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Next 11 Page(s) In Document Denied

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

8 December 1978

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

IRAN: THE TUDEH PARTY AND THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT



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Key Points

--The Tudeh Party, Iran's pro-Soviet Communist party, is deeply rooted and in the past has shown an ability to exploit grievances to achieve very rapid growth.



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--The leaders of the Iranian Communists are in exile in East Europe, but could return to Iran in a matter of days if the situation permitted.



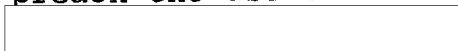
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--Since the Tudeh Party was suppressed nearly 30 years ago, it has actively recruited students in Europe. It has also stressed the development of an efficient and disciplined organization within Iran.



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--The Tudeh Party has followed pragmatic policies. It has for years emphasized cooperation with other opposition groups and, in contrast to Maoist offshoots, does not preach the use of violence against the government.



*This memorandum was prepared by the Iran Analytical Center of the Office of Regional and Political Analysis. Questions and comments may be addressed to*

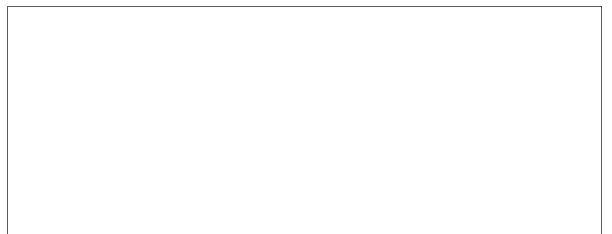


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25X1 --We believe that an underground organization exists within Iran, but because of the small amount of evidence available we are unable to estimate the current size of the party. [redacted]

--A few Tudeh Party organizers apparently surfaced during antigovernment demonstrations, but they do not appear to have been the leading force in fomenting disturbances. It is extremely difficult to distinguish Tudeh activists from members of other groups that use Marxist jargon. [redacted] 25X1

--Since early September Communist leader Iraj Eskandari has applauded the Shah's secular and religious opponents and reiterated the Communists' willingness to participate in a united front. [redacted] 25X1

25X1 --If the government collapses or restrictions on political activities are lifted, the Communists could make rapid gains because of their discipline and sense of purpose. [redacted]

#### Party Roots

Communism in Iran dates from 1917, when Iranian workers returning from the Caucasus oil fields--with encouragement from Soviet agents--formed the Justice Party, which in 1921 became the Communist Party of Iran. In 1920-21, Communist groups supported by Soviet troops tried unsuccessfully to form a separatist republic in northern Iran. Communists in the urban areas in the late 1920s, however, had considerable success in organizing workers. The party was outlawed in 1931 after the government discovered that the Communists were responsible for the oil workers' strike of 1929. [redacted] 25X1

25X1 During the 1930s, Communist covert activity focused on propaganda and recruiting among intellectuals, including students returning from Europe. The arrest and imprisonment of 53 ringleaders--known as the Erani Circle--ended this phase of activity in 1937. [redacted]

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25X1 The members of the Erani Circle were released in 1941 after the abdication of Reza Shah and the occupation of Iran by Soviet and British troops. They immediately formed another party organization named the Tudeh (Masses) Party. With Soviet troops occupying the northern part of the country and allied troops elsewhere, the Communists quickly built a nationwide organization. [redacted]

The Communists skillfully exploited grievances resulting from the modernization program of Reza Shah. The middle and working classes had expanded considerably, but had been given little opportunity to participate in politics. This coupled with the abrupt removal of restrictions on political activities, allowed the Communists to make rapid progress in the cities. Numerous front organizations were formed to work among the various groups and minorities. In 1944 eight Tudeh members were elected to parliament, and for three months in 1946 the Cabinet included three Tudeh members. [redacted] 25X1

25X1 In 1945-1946, Communist party organizers, with the support of Soviet troops, organized two autonomous republics in Azerbaijan. These puppet republics collapsed after the Soviets withdrew in May 1946. An attempt to assassinate the Shah in 1949 led to the proscription of the party throughout Iran, but the government failed to root out the Tudeh organization. [redacted]

25X1 Although still nominally outlawed, the party re-emerged between 1951 and 1953 when Mohammed Mossadeq was Prime Minister and, by using xenophobic slogans, again gained followers. The Tudeh appeal was greatest among the university students and civil servants. In addition to indoctrinated members, Tudeh gained a large number of sympathizers. The party successfully penetrated professional and trade union groups and also much of the civil service and the military. [redacted]

In supporting Mossadeq it played a key role in inciting mob violence on the streets of Tehran. The Shah's triumph

25X1 over Mossadeq in 1953 was followed by another suppression of the Communists. Over 1,000 party members and supporters were arrested, and most party leaders fled to East Europe. The party was dealt a crushing and near fatal blow when Iranian security forces broke up the Communist apparatus within the military. Some 500 pro-Communist army officers were arrested. [redacted]

The Party in Exile

Since then, the leadership of the Tudeh Party has been centered in [redacted] where it has been attempting to:

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--Refine its organizational structure.

--Keep activity alive in Iran through radio, press propaganda, [redacted]

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--Communicate with party members within Iran. [redacted]

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The expatriate organization is estimated to consist of about 400 individuals, including the senior leadership and their families. The Central Committee convenes in Moscow; the Executive Committee and Secretariat are based in East Germany. [redacted] the party has had cells in both Eastern and Western Europe. [redacted]

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25X1 Expatriate leaders receive stipends from local Communist parties. Other members support themselves by working for international front organizations or by teaching in Eastern Europe. [redacted]

For years the party used a transmitter in East Germany to broadcast party statements, commentaries, and summaries. The station was moved to Bulgaria in late 1965 and closed altogether in late 1976 after the Shah had protested to the Soviets. The Iranian Communists may now have access to the National Voice of Iran, which broadcasts from Baku in the Soviet Union, and to the Radio of the Patriots, which is

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25X1 based in Libya. Both stations broadcast anti-Shah rhetoric, but neither specifically mentions the Tudeh Party or any other organization. [redacted]

### Recruiting Students

The Communists, like most other opposition groups, have worked hard for years to recruit students studying abroad. The Confederation of Iranian Students, the major anti-government organization abroad, apparently contains a pro-Tudeh faction. This faction--as does the Tudeh Party as a whole--stresses evolutionary change in contrast to some New Left and Maoist student groups which vociferously proclaim their dedication to revolutionary violence. We have no information on the relative size of the various factions or on the activities of the student revolutionaries who return to Iran. [redacted]

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### Party Leadership

The Tudeh Party leaders are not young; several members of the current leadership were members of the Erani Circle imprisoned in 1937. Most of the leaders are Persians from respected aristocratic families; only a few have working-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds. [redacted]

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25X1 Tudeh Party First Secretary Iraj Eskandari is a member of the Qajar royal house that ruled Iran until it was overthrown by Reza Shah in 1921. A lawyer educated in France, Eskandari has been involved in Communist activities since at least 1925 and was a founding member of the Tudeh Party. He was for three months in 1946 Iran's Minister of Commerce. Since 1947 he has lived in Europe, first in Paris and later in East European capitals. [redacted]

The party's number-two man and likely successor to Eskandari is Second Secretary Nur-ed-Din Kianuri. Born in 1921, Kianuri is one of the youngest members of the Tudeh leadership. He is occasionally mentioned in party propaganda and accompanies Eskandari on trips abroad. Before he fled from Iran in 1956, he was regarded as the party's leading intellectual and wrote many of its policy statements. [redacted]

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The Tudeh leadership has had some substantial problems with factionalism. A deep rift developed in the 1960s between pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese factions. Two Central Committee members were expelled in 1966 for espousing Peking's line, and in 1972 the party's then First Secretary, Reza Radmanesh, reportedly lost his job for espousing "adventurist" policies.

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Pragmatic Party Policies

The Tudeh Party has been notably pragmatic in its policies. Aware of its limited strength and its need to cooperate with other radicals and nationalists, for years it has espoused a united front policy. Even at the peak of its power in 1953, the party did not seek to compete by itself, but called for a voice in a democratic front. The Communist content of its platform has therefore not been emphasized. [redacted]

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As part of its effort to gain broad popular support, the Tudeh Party has consistently been careful not to criticize religion or religious leaders. The party is not known to have recruited heavily among the Shiite hierarchy, although a few opportunistic members of the clergy were active in front organizations during the early 1950s. [redacted]

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An authoritative statement of Tudeh Party policies issued following the 15th Plenum of the Central Committee in 1975 emphasized the party's willingness and determination to join with other groups in opposition to the Shah. Only the "Maoists" were attacked. The statement reiterated the party's standard criticisms of the Iranian government and of the US, but it did not call for any immediate revolutionary effort against the Shah. Instead, it stressed the building of party cells within the country for use at the right moment. [redacted]

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A cornerstone of party policy has been the maintenance of close ties with Moscow. Tudeh has always depended on Soviet support and has faithfully followed Moscow's line even

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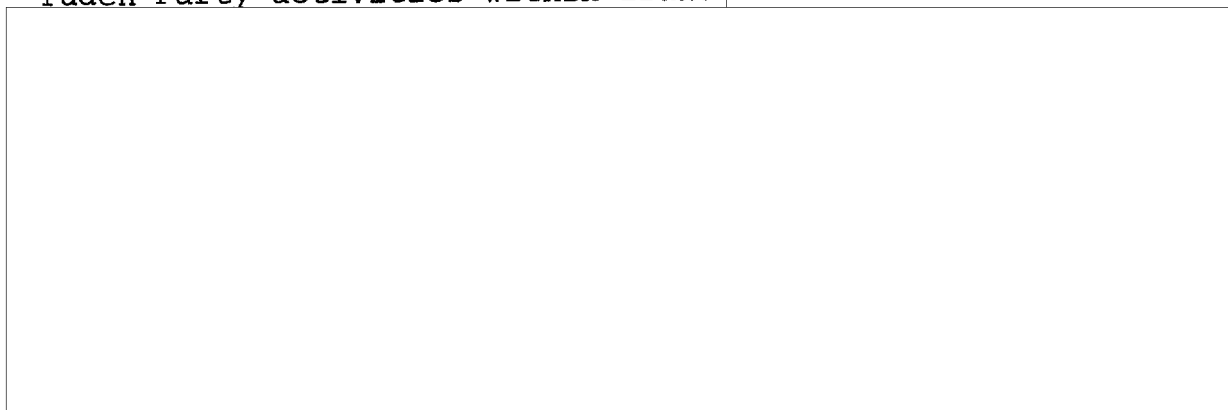
to the extent of toning down its opposition to the Shah when the USSR was trying to improve relations with Iran. [redacted]

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The Party Within Iran

Little reliable information is available on recent Tudeh Party activities within Iran. [redacted]

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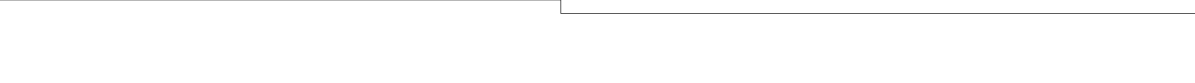
It is certainly possible that the Communists have succeeded in attaining their often-stated goals of rebuilding an effective underground organization and infiltrating the government and workers' organizations. The years of recruiting among disaffected students abroad could have borne fruit. Although most of the Tudeh Party infiltrators were arrested or recanted years ago, there could still be some party supporters within the civil service. [redacted]

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The US Embassy believes that Abdol Ali Partovi-Alavi, an ex-university professor and chief of a Tudeh Party front organization, heads the underground in Tehran. Little is known about Partovi-Alavi's activities, although he apparently is in contact with leftists on university campuses in other parts of the country. [redacted]

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The party does not necessarily want numerous members and an extensive organization that would be vulnerable to SAVAK penetration. Party doctrine instead calls for the

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formation of an elite party consisting of well-tested cadre trained in clandestine activities and capable of exploiting opportunities. The experiences gained during World War II and during the Mossadeq era showed that a few party members can quickly organize large numbers of the discontented to support a challenge to the government. [redacted]

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### The Other Marxists

The Tudeh Party is not the only organization in Iran that uses Marxist jargon; the left includes several other highly dedicated and well-organized clandestine groups. These groups compete with the Tudeh Party for support from disaffected students and other intellectuals. Members of these groups have received training and other support from the Palestinians, Libya, and possibly others. None is recognized by Moscow and Peking as an official Communist party. [redacted]

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From the limited information available it does not appear that any one of them has ties with the Tudeh Party. [redacted]

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At the far left of the political spectrum is the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party, the Maoist offshoot of the official party which was formed in the late 1960s. This group--and possibly other Maoist organizations--is active among students in Europe and probably also in Iran. It views the official party as too conservative and does not eschew the use of revolutionary violence. [redacted]

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The Peoples' Sacrifice Guerrillas, one of the two principal terrorist organizations in Iran, espouses a vague philosophy labeled Islamic Marxism. It features a good deal of Marxist terminology, but stresses its commitment to traditional Islamic religious principles. The other terrorist group, the Peoples' Strugglers, is an ultra-conservative organization. We have no information that the Tudeh is in contact with either terrorist group. [redacted]

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The Tudeh Party and the Disturbances

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On 1 November, however, some Tudeh Party members did openly demonstrate for the first time in 15 years on the campus of the University of Tehran, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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First Secretary Eskandari has applauded from exile the current efforts against the Shah and has called for a united front against the government. In interviews carried in the French Communist paper L'Humanite, he has stressed that his party respects Shia Islam and has praised Khomeini and other clergymen for their efforts against the Shah. Eskandari has called for the formation of a democratic government and end of restrictions on political activities to include the return of exiles. [REDACTED]

Eskandari has made no claim that his party is in any way involved in the current activities. In fact, he has seemed a bit defensive by noting that his party has long suffered under government persecution. The Party doubtless would prefer the formation of some sort of National Front government that would allow the Tudeh to compete openly and re-establish a network of front organizations. [REDACTED]

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We have no evidence that the Tudeh Party now has sufficient assets to launch a coup of its own. If, however, the government and military begin to crumble and anarchy results, the Communists can be expected to redouble their efforts to infiltrate all sectors of the government while at the same time seeking to develop mass support. Twice before they have made very rapid progress when given the opportunity, and they could do so again. [REDACTED]

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