

Iran: Moscow puts its capabilities to use

by Judith Wyer

The Iranian Communist Party (Tudeh) has historically been window dressing for a much deeper Soviet penetration of Iran since the pre-World War II days of Reza Shah. That influence has over the years been building so that it has never been more apparent than within the Khomeini regime today.

Today the U.S.S.R. enjoys alliances which span Iran's political spectrum from the leftist Islamo-Marxists inside the ruling Islamic Republican Party, to an array of opposition groups including the Mujaheddin and the Kurds. Soviet First Deputy Prime Minister Geidar Ali Reza Aliyev has established many channels of Soviet influence during the past 35 years, since he helped to establish control over Iranian Azerbaijan in the 1940s.

The hard core of Soviet assets in Iran today is in and around the so-called Imami faction of the ruling Islamic Republican Party (IRP). This grouping, comprised of Khomeini's closest confidantes, engineered the 1979 taking of American hostages. Khomeini's designated successor Ayatollah Montazeri is part of the Imami grouping, which today controls the powerful Qom theological seminary, an ideological center for the revolution.

Since the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, about a million and a half Afghans have sought refuge in Iran. This has created the pretext for Afghani communists to penetrate the highest levels of the IRP as born-again Muslim fundamentalists. The former IRP candidate for President of Iran, Jallaledin Farsi, who was purged from the IRP in an ongoing faction fight between leftists and the so-called Hojitia rightists last June, has been exposed as an Afghani "leftist."

Many of Khomeini's closest associates within the Imami grouping have longstanding ties to Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union and consider themselves to be socialists. This includes Iranian President Khomeini, a militant whose anti-imperialism goes so far as advocating blocking the Straits of Hormuz and overthrowing the monarchies of the Arab oil exporters of the Gulf. Another is Ayatollah Khoini, a terrorist who ran the hostage affair, and on Aug. 20 helped form an international Islamic terrorist organization, known as the Assembly of United Islamic Movements (dubbed "Islamintem"). Khoini, like many others in the Imami faction, spent time in East Germany and also attended Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow. Behzad Nabavi, another East German resident prior to the Khomeini takeover, helped to set up the

Council of Prayers of the Friday Congregation in Qom, along with Ayatollah Meshkini who has been designated by Khomeini to oversee the Council of Experts to decide who should succeed him.

But Moscow has also established ties with various factions of the opposition to Khomeini. According to the *Economist Intelligence Unit*, Aliyev sent an emissary to Paris early this year to contact the head of the Mujaheddin, Islamo-Marxist guerrilla leader Massoud Rajavi, and A. R. Ghasemlou of the Kurdish Democratic Party. The Mujaheddin-allied Kurds are based in northwest Iran near the Soviet border. Aliyev also reportedly established a connection with Ahmed Shariatmadari, son of the elder conservative Iranian Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari of Azerbaijan, who has been under house arrest in Iran for two years for opposing Khomeini.

Tudeh converts to Islam

The recent public statement of conversion from communism to Islam, on the part of former Tudeh Party leader Nureddin Kianuri and 19 other Iranian communists, cannot be dismissed as the outcome of torture in prison. There is evidence that the entire affair, beginning with Khomeini's mid-1983 attacks on the Tudeh, was coordinated from Moscow through a series of intermediaries, and involved a "re-tooling" of Soviet assets for new deployments. It appears that the operation was coordinated through Vladimir Kuzichkin, a Soviet diplomat who ostensibly defected to London in 1982. The public story goes that Kuzichkin, a long-time subordinate of Aliyev in the KGB, delivered names of various Tudeh and KGB operatives to Khomeini, during a secret visit to London by speaker of the Iranian parliament Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Foreign Minister Velayati in late March of this year. The fingered Tudeh members were among those who have now professed conversion to Islam.

According to Radio Iran, during the initial stages of the purge of the Tudeh, there was a counterpurge of the Qom theological seminary in which Soviet-allied mullahs, including in some cases members of the Afghan Communist Party, consolidated their control over this very influential Shi'ite seminary. Since early 1982 the Soviet media have denounced the Hojitia as an asset of the Shah's Savak and the CIA. But never has Moscow broken from its unflinching support of Khomeini.

Almost immediately after the Khomeini takeover Moscow began to sign numerous economic accords with Iran. Soviet-Iranian trade has more than doubled since 1979. Throughout the north of Iran the Soviets have been building infrastructure which Moscow says will further expedite Iran's trade with Eastern Europe. Washington sources say Moscow's strategy is to make itself economically indispensable to Iran. But the new rail lines, bridges and roads would also be required for a Soviet invasion at some future date.

This Special Report was researched by the authors and Thierry Lalevéé, Paul Goldstein, and Denise Henderson.