

(b) (1)
(b) (3)



National
Foreign
Assessment
Center

~~Top Secret~~

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: OCT 2005

Iran: The Shia Revolution and Iran's Neighbors

An Intelligence Assessment

~~Top Secret~~

PA 79-10503CX

October 1979

Copy 000



National
Foreign
Assessment
Center

~~Top Secret~~



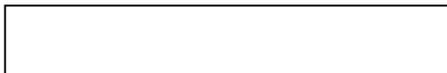
Iran: The Shia Revolution and Iran's Neighbors (U)

An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 19 October 1979 has been
used in the preparation of this report.*

This paper was prepared in the [redacted]
[redacted] Office of Political Analysis. Comments
and queries are welcome and may be directed to
the Chief [redacted]
[redacted] (U)

This paper was coordinated with the Office of
Strategic Research, the Office of Economic
Research, the Directorate of Operations, and the
National Intelligence Officer for Near East and
South Asia. (U)



~~Top Secret~~

PA 79-10503CX

October 1979



**Iran: The Shia Revolution
and Iran's Neighbors (U)**

Key Judgments

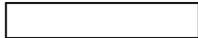
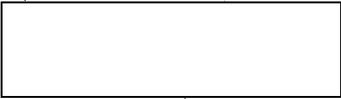
Ayatollah Khomeini and some influential members of Iran's religious community clearly are encouraging and in some cases assisting Shia dissidents in neighboring states.

Khomeini's focus on establishing an Islamic Republic, the continuing chaos in Iran, and the counsel of secular government officials, however, probably will be sufficient to prevent adoption of an official policy of intervention.

The statements of radical ayatollahs will keep Iraqi and Gulf suspicions at a high level and—barring an Iranian Government move to silence these figures—will prevent significant improvement of relations between Iran and its neighbors. Iraq will continue to meddle with Arab dissidents in Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan Province as a counter to Iranian encouragement of Iraqi Shias.

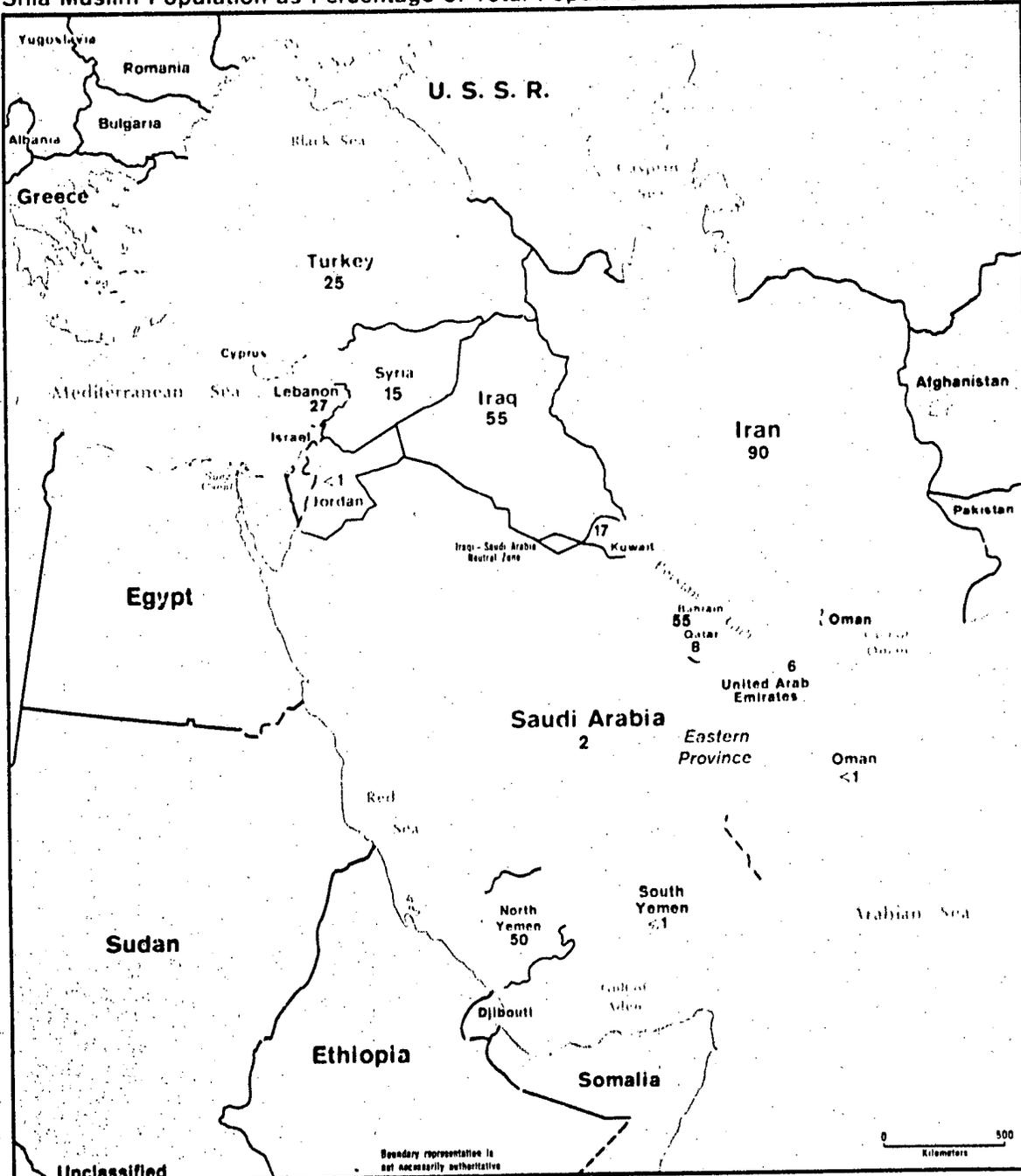
Iraq also will use Iranian encouragement of Gulf Shias to pose as a protector of the smaller Arab Gulf states against Persian imperialism. Iraq hopes in this way to extend its influence at the expense of Saudi Arabia.

The smaller Gulf states will increase security cooperation among themselves and with Saudi Arabia in recognition that instability in one will affect all. The larger issue of regional cooperation to protect the security of the Gulf region will remain unresolved because of the mutual suspicions and conflicting ambitions of Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.





Shia Muslim Population as Percentage of Total Population

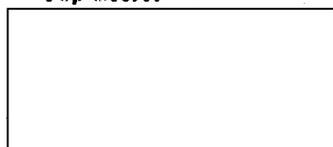


Unclassified

Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative

0 500 Kilometers

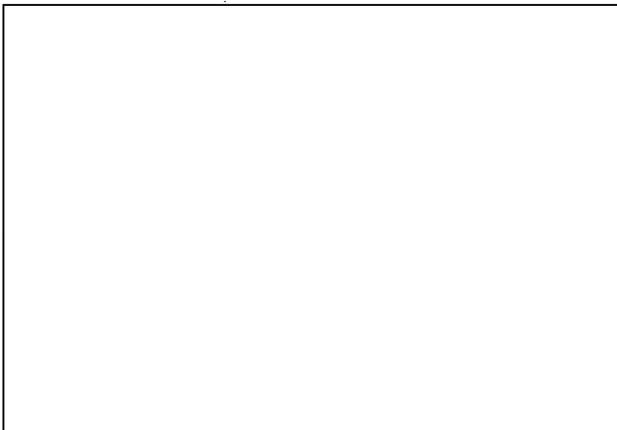




Iran: The Shia Revolution and Iran's Neighbors (U)

Shia demands for religious, economic, and political reforms have steadily increased in Iraq, Kuwait, and Bahrain since the overthrow of the Shah of Iran. In Afghanistan, the tribal insurgency against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul has been encouraged by the Iranian example, and in at least one case, Afghan rebels appear to have adopted tactics perfected during the Iranian revolution. Despite a relative absence of trouble, government authorities in Saudi Arabia, where there is a significant Shia community, remain deeply concerned about the potential for serious Shia dissidence. Saudi concern was reflected in late September by a strong Saudi message of support for Bahrain and Kuwait in the wake of Iranian encouragement of Shia unrest in those states. 

The Iranian hierarchy is divided over the policy it should adopt toward Shia communities abroad.



Despite Ayatollah Khomeini's demand for a "Revolutionary Islamic" foreign policy, there is no evidence that he has compelled the Iranian Government to implement a policy of providing materiel or financial assistance to religious dissidents in the Persian Gulf states or Afghanistan.¹ Iran's continuing political instability, unrest among its ethnic minorities, eco-

¹ Shia Muslims compose 12 percent of the total population of Afghanistan; Sunni Muslims, 87 percent. (U)

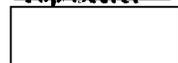
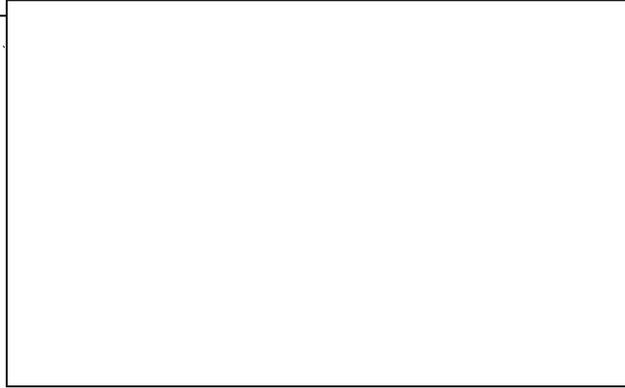


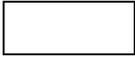
conomic disarray, and the lack of an effective military force continue to militate against an active, interventionist foreign policy in support of pan-Islamic goals. The radical impulse of the Iranian Shia clergy to export its Islamic revolution also is constrained by the more cautious attitudes of civilian officials who presently make up Iran's provisional government and those who will continue to participate in a clergy-dominated government. 

Iranian Relations With Iraq

The potentially most explosive link between Tehran and coreligionists abroad is the tie with Iraq's Shias. Khomeini spent 13 years in exile in Iraq, residing at Kerbala, a religious center for all Shias. From here he maintained contacts with Shia centers in Iran and plotted against the Shah. As a result, Iranian religious leaders have numerous ties to the Iraqi Shia clergy that could serve as channels of support should sectarian tensions in Iraq again flare into open hostility. Each statement by an Iranian clergyman complaining of Shia persecution elsewhere strengthens Iraqi suspicions that Iran intends to meddle in Iraq politically. Iranian interference also provides a cause around which Iraq can rally the smaller Gulf states in pursuit of its own leadership ambitions. This, in turn, is likely to spur Saudi Arabia to action lest Iraqi influence grow too great. 

The secular figures in Iran's provisional government see the dangers of risking confrontation with Iraq and of stimulating a united front against Iran in the Gulf.





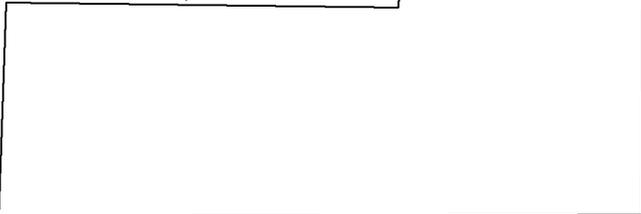
Ayatollah Khomeini

Unclassified (C)

Where Yazdi sees dangers, Iranian religious leaders see opportunity, even duty. They have encouraged the "demonstration effect" of the Iranian revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini explicitly advanced this effect when he responded in April to the Iraqi President's message of congratulations by issuing the barely veiled threat that Iran's revolution against the "Pahlavi dictatorship" had been a "warning to all the arrogant" from "the weak and oppressed."



The connections between Iranian religious leaders and Shias in Iraq are furthered by the presence in Iraq of about 250,000 Shias of Iranian ancestry. One of Iran's most respected clerical leaders, Ayatollah Khomeini, resides in Najaf. In June the Iraqi Government arrested Iraqi Shia leader Ayatollah Baqir Sadr, apparently to



prevent him from leading budding religious-based antigovernment dissidence. Baqr Sadr has strong support in Iran. Khomeini sent a telegram in support of Baqr Sadr following the arrest, and several other leading Iranian ayatollahs sent messages to Khomeini, urging him to mobilize demonstrations for Sadr's release. Sadr's arrest sparked demonstrations in many Shia areas of Iraq. [redacted]

The Iraqi View

Baghdad wants a stable relationship with Iran regardless of the political or religious orientation of the group that controls the government in Tehran. The Ba'athists were able to reach an accommodation with the Shah and probably would like to strike a similar deal with the Islamic Republic despite their aversion for the Ayatollah Khomeini. Attempts to arrange an exchange of high-level visitors, however, have foundered. Moreover, last summer's agreement to end hostile propaganda attacks has begun to fray as both Baghdad and Tehran have engaged in public recriminations following an Iranian-inspired flareup of Shia dissidence in the smaller Arab states of the Persian Gulf. [redacted]

Iraq's sensitivity to outside meddling with its Shia community reflects the long history of religious tension and violence between Iraq's Shia majority and the ruling Sunni minority. The Shia-Sunni split, which began as a dispute over the successor to the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century, still stirs strong passions in Iraq some 13 centuries later. The Sunnis regard the Shias as ignorant, superstitious throwbacks to an age best forgotten. The Shias see Sunnis as heretical and materialistic and are ill at ease with the pan-Arab thrust of the Ba'ath Party, which they regard as threatening to swamp them in a Sunni Arab sea. [redacted]

The Shias' sense of clannishness is reinforced by the highly emotional annual commemorations that mark the martyrdom of Ali and Husayn, who are regarded as the rightful successors to the prophet. In addition, Iraqi Shias regard themselves as special because Shias

from all over the world look to Iraq as a center of religious learning, shrines, and pilgrimages. The tombs of Ali and Husayn, for example, are located in Najaf and Kerbala. [redacted]

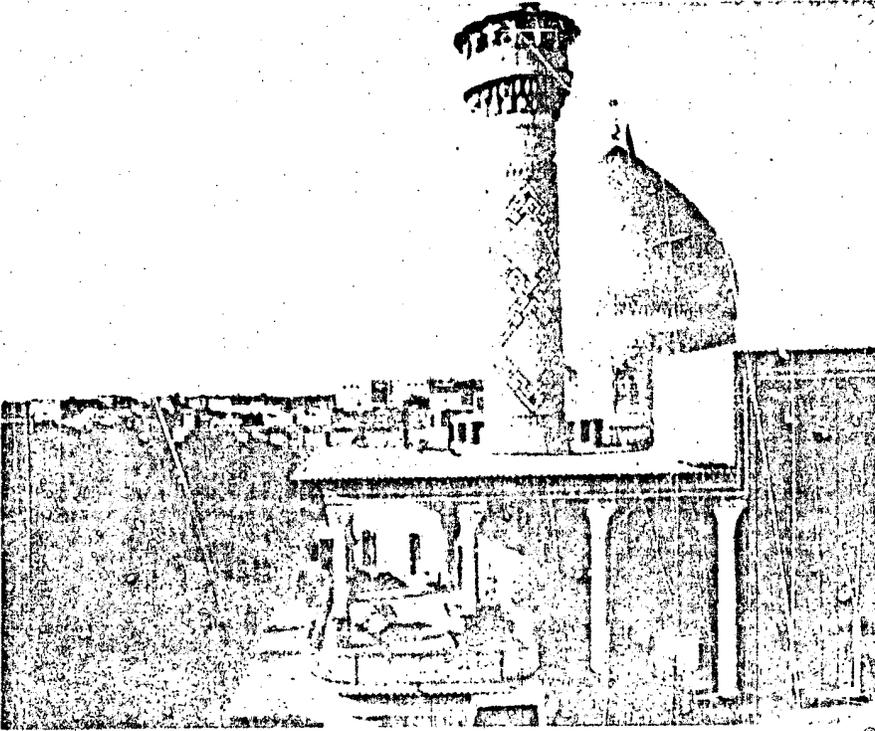
Iraqi Shias constitute 55 percent of the population and are in a good position to cause trouble for the predominantly Sunni Ba'athists should they adopt the Iranian experience as a blueprint for revolution. The Shias are concentrated in both urban and rural areas throughout southern Iraq. Baghdad itself may be as much as one-half Shia. Major oil pipelines pass through the Shia provinces. Strategic installations such as the port of Basrah, the Persian Gulf oil terminals, and the southern oilfields are heavily dependent on Shia labor. Shias are also strongly represented among the lower ranks of the police and the military, though the officer corps is dominated by Sunnis. [redacted]

The Ba'athist response to the dissidents' potential for disruptive activities has been a mixture of generous applications of welfare benefits with harshly repressive moves when cajolery and patronage fail. Although the military was used to put down religious rioting in the Shia holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala in February 1977, the most noticeable effect of Iran's revolution on the Iraqi Government has been to stimulate special efforts by Baghdad to conciliate the Iraqi Shia community. Development plans feature heavy commitments to housing, health care, and education, and the government has provided generous financial assistance for Shia religious activities. A number of Shias remain in top government and party posts despite recent political changes that saw three Shia members of the Revolutionary Command Council executed for plotting against the regime. [redacted]

President Saddam Husayn, not noted for his piety, also has made a personal effort to placate Shias. Saddam toured southern cities and villages early this year to meet with Shia village elders and inaugurate development projects. Saddam's public remarks during the recently concluded month of Ramadan also have an unusually strong religious flavor. [redacted]

~~Top Secret~~

*The mosque courtyard at
Kerbela, a famous Shia shrine*



Unclassified ©

*Saddam Husayn talks with
Shia villagers in Iraq*

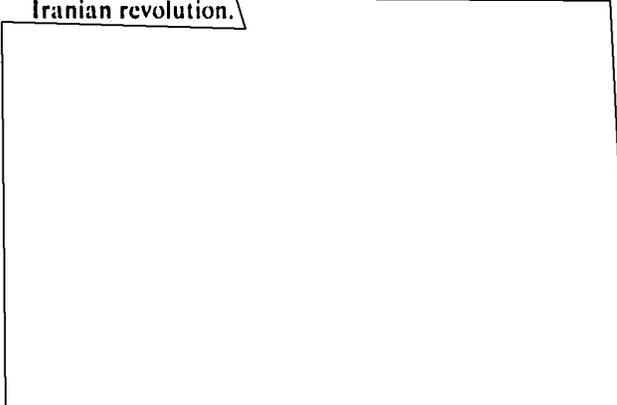


Unclassified ©

~~Top Secret~~

The Persian Gulf States

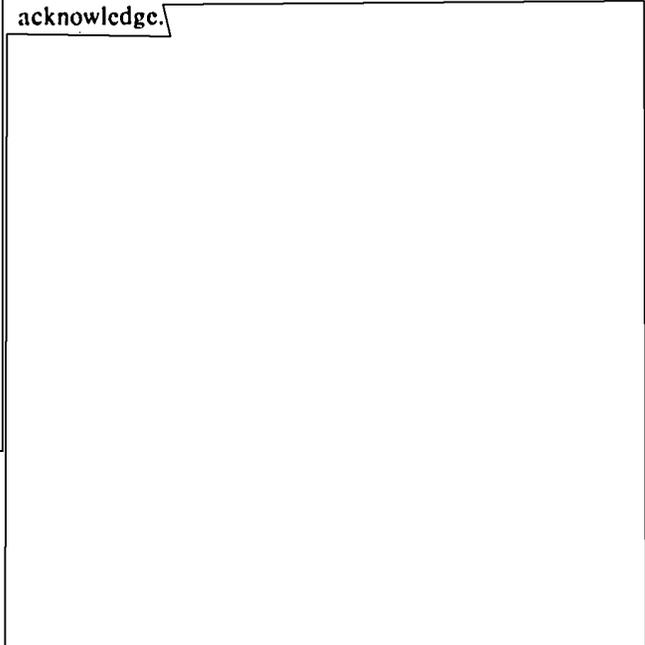
Iranian clerical leaders have directly intervened in the affairs of several of the smaller states of the Persian Gulf to encourage Shia dissidence stimulated by the Iranian revolution.



*Deported Bahraini
Shia leader
Moderrasi*

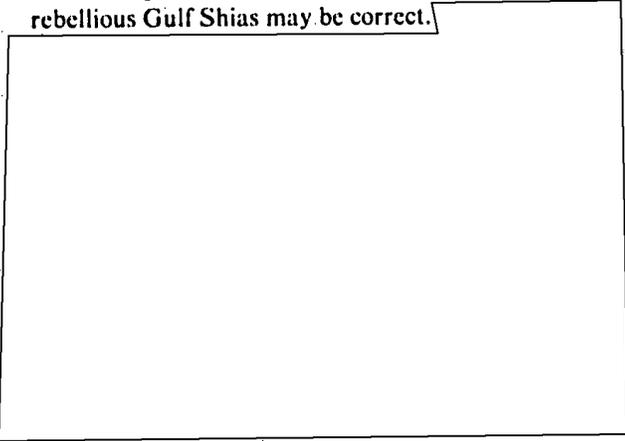
Unclassified

Leaders of the Persian Gulf states are concerned, however, that Iranian encouragement of Shia dissidents is more extensive than Tehran officials acknowledge.



The extent of Iranian support for the Shia dissidents in the Gulf states is unclear. Iranian Government officials have assured representatives of both Bahrain and Kuwait—as late as October—that Iran seeks nothing but friendly relations with its neighbors. An Iranian Foreign Ministry official stated in early September that the inflammatory remarks of Iranian religious leaders did not have the endorsement of the provisional government or the Revolutionary Council.

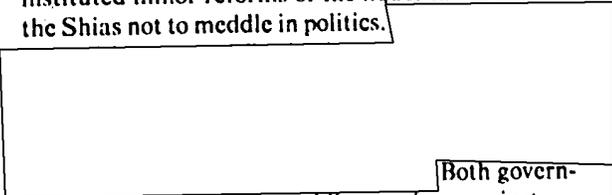
Arab charges of more extensive links between Iran and rebellious Gulf Shias may be correct.



In Kuwait, which has experienced a relatively low level of Shia dissident activity, contacts with radical Iranian Shias may be less extensive than in Bahrain. The Kuwaiti Shia community, however, numbers 200,000 or 17 percent of the population, of whom approximately 60,000 are expatriate Iranians who could provide numerous links to Iranian clerics. According to press reports, Ayatollah Khomeini met with a Kuwaiti Shia delegation in late August and, following this meeting, called for the creation of an international "Party of the Oppressed." Such a party would provide Khomeini with a mechanism to regulate the international activities of his supporter, channel funds, and put pressure on regimes that he might view with disfavor.

Elsewhere in the Gulf, Shia dissidence has been relatively minor, in part because Shias in Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar make up less than 8 percent of the population. (U)

The Gulf regimes generally have moved from conciliation to firmer measures. Bahrain's Amir Isa instituted minor reforms of the liquor laws but warned the Shias not to meddle in politics.



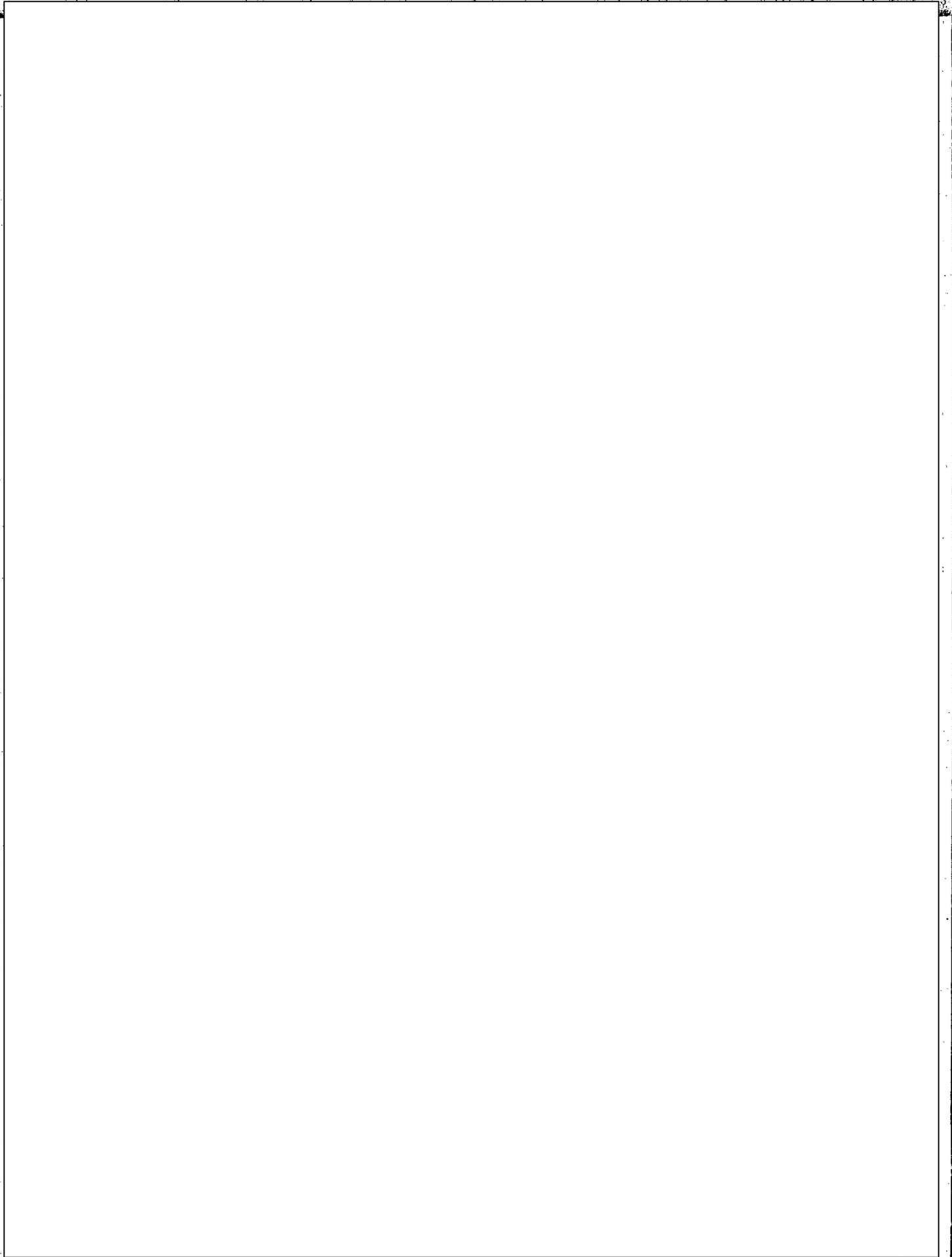
Both governments have issued stern public warnings against further agitation.

Sympathy for the Islamic reforms demanded by Shia ayatollahs is not widespread in the Gulf. Gulf Muslims, despite the strains of rapid development, show little interest in giving up the benefits of modernization in favor of a theocratic society similar to that contemplated by Ayatollah Khomeini. As long as Shia activists focus narrowly on Islamic issues, their influence probably will be limited.

The potential for significant unrest has increased substantially, however, because religious demands are being combined with calls to correct political injustices or alter economic patterns such as discriminatory hiring practices. Such a broader appeal attracts both political leftists eager to exploit Shia discontent and disgruntled members of the large expatriate labor force who, like many Shias, suffer from political and social discrimination. Newly educated youth, in particular, chafe at the almost total lack of popular representation in the Gulf monarchies and contribute to current demands for popularly elected assemblies, freedom of the press, and equal political rights.

The Gulf rulers, aside from increasing existing security coordination, have unenviable options in countering the criticism. They recognize the dangers of political repression and regard it as a principal reason for the Shah's ouster. Both Kuwait and Bahrain are discussing plans to restore popularly elected assemblies that were dissolved in the mid-1970s following leftist lobbying which the regimes regarded as threatening. Yet, political concessions—however necessary to prevent an explosive upheaval—are likely to fuel demands that will erode royal authority further.





[Redacted]

[Redacted]

The split between politicians and clerics, however, is again apparent. Clerical leaders have voiced strong support for the Muslim insurgents in Afghanistan.

[Redacted]

Afghanistan

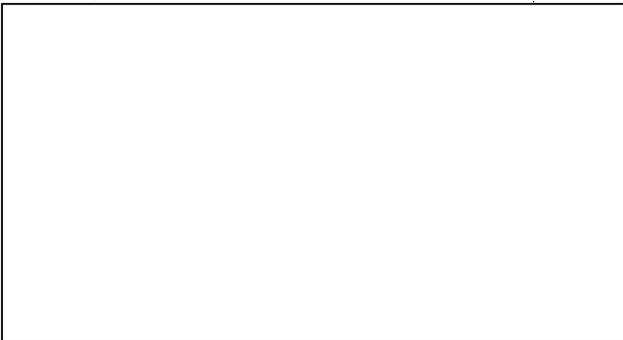
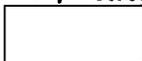
Iranian Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan recently reaffirmed Iran's position that it will not interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

[Redacted]

Despite expressions of support from Iranian clerical leaders and countercharges from Kabul that Iran has intervened actively to support the insurgents, Iranian influence on events in Afghanistan will continue to be slight.

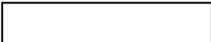
[Redacted]

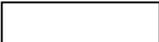
[Redacted]



One important effect of continued Iranian encouragement of Shia unrest—no matter how unofficial—will be to encourage Iraq to play the role of protector in the Gulf, thereby sharpening differences between Iraq and Iran. Should the dangers become immediate, Gulf rulers would have few alternatives to accepting some Iraqi protection; Saudi Arabia is too weak militarily to help, and closer security ties to the United States and the West may not be politically palatable. 

Prospects

Iranian Foreign Minister Yazdi has acknowledged the ambiguity in Iran's relations with its neighbors. The Foreign Minister and other government officials repeatedly have stated that Iran's foreign policy is based on the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of other states. Yazdi said on 18 September, for example, that Iran neither wants to export its revolution nor send armed men to fight foreign regimes. Yazdi noted, however, that Iran could not prevent the influence of its Islamic revolution on other countries. Moreover, Yazdi appeared willing to pay lipservice to Khomeini's messianic Islamic radicalism, asserting that it would be Iran's duty to take the initiative "to spread genuine Islam and genuine Islamic revolution throughout the world." 

The activities of Iran's semiofficial clerical leaders in support of Shia dissidents in neighboring states are likely to continue. These activities, primarily confined to expressions of support, though possibly including a low level of financial assistance, pose a significant threat to the internal security of at least one state, Bahrain, and pose a potential threat in Kuwait and Iraq. The messianic, pan-Islamic radicalism of the Iranian clergy will continue to strain relations between Iran and these states and to stimulate efforts by Arab states to organize a coordinated response. 

The most important restraint on Iran, however, is likely to be its own vulnerabilities. Disarray in the government and the economy, the low level of operational readiness of the Iranian military, and the pressing need to resolve domestic problems of political instability and ethnic unrest significantly inhibit Iran's ability to pursue an activist foreign policy whatever the stripe. Foreign Ministry officials are likely to continue to seek accommodation with states confronted by Shia dissidents supported by Iranian clerical leaders. 

