

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

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SENSITIVE

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
From: Cyrus Vance
Subject: White Paper on Iran

I wanted to bring you up to date on our efforts to prepare for an eventual Congressional or other inquiry into U.S. policy and activities in Iran and to restate my belief that we ought not to prepare a simple White Paper.

In response to an SCC decision last December, we collected and summarized in January the key documents available in each area of U.S.-Iranian relations since 1941. In addition, we prepared a lengthy, highly classified "Survey of U.S.-Iranian Relations," which, although clearly not a White Paper, covers the broad outline of U.S.-Iranian relations and details certain of their more sensitive aspects. This goes far beyond the initial short paper I understand you were given. The NSC has a copy of the "Survey" and a one-volume compilation of the summaries of key documents. We are holding the documents themselves and a substantial amount of useful backup material.

The NSC staff is reviewing certain of the important White House files to which we did not have access, to ensure that our inventory of key documents is as nearly complete as possible. Together, all of this material should provide us with the information we will need in responding to inquiries, preparing speeches in defense of U.S. actions, or presenting our case to the Congress through testimony.

I believe there are a number of serious problems inherent in preparing a simple White Paper on Iran:

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-- While supporters of U.S. policy toward Iran might at least initially welcome a White Paper, it is the detractors and the critics who would most carefully scrutinize the document and make it a target of their attacks. We would present a broad target for inquiry into nearly every action taken by the U.S. in pursuit of our objectives. In short, we could find ourselves decidedly on the defensive or having to adopt an untenable "we cannot go beyond what we have said" posture.

-- To be effective, a White Paper would have to be presented as an objective account of current and past policies. In portraying earlier problems, we could stimulate charges of having attacked previous administrations. To the extent the Paper fell short of complete objectivity, we could be open to charges, here and abroad, of "covering up" the acts of this or previous administrations.

-- Past experience with White Papers, such as those on China (1949) and Vietnam (1965), is not encouraging. Regardless of how well they were prepared (the China White Paper, for example, was very well done), they became more of a liability than an asset. The Vietnam White Paper was clearly a minus in public attitudes towards our Vietnam policies.

-- A White Paper covering the entire range of our policies with Iran could arouse serious concern in other states in the region, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan, that their confidential exchanges with the U.S. could be brought into the open at some point.

-- We would have difficulty controlling the timing of its presentation; once it was completed, we could encounter FOI and Congressional requests for its release.

-- Lastly, if issued before the hostages were released, a spirited public defense of U.S. policy in the form of a White Paper would almost certainly complicate our efforts to gain their freedom. Depending on how it were perceived, it could make still more difficult a face-saving solution for the Iranians, or strengthen those elements in Iran demanding other inquiries into U.S. actions in that country.

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