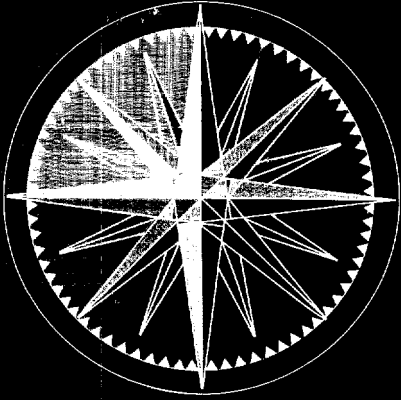


SECRET



Release 2006/09/27 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004000090002-9

17 May 1963

OCI No. 0280/63B

Copy No. 77

SPECIAL REPORT

OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

LAND REFORM AND TRIBAL DISSIDENCE IN IRAN

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

MORI/CDE

NO FOREIGN DISSEM

ARCHIVAL RECORD
PLEASE RETURN TO
AGENCY ARCHIVES, BLDG. A-18

SECRET

GROUP 1 Excluded from automatic
downgrading and declassification

228524/1

THIS MATERIAL CONTAINS INFORMATION AFFECTING THE NATIONAL DEFENSE OF THE UNITED STATES WITHIN THE MEANING OF THE ESPIONAGE LAWS, TITLE 18, USC, SECTIONS 793 AND 794, THE TRANSMISSION OR REVELATION OF WHICH IN ANY MANNER TO AN UNAUTHORIZED PERSON IS PROHIBITED BY LAW.

DISSEMINATION CONTROLS

This document **MUST NOT BE RELEASED TO FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS**. If marked with specific dissemination controls in accordance with the provisions of DCID 1/7, the document must be handled within the framework of the limitation so imposed.

SECRET

17 May 1963

LAND REFORM AND TRIBAL DISSIDENCE IN IRAN

The Shah of Iran has based the country's social and economic future on the success of his reform program. A salient feature of this "revolution from above" is land reform, aimed at transforming rural society from the traditional landlord-sharecropper system to one of village cooperatives. The program has made remarkable progress in its first year, and resistance by the landowners has been largely ineffective. However, the program now is encountering trouble from impoverished remnants of the old nomadic-tribal society of southwestern Iran, who see their pastoral life threatened by the establishment of farming cooperatives on their range lands. Since early March these tribesmen have been carrying out a guerrilla-type resistance that has pinned down a government force of more than two divisions. If the dissidence spreads to areas inhabited by larger, non-Iranian minorities, Tehran would face an ominous security problem.

Dissolution of Tribal Society

About one third of Iran's 21,000,000 citizens belong to ethnic minorities. In the past most of these groups either practiced pastoral nomadism or moved twice a year between traditional summer and winter pasture areas. Tehran's policy toward this "tribal" segment of the population has been to reduce its troublemaking potential by disarming it and to attempt to settle it in well-defined areas.

Although the government's efforts have only been partly successful, tribal authority has been breaking down gradually in recent years as more and more tribesmen adopt the settled life of villagers. This process has gone further in areas where conditions are more favorable for agriculture, such as in

northwestern Iran, but it is also apparent elsewhere.

The land reform program appears likely to hasten the dissolution of the old tribal society. It tends to split the rank and file of the tribal groups from their hereditary chieftains, who consider themselves the owners of all tribal lands. At the same time, it sets a new class of peasant landowners against tribal remnants still pursuing their traditional way of life on land which was formerly open range but which now is either turned over to or earmarked for peasant cooperatives.

Opposition to Land Reform

Thus far, resistance to the Shah's reforms has come from elements that have a vested interest in preserving the old

SECRET

SECRET

arrangements: large landowners (some tribal), religious fanatics, and certain members of the business community. Their resistance has taken the form of street demonstrations by religious groups in several cities and, beginning about the first of March, attacks by tribesmen on government garrisons and troop units in an area of southwestern Iran. These attacks have been carried out by elements of three minor tribes of the Shiraz-Ahvaz region --the Mamasani, the Sorkhi, and the Boir Ahmadi.

The tribal insurrection in southwestern Iran is not directed against land reform alone, but against Tehran's tribal policies generally. These have been especially oppressive and unimaginative in this area. Much of the violence is traceable to economic privation at the end of a severe winter, to reaction to the threat of forced disarmament, and to the traditional tendency of these tribes to brigandage. An additional irritant is the government's efforts to destroy the lucrative illegal poppy crop, on which the tribesmen rely for much of their cash income.

The "threat" of land reform is basic, however, because it is associated in the minds of the seminomadic tribesmen of the Shiraz region with forced resettlement. In January the former minister of agriculture and chief proponent of land reform, Hassan Arsanjani, made several public statements on the necessity for tribal re-

settlement. Shortly thereafter the Shah, over the opposition of local civil and military authorities, issued orders to disarm the tribes in Fars Province. This triggered the insurrection.

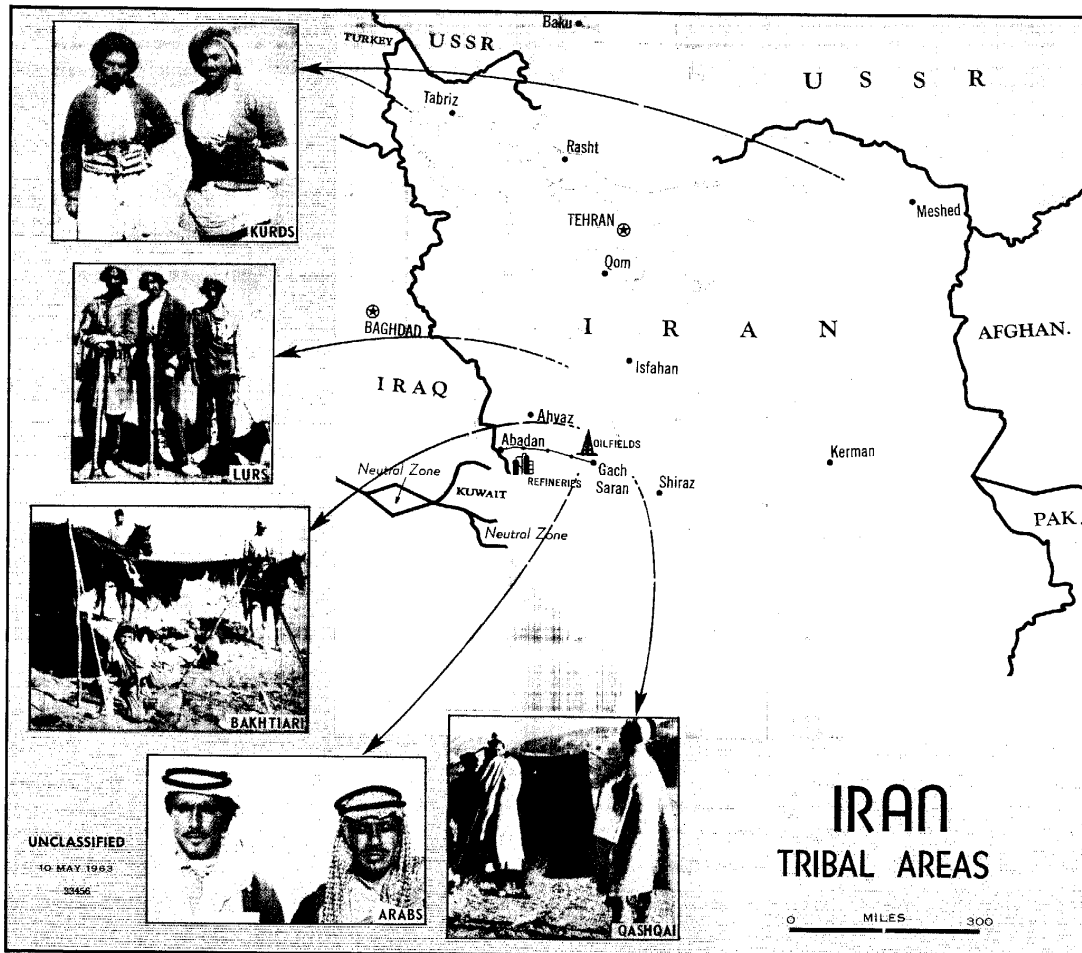
Military Operations
Against the Tribes

Military operations against dissident tribal elements in this region seemed to be making progress during March and early April, but have received several setbacks since then. A task force of about 13,000 infantry troops, plus some armor and mobile heavy machine guns, was set up early in March to deal with the insurrection. Command was coordinated by Lt. Gen. Ariana, who has had little field experience.

The campaign also suffers from division of responsibility. There have been charges and countercharges among the various services. In the wake of a tribal ambush of a two-company force on 20 April, the Shah dispatched an aide to Shiraz to investigate the operation and make recommendations.

Further reasons for the poor showing of the troops are the basic deficiencies in training, equipment, and combat-level leadership. During the early stages of the operation, units were immobilized by snow and cold because they had been brought into the mountainous area in March without winter uniforms. There is apparently

SECRET



SECRET

no system set up for the evacuation of casualties; many of the troops wounded in the 20 April ambush were not picked up for more than 24 hours.

Poor tactical leadership of the local government forces is illustrated by an account by a survivor of the 20 April debacle. An infantry battalion, minus one company, was moving in administrative formation through tribal territory west of Shiraz. The force was guided by local tribesmen. As the column entered a narrow defile the leading guide suddenly drew his pistol and shot the battalion commander dead. This was the signal for tribal forces concealed along the slopes to open fire from a range of about 50 yards. The two companies, totaling about 150 officers and men, suffered over 100 casualties.

Apart from their attempt at encirclement of the hostile bands, the government forces have resorted to various other measures, all so far without decisive success. Indiscriminate bombing and strafing of suspected villages appear to have had little effect on the tribes' paramilitary capabilities. Military units have also occupied blocking positions at passes used by the larger tribes in their annual migration to summer pasture. Here again the tactic has backfired, because this year's migration seems to consist solely of women and old men accompanying the flocks while the younger tribesmen remain behind in the mountains.

The government now plans to bring in progovernment tribesmen from southeastern Iran to hunt down the dissidents.

The insurrection and the associated rise in brigandage and highway robberies have disrupted normal life over wide areas of Fars and Khuzestan provinces. Few unescorted vehicles venture outside the towns, and oil exploration activity in the promising area between Ahvaz and Shiraz is at a standstill.

Many local observers feel that the problem requires a social-political, rather than a military solution. They recommend that the government declare the entire region a disaster area, and set the army to distributing food to the starving people and animals.

In spite of the repeated setbacks suffered by the government forces in their campaign of tribal pacification, there is no question that Tehran has the force to crush tribal dissidence in this region. However, the process will probably be a long and bloody one, with great suffering not only on the part of the combatants, but on the part of the larger uncommitted population, as well.

Other Minority Groups

A more serious situation would develop if some of the larger ethnic minorities in Iran were to engage in the same type of antigovernment activity.

SECRET

SECRET

There have been some indications of dissatisfaction among the Kurds, the Lur, and the Arabs of Khuzestan, and low-level reports that they have received arms from outside Iran, but no overt moves have been made by any of them.

The two tribal groups presently causing Tehran the most concern are the Bakhtiari and the Qashqai. These large confederations are concentrated near the area where military operations are going on but, although Qashqai elements appear to have been involved in the banditry that has plagued the Shiraz region since the beginning of the tribal insurrection, neither they nor the Bakhtiari appear to have taken any part in anti-government attacks.

The Qashqai, who number about 250,000, have long been a thorn in Tehran's side, and have carried out several large-scale attempts at rebellion in the past. They are a fighting people, linguistically related to the Turks. Their ruling family now is broken up, however, and general tribal unity appears poor. One of the khans of the Qashqai family is apparently attempting to direct subversive activities from exile in West Germany, perhaps with Soviet or UAR financial backing. The Qashqai are presently concentrating in their summer pasture area in the mountains north of Shiraz, and the government has positioned an infantry battalion between

their range and that of their neighbors to the north, the Bakhtiari, in an effort to keep them separated.

About 125,000 Bakhtiari occupy an area south of Isfahan. Many of them have adopted a sedentary life, but there remains seminomadic elements organized into clans under hereditary chieftains. Like the Qashqai, the Bakhtiari have a single, over-all ruling family. The leader of this family owns extensive lands in southwestern Iran apparently not yet affected by the land reform program. It is possible that he has been supporting the Boir Ahmadi insurgents with money and arms.

Another seminomadic, pastoral people, the Lurs, live in the mountainous region along the Iraqi border between Ahvaz and Kermanshah. This group, which numbers about 210,000, is reportedly disaffected, but so far they have taken no overt action. It is possible, however, that the Lurs are active in smuggling arms from Iraq and transferring them to other tribal groups in the interior of Iran. The Lurs are loosely organized, each small tribal group being governed by a council of elders.

About 300,000 Arabs live in Iran along the northern coast of the Persian Gulf and in the Ahvaz region near the Iraqi border. Although many of these

SECRET

SECRET

are now refinery and oilfield workers in the Abadan - Gachsaran region, most are still organized into seminomadic tribal groups under local sheiks. Separatist sentiment is known to exist among this minority group.

The Kurdish Problem

The 1,000,000 Kurds who live in Iran make up the most potentially dangerous minority, not only because of their number but also because of their fighting qualities and their relative political sophistication. The Kurds occupy two widely separated areas in Iran, with the larger group--about 700,000--living in an area that stretches along the Iraqi and Turkish borders. The remainder live almost a thousand miles to the east in the Meshed region and constitute no threat to government authority.

The Kurds of northwestern Iran have a history of separatist activity and were able, with Soviet assistance, to establish a short-lived breakaway Kurdish state just after World War II. At the present time the Iranian Kurds appear peaceful. They have been strongly affected by land reform, which has been carried further in northwestern Iran than elsewhere, and many of the tribesmen have been brought into the newly organized peasant cooperatives. These now may feel that their best interests

lie with the central government rather than with their former landlord, the tribal leader. The Kurds also appear to be impressed by the heavy concentration of military force deployed throughout their area.

Nevertheless, considerable separatist sentiment probably remains alive in the Kurdish minority. Contact has undoubtedly been maintained between the Iranian Kurds and the followers of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish revolt in Iraq.

Tehran has endeavored to maintain an ambivalent position in this dispute, surreptitiously supporting the Barzani group on one hand while assuring Baghdad of its friendship on the other. The Iraqi Government has requested the cooperation of both Turkey and Iran in sealing their borders if hostilities resume. Turkey agreed promptly, but Iran has dragged its feet on the request while keeping open its communications to the Barzani Kurds,

Moscow's recent show of sympathy for the Barzani cause may also cause apprehension in Tehran. If the Soviets should decide to furnish material support to the Iraqi Kurds, the logical route for a supply line--clandestine or otherwise--would lie across the Kurdish-populated northwestern corner of Iran. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

SECRET

SECRET

SECRET