

TASK FORCE AREA
CIA OPERATIONS CENTER

15 April 1980

This memorandum is partially in response to a 9 April Evans and Novak column on the National Voice of Iran (NVOI).

The article contains two major errors. It contends that NVOI supports the position of the militants holding the US Embassy. The article also asserts that NVOI criticized Bani-Sadr for giving concessions to "capitalists" and taking money from "toiling peoples' pockets" when he was Minister of Economics.

In point of fact, NVOI has not addressed the hostage issue directly. Moreover, the statement on Bani-Sadr was made by the Tudeh Central Committee on 31 January and reprinted in Le Monde on 2 February.

The memorandum distills NVOI subject matter over the past three months (January-March) and discusses how this Soviet-controlled instrument has geared its broadcasts to the theme of Islamic revolution.

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Currents in National Voice of Iran Broadcast:
January-March 1980

Summary

Created in 1959, the National Voice of Iran (NVOI) is an instrument of Soviet propaganda to Iran. The radio broadcasting facility, located in Baku, the capital of Soviet Azarbayjan, denies affiliation with the Soviet government. Its broadcasts are typically more extreme than the Soviet press, probably because of this "non-official" status. Commentaries are predominately in Persian with a few in Azarbayjani. The tone and content of the programming, however, are identical in both languages. (S)

NVOI concentrated on the following themes during January to March 1980:

- The threat of US imperialism to the Persian Gulf region in general and to the Iranian and Afghan "revolutions" in particular.
- The defense of Soviet intentions in Afghanistan, criticism of Iran's negative position on the Soviet intervention, and the need for Iranian-Afghan cooperation in battling imperialism.
- The urgency of promoting literacy and agrarian self-sufficiency to safeguard Iran's Islamic revolution from subversion and external pressures.
- The importance of President Bani-Sadr's adherence to the precepts of Khomeini both in solving Iran's internal problems and in combating imperialism. (S)

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted], Iran Task Force. Comments and queries may be addressed to Chief, Iran Task Force on [redacted]

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Background

The Soviets for almost forty years have used radio as a means of conveying their policy and propaganda to Iran. During World War II, the Soviets took advantage of broadcast time allotted the Allies on Tehran Radio to play up Soviet achievements, levy vitriolic attacks on the West, and, when appropriate, criticize Iranian policy. Simultaneously, Moscow Radio developed its Persian-language service to propagandize and occasionally comment directly on internal Iranian matters. (S)

In 1959 the Soviets bolstered their capability toward Iran with the establishment of the clandestine National Voice of Iran (NVOI) at Baku. Baku is an excellent radio propagation point owing to its location on the Caspian Sea. NVOI presents itself as a domestic station that officially is unaffiliated with any group--although its commentaries are pro-Moscow. There is no specific information on station personnel. Soviet and sympathetic Iranian Azarbayjanis who speak Persian in addition to their own Turkic tongue probably comprise most of the broadcast staff. NVOI still may employ Kurds fluent in Persian, but the station has discontinued its Kurdish programming. (S)

US "Imperialism" and Soviet "Liberation"

NVOI continued to place great emphasis on Iran's "popular" struggle with imperialism--particularly US "aggression"--in light of increasingly strained relations with the US over the hostage crisis. Broadcasts constantly warned that the Pentagon and the CIA are plotting military aggression against Iran. Although NVOI did not address the hostage issue, its fervent anti-US posture is apparently designed to reinforce the Iranian perception of the US as an aggressor and the hostages as criminal tools of that aggression. (S)

Editorials declared that the Iranians' battle against "US imperialism" is the final stage of the revolution. To ensure success, NVOI advocated the purge of all imperialist-minded bureaucrats, "those disguising themselves as religious men," and disloyal military men. Moreover, in late January NVOI noted that "in this connection the society of Muslim students (a partial reference to the student militants at the US Embassy) has issued a statement demanding that a list of all former Savakists (labeled as agents of US imperialism) be published so that they would be identified and punished for their crimes." (S)

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NVOI, however, was inconsistent in its appraisal of US relations with other Persian Gulf countries. Commentaries asserted, on the one hand, that the US is urgently negotiating with these countries for naval staging bases against Iran while, on the other hand, that the US is using its naval forces merely to squeeze them for oil, adding that "justice is with OPEC." One program was quick to point out that the Soviet Union poses no threat to oil rich countries because it is "more than self-sufficient." (S)

NVOI devoted equal effort to the Soviet "liberation" of Afghanistan. Commentaries argued that Iran's struggle against an imperialist US and its sycophants--the People's Republic of China, the UK, Egypt, Israel, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Oman--gives it common cause with the Afghan people. Iran, therefore, should strengthen its ties with Afghanistan against the "arch devil" US. One broadcast maintained that Afghanistan's support for and protection of the Iranian revolution had triggered US reaction against the new Afghan government. (S)

Several programs vehemently defended Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as a move based on "persistent requests from the legal government of Afghanistan." NVOI claimed that Soviet forces had joined with the Afghan people in battling US, British, and Chinese trained insurgents based in Pakistan and that US and Zionist imperialism had transformed the country's internal problems into grounds for regional aggression. Moreover, the "liberated" Afghan people clearly approved of the "changes" effected by the Soviets in their country. (S)

In light of these arguments, NVOI on two occasions attacked Iranian government statements condemning the Soviet intervention. The commentaries asserted that these irresponsible statements diverted attention from the struggle against US imperialism and that they were contrary to Khomeini's call for national unity on this vital issue. NVOI heaped criticism on Iran's participation in the Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference in late January. The broadcast claimed that the US and those dependent upon Washington staged the conference, which was held in Pakistan. Iran joined in the condemnation of the Soviet Union, commented NVOI, only under the pressure of imperialists in the government. (S)

Literacy and Land

NVOI played up literacy and a rejuvenated agrarian sector as vital factors in combating outside attempts to crush the revolution. Broadcasts repeatedly praised Khomeini's

alleged quest for national literacy as a means of better identifying false propaganda designed to deceive an uneducated populace. This effort, noted NVOI, is in stark contrast to the Shah's policies which "purposely prevented our country's people from becoming literate." NVOI editorials also praised the uprising by farmers and peasants against "feudalists and landlords." Moreover, broadcasts called for a government purge of large landowners as well as a purge of government officials in sympathy with rural magnates. (S)

NVOI asserted that the Shah, in collusion with the US, deliberately destroyed the country's agrarian economy, making Iran dependent on foreign agrarian produce. This situation, it said, endangers the revolution, particularly since the US has threatened economic sanctions and a naval blockade.* The solution, concluded NVOI, is greater self-sufficiency. Several broadcasts exhorted the Revolutionary Council to give the landless maximum assistance. At the end of January, a program lauded the Council's initial measures for land distribution and urged the government to grant the rural poor immediate financial aid. (S)

Presidency and Electorate

NVOI treated the presidency and the Iranian electoral system in broad strokes. Several broadcasts hailed the presidential election as a historic point of departure for Iran. The programs, however, warned that some candidates had attacked revolutionary forces loyal to Khomeini and that the election campaign could not wrest attention from the country's vital problems. One broadcast in Azarbyajani recalled Khomeini's message urging all ethnic minorities to vote. Following Bani-Sadr's election, NVOI emphasized that the president's duty is to abide by the dictates of Khomeini and press the fight against US and Zionist imperialism--an indirect criticism of Bani-Sadr's opposition to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. One program, nonetheless, praised Bani-Sadr's alleged call for a purge of the government and armed forces. In a brief commentary, NVOI criticized Iran's simple majority electoral system as ignoring "the rights of millions of toiling and oppressed Iranians." (S)

NVOI and Islamic Revolution

NVOI has couched its commentary in Islamic rhetoric. The Shah and the US are repeatedly cast as "satan" and "devil". Islam as used by NVOI conveniently mandates

*NVOI ignored US statements that an embargo would exclude food and medicine.

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courses of action in line with Soviet policy--such as a rapprochement between Khomeini and Afghanistan's Karmal. NVOI masks its support for the Communist Tudeh Party by lumping together so-called "progressive forces"--Communists and leftists--and clerical activists. Indeed, the Soviets believe that NVOI's recommended purge of "satanic" elements would afford the Tudeh and similar groups a broader scope of activity. (S)

Unlike the Tudeh's more direct attacks on Iranian government officials--Bani-Sadr in particular--NVOI conveys its criticism without naming figures still in favor with Khomeini. NVOI broadly casts such men as counterrevolutionaries and, therefore, in violation of Islamic precepts. Commentaries portray objectionable government policies as the ungodly machinations of officials whose goal is to sabotage the Islamic revolution and ensure the triumph of US-led imperialism. The solution to this heresy is liquidation. (S)

NVOI presents itself as a staunch supporter of Khomeini and Islam. The popular Iranian doctrine that Shia Islam is a modern, revolutionary movement in the purest sense has enabled NVOI to inject heavy doses of Marxist-style fervor into its broadcasts. Although Shia Islam and Soviet Communism are at opposite theological poles, the "revolutionary" nature of current Iranian social, political, and foreign policy probably affords NVOI's propaganda some sympathy. (S)