

Iranian Support to the Afghan Resistance

(U) Despite ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic similarities, Iranians and Afghans have not gotten along very well. They have possessed mutual disdain and fear for centuries. Iranians consider the Afghans coarse and brutal, with strong preferences for heretical Islamic tenets held by various Sunni sects. Until recently, the Afghans generally viewed Iranians as arrogant, effete, and submissive. Iranian Revolutionary Guard advisers with Hazara Shiites in the heartland of Afghanistan are changing this perception. Prospects for meaningful, long-term cooperation between Iranians and Afghans are increasing as Iranian fundamentalists seek to extend their will and influence, at least among Afghan Shiites.

(U) After the overthrow of Zahir Shah in 1973, Shah Mohammad Pahlavi succeeded briefly in gaining a basis for more cordial relations with Kabul, reaching agreements for both countries to share the Helmand River waters and building a rail link that would give the land-locked Afghans access to an Iranian port (Chah Bahar) on the Arabian Sea.

█ Shortly after the Khomeini revolution in February 1979, Iranian Shiite clerics and followers became involved in organizing Shiite Afghans in the isolated, semi-desolate central Hazarajat region of Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion in December 1979 was clearly not the impetus for Iranian revolutionary involvement in the country, since it was apparent that Iranian clerics had plans of their own for at least Afghanistan's Shiites prior to the event. Afghan Shiites account for about 15 percent of the population of 15 million.

█ Throughout 1980 to mid-1982, Iran flirted with aiding Sunni-led Islamic fundamentalist Mujahedin who were headquartered in Pakistan. Rifles (M-1, G-3), landmines, shoulder-fired antitank rockets, heavy machineguns, uniforms, and boots were supplied to at least the Hesb-e Islami (Islamic Party) led by Gulbuddin Hekmatiyar, for operations in southern and eastern Afghanistan. At the same time, however, Iranian support to Harakat-e Islami (Islamic Movement) and other

Shiite groups in the Hazarajat region caused serious interfactional strife among resistance groups, took a heavy toll of resistance leaders and fighters, and significantly weakened the overall resistance in the central and western provinces of Afghanistan.

█ Beginning in mid-1983, the Afghan resistance in Peshawar, Pakistan, appears to have recognized the dominant Iranian influence over the Hazara Shiite region. Since then, Iran has maintained relations almost exclusively with Afghan Shiite resistance groups and severed ties with the mainstream Peshawar-based resistance because of its heavy dependence on support from the West (US) and the conservative monarchies of the Gulf. Iran's major attention, training, and aid has been rendered to pliable and responsive Shiites, principally of the Nasr (victory), Niruh (force), Sepah (corps), and Hesb-e Allah (aka Hesbollah, Party of God) groups. Shortages of weapons and ammunition within Iran, caused by large-scale offensives against Iraq, have limited Iran's material support to client groups in Afghanistan since late 1983. However, the number of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps volunteers serving as advisers with the Afghan Shiite resistance in the Hazara region has increased. DIA believes that the degree of discipline and responsiveness to the Iranian-led Khomeini regime also has increased with the presence of these Guards. The Afghan resistance does not appear to make distinctions about the source of Iranian aid. The resistance quite likely believes it comes from the Government of the Islamic Republic. A somewhat different view exists within Iran.

█ About two million Afghans are estimated to be in Iran. The presence of these refugees, laborers, and resistance fighters has caused Iranian authorities to act repressively against Afghans to ensure that domestic control is maintained inside Iran. Significant numbers of refugees along the Afghan-Iranian border periodically have been repatriated forcibly without much apparent regard for their fate. Nevertheless, following such crackdown by Iranian authorities, individual Iranian religious leaders have often been reported takin

their own initiative to restore aid in the form of basic necessities, funds, and arms. Most clerics who have been active in these counterbalancing unilateral acts are supportive of Khomeini, but they do not claim Iranian Government sponsorship of their aid. This leads us to believe that, although the Afghans in Iran have experienced harsh treatment, the measures undertaken against them have been aimed more at maintaining a balance in Iran's official relations with Kabul and Moscow and not for the sole purpose of extinguishing the resistance's presence in Iran. While Iran has made strong efforts to sanitize and clear its border with Afghanistan, it has done so to avoid provoking Soviet retaliation for Iran's selective support of the resistance.

The Soviets also publicly and privately have criticized Iran for its activities in Afghanistan and have warned that relations will continue to suffer unless Tehran halts its activities in Afghanistan.

Iran's principal foreign policy objectives run a high risk of collision with Soviet aims in Afghanistan, which is not the

case in regard to Iran's objectives in the Gulf or Lebanon. The Khomeini regime's support to Afghan resistance groups runs counter to the Soviet objectives of installing a pliable Marxist regime in Kabul. Iranian revolutionary rhetoric "to assist oppressed peoples dominated by Godless and corrupt rulers" enjoins the Tehran regime to continue its support to the Shiite resistance elements in Afghanistan. Iran's encouragement of a pan-Islamic consensus is diametrically opposed to any Marxist-style regime that might be implanted by Moscow in Kabul. Iran's clerics, imbued with 6 years of revolutionary leadership, retain a strong interest in the welfare of their coreligionists in central Afghanistan. In a practical sense, the Hazaras, although a minority, offer Iran a bargaining chip in any decisions regarding the future of the Kabul regime. Finally, the new order that the Iranian revolution has generated is dedicated to incorporating at least selected Islamic groupings into its sphere of influence. This tendency is quite likely to endure even beyond the lifetime of Khomeini and probably stands some chance of increasing contacts and cooperation between Afghans and Iranians.