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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

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June 25, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *H*

SUBJECT: Your Query on Iran's Role in the Persian Gulf

During your meeting with the CENTO foreign ministers, you asked Assistant Secretary Sisco just how far the U.S. could go in leaving it to Iran to guarantee stability in the Persian Gulf. His response is attached but these are its main conclusions:

What Iran Can Do

- (1) Iran has a formidable military capability which -- short of direct Soviet aggression -- can defend itself from any foreseeable attack. It has the assistance of U.S. military sales credits to help it enhance this capacity over the next few years with the objective of becoming a deterrent of such credibility that it will not be seriously challenged.
- (2) Iran is making diplomatic efforts to secure trans-Gulf friendship and cooperation. [They have successfully resolved the Bahrain issue; they are talking to the Saudis about military cooperation; and they are offering aid and support to the Gulf states.]

Complications

--The traditional Arab/Persian antagonism cannot be overcome overnight.

--The Arab-Israeli dispute complicates Iran's efforts to move closer to the Arab states. Its relations with Israel and its CENTO role are visible.

What Iran Cannot Do

- (1) It cannot prevent -- despite its military capacity -- incipient subversion or revolution among its neighbors, nor arbitrate always successfully disputes among the Gulf states rooted in traditional rivalries and conflicting territorial claims.
- (2) Arab radicalism -- despite Iran's money and support to the moderates -- will have to be dealt with in the end by indigenous

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forces. Its ability to stem Soviet influence -- working through Arab radicalism -- will also be limited.

On balance, it would appear that Iran should continue to seek the active cooperation of its Islamic neighbors such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

A fuller study of the Gulf and discussion of U.S. strategy -- including this question of how heavily we can depend on Iran -- will be on its way to you through the NSC process.

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### IRAN AND THE PERSIAN GULF

By the end of 1971 the British will have withdrawn militarily from the Persian Gulf. Their departure ends a century and a half of control in the lower Gulf sheikhdoms which excluded unfriendly major powers, suppressed radical dissidents, and kept under control long-standing intra-Arab and Arab/Persian antagonisms. The prospect of the British departure has brought an air of uneasiness to the Gulf. Some wish the British would remain, but most accept the inevitability of their leaving.

With the exception of Iraq, which is already under its sway, radical Arabism is the thing most feared by the Gulf states. Interrelated with this fear is the fear of Soviet encroachment. All know the Soviets favor radical Arabism and all know of the favorable position the USSR has established in the UAR, Syria and Iraq.

In looking to the future two movements have gotten underway. On the Arab side of the Gulf cautious steps have been taken by the nine sheikhdoms to band together in a Federation of Arab Amirates.\* Age-old jealousies and suspicions make it an uphill fight. On the other side of the Gulf, Iran, the most powerful and stable nation in the area, has made clear its intention to assume a leading role in providing for the security of the Gulf in the future.

What Iran Can Do. Iran already has a formidable military capability which it is rapidly augmenting against

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\* Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras al-Khaimah, Umm al-Qaiwain, Fujairah. Total population 453,000 of which 200,000 is on Bahrain.

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the day the British leave. It has the resources (over \$1 billion yearly from oil) and the manpower (28 million population) to sustain its armed might and defend itself from any foreseeable attack short of direct Soviet aggression. Iran's goal is to develop a deterrent of such credibility that no area nation or likely combination would dare attack it or seriously challenge Iranian unrestricted use of the Persian Gulf or access to the waters beyond.

Iran has sought US military sales credits to help it create this deterrent. We have responded with credit of \$100 million for each of the last two years and plan to continue a program of this magnitude for at least another 4-5 years, Congressional approval permitting. Used wisely, as we hope and expect it will be, this military force can be an important factor in preserving stability and security in the Persian Gulf after 1971.

Iran recognizes the need, however, to supplement this force with a skillfully contrived and executed program of diplomatic initiatives aimed at securing trans-Gulf friendship and cooperation. Having foregone its claim to Bahrain, it has begun assiduously to woo its Gulf Arab neighbors by invitation to Tehran, the dispatch of special envoys and good will missions, and the offer of financial and technical aid. It has talked quietly with its largest Arab neighbor, Saudi Arabia, about military cooperation and steps Iran might take to come to Saudi aid in time of emergency.

The successful pursuit of this policy will require tact, patience, time and doubtless some money. It faces formidable obstacles. Fundamental is historic Arab/Persian antagonism. The Persians are ethnically different, they rarely conceal their belief that Arabs are inferior, and the Persians are of a branch of Islam which is considered heretical by orthodox Muslims.

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Added to these historical differences is Iran's circumspect but nonetheless well-known relations with Israel. The Arab/Israel conflict obviously makes it difficult for even moderate Arabs overtly to get very close to Iran. Prolongation of the Arab/Israeli confrontation or another outbreak of widespread armed conflict could either end nascent friendships between Iran and Arab states or force Iran to lean more heavily in the direction of the Arabs. Indeed there are already signs that Iran would give preference to improving its Arabic relations. Iran's CENTO connection with the West is also a liability in the context of developing closer relations with the Arabs. The introduction of CENTO into the Persian Gulf would particularly alarm Arabs.

What Iran Cannot Do. While Iran's military power and example of a stable, well-run nation doubtless stands for much, it cannot prevent incipient subversion and revolution among its neighbors. Nor can it do much to arbitrate the squabbles which will inevitably arise among sheikhdoms and states on the Arab side of the Gulf which are also rooted in age-old rivalries and conflicting territorial claims. Iran itself is involved in two disputes which concern several small islands (Abu Musa and the Tunbs) which guard the entrance to the Persian Gulf. As often as not these disputes are grievously complicated by the actual or suspected presence of oil.

Iran's ability to contain the growth of radical Arabism in the area is also severely circumscribed. It can provide some money and moral support for moderate regimes but in the end it is a matter that can be dealt with decisively only by indigenous forces. Iran's ability to prevent the growth of Soviet influence in the Gulf area through the ascendance of radical Arabism is also very limited. The Soviets have reflected increasing interest in the Gulf. Whether they will move cautiously in the interest of preserving good relations with

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Iran, Turkey and Pakistan is problematical. The Soviets maintained a position of neutrality in the recent dispute between Iran and Iraq over the Shatt al-Arab River. This position was assumed even though Soviet influence in the Gulf area is concentrated mainly in Iraq.

Conclusion. There is a substantial and positive role Iran can play in providing for the security and stability of the Persian Gulf after the British leave in 1971. There are also real limits to what it can achieve. Its best chance of achieving its purpose lies in its gaining the active cooperation of its Islamic neighbors, particularly Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

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