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National  
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# Iran: The Tudeh Since the Revolution

An Intelligence Assessment

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# Iran: The Tudeh Since the Revolution (U)

## An Intelligence Assessment

*Research for this report was completed  
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This paper has been coordinated with the Directorate  
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**Iran:  
The Tudeh Since the Revolution (U)**

**Key Judgments**

Since the collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy, the pro-Soviet, Communist Tudeh Party has emerged from years of repression and exile to become a small but influential political force in Iran. The Tudeh has supported the incarceration of the hostages and backed the Khomeini regime's anti-US policies. [redacted]

Although few in number, the Tudeh has some major strengths, including organizational talent and support from the USSR. It has sought to insinuate itself into a position of influence with the Khomeini regime by publicly backing it on all key issues while privately providing it with intelligence on the clerics' domestic enemies. [redacted]

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The regime has generally tolerated the Tudeh more than other leftists because of the party's support for its policies. Nonetheless, the party is closely watched and occasionally harassed because of its ties to Moscow. [redacted]

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Privately, the Tudeh has sought to infiltrate the government, especially the military. Although we believe the Tudeh has had some success in doing so, we lack information to judge the extent of the Communists' successes. [redacted]

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The Tudeh's close ties to Moscow have hurt its image within Iran, where it is widely perceived as an arm of Soviet foreign policy. While this is the Tudeh's greatest vulnerability, Soviet aid provides the party with financial support and a secure base of operations outside Iran. [redacted]

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The largest leftist party in Iran, the Islamic Marxist Mujahedin, has consistently rebuffed the Tudeh's efforts to form a broad leftist front. In the last six months, however, the Tudeh has gained influence with some leftist factions and is seeking to promote closer ties with the Mujahedin. [redacted]

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In the long term, the party could benefit from its organizational skills, foreign backing, and infiltration of the military to gain more influence. The Tudeh will probably bide its time, however, until Khomeini is vulnerable enough to be challenged. [redacted]

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To pose a major threat to the regime, the Tudeh probably needs the support of other leftist groups and possibly Iran's numerous minorities. By itself, the party probably can only seize power through a military coup. Even in this unlikely event, the Tudeh would require significant outside support from the Soviets to hold on to power. [redacted]

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**Strategy and Tactics**

In the two years since the fall of the Shah, Iran's pro-Soviet, Communist Tudeh (Masses) Party has gradually emerged as a significant, albeit relatively small, political force.<sup>1</sup> The party has sought to establish itself as the junior partner of the clerics who back Ayatollah Khomeini while slowly building its strength for the day it can play a more independent role. [redacted]

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The Tudeh leadership recognizes that the party is still too weak to seize power. The Tudeh suffers from its ties to Moscow and is widely perceived in Iran as anti-Islamic and insufficiently nationalist. In September 1979 the Tudeh's leader admitted that "everything depends on Khomeini. He has the people's support." Early in 1980 another leader carefully noted that "we are not strong enough to lead the (revolutionary) movement. Khomeini's influence is much higher than ours." [redacted]

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As a result the Tudeh has sought to align itself with the clerics and Khomeini, hoping to ingratiate itself into a position of influence, fuel Khomeini's anti-Americanism, and gain time to build its own strength. The Tudeh has publicly backed Khomeini on all key issues, including the handling of the hostage crisis, minority unrest in the provinces, and purges of the military and ministries. [redacted]

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Rumors are widespread, moreover, that the Tudeh has given the clerical Islamic Republic Party intelligence reports provided to Tudeh by the Soviets to improve the party's standing. Ayatollah Beheshti, a key cleric, is said to be a recipient of these reports. The Tudeh is also said to have warned the clerics in early September that Iraq would soon attack [redacted]

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Tudeh leaders have often defended the Khomeini regime as a progressive force. One Tudeh leader interviewed on Hungarian television in November said that:

<sup>1</sup> The Tudeh played little if any role in the revolution. The party was driven underground by the Shah in the 1950s and 1960s. By the mid-1970s, the Tudeh was almost entirely an exile organization based in East Germany. (See appendix A for background on the Tudeh before the revolution.) [redacted]

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*We support the clerics. We do not call them mullahs, but religious fighters. We support those who take part in the anti-imperialist struggle. The majority of Parliament, the current government, and all of Imam Khomeini's adherents are following a radical, anti-American line. Imam Khomeini's line represents the interests of the destitute people and the unemployed.*

The Tudeh spokesman admitted that the regime is also anti-Soviet, but blamed this tendency on a few "liberals" who favor the United States, including former Prime Minister Bazargan and former Foreign Ministers Yazdi and Ghotbzadeh. [redacted]

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The Tudeh's support for Khomeini is consistent with the party's longstanding policy of calling for a national front of all popular forces. The Tudeh recognizes its weakness and has never tried to seize power for itself, but rather has sought to form alliances with other political forces—alliances that the Tudeh hopes, in time, to dominate by virtue of its more developed organizational skills. [redacted]

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**Khomeini's Response**

The Islamic regime has tolerated the Tudeh much more than other leftist groups. In general, Khomeini has been sharply antileftist, and he has often ordered crackdowns on leftist activity. The two largest leftist groups, the Mujahedin and Fedayeen, have been periodically driven from the universities—their main base of support—and their offices closed, leaders arrested, and publications suppressed. The Fedayeen have been driven underground and broken up into several weak, competing factions. [redacted]

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The Tudeh has generally—but not always—been spared in these crackdowns. The Tudeh's newspaper, *Mardom*, is banned occasionally, but has always reappeared. Since September, *Mardom* has generally been out of circulation. Tudeh offices in Tehran, Rasht, Esfahan, and other cities have been ransacked by fundamentalist mobs but not closed. [redacted]

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The clerics apparently tolerate the Tudeh because of its pro-Khomeini stand. The regime, however, has not given the Tudeh a formal role in decisionmaking. The Tudeh has no seats in Parliament and no voice in formulating policy. [redacted]

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The Tudeh probably has had some success, however, in infiltrating the government, but we lack information on the extent of this success. In part, this reflects the Iranian tendency to ascribe to the Tudeh more influence than it probably has—especially in conversations with Western officials. [redacted]

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Despite rumors that some senior officials, including Beheshti, are secret Tudeh supporters or that the militants holding the US hostages are Communist-led, there is no good evidence that the Tudeh actually has this much influence. Nonetheless, these rumors reflect the widespread Iranian belief that the Tudeh is more powerful than it is—a belief the party probably welcomes. [redacted]

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**Impact of the Iran-Iraq War**

Tudeh is attempting to exploit the war with Iraq to improve its nationalist credentials and gain popularity. The Tudeh has already gained some advantages from the war. The regime's attention has shifted to the battlefield. The confusion of the war and the diversion of Revolutionary Guards and military forces to the border has probably made it somewhat easier for the leftists to operate in Tehran and other large cities. [redacted]

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Militia men from all three major leftist groups—the Islamic-oriented Mujahedin, independent Marxist Fedayeen, and the Tudeh—took part in the fighting for Khorramshahr, Abadan, and the other major cities in Khuzestan in the first month of the war. The leftist militias worked closely with Revolutionary Guards in the province. The leader of the Tudeh Party's Khuzestan wing reportedly was killed in the street fighting in Khorramshahr and was given a well-publicized martyr's funeral near Tehran. The regime was clearly alarmed by the left's actions and banned all three groups from Khuzestan on 16 November. [redacted]

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The Tudeh's newspaper has publicly urged the regime to form a national unity government including "all patriots without exception" and negotiate a formal

agreement on cooperation between Muslim and leftist parties. *Mardom* has also urged the Khomeini regime to improve ties with the Soviets. It has claimed that Moscow supports Iran against Iraq and pointed to the Soviet refusal to undertake a massive military resupply of Iraq. [redacted]

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**Organization and Membership**

The Tudeh has traditionally been the best organized political group in Iran. It has emphasized tight discipline and clandestine organization. The party has numerous front organizations, including one for women, another for students, and several workers' associations. [redacted]

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The party is aggressively recruiting new members. [redacted]

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[redacted] last June that the Communists had benefited greatly from the Khomeini regime's tolerance. They claimed that the Tudeh has more than 100,000 members and sympathizers. Tudeh First Secretary Nureddin Kianuri told journalists that *Mardom* has a circulation of some 40,000. [redacted]

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Although these figures probably are exaggerated, fragmentary evidence suggests that the Tudeh has made significant gains. When the Tudeh emerged from 20 years in the underground after the fall of the Shah, it probably had no more than a few hundred members in Iran and several hundred more in exile in East Germany and the USSR. One assessment concluded that the party had only 1,500 members in early 1978—400 in exile in East Germany. [redacted] in 1980 that the party now has 5,000 hardcore members. [redacted]

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**Activity in the Military**

Tudeh leader Kianuri is said to be especially close to Moscow and a strong believer in following the Soviet lead. 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. With strong Soviet backing, he replaced party leader Iraj Eskandari in January 1979. One of Kianuri's key goals is to infiltrate the Iranian military. We lack



Tudeh leader Kianuri seated at his desk in Tehran [redacted] Unclassified

seized power in April 1978 with the support of only a few hundred well-placed officers in a military of 100,000. The party presumably uses its military apparatus to provide intelligence to the Soviets as earlier Tudeh military organizations did and to prepare for the day when the regime is more vulnerable. [redacted] 25X1

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] 25X1

**Relations With Foreign Communists**

The Tudeh's only significant foreign supporters since its creation in 1941 have been the Soviet Union and its allies. 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 often mention the Tudeh by name. The USSR also provides the party with some financial and other aid. Until recently, the Soviets subsidized publication of *Mardom*. Tudeh Party organizers are regularly trained at Soviet and East European party schools. [redacted] 25X1

Of the East European parties, the East Germans—probably with Soviet encouragement—maintain the closest links with the Tudeh. East Berlin provided organizational assistance for the return of Tudeh members to Iran, and a small nucleus has remained in Leipzig in case the party is again driven underground. East Germany also provides some financial assistance to top-level party functionaries. [redacted] 25X1

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 ruling parties in South Yemen and Afghanistan; Kianuri has visited Aden on several occasions to meet with other Middle Eastern Communist leaders. The Tudeh has supported the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. [redacted] 25X1

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information on the extent of the Tudeh's success in this effort, [redacted]

[redacted] the military reported recently that the Tudeh has made significant gains in infiltrating the officer corps. The extensive purges in the military since the revolution have helped this effort. Many officers are disillusioned with Khomeini and the clerics, and the regime's security apparatus is too weak to prevent Communist penetration. [redacted] 25X1

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The Tudeh has attempted to use its position in the military to insinuate itself into a position of influence with the Khomeini regime. Bani-Sadr has said that the Tudeh provided information to the regime that helped uncover a military coup plot. [redacted] [redacted] officers who participated in a foiled coup plot in July reports that the plotters deliberately avoided recruiting junior officers because so many are Tudeh members. [redacted]

There is no evidence that the Tudeh has sufficient assets in the military to stage a coup—much less that it is planning to do so. The party, however, has probably studied the example of its Afghan counterpart, which

**Relations With Other Leftists**

A key Tudeh objective since the fall of the Shah has been the creation of a unified leftist front under the party's leadership. Repeated Tudeh efforts to do so have been unsuccessful, however, because of the party's slavish obedience to the Soviet line. The Tudeh organized a meeting in June 1980 with representatives from the Mujahedin and the Fedayeen in hopes of forming a front, but without effect. The party again appealed to the Mujahedin and Fedayeen to unite with it shortly after the war with Iraq began, but again met with no success. [redacted]

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Despite these rebuffs, the Tudeh has succeeded in establishing working relationships with elements in the two parties. Moreover, rumors have circulated widely in Tehran about contacts between Mujahedin leader Masud Rajavi and Kianuri. The regime may be helping to bring the Mujahedin and the Tudeh together, by its arrest and conviction in November of senior Mujahedin leader, Muhammad Reza Saadati, accused of spying for the Soviets. Most Mujahedin leaders, however, back Bani-Sadr against both Tudeh and the clerics. [redacted]

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Since last summer, significant elements of the Fedayeen have cooperated with the Tudeh. [redacted] the Fedayeen leadership has split between those advocating and those opposing ties with Moscow and the Tudeh. [redacted]

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**Activities Among Minorities**

The Tudeh has long tried to develop a base among Iran's numerous ethnic minority groups. The party's support for Khomeini has hurt its efforts to build links to the minorities, but the party continues to try to curry favor [redacted]

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The Tudeh has been particularly active among the Kurds. A pro-Tudeh faction of the largest Kurdish group, the Kurdish Democratic Party, emerged last spring. This faction, led by KDP Deputy Secretary General Qani Blurian, left the KDP mainstream because Blurian favored negotiations with Tehran rather than continued fighting. [redacted]

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Some Iranian leaders have also accused the party of subversive activities among the Baluchi tribes of south-eastern Iran. Information on the Tudeh's activities in

this area is limited, but the party has long had close ties with the Afghan Communist Party, which is also accused of subversive activity among the Baluchis. [redacted] 25X1

The party has traditionally been strong in the region south of the Caspian Sea, the homeland of several minority groups including the Azaris and Turkomen (see appendix B for more information on the Tudeh's Azari branch). [redacted] 25X1

**Prospects**

The Tudeh is in a good position to gain more influence. Like the other leftist parties, the Tudeh benefits from the popular alienation caused by the clerics' efforts to impose their strict Islamic moral code and to radicalize the revolution. The party also benefits from the continuing decay of the Iranian economy, which alienates more and more Iranians from the *mullahs'* mismanagement. [redacted] 25X1

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The Tudeh also has significant strengths. Its organizational skills and outside support give it advantages unique among Iranian political parties. [redacted] 25X1

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The party must compete, however, with more popular groups like the Mujahedin, which have a more Islamic and nationalist image. In this sense, the Tudeh's continuing ties to the regime undermine its efforts to pose as an alternative to Khomeini. At least for the present, the Tudeh leadership seems to prefer to ride the clerics' coattails rather than go it alone and risk suppression. [redacted] 25X1

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The Tudeh will probably bide its time and prepare for the day—perhaps Khomeini's death—when a challenge to the regime could have some chance of success. In the meantime, it will continue to try to insinuate itself into a position of influence and power [redacted] 25X1

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The Tudeh's greatest weakness will continue to be its lack of popular backing—because of its ties to Moscow and its atheist image in a deeply Islamic society. Without support from other leftists like the Mujahedin or the minorities, the party could probably only seize power through a military coup during a period of extreme confusion and political unrest in Tehran. Even then, the Tudeh would require significant outside assistance from the Soviets to hold on to power. [redacted] 25X1

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## Appendix A

### The Tudeh Before the Revolution

Communism in Iran dates from 1917, when Iranian workers returning from the Baku oilfields—with encouragement from Soviet agents—formed the Justice Party, which became the Communist Party of Iran in 1921. In 1920-21, Communist groups supported by Soviet troops tried unsuccessfully to form an independent republic in northern Iran. Communists in the urban areas in the late 1920s had considerable success in organizing workers. The party was outlawed in 1931 after the government discovered that the Communists were responsible for the oilworkers' strike of 1929. [ ]

During the 1930s, Communist covert activity focused on propaganda and recruiting among intellectuals, including students returning from Europe. The arrest and imprisonment of 53 ringleaders—known as the Erani Circle—ended this phase of activity in 1937. [ ]

The members of the Erani Circle were released from prison in 1941 after the abdication of Reza Shah and the occupation of Iran by Soviet and British troops. They immediately formed another party organization, the Tudeh (Masses) Party. With Soviet troops occupying the northern part of Iran and allied troops in the south, the Communist quickly built a nationwide organization. [ ]

The Communists skillfully exploited grievances resulting from the modernization program of Reza Shah. The middle and working classes had expanded considerably, but had been given little opportunity to participate in politics. This, coupled with the abrupt removal of restrictions on political activities, allowed the Communists to make rapid progress in the cities. Numerous front organizations were formed. In 1944, eight Tudeh members were elected to Parliament, and for three months in 1946 the Cabinet included three Tudeh members. [ ]

In 1945-46, Communist Party organizers, with the support of Soviet troops, organized two autonomous republics in Azarbayjan. These puppet republics col-

lapsed after the Soviets withdrew in May 1946. An attempt to assassinate the Shah in 1949 led to the proscription of the party throughout Iran, but the government failed to root out the Tudeh organization. [ ]

Although nominally outlawed, the party reemerged between 1951 and 1953 when Mohammed Mossadeq was Prime Minister. By using xenophobic slogans, the party again gained followers. The Tudeh appeal was greatest among university students and civil servants. In addition to indoctrinated members, the Tudeh gained a large number of sympathizers. The party successfully penetrated professional and trade union groups and also much of the civil service and the military. [ ]

In supporting Mossadeq, it played a key role in inciting mob violence in Tehran. The Shah's triumph over Mossadeq in 1953 was followed by another suppression of the Communists. Over 1,000 party members and supporters were arrested, and most party leaders fled to Eastern Europe. The party was dealt a crushing and near fatal blow when Iranian security forces broke up the Communist apparatus within the military. Some 500 pro-Communist Army officers were arrested. [ ]

From 1953 until the fall of the Shah in 1979, the leadership of the Tudeh Party was centered in Leipzig, East Germany, where it attempted to:

- Refine its organizational structure.
- Keep Communist activity alive in Iran through radio, press propaganda, and covert communications.
- Communicate with party members within Iran. [ ]

The expatriate organization consisted of about 400 individuals, including the senior leaders and their families. The Central Committee convened in Moscow; the

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executive committee and secretariat were based in East Germany. The party apparently had cells in both Eastern and Western Europe.  25X1

For years the party used a transmitter in East Germany to broadcast party statements, commentaries, and summaries. The station, named Radio Iran Courier, was moved to Bulgaria in late 1965, but was shut down in late 1976 after the Shah protested to the Soviets.  25X1

## Appendix B

### The Azarbayjani Democratic Party

Since the fall of the Shah in February 1979, the pro-Soviet Azarbayjani Democratic Party has slowly re-emerged in northwestern Iran. The ADP has been recruiting in Tabriz and other large cities in Azarbayjan and has infiltrated some of its members into the province from their exile in the USSR. The party is weak, but is slowly increasing its strength as the Khomeini regime cracks down on other political groups in the area. [ ]

The Azarbayjani Democratic Party was established during World War II as the Azarbayjani wing of the Tudeh Party. Soviet forces occupied Azarbayjan in August 1941 and installed the ADP at the head of the puppet government in the area. In December 1945, ADP leader Jaafar Pishavari declared the creation of an autonomous Azarbayjan with Soviet support. [ ]

Under pressure from the United States, the United Nations, and the Tehran Government, Soviet forces withdrew from Azarbayjan in May 1946. In October, the Tehran Government announced that it intended to occupy Azarbayjan, and in December Iranian troops moved into Tabriz. Pishavari and other senior members of the ADP fled to the USSR. Iranian troops also seized Mahabad in Kordestan, crushing an autonomous Kurdish republic also formed with Soviet aid. [ ]

The Shah cracked down on the ADP and Tudeh for the next 30 years; and both parties were driven underground. For all practical purposes, the ADP ceased to function in Azarbayjan, but a cadre of its leaders and their supporters remained in exile in the USSR just across the border. [ ]

#### Postrevolution Activities

The ADP played virtually no role in the disturbances that brought down the Shah. Almost immediately after his departure from Tehran, however, reports of renewed ADP activity in the northwest began to appear. Press reports indicated that a few ADP and Tudeh supporters took part in the fighting in Tabriz in

February 1979 after the revolution's triumph in Tehran. [ ] "autonomy" 25X1  
committees were formed in several Azarbayjani cities immediately after the revolution. [ ] 25X1 25X1 25X1

[ ]  
that a senior ADP official with longstanding ties to the Iranian military had infiltrated into Azarbayjan. [ ]  
[ ] several ADP leaders returned from Algeria—one of whom unsuccessfully ran as a candidate from Tabriz in the parliamentary elections in early 1980. [ ] 25X1 25X1

#### Support for Khomeini Against Shariat-Madari 25X1

Like the Tudeh, the ADP has consistently supported the Khomeini government on all major issues. The Communists have been careful to minimize their past emphasis on Azarbayjani independence and have instead carefully urged the regime to grant minorities like the Azaris and Kurds more local government without defining specifically what the regime should do. [ ] 25X1 25X1

The Communists have aligned their forces with Khomeini against Ayatollah Shariat-Madari, the most popular religious leader in the province. In December 1979, Shariat-Madari's supporters in Tabriz rioted against Khomeini's new constitution. The ADP and the Tudeh denounced the unrest as a US plot and reportedly provided the central government with a list of pro-Shariat-Madari supporters in the military who were subsequently arrested. [ ] 25X1

#### Baku Activities

The ADP apparently retains a cadre organization within the USSR at Baku. In July 1980, the Iranian consulate in Baku was briefly seized by Communist exiles who demanded that the Tehran Government

allow them to return to Iran. The Iranian Ambassador to Moscow, Mohammad Mokri, protested the takeover to Soviet authorities [ ] 25X1

We have little reliable information on the size and activities of the ADP inside the USSR. The party may participate in running the Soviet-sponsored National Voice of Iran radio station in Baku, which broadcasts into Iran in Azari as well as in Persian. [ ] 25X1

#### Prospects

The ADP has apparently been able to emerge as a political force in Azarbayjan since the revolution, but it remains a small and largely uninfuential element. The party leadership probably hopes to benefit, however, from the Khomeini regime's weak security apparatus to build up a cadre in the province that could play a more significant role in the future. [ ] 25X1

The party probably also hopes to benefit from the Khomeini government's persecution of Ayatollah Shariat-Madari's supporters, which is steadily weakening the largest moderate political organization in the area. Since the December 1979 riots Khomeini has placed Shariat-Madari under house arrest, replaced many of his clerical supporters in Tabriz with Khomeini loyalists, executed several members of his political organization, closed its offices, and forced many of his closest supporters into exile. [ ] 25X1

The ADP is too weak to seize power in Tabriz and hold it on its own. The party could probably be used as it was in the 1940s, however, as a stalking horse for the Soviets should Moscow again decide to move forces into northwestern Iran. [ ] 25X1

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