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21 February 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director (Intelligence)

SUBJECT: Iranian Prime Minister faces growing opposition (S Tehran 3306, 20 Feb 53)

1. Ambassador Henderson reports increasing speculation in Iran over the possibility of the fall of Mossadeq's government in the near future. The continued disintegration of the National Movement Group, Mossadeq's frequent parliamentary mouthpiece, has strained Mossadeq's relations with his advisors and several of his associates reportedly expect a change of government "within a few weeks." Nationalist leader Kashani is again acting as a lodestone for various opposition elements and there is new discussion in Tehran of a possible successor government which it is alleged that the Shah will support. Former Prime Minister Mansur and General Zahedi have again been mentioned as candidates to succeed Mossadeq.

2. The Ambassador believes that Mossadeq may temporarily be able to exploit in his favor a rejection of the latest proposals for solving the oil dispute but that a breakdown of the oil talks would ultimately strengthen his opponents.

3. The disaffection in early February of five leading nationalists from the National Movement Group has weakened Mossadeq's position. Nevertheless, there is no reason to believe that any opposition effort to remove the Prime Minister at this time will succeed. Mullah Kashani, Mossadeq's leading competitor for control of the National Front, does not at present command sufficient following to challenge him. The Shah is convinced that only Mossadeq can settle the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute. He insisted as recently as 13 February that he does not wish to take over the government until the dispute is settled. There is no other conservative leader strong enough to unify heterogeneous opposition elements.

State Dept. review completed

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4. The Prime Minister, moreover, has maintained that he will not stand idly by while the "British" attempt to unseat him through an alliance of the disgruntled groups which oppose him. Despite Mossadeq's non-committal acceptance of the latest British proposal for settling the oil question, his concern over the growing disaffection among his supporters will probably incline him to reject the proposal in order to generate support for his government. While Mossadeq may be expected to benefit temporarily from this maneuver, the breakdown of the oil negotiations will increase pressure for drastic social reform.

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