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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Dr. W. L. Langer

DATE: 16 March 1951

FROM :

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SUBJECT: Iran

1. The crash estimate on The Current Crisis in Iran seriously under-rates, in my view, the significance of Razmara's assassination. The assassination has done much more than increase political instability (para. 1). It has removed from the political scene the only individual (possibly excepting the Shah) capable of maintaining what little prestige and authority the central government formerly possessed and the loyalty to it of the armed forces (para. 2a). It can generally be expected that from now on the cohesion and strength of the central government will further deteriorate and that it will be at the mercy of the extremist groups now dominating the Majlis. Its authority over the armed forces, in which factionalism and intrigue will develop, will rapidly diminish. Confidence of the provincial governments in the authority of the Tehran government will be undermined, and the tribes will be more than ever inclined to ignore or, if necessary, resist efforts of the central government to impose its will over them.

2. The statement in paragraph 2 that there is no "imminent danger of the government losing control" is, in my opinion, extremely misleading. While it is unlikely that the government will collapse during the next few weeks, there is little doubt that it began to lose control as soon as Razmara was assassinated. The fact that a small minority in the Majlis was able to obtain unanimous approval for the oil nationalization bill, a measure detrimental to Iran's vital interests and opposed by both the Shah and the Cabinet, is a significant indication of the government's weakness. It is also significant that Prime Minister Ala has little influence in political circles and in fact has not yet been able to form a government.

3. Probably the only development which could block the present accelerated trend toward political dissolution would be the establishment of martial law, dismissal of the Majlis, and assumption by the Shah of emergency powers. In view of his personality and his "soft" attitude during the present crisis, it appears extremely unlikely that he will adopt such a policy. On the contrary, he and Ala are now reported to be "negotiating" with the very groups which were responsible for the oil nationalization action and which, at least indirectly, are allied to the group responsible for Razmara's death.

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4. There seems to me to be little doubt that the Tudeh party, the tribes, and disaffected groups in general will take advantage of the political turmoil in Tehran to advance their interests. Although open rebellion is unlikely in the immediate future, the possibility of serious internal troubles during the next few months (autonomous movements, strikes and sabotage in oil areas, tribal difficulties) has been greatly increased by the death of Razmara and by the elevation to power of the ultra-nationalist National Front.

5. Specific comments on Conclusions of subject estimate:

a. Paragraph 1:

"Vigorous demand for nationalization of oil resources" has been expressed for many months by the National Front and other nationalist groups and did not suddenly develop after Razmara's assassination as here implied.

b. Paragraph 2:

Reference to "armed intervention by the USSR" leaves the impression that this constitutes a major threat to the Iranian government. It seems extremely unlikely that the USSR would invade Iran at a time when internal developments are all in its favor.

c. Paragraph 2a:

The second sentence is negative evidence. Positive evidence is that Razmara was only individual capable of maintaining the government's control over armed forces.

d. Paragraph 2b:

In spite of first sentence, extreme nationalists are now ruling the roost in Tehran, and both Shah and Ala are negotiating with them concerning the formation of the new government and changes in the high command of the armed forces.

e. Paragraph 2c:

Perhaps not immediately, but what about in two or three month's time when the present rot in Tehran has sifted into the provinces and the armed forces?

f. Paragraph 2d:

First sentence raises question: "Who are now responsible government officials?" Extreme nationalists have the bit between their teeth and are certainly running things at the moment. In these circumstances, the "cooperation of the British" is beside the point, even in the unlikely

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event that the British are going to be willing to negotiate on the basis of nationalization.

g. Paragraph 3:

To imply that the British are primarily responsible for the present crisis and that their future attitude will largely determine its development is a serious oversimplification of the situation.

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