

# Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution

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# The Minorities Question in Iran\*

In the Middle East as in the West, the concept of a "minority", covering both religious and ethnic minorities within a state, is a modern one. Today, ethnic minorities are important in much of the Middle East. In the pre-twentieth-century Middle East, however, as in the pre-eighteenth-century West, the only minorities generally considered important were religious ones, who might be either unbelievers (in the Muslim world divided into protected "People of the Book" monotheists with scriptures - and unprotected polytheists) or heretics, whose beliefs related to the dominant religion but were judged to diverge so seriously and dangerously as to merit punishment, sometimes death. The only religious minority sometimes tolerated in the West were the Jews, who were, however, increasingly expelled and forced to move to Eastern Europe or to Morocco and the Ottoman Empire. Peaceful coexistence between Catholics and Protestants as well as tolerance and legal emancipation for Western Jews are eighteenth- and nineteenth-century phenomena. The twentieth-century Holocaust, the continuation of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslims prejudices in the West (where Muslim populations are now significant - for example, about 3 million in the United States), and revived intra-Christian tensions in parts of the West should warn Westerners against thinking that religious prejudices and persecutions happen only elsewhere.

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## RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN THE MUSLIM MIDDLE EAST

For centuries, the Muslim world showed greater tolerance of minority religions (sometimes including theoretically forbidden "polytheistic" religions like Hinduism) than the West. In return for a special tax and sporadic and only rarely unbearable marks of second-class status, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Mandeans (Sabeans) were allowed to follow their religions and be governed (on matters not involving conflict with Muslims) by their own laws. Both Shi'a Iran, which was never part of the Ottoman Empire, and Sunni-Shi'a Iraq, long part of that Sunni Empire, housed significant communities of Jews, Sabeans, and Christians of various denominations; and Iran also had Zoroastrians. Both also contained smaller religious groups influenced by Islam, chiefly among a minority of their ethnic Kurdish and Turkish populations: notably the Yezidis, whose syncretic religion of ancient origin was wrongly stigmatized as "devil worship," and the Ahl-i Haqq or Ali Ilahis, who are said to incorporate pre-Islamic Kurdish or Turkish beliefs and to deify the first Shi'ite imam, Muhammad's son-in-law Ali. Both Iraq and Iran have large Twelver Shi'a and Sunni communities, and both have also had Sevener Shi'as (Isma'ilis), who have now dwindled to a small minority.

In the Iraq-Iran area, the main struggle having religious overtones has been between its two largest communities, the Sunnis and the Twelver Shi'as. Like the "religious wars" between Catholics and Protestants in early Modern Europe, however, Sunni-Shi'a struggles were not purely confessional in origin. They largely reflected struggles between an Iran that was made Shi'ite by the Safavid dynasty in the sixteenth century and the Sunni Ottomans, who failed to conquer Shi'a Iran (whereas they succeeded in most Sunni lands they attacked). The Ottoman Empire and its successor Arab states were politically identified with Sunnism, and Iran with Shi'ism. Both were (and mostly still are) thought of by their adepts as true Islam, from which the other group had deviated. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Sunni-Shi'a struggles declined, and there were moves for a Pan-Islamic unity of the Muslim world against the threat of Western infidel conquest or control. Most believers do not change their ideals quickly, however, and Sunni-Shi'a hostilities remain below the surface, especially ready to break out when one community feels oppressed or persecuted by the other.

Persecution of non-Muslim religions has occurred sporadically in the Muslim Middle East, resulting, for instance, in the medieval emigration of most Zoroastrians from Iran to India and some forced conversions of Jews. Persecution was less severe than in the premodern West, but because modern economic and intellectual trends began later in the Middle East than in the West, so did new types of religious toleration. Westerners have seized upon examples of religious persecution by Muslims not only with the aim of righting injustice, but often with the less admirable aim of claiming that Muslims are unfit to govern themselves without Western control or guidance.

In the West, and later in the Middle East, the rise of commercial and industrial capitalism has encouraged the growth both of national markets and nation-states, which can function most efficiently by treating at least most male citizens more equitably than in past regimes - subjecting them to the same laws and opening "a career to talents" through standardized educational systems that train good bureaucrats, soldiers, businessmen, workers, and professionals. Moreover, modernizing rulers of nation-states want to encourage the loyalty of all citizens to the nation, and this, too, moves them to

minimize differences among religious communities and to reduce residential, educational, legal, and other barriers between them.

In parts of the Middle East, there is now a countertrend to such playing down of religious differences, partly in reaction to Western policies and to the rapidity and methods with which all sorts of Westernizing measures (often harmful to the rural and urban masses and the petty bourgeoisie) have been introduced. Among these measures are steps to treat religious groups as equal, and some Muslims believe such measures to be against the Quran and Islamic law; for, taken literally, Islamic teaching prescribes a protected status for religious minorities, but not absolute equality. The status of the Jews has worsened in Arab countries since the foundation of Israel; and mass migration of Jews from Muslim (especially Arab) countries mirrors the emigration of Arab Palestinians from their former homeland. Hence, the idea of religious equality is a recent one in the Muslim Middle East, although modernizing leaders have tended to favor it while often excepting groups considered dangerous to the state or having ties with foreign enemies.

## LINGUISTIC AND "ETHNIC" DIFFERENCES

While religious differences have become less marked, linguistic or "ethnic" differences have assumed much more importance in the modern period than they had in premodern times (another change that began earlier in the West). In premodern polities, it was rarely a matter of concern that groups of people within one's borders spoke languages different from that of the majority - if indeed there was a majority language. In order to function in state positions, a man would have to know the dominant language - whether German in the Austrian Empire or Ottoman Turkish in the Ottoman Empire - but persons from many ethnic groups learned these languages, and no need was felt to educate anyone but the elite in the dominant language. Compact linguistic groups in premodern countries might feel a common cultural identity, but this was not as universal as their nationalist descendants now suppose. In the case of Middle Eastern politico-economic groups called "tribal," which tended to believe in descent from a common ancestor (at least of their leaders), cohesive feelings might be quite strong and form one basis for autonomous or independent polities. These small polities, however, did not have true linguistic or tribal boundaries but, like larger states, were based on how much territory could be taken and held, regardless of what languages were intermixed in those territories. In the Ottoman Empire and Iran, even in periods of strong central government, tribes usually had considerable local autonomy; often, tribal leaders were used as tax collectors and heads of tribal levies or as mediators with the central government.

In Iran and Iraq, linguistic minorities were largely tribal - a word that has no agreed-upon definition, but which in Iran and the Ottoman Empire usually involved self-identification by a word translated as "tribe" and denoted some political cohesion under recognized leaders, belief in descent of tribal leaders from a common ancestor, general linguistic unity (outsiders adopted into the tribe usually learned its language), and often a largely, though not exclusively, pastoral economy whose organization was a major determinant of economic and political life. Tribes also tended to concentrate in arid or

mountainous areas, often far from the control of the central government. The upkeep of flocks in such areas usually requires some form of movement: ranging from the transhumance characteristic of some Kurds (that is, they settle in villages, but the shepherds take sheep to higher pasture in the summer) to the biannual migrations (in spring and fall) characteristic of many Iranian tribes, including the well-known Qashqai and Bakhtiari confederations. The Qashqais, Bakhtiari, and Kurds are sometimes loosely referred to as tribes; however, neither anthropologists nor the people themselves call such large and loosely connected groups tribes, but retain that word for smaller, more cohesive groups. The Qashqais, Bakhtiari, and former Khamseh of Iran are or were confederations, formed during certain periods in Iraq and Iran largely to deal with the central government and each other. The Kurds, living in several countries, now constitute a huge conglomeration of tribes and nontribal peoples united by language and culture. Neither tribes nor confederations are as stable as is often thought: in both cases, membership and loyalties shift according to politico-economic circumstances. Individuals or small groups often join or leave tribes, tribes can switch confederations, and new tribes or confederations can arise and die out.

Not all linguistic minorities are tribal. Among the Azerbaijani Turks of northwestern Iran - who, if one counts those who have migrated to Tehran and elsewhere, may number as high as 9-10 million, or about a quarter of Iran's population - only the Shahsevan in Azerbaijan are tribal-nomadic. Some pre-nineteenth-century Azerbaijanis had feelings of Turkish cultural identity, and there were poets who wrote in what is now called Azerbaijani (although this was intelligible to Turks elsewhere). What we would now call nationalism did not exist among them or among other minority or majority linguistic groups in the Middle East. In premodern times, even the largest minority group, the Kurds, with their several million people bordering each other chiefly in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, desired (and for a time under the Ottomans partly achieved) at most an autonomous status - with forms of rule based on political and religious elders - not a modern nation state.

## NATIONALISM, MINORITIES, AND CLASS

None of this is surprising except to those who wish to read nationalism into a premodern, prenationalist past. Modern economic ties, transport, and production systems are prerequisites to nation states that would try to control distant minority populations. Imposition of central political and economic control and exploitation, a majority language, and unfamiliar customs, accompanied by suppression of local cultures and of nomadism - nomads being not only "unmodern" but also potentially dangerous warriors - are factors in the rise of counter-nationalisms among linguistic minorities. Some minorities, notably the Kurds and the Azerbaijanis, number in the millions and cover large territories. Many central governments fear making concessions to minority demands, which, they think, might eventually lead to loss of government control. On the other hand, such minorities and their sympathizers argue that complete nonrecognition of minority rights feeds rebellious sentiments.

Although the West has had few nomadic tribes, it has had a similar history of majorities and minorities. As in the Middle East, religious affiliation in the West was

more important than language at least until the late seventeenth century, and many states were formed with no regard for linguistic boundaries. The nineteenth century rise of nationalism - reflected in the unification of Germany and Italy, the revolts of the Balkan Christians of the Ottoman Empire, and the nationalist principles imposed after World War I in Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman territories - seemed to enshrine the ideals of the nation state. Yet, nationality remains a vexed question in the West as in the Middle East. Politically and economically dominant and exploitative nationalisms have given rise to counter-nationalisms, as with the Basques, the Northern Irish, Yugoslav nationalities, French Canadians, and others. In both West and East, once ethnic nationalism became widespread it was inevitable that ethnic grievances would grow: there are no agreed-upon ethnic boundaries, and even if there were, no state will give up territory or true autonomous rights without a bitter struggle.

Minorities are often economically oppressed or neglected, and this is a further cause of their discontent. In Iraq, most Kurds and Arab Shi'as (actually an oppressed majority) have long been manipulated by Sunni Arab-dominated governments. In Iran, tribal nomads were traditionally a partially advantaged group; military prowess enabled their political leaders to dominate local peasants, and nearly all important Iranian rulers from the tenth century until 1921 were tribal in origin. Under Reza Shah (1925-41), however, the tribes were disarmed and settled without provision for an adequate livelihood. Though some migration recommenced in 1941, the policies of Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-79), including land reform, weakened the economic position of the nomads. The Kurds were largely bypassed in Iran's economic development program, and the Lurs, Arabs, and Baluchis remained even poorer than the Kurds. Nontribal Azerbaijan lost its former economic prominence when Reza Shah centralized economic activities in Tehran, and migration out of Azerbaijan during and after World War II caused Azerbaijan's economic importance to decline greatly.

Although a complete analysis would require discussion of changing class positions within each minority, here only a few partial generalizations regarding class can be essayed. In Ottoman Iraq, the main ruling groups were Sunni Arab or Turkish, and Sunni Arabs have retained dominant positions, although some privileged Shi'as and Kurds have entered important governmental and military positions. Nomadic tribes were powerful before modern centralization, but their leaders were made into big landlords only after Ottoman and, particularly, twentieth-century British policies encouraged the registering of communal lands to tribal sheikhs. This policy favored Sunni sheikhs, although a few Shi'as also benefited; Sunnis as well as Shi'as were among those turned into landless tenants, but the Shi'as were especially hurt. Jews and Christians were mostly poor, but some were involved in trade, moneylending, and crafts. With the exodus of Jews after 1948, their place in trade was largely taken up by Shi'as. Sunni Arabs and Kurds and Shi'a Arabs thus occupy a variety of class positions, but Shi'as and Kurds have been relatively disfavored economically both in the premodern and, in their poor majority, the modern period.<sup>1</sup> Like many modernizing, centralizing governments, both the Ba'th regime in Iraq and the Pahlavis in Iran have favored the middle to upper class of the dominant religion and nationality.

In Iran as in Iraq, a minority within the tribes benefited economically from modernization, getting more control of land, positions, and even capital for urban enterprise. Far more tribespeople, however, lost control of land and flocks, often

becoming part of the migrant subproletariat that has streamed into towns in recent decades. Tehran, even more than Baghdad, became the center of economic life and industry, and distant ethnic groups suffered from economic neglect and political control by administrators and entrepreneurs from the center. Some members of religious minorities, including some Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Baha'is, benefited for a time from foreign intervention against persecution and from Pahlavi secularism, so that their largely impoverished economic position improved. But all these minorities had their poor as well as their middle class and wealthy. Under the Islamic Republic, they suffer various degrees of discrimination. Minorities, thus, have economic as well as cultural reasons to resist the policies of central governments, which, whether they call themselves monarchical, Islamic Republican, or Ba'th Socialist, seem unwilling to meet even those needs and demands of minorities that should not be considered threatening.

From the foregoing historical review, it should be evident that both Iran and Iraq, with their ethnically and religiously diverse populations, face challenging "minority problems." This chapter will focus on those problems in the country I know best, Iran, but many of the insights herein can be helpful in understanding Iraq's similar - though certainly not identical - minority problems.<sup>2</sup>

## IRANIAN ETHNIC MINORITIES

Although, for purposes of discussion, it would be convenient to separate Iran's minorities into religious and linguistic categories, this is a very difficult task, for some minorities - most Kurds, the Turkomans the Baluchis, and some Arabs - are both religious and political minorities. Another logical division, however, is possible: all the compact ethnic groups in Iran are predominantly Muslim, whether Shi'a or Sunni, and so Muslim ethnic minorities can be treated as one group, while the non-Muslim Jews, Christians, Baha'is, and smaller religious minorities can be treated separately. Except for the Sabians, none of these religious minorities makes up a compact group, and none has made autonomist demands; most are scattered in urban areas, having only a small rural component. The non-Muslim groups are represented in bazaar crafts and trade as well as in more modern, middle-class positions.

To begin with the Muslim ethnic minorities, their significance in Iranian politics is closely related to their numbers, their mode of life, and their location within Iran. No exact figures on their numbers are available; official figures greatly underestimate the size particularly of the largest groups, the Azerbaijanis and the Kurds, while some recent estimates from these groups somewhat overestimate their numbers. More accurate data, based on 1960s sources and the consolidation of some groups that I separate, have been provided by Ervand Abrahamian (see Table 1). These estimates do not correspond exactly to mine, given below, but are far more accurate than the official figures, which, for example, always have native Persian speakers in the majority.<sup>3</sup> The recent scholarly literature is in agreement that this group is almost surely a slight minority in the Iranian population - approximately 45 per cent of 40 million; or about 18 million people. Recent estimates of the number of Azerbaijani Turks, which usually include those who have migrated from Azerbaijan but still speak Azerbaijani as a first language, range

Table 1. Iranian Linguistic Groups (percent of national population)

<i>Linguistic Minorities</i>		<i>Marginal Linguistic Minorities</i>	
<i>Turkic</i>			
Azeris	19	Mazandarans and Gilakis	8
Kurds	7	Bakhtiari and Lurs	6
Arabs	3		
Baluchis	2		
Others	7		
<i>Armenians and Assyrians</i>	1		
<i>Others</i>	2		

*Note:* Native Persian speakers = 45 percent

*Source:* Ervand Abrahamian, "Communism and Communalism in Iran: The Tudah and the Firqah Dimokrat," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (October 1970): 293.

from 6 to 13 million; and 9 to 10 million, or almost a quarter of Iran's population, seems a reasonable estimate. Iranian Kurds are now generally estimated at about 4 million. Baluchis may number about 1.5 million and Arabs, 1 million. The major tribal confederations number in the hundreds of thousands. Since native Persian speakers, whom I will henceforth refer to as Persians, are now believed to be a slight minority in Iran, it, like Iraq, is seen to be a country without a compact majority. Persians, however, occupy the central plateau, predominate in cities and in government, have linguistic hegemony throughout Iran, and do not face a unified opposition or ethnic minorities.

Three general types of Muslim ethnic groups may be distinguished. I will exclude the gypsies, scattered throughout Iran, on whom little research has been done but who often attach themselves to tribes in special occupations (for example, as tinkers or musicians). First, there are settled, mainly nontribal peoples who live on or near the Iranian Plateau, are in frequent contact with Persians, and are Shi'ite in religion. These include chiefly the Azerbaijanis and secondarily the Gilaki-speaking peoples of Gilan and Mazandaran, whose language, like Persian, is Indo-European and most of whom also speak Persian easily. Although Gilanis and Azerbaijanis have at times been rebellious, they are closer to the Persians in life style and loyalties than most of the tribal minorities. There is even some disagreement over whether the Gilakis constitute a true ethnic group.

Second, along the border, there are sizable ethnic groups, largely tribal and pastoral in origin: the Kurds, Turkomans, Baluchis, and Arabs. These are distinguished from the other tribal groups by being Sunni in religion either in part (the Arabs), in great majority (the Kurds), or completely (the Turkomans and Baluchis). In light of the zeal with which the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722) tried to convert to Shi'a Islam all Iranians, including tribespeople who spoke neither Persian nor Turkish, this Sunnism is one sign of

the somewhat tenuous past connection of those four peoples with the Iranian state. These peoples are also distinguished by having a large, related ethnic group across the border. (This is also true of Azerbaijanis, but they appear today to have few ties to Soviet Azerbaijanis.) Some Kurds, Arabs, and Baluchis have at different times shared in struggles with their related ethnic group across the border, and members of all four groups have at times spoken out for autonomy. As the largest and most widespread group, having a significant Shi'a population, the Kurds to some degree share characteristics with the first group, Azerbaijanis, and Gilakis. Thus settled Kurds, especially Shi'as, sometimes become very Persianized and even enter into Tehran politics, which is less characteristic of the more clearly demarcated Baluchis, Turkomans, and Arabs.

The third group comprises tribes and tribal confederations that are Shi'ite, do not have ethnic kin across borders, and generally are smaller and less menacing to the center than the other two groups, even though they have (especially the Qashqais) fought the government at times. Below I consider features of the above three groups that are most relevant to Iran today.

### **Settled, Nontribal Peoples**

I will limit myself here to the politically important Azerbaijanis. Ever since the mid-eleventh-century invasion by the Seljuq Turks, Iran has been ruled mainly by Turkish-speaking dynasties of tribal-nomadic origin, and it is the heavy presence of invading Turkish tribes and rulers that accounts for the Azerbaijanis Turkish speech. For centuries, Azerbaijan's capital, Tabriz, was the capital of major dynasties as well as its largest and most important commercial city. The Safavids moved the capital to Isfahan, and the Turkic Qajars (1796-1925) moved it to Tehran. In the later nineteenth century, Tabriz's commercial importance declined with changes in international trade routes. More calamitous was the effect of Reza Shah Pahlavi's centralization of economic activity in Tehran and the fall of trade with the Soviet Union, which depressed Azerbaijani trade and industry and caused Azerbaijani migration south. Whereas in the early twentieth century, especially during the constitutional revolution of 1905-11, in which Tabrizis played a heroic role, Turkish newspapers and literature circulated freely, the Pahlavi shahs allowed only Persian to be taught and printed in Iran. After World War I there was a local rebellion in Azerbaijan under Sheikh Muhammad Khiabani, whose autonomist government instituted a number of reforms, demanded fairer financial and cultural treatment by the center, and renamed the province Azadistan ("Land of Freedom"). This movement was militarily suppressed in late 1921, as was another Azerbaijani revolt a few years later.

These movements and the constitutional revolution demonstrated strong sentiments in Azerbaijan for greater democracy, equality of treatment, and freedom from both governmental and foreign oppression. That the Azerbaijanis long led Iran in the struggle for democratic rights is not surprising, since their language put them into close contact with advanced Turkish thinkers in Russian Caucasia and the Ottoman Empire, and since the impact of commercial capitalism was felt first in Azerbaijan. Also, before the Russian Revolution, many Azerbaijanis migrated back and forth to jobs in

Transcaucasia, including the Baku oil fields, where they came into contact with Caucasian workers with radical or socialist ideas. A Social Democratic party was formed in Tabriz as early as the constitutional revolution.

An awareness of this democratic and radical background is important to understanding the autonomous Azerbaijani government of 1945-46, led by Ja'far Pishevari and his Democratic party. That government is often presented as simply a consequence of the Soviet presence in Azerbaijan, but the main role of Soviet troops then was to keep out central government troops. The Azerbaijanis had sufficient cultural and economic grievances and enough radical and democratic background to support in considerable numbers Pishevari's government, though there is no scholarly agreement on the degree of its popularity or on the kind of welcome given central troops when they returned and overthrew it.<sup>4</sup> The new government began teaching Azerbaijani in the schools and set up Azerbaijan's first university, which taught in Azerbaijani. Some socioeconomic reforms, including land reforms, were instituted, causing a flight of landlords southward. Some measures were popular and others unpopular, but the aims of political and cultural autonomy and a fairer share of revenues and economic life were widely shared. Soon after Soviet troops withdrew, the central government abrogated the agreement it had made with Pishevari on autonomist rights and sent in troops to overthrow his government and its reforms, often brutally.

Under Mohammad Reza Shah, no autonomist demands or local language teaching were allowed to any group, and even though Azerbaijan received some new economic projects and was favored in land reform, autonomist or nationalist feelings remained strong. Despite such concern for autonomy and against rigid centralization, no significant group in Azerbaijan has advocated breaking with Iran, and many Azerbaijanis have been important in the central government and in Tehran's intellectual, economic, and professional life. After the 1979 revolution, many Azerbaijanis identified with the liberal and learned Ayatollah Shariatmadari, himself an Azerbaijani, who was more popular among them than Khomeini. A largely Azerbaijani Islamic political party was set up, but Shariatmadari was too cautious to sanction it. This party urged a boycott of the new theocratic constitution in the December 1979 referendum. Large numbers of Azerbaijanis did boycott the referendum, and when the local radio station distorted this fact it was seized and Tabriz saw a minor revolt. Shariatmadari did not defend the revolt and acquiesced in the dissolution of the party, after which there were no more such dramatic movements. Nonetheless, most Azerbaijanis probably still prefer Shariatmadari (under virtual house arrest in Qom since 1980) to Khomeini and continue to want some sort of autonomy. Many are involved in radical antigovernment movements, whose chief strength (notably the minority faction of the Marxist Feda'iyān and the Islamic socialist Mujahedin) lies in the north, from Mazandaran through Gilan, Azerbaijan, and Kurdistan (where they help specifically Kurdish parties). Azerbaijan is a source of support for many Mujahedin militants.

Given a government willing to compromise and allow local rights as great as (though not necessarily identical to) those enjoyed by U.S. states or Canadian provinces, the Azerbaijan question in Iran should be soluble, since Azerbaijani ties to the Persians and to the center are great. Strict centralization and the prohibition of local printing, broadcasting, and political parties, however, can increase discontent. It should be added, though, that several twentieth century intellectuals of Azerbaijani origin, notably Ahmad

Kasravi and Hasan Taqizadeh, favored Persianization of Azerbaijan and all Iran. Moreover, since 1979 many pro-Khomeini mullahs from Azerbaijan hold top positions in Iran's ruling party and help govern Iran. Azerbaijanis, then, have held a wide variety of political views and positions.

## **Border Tribal Groups**

### *The Turkomans*

The smallest of the Sunni border tribal peoples, the Turkomans had a nineteenth-century reputation for raiding and enslavement of Shi'as (whom they saw as unbelievers and hence liable to be made slaves). It has been claimed that some Iranian Turkomans retained their nomadic life style largely for political reasons, since it put them in a position to retain considerable political autonomy.<sup>5</sup> They were already partly pacified before Reza Shah, but it was he who forced them, like other tribes, to settle and give up their arms. Living in good agricultural territory, a minority of them have grown rich since World War II through the mechanized cultivation of cotton. Not surprisingly, given their relative prosperity, they were not among the groups most hostile to Mohammad Reza Shah, and soon after the 1979 revolution, they began to show concern about economic issues and felt that Sunnis were being discriminated against by an increasingly Shi'ite state. From 1979 until today, several armed revolts by the Turkomans, often related to peasant attempts to take land, have been put down. It seems clear that many remain discontented with what they see as an uncompromisingly Shi'ite government, not to mention the political, economic, and cultural grievances they have against the new regime.

### *The Baluchis*

Living in southeastern Iran, as well as in Afghanistan and Pakistan, most Baluchis are, like most Turkomans, physically distinguishable from most Persians, from whom they are largely separated by desert. Although the Baluch language is related to Persian, the two are not mutually intelligible, and over the centuries there has not been much contact or intermixture. Some Baluchis feel closer to their fellow Sunni Baluchis in Pakistan and Afghanistan than to ethnic Persians. Like other border tribal groups, the Baluchis have in the past been largely a nomadic people, though some have by now settled.

Baluchistan, the poorest and most backward region of Iran (partly because of its great aridity, the southwest is generally Iran's poorest area) constitutes part of the province of Baluchistan-Sistan, the inhabitants of Sistan being mainly Shi'as. After the Islamic Revolution, Baluchis complained that they were being ruled by the Shi'a Sistan minority and began revolts that continue to this day. Some Baluchis were rather favorably disposed toward the late shah, partly because he brought some economic improvements to the area. But even in Mohammad Reza Shah's time, there were a few Baluch nationalist revolts and movements. As with the Kurds and Arabs, Baluch dreams of breaking off and forming a new state with their ethnic kin across the border do not seem feasible, unless there is to be a series of international wars and rebellions in the Middle East, for no country is willing to give up such a large chunk of territory without a bitter

fight. More feasible are the demands of the Baluchis and other ethnic minorities for local autonomy, including internal self-rule, teaching of their own language, and religious equality. In recent decades, Baluchistan has looked much like a colony of Tehran, from where nearly all its officials come, and this politico-economic control by the Tehran elite is one cause of local resentment.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Arabs*

The Arabs of Khuzistan are the least studied of the large ethnic minorities, in part because few scholars were able to study them (or the Kurds) and in part because the Arabs have become intermixed with the many ethnic Persians, Azerbaijanis, and non-Arab tribal peoples that have moved into Khuzistan since the discovery of oil there in 1908. Khuzistan is by far Iran's greatest oil-producing province, holds its largest refinery (Abadan), and hence is the province Iran would be least likely to put in danger of loss or secession without a great struggle. Consequently - and also because the urban Arab population is now so intermixed with non-Arabs, who are now in the majority in Khuzistan - the Arab issue is not entirely comparable with that concerning the Kurds, Turkomans, and Baluchis. There is no large Arab-majority region that could be put together as an autonomous region having a significant Arab urban center. Both before and after the 1979 revolution, there were some Arabs who demanded autonomy, but owing to demographic changes, demand may be unrealistic. More possible would be official recognition of the use of the Arabic language along with Persian, a greater place for local Arabs in government, and economic programs for the Arabs, many of whom live in exceptionally depressed conditions. Though many Arabs work in the oil industry, agribusiness, and elsewhere, most hold lower-paying jobs than non-Arabs.

Outside Iran, Arab propaganda maintains that before Reza Shah there existed an independent state of Arabistan, which was annexed by Reza Shah. In fact, Khuzistan (then called Arabistan) was always part of Qajar Iran, as can be determined from nineteenth-century maps and histories, or by the fact that the British, despite their support for Khuzistan Arab leaders, made their chief oil concession agreements covering "Arabistan" with the government of Iran. Before Reza Shah, the Arab tribes, like so many tribes far from Tehran, had considerable local autonomy, and their chief tie to the center was to pay taxes. Sheikh Khazal, the chief Arab tribal leader of the early twentieth century, got support from the British, who made subordinate oil agreements both with him and with Bakhtiari leaders in order to keep the oil areas trouble-free. In 1924, some Arab tribal leaders even had illusions of securing independence from the domain of Reza Khan, but he was able to move in troops to putdown a Khazal-led southern tribal independence movement, and the British gave the Arabs no aid. After this the ethnic mix of the region changed rapidly with the growth of the oil industry and, more recently, with related industrial and agricultural projects. Unlike Baluchistan and Kurdistan, Khuzistan is a rich province, but the Arabs have by no means shared proportionally in those riches.

Many writings state that the Arabs are Sunni, but the only bases for this assertion seem to be that most Arabs in the world are Sunni, that some Arabs in Khuzistan clearly are Sunni, and the Shi'a Arabs follow some customs that Persians associate with Sunnism. In the absence of scholarly work or census surveys, it is impossible to estimate the percentages of Shi'as and Sunnis among the Arabs, but the evidence suggests that the great majority of Iranian Arabs are Shi'ite. First, the Arabs border on a part of Iraq that is,

and has long been, almost entirely Shi'ite, and it would be surprising to find a Sunni pocket in such an area, especially since, second, they live in the Shi'ite state of Iran.

Arab autonomist sentiment has been encouraged by Arabs outside Iran, especially by Iraqis, but was effectively suppressed under Pahlavis. After the revolution of 1979, the Arabs, like many ethnic minorities, expected to be permitted more autonomy and, like the others, were disappointed. The new Iranian government allowed for locally elected councils, but neither in its laws nor its constitution would it set up ethnic regions or allow much use of local languages in education and official bodies. Arab protests occurred and sabotage of oil pipelines was blamed on Arab nationalists. Such events probably encouraged the Iraqi government to believe that Iran's Arabs would cross over en masse when they launched their invasion; but, in fact, Arab defection was slight. This suggests that Iranian Arab identification with Iran is greater than one might gather from some Arab nationalist statements. (The same is probably true of other ethnic minorities, whose leaders ask for autonomy, not independence.) It also suggests once more that Iran's Arabs are mostly Shi'as and do not relish incorporation into a Sunni-secular Iraqi state disliked by many of its own Shi'a subjects.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Kurds*

The largest and most important of Iran's partly tribal ethnic minorities are the Kurds, a group that has had the most significant conflict with the central government. Kurdish, like Baluchi, is an Iranian language related to Persian, and Mohammad Reza Shah sometimes tried to use this fact to stress Persian-Kurdish brotherhood, albeit without great success. The Kurds are said to constitute the largest contiguous ethnic group in the world (chiefly in eastern Turkey and Iraq and in western Iran) that has never had its own nation-state, although large parts of Kurdistan were autonomous under the Ottoman Empire. The Kurds are a more ancient people in their area than the Arabs or Turks; and this, together with the fact that they number in the many millions (about 10 million internationally- some say more) and predominate in a large territory, has given them a basis for a nationalist movement with varying goals that dates back to the late nineteenth century. In the first treaty dismembering the Ottoman Empire after World War I, Ottoman Kurds were given their own polity, but that treaty was so ruinous to Turkey that it had to be completely redrafted after a successful Turkish nationalist war led by Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk). The first treaty, however, undoubtedly encouraged a nationalist legacy among Kurds everywhere. Reza Shah dealt with Kurdish uprisings as severely as he did those among other tribal groups.

As in Azerbaijan, autonomy feelings came to the fore in World War II. Although neither the Soviets nor the British were in control of most of Kurdistan then, the Kurdish autonomist movement (centering in the town of Mahabad) got some Soviet aid in its buildup towards the declaration of an autonomous Kurdish Republic, which lasted through 1946. Even more than in Azerbaijan, the autonomist movement reflected local sentiment: it was headed by a popular leader, Qazi Mohammad; had a broad-based political party, the Komeleh (later called the Kurdish Democratic party); and got help from the strong Iraqi Kurdish Barzani tribe, led by Mulla Mustafa. Like the Azerbaijan movement, it was put down with great violence soon after Soviet troops left Iran.

By the 1970s, Mohammad Reza Shah felt confident of his control of Kurdistan, as of all Iran, and used Iranian Kurdistan as a conduit for arms and a place of refuge for

Iraqi Kurds, then fighting their own government for autonomy. The shah did this, with "secret" U.S. aid (partly managed by the CIA), in order to end Iraqi threats to Iran, chiefly Iraq's demand to control the Iranian side of the Shatt al-Arab river border. Iraqi Kurds, particularly conservative leaders like Mulla Mustafa Barzani, were mistaken in their belief that Iranian aid would continue after the shah achieved his own goal (which he did in the 1975 Treaty of Algiers). One of the last things the shah wanted was an autonomous Kurdish state on his border that might rekindle autonomist movements among Iranian Kurds. Some Kurds put their trust in U.S. aid, but were likewise disillusioned. The 1975 treaty caused thousands of Iraqi Kurds to take refuge in Iran and spelled the end of both Iranian and U.S. aid to Iraqi Kurds. The whole incident may have rekindled autonomist feelings in Iranian Kurdistan (a territory far larger than either the Mahabad Republic or the province called Kurdistan), but such feelings were probably strong in any case, particularly among non-Shi'a Kurds - their Sunni majority - and the Ahl-i Haqq minority. Some urban Shi'a Kurds identified more with the central government; indeed, urban Kurds have produced leaders of Iranian nationalist movements and parties.

Kurds, like Azerbaijanis, participated significantly in the 1979 revolution, and like them, hoped to achieve autonomist and democratic goals. Several political parties grew up in Kurdistan after the revolution, nearly all of them leftist to some degree. The most important is the Kurdistan Democratic party (KDP), led by a formerly exiled intellectual, Abdulrahman Qassemlu. Another important leader is the Sunni religious leader of Mahabad, Sheikh Ezzedin Husaini. Kurdish autonomy is also supported, both within and outside Kurdistan, by nationwide leftist and liberal groups who oppose the government - chiefly the Mujahedin, the Feda'iyen, the "Maoist" Peykar, and the former National Democratic Front of Hedayatollah Matin-Daftari - and by some liberal leaders. The Kurdish Komeleh party, to the left of the KDP, also fights for autonomy; the KDP and others explicitly support the rights of the many non-Kurds in the Kurdish-majority region.

In March 1979, a Kurdish delegation went to Qom to present the Kurds' demands to Ayatollah Khomeini, who said they were unacceptable. Small clashes began soon after, and the Kurds overwhelmingly boycotted the referendum for an Islamic Republic. Mediation attempts failed, despite the good will of a few mediators like Ayatollah Taleqani (d. September 1979), and in mid-August the army was ordered to attack the Kurdish towns, which were taken after a struggle, though resisters moved into the mountains and countryside. Under Kurdish and other pressures, the Iranian government, in December 1979, announced a program granting limited autonomy to minorities. For the first time, cultural and linguistic rights for minorities were recognized (though these were scarcely put into practice). No changes, however, were made in provincial borders, which are not ethnically relevant, and the Kurds remained scattered throughout several provinces of mixed population. This program was neither accepted by activist Kurds nor modified by the government, and the fighting continued sporadically during 1980 and 1981. Although the Iranian army and government control the main towns of Kurdistan, this is not true of much rural and mountain territory, where effective autonomy has been achieved for the present. It is widely believed that Iraq has aided Iran's Kurds since the Iraqi attack on Iran, making many Iranians suspicious of Kurds (as of Iran's Arabs). Iran's Kurds are unlikely to repeat the error of Iraqi Kurdish leaders by relying heavily on

aid from a country fundamentally hostile to true Kurdish autonomy. The Kurdish question in all countries is complicated by the fact that - even though Iran's Kurdish leaders since 1979 have insisted they want autonomy, not separation - some Kurdish leaders in the world, past and present, have advocated an independent Kurdish state. While no non-Khuzistani minority is likely to fight for separation so long as Iran has a huge oil income from Khuzistan (constituting most of the government's income), this incentive to unity will end after the oil runs out (perhaps early in the twenty-first century). Nonetheless, indications are that the majority of Iran's Kurds want autonomy, not separation, and that military suppression of Kurdish autonomists will not bring a long-term solution to Iran's Kurdish questions.<sup>8</sup>

### **Shi'a Tribes and Tribal Confederations**

There is space here to deal only with the larger groups and to make a few generalizations. Since 1978, as in Iran's most distant past, the weakening of the central government has meant a reassertion of virtual autonomy by many of Iran's tribes, accompanied today by some revival of nomadism, movement onto lands of settled people (some of which were taken from tribal peoples under the shah's land reform), and increased internal struggles within some tribes and confederations, notably the two major ones, the Qashqais and the Bakhtiariis.

#### *The Qashqais*

The Turkic-speaking Qashqais of Fars have long been involved in politics, including some pro-German (because anti-British) activities in both world wars and revolts against the government in the 1940s and 1950s, the latter after the overthrow of Mohammad Mossadeq, whom they supported. Mohammad Reza Shah then exiled their paramount chief, Naser Khan, and his brothers, and later certain state functions of other tribal khans were removed and the tribes put under gendarmerie control. In 1962 the murder of a land reform official in Fars province was used as a pretext to crack down on the whole confederation, and control measures became even more severe. The Qashqais were consequently hostile to the shah (as they had been to his father, who had decreed tribal sedentarization) and welcomed the 1979 revolution. They used the revolution to regain considerable autonomy and the use of some lands lost to non-Qashqais during the land reform, and Naser Khan returned from the United States to a tumultuous welcome. Internal struggles have surfaced, however, in part between young Qashqais (sometimes affiliated with the leftist-minority Fedayan) and the khans and their affiliates.<sup>9</sup> Like other tribal groups, the Qashqais are class-divided, the strata ranging from the rich to the propertyless, and their struggles reflect these divisions.

#### *The Bakhtiariis*

The Bakhtiariis, who speak a dialect of Luri, an Indo-European language, have also long been involved in politics, but in a different way. During the revolution of 1906-11 they were the only large tribal group to back the constitutionalists. (Many tribal soldiers were

used by Mohammad Ali Shah against the constitutionalists.) After Mohammad Ali Shah's coup d'etat against Parliament and the constitution, the Bakhtiari cooperated with urban guerilla forces from the north to overthrow him in 1909. A few Bakhtiari leaders were sincere constitutionalists, but most simply wanted to increase Bakhtiari power. In fact, after 1909 several Bakhtiari leaders entered the cabinet or received provincial governorships. The Bakhtiaris (and certain Kurdish tribes) are the only tribes with an urban elite that would produce leaders so heavily involved in Tehran politics under Pahlavi rule. The first head of the Savak secret police Taimur Bakhtiar, who turned against the shah and was then killed in a "hunting accident" in his Iraqi exile; Soraya Bakhtiar, Mohammad Reza Shah's second wife; and Shahpur Bakhtiar, long-time National Front activist and Mohammad Reza Shah's choice as the prime minister who might stem the revolutionary tide are all examples of this heavy political involvement. None was close to the tribal population in its homeland (chiefly in Isfahan province, just above the Qashqai territories). Much like the Qashqais, the Bakhtiaris since 1978 have experienced both greater autonomy, owing to central government weakness, and increased internal struggles.<sup>10</sup> Like other tribes, they have also experienced growing class division and urban migration.

Less is known about the recent activities of other large tribal groups: the Shahsevans of Azerbaijan - who, unlike the Qashqais, Bakhtiaris, and most other tribes, speak the same Turkish language as the surrounding settled population - or the non-Bakhtiari Lurs, chiefly to the west in Luristan. It seems likely, though, that the general trend toward greater autonomy owing to governmental weakness is also felt by these and other tribal groups. This autonomy does not necessarily make tribal peoples supporters of the current Iranian government - especially as most tribes have taken Islam rather lightly, have had few dealings with the mullahs, and have not segregated or veiled their women (indeed, the migratory tribal schools pioneered by the Qashqais were coeducational). To the extent that these tribal peoples are now forced to follow the government's interpretation of Islam, they feel restricted.<sup>11</sup>

## IRANIAN RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

### **Muslims or Near-Muslim Minorities**

The Sunnis, whose religion is well known (since it comprises the majority of the world's Muslims), are chiefly concentrated among the border ethnic peoples discussed above - all Turkomans and Baluchis, most Kurds, and some Arabs. There are also little-known pockets of Sunnism among ethnic Persians, attested to by eyewitnesses but not yet studied. Almost the same may be said of the Sevener Shi'as (Isma'ilis), all of whom were once widely thought to have left Iran for India in the 1840s after the failure of a revolt led by their hereditary leader, the Agha Khan. Recent scholars have found and begun to study the thousands of Isma'ilis who still exist in Iran. The Ahl-i Haqq, or Ali-Ilahis, a sect found chiefly among the Kurds and some Azerbaijanis, are known as deifiers of the first imam, Ali, although scholars have found that their religion deviates in other ways from Shi'a Islam and probably includes native Kurdish and Turkish elements. There are also

differences of view and affiliation among Shi'a Muslims that could result in severe factional struggles.<sup>12</sup>

## **Jews**

The Jewish community, which may once have numbered as many as 80,000 but is now much smaller, especially with the post-1948 emigration (mainly to Israel) and the post-1978 emigration (mainly to the West), goes back centuries before the Christian Era. In recent times it has been wholly urban, concentrated in Tehran, with Shiraz as its second center. Shi'ism, Iran's state religion since 1501, is generally said to have been more discriminatory toward Jews and other protected non-Muslims than Sunnism. Shi'a Islam emphasizes ritual purity: the touch of an unbeliever might be polluting, and Jews and other non-Muslims in Qajar times might have had to stay home on rainy days, since water could carry pollution. The protected minorities lived mostly in separate residential quarters, and meaningful social contact with Muslims, especially within the home, was usually out of the question. Food could not be shared since touch might be polluting. It is not likely that such restrictions were resented by minority communities of the past as strongly as they would be today: the notion that each religious community should stick largely to itself was (and in some cases still is) an accepted one in many societies, and within one's own community a rich social life was often possible. More damaging to the Jews and other non-Muslims were Iranian laws to the effect that if one member of a family converted to Islam, he received the entire family's property; occasionally there were also forcible conversions (often reversed later) of local communities to Islam. The Jews, moreover, were mainly an impoverished community in Qajar times, even though a few of them could make a good living at trades shunned by Muslims - namely money lending and silver- or goldsmithing. .

With some success, beginning in the last nineteenth and, especially, in the twentieth centuries, various Western Jewish organizations directly or indirectly pressured the government on behalf of the Jews and opened some modern schools. The Pahlavi dynasty - in line with its desire to modernize, encourage enterprise, break down community barriers in favor of an all-Iranian nationalism, and present a modern image - ended discriminatory laws against Jews and other minorities, closed down foreign and confessional schools to bring everyone under one national curriculum and language, and in some ways even encouraged minorities as a counterweight to overzealous Shi'as. Jews often prospered under the Pahlavis, with many of them becoming merchants and small businessmen, though thousands remained poor. Although many Jews emigrated to Israel, some came back and a majority chose not to go at all. Thousands of Jews, in fact, came to Iran from Baghdad. Jews were permitted to move out of their residential quarters, as were other minorities, and to some degree enter the Iranian mainstream. As in many countries, however, anti-Semitism did not die and was reinforced by the unpopularity, both among the Muslim masses and many secular intellectuals, of Shah Mohammad Reza's friendly policy toward Israel. After the 1979 revolution, a few leading Jews were executed, but many hundreds of times more Muslims have been executed. So this is not, as of 1981, as large a discriminatory point as it has sometimes been made to seem in the United States. More widespread were various less drastic expressions of anti-Semitism, which was fed to some degree by the belief, common not only in the Muslim world but in the Third

World and elsewhere, that Israel is an imperialist, anti-Muslim country and that Jews are likely to be actively pro-Israeli. Thousands of Jews with money were able to leave Iran during and after the revolution, but those who remain have less chance to leave and are understandably apprehensive.<sup>13</sup>

### **Christians**

Iran's Christians are divided into two major groups, the Armenians and the Nestorian Assyrians. Each has its own language. The Armenians were formerly concentrated in Azerbaijan, near Russian and Turkish Armenians, and in Isfahan, where the Safavid Shah Abbas imported Armenians who were traders or skilled in the crafts. They founded their own city of New Julfa and, more recently, have also moved to Tehran and other cities. While largely identified with the Persian constitutionalists in the 1905-11 revolution, Armenians have subsequently entered little into Persian politics. Some Persians suspect them of excessively close ties with Westerners and dislike their frequent prosperity, based largely on good education; in general, though, the Armenians have rarely been persecuted. As did other religious minorities, they preferred the secularist regime of the Pahlavis to the Islamic Republic, which has limited their freedoms, and many have left Iran since 1978. Their language is Indo-European but not close to Persian, although vocabulary influences exist in both directions. Until recently, they numbered over 100,000. Many work in the crafts and as traders, a few are agriculturalists in Azerbaijan, and their mastery of languages and good education also brings them into cosmopolitan businesses and professions.

The Nestorians, who speak Assyrian, the modern version of ancient Semitic Aramaic, used to be found almost entirely in the region of Urmieh, on Lake Urmieh, surrounded by Kurds and Azerbaijanis. In recent times many have moved to Tehran and elsewhere, but Urmieh is still heavily Christian. The community, the only compact Christian community in Iran, was the center of attention for Western missionaries from the early nineteenth century on. As a result, schools and hospitals were built, and some Nestorians were converted to Western varieties of Christianity. Less numerous and less prominent than the Armenians, the Nestorians are not important in business or politics and hence have aroused less prejudice than the former. Neither the Nestorians nor the Armenians have faced as many problems as the Jews or, especially, the Baha'is, since the revolution.<sup>14</sup>

### **Zoroastrians**

Iran's several thousand Zoroastrians, now greatly outnumbered by South Asian Zoroastrians (Parsis), who are descended from Iranian exiles, experienced a dramatic change of fortune in the twentieth century. Concentrated in the southern cities of Yazd and Kerman, they were a poor and often despised community until Indian Parsis began to aid them and, more important, until an Iranian nationalism began to develop in the late nineteenth century that prized pre-Islamic Iran and its religion above Islamic Iran. This trend influenced Reza Shah, who encouraged pre-Islamic studies and cultural themes and, by honoring Zoroastrianism, went beyond his generally tolerant religious policy. Unsurprisingly, most Zoroastrians remained poor under the Pahlavis, but some were able

to move out of their quarter and gain the education needed to become successful professionals, civil servants, and businessmen. Although the Islamic regime does not, of course, honor Zoroastrianism, there have been no reports of special persecution. Like the Nestorians, they are a small community and, having no great reputation for close relations with disliked Westerners, arouse little hostile feeling.<sup>15</sup>

### **Sabeans (Mandeans)**

Like Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians, the Sabeans are a protected People of the Book. According to some scholars, this community was not really one of those intended by the Quran when it named protected people, but it was later so regarded. (They might have been protected in any case, since the Zoroastrians are not named in the Quran but came to be protected both for practical reasons and because they were judged to be scriptural monotheists.) The Sabeans live in Khuzistan, near the Iraqi border, and are also found in Iraq. Like Armenians and Jews, they work in precious metals, work that is shunned by Muslims for religious reasons, and they are also agriculturalists. Syncretic and partly esoteric, their religion has been described in various ways. In Muslim lands they may say that they are Muslims (without trying to hide that they are Sabeans), and to Christians that they are Christian. Their religion has some Christian elements, and Westerners have sometimes dubbed them "Christians of Saint John the Baptist." The Iranian Sabeans are neither numerous nor politically important, and very little has been written about them or about their fortunes under various regimes.<sup>16</sup>

### **Baha'is**

Although they are the largest non-Muslim minority in Iran, numbering perhaps 250,000 or more, they are also the most troubled. Unlike the above communities they are not protected People of the Book. What is more serious, from the point of view of fundamentalist Muslims, they descend from a religious movement that broke from Islam, and conversion from Islam is prohibited in Muslim law. To add to their difficulties and present danger, the headquarters of their religion happens, by historical chance, to be located in the present-day Israel. Some Muslims therefore believe, especially if their leaders say so, that Baha'is are closely tied to Israel even though they have taken an officially neutral position in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Baha'is descend from the messianic Babi religion, which arose in the 1840s when a young Shirazi declared himself to be, first, the gate (*bab*) to the last imam and, later, the imam himself, returned as the messianic mahdi. He produced a new scripture and declared that mankind has a progressive series of prophets and scriptures, which will continue with a future prophet. The Babists led revolts and were persecuted, particularly after an attempted assassination of the Qajar shah, after which a number of them went to Iraq. There, one of two claimants to be the Bab's successor also claimed to be the predicted future prophet and wrote new scriptures that greatly changed Babism in an internationalist, pacifist, syncretic, and liberal direction. This was Baha'ism (named after its founder, Baha'ullah), and it won over most Babists. (Only a very small, secret remnant of the followers of the original Babi creed remains in Iran.)

Despite the fact that Baha'ism requires its followers to eschew political activity, Baha'is have often been politically suspect in Iran and have frequently been made scapegoats. Their failure to oppose the Qajar shahs in the constitutional revolution caused many to see them as the shahs' partisans. The Pahlavi shahs, even though they took anti-Baha'i measures, were believed by many to favor the Baha'is. In Muslim countries, people are regarded as belonging to the religious community of their parents or grandparents unless they have publicly converted to another religion (this is also true in Western countries for religious minorities, such as Jews and Muslims), and thus persons in the Pahlavi government whose backgrounds were Baha'i, or part Baha'i, were often considered Baha'is. Such persons included Amir Abbas Hoveyda, prime minister for twelve years, and a few other government figures. They were also dubious accusations about some persons in Savak, though there is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of Savakis were born Shi'as, and accusations against the Baha'is were mainly false pretexts for persecution.

The Baha'is have never been a recognized religion in any country that calls itself Muslim, since their recognition would go counter to strict Islamic law and sentiment. Nonrecognition does not automatically mean persecution, however, and for most of the twentieth century in most Muslim countries, including Iran, Baha'is have been treated little worse than other religious minorities. Yet, many ulama in Iran have disliked this fact, and in 1955 they pressured the shah into destroying the Baha'i temple in Tehran and carrying out other persecutions. Later, though, the shah halted persecutions and seems to have favored somewhat a few persons of Baha'i and other minority background, possibly since they were more likely to be beholden to him than Shi'a Muslims. The governmental and economic power of minorities was greatly exaggerated by their opponents. Like some other religious minorities, Baha'is tended to be well educated, and those who had good educations were in a position to get good jobs, some of which brought them into contact with Westerners.

Given the fact that the Jews and Christians have not suffered nearly as much persecution as recently experienced by the Baha'is, it appears that it is chiefly the Baha'is lack of legitimate religious status under strict Muslim law that has rendered them vulnerable. Relatively few Baha'is have been able to leave Iran, and most remain there in fear. Among officials and other executed after the revolution, persons of reputed Baha'i background were disproportionately numerous; and in 1981 the visible leaders of the Baha'i community were executed, and Baha'i children were turned away from school unless they converted to Islam. One charge against executed Baha'i leaders was that they were "Israeli agents," although few Jewish leaders were killed under this charge. Some fear a forcible attempt to obliterate Baha'ism in Iran, and the community understandably feels very threatened.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR NEW POLICIES

Some may conclude that for minorities, the Islamic Republic has in every way been worse than the Pahlavis. This may be true for several religious minorities, toward which an extreme fundamentalist stance has often been taken, but for the ethnic minorities the picture is more mixed. Many tribes have greater autonomy and freedom to carry out

migratory pastoral nomadism than they did under the Pahlavis. Toward ethnic autonomy, the Pahlavis did not offer even the partial concessions proposed by the Islamic Republic (some written into its constitution) but insisted on appointing officials from Tehran and on strict monolingualism. Armed resistance movements by the Kurds, Baluchis, Turkomans, and some Arabs under the Islamic Republic do not mean that they are treated worse now than under the Pahlavis, but rather that they did not achieve everything they expected from the revolution and that they face a weaker government, against which they can revolt with some hope of victory. Persian Shi'a Muslims have suffered far more jailings and executions since the revolution than any other combination of groups, mostly on political or moral charges. Those in charge of the regime seem to feel that they are in possession of God's truth and that any political or religious deviation from their view is culpable. They also feel their own weakness, especially as compared to the Pahlavis, and hence are increasingly moved to try to suppress opposition and deviation by violent means. The Pahlavis were convinced enough of their strength and stability that Mohammad Reza executed hundreds, rather than thousands, on political grounds. Like the Islamic Republicans, however, the Pahlavis did take strict measures to enforce their own dictatorial view of conformity: Reza Shah's tribal policy caused many deaths, and neither he nor his son allowed opposition parties or organizations to exist. The solution to problems of persecution and national minorities, then, is not to be found in a return to the past, but in the adoption of new policies.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> A masterful discussion of the development of modern class relations among Iraq's ethnic and religious groups is to be found in Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communist Bathists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978). Batatu includes an ethnic map of Iraq (p. 38) and an ethnic table, based on 1947 estimates (p. 40).
- <sup>2</sup> Those interested in the Iraqi minorities problem should consult Batatu, *Old Social Classes* and Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1981).
- <sup>3</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, in his *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), using data for 1956, provides an elaborate table that includes figures for religious minorities: Assyrians, 20,000; Armenians, 190,000; Jews, 60,000; Zoroastrians, 16,000; and Baha'i's, 192,000. Richard V. Weekes, ed., *Muslim Peoples* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), offers figures (pp. 510-11) that, while they overstate native Persian speakers and understate the Azerbaijani and Kurdish minorities, seem more realistic for the smaller tribal groups: Qashqais, 408,000; Turkomans, 313,000; Shahsevans, 306,000; Karkalpaks, 21,000; Baluchis, 1.5 million; Arabs, 614,000; Bakhtiaris, 571,000; Lurs, 459,000; and Bassaris, 21,000. Weekes, whose book includes several useful entries on many of the Iranian and Iraqi minorities discussed in this chapter, estimates the "undetermined" Hazaras, Tajiks, Qizilbashs, and Gypsies as totaling 1,813,000 persons.
- <sup>4</sup> See Ervand Abrahamian, "Communism and Communalism in Iran: The Tudah and the Firqah Dimokrat," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (October 1970): 291-316; S. Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); William O. Douglas, *Strange Lands and Friendly People* (New York: Harper, 1951).
- <sup>5</sup> William Irons, "Nomadism as a Political Adaptation: The Case of the Yomut Turkmen," *American Ethnologist* 1 (1974): 635-58.
- <sup>6</sup> Personal observation and investigations: several articles by P. Salzman on the Baluchis, including "Continuity and Change in Baluchi Tribal Leadership," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (October 1973): 428-39, and several articles by B. Spooner on the Baluchis.
- <sup>7</sup> My recent information comes mainly from personal informants and wide reading of newspapers and journals. Prerevolutionary minority group opposition, including that of the Arabs, is discussed in Fred Halliday, *Iran:*

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*Dictatorship and Development* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1979), chap. 8.

<sup>8</sup> On the Kurds in Iran, Iraq, and elsewhere, see G. Chaliand, ed., *People without a Country* (London: Zed Press, 1979); and M. van Bruinessen, *Agha. Sheikh and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan* (Utrecht: n.p., 1978). Also see W. Eagleton, Jr., *The Kurdish Republic of 1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>9</sup> Personal information from Qashqai informants. On the Qashqais, see especially the writings of Lois Beck, including "Tribe and State in Revolutionary Iran: The Return of the Qashqai Khans," in *Iranian Revolution in Perspective: Iranian Studies*, ed. F. Kazemi, 13 (1980); "Economic Transformations among Qashqai Nomads 1962-1978," in *Modern Iran: The Dialectics of Continuity and Change*, eds. M. Bonine and N. Keddie (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981); "Women among Qashqai Nomadic Pastoralists in Iran," in *Women in the Muslim Worlds*, eds. L. Beck and N. Keddie (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); and Lois Beck (with N. Keddie), *The Qashqai People of Iran* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, UCLA, 1981). Also see P. Oberling, *The Qashqai Nomads of Fars* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974) and anon., *The Qashqai of Iran* (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 1976). On several tribes, see R. Tapper, ed., *The conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (1983).

<sup>10</sup> Oral information from J. P. Digard and G. Garthwaite. On the Bakhtiariis, see the relevant articles by Garthwaite and his *Khans and Shahs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 1983). Digard has written several articles in French on the Bakhtiariis and has done a book on their technology.

<sup>11</sup> On the general problems and position of ethnic minorities before and after the revolution, see N. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981); L. Helfgott, "The Structural Foundations of the National Minority Problem in Revolutionary Iran," in *Iranian Revolution in Perspective*, ed. Kazemi; idem, "Tribalism as a Socioeconomic Formation in Iranian History," *Iranian Studies* 10 (Winter-Spring 1977): 36-61; and R. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, rev. ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Most Iranian towns have been traditionally divided into hostile factions of religious origin, notably the Nimatis and Haidaris, who have engaged in periodic battles. In addition, followers of different mujtahids or ayatollahs have sometimes been hostile toward one another, and this has continued until today. The Isma'ilis and the Ahl-i Haqq have both been discussed in numerous books and articles by W. Ivanow, V. Minorsky, and others; the medieval Isma'ilis, or "Assassins," are studied in M. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* (The Hague:

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- Mouton, 1955) and B. Lewis, *The Assassins* (New York: Basic Books, 1968). Rafiq Keshavee has recently completed his Harvard University dissertation on one group of Isma'ilis in contemporary Iran.
- <sup>13</sup> Besides periodical and newspaper sources, see Laurence D. Loeb, "The Religious Dimension of Modernization among the Jews of Shiraz," in *Modern Iran*, eds. Bonine and Keddie; idem, *Outcaste: Jewish Life in Southern Iran* (London: Gordon & Breach, 1977); and the sources he cites.
- <sup>14</sup> John Joseph, *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors: A Study of Western Influence on Their Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960); Eden Naby, "The Assyrians of Iran: Reunification of a 'Millat,' 1906-1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 8 (April 1977): 237-49; I. P. Y. Ter-Yovhaneanc, "The Armenians, 1850s," in *The Economic History of Iran, 1800-1914*, ed. C. Issawi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 59-62. There is a large body of missionary and travel literature dealing with Iran's Christians.
- <sup>15</sup> Michael M. J. Fischer, "Zoroastrian Iran between Myth and Praxis" (Ph.D dissertation, University of Chicago, 1973); Mary Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); Paul Ward English, "Nationalism, Secularism and the Zoroastrians of Kirman," in *Cultural Geography: Selected Readings*, eds. F. Dohrs and L. Sommers (New York: Crowell, 1967). There is also a large body of missionary and travel literature on the Armenians and Assyrians.
- <sup>16</sup> See Lady Esther S. S. Drower, *The Mandaean of Iraq and Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1962).
- <sup>17</sup> On the Babis and Baha'is, see especially E. G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918); Shoghi Effendi, trans. and ed., *The Dawn Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Baha'i Revelation* (New York: Baha'i Publishing, 1932); N. R. Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism," in *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society*, ed. N. R. Keddie (London: Cass, 1980); and William M. Miller, *The Baha'i Faith: Its History and Teachings* (South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1974).