

Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

The Kurdistan card

Moscow is ready to play Iran's minorities, from Kurds to Baluchis, in its drive to a post-Khomeini Iran.

Under the direct control of Moscow, Iran's minorities from Kurdistan to Baluchistan are ready to fight for their independence in the coming months. After many back-room negotiations, primarily in Baghdad and London, new political and military coalitions have sprouted, and Kremlin thinking is quite flexible on how to deploy them.

Moscow's scenarios intersect an impending internal collapse in Iran, due to the mullahs' inability to launch a new offensive in the war with Iraq. To divert attention from the failure at the front, a new wave of purges and executions is under way in Teheran. Some of the mullahs are now tempted to redeploy part of the army or the revolutionary guards, *pasdarans*, against the minorities, merely to keep the *pasdarans* busy.

One key minority region, **Baluchistan**, comprising an ethnic group that overlaps Pakistan and Iran, may be the target of a Soviet invasion soon, according to regional political observers. This would follow the Soviets' offensives against the Afghan resistance movement in the Panjshir and Logar valleys, as well as around the border town of Herat. The Soviet effort to impose total control over Afghanistan unfortunately may succeed, since the resistance has been cut off from outside military supplies. Baluchistan would be the natural next target, giving Moscow its long-sought warm-water port on the Indian Ocean.

The leader of the Pakistani Baluchistan Liberation Front, Attar ul-

Mangal, told the French weekly *Nouvel Observateur* in early June that he would welcome a Soviet invasion of his region. We learned that Attar ul-Mangal, generally based in London, has been meeting regularly for some time with Iranian Baluchis as well as representatives of the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq of Massoud Rajavi, the so-called "Islam-Marxist" opposition to Khomeini.

Mediating between Iranian and Pakistani Baluchis have been some of Rajavi's close co-workers, such as Matin-Daftari, an international lawyer, previously a socialist and now a member of Rajavi's National Resistance Council; and two better known international figures, Mefti Khambaba Teherani and Bahram Neroumand. Both were active in the mid-1960s in cooperation with Mao's China or Castro's Cuba, and were later sought, in the mid-1970s, as known collaborators of the German Baader-Meinhof terrorist group.

According to reports, the trio has been meeting in Paris with Rajavi, and followed him in mid-July on his visit to London, before flying again to Pakistan and Baluchistan. Preparing a secessionist operation are some 6,000 Baluchi fighters currently being trained in the region of Afghanistan under Soviet control.

A parallel operation is being readied on the other side of the Iranian map in **Kurdistan**. The Kurds are a mountaineer tribe whose stomping ground extends over Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.

Moscow has just pulled off a ma-

joir diplomatic and military coup by mediating an alliance between old enemies, Iraq's Saddam Hussein, and Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Once again, the Mujahedeen were involved, as was an associate of Rajavi in his National Resistance Council, Abdelrahmane Ghassemlou of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran. Jalal Talabani, an Iraqi Kurd known for years as one of Moscow's pet Kurds, had been active out of Damascus against Saddam Hussein for years. Later he allied with Iran's Khomeini against Iraq.

But recently, talks on a plan for "greater autonomy" for the Iraqi Kurds have been held between Saddam Hussein and Talabani in Baghdad. As a result, there is a military force of some 12,000 Kurdish fighters in Iran's Kurdistan, a large force for this mountainous area, where only guerrilla warfare can be waged.

Equally worried about such a large enemy force at their borders with Iraq as about the need to keep the armed forces busy, the Iranian authorities announced on July 26 a new offensive in Kurdistan and in West Azerbaijan. This will put to the test the secessionist war machine that Moscow has put together.

However, a Soviet-sponsored alliance between Iraq and the Kurds has not merely become a threat for Iran, but also for Turkey. Following these developments with close attention, Ankara has allowed some newspapers to speak again of Iraq's oil fields of Kirkuk and Mossul as being "Turkish territories." Indeed, it was not so long ago that Baghdad had pleaded for a Turkish military intervention north of these oil fields to face the Kurdish threat.

With both Kurdistan and Baluchistan under total Soviet control, a new drive for separatism is expected to explode by no later than September-October.