

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Power struggle in Iran

Will Khomeini and his mullarchy survive if the hostage question is settled?

In the wake of Iran's parliamentary decision to move toward the release of the 52 American hostages, a full-scale power struggle has erupted in Iran that could topple the Khomeini government.

For the past 12 months, the continuing crisis around the hostages has been the glue that has kept Iran together and Khomeini and his clerics, or mullahs, in power. Once the hostages are released, the chief political weapon of the mullahs will have been removed, and a minimum of five different factions are expected to make simultaneous bids for power. Among those jockeying for position in the power struggle are the Iranian left; the old Iranian National Front of former prime minister Mehdi Bazargan; the monarchists, who support the return of the late shah's son, Reza Shah II, to Iran; the Iranian military; and the mullahs themselves.

The biggest challenge to the mullah-dominated Khomeini government comes from the Iranian left, which is composed of several factions including the communist Tudeh Party, the Mujahedin, and the Fedayin. Despite their ideological differences, they all oppose the release of the hostages and have organized extensive support throughout Iran for their position.

That faction of the mullahs, led by Ayatollahs Khalkhali and Beheshti, who are eager to make an arms-for-hostages deal with the United States, is moving fast to

squash the left. On Nov. 1, Iranian radio broadcast reports about the existence of a "fifth column" in the central city of Shiraz. According to the broadcast, Iranian dissidents backed by Iraq and some leftist parties such as the Tudeh and Fedayin have caused disturbances in Shiraz in recent days.

"The Baathist Party's fifth column has been mobilized in the cities and is creating an artificial state of unrest," the broadcast stated, adding that Khomeini's Revolutionary Guards "immediately found and arrested the heads of . . . this fifth column."

Further signs of a crackdown on the left were evidenced by the banning of the Tudeh Party newspaper two weeks ago at the start of the parliamentary debate on the hostage question. In addition, the trial of Mujahedin leader Saadati has been resumed following its postponement at the start of the Iran-Iraq war. Saadati is being accused of spying for the Soviet Union.

According to a source close to the Iranian left, "Unless the left, and in particular the Mujahedin, is smashed, Khalkhali and Beheshti will not be able to get away with speaking, they are going to be overthrown."

The monarchists are also beginning to flex their muscle. According to Iranian sources, following Reza Pahlavi's Oct. 31 announcement in

Cairo that he is the new shah, pro-shah demonstrations occurred in Teheran, Tabriz, and the holy city of Qom, Khomeini's base of operations. Supporting these demonstrations were followers of the anti-Khomeini ayatollah Shareatmadari, presently under house arrest in Qom.

According to insiders, Iranian president Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, who has carefully kept himself out of the limelight during the current hostage negotiations, is quietly working with Khalkhali and Beheshti around a deal with the United States. However, at the same time, Bani-Sadr, through his newspaper *Inqilab*, is attacking Prime Minister Mohammed Ali Rajai and the more extremist of the religious layers and is taking steps to secure a new power base in the military. Dressed in full military uniform, Bani-Sadr has been spending virtually all his time in recent weeks in the war zone, meeting with the armed forces command in an effort to win over their support.

According to reports from the front, the military is ready to bolt from Khomeini. They are already bolting from the front.

To prevent both regular and noncommissioned officers from fleeing from the front lines, Revolutionary Guards have reportedly been positioned behind the armed forces to lock them in.

Pushing Bani-Sadr to become an alternate power center to the clergy are members of the Iranian National Front of former prime minister Bazargan. In a series of articles in his paper *Mizan*, Bazargan has attacked the "savagery" of the current regime and compared its "brutality" with that of the shah.