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Iran: Growing Qashqai Opposition

An Intelligence Memorandum

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[redacted]

MORI/CDF

September 1980

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Iran: Growing Qashqai Opposition (U)

Summary

The Khomeini regime appears to be preparing to move against the Qashqai and other tribes in southwest Iran that it suspects—with some justification—of disloyalty. Sporadic clashes have already occurred in the Qashqai homelands, which are located between Tehran and the oilfields of southwest Iran. (C)

The regime's plan is probably part of a larger effort to crack down on traditional minority leaders who have reasserted their authority during the instability that has followed the collapse of the Shah's regime. (C)

Qashqai leaders are redoubling their efforts to obtain reliable sources of more and better arms and equipment as well as to develop a coherent opposition to the Khomeini regime. (S NF NC OC)

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This memorandum was prepared [redacted] Southwest Asia Analytic Center, Near East–South Asia Division, Office of Political Analysis. It was coordinated with the Office of Strategic Research and the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia. Information available as of 4 September 1980 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and should be directed to the Chief, Southwest Asia Analytic Center, OPA [redacted] 25X1

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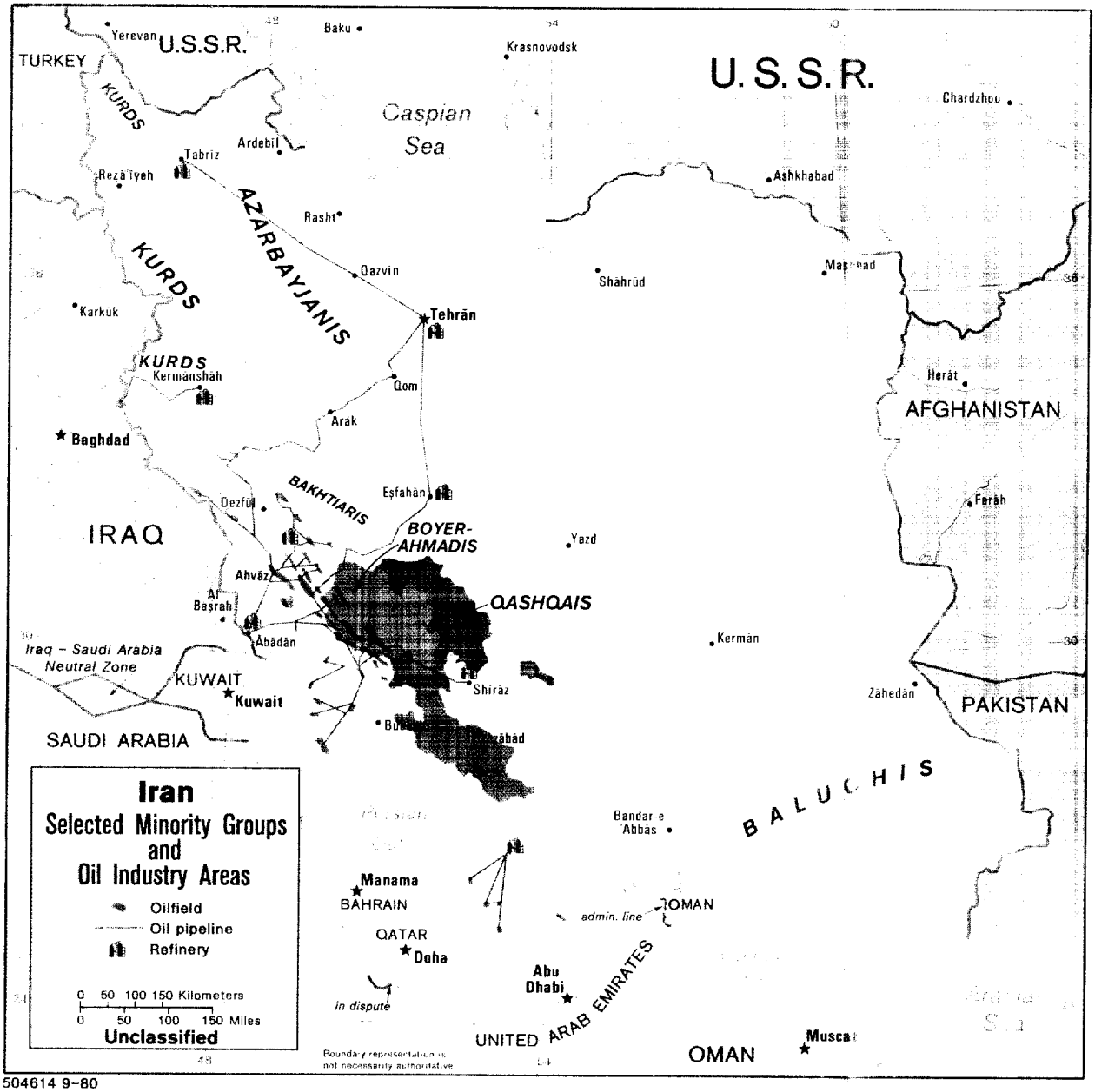

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Iran: Growing Qashqai Opposition (U)

Fundamentalist supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini believe that continuation of traditional minority power structures is incompatible with the development of the Islamic Republic. This belief accords with the view of previous Iranian central governments that were intent on extending their authority. When the central government has been weak, leaders of the major tribes have been able to deal with the capital almost as equals. As central governments have grown stronger, they have resorted to force to restrict minority autonomy and tried to restructure local social patterns to preclude a resurgence. There have been some indications that pro-Khomeini fundamentalists—most notably Ayatollah Beheshti—might consider a federal system that could accommodate much of the minorities' desires for local self-rule. But most of the Khomeini camp—including Khomeini himself—is strongly opposed. (U)

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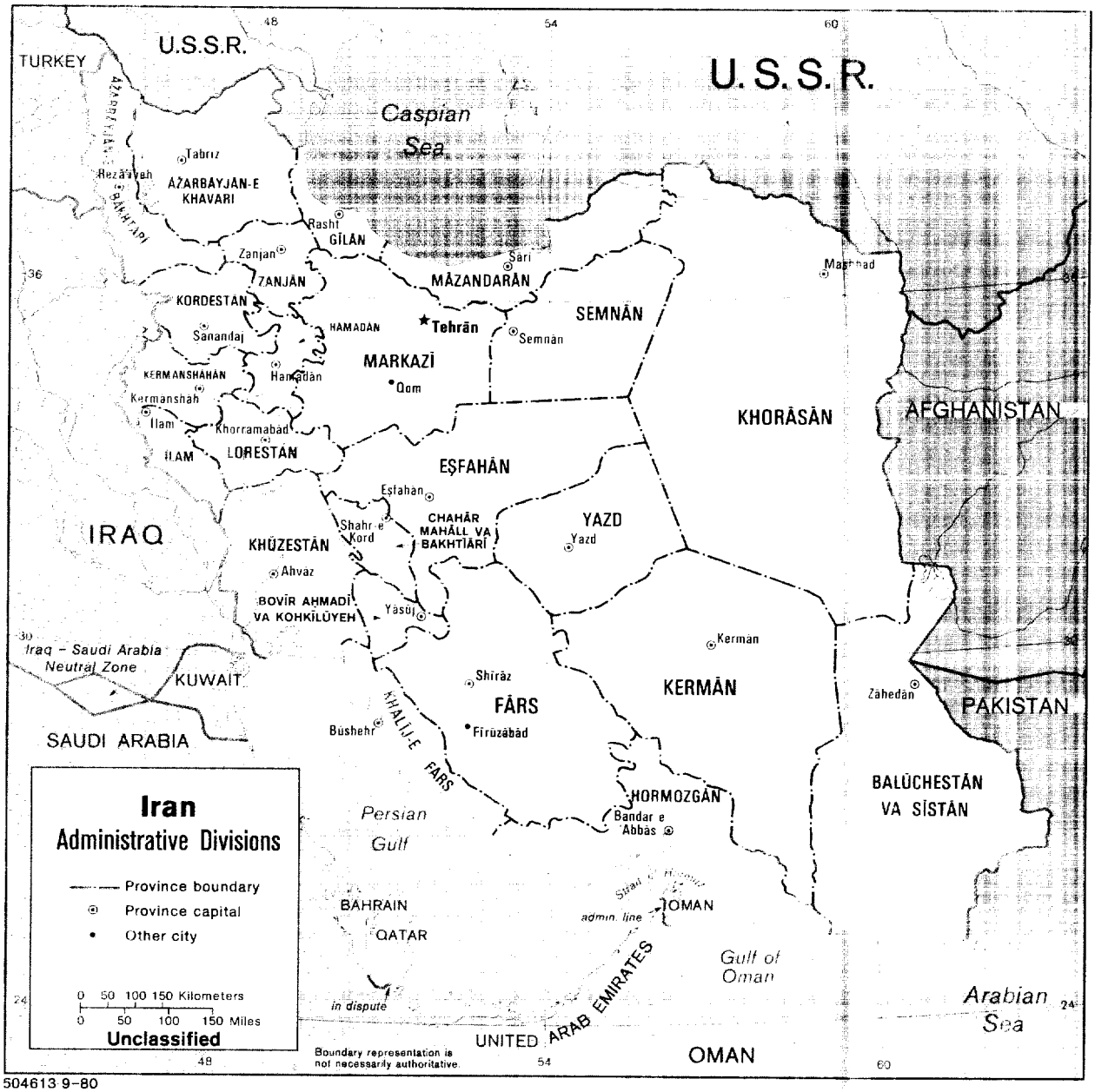
Tribal leaders sense that the attacks against them could signal the beginning of a major crackdown, but some also are beginning to believe that they have enough strength, if they cooperate among themselves and with other minority groups, to fight off a government offensive and possibly even 25X1



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topple Khomeini. [redacted] what seem to be the first signs of serious attempts by leaders of the Baluchis, Qashqai, and Kurds to open talks on joint action against the Khomeini regime. (S NF NC OC)

The Qashqai

Iran's seminomadic, ethnically Turkic, Shiite Qashqai number an estimated 500,000 to 530,000. Their lands extend throughout Fars Province, west into Khuzestan, and north into Isfahan Province and the Chaharmahal governate—an area of about 150 by 350 miles. The Qashqai have established their headquarters at Firuzabad—a town south of Shiraz. They and their allies—the approximately 125,000 Boyer-Ahmadi—are geographically positioned to cut ties between Tehran and the petroleum producing region. Composed of 44 subtribes divided into nine groups, the Qashqai are one of the best organized tribal confederations. They are not well integrated into Iranian society and have a history of opposition to the central government. (C)

No political groups have appeared among the Qashqai since the revolution. Tribal leadership remains with the four sons of the last paramount Qashqai khan, who was executed by the ex-Shah's father. These energetic leaders have been running the tribe for decades. Despite their 20-year exile from the tribal homelands, they easily reasserted direct control when they returned to Iran after the revolution. The youngest khan, Khosro (59)—who led the Qashqai forces against the Army in the 1960s—seems to be the most politically active. The eldest brother, Naser (75), is very ambitious but is less active on the national political stage. Mohammed Hosein (66), the third khan, who is reportedly living in Western Europe, seems to act as a go-between for the Qashqai with anti-Khomeini groups. About a year ago, he said his people were prepared to stage a coup if they had US backing. The second brother, Malek Mansur (69), seems to be inactive. (S NF NC OC)

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Naser's eldest son, Abdullah, who is in his forties, has been one of the targets of the fundamentalists' press attacks, probably because he is the titular head of the next generation of Qashqai leaders. A physician trained in the United States, he has been described as [redacted] influenced by his cousin, Homan. About 30, Homan is the US-educated eldest son of Mohammed Hosein. He is said to be politically astute. (C NF NC OC)

Postrevolution Developments

The Qashqai area has been quiet in comparison to areas occupied by other major Iranian ethnic minorities, almost all of which have seen major clashes with the government's forces since the revolution. As in other 25X1

minority areas, the radical Marxist-Leninist Fedayeen have tried to organize local citizens, but they have been unable to establish themselves as an alternative to the tribal leadership despite intensive efforts to discredit the Qashqai khans. (S NF NC OC)

From the beginning of the Islamic Republic, the Qashqai leaders have tried to insulate their territory from negative side effects of the revolution. Within two weeks of Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran in mid-February 1979, the Qashqai khans met with him and agreed that they would "establish order" in their homeland in return for Khomeini's promise that the local pro-Khomeini clerics and security forces would not meddle in the tribe's affairs. In June 1980, Mohammed Hosein noted that the Revolutionary Guard had not penetrated Qashqai areas, although he implied it was not because of Khomeini's promise, but because of the tribe's strength and resistance. In addition, Qashqai leaders repeatedly warned officials that Qashqai desires for more social services and facilities must be addressed. (S NF NC OC)

Political Efforts

As the Islamic revolution has developed, the Qashqai leaders have grown more unhappy with the fundamentalists and increasingly skeptical about the staying power of the Khomeini regime. They have been testing the political winds in Tehran and Qom, and among local political, religious, and military leaders. (S NF NC OC)

At first, the Qashqai khans tried to work within the framework of the new Islamic Republic to safeguard their people's interests. Khosro Qashqai was elected as the tribe's representative to the Assembly in March 1980, but his credentials were questioned and ultimately withdrawn. He was arrested for a short time in early June, on the basis of documents found at the US Embassy as well as alleged testimony by one of the hostages said to show that Khosro was a CIA agent. He was also accused of contacts with SAVAK and a personal relationship with the Shah. With these additional attacks on the tribe's leaders, the Qashqai knew that there would be no place for them in the new regime and began to look for more allies. (S NF NC OC)

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When they still believed they could have a role in national politics, the Qashqai leaders considered trying to form a secular political party—possibly headed by Madani—that would advance the interests of the minorities as part of its platform. Voting patterns in Madani's unsuccessful presidential candidacy early this year probably showed that he has substantial political support among the Qashqai and their neighbors. (S NF NC OC)

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Preparations for Future Fighting

Public expressions of Qashqai emotions have cooled somewhat since June, when tribesmen clashed with local security forces for several days after Khosro Qashqai's arrest. But tribal leaders have redoubled their efforts to obtain arms and strengthen key points in their territory. They fear that the regime will soon try again to kill or arrest some of them to enforce continued Qashqai good behavior. (S NF NC OC)

Since their return from exile, the tribe's leaders have sought better weapons and equipment. The Qashqai have numerous small arms, but these are often outdated. Unlike the Kurds, who gained much of their equipment from raiding military installations as the Shah's regime collapsed, the Qashqai have had to rely on smuggling to increase and update their inventory. They have contacted such diverse sources as dissident Kurdish arms smugglers and at least two exile leaders, former Prime Minister Bakhtiar and General Oveisi. They are not taken with any of the exile leaders, but have recently been attracted by the exiles' apparent access to Iraqi funds. The Qashqai have asked Bakhtiar to arrange reliable supplies of rifle ammunition no longer readily available and to obtain new antitank weapons for them. Oveisi has been asked for funds to buy 6,000 rifles. The Qashqai khans, who are strongly linked with the West, say they have refused tentative aid offers from Libya, Palestinian groups,

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and Iranian leftists. The Khomeini regime knows the Qashqai have been collecting weapons and strengthening their positions and that they could cause significant problems in the southwest. (S NF NC OC)

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Outlook

The Qashqai leaders know that their lightly armed and untrained tribesmen would not fare well in pitched battles with the Army, especially if the air force were active. They may believe, however, that they can take advantage of the local terrain—and of surprise if they go after key oil facilities—to undermine effective government control in parts of the southwest. Qashqai chances of defending their own territory by fighting off the Revolutionary Guard are much better. During the clashes in June 1980, the tribe inflicted "relatively heavy" casualties on the guard, according to one source. (S NF NC OC)

The Qashqai leaders probably hope that the ties they have tried to develop with local military commanders will weaken the latters' resolve to fight against the Qashqai and even identify potential sympathizers in the military. The Qashqai were probably encouraged when some members of the ground and air force units in the Shiraz area refused to fight against dissident Kurds. Local Army unit commanders also publicly indicated that they would not attempt to quell the most recent Qashqai disturbances. The regular forces would be more likely to oppose the Qashqai, however, if the tribe initiated incidents outside their homelands designed to interrupt Tehran's control of the oilfields. (S NF NC OC)

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Under past regimes, the regular forces have had considerable trouble in attempting to control the Qashqai. During clashes in the 1960s over the Shah's land reform, it took a large-scale Army campaign to control the tribe. Government forces now in the Shiraz area have been as depleted by the revolution as units elsewhere in Iran. Tehran could bring in reinforcements, but it would have to do so in the context of its need to maintain its defenses in other minority areas, as well as along the Iran-Iraq border and the Persian Gulf coast. (S NF NC OC)

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