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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 172

SUBJECT: The 6 December Riots in Tehran

1. On 7 December the New York Times, the Washington Post and the New York Herald Tribune all carried an Associated Press story from Tehran which described the previous day's riots in Tehran as a situation in which "five thousand Communist-led youths, shouting death threats against Premier Mohammed Mossadegh, fought a wild five-hour battle in the streets . . . with the police, troops and anti-Red civilians who totalled 10,000." The story goes on to state that the Communists "precipitated the clash with a defiant march on Government buildings," adding that nationalist-backed police and soldiers then "beat down the Communists." Although later portions of the story cover nationalist violence during the day, the implication is that the riots were primarily a Tudeh affair, deliberately provoked in order to make trouble for the police and for the Mossadeq government.

2. This account of the affair is not borne out by the other reports available, those of the US Embassy, the US Military Attache, and the Christian Science Monitor reporter. According to the Embassy, the demonstration, originally scheduled at Tehran University to air the grievances of the Tudeh student organizations, was hastily rescheduled for Majlis Square when police turned away the demonstrators at the University, and was proceeding in a "fairly orderly" fashion downtown when "thugs from two National Front groups descended on the demonstrators." All sources, including the AP, point out that the sequel was that Tudeh demonstrators received a thorough beating and that thereafter National Front gangs proceeded to wreck the offices of pro-Tudeh and opposition papers; the MA asserts that this started while the Tudeh demonstrators were still en route from the University to Majlis Square. The MA also asserts that the political significance of the affair was that Tudeh's prestige was lowered. The Monitor correspondent asserts that the damage inflicted on Tudeh's organization, personnel, offices, and printing equipment represented "a new and heavy blow, perhaps the heaviest since the party's complete dislocation [in] February 1949" --when the party was banned.

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3. We do not believe that the breathless account of the AP, with its lack of substantiating detail, can stand up against the evidence of the other sources. We therefore see no reason to change our current estimate that Tudeh is committed to a policy of continuing demonstrations but is as yet neither willing nor able to take the initiative in street fighting. In this instance it appears that Tudeh was not prepared for real trouble and that the National Front definitely was. Tudeh's continuing inability to hold its own in street fighting is probably a significant indication of its lack of capabilities for executing a successful coup at an early date, although the Monitor's statement of the seriousness of the blow Tudeh has received is probably grossly exaggerated.

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