

# Iran Pulling Out Militia in Pre-Vote Concession to Kurds

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## Iran Pulling Out Militia in Pre-Vote Concession to Kurds

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Iranian authorities made a significant concession to the country's rebellious Kurdish minority last night in an evident effort to increase voting in Friday's presidential election and to present a unified image against a perceived Soviet threat.

At its nightly meeting, the ruling Revolutionary Council agreed to withdraw government militiamen from the Kurdish cities of Sanandaj and Mahabad, bowing to longstanding Kurdish demands for local control of law enforcement in their province in western Iran.

As the American hostages endured their 79th day in captivity, the Iranian government continued to shift its attention to the problems of provincial unrest and the Soviet presence in neighboring Afghanistan.

Iranian officials are believed to fear that antigovernment violence in the provinces and minority-group threats to boycott the nation's first presidential election give the appearance of national weakness and increase the potential for Soviet military intervention.

In recent days, top Iranian leaders have warned that the Soviets may move troops across the Afghan border, and the Revolutionary Council was reported last night to have considered official support for Afghan rebels who are fighting the Soviet occupation forces.

Afghanistan continued to dominate the presidential campaign yesterday with the front-runner, Finance Minister Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr, declaring that Iran was likely to pull out of this year's Olympics in Moscow if he is elected.

"How can we go to Moscow when we know Soviet troops are killing our Moslem brothers in Afghanistan?" he asked before setting off for a campaign tour of central Iran.

Another presidential contender, Foreign Minister Sadough Ghotbzadeh, who first denounced the Soviet occupation Saturday, continued his attacks yesterday, saying Iran's "own borders are in danger," according to the official Fars news agency.

As Iran readies for Friday's important presidential contest, officials have moved to quiet provincial dissent and attract large numbers of voters for the first real referendum on

*In an effort to limit reporting on the Americans being held prisoner inside the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, the Iranian government has expelled American reporters, including those of The Washington Post. The Post will continue to report the siege of the embassy, which today entered its 80th day, by using reports of news organizations still functioning in Iran.*

the nation's leadership since last February's revolution.

The Revolutionary Council's decision to pull back the central government's paramilitary guards from the two Kurdish cities marked the first concession to local authorities who have sought to use their own police forces to handle law enforcement duties.

The paramilitary troops, known as Revolutionary Guards, were organized after the revolution by Iran's religious and political leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who sent them to each province to help augment local law enforcers.

Soon after their arrival, the young, heavily armed guards irritated provincial residents by flaunting their modern automatic weapons and paying little attention to local customs. Several regional uprisings in recent weeks have centered on demands for the guards' removal.

In the provinces of Kurdistan in the west and Baluchistan-Sistan in the southeast, the guards, who are followers of Khomeini's Shiite wing of Islam, were accused of trampling on religious rights of residents who belong to the Sunni branch of the religion.

The two Islamic sects have been divided since the new constitution enacted in a referendum last month made Shiism the official religion of Iran.

In an earlier gesture apparently designed to stop Sunnis from boycotting Friday's election, Khomeini said he was prepared to have the constitution amended to permit the Sunnis to set up their own courts in areas where they predominate over Shiites.

Although some Sunni leaders applauded Khomeini's announcement, Kurdish leaders continued to threaten an election boycott because their favorite candidate, Massoud Rajavi, had been disqualified from the race on grounds that he failed to vote for the constitution.

It was too early yesterday to determine whether the council's decision to withdraw Revolutionary Guards from Kurdistan would appease the nomadic tribesmen who have fought government forces and staged sit-ins in government offices for weeks to back their demand.

Moreover, no one could estimate what impact the council's decision would have on other autonomy movements in provinces like East and West Azerbaijan, whose Turkish-speaking minority makes up the largest national ethnic group in Iran.

The region's religious leader, Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, was reported over state radio to have encouraged his followers to vote in Friday's election. Nevertheless the Turkish-speakers have grown increasingly

dissident after weeks of clashes with Khomeini's backers.

As election day nears and Iranian officials turn their attention to domestic unrest and foreign threats, the hostage issue seems to attract less and less interest in government circles and the streets of Tehran around the U. S. Embassy.

According to news reports from Tehran, the normally large and noisy crowds that gathered in front of the embassy to shout support for the Islamic militant occupiers holding the hostages have dramatically dwindled in recent days.

The normal embassy routine was interrupted briefly yesterday when American radio reporter Alex Paen, of KMPC radio of Los Angeles, delivered a broadcast tape of the Super Bowl football game for listening by the American captives. Paen said he received assurances that the cassettes would be given to the hostages.

Paen was allowed to remain in Tehran three days after other American reporters were ordered to leave the country so he could deliver the tapes.

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Associated Press

Radio reporter Alex Paen leaves embassy in Iran after delivering mail and tapes.

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