

[Transcribed from poorly legible copy]

SECRET

From: Amembassy Tehran  
Action: Secstate Wash DC Immediate  
Subj: Looking Ahead: The Military Option  
Ref: Tehran 10267 (NOTAL)

Summary: A military takeover is feasible, but at heavy long-term cost for U.S. interests as well as for Iran. End summary.

1. It has become a commonplace in Tehran conversations these days that the country is heading ever [word illegible] to some sort of military takeover [5 words illegible] of stopping street disorders and [word illegible]. The main difference of opinion is between those who believe that the polarization of opposing forces between the enemy camp and the Shah's has reached the point of no return leading to a test of strength, and those who believe that this test of strength can still be postponed or averted by introduction of a political solution within the present constitutional framework. Almost everybody agrees a military takeover will be ordered by the Shah eventually, if the disorders continue. Differences of opinion exist as to the degree of chaos that will be averted by such a military takeover, the degree of long-term harm that will be done by it, its likely duration, and the forces which will emerge in Iran under the military régime and afterward.

2. Most people believe the military are pressing for such a takeover. Top military officers have continued to express to us in a very direct way their impatience with the present government. Air Force General Babii [?] has been the most blunt and outspoken, and he is champing at the bit to impose order. Admiral Habibollahi, General Oveisi, and others, while not as extreme as Babii, believe a halt must be called to the vast public disorders. General Azhari, perhaps the most reflective [word illegible] in the military establishment, appears to be wobbling: he told General Gast, chief of ARMISH-MAAG, that perhaps the Shah had gone too far too quickly in his liberalization. These officers profess loyalty to the Shah -- we believe sincerely -- and imply that no action would be taken without his blessing. They also realize that without the Shah's approval, a military government would lose any venter of "legitimacy." They are, however, deeply disturbed by the apparent weakness and desolation of the Shah currently, and in due course may attempt to force his hand -- join us or leave.

3. Supporting the idea of a takeover are many Embassy contacts within the business and government establishment here, including some technocrats. They frequently phrase the thought more gently as the need for firm leadership and view it as the lesser of two evils if disorders continue and political remedies seem unavailing. Many have convinced themselves that nothing less than the national survival of Iran and its non-communist future are at stake. A goodly portion of these people consists, on the other hand, of moderates who eagerly wish for a political solution rather than a military takeover. Even

the stronger partisans of a takeover [2 words illegible] it would inflict deep wounds [3 words illegible] in the long run.

4. The Shah himself told the ambassador that one of his options would be a military government. He has said this could be either straight-out rule by the armed forces or a mixed civilian/military government with a general as prime minister. He has not specified who the general would be, though Fereidun Jam, a former chief of staff and present ambassador to Spain, has often been mentioned by circles best described as neither whole-heartedly pro-Shah, nor oppositionist.

5. Any takeover would have to involve a very hard crack-down on demonstrators in the streets, students and professors demonstrating in the universities, schoolchildren and teachers demonstrating in the schools, religious leaders and their bazaari merchant backers, left-wingers of all sorts, and sufficient numbers of striking workers to get all strikers back on the job. Some curbs on the press would be inevitable. The momentum of this operation would involve thousands of arrests, among the first probably being many of the political prisoners, who have been released over the past year or two. Since the opposition has made it clear it is preparing guerrilla-style resistance, the army would have to face extensive urban violence, and a degree of hit-and-run terrorism outside the cities. Given the pro-government passivity of many areas of the countryside [5 words illegible] Sunni Moslem tribes who were pacified by Reza Shah and the present Shah not [3 words illegible] the army should be able to handle disturbances outside the larger cities. For urban purposes, the police and SAVAK would have to be given a freer hand than in recent months, perhaps, assisted by some sort of military intelligence in whom the Army high command would have greater confidence. To be effective, the takeover would have to turn Iran back to the tightly controlled state it was before liberalization began in mid-1976.

6. We are quiet [sic] sure this can be done -- but at a cost. We believe the vast percentage of the military officers would be loyal to such a government -- particularly if the Shah's imprimatur was on it -- and a large percentage of the troops would follow their officers. (The government policy of stationing troops away from their home area would help in this respect, though we would witness some desertions and even defections to the other side.) A degree of antagonism exists between the military and the security forces, but this is more in the nature of rivalry than any difference of policy, and we would expect the security agencies to cooperate.

7. On the other hand, almost everyone agrees the long-term costs would be heavy. In the eyes of vast numbers of moderates who have been hoping for a moderate outcome, [the rest of the document is illegible -- approximately 3 pages].

[signed]

Sullivan

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Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, [nsarchiv@gwu.edu](mailto:nsarchiv@gwu.edu)