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# Iran: Recent Tudeh Party Activity

**An Intelligence Memorandum**

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**Iran:**  
**Recent Tudeh Party Activity**

**Summary**

The pro-Soviet Tudeh Party is too weak to challenge the Khomeini regime directly, but it is aggressively expanding its operations in Iran. It publicly supports Khomeini on all key issues, while clandestinely building its strength.

The clandestine organization of supporters, which the Tudeh Party reportedly is trying to establish within the Iranian military, probably will provide intelligence to the Soviets on the Iranian military. It also could serve as the nucleus for a coup attempt if the party concludes that Khomeini is becoming vulnerable.

The party so far has failed to attract other leftist parties into a united front because of its well-deserved reputation of subservience to Moscow. The Tudeh has infiltrated other leftist groups, however, and has maintained its ties with several leftist-oriented minority groups.

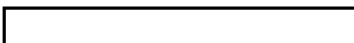
The Tudeh continues to benefit from Soviet and East European support and is strengthening its ties with other Middle Eastern Communists.



*The author of this paper is  of the Iran Task Force, Office of Political Analysis. It was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia and the Directorate of Operations. Information available as of 4 April 1980 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief of the Iran Task Force,*

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**Iran:**  
**Recent Tudeh Party Activity** [Redacted]

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The pro-Soviet Communist Tudeh (Masses) Party is steadily emerging from years of inactivity to become an important factor in Iranian politics. The party leadership has backed Ayatollah Khomeini on all major issues. Alone among the country's leftist parties, the Tudeh supports Khomeini as a positive and progressive leader. It has supported his new Islamic constitution and has been one of the most consistent backers of the occupation of the US Embassy in Tehran. [Redacted]

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President Bani-Sadr has been increasingly critical of the party in recent weeks, especially its support for the militants occupying the US Embassy. He admits, however, that there is no good evidence that Tudeh members are among the militants, and despite his rhetoric, Bani-Sadr has taken no action against the Tudeh. [Redacted]

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**Strategy**

The Tudeh Party recognizes that it is too weak to challenge Khomeini directly and prefers to depict itself as a junior partner of the regime. One party leader said recently that "we are not strong enough to lead the (revolutionary) movement. Khomeini's influence is much higher than ours."

[Redacted]

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Nonetheless, the party participates actively in the country's political affairs. The Tudeh nominated more than 100 candidates for the first round of legislative elections in March, although party leaders acknowledged they had little chance of winning any seats. The party has established numerous front organizations, including one that represents women's interests, and it publishes two newspapers, including the daily *Mardom*. [Redacted]

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Behind this overt activity, the Tudeh is aggressively recruiting new members and preparing for the day when the Khomeini government is vulnerable. There are no reliable estimates of the party's size, but one assessment concludes that it had only about 1,500 members at the time of the revolution last year—about 400 in exile in East Germany. According to this account, the Tudeh now has about 5,000 hardcore members and a somewhat larger overall following. Press reports indicate that the party has attracted as many as 50,000 participants to its demonstrations in Tehran. [Redacted]

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This memorandum updates *Iran: The Reemergence of the Left*, PA 79-10572C, December 1979, which provides background information on the Tudeh Party. [Redacted]

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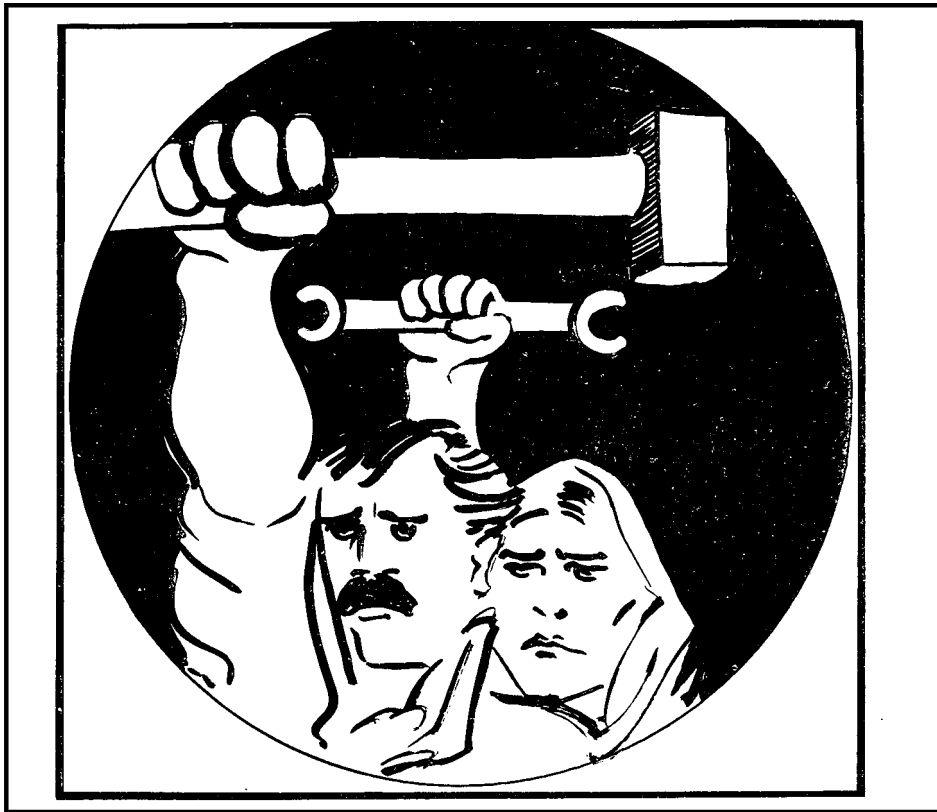
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*Tudeh Party emblem from newspaper Mardom.*

The relatively small number of official party members can be misleading. The Tudeh is the only well-organized party in Iran and has always emphasized the role that a small, elite cadre can play. Party leaders do not appear interested in forming a mass organization. [Redacted]

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The party has concentrated its recruitment activity in several traditional target areas. Students and industrial workers, especially oilworkers, have been particularly sought. There are conflicting reports on how successful the party has been, but [Redacted] the Tudeh has been successful in recruiting significant numbers of midlevel management officials in the oil industry. [Redacted]

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X1C **Tudeh Activity in the Military**

[Redacted] the Tudeh Party is engaged in what appears to be a significant effort to develop a clandestine organization within the Iranian military:

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- [Redacted] several members of a Tudeh military organization that existed in the 1950s now are recruiting officers.
- [Redacted] other Tudeh military organizers have recently returned to Iran from exile in Algeria. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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We lack information on the extent of the Tudeh's success in penetrating the military, but in the past the Tudeh has given high priority to this effort. In the 1950s the Tudeh recruited over 400 officers before the Shah's security forces cracked down. The Khomeini regime lacks the intelligence network to resist Communist penetration, and many officers are unhappy with the Ayatollah's chaotic rule. [Redacted]

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The Tudeh almost certainly has studied the example of its Afghan counterpart, which seized power in April 1978 with the support of only a few hundred well-placed officers in a 100,000-strong military. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] the Tudeh maintains close ties with the Afghan Communists. [Redacted]

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There is no sign that the Tudeh Party plans a coup at this point. It is too unpopular to confront Khomeini, but probably hopes to:

- Use its military organization to provide intelligence for the Soviets, as the earlier Tudeh military organization did.
- Prepare for the day when the Khomeini regime is vulnerable. To survive, a Tudeh-led military regime that seizes power would require massive Soviet support, including military intervention. [Redacted]

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The Tudeh's organization within the military probably functions fairly independently of the rest of the party. In the 1950s the Tudeh military organization was linked only by a special committee to the party Central Committee. The officers' organization was also kept separate from another clandestine organization composed of noncommissioned officers. [Redacted]

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**Internal Divisions**

The Tudeh has long been plagued by internal factionalism. A persistent cause of dispute has been the degree to which they should follow Soviet direction. Tudeh First Secretary Nureddin Kianuri is said to be especially close to Moscow and a strong believer in following Soviet initiatives. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]  
The 63-year-old Kianuri spent almost 25 years in exile in East Germany. Kianuri has been described by those who have met him as intelligent, dedicated, and very conscious of where he wants to lead the party. He replaced party leader Iraj Eskandari in January 1979— [Redacted] with strong Soviet backing. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Eskandari's backers are apparently now a small minority in the party. He came back to Iran along with Kianuri in 1979, but left for East Germany once more in October 1979. He is said to be considering returning to Iran

[Redacted]


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*Tudeh First Secretary Nureddin Kianuri speaking in Tehran.*

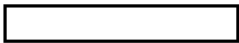
again this summer to set up a rival organization but feels that he may have to move to Western Europe in the interim because he fears his relationship with the East German Government may become strained. 

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### Relations With Other Leftists

The Tudeh traditionally has tried to form a united front of leftist groups to increase its influence. Its efforts to form such a bloc to support a common list of candidates in the legislative elections failed when Iran's two other major leftist groups, the Islamic-oriented Mujahedin and the Marxist Fedayeen, refused to join because of the Tudeh's links with Moscow. Relations between the Tudeh and the Fedayeen have long consisted of mutual accusations of counterrevolutionary tendencies. 

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It is likely that the Tudeh has penetrated both of these groups, however, and that elements of each are pro-Tudeh. The Fedayeen in particular has a long history of pro- and anti-Tudeh factionalism. One of the largest Fedayeen groups in the mid-1970s, the Fedayeen Munsheb, was aligned with the Tudeh until the revolution when the two merged. 

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The Communists also have sought to develop ties with Iran's various minority parties, many of which have long had close ties to the Tudeh or are independent leftists. The Tudeh traditionally has been strong among the Turkish minorities around the southern littoral of the Caspian Sea, particularly in Gilan Province and among the Turkomen. 

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The Tudeh claims not to be involved in the unrest that has been common among Iran's minority groups since the fall of the Shah, and the party publicly supports the regime's efforts to restore order in the provinces. Government officials have consistently indicated, however, that they believe the Tudeh is supporting minority unrest and acting as a link between the USSR and the dissidents. [redacted]

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The party has had longstanding ties with the largest Kurdish group, the Kurdish Democratic Party. The KDP was supported by the Tudeh in the 1940s, for example, when the Kurds briefly established an independent republic near Mahabad. The last congress of the KDP's senior leadership in February voted to suspend most of the pro-Tudeh members of the Central Committee of the KDP because of the Tudeh's unwillingness to criticize Khomeini's heavyhanded measures to repress the Kurds. Some ties between the Tudeh and the KDP, however, probably continue. [redacted]

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The best evidence of Tudeh activity among the minorities is in Azarbayjan. Since the revolution the Tudeh's traditional front organization in the area, the Azarbayjan Democratic Party, has reemerged and resumed activities.

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[redacted] the Tudeh and the ADP are concentrating on recruiting students and working closely together. [redacted] senior leaders of the ADP, who fled Iran after the collapse of the shortlived pro-Soviet Azarbayjan Republic in 1946, have returned to the province. [redacted]

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The Tudeh's strategy with the minorities probably is to retain its links to local leftists but keep a low posture that avoids the regime's wrath. In this way the party can be prepared to work more closely with the minorities when it judges the Khomeini government vulnerable to challenge from the left. [redacted]

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**Relations With Foreign Communists**

The Tudeh's principal foreign supporter since its creation in 1941 has been the Soviet Union. The party looks to the Soviets for leadership, and the Soviet-controlled clandestine National Voice of Iran radio based in Baku often enunciates policies close to the Tudeh line, although it does not mention the Tudeh by name. We believe the USSR also provides the party with some financial and other aid. Tudeh Party organizers are regularly trained at Soviet and East European party schools. [redacted]

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Of the East European parties, the East Germans maintain the closest links with the Tudeh. East Berlin provided organizational assistance for the return of Tudeh members to Iran, and a small personnel nucleus has

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remained in Leipzig in case the party is again driven underground. East Germany also provides some financial assistance to top-level party functionaries. [REDACTED]

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The party also maintains good relations with most Middle Eastern Communists, including the Syrian and Lebanese parties and the pro-Soviet Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Relations are particularly good with the South Yemeni and Afghan Communists. [REDACTED]

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