

Ayatollahs bargain for Washington's blessing

by Robert Dreyfuss

President Carter, in a desperate bid to salvage his reelection chances, is moving dangerously close to giving Iran's ayatollahs everything they want.

The Iranian leadership, including the Muslim Brotherhood secret society that controls the levers of power in the Khomeini dictatorship, know full well what is also common knowledge among the political insiders in Washington, that without the release of the 52 U.S. hostages Carter will lose the Nov. 4 election.

For that reason, the Iranian mullahs intend to extract sweeping political concessions from the Carter administration by manipulating Carter in the final two weeks of the election campaign.

In recent days, Carter and Secretary of State Ed Muskie have declared that the United States is prepared to send weapons and spare parts to the aid of Khomeini's terrorist clique if the hostages are freed.

Spare parts not the issue

But the issue of trading hostages for arms is not the issue.

The real issue at stake in the current round of U.S.-Iran secret negotiations is that the ruling clergy of Iran is demanding that President Carter both formally legitimize the Khomeini regime and, at the same time, abandon the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf to the "export" of the Iranian revolution.

The controllers of Khomeini and the Muslim Brotherhood are a particular faction of the Anglo-American intelligence and financial establishment, who helped

bring Khomeini to power by toppling the shah. During 1978 and 1979, the Carter administration collaborated with these circles in supporting the revolution in Iran—and now the clergy in Iran is demanding that Carter go all the way and give the Muslim Brotherhood and its London backers full freedom of action in the Persian Gulf.

By institutionalizing the Khomeini regime, London intends to create a permanent base of operations for the Muslim Brotherhood in the region. Then, from Teheran, the British can destabilize the entire Gulf area, reduce the flow of oil, and jack up oil prices.

Carter grovels for mullahs

In a speech on Oct. 20, Carter said that if the hostages are released, then the United States would immediately free \$8 billion in frozen Iranian assets in U.S. banks and, he implied, clear the way for shipping at least \$550 million in arms and spare parts to Iran and its fanatical leaders.

Secretary of State Muskie, on the same day, sharpened U.S. criticism of Iraq and offered help to Iran. "The integrity of Iran is threatened by the Iraqi invasion. We are opposed to the dismemberment of Iran. We believe that the coherence and stability of Iran is in the interests of the stability of the region as a whole."

It was the first time that an American official called the war an "Iraqi invasion," and it reflected, according to diplomatic sources, the start of a much broader U.S.-Iran alliance.

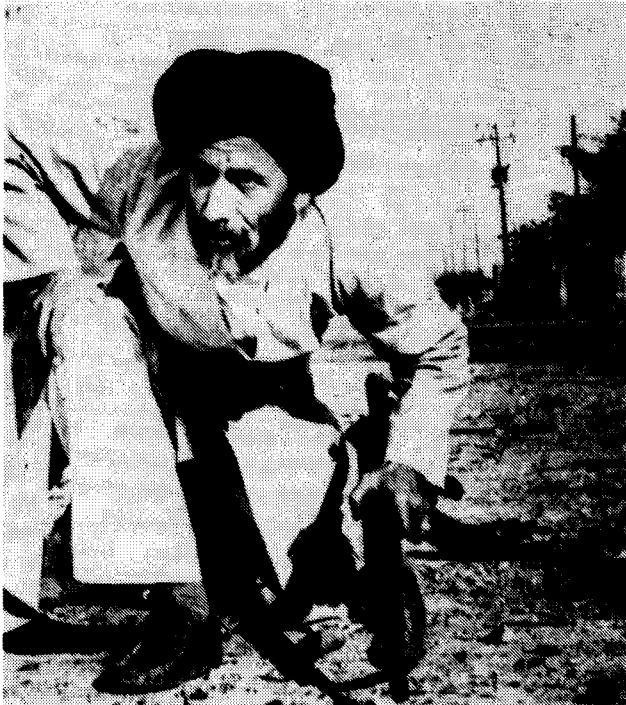


Photo: Wide World

An Iranian mullah in besieged Khorramshahr.

But whether or not the U.S. overtures to Iran will bear fruit is still unclear.

Less than 24 hours after the Carter and Muskie speeches, a leading Iranian official, Hassan Ayat of the ruling Islamic Republic Party, delivered a rebuke to Carter.

"Carter is trying to save his face with American voters—that's why he is making it look like there are secret negotiations with Iran." He then proceeded to lay down extremely tough conditions for releasing the 52 hostages, including a suggestion that Iran is seeking "to settle accounts with the pro-American regimes of the region."

Said Ayat, "This is the occasion to export the Islamic Revolution."

He then declared, "Washington will have to accept these conditions, or else we will put the hostages we consider spies on trial."

And Ayatollah Rafsanjani, the Iran parliament speaker, said bluntly that "If the United States accepts the conditions, there won't be any problems."

Preelection maneuvering

Both the Democrats and Republicans, as well as all factions of the Khomeini government, know the impact that Iran's release of the hostages might have on the outcome of the Nov. 4 elections.

Carter and his entourage are now edging closer to making the kind of concessions to Iran which, although they might in fact induce the Teheran regime to let the

hostages out, would lead to a strategic debacle for the United States in months to come.

By agreeing even to negotiate with Khomeini's terrorists, Carter is degrading the United States and causing serious doubt about U.S. policy for the region and internationally.

A counterstrategy?

The Republicans, including Reagan, are also aware of what Carter is trying to do on the eve of the election. In the first sign of a counterstrategy, Reagan yesterday blasted Carter for a "humiliation and a disgrace" to the country for having let the hostages languish for almost a year, and he declared that he has a "plan" to get them freed.

But Reagan did not state what many political insiders know to be the case: that Carter set up the taking of the U.S. hostages last fall deliberately and with malice aforethought, with the help of British and Israeli intelligence! Among other things, the Teheran crisis allowed Carter to steamroller Ted Kennedy in the Democratic primaries.

Because key elements in the Reagan camp, such as Henry Kissinger and David Rockefeller, were themselves directly involved in the conspiracy to seize the hostages, it is certain that Reagan will not raise the real issues of the Teheran crisis unless he breaks with the Kissinger-Rockefeller faction.

For their part, the Iranians believe that due to election pressures now they can win from Carter concessions which would otherwise be impossible. But many Iranians, such as President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr and others, are also afraid that if the hostages are not freed then Reagan—who is expected to be much less willing to tolerate the ayatollahs—will be elected. So they are arguing that the hostages ought to be freed in the time remaining before Nov. 4.

Warnings from Iraq

Iraq is issuing bitter warnings to the Carter administration not to make the mistake of siding with Iran's religious oligarchs. "The United States better remain neutral in the Gulf conflict," said Iraqi foreign minister Saadun Hammadi, "and refrain from supplying weapons and spare parts to Iran." Otherwise, he said, "Iraq will consider [it] to be a hostile party directly involved in the conflict."

But, despite the tough talk that continues to stream from Iran, there are contrary indications that much of the preliminary negotiations toward a U.S.-Iran deal have been completed. In Teheran, Prime Minister Mohammed Ali Rajai—having just returned from New York—said that he is certain Washington is prepared to meet the four conditions for returning the hostages that were set two months ago by Khomeini.