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निकट पूर्व/दक्षिण एशिया विश्लेषण कार्यालय
ادارة التحليل لشؤون الشرق الاوسط وجنوب آسيا
המחלקה לענייני המזרח התיכון ודרום אסיה
اداره تجزيه و تحليل خاور ميانه و جنوب آسيا
Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis
Directorate of Intelligence

1 April 1985

Mr. Vincent Cannistraro
Director of Intelligence Programs
National Security Council

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Vincent,

Attached is the memorandum you requested on Iranian opposition. I hope you find it and the other memo I sent you useful. If you would be interested, I would be happy to have the Chief of the [redacted] and the senior political analyst on Iran come down and talk with you about Iranian matters. This would need to be done quickly, however, as they both will be leaving in mid-April for a TDY to the Middle East.

[redacted]
Chief, [redacted] Division

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505



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. [redacted]

* * *

Long-running power struggles within the Khomeini regime are intensifying, both because of the Ayatollah's failing health and because the regime faces serious problems with the economy and in the war with Iraq.



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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. []

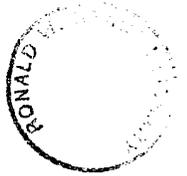
The regime's efforts to deal with these problems are being complicated by factional infighting. Moderates believe that the best way to preserve an Islamic regime in Iran is to adopt a less aggressive foreign policy and to adjust domestic policies in an effort to deal with economic difficulties. Radicals 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. []

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. []

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. []

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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. []

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. []

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. []

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. []

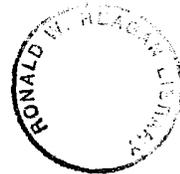
Tudeh Communist Party. The pro-Soviet Tudeh had about 5,000 members before its leaders were arrested for treason and the party was repressed in 1983. Tudeh had cooperated with the Khomeini regime, but it also had penetrated both the government and military. Some senior members associated with the military 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. []

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. []

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. []

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

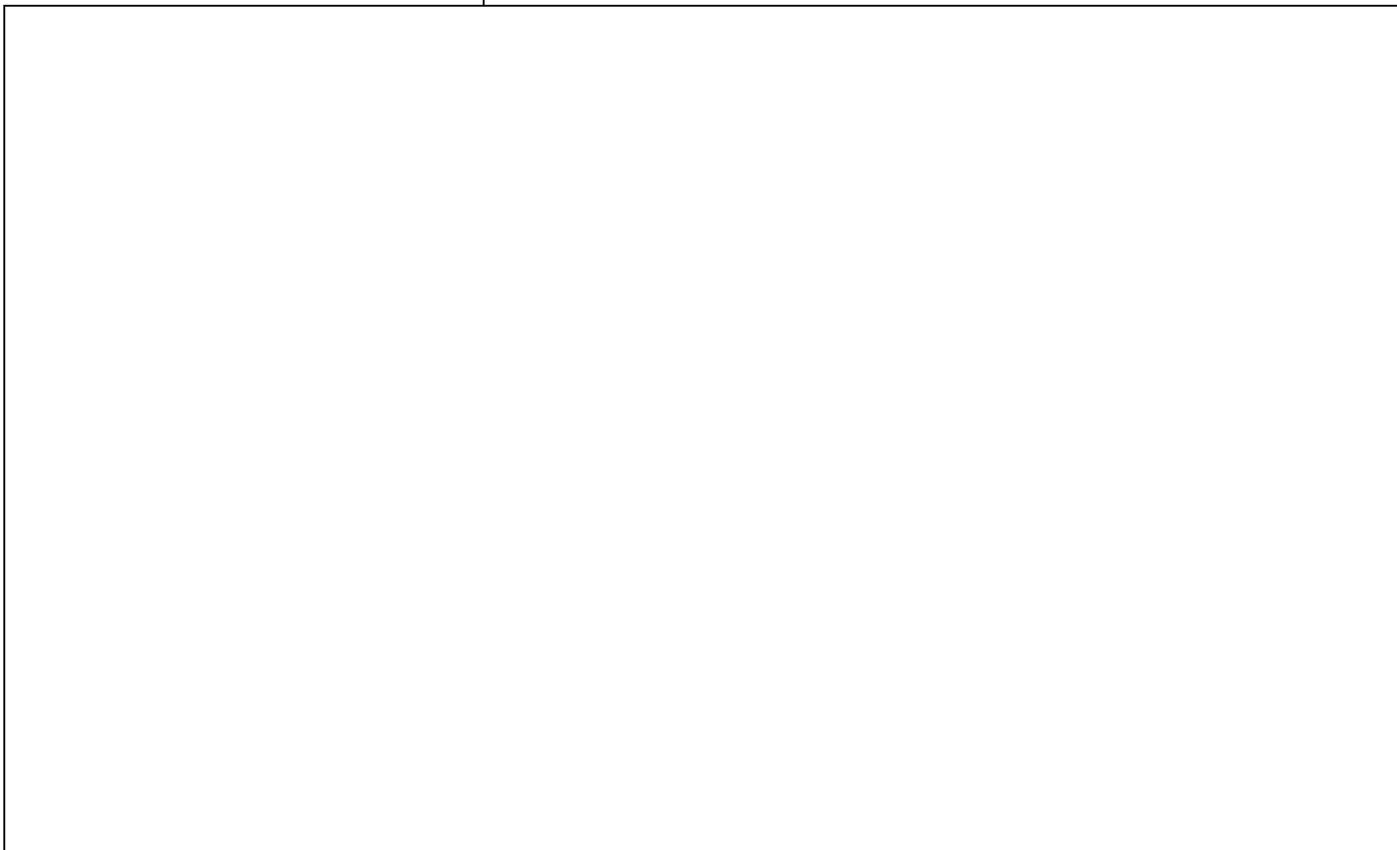
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leadership, but it may be the nucleus of a coordinated labor movement. If it exists, this would be the first internal group to challenge the regime since the suppression of the Mujahedin-e Khalq and it could attract popular support because of economic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

The Opposition Outside Iran

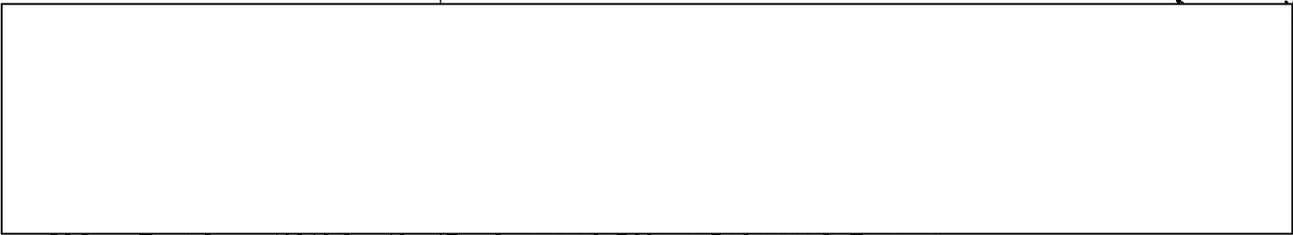
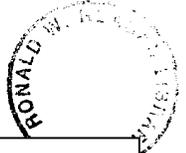
Iranian exiles have been unable either to unite or to maintain strong links into Iran. Bickering among the groups and competition for resources have diverted their energies. Exiled oppositionists and their supporters can be divided into two groups--those who were part of the revolutionary coalition,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



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



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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.)

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.

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.

Military. The regime has repeatedly uncovered coup plots and urged 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.

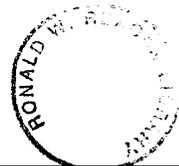
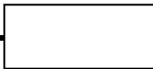
Revolutionary Guard Officers and Radical Lay Technocrats. Both groups play an important role in the Khomeini regime. Regime concern about the influence of the Guard is reflected in Khomeini's admonitions that it stay out of politics. Despite these warnings, factions within the regime have sought support 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.

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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 several sources have reported that 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.

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