IRAN SINCE THE REVOLUTION

Internal Dynamics, Regional Conflict, and the Superpowers

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Brooklyn College Studies on Society in Change No. 47 Editor-in-Chief Béla K. Király in government, but with the giving of greater weight to right-wingers and to those who once favored the radicals but now act conservatively. The radicals are, as of January 1984, still in government, and some are still fighting for greater influence. In social terms the recent development has been away from workers and peasants and toward the middle, landed, and professional classes—including bazaaris, landlords and wealthy peasants, and professionals and technocrats, as well as those in these classes and among students outside Iran whom the government would like to attract back to Iran. Revolutionary utopianism has, at least for now, partly given way to "bourgeois" practicality, including a stress on oil income, foreign trade, and technology, though continued war, jailings, executions, and anti-American rhetoric have kept most Americans from noticing the change.

Both Iranian revolutionaries and some foreign analysts have divided the revolution in power into three phases, and the Thermidor beginning sometime in 1982 may be added as a fourth.

The first phase began with the seizure of power by guerrilla forces in the name of the revolution in February 1979 and ended with the taking of the American hostages in November 1979. At first there was a true united-front government, including not only nonulama supporters of Khomeini, notably Prime Minister Mahdi Bazargan and the younger Abu '1-Hasan Bani-Sadr, Sadeq Qotbzada, and Ibrahim Yazdi, but also, for a time, more conservative, secularist members of the National Front such as Karim Sanjabi. For a time there was considerable freedom of the press and association, but by the summer of 1979 numerous newspapers and journals had been suppressed, and the clerically backed thugs called the Hezbollahis were breaking up demonstrations by leftist and left-center groups, notably the Mojahedin-e Khalq, the Feda'iyyin-e Khalq, and the National Democratic Front led by Hedayatollah Matin-Daftari, a grandson of Mosaddeq.

With the taking of the U.S. embassy and hostages, the movement toward control by radical clerics received a big impetus that the growing radical clerical leadership used for its own ends; this inaugurated the second phase of the revolution. Bazargan and his foreign minister Yazdi resigned when they were unable to resolve the crisis, and their power passed to radical clerics. In the light of later trends, the January 1980 election of Bani-Sadr as president appears in part as an anomaly that occurred largely because the Islamic Republican Party candidate was forbidden to run because of a technicality. Iraq's attack on Iran later in 1980 further radicalized the situation and made opponents of the regime, such as the Kurds, who had been fighting for autonomy since negotiations broke down in 1979, look like traitors. Bani-Sadr's position as commander-

in-chief did not increase his long-term power and was taken from him in 1981.

The third phase began in the spring and early summer of 1981, when participants in a Bani-Sadr rally, attacked by the Hezbollahis, fought back, and Bani-Sadr was stripped of his presidency and went into hiding. He escaped abroad with Mas'ud Rajavi, leader of the Islamic leftist Mojahedin-e Khalq, which declared its militant opposition to the regime. A large number of assassinations of high- and middle-level governmental figures, mostly by the Mojahedin, failed to weaken the government but did give it both a reason and an excuse to crack down on all opposition, which was tainted with abetting the Iraqi enemy. Executions, torture, and jailings occurred on a massive scale.

During these three phases the government tried to meet some of the needs of the poor, despite the economic problems created by revolution and war, and the volunteer Construction Crusade carried out important public works while organizations like the Foundation for the Oppressed aided the urban poor. New land distribution measures were proposed from 1980 on but never implemented, although some confiscations effected by peasants were not reversed.

The fourth phase began with conservative measures early in 1982, and by the end of that year, this tendency was clear, even though there were few major personnel changes after those necessitated by the assassinations. One aspect of this phase has been the veto by the Council of Guardians as un-Islamic of economic measures that were deemed to interfere with private property (in contrast to the numerous nationalizations that had taken place earlier). The two main measures so vetoed in 1982 were a land reform bill, which would have divided still-existing large holdings among poor peasants, and one nationalizing most foreign trade. Iranian eyewitness reports indicate that pressure from landowners and bazaar elements whose economic interests would be hurt by these measures help account for these vetoes; both laws had been passed by the Majlis, which still represents more broad-based popular opinion.

In late 1982 Khomeini issued a decree that, among other things, protected people's homes, jobs, and telephones against scrutiny or invasion by officials, and this was followed by the creation of investigative bodies that traveled throughout Iran and the forced resignation of some officials charged with crimes against people. Khomeini spoke of the revolutionary phase's being over and the need for stabilization. Middleclass and upper-class pressures were at work here too, as was the growing economic pragmatism also seen in Iran's striving for high oil production and prices and numerous trade and industrial agreements with a variety of countries that could not meet Iran's ideological standards. The establishment of some new legal norms, as long as the persons

involved were not Baha'is, women, or associated with organizations considered hostile, was aimed in large part at the middle classes and at halting the continued emigration of trained persons and attracting back such persons who had gone abroad. The conservatism has often not, however, been directed toward legal norms. The increasing arms sales by the USSR to Iraq after Iran refused to negotiate with the latter were probably the main reason for the arrest early in 1983 of the leadership of the Tuda party and the effective banning of that party despite its support of the government. Jailings and/or executions of people for their associations-whether Mojahedin, Tuda, or Baha'icontinue and often involve the flouting of legal norms.

The 1982 veto of the land reform bill was both an element and a directional signal in the treatment of peasants. The increasing references to the sanctity of private property in Islam have found their most extreme expression to date in a labor act proposed in 1983, which would do away with both the gains made before the revolution and those added in some areas since then. Islam is said in this bill to sanction what amounts to the view enforced in parts of the West at the beginning of the nineteenth century, namely, no interference of any sort with private contracts between owner and worker. Group gains, including unions, insurance, and a minimum wage, would be outlawed, as would existing limits on child labor. In a period of mass unemployment like the present, workers would surely bid each other downward. Whether or not the measure passes in its current form, it is a good indication of the way some of those now leading the government look at socioeconomic issues.¹² The dismissal in the summer of 1983 of the Minister of Labor who sponsored the bill put the bill in limbo, but its ideas were not repudiated by its supporters.

As I have said, it is a special feature of the Iranian Thermidor that it is being carried out largely by the same persons who were identified with the radical Phase 3 and, in some cases, with even earlier phases. It is common both in the Muslim world and elsewhere for someone who begins with a radical and populist appeal to adjust to the old ruling classes and conservative ways once in power, but here there has been, in addition, a postrevolutionary phase of increasing radicalism reminiscent of revolutions like the French, in which personnel did change. It appears that revolutions do have a momentum and force that pushes them, once in power, toward fulfillment of some of their promises to the masses and suppression of less revolutionary views. In the English, French, and Russian revolutions, foreign war was another force leading to greater radicalism and to both voluntary and forced unification of the nation behind the embattled revolution, and this has also happened in Iran. These parallels with non-Islamic movements, as well as the

ease with which many of Iran's clerical leaders can change their interpretations of Islam from revolutionary-populist to conservative-bourgeois, indicate that Islamic ideology is malleable according to circumstances. Both radical and conservative camps still exist among the ulama, with Khomeini bowing to trends more than is admitted, and future trends cannot be divined by any study of Shi'ism, which is constantly in flux.

Since the 1960s, Islamic revival in Iran, while appealing to some of the same mass sentiments, has represented a wide variety of trends in practice. Even if one starts an analysis only in 1978, one finds a variety of ideas bound together at first more by a common enemy-the shah and his foreign supporters—than by a really common interpretation of Islam. Interpretations ranged from the de facto socialism of the Mojahedine Khalq through the more ambiguous radicalism associated with the name of 'Ali Shari'ati (d. 1977), the reformism of Mortaza Motahhari, and the rather conservative bazaar-oriented constitutionalism of Kazem Shari'atmadari, to the populist fundamentalism of Khomeini. Younger nonclerical followers of Khomeini such as Bani-Sadr, Qotbzada, and Yazdi seem to have believed that their influence on Khomeini's pronouncements in France, which Khomeini accepted out of pragmatism, would extend to a real moderating influence after the revolution, but it did not. Bani-Sadr has subsequently claimed to have been betrayed by Khomeini, but he seems rather to have believed in that part of the prerevolutionary Khomeini that pleased him.13

After the revolution there continued to be ideological differences, not only including all the above groups, but centering more and more on continuing differences between radical and conservative ruling clergy, among whom there were often shifting alliances and subfactions. As noted above, policies have changed significantly from one phase of the revolution to the next, and for each phase and policy an Islamic justification has been found. The few constants that might be noted have been in enforcing "Islamic" laws and some "Islamic" punishments (in quotation marks because there is no complete agreement, even among Shi'is, about what laws and punishments are Islamic). These are mostly, as elsewhere, in the sphere of what we would call morality and in the segregation of women and a return to many Quranic or early Islamic laws regarding marriage and the family. Bad treatment of the Baha'is has also been present in all phases. Essentially, then, a considerable number of Baha'is, active oppositionists, and women have borne a burden in all phases of the revolutionary movement from at least Phase 2 on.14

Another constant of the Islamic Revolution in power, which ties it to the Islamic revivalist movements discussed in the first part of this article, is its anti-imperialist appeal. The "Great Satan," the United States, remains the great symbolic enemy, responsible for most of Iran's

but more progressive, more challenging and innovative view of knowledge as an alternative to the official teachings of the conservative theologians.

The fogaha', on the other hand, viewed the Imam as the sole authoritative source of knowledge and maintained that the renewed understanding of the revelation had to be postponed until the return of the Hidden Imam. As guardians of the law that regulates the everyday life of the believer in this world and prepares him for the next, they resisted and condemned the development of an individual leadership that laid claim to absolute authority in the name of the Imam. Nevertheless, despite the traditional stand of the jurists, occasional deviations from the norm may be observed. For instance, the concept of the marja'e taglid-e motlag as the supreme authority in religious affairs, which gained ascendancy in the nineteenth century, demonstrates the jurists' own temptation to recognize the need for individual leadership. That this concept did not find firm roots in Imami Shi'ism is evidence of the sect's strong juridical preference for a collective leadership that allows a degree of ekhtelaf, divergence of opinion in legal matters not directly concerned with the basic principles of religion or with fundamental aspects of the dogma.

At the turn of the century, socioeconomic forces and new ideas shifted the emphasis in religious disputes from doctrinal considerations to politics. The lay modernists found "converts" to their political cause within the ranks of the dissident ulama and through them gained the valuable support of some high-ranking members of the religious establishment. A new conception of the law then split the opinion of the religious community. The state and the religious establishment had periodically clashed over their respective rights to administer the law. While the ulama had a monopoly over matters pertaining to personal and commercial law, the state enjoyed the right to administer public law, or 'orf. The distinction between 'orf and shari'a and their application to particular cases was not always clear. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, government officials often clashed with the ulama, who accused the state of encroaching upon their legal domain and enlarging its jurisdiction at their expense. To a number of high-ranking ulama, including Ayatollah Fazlollah Nuri, who had initially supported the movement, the promulgation of the Constitution of 1906 and the subsequent establishment of the Majlis as a consultative assembly for legislation offered a unique means to institutionalize and control the 'orf system. The idea of collective leadership taking over from a despotic monarch the power to enact laws pertaining to the public life of the believers thus gained official recognition. It also constituted yet another Shi'i attempt at accommodating the state, a more up-to-date modus vivendi. In the words of the revolutionary preacher Jamal ad-Din, the Majlis served as vali al-amr (Holder of Supreme Authority) in the absence of the Imam.3

The first decade of the twentieth century marked the end of theological speculative ferment. It was also the beginning of a political era in which the crucial issues were no longer those of doctrine or of man's relation to the ultimate conditions of his existence. The dispute that came to divide the ranks of the religious establishment was over aspects of the new law. Both the opponents and the proponents of the new constitution favored the continued existence of the state, with its executive power delegated to a cabinet of ministers directly responsible to the Majlis. Nuri and fellow opponents of the constitution came to champion the cause of the reactionary Mohammad 'Ali Shah Qajar mainly as a result of their objection to the inclusion of certain articles. These articles, guaranteeing sovereignty of the people, freedom of opinion, equality of all citizens, including the religious minorities, before the law, and compulsory education for all men and women, were declared contrary to Islamic principles and directives. In fact, Nuri accused the Majlis of seeking to establish the "heretical" Babism and eradicate Islam in Iran. Yet members of the religious establishment occupied one-fourth of the seats of the Majlis that had drafted and unanimously adopted the new constitution. Moreover, a leading mojtahed of the time, Mohammad Hosain Na'ini, wrote in favor of the constitutional government. His often-quoted work4 is nowadays hailed as an authentic Shi'i attempt at defining the form of government that would best fit the conditions of ghaiba. While Nuri's view was obviously influenced by his concern with the immediate threat of the Babi heresy (the ulama's main enemy at the time), Na'ini was undoubtedly inspired by Western concepts of constitutional rights.5 The concerns of both men reflected the social

tensions and clashing rhetorics of their time. In the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution, the poet, the lay man of letters, came to displace the mojtahed in influencing public opinion. The traditional centers of Islamic culture rapidly lost influence and prestige among progressive-minded thinkers. Change in intellectual outlook, traditionally initiated by speculative theologians and philosophers from within the ranks of the ulama, was undertaken by groups outside the religious establishment. However, the system of religious beliefs enforced by the ayatollahs was not openly rejected. Secularization, or the institutional change inaugurated by the first Majlis, was not accompanied by change in doctrine. Nor was secularism in its Western form adopted officially. The constitution specifically declared Twelver Shi'a Islam the state religion and granted a council of five mojtaheds the right to supervise Majlis legislation. Moreover, religious studies were made compulsory in public schools. The official anticlerical and mod84

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reflected in the story of Esther and Haman. The Jews were also subject to the intermittent hostility of Zoroastrian priests, the severity of which depended to a large extent on the personality of the reigning Sasanian monarch and the relative power of the priestly caste.

The Islamic conquest of Iran in A.D. 642 was not necessarily viewed as a calamity by the Jews. They were granted the status of protected minority (dhemmi) and partook of the cultural expansion and development of early Islamic civilization. They were, however, subjected to heavy taxation and probably also some of the prejudice directed against other non-Muslim and non-Arab elements of the population. Jewish settlements were established throughout the country in both urban and rural areas,3 and the Jews engaged in a variety of occupations in commerce and trade. Isfahan emerged as the primary center of Jewish learning, but Talmudic scholarship was also in evidence in other parts of Iran.4 Messianic movements emerged sporadically in Isfahan and elsewhere.

The available information on Jewish life in Iran during the centuries immediately preceding the Mongol invasion is not extensive, but a Jewish presence persisted in many areas of Iran. There is evidence of extensive activities by adherents of the Karaite schism in the ninth and tenth centuries. The Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century resulted in the destruction of several major cities and the massacre of their populations. The Jews, along with other Iranians, suffered heavily at the hands of the invaders. A few prominent Jews, however, emerged as key officials of the administration in the ensuing period. Some of them even reached the rank of grand vizier of the Il-Khanids and provided protection and a brief respite for their Jewish brethren. With the downfall of these officials, Jewish life once again suffered.

The coming to power of the Safavid dynasty in 1501 created a new situation for Iranian Jewry. The Safavids made Shi'ism the state religion and showed overwhelming zeal in transforming Iran into a Shi'i land. A new and more acute intolerance was directed against non-Shi'is and expressed with some regularity in persecutions of the Jews. Codes of conduct and rules designed to restrict Jewish social and economic life were promulgated.⁵ Pressures for conversion were particularly strong and resulted in a decrease of the Jewish population and severe intracommunal strife. Special identifying clothing, their "badge of shame," was required of the Jews, further segregating them from the dominant Shi'i community. The Law of Apostasy allowed a Jewish convert to Islam to "inherit all of the property of his relatives, even those of distant degree."6

The restrictive codes of the Safavids, among the most severe in the Muslim world, had detrimental consequences for Jewish economic, social, legal, and political rights. As Sorour Soroudi remarks, the main purpose

of these regulations was "to degrade the Jew in the eyes of the Muslim." The only respite for the Jews came after the downfall of the Safavids, under Nader Shah Afshar (1736-47) and Karim Khan Zand (1750-79). With the establishment of the Qajar dynasty in late eighteenth century, however, many of the Safavids' restrictive codes, mass conversion pressures, and other forms of persecution were revived. The relative ascendancy of the Shi'i clerics in the Qajar era contributed to this rise in anti-Jewish sentiment. The Jews of Mashhad and Tabriz in particular suffered enormously during this period.8 The general worsening of the situation was probably a factor in the conversion of many Jews to the new Babi-Baha'i religious movement.9

The Qajar period also heralded a few important positive developments for the Iranian Jews. First, communications and contacts with world Jewry were reestablished. Second, secular education was made available through the creation of the first Alliance school in 1898.10 Finally, the adoption of a constitution based on popular representation in 1906 officially and formally recognized the Iranian Jews as a religious minority. The Jews were allowed to elect a representative to the Iranian parliament. Although these changes were slow in coming, they affected the community in a beneficial way.

The next notable event for Iranian Jewry was the coming to power of Reza Shah and the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925. Reza Shah's programs of modernization and secular nationalism as well as the tight rein he imposed on clerical influence helped the Jewish community immensely. He abrogated the Law of Apostasy and abolished the jezya (poll tax).11 Jews entered a variety of occupations, including government service. The only discontinuity in this period was Reza Shah's sympathy for the Axis powers, which eventually resulted in his forced abdication in favor of his son in 1941.

The succession of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to the Peacock Throne greatly improved the status of the Jews in Iran. Despite sporadic anti-Jewish incidents and the anti-Baha'i campaign of 1955, his reign can probably be considered a "Golden Age" for minorities in modern Iran. The Jews prospered economically, socially, and culturally, especially in the last two decades of the shah's rule. A new and vigorous Jewish bourgeoisie emerged in the capital city, which in turn attracted Jewish migrants from provincial towns and rural areas. By the early 1970s, Tehran was the center of Jewish economic and social activities. Iran's Jewish population surpassed eighty thousand, with perhaps over half residing in Tehran.

During this period the Iranian Jews also benefited from the generally friendly and multifaceted relationship of Iran with Israel. This relationship went through different phases in the course of the shah's regime but

- 2. Laurence Loeb, Outcaste: Jewish Life in Southern Iran (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1977), p. 274. See also I. Neusner, "Jews in Iran," in Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 3, pt. 2, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian Periods, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 909-23; Shaul Shaked, ed., Irano-Judaica: Studies relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages (Leiden: Brill, 1982).
 - 3. Loeb, Outcaste, p. 279.
- 4. Ibid., p. 280, citing Walter Fischel, "Isfahan: The Story of a Jewish Community in Persia," in Joshua Starr Memorial Volume (New York: Jewish Social Studies Publication, 1953), p. 116. On the contribution of Iranian Jews to Persian literature of both pre- and post-Islamic periods, see Jalal Matini, "Ahamiyyate Athar-e Adabi-ye Farsi-ye Yahudian," Iran Nameh 1 (1983):424-46.
 - 5. Soroudi, "Jews in Islamic Iran," p. 103.
- 6. Loeb, Outcaste, pp. 286, 292; Soroudi, "Jews in Islamic Iran," pp. 104-6; Fischel, "Israel in Iran," pp. 1167-71.
 - 7. Soroudi, "Jews in Islamic Iran," p. 104.
- 8. Ibid., p. 106; Marvin Weinbaum, "Iran and Israel: The Discreet Entente," Orbis 18 (1975):1071.
- 9. See Walter Fischel, "The Bahai Movement and Persian Jewry," Jewish Review, March 1934, pp. 47-55; Hayyim Cohen, The Jews of the Middle East: 1860-1972 (New York: Wiley, 1973), pp. 162-63.
- 10. Cohen, Jews of the Middle East, pp. 53-54, 141-46; S. Landshut, Jewish Communities in the Muslim Countries of the Middle East (Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1950), p. 65.
 - 11. Loeb, Outcaste, p. 289; Soroudi, "Jews in Islamic Iran," p. 107.
- 12. Farhad Kazemi, "The Fada'iyan-i Islam: Fanaticism, Politics, and Terror," in From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam: Essays on Social Movements in the Contemporary Near and Middle East, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 162.
 - 13. Weinbaum, "Iran and Israel," p. 1073.
 - 14. Ibid., p. 1074, n. 10.
- 15. Jerusalem Post, December 31, 1961, quoted in Weinbaum, "Iran and Israel," p. 1070.
- 16. New York Times, July 27, 1960, p. 5.
- 17. New York Times, July 25, p. 2; July 27, p. 5; July 29, p. 1; August 1, p. 7; and August 30, p. 2, all 1960.
 - 18. New York Times, July 28, 1960, p. 5.
- 19. Weinbaum, "Iran and Israel," p. 1077. Detailed analysis of Iran-Israel relations can be found in Samuel Segev, The Iranian Triangle: The Secret Relations between Israel-Iran-U.S.A. (Tel Aviv: Maariv, 1981). According to Segev (p. 94), El Al was permitted to operate in Iran in 1958 but only discreetly. After Nasser's death in 1970, El Al was allowed to function openly and advertise its flights. See also pp. 77–78, 80. I am indebted to David Menashri for sending me a copy of this book. I am also grateful to Shaul Bar for the time he took to read and translate the Hebrew text for me.
 - 20. Davar, April 20, 1980, pp. 3-4.

- 21. Segev, Iranian Triangle, p. 108; Weinbaum, "Iran and Israel," p. 1076.
- 22. Davar, April 20, 1980, pp. 3-4. Segev points out that the Iranian foreign minister, 'Abbasqoli Khal'atbari, visited Israel in 1977 (Iranian Triangle, p. 153).
- 23. Discussion of the Iran-Israel oil link can be found in Robert Reppa. Sr., Israel and Iran (New York: Praeger, 1974), pp. 73-86; Segev, Iranian Triangle, p. 75; Weinbaum, "Iran and Israel," pp. 1078-80; Marvin Zonis, "Israel and Iran: From Intimacy to Alienation," Moment 4 (March 1979):13.
 - 24. For details see Reppa, Israel and Iran, pp. 98-99.
- 25. Rabi'i's defense is (to my knowledge) part of the only published report of the proceedings of the Islamic Revolutionary Courts. Most of the minutes of the trial were published in Iranian newspapers. Three issues of Ettela'at give reasonable verbatim accounts of the trial: Farvardin 21, 22, and 23, 1358/1979. See also Segev, Iranian Triangle, pp. 72-74.
 - 26. Zonis, "Israel and Iran," p. 12.
 - 27. Ibid., p. 15.
- 28. Weinbaum, "Iran and Israel," p. 1081; Segev, Iranian Triangle, pp. 119, 176, 187.
- 29. John Cooley, "Iran, the Palestinians, and the Gulf," Foreign Affairs, summer 1979, p. 1017.
 - 30. Ibid.
- 31. For a firsthand account of the Jewish community's distress at this time, see Barbara and Barry Rosen (with George Feifer), The Destined Hour: The Hostage Crisis and One Family's Ordeal (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), pp. 78-80.
- 32. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Velayat-e Fagih: Hokumat-e Eslami (Tehran, 1977), p. 38; also p. 6.
 - 33. Ibid., p. 175.
- 34. During the first presidential elections held in the Islamic Republic, in January 1981, a radio reporter was dispatched to a Jewish activities center to interview the Jews and broadcast their views on the election. The reporter asked those present about the primary qualifications for the office of the president. Every respondent began with the statement that he must be a believing and true Muslim who respects, fulfills, and enforces Islamic injunctions.
- 35. A letter of protest was sent to members of Parliament by a group of Iranian Jewish intellectuals in April 1981.
- 36. Many of these recent Jewish immigrants to Israel are of modest socioeconomic background and have practically no knowledge of Hebrew. For a variety of reasons, their adjustment to Israeli society has been difficult. There is, however, an organization of Iranian Jews in Israel. The organization was founded in 1979 and is led by the Iranian-born Likud member of the Knesset Moshe Katsav. The group arranges social and cultural activities and publishes Payam, a monthly Persian-language magazine that includes general articles on world events and Iranian Jewry, short stories, and other features. See, for example, Payam for August and November 1980.
- 37. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), p. 504.