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Prospects for Iran

Interagency Intelligence Memorandum

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PROSPECTS FOR IRAN

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PRINCIPAL JUDGMENTS

The *Islamic Republic Party* (IRP) now controls the formal reins of government in Iran, but has yet to consolidate power fully. Differences of approach and emphasis, as well as personality clashes exist in the IRP, but they do not now seem open to Western exploitation.

The IRP, its armed supporters—the Revolutionary Guard and fundamentalist thugs—and the revolutionary committees have effectively limited widespread dissidence beyond specifically targeted terrorist actions. Any effective move to unseat them would require both extensive internal popular support and military action. Despite the IRP's obvious and major problems, no leftist or moderate group is yet able to mount such a challenge.

Khomeini maintains his personal hold over the urban masses and is central to IRP legitimacy. If he dies before the consolidation of fundamentalist power, competing groups will attempt to manipulate the succession and thereby weaken the ruling clique. It is unlikely, however, that this weakening process would lead to an immediate collapse of fundamentalist rule.

Currently, the chief internal opposition group is the strongly nationalistic and leftist *Mujahedin*, which is being undercut by the government's harsh repression. Despite recent tactical moves to broaden its support base, the *Mujahedin* is unlikely to moderate its basically Islamic radical leftist orientation. The *Mujahedin* has approximately 12,000 organized members, mostly present or former students. Because its terrorist tactics have openly challenged the regime, the *Mujahedin* has gained some sympathy among other disaffected Iranians who

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disagree with its leftist ideology. In seeking a stronger foundation for its activities, the Mujahedin might seek common cause with:

- *The Exiles.* Any alliance between the Mujahedin and exiles would be tactical. Both sides would submerge their differences only until the fundamentalists fell.
- *Other Revolutionary States and Groups.* The Mujahedin has good credentials with Algeria as well as links to Libya and the PLO, and once in power might turn to them for assistance and support.
- *The Soviets.* Although the degree of Soviet influence within the Mujahedin is debatable, there is evidence of both direct and indirect contacts. Mujahedin publications consistently attack the United States but generally avoid mention of the USSR. The organization probably shares a number of Soviet positions and could turn to Moscow for assistance if it took power. Its stated preference, however, is for independent policies.

The pro-Moscow *Tudeh party* remains small and is having problems recruiting members because it cannot dispel the image of being foreign controlled. Tudeh is, however, relatively well organized and liberally funded by the Soviets. It supports the IRP while working hard to infiltrate the government and military. We do not believe it is currently capable of assuming power even during a rapid disintegration of the fundamentalist government.

Various *non-Persian minorities*—most of which are armed—are hostile to the central government and may be open to outside manipulation. The minorities' willingness to cooperate with any opposition movement depends on their belief that parochial desires for local autonomy would be advanced. None of these groups plays a major role in the political dynamics of Tehran itself.

Most of the *Iranian military* is engaged in the war with Iraq and consequently is far from Iran's center of power. Some officers may maintain contacts with exile groups and opposition forces inside Iran, but exile claims of support are unverified and probably exaggerated. The services have personnel, morale, command, and logistic problems. Fundamentalist control is strengthened through the presence of the Revolutionary Guard and pro-Khomeini informants. We know of no military heroes emerging from the Iran-Iraq war. The regime has always been deeply suspicious of military loyalties. The war, however, has delayed implementation of fundamentalist plans to Islamicize the Army. Otherwise, the border fighting has had little political impact in

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Tehran, and the fundamentalists do not seem to feel any pressure to end the conflict soon.

The *traditional Iranian power brokers*—leading bazaar merchants, secular politicians, and moderate clerics—have been intimidated by the IRP. They hope for a strong leader to emerge to offer a viable alternative to fundamentalist rule.

The Iranian *exile leadership* has been ineffective and unwilling to unite. Many exiles are discredited by past associations with the Shah or the Iraqis. Former Navy Commander Admiral Madani appears to have fewer liabilities than other exile leaders. An outside moral and financial supporter and manipulator would be required to force some cohesion upon the exile community and to organize any aggressive development of its potential assets inside Iran. Unification of the exile leadership would be a small first step with limited advantages. Such unification would not necessarily have much immediate political impact on internal politics in Iran but could result in:

- A realistic inventory of their actual contacts and organization in Iran.
- A coordinated propaganda strategy.
- Some hope in Iran that an opposition focal point had been established.

The *Soviets* are unlikely to attempt a power play merely because the exiles are being supported by a Western power and, so long as Iran is not pro-West, Moscow is unlikely to intervene militarily. Nevertheless, the Soviets would seek to exploit any Western backing of the exiles to ingratiate themselves with the fundamentalists. If Western-backed elements seemed to be mounting a successful attempt against the regime, Moscow would intensify support for its clients.

The Soviets possess some key advantages in Iran. Geographic proximity, ongoing economic and military aid, diplomatic representation, covert intelligence activity, and a radio station all offer opportunities for Soviet exploitation. Additionally, the present focus of the Iranian revolution continues to be more anti-American and anti-Western than anti-Soviet.

Several possible developments could lead the Soviets to consider military intervention in Iran. These include:

- Serious threat of a preemptive US military move.
- Seizure of power by a leftist coalition explicitly calling for Soviet assistance.

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- Collapse of the government in Tehran with no clear successor regime emerging.

There are also major disincentives for the Soviets' use of overt military force in Iran. Paramount in such a decision would be the risk of a long-term escalating military confrontation with the United States, both in Iran and elsewhere. Still, if Moscow believed the momentum of political events in Iran threatened the possible reemergence of a strong, centralized pro-US regime in Tehran, it might use the threat of military intervention as a tool. Any US attempt to intervene militarily in Iran greatly increases the prospect of a Soviet counterintervention.

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