
MIDDLE EAST

Is the end near for the Khomeini regime?

by Robert Dreyfuss



The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Ayatollah Khomeini might not last out the next few months.

According to Iranian sources, the exile opposition to the regime of Khomeini and his entourage is preparing to deliver the coup de grace to the tottering government of Abolhassan Bani-Sadr and the ayatollahs of the Islamic Republican Party. With each passing day—unreported by the Anglo-American press—the anti-Khomeini forces are building up their strength inside the country from bases in continental Europe and the Middle East, especially Iraq, and making the alliances needed to topple the Khomeini regime.

At the same time, a multi-level factional struggle has erupted in Teheran over the past few weeks that, according to Iranian and American sources, will shortly lead to the downfall of President Bani-Sadr. Outflanked by his factional enemies, Bani-Sadr is losing a rearguard battle to save his presidency to a coalition of the so-called “Syrian faction” in Iran and the Islamic Republican Party of Ayatollah Beheshti and his clerical mafia.

The result of the external pressure on Iran and the threat of an organized uprising by the Iranian population against Khomeini, combined with the fractious political situation in Teheran, is that the very same Anglo-American intelligence circles that put Khomeini into power in 1979 are now themselves deeply divided and uncertain about how to proceed. While the secret services of Great Britain and the United States are still fully committed to maintaining the Khomeini regime in power, at the same time they have begun to cast about for strengthened links with the exile opposition in order not to be caught short if and when Khomeini’s clique is ousted from power.

Bakhtiar and the generals

Inside Iran, a clandestine army is being assembled among the dissident tribal and ethnic groups in the provinces, among the army, and in the once prosperous

Iranian middle class that seethes with hatred for the perverse mullahs of the Khomeini clique. According to Iranian sources, the temperature is right for a mass uprising that would spread in ripples throughout the country as early as the summer of 1980.

Earlier this month, according to Iranian sources, broadcasts of a newly established Radio Free Iran began beaming into the country from a transmitter believed to have been erected in neighboring Iraq. In one of the first broadcasts, General Oveissi—former military governor of Teheran—told to the Iranian people to prepare for “difficult days ahead” and to store up foodstuffs, water, and medicine for the coming struggle. Soon, he said, Iran would be rid of the Khomeini regime. Indicative of the fragile hold of that regime on the population, many thousands of Iranians all over the country went on a panic buying spree to prepare for the counterrevolution, creating shortages of necessary goods in several cities.

In Azerbaijan, whose capital, Tabriz, is the second largest city of Iran and the political center for the populous northwest, former National Iranian Oil Company Chairman Hassan Nazih is reportedly organizing an extensive political network opposed to Khomeini throughout the whole province, which comprises as much as one-third of Iran’s entire population. Many of Iran’s military commanders and moderate Ayatollah Shariatmadari, now under house arrest in Qom, come from Tabriz and other parts of Azerbaijan.

In a recent interview in *Le Monde*, Nazih declared that his goal is the establishment of a “secular, republican” government to replace that of the mullahs. According to Iranian sources, Nazih is working closely with exiled Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar, the last Iranian government chief before the revolution. Bakhtiar, who presently lives in Paris, has made several trips to Baghdad, Iraq, for strategy sessions with other Iranian leaders to prepare for the actual counterrevolution.

Rallying to the support of Bakhtiar and Nazih, in particular, are the leaderships of the Iranian Arabs, the Kurds, and the Azerbaijanis, as well as other tribal and ethnic blocs including the Bakhtiaris, the Lurs, and the Qashquis. Further, according to Baluchi sources in Western Europe, within the next two to three weeks a major revolt along the lines of the Kurdish civil war will erupt in Baluchistan in southeastern Iran near the Pakistani border.

The Kurds, reported to be led by General Palizban of the old Iranian armed forces, are engaged in what can only be called a full-scale war against the Khomeini regime. Earlier this month, the latest attempts to mediate the conflict broke down and heavy fighting broke out again. The general staff of the Iranian armed forces, which is unwilling to pursue the campaign against the Kurds, has seen itself shunted aside in favor of the fascist Revolutionary Guard, which has borne the brunt of the fighting in Kurdistan. In mid-May, several officers in the army were summarily executed for refusing to obey orders and lead attacks on the Kurdish rebels.

In Khuzestan, inhabited by Iranian Arabs, the level of civil unrest and sabotage actions is rising significantly, with its major effect being the sharp reduction in Iranian oil output, now down to less than 500,000 barrels a day, compared to more than 4 million last fall and over 6 million barrels per day under the Shah. That has had a dramatic impact on the Iranian economy. Virtually every sector of the economy has ground to a halt, and shortages of meat, milk, and other goods are widespread. The army of millions of the unemployed is swelling every day.

Publicly, the Iraqis have let it be known that they are willing to support the opposition to Khomeini, giving political support to the Azerbaijan rebels and arms and ammunition to the Kurds and the Arabs. In addition, several Iraqi Shiite leaders including Ayatollah Kho'i are in clandestine contact with several ayatollahs in Iran who are said to be prepared, at the right moment, to make a series of announcements supporting the anti-Khomeini opposition.

According to the apparent timetable of the revolt, the exiles expect the rebellion to begin in earnest in late spring or early summer and then snowball into general strikes and finally a popular uprising. It actually began during September and October of 1979, but it was halted with the seizure of the 53 U.S. hostages by the Khomeini regime in November 1979. That act, perpetrated with the full knowledge and encouragement of the Brzezinski National Security Council and the U.S. Department of State, was calculated to provide a pretext for propping up the Khomeini regime.

The U.S. government's solicitation of the embassy seizure by inviting the Shah to the United States created a political rallying point for the Khomeini regime, and permitted the Ayatollah to mobilize the Iranian masses

in a show of hatred for the United States and the Shah. Naturally, the sudden show of hostility to an "outside enemy" caused the Khomeini opposition to lose the momentum needed for an uprising to develop.

Second, nations like Iraq and the Bakhtiar forces were put in a difficult position to the extent they planned any intervention militarily from the outside. In such an event the hostages would likely have been killed by the Khomeiniacs, with the blame falling on the forces about to become the new government. Moreover, U.S. and British intelligence agencies, for the same reasons, could openly, so to speak, oppose the overthrow of Khomeini, and undermine the opposition's efforts to prevent "danger to the hostages."

Leading Iranian sources have indicated that they believe that this was the chief reason that the Carter administration invited the Shah to America and sponsored the takeover of its own embassy, to protect the regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Both Iranian and European sources make the same point concerning the supposed U.S. attempt at militarily "rescuing" the hostages last month. Of course, every feature of the operation, as both European and American sources point out, was predesigned to fail as far as a rescue was concerned. Now, top French officials have been quoted by the May 17 *Washington Post* as saying that the "fiasco" of the U.S. action against Iran "stopped the counterrevolution" against Khomeini.

It is *EIR's* information that Israeli intelligence, which controlled the Shah's air force officer corps and thereby played a key role in bringing the Ayatollah to power in February 1979, has also been involved in operations against the Bakhtiar opposition to keep Khomeini in power. The same May 17 story in the *Post* quoted exiled Iranian sources complaining that Israeli intelligence, pretending to offer its support to Iranian groups seeking Khomeini's overthrow, is actually helping to "sabotage" any plans by the opposition "that displease Washington".

In such ways, the Carter administration which brought Khomeini to power and has solicited and exploited the hostage crisis to keep all of Europe on the verge of economic disaster, has placed as many obstacles as it can muster in the way of any operations from within or outside Iran that would overthrow the made Ayatollah's regime.

Nevertheless, tension does remain between the civilian, republican leadership of the opposition movement and the military. Bakhtiar and Gen. Oveissi, although they have met, do not get along, and it is felt that the generals around Oveissi are less principled and more ready to work with Anglo-American circles. One Iranian source says that within a few months of the establishment of a new Iranian regime the civilians would be shunted aside by the generals in a de facto military coup.