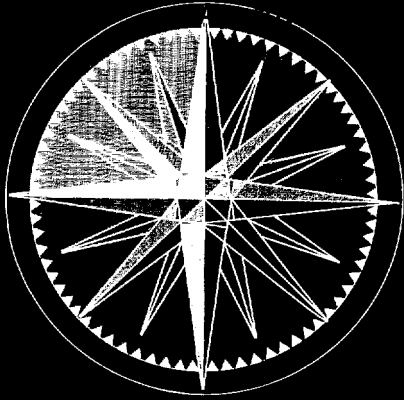


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Case 2006/11/13 : CIA-RDP79-00927A005300060002-8  
10 June 1966

OCI No. 0293/66A

Copy No. 42

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY  
**SPECIAL REPORT**

IRAN'S "WHITE REVOLUTION"

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Approved For Release 2006/11/13 : CIA-RDP79-00927A005300060002-8

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## IRAN'S "WHITE REVOLUTION"

What the Shah has labeled as Iran's "White Revolution" is a program of limited economic and social reform. It is his attempt at partial fulfillment of Iran's need for a more enlightened and productive peasantry. The key point in the program, land reform, is officially in its final stage. It appears to have effectively broken the grip of land-rich absentee landlords on Iranian agriculture, while leaving their over-all economic and political power undiminished. Other aspects of the reform program--literacy, health, profit sharing, and suffrage--have been progressing well but slowly, and some have barely gotten under way.

The program as a whole is less revolutionary than the Shah pretends and than his critics would like. Conspicuously absent is any suggestion of political reforms that would reduce the Shah's now complete control of the government and permit wider popular participation. The Shah may be counting on progress in the economic field to mute opposition demands for greater political freedom. This may serve him only for the short term, however, since economic and educational advance is likely to whet the public appetite for similar progress in the field of politics.

### Background

In 1953 the Shah nearly lost his throne in a violent dispute with nationalist premier Mohammad Mossadeq. A major appeal of Mossadeq was his promise of social, economic, and political reform designed to improve the lot of the rural peasant and the urban worker and to eliminate government corruption and the power of the big landowners. Nationalist opposition attacks on the Shah ever since have concentrated heavily on the theme that only his "illegal" ouster of Mossadeq prevented popular aspirations from being realized.

In 1961 the Shah started a series of reform programs, which he later described as the "White Revolution." These programs aimed to accomplish, although more gradually and in a more limited way, many of the aims of the nationalists. Political reform, however, has so far been excluded.

The Shah's actions certainly did not spring solely from an unadulterated devotion to "the principles of individual and social freedom," as he has declared. Neither, however, did they come only from a cynical, self-serving desire to maintain

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a tottering regime, as nationalist oppositionists like to contend. The Shah seems to have a personal commitment to land reform, the keystone of his program. As early as 1951 he started selling crown lands to the peasants who were farming those lands. This program continued sporadically until the remaining villages came under the current land distribution scheme.

Violent antigovernment demonstrations in Tehran in 1960 and 1961 may have given additional impetus. The Shah subsequently appointed a prime minister and cabinet which were more reform minded than any in the past. Many Iranians believe, possibly correctly, that the Shah's decision to support a reform program at that point was a direct response to the policy of the Kennedy administration, which encouraged social and economic self-help in developing nations.

In a January 1963 referendum the Iranians voted solidly in favor of the Shah's six-point reform program. The government carefully supervised the voting to ensure a large turnout and a favorable result. Even without the supervision, however, the voters probably would have approved the program, and there was genuine public enthusiasm for one key point--land reform.

Following from this key point, the Shah's second point called for the compensation of dispossessed landlords. Point three was the establishment of a "Literacy Corps." The remainder

of the reforms were the nationalization of forests, a scheme for profit-sharing between management and labor, and a change of the electoral law. Later, the Shah added a Health Corps and a Development Corps and established "Houses of Justice," a system of village courts.

The various programs appear to have been worked out and implemented with an eye to compromise. The Shah's apparent intention was to make them radical enough to produce some results, but conservative enough to avoid extensive disruption and a truly revolutionary situation. This is particularly true in the case of land reform, the element in the "White Revolution" with the most potential for shaping a new economic and social structure.

#### Land Reform

Land reform touches nearly all of Iran's 40 to 50 thousand villages (Iranian statistics are not consistent) and their 18 million inhabitants (Iran's total population is 24 million). The ownership of land in Iran has been exceedingly complex. Some of the agricultural areas have been in continuous cultivation for thousands of years. During this time, various patterns of tenure and ownership have come into use, to be changed or discarded as political and economic conditions changed. In some areas there has been considerable stability, in other areas there have been frequent shifts in ownership.

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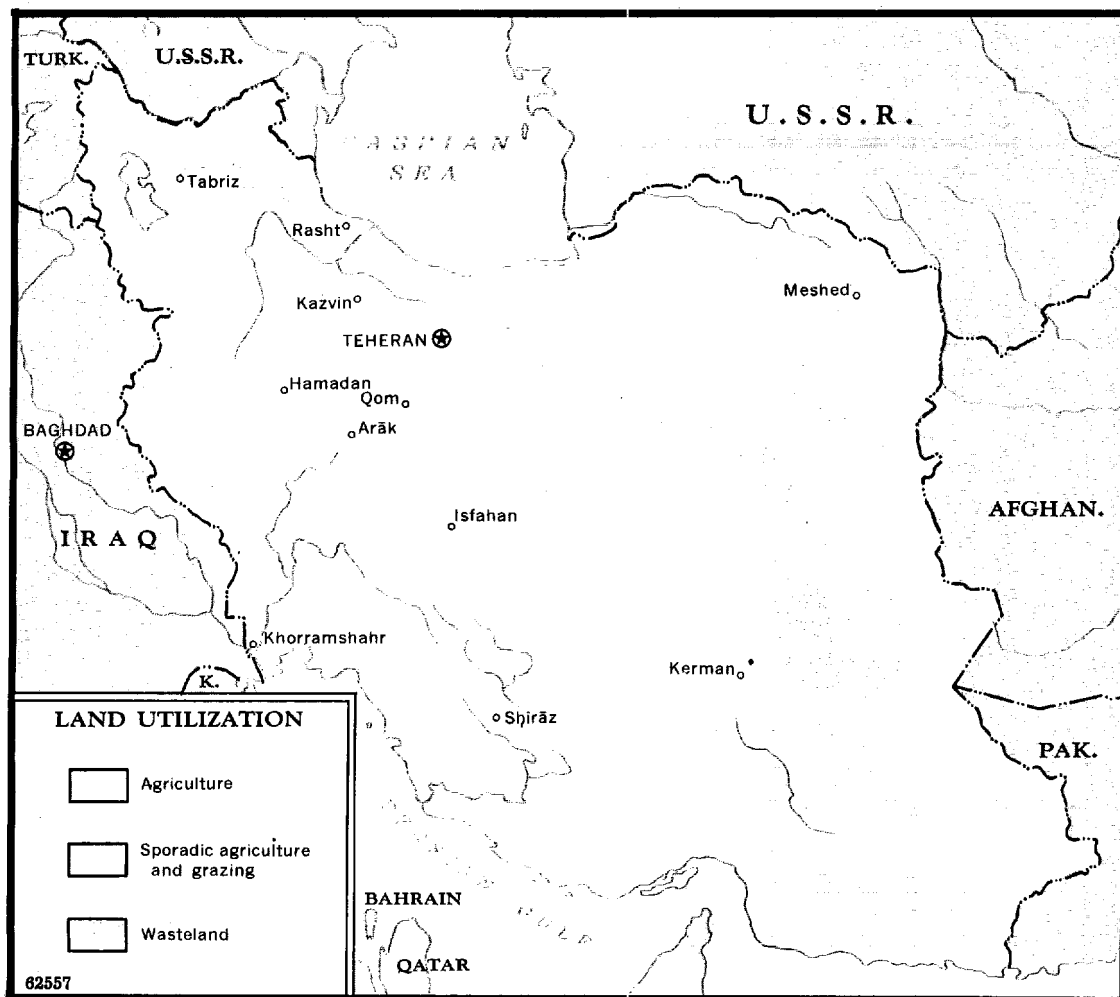
Land tenure arrangements have varied widely from village to village, but under the typical pattern of the past there were four principal categories: 1) private holdings; 2) endowed lands, whose sale was prohibited and whose revenues were set aside in perpetuity for a specific use; 3) crown lands belonging to the royal family; and 4) public domain lands belonging to the government. The present land dis-

tribution affects primarily the first two categories.

Private Holdings

Private holdings were of two types. One was the large holdings of absentee landlords, many owning several villages and some having several hundred. Such holdings included more than 13,500 villages, covering about 55 percent of Iran's agricultural land.

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These landlords are the basis for the semi-myth that 200 (or 500 or 1,000) families control the country. The second type of private holding was that of the small holders, owning one village or less. Many of these holders lived and worked on the land they owned. About 16,500 villagers were in this category.

The main provisions of the land reform law of January 1962 affected primarily the large landlord. The operation of the two stages by which it was implemented is a good example of the compromises which were worked out.

The first stage reduced landlord holdings to one village. The surplus land was not confiscated, however, but bought by the government and sold to the peasants who had been working the land and who could supply their own "capital"--plows and other implements, draft animals, and/or seed. According to official Iranian figures, all or parts of 12,875 villages are being distributed to 455,959 peasant families, some 2 3/4 million persons.

The value of the land was determined by the amount of taxes which the landlord had previously paid--a condign punishment, inasmuch as landlords have consistently underpaid or not paid taxes. The landlords are being reimbursed over a period of 15 years by a cash down payment and "payment orders"--negotiable paper bearing six-percent interest over a period of 15 years.

Peasants receiving land in the first stage repay the govern-

ment the purchase price plus 10 percent over a period of 15 years. Forcing the peasants to pay for the land not only reimburses the government for its outlay to the landlords, but also encourages the farmer to produce at more than a subsistence level.

The second stage, which reduced holdings to a prescribed acreage--varying with the productivity of the land--is more complicated. The landlord was permitted to sell excess land to the government as in the first stage or he could, by mutual agreement, sell directly to the peasant, lease the land to the peasant for 30 years, or divide the land with the peasants on the basis of previous cropsharing arrangements. Wherever the landlord held less than the minimum, he could, with peasant agreement, buy the rights to the land from the peasant. Most second-stage transactions involved leasing arrangements, with 813,260 peasants leasing land from the landlords. A total of 21,764 peasants bought land directly from landlords.

A third stage of land reform is just beginning. It is devoted to the improvement and modernization of farming and to providing the farmers with credit, improving cooperatives, and training. Cooperatives have been a feature of the land reform programs from the beginning, and all peasants who receive land must join a cooperative. A shortage of skilled co-op workers is apt to be a serious weakness in this aspect of the program.

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Public Domain and Crown Land

Land and villages in these categories have been sold to peasants periodically for many years. Further sales now are being carried out by the Land Reform Organization. Government statistics for second-stage transactions reveal that 7,322--about half--of the public domain villages have been leased to 79,742 peasant families. Some 812 villages belonged to the royal estates. Most of these appear to have been distributed, although an undetermined number have been retained for the Crown Prince.

Endowed Lands

Endowed lands have had a special status in Islamic and Iranian civil law. Legally, property can be set aside in perpetuity, with its income devoted to personal interest, e.g., placed in trust for the settler's descendants or for charitable purposes, usually the support of religious personages, institutions, or functions. As much as 15 percent of Iran's cultivated land is estimated to be in this category.

The civil code permits sale of these endowed lands only if this results in the acquisition of better property. Alienation of endowed property on long-term lease is not expressly forbidden by the civil code, however, and the delicate religious problem inherent in the confiscation or forced sale of endowed lands was solved by granting 99-year leases

to the peasants tilling the land. It appears that nearly all of the more than 700 endowed-lands villages have been treated in this way.

Results of Land Reform

Land distribution has generally been considered successful in breaking the dominance of the land-rich absentee landlord and laying the basis for a class of small farmers. The landlord is, however, not completely out of the picture. Some, although probably not a significant number, of the large landowners deeded villages to wives, children, and other relatives before distribution went into effect. More important, however, the landowners with substantial holdings have had other sources of income from trade, business, and industry. There has been no diminution in their political or economic strength and, indeed, their situation may even have been improved by being freed from the social and economic problems of tenant farming.

Iranian agriculture now appears divided into two major segments. One is a traditional village agriculture, carried on by peasants who have received or have rented land and by the small holders who have retained village land. These people are cultivating the same land as they did under the previous crop-sharing system. They now have a greater control over their own futures, but a genuine improvement in economic status will be slow in coming.

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The other segment includes lands which have been retained by landlords, virgin lands being developed in modern ways by these landlords, and new agricultural enterprises being developed by a new class of agricultural entrepreneurs. The prospect for the most rapid growth appears to lie in this segment of Iranian agriculture.

Information on the effects of land reform on agricultural production and peasant successes and difficulties is still scanty. The long-range effects may not be seen for a decade. They depend heavily on the success of the co-operatives and on the government's ability to stimulate modern techniques.

The major criticisms of the Shah's nationalist opponents are that his land distribution program is not sufficiently revolutionary, was poorly planned, dishonestly executed, and designed more for political propaganda than social effect. Although the big landlord is anathema to the nationalists, the village bourgeois smallholder, whom they see multiplying as a result of land reform, is also looked on with a jaundiced eye. In the words of one of the more articulate nationalist critics, "The big absentee landlord may have been a kinder paternal figure to the peasant than the small landlord. Feudalism is usually less ruthless than capitalism."

More trenchant is the observation that the average peas-

ant holding is too small to be farmed profitably. Inasmuch as in virtually every case, the peasant acquired the same land which formerly he had farmed for the landlord, the traditional pattern was maintained. This has meant that often a peasant owns several small plots of land that are widely scattered and of quite different fertility. The difficulties of applying modern farming techniques under these circumstances are obvious.

Potentially more serious is the large number--perhaps as many as 6,000,000--agricultural laborers and migrant workers who do not qualify for land distribution because they have only their labor to contribute. Such laborers form the bulk of the rural unemployed and underemployed and it is this group that tends to migrate to the cities, adding to the great mass of the urban unemployed. So far inarticulate and unorganized, but increasingly aware of their low economic and social status, they are likely to become a major problem in future years.

#### The Literacy Corps

Another major part of the Shah's program is the Literacy Corps, an ambitious attempt started in late 1963 to give millions of peasants at least the rudiments of literacy in Persian. Service in the Literacy Corps, which now has more than 13,000 young men in the field, is in lieu of military service. Qualified conscripts are given

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### Literacy Corpsman teaching village children in Iran

basic military training and special training in teaching illiterates and then sent out to the villages for the remainder of their tour of duty.

Compulsory education has been the law since 1911, and 20 percent of the country's population are now believed to be literate. There are about 15,000 schools with 75,000 teachers accommodating about 2.5 million pupils. There are, however, some two million children for whom there are no schools or teachers and millions of adults who have never had an opportunity for schooling.

The problems have been formidable. The number of teachers

has nearly doubled in ten years but the number of elementary school children has tripled. Teachers have been poorly paid; many are poorly trained and not highly regarded. Educational facilities have been concentrated to a large extent in urban areas. The remoteness of many villages, their small population, the necessity of children working as soon as they can walk, the lack of modern amenities, and frequently the opposition of the local landlord have all worked against the spread of educational opportunities in rural areas.

The Literacy Corps is a direct and imaginative attack on these basic problems. As an alternative to regular military

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service, the Literacy Corps is attractive to the better educated conscript. The corpsmen receive higher pay--they all serve as non-coms--and their status as uniformed representatives of the government performing a function which the villager appreciates as useful gives them motivation and prestige that they might never attain under other circumstances. Many of them have become advisers and spokesmen for the villagers on a wide range of matters, from building construction to government relations. More than 6,000 former corpsmen have now joined the Ministry of Education as regular teachers and have been sent back to rural areas. Only budgetary limitations are restricting this number. Top corpsmen with supervisory potential are being selected for college training, including a year in the US.

As with most of the reform program, it is difficult to evaluate the results of the Literacy Corps program at this point. Literacy was formerly defined as completion of the basic two books of the course. By this definition some 724,000 children and adults have so far become literate and nearly half a million are currently in classes. The Ministry of Education has now accepted the UNESCO definition, and an Iranian now is considered literate if he learns to read sufficiently to raise his economic position. By this definition, results can be measured only after a considerable period of time and would seem to involve much more than simply learning to read. As a morale factor, the Literacy Corps probably rates high among the peas-

antry as a favorable sign of the central government's concern.

#### The Health Corps

The Health Corps was started in January 1964 and now has about 1,500 corpsmen formed into about 358 teams throughout the country. The Health Corps, a parallel of the Literacy Corps, is an attempt to fill a serious need in the countryside--the provision of medical services. The country has about 3,700 medical doctors; of these some 1,700 are in Tehran, and the remainder are in other urban areas. In urban areas the ratio of hospital beds to patients is about 1 to 384, in the rural areas about 1 to 18,000.

Again like the Literacy Corps, Health Corps members are drawn from army conscripts performing their military obligations in this manner. About 25 percent of the present personnel are college educated medical doctors or social workers; the remainder are high school graduates. The basic unit is a team of one commissioned doctor assisted by two or three medical assistants and a driver. Dental, laboratory, and sanitation teams vary somewhat from this pattern.

The Health Corps has been enthusiastically accepted in the villages, so much so, in fact, that the seeds of future trouble may lie in the almost certain shortage of medical personnel in later years. The villagers who taste government welfare for the first time see it as a citizen's long overdue right. One Health

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Corps doctor remarked that the villagers looked upon free medical treatment as a government responsibility and refused to do anything for themselves. They wanted "the hand of God to come down from the sky to help them."

#### Other Programs

The achievement of other aspects of the Shah's program has been less noticeable. The forests have been nationalized, and the former owners presumably are being compensated. However, no major moves to preserve and exploit this valuable natural resource seem to have been made. The Development Corps, also made up of army conscripts, and the "Houses of Justice" are barely under way.

The program of profit sharing between management and labor in industrial enterprises aims to give workers up to 20 percent of the profits of the shop or factory in which they work. In practice, the agreements which have been concluded--covering some 87,000 workers out of a possible 400,000 eligible--have been tied to various types of production incentives, with the average annual benefit probably less than five percent of the worker's income.

Management has generally opposed the profit-sharing scheme, although giving in to government pressure. On the other hand, there has been a tendency in some cases for the Ministry of Labor to demand profit sharing even though the company may not have made a profit.

Management has been given several complex formulas for determining the basis on which profits may be shared. The formula can involve percentage of net profit or percentage of total production. It can be based on reduction of waste or additional production above certain norms.

Some workers are reported to believe that they have a right to receive 20 percent of a factory's estimated profits, regardless of any formal agreement, and they have been critical of the most common form of agreement, that which requires greater diligence and effort. This last approach, however, has had a significant effect in at least two factories, where a great decrease in waste and an increase in production have resulted in as much as a 40-percent increase in the workers' annual income.

The Shah has recently reiterated the necessity of carrying out the profit-sharing law to the letter, and there is every indication that the Ministry of Labor intends to proceed as fast as possible.

Some changes in the electoral law, called for in the Shah's original program, appear to have taken place. The law under which the September 1963 elections were held was in effect the same law that prevailed in 1960, but changes having to do with the mechanics of voting were made. The most conspicuous change was the enfranchisement of women. Few women voted in 1963, however, and the government made no strong attempt to get out

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the female vote. They were permitted to vote in the January 1963 referendum, but their votes were not counted in the final tabulation, thus avoiding a direct confrontation with the religious authorities at that time. Women were for the first time "elected" to parliament in 1963. This was clearly the decision of the Shah, inasmuch as all candidates were personally approved by the Shah and the government saw to it that they were elected.

#### Outlook

The most conspicuous feature of the Shah's reform program is its lack of any attempt or even thought of political reforms. The Shah is clearly the moving spirit of the program, and neither the newspapers nor the radio permit the population to forget his role.

So far, however, the Shah has made no attempt to organize peasant support. The nearest he has come to this was the "Peasants' Congress" in early 1963 and the "Congress of Free Men and Free Women," which met later the same year to choose candidates for the election which followed. Both of these were

carefully stage-managed to produce the desired results, but there has been no follow-up.

The refusal of the Shah to push for any political reforms reflects his well-known views that the Iranian people are not yet prepared for a more democratic milieu and that political reform is impossible until economic reform has been achieved. At what point the Shah will decide that more political freedom is possible is not clear.

The elections which should take place in 1967 may give a clue to the amount of free political activity the Shah is prepared to accept. It seems unlikely, however, that he would do more than permit some choice among government-approved candidates, and, perhaps, encourage greater participation by women. Certainly he will not permit his nationalist opponents the free rein they demand. Meanwhile, the Shah's position continues to depend on the regime's ability to continue to show some progress in reforms, the alertness of the security forces, and the bad aim of potential assassins.

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