

DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE
AGENCY

INTELLIGENCE APPRAISAL

**IRAN:
RELIGIOUS-INSPIRED
OPPOSITION(U)**

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Roots of Religious Opposition In Iran

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(U) Recent unrest in Iran has highlighted traditional opposition by religious leaders to the government. This opposition manifested by the religious community in Iran originated in an Islamic schism that occurred shortly after the Prophet Mohammed died in 632 AD. The Prophet's son-in-law Ali and Muawiya, a descendent of previous rulers of the Islamic community, became embroiled in a struggle of succession. When Ali was murdered, his chief opponent was chosen as leader by the majority of Muslims. Those who favored Ali became his followers and were known as the Shiat-al-Ali. The line of succession for the Shiite is from Mohammed through Ali and his descendants to the last of 12 Imams, the spiritual and temporal leaders of Shiite Islam. The last Imam disappeared in the 10th Century and will return some day to redeem man. The declaration of Shiite Islam as the state religion by the Safavid Dynasty in the 16th century further divided Iran from the rest of the Sunnite Islamic community.

(U) The interpretation of religious law in Iran is made by the Ulama, religious leaders of the Shiite community, even though the individual follower of Islam theoretically does not need an intermediary between himself and God. The Mujtahid provides religious leadership to the people and makes judgments on religious conduct (figure 1). Since interpretation of the law involves all facets of life -- including social, economic, and political matters -- the religious leader inevitably comes into opposition to the

RELIGIOUS

- PISVA-YE-MUSLEMIN -- Universally rec
presently unocc
- AYATOLLAH -- High status in
next to the abo
- MUJTAHID -- Literally, "the
Must have comple
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have recognition
community.
- MULLA -- Works at the con
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RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY IN SHIITE IRAN

- Universally recognized by Shiite community as religious; presently unoccupied,
- High status in the Shiite community, and the highest honor, next to the above, that a Shiite leader can attain. Literally, "the Sign of God."
- Must have completed a course of religious studies and receive authorization from a qualified Mujtahid. Must also have recognition from laymen and scholars in the religious community.
- Works at the community level as a leader knowledgeable in religious precepts; individual is not as extensively schooled as the above.

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Figure 1

state or its agents. The Ulama consider the Shah a subject under Islamic law and answerable to those who interpret it. He is seen as a temporal ruler of the Iranians until the last of the Imam returns to provide salvation for all.

(U) Religious leaders have in modern times played a prominent role in antigovernment activities. During the latter half of the 19th century, they were instrumental in thwarting efforts by Naser-i-Din Shah to grant concessions to foreigners who would have "Westernized" Iran. Their active opposition to the British tobacco concession in 1892 led to a cancellation of foreign monopolies. In the early 1900s, religious leaders were divided on the issue of constitutional reform, but the majority eventually supported the political dissidents who forced the Shah into signing the constitution. The Ulama appeared to support the constitution as a step toward modernization, but they were actually in favor of the document because it could be used to limit the Shah's power. Although their current demand for a return to "constitutional rule" is an act of defiance to the Shah, the leaders have not acted so boldly as to prompt a direct and harsh reaction by the Monarch, who would probably not like to be seen as opposing "constitutional rule" per se.

(U) Reza Shah, who founded the present Pahlavi dynasty, widened the division between the religious community and the government when he embarked on a number of reforms and modernization efforts. Since then, the influence and powers of the religious leaders have gradually eroded.

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