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# U.S. Hostages May Outlive Ayatollah

The American hostages in Iran may outlive their tormentor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, if intelligence reports about his health are correct.

The reports claim that the Iranian oracle—weakened by a heart attack, plagued by prostate problems and slowed by old age—shows symptoms of physical deterioration. He has become feeble, his movements faltering, his voice wavering.

The only question, according to the intelligence reports, is whether the ayatollah or his regime will collapse first. He sits cross-legged in his shrine in Qom, aloof and scowling, while a power struggle rages around him.

Rebellion has flared up in northwestern Iran. Kurdish guerrillas, carrying weapons airdropped by the Soviets, have attacked government outposts. They are the shock troops for the Soviet-supported Kurdish Democratic Party, which hopes to carve an independent Kurdistan out of Iran.

The Soviets are also stirring up other rebellious ethnic minorities, intelligence reports allege, as part of a strategy to destabilize and dismember Iran. Throughout the country, violence has erupted between militant Muslim Hezbollahis and radical Marxist Fedayan.

Even the ruling Revolutionary Council is irreparably split between Ayatollah Mohammed Beheshti's religious activists and President Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr's moderates. The populace is at the mercy, meanwhile, of arbitrary revolutionary prosecutors, local revolutionary committees and armed militants.

The taking of hostages, for example, has caught on. The militants are now likely to resolve contract disputes or

other grievances by seizing hostages. And the Bureau for the Battle Against Corruption, an appendage of the prosecutor's office, functions as a vigilante band enforcing Moslem standards.

Presiding over all this is the ailing, 80-year-old Khomeini who has become an Iranian Mao Tse-tung, seemingly untouched and untroubled by the chaos he created.