

Will Khomeini pull the Mideast down with him?

by Robert Dreyfuss

President Carter's refusal to lend American support to former Iranian Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar and his military allies seeking to topple Ayatollah Khomeini guarantees that, probably within two months, Iran will be taken over by forces loyal to the Soviet Union. That is the evaluation of both U.S. analysts and Iranian sources opposed to the Khomeini regime.

Over the past nine weeks, at an accelerating rate, Khomeini has lost virtually every institutional backing that his regime had since its takeover in February 1979. The middle class, the entire command of the armed forces, the National Front, the left, various tribal leaders, businessmen, and civil servants have all broken with the Khomeini dictatorship.

Now based only on a narrow grouping of the Muslim Brotherhood clergy around Ayatollah Khalkhali, Ayatollah Beheshti, and the Islamic Republican Party, the regime is maintaining its grip over the country by sheer terror and brutality. Only one social force remains loyal to the Khomeini circle: the mob, including the Shiite fanatics recruited from among the unemployed and illiterate of Teheran's slums, paid to demonstrate their support for Khomeini in the streets.

But, in the opinion of every analyst of Iran, the Khomeini regime cannot last. And virtually every source agrees that, as of now, only two forces in Iran are capable of replacing the Khomeini clique.

The first is the moderate, largely middle-class faction which can be identified with two institutions: the armed forces and the old National Front; most of them are supporters of exiled Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar, Hassan Nazih, the former director of the National Iranian Oil Company, and other National Front figures.

The second is the left and the Communist Tudeh Party, which, though relatively weak when measured against existing forces outside Iran, can be expected to win immediate and decisive support from Soviet military intelligence in the event of a civil war erupting in Iran.

The outcome of the power struggle within Iran will be determined entirely by the support those forces receive from outside Iran.

At present, there are only three political factions outside Iran which, therefore, can determine the outcome of the Iranian situation.

The first is traditionally the strongest power in Iran, associated with the Anglo-American intelligence services and the Seven Sisters oil cartel. It is this grouping, represented by the Carter administration, which for three years has continued to support the Muslim Brotherhood clergy in Iran and which is most closely associated with the Khomeini regime.

Led by Zbigniew Brzezinski of the National Security Council, the Anglo-American circles have supported both the clergy and the secular Shiite extremists led by



Photo: Sygma

Ibrahim Yazdi, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, and Sadegh Ghotbzadeh.

The second outside force is the combination of the Franco-German axis in Western Europe with the Arab powers of Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

The Europeans, like the Arabs, have immediate and urgent national security interests in toppling the Khomeini regime; and they have invested great political capital in putting together a workable outside coalition around Bakhtiar and the military commanders who fled Iran in 1979, with logistical support from Iraq, across the Iranian border.

The third outside force is the Soviet Union and the socialist countries. Though officially remaining neutral, they are believed to have built up important allies within Iran, especially in the provinces that border on the U.S.S.R., along with Baluchistan and Kurdistan.

Brzezinski's strategy

According to information from Washington intelligence sources, Brzezinski and the NSC are well aware that the Khomeini regime cannot last more than a few months. In light of this evaluation, Brzezinski has developed the following strategy.

At all costs, Brzezinski believes, the possibility of a successful coup against Khomeini by Bakhtiar and the European-Arab coalition behind him must be prevent-

ed. That scenario, the thinking goes, would augment the power of the European-Arab bloc around the European Monetary System, and bring about a decisive shift in the world balance of power in favor of the Paris-Bonn axis.

With Iraq and Saudi Arabia already committed to backing the Franco-German initiative, the addition of Iran under a Bakhtiar-led regime would immensely add to the power of the continental European alliance.

Thus, Brzezinski has determined that the United States must *encourage* a U.S.-Soviet confrontation over Iran in which the takeover of Iran by the U.S.S.R., the most likely outcome of that showdown, would be a more welcome development than for Iran to come under the control of the Bakhtiar National Front forces.

In practice, the Brzezinski strategy works out as follows.

First of all, using the close liaison between Anglo-American intelligence and the Khomeini apparatus, Brzezinski has ordered the destruction of the "middle."

In effect, that means the physical elimination of the moderate forces inside the country, while among the emigrés the attempted assassination of Bakhtiar in Paris and the brutal murder of Ali Akbar Tabatabai in Washington reflect the Brzezinski decision to liquidate the opposition to Khomeini from the side of the moderates in exile.



'U.S. supports Khomeini'

The following interview with Shahpour Bakhtiar was published in the Atlanta Constitution on July 8, 1980. It begins with excerpts from Bakhtiar's unusual charges that the United States is actively opposing his activities while supporting the Khomeini regime.

Can I tell you something that does not reflect favorably on the United States? I have been told that two months ago a very high individual in the U.S. government told officials in Turkey, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other states of the Persian Gulf not to help the persons who are fighting against Khomeini.

. . . I cannot accept any military government in Iran, now or any time in the future. I have the power myself—to strike a blow against Khomeini, and there are armed forces to help me do this—both armed forces supported by civil authorities, by the mass of the people, by merchants, by the intellectuals, by other people. That is what I want.

Q: What about General Gholam Oveissi and his armed forces, who is planning to establish a military regime?

Bakhtiar: He would be a second Pinochet, and a second Pinochet is not possible on the border of the Soviet Union. . . .

Q: And what about General Oveissi's plans to bring about an invasion of Iran through Iraqi territory?

Bakhtiar: I am absolutely opposed to this strategy. It would lead to civil war. We have to strike strongly and quickly. The Kurds are necessary to absorb the Khomeini partisans at the frontier, but it is not by this route that Iran must be attacked. Because to attack Iran through any other country will lead to intervention by the Soviet Union. . . . I don't have any formal assurances but I am convinced—even though President Carter is very hesitant—that if the Soviet soldiers make a belligerent crossing of the Iranian frontier there will be a world war.

Thus, while sheer terror tactics prop up the Khomeini dictatorship for another few weeks or months, the United States is positioning itself for direct military intervention into Iran through the Rapid Deployment Force and the naval task force in the Indian Ocean, together with British and Israeli military capabilities.

The prolongation of the Khomeini regime's present policies over a period of several more weeks will so polarize the country as to guarantee the disintegration of Iran as province after province simply declares its autonomy.

The Soviet Union, bordering on Iran, will not permit the fragmentation of its neighbor, and it is expected that the Soviet Union will intervene at a point that the process of disintegration becomes irreversible.

More broadly, the central command of the Muslim Brotherhood, which controls both Khomeini and the Libyan regime of Col. Muammar Qaddafi, is deploying to destabilize the entire Middle East region. A wave of assassinations in Turkey has brought that country to the brink of outright civil war, and the collapse of Turkey would be a grave threat to both Syria and Iraq. Meanwhile, in Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood is pursuing its campaign of assassinations against Syrian officials, and Lebanon is being brought closer to renewed fighting.

The Persian Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, are also being hit with threats of revolutions, and President Sadat of Egypt, in a July 23 speech, predicted the "emergence of exclusively Christian states" in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East.

In sum, that is the scenario for the so-called "Bernard Lewis plan," named after Professor Bernard Lewis of Oxford University and British intelligence, who devised the strategy of balkanizing the Middle East and Iran into tribal, ethnic, and sectarian mini-states. In the long run, Brzezinski and Bernard Lewis expect that the U.S.S.R. itself will be transformed by the spread of Sufi brotherhoods and Muslim fundamentalism inside the Muslim population of the southern Soviet Union.

Developments since Venice

Reviewing political developments in Iran since the end of June, the following pattern emerges.

During the two Venice summits in late June, key Western European political forces, centered in France and West Germany, made the decision to give covert support to the anti-Khomeini forces grouped around Bakhtiar.

While the Europeans did not receive backing from Washington, they decided to increase incrementally their collaboration with the Bakhtiar forces despite U.S. opposition; and for the first time since the coming to power of the Khomeini regime it appeared possible that

Khomeini might be toppled in a popular uprising linked to a seizure of power by the armed forces.

It was then that Brzezinski and Anglo-American intelligence began their counterdeployment. That had two distinct aspects: the first was the elaboration of an overtly anti-Soviet posture by the Iranian government, a move spearheaded by Ghotbzadeh. The Iranian foreign minister, on orders from Brzezinski, launched a series of provocations against the Soviet Union beginning with the mid-June meeting of Islamic foreign ministers in Pakistan. By antagonizing the U.S.S.R. and the pro-Soviet forces in Iran, Brzezinski and Ghotbzadeh hoped to polarize Iran and force the Soviet Union into engaging in more overt support for the Iranian left and the Tudeh.

That accomplished, Phase II of the Brzezinski moves occurred with the sudden and decisive shift by the kook

leaders of the Islamic Republican Party and the inner circles of the Khomeini clergy. As described above, the objective of this policy was to destroy the "middle" in Iranian politics.

Beginning at the end of June, Khomeini suddenly reversed his recent support for President Bani-Sadr and the relative moderates, instead declaring his intention to purge the "Satanic regime" in Iran. Denouncing Bani-Sadr—only two weeks after he had unequivocally backed Bani-Sadr in an earlier battle with the IRP—Khomeini pronounced: "If the government does not rectify itself, I will rectify it soon." He threatened to unleash the masses against Bani-Sadr and give him the "Shah treatment."

Almost immediately, Khomeini and the IRP—through the offices of Interior Minister Rafsanjani and others—instituted a massive purge of the state appara-

Khalkhali's killers 'have some fun'

The following excerpts are taken from a front-page article in the July 21 Washington Post entitled "Tehran Alley: Play by Day, Death by Dark" by Jay Ross. In horrifying detail, it describes the butchery and blood-letting that are the hallmark of the Khomeini regime.

During the day, Kutche Ghavan Daftar, a dead-end alley about the length of a football field, serves as a soccer ground for the children of the south Tehran slum neighborhood known as Jamshid.

At night it has turned into Tehran's Death Row, a place where 22 grisly public executions have taken place during the past 10 days.

In the Jamshid alley, pieces of brain fleck a wall where most of the sex and drug offenders have been executed. The horrified inhabitants of the area say the executioners first fire their Uzi submachine guns at the heads of the victims, then at their hearts and then at their sides.

On Thursday [Ayatollah Sadegh Khalkhali] tried a new twist, switching to hanging instead of shooting. Residents pointed out a long pipe with eight hooks lying in the alley which, they said, had been welded to two other pipes to form a makeshift gallows. Eight ropes were attached, they said, and the victims were strung up after midnight.

The gallows, however, collapsed under the weight

of the prisoners, according to horrified onlookers. They said the prison staff that comprised the execution squad then simply opened fire on the convicts.

There were seven victims each in the first two rounds of executions, including two women, one of whom was well advanced in pregnancy, according to the residents of the neighborhood.

According to several persons, Khalkhali decided to "have some fun" during the second executions. He reportedly told the guards to shoot just the first three. The other four then were told they were being released, the witnesses said.

Relieved, they started to run away, according to the story, when Khalkhali ordered the executioners to open fire. The four were shot in the back, unlike the rest, who faced the firing squad blindfolded with their hands tied behind their backs and standing against the wall.

So far, the bodies have been taken away quickly in ambulances. . . . The intention in the future hangings is to leave the bodies up for four hours so Jamshid residents can see what happens to drug pushers.

Khalkhali's professed purpose in carrying out Iran's first public executions in almost 15 years is to influence people to stop taking or selling drugs. But the residents, many of them addicts, say the killings have had no effect.

An aged woman said, "If you have seen how they shoot dogs, that's how they shoot them."

As she spoke she frequently dipped her foot in the water flowing in a sidewalk *jube*, Tehran's primitive drainage system. After the executions, others said, the water is red with blood.

tus and the armed forces and education system. By July 1, five hundred workers at the National Iranian Oil Company and 69 members of the faculty of Tehran University were suddenly fired, with the charges being merely that they had been associated in some ways with the former regime. Within a few more days, 1,000 government workers were purged from dozens of different offices, and Khomeini was ordering extirpation of every vestige of the regime of the Shah, including such trivial matters as letterheads and ash-trays with imperial seals!

At the same time, events in Iran also took on a more barbaric and inhuman tone. In one highly publicized case, four condemned prisoners were buried up to their chests and then, on official orders of the state prosecutor under Ayatollah Khalkhali, stoned to death, in what was described as implementation of "Islamic law."

Other condemned men and women—called "drug runners," but usually, in fact, simply political prisoners—were executed by Khalkhali in hideous massacres on street corners, with no formalities, in order to "teach the people a lesson." A leading ayatollah proposed that each Friday at the prayer ceremony in Teheran the regime ought to execute prisoners in public view. The public executions were designed to communicate the simple idea that the regime was cold-blooded enough to exterminate its opposition.

The mob—by now the only political base for the regime—was also being whipped up into a frenzy, with ringleaders paid handsomely by the stored up oil revenue to organize gangs to come out and demonstrate in favor of Khomeini. In early July, an estimated 500,000 people stormed through Teheran's streets shouting their support for the regime and a proclamation to outlaw the leftist and moderate opposition groups, particularly the Mujaheddin and the Fedayeen-e Khalq. Both these organizations, though their strength is difficult to estimate, are increasingly popular among the middle class and the students, as well as other strata, simply because they are the only visible organized resistance to Khomeini. Since then, offices of the Mujaheddin and Fedayeen as well as those belonging to the Communist Tudeh Party have been ransacked and destroyed by the mob under the control of the fascist "Party of God" militia.

At the same time, the official Revolutionary Guard, the SS of the Khomeini regime, has been gradually moving to increase its own power. With the regime increasingly mistrustful of the armed forces command, the paramilitary Guard has been deployed more and more to seize control over the command positions of the regular armed forces, causing resentment and a great deal of resistance within the army itself. Particularly in the oil fields region around Ahwaz in Khuzestan, the Revolutionary Guard is reportedly acting to replace the armed forces there.

The climax of the purges and mobilization of Islamic fundamentalist mobs that began immediately after the Venice summit was the reported discovery of a plot in the armed forces two weeks ago. According to the official Iranian account, air force and naval units had planned to bombard the homes of Khomeini and other officials and then distribute leaflets proclaiming: "We have rid Iran of the clergy." In the wake of the alleged discovery of the plot, up to 1,000 armed forces officers have been arrested and are to be put on trial, and many already executed. Khomeini, in a speech delivered several days after the alleged plot, declared that "every single one" would be executed if found guilty.

According to Iranian sources, in fact, there was not a coup d'etat being planned for the time of the announced discovery of the plot, but for some weeks later—and the move by Khomeini's secret police and SAVAMA was aimed at simply arresting as many suspected plotters as could be found in order to preempt whatever the pro-Bakhtiar circles might be planning. No doubt, the capabilities of the resistance in Iran have been severely set back by the arrests, but, by the same token, according to Iranian sources, the number of people opposed to the regime has grown enormously as a result of Khomeini's crackdown.

Now leading the opposition inside Iran are two poles of forces, the first around Admiral Ahmad Madani, former commander of the Navy and ex-Defense Minister, and the National Front forces around Karim Sanjabi. Madani, an opportunistic nationalist, at first was a strong supporter of the Khomeini government but has since broken definitively with Khomeini and earlier this month, refused to take his elected seat in the new parliament when his credentials were challenged. Madani has since established an opposition party called the National Struggle Front, and though he does represent a challenge to the regime, it is almost impossible for the Khomeini police to arrest him because of his strong backing from the navy and air force. Recently, Madani delivered a speech calling for the release of the U.S. hostages, and he has been attacked by the ruling IRP and the "students" holding the hostages as an "agent of the CIA."

But Madani himself is not fully trusted by the army because of his overt cooperation with the regime since 1979; he is only part of the much broader opposition in the armed forces. In addition, many tribal leaders, such as Khosrow Qashqai, the clan leader of the 500,000 Qashqai tribesmen, have broken with the regime and in case of civil war, will lead their followers in a fight against the mullahs. In fact, not only the Qashqai but the Lurs and Bakhtiars, the Kurds, the Arabs, and many other minority populations are prepared to revolt against Khomeini should a leader emerge.

Islamic clergy attack the Khomeini heresy

Perhaps the factor that can tilt the balance in Iran against Khomeini is the impact of the opposition within Islam to the brand of cultist mysticism proclaimed by the Khomeini regime. Inside Iran, Ayatollah Shareatmadari, the second most powerful religious leader in Iran, is known to be waiting for the opportunity to give the signal for his followers, which include as much as half of Iran's population centered in Tabriz, Azerbaijan, to demonstrate their opposition to Khomeini. Shareatmadari is under house arrest and has been unable to speak freely since he mounted a challenge to Khomeini last year.

But two major new developments may yet trigger off the religious anti-Khomeini force.

First, the Ayatollah Kho'i in Iraq, residing at the shrine of Kerbala, Iraq, the holiest shrine of the Shiite sect, two days ago denounced the Khomeini regime and said that Khomeini was a heretic who does not represent true Islam. Ayatollah Kho'i is the most powerful leader in the world Shiite community and the de facto "pope" of Shiism, and therefore his word will carry significant weight.

Second, the Saudi Arabia-based Muslim World League, often a spokesman for official Sunni Islam, this week also attacked Khomeini for having said that the Prophet Mohammed, the founder of the Islamic movement, was not powerful enough to deal with modern problems, virtually an open admission of Khomeini's heresy. Because the League reflects Saudi thinking, it would thus appear that both Iraq and Saudi Arabia have begun lining up the religious movement against the madmen of Teheran.

Ghotbzadeh insults the Soviets

Iranian Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh has been the chief agent in Iran leading the Iranian assault on the Soviet Union since the period immediately after the June Venice summit of the Western industrial nations.

Astute political analysts, and some not so astute

otherwise, note that Ghotbzadeh's animosity toward the Europeans and the Soviets, in turn, rises and falls according to what one may adduce to be the attitude of London intelligence circles toward recent "geopolitical" developments involving Europe and the Soviet Union. When London and Zbigniew Brzezinski get mad at Moscow, the foulest sorts of things come out of the Iranian minister's mouth about "communists."

At a Teheran press conference at the beginning of July, just after the July 1 expulsion of a Soviet diplomat on charges of being a "spy," Ghotbzadeh announced that he had requested the Soviet Union to withdraw almost the entirety of its diplomatic staff from the Soviet Embassy in Teheran, citing "numerous cases of wrongdoing by Russian officials." At the same time, he announced that henceforth all Iranian offices would be restricted to a maximum of two Soviet officials and technicians.

On July 6, Ghotbzadeh elaborated on his charges against the U.S.S.R. Citing the activities of the Tudeh Party in Iran, the official Communist Party, immediately after a visit to Moscow by Tudeh Chairman Kianouri, Ghotbzadeh said that the Tudeh were "agents" of the U.S.S.R., and he was specifically attacking the "military section" of the Tudeh Party.

Two days later, the Soviet Union issued a toughly worded and highly unusual warning to Iran. In a release distributed by the Soviet TASS news agency, Moscow warned Iran that "there is information to the effect that elements hostile to the U.S.S.R. intend to carry out provocations against the Soviet Embassy in the Islamic Republic of Iran, up to and including seizing control of the embassy. Such actions have the aim of prejudicing the good neighborly relations between the U.S.S.R. and the Islamic Republic of Iran." TASS also suggested that the "dangerous character of such actions" might threaten Iran.

In light of the U.S. Embassy seizure, the Soviet warning was a clear indication that Moscow would not tolerate a similar action against its own mission.

But in an interview on Teheran radio several days later—after having assured Moscow that no takeover of the Soviet Embassy was being planned—Ghotbzadeh then delivered a vitriolic speech against Moscow and "the communists," declaring that it was his intention to develop closer relations between Iran and the Peking regime, and with Pakistan.

Ghotbzadeh, who is widely known to act as an agent of British intelligence, had begun his anti-U.S.S.R. campaign at the mid-June summit of the Islamic Conference, when he shocked the Muslim foreign ministers by inviting into the Iranian delegation itself representatives of the various Afghanistan guerrilla movements of the Muslim Brotherhood.