

A government of national reconciliation for Iran?

by Robert Dreyfuss

For the first time since the Iranian revolution two years ago when Ayatollah Khomeini's Muslim Brotherhood mullahs toppled the Shah and instituted their reign of terror, the moderate opposition to the Khomeini regime inside and outside Iran is on the verge of forming one united front.

There are two reasons for the change.

The first is the growing economic crisis in Iran and the reported illness of Khomeini, which together signal that Iran is ripe for a change of government soon.

The second is the inauguration of Ronald Reagan in Washington. Although the Reagan government has not yet signaled publicly its readiness to support—overtly and covertly—the Iranian anti-Khomeini forces, the feeling is virtually unanimous in the opposition circles that the new U.S. government is prepared to consider such support. “At least,” said one former Iranian military officer, “the harassment and intimidation we faced while Jimmy Carter was in the White House is going to be removed. Under Reagan, if nothing else, we will be able to operate more freely.” The officer complained that Carter's officials often threatened Iranian exiles, made it difficult for them to travel, and repeatedly indicated that it favored the current Teheran regime.

Now, in the expectation of changes in Washington, Iranian military exiles, former politicians, and Iranian civil leaders are engaged in an intensive dialogue in order to put together what some Iranian anti-Khomeini leaders call a “government of national reconciliation.” Among those involved in the talks are former Prime Ministers Shahpour Bakhtiar and Ali Amini, Gen. Gholam Ali Oveissi, Bahram Aryana, Gen. Feredoun Djam, and many others in exile in the United States, Western Europe, and the Middle East.

Behind the exiles, and to a greater or lesser extent recognized by the exile leaders as a necessary component of the next Iranian regime, is the family of the late Shah, living in Cairo in virtual seclusion.

Inside Iran, there is a growing momentum behind the movement to topple Khomeini's Islamic Republic and purge the mullahs from power. Military men and the professional classes, merchants and the *bazaaris*, the

various tribal leaders, and conservative clergymen are fast establishing closer ties with the exiles.

Earlier this month, in a Paris press conference, former Iranian Prime Minister Ali Amini declared that he is prepared to make a bid to gather up anti-Khomeini sentiment into a unified movement. In an exclusive interview with the *EIR*, he explained his immediate intentions.

“I am going to propose in a few days a political platform on which everyone can agree in order to liberate Iran,” said Amini. “The economic situation in Iran is really catastrophic.” Amini said that he is calling on Iranians inside and outside the country to “join my initiative.”

Since his press conference, Amini said, “I have received a lot of telegrams from people everywhere; from France, Germany, America, and England.”

During his sole public appearance, Amini showed great reluctance to be specific about his intentions. For instance, in response to one question, he refused to say whether he supported a monarchy or a republic for Iran, saying that “it is too early” to discuss the issue and that it would “divide” the movement. All that he would say is that he intends to save Iran from the communists and that his movement is open to “all Iranians who are not following Moscow's orders.”

According to Iranian military sources, however, Amini is attempting to form a National Reconciliation movement, and he has attracted the support of many younger Iranian officers. Among the organizations said to be considering announcement of support for the Amini movement is the so-called Army for the Liberation of Iran (ARA). The ARA, which publishes a newspaper by the same name, is said to have a rather significant following inside Iran among military personnel, and its newspaper circulates widely, though clandestinely, throughout the Iranian armed forces. Further, many forces inside Iran are expected to rally behind Amini's group, including Ayatollah Shareatmadari of Tabriz and Sheikh Hosseini of Iran's Kurdish area.

Though it has not been publicly announced, in recent weeks Amini reportedly visited Cairo, Egypt, to

meet with the monarchist forces gathered there around young Reza Shah Pahlavi and his mother Empress Farah Diba Pahlavi, widow of the late Shah. In discussions there, Amini is said to have reached a preliminary agreement to support the restoration of the previous, 1906 Constitution. Under that document, which would replace the Islamic Constitution of the lunatic mullahs, the new regime would be a constitutional monarchy modeled on Spain's.

But many Iranians are skeptical of Amini's ability to emerge as a the central figure in an exile movement. Amini is 75 years old and ill, and, more important, he is tainted by the past, reportedly having cooperated with the British secret services and circles around the Kennedy administration from the 1950s and 1960s in working against what many Iranians believed was Iran's national interest at the time. "I would say that Amini might be able to emerge as a symbolic sort of figurehead for the exile movement," said one former Iranian diplomat. "But he won't lead things."

One ex-general described Amini's role this way: "He can do to Khomeini what Khomeini did to the Shah. From exile, he can get the attention of the media and the exile community, and, as an old man, become the rallying point for those inside."

Amini and Bakhtiar

Besides Amini, the other center of anti-Khomeini resistance is Shahpour Bakhtiar in Paris. Bakhtiar, the last prime minister of Iran before the revolution, is said to be exploring the idea of a coalition with Amini. According to Iranian insiders, Bakhtiar and Amini are drafting a document which might serve as a basis for a unified opposition movement.

"A meeting was supposed to have taken place in the United States on Feb. 11," said Amini to *EIR*, "but it has been postponed until the beginning of March so that everyone can be there together. The slogan of this group will be 'the liberation of Iran.'" According to Iranian military sources, between 50 and 100 supporters of Iranian exile leaders have already held preliminary meetings in the United States, paralleling similar discussions in Western Europe.

In his Paris press conference, Amini said that he is willing to hold a joint press conference with Dr. Bakhtiar "and with others," but he hinted that he has political differences with Bakhtiar. According to Iranian sources, those differences revolve around the question of how much power would be restored to the old monarchy and to its inner circle; Bakhtiar, it is believed, is resisting the idea of giving to the monarchy anything more than a symbolic role.

But because Bakhtiar has adopted what to many is a strongly moral, even purist position, he has received strong support from many exiles disillusioned with what

they consider to have been the errors of the late Shah's regime, especially the corruption and venality of the courtiers. For that reason, Bakhtiar has enemies among the aides to the late Shah.

Interestingly, Egypt's President Anwar Sadat seems to be playing a significant role in trying to unite the various Iranian factions. During his recent visit to Paris, for instance, Sadat met with Bakhtiar secretly and invited him to come to Cairo for more detailed discussions on the question of toppling Khomeini, in view of Sadat's upcoming visit to Washington in March. Sadat, host to the young Shah, is said to be cooperating quietly with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq to explore the potential for getting rid of the Khomeini plague.

The question of unity among the exiles is crucial in view of the Reagan administration's silence so far on Iran. In the administration and in Congress there are people who want to lend American backing to a bid for power by the exiles, but so far they have not had anything more than a squabbling collection of opposing cliques to contact. If, as expected, the next few weeks sees the emergence of a unified movement, then an entirely new situation will emerge.

"Perhaps the United States cannot do anything in a direct way, but through a third country it might be possible to lend tremendous support to the exiles," said a highly experienced veteran of Iranian politics. Among the countries that might be prepared to cooperate with the United States in that regard are France, West Germany, and Iraq.

But a former CIA official said that Iraq was angry with the United States because of repeated rebuffs from the Carter administration. "When Iraqi Foreign Minister Hammadi came to the United States for the U.N. session last fall, he was prepared to tell Secretary Muskie that Iraq would help Washington get rid of Khomeini," he said. "But Muskie accused Iraq of threatening world peace by its attack on Iran!"

But now with Reagan things might improve. From all indications, the situation in Iran will not wait. "Teheran is now totally paralyzed," said one Iranian who is in regular contact with Iran. "There are food shortages, fuel shortages, rationing of everything. People are fed up."

Another source said that there are daily bombings and demonstrations against the regime. In Tabriz, Iran's second city, rioters burned banks and tore down photographs of Khomeini in a mass outpouring of anti-Khomeini feeling last week, during the second anniversary of the establishment of his Islamic Republic. But such opposition goes unreported generally, since Iran does not allow journalists outside Teheran.

Nevertheless, the writing is on the wall. "The Khomeini regime is nearing the end of the line. It is only a matter of time now," said an Iranian expert.

Tabatabai on exiles' past and future

Mohammed Tabatabai is the president of the Washington-based Iran Freedom Foundation (IFF). In July 1980, his brother, Ali Akbar Tabatabai, was assassinated by agents of the Khomeini regime's secret police, the Savama, in cooperation with Muslim Brotherhood terrorists. Ali Akbar had been the only public spokesman in the United States for the anti-Khomeini movement, and his death was meant to warn others not to undertake political activity in exile. Here, his brother, seeking to continue the work of the IFF, gives an exclusive interview to EIR's Middle East Editor, Robert Dreyfuss.

EIR: Your brother was assassinated in Washington, and yet very little was done to investigate the matter by American authorities. Can anything be done now?

Tabatabai: We have to go back to the case of the hostages and their seizure, which we disagreed with totally. My understanding is, with regard to the killing of my brother, that the United States had been deeply involved with the negotiations concerning their release. Then, the Savama took advantage of the situation with the help of the Muslim Brotherhood terrorist organization, and killed my brother. They realized that the reaction of the U.S. government would not be very forceful—and in that they succeeded.

This is my way of thinking. I don't have many facts on hand. But my understanding was that the government of the United States decided not to follow and not to prosecute those people who were involved in the killing of my brother, at *that* point in time, in order to go on with the negotiations for the release of the hostages. I'm hoping that now, after the release of the hostages, that the government of the United States is going to open the case again, and prosecute those people.

Obviously, we do know, and there are facts on hand, that the international terrorist Muslim Brotherhood organization, for the first time, is coming here. They have opened a U.S. chapter, and they are here in the United States and in the cities of America for the first time.

EIR: Are the Iranian exiles getting organized now?

Tabatabai: For the first time, I do know that a large group of prominent Iranians, technocrats, bureaucrats, the intelligentsia, are trying to get together and form a group of leading Iranians living in the United States. I'm sure that when that happens, which I hope will be very

soon, then we will have a nucleus of power for the first time in two years.

EIR: Some people here argue, though rather unconvincingly, that President Bani-Sadr can befriend the U.S.

Tabatabai: No, that isn't feasible. More than 12 million Turkish-speaking Iranians, 4 million Kurds, 2 million Baluchis, one and a half million Turkomans, and 2 million ethnic Iranian Arabs, as well as 3 million Iranians who are living overseas, are opposing *this* regime and *whoever* brought it into power. I know there are political forces supporting Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh, and they are trying to subvert the government of [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein in order to project Bani-Sadr as the winning hero of this war. But that will not work. He has been a party to the atrocities brought upon the Iranian nation, and he condoned many, many of them, including closing the universities, burning the books, and purging more than 50 percent of the officer corps.

If he comes to power, his rule will be a very short one. He will be faced with the noncooperation of the intelligentsia, the technocrats, and others. Iran still is going to be in a state of instability.

EIR: What do Iran's exiles expect from the United States?

Tabatabai: Well, let me say that at this point in time we need all the help we can get from our friends in the free world, either overtly or covertly, and I will leave the details to them.

I think the United States should recognize that her Western European allies do have a different interest in the area, which Washington should take into account.

Also, the Soviet Union shares a 1500-mile border with Iran. Western Europe's interest lies in sources of energy, which could be considered their lifeline, and Middle East trade markets. The Soviet Union would be content if the United States comes to an understanding or some form of guarantee not to build a military base on Iranian soil, and not to install any other monitoring devices there.

The Soviet Union's interests lie somewhere else. They have long-term plans and strategies, and so the government of Russia does not have an immediate interest in Iran. They have enough sources of energy, and the headache of Iran is not worth it to them to get involved in such a thing. But if the political forces in Iran are not supported by the Western allies to get there and establish a friendly government—that is, friendly with all nations of the world, including the Russians—based on mutual respect, and I emphasize mutual respect—then we do not have a chance to establish democratic rule over there.

The communists are working with the peasants and workers in Iran now, trying to prepare the basis for a new structure to society for communism. So the Russians do not have an immediate interest.