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Iran Facts

Area: 1,648,000 sq. km.

Capital: Tehran

Total Population: 68,960,000 (source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1998, est.)

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Risk Assessment

Although there is little current information on the status of the Bakhtari (and that which is out there is anthropological in nature), several assumptions about the condition of Bakhtiari can be made. First, being Shi'i Muslims, there is probably little religious discrimination against them. Second, due to their nomadic lives on the periphery of Iranian society, they probably do not hold severe grievances against the central government, although any infringement over their traditional territorial rights would likely change this situation. Third, the election of Mohammed Khatami as president of Iran should be an encouraging sign for the Bakhtiari. Khatami, a moderate, has made public announcements calling for tolerance among all of the factions within Iran, and in practice to date, this has left Shi'i Muslim minorities (e.g., Azeri, Shi'i Arabs) in a relatively advantageous position over non-Shi'i minorities (e.g., Baha'i, Christians).

Analytic Summary

The Bakhtiaris of Iran are a tribal people that live in the west central region of Iran near the Zagros mountains. Most live in the provinces of Isfahan and Khuzistan while fewer numbers live in the Lars and Luristan provinces (GROUPCON = 3; REGIONAL = 1). They speak a dialect of the Luri language (CULDIFX2 = 2), are Shi'i Muslims (CULDIFX4 = 0), and live a nomadic lifestyle with set yearly migrations between summer and winter pastures. Those who have settled down have tended to become assimilated into the Iranian culture and are no longer considered Bakhtiaris by the general population.

The Bakhtiaris' social structure forms a pyramid. Their basic social and economic unit is the nuclear family upon which larger units are built, from the extended family level through the tribal level. Finally, the highest level is that of the Bab, which is a group of tribes. There are eight Babs.

These Babs are led by Kahns who tend to come from certain families although lineage alone does not guarantee the position. These Babs are also divided into two groups: the Chahar Lang, who live in the North, and the Haft Lang, who live in the South. Loyalty to the family comes first for most Bakhtiari, and loyalty decreases as the group level moves away from this unit. Thus, the Bakhtiari tend to be divided into many factions that often quarrel with each other. However, confederations of Babs have existed since at least the 19th century for purposes of defense, resolution of internal disputes and administrative purposes in the state system.

As a rural people removed from the central politics of Tehran, there is no evidence of either conventional or militant Bakhtiari political organizations (GOJPA03 = 0). This lack of political mobilization has likely deemed the Bahktari to be unthreatening to the Iranian government, and the fact that Bakhtiari are Shi'i Muslims may contribute to no overt repression (REP98-03 = 0) or discrimination (POLDIS03 = 2; ECDIS03 = 0; CULRES03 = 0) of this group in recent years.

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