

## Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

### Invasion sparks Teheran infight

*Bani-Sadr wants to use U.S. arms against the mullahs, who are hoping to avert a military buildup.*

The Iraqi invasion of Iran has exacerbated a faction fight within Iran's regime, between a clique of secular leaders centered around President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr and the ultra-fundamentalist Islamic clergy, known as mullahs, centered in the Islamic Republican Party (IRP). Though the differences between the two groupings existed before the Iraqi invasion, the war has intensified their differences, centering on the issue of how to respond to Iraq's far-superior military power.

Throughout the war, Bani-Sadr and his allies, former defense minister Mustaffa Chamran and current defense minister Javad Falcouri, have argued that the Iranian military must be reconstituted to effectively challenge Iraq's invasion. The mullahs have opposed the move on the grounds that a reunified military would not hesitate to eliminate Khomeini and his Islamic brethren, who ordered the execution of thousands of Iranian military officers.

But behind Bani-Sadr's argument there lies another motivation. Bani-Sadr has made no secret of his ongoing efforts to strike a deal with the Carter administration for the release of the hostages in exchange for a U.S. commitment to sell arms to Iran. For months Bani-Sadr has been the contact man in Iran for clandestine contacts with the State Department and U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim.

Bani-Sadr's eagerness to release the 52 American hostages does not reflect any moral scruples, but is based on his design to reunify Iran's fragmented military, which he calculated a U.S. commitment to sell arms to Iran would greatly enhance.

Bani-Sadr estimates that he can use such a military capability to stage a coup against the powerful mafia of mullahs associated with Ayatollah Beheshti and Ayatollah Montazeri, the leaders of the IRP.

This week the announcement came from Iran that the Ayatollah Khomeini had formed a Supreme Defense Council with total power for administering both military and civilian control during the course of the war. Iranian sources report that the composition of the council was designed to undercut Bani-Sadr's power play.

The Council, which is reportedly carefully balanced between the two factions, typifies the way in which Khomeini has played them off against one another to ensure his own supreme position within the country.

Bani-Sadr's overtures to the United States are being countered by the mullahs' overtures to the Soviet Union.

Early this month, Ayatollah Beheshti gave a speech which echoed a speech delivered the same week by the head of Iran's Communist Party praising Iran-Soviet relations. According to the *London Times*, Aya-

tollah Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Khomeini have called for Iran to strengthen its relations with those Arab countries which are closest to the Soviet Union: Algeria, South Yemen, Syria, and Libya. The sudden cozying up to the U.S.S.R. and the Iranian Communist Party by the traditionally anti-Soviet Iranian clergy is part of a scenario being run through British-intelligence-polluted segments of the Soviet Communist Party associated with British triple agent Kim Philby to spark a superpower confrontation in the Mideast (see article on page 36).

Meanwhile, according to the *Washington Post* of Oct. 15, there is a new wave of optimistic expectation in Washington that Bani-Sadr will be able to achieve a hostage release before the Nov. 4 American Presidential elections, a development calculated to aid Carter's reelection bid. The *Post* reports that the major condition Bani-Sadr has placed on a release is the unfreezing of the \$8 billion in Iranian assets still being held in U.S. banks and the delivery of \$470 million worth of arms, part of a transaction stalled following the taking of the hostages last year.

Mansour Fehrang, a close ally of Bani-Sadr who favors the release of the hostages, is currently representing Iran at the U.N. One day into the Security Council hearings, the Iranian prime minister, Mohammed Ali Rajai, a close ally of the mullahs, suddenly announced that he would come to the U.N. to participate in the hearings. Perhaps Rajai was sent by the Iranian clergy to disrupt any deal Bani-Sadr was counting on to help facilitate his designs of consolidating power in Iran.