

THE LEFT IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN

Ideology, Organisation and
the Soviet Connection

Sepehr Zabih

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SOVIET CONNECTION

SEPEHR ZABIH



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PREFACE

This study has three interwoven strands: 1. an inquiry into the ideologies and organisations of the Left in contemporary Iran; 2. a critical examination of the interaction between these organisations and the Islamic Republic; and 3. an analysis of the connections of the Soviet Union with the Iranian Left. The section on the Tudeh Party is a sequel to my earlier work on the Iranian communist movement from 1917 to 1967, and a more recent study covering the 1917-41 epoch.

The introductory chapter puts the Left into historical perspective. It is followed by a review of Soviet interaction with the Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic. The rise and demise of the Old Left, the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party, between February 1979 and May 1983 and the concomitant crisis in Soviet-Iranian relations thereafter is a primary focus of this study. Next, the New Left between 1966 and 1981 is studied in terms of its ideological development, its many organisational changes and crises, and its performance prior to and since the 1978-9 Revolution. The defection of a majority of leftist organisations from the Islamic regime by the summer of 1981 and the government's brutal repression of these groups in 1981-2 will be emphasised.

An account of the Militant Left and its resort to insurgency as a means of fighting the Islamic regime constitutes the next chapter. The Conclusion will offer some generalisations and a prognosis about the Left as a whole in contemporary Iran. No attempt will be made to cover the so-called Ethnic Left, such as the Kurdish Communist *Kumeleh*, because it has a narrow regional base. However, reference will be made to links between it and nationwide leftist groups when justified.

The need for this study was recognised when the author was conducting research for his most recent book, *Iran Since the Revolution*, shortly after the rise of Khomeini's theocracy to power. Although a chapter of that study is devoted to the Left and the Islamic Republic, it soon became apparent that the subject deserved a more comprehensive examination. With the banning of the Mojahedin, one of the strongest Islamic-Marxist organisations during and immediately after the Revolution, a host of literature on that organisation became available, and the outlawing of the Tudeh Party in May 1983 and the crisis in Soviet-Iranian relations gave new impetus to interest in the politics of

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the Left and Soviet-Iranian relations since 1979.

Another factor was the author's perception of the inherent instability of the Khomeini regime and the likelihood of an intense succession crisis. The Left, as an integral part of future development in Iranian politics, will doubtless play a critical role in Iran's post-Khomeini political configuration.

In several presentations at academic and US State Department-sponsored conferences in the United States and Western Europe, as well as in several articles in journals, I have attempted to draw the attention of public officials and scholars to these issues in contemporary Iran. I was much encouraged by their response. George Lenczowski, of the University of California at Berkeley and the Hoover Institution, was particularly active in initiating outside support for the study. Dr William Quandt of the Brookings Institution recommended a tentative outline of the volume to the Brookings Institution. By spring 1983 I was granted financial and research support including a summer guest scholarship at the Brookings Institution and a one-year visiting scholarship at the Hoover Institution. Saint Mary's College of California offered me the scholarly leave that has made possible my full-time dedication to this study since May 1983.

Thus equipped, I made certain that original source materials in Farsi and other languages were utilised; that leaders or participants in a variety of leftist groups or sub-groups were identified and, whenever possible, interviewed; and that policies and actions of the Islamic regime in relation to each of these groups and the Soviet Union were meticulously documented. Frequent visits to US cities with heavy concentrations of Iranian exiles were made, and on four occasions research trips were made to Western European countries, East Berlin, and Leipzig in search of leftist source material and opportunities to meet Iranian leftists of various shades and affiliations.

Particularly rewarding was my visit to Europe in October 1983 upon learning of the arrival of several Tudeh Party defectors, including some in the military. My interviews with them shed much new light on the most recent crisis in Soviet-Iranian relations and the status of mostly clandestine leftist groups.

Many individuals and academic research institutions helped to make this study possible. To name all would require much space, but I have already referred to the most important. A special note of heartfelt gratitude is reserved for Elizabeth Oates, whose competent typing and skilful editing of the first draft proved indispensable. Many who gave generously of their time at some risk to their personal safety must

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for obvious reasons remain unnamed.

Responsibility for the entire study is exclusively mine and in no way attaches to the persons or institutions that supported this project in a variety of ways.

1 THE IRANIAN LEFT: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to give this study proper perspective it is necessary to provide the background of the evolution of the leftist movements in Iran prior to the 1978-9 Revolution.

It is important to remember that even prior to the acquisition of power by the Bolshevik Party in Russia in October-November 1917, the Iranian intelligentsia, which was quite small in number, was attracted to socialist and reformist philosophies and doctrines which originated in the West. Thus in the period between the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and the revolutionary turmoil in Russia beginning with the democratic revolution in spring 1917 and ending with the seizure of power by Lenin in autumn 1917, there were Iranian groups and individuals whose writings reflected the attraction of socialism and democracy and, to some extent, even Marxism.

Once the Russian Revolution became a reality, the main source of the intellectual penetration of Iran shifted from Western European countries to Russia.¹ That the Czarist regime could be overthrown by National Democratic forces and replaced by the Marxist-Leninist party was attractive to the politicised Iranians who saw similarities between Czarist Russia and Iran in that period. The decade between Iran's 1906 Constitutional Revolution and the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution was one of socio-political turmoil in both countries.

Many studies have been undertaken concerning the nucleus of the communist movement in Iran.² My intention is not to review the literature of this period, or to repeat the history of the communist movement in Iran since its inception in Baku, the Edalat Committee (Farsi for 'justice'), or to dwell at length on the emergence of Reza Khan to power in 1920 and the subsequent normalisation of relations between the new governments in the Soviet Union and Iran.

What is worth mentioning is that by 1921 a precedent had been established between the new Russian communist government and the new Iranian regime based on the normalisation of state relations, even though it entailed temporarily sacrificing local communists or workers' groups with their own aspiration of emulating the Bolshevik Revolution. In short, as early as 1921 the Bolshevik regime showed that when faced with the choice of actively and militarily supporting a rebellious,

pro-communist movement in northern Iran and normalising its relations with an emerging new regime that promised stability and peace to that strategically sensitive neighbour, the Soviets showed no qualms about opting for the former.³

Although this precedent was established early in Soviet-Iranian relations, it should not be misconstrued as the Soviet Union's complete abandonment of support for fellow-communists or its desire to extend communism to neighbouring countries. Far from it. It meant simply that Soviet support for these groups or movements anywhere, especially in the Middle East, would take a clandestine form. The Soviet Union and the Comintern, which was very active up to the mid-1930s, used the tactic of underground operations and awaited the opportunity to switch from clandestine tactics to open backing for groups espousing Marxism-Leninism.

Between 1921 and 1941 the central government gradually consolidated its power. Its last two years coincided with the first years of the Second World War, and fairly normal relations were maintained between the two countries. Discreet efforts by Soviet agents to penetrate the Iranian political system or aid and abet clandestine organisations were not entirely dispensed with; the difference is that new identities were chosen. Rarely in that period does one hear of the Iranian Communist Party or the Iranian Communist Movement but, rather, the nucleus of a new Marxist organisation was formed by Iranian intellectuals educated and trained in European countries, notably Germany and France, and occasionally in the Soviet Union.

The emergence of this nucleus – known as 'The Group of 53,' which was the total number of individuals arrested and convicted in the early 1930s – is another evidence of the continuing attraction of Marxism-Leninism for at least a small segment of Western-educated Iranian intellectuals.⁴

The Group was detained, publicly tried, and given sentences ranging from three to ten years. Its leader, physicist Dr Taghi Erani, was the only one who died in prison, allegedly as a result of medical negligence after he had contracted typhus. The remaining 52 individuals were released in 1941 when, as a result of the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, all political prisoners were given amnesty.

The links of this Marxist-Leninist nucleus with the Soviet Union were tenuous. Several of its members had come to Iran from Russia and one or two were formal agents of the Soviet Secret Police, but the majority were leftist intellectuals who had accepted Marxism-Leninism while being educated in European countries, often on state scholarships.

Their views were reflected in a highly sophisticated theoretical-philosophical journal called *Donya* (*The Universe*).

This discovery and the trial of this group led a number of like-minded countries in the region, namely Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Afghanistan, to sign a treaty of cooperation and coordination of their efforts directed at Soviet-sponsored or leftist-sponsored organisations and movements.⁵ The treaty was not a collective defence treaty, and even if one did interpret it as such, it did not prevent British intervention in Iraq to crush a rebellion in 1940, nor did it save Iran at the end of August 1941 when the Anglo-Soviet military intervention caused the subsequent abdication of Reza Shah in September 1941.

The wartime occupation of Iran led to a new socio-political condition which gave rise to the formation of a pro-Soviet, Marxist-Leninist party known as the Tudeh (Farsi for 'the mass of the people'). It is significant that the Tudeh Party, which was established under military occupation, attracted a large following not only among the intelligentsia but among the emerging industrial working class and some segments of the peasantry, particularly in the northern provinces adjacent to the Caspian Sea.

The party assumed different characteristics at different stages of its existence. Up to the dual crisis of Azarbayjan and Soviet Union-Iran relations from 1944 to 1947 it was not, organisationally or ideologically, a true communist party. While it generally supported the Soviets, the support was given when the Western countries (led by the United States and Great Britain) fighting Nazism were closely aligned with the Soviet Union and were actively involved in an enormous war effort to enable the Soviet Union to resist the Nazi invasion, crush the German war machine, and terminate hostilities in Europe. Thus, supporting Soviet policies at that time could not be equated with espousing Marxism-Leninism.

In the initial phase the Tudeh Party was successful in appealing to democratic sentiments because it was perceived to be a democratic party. It favoured freedom of the press, speech, and assembly, and participated in parliamentary elections which were relatively free even though the Soviet occupation forces helped elect between eight and ten deputies mostly from areas under their military control in a unicameral parliament of 120 members.⁶ Granted all this, when the crisis of Azarbayjan and Soviet-Iranian tension erupted between 1945 and 1947, a major split occurred in the Tudeh Party on the nature of the Soviet regime, and its interests in Iran.

Much has been written on this crisis between the two countries

and the misfortune of the Tudeh Party resulting from its identification with the Soviet Union. In brief, the Soviet Union which emerged victorious from the Second World War wanted a huge oil concession in northern Iran to match the British oil concession in southern Iran, and to pre-empt the granting of concessions to American oil companies in northern Iran. The Soviet Union considered the region essential to its own security.

The Tudeh Party echoed the Soviet line and described Iran's northern region, including the provinces of Azarbayjan and Mazandaran on the Caspian Sea, as the legitimate security perimeter for the Soviet Union (*Harime Amniyat*, in Farsi).⁷ This was the first major crisis both in Soviet-Iranian government relations and the regime's attitude regarding the Iranian Left. It demonstrated Soviet manipulation of a group which was heretofore considered a social democratic political organisation affiliated with trade unions, youth organisations, and (as was learned some years later) a network of sympathetic army officers. The Soviet Union took advantage of its status as an occupying power even though a 1942 tripartite agreement with Britain and Iran obligated it to remove all its forces from its zone of occupation within six months after the end of the Second World War.

In refusing to carry out that obligation, the Soviets instigated the first serious post-war international crisis in the region and Iran complained to the newly established United Nations organisation. The gravity of the crisis was also due to the fact that a small power had brought a serious accusation against one of the five permanent members of the Security Council.⁸ The details of the crisis and how it was resolved need not be repeated here, but it had an enormous impact on the fortunes of the Tudeh Party as well as other political groups in Iran.

In December 1946 the two so-called Soviet Republics, Azarbayjan and Kurdistan, collapsed when the Soviet Union agreed to evacuate the northern provinces in return for the promise of an oil concession. The Leftists, both in Iran and outside the region, faced the first dramatic test in which ideological loyalty to the Soviet Union was pitted against nationalistic sentiments. This dilemma resulted in the disintegration of the leftist movement in Iran for at least the next few years. The collapse of the two Soviet-sponsored regimes had repercussions for different segments of the leftist movement. For the Kurds who had relied upon Soviet support and had established an autonomous regime, it meant the betrayal by the Soviet Union of their cause. For the alienated people of Azarbayjan, a fair number of whom initially sup-

ported the separatist movement, it clearly meant the Azarbayjan Democratic Party had been utilised as an agent of Soviet diplomacy.

Although that separatist regime did not last long enough to test its domestic reforms, some of its measures — the adoption of the Azari Turkish language, the establishment of a radio station with the support of the Soviet Union, the setting up of the university at Tabriz, and some land and similar reforms — did appeal to a segment of the population. When it became obvious that the Soviet Union was reaching an accommodation with the central government in Tehran and sacrificing them in the process, a sense of betrayal prevailed, especially after the disclosure that the dominant positions within the Azarbayjan Republic were all occupied by Azarbayjanis from the Soviet Union. This all combined to alienate most of the people by early summer 1946. When action was taken by the central government to send its troops into the province, it became apparent that the Soviets opposed the outbreak of large-scale hostilities between the troops of the central government and the militia and the army of the Azarbayjan and Kurdestan republics. Moscow's decision broke the backbone of the separatist movements.⁹

The causes of alienation of the leftist groups from the Soviet Union may be summarised as follows:

1. For those non-communist Azarbayjanis and Kurds who had welcomed the support of the Soviet Union to achieve a degree of the autonomy that had evaded them, the cause was the political unreliability of the Soviets as protectors and friends. Neither group could rely on the Soviets to support their aspirations and prevent the central government from regaining their provinces by force.

2. For those who were ideologically attracted to the Soviet cause, it proved that the fate of the communist movement in Iran was of marginal importance to the Soviet Union despite its claim to the leadership of an international communist movement. This realisation provoked a major split in the Tudeh Party and its affiliated trade union movement, and also led to the gradual emergence of anti-Soviet or non-Soviet leftist groups within Iran towards the end of 1946. It is important to note that the first major crack in the international communist movement did not occur with the defection of Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito in 1948 but with the disintegration of the most powerful communist movement in the Middle East two years earlier.

3. The least affected were a number of well-known communist leaders who believed that although accommodation with the central government was unpleasant and they had been let down in the higher

interest of the Soviet Union, Moscow could be forgiven because of the difficult task of leading the international communist movement in an extremely hostile world.¹⁰ Many of them did not leave the party, while others believed that the crisis brought about the purging of fellow-travellers who were not good Marxist-Leninists. They blindly submitted to Soviet leadership instead of hiding under the cover of nationalism and supporting the semi-feudal ruling class which was then governing Iran.

The failure of autonomy-seeking communists in the two provinces had profound immediate and long-term consequences for the Left. About a year later, in October 1947, the Soviet Union suffered the ultimate diplomatic humiliation when its painstakingly-negotiated oil agreement with Iran was rejected by the Iranian parliament. Moscow showed no inclination to pressure Iran into a renegotiated agreement, thus within two years they had received two severe blows: the disintegration of the communist movement and a major diplomatic failure at the hands of a smaller state. What made the latter even more drastic was that Iran had barely recovered from the consequences of war-time occupation and had no reliable friends either in the international community or in the region.

While Iran was literally alone in that crisis, American diplomacy was not inactive. In the United Nations Security Council and through diplomatic effort, the Truman administration had expressed displeasure at the prospects of Soviet reoccupation of Iran. The United States had no sympathy for Soviet pressure for an oil concession by supporting Iran's pro-Soviet groups and personalities in order to gain a share in the control of the government and economy.¹¹ What stands out from the crisis is the impact on the Left and on the future of radical and revolutionary groups dedicated to the overthrow of the Iranian regime.

It took nearly three years after the crisis before the Left managed to regroup some of its scattered forces. Two leftist groups could be identified in the wake of the Azarbayjan crisis. The first (and still the largest) comprised individuals in the Tudeh Party who remained loyal to the Soviet Union. They formed a new congress from which emerged a smaller, but more tightly organised, party.¹² This party was officially outlawed in February 1949 as a result of an attempt on the life of the Shah.

The second leftist group consisted of those who had defected from the Tudeh Party over the Azarbayjan crisis. Basically represented by Western-educated Marxist Socialists and influenced by the defec-

tion of Marshal Tito from the Soviet Union in 1948, they called themselves the Third Force and espoused a social democratic, Marxist-Leninist line. The subsequent formation of the Cominform, which tried to retain loyal communist parties both in power or in opposition, evoked Third Force admiration for Yugoslavia's brand of national, independent communism.

In 1950 Dr Mozzafar Baghai, a French-educated leftist (but anti-Soviet) politician, formed the Toilers of the Iranian Nation Party, which claimed to be a socialist democratic party with no ties to the Soviet Union but with a strong belief in radical reforms. It attracted some of the defectors from the main Tudeh Party, and the majority of Third Force also joined the Toilers. They were active in Dr Mossadegh's National Front in the winter of that year.

Thus the Iranian Left survived the fragmentation caused by the Soviet-Iranian crisis of 1946-7 although a proliferation of leftist groups ensued, similar to that in other countries which responded to the appeal of Marxist ideology. From 1950 to 1953 all three leftist groups were involved in political activism. When Dr Mossadegh's Nationalist government was formed, the Tudeh offered conditional support and the other two groups initially gave full support, but even the Tudeh participated in the July 1951 uprising over the reinstatement of Dr Mossadegh to power. In August 1953 when a CIA-connected military coup combined with elements of the population in Tehran and other major cities to topple the Nationalist regime, the Tudeh once more backed the government.

This writer and others have studied this period at some length.¹³ Suffice it to say that the Soviet connection with the Tudeh Party was sustained throughout this period. The normalisation of Soviet-Iranian relations was initiated during the premiership of General Ali Razamara, an arch enemy of the Nationalist forces, whose government preceded Dr Mossadegh's regime by several months. However, in the early 1950s the Soviet Union was undergoing considerable change and it is possible that for a period the pro-Soviet party in Iran was neglected, particularly after the Tudeh Party was banned in 1949.

The normalisation of relations with the government of General Razamara between summer and fall 1949 did not entail a change in the political fortunes of the Tudeh Party. At this time a popular movement demanding the nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had generated a broad coalition of nationalist forces under the leadership of Dr Mossadegh. With his assumption of the premiership in April 1950 the Left became only marginally important to the scope and

intensity of the Nationalist Movement, which seemed to have submerged the Leftists in the first half of this period. The Nationalist movement created conditions for open political activity, due in part to the democratic inclination of the new Nationalist government and in part because of the need for mobilising all political forces, including the pro-Soviet Left, around the goal of terminating British economic and political domination in Iran.

Although the Tudeh Party was legally banned, its many front organisations, the largest of which were the Society to Combat Colonial Oil Companies and the Society of Partisans of Peace, continued to represent the pro-Soviet Left. While they took advantage of the new environment for free political activity, they believed they did not constitute the vanguard of the Nationalist mass movement and they had to follow the leadership of Dr Mossadegh or, as often was the case, clamour for a more radical stance in the Anglo-Iranian dispute.

After the July 1952 massive uprising to reinstate Dr Mossadegh another dilemma plagued them, namely the ambiguity in Soviet attitude and policy toward Iran's Nationalist movement. The relative strength of the Left, whether the Tudeh or pro-government groups such as the Third Force, was put to the test in the July 1952 uprising.

It is estimated that the members of the Tudeh Party who formed a temporary alliance with the Nationalist forces to overthrow the short-lived regime of Ahmad Ghavam, of 1946-7 fame, represented about a third of the street fighters and demonstrators both in Tehran and in other major centres of population. The submission of the Shah to popular demands and his surrender of important authority to the reinstated Prime Minister created a climate in which leftist parties clamoured for more radical measures in domestic and foreign policy. The Left seemed discontented with merely restoring Dr Mossadegh to power; it wanted to take advantage of the successful popular uprising to alter the political system.

Perhaps a more significant impact of the July uprising in 1952 was the Tudeh conviction that its military potential must be utilised. They reasoned that in a similar situation the Left, which constituted only one of several groups in a broad popular coalition, could seize power if it was supported by even a small segment of the military. This was a critical development at the end of the Nationalist regime, yet when the opportunity arose neither the Tudeh nor other leftist groups acted decisively to save the Mossadegh government from the August 1953 coup.

What role the pro-Soviet Left should have played, what the Soviet

policy towards the Nationalist regime was in spring and early summer 1953, whether the death of Stalin in March and the uncertainty of a succession struggle played a significant role in the calculations of the Tudeh and other communist parties – these are all questions that are beyond the scope of this introduction. One result of the return of the royalist regime to power was an attempt to ban the Tudeh Party. The inroads that the party had made in the armed forces was alarming; of an officer corps of roughly 5,000, close to 600 had joined the underground network of the party's military organisation. Their discovery was another severe blow to the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party, one from which it did not recover for about a decade.¹⁴

Political changes between 1953 and 1973 significantly affected all parties, including those of the Left. This is also a period of important changes in Soviet leadership and their foreign policy as a whole, and towards Iran in particular. The authoritarian government of the late Shah consolidated its power as all parties of the Left were rejected and often severely repressed. Simultaneously in this period, gradual socio-economic modernisation with its impact on the country's political system began to take shape.

Up to the early 1960s, the near-disappearance of leftist parties together with a search for accommodation with Iran by the Soviet Union, which had already experienced de-Stalinisation in 1956, had affected all parties, particularly the Stalinist segment of the Tudeh Party. In the body of this study some long-range consequences of Soviet-Iranian accommodation for the Left will be carefully examined, but for the purpose of this introduction, domestic reforms and Iranian accommodation with the Soviet Union shall be noted.

Under pressure from many sources, the Shah embarked on a series of domestic reforms, including land redistribution and other social programmes, to make Iran a modern, progressive country. These reforms were undertaken under the auspices of a highly centralised authoritarian system which ensured that no undesirable political result would ensue. Both Iran and the Soviet Union searched for accommodation and closer commercial relations. However, this was preceded by grave tension. By 1961 the Soviet leaders characterised the Iranian regime as a rotten apple which would fall from the tree without it being shaken. Nevertheless, hardly a year later the Soviet government and the government of the Shah reached the famous October 1962 understanding.¹⁵

That marked the beginning of a new era in formal relations between the two countries and was followed by closer relations with some communist countries of Europe, in a number of which (notably East

Germany, Romania, and Bulgaria) some exiled Tudeh members had found refuge. As relations with Moscow itself improved, Iranian communists were forced to move to these countries from whence clandestine radio and propaganda activities directed at Iran continued for some time.

It is a mistake to assume that after 1962 the Iranian Left was completely dormant. Some indisputable facts are that in June 1963 there was a widespread religious uprising against the regime, but participation by leftist parties was minimal. The Tudeh Party, along with some independent leftist politicians, interpreted the uprising with a degree of contempt, calling it a reactionary, religious move against the land reforms and opposed to extending suffrage to women and similar reforms undertaken by the regime. That uprising was easily crushed by the loyal military and a determined Shah. The Left subjected the uprising to a thorough analysis in order to discover what opportunities had been lost and whether a similar upheaval by the opposition parties would once again catch the parties of the Left off guard.

A review of the doomed Pahlavi regime between 1963 and 1978 finds the leftist groups engaged in a reappraisal of their positions. The Tudeh Party and the New Left (which emerged after the 1963 religious uprising) considered seriously various forms of struggle against the regime. There was also a proliferation of leftist groups, many of which could not be identified before or during the 1978-9 Revolution. All aspects of the Left had to be reappraised as well as the attitude of the regime itself and the degree of Soviet domination of the international communist movement. The changing positions of communist parties outside Europe towards Iran also required scrutiny.

Soviet relations with Iran continued to improve and, in turn, the regime tried to enhance Moscow's perceived stakes in a stable, though pro-American, Iran in a region notorious for its political instability. The events of 1963 created conditions for the emergence of armed resistance or guerrilla warfare against what appeared to be a very powerful and indomitable political system. These groups had to review their attitude toward the Soviet Union and the West before they could develop an effective plan for the overthrow of the political system. All these issues preoccupied leftist groups in the post-1963 era.

Around 1965 the Tudeh Party lost its monopoly of representing the Left in Iran for in that period several political groups espousing various forms of leftist radicalism emerged as a direct result of the failure of the 1963 uprising. The New Left consisted of groups and individuals who, up to 1963, were either non-political or ambivalent as to the best

methods of expressing legitimate dissent against a progressively more authoritarian political system. But few choices were available to them. They could go underground, they could leave the country, or they could prepare for an armed struggle by receiving military training in such radical or anti-Iranian countries as Libya, parts of Lebanon, South Yemen, and in some instances in Cuba, North Korea, and China. Some groups opted for simply trying to survive the Pahlavi regime and, while not co-opted by the regime as many other groups were, they did not become totally depoliticised either. Opposed to them were those who rejected the thesis of survival and tried to undertake the training necessary for urban guerrilla warfare, hoping that in time the public would rally to their support.¹⁶

One way of studying leftist groups in this period is to inquire whether they believed that the then-prevailing conditions ruled out political activism or whether they were of the opinion that despite all the difficulties some measure of armed resistance in their huge country was possible. In this sense, it appears that through 1978, the main faction of the Tudeh Party in exile (which continued to identify with the Soviet Union) hoped for a change in political conditions in Iran which would enable the Soviets to regain their former influence. They believed that pro-Soviet communists could only hope to outlast the regime, although party members were involved in several strikes and labour unrest and their external organisations, propaganda, and indoctrination activities continued unabated.

Opposed to these were most of the groups which in this study are designated the New Left. They believed that the repressive Pahlavi regime had created conditions conducive to armed resistance. Their success in staging acts of terrorism or guerrilla warfare depended largely on the countermeasures taken by the security forces.

Between 1966 and 1978, those who believed in armed resistance maintained a level of guerrilla warfare which was never totally eradicated. The security forces infiltrated some of these organisations and several times declared their complete destruction. But just as frequently, evidence of their continued activities surfaced, such as the assassination of an army officer or an American military adviser, or an explosion in a factory.

As long as the regime took such measures as trying their members before military tribunals instead of civilian courts and severely punishing them for the slightest infraction of State Security Codes, these groups were denied the opportunity for a serious ideological dialogue among themselves or with the Old Left. Such constraints did not apply

to leftist groups outside Iran, and in both the United States and Western European countries they were engaged in marathon discussions about coordinating anti-regime efforts, promoting unity of purpose and action, and ultimately undertaking guerrilla training in host countries – some of which had normal, even friendly, relations with the Shah's regime.

In another section of this study a review will be made of the position of these groups prior to the fall of the Shah's regime. When the Revolution triumphed in 1979, their rhetoric and endless ideological discussions were simply transferred from abroad into Iran itself, except that now they had acquired new urgency because the time for concrete action was at hand.

Another way of categorising the groups of the New Left is to use the criterion of secular, as opposed to Islamic, radicalism. Among Islamic radical groups, the Mojahedin stand out as the most active, the best organised, and perhaps the largest guerrilla organisation. During their clandestine activity, the group advocated the integration of what they viewed as genuine Shia radicalism and some aspects of Marxist socialism. They could be considered leftist, both in advocating the use of force and armed resistance to topple the existing regime and in the acceptance of social and economic concepts generally identified with Marxism. The regime had no difficulty designating them as an Islamic Marxist organisation even though a better term would have been a Radical Shia-Marxist Socialist organisation because the term 'Islam' has broader connotations than the activities and ideology of this particular group exhibited.

Similarly active and the second largest group rejecting the concept of survival at any cost was the Peoples' Fedayeen, secular Marxist-Leninist but not pro-Soviet like the Tudeh Party. Many of the Fedayeen's former members were defectors from the Tudeh Party who had belonged to its youth organisation from 1950 on. They believed that the United States and the Soviet Union did not differ substantially in regard to the future of Iran and its 'liberation' from the oppressive regime of the Shah.

Members of this secular group received similar training in countries which were hostile to Iran and engaged in political and organisational work in Western European countries as well as in the United States. Often young students who were sent abroad for study, either under government sponsorship or supported by their parents, were susceptible to the appeal of freedom of political activity in their host countries. Many joined together to organise the Confederation of Iranian

Students, which the regime of the Shah declared subversive after retaliatory measures against them or their families proved ineffective. Not infrequently, members of the New Left joined together in forming conferences and symposia in a number of Western countries in which they discussed the issue of how best to undermine the existing regime in Iran. Their resolutions and appeals would be extensively distributed, even inside Iran.

The attitude of the security authorities toward leftist groups was initially unsophisticated. They made little distinction among individuals or small groups who opposed the regime by taking different protest actions ranging from writing letters to organising secret meetings, or locating safe houses for members of the urban guerrilla movements. Towards the end of 1978, partly as a result of the regime's measures to permit some freedom of the press, the attitude towards these leftist groups became more sophisticated. For example, Tudeh Party members were often singled out as the Moderate Left, and the members of the New Left – especially the Mojahedin and the Fedayeen – were designated fanatics, or Extreme Left. In a series of trials before the Military Tribunal, most of the accused leaders of these groups were given the opportunity to defend themselves and express their views, which the controlled media were permitted to cover extensively.

Some data on the number of arrests, executions, and other forms of punishment of these groups will be discussed and analysed in the body of this study. It should be noted that they were fundamentally urban and belonged mostly to lower-middle-class groups, certainly in the case of the religious Mojahedin as opposed to the secular Fedayeen. The former came from highly religious backgrounds and families in cities with important Shia shrines such as Mashad, in the northeastern province of Khorassan.

Similar class characteristics also apply to a number of fringe groups, most of which are secular in orientation but differ on what constitutes genuine Marxism-Leninism. They range from those who promote the Maoist line to those who identify with Leon Trotsky's position during and after the Bolshevik Revolution. A constant theme in the dialogue among leftist groups in this period had to do with how one interprets Marxism-Leninism, and under what conditions these doctrines could be applied to Iran under the Shah.

By the end of 1978 the Left and the Soviet Union were not always ideologically linked, nor was their evaluation of Iranian politics identical. Except for the exiled Tudeh Party, which the remnant of the Democratic Party of Azarbayjan had joined prior to the 1978-9 Revo-