

~~TOP SECRET~~

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BLACK ROOM REPORT

We have been examining the situation in Iran from the standpoint of influencing the course of political developments. These developments are likely to include one of the following:

- a hostile Islamic state or hostile leftist state -- either supported by the USSR.
- disintegration of Iran with possible Soviet intervention in the north.

To influence events, there are several approaches which could be followed. Each involves an increasing level of U.S. commitment:

1. Contingency Planning. Let nature take its course and be prepared to weigh in at the appropriate moment by virtue of indirect contact with dissidents.
2. Destabilization. Propaganda and black operations intended to discredit Khomeini and breed dissent among him and his followers.
3. Contact Opposition. Direct U.S. contact with potential alternative leaders indicating support for their efforts. Expanded contacts with tribal elements, initially aimed at better intelligence collection.
4. Encourage/Organize Alternative. On political side, aim at a government-in-exile or creation of a political cadre which could move in quickly. On the tribal side, provide arms, support and coordinating mechanism for regional movements.

Several basic policy questions must be answered in considering our approach:

1. Are we prepared to accept a commitment to destabilize the situation in Iran and try to replace the present leadership?

*not yet*

- It could be a protracted effort, and success is by no measure assured.
- The commitment will tend to grow over time and to become increasingly visible.
- This could weld the left and religious extremists together on a common anti-American theme.

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Classified and Extended by Zbigniew Brzezinski  
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But

- Friendly opposition forces are unlikely to act effectively without a clear signal from us.
- Continuation of Khomeini's rule is likely to destroy the moderate elements in the political spectrum, leaving the left as the only credible alternative to religious fanaticism when Khomeini inevitably falls or passes from the scene.

2. If we make such a decision, what is our strategy? Should we focus our efforts on the regime in Tehran and attempt to replace the central government?

- Tends to preserve territorial integrity and unity.
- Minimizes risks of Soviet (or Iraqi) dismemberment.

But

- Khomeini is strongest in Tehran -- controls the streets.
- Our assets are very limited there.

3. Alternatively, should we focus our efforts on the periphery to build up an alternative government?

- Tribal opposition is real and could undermine Khomeini's authority.
- The oilfields are the possible prize. We would maximize our chances of holding the oil in the event of complete collapse or Soviet intervention.

But

- The risk of civil war and complete disintegration is serious.
- The danger of Soviet intervention in the north is increased. This is likely to be a partition option.

What assets do we have?

- Egypt should be willing to cooperate with us for broadcasts and possibly other operational assistance. Iraq may be willing to work with us in certain areas. Saudis and Gulf states possible allies.
- Some key figures inside Iran may be willing to cooperate (Admiral Madani, Governor of the oil region, Ayatollah Shariat-Madari).

-- We have good contact with some of the tribes, and this could be expanded.

-- Exile groups are begging for a signal from us. There are some good people (Amini, Bakhtiar), outside Iran that can have an impact there, but they would need a lot of help to become a significant factor.

-- Ultimately, direct overt U.S. intervention could be required. The extent of our commitment should be no greater than our willingness to play it out to the end. This is particularly important the more we involve the Saudis and Egyptians.

-- The Iranian military at present belongs to no one. Although our capability to swing it to our support is limited, neutralizing it is a realistic objective.

Our liabilities:

-- Khomeini is viewed as a saint by much of the Iranian population and the embodiment of the national will. Opposing him directly may only strengthen his appeal. He is ruthless and thrives on confrontation.

-- Khomeini controls Tehran and the streets. It is hard to visualize any leader or organization taking him on on his own turf.

-- There is no obvious alternative leader. Most have been tainted by association with the Shah. This is particularly true of the exiled military.

Three alternative assessments:

1. The only way to find out how much strength Khomeini really has is to test it. That means we have to take some action, e.g. mounting a propaganda/disinformation effort, probing weak spots in the military and political structure, and increasing our level of contacts with tribal elements and exiles. We are never going to be able to work with the Khomeini regime. We might as well recognize that fact and begin a systematic effort to build an alternative infrastructure. Letting nature take its course in fact means abandoning the field to the left as the only viable alternative. The longer Khomeini remains in power, the more tempting it will be for the moderates to move to the left or be crushed. A center coalition will emerge only if we encourage and support it.

2. Although we do not like Khomeini, we lack the assets to bring him down. By opposing him directly, we play into his hands and strengthen his appeal. Khomeini is his own worst enemy. Left

I agree

to his own devices, he will destroy himself. We should prepare for that event and use our covert assets to urge it along. But we should not get ourselves committed to his overthrow. We will probably not be able to bring it off, and the commitment is open-ended. The Iranian revolution was a true expression of deep-seated national will, and the anti-Americanism we are seeing is a true expression of national outrage at U.S. actions over the past 26 years. To support the overthrow of Khomeini will be seen in Iran as an attempted replay of 1953 and the return of the Shah. Such a move opposes the fundamental trend of events and will foreclose any future cooperation.

3. We are not in control of events, and we must prepare for the worst. The oil fields are what count in the final analysis. We should focus our attention on the south and prepare to hold it no matter what. That is where our best assets are located, and we should play from strength.

Our Choices:

Actions

-- Destabilize the current situation -- this can be done without showing the American hand and could contribute to undermining Khomeini and the emergence of more moderate leadership but equally could hasten the advent of a more radical leftist regime.

-- Increase contacts with dissidents. To be more effective to our current contacts, this would have to involve some financial support. Our hand would begin to show.

-- Support for tribal elements.

Strategy

-- Focus on developments in Tehran.

-- Focus on tribal support with emphasis on securing a base in the oil producing region in the south.

*Be extremely cautious about U.S. action for now. but assess options within CIA. Let them give us analysis of all potential Anti-Khomeini elements -*

*J*