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Contents

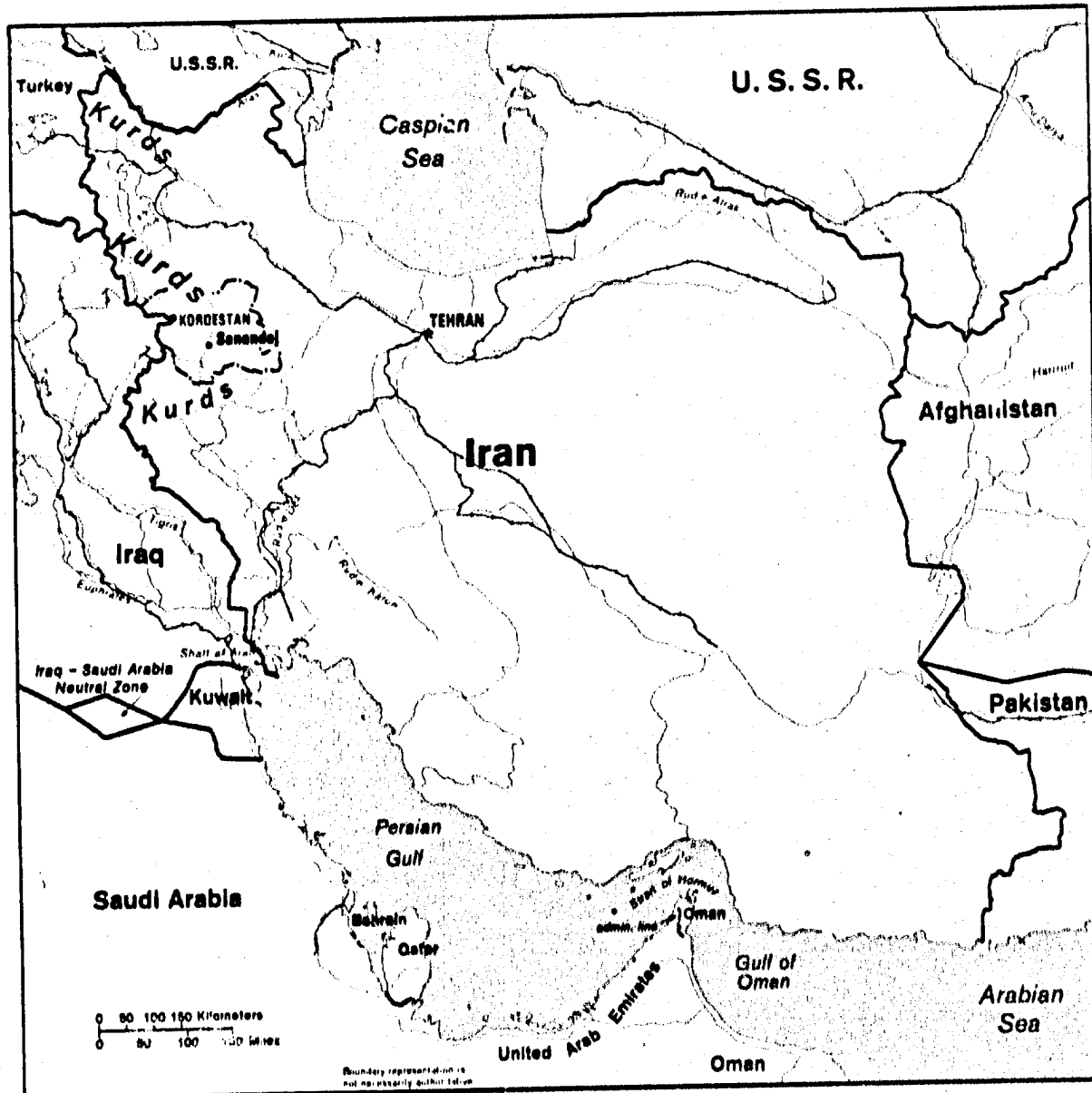
Situation Reports

Iran.	3



~~Top Secret~~

14 March 1980



~~Top Secret~~

IRAN

It is increasingly likely that President Bani-Sadr will not get a clear majority in the parliamentary election that begins today, forcing him to deal with a divided legislature.

Western observers in Tehran believe that Bani-Sadr's chances have been hurt by the success of the militants at the US Embassy in blocking his efforts to resolve the hostage crisis.

Bani-Sadr probably will not get a majority; in many districts, he has failed to field any candidates. Some observers believe that Bani-Sadr may resign if he concludes the legislature is dominated by his enemies.

A key factor will be the voters' perception of which candidates have Ayatollah Khomeini's blessing. While he has refused to endorse any candidates specifically, many Iranians may conclude that Khomeini's recent moves supporting the militants indicate that he no longer fully backs Bani-Sadr.

The election campaign has been very hard fought. Leftist parties--especially the radical Mujahedin--have been particularly visible, although Khomeini has urged Iranians to boycott the left. Voting has been suspended in Sanandaj, the capital of Kordestan Province, allegedly because of security problems, but probably also because of leftist influence among the Kurds; the Interior Ministry today said the presence of "armed groups" probably will force a postponement of balloting in several other Kurdish towns.

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14 March 1980