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on Conventional Wisdom, Entrenched Dogma and Sacred Cows¹*

The Dionysian Rites of Henry Kissinger's CIA and the Iranian Revolution of 2010

A Modern Examination of Central Intelligence Agency
"Warnings of Revolution" Tools c. 1980

Case Study: Present-Day Iran

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Abstract

Failing to foresee the Iranian Revolution of 1979 is, rightly or wrongly, often cited as one of the most significant and dramatic of Western intelligence failures. After enduring a superlatively ignominious electoral defeat in the history of the United States (Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter with 89.7% of votes in the Electoral College in 1980) and in what may have been the record holder for rapidly published post-presidential memoirs up to that point, Jimmy Carter's 1982 book "Keeping the Faith: Memoirs of a President" pointed an accusing finger at the Intelligence Community's Iranian performance. His recollections lamented the work of the Central Intelligence Agency in particular, citing an analyst report on Iran from August of 1978 indicating that the country "...is not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation." By January of 1979 the Shah had fled. As might be imagined, what followed was a full court press, prompted by constant policy-maker pressure as well as the personal intervention of Henry Kissinger, who was badly embarrassed by the failure, to develop an organic revolution early warning system capability within the various appendages of United States intelligence. We review one such system outlined in the Central Intelligence Agency report "Warnings of Revolution," dated March 1980 and apply the methodology to present-day Iran. We find generally that the methodology's results are consistent with a finding of probable revolution (as it is defined in the report) in present-day Iran. Our open source version of this tool with general application to a wide span of national targets is available for public use courtesy of Zero Hedge.³

I. INTRODUCTION

IF the reader harbored any doubt at all that Henry Kissinger was, in fact, a figure all but despised by the professional intelligence community in the United States between 1979 and 1980, such a notion would have been immediately extinguished after absorbing the opening salvo delivered by then CIA analyst Robert Hopkins in "Warnings of Revolution," an internal CIA publication from the Agency's "Center for the Study of Intelligence." Hopkins begins:

A few years ago when Henry Kissinger was the President's National Security Advisor, he made known to the

Intelligence Community that he wanted to be informed 72 hours in advance of every coup d'état occurring anywhere in the world. As a result of this executive fiat, embassy officers and intelligence operatives established and maintained contact with dissident elements of all persuasions in the more restive countries of the globe, listening to their grandiose plans for seizing power and probing for information to ascertain if anti-government plotting were mere bravado or if it had a real chance of unseating a government leader. Although they were only seeking information to satisfy a request from a senior policy maker, they were perceived locally as being enmeshed in political intrigue. It was almost inevitable that when a coup d'état was attempted, the United States was accused of being involved.⁴

Lest it be felt that contemporary scholars might dismiss an indictment emanating from this quarter, it bears mentioning

1 "Frustrating confirmation bias with obscure sources since 2009." Cf. ("Consult") is a journal publishing new analysis and editorial opinion on a number of topics of economic and financial import. Content is published with a focus on subject matter that may be better illuminated by resort to obscure or obscured sources from a variety of eclectic, ignored or forgotten sources. Cf. is sponsored (fleeting) by Zero Hedge (<http://www.zerohedge.com>). Direct inquiries to cf@zerohedge.com.

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3 See: <http://www.zerohedge.com/cf/v1i1>

4 Hopkins, Robert "Warnings of Revolution," Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency (March, 1980 - Declassified December 4, 1984) Available at <http://www.zerohedge.com/cf/v1i1>

that the Center for the Study of Intelligence⁵ might best be described as the organic scholarly journal of the Intelligence Community. The Center makes habit of distilling analysis methodologies, presenting findings and other reports (many classified) otherwise furthering the profession of intelligence analysis. These particular features of the Center (particularly the internal nature of its initial distribution and its tendency to classify material) suggest that its pronouncements are likely to be particularly forthright. Publications from the Center in the immediate aftermath of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 might, therefore, offer a unique insight into the state of the Intelligence Community from its own viewpoint during this period as well as present an interesting experiment in quantifying the then "state of the art" in analytical methodology using current events.

For the uninitiated, a key tenant of modern intelligence is the separation of collection (the raw, "in-the-field" gathering of information relevant to the national interest of the collecting nation) and analysis (the application of analytics and assessment methodology to draw conclusions and predictions based on the data collected). One of the benefits of this demarcation is the development of modular tools that function independently of a collection apparatus. Accordingly, much of the utility, such as it is, of modern intelligence analysis tools and methods can be divorced from the need for an extensive (and expensive) collection infrastructure. Given an analytic tool, an analyst possessing access to Open Source Intelligence ("OSINT") but without access to Human Intelligence ("HUMINT"), Signals Intelligence ("SIGINT") or any of the other resource intensive intelligence disciplines generally reserved for well-resourced national intelligence services⁶ may still take advantage of analytic tools to draw conclusions and make predictions. The instant utility to the investor with exposure to crude, energy or the Middle East should be self-evident.

The practice of divination, even in the most technical of fields and as any expert in quantitative finance will gleefully point out, is by necessity largely a form of "black art." Attempting to catalogue every potential change of sovereign power with 72-hour notice could not be anything but an impossible task even absent the vagaries of subjectivity particular to intelligence gathering and analysis (not to mention the prevalence of groups with opposing interests likely to attempt to frustrate collection and clear analysis). It is likely no accident, therefore, that Hopkins rolls his eyes at the "Kissinger Mandate" thus:

In Bolivia, for instance, there have been 190 coups d'état in 155 years. Not one of these had a serious impact on the United States. To publish analysis on Bolivia's current political plight is to divert the

attention of U.S. Policy makers from matters of true concern.

Nonetheless, Hopkins proceeds to articulate a succinct, accessible and flexible framework for the evaluation of the "warnings of revolution" within a given target. In doing so he highlights the potential use of, and even a preference for, OSINT. Specifically:

Most warnings of revolution are discernible from open sources and can be acquired without stirring nationalist fervor by active probing. If a competent analyst can recognize these indicators he should be able to weigh their significance not only to alert policy makers to an impending revolution, but also to estimate its effects on the security of the United States, on important U.S. interests, and on the physical safety of U.S. official and U.S. citizens in the country.

Though a far cry from Kissinger's demand for induction into the Dionysian Mysteries of intelligence analysis, it will be seen that Hopkins' model is possessed of a number of positive features.

II. THE HOPKINS MODEL

The Hopkins Matrix

The Hopkins Matrix focuses the analyst's attention on five major categories of incidents:

1. Natural Disasters
2. Market Problems
3. Social Ferment
4. Political Intrigue
5. Government Countermeasures

Within each category the analyst notes the occurrence of relevant incidents with reference to the source material describing the incident and the date. A subjective rank of the incident's severity or "impact" is assigned a numeric value. The spectrum of impact values is defined thus:

| | |
|-------|----------|
| 1-5 | Minor |
| 6-10 | Moderate |
| 11-15 | Serious |
| 16-20 | Critical |

The author provides discussion with respect to each major category along with (then current) historical examples. One assumes that a degree of the author's (or the Agency's) experience also supports the methodology, even if it is not stated explicitly.

The sum of impact values is calculated to arrive at the "Stability Factor" for the time period studied.

Two matrices are completed spanning separate time frames

⁵ See: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/about-csi.html>

⁶ These include Imagery Intelligence ("IMINT"), Measurement and Signature Intelligence ("MASINT"), and Technical Intelligence ("TECHINT").

and the differences measured. (As an example, two consecutive six-month periods are used in the source documentation). Changes in the Stability Factor between periods are taken as an indication of escalating "Revolution Warnings" and, if significant, are expected to prompt the analyst to consider briefing policy makers or otherwise issuing a warning of increased instability.

Structural Assumptions

Several assumptions clearly underlie the Matrix and the design that characterizes it.

- Incidents have an additive or cumulative effect on stability/instability
- The framework itself can be time-frame agnostic
- The categories and specific incidents described are, in fact, accurate predictors of revolution

Application Assumptions

Considering, for the moment, the suitability of the Matrix's basic structure, proper use of the Matrix itself assumes some things about the user and the context of use. Specifically:

- The ability of the analyst to properly weight the intrinsic "impact" of recorded incidents
- The ability of the analyst or collection apparatus to collect a comprehensive list of impactful incidents
- The ability of the analyst to filter out "noise" be that latent to the environment or created by competing interests

Hopkins specifically addresses some of these issues:

Only the regional analyst, with his profound understanding of the dynamics of the country, can make such judgments effectively and consistently.

Assumptions Implied by Historical Context

A number of assumptions flow naturally from the political and technical environment Hopkins was in when developing the methodology. For instance:

The methodology depends in some instances on the "fog of war" as it were in assigning import to slow or ineffective communication. Clearly, the absence of ubiquitous grassroots video and its prompt distribution (See e.g., YouTube and Iran) lessen had implications for the ability of governments to repress revolutionary movements and prevent the spread of anti-government information between groups.

For the most part, however, these anachronisms can be overcome by the careful consideration of appropriate impact scores for the fairly comprehensive incident type list Hopkins has developed.

Weaknesses

The discussion that accompanies the model contemplates a sort of "discounting" over time of historically distant incidents. It also contemplates the potentially enhancing impact of incidents that occur in clusters. An earthquake followed by riots followed by university closings will have a more significant effect, most likely, when these events follow each other closely.

Clearly, one of the primary motives for the adoption of the Matrix is to simplify and standardize the coarser aspects of Revolution prediction. Obviously, it is not the somewhat mechanical process of filling in the Matrix, which at its heart is still only a framework, that defines the predictive value of the resulting work-product, but the skill and insight that accompanies the selection of the various impact values assigned to incidents.

By the author's own admission, the methodology is weak when dealing with nations with established democratic institutions, (mostly) free elections and liberal press controls. Revolutions are by definition extra-legal changes in government in response to a citizenry's inability to effect peaceful change.

Comparative Revolutionary Environment

Hopkins also provides a secondary tool, the Comparative Revolutionary Environment chart. This chart effectively takes the form of a familiar "star diagram" and is used to compare various incidents and weights over time. Though we implement the graphical tool there described, a detailed discussion of the CRE is beyond the scope of this work.

III. APPLICATION

General

In applying the model, we elected to build the framework into a Google Documents spreadsheet. We chose this approach to permit easy reference to the tool in the public domain and to permit some degree of "peer experimentation" with our findings in the instant case.

Where possible we preserved the mathematic structure contemplated by the Hopkins model (e.g., summing the total impact scores, and subtotaling each major category).

We allowed for two arbitrary timeframes for our first model, but the system scales easily and should support arbitrary timeframes and segment sizes.

We also implemented a "star chart" graphic to mimic the approach contemplated by the Comparative Revolutionary Environment graphic.

Iran in 2010

In the case of contemporary Iran, we collected a number of incident reports from disparate sources, all open source

material and relied on such regional expertise as was available to us to estimate the proper impact scores for the incidents we catalogued. Where possible we followed the dictates of the source document when considering timing, proximity of events, severity, severity of response and the like to estimate the critical "impact" scores.

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

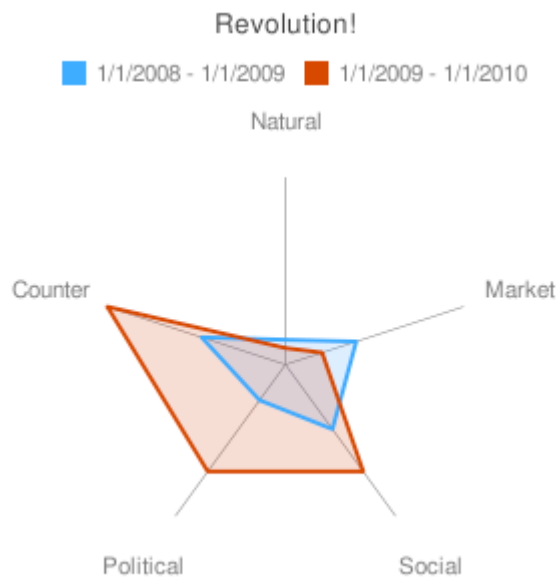


Fig. 1. Iranian Revolutionary Warnings 2008-2009

Within the constraints of the methodology it will be seen that Revolution Warnings the in Social, Political and Countermeasures categories have all increased significantly between the two timeframes. High scores for the recent election fraud, the increase of terrorism in a highly controlled and regimented society and oppression pushed these categories out significantly on the Comparative Revolutionary Environment scale.

In our estimation these results would trigger a policy-maker "Revolution Warning" from the analyst conducting the study.

V. FUTURE STUDY

As the model is highly sensitive to specific judgments by the analyst with respect to the "impact" score assigned to each incident, a comprehensive discussion of each incident and the rationale for the scores assigned should be a standard part of any public report using the Hopkins methodology. Given that our use of the methodology in this instance was primarily introductory, we have elided our discussion of case-by-case scoring rationale. Further, it is our intention to improve on the methodology in a number of ways before using it as a serious tool for analysis in a contemporary setting.

VI. PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

Several of the tasks critical to the successful implementation of the Hopkins model were, of necessity, left to the particular expertise, idiosyncrasies and biases of the individual analyst completing the methodology. Several key elements would appear to invite stronger and more consistent implementation in today's environment of ubiquitous and free spreadsheet technology including the automation of:

1. Time decay of impact scores for individual incidents
2. Impact score enhancement for temporally proximate and complimentary incidents
3. Source reliability weighting for incident impact scores

In particular, we anticipate developing "half life" scores using historical incidents along with public sentiment indicators and/or opinion polls to develop individual "decay curves" for various incident categories that can in turn be used to estimate a discount for impact scores over time.

We also plan to develop a standard template for impact score justification that will permit reports generated with the methodology to be quickly and effectively critiqued when placed in the public domain.