



**National  
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*Jan. Intelligence: Hostages*

# **Iran: Implications of the Shah's Death for the Hostages**

**An Intelligence Memorandum**

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**Iran: Implications of the  
Shah's Death for the Hostages (U)**

**Summary**

The deteriorating health of former Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and the requirement for major surgery raises the possibility that he may soon die. His death would remove one of Iran's principal conditions for the release of the US hostages, but this probably would have little impact on the crisis, at least for the near term.

A persistent goal of Khomeini, his more radical followers, and the captors has been to purge Iran of the "corrupting," anti-Islamic, Western influences that the Shah introduced into Iran. Further, since the Shah's stay in the United States, Khomeini and the captors have shifted their animus increasingly from the Shah to the United States. Thus, the death of the Shah will not end the hostage situation. Anti-US sentiment will probably be intensified as Khomeini and others focus more strongly on the struggle between Islamic fundamentals and Western influences, as exemplified by the United States, with the hostages continuing to be the focal point of Iranian animosity.

*The above information is Secret Nofor.*

*This memorandum was prepared by the Iran Task Force and the Center for the Analysis of Personality and Political Behavior, Office of Political Analysis. It has been coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia, the Directorate of Operations, and the Office of Scientific and Weapons Research. Comments or queries may be directed either to Chief, Iran Task Force [redacted] Information as of 19 March 1980 has been used in the preparation of this memorandum. (U)*

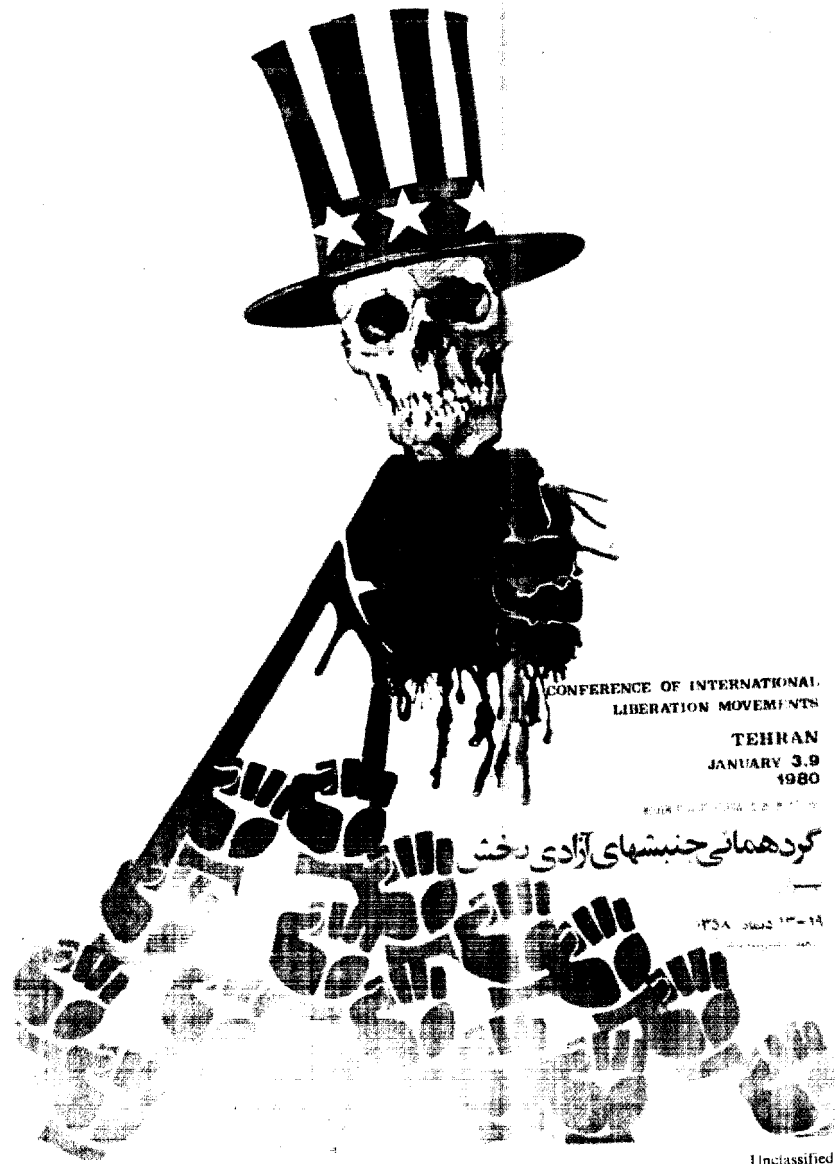
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Poster circulating in Iran in  
January 1980, demonstrating  
Iranian animosity toward the  
United States.



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**Iran: Implications of the  
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The Iranians most concerned about the hostages would have little reason to change their fundamental position in the event of the Shah's death.

The militants occupying the US Embassy would want to continue to play a key role in Iranian politics and to humiliate the United States. They probably would change their demand from insistence on return of the Shah to Iran to insistence on the return of his fortune.

The militants and, perhaps, elements of the Iranian public have already shifted the major focus of their animosity from the Shah to his perceived prime supporter, the United States. Last summer, posters circulating in Tehran showed Khomeini in the form of an angel struggling victoriously with a devil with the Shah's face and a small US flag and a Star of David on his cloak. By January, however, the Shah had disappeared from the posters in Iran and the United States became the major opponent. President Carter replaced the Shah as the primary enemy of Iran, the personification of anti-Islamic influences.

The hardline clerics of the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) would probably continue to back the militants against Bani-Sadr in order to weaken the Iranian President.

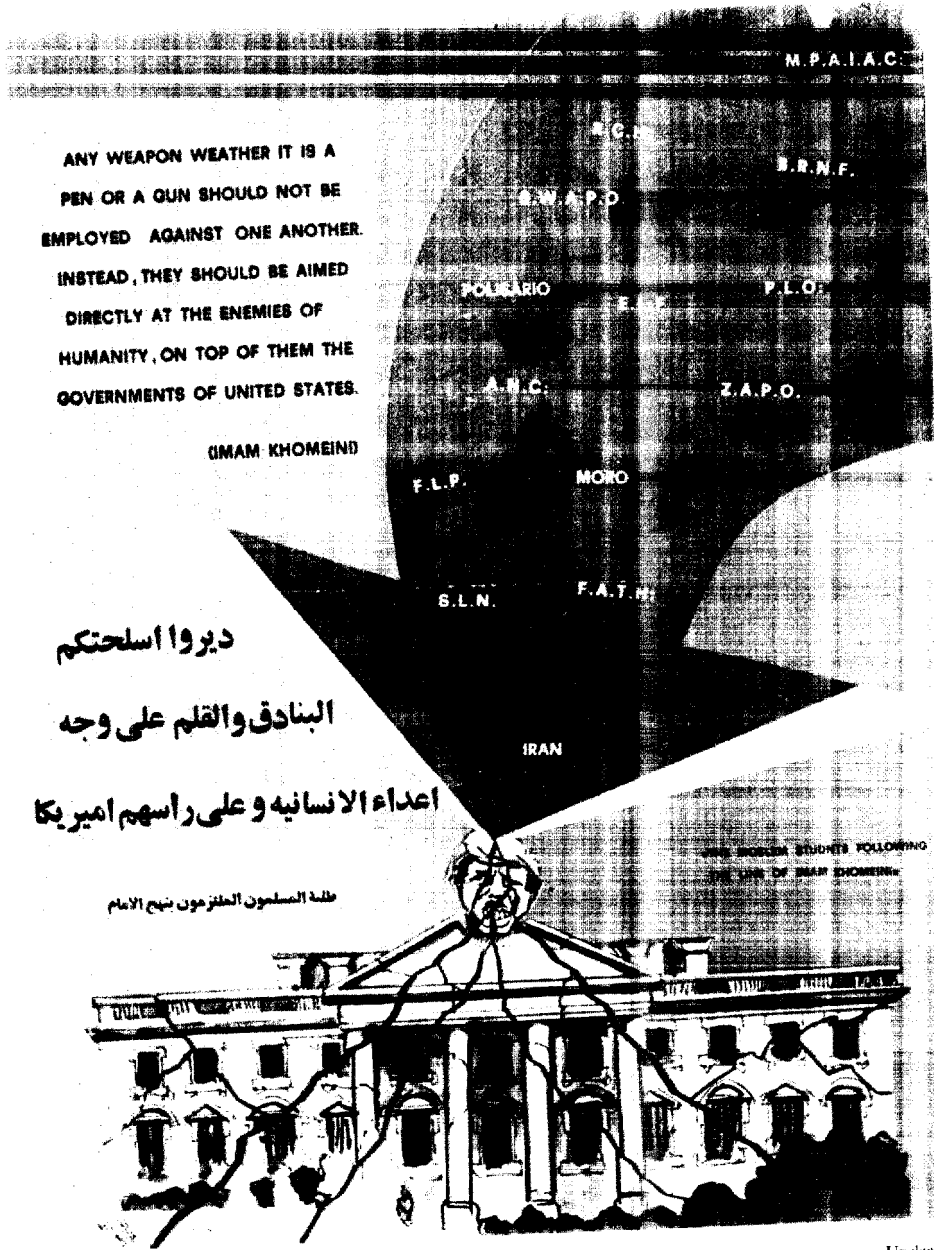
The Iranian left, which has backed the Embassy captors, would have little reason to change its stance, since it, too, wants to weaken Bani-Sadr and humiliate the United States.

The general public in Iran is bored with the hostage crisis. Hardliners can continue, however, to mobilize a crowd to demonstrate at the US Embassy when they believe it is necessary.

President Bani-Sadr would continue to want to end the crisis and would argue that the Shah's death removed the rationale for continuing to hold the hostages. Foreign Minister Qotbzadeh raised this point in a recent interview. The Shah's death would not lead to any improvement in Bani-Sadr's political position, however, and he would still lack the power to order the militants to release the hostages.

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President Carter has replaced  
the Shah as the primary enemy  
of Iran.



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**Khomeini's Role**

The key figure in the crisis would continue to be Ayatollah Khomeini. Although Bani-Sadr would attempt to persuade him that the Shah's demise removed the necessity for the continued detention of the hostages, since the Shah's potential to threaten the Islamic Republic would be gone, it is more likely that Khomeini would support the captors because:

- He would feel cheated of his revenge against the Shah.
- He would still need a political diversion to keep the revolutionary fervor of Iranian politics alive.
- He would still wish to avoid making a hard decision on the crisis, since a final pronouncement would risk increasing the political bickering among the various elements of the revolution (that is, the militants, the IRP, and Bani-Sadr).

Moreover, there is persistent evidence that Khomeini now views the United States as the primary antagonist. Khomeini's anti-West feelings can be traced back as far as the early 1960s when he led a campaign against US efforts to gain diplomatic immunity for its military personnel in Iran. He opposed the Shah in part because the Shah's modernization program introduced "corrupting" Western influences into Iran—influences that many of the Shia clergy adamantly opposed. Increasingly, Khomeini attacked these influences and stressed the need to purge Iran and Islam of their effects. In 1970, for example, he said that:

*For centuries, the agents of colonialism (the West, including the United States) and the educational and political agencies have injected their poisons into the people's minds and ethics until they corrupted them. . . . The sick ideas coming from abroad must also be uprooted, and every form of corruption, evil, and deviation in society must be fought.*

When Khomeini succeeded in wresting power from the Shah in 1979, his desire for vengeance was not satisfied. But at the time, the Shah was the devil who brought Western influences into Iran and who was, therefore, the object of attack. The Shah's entrance into the United States in October 1979, however, brought Khomeini's two hated enemies together. For Khomeini, who was having difficulty leading Iran, the Shah's arrival in the United States provided an external focus around which to rally the country. With the possibility that his hated enemy might die, and needing an external enemy both psychologically and politically, Khomeini shifted his animus progressively to the United States over the succeeding months. This change was reflected in his rhetoric, which shifted from portraying the Shah as the prime opponent, to the Shah as a puppet of the United States.

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In a speech in December 1979, for example, Khomeini described pernicious Western influences at great length with only a passing mention of the Shah:

*The superpowers, which wished to plunder everything we had . . . without us realizing that they were stripping us naked—these superpowers came and drew up plans. One of their big plans is to rob us of our brains and to replace them with European ones. . . . They have done this, and they have robbed us of our mental independence. . . . Strive to change these brains. Let our university professors strive so that our young people can have their brains changed into independent brains and not colonialist ones. . . . What shame and degradation it is for a country that it has to stretch its hands toward America and ask it for wheat, that it has to take its begging bowl to its enemy and ask the enemy for sustenance. What shame it is for us. . . . They have made so much propaganda that they have made us deny our own humanity.*

Although the Ayatollah's rhetoric continues to emphasize that the Shah must be returned, the most intense abuse is directed at the United States. The move to Egypt further increased animosity toward the United States as Iran recognized the Shah was even further removed from its grasp. With the Shah's death, it is likely that the transfer of animosity will be complete. Accordingly, there will be no easing of the hostage situation. Where once the hostages were a lever to get back the Shah, now the "guilty" hostages in "the nest of spies" will be a lever to coerce admissions of guilt from the United States concerning its responsibility for Iran's difficulties.

#### Other Factors

The Shah's death could also lead to a claim that the United States had deliberately killed the Shah in order to save the hostages. The Iranians might also argue that Egypt had aided such a plot to gain favor from the United States, just as they argued that the Shah's flight to Egypt was a US plot. Alternatively, they might claim that the Shah's death was a US hoax, and they might continue to demand his return or physical proof of his demise. If the mood in Tehran became sufficiently emotional and volatile in the aftermath of such charges, the hostages might be in greater danger of being attacked by the mob or of being placed on trial.

The United States might gain an advantage in at least one respect. World opinion would probably see the continued incarceration of the hostages after the Shah's death as even more unwarranted than it is now. World opinion has had little effect on the crisis, however, and no impact at all on the hostages' captors.

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