

## The French Connection

*“France recklessly encouraged a succession of Muslim leaders, who proved to be implacably hostile to the West, from Gaddafi to Saddam Hussein. It was the French who turned Yasser Arafat into a figure on the world stage and tolerated his terrorists in their midst. And it was the French who enabled Ayatollah Khomeini to launch his Islamic revolution from a suburb of Paris.”* (Daniel Johnson<sup>1</sup>)

**It was while in France** that Khomeini’s speeches and writings were the most prolific and where the planning for his Islamic revolution gained momentum. Khomeini, the usurper, gave over one hundred media interviews during his short, four-month stay in Neauphle-le-Chateau. His pronouncements were quickly translated, printed, and sent to Tehran. According to Dr. Parviz Mina, the French gave Khomeini every media advantage and constantly covered his activities. “On the French news,” said Dr. Mina, “normally there are two special news programs, one at 1:00 in the afternoon and another at 8:00 p.m. And normally international news takes up ten minutes or fifteen minutes....During the time of Khomeini, every day, fifteen minutes they were talking about Iran and Khomeini, every day...the media was given the free hand....[the French government] provided him security. I think all the facilities he needed is at his disposal.”<sup>2</sup> The dour Ayatollah had been transformed overnight into a VIP, the darling of the liberal Western media, and France had become command central for the launch of his Islamic Republic.

France in 1979 boasted three major television outlets: *TeleFrance1 (TF1)*, *Antennae 2 (A2)*, and *France 3 (FR3)*; the latter two were owned by the government. A2 was similar in style and content to America’s Public Broadcasting System. The station set the tone for stories on “Journal 20h” (the 8:00 PM news), the equivalent of the NBC or

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Johnson, “J’Accuse,” *Literary Review*, [http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/johnson\\_12\\_06.html](http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/johnson_12_06.html). (Accessed June 2008.)

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Parviz Mina interview, Paris, France, April 18, 2008.

CBS Nightly News. On October 10, 1978, mere days after Khomeini's arrival, he was pictured in a story on A2. The images showed Khomeini dressed in dark clothing and sitting tailor-fashion on Persian carpets. He was posed in a lush green garden surrounded by children. He was described as being a deeply religious man who abstained from worldly things.<sup>3</sup> The images were reminiscent of the beloved Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi, the champion of non-violence. Khomeini was clearly being modeled as a modest man compared to the extravagant Shah.

The most influential daily newspaper in France at that time was *Le Monde* or "The World." Though *Le Monde* was left-of-center, it was not as far left as the communist *Libération*. On the other side of the coin was just slightly-right-of-center, *Le Figaro*. While French President Giscard D'Estaing was purported to be "Centrist," his views more nearly matched those of *Le Monde*.

Many in France thought journalist Paul Balta had been assigned by *Le Monde* to cover Khomeini; it was more apropos to say that Khomeini assigned him. Balta would tell the story years later of how he landed in Paris just after Khomeini arrived in exile at Neauphle-le-Château., a suburb of Paris:

While I was covering the Iranian revolution for *Le Monde*, I came to Paris in November 1978. Abu Hassan Bani Sadr, principal adviser to Khomeini and President of the Republic, told me that the Ayatollah, also called Imam, wanted to meet me. To my surprise, he explained to me that he had had my articles translated from the French press and that Khomeini

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<sup>3</sup> Journal de 20 h, A2 October, 10, 1978 Video may be viewed online at [http://www.ina.fr/archivespour tous/index.php?full=Khomeiny&genre=&chaine=&mode\\_document=&date\\_dif\\_jour1=&datedif\\_mois1=&datedif\\_annee1=&action=ft&explorer\\_OK.x=4&explorer\\_OK.y=8&cs\\_page=0&cs\\_order=3](http://www.ina.fr/archivespour tous/index.php?full=Khomeiny&genre=&chaine=&mode_document=&date_dif_jour1=&datedif_mois1=&datedif_annee1=&action=ft&explorer_OK.x=4&explorer_OK.y=8&cs_page=0&cs_order=3)

had said about me, “Who is he? He writes like no other; he knows Islam and Iran. I want to see him.” I went to Neauphle-le-Chateau, where he lived in exile since October 5. He shared his frugal meal with me: a large bowl of soup, bread, fruit, and some cakes just for me. He said that first he would ask me questions before answering mine. Once done, he granted me an official interview, which it was not customary.<sup>4</sup>

Had the Shah established the same conditions for an interview, would Balta have been as kind to Pahlavi in his writings as he was to Khomeini? For example, in a Khomeini biography/profile by Balta for *Le Monde* on February 1, 1979, he wrote:

A believer in jihad (in the original sense of the term, generally translated as “holy war,” it is the battle against oneself), he (Khomeini) disciplines himself down to the smallest details in daily activities and to an intense spiritual life. “He is an example to all, and even his worst enemies can never contest that,” they say in Iran.<sup>5</sup>

Did Balta later realize just how clever the Ayatollah had been with him? He posed a question to Khomeini in January 1979: “When you win [Not “if you win,” but “when.”], what will be the status of the Iranian women?” Khomeini’s answer: “Our women fight like lions. They deserve our admiration. In the Islamic state, they will have the status that they deserve.”

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<sup>4</sup> Balta, Paul, [http://www.clio.fr/BIBLIOTHEQUE/la\\_republique\\_islamique\\_diran.asp](http://www.clio.fr/BIBLIOTHEQUE/la_republique_islamique_diran.asp) translated from the French by Dan Godzich

<sup>5</sup> *Le Monde*, February 1, 1979 translated from the French by Dan Godzich

Just weeks later Balta joined Khomeini's entourage on the Air France plane that flew the triumphant Ayatollah to Tehran. Delivering a significant speech to his adoring followers in Qom, Khomeini returned the women of Iran to the Dark Ages. Balta explained:

He [Khomeini] outlined the main orientations of the future Islamic Republic and proclaimed compulsory wearing of the *chador* – "veil" – which had been abolished by the Shah. At the conclusion of the ceremony, I expressed my surprise about the *chador*, but he replied to me: "I told you they deserve our admiration. It is always the case, but I added as in the Islamic state, they will have the status that they deserve."<sup>6</sup>

It was also in France, that most cosmopolitan of countries, that Khomeini received the make-over of all times. This son of an Indian fortune-teller was stripped of his past. His father became the leader of the Khomeini clan who, supposedly, was murdered by Pahlavi's father. Khomeini graduated from second-rate mullah to academic and renowned holy man. If he was the Eliza Doolittle, who was the Henry Higgins? What country (or countries) was so determined to unseat the Shah that it was willing to undertake the transformation?

Dominique Lorenz, a journalist for the French *Libération*, wrote that "having picked Khomeini to overthrow the Shah, [the Americans] had to get him out of Iraq, clothe him with respectability, and set him up in Paris; a succession of events which could not have occurred if the leadership in France had been against it."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Balta, Paul, [http://www.clio.fr/BIBLIOTHEQUE/la\\_republique\\_islamique\\_diran.asp](http://www.clio.fr/BIBLIOTHEQUE/la_republique_islamique_diran.asp) translated from the French by Dan Godzich

<sup>7</sup> "Une Guerre," ("One War"), *Éditions des Arènes*, Paris, 1997.

In France, Khomeini's Iranian visitors totaled more than one thousand per day, all of which the French blessed or, at the very least, turned a blind eye. The Ayatollah became the "Guru of Hate" as he shared his vitriolic dislike for the Shah with all who would listen and learn. These disciples, including a number from various American universities, were not coming just to sit at the feet of the "Teacher" and learn; their pockets, lined with money collected through the Bazaar, the commercial system in Iran, were empty when they left Khomeini's presence. Some estimates place the contributions at approximately twenty million British pounds.

The Ayatollah's compound was reportedly surrounded by representatives of covert agencies from the major powers: the CIA, Britain's MI-6, Russia's KGB, and the French intelligence organization, SDECE. One has to wonder why an unknown, uncultured, old cleric was the focus of such attention.

Intelligence officers from Israel, France and the U.S. stated that the U.S. government wrote checks to Khomeini while he was in Paris in increments of approximately \$150 million. They were delivered through the CIA.

One visitor to Khomeini's chateau described the mesmerizing effect the Ayatollah had on his visitors:

He [Khomeini] started to speak in his deep, bass voice, and I never heard a voice as serene and moving. It was said that he caressed the ears of his listeners, in soft waves to put them in a trance state...Here we had an Imam, with his long, grey beard and black turban of the Shiites...and here, all of these men representing the social and intellectual elite of Iran, listened in absolute silence, hanging on every word that fell from his lips

with an attentive fascination....Khomeini was always sure that the driving force of the revolution would be religious, and he was therefore destined to take the leadership role.<sup>8</sup>

French journalist André Fontaine “compared Khomeini to John Paul II, heaping praise upon the [Ayatollah] without reserve. The philosopher Jacques Madaule, referring to Khomeini’s role, asked if his movement did not ‘open the gates of the future of humanity.’”<sup>9</sup>

Aiding Khomeini during his French exile was Abol Hassan Bani Sadr. Journalist Charles Villeneuve related to me that Bani Sadr was responsible for supplying the cassette tapes filled with anti-Shah propaganda and dispatching them through the network that would insure their arrival in the mosques in Tehran.<sup>10</sup> The Iranian had resisted attempts by CIA operative Vernon Cassin (under the alias Guy Rutherford) to enlist him as a mole. Cassin’s documents would eventually wind up in the hands of the militants who seized the American Embassy and would signal the downfall of Bani Sadr.

In my interview with him, Giscard d’Estaing shed more light on the messages sent into Iran by the Ayatollah:

During his stay, the Imam was active. He sent messages to Iran to Tehran....he used tapes....carried by followers to Iran...to Chayet, the man in charge....we knew the Interior Ministry was still watching closely the activities of the Ayatollah. He seems to deliver violent messages....we

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<sup>8</sup> Mohamed Heikal, *Khomeini and his Revolution*, Les Editions Jeune Afrique, 1983, (Translated from French), pp. 155-159.

<sup>9</sup> Cited by Houchang Nahavandi in *The Last Shah of Iran*, translated from the French by Steeve Reed (France: Editions Osmonde, 2004), p. 241.

<sup>10</sup> Personal Interview with Charles Villeneuve, journalist, Paris, France, April 19, 2008.

have political refugees, but they must abstain from violence. So we warned him...that we would not accept that [he] would go on sending messages....But he went on...we had the tapes. The second time I was warned by our ambassador in Tehran that Khomeini had sent a message asking to kill the Shah...five days later, we had confirmation that he sent another violent tape to Tehran saying the same thing, which was, “kill the Shah.”<sup>11</sup>

CIA memoranda regarding Khomeini and the Shah seem to have either been deliberately ignored by the Carter administration or lost in the great governmental paperwork shuffle. One such memorandum flatly stated, “Khomeini is determined to overthrow the Shah and is unlikely to accept compromise....Khomeini is anti-communist, but his followers may be susceptible to communist and radical penetration. He has cooperated in the past with Islamic terrorist groups.”<sup>12</sup>

A CIA intelligence memorandum dated January 19, 1979, and released three days after the Shah’s departure contained detailed information on Bani Sadr and Sadegh Ghotbzadeh (A Syrian-born leader of the opposition movement), including the fact that both men had ties to Palestinian commandos. Questions arise: Why was the memo released after the Shah’s departure from Tehran? Did President Carter and administration officials have access to this information in the months prior to abandoning the Shah and permitting Khomeini to return to Tehran?

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<sup>11</sup> Giscard d’Estaing interview, April 2008.

<sup>12</sup> CIA Intelligence Memorandum: The Politics of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, November 20, 1978, Declassified. Chadwyck-Healey, *Iran: The Making of U. S. Policy 1977-1980*, Alexandria VA 1990.

Early in 1977 Khomeini had begun to woo the military in Iran through his taped messages. The wily Ayatollah knew that to win the revolution he must first charm and disarm the military. He began to indoctrinate the troops with the message of the Shah's corruption and their own place as soldiers of Allah; as such, they were prohibited from shooting at their own brethren. He exhorted them to return to their homes, to the faith, and to service to Allah. Surprisingly, it was not SAVAK or the Shah's inner circle that stumbled onto Khomeini's tactics; it was the Israeli mission to Tehran that had become apprehensive.

By fall 1977 the Ayatollah was giving the soldiers specific instructions as to how to achieve his goal. He encouraged them to desert their posts in numbers, reminding them it was their God-given right to take their arms with them. Ironically, the very day Jimmy Carter praised Iran as "an ocean of stability in a stormy sea," a battalion of five hundred soldiers abandoned their post in the Meshed region. Said one journalist, "The Ayatollah effectively disarmed the Shah's military before engaging it in final battle."<sup>13</sup>

In another ironic twist, the Shah found himself an unwitting accomplice of Khomeini's revolution. In his efforts to modernize Iran, the Shah had installed a costly direct-dial telephone system. It allowed Khomeini to pick up the phone in Neauphle-le-Chateau and have direct talks with his cohorts in Tehran.

It was this telephone system that Azarbarzin was certain the CIA had bugged. He cited one incident to support his theory:

The Shah asked me to bring General Nissiri back into the country;  
it seemed the Shah was considering putting him in as prime minister.

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<sup>13</sup> Mohamed Heikal, pp. 155-159.

Nassiri was then stationed as the Shah's ambassador to Pakistan. I ordered an aircraft at the airport, only told the crew where they were going once onboard. We flew to Pakistan at night and returned with Nassiri to a nondescript gate at the airport, and drove back to the palace. I had made arrangements and alerted the Imperial Guard that we would sneak Nassiri in through an unused entrance after midnight.

Usually Ambassador Sullivan arrived at the palace at 10:00 AM....That morning...Sullivan arrived at 8:30 AM and asked to see the Shah. When they met Sullivan immediately began to explain that it was a mistake to name Nassiri...because the people demonstrating on the street were there because of Nassiri's actions as head of SAVAK. Instead of making Nassiri the PM as planned, he was placed in jail to please the Iranian masses.

On November 3, 1978, the Shah decided to create a military cabinet. His nominee was General Oveissi....The Shah ordered General Oveissi to start selecting his cabinet members. On November 4 both British Ambassador Anthony Parsons and U.S. Ambassador William Sullivan had audiences with the Shah. They convinced him that people called Oveissi a butcher for the way he had put down protests in 1963.<sup>14</sup>

The ambassadors suggested that the Shah appoint General Gholam-Reza Azhari as prime minister. Was this just another attempt on the part of the U.S. and British governments to manipulate Pahlavi?

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<sup>14</sup> Lt. General Shapur Azarbarzin interview, June 2008.

It seemed the Shah's government could do nothing to prevent Khomeini from attracting like-minded revolutionaries to his chateau outside Paris. In my interview with Samuel Segev, he confirmed that two of Khomeini's visitors in France were Farouk Kaddoumi, PLO department head, and a Libyan representative of Muammar al-Qaddafi. Khomeini was tendered arms and money in support of the revolution. Soon after, Radio Tripoli broadcast messages in Persian to Khomeini backers in Iran, and PLO terrorists were dispatched to Tehran.<sup>15</sup>

As the turmoil fueled by Khomeini's subversive methods in his country increased, the Shah tried appeasement measures to placate the rioters and strikers. He eased curfews, allowed processions to mark holy days, and ultimately succumbed to the pressure to put a new government in place. He chose Shahpour Bakhtiar, a forthright critic of the monarchy, as the new leader. Ardeshir Zahedi urged General Oveissi to secure Bakhtiar's agreement that he would work with the army to restore order not undermine it, and Bakhtiar agreed.

At Bakhtiar's urging the Shah agreed to leave Iran for what was labeled "rest and recuperation." Empress Farah Pahlavi writes that even though Bakhtiar urged the Shah to leave, The Chief of Staff General Abbas Gharabaghi was opposed to the move and warned the empress that if the Shah left Iran, the army would collapse.

This evaluation was supported by Ambassador Lubrani. He dressed himself as a middle-class Iranian and went out among the rioters and demonstrators. He related that the soldiers simply stood by while women in the crowd placed carnations in the muzzles of their rifles. The army was effectively neutralized by the massive crowds of Iranians.

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Segev interview, Jerusalem, Israel, May 15, 2008.

The question then became: Had the Shah given the order to shoot into the crowd, would the army have complied?<sup>16</sup>

The Shah assumed that upon his return, he would become a constitutional monarch much like Queen Elizabeth II in England. Little did he know that once airborne, he would have caught his last glimpse of his beloved country, and that Iran would plunge back into the Dark Ages from which he had tried so hard to lead his people. Pahlavi was convinced the French government was ignoring Khomeini's clever plot to incite revolution in Iran.

From Paris, Khomeini had called upon the Iranian military to forestall any attempt by the Shah to promote a military coup. He had also urged the Iranian people to overthrow the Bakhtiar government, calling it illegal and illegitimate. The Ayatollah wrote:

“There is a possibility that the treacherous Shah, now about to depart, will commit a further crime, a military coup d'état. I have frequently warned that this is probable....The courageous people of Iran know that there are only a few slavish and bloodthirsty individuals in the army, who apparently occupy important positions and whose identities are known to me, and that the honorable elements in the army will never permit these slaves of the Shah to commit such a crime against their nation and religion. In accordance with my God-given and national duty, I alert the Iranian army to this danger, and I demand that all commanders and officers resolutely prevent the enactment of any such conspiracy and not

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<sup>16</sup> Uri Lubrani interview, May 2008.

permit a few bloodthirsty individuals to plunge the noble people of Iran into a bloodbath. Iranian army, this is your God-given duty. If you obey these congenital traitors, you will be accountable to God, Exalted and Almighty, condemned by all humanitarians, and cursed by future generations....The Iranian people...must recognize that a few treacherous members of the army cannot sully the army as a whole. The record and responsibility of a few bloodthirsty individuals is something separate from the army as a whole. The army belongs to the people, and the people belong to the army. The army will not suffer any harm as a result of the departure of the Shah.<sup>17</sup>

According to President Carter's memoir, *Keeping Faith*, President d'Estaing offered to deport Khomeini to halt the discord and stop Khomeini's rabble-rousing from French shores. Carter writes that "the Shah had thought it would be better to keep Khomeini there [France], instead of letting him go to Iraq or Libya or some place where he might orchestrate even more trouble."<sup>18</sup> A poll taken among the French people found that half [of those] questioned were "sorry that their government granted political asylum to the Ayatollah."<sup>19</sup>

In July 1979 President Jimmy Carter inked a document launching America on the path that on September 11, 2001, would lead to the deaths of 2,974 innocent civilians; another twenty-four individuals are still listed as missing. What was the document? It was

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<sup>17</sup> Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations*, translated and annotated by Hamid Algar (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 247-248.

<sup>18</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1995), p.454.

<sup>19</sup> Discovery Channel, "Koppel on Iran," December 3, 1979, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,948624,00.html>. (Accessed January 2008.)

the first order to send aid to the Afghanistan rebels fighting against the Soviet invaders. The aid would provide the weapons and know-how to train the rebels in terror tactics; lead to the creation of the Taliban; and give rise to the scion of a Saudi prince, a ruthless young man named Osama bin Laden, founder of the vile and violent al-Qaeda.

In 1980 the Afghan rebels were aided by a \$30 million infusion from the Carter administration. The ante was raised in Carter's 1981 budget to \$50 million. It marked a rise in significant aid for the resistance from international sources.

The Iranians under Khomeini's leadership were relentless in the pursuit of the Shah's assets purported to be stashed in American banks. In a move seemingly designed to further insult the United States, Khomeini's negotiators demanded a total of \$24 billion dollars be transferred to a bank in Algeria. On the heels of the ridiculous stipulation, the Iranians distributed a synopsis of their demands. The U.S. retaliated by printing a summation of its own correspondence with the rogue nation. The deadlock between the two countries seemed insurmountable until January 15, 1981. Just days before Carter was to leave office, Iran capitulated and agreed to Carter's demands to pay off loans owned to U.S. banks. In marathon sessions, new drafts were produced, new documents drawn and the Bank of England was approved as the repository of escrow funds. Shortly after 4:00 A.M. on Inauguration Day, January 20, 1981, the Carter administration relinquished \$7.977 billion to the Iranians. According to one source, the transfer required fourteen banks and the participation of five nations acting concurrently.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Gary Sick, *All Fall Down* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.com, Inc., 2001)P. 397–398.

## Interviews

My deepest gratitude goes to the men and women who have agreed to interviews: Her Majesty Farah Pahlavi, wife of the former Shah of Iran; Mr. Atabai Kambiz, chief of staff to Empress Farah Pahlavi; editorial journalist Samuel Segev; journalist and terrorism expert Charles Villeneuve; Robert Baxter, research associate in Paris; Dr. Parviz Mina, Director, National Iranian Oil Company (under the Shah); Dr. Abol-Majid Majidi, minister of planning and budget (under the Shah); Valerie Giscard d'Estaing, former President of the French Republic; Hubert Vedrine, adviser to President Francois [Mitterrand](#), and secretary-general, 1991-1995; Benjamin Netanyahu, former prime minister of Israel; Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert; Yitzhak Rabin, former prime minister of Israel; Shimon Peres, former prime minister of Israel; Uri Lubrani, former Israeli ambassador to Iran; former Israeli ambassador to the U.S. Dore Gold; Marvin Kalb, award-winning reporter for CBS and NBC; Dr. Alan Dershowitz, professor, Harvard School of Law; Israeli Mossad agent Eliezer Zafir; General David Ivri, commander Israeli Air Force and ambassador to U.S.; General Yitzhak Segev; Dr. Ahmed Tehrani; Lt. General Shapour Azarbarzin; Ambassador Ardeshir Zahedi; research assistant Dan Godzich, Washington, D.C.; Dr. Ronen Cohen who provided invaluable research information from Israel; and Arlen Young, who spent hours proofreading the pages of this manuscript.

This story began with late Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and my talks with him during the Carter presidency. This book would not be complete without recognizing his influence and that of many others over the years: Dr. Reuben Hecht; Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir; Major General James E. Freeze, assistant deputy director for Plans and Policy, national security; General Jerry Curry, department of defense in the Pentagon; General George Keegan (retired), chief of Air Force intelligence from 1972 to 1977; Lt. General Richard F. Schaeffer (retired) Deputy Chairman of NATO Military Committee from January 1974 to June 1975; Isser Harel, former head of Israeli intelligence and security; Lieutenant General Moshe Ya'alon, former chief of staff, IDF; and to Mr. James Woolsey, former director, CIA; General Hugh Shelton, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; General Yossi Peled, chief of the Northern Command, Israel; General Dani Yatom, head of Mossad, Israeli intelligence Service; General Ya-akov Amidror, former chief of IDF intelligence; Lt. General Tom McInerney; Masoud Barzani, president of Iraqi Kurdistan; and the late General Robert "Dutch" Huyser, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, United States European Command.