

Northern Flank by Göran Haglund

Trading with Khomeini

The Social Democrats have sponsored massive trade with Iran, without one Swedish hostage held.

When Khomeini took power in 1979, Swedish exports to Iran and Iraq were about the same. As disgust over events in Iran swept the world, exports to chaotic Iran initially dropped from Sweden (ruled by non-socialist regimes since 1976), while exports to Iraq increased, especially after the Iran-Iraq war began in 1980.

As execution patrols worked overtime in Teheran, Social Democratic leader Olof Palme, soon to become official United Nations mediator in the Gulf war, won fame for his astonishing assertion that Iran "with pedantic care is building its democratic institutions."

In October 1982, Palme returned to power, and in February 1983, Foreign Trade Undersecretary Carl-Johan Åberg was sent to Iran to change the situation. And the change was dramatic. As high-level trade delegations tripped over each other in Teheran and Stockholm, exports to Iran nearly tripled between 1982 and 1983, while dropping by two-thirds to Iraq.

Rather than exploiting the need for supplies on both sides of the war, and cynically shipping arms to both parties, the Swedish pattern is one of systematic Social Democratic support for Khomeini.

While media have focused on Swedish arms shipments to Iran, a much larger flow of "civilian," though often enough war-related, goods has been neglected. While the arms shipments are by no means insignificant, the one-sided "civilian" trade expansion to Iran flies in the face of Sweden's official "neutrality" doctrine.

Most indicative are truck exports, where Swedish manufacturers are among the world's largest. Although trucks are not arms, modern wars cannot be fought without them. Without trucks, no arms, ammunition, food, or troops will reach the front. Until 1982, Sweden supplied Iraq with thousands of trucks per year; after Palme's return to power, Sweden supplied the trucks to Iran.

During 1980-82, Sweden exported 15,400 trucks to Iraq, and only 2,094 to Iran. Of the latter exports, 90% occurred in 1982, after Palme and Kissinger Associate executive Pehr Gyllenhammar of trucks-producing Volvo were pressing hard for support of Iran. During 1983 through 1985, Swedish truck exports to Iraq dropped to a total of 574, less than 4% of the preceding three years, but instead grew to 12,781 to Iran, a more than sixfold increase relative to 1980-82.

These dramatic shifts were not debated by newspapers or "intellectuals," nor subject to parliamentary review. No mere whim of the free-enterprise system of the West, they embody a deliberate *intervention* of a "neutral" country into a foreign war, where Soviet and allied Socialist International bets have increasingly been staked on the mad mullahs.

This intervention was effected by Sweden's own invisible government, whose complicity in shady Iranian affairs is but an extension of that in the United States—and whose unraveling is a likely corollary of that in the United States.

When a March 1 *New York Times Magazine* feature on the Palme murder cited "evidence that police and prosecutors may have been restrained and perhaps misled by their own government, particularly the foreign ministry," it is former foreign ministry undersecretary Sverker Åström who is under attack, both as a key Swedish arms trade figure and as a special foreign policy liaison associated to the Palme murder investigation.

And when the *Times Magazine* quoted a Swedish official that most people don't want the truth about the murder, because "it would be disastrous for the foreign ministry if people knew how stupid we have been in the Gulf," it is foreign trade undersecretary Åberg who is under attack.

A friend of recently resigned U.S. Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Perle, Åberg, since Palme's return to power, has been responsible for Swedish support of Iran—along with Palme himself and former Foreign Trade Minister Mats Hellström. The latter was discreetly made agricultural minister in October 1986, allegedly "to expand his domestic political base"—an unlikely prospect, given the rate at which Swedish farmers are driven out of business.

Åberg's job included facilitating Khomeini's imports of Volvo trucks, by making Swedish authorities and companies—among them Volvo!—buy overpriced Iranian oil, allowing Teheran to balance its swelling trade deficit with Sweden. As Åberg's efforts failed, exports to Iran collapsed by half in 1985, and by another half in 1986, as Swedish truck sales dropped to zero in 1986. This failure to comply with Iranian trade requirements likely played a greater role in aggravating Palme's conflict with Khomeini than any blocked arms shipments, which have been mentioned as a possible motive of Palme's murder.