

AN AMERICAN
ALLY DEPOSED

“Men and women in Iran broke old chains only to forge new ones. They demolished the rule of one man and then submitted to the tyranny of another.” (FOUAD AJAMI)¹⁸⁷

“The seeds of 9/11 were sown a quarter of a century ago when Khomeini came to power. Khomeini’s ascent to power was aided by the policies of Jimmy Carter and his allies on the political Left.” (DINESH D’SOUZA)¹⁸⁸

IN AN ATTEMPT TO SOLIDIFY his position in the region, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi sought to align himself with his neighbors as early as 1974. The Shah, who was able to move Iran into a leadership role in OPEC during the Nixon-Ford administration, felt the time had come to move his country into a more central position in the region. (In 1976 in a display of largess, Pahlavi gave away nearly two billion dollars to countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Syria to help achieve his goal.) Pahlavi sent his trusted emissary, General Gholam-Reza Afkhami, to Cairo to research the possibility of greater cooperation between Egypt and Iran. As a result of

Afkhami's hard work, Egypt garnered a state-of-the-art radar system and an opportunity for Egyptian pilots to see Iran's Phantom jets first-hand. It also paved the way for the first visit of an Iranian monarch to Egypt in twenty-three years. Sadat asked Pahlavi to intervene with Rabin over the Sinai oil fields.

The Shah's visit in Cairo led the monarch to inform Rabin that the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline was in danger of being shut down in early 1975. Rabin sent his Foreign Minister Yigal Allon to Tehran for meetings with the Shah. The two men were able to reach an agreement that allowed the flow of oil to continue, albeit with a higher rate for transfer fees but with a lower price for the oil.

In May of that year, however, the Shah surprised Israel by siding with Sadat over Israeli withdrawal from the territories captured during the Six-Day war. This placed an inordinate amount of stress on Israel-Iran relations. Ambassador Uri Lubrani was informed that relations between the two countries would be deferred until Israel decided to acquiesce to calls for withdrawal at least from the Abu-Rudeis oilfields. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was finally able to exact a commitment from Pahlavi that he would not stop the flow of oil to Israel. Even with this agreement, Rabin felt it necessary to return to Tehran for another secret visit with the Shah. Unfortunately, Rabin was unable to maintain his anonymity among the Jews in the region. Pahlavi, however, was able to assure Rabin that Israel's oil needs would be met.

While the Shah was also reaching out to Egypt and other Arab countries, he was determined to allow neither the Soviets nor Americans to establish bases in his area of the Persian Gulf. The fact that the Soviets defied an agreement to withdraw from Iran in a timely manner following World War II and created two republics within the territory occupied—Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan—was very distressing to Pahlavi. It was not until UN intervention in 1946 that the Russians abandoned their territory in Iran. Perhaps that is why the Shah considered the U.S.S.R. to be the most important threat to Iran; after all, the two nations shared a

1,240-mile border. For centuries the Russian agenda included securing a warm-water port facility and subverting any nation considered to be pro-Western. Pahlavi felt the Russians had the most to gain should Iran plunge into internal unrest. An April 1974 document from the State Department outlines the Shah's fears regarding Soviet aggression:

*The Shah believes Soviet activity in the Middle East indicates a continuing use of proxies such as Iraq and South Yemen to accomplish Soviet foreign policy goals. The Shah remains concerned by the potential for instability—and Soviet exploitation of it—in neighboring countries. He is concerned about radical movements in the Persian Gulf; Iraq's hostility towards Iran....He recognized the need for, and has been seeking, improved relations and cooperation with the more moderate Arab governments....Establishing this cooperation is not easy because of long-standing Arab wariness toward Iran.*¹⁸⁹

What Pahlavi may or may not have known was that the Soviets began courting the PLO shortly after Israel's success during the 1967 war. Soviet support for the terrorists was documented by Russian General Ion M. Pacepa, a defector to the West in 1978. In an article on *National Review Online*, Pacepa wrote:

*Between 1968 and 1978....security forces of Romania sent two cargo planes full of military goodies every week to Palestinian terrorists in Lebanon.... [The shipments did not stop after the fall of the Shah] ...in 1983 alone [the East German Stasi] sent \$1,877,600 worth of AK-47 ammunition to Lebanon. According to Vaclav Havel [president of Czechoslovakia], Communist Czechoslovakia shipped 1,000 tons of odorless explosive Semtex-H (which can't be detected by sniffer dogs) to Islamic terrorists—enough for 150 years.*¹⁹⁰

In actuality, the Soviets extended an invitation to Arafat to set up a PLO bureau in Moscow in 1974. General Pacepa wrote in his

memoirs that Arafat possessed “an incredible amount of fanaticism...of tangled oriental political maneuvers, of lies, of embezzled PLO funds deposited in Swiss banks, and of homosexual relationships, beginning with his teacher when he was a teenager and ending with his current bodyguards. After reading that report,” said Pacepa, “I felt a compulsion to take a shower whenever [I] had just shaken his hand.”¹⁹¹

Another Soviet counter-espionage defector from Poland, Colonel Michel Goleniewski, took aim at the Grand Ayatollah himself. The Russian exposed a CIA document from the early 1960s. The document reportedly revealed that “Khomeini was one of Moscow’s five sources of intelligence at the heart of the Shiite hierarchy.”¹⁹²

Although the PLO was a vital ingredient in the overthrow of the Shah and the return of Khomeini to Tehran, it was, however, the signing of a peace treaty with the Kurds in Northern Iraq that may well have signaled the beginning of the end for the monarch. In allowing some ten thousand religious pilgrims the right to freely travel from Iran to Iraq, the Shah opened the door for the smuggling of Ayatollah Khomeini’s fanatical and mutinous views across the border. It was through this pipeline that Khomeini’s cassette tapes were transported into the hands of the opposition in Iran.

While the Shah was seen to be the principal patron of the Iraqi Kurds’ struggle for independence and had supported the Kurds with arms and training, Iran’s assistance came to a halt with the signing of the Algiers Accords between Iran and Iraq. During an OPEC meeting the two sides met and hammered out an agreement to end an ongoing dispute over borders, water, and navigation rights. The Shatt-El-Arab waterway was designated the defining border. On June 13, 1975, the two nations signed the treaty. Unfortunately for the Kurds, the Accords also meant the end of the Shah’s support of the Kurdish rebels. Without that support the Kurds were powerless to provide any deterrent to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Iran.

Earlier in 1975 Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Iran's Finance Minister Hushang Ansary had inked an agreement totaling \$15 billion in purchases by Iran from the U.S. It was "the largest agreement of its kind ever signed by the two countries."¹⁹³ Such a massive sum of money was unfathomable to the vast majority of Iranians. This served to further distance the Shah from his people.

It was also in 1975 that the Shah established principals regarding private ownership of mining and industrial operations. Pahlavi gave the owners a period of three years to offer to the public 49 percent of the industries. This edict created a chaotic situation for the Shah. Wealthy industrialists were furious. They felt they were being forcibly stripped of their assets. Private citizens were equally disturbed at the thought of having to incur unwanted debt in order to purchase shares in the various companies. In his zeal to better the lot of the Iranian people, the Shah played right into the hands of what would become future President Jimmy Carter's human rights witch hunt by placing what appeared to be an unnecessary burden on the Iranian people.

With an agreement in place between Iran and Iraq, the Shah turned his attention to President Carter. In an attempt to mollify Carter's human rights agenda, the Shah ordered a sequence of liberalization policies. He permitted the reorganization of the National Front, an on-again-off-again, loosely organized political faction committed to "establish Iran's unequivocal sovereignty within and without; in other words...rule of law within, and political independence...without."¹⁹⁴

In a note from Sullivan to the secretary of state, the ambassador commented that:

The GOI (Government of Iran) is continuing to feel its way through the circumstances which have resulted from its policy of liberalizing conditions for public airing of dissent. The decision to avoid the use of massive police action is encouraging....If the dissidents opt for violent confrontation

*some nasty street fighting could erupt...and...turn into goon squads. We will continue to monitor carefully.*¹⁹⁵

The National Front had been inactive for a number of years. In its absence a generation of students had arisen who were devoted to radicalism and Islamic fanaticism. As an island of stability of what was increasingly becoming a turbulent sea of discontent in Iran, the National Front seemed content to protect the monarchy with the understanding that the “monarch reigned, but did not rule.”¹⁹⁶ This seemed to be supported by the protest marches that crippled Tehran on December 10 and 11, 1978. A CIA assessment of Iran indicated:

*The protest marches in Tehran...which brought out as many as a million demonstrators into the streets, were masterfully organized and controlled. The evidence suggests that local community leaders called dasteboardan, whose traditional functions include organizing religious processions, mobilized small crowds around local mosques and then moved these groups to join others from around the city.... The ability of these local community leaders to bring out large numbers of people in response to directives from members of the Islamic clergy gives the religious opposition in Iran an organizational strength which distinguishes it from any other group within the opposition....The Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini has served as the focal point for the loyalty of the religious opposition....There is no evidence to substantiate the claim...that behind the pattern of events lies the guiding hand of “foreign elements,” “leftists,” or...the Tudeh party....demonstrations in Tehran on the high holy days of Moharram...were the most impressive display of organizational ability thus far seen in the recent incidents of civil unrest in Iran.*¹⁹⁷

The report went on to indicate that Khomeini had a strong following, particularly within the lower classes, urban centers,

bazaar merchants and shopkeepers, and students who often chanted his name during rallies.

In a manifesto apparently drafted specifically for the December 10-11 marches, the Khomeini-inspired revolutionaries laid out their position. The document stated:

- » Ayatollah Khomeini is our leader. Whatever he asks we will carry out. This march is a vote of confidence in Khomeini.
- » The apparatus of the governmental dictatorship must be overthrown and power transferred to the people.
- » The rule of Islamic social and individual justice must be established on the basis of the votes of the people.
- » This is Human Rights Day. We ask for the human rights which our struggle has sought.
- » The imperialism of East and West must be removed. The Iranian people will continue and extend their relations with other nations.
- » People should not make money from money. The exploitation of human beings by others should be stopped. The collection of wealth in the hands of some people and the property of others should be redistributed.
- » We salute the martyrs of the Iranian struggle.
- » We demand release of all political prisoners and return of all who have left the country because of lack of freedom.¹⁹⁸

The Embassy also asked the questions: Will the Shah call for martial law, and if so, how heavy-handed will the government be? And perhaps most importantly, would the opposition be able to unite sufficiently to be able to approach the Shah convincingly?

The State Department telegram concluded:

Situation...offers both danger and hope. Danger in that radicals will instigate violent incidents which will draw

*moderates' attention away from rather pleasant feeling of success and provoke severe military reaction. Hope in that opposition can get unified proposal ready to move forward to coalition government reasonably soon.*¹⁹⁹

Also in December the Shah approached National Front leaders Shapour Bakhtiar and Gholam Hossein Sadiqi (the Shah's first choice as prime minister) to pursue the idea of instituting a civilian government or a constitutional monarchy. The men also explored the possibility of military rule. Unfortunately, the National Front, unlike the exiled Khomeini, had no accessibility to a network by which to propagate its message across Iran.

Dr. Parviz Mina told me of his last visit to Tehran and his certainty that the Shah's monarchy would not survive:

*When the plane took off it circled over Tehran. And I was looking down...on the northwestern side of the city...there was this famous avenue running from east to west...this street right from the beginning to the end was packed with people who were demonstrating against the Shah. I said, "By God, that's the end of it." That was the day I thought that he was...not going to survive.*²⁰⁰

Waiting in the wings was the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, whose vendetta against the Shah of Iran began in 1963 when Pahlavi's forces successfully thwarted a religious movement headed by Khomeini and deported the fanatical cleric first to Turkey and then to Iraq. From that time Khomeini became obsessed with the overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy.

It was Khomeini's ability to turn local mosques into cauldrons of revolutionary turmoil that was absolutely remarkable given the territorial nature of the mullahs and ayatollahs. Former Israeli Ambassador Uri Lubrani summarized his feeling about Khomeini's rise:

The religious establishment was the only organized body in Iran...in each village. If you ask about Khomeini having a

network, he had the best possible network in Iran. I tried to touch base with the religious establishment in 1973; they wouldn't talk to me. The Shah didn't have an agent in each village, neither a policeman. Nobody was allowed [by the Shah's government] to organize...only the religious establishment....add to that what Khomeini was disseminating from his exile first in Iraq and then in France, you'll see that this big network was being fed with dissent and sedition....By the beginning of 1978 I began to have forebodings...to feel uneasy...to look for more urgent signs...of something brewing. I went to see my foreign minister, Moshe Dayan, and told him of my concerns. I said, "I have my forebodings...we ought to begin to phase out." I knew at the end of the day...Israel will have no place in Iran...the new regime will be an unfriendly regime to Israel.²⁰¹

In a move that in hindsight was likely one of the most imprudent decisions by the Shah, Pahlavi freed a number of pro-Khomeini mullahs from Iran's prisons in 1978. These disgruntled clerics bent on revenge gladly joined Khomeini's underground and were among the many whose mosques were made available to the radicals.

The network of mosques proved to be much more effective than the efforts of the National Front. Khomeini, however, was slow, methodical, and determined to seek revenge against his adversary, the Shah, no matter the time or cost in money or lives. The Grand Ayatollah recruited from the ranks of mid-level mullahs who whipped their followers into rabid, pro-Khomeini militants.

The Shah, of course, had charted his own path simply because he wanted the favor of his subjects, the Iranian people. He professed to be a pious Muslim; he made the required trips to pay homage at the various shrines. The Shah craved the favor of the clerics, and submerged himself in prayer. How could he openly declare war on the mullahs whose support he so actively sought?

Khomeini's charisma was especially appealing to the lower classes, the *mostazafin*...the dispossessed. They saw him as their savior; the one who would rescue them from their lives of toil. Ahmad Ashraf wrote of the Ayatollah: "Khomeini gave the masses a sense of personal integrity, of collective identity, of historical rootedness, and feelings of pride and superiority."²⁰² In their hysterical longing for the coming of the *Mahdi*, the risen one that would free the masses from privation, discrimination, and tyranny, some claimed to have seen the Ayatollah's face in the moon.²⁰³ This would certainly be consistent with the Persian penchant for superstition, numerology, and dependence on "omens, symbols, prophecies, and revelations."²⁰⁴

It would be in the name of this *Mahdi* that a rogue Muslim fanatic and his faction in Saudi Arabia would seize the Grand Mosque in Mecca, seal the doors, and hold hostage the pilgrims inside the holiest of Muslim sites. The two-week siege would end only when French mercenaries and Saudi National Guard troops stormed the mosque. Hundreds were killed in the crossfire. This attack, though unsuccessful, was to be only a foretaste of the tactics Islamic fanatics were willing to use to achieve their goal...world domination through the return of the revered *Mahdi*. Khomeini was reputed by some to be the long-awaited redeemer of Islam.

Author Jahangir Amuzegar wrote of the mesmerizing Khomeini's appeal:

*He [Khomeini] spoke of such misty but universally popular goals as political and religious freedom, independence from pernicious foreign influences, social justice...the obligation to help the poor...the villainy of corruption, a need to conserve precious natural resources...and other goals.*²⁰⁵

With his smooth rhetoric, Khomeini managed to ensnare leaders of *The People's Mujahedeen-e-Khalq* and the Marxist-inspired *Fedayeen-e-Khalq* ("freedom fighters" with strong ties to the PLO) and entice them to join his brand of Islamic revolution.

It was the *Mujahedeen* with its thin veneer of Islam that endowed Khomeini with the venerable title of “Imam.” The group joined hands with Khomeini, deeming the Shah to be too secular. The *Fedayeen* was more interested in launching a Marxist revolution akin to that of Fidel Castro in Cuba or Che Guevara in Latin America.²⁰⁶ Both organizations had ties to the PLO. The Ayatollah had asserted he would be a “guide to the people.”²⁰⁷ Few realized that he would, instead, grip the reins of power in Iran and rule with an iron fist, squashing all opposition in his path. Khomeini managed to pull the wool over the eyes of the likes of intellectual James Bill, who described the tyrannical ruler as a man of “impeccable integrity and honesty, who has denied again and again that he will hold office.”²⁰⁸

To fund his campaign to depose the Shah, Khomeini relied in part on both the PLO and Syria’s Hafez Assad. The Soviet defector, former General Ion Pacepa, also revealed that another source of funds to support this direct onslaught against the Shah came from the Soviet Union. Khomeini’s fanatical influence on the mullahs in Iran was to be driven home to Pahlavi with powerful potency on October 9, 1977: twenty-plus students with covered faces rampaged through the University of Tehran, vandalizing classrooms, torching buses, and demanding that women be totally segregated from the male student population.

It was, however, during *Ramadan* (a Muslim month set aside for fasting and reflection) in August 1978 that large protest rallies erupted all across Iran. Curfew was imposed in some cities following days of mass rioting. The city of Abadan was the site of a mass murder said to have been staged by Islamic radicals. The doors of the *Rex Cinema*, hosting an Iranian film, were barred while the building was torched; 477 people died in the conflagration, including a number of children and their mothers. The clergy that directly supported Khomeini avowed that the fire was set by SAVAK, the Shah’s secret police. Iranian police determined that followers of the Ayatollah were responsible for the murders of so many innocent

people. In retrospect, this reeks of the tactics used by radical Islamic terrorists in countries such as Egypt, Algeria, and ultimately in the United States.

In Qom, the center of Islamic education in Iran, police fired into a group of rioters who were protesting a denouncement of Khomeini in the newspaper. Several clerics were killed in the melee. The Shah's attempts to suppress the rioting were rejected by his enemies and supporters alike. His enemies saw it as a weak attempt at appeasement, and his supporters just saw it as weakness, period. Khomeini saw it as the beginning of a tsunami that would sweep the Shah out of power. It was becoming more obvious that the threat to Iran was not from the communist Soviet Union, but from socio-economic, religious, and political sources.

Under the tutelage of his former son-in-law, Ardeshir Zahedi, the Shah was encouraged to offer up a scapegoat to appease the mobs of demonstrators. Zahedi, who had been appointed Ambassador to the United States, suggested such substitutes as Amir Hoveyda, and SAVAK heads Hasan Pakravan and Nematollah Nassiri. Zahedi assured Brzezinski, back in Washington, that he had the situation in Iran firmly in hand; obviously he was badly mistaken. Not even a counter demonstration organized by the ambassador could quell the unrest in his homeland.

In *Answers to History* Pahlavi wrote of the supposed role of the secret police:

*The Western press...claims that bloodshed and death that marred our cities had nothing to do with terrorists but was the work of SAVAK agents....If SAVAK had only been as effective as our enemies claimed, they would not have been out in the streets shouting vilifications.*²⁰⁹

Dr. Mina talked with me about SAVAK and its purpose in Iran as seen by the Shah:

One thing the Iranian people did not appreciate was the lack of freedom of political activity. There was absolutely no

other problem as far as individual liberty, religious liberty....It was only political activity which was controlledthe reason that was being done was because...the Shah was always afraid of the fact that Moscow would woo the intermediaries of their own choosing, which was the Tudeh Party, the communist party in Iran....he was frightened against communism....It was the United States that encouraged him to encourage the SAVAK....But that secret police was only fighting against communism....That was one of the reasons that they [U.S.] helped the Shah to create this secret police and then asked the Israelis to help Iran in training the people in [SAVAK].²¹⁰