

IRAN AND SUPERPOWERS

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The violent struggle over the fate of Iran, confronts the Superpowers (USA and Soviet Union) with potentially one of the most dangerous international crises.

Prof. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the White House's national security adviser, sees Iran as a critical link in what he calls an "arc of instability" stretching from Bangladesh around the Indian Ocean to Southern Africa-an area that supplies the West with much of its oil and dominates strategic tanker routes.

Religious and racial warfare, political violence, social conflict, military rule-all figure in the Turmoil that groups nations of the "arc of instability". Soviet Union is both stimulating and exploiting instability in this vast area. At stake are enormous Persian Gulf oil supplies and control of strategic points that are of life and death importance to the West.

The challenge facing USA; how to prevent the Soviets from exploiting the instability along this arc and particularly in Iran, to expand their influence in a region so vital to the United States as well as its allies.

That issue topped the agenda at the January 5-6, 1979 Guadeloupe Summit which brought President Carter together with Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, President Valery Giscard d'Estaing and Prime Minister James Callaghan.

It is Iran's potential swing away from its strong pro-West stance that worries the West and especially Washington. The U.S. imported 920,000 bbl oil daily from Iran, about 5 % of national need. There is \$ 700 million worth of US Investment in Iran

The US has sold the Shah not only \$ 10 million worth of arms in recent years, but more than \$ 2 million annually in food, construction materials and services.

Iran, however, is more than an American marketplace. It overlooks the Persian Gulf. It protects the giant oil tankers passing through to the US, Europe, Israel, South Africa and Japan. The moderate Arab countries-Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, have long considered Iran as a reliable bulwork against radicalism.

In the recent past, the Western World has seen the erosion of stability in the Horn of Africa, North and South Yemen, Lebanon, Afghanistan and now Iran.

There is no doubt that this shift would be more than enough to cause a major political and economic shakeup in the global balance of power. Are the Russians behind it all? Some observers remarked that though events in Iran stemmed from genuine dissent, they were sure that there was some Soviet influence at work.

Interviewed by James Reston of The New York Times, the White House's National Security Adviser said; "I don't think the Soviet Union has either the ideological capacity or the economic power or even the military resources to impose global domination. I think the real danger to today's world is that the conflicting aspirations of man will create massive global chaos and fragmentation.

Today the Soviet ideological appeal is close to nil. There isn't a revolutionary in the world today who, when thinking of a model for the future, thinks of the Soviet Union. Soviet military power is not enough to dominate the world but enough to make the resolution of regional conflicts much more difficult.

Today the area of crisis is a group of states-literally an "arc of instability". Their internal fragility social and political could interact with the projection of Soviet power and they together could create a problem as acute as the one that we faced even in 50's or 60's, especially because of oil.

Beyond Soviet power regional conflict, the fragmentation of wobbly social and political structures in societies incapable of absorbing the political awakening of so many more people is a real problem. There is an increase of Soviet power and disintegration of

political fabric in some regions of the world that are of importance to us."

II

With the Shah's departure, the West has lost an ally who policed the Gulf against Marxist guerillas, a rich customer for its weapons and capital goods and a sure supplier of its oil. Russia's shifting response to Iran's crisis suggests that the Soviets started to consider the Shah's departure as working to their advantage.

On 26 October, when strike demonstrations and riots already were spreading in Iran Mr. Brezhnev sent a friendly personal telegram to the Shah on Iran's national day.

On November 19th, Mr. Brezhnev issued in the form of a personal statement in Pravda a warning to the US and other Western Powers that Russia would regard any intervention by them in Iran "as a matter affecting its security interests". By early December the Soviet press was in full cry against western "fabrications" about Russian activity in Iran. Direct criticism of the Shah emerged during December. The Soviet public was told that most Iranians opposed him and that "cracks" were showing in his army. On January 4th, Izvestia was telling its readers that the Iranian opposition regarded the Americans as the mainstay of the anti-popular regime. Meanwhile Pravda named Mr. Brzezinski as the foremost American advocate of gunboat diplomacy. By mid January Moscow broadcasters were accusing Mr. Bakhtiar of making "anti-communist and anti-Soviet" statements about a conspiracy between Iranian and foreign communists to "dismember" Iran. Izvestia has reminded its readers that the Soviet-Iranian treaty of 1921 is still valid; but it did not remind them that the treaty permits Russian forces to enter Iran and act in "self-defence" against any attempt by a third country to make Iran a base for anti-Soviet action.

If no one interferes in a direct manner in events in Iran, it is practically certain that Soviet influence in this "key" Middle East country will grow. Sooner or later anti-west sentiments will bring new social substance which will provide a completely different

springhead of political influence on the Iranian scene unlike that of yesterday.

For this reason it was not difficult to understand Brezhnev's warning against outside influence.

At the latest stage of the Iranian crisis Soviet interests of a global-strategic nature have become clearer than at any other earlier stage.

Almost 50 years ago a separatist rebellion supported by the USSR resulted in a short-lived "Persian Socialist Soviet Republic" in the northern province of Gilan in 1920. In 1921 it was crushed by Reza Khan, later Reza Shah and founder of the Pahlavi dynasty.

In World War II, Iran declared her Neutrality. But to prevent the expansion of German influence and to open a secure supply line to the USSR Britain and the Soviet Union invaded Iran in August 1941.

Reza Shah abdicated in favour of his son Muhammed Reza and was exiled to South Africa.

Soviet troops occupied the North of the country while the British occupied the South, joined in 1941 by American troops. They developed ports and constructed roads through which millions of tons of war material were sent to Russia.

In January 1942 a Treaty of Alliance was concluded between Iran, Britain and the USSR. The two powers undertook to respect Iran's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. While Iran granted the Allies the use of all her means of communications. Allied forces were to be withdrawn from Iran, not later than six months after the cessation of hostilities.

The Russians kept their zone of occupation under firm control denying the Iranian authorities freedom of movement. Furthermore they pressed Teheran to grant them oil concessions. The Russians encouraged separatist movements in North Iran. In December 1945, they engineered the creation of two puppet governments; an "Azerbaijan Republic" with headquarters in Tabriz and a smaller "Kurdish Republic" with headquarters in Mahabad.

The Soviet army prevented Iranian troops from entering Azerbaijan to crush the rebellion. Even after the evacuation of Russian troops from Iran in May, the Soviet Union pressed Teheran not to send troops to Azerbaijan. Only in December 1946 were Iranian forces able to recapture the northern separatist provinces.

Iranian complaints to the UN Security Council had preceded these developments. In January 1946, Iran denounced Soviet interference in her internal affairs and in March she complained bitterly that the USSR had not withdrawn her troops from Iran, as she was committed to do. (British and American troops were evacuated.)

These complaints supported and encouraged by the Western Powers and the ensuing discussion at the Security Council were the first open post-war East-West clash, the first signs of the impending cold war; Russia was compelled to withdraw her troops from Iran by May 1946.

During the period of Soviet occupation many Communist detainees had been released as a result of a general amnesty to political prisoners and a Communist party called "Tudeh The Masses" had been established especially in the Russian occupied north (In February 1949, after an unsuccessful attempt on the Shah's life by a member, the party was outlawed).

Mr. Mossaddeq established a faction called the "National Front" and started a campaign for the Nationalization of Iran's oil.

In March 1951 the Premier General Ali Razmara who opposed Mossaddeq's views was assassinated by a member of ultra religious Fedayan Islam and in April Dr. Mossaddeq became Prime Minister. Besides his "National Front" Mossaddeq was supported by different groups, such as the religious one headed by Ayatullah Kashani. The Tudeh party-outlawed in 1949, but allowed by Mossaddeq to operate again-and the merchants of Teheran's Bazaar. These groups shared the Front's of the British and anti-Shah attitude.

As no oil was being sold the economic situation deteriorated and the country faced bankruptcy. In July 1953, there were resignations from the Majlis in protest against Mossaddeq's policy.

In order to forestall a vote of non-confidence Dr. Mossaddeq held a "referendum" and claimed that its results authorized him to

dissolve the Majlis. The Shah then dismissed Mossaddeq and appointed General Zahedi as Prime Minister (16 Aug. 1953). But Mossaddeq refused to obey, and as Zahedi after an unsuccessful attempt to arrest Dr. Mossaddeq disappeared, the Shah left Iran. However the Army had remained loyal to the Shah, rapidly took control of the capital, arrested Mossaddeq and enabled the Shah to return (19 Aug. 1953).

The Shah proceeded to consolidate his position which changed from that of a symbolic Head of State to that of an autocrat.

In the early 1960's Iran began to appear as an independent factor in the region and to demonstrate her independence of the super-powers. Iran's basic orientation remained pro-West and she maintained special ties with the USA. A bi-lateral defence treaty signed with the USA in 1959 was in force. Iran was a member of CENTO. Yet since the mid 1960's the Shah would like to refute the charge that he was reinstated during his struggle with Dr. Mossaddeq by the Americans and keeps his position through their support.

Great changes have taken place in Iran-Soviet relations. In Dec. 1962 Iran informed the Soviet Union that as an act of good will to foster friendly relations she would not permit the stationing of foreign missile bases on her territory.

At the same time Premier Bulganin publicly dissociated himself from past Soviet activities against Iran. The USSR had apparently abandoned her hope that hostile propaganda and subversion would bring leftist forces to power in Iran, and decided to cooperate with the existing regime. There have been exchanges of high level visits. The Shah visited the USSR in 1956, 1965 and 1968. Trade and economic ties were increased and there was an impressive Soviet and Eastern European economic presence in Iran.

III

In Jan. 1963 the Shah submitted his plan for social and economic reforms, called the "White Revolution" to a referendum; 98 % of the electorate approved his Land Reform.

Opposition to the Shah's reforms came from the land owners and from the religious circles.

The latter initiated in June 1963 a series of riots in Teheran, Tabriz, Isfahan and Meshhed. At last 100 persons were killed and some 200 injured.

In the elections of September 1963 women participated for the first time and in 1968 a woman, Mrs. F. Parja, was included in the cabinet as Minister of Education.

The Shah's defenders charge that Khomeini and other Mullah's opposed the so-called "White Revolution" because it demanded confiscation of their landholdings and equal rights for women.

Khomeini denied any self-interested motive, charging instead that the reform simply favored absentee landlords who were supporters of the Pahlavis and that Islam has never opposed women's liberty.

Khomeini has added, however that "we will not permit behavior that is contrary to the public morality." He did not say what that might mean.

Banished by the Shah in 1964 Khomeini settled in An Najaf a major Shiite holy city in Iraq that contains the Tomb of the Prophet Muhammed's son-in law Ali. There are two main divisions in Islam; Sunnites, who follow the Sunna, the traditional practice of Muhammed and Shiites (the Shia, the faction) that held that only descendants of the prophet Muhammed and his son in law Ali could legitimately head the Islamic community. Those claimed as successors of the Prophet were called Imams. In modern Islam the term "Shi'a" refers to the major non-Sunni group which follow the juridical-theological school, (al-Jafariyya-after the 6 th. Imam Jafar al Sadiq died 765).

This school has been the state religion of Persia since the early 16th century. Shi'i institutions of traditional learning are located mainly in the Shi'i holy cities containing the Shrines of the Imams, such as Najaf, Karbela and Kadhimain in Iraq and Qum and Mashhad in Persia. The number of Shi'i Muslims (or Alevis, as they are called in Turkey) is considerable in Turkey also.

Shiism a breakaway sect was at least partly embraced by the Iranians because it put them apart from their Sunni Arab conquerors. Its main doctrinal difference is that it allows religious leaders far more latitude in their interpretation of the Kuran than the fundamentalist Sunnis.

If Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini's political plans materialize; the Middle East will see emergence of a new Islamic Republic. In modern times Islam has been making an influential comeback. Governments have been required to take growing care not to offend Islamic mores. Even in countries with Social Governments like Algeria and Syria or Secularist Turkey, it has become hard to ignore the power of the mosque.

There the Ayatullah lectured students; calling for direct political action, to root out corruption in Iran, eliminate Western cultural and moral influence and to replace the Iranian monarchy with a constitutional theocracy governed by the precepts of the Koran. His goal Khomeini said "was to produce a generation of believers to destroy the thrones of Tyrant. His tape recorded lectures were circulated widely inside Iran.

In 1977, when Khomeini's son Seyyed Mustafa (49) died suddenly in An Najar, the Mullah hinted that SAVAK agents might have been responsible. In reply the government planted a clumsy character assassination in Tehran's main newspaper "Ettela'at", linking Khomeini, who is in fact a vitriolic anti-communist, to the (illicit) communist Tudeh party. The newspaper article was the first mention of Khomeini's name in the Iranian press in years and the patently false charge helped to make him a public hero to the Shah's populist opposition.

Demonstrators took to the streets in protest helping to start the long cycle of unrest that led to the Shah's vacation on Jan. 16th 1979. The Shah hated good advice and made many mistakes; what is involved, above all, is accumulated discontent over the corruption in the regime's upper strata, which the Shah only began to root out when it was too late. The bitterness over the procedures and methods employed by SAVAK can be also added. The Shah was outnumbered by the religious factions outraged by years of what Jalal Al-

Ahmad called "West toxication?gharb-zadegi", by the teeming population of the bazaar economy, huddled round the mosques, in revolt against the cheaper banks and supermarkets outside and against roaring inflation, by the migrant peasantry now unemployed on urban building sites where formerly wages jumped almost by the day, and by the articulate students and ex-students from the greatly expanded universities. It seems that in the whole of the Shah's high geared and hasty and insufficiently cautious policy of bringing Iran up to modern times, not enough room was left for the traditionalistic masses' social adaptation to their new situation. The balance that prevailed in Iranian society was too fragile and too unstable for the sudden modernization campaign. The religious leaders had every opportunity to settle their own scores with the Shah's blasphemy which rested upon the despised West.

Furthermore-and here we perhaps come to the very crux of what is going on in Iran today-and indirectly around it; the country is big and rich and is situated along what is possibly the most delicate strategic plane in Super-powers rivalry.

Is Khomeini the leader for Iran? It is still extremely difficult for outsiders to understand the message given by the aged theologian. His appearance counts against him in the West. Yet this does not mean that Khomeini is out of touch with Iran. Because the vast majority of Iranians themselves have no real understandings of the implications essential to the Western way of life, which the Shah chose for them. Khomeini is closer to the man in the Iranian street (or field) than their King of Kings was.

This populist alliance in Iran, of the religious Shia right, of the working class and the radical left is not new. It comes together rarely and temporarily. In 1890 in protest against the tobacco concession granted to Major Tablot; in 1905 in the Constitutional movement, in the events of 1951-53 under Mossadeq. It sweeps all before it and then, threatened by itself, usually subsides. The only question this time is when the thirst for order in Iran reasserts itself, who will be there to preside over the necessary years of political adjustment.

The radical left cannot in a religious right country, have anything to offer Iran. A minority dictatorship sustained by Iran's

Russian neighbour to the north or a regime of Mullahs to the right would strip Iran of its burgeoning middle-class talent and would make of a country, that both the US and the Soviet Union need to see stable unstable and unpredictable.

Once it became evident that the Shah had lost irrecoverable ground, the US, which masterminded the salvage operation in Iran 25 years ago, signaled that it was not prepared to do so again. That was sensible.

A nation's self-interest is not served by supporting a ruler who has become detested even by his people.