

Doc Number: KP000085

# Kurds step up struggle with Khomeini, gain control of much of northwest Iran

Mahabad, Iran (AP)—Kurdish guerrillas who have stepped up their war against troops of the revolutionary government in recent days appear to have control of hundreds of square miles of the breathtakingly beautiful mountain region of northwest Iran.

"We've got independence, but we are willing to compromise and settle for autonomy within post-revolutionary Iran," said Amir Qazi, one of the leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic party.

The armed Pesh Merga guerrillas are the only authority in many towns and villages throughout Iranian Kurdistan. Mr. Qazi's claim of "independence" apparently leads the government to doubt the Kurds are willing to settle for autonomy instead of secession.

In the last week, a total of 30 government soldiers and Kurdish guerrillas have been killed and scores wounded near the town of Marivan, 90 miles south of here, reports said. Marivan's 30,000 residents evacuated the town to protest the arrival of government security forces and set up tent cities on the outskirts.

Ten thousand Kurds from the city of Sandanaj were marching to Marivan in a display of support, their ranks swelled to almost 20,000 by villagers from along the 50-mile route, press reports said.

Reports yesterday indicated the government was sending reinforcements into the area, known traditionally as Kurdistan.

Suppressed during the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Kurdistan Democratic party was legalized after the overthrow of the monarchy in the Islamic revolution last February. Now, in the absence of government representatives, it helps administer this town of 100,000.

Kurds have a historic reputation as tough mountain warriors, and Mr. Qazi estimated that as many as 500,000 are armed. Four million members of the ethnic minority are believed to live in the region.

"They love guns and are ready to fight for their rights," Mr. Qazi said.

The latest chapter in the Kurds' centuries-old quest for freedom started with the overthrow of the shah and the breakup of the Army. They established their unofficial independence by seizing weapons from ransacked military barracks and revived their old demand for autonomy.

Last March, the Kurds beat back an attempt by the new revolutionary government to snuff out their insurrection in violent clashes that left more than 200 dead in several Kurdish towns.

Buoyed by the success, the KDP hurriedly organized the Pesh Merga and brought under its control most of Iranian Kurdistan, a strip of land approximately 100 miles wide and 400 miles long.

It extends from the border with the Soviet Union in the north, along the borders with Turkey and Iraq, and dips below Sanandaj in the south.

The mountain tribesmen, in tasseled turbans and baggy trousers, are dispersed throughout this territory now, modern automatic rifles proudly slung from their shoulders, pistols, daggers and grenades stuck in their belts and bandoliers draped across their chests.

During July an unofficial cease-fire that had prevailed since the March fighting began to fray after indications that the Tehran government was increasingly anxious to reimpose its authority in Kurdistan.

For many Kurds, history was repeating itself after 33 years, although they hope for a happier ending this time.

In 1946, soon after the end of World War II, the Kurds seized the opportunity to proclaim an independent republic, centered at Mahabad. But the shah's army crushed the fledgling republic 11 months later.