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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

1 April 1985

IRAN: STATUS OF OPPOSITION GROUPS

Summary

The Khomeini regime is facing its greatest challenges since securing control of Iran. Factionalism within the regime, dwindling oil income, and the recent military setbacks are causing increased domestic unrest. Nonetheless, organized opponents of the regime--both within and outside Iran--appear to lack sufficient strength to exploit the regime's problems. Opposition groups inside Iran remain on the defensive because of harsh government repression. Regime opponents in exile have little support in Iran and continue to bicker among themselves. Rather than opposition groups, we believe factions within the regime have a better chance of gaining control and altering Iranian policies. Iran's mounting economic problems and war weariness, however, are creating conditions that could permit a non-clerical coalition to coalesce and gain popular support.

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Long-running power struggles within the Khomeini regime are intensifying, because the regime faces serious problems with the economy and in the war with Iraq.

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, Persian Gulf Division. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division, [redacted]

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- Lower oil revenues and low foreign exchange reserves prevent the government from relying on imports to maintain current consumption levels and to provide materials for domestic industry.
- Economic austerity is adding to domestic unrest and regime spokesmen are urging the public to lower its expectations.
- Iran's latest offensive was a dismal failure despite months of preparation.
- Iraq appears determined to maintain a heightened level of economic and military pressure on Iran to force it to the negotiating table. [redacted]

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The regime's efforts to deal with these problems are being complicated by factional infighting. Moderates believe that the best way to preserve an Islamic regime in Iran is to adopt a less aggressive foreign policy and to adjust domestic policies in an effort to deal with economic difficulties. Radicals believe that any relaxation of revolutionary policies will lead Iran back into subservience to the West--and also end their political careers. Khomeini, whose support is still critical for any faction's success, recently seems to have been tilting away from the radicals. [redacted]

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Groups opposed to the Khomeini regime--both inside Iran and abroad--have been unable to exploit the government's problems, and we believe they are unlikely to wield significant influence in Iran even after the Ayatollah dies.

- No leader capable of challenging Khomeini's personal appeal or that of the Islamic government he symbolizes has emerged within any opposition group. The role of a strong personality to galvanize popular opposition--as Khomeini did against the Shah--is considered crucial by most experts on Iran.
- Prominent exiles engage in endless bickering and posturing. Although some maintain limited contacts inside Iran, there is little evidence of popular support for any of them.
- Opposition groups active within Iran are subject to repression and continuous surveillance by the regime. These groups remain an irritant rather than a significant threat. [redacted]

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Nonetheless, Iran's economic downturn and popular war weariness are issues that eventually could unite disparate elements in the population against clerical rule. War policy already is debated within the regime in terms of how the day-to-day well-being of the regime's lower class supporters will be affected. Iranian leaders also appear to recognize that economic problems can cause a broad segment of the populace to turn against the regime. The government has moved to placate conservative bazaaris and has beaten and arrested dozens of striking workers in hopes of preventing a unified opposition labor movement. Although there is little information about the organization of strikes, one new group--the Solidarity Committee of Iranian Workers, based in Esfahan where Communist influences have been strong among workers--claims it coordinated strike actions in several cities late last year, according to the exile press. [redacted]

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Opposition Groups in Iran

There are several groups inside Iran in open opposition to the Khomeini regime. Although all cooperated in the anti-Shah movement and hoped to play influential roles in the revolutionary government, they have been excluded by the clerics and have turned against the regime. Recognizing that these groups pose a threat, Tehran has brutally suppressed them. [redacted]

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Mujahedin-e Khalq. This Islamic-Marxist nationalist group assassinated several US advisors in Iran during the revolution. Led by exiled Masud Rajavi, it posed the most serious challenge to the Khomeini regime until it was suppressed in 1981. Rajavi fled to France in 1981 and the status of current Mujahedin leadership in Iran is unknown. The group had a committed cadre of around 10,000 educated urban youths at its peak in early 1981 and had penetrated the government and the Revolutionary Guard. It still claims to have several thousand cadre, although we suspect this figure is exaggerated. [redacted]

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The Mujahedin-e Khalq has an active propaganda program outside Iran and has been involved in the recent resurgence of scattered terrorist actions in Iran and abroad. The group maintains an uneasy alliance through the National Resistance Council with former President Bani-Sadr and the Kurdish Democratic Party. [redacted]

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Paykar. This group is a leftist offshoot of the Mujahedin-e Khalq. It has always been small and its members are regular targets of regime repression. [redacted]

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Tudeh Communist Party. The pro-Soviet Tudeh had about 5,000 members before its leaders were arrested for treason and the party was repressed in 1983. Tudeh had cooperated with the Khomeini regime, but it also had penetrated both the government and military. Some senior members associated with the military were executed following the crackdown in 1983. Civilian leaders have not yet been tried. An underground organization may still function in Iran, but the new party leadership is in exile in Europe. [redacted]

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Fedayen-e Khalq. This small radical leftist group carries out scattered terrorist activity in Iran and abroad. It split in 1979, one part merging with the Tudeh Party and the other remaining active in northwestern Iran along with dissident Kurds. It has been repressed by the Khomeini regime and its leadership is unknown. [redacted]

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Kurdish Democratic Party. Abdol Rahman Qasemlu, its leader, claims that the party has 10,000 members, but it probably has far fewer than that under arms. Repeated regime offensives since 1979 have forced the Kurdish guerrillas into the mountains, where they continue hit-and-run operations. Iraq and European socialist groups provide some aid and the Party remains in an uneasy alliance with the Mujahedin-e Khalq. [redacted]

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Solidarity Committee of Iranian Workers. According to the Iranian exile press, this group emerged in late 1984 during a period of apparently coordinated strikes in major urban centers. The exile press claims the group is modeled on the Polish Solidarity Union. No details are available on its

leadership, but it may be the nucleus of a coordinated labor movement. If it exists, this would be the first internal group to challenge the regime since the suppression of the Mujahedin-e Khalq and it could attract popular support because of economic austerity and war weariness. [redacted]

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The Opposition Outside Iran

Iranian exiles have been unable either to unite or to maintain strong links into Iran. Bickering among the groups and competition for resources have diverted their energies. Exiled oppositionists and their supporters can be divided into two groups--those who were part of the revolutionary coalition, but later ran afoul of the Khomeini regime, and those who opposed the revolution. Prominent among the former are:

- Former Defense Minister Admiral Ahmad Madani, 56 years old. Madani fled Iran in 1980 after antagonizing pro-Khomeini radicals. He seems to retain a positive reputation in Iran, but has only limited influence among some moderate clerics and laymen as well as among some military elements. Madani may be the only exile leader with sufficient support to have a chance of returning to an official position in an Islamic post-Khomeini regime.
- Former President Abol Hasan Bani-Sadr, 52 years old. He fled Iran with Mujahedin-e Khalq leader Rajavi in 1981 and retains none of the popularity he enjoyed when Khomeini seemed to endorse him. A Paris-educated radical economist, he has no personal appeal to Islamic radicals or moderates.
- Mujahedin-e Khalq leader Masud Rajavi, in his late 30s. He was a charismatic leader of the Mujahedin-e Khalq, but lost much of his credibility when he fled Iran in 1981, leaving behind his militant wife who was subsequently killed by regime security forces. He remains an articulate spokesman for the Mujahedin's Islamic-Marxist doctrine which appeals to educated urban youths, but is suspect among older, less upwardly-mobile Iranians.
- Tudeh remnants scattered throughout Europe, the USSR, and Afghanistan after the government cracked down on the Party in 1983. Considered an appendage of the USSR, its leaders have little personal following in Iran. [redacted]

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Exiled leaders who opposed the Islamic Revolution from the start have little support inside Iran.

- Former Prime Minister Shapur Bakhtiar, in his early 70s, probably retains a weak following among the Westernized urban population remaining in Iran, perhaps including some older military men. He may also be able to run limited anti-Khomeini operations inside Iran. He has no Islamic appeal, however, and cultivates an image more French than Iranian--a professional exile par excellence.
- Reza Pahlavi, the late Shah's 24-year-old elder son, benefits from a nostalgic popular hindsight triggered by the current hardships in Iran. Although some elements of the population taunt regime members

by shouting pro-Pahlavi slogans during demonstrations, the royal family retains little support in Iran. Royalists may, however, be able to stage limited operations inside Iran. The "young Shah" has no well-defined political personality or program, although he recently named a committee to consider forming a government-in-exile. [redacted]

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Opposition Factions Within the Regime and Other Interest Groups

The following groups accept, in varying degrees, the principal of clerical influence in the government. They disagree, however, with some aspects of the current regime and are attempting to reshape clerical rule. We believe these groups will play key roles in the struggle for control after Khomeini and are attempting to exploit current difficulties for their own advantage. (A list of key regime members and their affiliations is attached to this memorandum.) [redacted]

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Moderates within the Regime. These clerics, laymen, bazaaris, and government technocrats believe that Iran's interests--and their own--lie in reducing clerical involvement in government. They would like to scrap radical proposals for central control of economic activity, land reform, prolonging the war with Iraq, and limiting foreign contacts to other revolutionary regimes. We believe the moderates probably are strong enough in the newly elected Consultative Assembly to sidetrack radical programs. Moreover, they recently have been strengthened by support from Khomeini in his statements on domestic legislation and foreign policy. [redacted]

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Conservatives Outside the Regime. This faction is dominated by elderly senior Shia clerics who are strongly opposed to close identification of the clergy with the government. They would like to reduce the day-to-day political role of clerics and rescind radical foreign and domestic policies. Of the four senior clerics who have most strongly criticized the regime, two recently died. Two other senior clerics sometimes cooperate with Tehran because they hope--along with their moderate allies--to affect the succession to Khomeini. [redacted]

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Military. The regime has repeatedly uncovered coup plots and purged the armed forces, but still suspects their loyalty. The ubiquity of clerical advisors and informers reduces the possibility of effective independent political activity by the military or action on behalf of an exile leader. Moderate and conservative clerics have cultivated contacts within the regular and paramilitary forces and would attempt to use these links to gain military support if the power struggle among regime factions becomes violent. [redacted]

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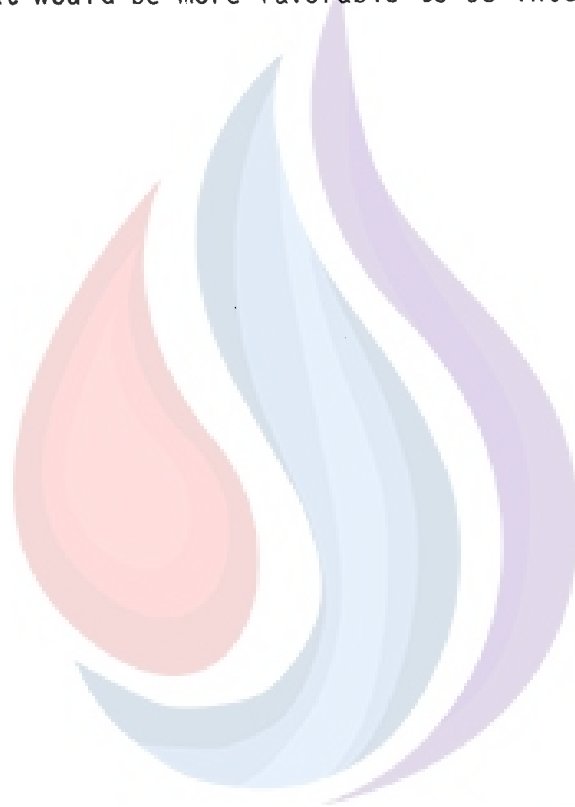
Revolutionary Guard Officers and Radical Lay Technocrats. Both groups play an important role in the Khomeini regime. Regime concern about the influence of the Guard is reflected in Khomeini's admonitions that it stay out of politics. Despite these warnings, factions within the regime have sought support among Revolutionary Guard units in anticipation of future strife. Many Guard officers and radical lay technocrats are opportunists who are not deeply Islamic and probably resent the prominence of the clerics. These elements probably hope eventually to oust the clerics in favor of a government dominated by "progressive" lay groups. [redacted]

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The Guard--never a cohesive organization--presently appears to be even less unified than in the past. Experienced Guard officers are disillusioned and [redacted] the Guard is losing men at all levels. These trends probably will be strengthened by Iran's latest defeat. Nearly all the forces committed to the attack were Revolutionary Guards and we believe they comprised over 90 percent of the casualties. There is an alternative, although less likely, possibility that the recent losses and other government actions limiting Guard prerogatives could spur Guard unity against a "common" enemy--the clerical regime. If elements of the Guard unite, they would become a key player in the Iranian power struggle. Should the Guard help overthrow clerical rule, it would be unlikely to support moderate policies that would be more favorable to US interests. [redacted]

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Personalities in the Khomeini RegimeProminent Leaders Not Tied to Any Faction

These individuals are sometimes referred to as the pragmatists because they align with various factions depending on the issue and their own political stakes.

- Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's heir apparent, is a senior cleric in his 60s who has increasingly taken on duties delegated by Khomeini. Labelled a radical in the early years of the regime, he has more recently become a leading spokesman for more moderate policies.
- Majles Speaker Rafsanjani, a junior cleric in his 40s, is a skilled politician, second only to Khomeini in power. A firm believer in tight clerical control, he has been associated with both radicals and moderates. He is probably more willing than Montazeri or President Khomeini to deal with the USSR.
- President Khomeini, a junior cleric in his 40s, is less politically adept than Rafsanjani, but is known as an excellent speaker. He also has been associated with both radicals and moderates. Khomeini opposes Montazeri as Khomeini's sole heir. He probably will run for re-election this fall. 25X1

Moderates

We believe the following Iranian leaders are moderates who generally favor more normal ties with the West.

- Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani, a senior cleric in his 50s, has longstanding ties to Khomeini. He leads an important moderate clerical association based in Tehran and has strong links to the Revolutionary Guard. He may be a candidate in the presidential election this fall.
- Majles Deputy Speakers Yazdi and Rabani-Amlashi are mid-level clerics in their late 40s or early 50s. They have spoken out strongly against radical proposals for extensive clerical involvement in government, far-reaching economic and social changes, and an intransigent foreign policy. Instead, they favor a government focused on the Assembly and led by capable laymen under general clerical guidance.
- Foreign Minister Velayati, a Western trained physician in his 40s, is typical of the technocrats who are working to create a less radical Islamic regime. He probably hopes to become Prime Minister. 25X1

Conservative Clerics

- Grand Ayatollahs Marashi-Najafi, Golpayegani, Shariat-Madari, and Tabatabai-Qomi, top level clerics in their 80s and 90s, are theoretically Khomeini's spiritual peers. All have used their wide popular influence to encourage opposition to many of the regime's radical programs. Shariat-Madari and Qomi are under house arrest.

(Two other Grand Ayatollahs opposed to the Khomeini regime have died of natural causes since last fall.) [redacted]

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Radicals

The following prominent radicals are typical of those who are not pro-Soviet, but whom we believe are willing to cooperate with the USSR, especially if they felt Iran was under increased threat from the US.

- Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Sheikholeslam, a layman in his 30s, was a leader of the hostage-takers at the US Embassy. He is a strong advocate of radical foreign policy positions and has been closely linked to terrorist activities.
- Revolutionary Guard Commander Rezai and Guard Minister Rafiqdust, laymen in their 30s, who have longstanding links to influential radical clerics and radical Arab states and groups.
- Heavy Industries Minister Nabavi, a layman in his 40s, has been labelled a leftist [redacted]. According to Rafsanjani, Nabavi is an excellent manager. Nabavi has ties to an armed paramilitary group whose sympathizers hold other influential positions.
- Hojat ol-Eslam Khoiniha, a junior cleric in his 40s, was the spiritual advisor of the hostage-takers and a deputy speaker of the Assembly until mid-1984. Close to Khomeini's son, Ahmad, Khoiniha now holds a shadowy position as a personal advisor to the Ayatollah and hopes to win his endorsement for the presidential election later this year. He has been closely linked to Iranian terrorist activity. [redacted]

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SUBJECT: Iran: Status of Opposition Groups

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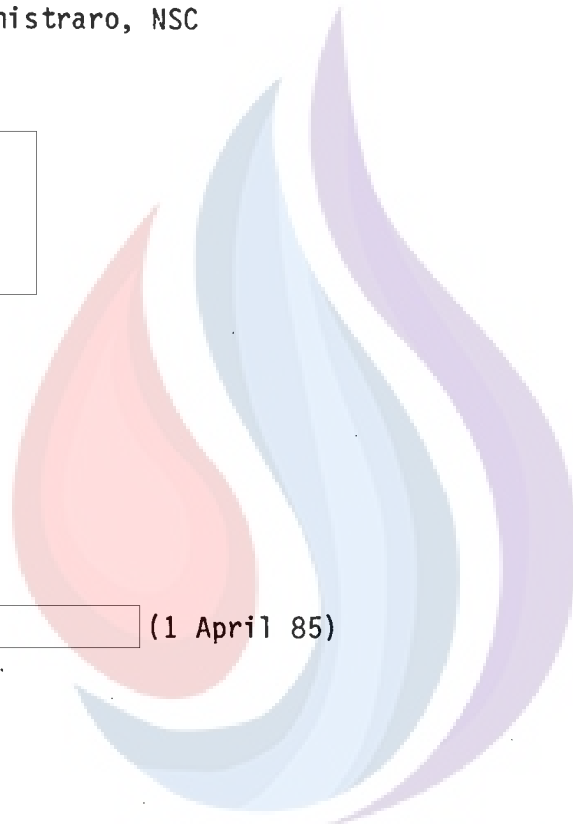
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