

U.S. Intelligence Experts Misread Extent of Iran Riots, Officials Say

By George C. Wilson
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The United States suffered an intelligence gap by not recognizing that the recent riots in Iran were going to get out of hand, according to U.S. officials.

Several members of Congress and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were more alarmed as they watched the initial demonstrations in Iran than were the supposed experts in the State Department and the Intelligence community, administration officials conceded.

Intelligence officers interviewed admitted they did not underscore heavily enough the possible escalation of the initial rioting in Iran, but said the "customers" in Washington failed to demand in-depth assessments.

Also, they said, the sharp curtailment of U.S. covert activities as part of the post-Watergate reforms of the Central Intelligence Agency, led to U.S. intelligence officials relying too heavily on the Iranian intelligence organization, SAVAK, for information.

One former CIA agent said it was standard practice before Watergate for U.S. intelligence officers to pose as students and Iranian student leaders all over the world.

Although this penetration of Iranian student groups angered both the shah and State Department officials, this person said, it was, and is, the best way to forecast what young Iranian dissidents are likely to do.

One forum for early congressional concern was the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Its members questioned two State Department executives—Jack C. Miklos and Henry Precht of the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs—in a closed session Sept. 15 on the demonstrations in Iran.

According to those who heard it, the State Department testimony was so vague that angered committee members demanded that the Central Intelligence Agency to the Senate with hard information on developments in Iran.

Robert R. Bowie, director of CIA's National Foreign Assessment, appeared before the committee in secret session Sept. 27 and, according to those who heard him, gave an optimistic view of the situation in Iran.

The Defense Intelligence Agency, as well as the CIA, failed to predict that the demonstrations against the shah would get out hand, officials said,

even after the joint chiefs had expressed their concern to DIA.

Maj. Gen. Schlomo Gazit, director of Israel's military intelligence operation, read the diplomatic traffic from Washington as well as his own intelligence reports on the situation in Iran as the trouble developed.

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U.S. Supports Shah But Won't Interfere

Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance, responding to warnings by Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev, said yesterday the United States will continue to support Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's "efforts to restore domestic tranquility" in northern Iran.

But Vance, in a formal statement, denied that the American role amounted to an attempt to intervene militarily in Iranian politics.

"The United States does not intend to interfere in the affairs of any other country," he said. "Reports to the contrary are totally without foundation."

Vance's comments were in response to a statement by Brezhnev that the Soviet Union would regard any U.S. military intervention in Iran as "a matter affecting the security interests of the Soviet Union. Iran borders the Soviet Union."

"We firmly support the Shah in his efforts to restore domestic tranquility in Iran, and have confidence that Iran can solve its own problems," Vance said.

"We intend to preserve and pursue with Iran our strong bilateral political, economic and security relationship."

