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Director of
Central
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Tuesday
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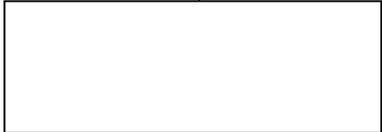
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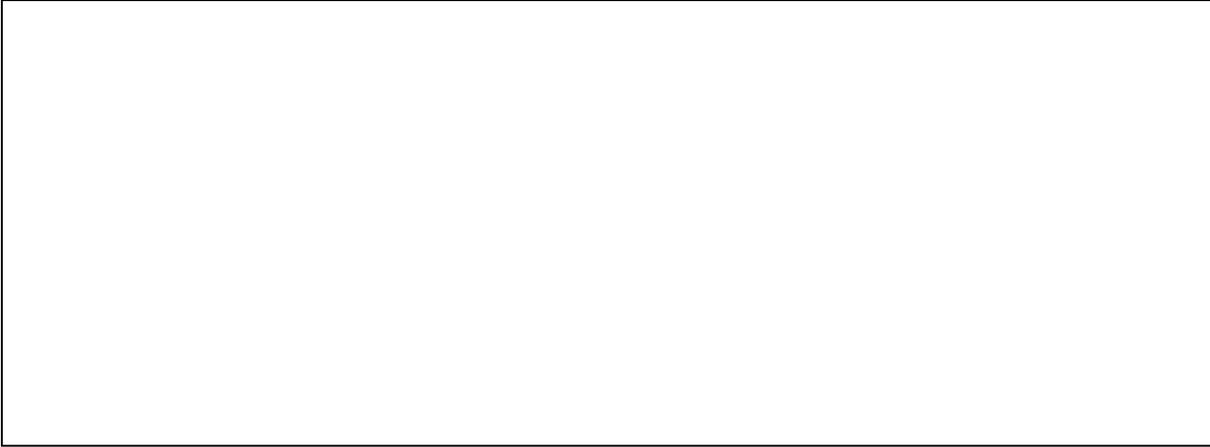
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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

IRAN: The Assembly Election and the Hostages

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Ayatollah Khomeini's decision to continue to give the National Assembly responsibility for the fate of the hostages threatens to introduce new complications into the power struggle in Iran. There is little reason to believe that the Assembly--which will not meet until April--will choose to release the hostages without further US concessions unless it has direct orders from Khomeini. Meanwhile, the election for the Assembly will be a crucial test of President Bani-Sadr's ability to consolidate his hold on power. [REDACTED]

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Most of Bani-Sadr's opposition comes from Ayatollah Beheshti's Islamic Republic Party. Beheshti and his hard-line supporters expect to do better in the legislative election than they did in the presidential voting last month, and hope thereby to reduce Bani-Sadr to a figurehead. [REDACTED]

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The outcome of the election will be further complicated by the participation of the radical Mujahedin guerrillas, the leftist Fedayeen group, and numerous minority candidates. The largest Kurdish organization, the Kurdish Democratic Party, is backing the Mujahedin's candidates. The pro-Soviet Tudeh Party and Admiral Madani's supporters are also putting forward slates of candidates. In all, over 1,000 candidates have filed for 270 seats.

Khomeini has said little about the election beyond the comment that the candidates should be "good Muslims." He may intervene as he did in the presidential vote, however, by disqualifying leftist candidates. The Ministry of Interior has already omitted some Tudeh and Fedayeen candidates from electoral lists, but there has not been a formal ban of the left.

Prospects

If Khomeini does not intervene, the most likely outcome of the election is a divided Assembly, unsure of its responsibilities and eager to establish its revolutionary credentials. The constitution gives the Assembly responsibility for determining its own internal regulations, and the legislators will have to spend some time on these. The Assembly will also have to approve a prime minister named by Bani-Sadr--a task that could prove difficult if the Islamic Republic Party has a majority.

Regardless of their political loyalties, the legislators probably will want to move cautiously on the hostage issue and not get too far in front of Khomeini. They may delay any decision by initiating an investigation of the US and the Shah; the constitution gives the Assembly authority to conduct investigations of national problems.

In any case, Khomeini could overrule the Assembly.

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Constitutional Powers

The Iranian constitution gives executive power to the supreme religious leader (Ayatollah Khomeini), the President, and the Prime Minister, but it is deliberately vague about many aspects of the power relationships among them. If Bani-Sadr can select a Prime Minister with close ties to himself, the President's position will be strengthened. If the Islamic Republic Party can block his nominee in the Assembly, Bani-Sadr probably will lose much of his authority. Whatever the case, Khomeini will retain ultimate power and can overrule all others.

If Khomeini chooses, he can refer any Assembly decision on the hostages to the Council of Guardians--composed of six clerics and six lawyers--which is responsible for overseeing all legislation. Khomeini has so far appointed the six clerics himself; they are primarily members of the Qom Theological Society, a hard-line group that was among the earliest backers of the Embassy takeover. The six lawyers are to be appointed by the Assembly.

The President cannot move too quickly toward release of the hostages without risking Khomeini's wrath. Moreover, the Supreme Court--headed by Beheshti--may charge the President with violating his duties toward the Assembly and recommend to Khomeini that the President be dismissed. The situation, therefore, is ripe for continued temporizing by Khomeini.

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