repeated investigations and interrogations, the court finally sentenced Pouladin to death." (16).

Regarding the case of Colonel Pouladin and the manner of his trial and execution, Seyyed Jaʿfar Pishevari—the head of the Democratic Party government in Azerbaijan—writes the following in his prison memoirs, published in the years after September 1941: "Unfortunately, I did not see Colonel Pouladin in prison; he had been executed at the time of my arrest. I only came across his comrades and was in contact with them for a long time. Moreover, the memory of him had not faded among the other prisoners… In general, everyone said Pouladin was a valiant man and a composed officer. During his arrest and interrogation, he showed no weakness or cowardice. In prison he was very dignified and serious. He greeted death with an open brow. He knew that he would eventually be executed, but he never showed it. They said that on the night they came to inform him of his firing squad, he was very calm and no trace of anxiety or fear could be seen on his face. In grooming himself and changing clothes—even using perfume—he showed no haste. He bade farewell to all with composure and set off with measured steps. They even said he himself gave the order to fire. Hayyim was in prison for seven years and remained steadfast. Among the late Pouladin's comrades, Hayyim (editor of the newspaper *Ettehad*) was a notable figure. He said: at the time of my arrest I was a deputy of the National Consultative Assembly and, by law, had parliamentary immunity and could intervene in all political matters. They appointed him a court-appointed lawyer and, after seven years [approximately five years is correct] of torment and hardship, they executed him. Colonel Nasrollah-Khan Kalhor and other comrades of Colonel Pouladin did not have a good opinion of Hayyim. Nasrollah-Khan Kalhor said: I knew Hayyim well; he was known as 'Vasili' in Kermanshah and had connections with foreigners. From the beginning I told the late Pouladin that one cannot work with such elements. Pouladin was a good military man but a clumsy politician. It was he who involved all of them in these affairs…" (9).

In the accounts of Soleiman Behboudi and Mohammad Arjomand—both of whom, according to their memoirs, were present at court with executive responsibilities when Colonel Pouladin confronted Reza Shah and both recall the day in question—"it would seem that the depiction of Pouladin's pleading and begging for the Shah's mercy is somewhat exaggerated." For, a rumor soon spread in the capital that Pouladin, in response to Reza Shah's question [about the motive for the assassination plan], told him: "Uncle, you struck and it worked; we struck and it did not"—a reference to Reza Khan's 1921 coup. This rendering, however, appears to be a popular, colloquial retelling among the people of old Tehran. Moreover, if we take Pishevari's memoirs as grounded in fact, it seems unlikely that, after

the plot was uncovered and he faced the Shah, Pouladin showed weakness to the degree reported by Behboudi and Arjomand; or, if their statements are accurate, perhaps at the outset he sought to mislead or soften the Shah, but, once aware that the assassination and coup plan had been exposed and corroborated by documents and testimonies of other actors, he adopted a different stance—as Pishevari writes. At the insistence of Mostowfi al-Mamalek, the Prime Minister, a military court was convened. The [initial] court sentenced Pouladin to ten years' imprisonment for participating in the printing of clandestine broadsides, and the appellate court confirmed it. At Reza Shah's insistence, another military court was convened and Pouladin was sentenced to death by firing squad. Reza Shah personally followed the interrogation and trial of Colonel Pouladin and his companions, and it is certain that, because of his direct intervention, the proceedings deviated from the usual legal course (9, 13, 15).

Lieutenant General Amanollah Khan Jahanbani, in his memoirs published in 1967, refers briefly and without commentary to the trial and execution of Colonel Pouladin. The proposal to appoint Pouladin as commander of the Pahlavi Regiment had originally been made by Brigadier General Amanollah Mirza Jahanbani when he served as Chief of the Army General Staff—an association that could have implicated him as well; had he held that same post during Pouladin's arrest and trial, he might not have escaped the fallout. But at that time Jahanbani commanded the Eastern Division, and his deputy, Brigadier General Habibollah Sheibani, had been appointed Chief of the General Staff. Sheibani did not consider the trial of Pouladin and his comrades fair or consistent with the Army's court-martial regulations; consequently, he refused to sign the firing-squad order and was removed from the General Staff. This action incurred the Shah's displeasure; Sheibani was dismissed, and Brigadier General Mohammad Nakhjavan, head of the Military Schools, was appointed in his stead (5, 9).

The newspaper *Ettelaʿat* reported the trial and execution of Pouladin with the headline "The Execution of Colonel Mahmoud-Khan Pouladin," publishing a photograph of him in Gendarmerie uniform in its issue of Wednesday, February 14, 1928 (25 Bahman 1306 SH). It wrote: "Yesterday morning at five o'clock after midnight, Mahmoud-Khan Pouladin, former colonel, was executed in Bagh-e Shah. Readers may be generally aware of the details of the attempted assassination, the operations, and the plan that Pouladin and his associates devised and initiated against the independence of the country. The said conspiracy was discovered about a year and a half ago by the esteemed Police Department; Mahmoud-Khan Pouladin and his partners—Nasrollah-Khan Kalhor (former colonel), Ahmad-Khan Homayoun (adjutant), Rouhollah-Khan (Meshkin-Qalam—adjutant), Ahmad-Khan Pouladin (lieutenant), Samuel Hayyim [Shmuel Hayyim], the Jewish deputy of the Fifth Majles—were arrested and detained and interrogated. After preliminary investigations and interrogations conducted by the Police Department, the plot to disrupt the country's order was uncovered, and their dossier was compiled and completed. A military tribunal, in accordance with military law and regulations, was convened, and after lengthy proceedings Mahmoud-Khan Pouladin was sentenced to death. As for the other accomplices, the military court issued the following sentences: Ahmad-Khan Homayoun, fifteen years' imprisonment; Nasrollah-Khan, seven years; and Rouhollah-Khan, five years. The dossiers of the two civilians, Hayyim and Ahmad-Khan Pouladin, were sent to the Ministry of Justice for judgment under the country's laws. The sentences issued by the military court have recently received the royal assent and have been carried out." (9, 15).

The execution order for Colonel Pouladin was carried out at midnight on February 13–14, 1928 (24 Bahman 1306 SH) at the Central Division's firing range [Bagh-e Shah] under the command of Colonel Ahmad Zavieh, and Bozorgmehri delivered the coup de grâce. Several years later, in a report dated December 12, 1931, Hart provided further details on the execution of Colonel Pouladin—although the tone of Hart's report is almost non-bureaucratic

and narrative-like, and it casts Reza Shah in a prominent role at the sentencing stage: “He was tried in a military court; General Sheibani, then Chief of the General Staff, was among its members. They sentenced him to several years in prison. The Shah… objected to the sentence. The offender had to be made an example to others, and under military regulations the accused should have been sentenced to death. The court had been excessively lenient. The officer must be condemned to the firing squad. The royal order was communicated to the judges. A new court was convened, and [the sentence the Shah had ordered] was announced. But this time General Sheibani objected to the sentence; the death penalty could not be carried out unless it bore his signature as Chief of the General Staff. Believing the sentence overly severe, he refused to sign. It is said the Shah became very angry and, without prior notice, went personally to the Ministry of War; showing the sentence to the Chief of the General Staff, he said, ‘Come now, sign this.’ Sheibani is said to have replied, ‘I am also His Majesty’s servant, but I cannot sign this order. If His Majesty insists, I shall be forced to resign from the post with which he has honored me.’ As usual, Reza Shah said, ‘Very well, agreed. You are no longer Chief of the General Staff. I myself will assume responsibility.’ And he himself signed the order. The officer was shot the next morning. General Sheibani spent a short time in retirement.” (5-7).

Causes of the Coup

Regarding the causes of the coup and the intent to assassinate Reza Shah, various hypotheses and viewpoints have been advanced in historical books and articles. Yet, as Minister-Counselor “Philip” of the United States—one of the most reliable available official sources—rightly noted in his reports, “all of these reports are very vague and no convincing evidence supports them,” and “there is still [documented] no information on the nature of the alleged conspiracy,” apart from Colonel Pouladin’s dissatisfaction with his superiors and the discrimination and frictions between the Cossack forces and the Gendarmerie—points that seem, to some extent, accurate and well founded, but have not been uncovered and published in historical records. Newspapers in Tehran at the time, lacking access to reliable information—and even when aware of certain details—did not disclose the particulars of the conspiracy due to the oversight or possible pressure of the Tehran Police, and specifically with respect to the coup attempt, they wrote ambiguously and generally, without presenting or citing reliable documents, merely asserting that the plot had begun immediately after the change of dynasty (Reza Shah’s accession), that the police had kept the conspirators under surveillance for eighteen months, and that shortly before execution of the plan, all the plotters were arrested upon obtaining “judge-pleasing” evidence. Likewise, beyond generalities and accusations—such as “assassination conspiracy,” “operations and plans that Pouladin and his associates devised against the independence of the country,” “pistol attack,” “Bolshevik ideas,” “distribution of clandestine broadsides,” and “the assassination of Reza Shah and the Crown Prince”—the historical documents and various quotations, as we have seen, made no reference to the details of the event or the actions of the coup’s planners and offered no documentary proof. In this section of the article, therefore, we examine different accounts regarding the causes of the coup. It is hoped that in the future, with access to and discovery of archival materials, the hidden dimensions of Colonel Pouladin’s coup will be clarified and studied for the historical record. (7, 9, 13).

Minister-Counselor Philip, the American deputy chief of mission in Tehran—who, being in the capital at the time, witnessed and closely followed the affair and discussed it with the prime minister of the day and his British counterpart in Tehran—wrote in a report to the U.S. Department of State: “These arrests apparently occurred because the Shah suspected a conspiracy among the officers of his Household Regiment. For some time, rumors

have circulated about leaflets being distributed around the city containing statements against the Shah. All these reports are very vague and no convincing evidence supports them. I know no one who has seen these leaflets…" He continued: other than the fact that more people had been arrested, he still had no information about the nature of the alleged conspiracy or any ruling of the court-martial trying the accused; moreover, the Tehran press had made no mention of the matter. He added that claims such as Colonel Mahmoud Pouladin having proposed the plot, intending to seize the Shah at the palace by leading the Pahlavi Regiment, could not be trusted given the complete secrecy maintained by officials with access to reliable information. (7).

Some contend that one of the reasons for Pouladin's action against the Shah may have been the Gendarmerie officers' dissatisfaction with being merged into the Cossack forces—an act that subordinated Western- and European-trained officers, devoted to military discipline, to often less-educated Cossack officers (Jam-e Jam Online, "A Military Man's Clumsy Policies," February 14, 2014). In late 1925, when Colonel Pouladin returned to the capital, he was promoted to full colonel and appointed commander of the Pahlavi Infantry Regiment, while the Central Division was under Brigadier General Morteza Yazdanpanah. It comprised four brigades: the First Brigade was commanded by Colonel Karim Bozorgmehri—Pouladin's direct superior; the Second Infantry Brigade by Colonel Mohtashami; the Cavalry Brigade by Jafarqoli Biglarpour; and the Artillery Brigade by Colonel Abolqasem Granmayeh. The commanders of all regiments in the two infantry brigades were *yavar* (majors), and only Pouladin held the rank of full colonel; in terms of service record and promotions, he outranked the two brigade commanders (Bozorgmehri and Mohtashami). From the day of his appointment [to the Pahlavi Infantry Regiment], he appeared discontented, clashing daily with his brigade commander and considering himself in every respect more qualified than Bozorgmehri. In court, Pouladin explicitly confessed to such behavior and attributed his decision to the misconduct of Colonel Bozorgmehri and to pervasive discrimination in the army. If we accept Aghili's account, the injustice inflicted on Pouladin's European–Swedish-trained military persona on the one hand, and his self-regard and irascible temperament on the other, could explain his plan to assassinate and overthrow the principal author of that injustice—Reza Shah—together with several like-minded officers. (5, 17).

On the other hand, Pouladin was known as a loyal officer to the Shah and had received the Medal of Bravery. His unmediated proximity to the monarch and to the newly formed Pahlavi court, and his special status as adjutant to the sovereign, were advantages he could have leveraged for himself—and even for his associates—while advancing through the army at least in the long run. The horizon of the newly established army, and even the political arena, offered a clear prospect for Pouladin—prospects that, because of the colonel's impatience and perhaps because the Shah slighted or ignored him in timely promotions, yielded nothing but the end of life for the Shah's adjutant. Thus, Pishevari's report of Nasrollah Khan Kalhor's remark—that "Pouladin was a good military man but a clumsy politician"—rings true. (9, 13).

Sirvan Khosrowzadeh, in an article titled "The Rise of the Cossack Force and the Fall of the Gendarmerie: Probing Contradictions and Rivalries," rightly highlights the frictions between these two forces—frictions relevant to our discussion and indicative of the mutual dissatisfaction of their senior officers. Colonel Pouladin was surely not immune from such discontents and rivalries; if not the sole motive for his intent, they were certainly among the main causes for him and his military associates to seek removing Reza Shah from the throne. He writes: "In 1924–1925, amid the republican movement, the split between the Gendarmerie and the Cossacks reemerged within the army and was felt more acutely in the Eastern Division; a significant portion of former gendarmes opposed placing Reza Khan at the head of the republic." The conflicts did not end there: "In the summer of 1926, Colonel Pouladin, along

with several other officers, including Colonel Nasrollah Kalhor [himself an American College–educated ex-gendarme], contemplated a coup against Reza Shah, but the plan was exposed before it occurred and Pouladin and his associates were arrested." At the same time, a baseless rumor reached Brigadier General Amir Ahmadi—then fighting Simko in Urmia—that he would be tried and executed for collusion with the plotters, and that Reza Khan had dispatched twenty-seven officers under Brigadier General Sheibani to carry out the execution; before the misunderstanding was cleared up, Amir Ahmadi telegraphed the Shah, protesting that "General Sheibani is a Gendarmerie officer and I am a Cossack officer… if an officer of the Cossacks had been tasked—or if Your Majesty had ordered me to kill myself—I would not have sent this telegram…" These statements reveal the depth of the Gendarmerie–Cossack divide even years after their merger into a unified army. (4, 5).

As noted, because Colonel Pouladin's father had served in the Cossack Brigade, Pouladin began his basic education and military career there, and—after being expelled—later joined the Gendarmerie. Thus, he should not be presumed to have entirely severed himself from the Cossack spirit or Russian-influenced thinking. Kaveh Bayat's account in *The Lahuti Coup: Tabriz, February 1922*, quoting the memoirs of *Yavar* Ebrahim Khan Arfaʿ—who served on the Gendarmerie Staff in Tabriz at the time—substantiates this: one reason for Pouladin's arrest in Sharfkhaneh by Lahuti was his refusal to join the mutinous gendarmes, contradicting Khosrowzadeh's view and showing that, at least during the Lahuti affair, Pouladin showed little outward or practical zeal for subordinating Gendarmerie officers to Cossack command. Bayat quotes Arfaʿ describing how the gendarmes arrested Colonel Mohammad Ali Khan Pouriya, a Cossack officer, who had come to take command of Regiment 14, as well as Colonel Pouladin, who refused to join them; the senior Gendarmerie officer present rebuked the mutineers and urged obedience to their lawful commanders. This episode may also explain why Brigadier General Sheibani, Chief of the General Staff at the time of the coup trials, not only considered the sentences unjust but refused to sign Pouladin's death warrant—reflecting both his legal objections and the lingering Gendarmerie–Cossack tensions noted by Aghili and Khosrowzadeh. (5, 10).

In any case, Brigadier General Sheibani—who received his early education at Alliance schools and was counted among the progressive, foreign-educated Gendarmerie officers—declined to comply with the order of an unlettered but powerful Cossack, even if he was the monarch, and he briefly incurred Reza Shah's wrath. Long after these events, as Manuchehr Riahi relates on the authority of Habibollah Sheibani, Reza Shah so admired Sheibani's valor and sound judgment in ending the Fars uprising that he sought to honor him as a royal son-in-law by offering him his eldest daughter, Shams, in marriage; yet Sheibani—again deaf to the command of the Cossack Shah—replied that he did not intend to marry, an answer the Shah took as insolence, and Sheibani fell from favor and was confined to his home. Public opinion held that the coup narrative had been concocted by Police Chief Brigadier General Mohammad Dargahi. Harold Nicolson, the British chargé d'affaires, said that the Shah was in a state of foolish, vindictive suspicion, obsessed with the fear of assassination, convinced of a conspiracy in the army against himself, and therefore pressing Dargahi to produce the conspirators. It should be noted, however, that Nicolson—personally and politically—soon became a fierce opponent of Reza Shah and undid the goodwill Sir Percy Loraine had cultivated; from his first meeting with Reza Shah, he took a strong dislike to him and, in a report dated September 30, 1926—two months after Loraine's departure and exactly two months before the coup's discovery—he described the Shah in harsh terms. Such prejudices and background made Nicolson ill suited to comprehend an Iran in flux. (8, 15, 19).

It should not be overlooked that, at the time the coup was uncovered, the British Embassy and Harold Nicolson were, as a matter of course—given Shmuel Hayyim's role in the affair, his prior services favorable to the British Empire, and perhaps the desire to safeguard the rights of a member of the Jewish minority—unwilling to see the principal causes of the coup disseminated and redisseminated before public opinion. Otherwise, as Abbas Milani writes in *The Shah*, "one of the leaders of the arrested group was named Hayyim. Soviet newspapers, which in those days still supported Reza Shah and regarded him as Iran's 'national bourgeois,' described the arrestees as British agents. At the time, Hayyim was a leader among Zionist Jews in Iran. The British Embassy, worried about Reza Shah's 'paranoid suspicions,' decided not to intervene." But the truth of the matter was otherwise. For example, documents of the U.S. Department of State clearly and documentarily show the involvement and follow-up of the British Embassy: "On the fourth of the current month, the British chargé d'affaires came to see me. Mr. Nicolson said that he wished … to seek my assistance. He indicated that Mr. Hayyim is the representative in Tehran of the British 'Association' for Zionist propaganda [the Jewish Agency], and that any unjust or harsh measure against him would have an unfavorable reaction abroad. Mr. Nicolson asked me, if I were inclined, to inform the Shah or the government of the disastrous consequences that might result from extreme measures in connection with the alleged conspiracy." In any case, the Shah's "paranoid suspicions" and the "alleged conspiracy," as cited by the Soviet press and by Nicolson, in addition to concealing the true nature of the affair and the Embassy's role, were far more believable and acceptable to ordinary people living in the material and political poverty of Tehran at the time: a newly enthroned, suspicious king who saw plots and treachery everywhere. (7, 8, 12).

In September 1927, broadsides were distributed against Reza Shah, and the Shah—who had appointed Colonel Mohammad Khan Dargahi as chief of police, a man who was by all accounts violent and conniving, well practiced in making accusations and fabricating cases—put him under pressure to identify and arrest the culprits. Apparently, a Jewish figure named Shmuel Hayyim, who had a personal enmity with Dargahi, stood behind the affair and, taking advantage of Pouladin's discontent, drew near to him. Pouladin—then commander of the royal guard—cooperated with him along with several other military officers. But the plan and intention were exposed by a man named Aqa Mir, whom Soleiman Behboudi identifies as a former orderly officer close to Reza Shah before the enthronement. As the press of the time, including *Ettelaʿat*, wrote, the plan of these men was a coup and an action against the independence of the country. In any event, as will be shown with documentation, Hayyim's and Pouladin's contact predates September 1927 by at least seven years, and it stands to reason that both were informed of each other's views regarding Reza Shah's monarchy and its pillars of power—including the newly established police, as well as the character and managerial traits of Colonel Dargahi. (15, 17, 19).

This episode began in late September 1926, just after the Shah's coronation. Reports reached him that unsigned and highly threatening broadsides were being distributed in Tehran. The Shah, hearing this, flew into a rage and vented his fury upon the police chief. The newly formed army had just weathered severe uprisings, and the Shah believed the broadsides were the work of a revolutionary organization composed of disaffected army officers; he ordered Dargahi to identify and arrest the leaders at any cost. A second view, however, contradicts this reading, holding that Reza Shah acted under the delusion of a plot against himself. Proponents of this view attribute political killings to the distrust and fear of the head of state and argue that within the army—and even at the highest command levels—personal rivalries and self-interest often outweighed national interest. Reza Shah's class base, pride, and marked preference for elevating rootless flatterers led most political notables of the late Qajar era to refuse active cooperation with him, withdrawing into seclusion or non-political pursuits. The Shah's suspicion-ridden

temperament nurtured a constant anxiety that foreigners might someday place one of these newcomers in his stead; thus he could never sustain real trust in those around him. Beyond this interpretation—which is partly plausible—a third view holds that the intrigues of some of Colonel Pouladin's rivals and enemies fostered the Shah's suspicion of him; some identified Dargahi as the enemy, while others believed Amir Ahmadi was the prime mover. In historical research, however, one must weigh the extent and impact of such royal suspicion against documented performance and evidence. There is no doubt regarding Reza Shah's mistrust of his entourage—especially military peers and politicians educated in Russia or Britain—yet this suspicion appears to have peaked after 1933, alongside his absolute power and particularly after the dismissal and subsequent execution of the powerful court minister Teymourtash, acquiring a pathological cast. In 1927, at the time of Pouladin's coup, despite rivalries and disagreements among officers—and despite frictions between leading commanders before and after the coup with the army's supreme commander—Reza Shah still placed his greatest reliance and trust in the army and its generals. A relative confidence obtained between the unified, Pahlavi-era army and the newly established monarchy, for the endurance of each was inextricably linked to the other. This confidence and mutual reliance persisted, at least for a time, while the old Cossack cadres still dominated the army. We should recall that during the "Republican" agitation, when Sardar Sepah clashed with the Majles, feigned resignation as prime minister, and headed toward Jajrud—thus gravely weakening the premiership in the Majles—"the army and its commanders rallied to Sardar Sepah's support." On April 8, several telegrams reached deputies in which army commanders threatened to march in the streets if the Majles did not declare full support for Sardar Sepah; this pressure compelled the chamber to recall Reza Shah to the capital to continue in office. Hence, even in 1926–1927, Reza Shah preserved—at least outwardly—the bearing of a Cossack and senior officer committed to military norms, with many supporters among the commanders and ranks. The initial court-martial sentence of imprisonment for the principal accused, and Brigadier General Sheibani's later refusal to sign and promulgate Colonel Pouladin's death sentence, point to these appearances and a relatively regular course of proceedings; thus the discovery, pursuit, and trial cannot be reduced—pace Nicolson—to sheer paranoia and manufactured charges by Reza Shah and Police Chief Dargahi against Colonel Pouladin at the time of the coup. Still, both factors, supported by historical sources, may have influenced stages of discovery and the execution of sentences. Accordingly, the first explanation—distribution of broadsides against the newborn monarchy, "inspired by the Bolshevik ideas of the October Revolution," coupled with fissures among the leaders of the unified army and discontent over rank and Colonel Pouladin's personal traits—appears closer to the truth and may represent the principal and actual causes of the coup and the plan to assassinate Reza Shah. As for Pouladin's character, Aghili records "the execution of five innocent Iranians without trial or authorization from the competent authorities in the village of Qezelcheh to curry favor with the Turks," and describes him as "an officer … power-seeking, touchy, and foul-mouthed." Mokhber al-Saltaneh's *Memoirs* likewise point to his hedonism, aggressiveness, and misconduct in the Sharfkhaneh Gendarmerie during the Lahuti affair: "Two thousand tomans were given to Pouladin to take to Sharfkhaneh and distribute among the gendarmes; it was said five hundred tomans were squandered on revelry in Tabriz and the rest carried to Sharfkhaneh," and "Summoning the Gendarmerie officers, Mahmoud Khan Pouladin railed at them: 'It would be more honorable to command a band of prostitutes than to command you.'" These are but glimpses of Colonel Pouladin's personality, echoed in other memoirs and historical works. (5, 7-9, 11).

Shmuel Hayyim, Deputy of the Fifth National Consultative Assembly

Shmuel Hayyim (Samuel Hayyim, 1891–1931), son of Yehezkel Hayyim (a craftsman and bazaar merchant), was born in Kermanshah in 1891 (1270 SH). He completed his primary and secondary education at the Alliance Israélite Universelle school of the Kermanshah Jewish community and, alongside his studies, learned Hebrew, French, and English. In 1914 (1293 SH), he was hired by the Khorramshahr Customs and soon obtained its directorship. In that position, he established good relations with the British, and during the British occupation of Iran in World War I he first served as interpreter and later as administrative adviser to the British Army in Qazvin. After a time, however, he joined the forces opposing Britain and became a supporter of Seyyed Hassan Modarres. (7, 8).

In late 1920 (1299 SH), Hayyim came to Tehran and engaged in journalism at the newspaper *Ettehad*. Then, in 1922 (1301 SH), he published an independent newspaper for Jews titled *Ha-Hayyim*. Publication of this social–critical weekly in Persian and Hebrew continued until 1925 (1304 SH). An international supporter of the Jewish national movement (Zionism), he used this weekly to set out the problems of the Jewish community, encouraging Iranian Jews toward greater socio-political participation and struggle for freedom and equal rights, while sharply criticizing the leaders of the Zionist organization in Iran. (8, 12).

In 1923 (1302 SH), elections for the Fifth Majles began amid a Jewish community split into a “radical” camp led by Shmuel Hayyim and a “moderate” camp led by Loqman Nehorai, with both sides fiercely attacking each other in Jewish associations and newspapers. Hayyim, founding the Hovevei Tsiyon association and the Umid Committee, confronted the Zionist Association and accused its head—Loqman Nehorai—of betrayal and neglect of Jewish rights. In his newspaper *Ha-Hayyim*, he sharply criticized British policy, accused members of the Zionist Association of collaborating with the British, and derided Loqman Nehorai as a “foolish deputy.” Although he opposed granting the southern oil concession to Britain, he favored granting the northern oil concession to the American Sinclair company. (7, 12).

Amid this atmosphere—while political and social dualism in the Jewish community had degenerated into factionalism and invective—Shmuel Hayyim, by establishing connections with certain state officials and securing the assent of some leaders of the Tehran Jewish community, stood for the Fifth Majles and succeeded in being elected deputy of the National Consultative Assembly with 3,909 votes out of 5,780 cast by the Jewish electorate. (15).

After entering the Majles, Hayyim reconstituted the Zionist Association and, in collaboration with Dr. Sapir [the Jewish hospital in Tehran bearing Dr. Sapir’s name remains active on Mostafa Khomeini Avenue], assumed leadership of Zionist organization in Iran. During his term, he intensified his criticism of the Iranian government and demanded the abrogation of discriminatory religious laws against Jews. He also established contact with the League of Nations (the precursor to the United Nations) and requested its assistance for the Jews of Iran. During his tenure, the social, economic, and security situation of Jews saw relative improvement, and Jewish migration from the provinces to Tehran increased. In addition, administrative reforms brought greater attention to Jewish legal issues; Hayyim personally visited offices to defend the rights of Jews subjected to abuse. He also called for allocating a

portion of levies collected from merchants to construct and repair Jewish communal institutions and, through a single-article bill, sought freedom of enterprise and the removal of its obstacles. (15).

During Hayyim's two years as deputy (February 1924–February 1926; Bahman 1302–Bahman 1304 SH), major events transpired in Iran's history: the Qajar dynasty was deposed; Sardar Sepah Reza Khan, having suppressed secessionist tribal leaders and reasserted national unity—and with the support of his allies in the Majles—ascended the throne with authority. In those years, Hayyim wrote articles in his newspaper against Ahmad Shah and in favor of Reza Khan's monarchy and even participated in the Constituent Assembly convened in November 1925 (Aban 1304 SH) to confirm Reza Shah's accession. He also continued to promote Zionism among Iranian Jews, publishing with gusto news about Jewish migration to Palestine, the Executive Fund's activities, and the formation of the Knesset Israel—developments supported by Britain—which thereby provoked Reza Khan's suspicion and hostility toward him. Meanwhile, internal divisions within the Jewish community persisted, and Dr. Loqman's supporters reorganized to return him to the Majles. (8, 12).

At the start of campaigning for the Sixth Majles, rallies by Hayyim's supporters were, through the machinations of Police Chief Colonel Dargahi, suspiciously disrupted by engineered clashes, and ultimately he failed to secure a seat, while his rival Dr. Loqman Nehorai—backed by the government—was again elected deputy. (15, 17).

In 1926 (1305 SH), a group of disaffected army officers led by Colonel Mahmoud Pouladin were arrested on charges of forming a committee to overthrow Reza Shah; because Shmuel Hayyim was a close friend of Pouladin, he too was arrested on the same charge and his newspaper was shut down. Hayyim's extremism meant that, after his arrest, none of the Zionist organization's leaders and founders supported him. Following trial in a court-martial, he was imprisoned on charges of conspiracy and espionage for Britain and, ultimately, after five years' incarceration, was executed on December 14, 1931 (23 Azar 1310 SH) by order of Reza Shah. (7, 8).

Monsieur Hayyim entered the Kermanshah Customs at age twenty and then served in Khorramshahr; during World War I he moved to Kurdistan and continued in service. With Britain's occupation of Iraq, he and his customs inspectors uncovered hoarded grain depots in Kurdistan and distributed the grain among those stricken by wartime famine. At this point he resigned from the Kurdistan Customs and entered British service, becoming deputy in the Political Department of British forces in Iran and being transferred to Qazvin. After a time, he resigned and went to Tehran, where his speeches among the city's Jews attracted many intellectuals and youth; simultaneously, he collaborated with his friend Sarkeshikzadeh at *Ettehad*. Soon thereafter he launched his own newspaper (*Ha-Hayyim*). His opponents in the Jewish community, headed by former deputy Loqman Nehorai, sought to block the validation of his mandate; ultimately, however, with the support of Seyyed Hassan Modarres, his credentials were approved. (7, 8).

Colonel Pouladin, Shmuel Hayyim, and the British Embassy

During his tenure in Qazvin, Pouladin built an intelligence network within the Gendarmerie battalion and closely cooperated with British occupation forces in the city, thereby playing an effective role in the coup of February 21, 1921 (3 Esfand 1299 SH). (3).

A telegram from Colonel Pouladin dated April 19, 1920 (30 Farvardin 1299 SH) was sent to the then–prime minister, Vosough al-Dowleh, evidencing a familiar and covert connection between Pouladin and Shmuel Hayyim at least from the time when Pouladin was chief of the Qazvin Gendarmerie. In this telegram, Colonel Pouladin introduces Hayyim as the "secret agent of the British Political Consulate" in Qazvin who intends to depart for Tabriz

and wishes—"without the knowledge of the British Embassy"!—to undertake missions for Vosough's cabinet; Vosough al-Dowleh, in his ciphered reply, asks for accurate information about the situation in Tabriz as soon as Hayyim arrives: (5, 7).

No. 197

Dated 30 Farvardin 1299 SH

To: The Premiership [Vosough al-Dowleh]

"… A Jew named Haym [Hayyim], the secret agent of the British Political Consulate in Qazvin, is departing for Tabriz to carry out a mission. In view of his acquaintance with this servant, he has requested that I introduce him to Your Excellency so that, should any special orders or missions be required for Tabriz, they be entrusted to him; however, I do not know why he is unwilling that the British Embassy be informed of this matter [!?]. He will depart within a week.

Chief of the Qazvin Gendarmerie – M. Pouladin."

Vosough al-Dowleh replied to Colonel Pouladin's telegram introducing Shmuel Hayyim as follows:

No. 417

Dated 31 Farvardin 1299 SH

Urgent – Reply to No. 197

"I [Vosough al-Dowleh] am inclined to make use of the services of the person mentioned [Shmuel Hayyim] at present and in the future. For the time being, tell him that, after arriving in Tabriz, he should obtain accurate information about the situation there and send me a report through you. Whatever I may have to convey, I shall communicate to him through you.

31 Farvardin – To be enciphered."

Vosough al-Dowleh

The establishment of an intelligence network in Qazvin and the links with the British Embassy, as noted by Hassan Soleimani, together with the exchanged telegrams between Colonel Pouladin and Vosough al-Dowleh, clarify several points for readers and historical researchers: first, the acquaintance between Pouladin and Hayyim—the two principal actors later executed in connection with the coup—dates back to 1920 (1299 SH), at least about seven years before the coup design was conceived. Their collaboration was therefore not a late development arising from Reza Khan's tenure as Minister of War or Prime Minister, nor from the first years of Pahlavi I's reign. (3, 7).

Second, the relationship between these two men was police–security in nature and oriented toward covert missions. It is not far-fetched to surmise that, prior to Hayyim's introduction to Vosough al-Dowleh, he had already undertaken similar tasks for the Qazvin Gendarmerie—then under Major Pouladin—and that, after Pouladin recognized Hayyim's capabilities and assessed him, the telegram and proposal of collaboration were sent to Vosough al-Dowleh. Third, Hayyim's contacts and activity with the British Embassy were in a security capacity—as a "secret agent"—which again indicates his prior covert work for the British mission. The British Embassy's subsequent efforts to secure Hayyim's release from a death sentence, referenced below, provide documentary evidence of the importance of his person or performance and of his deep connections with the British legation. Finally, both men's inclination to approach centers of power is undeniable: Pouladin by his appointment as the Shah's aide-de-camp, and Hayyim by entering the Fifth Majles—both, at least for a time, attained success. Taken together, these four points help explain their approach to the locus of power—Reza Shah—and constitute evidence

of the latent capacity for a covert plot against the Pahlavi monarchy, a plot that ended in the execution of two old associates. Furthermore, Pouladin's contacts with religious minorities in Iran were not limited to the Jewish Hayyim; by virtue of his Constitutional Revolution activities with Yeprem Khan and other Armenians and Jews, such ties had already formed. As recorded, both former and subsequent police chiefs of Qazvin—Pouladin's posting—were Armenians: "After the conquest of Tehran and the deposition of Mohammad Ali Shah, Sepahdar-e Tonekaboni, commander of the Gilan forces, became prime minister, and Yeprem Khan became police chief. Yeprem Khan (an Armenian) appointed Mahmoud-Khan Pouladin as police chief of Qazvin… later Mahmoud-Khan was summoned to Tehran, and Ovakim (an Armenian) replaced him as police chief of Qazvin." (5, 11).

Mohammad-Gholi Majd, in discussing Reza Shah, oil revenues, the Reza Shah era, and U.S. State Department documents, writes: "Reading the State Department documents, one gradually perceives the role of the British in guaranteeing the personal security of [Reza] Shah. Hart's question—why did no one kill Reza Khan?—had a simple answer: because the British would not allow it. The ruthless and efficient military intelligence service, which uncovered and foiled several plots to assassinate Reza Khan, was run by the British." He maintains that the 1926 plot to assassinate Reza Khan designed by Colonel Mahmoud Pouladin was foiled by the British, and that, besides Pouladin himself, most of his associates were executed. (7, 8).

However, Majd does not cite the precise State Department records detailing those "several" assassination plots—including the Pouladin case—which prevents us from accepting his conclusion as definitively documented. Nonetheless, Hayyim's commercial, political, and security ties with the British Embassy and British nationals in Iran—before the coup of February 1921 and after World War I—his participation in the coup episode, and the roughly five-year delay in carrying out his death sentence after Pouladin's comparatively swift execution are difficult to deny. These points suggest hard bargaining and persistent advocacy by the British Embassy to overturn the death sentence and save its Jewish operative, though Reza Shah's insistence on punishing the political–financial agent of the plot ultimately prevailed, and Hayyim was not spared on December 30, 1931 (8 Dey 1310 SH). (7, 8).

In *From Qajar to Pahlavi*, Majd refers to documentary evidence that shows the British Embassy's close monitoring of Hayyim's situation—so much so that it encouraged the U.S. Embassy to negotiate with Reza Shah and even warned of "disastrous" consequences if "unjust" measures were taken against him. Based on these reports, Majd's earlier assertion that the British legation itself foiled the assassination plot while afterward striving to secure Hayyim's release sits uneasily together: if the British had neutralized the plot, why did they not first ensure their agent's safety rather than later, through the U.S. Embassy, seek his release? One possibility—echoing Nasrollah-Khan Kalahur's remark recorded by Pishevari that "I knew Hayyim well; he was known in Kermanshah as 'Vasily' and had connections with foreigners… Pouladin was a good soldier but a naive politician"—is that Hayyim was not fully trusted among the plotters and, in the planning or disclosure of the conspiracy, coordinated closely with the British Embassy; despite such cooperation, he was ultimately consumed, in the British view, by an "alleged" charge and Reza Shah's "paranoid suspicion." (7, 9, 19).

Majd cites State Department documents as follows: "On the fourth of this month, the British chargé d'affaires came to see me. Mr. Nicolson said he wished my assistance regarding the arrest of a Jew named Shmoyil Hayyim, former deputy, on the **alleged** charge of complicity in this plot. [Murray's note: Hayyim is generally considered a British agent.] He pointed out that Mr. Hayyim is the representative in Tehran of the British Agency for the promotion of Zionism [the Jewish Agency], and that any unjust or drastic measures against him would provoke unfavorable reactions abroad. Mr. Nicolson asked that, if I saw fit, I inform the Shah or the Government of the disastrous results

that might ensue from extreme actions connected with the **alleged** conspiracy. I said that I would raise the matter with the prime minister at my next meeting [Murray's note: better not move so fast].… After this meeting I learned that Mr. Hayyim, to whom Mr. Nicolson referred, does not enjoy a good reputation among Tehran's Jews and is regarded as a British spy—perhaps because the British Intelligence Service, during the war, employed him." In another instruction: "In accordance with the promise made to the British chargé, I discussed [Hayyim's] case with the prime minister and said that secret trials culminating in executions would certainly produce unfavorable impressions abroad; he replied that the War Ministry was aware of this." "On November 16, 1926, Shaw wrote to Philip: 'Your No. 186 of October 5, 1926, and your other reports about the plot against the Shah's life were very interesting. As you may have guessed, the Department's interest is largely theoretical—except that two of the accused, namely Major Rowhollah-Khan and Colonel Pouladin, were somewhat helpful to the [U.S.] Legation in the Imbrie case. I understand your British colleague has asked your help regarding the arrest of Shmuel Hayyim, former deputy of the Jewish community, and that you promised to raise the matter with the prime minister. In view of information you subsequently obtained about Hayyim, I do not think it advisable for you to intercede on his behalf, particularly since no American interest is involved. I would like to know the outcome.'" (7).

Two points in the U.S. Legation and State Department reports warrant attention. First, as Murray's marginalia to Philip's dispatch indicates—"Hayyim is generally considered a British agent"—and as in the cautions "better not move so fast" and "it is not advisable to intercede," the Americans were aware of, or at least suspicious about, Hayyim's role and, more specifically, the British Embassy's role in the design or exposure of the coup; thus they counseled their representative to avoid intervention. Second, the cooperation of Nasrollah-Khan Kalahur in the Imbrie affair—something the Department had in view when mentioning assistance by Major Rowhollah-Khan and Colonel Pouladin to the U.S. Legation—shaped Washington's posture toward the coup and is worthy of further study. (7).

According to the U.S. consul in Tehran and as reported in the December 17 issue of *Shafaq-e Sorkh*, Shmuel Hayyim was alleged to be among the instigators of Muslim riots against Jews. Hart, the U.S. consul in Tehran in 1931 (1310 SH), relying on Philip's earlier dispatches, wrote: "The Belgian Director-General of Iranian Customs, under whom Hayyim once worked, confirms the reports now generally circulating in the domestic press.… As an example, I enclose the piece published in the December 17 issue of *Shafaq-e Sorkh*. It continues the account of Hayyim's crimes: because the Jews of Iran were still hesitant to leave their homes [to migrate to Palestine at the Jewish Agency's behest], Hayyim, to inflame them against their Muslim compatriots, orchestrated the ugliest incident in Tehran's Jewish quarter. Within a week, fear and disorder reigned, and his plan partially succeeded, as some Jews left for Palestine.… Although the charge that he designed the 1922 disturbances may have been exaggerated, apparently no one seriously disputed its truth." Hart then analyzes the reality of the disturbances: they were not a spontaneous Muslim uprising against Jews. Two years later, Vice-Consul Imbrie—himself the victim of a similar intrigue at the Sheikh Hadi street *saqqakhaneh* on July 18, 1924—concluded that, without doubt, Britain, through the Jewish Agency and Hayyim, had been the principal driver of these events; "that Britain was the principal instigator of the riots against the Jews is obvious; I am persuaded even our Minister would agree." (7).

It is known that one aim of the anti-Jewish disturbances, and later Imbrie's murder—which many contemporary historians believe Sardar Sepah had a role in—was, beyond cabinet politics and his personal ambitions and the oscillation of cabinets between British and Russian interests, to disrupt Tehran's oil talks with American advisers and representatives of the Sinclair and Standard Oil companies. Thus, while in the anti-Jewish disturbances and

the Imbrie affair the British (and even the Soviets), rivals over Iran's resources, achieved their objective of edging out an American oil competitor, the Jewish Agency, through Hayyim, advanced one of its principal goals—encouraging Jewish migration to the "Promised Land." The key point, however, is that U.S.–Iran diplomatic relations were strained by the Imbrie affair; hence Colonel Rowhollah-Khan's role in favor of the United States and his antipathy toward Hayyim, and his presence in the coup's planning, become more intelligible: "Major Rowhollah-Khan [a gendarmerie officer] of the Pahlavi Regiment and a graduate of the American College.… In 1924 he was tasked by the Iranian Government to accompany Major Imbrie's remains to the United States, but owing to legal restrictions on the entry of the U.S. ship *Trenton* he did not make the voyage." This, together with the fact that "his brother was formerly the interpreter to the U.S. military attaché in Tehran," suggests a general inclination on the part of Colonel Rowhollah-Khan—and, by extension, of his superior, Colonel Pouladin—toward the rising American influence in Iran. The historical–research question, then, is how, given such sympathies, Pouladin and Rowhollah-Khan could have cooperated with the "British–Zionist" Hayyim in plotting a coup against Reza Shah—an operative whose actions contributed to the murder of a U.S. vice-consul and disrupted American oil negotiations with Iran. Was Pouladin, contrary to American assumptions, essentially Anglophile? And did the State Department's advice to its consul in Tehran—to avoid "moving too fast" and refrain from interceding for Hayyim—relate to the anti-Jewish disturbances and the Imbrie affair allegedly orchestrated by the Jewish Agency or the British Embassy under Hayyim's direction? Why do British and American diplomatic writings and later historians so often point to factors other than the core causes of the coup? (7, 9).

Harold Nicolson, the British chargé d'affaires, stated that Reza Shah was in a state of "foolish and vindictive suspicion," terrified of assassination, persuaded that there was a conspiracy against him within the army, and consequently put heavy pressure on Police Chief Mohammad Dargahi to identify the conspirators. (17).

Stephanie Cronin—who has written extensively on the "history of the army"—argues that the case was manufactured by the police and that there was in fact no coup or assassination attempt, reasoning that the commander of the Shah's guard, being so close to the monarch, could have killed him far more easily and quickly than by elaborate preparation and collusion with junior officers. (4, 13).

Conclusion

Pouladin stated explicitly in court that he had plotted a coup, attributing his decision to Buzarjomehri's misconduct and to pervasive discrimination within the army. Given his record of service in Azerbaijan and in the Western Division, and after a year commanding the Shah's guard—together with his formal military and gendarmerie training—he expected promotion to brigadier general, especially since many of his peers from both the Cossack and Gendarmerie ranks had already attained that grade. His frustration, coupled with an aggressive and undeniably ambitious temperament, and the Shah's disregard for his expectations, may have fueled his discontent and the idea of conspiring against Reza Shah. Yet the deeper motive was his own vaulting ambition—the naïve belief that, after killing Reza Shah and arresting the senior commanders, he could seize power and take the Shah's place. On the other hand, the principal non-military actor—who was ultimately executed—in this affair was Shmuel Hayyim, who, after failing to regain a seat in the Sixth Majles, engaged in plotting against the Shah. Taken together, the most substantiated account holds that the primary impetus for the attempted coup and assassination lay with Colonel Pouladin and his principal British-linked associate, Shmuel Hayyim.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adheried in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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