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The Sun (1837-1985); Dec 9, 1979; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)

Doc\_Number: KP000118

## Prospect of rebel alliance threatens Khomeini regime

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Tehran—Iran's militant Kurdish Democratic Party yesterday declared its support for the local rebellion that has occurred in the Azerbaijan region adjacent to Kurdistan.

"The Kurdish Democratic Party supports the legitimate demands of the people of Azerbaijan concerning the elimination of national injustice . . . and their demands for autonomy," it was announced.

The Kurdish announcement raises the possibility of a potent alliance—between the 12 million Azerbaijani Turks, most of whom live in the northwestern corner of Iran, and the 3.5 million Iranian Kurds who live in the mountains south of them—against Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's Persian-dominated regime in Tehran.

The Shia Muslim leaders of revolutionary Iran also face the threat of rebellions from three other ethnic groups living in different corners of the country, who feel that the Islamic regime has not ended the discrimination they have long felt from the Persians of central Iran. The three groups are the two million Arabs in southwestern Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan district near the Persian Gulf, the half-million Baluchis in southeastern Iran near Pakistan and the half-million Turkomans who live in northeastern Iran next to the Soviet Union.

Together, the Azerbaijani Turks, the Kurds, the Arabs, the Baluchis and the Turkomans total more than 18 million and constitute a slight majority of the nation's population, the Persians numbering about 17 million.

Ayatollah Khomeini's anti-American campaign represents to a considerable extent an attempt by the revolutionaries to inspire national unity in a country that is in danger of coming apart at all corners.

The Azerbaijani Turks and the Kurds are demanding constitutional guarantees of autonomy that would give them much more local authority and would weaken the central government's control over them. Ayatollah Khomeini does not want to surrender such control any more than the shah did. He may have to, however, inasmuch as the alternative, if the Azerbaijanis and Kurds stand firm, probably would be only an unsuccessful attempt to crush the rebels by force.

Ayatollah Khomeini attempted such a suppression earlier this year in Kurdistan, sending Iran's army into the mountains in pursuit of the Kurdish guerrillas. But the army soon bogged down and was harried by repeated ambushes. The Kurdish Democratic Party currently is in effective control of the region, which is about the size of Denmark.

Under a cease-fire that the Iranian government and the Kurdish rebels agreed to in mid-November, revolutionary guards in Mahabad, the capital of Kurdistan, are withdrawing, while regular army troops are confined to their barracks.

Pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini are not displayed publicly in Kurdistan as they

are in central Iran. On display instead are photos of Kurdish guerrillas as they died earlier this year before an army firing squad.

The Kurds boycotted last week's referendum on the Islamic Constitution, which gives Ayatollah Khomeini near-dictatorial powers while failing to grant the Kurds the autonomy they had been promised by the revolutionary regime. Unable to force central government control over the Kurds, Ayatollah Khomeini last month had to concede them the principle of autonomy, a matter now to be negotiated by a commission appointed by the ayatollah.

After ousting the shah last February, Iran's revolutionary leaders promised a sympathetic hearing for the Kurds' autonomy pleas. But as early as March, fighting had broken out between the Kurds, who are Sunni Muslims, and government forces that were predominantly Shia Muslims.

Sheikh Ezzeddin Hussaini, the spiritual leader of the Iranian Kurds, said last week: "Ayatollah Khomeini's role in the revolution can be divided into two parts. The first was as a leader of the people against the shah. Here, we agreed with him. But after he seized power, he committed many mistakes. He ordered an attack on Kurdistan, banned political parties and other groups, and he took away the freedom of the press. He changed the Assembly of the People into an assembly of experts.

"Of course, if Ayatollah Khomeini accepts autonomy for the Kurds as he has promised, we will be much closer to him and our relations will improve," the Kurdish leader said.

The revolutionary regime has also sent a committee to Azerbaijan, where local forces continue to hold the television station and other public buildings in Tabriz, the capital of the province. The city is intently waiting to see whether it will become the focus of a civil war, or whether an agreement with Ayatollah Khomeini on demands for autonomy and individual rights can be achieved.

Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariat-Madari, Iran's second most influential Shia Muslim clergyman and the leader of the Azerbaijani Turks, yesterday asked the people of Tabriz not to demonstrate against the government. However, he did not tell them to surrender control of the city to the former authorities.

Hassan Nazih, who this fall was dismissed as Iran's oil minister, has gone to Azerbaijan to play a central role in the uprising. Rahmatola Mghadan, Azerbaijan's representative to the Iranian assembly of experts which drafted the Constitution, fled from his home in Tehran yesterday before police ransacked it and arrested five of his assistants.

The half-million Baluchis, like the Kurds, largely boycotted the referendum on the Constitution, even forcing polls to close and denouncing the balloting as a fraud. Whatever success the Kurds and Azerbaijanis have in achieving autonomy

will inspire the Baluchis to demand the same.

The implication for Iran is the distinct possibility of a weakened central government, whether through autonomy agreements or as a result of several simultaneous rebellions in different corners of the country.

These developments may also have far-reaching implications for the entire region. For if the Kurds, after decades of unsuccessful struggle, at last win genuine autonomy in Iran, their Kurdish brothers in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and the Soviet

Union may well be stirred to similar activism.

Iran's revolutionary leaders blame the United States for much of the trouble they are having with the country's minority groups, though they supply no evidence to support the accusation. Typical of such accusations is the charge in the Islamic Republic newspaper that "Carter's administration and the American espionage services have devoted all their attention to . . . destroying the [Iranian] revolution from within. . . . That is not possible except through local conspiracies."