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REVISITING THE SEVENTIES

The Third World Comes of Age

By THOMAS C. REED *and* DANNY B. STILLMAN

During the 1970s, most young American officers were focused on our sad evacuation from Vietnam, the frightening advances in Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile warheads, or the political cannibalism then consuming leaders in Washington. They thus missed the important stories. A quarter century later, it might be well to revisit those years.

Hidden in plain view lay the rise, funding, and technical enablement of certain Third World leaders who now seek nuclear arms and who may soon bring about the detonation of a nuclear device within the West. Such a catastrophe is far more likely today than the Mutual Assured Destruction planned during the Cold War. Where did these people come from, and how complicit were American leaders in their rise?

As the 1960s drew to a close, kings and emirs friendly to the West ruled most of the Middle East. India was thought to be a peaceful and nonaligned—although Soviet-friendly—backwater. A glut of cheap oil was on the market. Producing states and independent drillers had to rely on the major oil companies to refine and market their product using price wars, advertising, glassware, and customer service as enticements. Nuclear weapons were solely the province of the Big Five (China, France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States), who were the victors of World War II and were enshrined as the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. But then the cradles of early civilization began to rock.

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September 1969: Libya Goes Radical

For the quarter century after the end of World War II, Idris al-Senousi had been in charge of the United Kingdom of Libya. A wartime, Italian-fighting hero, Idris was installed by the British at the end of the war and legitimized by a plebiscite soon thereafter. He ruled his utterly impoverished kingdom with a kindly hand until the discovery of oil in 1955. Then corruption set in. Oil production rose from nothing in 1958 to 3 million barrels per day a decade later. In 1968, the world price of oil was only \$3.50 per barrel, but even that gave the ruler of the desert kingdom a daily cash flow of over \$10 million—a multibillion dollar annual kitty.¹

King Idris had no children, and he had done little about planning for his succession. In 1964, at age 74, he had tried to abdicate for reasons of health. His subjects would hear none of it. There was a nephew, Hassan al-Reda, known as “the Black Prince,” but his reputation for graft and his lack of gravitas ruled him out as a serious contender for the throne. The family tree stood without solid roots, yet it had produced the low-hanging fruit of newly discovered oil deposits.

In the summer of 1969, at age 79, King Idris headed off to the Turkish spa at Bursa for treatment of a leg ailment. Most other high government officials were also vacationing outside the country. On September 1, with the decks clear, Captain Muammar Qadhafi mounted a coup.

Qadhafi was born in the desert south of Sirte during World War II (in 1942) as Montgomery and Rommel battled for the coast. He grew up in Seha, a village in the southern desert of the Fezzan. As a poor Bedouin boy from the interior, he joined the army at age 17 because there were no other opportunities. He brought with him a resentment of material wealth, foreigners, and infidels.

In 1952, as the British turned over their postwar authority to the newly independent Libyan government, they started to train a constabulary and an officer corps for the infant kingdom. In time, Qadhafi was identified as one of the army’s brightest and best. He was sent to the Royal Libyan Military Academy in Benghazi for officer training. Upon graduation in 1965, he was invited to attend Sandhurst, the United Kingdom’s military academy, for further training as a military engineer. En route home, in 1968 Qadhafi visited post-Farouk Egypt, picking up a healthy dose of Nasserite Arab national-

ism along the way. Upon his return to Libya, Qadhafi and some fellow junior officers began to organize. They called themselves the Free Officers’ Association and gave their intended revolution a name: Operation *Jerusalem*.

On September 1, 1969, the 27-year-old Captain Qadhafi and a handful of his fellow officers made their move. Armed with a few



Colonel Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi

U.S. Air Force (Jeremy T. Lock)

revolvers and a mere 48 rounds of ammunition, they closed in on two targets. One was the military headquarters in Tripoli, whose officers already were predisposed to the radical views of the Free Officers’ Association. The other was Tripoli’s radio station. Qadhafi and his men stormed and took over both. That was all there was to it. No rolling tanks,

other insurgent officers were junior captains and lieutenants, all in their twenties. To give the coup some credibility (and to protect the key players), one Colonel Bushwerib was first announced as the coup leader. Then, a week later, a government was announced with Mahamoud al-Maghreby as its prime minister. Lurking in the background, however, as the ultimate source of authority, was the Revolutionary Council. Qadhafi was its chairman; the captains and lieutenants constituted the membership.

Due east of Tripoli lay a U.S. Air Force facility known as Wheelus Air Base. It was a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) training site, a place where pilots based on the foggy and crowded European continent could unfold their wings. Wheelus was a gorgeous place and the site of a Mussolini-era racetrack right on the Mediterranean Sea. The beach and the scuba diving were spectacular. But Wheelus was also secure; it could be reinforced from that same sea. Ten thousand U.S. troops and civilian personnel were stationed there, making it one of the best-defended American air bases in the Near East.

The wing commander at Wheelus during the late summer of 1969 was Colonel Daniel “Chappie” James, an outstanding fighter pilot just returned from 78 combat missions over Vietnam. In later years, when both coauthor Reed and then-General James worked at the Pentagon, James came to tell Reed of the events that took place during that historic night in September 1969.

Colonel James had arrived in Libya only a month before, but he was a quick-witted and sharp officer. On that fateful night of September 1, his operations center at Wheelus

within 5 years of his takeover, Qadhafi engineered the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries’ embargo of shipments to the United States and its Western allies

no action in the streets of Benghazi or Tobruk. Just a gang of young rebels at the radio station in Tripoli and a sympathetic group of duty officers at headquarters; but that was enough. Once on the air, the rebels announced the end of the United Kingdom of Libya, the abolition of all existing government structure, and the birth of the new Libyan Arab Republic.

At first it was not clear who was behind this coup. Qadhafi was the most senior of the plotters, but he was only a captain. The

picked up the Qadhafi-organized broadcast. A few phone calls around the country revealed the very narrow base of this coup-in-progress. Colonel James knew that Qadhafi’s accession and Idris’ departure would not be beneficial to Western interests and so advised his superiors in Washington. Colonel James had a well-armed, well-trained, and highly mobile security force on base to protect that NATO facility from insurrections, terrorists, or Soviet-inspired attack; Wheelus was home to

some valuable assets. The colonel formulated a plan to send an armed detachment down-town, break into the radio station, arrest the ringleaders, and secure the government facilities as needed. But before acting, he sought the approval of the National Military Command Center in the Pentagon. The officers on duty there referred the matter to the Situation Room in the White House.

Richard Nixon's memoirs make no specific reference to this event, and Henry Kissinger writes in generalities about the precarious military balance in the Middle East during those years, so neither official seems to have given the Qadhafi coup much attention. When queried, Kissinger recalled that he and Nixon wanted to overthrow Qadhafi, but the Foreign Service specialists at the Department of State saw Qadhafi as a "reformer." In all probability, the new Nixon administration simply did not have the confidence needed to deal swiftly with Qadhafi. Taking any action would be "interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state," Kissinger said later.

Colonel James' troops stayed in their barracks at Wheelus as Qadhafi consolidated his power. By the morning of September 2, he was extending his control throughout Libya. The Black Prince renounced his claim to the throne, calling on Libyans to support the new government. Within a week, the United States recognized the junta as the de facto government, and during that same week, King Idris was told to stay in Turkey. His cabinet fled

their homeland, and a campaign of assassination and kidnapping of former officials began. Only the noisy disturbance created by a former prime minister, locked in the trunk of a kidnapper's car, alerted a London policeman to his plight. On December 2, 1969, the Revolutionary Council arrested the Libyan army's chief of staff and the chief of security. A counter-coup was attempted on December 11. It failed. Qadhafi promoted himself to colonel. Then, on January 16, 1970, Qadhafi took off the wraps. He assumed the roles of prime minister and minister of defense.

Within 5 years of his takeover, during Israel's Yom Kippur War in 1973, Qadhafi engineered the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries embargo of shipments to the United States and its Western allies.² He also pioneered the first "oil shock," raising the price from \$3.50 to \$13 per barrel and making those increases stick. Within 10 years, Qadhafi was enjoying oil revenues of over \$50 million *per day*.³ Some of those petrodollars made their way into the schools and hospitals of his citizens, but much of Qadhafi's cash went to finance an impressive chemical warfare complex, a plague of terrorist attacks on Americans abroad, and at least two forays into the development of nuclear weapons. The first was undertaken in the early 1980s, a time when China was transferring nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan and when China had contracted, in secret, to build the El Salam nuclear reactor in Algeria.⁴ Qadhafi's scientific advisors hoped to travel a similar

plutonium route; contractors from Japan and Belgium were to supply the technology, but the project proved indigestible to the limited Libyan scientific infrastructure.

During the decade following the oil shocks, Qadhafi's terrorist activities drew a response from the Reagan administration. On April 15, 1986, the President ordered an air attack on Tripoli and Benghazi in response to an earlier Libyan-sponsored assault on La Belle

Discotheque, a West Berlin hangout of American Servicemembers. While the April 15 attacks were aimed at Qadhafi, they only succeeded in killing his infant daughter and wounding several others in his family. Some claim Qadhafi "calmed down" after that, but in fact he just became more discreet—and more determined. From disclosures arising after the seizure of the BBC *China* in 2003, it is clear that Qadhafi's second nuclear weapons effort, with roots in Pakistan, was born after the 1986 attacks on Libya.

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Qadhafi became an important force for evil in the Cold War and in the power vacuum that followed, a role made possible by visionary oil men, a negligent king, and a timorous White House that was unwilling to intercede when Western interests were clearly at stake.

**December 1971:
Fission Comes to Pakistan**

At the time of independence in 1947, the British colony of India was partitioned into a central Hindu state (India) and two separated regions with ties to the Muslim religion. The latter parcels, taken together, were to be known as Pakistan. East and West Pakistan were neither contiguous nor compatible, and for years politicians and officers in the West controlled the government. In 1970, however, the consolidated voters in the East won the Pakistani elections. The authorities in the western capital of Islamabad did not care to hand over power.

On March 26, 1971, rebellious army officers in East Pakistan declared independence. Their legitimacy was immediately recognized by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India, who was eager to see her Muslim rival dismembered.

With a war of independence in the air, the Cold War superpowers promptly took sides. On August 9, India and the Soviet Union executed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. As an offset, during that same summer, the Chinese offered material, but not military, support to Pakistan. The Nixon administration, with one eye on its planned rapprochement with China, joined



U.S. Navy planes attack Libyan *Nanuchka II*-class missile corvette in Gulf of Sidra after Libyan forces fired on U.S. aircraft in same area, 1986

in supporting its allies in Islamabad, while the government of India, having lost a border war with China⁵ a decade before, waited for the winter snows to close the Himalayan passes before deploying active support for the rebels in the East.

In preparing for conflict, the generals in Pakistan noted the lessons of the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War of 1967: preemption pays. On December 3, 1971, the Pakistani air force staged a preemptive raid on the airfields of Northwest India. Those raids were ineffective. The Indian military struck back.

The United States sent a carrier battle-group, led by the USS *Enterprise*, to the Bay of Bengal. The Soviets responded with a trailing naval force, including nuclear-powered submarines, dispatched from Vladivostok. Both forces were on station, armed with nuclear weapons, by the second week of December 1971.

The war itself was a disaster for the overpowered Pakistanis. Within 2 weeks, Pakistan had lost half its navy in battles off the port of Karachi, half its air force in the eastern and western skies, and one-third of its army on the ground in East Pakistan. On December 16, the Pakistani army had no choice but surrender; 93,000 of its troops and camp followers had been taken prisoner. Photographs and videos of Pakistan's Lieutenant General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi surrendering his forces to gloating Indian Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora swept the world.

East Pakistan became the independent Republic of Bangladesh. Muslim leaders in Islamabad wept; a young Pakistani scientist in Holland resolved to seek revenge; Brigadier General Yahya Khan, the military president of what remained of Pakistan, resigned. On December 20, 1971, a civilian—Zulfikar Ali Bhutto—took control of the government. Bhutto was the leader of the Pakistan People's Party, a prodemocracy organization that was supported by the socialist segments of society while it opposed military rule.

The lessons imposed on the leaders of the new, residual nation were clear: a force equalizer was mandatory. The newly installed president of Pakistan had served as minister of fuel, power, and natural resources. As such, he was conversant with the possibilities of nuclear power—and weapons. Within 3 weeks of his installation, President Bhutto met with his senior scientific advisors to review the nuclear option. The usual ebb and flow of graduate students to universities in the West had begun a decade before.

Pakistan's first nuclear power reactor was already under construction in Karachi; it was to go critical by the end of the year. During the months that followed the January 1972 meeting, the president refocused the work of his nation's Atomic Energy Research Council by taking full control, renaming it the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC), and installing nuclear engineer Munir Ahmad Khan as its director.

Khan family moved to Leuven in Belgium. Khan entered Catholic University to continue his studies in metallurgy.

Through all those years, Khan's life had been that of the innocuous student and family man, but in 1971 events at home brought a sense of urgency. In the spring of that year, as noted above, the political leaders of East Pakistan rebelled, declared independence from West Pakistan, and adopted the name

Khan returned to Amsterdam fully committed to collecting information and parts while Pakistani authorities began to purchase components for a uranium enrichment program

In 1973, demonstrating his belief in democracy—while building his own scaffold⁶—President Bhutto drafted and brought about the ratification of a new constitution. Henceforward, the president was to serve as chief of state; a prime minister was to run the government. Z.A. Bhutto resigned the presidency in August 1973 in order to become the first prime minister of Pakistan; he carried the nuclear portfolio with him. By the time of his removal from power in 1978, Bhutto had assembled a first-class nuclear weapons team. A nuclear power reactor was cranking out plutonium, and knowledgeable scientists were cranking out bomb designs.

**June 1972:
A.Q. Khan in Holland**

In 1936, Abdul Quadeer Khan was born in Bhopal, India, to a Pakistani family. When the British granted independence to the Indian subcontinent in 1947, they used the partition of Hindus (in India) from Muslims (in the split territories of East and West Pakistan) as the fig leaf for their withdrawal. As with any partition, minorities were left behind on both sides. Life was grim for the Muslim Khan family in Bhopal, so at the age of 18, the young Khan migrated to Karachi, in West Pakistan, on foot.

Once there, Khan attended the D.J. Sindh College of Science, graduating in 1960 with a degree in metallurgy. After a brief stint in local government, he decided to pursue graduate studies in Western Europe. He met and married a Dutch girl, spent 4 years at the university in Delft, and emerged with a master's degree in metallurgical engineering. In the process, he became fluent in Dutch and German. In 1968, the young

Bangladesh for their side of the continent. A bloody civil war ensued, with India intervening on the side of the successful rebels. In the aftermath of that war, all loyal Pakistanis (including the 35-year-old Khan) decided they had to “do something” about India.

At home, unbeknownst to Khan, the new government of Ali Bhutto had already decided what to do: go nuclear. There had been rumors of Indian nuclear ambitions for some time. In January 1972, President Bhutto called 70 of his leading scientists to Punjab to discuss this option. His audience was enthusiastic and promised results within 5 years.⁷

Back in Belgium, A.Q. Khan received his doctorate in metallurgy in June, then moved to Holland to take a job with a subcontractor working for the Uranium Enrichment Corporation (URENCO), which was organized by the British, Dutch, and German nuclear power industries to develop the technology needed to separate U-235 fuel from natural uranium compounds. Ultracentrifuges, rotating at very high speeds, were the preferred route. The resulting URENCO technology was the best in the world. In 1972, Dr. A.Q. Khan began collecting—that is, stealing—that know-how with meticulous care.

On May 18, 1974, the Indians tested a nuclear device under the Rajasthan desert. That was the final and defining moment for Khan. The following month, he wrote a letter to President Bhutto (whom he did not know) explaining the role of the centrifuge in producing fissionable material. Khan offered to help with any Pakistani nuclear weapons program. (He did not know one was already under way.) Bhutto responded with interest through his embassy in The Hague.

During the fall of 1974, Khan spent 16 days at the URENCO facility. His day job was to translate documents, but during his spare time, he toured the plant, taking notes on the design and operation of the equipment. His observations were written in his native Urdu to disguise them from prying eyes. In December 1974, President Bhutto and Khan met in Karachi while Khan and his family were home for the holidays. The covert PAEC had already embarked on a plutonium-based nuclear weapons plan, but at their meeting, Bhutto decided to put Khan in charge of a parallel enriched uranium effort.

In the spring of 1975, Khan returned to his post in Amsterdam, now fully committed to collecting information and parts while Pakistani authorities began to purchase components for a uranium enrichment program.⁸ A coworker became suspicious and Khan was moved to a less sensitive job. In December 1975, he returned to Pakistan for the holidays, but this time he never returned to URENCO. In the spring of 1976, Khan started work at PAEC. With the full support of the Bhutto government, he was authorized to organize the Engineering Research Laboratory in Kahuta, 15 miles due east of the Islamabad airport. That facility was to develop a uranium enrichment capability for Pakistan. It opened for business on July 31, 1976. Khan stayed in touch with his friends and informants in Holland, and his work may have received additional funding from Libya and Saudi Arabia. During the years that followed, China began the transfer of nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan—presumably to A.Q. Khan—in part as a consequence of the Chinese-Indian border clashes of the previous decade.

In the late 1970s, the American intelligence services learned of all this activity; Central Intelligence Agency surveillance of Khan apparently began in earnest, but in December 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. The Americans needed all the help they could get from neighboring Pakistan, so hard questions about covert nuclear programs were off the table. By the end of that decade, Khan had an operational enrichment centrifuge online and running at Kahuta as the Americans busied themselves elsewhere.

**February 1979:
Khomeini in Iran**

Persia, now known as the Islamic Republic of Iran, is not an Arab nation. Its

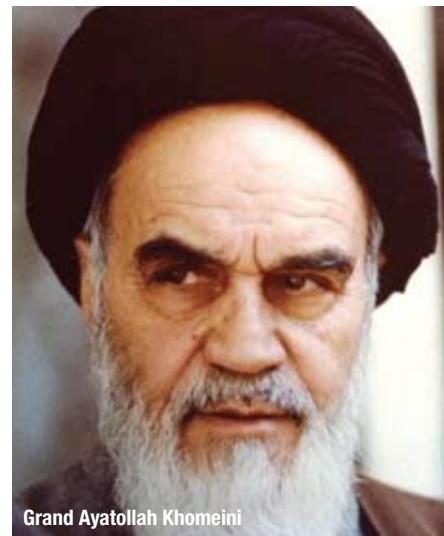
residents speak Farsi, although Islam is the predominant religion. For much of the 20th century, Iran has been caught in the jaws of history. The Caucasus Mountains and the Soviet Union lie to the north; the old British Empire of India and Transjordan spread to the east and west; and the Persian Gulf bounds Iran on the south. Within the country lay the oilfields that were the prize in the “Great Game” of the early 20th century.

Iran entered that century as an independent monarchy, with its ruler known as the Shah. There was one revolution in 1906 that limited the power of the Shah and established a National Assembly. In 1925, there was another transition wherein Reza Pahlavi seized power (with the concurrence of the National Assembly) and declared himself Shah. In September 1941, 3 months after Adolf Hitler’s surprise invasion of Russia, both Britain and the Soviet Union, now allied in the fight against the Nazis, invaded Iran. They deposed the sitting Shah (a Hitler sycophant) and installed his 22-year-old son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.

When the war was over, getting the Russians out of Iran was not easy; only a firm stand by President Harry Truman staved off a partition. Then there was the difficulty with Mohammad Mossadeq, the prime minister who in 1951 decided to nationalize Iran’s oil industry. At that time, Iran was dependent on foreign markets for the sale of a then-surplus commodity. In 1953, military officers sympathetic to the Shah (and supported by the United States and Britain) removed Mossadeq from power. That move reopened the foreign markets

Iran had begun; those opposed to the Shah’s plans would have to go. The Shah imprisoned, and soon thereafter exiled, one of Iran’s leading religious activists of that time, 36-year-old Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Thus the latter’s arrival in Iraq.

The Pahlavi-Khomeini relationship had a long history. The Ayatollah’s father had been killed by agents of the elder Shah;



Grand Ayatollah Khomeini

Khomeini lost one of his sons, Mustafa, under mysterious circumstances that implicated the younger Shah’s regime. Thus, once exiled to Iraq, Khomeini began to plot his revenge. In 1965, his agents assassinated the Shah’s prime minister, Hassan Ali Mansur; in the years that followed, the Ayatollah began to articulate his vision of an Islamic Iranian Republic.

In 1971, the British government decided it could no longer support an empire, or even

the Tudeh never enjoyed a broad base of support, but in 1971, it made common cause with the Islamic radicals, organizing the first armed uprisings against the Shah

for Iranian crude, which, in turn, brought prosperity to Iran and its leader. But that coup also brought a resentment of Anglo intrusion that persists to this day. For 25 years after the Mossadeq removal, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi ruled as a staunch Western ally.

But Iran is a Muslim country. In 1963, the Shah introduced a package of social and economic reforms, widely hailed in the West but highly offensive to the religious leaders within Iran. The forced Westernization of

military bases, in the Middle East. As the British moved out, the Nixon administration took over as the Shah’s patron. Nixon and Kissinger wanted the Shah, and Iran, to take over the job of policing the Persian Gulf. After the first oil shock in 1973, the United States started selling lots of sophisticated aircraft, missiles, and electronics to the Shah’s oil-rich regime. The Soviets were not pleased, so they began to expand their support of the Tudeh (communist) party in Iran. The Tudeh never enjoyed a broad base of support, but in 1971,

it made common cause with the Islamic radicals, organizing the first armed uprisings against the Shah.

In 1977, Jimmy Carter took office as President of the United States. With him came a new approach to human rights. Those policies may have been morally just, but they proved fatal to the Shah and a blessing to Khomeini. In response to pressures from Washington, the Shah made concessions to his internal critics, which only emboldened them to ask for more. Riots broke out in the city of Qom. The Shah had tried to Westernize a very old culture. Many of its custodians did not approve, and his enlightened postwar leadership had degenerated into a despotic egomania. The Shah had antagonized the ayatollahs and much of the Iranian middle class, and he was dying of cancer.

In 1978, the Carter administration, probably unintentionally, undertook a two-track approach to the future of Iran. William Sullivan, a career Foreign Service officer and by then the U.S. Ambassador to Iran, was the voice of the State Department. He and his backers saw Iran's future in the hands of the clerics. He wished to meet and negotiate with Khomeini, whom he envisioned as a Gandhi-like figure whose accession to power would reflect the values and serve the interests of the United States. At the same time both Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and the Pentagon wanted to rely on the Shah's well-trained military to maintain order. The Brzezinski components of the Carter administration hoped the Iranian armed forces would hold together in order to run the country when and if the Shah left. They saw radical Islam as a serious threat to the West. As 1979 dawned, Ambassador Sullivan was already in Iran conversing with the clerics, while President Carter still thought



Commander of Pakistan Army in the East signs Instrument of Surrender ending Indo-Pakistan Liberation War, 1971

Bharat Rajeshak News



Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran

U.S. Air Force (Denham)

the Shah could be saved and/or that the Shah's generals could succeed him. To facilitate that transition, the White House dispatched four-star Air Force General Robert "Dutch" Huyser to Iran. His instructions were to "convey the President's concern and assurances to the military leaders at this most critical time."

The choice of an Air Force emissary was unfortunate. General Huyser was the most talented of men, but within Iran the Shah's air force was bitterly resented. It was soaking up national treasure in the purchase of exotic aircraft, radars, and control systems that were of little help to the Iranian army. The survival of the Shah's rule would depend on that army taking control of the streets. An Air Force general from the United States, vendor of all those airplanes and other gadgets, would not be able to solidify that army's support.

For an entire month, from his covert arrival in Tehran on January 2, 1979, to his helicopter evacuation at dusk on February 3, Huyser was, as *Pravda* put it, the "American Viceroy in Iran." Upon his arrival, Huyser found a reasonably honest government and a well-trained military ready to carry out its leaders' orders. He encountered an ill Shah—suffering from cancer, dreaming of progress that many of his citizens did not want, and unwilling to order the Imperial Guard to fire on his own people to enforce his visions of a better life.

General Huyser also found an economy paralyzed by work stoppages, orga-

nized by the clerics and the Tudeh. Striking customs officials had closed the borders to foodstuffs while admitting a flood of arms for the rebels. He found a banking system operating sporadically and then only to effect domestic transactions, with no settlement of international accounts. He found an oil industry with production cut back to a few hundred thousand barrels a day, with no refined products delivered to the military. And he found streets filled with demonstrators. In Huyser's view, the total support for the clerics and Tudeh never stood at more than 15 to 20 percent of the people; the remaining opposition was held together by their personal dislike of the Shah, his egomania, and his campaign to Westernize their culture. Adding to the chaos, the schools were closed during this crisis. The median age of Iran's citizenry was only 16; there were too many kids on the street with nothing to do.

Huyser inherited a military leadership utterly devoted to and dependent on the Shah yet riven by interservice rivalries. Thus they were incapable of acting on their own. The army chief, resentful of an American Air Force officer usurping the throne, would not use his troops to take over customs; the navy chief would not use his experienced technicians to operate the oilfields and refineries. The air force and the procurement minister were under constant pressure from Washington to execute



DOD (Dennis A. Gruyth)

Former U.S. hostages, freed from Iranian custody, arrive at Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, on New Year's Day, 1981

sales agreements for weapons systems en route even though the regime was mortally stricken, with only days to live. The chief of the supreme commander's staff (army General Abbas Gharabaghi) was probably reaching an accommodation with the Ayatollah. This is now apparent from that general's freedom of movement in postrevolutionary Tehran and his subsequent comfortable retirement to Paris. The incoherence of the Iranian military chiefs and their inability to organize a coup undoubtedly led to their downfall and eventually to their exile or death.

On Tuesday, January 16, 1979, the Shah left Tehran aboard his 707, headed to Cairo "on vacation." The rejoicing was tremendous, but the pressure seemed to be off. The National Assembly had confirmed a successor government, led by Shaphur Bakhtiar, but that regime would not use its military to break the strikes, which it could have done. Thus the economic paralysis continued, and the military chiefs did not know what to do. For a week after the Shah left, Ayatollah Khomeini held court in Paris, issuing statements and pulling the strings on the demonstrations—now turning to fire bombings—back in Iran.

On Thursday, February 1, the Ayatollah returned to Iran on an Air France jet. Upon landing in Tehran, he declared the Bakhtiar government illegal and announced his intention of replacing it with a true Islamic government. Army troops escorted

Khomeini safely from the Mehrabad Airport to downtown Tehran, where they turned him over to his followers. By then, the military was on full alert, ready for a fight. Neither the troops nor their leaders showed any signs of folding, but the safety of any American in Tehran was in question. Most had been evacuated, and on Saturday, February 3, the White House ordered General Huyser to leave as well. In the late afternoon of February 3, as dusk was settling in, the American Viceroy in Iran took off from the Iranian equivalent of the Pentagon. He traveled by helicopter to Mehrabad wearing his bulletproof vest, and from there flew to Stuttgart, Germany.

During the week that followed, Khomeini's standoff hardened, yet the military kept its hands off the power centers of the economy. Then, on Friday evening, February 9, order collapsed. At the Doshan Tappeh Air Force Base, the enlisted troops began to riot. The next day, weapons were stolen from the Imperial Armory, and fires began to break out throughout Tehran. By Sunday, February 11, it was all over: the army chief, General Abdol Ali Badraie, was assassinated outside his own headquarters, perhaps by his own troops. The supreme commander's staff headquarters came under gunfire, with the officers retiring to the command post deep underground. The surviving senior officers were arrested and imprisoned. Deprived of its leadership, the military collapsed and with it the Bakhtiar government.

the Iranian air force and the procurement minister were under constant pressure from Washington to execute sales agreements for weapons systems even though the regime was mortally stricken

In time, the air chief, General Amir Hossein Rabii, was tried and executed by firing squad. The navy chief, Admiral Kamaleddin Habibollahi, escaped from prison, migrated to the Turkish border, and later reached the United States. The vice minister of war, also the procurement chief, was imprisoned, escaped, and also walked to the Turkish border. As 1979 ended, brutal executions ordered by revolutionary councils were widespread, and a new Islamic constitution had been ratified by referendum. The Shah himself died of cancer in Cairo on July 27, 1980.

In General Huyser's view, the mistakes started with an arrogant Shah trying to impose 20th-century industrialization on a medieval society. Then there was the indecisive administration in Washington sending an Ambassador to "work with the opposition, to compel a hundred senior Iranian officials to leave the country," while at the same time telling General Huyser to hold the military together, to support a successor government to the Shah. At the end, it was Bakhtiar's refusal to use the army, the only effective lever he had, that ended

all American hopes. How differently history might have been if the prime minister had made full use of those forces during the closing days of January 1979.⁹

As it was, a grimly anti-American radical Islamic government came to power, again with the assistance of an inattentive American President. And once again, the chaos in the wake of that transition triggered another three-fold increase in the price of oil.

The decade of the 1970s has come and gone. In its wake are strewn the crowns of departed monarchs, glassware from long-closed gas stations, and abandoned trinkets from the cradles of civilization. A river of petrodollars now floods those early empires supporting the whims and ideologies of the new dictators. Many of them have earned the sobriquet “Islamofascist.”

As the 1970s ended, the stage was set for the nuclear pandemic to come. Since then, the United States has been marked as “the enemy” in Arab eyes, the once-moribund Chinese giant has revived, and nuclear weapons have been introduced into the Third World. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Equivalent to over \$20 billion in 2008.

² Founded in Baghdad in 1960 to coordinate the producers’ oil policies, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) remained an innocuous trade association until the 1973 Arab-Israeli war inspired Islamic radicals to use its pricing and allocation power to dictate economic policy to the industrialized West. In 2008, OPEC accounts for about 40 percent of the world’s oil production and about two-thirds of its proven reserves. Neither Russia nor any of the former Soviet republics is a member of OPEC.

³ Equivalent to a quarter billion dollars per day in 2008.

⁴ El Salam was to be a 15 megawatt reactor to be built at Ain Oussera, 170 miles south of Algiers and 600 miles east of Tripoli. El Salam was only discovered by Western intelligence in 1991; it went critical in 1992.

⁵ Nixon’s surprise trip to China took place 6 months later in February 1972.

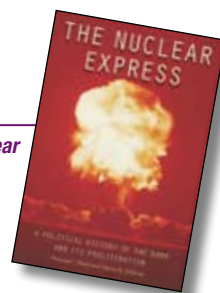
⁶ Bhutto was executed by his presidential successor, General Zia ul-Haq, in 1979.

⁷ In reality it took two decades for Pakistan to achieve nuclear weapons status, and then only with Chinese help.

⁸ These purchases began in August 1975. See Shahid-ur-Rehman, *The Long Road to Chagai* (Islamabad: Print Wise Publication, 1999).

⁹ Upon his retirement from the U.S. Air Force in the 1980s, Huyser dictated his memoirs of those incredible 30 days at a desk in Reed’s office. See Robert E. Huyser, *Mission to Tehran* (Oxford: Andre Deutsche Ltd., 1986).

This article is an abridged chapter from the authors’ forthcoming book, *The Nuclear Express: A Political History of the Bomb and Its Proliferation* (Zenith Press).



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Strategic Forum 232

Energy Security in South Asia: Can Interdependence Breed Stability?

South Asia is projected to play a major role in global energy markets over the next several decades. Satisfying the region’s growing demands will require a heightened degree of energy interdependence among historically antagonistic states. Consequently, according to author Joseph McMillan of the National Defense University’s Institute for National Strategic Studies, regional leaders will face a tradeoff between traditional desires for energy self-sufficiency and the ambitious development targets that they have set for themselves. Achieving such growth requires that the countries of South Asia address the persistent international disputes that hamper cross-border energy trade, establish effective control over presently ungoverned areas, reorient the missions of military forces to some extent, and develop a better understanding of the effects that energy interdependence will have on broader relations with neighbors. From the U.S. point of view, understanding the multifaceted causal connections that exist among economic development, energy supplies, and security and stability, and how these dynamics are likely to affect South Asian states’ decisionmaking, may provide points of leverage with which policymakers can shape behavior on a wide range of issues affecting U.S. objectives in the region.

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