

Carter, Yazdi, and the Iranian deal

by Our Special Correspondent

On Dec. 13, 1978 four U.S. citizens and government officials held a meeting at Dominique's restaurant on Pennsylvania Avenue, four blocks from the White House, and set forth a dramatic new United States policy which has remained in place since that time. Central to fashioning this new policy was the State Department's Iran and Mideast expert, Henry Precht. Precht held this meeting that outlined the Carter administration's policy toward Iran with one of Ayatollah Khomeini's closest allies, Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi.

Dr. Yazdi, a naturalized U.S. citizen—according to a leaked State Department document, recruited to the Central Intelligence Agency—attended the meeting along with Prof. Marvin Zonis and Robert Hirschman. Zonis had been one of the key Carter administration advisers on Iran working out of the University of Chicago. This meeting came two days after President Carter gave his now famous and highly publicized speech supporting the Shah of Iran, which was more akin to a “kiss of death.”

The purpose of the secret Precht-Yazdi meeting was to have Precht brief him on the real U.S. policy for the “fall of the Shah.” Zonis underscored to Yazdi that the President faced a serious problem, in that the President could not openly support the Islamic Revolution and the potential criticism Carter would receive if he

publicly or directly supported a “fundamentalist religious revolution.” Both Precht and Zonis conveyed Carter's deep understanding for the Islamic revolution. It was on the basis of this discussion at Dominique's restaurant that U.S. “back-door policy” was set and has continued up through the present Reagan administration.

Ibrahim Yazdi, considered the most important contact for Khomeini in the United States, was born in 1931 and became one of the first members of the Islamic Society of University Students created during the Mossadegh era as the first fundamentalist student organization. Studying to become a pharmacist, like two of his brothers, at Teheran University Yazdi met Mehdi Barzagan, Ayatollah Telegani, and Muhammed Nagshab (who later became one of the founders of the Mujahedeen) After receiving his university degree, he went to the United States to work for a “drug production company” that had CIA ties in Iran. By 1962, Yazdi had joined the inner circle of Khomeini and followed him into exile. During this period, he received an offer of a job at the American University of Beirut, where he contacted the leading Shi'ite ayatol-

lah, Imam Mussa Sader.

Leaving Beirut, Yazdi traveled to Iraq, where Khomeini resided in exile, to put forward plans whereby Yazdi became the ayatollah's personal representative in the United States. Upon his return to the United States in 1966, Yazdi began to establish the Muslim Student Associations, modeled on the Islamic Society of University Students. In 1973, Yazdi became a U.S. citizen.

By 1978, operating on behalf of Khomeini and the banker's faction of the CIA, Yazdi traveled to London, Paris, and Rome to evaluate the situation. Khomeini had been kicked out of Iraq and needed a new residence. At the time Yazdi was arranging Khomeini's travel to Paris, the ayatollah changed his mind about going to Paris and instead sought Kuwait as a refuge. Yazdi personally intervened with Khomeini and changed his mind—a minute too late, since the ayatollah had been arrested by the Iraqi authorities. Yazdi along with other U.S. officials contacted the Canadian government to get the Canadian embassy in Baghdad to intercede on behalf of the United States, which had no representation there. The success of the intervention enabled Khomeini to leave Baghdad for Paris.

During the next two years, Yazdi played a seminal role in shaping the composition and policy of the opposition National Front, and convinced Khomeini and his son that he could control Barzagan and its leading members. Having received the blessing of Khomeini to serve as Barzagan's deputy, Yazdi, upon the successful overthrow of the Shah of Iran, became the first foreign minister under the new regime. It was only with the hostage crisis, when the U.S. embassy was seized by members of the Revolutionary Guards, that Yazdi resigned his position in order to preserve his special status as the U.S.-Khomeini back channel.

When the Iran-Iraq war erupted in June 1980, this back channel went into action. Barzagan, hoping for a “second revolution” (which is the exact term utilized by the Israelis to convince the United States to continue to ship arms to Iran), formed an alternative “moderate” government to Prime Minister Rajai, whose government lacked the technical expertise to govern without complete and utter chaos. Although the Barzagan “dream” was never fulfilled, Khomeini and the leading fanatical fundamentalist clergy led by Beheshti, Rafsanjani, and Montazeri found the Barzagan forces useful as a back channel.

Over the last six years, U.S. policy has been to provide arms to Iran in the hope of bringing Barzagan, Yazdi, Sadegh Tabatabai, Ali Ardalan, Ali Akbar Moïnfar, Hussein Bani-Sadr, and several other so-called U.S. assets to power in Iran. Anytime the United States cuts off the arms shipments, this list of people announces its opposition to the Iran-Iraq war, denounce terrorism, and publicizes its opposition activities through the official and tightly controlled Iranian press as a means of drawing U.S. administration support. Then, as now, the game goes on, except this time with Ronald Reagan as President, not Jimmy Carter.

State Department documents on Yazdi

The following memo to State Department files was written by department Middle East expert Henry Precht on Dec. 13, 1978, prior to the overthrow of the Shah by Ayatollah Khomeini.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SECRET-SENSITIVE December 13, 1978
MEMORANDUM TO THE FILES
FROM: NEA/IRN, Henry Precht
SUBJECT: Conversation with Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi, Adviser to Khomeini, December 12, 1978, at Dominique's Restaurant

I had dinner with Robert Hirschman of WETA and Dr. Yazdi and for a short time Marvin Zonis at Hirschman's invitation. Yazdi, an American citizen, was on his way to spend a day in Houston where he is in cancer research. He has known Khomeini since the early 1960's. Yazdi is a reserved, exceedingly calm, but very persistent idealist. I believe he is intelligent and honest with himself. The following paragraphs summarize the main points in our conversation:

—The President's December 12 statement: Yazdi
(Deleted)

banks, movie theaters, hotels, etc.? Yazdi said Khomeini had not called for such actions and that some were the work of SAVAK. He acknowledged that it was not possible to control strictly their followers in Iran and that

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On parting, we agreed that neither of us would acknowledge that there had been any official contact between Khomeini and the U.S. Government.

cc: D - Mr. Christopher
P - Mr. Newsom
NEA - Mr. Saunders
CIA - Mr. Ames
NSC - Captain Sick
Ambassador Sullivan

Drafted: NEA/IRN:HPrecht:amp
12/13/78 - ext:20313
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The following advisory on how to handle questions about Yazdi from the press was sent from the State Department to the embassy in Teheran on June 23, 1979.

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23 Jun 79

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY TEHRAN 3140
BT
CONFIDENTIAL STATE 161960
E.O. 12065 GDS 6/20/79 (PRECHT, HENRY)
TAGS: IR
SUBJECT: PRESS GUIDANCE

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT).
2. FOLLOWING CONTINGENCY GUIDANCE HAS BEEN APPROVED.

Q. IS EBRAHIM YAZDI A U.S. CITIZEN?

A. WE CANNOT CONFIRM THAT HE IS A U.S. CITIZEN.

Q. DOES HE NOW HAVE OR HAS HE EVER HELD A U.S. PASSPORT?

A. STATE DEPARTMENT PASSPORT FILES ARE CONFIDENTIAL AND PROTECTED BY THE PRIVACY ACT. WE CANNOT, THEREFOR, CONFIRM OR DENY REPORTS OF ANY INFORMATION IN THESE FILES.

Q. IF DR. YAZDI IS AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, CAN HE RETAIN HIS U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND PASSPORT IF HE IS CONSIDERED AN IRANIAN CITIZEN UNDER IRANIAN LAW?

A. ALTHOUGH THE U.S. DOES NOT ENCOURAGE DUAL CITIZENSHIP AS A MATTER OF POLICY, IT DOES ACCEPT ITS EXISTENCE IN INDIVIDUAL CASES AS A MATTER OF FACT RESULTING FROM THE CONFLICTING LAWS OF OTHER COUNTRIES WHICH CANNOT BE CONTROLLED BY THE U.S. THUS, SOME U.S. CITIZENS MAY POSSESS ANOTHER NATIONALITY AS A RESULT OF THOSE CONFLICTING LAWS.

Q. IF IN FACT DR. YAZDI IS A U.S. CITIZEN, HAS HE LOST HIS U.S. CITIZENSHIP BY ANY ACTIONS-HE HAS TAKEN? IF SO, IS THE STATE DEPARTMENT IN THE PROCESS OF REVOKING HIS CITIZENSHIP?

A. AS I INDICATED PREVIOUSLY, IF WE HAD AN INFORMATION ON THIS QUESTION, IT WOULD BE PROTECTED BY THE PRIVACY ACT.

VANCE
BT
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