

Iran: the uncertainty continues

Bakhtiar faces threat of civil war, generals' coup

Despite the departure of the Shah this week from Iran, the situation there remains far from stable, with the threat of a possible coup d'etat carried out by rabidly anti-Soviet, pro-Shah generals hanging ominously over the newly-formed government of Prime Minister Shahpur Bakhtiar.

On Jan. 17 in Alwaz, located several hundred miles to the south of Teheran, renegade "pro-Shah" troops reportedly "went wild" upon learning that the Shah had left the country. Shouting "traitors" to their commanding officers who had called for allegiance to Bakhtiar, they proceeded to carry out an assault on an anti-Shah crowd celebrating the Shah's departure and demonstrating their support for fundamentalist religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini.

Khomeini's refusal to support the Bakhtiar regime and declaration its intent to replace it with an "Islamic government" is the key factor fueling the coup momentum. Alarmed at the prospect of a Khomeini-dominated government, the military is tending increasingly toward carrying out a pre-emptive takeover of its own.

Iranian sources believe that Israeli intelligence is behind the hard-line generals. The Israelis, according to several Iranians quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor*, are "playing on the extreme sensitivities of an Army that has just lost its leader, the Shah."

"They are trying to do here what they achieved in Lebanon," they continued.

Khomeini is doing his utmost to keep the situation hot. He refused to meet with the head of the Regency Council who traveled to Khomeini's Paris headquarters last week, and is continuing to spur on his supporters to insurrection. As soon as the Shah left Iran, Khomeini issued a "revolutionary statement" calling the Shah's departure only a "par-

tial victory" and vowing to form an Islamic republic when he returns "at the proper moment."

However, signs are emerging of an undercurrent against Khomeini that could potentially isolate him in the days and weeks ahead. Friction has arisen between Khomeini and other religious leaders in Iran who are more amenable to accommodating the new Bakhtiar government. Similarly, there are signs of strain becoming evident between Khomeini and the opposition National Front, whose chairman last week visited Khomeini to pressure him not to return to Iran out of fear that his return could trigger full-scale civil war.

Caught in the middle of the Iran crisis is Bakhtiar, whose efforts to restore a modicum of stability to the country appear to be eroding. Only one day after Bakhtiar's cabinet had received a resounding vote of confidence by the Parliament, Justice Minister Yahya Sadeq Vaziri resigned. Vaziri was considered

one of the strongest ministers in Bakhtiar's cabinet. This blow to the fledgling government was augmented by the resignation of 15 members of the lower house of Parliament. In addition, Foreign Minister Mir-Findereski, the former ambassador to the Soviet Union who looks with favor on maintaining good relations with Moscow, is considering quitting the government, according to unconfirmed rumors emanating from Teheran.

This coming week will be the litmus test for Bakhtiar. Without the vigorous support of France, the Soviet Union, and the U.S. for his efforts to restore order to Iran, Bakhtiar will be left isolated and susceptible to a coup attempt, the repercussions of which will set off waves of instability throughout the region, feeding into another oil crisis in the West and setting the stage for a Brzezinski-backed showdown between the Soviet Union and the U.S.

London places Israel back on path toward war in Mideast

Continued Arab efforts toward a Geneva peace conference and progress in talks aimed at Syrian-Iraqi unification this week forced London's geopoliticians back on the road to war in the Middle East. The target area is southern Lebanon, where new Israeli military provocations have begun in earnest.

Lebanon's fragile sovereignty is receiving another battering from Israeli armed forces. Strikes into Lebanon have included a gunboat attack on Tyre and commando raids on southern Lebanese

villages. These actions, coordinated with attacks on United Nations peacekeeping forces by southern Lebanese Falangists and Shi'ite religious fanatics run by Israeli intelligence, have raised anew fears that Israeli and Syrian forces will become engaged in direct combat.

Israel's right to re-enter Lebanon is based on tales of an "upswing of Palestinian terrorism," which received token credibility after the raid this week on Maalot. A squad of guerrillas attacked a guest-house, causing the death of one