

Iran, With U.S. Help, Seeks

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In the past two years the United States has sold almost \$6 billion worth of sophisticated military equipment to the shah of Iran.

It has sent more than 800 technical and military personnel "to assist Iranian military advancement."

At least a thousand more American civilians are in Iran on private, defense-related missions. And by State Department estimates, there are now 15,000 to 18,000 U. S. citizens in Iran.

There are about 2,000 Iranians in military training in the United States, in addition to the 13,000 in American colleges and universities.

All are directed toward the fulfillment of one goal: His Imperial Majesty Mohammed Reza Pahlavi has decided to make Iran the world's fifth-largest non-nuclear power to cleanse the Persian Gulf of "subversion under whatever name."

He has the blessings—as well as the weapons—of the United States. But the shah has greater ambitions that look out toward the Indian Ocean, and perhaps farther.

He is the spearhead of a regional arms race that could become the most expensive in history.

He is the preeminent leader in the drive to push up oil prices, and to keep them there. Yet he has also been a reliable supplier of that critical commodity, never interrupting the flow—either to this country or to Israel—during the Arab oil embargo.

He is a ruler who is trying to improve the lot of his people economically; yet he is dictatorial and repressive.

There is a Persian proverb which loosely translated, says: "The more you eat the more your eyes and heart desire." This is not the royal motto but it is a useful description of what the shah is doing, both in his domestic and foreign policies.

Why—given the contradic-

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tions—is the United States putting its bets on this ambitious, perhaps unpredictable ruler?

A simple answer is that for the time being there is a coincidence of interest. But nobody wants to look more than 10 years ahead.

Foreign policy experts point out that if the shah is completely successful, he may one day manage to supersede, or erase, American influence in an expanding, still-undefined area where he has established his own equivalent of a Monroe Doctrine.

"Then we'd lose our gamble," said one American foreign policy specialist. "There's also a gamble that radical forces could take over the small and weak states of the Gulf. Then we'd lose, too."

"But," he added, "the United States is betting that an autocratic monarch has survivability. Anyway, the shah is the only one around with any power in an area of weakness."

For now the theme heard over and over again in official Washington is that the United States can count on the shah.

"Look at the map," said one American official, pointing to the wall-sized Mercator projection of the world and a huge Soviet Union pressing down on a small Iran along a 1,000-mile common border.

"The shah," he said, "even in his own lifetime, had reason to be concerned about the Soviet Union. It occupied Azerbaijan. Iran is a target of Soviet opportunity. The shah worries about it and we worry about him. . . . Then there's Iraq and the border conflict there. Pakistan is very weak. . . . Baluchi tribesmen flow back and forth between Pakistan and

Iran. . . . If the Pakistan government were really weak, maybe the Soviets could come in through that route. . . .

"There's the narrow Strait of Hormuz (the critical Gulf oil lifeline), very vulnerable, very easy to cut off. There is Saudi Arabia, very weak, very rich. There are no particular problems with the royal family now but who

knows who'll be there 20 years from now. . . ."

"We've always felt that a non-Communist-dominated Iran is precisely what we need in the Persian Gulf," said another official. "It's the back door to the Arabian world."

American officials like to recall that as a non-Arab oil producer, the shah has proved a reliable supplier. Conservative estimates put

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Iran's reserves at 55 billion barrels. Another fact that officials say little about is that Iran provides the United States with well-located intelligence stations from which to monitor Iran's giant neighbor to the north.

These alone are reason enough to keep the shah happy. So the United States is sending him F-14s and F-4 Phantoms, a communications system and an air defense network, antitank missiles and surface-to-air missiles, helicopters and electronically guided air-to-surface missiles.

Because the American arsenal is virtually cleaned out of tanks the shah is getting 800 Chieftains from Britain, along with highly mobile hovercrafts for skimming around the gulf.

Rep. Clarence D. Long (D-Md.) charged recently that American arms sales to Iran are impairing U.S. defense readiness, particularly by creating critical shortages of skilled technicians. The Pentagon responded that none of the equipment being sent was in short supply and that the manpower has always fallen short of what the books say it should be. "We went through World War II and the Korean War in crit-

ical short supply," said one official.

There is no shortage of support for the shah at the Pentagon, where officials have gotten a reputation for trying to give him everything he wants. "There is no policy limit on the dollar amounts of what the shah can buy," said one U.S. official. The only limits applied concern introducing weapons systems that would be "unduly destabilizing" such as nuclear weapons. But the shah gets the most advanced model of the things he does buy.

The shah's oil-price policy brings unhappiness here but so far as the Pentagon is concerned, it is a happy coincidence that his recently quadrupled wealth and purchasing power are equal to his ambitions. Any failure to supply him with what he wants in the way of the finest the American arsenal can produce, officials say, would do less to lower the price of oil than to convince the Shah that the United States is unreliable. Meanwhile, the sales go some way toward helping the ailing U.S. balance of payments.

Nor have congressional actions slowed the deliveries, concerns about a new arms either to Iran or to other oil-rich nations, most notably Saudi Arabia. The two countries share a desire to keep radical influences out of the gulf, but the shah's tentative approaches toward regional cooperation have been largely ignored. For to some extent, his neighbors seem to be trying to protect themselves from their protector.

Iranian forces are already involved in quelling the Dhofar rebellion in Oman and the shah has taken steps to control the Strait of Hormuz and certain other

choice pieces of real estate.

Iran is already the dominant military force in the Persian Gulf. The shah has made it his priority to become the world's fifth largest non-nuclear power.

He spent an estimated \$8.5 billion for arms in the United States alone in 1974, 14 per cent of Iran's gross national product. The U.S. military budget was 5.5 per cent of the American (GNP).

To an extent, Iran is a nation that can have guns as well as butter, although it is limited by a shortage of trained technical personnel—which the shah is also importing. Second to military power is the shah's drive for developing the economy. In third place are programs for social welfare. Fourth, and very much last, is the establishment of political freedoms.

The order of priorities means that the United States for a long time to come will be aiding to a dictator who brooks little opposition. The secret police system, SAVAK, is efficient, routing out the shah's ene-

mies in terrorist groups on the right composed of religious fanatics, and the Marxist-oriented left.

"You or I wouldn't find it a pleasant place to live," conceded one American official, adding with deliberate understatement: "He has good control over the political process."

Officially there is an opposition in what the shah likes to describe as a two-party system. But hardly anybody believes such a system exists, especially since the chief of the opposition Mardom party was removed by his central committee because he took himself seriously and spoke out against some of the shah's programs.

The shah himself has made it clear that democracy is for some future time. "When my people begin acting like Swedes," he is often quoted as saying, "I shall begin to act like the Swedish king."

The shah has just completed a swing through Jordan and Egypt to secure his ties in the Arab world—a

move seen here as part of an effort to pin down support in his continuing border war with Iraq, whose radical Ba'athist Party is dedicated to the overthrow of conservative monarchies.

U.S. officials say they are convinced the shah would not join in an Arab-Israeli war and doubt strongly that he would cut off oil supplies, either to the United States or to Israel. Even during the October, 1973, war, Iranian oil continued to flow to Israel and the shah has said repeatedly that he would not cut off oil for political reasons.

Having become the prominent power in the Persian Gulf the shah now looks to wider horizons still with American endorsement. This time it is the Indian Ocean, where the United States wants to counter Soviet naval activity. Washington is building up facilities on the island of Diego Garcia and the shah has hired American contractors to construct a \$600 million installation at Chah Bahar, southeast of the Strait of Hormuz.