

By JB NARA Date 10-19  
EO 12958

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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

INFORMATION

SECRET (GDS)

July 17, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER

FROM: HAROLD H. SAUNDERS *Hal*  
HENRY R. APPELBAUM *HA*

SUBJECT: Coup in Afghanistan

So far there have been no reports of any serious challenge to the new Afghan regime headed by former Prime Minister (1953-63) Mohammad Daud. Assuming he stays in power, Daud seems unlikely to make any major shifts in Afghan policies, but there could be some changes in emphasis.

Daud's coup, carried out yesterday by several hundred of his supporters in the Afghan Army, was well planned and swiftly executed. Daud appears to have the support of key people in the army and apparently has maintained ties with many of the tribal groups that dominate most of this rural and backward nation. He could still have some trouble, however, with military units outside Kabul and/or with some of the tribes in the countryside.

The ousted King, Zahir Shah, is in Italy, where he was visiting at the time of the coup. Several other key members of the royal family and the ousted government are reported under arrest, and some executions have been rumored. The whereabouts of Zahir Shah's Prime Minister, Mohammad Musa Shafiq, are unknown. (You will recall Shafiq from Harvard.)

As Prime Minister in the 1950s, Daud provided Afghanistan with very strong leadership. He made strenuous efforts to modernize the economy and the armed forces. Opposition to many of his modernization programs and his authoritarian rule finally led to his ouster in 1963 and the establishment of a political system that permitted greater popular participation. Daud, however, kept up his contacts in the army and elsewhere and remained critical of what he and many others felt was an excessive degree of corruption in Afghan society and politics.

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EO 12958SECRET (GDS)

- 2 -

During the 1950s Daud turned to the USSR for large-scale economic and military assistance. He is, in fact, probably more responsible than any other Afghan for the country's present close relationship with the USSR. Nevertheless, he is basically a nationalist. He may well lean a bit more toward the Soviets than his predecessors did, but he probably will continue Afghanistan's traditional foreign policy of trying to play the great powers against each other. Moscow's already considerable influence in Kabul thus will probably be increased only marginally by the Daud takeover. The change could even prove to be a net loss to Moscow if it results in instability and disorder in contrast to the previous stable situation that was generally satisfactory to the Soviets. So far there is no evidence of Soviet complicity in the coup.

Afghanistan's other two next-door neighbors, Pakistan and Iran, are likely to be unhappy about the Daud takeover. The earlier Daud regime was marked by serious strains in Pakistani-Afghan relations due to his support for tribal Pathan separatists who live in Pakistani border areas but are ethnically related to the Afghans. The Shah of Iran will be unhappy about the disappearance of another monarchy in the region. Both he and Bhutto may voice concern that Daud's reemergence means an increase in Soviet influence. Whether Tehran or Islamabad try to do anything about Daud may depend largely on how he behaves toward them. So far there have been no indications as to his intentions.

The Iranian Ambassador here tells us confidentially that the Shah and Bhutto may meet somewhere in Europe to discuss the problem, and the Iranians are getting in touch with the Afghan king in Italy.

For the US, Daud may be a little harder to deal with than was Prime Minister Shafiq or the King. He is likely to be more suspicious of US motives, somewhat less cooperative, and a bit more pro-Soviet. Nevertheless, on the issues that affect US interests--continued Afghan independence, stability in the area, and narcotics--there is no reason to think he will reverse Afghan policies.

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