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OCI No. 1996/63

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
11 June 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Insurgency in
Iran

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3. Iran

a. Urban Riots - The rioting that took place in Tehran, Qom, and Shiraz on 5 and 6 June was instigated by a clique of conservative religious leaders (mullahs) of Iran's dominant Shia sect, who violently oppose land reform and the emancipation of women--key features of the Shah's reform program. The mullahs doubtless obtained financial assistance from the landowning class. Iranian officials have also charged Nasir with complicity in the outbreak, probably without real cause.

The Iranian security forces had been forewarned of trouble during the Moharram period of religious mourning (25 May to 24 June) when the mullahs are in particularly close contact with the public. The authorities at first decided to permit normal religious activity as long as the sermons did not take on a political tone. When the mullahs called for the overthrow of the government it was decided to arrest the chief agitator, Ruohollah Khomeini, and a number of his followers.

Khomeini's arrest of 5 June set off a series of protest demonstrations in Tehran and its suburbs, and in the large shrine cities of Qom and Shiraz. These demonstrations were well planned and organized, and were evidently intended to produce a complete breakdown of public order.

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In Tehran, the rioters planned to overwhelm the local police by carrying out a number of simultaneous attacks in various parts of the city. Saboteurs were dispatched by taxicab and bicycle to a number of points. They were able to start several fires and do some minor damage to buildings and vehicles, but did not succeed in knocking out any major installations.

Meanwhile, the agitators had mobilized a large number of bazaar idlers and slum dwellers from south Tehran. Crowds headed for major targets, such as the radio station, government buildings, and Tehran University, where they hoped to link up with mobs of student rioters.

The city police were committed early in the disturbances, but were quickly outmatched, having only the cadets from the police academy as a reserve. The commander of the Tehran military garrison immediately committed his troops, but also found he needed a reserve. An additional battalion was brought in from outside the city.

Once committed, the troops performed well. It had been feared that they might refuse to fire on the crowds, but there was no difficulty in this respect. In one instance, when a detachment cordoning off a street was rushed by a crowd, the troops fired into the mob, killing and wounding a large number. However, they generally behaved with restraint, firing over the heads of the crowds and keeping casualties to a minimum.

The overwhelming use of military force broke up the demonstrations, and after a brief renewal of skirmishing on the morning of 6 June, order was restored in Tehran. Similar rioting and counteraction took place in Qom and Shiraz on 5 June.

Curfew and martial law regulations have been strictly applied in Tehran, and the arrest of Khomeini and his cohorts has deprived the mullah group of valuable leadership. However, some new leaders are appearing and calling for a renewal of the struggle. They may attempt further disturbances. The government forces available

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should suffice to maintain general order in the city.

The religious fanatics do not appear to have enough public support throughout the country to seize control of any other important towns. In their bitterness and desperation, however, they may well attempt sabotage or isolated terrorist attacks. The danger of assassination attempts against the Shah and other government officials is also increased. Furthermore, if Khomeini is executed, ill feeling against the Shah will be aggravated.

b. Tribal Insurgency - The assassination (by his brother) of Abdollah Zarghampur, the prime mover in the tribal troubles, leaves only one active leader of a tribal group of guerrilla fighters in the southwest. This is Nasir Taheri, a minor khan of the Boir Ahmadi tribe. His forces, probably numbering about fifty, are split up, and may be attempting to escape to Iraq or Qatar. Most of the other tribal chiefs have submitted to the military authorities, and the government will now be able to turn more attention to the brigandage and highway robbery that has plagued the Shiraz area for several months. Although this is largely carried out by Qashqai bands, there is no reason to think that it is politically motivated.

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