

Half of Iran in rebellion

The rebellion that has engulfed Iran has the support of approximately half the country's population located in five distinct ethnic areas.

The central figure of the insurgency is Ayatollah Shariatmadari, the second highest ranking religious leader and Khomeini's premier rival. The base of Shariatmadari's followers is the city of Tabriz, the capital of Azerbaijan province in northwestern Iran, whose population is Turkish-speaking Azerbaijani Turks, who comprise one third of Iran's population. Azerbaijani Turks also comprise one third of Teh-

eran's population. There is also a strong pro-Shariatmadari militia in the holy city of Qom, where Shariatmadari is now residing.

Shariatmadari's followers have seized control of Azerbaijan, expelling pro-Khomeini government troops and representatives, seizing the radio station in Tabriz, and kicking out the pro-Khomeini governor. The Iranian army, which is largely commanded by Azerbaijani officers, is largely behind Shariatmadari.

Many leading opposition figures and groups which supported Khomeini's Islamic regime have since broken with the Ayatollah

and gone into Azerbaijan, notably the Fedayeen and the Muradine al Khalq. These two guerrilla groups have also lent military backing to the Kurdish minority's opposition to Khomeini. As well, a number of prominent figures associated with the National Front have broken their allegiance to Khomeini and sought refuge in Azerbaijan. The influential former head of the National Iranian Oil Company, Hassan Nazih, is now working closely with Shariatmadari. Nazih's influence extends into the oil producing region of the Khuzestan district.

Shariatmadari is backed in his confrontation with Khomeini by other ethnic minorities in Iran, including the country's 4 million Kurds. Both the Kurdish Democratic Party and Sheikh Hosseini, the religious leader, have endorsed the rebellion.

In Khorasan province, the Turkomen population there is led by Ayatollah Qomi, who maintains close ties with Shariatmadari and has mobilized his followers behind him.

In Baluchistan, Baluchi rebels there have taken the pro-Khomeini governor of the province hostage.

Although Khuzestan province is reported to be presently quiet, the Arab Sunnis who comprise the bulk of the population are reportedly at odds with Khomeini's fanatic brand of Shiite fundamentalism. Also residing in Khuzestan is the Bakhtiari tribe, who maintain their loyalty to former prime minister Shahpur Bakhtiar, now in exile in France. The situation in Khuzestan is crucial, given the fact that it is that province that produces Iran's oil; the Arab and Bakhtiari populations there comprise most of the labor for Iran's oilfields.

