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NFAC 3769-79

18 July 1979

Memorandum for Dr. Bowie

Subject: Earlier Estimates on Iran

Estimates on Iran: 1960 - 1975, The RecordNIE - Outlook for Iran - 16 February 1960

Estimative emphasis is on the stability of the Shah's regime and chances of an upheaval. The military and security forces are seen as main support of Shah but also as chief potential threat to his regime. (A coup attempt might take place any time.)

While the odds on an upheaval are difficult to assess, on the whole the chances are estimated to be against a coup; but a coup might be triggered by civil disturbances threatening public disorder.

However, the paper notes new internal threats generated by economic developments and difficulties that are apt to weaken the Shah's position. The "long-run importance of this civilian opposition cannot be discounted." "If a dramatic issue and effective leadership should emerge, the opposition would probably be able to mobilize popular support for attacks on the present order."

NIE - Prospects for Iran - 28 February 1961

Focus primarily domestic. Growing political unrest of urban middle-class more openly manifested. "While a political upheaval could take place in Iran at any time, the odds are

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against such a development in the next year or two. However, profound political and social change in one form or another is virtually inevitable. *The nature of Iranian politics and the character of the Shah make it unlikely that this change will be evolutionary"*

SNIE - Political Prospects for Iran - 7 September 1962

Focus internal. "Before long (the Shah) will almost certainly again become the direct target of political pressures and general discontent. As long as he retains control of the army and security forces, the chances are that he will be able to ride out such crises, *but each time a serious crisis rises, the possibility of his overthrow or even his voluntary abdication will be present.*"

SNIE - The Iranian Situation - 10 April 1963

Focus internal. Conclusion similar to above: Forces are set in motion that it will be difficult to organize and direct. However, chances of Shah remaining in control are good.

NIE - Iran - 20 May 1964

Focus domestic. It is held to be uncertain whether modernization will prove relatively peaceful or whether violence and revolution are in store. Shah's reforms stimulate and shape forces that must bring eventually profound changes in Iranian society, *one way or another.* However, the Shah, supported by the armed forces, seems likely to dominate Iranian political life for some time to come.

NIE - Iran - 24 March 1966

Focus domestic and foreign policy. Shah is aware that his domestic position depends on US support. He will probably remain firmly in control though the bulk of the educated

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middle class will remain estranged from his regime. Religious conservative opposition is also noted but it is said to be muzzled and leaderless. *The opposition is highly unlikely to come to power because it is disparate and fragmentary.*

Special Memorandum - The Shah's Increasing Assurance - 7 May 1968

Focus mainly external. *The Shah is said to have dramatically strengthened the position of the monarchy during the past decade. He has undercut the already fragmented opposition by carrying out economic and social reforms. From a timorous, titular monarch he has turned into a self-confident potentate. Longer-range problems remain, but for some time to come the unrest of earlier days seems under control. Over the long term, the Shah's policy of rapid industrialization will probably not provide a satisfactory substitute for greater political participation, but for some time to come the unrest of earlier days seems under control.*

SNIE - Iran's International Position - 3 September 1970

Focus primarily external. Shah's internal position is said to be solid. The economy is booming. There is no organized opposition. The conservative Muslim clergy is only mumbling.

NIE - Problems in the Persian Gulf - 7 June 1973

Focus on external problems. *The Shah is keeping domestic frustration and hostility under firm control by means of the "White Revolution" and repression of dissent.*

NIE - Iran - 9 May 1975

Focus both domestic and external. *"We see little prospect during the next few years for a serious challenge to the Shah's authoritarian control over Iran's internal affairs." Nevertheless, his monopoly of decisionmaking is incurring political costs in terms of growing alienation and discontent. Strains within Iranian society seem destined to grow.*

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Comment

1. Estimates were more frequent during the 1960s (especially early 1960s) than in the 1970s. Why?
2. The main focus of the first five estimates was on Iran's internal affairs. In 1966 the emphasis shifts to its foreign role. The last estimate (1975) dealt with both sides.
3. Relatively speaking, the analytical and estimative quality of estimates was better during the first part of the 1960s than afterwards. The earlier estimates reflected an understanding that rapid economic development was bound to be destabilizing in this autocracy and that a violent upheaval, though not imminent, was almost certain to occur in the longer run. (In retrospect, these estimates were very good.)
4. The NIE of March 1966 breaks with the estimative thrust of the preceding papers. The new tone is strongly established in the Special Memorandum of May 1968. The Shah's position is now seen as solid and the opposition, even though present and perhaps growing, is perceived to be weak and divided. It appears that this new estimative thrust prevailed through 1978 and the approach (seen in retrospect) of a revolutionary crisis.
5. The intriguing question is: Why did this change in basic assumptions occur in 1966 and 1967? I do not know and can only list some possibilities.
 - a. Was it induced by a "cry wolf" phenomenon? (This is not very plausible because the earlier estimates placed the probability of a serious upheaval in the far future.)
 - b. Was it induced by Iran's rapidly expanding armed forces and by their perception as an effective means of suppressing any active opposition?
 - c. Was it induced by a deterioration in the flow of information? And if so, why did this happen? Was it largely that information on Iran's domestic politics

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was given a reduced priority because of the new prevailing assumption that the Shah's hold on power was firm?

d. Was it induced by a change in US policy toward Iran? And if so, in what manner?

e. Was it induced by a change in the quality of the analysts?

f. Was it a consequence of INR's contraction?



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