

The Nation and Its Minorities: Ethnicity, Unity and State

Policy in Iran

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The Iranian constitution has specific provisions guaranteeing equal rights to minorities. They have the right to their specific religious practices, as well as the right to use their languages in the mass media and in education. The constitution also grants the minorities a modicum of legal and administrative autonomy in regions where they are the majority. These constitutional provisions have little meaning in reality, and the state is pursuing policies of religious, linguistic, and cultural unity at the expense of minority rights.

A comprehensive analysis involving participants from the National Intelligence Council in the United States, non-governmental institutions, academia, and the private sector, predicts that internal conflicts stemming from ethnic or religious disputes might increase in the next fifteen years.¹ "Responding to emerging and dynamic religious and ethnic groups," according to the analysis, will be an important challenge for states between now and 2015.

Iran is clearly one of the countries that must come to terms with ethnic diversity if its territorial integrity or, at least, its political stability is to remain unthreatened. The Islamic Republic's population of roughly 65 million people consists of many religious and ethno-linguistic groups. The largest ethnic group is Persian, which makes up 51 percent of the population. This is fol-

lowed by Azeris at 24 percent, Gilakis and Mazandarans at eight percent, Kurds at seven percent, and Arabs at three percent. The Baluchi and Turkmen minorities make up two percent of the population each. There are some 96 independent tribes scattered throughout the country.²

After years of difficulties encountered under the monarchy, ranging from forced relocation to co-optation to extortion at the hands of government agents, some of these minorities welcomed the 1978-79 Islamic revolution and what they hoped would be greater autonomy. What they encountered instead was a system that frowned on anything distinctive to an ethnic minority — be it language, religion, culture, or even territorial identification. Minority demands were ignored out of concern that the state would disintegrate and also because the revolutionaries believed that the purpose of the revolution was to create an Islamic state with a Shia leadership. In some cases, the state crushed the resulting ethnic insurgencies.

Currently, the state downplays factors that are distinctive to minority groups, and instead emphasizes the preservation of "unity." In the words of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the highest-ranking political and religious figure in Iran, "The noble nation gives priority to unity over factors which might divide it."³ In line with its

concept of unity, the state promotes the image that there are no ethnic problems in Iran and all minorities see themselves as part of the Iranian nation-state first and foremost.

Nevertheless, ethnic groups in Iran militate for the right to use and study their different languages and practice minority religions. As recently as May 2001, writers, intellectuals, and parliamentarians wrote a letter to President Mohammad Khatami in which they criticized insufficient funding for cultural activities in ethnic communities and inattention to ethnic rights. The letter's signatories also appealed for protection for the country's ethnic languages and called for an end to discrimination.⁴

Tehran is clearly sensitive to any possible separatist tendencies and the possible exploitation thereof. The Minister of Intelligence and Security issued a warning about the "enemy's deceitful use of ethnicity as a tool in conspiracy."⁵ When different minorities do make occasional demands for greater national rights, they are usually ignored. This led a Tehran daily to warn that "the specific lack of attention paid to the civil demands of ethnic groups has also led to their grievances and many frustrations."⁶

The Iranian government already faces a restive population, as was demonstrated when there were a number of soccer riots in October 2001. In one case, the authorities arrested over 1,000 people after Iran lost a World Cup qualifying match. The destruction caused by the rioters might have been sufficient reason for arresting them, but what really frightened the government was the rioters' anti-government slogans and their calls for the return of the exiled crown prince, Reza Pahlavi. A government official later said that the arrestees could face imprisonment, a fine, or a flogging, and those under 18 who are found guilty would be sent to reform and education centers, where "they are helped and guided by psychologists and welfare specialists."⁷

Nor were these October 2001 riots isolated incidents. There were soccer riots in December 2000, also. Provincial demonstrations about inadequate public services are a frequent occurrence, as are demonstrations by workers who have been laid off or who have not been paid for several months. Student demonstrations are a fairly regular occurrence, too. Often these events focus on universities' mismanagement, dilapidated facilities, high fees, and incompetent instructors. In late August 2000, student-related demonstrations took a more serious turn, when a meeting of the main reformist student organization, the Office for Strengthening Unity (*Daftar-i Tahkim-i Vahdat*), turned into approximately one week of violent clashes between civilians, security forces, and vigilantes. A policeman was killed, and parliament and the judiciary launched an investigation into the affair.

Relying mainly on Iranian print media because the Iranian government makes field work on this subject so difficult, this paper will discuss state policy towards the ethnic minorities through an examination of recent events concerning the Kurds, the Baluchis, the Turkmen, and the Azerbaijanis.⁸ What this research indicates is that Tehran gives lip-service to practical recognition of minority rights. In reality, Iranian state policies now advocate unity, encourage acculturation to a common culture, and promote assimilation.⁹ The state, Persian nationalism, and Shia Islam are supposed to be the unifying factors, and this unity is imposed through force when necessary. Mounting ethnic grievances in Iran, when combined with unemployment rates estimated to exceed 25 percent and an increasingly young and frustrated population chafing under a lack of political and civil liberties, could erupt into civil unrest in the near future.

A HISTORY OF ETHNIC TENSIONS

Tension between the Iranian state and the country's ethnic minorities is not peculiar to the current era. Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925-41) emphasized Iranian

nationalism and was hostile towards the country's Arabs, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkmen, and Turkic speakers because he saw ethnic and cultural pluralism as a threat to the state. "Such groups were therefore exposed to ruthless coercion to force them to enter the mainstream of Iranian society, accompanied by systematic attacks upon their cultural identities."¹⁰ Their leaders often died under mysterious circumstances in Tehran.¹¹

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi succeeded his father in 1941, and he had to deal with an Azerbaijani secessionist movement immediately after World War II.¹² He also sought to settle the tribes, which in some cases were being stirred up by foreign agents. A 1953 rebellion of the Bakhtiari tribe was suppressed only with the use of military aircraft.¹³ That same year, the Qashqai tribes marched on Shiraz.¹⁴ During the 1970s, Tehran helped suppress a Baluchi insurgency in Pakistan because it feared that the conflict would spread into Iran. The Baluchis were backed by Iraq, which opened an office for the Baluchistan Liberation Front in Baghdad.¹⁵

The Kurds tried to secede immediately after World War II, with an unsuccessful attempt to create a Kurdish Republic of Mahabad.¹⁶ The army campaigned against the Kurdish Javanrudi tribe, which had been practicing virtual autonomy in the remote mountains of western Iran, in 1956. Later, the state played the Kurds against each other to preclude their exploitation by the Soviet Union or Iraq.¹⁷ After 1963, Iran and Israel encouraged the Kurds to fight the Iraqis, thus keeping the Iraqi military concentrated in the north to preclude its commitment to the Arab wars against Israel, and also to collect intelligence about it. Eventually, Iran supplied the Kurdish combatants and the Iranian Army provided artillery support for them. The Shah abruptly ended aid to the Kurds in 1975, after he and Iraq's Saddam Hussein signed the Algiers Accords.

Yet these were the more eye-catching events. The ethnic minorities' more mundane concerns dealt with use of their languages in education and publishing, property rights, freedom of movement, and government resettlement plans. The monarchy's policies favored centralization, and its policy of industrialization led to urban migration. The migrants came to realize how undeveloped the outlying provinces really were.

Under these circumstances, most of the ethnic minorities welcomed the 1979 Islamic revolution and what they hoped would be greater autonomy and self-management. Yet several parties that represented ethnic minorities boycotted the spring 1979 election of the Assembly of Experts that would draft the first constitution because they saw it as a rigged event.¹⁸ Minority rights became an issue in the debates about the new constitution. A Kurdish leader said that the constitution should give the ethnic minorities autonomous administrative, cultural, economic, provincial, and security institutions, and he called for a redrawing of provincial frontiers so Kurdistan would be larger.¹⁹ A Baluchi party demanded the right to revise any laws that did not meet local requirements before applying them.²⁰

The constitution's eventual failure to account for ethnic minorities' demands caused disgruntlement, but around this time there was ethnic unrest in southwestern Khuzestan Province, north-eastern Gorgan Province, and south-eastern Baluchistan, which only underlined the perceived need for strong central authority. Moreover, Iranian leftists who opposed the clerical regime encouraged Kurdish, Baluchi, and Turkmen autonomy movements that sometimes were put down forcefully. The leftists may have been rhetorically committed to such popular ethnic movements, but support for them probably had more to do with opposition to the clerics and the pursuit of political power.

SUNNI MINORITIES

The Islamic Republic's 1979 constitution, and the amended version that was adopted ten years later, discusses some aspects of minority rights.²¹ Article 19 states that "all people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights." Article 15 permits the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, although the official language is Persian. Article 12 of the constitution recognizes Islam and the Twelver Jaafari school as Iran's official religion.²² Shia Muslims make up 89 percent of the population.

Sunni Islam is practiced by 10 percent of the Iranian population, and most Baluchis, Turkmen, and Kurds are Sunnis. "Other Islamic schools are to be accorded full respect," according to the constitution, and in regions where they make up the majority, local regulations should be in accordance with the respective schools of Islam.

This is not the reality, however. There is *de facto* discrimination against Sunni Muslims. Sunni mosques in Mashhad, Salmas, and Shahinzadeh were destroyed, and those in Shiraz, Orumieh, Sanadaj, Saqqez, and Miyandoab were closed.²³ Tehran still does not have a Sunni mosque. The state exerts tighter control over Sunni seminaries than it does over Shia ones. State broadcasting does not transmit the Sunni call to prayer, which differs slightly from the Shia one. There are no allowances for Sunni representation in the parliament, although seats are reserved for Jewish, Zoroastrian, Assyrian, and Armenian representatives.²⁴ Shia Muslims dominate most government posts and parliamentary seats.

The reason for this situation is fairly straightforward: the ruling Shia elite recognize that these Sunni minorities have less in common with the government in Tehran than they do with their co-ethnics across the borders in Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan. If their sense of identity was strength-

ened by, for example, participating in mass religious activities, or if they had independent leadership figures, such as Sunni prayer leaders, they might demand greater local autonomy and act against the state. Moreover, greater fluency in minority languages could facilitate communication with co-ethnics in the neighboring countries. This could result in cross-border political movements, which in turn could militate for the redrawing of state boundaries.

THE KURDS

West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Ilam, and Kermanshah Provinces are heavily populated by Kurds, about 75 percent of whom are Sunni. Also, Kurdish refugees from Iraq settled in the area, and members of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) reportedly settled in the area after fleeing from Turkey and Syria in early 1999. There are many Kurds living immediately across the borders, too. The areas in Iran inhabited by the Kurds tend to be underdeveloped and have high unemployment. According to the 1999 *Human Development Report of Iran*, these provinces are in the lower half of the provincial scale of the human development index.²⁵ Kurdish writers and intellectuals also complain about a lack of political representation in Tehran and the lack of attention to their cultural needs.

Iran's revolutionary regime came to see the predominantly Sunni Kurds as its greatest challenge. Former officers of the Shah's military had established units in the Kurdish regions and threatened the new regime. Tehran also feared what it saw as the Kurds' separatist tendencies. Shia Kurds who did not have such intentions ended up in conflict with the Sunni Kurds.²⁶ The central government also sent troops, mostly the highly-committed Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), to fight against the Kurds.²⁷

While the regime was fighting the Kurds, it also was fighting Iraq, which was something of a distraction. By July 1984, however, the Iranian government

controlled much of Kurdistan. Tehran then proceeded to eliminate the leaders of Kurdish organizations. Abdol Rahman Qassemlu and Sharif Sharafkandi of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), were assassinated during June 1989 and September 1992 trips to Europe.

The region suffered a great deal of devastation during the 1980-1988 war with Iraq and because of Iranian government repression. Tehran eliminated villages, expelled their populations, and planted mines.²⁸ There has been some reconstruction of local infrastructure in the years since the war, but a great deal remains to be done. Local management was not used, furthermore, and as unemployment climbed, many local youth left for the cities to find work.

During an August 2000 visit to Kurdistan Province, President Mohammad Khatami pointed out that the province suffers from the "pain of chronic deprivation," as well as "poverty and [a] high rate of unemployment."²⁹ And when he visited the predominantly Kurdish town of Bukan in West Azerbaijan Province to inaugurate a hospital, Khatami expressed the hope that the town soon would be connected to the national gas network and the local road would be paved.³⁰

According to a Kurdish parliamentary representative, the economic situation and apparent indifference undermine the Kurdish population's trust in the central government.³¹ "Chronic unemployment" and no local factories, "the lack of job-generating centers," and the "unkind approach of central hiring officials" has forced alienated youth to leave the country illegally to find jobs. Others "have been forced to join the PKK." A local journalist was arrested after complaining about the disproportionate presence of non-Kurds in Kurdistan Province. Given the high level of unemployment in the province, he told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Persian Service, he found the absence of Kurdish officials at his hearing particularly painful.³²

There is unhappiness with the central govern-

ment's failure to apply the same attention to legal matters among the Kurds as it does in the capital. When Iranian Kurds protested Turkey's arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in February 1999, they were repressed by the central government. The failure of the Khatami administration to do anything about this led to complaints from a Kurdistan parliamentarian and from local writers.³³ One wanted to know why nothing was done about the suppression of Kurdish demonstrators, while there was such an uproar about the suppression of the July 1999 demonstrations in Tehran. The author asked President Khatami if Kurds are not equal before the law: "Were not the Kurdish people and the Kurdish youth worth anything that you did not condemn the inhumane action [in Sanandaj] in the way that you condemned the events at Tehran University dormitory? ... Is the promise of civil society and political development only for those who live in Tehran?"³⁴

At the same time that Tehran acts against expressions of support for the PKK by Iranian Kurds, it has provided low-level support for the PKK for years. There could be many reasons for this apparently contradictory practice. Tehran is concerned about the presence of a large and powerful pro-U.S. country on its Western border, and these concerns increased because of Ankara's military cooperation agreement with Tel Aviv, which permits Israeli aircraft to use Turkish airspace several times a year. In recent years, furthermore, Iranian officials have expressed unease about Western intentions in the Caucasus, and Azerbaijani expressions of enthusiasm about NATO. Tehran also complains about the activities in Turkey of the Mujahedin-i Khalq Organization, an armed opposition group. For these reasons, Tehran may intend to use the PKK to destabilize Turkey.

The secular government in Ankara does not seem very kindly disposed towards the Islamic government in Tehran. In the summer of 1999, Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit said that the student demonstra-

tions in Iran were a natural reaction to an outdated and repressive regime. Ankara has pressed Tehran to end its support for the PKK with little success. William Hale, an expert on Turkish affairs at the School of Oriental and African Studies, speculates that Iranian support for the PKK may have more to do with internal political struggles than with a clear-cut state policy.³⁵

The difficulty is that Iran's support for the PKK is part of an internal struggle for power within Iran. In other words, one of the aims of President Khatami and the reformist wing would be to reconstruct their relations with the Western powers, which for the present purposes include Turkey. If the conservatives can obstruct this, for instance by supporting the PKK against Turkey, then they can use the PKK in effect as a means of achieving their internal political aims.

Indeed, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), and Islamic Revolution Guards Corps all have a powerful influence in foreign policy, and within individual agencies there are contending factions that pursue seemingly contradictory policies. For example, all of Iran's security forces are involved in fighting Afghan narcotics smugglers on the eastern borders, and the country is faced with rising addiction rates. Yet the PKK is allowed to operate heroin refineries and tax narcotics smugglers.³⁶ And the PKK's own smuggling of drugs and other goods is tolerated because the MOIS gets information about Turkey from the smugglers.³⁷

Cultural and linguistic issues are also a problem for the Kurds. Iran has no private broadcasting that might cater to ethnic minorities. State broadcasting (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, IRIB) has programs in regional dialects, specifically Kurdish, Azeri-Turkic, Turkmen, Baluchi, and Arabic. Neither their quantity nor quality is adequate. Locals "expect Article 15 of the constitution, that permits the teaching of local languages and literature, besides teaching Persian, will be put into action after 20 years. Local radio and television programs would be increased.... [E]xpansion of

universities and research centers would be on the agenda."³⁸

The parliamentary deputy from Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province, said that the government must increase the popularity of the Kurdish language in Iran.³⁹ He added that a Kurdish language academy should be established, and Kurdish dailies and weeklies should be published. In November 1999, students wrote to Azad University's chancellor to ask for Kurdish-language teaching in Kermanshah universities.⁴⁰ And in February 1999 they had protested about the lack of Kurdish-language classes in the universities, with the result that Tehran's Shahid Beheshti University promised to open a Kurdish Studies department.⁴¹

There also is frustration about poor political representation: there are no local Sunni governors, deputy governors, judicial officials, or religious officials, although until Autumn 2001 there was one Kurdish governor. One author complained that "Pan-Shiism" effectively excludes a substantial number of people from the "united body of Iran," with the result that the Iranian Sunni community's trust is "weakened."⁴² After the Spring 2000 parliamentary election, there was unrest in some of the Kurd-dominated areas after the hard-line Guardians Council, which is charged with supervising elections, overturned the results in some of the constituencies.⁴³ Sanandaj's representative said that the cancellation of results in Orumieh had undermined public confidence.⁴⁴ Election results in Saqqez and Baneh were overturned, also. A losing candidate in Kurdistan Province claimed that state broadcasting favored one of his opponents.⁴⁵

The increased presence of Kurdish representatives in the sixth parliament led to expectations that some of the voters' demands would be met. After the first round, in which 18 Kurds were elected, one candidate said that he expected there would be more Kurdish instruction at the university in Sanandaj, and he called on the Khatami government to have more Kurdish

officials.⁴⁶ Subsequently, a 40-member parliamentary faction representing the predominantly Kurdish provinces of Kurdistan, Luristan, and Kermanshah was formed.⁴⁷

All of this apparently came to nothing, and in September 2001 Kurdistan Province parliamentarians tried to resign en masse to protest discrimination against the Kurdish and Sunni minority. The representatives criticized President Khatami for not paying attention to their co-ethnics' plight.⁴⁸ One of them complained that the Interior Ministry has never responded to requests that it send a delegation to the province, it rarely replies to any communications, and when it does reply, the response is usually unsatisfactory. Other complaints were that more than 80 percent of the province's residents live below the poverty line and the state universities grant very few places to students from Kurdistan. The deputies also resented the Interior Ministry's failure to consult with them when it chose a replacement for the popular governor, Abdullah Ramazanzadeh, who had been awarded a position in the presidential cabinet.⁴⁹

THE BALUCHIS

The majority of south-eastern Sistan va Baluchistan province's population of 1.2 million is ethnically Baluchi and religiously Sunni (most Sistanis are Shia, while Baluchis are Sunni). As such, they have more in common with Baluchis across the border in Pakistan and Afghanistan than they do with the Shia central government in Tehran. Furthermore, the region is underdeveloped and suffers from a higher-than-average unemployment rate, leaving people with few options other than illegal activities, such as smuggling.⁵⁰ The 1999 *Human Development Report of Iran* notes that Sistan va Baluchistan is at the bottom of its index.⁵¹ The government blocked attempts to create a political organization that would represent Baluchi interests. According to Baluchi activists, furthermore, Tehran has forcibly relocated Baluchis to remote areas, while

encouraging non-Baluchis from other provinces to replace them through the provision of incentives like free land, government jobs, and subsidized housing.⁵²

There is a sense in this region that Tehran is insensitive to local's concerns. Sistan va Baluchistan's parliamentary deputies dispatched an open letter to President Khatami in which they explained that the provincial economy depends primarily on agriculture, but because of the drought, the land and livestock have been damaged badly.⁵³ The letter complained that not enough relief had been forthcoming, and the deputies requested that "significant funds be allocated to eliminate the basic problems of the people as soon as possible." Khatami did not meet with the deputies until over a month later, and then he told them that they should exploit the province's resources to promote employment, investment, and production.⁵⁴

This is just the most recent incident. At a September 2000 funeral in Saravan of locals killed in an ambush by "unidentified armed men," the governor and military commander refused to meet with locals demanding action.⁵⁵ Complaining about the "sectarian and tribal clashes" in the region, the Sunni Friday Prayer leader of Nikshahr demanded that security officials act more decisively and responsibly.⁵⁶ He went on to suggest that this is why people take the law into their own hands. Provincial schools are in poor condition and there is a limited number of them. In the border region of Chahbahar, for example, children from the first to fifth grade "study in straw huts with only one teacher."⁵⁷

There also is the sense among locals that there is anti-Sunni discrimination. The Friday Prayer leader of Zahedan, who in addition to being a Sunni is a state appointee, complained that "in Sunni-populated areas, sometimes unnecessary interventions in religious affairs occur on the part of some low-level functionaries, for example in Sunni mosques and school affairs, which causes irritation to the Sunnis."⁵⁸ There also

has been anti-Sunni violence in the province. During the spring of 2000, a Sunni seminarian from Birjand was beaten, set on fire, and killed in Zahedan.⁵⁹ In June 1998, Molavi Imam Bakhsh Narouie, prayer leader of a Sunni mosque in the town of Miyankang, was killed, leading to protests from the local community who believed that the authorities were responsible.⁶⁰ Two Sunni clerics from Sistan va Baluchistan were murdered during the fifth parliamentary election in 1996.⁶¹

Statements by the Iranian government and by state appointees about an October 17, 2000, car-bomb near the (Shia) Ali Ibn Abi Talib Mosque in Zahedan suggest that there is at least some awareness of the Sunni-Shia tensions. Security officials immediately blamed the incident on "subservient elements of arrogance," but then the local security council indicated that "this act of terrorism has been aimed at creating discord between Shia and Sunni Muslims."⁶² Blaming the U.S. and Israel, state radio said that a 1998 bombing at Zahedan's Sunni Makki mosque and the 1990 murder of Sheikh Ali Mazrei, prayer leader at the Ali Ibn Abi Talib Mosque, had a similar purpose. And at an 18 October rally in Zahedan that was attended by many local officials, Molavi Abdolhamid warned: "Let the criminals and global arrogance's lackeys know that, as a result of these evil deeds and contrary to their intentions, the unity between the Shia and Sunnis of Sistan va Baluchistan Province will continue to serve as a model for the entire country."⁶³

And it was only after the bombing in Zahedan that President Khatami decided to send a delegation to investigate drought damage in the province and Supreme Leader Khamenei met with Shia and Sunni clerics, officials, and tribal chieftains from Sistan va Baluchistan.⁶⁴

For public consumption, the Iranian government often dismisses violence in the Baluchi-inhabited eastern parts of the country, in Sistan va Baluchistan

Province and in Khorasan Province, as part of its conflict with drug traffickers, kidnappers, and assorted bandits. Yet frequent references to "insurgents" and the type of military force employed against them belie such claims.⁶⁵ A warning from a senior Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) commander to members of the Basij Resistance Force in Zahedan that "the enemy has opened a new front against the Islamic revolution" undermines claims that the local conflict is only with bandits.⁶⁶ So, too, do warnings by the Minister of Intelligence and Security to audiences in Chahbahar and Iranshahr that there are efforts to set local Shia and Sunnis against each other.⁶⁷

THE TURKMEN

The majority of Iran's Turkmen population lives in the northeastern parts of the country. Originally, this made up Khorasan and Mazandaran Provinces, but redistricting resulted in the addition of Gulistan (Gorgan) Province. While the stated reason for doing this was to simplify administrative processes in view of a growing population, local observers believe the main motivation was to divide the roughly 1.35 million Turkmen and decrease the chances of ethnic identities superseding identification with the state.

According to an Iranian specialist, the Turkmen would like a single Turkmen province, rather than three separate ones.⁶⁸ Also, they resent the fact that the Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian minorities have a set number of parliamentary seats guaranteed to them, whereas the predominantly Sunni Turkmen have no such guarantees. This resulted in some support for pro-Turkmen candidates in the February 2000 parliamentary elections, but they did not fare well.

The quality of state broadcasting was an issue during the student demonstrations of July 1999, also. Demonstrators in the Turkmen-dominated areas complained about radio broadcasts from Gorgan. They said the language used is a mix of Turkmen and Per-

sian, and the programming consists of government propaganda.⁶⁹

Azeris, The Shia Minority

Azeris make up a large proportion of the Iranian population, with estimates running from 24 percent to 41 percent. Iranians of Azeri origin are active in all walks of life (government, military, clergy, business), and many of them, such as Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei himself, are major players in Iranian politics. During Khamenei's trip to the predominantly Azeri-inhabited northwest (West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, Ardebil, and Zanjan Provinces), he said that "one of the strongest bases of this great revolution and Islamic system lies in these very Azeri-speaking regions."⁷⁰

Yet many Azeris do not think they get adequate attention from Tehran, either politically or culturally. During President Khatami's visit to West Azerbaijan Province in September 2000, Azerbaijani academics and parliamentarians sent an open letter to him.⁷¹ They asked, "How come that in times of war and defending the country that all peoples, above all the Azerbaijanis, fought the enemy on the front, but in times of peace and security there is dust covering our civil rights?" Problems faced by the Azerbaijani minority are visible in the state's reaction to the violent suppression of student unrest at Tabriz University in July 1999; and in its inattention to Azeri culture and language.

Security forces broke up a gathering to mark the one-year anniversary of the July 1999 incidents at Tabriz University, and they arrested 17 people in connection with this.⁷² One year earlier, police entered the Tabriz University campus to break up a demonstration, scuffles broke out between students and the Basij Resistance Force, and a member of the Basij was shot. In the subsequent unrest and demonstrations, many more people were hurt, and at least 200

were arrested. After secret trials in September, about 20 people received jail sentences. But those who attacked the students remain at large. The university's dean complained that "[t]he atrocities that took place in Tabriz University were far worse than the Tehran University campus incident, but for various reasons they have been played down or neglected by the press and officials, and the people's representatives."⁷³

The government's failure to prosecute anybody for the security forces' violent actions stands in sharp contrast to the highly publicized trial for what happened at Tehran University. Tabriz's parliamentary representative said that "the political authorities are not pursuing the case seriously, ... and the political atmosphere of the province is closed," and the provincial governorate also complained about this situation.⁷⁴ Even the Speaker of Parliament agreed that "the Tabriz students' rights have been ignored."⁷⁵

There also is unhappiness with the cultural and linguistic situation faced by Azerbaijanis. The signatories of the letter to President Khatami complained about Persian racism, and they demanded a national television channel and the right to Turkish education.⁷⁶ A professor at Tabriz University complained that he and his colleagues no longer speak Azeri-Turkic properly, "because we are used to Persian and English." A student in Tabriz said: "our mother tongue is being eliminated. Turkic is being cluttered with Persian. Turkic is being cluttered with many Arabic words. On the other hand, with English words."⁷⁷

A Tabriz daily complained that state television's "professional acrobats and wheeler-dealers" delight in "making a parody of our language."⁷⁸ The situation had better improve, according to the East Azerbaijan Province daily, because "our patience, together with our ability to withstand humiliation and ridicule, is exhausted." And a group of Azerbaijani intellectuals living in Iran complained that the language is spoken

incorrectly on state television and radio.⁷⁹

At the same time that sources in Iranian Azerbaijan complain about the quality of minority programming, sources in the Republic of Azerbaijan complain that the programming is subversive. Four channels of Iranian state television can be seen in the southern part of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and they interfere with Azerbaijani news broadcasts.⁸⁰ Iranian television tells Azerbaijanis to worry about their own country, rather than the fate of Azeris living in Iran, and it criticizes Azerbaijani politicians.

Reports about repression in Iranian Azerbaijan and suppression of national rights there appear with some frequency in Baku. In October 2000, clashes between locals and security forces in Ajabshir were related to eligibility for government funding according to Iranian sources, for example, but according to Azeri nationalists, the unrest "could also be regarded as the first signs of the growing national and liberation movement in southern Azerbaijan."⁸¹

In January 2000, Azeri nationalists claimed Iranian security forces opened fire on a 7,000-person rally in Tabriz, wounded 50 people, and arrested another 500.⁸² The rally was for national rights, and in support of a nationalist whose candidacy for the parliamentary election was blocked by the authorities. Tehran denied these claims, a Tabriz parliamentarian and the governor said that such reports were fallacious and could not be independently confirmed.⁸³ This same Azeri nationalist, who had been elected but not allowed to serve in a previous (1996) parliament, said that when he was on his way to register as a candidate the security forces had arrested him and refused to release him.⁸⁴ Republic of Azerbaijan news sources claimed that most voters in Tabriz would boycott the parliamentary election because the authorities refused to allow the registration of this and other independent candidates.⁸⁵

Several organizations outside of Iran promote Az-

eri national rights. One of these organizations sent an open letter to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in which it urged European countries to pressure Iran to observe the rights of its ethnic Azeris. After RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service broadcast a report about this letter, it was accused of trying to "sow discord among Iranian Azeris." A state-run Iranian newspaper warned: "The mischievous attempts of the radio may pay off in other countries, not in Iran."⁸⁶

The authors of the September letter to Khatami demanded that state agencies employ more Azerbaijanis.⁸⁷ There have been other complaints about the non-Azeri personnel in state agencies. In one case, the Ardabil Province director-general of road and transportation was identified as an "anti-Azerbaijani" person who "insulted the language and culture of this heroic land."⁸⁸ The governor-general was condemned for his apathy in similar cases and urged to act this time.

The ethnically related problems among the Azerbaijanis have been blamed on poor political representation. An editorial in a Tabriz daily complained that President Mohammad Khatami does not have enough Azeri ministers and that of three he did have (Minister of Housing and Urban Development Ali Abdol-Alizadeh, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Issa Kalantari, and Minister of Industries Qolam Reza Shafei), only one — Shafei — was of any use.⁸⁹

Representatives of the Azeri provinces are chosen irrespective of their ethnic origin. In previous parliaments, they tended to vote along factional lines. This pattern continued even after the creation of a 19-member East Azerbaijan Province Deputies Assembly in the fifth (1996-2000) parliament. Creation of an Azeri-speaking Assembly, with all the deputies from West Azerbaijan, Ardebil, Zanjan, Qazvin, and East Azerbaijan Provinces is planned, too, which may result in greater attention to ethnic Azeri demands.

Conclusion

An international human rights organization noted:

Information about human rights violations suffered by ethnic minorities in Iran is difficult to obtain and to verify....[T]he situations of its ethnic minorities are not closely monitored by international support groups. It is difficult to gain access to many areas where the minorities reside, and the Iranian media does not report on issues of ethnic discrimination.⁹⁰

But it is obvious that problems do exist. After discussing some of them in March 2000, the UN's human rights rapporteur for Iran said that he was "forced to conclude that sufficient political will is lacking to push this area onto the government's priority list."⁹¹ An Iranian commentator pointed out that in the 21 years since the revolution, "none of the groups in the country — whether small or large — have been able, within the framework of the principles of the law, to enjoy their basic citizenship rights."⁹²

It would be unfair to say that minorities, especially the tribes, are ignored by the government. Most recently, state officials noted that Iran's drought is affecting the tribes, particularly those that deal with livestock.⁹³ But they also noted that the state is not providing tribesmen with the financial credit needed to buy more animal feed, lease pasturage, or facilitate breeding. Another state official noted that of the 2.6 trillion rials in drought compensation, only two percent was allocated to tribal people.⁹⁴ Also, the major project launched in August 2000 by the Construction Jihad Ministry and the Basij Resistance Force focused on tribal affairs (and eight other areas).⁹⁵ An Assembly of the Deputies of Tribal Regions existed in the fifth parliament, furthermore. Yet these steps are not directed towards ethnic groups specifically, nor do they promote the minority rights alluded to in the constitution.

Moreover, it would be misleading to suggest that all of the minorities' complaints relate to their ethnicity.

Economic issues, mainly unemployment and underdevelopment, probably are the most frequently cited grievances. Yet unemployment is a problem that affects the entire population, not just the minorities. The official unemployment rate is 13.86 percent, according to a September 2001 report from Iran's Statistics Department,⁹⁶ and unofficial estimates put the overall unemployment rate in the 25 percent range. President Khatami warned parliament in October 2001 that 42 percent of the people seeking jobs every year cannot find employment.⁹⁷ Underdevelopment, furthermore, is the result of a poorly managed command economy that is kept afloat due to Iran's oil income.

Under these circumstances, when people are dissatisfied with a major aspect of their lives, their dissatisfaction with other issues can take on added importance. So a Sunni Baluchi might find himself thinking that it is bad enough that he cannot feed his family, but his family cannot even go to the mosque of its choosing. And a Kurd who is forced to move to a major city to look for work will resent his children's inability to read Kurdish.

The outcome of recent elections in Iran — for municipal councils in February 1999 and for the parliament in February 2000 — also suggested that ethnic rights would receive greater attention. High public participation in the municipal elections indicated an interest in decentralization, and as the Interior Minister pointed out, outside of Tehran, tribal and ethnic factors played a part in voting.⁹⁸ Indeed, the idea of local councils had been popular among Iran's ethnic minorities for several years, and after the revolution autonomy movements pressed for councils in the Kurdish and Turkmen communities.⁹⁹ In the former case, however, legal frameworks for the councils' powers remain poorly defined, and in the more than two years since the first council elections, they have accomplished relatively little.

Ethnicity played a part in some of the provincial

parliamentary campaigns in 2000, although the Interior Minister expressed the hope that this would not be the case.¹⁰⁰ Events in the predominantly Turkmen- and Azerbaijani-inhabited provinces were mentioned above. Also, a conservative in Khorasan complained that his reformist rivals “played on tribal prejudice.”¹⁰¹ In Khuzestan, “[s]ome of the candidates and their supporters [were] involved in inciting nationalist feelings and provoking ethnic tendencies among the people to obtain votes.”¹⁰² After the election, an editorial in a reformist daily said that since the new parliament is likely to co-operate with President Khatami’s government, everybody will expect the adoption of laws permitting the “complete realization of the people’s rights, regardless of religion, race, or nationality.”¹⁰³

It does not seem, however, that the new, reformist-dominated parliament will take any actions that might be oriented towards minorities. One of the leading reformist dailies noted, before it was closed down, that the conditions for minority rights and people’s coexistence are defined in the constitution.¹⁰⁴ To apply federalist solutions in a situation of weak civil society institutions, it suggested, was inappropriate. And in light of Khatami’s calls for patience and his support for acting within a constitutional framework, it does not seem that any changes will come from that direction in the near future.

The formation of regional groupings — such as the Kurdish or Azerbaijani ones, the North faction (with representatives from Gulistan, Gilan, and Mazandaran Province) or the Assembly of Deputies of the Deprived Regions — within the parliament may help individual provinces. This is not, however, a form of ethnic identification. So it may help Azerbaijanis through numbers, but it will not help the Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs, or Turkmen. Factional differences in the parliament, furthermore, will hinder practical displays of unity within the regional groupings.

In early 2000, the Expediency Council ratified a

general policy on minorities.¹⁰⁵ At that time it was decided to prevent “abuse of tribal and religious minorities that could lead to infiltration of foreigners and thus harming national unity.” To this end, it was determined that “the culture and civilization of Islam and Iran, the Persian language and writing are key factors of solidarity.” The language used in the statements about this policy suggests three things. One, the state is aware of minority grievances and demands. Two, the state prefers to blame its difficulties on foreign scapegoats, rather than dealing with them. And three, national unity is more important to the state than minority rights. Yet this kind of policy on minorities and ethnicity is exactly what can be exploited with grave results for Iranian unity.

Notes

¹ National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future With Non-government Experts*, NIC 2000-02, December 2000 (www.cia.gov/cia/publications/globaltrends2015/).

² These statistics are from the CIA’s *World Factbook 2000* www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ir.html. A source of interesting demographic data based on the 1987 census, although it does not provide specific figures on the minorities, is Bernard Hourcade et al., *Atlas d’Iran* (Montpelier-Paris: RECLUS - La Documentation Française, 1998), pp. 59-69. Tribal figures are from a 1987 census, cited in Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines of the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Name-yi Otaq-i Bazargani*, no. 3 (June 1996). The 1998 census does not provide an identical breakdown of data, but it states that the total tribal population is a little over 1.3 million; *Zakhaere-yi Inqilab*, no. 2 (Summer 1999).

³ Friday prayer sermons at Tehran University, Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, December 17, 1999.

⁴ Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), May 6, 2001.

⁵ Hojatoleslam Ali Yunesi, cited by IRNA, July 18, 2000.

⁶ Said Jalili, “The Expediency Council and the Issue of Ethnic Groups,” *Akhbar-i Eqtesad*, March 5, 2000.

⁷ Reza Jafari, head of the Juvenile Criminal Complex, cited by Agence France Presse, October 25, 2001.

⁸ On the basis of territorial and linguistic claims, Kurds, Baluchis, Turkmen, and Arabs are defined as “national minorities,” while Lur, Bakhtiari, and Qashqai are referred to as “tribes.” See Leonard M. Helfgott, “The Structural Foundations of the National Minority Problem in Revolutionary Iran,” *Iranian Studies*, XIII, 1-4 (1980), pp. 201-

02.

⁹ Such a statement was valid about 15 years ago, too. See Patricia J. Higgins, "Minority-State Relations in Contemporary Iran," in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, eds., *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics* (Syracuse, 1986), p. 176.

¹⁰ Gavin R.G. Hambly, "The Pahlavi Autocracy: Riza Shah, 1921-41," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 234-35.

¹¹ J. W. Limbert, *Iran: At War With History* (Boulder, CO, 1987), p. 87.

¹² See E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 388-415.

¹³ The British allegedly were arming the Bakhtiari and encouraging them to rebel against the central government; "Intrigues Among the Bakhtiari Tribes," Foreign Service Dispatch 414, 788.521/28 November 1952, Box 4109, Record Group-59, National Archives, Washington, DC;. Foreign Service Dispatch 738, 788.00/10 March 1953, *ibid*.

¹⁴ The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency offered the Qashqai money and cabinet posts if they would support the Shah and refrain from attacking the city, according to interviews with the Shahilu family that were corroborated by Miles Copeland in a July 1979 interview; see L. Beck, *The Qashqai of Iran* (London, 1986), pp. 153-4.

¹⁵ S.S. Harrison, "Nightmare in Baluchistan," *Foreign Policy*, no. 32 (Fall 1978), pp. 138-9.

¹⁶ See A. Roosevelt, "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad," *Middle East Journal*, 1 (July 1947); A. Roosevelt, *For Lust of Knowing: Memoirs of an Intelligence Officer* (Boston, 1988); and W.L. Westermann, "Kurdish Independence and Russian Expansion," *Foreign Affairs*, 24 (JUL46).

¹⁷ The U.S. government got involved in Iran's Kurdish operations as early as 1963-64, with training and advice provided by the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) to Iranian troops in the field in an attempt to put down a Kurdish insurrection. See R. Secord with J. Wurts, *Honored and Betrayed: Irangate, Covert Affairs, and the Secret War in Laos* (New York, 1992), pp. 46-51.

¹⁸ A. Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*, J. O'Kane, trans. (London, 1997), p. 32.

¹⁹ Ezedin Hussein, cited by S. Bakhsh, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (New York, 1984, 1986), pp. 77-78.

²⁰ The Itihad-i Muslimin party, cited by Bakhsh, p. 78.

²¹ An English-language translation of Iran's constitution can be found at www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/ir00000_.html.

²² Article 13 of the Islamic Republic's constitution says that Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians are the "only recognized religious minorities." While on the surface this sounds impressively all-

encompassing, the reality is that most of the country's laws discriminate against non-Muslims. Tehran does not even recognize Bahaim as a legitimate religion. Through state policies and official statements, a threatening atmosphere exists for Bahais, many Christians, and Jews. Members of these religious communities have suffered arrests, arbitrary detention and continuing incarceration, confiscation of property, denial of educational rights, and desecration of cemeteries. There are severe restrictions on Bahais' and Jews' access to employment opportunities and to legal redress.

²³ *Iran-i Farda*, no. 49 (December 21, 1998).

²⁴ Shamshun Maqsdpur, fifth parliament representative for the Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, said that they suffer discrimination in employment and in payment of blood money, and their language is not taught in schools. See *Zaman*, no. 27 (January 1999).

²⁵ From the Interim Report of the Commission on Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, by Special Rapporteur Maurice Copithorne; United Nations General Assembly, Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, AA/55/363, September 8, 2000. *Iran International*, no. 9 (June 2000), also discusses the *Human Development Report*, but from a very optimistic viewpoint that omits such negative information.

²⁶ D. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London, 1996), p. 270.

²⁷ The IRGC is a parallel military organization that was created immediately after Iran's revolution by clerics who were unsure about the loyalty of the regular armed forces. The IRGC helped the clergy solidify its hold on power, and during the eight-year war with Iraq, the IRGC developed into an organized military force that also played a part in Tehran's effort to export the revolution.

²⁸ See S. Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War* (London, 1988).

²⁹ IRNA, August 6, 2000.

³⁰ IRNA, September 17, 2000.

³¹ Mahabad representative Abdollah Nurbakhsh, speaking during the April 18, 1999, session, cited in *Resalat*, April 19, 2000.

³² Reformist journalist Masud Kordpur, who has been associated with *Arya*, *Khordad*, *Fath*, *Neshat*, and *Asr-i Azadegan*, was in court on September 5, he told RFE/RL's Persian Service; cited in *RFE/RL Iran Report*, 3, 36 (September 18, 2000).

³³ Sanandaj MP Seyyed Maruf Samadi, cited in *Khordad*, July 3, 1999.

³⁴ Shokrollah Javan, "A Kurd's Letter to Khatami," *Iran-i Farda*, October 6, 1999.

³⁵ Charles Recknagel, "Iran: Crisis With Turkey Cools But Relations Remain Volatile," *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine*, August 11, 1999.

³⁶ Turkey's intelligence service (*Milli Istihbarat Teskilati*), cited by

Anatolia News Agency, October 7, 1999.

³⁷ Iranian Lieutenant Qolam Ali Feleksiyeer crossed the border on October 2, 2000 and requested asylum from Turkey. During questioning by Turkish military intelligence, he revealed information about the smuggling activities, Istanbul's NTV reported on October 16, 2000.

³⁸ Hassan Ghaderi-Paveh, "The Kurdish Region: Election and Expectations," *Fath*, February 3, 2000.

³⁹ Rahman Behmanesh, cited by IRNA, September 17, 2000.

⁴⁰ Kermanshah's thrice-weekly *Bakhtar*, November 2, 1999.

⁴¹ *RFE/RL Iran Report*, 3, 2 (January 10, 2000).

⁴² Salah al-Din Abbasi, "What has Civil Society Done for the Kurds?" *Iran-i Farda*, no. 51 (January 21, 1999).

⁴³ On the Guardians Council's activities, see A.W. Samii, "Iran's Guardians Council as an Obstacle to Democracy," *Middle East Journal*, 53, 4 (Autumn 2001).

⁴⁴ Fifth parliament representative Bahaedin Adab, *Payam-i Imruz*, May 2000.

⁴⁵ *Ham-Mihan*, February 23, 2000.

⁴⁶ Seyyed Fatah Hussein, cited in Istanbul's *Ozgun Bakis*, March 4, 2000.

⁴⁷ *Afarinesh*, 8 June 2000; *Bahar*, June 8, 2000.

⁴⁸ Signatories of the letter to Khatami were Bahaedin Adab of Sanandaj, Jalal Jalali of Sanandaj, Masood Hussein of Qorveh, Mohammad Mohammad-Rezai of Bijar, Abdullah Sohrabi of Marivan, and Salaheddin Alaie of Saqez; IRNA, October 2, 2001.

⁴⁹ *Seda-yi Idalat*, October 8, 2001; *Tehran Times*, October 2, 2001.

⁵⁰ *Jahan-i Islam*, June 28, 1999; *Iran News*, September 29, 1999. Interview with Khash parliamentarian Masud Hashem Zehi and "educated Baluchi" Hamid Sardar Zehi, cited by *Seda-yi Idalat*, July 3, 2000.

⁵¹ From the Interim Report of the Commission on Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, by Special Rapporteur Maurice Copithorne; United Nations General Assembly, Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, AA/55/363, September 8, 2000.

⁵² Human Right Watch, <http://www.igc.org/hrw/reports/1997/iran/Iran-06.htm>.

⁵³ The September 3 session, reported in *Kayhan*, September 5, 2000.

⁵⁴ IRNA, October 16, 2000.

⁵⁵ *Kayhan*, September 16, 2000.

⁵⁶ Molavi Abdullah Vahidi-Far, cited by *Kayhan*, September 17, 2000.

⁵⁷ Interview with Khash parliamentarian Masud Hashem Zehi and "educated Baluchi" Hamid Sardar Zehi, cited by *Seda-yi Idalat*, July

3, 2000.

⁵⁸ Molavi Abdolhamid, cited in *Sobh-i Imruz*, April 23, 2000.

⁵⁹ *Iran-i Farda*, April 12, 2000.

⁶⁰ *Human Right Watch World Report*, <http://www.igc.org/hrw/worldreport99/mideast/iran.html>.

⁶¹ Molavi Abdul-Malek Molazadeh and Molavi Jamshid Zehi were murdered while in Pakistan, and Sheikh Mohammad Ziai of Bandar Abbas was killed via a lethal injection, according to *Gunagun*, July 20, 2000.

⁶² IRNA, October 17, 2000. Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran External Service October 17, 2000.

⁶³ Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Network 1, October 18, 2000.

⁶⁴ Governor-General Mahmud Hussein said experts from the Management and Planning Organization and the Construction Jihad Ministry would inspect the region, and he estimated damage worth 2,840 billion rials; IRNA, October 21, 2000. On Khamenei's meeting, IRNA, November 6, 2000.

⁶⁵ Brigadier General Abdol Ali Purshasb, Commander of the Ground Force of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran, noted that the army is employed against "insurgents" in the east; *Saff*, no. 240 (April-May 2000), pp. 31-4. Similar comments are seen in an interview with Brigadier General Mostafa Torabipur, Chief of the Joint Staff of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran; *Saff*, no. 239 (March-April 2000), pp. 10,12; and in the report to the president from Commander-in-Chief of the Army Major General Mohamad Salimi, in "Presenting the Performance Sheet of the Army to the President of the Republic," *Saff*, no. 243; (July-August 2000). The official Islamic Republic News Agency carried nine reports in January-September 2000 about the killing of insurgents.

⁶⁶ General Abdul Mohammad Raufinejad, cited by IRNA, October 29, 2000. The Basij Resistance Force is a sort of reserve organization that is affiliated with the IRGC, and its personnel became famous for their human-wave tactics during the Iran-Iraq War.

⁶⁷ Hojatolislam Ali Yunesi, speaking to the Administrative Council of Chahbahar City and to a gathering of Shia and Sunni clerics in Iranshahr, cited by IRNA, November 25, 2000.

⁶⁸ Nurjan Ak, an Iranian expert on Turkmen affairs, described the impact of state policies in a December interview with RFE/RL's Turkmen Service, cited in *RFE/RL Iran Report*, 3, 2 (January 10, 2000).

⁶⁹ Nurjan Ak, interview with RFE/RL's Turkmen Service; cited in *RFE/RL Iran Report*, 2, 29 (July 19, 1999).

⁷⁰ Address by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in Basij Square, Ardebil, cited by Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran Radio 1, July 24, 2000.

- ⁷¹ Guy Dinmore, "Tackling Iran's Ethnic Divide," *The Financial Times*, September 18, 2000.
- ⁷² Tabriz *Fajr-i Azerbaijan*, July 16, 2000.
- ⁷³ Tabriz University dean Mohammad Hussein Purfeyz, cited by *Bayan*, April 26, 2000. One person was tried for attacking Purfeyz; *Payam-i No*, June 17, 2000.
- ⁷⁴ Tabriz representative Akbar Alami, cited by *Afarinesh*, July 8, 2000. East Azerbaijan Province's governor's office, cited by *Bahar*, July 4, 2000.
- ⁷⁵ Hojatoleslam Mehdi Mahdavi-Karrubi, cited by IRNA, August 12, 2000.
- ⁷⁶ Guy Dinmore, "Tackling Iran's Ethnic Divide."
- ⁷⁷ Baku's ANS television, August 23, 1999.
- ⁷⁸ Tabriz's *Fajr-i Azerbaijan*, May 19, 2000.
- ⁷⁹ Azerbaijan International (Winter 1998).
- ⁸⁰ *Zerkalo*, February 29, 2000.
- ⁸¹ Boyuk Rasuloglu, cited by *Yeni Musavat*, October 15, 2000.
- ⁸² The rally was for Iranian-Azeri nationalist Mahmoud Ali Chehragani (Johragani), according to Piruz Dilenchi, head of the National Liberation Movement of Southern Azerbaijan, cited by ANS television, January 7, 2000. Baku's Space TV, January 8, 2000.
- ⁸³ MP Balal Samarqandi and Tabriz Governor Abbas Khorshidi, cited in *Tehran Times*, January 11, 2000. Sources in Tabriz told RFE/RL's Persian Service that some of Chehragani's supporters were detained by the police on January 5 or 6, but nobody could confirm the claims of shootings or mass arrests; *RFE/RL Iran Report*, 3, 2 (January 10, 2000).
- ⁸⁴ Chehragani, in an interview with RFE/RL's Azerbaijani service, cited in *RFE/RL Iran Report*, 2, 51 (December 27, 1999). See also Azerbaijan's *Yeni Musavat* daily and Turan News Agency, December 18, 1999.
- ⁸⁵ Among these "independent deputies" was Chehragani; Baku's Turan news agency, January 28, 2000. One-hundred-twenty candidates ran for Tabriz's six seats. Rather than the apathy suggested by Azerbaijani sources, the week of campaigning was "hectic," according to Robin Allen, "Tabriz Gripped by Election Fever as Iranians Prepare to Vote," *Financial Times*, February 18, 2000.
- ⁸⁶ *Tehran Times*, November 29, 1999.
- ⁸⁷ Guy Dinmore, "Tackling Iran's Ethnic Divide."
- ⁸⁸ *Ava-yi Ardabil*, June 25, 2000.
- ⁸⁹ The commentary noted that Khatami is not entirely to blame, because the northwestern provinces' parliamentary representatives and Friday Prayer leaders did not lobby very hard for their own candidates; *Tabriz's Payam-i No*, June 9, 2000.
- ⁹⁰ Human Right Watch, <http://www.igc.org/hrw/reports/1997/iran/Iran-06.htm>.
- ⁹¹ Associated Press. March 15, 2000.
- ⁹² Said Jalili, "The Expediency Council and the Issue of Ethnic Groups," *Akhbar-i Eqtesad*, March 5, 2000.
- ⁹³ Ismail Musavi, head of the Central Province Center for Tribal Affairs, cited by IRNA, August 1, 2000.
- ⁹⁴ Mohammad Reza Eskandari, head of the Organization for Iranian Tribal People's Affairs, cited by *Kar va Kargar*, September 14, 2000.
- ⁹⁵ *Javan*, August 6, 2000. The Construction Jihad was created to extend the regime's reach in the countryside. Members helped peasants seize land, worked on developing rural infrastructure, and administered loans. During the Iran-Iraq War the Construction Jihad served as the IRGC's "Corps of Engineers," according to K. Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder, 1993), pp. 41-42.
- ⁹⁶ *Iran Daily*, September 22, 2001. The lowest unemployment rates are in East Azerbaijan (8.75 percent) and West Azerbaijan (8.8 percent) provinces. The worst unemployment rate is in Luristan Province (30.49 percent).
- ⁹⁷ The parliamentary proceedings of October 23, 2001, cited by *Resalat*, October 24, 2001, and *Hayat-i No*, October 24, 2001.
- ⁹⁸ Interior Minister Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari, cited by *Kayhan*, March 2, 2000.
- ⁹⁹ Schirazi, p. 111.
- ¹⁰⁰ Interior Minister Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari, cited by IRNA, December 26, 1999.
- ¹⁰¹ Mashhad deputy Hamid Reza Taraqi, cited in *Fath*, February 21, 2000.
- ¹⁰² *Jomhuri-yi Islami*, February 3, 2000.
- ¹⁰³ Farah Adnani, "The National View and the Issue of Iranian Nationalities," *Asr-i Azadegan*, April 2, 2000.
- ¹⁰⁴ Hamid Reza Jalaipur, "Why Does National Security Have Priority Over Even Reform Requirements?," *Asr-i Azadegan*, March 8, 2000.
- ¹⁰⁵ IRNA, September 25, 1999, December 25, 1999, and January 22, 2000. Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the father of Iran's Islamic revolution, created the Expediency Council in 1988 to resolve impasses between the parliament and the Guardians Council, whose task is to vet candidates for elected office, supervise elections, and determine if legislation is religiously and constitutionally acceptable. The Expediency Council also advises the Supreme Leader.