

# THE WEAPON OF CRITICISM

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## Mission to Teheran

General Robert E. Huyser  
Andre Deutsch, London 1986

## All Fall Down

Gary Sick  
Random House, New York 1985

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All classes sum up their defeats as well as their victories. In General Huyser's *Mission to Teheran* and Gary Sick's *All Fall Down*, two tried and trusted servants of the US imperialist ruling class attempt to explain the debacle of US imperialism's Iran policy and the fall of the Shah in 1979. Of course, the class blinders of these two imperialists, as well as their ultimately petty concern to shift blame from themselves and onto others, greatly limits the value of such summations. Still, the collapse of the Shah's regime in Iran did represent a very considerable blow to the US imperialists even if the Iranian revolution ended up aborted and deformed into a reactionary and barbaric Islamic Republic. For these reasons the imperialist ruling circles, especially in the United States, have paid considerable attention to summing up the "lessons of Iran" and, it seems, are even trying to apply these summations in their interventions in other dominated countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America when long entrenched reactionary regimes are under assault (most recently in Seoul). For this reason it is not enough for the revolutionaries to sum up *their* experience and that of the masses; they must *also* know what the enemy is thinking and planning so as to be better able to foil them. It is in this light that these two books, which represent a sort of "second wave" of memoirs (the first wave being those of President Carter, US Ambassador to Iran Sullivan, etc., published shortly after the end of the Carter Presidency in 1980) are at least worthy of note.

General Robert E. Huyser was

the highest-ranking army officer sent to Iran by President Carter to supervise the departure of the Shah and to directly oversee the Iranian military. His book is mostly a day by day account (albeit heavily filtered) of his activities during his 40 day mission. Gary Sick, on the other hand, is a relatively unknown retired Navy captain who served on the staff of the U.S. National Security Council as the resident "Iran expert" during the whole of the Iran crisis. Sick's book is far more pretentious than Huyser's account, but is actually of less value.

The starting point for both is the recognition that the Pahlavi dynasty was the main support for US interests in the vital Gulf region and that the Shah was considered a permanent feature of the region. As Sick puts it: "No regime could have appeared stronger, richer or more firmly entrenched than that of the Shah in the mid 1970s."

The propping up of the Shah dates way back to the postwar period and especially to 1952 when the U.S. was instrumental in engineering a coup d'etat which allowed the Shah to depose the bourgeois liberals centred around the former Prime Minister Mossadegh and mercilessly crush the masses. From that time on Iran was a "privileged" recipient of all sorts of U.S. attention. The "White Revolution," the massive military buildup of the Iranian armed forces, the building up a modern intelligentsia in the cities—all this was done in conjunction with Western, especially US, imperialism.

This process took on an even greater dimension under the Nixon-Ford administrations (1969-1976) as Nixon tried to implement his policy of developing "regional gendarmes" to avoid direct reliance on the intervention of US troops in various "troublespots" in the world—a response to the devastating defeat the US had suffered in Vietnam.

In both books an account is

presented of an Iranian society thoroughly bound to that of the US itself. The 30,000 strong "American community" in Iran played a major role in almost every aspect — and most especially the military. When it comes to describing what the *nature* of these US-Iranian bonds were, the unabashed Huyser is more to the point than the sophisticated Mr. Sick. The latter contends that one of the principal problems was that "Iran was the regional tail wagging the super-power dog." He bases this rather ridiculous statement on the fact that Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had given the Shah a blank check to acquire any non-nuclear equipment in the US arsenal (an internal US government report from 1976 had said that in the relationship between Iran and the US "the Government of Iran exerts the determining influence").

In fact, General Huyser's book shows more clearly than ever that the old slogan of the Iranian revolutionaries, "The Shah Is a US Puppet," was a thousand times true. Even before General Huyser was appointed the US "regent" when his Highness the Shah was sent off packing, the General was well known in Teheran. As the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of US European Command (responsible for all US troops in NATO as well as the Middle East) had been called upon to "advise" the Shah, and to integrate the Iranian military into US military contingency planning.

In the opening pages of his book Huyser's conceit lets an important cat out of the bag: Huyser himself personally wrote (in "hand-writing"! ) the "Concept of Operations and Operational Doctrine" for the Iranian military. He boasts how he did this after a team of US officers had studied the problem and that his draft was approved "without changes" by the Iranian chiefs of the armed services as well as the Shah himself. Thus the US imperialists decided not only in con-

tent but even in form the basic war-fighting doctrine of the Iranian military! Hardly a case of the tail wagging the dog! If anything, Sick only shows that the US presidents and the very top levels of their advisers preferred to give orders to the Shah directly rather than entrust such an important task to lowly State Department bureaucrats. As for the argument that the enormous payments by the Shah for US military equipment somehow modified the basic master/lackey relationship (a contention not only of some openly pro-imperialist commentators, but also of the supporters of the notorious "Three World Theory") the ability of the U.S. to quickly and effectively "freeze" the many billions of dollars of Iranian assets during the "hostage crisis" of 1979 shows that this much heralded "economic clout" was really little more than a US bookkeeping arrangement.

In fact, both the Huyser and the Sick accounts show that as the crisis deepened the puppet strings grew taut and the Shah was left with little room to wiggle about on his own. Ambassador Sullivan would hold *daily* meetings with the Shah (usually accompanied by the British ambassador) and was instructed from Washington to provide advice to the Shah with "greater specificity." Even the arrangements for the Shah's departure were made by the US, and his last words to his own chief of staff were "to obey" General Huyser!

Huyser's basic mission was to take direct charge of the Iranian military and to assure that the reactionary state power (essentially the army) remained intact even after the Shah fled the country. His first task was to convince the top Iranian generals themselves not to flee with the Shah. He describes a snivelling and cowardly bunch of incompetents who had to be controlled by gruff scoldings alternated with condescending babying. Huyser's description of the emotional col-

lapse of the generals as the Shah departed on his airplane is particularly amusing. . . .

Once he was assured that the leadership of the Army would not desert, Huyser set about trying to organize a military intervention. Although he ultimately failed (to some extent because things were too far gone by the time Huyser got there), his account reveals quite a bit about the strategy of the US imperialists in such a situation, especially the counter-revolutionary dual tactics of the carrot and the stick.

Those who see savage military repression as incompatible with political "reform," or who would prefer to believe that a so-called military/fascist bloc can be opposed to a "civilian bloc" (as we heard argued in the Philippines) would do well to read Huyser's account.

Huyser, whose mission and, indeed, whose very existence is bound up with a "military option," points out that the Shah needed to "make the transition to a more democratic form of government" and "modernise his methods of ruling."

Huyser was told to make various contingency plans involving the military, either a coup in which the generals would take power or unleashing the military in support of the civilian government of Bakhtiar (who had been appointed Prime Minister in the last days of the Shah). Huyser seems rather indifferent to the choice to be made. He points out that the "preparations" for the two things are the same and furthermore seems clear on the imperialists' necessity to combine bloodbaths with reforms, changes in government, and even a basic modification of the regime itself. Gary Sick made the same point in an internal memorandum (quoted in his book) written just weeks before the final overthrow of the Shah. "If we are to back the Shah in a series of repressive moves it should be with the clear understanding that repression is no substitute

for political concessions on his part, leading to a new government which will have some real credibility.”

Huyser makes a couple of interesting observations on the relationship between the carrot and the stick. Without the carrot, he points out, it will be difficult for the stick (in this case a military coup) to be accepted. In addition, he points out later, the threat of a coup makes various schemes for a change in government more palatable. He quotes Carter's National Security Adviser Brzezinski (Sick's boss at the time) as telling him to openly make plans for a coup because “we could scare the opposition into supporting Bakhtiar by warning that the alternative was the Army.” When one reads these lines it is difficult not to think of the Philippines where the open preparations for a coup are used precisely to “scare the opposition” into supporting, or at least acquiescing, in the reactionary Aquino regime, and it is all the more unfortunate that some of our comrades seem to have been slow to perceive this point as well. (See “An Open Letter to the Communist Party of the Philippines,” *AWTW* 1987/8).

Much has been written about alleged policy disputes within the U.S. ruling circles over the best way to handle the Iran situation. In fact there seems to have been a large measure of consensus up to almost the very end when the impending fall of the Shah increased the tendencies toward mutual recrimination and buck-passing. As long as the preservation of the monarchy seemed a feasible option, all of the key US figures were in agreement to do what needed to be done to prop up the Shah while encouraging measured steps toward “democracy.” But as the collapse of the Shah loomed closer it became clear that it would be necessary to rely on opposition figures to form a government while trying to hang on to the Shah as the chief of state and, more to the point, chief of the armed forces. But while Bakhtiar was willing to take a gamble at forming a government under the monarchy, Bazargan saw that it was too late for any accommodation with the Shah and ended up form-

ing Khomeini's first government.

Nor did the US ruling class necessarily refuse a role to Khomeini himself. Secret contacts between Khomeini forces and Washington had taken place through numerous channels. While Huyser was trying frantically to prop up the Bakhtiar regime he repeatedly sent messages to Washington “about trying to establish some relationship with Khomeini.” And, “My even bigger concern at this time was that there was absolutely no dialogue between Bakhtiar and Khomeini.” In fact, Huyser insisted to the Iranian Army that they should “adjust their ideas” and get ready to accept the return of Khomeini as a “religious leader.”

One reason Huyser was hoping for a reconciliation with Khomeini was his concern about the emergence of a “third force”: “[US Defense] Secretary Brown wanted to know if I thought third parties could make trouble, and of course *this was one of my abiding fears*. They were the ones who had caused most of the latest bloodshed. I told them I wasn't sure exactly who the third party was — PLO, local terrorists, Communists or a combination of all these. I thought it probably included just plain hoodlums. Certainly it was growing in strength.” Elsewhere Huyser writes of trying to approach the Khomeini forces based on their “common cause” with the military against this “menace.”

To the extent there ever was real dispute it seems that it was over whether it would be possible, as Huyser claims Ambassador Sullivan proposed: “to unplug the military, switch them off, and when Khomeini returned in triumph, just plug them back in.” All were clear that the critical ingredient was to maintain the existing state power (essentially the armed forces) intact. And all saw a place for Khomeini.

In the writings of many observers Ambassador Sullivan is painted as the “bad guy” whose unauthorised contacts with the Khomeini forces weakened the US position of supporting the Shah. Of course, these books were written before the “Irangate” affair and one wonders

whether now, when rapprochement between Iran and the “Great Satan” seems more and more possible, perhaps history will smile more kindly on poor Sullivan.

Finally it is worth noting briefly some of the concretes of Huyser's preparation for military action — again either in the case of a coup or in support of the “legal government.” First, Huyser was planning to rely on elite forces — probably no more than ten or twenty thousand men out of an armed forces of 450,000 — to deliver the necessary blow. As he put it: “history has often shown [that] with prudent planning it does not take a great many troops to seize control of a country. The plans we had drawn up were very precise and did not require us to take on the masses. The strategy was to defend the key installations; against such dispositions the masses could not hope to dislodge them. We had no intention of trying to dominate each city and thoroughfare. . . . This way was both easier and more effective.” In his book Huyser justifies civilian casualties of five to ten thousand deaths — how many he was really counting on is anybody's guess.

When reading the US imperialists' accounts of the collapse of the Iranian regime one cannot help being struck by the seeming impotence of the reactionary classes in the face of the revolutionary upsurge of the masses. And this is a country where President Carter had toasted the Shah, only one year before his overthrow, as “an island of stability in the Middle East.” As Sick warns his fellow imperialists: “Certainly one should guard against casual judgments that *any* regime is so strong or so well established that it is immune from revolutionary contagion.” (emphasis in original)

At the same time it is absolutely clear that no revolutionary crisis, no matter how deep, will result in a genuine revolutionary transformation of society unless the proletariat is able to lead an armed struggle to resolutely and thoroughly smash the existing state apparatus and completely sweep away the reactionary order. That is an important lesson for our side. □