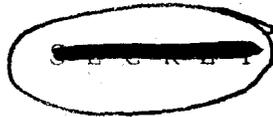


Disturbing

NEA - ~~W/10~~
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28 February 1972



1. The local press of 27 and 28 February carry front page articles announcing mass rallies and demonstrations organized by the National Defense Committee, composed of all groups, parties, and guilds, to be held in Tehran and provinces Tuesday, February 29, to answer all foreign enemies, provocators and agents of imperialists. The press is careful in mentioning imperialists and refers to regimes such as the Baathist Government in Baghdad.

2. All shops, private businesses, industries, universities and schools will be closed Tuesday until mid-day to allow people to join mass protest rallies and demonstrations. Government offices will remain open. The Majlis cancelled the Tuesday session so that the members can participate in the rallies.

3. The major rally, an all day affair, is to be held in Tehran Sepah Square in the bazaar area, about one and one-half miles south of the Embassy. (We also learn another big rally is scheduled to be held in the sports stadium one block east of the Embassy Compound.)

4. Over the past several months a number of more or less chronic causes of popular dissatisfaction have taken on a considerably sharper edge. The likelihood of a change in Prime Ministers - which until now  has consistently assessed as scant - appears at this point to be a real possibility - if only as a sop to public discontent. As a guess, Jamahid Amuzagar would be a good bet as Hoveyda's successor.

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5. The following factors lead to this conclusion:

A. The cost of food - food which provides the diet of the poor and medium income group - has about doubled in the past year. Many who could afford meat or fish once a week last year cannot afford it at all this year. Wages have increased, but not proportionately. Thus there is a real squeeze on a large proportion of the population. Last week the Minister of Agriculture - without consulting the Prime Minister - announced large increases in meat prices. Public disapproval was immediately manifested to a degree which [redacted] [redacted] alarmed the Prime Minister enough to impel him to telephone the Shah to request and obtain the Shah's approval to reverse the Minister of Agriculture's announcement. [redacted], meat prices, which shot up following the first announcement, have not returned to their previous levels despite the reversal and there is still serious discontent.

[redacted] distribution of meat and most other foods is controlled and exploited by men in responsible positions in government. This is known to the consumers who therefore not only hold the government responsible for the price rises but also for corruption in this area which is a vital part of their lives.

B. The clergy, which is always anti-government, is much more so today than in the past three years. There are two specific current issues; the government effort to establish a religious corps and recent government arrest of a very prominent Ayatollah followed by the distribution of photographs which show him in rather strenuous sexual activity with a young woman. The result of all this has been to engender widespread anti-government feeling coupled with a sympathy toward the clergy even among those who normally care very little.

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C. Public disapproval of corruption in government has also become more widespread as it affects increasing numbers of people in their daily lives. While there have always been chronic complainers, [REDACTED] hear of more and more specific examples from persons who cite what we feel reasonably certain are accurate incidents. For example, a senior military officer who certainly represents the loyal government employee recently expressed incredulity at the extent of disorder and impersonal inefficiency in the Ministry of Justice which can be overcome only by the use of bribes.

D. Urban guerrilla activity has attracted some public sympathy and even admiration because it provides for many a vicarious expression of the resentments which they have but do not dare express. Recent trials have resulted in convictions which include some death sentences. (It is very difficult to determine the exact number from press accounts - probably 5 or 6.) While many arrests have been made, we doubt that anything like a total wrap up has been achieved. It is not possible to put this factor into the equation with any precision, but it seems reasonable to estimate that if the executions are carried out while the present situation prevails, this will contribute to the general anti-government disposition of the people.

E. Government foreign policy is subject to widespread criticism because it is believed to result in a continuing tension between Iran and its Arab neighbors. Many people believe that this tension is used by the government as the excuse to procure expensive military equipment using funds which could better be spent to remedy fundamental domestic ills.

6. Today's press carries announcements of a mass rally to be held on 29 February. If our estimate is correct, there will be little enthusiasm for it. There will also be groups - the clergy, bazaar, and possibly urban guerrilla - which may seek to turn the assembled mass toward issues for

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Page 4

which it would have enthusiasm. We cannot predict
the upshot for there are aspects about which we
know too little.

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