

Bakhtiar challenges Khomeini's Islamic rule

Shahpur Bakhtiar, the former prime minister of Iran, emerged after almost six months in hiding to announce he is leading a campaign to remove the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini from power in Iran. He made his announcement in a July 31 press conference.

The emergence of Bakhtiar is backed officially by the French government and is a critical part of France's stepped-up efforts to quell the volatile Middle East and create an axis of peace and prosperity between Western Europe and the Arab world. In backing the Bakhtiar option for Iran, France is throwing its support behind those responsible leaders in the Middle East, including Bakhtiar, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, and Syrian President Hafez Assad, who are all committed to eradicating the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood—represented in Iran by Khomeini—and similar products of Anglo-American intelligence which have helped keep the region underdeveloped and divided. The Soviet Union, which looked favorably on Saddam Hussein's recent purge of the Muslim Brotherhood and related networks in Iraq, is also favorable toward Bakhtiar.

No to Islamic Republic

Bakhtiar's reappearance as a strong republican leader and rallying point for anti-Khomeini patriots has electrified Iranian nationalists both in and outside Iran who are distraught over Khomeini's policies of deindustrializing Iran and dismantling the very foundations of the economy. To prepare for his return to Iran, Bakhtiar is sending in taped cassettes denouncing Khomeini's "new dictatorship" and his adherence to medieval economic policies.

"Khomeini's 'revolution' is turning back the clock," charged Bakhtiar in his press conference. "What I want is progress, progress in all domains: political, cultural, economic, social. I want to obtain what I ceaselessly demanded from the Shah. If he had listened to me, we would not be where we are today."

Bakhtiar compared his mission to that undertaken by Charles de Gaulle during World War II, hitting at Khomeini and Iran's Islamic "revolution" as part of an intelligence operation being run from outside Iran. "In 1940," the former premier stated, "de Gaulle found himself in a foreign country while his country was

occupied. Today, Iran is occupied by forces inspired from abroad."

"The mullahs should go back to their mosques," Bakhtiar continued. "There is not a single religious figure who can put Iran on the march again."

Bakhtiar noted the dramatic difference between the Khomeinians and Iranian nationalists like himself. "We fought for independence and freedom," he declared. "Today we have neither."

Bakhtiar's son Guy, who is employed by French intelligence, described his father's press conference as a "trial balloon" and announced that "a more organized campaign will be under way as soon as we measure the reaction to his speech at home."

In his press conference, Bakhtiar repeatedly stated that "many people in Iran are wishing for my return." Informed sources predict that Bakhtiar and his French allies are working on a three-to four-month perspective for his return to Iran and the overthrow of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Ayatollah calls for murder

Not surprisingly, Bakhtiar's opponents have responded with a savagery mirrored in their administration of Islamic justice. Last week, Ayatollah Khalkhali, known as the most fanatic of the religious leaders in Iran, called for the assassination of Bakhtiar. Khomeini himself has denounced Bakhtiar as an "antirevolutionary" criminal and imposed the death sentence on him.

The Shah option

There are also numerous signs that individuals loyal to the deposed Shah and linked to Anglo-American, Israeli and Egyptian intelligence are willing to support Bakhtiar's efforts to use him and his movement as a vehicle for restoring the Shah to power.

According to Swiss sources, the Shah and backers, in cooperation with supportive generals from the Iranian military, are preparing a coup against Khomeini. The Shah is reportedly coordinating this operation closely with Henry Kissinger and former President Nixon, both of whom have visited the Shah in Mexico.

According to one source, Gen. Oveissi and Ambassador Zahedi, the Shah's former envoy to Washington, are currently coordinating a pro-Shah takeover from the hinterlands of eastern Turkey.

According to one Iranian source, the U.S. government—in particular Secretary of State Cyrus Vance—is committed to preventing Bakhtiar from coming to power and is backing the Shah option.

While Vance and the State Department hope to use Bakhtiar's movement to relaunch the easily manipulable Shah into power in Iran, the success of their efforts will in large part depend on the actions of the French in supporting this nationalist movement.

—Nancy Parsons