

What happened to the hostages at the Embassy in Tehran is only the tip of the iceberg. Americans are finally discovering what has been going on in Iran for a year. Very little has been

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printed on the widespread terrorism abroad in Iran, particularly against the Baha'i community.

The persecution of the Baha'is and the desperate action against the American Embassy are not necessarily what they appear to be. They are symptoms of a floundering and hopeless situation that is being exploited by a hard core of political opportunists. Counterforce cannot be as effective as economic measures and social-political isolation. The American government sensibly responded in this direction. The Baha'is were the first sacrificial offerings; the 60 Americans were the next. It remains a crisis seeking a solution.

The Baha'i faith is an independent religion that emerged in the city of Shiraz in southern Iran, the city of the great Persian poets, Hafiz and Saadi, in 1844. Its prophet was Ali Muhammad who took the name of Bab or "gate." Like John the Baptist, he claimed to be the Herald of One greater than himself. The years that followed the Bab's declaration were filled with ferocious and fanatical murder of thousands of Baha'i followers by Islamic zealots. Now, 135 years later, the cycle is being repeated.

Information obtained by this writer from sources within Iran reveals a horror story that has barely surfaced in the world press. Baha'i hostages have been held incommunicado until bailed out by the Baha'i community. They are released after payment and picked up a few weeks later for larger sums. Some, such as

the Baha'i elder in Mashhad, were less fortunate. When the community could not raise \$100,000, he was executed.

Baha'i grave sites throughout Iran are being dug up and desecrated. The birthplace of the sect's founder in Darkula was burned to the ground. Homes of outstanding community leaders, doctors, teachers, who happened to be Baha'is, have been looted and destroyed, with some people beaten and killed. While it has not yet reached holocaust level, it does not have far to go. The community is gradually being destroyed. Many school teachers are Baha'is. All have been dismissed. Now, those non-Baha'is who authorized their hiring originally are being persecuted, particularly in Isfahan and Shiraz. The professors at the major universities have been stripped of all positions and then retired. They are now being required to refund salaries and pensions. Baha'is are on a black list. Property, holdings, are being systematically confiscated.

(Like the Sufis, another Persian minority, the Baha'is believe one may approach Allah directly, without the intervention of a priesthood. The Baha'i religion claims to embrace the prophets of all religions equally as messengers of God. They believe that one should demonstrate his devotion to justice and the human spirit in his daily behavior. "Too often," wrote Baha'u'llah, "has society suffered from outwardly pious men, pillars of church and ornaments of community, who were convinced they were 'saved' and they could, with impunity, disregard the basic rules of decent conduct.")

In an attempt to justify actions taken against the Baha'is, the faith is being identified not as a religion but a

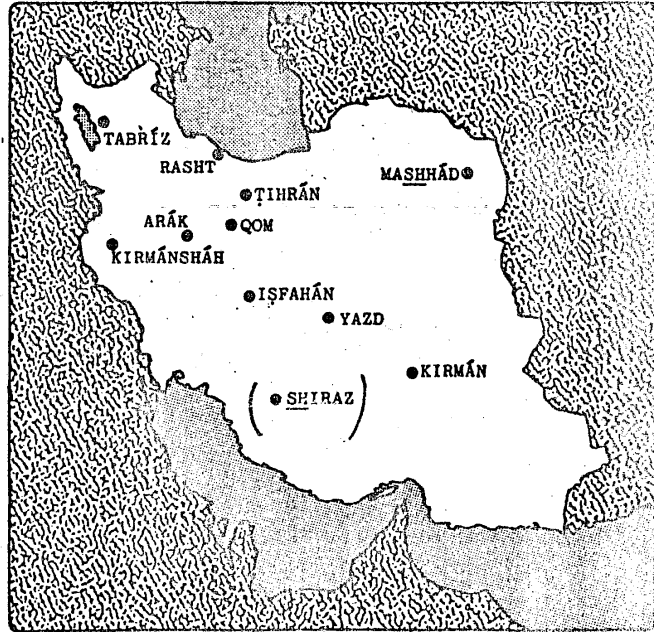
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Terrorism In Iran

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The exercise at the American Embassy is part of the intoxication of power that has swept through the leftist youth in Iran. The mask of religiosity seems to be an illusion. Khomeini has limited power. The real power appears to be in the hands of the Palestine cadres, 16 to 20-year-old PLO-trained political advisers attached to Komehans in every locality. They are under the control of the PLO apparatus within Iran who direct the action, including the American Embassy takeover. The PLO ploy offering to obtain the release of the hostages is ironic. It has been part of the process of creating the incident in the first place.

Whatever is left of civil government in Iran has attempted to placate those making representation on behalf of the Baha'is by asserting that the Iranian Baha'is are a political party. The foreign minister, Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi, claimed on a recent American-television program that Iranian Baha'is, unlike Baha'is elsewhere, were involved in politics, conspired with and were favored and supported by the shah. Dr. Yazdi alleges that they were prominent members of SAVAK, the shah's secret police.

Although some Baha'is with unique qualifications were placed in positions of trust because of their ability and integrity, it is simply not true to say that Baha'is were favored by the Shah. On the contrary, they were denied civil rights. They could not register their marriages, nor hold religious ceremonies. They were forbidden to publish Baha'i literature or establish Baha'i schools. Many from the rank and file of the Baha'is were denied jobs and sometimes even their rights to pensions because of their

As to the alleged role of Baha'is in SAVAK, this is clearly untrue. For example, as late as January 1979, through the machinations of SAVAK, before the final collapse of the shah's government, an order was given to systematically loot and destroy hundreds of homes of Baha'is in order to make it appear as if it were done by Khomeini's followers.

Although some Muslim clerics were among the first to try to dissuade the mobs from participating in the SAVAK plan, they eventually could not contain the mobs from venting their anger against the Baha'is. It has now become a political device to distract the masses from the chaotic political and economic mismanagement.

Nicholas Gage wrote in December of 1978: "For Iranians, the mullah's orders are law." He referred to the massacre of some 500 people locked in a movie theatre in Shiraz and set afire. This act was justified because the dead had been attending the cinema on a religious holiday.

Combining this fanaticism with the militancy of the young PLO-inspired radicals makes the situation combustible. With the additional ingredient of Iranian oil, the chain reaction is awesome. The Baha'is have been the first victims. The economic sanctions should be combined with continual political pressure for the human rights of the Baha'i minority and all peoples trapped within Iran.

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