

Washington, January 26, 1961.

JCSM-27-61

- SUBJECT
- U.S. Courses of Action in Iran (U)
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1. Reference is made to a memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, dated 10 October 1960, subject: Reassessment of the Military Importance of CENTO to the United States.²

2. By reference, the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed the views that:

a. CENTO, which incorporates Iran into the alliance system, represents a vital connecting link in the U.S. sponsored and supported collective security system stretching generally around the periphery of the Communist Bloc.

b. Iran today is the soft spot in the CENTO defense alliance.

c. Loss of Iran to the West would destroy CENTO, drive a wedge between NATO and SEATO, threaten Western access to Middle East oil, and expose the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa to further Soviet penetration and expansion.

3. The government of Iran, personally dominated by the Shah, is perennially threatened by dissident elements within Iran. In recent months, factors militating against the stability of the region include inflation and other economic difficulties, the so-far unsuccessful land reform program, Soviet propaganda and subversive efforts, and the long deferral of free elections. In addition, the Shah is known to view the recent overthrow of the governments in Korea and Turkey with apprehension.

4. U.S. national policy toward Iran (NSC 6010)³ recognizes that under present circumstances it is to the U.S. interest to support the Shah's regime, but also provides that the United States should be prepared to disassociate itself from the Shah should he appear likely to be overthrown. The OCB plan for Iran⁴ provides guidance for personnel in the field to influence the Shah in the direction of ameliorating domestic conditions. However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are concerned that plans for Iran may not have taken fully into account the numerous and varied possibilities of political crisis in Iran which may call for U.S. military action of some kind. This action could range from assistance in counter-subversion efforts to implementation of the contingency plan of CINCNELM, which provides for military action in somewhat general terms. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCNELM could improve military contingency plans if the political guidance to deal with diverse possible crises were more specific.

5. In view of the variety of possible crises in Iran, and in order to further the objective of increasing the viability and effectiveness of CENTO, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that U.S. policy should be supported by the provision of additional feasible courses of action, political and military, for dealing with emergencies in Iran.

6. As indicated by the proposed memorandum the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that any regime which would replace that of the Shah at this time,

whether communist or non-communist, would be less Western-oriented and would therefore, represent a net loss to U.S. interests in the Middle East. This assessment is based upon the absence of any constructive pro-Western alternative regime, as recognized in NSC 6010. It would, therefore, appear to be in the best interest of the United States at present to support the Shah's government by all appropriate means. Nevertheless, recognizing the possibility that events may result in the sudden removal of the Shah from the scene, plans are required for supporting a pro-Western successor, such as a regency, or a carefully selected friendly faction.

7. It is recommended that you forward a memorandum to the Secretary of State along the lines suggested in the Appendix hereto in order to initiate the development of appropriate alternative national courses of action for Iran.¹
For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

L. L. Lemnitzer⁶
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 64 A 2382, Iran 000.1-1961. Top Secret.

² Not printed.

³ Dated July 6, 1960; for text, see *Foreign Relations*, 1958-1960, vol. XII, pp. 680-688.

⁴ Not printed. (Department of State, OCB Files: Lot 61 D 385)

⁵ Attached but not printed. On January 30, Lemnitzer expressed his concern about the situation in Iran to Secretary Rusk. Subsequently, Bowles directed the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs to prepare a brief summary of the current internal political situation in Iran. (Memorandum from Bowles to Jones, February 6; *ibid.*, PPSFiles: Lot 67 D 548, Iran 1958-1961) The paper, prepared by the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs on February 11, and a subsequent one of March 20 were transmitted to the National Security Council on March 27. See Document 27.

⁶ Printed from a copy that indicates Lemnitzer signed the original.