

The Clerics Lash Back

as Iranians Question Their Legitimacy

VIGOROUS ATTACKS ON THE CREDIBILITY and legitimacy of the clerical leadership in Iran have continued to mount since the February 20, 2004, *Majlis* (Parliament) elections which, despite the removal of so-called "reformists" from the ballot, still failed to attract a meaningful voter turn-out. The elections showed the extent of electoral fraud to which the clerics were forced to turn, highlighting their tenuous hold on power. There are now signs that the underpinnings of the clerics will be attacked still further, especially as evidence is now available showing even that their claims to religious authority are open to question.

The late Soviet leader Joseph Stalin once said: "It's not who votes, but who counts the votes", a maxim which has found resonance in the February 20, 2004, Iranian national elections. A substantial cadre of ballot officials, directly answerable to the hard-line clerical leadership of Supreme Leader Ali Hoseini-Khamene'i, "counted" the votes and issued results which almost nobody in Iran or abroad really believed to be accurate.²

The credibility of the February 20, 2004, elections was essentially further undermined when observers saw already half-filled ballot boxes "stuffed with fake votes" transferred into polling stations on election day, and artificial crowds created by reducing the number of available ballot boxes at each location to create long lines and the appearance of a large turnout. This deception was bolstered by "rent-a-crowd" groups of black "chador" women who were called into action when any one of the 300 foreign journalists, covering the elections, appeared at a polling station.

Tehran sources report that 54 full ballot boxes disappeared and that initially the Interior Ministry offered "correct" voter turnout figures showing an attendance of about 11 percent in Tehran. This task was taken away from the Interior Ministry and the tally given as more than 30 percent for the capital and a touch more than 50 percent for the nation. Missing from all statistics are the huge number of blank votes cast by Government employees and students forced to vote to receive a "voted" stamp in their ID cards, without which they could face future difficulties.

Reformers and opposition groups of all kinds, including the leftist Iran *Mujahedin* Organization calculated that the hardliners only truly had the support of about 10 to 15 percent of Iran's voters.

What bears watching more than the struggle between the hardliners and the so-called "reformers" is the turmoil, rising from the political depths, which threatens to destabilize the *status quo* in Iran far beyond the earlier student unrest and which now targets the legitimacy of the Islamic coup itself.

"Reformers", with nothing left to lose and outraged by the disqualification of their candidates and the resultant takeover by the hardliners of the only nationally-elected government body, have begun to poise an attack at disqualifying the ruling clerics' claim to any legitimacy; to even be in power, let alone rule. Diplomatic sources speculate that a significant nudge in this direction could well result in a speedy downfall of the Iranian clerics.

Supreme Ruler Ali Khamene'i's authority and ability to govern has been publicly and directly questioned in an unprecedented open letter written by members of the *Majlis* (parliament) and widely publicized outside Iran. Two Iranian newspapers, *Yaass Noh* and *Shargh*, which reprinted the letter within the country, were immediately closed down. This essentially unprecedented confrontation against the clerical leadership of Iran signaled an attempt to cut the clerics off at the knees rather than dispute election details or the misuse of existing power structures.

Nor are the hardliners still a monolithic group, sharing the same religious and

ideological aims and opinions as was the case when "Ayatollah" Ruhollah Khomeini was alive and in charge after the 1979 collapse of the Imperial Government. Khomeini had demonstrated an unbending, single-minded resolve and capability to hold all institutions and individuals in line, but now, previously concealed dissent among the major players has sprung to the fore. When the veil of "democratic and fair elections" was torn away by the hardliners, it revealed more than was intended.

Significantly, the former President of Iran and head of the Expediency Council and international businessman "Ayatollah" Abbas Hashemi Rafsanjani has also openly announced his policy disagreement with Ali Khamene'i over talks with the US, citing sorrow that Khamene'i's clinging to Khomeini's anti-US edicts rather than to pragmatic policy, had stifled Iran's ability to advance politically.

Religious scholars can find no basis for Ali Khamene'i's self-awarded *ayatollah* title nor of Rafsanjani's use of that appellation. Nor Khomeini's, though he was artificially elevated and granted use of *Ayatollah* to save his life.

With all bets off, the reformers have now struck at the heart of the revolution and are insisting on an inquiry into the disappearance of Grand *Ayatollah* Mussa Sadr, some 25-years ago, during a visit to Libya.³ The Iranian born leader of the Lebanese Shia was revered and respected above all others in the Shia world. He refused to accept Ruhollah Khomeini as an *ayatollah* and with the influence Mussa Sadr enjoyed, he became an insurmountable obstacle to Khomeini's political plans, and of those who supported the overthrow of the Shah and needed a despot like Khomeini to be their cat's paw.

Grand *Ayatollah* Sadr's mysterious disappearance in Libya – his body was never found – opened the way for Khomeini to "invade" Iran, which accurately describes the action of a *foreign national* taking over a country in which he was neither born nor had any Persian blood in his veins at all, paternally or maternally. While one devout Iranian in California speaks of Khomeini reverently as a "great man, similar to Hitler", other less friendly Persians liken him to an invader like Genghis Khan,

the Mongol scourge.

Unable to strike at the hardliners on an uneven playing field, the “reformers” have now begun an all-out assault on their former clerical allies. The cornerstone and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, from which the present leaders draw their legitimacy to govern, was Khomeini and the structure which he put in place. However, there is compelling evidence that Ruhollah Khomeini was never an Iranian in the first place and had no right to inflict his policies on the Iranian people. Nor was his elevation to the title of *ayatollah* anything more than a political, face-saving expediency to prevent his being hanged for treason in 1964.

Considerable effort was made in 1979 to eradicate evidence of any record of either Khomeini’s non-Iranian origins and the source of his use of the title of *ayatollah*, and one of the first actions which Khomeini took, within hours of his return to Iran after the Shah left, was to execute two prominent men who were living proof of his origin and also of his false *ayatollah* status. One of these was Gen. Hassan Pakravan, Head of SAVAK, the Imperial Iranian national intelligence and security organization.

Furthermore he immediately tried to assassinate the highly-respected *Ayatollah* Shariatmadari, who, with *Ayatollah* Golpayegani, had in 1964 granted Khomeini the false title. They had agreed to allow Khomeini — then literally awaiting death on charges of treason — to be called an *ayatollah* to save his life: it was forbidden to execute an *ayatollah*. This took place in 1964 at the urging of the British Ambassador to Iran and Gen. Pakravan, when a face-saving legal reason had to be found not to hang Khomeini for treason. It is known that Pakravan had fought hard to avoid Khomeini’s execution at that time.

Later, when the 1979 assassination attempt failed against Shariatmadari, Shariatmadari, far higher in the religious hierarchy than Khomeini, was placed, incommunicado and under house arrest, without the right to preach or receive visitors other than a handful of close relatives, whose anti-Khomeini statements could be easily impugned as biased.

Recent reports from Tehran showed the death *fatwa* (religious edict or opinion) issued against British author Salman Rushdi by Khomeini for writing an “anti-Islamic” book and cancelled a few years ago, had been reinstated to warn journalists or writers the clerics cannot directly control, that they risked death at the hands of devout Moslem fanatics if they uttered a word against the rulers in Iran or weakened their standing by revealing the illegitimate provenance of their power and thus contest their right to impose their theocratic despotism on a reluctant people.

Few contest that Khomeini’s mother was a Kashmiri Indian, but even fewer — Iranians or otherwise — know his father’s origins or his real name. The late Iranian



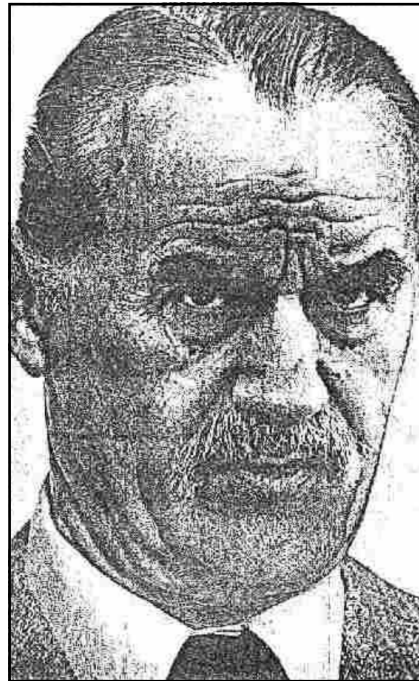
“Ayatollah” Ruhollah Khomeini.

Senator Moussavi, who represented Khuzestan Province in Southern Iran, at the time of the monarchy, knew Khomeini’s father and his four sons well, looked after their needs, used his influence to obtain their Iranian identity cards with fictitious dates and places of birth to avoid military service. Sen. Moussavi died for this help, on Khomeini’s personal orders, immediately on this *mullah*’s return from France after the 1979 coup.

SAVAK chief Gen. Pakravan, the man who saved Khomeini’s life in 1964, was taken that same night onto the roof of his house and shot to death for having compiled a complete background file on Khomeini. The SAVAK background file still exists, as a senior SAVAK official, who defected and joined SAVAMA (the clerics’ equivalent of the SAVAK) took possession of it. This same man was reportedly head of SAVAMA in the US for quite some time, and sources indicate that he has kept the file “for a rainy day”.

Why did Khomeini return to Iran with such a bloodthirsty mind set? It seems clear that it was to exact the revenge which he said he would have. Prior to his return to Iran in 1979, Khomeini openly stated that he would kill as many Iranians — he considered everyone in Iran guilty in advance — as there were hairs on the head of his son, killed in a car accident, but in his mind killed by Iranian authorities.

Unable to provide an acceptable paternal background for Khomeini, a story was concocted to link his paternal heritage to that of his Kashmiri Indian mother and introduced an Indian-born father (also from Kashmir) but of Iranian heritage. In fact, no such person existed. But someone with similar and misleading characteristics certainly did, which could lend credence to



Khomeini: a 1979 rendering without beard.

this fiction of an Indian father.

Khomeini’s real father, William Richard Williamson, was born in Bristol, England, in 1872 of British parents and lineage. This detail is based on first-hand evidence from a former Iranian employee of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (later British Petroleum: BP), who worked with and met the key players of this saga. This fact was supported by the lack of a denial in 1979 by Col. Archie Chisholm, a BP political officer and former editor at *The Financial Times*, when interviewed on the subject at his home in County Cork, Ireland, by a British newspaper.

The then-78-year old Chisholm stated: “I knew *Haji* [as Williamson was later known] well; he worked for me. He certainly went native — but whether he is Khomeini’s father I could not say.”

Would not an outright, ridiculing denial have been the natural response, were there no truth to the British paternity? From someone who “knew *Haji* [and thus the truth] well”?

Chisholm obviously wished to avoid a statement leading to political controversy or possible personal retribution in the very year Khomeini took over in Iran. Nor as a former, experienced political officer himself would he be willing to drag Britain into the new Middle East conflict. But neither was he prepared to provide an outright lie instead of his “no comment”.

How it all happened:

A stocky, handsome, dark-haired Bristol boy, Richard Williamson ran away to sea at the age of 13 as a cabin boy, on a ship bound for Australia. However, he jumped ship before he got there. Little is known about him until he showed up, at the age of 20, in Aden at the Southern end of the Arabian Peninsula in South Yemen, where he

joined the local police force.

His good looks soon had Sultan Fazl bin-Ali, ruler of Lahej, persuading him to quit the police force to live with him. Richard later left him for another *Sheikh*, Youssef Ebrahim, a relative of the Al-Sabah family, which rules Kuwait today.

A few points should be remembered about the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula area at that time.

Regional countries like Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and so forth did not exist as sovereign entities and were artificially created about 70 years ago by the British and French governments when they partitioned the area. Iran, or Persia as it was called, was soon to be controlled by Russian Cossacks in the North and the British Army in the South, although technically it remained an independent monarchy under the largely absentee Qajar dynasty.

British military presence in Iran was under Lt.-Col. Sykes (later Sir Percy Sykes), based in Shiraz, but politically controlled by Sir Arnold Wilson in Khorramshahr (then called Moham-mareh) with assistance from E. Elking-ton in Masjid-Suleiman and Dr Young, based in Ahwaz. All three were cities in Khuzestan Province, which was later represented by Senator Moussavi. Col. T.E. Lawrence, who gained fame as "Lawrence of Arabia", operated out of Basra in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Khorramshahr during this same period.

Oilfields, far beyond the technological capability of the Arab tribes (or Persia) to develop or appreciate as a valuable commodity, were being discovered and exploited by the British, including via the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, formed to siphon off oil from Khuzestan Province in Southern Iran.

Kuwait, on the other side of the Persian Gulf was still not a country at the time.

As the major player in the Middle East oil industry, Britain had to exert influence and control through its political and oil personnel. *Haji* Abdollah Williamson became one of these in 1924 when he joined British Petroleum as political officer. He retired under that same name in 1937, at the age of 65.

Earlier, in what is now Kuwait, Richard Williamson had very quickly converted to Islam and adopted the first name of Abdollah. Family names were still unusual and "son of the son of" or "son of a type of worker or craftsman" was still commonly used to identify people. For 14 years he had lived among the Bedouin tribes on the Arabian Peninsula and in 1895 and 1898 he went on pilgrimages to Mecca, took on the rightful title of *Haji* and took on his first benefactor's name of Fazl, adding Zobeiri to it as a distinguisher. Thus William Richard Williamson became *Haji* Abdollah Fazl Zobeiri.

During his service with British Petroleum in the Persian Gulf, *Haji* Abdollah took his vacations in Indian Kashmir, to rest from the relentless Gulf heat and in

this timeframe married at least seven times — to Arab and Indian women — each under Muslim marriage rituals. He sired 13 children of whom seven were boys and the rest girls with most of the children dying in early childhood.

His repeated Kashmir excursions and Indian wives and use of the name Abdollah Fazl Zobeiri probably give rise to the "Kashmir Indian" father misconception. With dark-haired *Haji* Abdollah a fanatically devout Muslim, a characteristic he imposed on his children, this fervent religious attitude and Arab nomenclature would not normally be an expected combination for a foreigner, especially an Englishman.

He insisted his four surviving sons attend religious school in Najaf (in Iraq) under the tutelage of *Ayatollahs* Yazdi (meaning of the city of Yazd) and Shirazi (of the city of Shiraz). Two of them, Hindzadeh (meaning Indian born) and Passandideh (meaning pleasing or approved) studied well and eventually became *ayatollahs* in their own right.

The third boy, a troublesome young man, failed to make his mark in Najaf and went to the Iranian holy city of Qom, where he studied under *Ayatollah* Boroujerdi. When family names became a requirement by law under His Majesty Reza Shah, the young man chose the city of his residence — Khomein — as the designator and took on the name Khomeini (meaning "of Khomein").

The fourth son hated theology and went across the Persian Gulf to Kuwait and opened up two gas (petrol) stations using the paternal family name of *Haji* Ali Williamson, though it is unclear if he ever performed the *Haj* pilgrimage. This in itself links Khomeini — through that brother — with *Haji* Williamson. Why, otherwise, would Rouhollah Khomeini's undisputed brother use the Williamson family name?

The patriarch of this brood, *Haji* Abdollah Fazl Zobeiri (aka *Haji* Abdollah Williamson in BP), was thrown out of Iran by Reza Shah along with three other British political officers for anti-Iranian activity and joined his son in Kuwait. Here he took on the duties of Oil Distribution for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

With his longstanding contacts in the Arab world and his Muslim religion, he forced a 50/50 agreement between US oil interests in Kuwait and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company as well as in 1932 pursuing the exclusive exploration rights for British Petroleum in Abu Dhabi.

His lack of a formal education forced British Petroleum to send out Archie H. T. Chisholm (see above), a senior executive, to conclude the Abu Dhabi contract and together with *Haji* Abdollah's political influence they overcame competition from Major Frank Holmes, *Sheikh* Hussein and Mohammad Yateen to successfully land the exclusive contract. Chisholm, as he said, got to know Khomeini's father well.

Back in Iran again in 1960, Khomeini saw an opportunity to exact revenge for

his father having been thrown out of Iran and to impose his Islamic fundamentalist philosophy onto an Iran struggling with budget problems, caused mostly by its oil being in the control of foreign oil companies, which decided — not Iran — how much oil the country was allowed to produce and at what price it had to be sold.

With his own and his family's theological background, he began to foment an anti-monarchy revolt through the mosques, which by 1964 resulted in imposition of martial law and finally with his arrest and his being sentenced to death by hanging. And consequently being given the life-saving *ayatollah* title which he had not earned.

After formally being exiled to Turkey, he ended up in Iraq where he wrote some philosophical and social behavior dissertations which were so bizarre by religious standards that, where possible, the tracts were bought up and destroyed by the Iranian Government when he took over in 1979. The most damning were in Arabic language versions and then later, "cleaner" texts appeared as edited translations in Farsi.

Some linguists, who studied his public speeches in 1979 and 1980, concluded his Farsi vocabulary to be less than 200 words, so not only did he not have Persian blood, he did not even speak the language. With the number of Iranians who have died because of him and his successors over the past 25 years going into the hundreds of thousands, if not well over a million if the death toll from the eight-year Iran-Iraq war is included, this Anglo-Indian with Arab Sunni Muslim theological and philosophical roots may have had no love or compassion for Iranians either.

In the Iran Air aircraft flying Khomeini back from France to Tehran in early 1979, with cameras rolling, a journalist asked: "What do you feel about returning to Iran?" He replied: "Nothing!" The question was repeated, and again he replied: "Nothing!" ★

Footnotes:

1. Alan Peters is the *nom de plume* of a correspondent who spent many years engaged in security and intelligence issues in Iran. This report is copyright © 2004 by Alan Peters.
2. See *Defense & Foreign Affairs Daily* February 23, 2004: *Iranian Elections Reinforce Short-Term Clerical Grip; Heighten Political Instability*.
3. Editor's note: See *Defense & Foreign Affairs Daily* March 1, 2004: *Iranian Leadership Seeks Ways to Circumvent IAEA, and to Suppress Possible Libyan Revelations About Iranian Involvement in PA103 and WMD*. Significantly, while this report deals with the concern of the Iranian clerics over the possibility of launching terrorist or insurgent attacks against Libyan leader Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi of Libya over matters related to Iran's involvement in WMD programs and the PA103 terrorist bombing, it is possible that the clerics also feel concern that the transformation of Libya's relations with the US could also reveal unpalatable truths about the disappearance of Lebanese Grand *Ayatollah* Mussa Sadr.