

By Oriana Fallaci

New York Times (1923-Current file); Oct 28, 1979;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times with Index

pg. SM5

'EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE BOSS'

An interview with
Mehdi Bazargan, Prime Minister of Iran
By Oriana Fallaci

On Sept. 17, five days after her interview with the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (published in The New York Times Magazine, Oct. 7), the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci was ushered into the office of Iranian Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan. A European-trained engineer and one-time construction-company executive, Mr. Bazargan is 74 years old. He first became active politically in 1936 as an opponent of the Iranian royal family; in the 1950's, after the exile of Shah Mohammed Riza Pahlavi, Mr. Bazargan was named chairman of the nation's oil corporation in the Government of Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh. In the years following the Shah's return to power, Mr. Bazargan was jailed four times for his political activities.

The Prime Minister is both a devout man and something of a liberal, Miss Fallaci notes. "When he was in prison," she says, "his daughter came to him and asked permission to marry, which is the custom in Iran. He said, 'But that is your problem. It is not for me to make that decision.'"

Mr. Bazargan's daughter accompanied Miss Fallaci during the interview in Teheran and served as translator, for although the Prime Minister is fluent in French and English, he insisted on speaking in his native Farsi for the record. "If I don't measure my words," he told Miss Fallaci, "one single, short question could make a great deal of trouble for me."

An edited transcript of their discussion follows.

ORIANA FALLACI: Mr. Prime Minister, there's a sentence you often repeat: "They've put a knife in my hand, but it's a knife with only a handle. Others are holding the blade." So I ask you, just how important is the Government you head?

MEHDI BAZARGAN: That's a good question, a legitimate question, which it won't be simple to answer. For it's as though you were asking me, "Who's in

command today in Iran?" And if I were to say I'm in command, that wouldn't be true; if I were to say Khomeini is in sole command, that wouldn't be exact; if I were to say a lot of people are in command, that wouldn't be clear.

My role is a weak one. That is true in part because a revolution, a genuine revolution, has taken place here, and in part because Khomeini's ascendancy over the people is without parallel in the last 70 years of Persian history.

So let's say that, from an official standpoint, the Government is in command, but from an ideological and revolutionary standpoint, Khomeini is in command — Khomeini with his revolutionary councils, his revolutionary committees, his Revolutionary Guards and his relationship with the masses. And that relationship with the masses is in fact very special, in that he and they think in the same way and speak the same language: a nod and they understand each other.

And then there are the revolutionary tribunals, the religious authorities who, with the pretext of carrying on the revolution, are administering many cities and causing all kinds of problems and

misunderstandings. No, it's not an easy situation.

FALLACI: Actually all you do is to threaten to resign. Could we talk about that?

BAZARGAN: Let me say I've never thought of really deserting the battlefield, but there have been moments when the temptation was strong. In the beginning, for instance, when I realized that the Government did not have the necessary authority to act because too many people were taking a hand in it, I went to Khomeini and told him: "I can't work this way. If you want me to be Prime Minister, this interference must stop. And if you want to go over my head, you ought first to consult me." He promised to do so, but things did not change.

As of two months ago, the situation had not changed, except for the fact that the criticism had worsened: I wasn't running an effective Government, I wasn't running a decisive Government, I wasn't running a revolutionary Government — and it was all my fault. I wrote him a letter. I reminded

him that I'd taken on the job at his insistence. I repeated that I could not direct a Government in a country where everybody wants to be boss. "If you're not satisfied with me," I told him, "let me go. If you have someone more suitable than me, send for him. I don't object. And this is my resignation." He replied: "I have no one else. Nobody. Stay." And once again he promised not to interfere.

FALLACI: But he does interfere. Sometimes, as we've seen, in the most peculiar and unpredictable ways. Proclaiming himself supreme head of the armed forces, for example. And, as I told him during my recent interview with him, there are quite a few people who call him a dictator, quite a few who see danger in all this or a beginning of fascism. And he answered that it wasn't so.

BAZARGAN: He told you exactly what he believes. He doesn't want to be a dictator, nor does he want to become one. He doesn't want to impose his own decisions, his own wishes. Even when he goes over my head with his orders, his letters, his communiques; even when he uses Government channels to exercise his authority, which he does too often; even when he bombards me with his domineering advice, he doesn't mean to be dictatorial. He acts that way unconsciously, without realizing it, in good faith.

No, you can't compare him to a Mussolini. And not even to a Napoleon, or a de Gaulle. You have to know him, you have to understand his manner of being, his character.

Actually, he is like [former Prime Minister] Mossadegh in this way, and keep in mind that Mossadegh had a Western way of thinking, he'd been educated in Switzerland. Mossadegh would say, "Yes, you're right, certain decisions are up to Parliament" — and then he'd forget about it and do as he pleased, all the while believing that he was in the right, that he was acting for the good of the people.

Khomeini also thinks he's acting for

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The Prime Minister with Miss Fallaci: "If I were to say I'm in command, that wouldn't be true."

people's own good. In fact, whenever I protest, he says he's sorry, and he promises not to do it again.

FALLACI: And instead he does it again.

BAZARGAN: Immediately. All it takes is for something not to work, or for some measure of mine to irritate him, or for a public protest to be presented to him, and he starts all over again.

FALLACI: And this seems to you consistent with the principles of democracy and freedom that Khomeini upholds in the name of Islam? Mr. Bazargan, I've interviewed a lot of dictators, and I've never met one who called himself a dictator; I've never met one who didn't say he was acting for the good of the people.

BAZARGAN: That's the typical statement of a Westerner. Your indignation stems from the concept that you Westerners have of democracy and freedom; it is not necessarily the concept we have in the East. You can't just draw a straight line and say, "If you behave like this, you're democratic; if you behave like that, you're a fascist."

Khomeini is considered a kind of father, a paterfamilias. He'd like everyone to participate in family government, but at the same time he believes that it's up to the father to rule and no one else. Or he forgets that some choices should be left to the mother, others to the children — in short, that the responsibilities should be divided among the executive, legislative and political authorities.

But when you remind him of it, he understands. And he feels sorry, too, sometimes all too quickly. On the one hand, that is a relief because it shows that he accepts criticism and has no prejudices, but on the other hand, it is disastrous because a leader of his rank shouldn't change his mind so easily. My conclusion, however, is that these are not the characteristics of a dictator.

FALLACI: They may simply be the characteristics of a despotic old man.

BAZARGAN: No, they're the characteristics of a man who has no background of political leadership. Khomeini has never been a real politician, nor has he ever been a general or the head of a firm. I mean, he's never had the training needed to face the administrative responsibilities

that he now finds on his shoulders. In fact, he doesn't understand government, he doesn't know the techniques for administering a country.

He got into politics 18 or so years ago when he took up the struggle against the Shah, but he got into it in a special way, as a religious figure, and without any plan of becoming the man who was to lead the revolution. I even wonder if he had any inkling that he was starting a revolution.

Look, Khomeini is a rough and primitive man, but he's also a genius. I've never known anyone who has his capacity to interpret the mood and will of the masses, to communicate with them by a simple look or a few words spoken at a distance. Moreover, he hasn't been chosen only by the masses. Many intellectuals, too, have followed him from the start like orphans in search of a teacher, a father. So it's natural that he feels like something more than a religious leader — like the custodian of the revolution, its supervisor, its guardian. And the Government is paying the consequences of that feeling.

FALLACI: Mr. Bazargan, from the moment we began this interview, we've been talking about Khomeini. He's a name, a reality, that we just can't get away from. He's present even when he's not present. He worms his way into all your thoughts, all your statements. How do you get along with him?

BAZARGAN: I'll tell you, from a human standpoint — well, he likes me. And I like him, in spite of his faults and his disconcerting changes of opinion. For heaven's sake, how can you not feel a liking for such a man? And besides, he's still the man who led us to expel perhaps the most powerful monarch in the world; he's still the man who keeps us united — and he is still the man who chose me to head the Government and keeps me in that job. If someone goes to him to speak ill of me, he doesn't listen or he gets angry and defends me.

But from a political standpoint, our relations are difficult, very difficult. We keep going in spite of disagreements, conflicts.

The first conflict exploded when I went to see him in Paris, and we began studying the proper strategy for overthrowing the regime. I believed in the step-by-step method, going about it gradually. I was convinced that there was only one way to free

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ourselves from the Shah, by getting America to abandon him little by little, by acting in such a way that he would gradually get weaker while the people were getting gradually stronger.

I was convinced of it because the Iranians have always been under the heel of some despot and are therefore accustomed to obeying. Moreover, every time they've rebelled, it's turned out badly. And I said, "The people aren't ready to face freedom. We have to let them get used to it by teaching them to grow politically. Let's take power by short steps: first the schools, then the press, then the courts, then the economy, then the army. Otherwise we'll sink into chaos and we may even get another tyrant."

Khomeini, however, wanted to do everything at once. "Nothing gradual," he said, "no waiting. We must not lose a day, a minute. The people are calling for an immediate revolution. It's now or never." We almost had a quarrel, but he seemed so sure of being right, of winning — his faith was so absolute, so unshakable

— that I gave in. And I said, "All right, let's take the plunge. Let's have the revolution."

He directed me to be Prime Minister in the Government that would take over the country after the victory. Then he directed me to help him choose the other ministers, and here I am.

Still, and even though things turned out the way he said, point by point and with chilling precision, I go on thinking that my original strategy was the right one. If we'd followed the step-by-step method, we wouldn't have the problems we have today. The country would be experiencing its freedom in quite a different way. Everything-at-once is an old Iranian vice that brings along a lot of perils.

FALLACI: But, Mr. Bazar-gan, the step-by-step method, or compromise, was also Shah-pur Bakhtiar's strategy. That would make it seem that this much-disgraced Bakhtiar, whom Khomeini would like to put on trial for treason, did nothing very terrible in assuming the post of Prime

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The Ayatollah Khomeini looks on while Bazargan, his choice as Prime Minister of Iran, speaks.

Minister in the Shah's Government.

BAZARGAN: Bakhtiar never talked about doing anything step by step — as Mr. [William J.] Butler, of the International Commission of Jurists, is well aware.

I mention Butler because in that period he approached me many times to find out my ideas and to let me know that the Americans would never permit a sudden change of regime in Iran. They were afraid that, with the fall of the Shah, the country would be thrown into anarchy and lie open to Soviet intervention. And each time I told Butler that I didn't want a sudden revolution either, but that the Shah had to go, and so we had to act in that direction — a little at a time. In the end, Butler was convinced and to such an extent that he promoted our Human Rights Committee.*

Bakhtiar, like everyone else, learned of my step-by-step method through an open letter I published. And when he became Prime Minister, he appropriated it to justify himself.

FALLACI: So you, too, consider him a traitor.

BAZARGAN: I can't talk about that.

FALLACI: I see. Let's get back to Khomeini, and let's do it this way: Because of his choice, no matter how victorious it was, tens of thousands of human beings were slaughtered. Doesn't that seem to you too high, too cruel a price to pay?

BAZARGAN: I'll answer you with another question. Do you know of any revolution, even a scientific one, that has taken place without bloodshed? No despot is ever going to give up his throne because you ask him to give it up, or because you beg him to go away. The final word is always an act of war. Even my strategy, at the end, would have required some bloodshed.

FALLACI: But you've just acknowledged that if Kho-

*William J. Butler is a New York attorney and an officer of the International Commission of Jurists, a non-governmental agency recognized by the United Nations. In 1975, he was sent to Iran by that organization to investigate human-rights violations. He returned to Iran in 1977 and 1978 at the invitation of the Shah as a consultant on human-rights improvements. Responding to a query about the Bazargan comments from The New York Times Magazine, Mr. Butler confirmed that he had talked with Bazargan and other dissidents and that he sought international recognition of the Human Rights Committee, which Bazargan led. Mr. Butler denied, however, making the comments about American strategic intentions that Prime Minister Bazargan attributes to him.

meini had been less impatient, Iran today would be experiencing its freedom in a different way. The inadequate democratic upbringing that you've pointed out, isn't it reflected in the chaos and in the obedience of the masses to Khomeini? And isn't it perhaps these two factors that are now preventing you from governing?

BAZARGAN: Yes, I must admit that it's precisely because of a sudden revolution and an immediate victory that power is now slipping out of the hands of the governing authority. Think of the revolutionary tribunals. Since the Government has no control over them, I proposed setting up an extraordinary tribunal that would act in accordance with our directives. Well, not only has the proposal not materialized, but all the tasks that I intended to assign to the extraordinary tribunal have been shifted to the revolutionary tribunals.

Then think of the deplorable state in which the army, police and security forces find themselves, all of them indispensable bodies for establishing law and order. Since the people consider them a diabolical extension of the past, a threat left over from the imperial regime, we haven't succeeded in putting them back in shape.

The revolutionary committees and the revolutionary guards cannot perform their duties because they're not trained, they quarrel among themselves and they refuse to take orders from us. And though just recently they've begun to understand that a central authority is needed, the dispersion of power is still so diffuse that you often don't even know who's directing traffic. I say that these are things that would paralyze any government.

Finally, if we add to all this the detail that our domestic and foreign enemies have not been defeated, that every day the so-called left burns or subverts something. . . .

FALLACI: Just a minute, Mr. Bazargan. Do you share Khomeini's judgment about the burning and subversion of the left? Do you, too, deny the right to exist to a left that's been fighting for years?

BAZARGAN: If you mean those who really fought against the Shah, and were imprisoned, tortured, even murdered, my answer is that I don't consider them enemies. The revolution has brought freedom to them, too, and so long as they limit themselves to expressing their opinions

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and ideologies peacefully, nobody is going to touch them.

If instead you mean the armed left that is fomenting disorder and rebelling against the Government, my answer is that I am absolutely in agreement with Khomeini. A left that abounds with people who collaborated with the SAVAK [the Shah's secret police] is not a genuine left. They represent the most dangerous enemies of our revolution. They stir up the workers in factories, the clerks in offices; they spread slanderous lies and organize biased demonstrations. For example, the one in March against the chador [the traditional head-to-toe veil worn by Iranian women]: journalists did not understand what was behind it. They'll be surprised to learn that many women in the procession were SAVAK women or ladies of the imperial entourage who never wear the chador. They had been made to put it on by those left-wing provocateurs, the same ones who are now throwing stones at women with uncovered heads.

Yes, in this, Khomeini is right.

FALLACI: Is he also right when he approves the shutting down of newspapers that write things he doesn't like?

BAZARGAN: I can tell you this: Considering the particular historical moment in which we live, there were good reasons for silencing those newspapers. And if you Europeans were to look back a little, if you paid a little attention to your own past, you would be more indulgent toward us.

Why do you always pretend to forget that a revolution has taken place here, that a revolution is still going on? You cannot demand of us the same kind of freedom and democracy as you expect of orderly societies.

Yes, those newspapers have been shut down. The printing shops that printed them have also been confiscated. They no longer belong to rich people who have fled abroad after collaborating with the Shah. Now they belong to the Foundation of Muztazafin — that is to say, to the poor who lack shoes.

In any event, it wasn't the Government that ordered the shutdown, the confiscation. Nor even Khomeini. It was the revolutionary tribunals carrying out the will of the masses. The masses made the revolution; it was their bodies that were strewn in the streets and squares. If we were not to re-

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BAZARGAN

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spect their will, they would impose it violently.

FALLACI: Revolution was also made by the Kurds, Mr. Bazargan. And yet you paid no attention to their will. When they tried to express it, you crushed them.

BAZARGAN: That's not the way it was; we weren't the ones to attack first. We wanted to reach an agreement with the Kurds, even though we were dealing with radicals who were a little too extremist. We said, "Let them be as they like, let them choose what they want." And when they started talking about autonomy, we accepted even that.

We insisted that the governor of Kurdistan be a Kurdish governor and that the soldiers of Kurdistan be Kurdish soldiers and that the administrative offices of Kurdistan be directed by Kurds. But then the agrarian-reform incident occurred over the division of lands that had previously belonged to the Shah.

According to the law, those lands should have gone to the Foundation of Muztazafin, but the Kurds rebelled. They said, "No, we'll see to the distribution of the land and in the manner that seems proper to us." We had to send our officials to work out an agreement, and they were pelted with stones. Then the Kurds organized processions of people armed with knives and crowbars, with truckloads of bricks to throw at the barracks. . . .

FALLACI: And you responded with the army, the firing squads. Just like the Shah.

BAZARGAN: That's not correct either. They erected barricades in every village, every city, and they killed the commanders of the garrisons, even using weapons brought from other countries; they transformed the revolt into a war.

The truth of what happened in Kurdistan has never been told, nor has it ever been explained that we were forced to intervene to keep the unity of the nation from going to pieces. They didn't simply want autonomy, they wanted to be separate from Iran. But it could have been worse. We succeeded in dismantling their positions with the least possible bloodshed. I tell you there were more dead among our officials than among the Kurdish rebels.

As for those who were tried

by the revolutionary tribunals and then shot, they were people who had killed soldiers and civilians. Even in hospitals.

FALLACI: Or else they were members of the Kurdish Democratic Party, Mr. Bazargan.

BAZARGAN: That means enemies of Islam and of Iran. There was no choice, no choice.

FALLACI: That's what they always say. And what do you have to say about the other trials taking place in those revolutionary tribunals, Mr. Bazargan? Do you, like Khomeini, approve of the shooting of adulteresses, homosexuals and prostitutes? Do you also deny, as he did, the case of the pregnant 18-year-old who was executed because she was in love with a man other than the man who had been forced on her as a husband?

BAZARGAN: I've already explained to you that the revolutionary tribunals are not subject to the Government, they don't act in accordance with the Government, they're completely outside my control. In a message to the nation, I've denounced their abuses, their lack of witnesses and of proper inquiry. I've quite expressed my rejection of them and my disdain. What else do you want me to add?

They are very crude tribunals. They ought to judge in accordance with Islamic law and they don't always do so. In fact, the Koran does not order the execution of adulteresses, homosexuals and prostitutes. In the case of adulteresses, it doesn't even order them to be tried unless there exists irrefutable proof, which is impossible to obtain.

FALLACI: I know. Your tradition holds that adultery can only be shown when a silk thread passed between the two bodies encounters a barrier. And it also says that the test must be made in the presence of four witnesses.

BAZARGAN: Yes, and so I don't see how those tribunals can justify their actions. What makes them so sure that the sexual act was actually committed? Who gives them the authority to judge such things? And besides, Mohammed says it is better that 10 guilty persons go free than that one innocent be condemned.

But let me say that you play up these executions too much in Europe and America. You exaggerate a lot. One hunchback, 40 hunchbacks, as we say here. Do you know the joke? A fellow goes outside his house and says to his wife: "There's a hunchback outside." And the wife tells the neighbor: "There are two hunchbacks outside." And the neighbor tells her brother: "There are four hunchbacks outside." And so on until they get to 40.

You're treating us unfairly. About the positive aspects of this revolution, even about the dramatic efforts we're making to rebuild the country, you never write a word. But the minute something ugly happens, you seize on it avidly and enlarge it.

That didn't happen in the days of the Shah. Very seldom did a journalist attack the Shah. But then, he was very good at making friends in the foreign press, and let's not forget that a good part of the Western press is in the hands of the Zionists. What benefit would it receive from speaking well of us?

Naturally, the Western press plays up the execution of adulteresses, even while keeping silent when criminals who rape children or start little girls off in prostitution are also shot. In any event, compared to other revolutions that have taken place in other countries, even those who have been shot for political crimes are few. The same proportion as between a drop of water and a lake.

FALLACI: Maybe. But sometimes even a drop of water is enough to describe for us a reality. In this case, the despotism of an obtuse and enraged clergy that in the name of God is manipulating people's ignorance or even increasing it. Directly or indirectly, the revolutionary councils are in the hands of the clergy, the revolutionary guards are in the hands of the clergy. And the weakness of the Government, the only bulwark of laymen, shows that there's no place for the laity in Iran. Mr. Bazargan, is this what you wanted for your country?

BAZARGAN: No, and paradoxical as it may sound, neither did Khomeini. Nor his followers. I've realized this since our meeting in Paris. He wanted everything except for the clergy to end up governing the country. Had he felt otherwise, I wouldn't have accepted the post of Prime Minister.

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That I'm a very religious and devout man is well known, but I've always been drawn to people like the Ayatollah Taleghani [an Iranian religious leader who at one point shared a prison cell with Bazargan] who said that an imposed religion is not a valid religion. And one of my favorite books has always been the one by the Ayatollah Naini, translated 25 years ago by Taleghani, in which it's explained that there are always two despotisms to be fought: the monarchic and the religious.

The trouble is that something unforeseen and unforeseeable happened after the revolution. What happened was that the clergy supplanted us and succeeded in taking over the country.

FALLACI: Do you mean to say that a kind of coup d'état took place within the revolution?

BAZARGAN: Not exactly, since the revolution developed in accordance with Islamic principles and the clergy played an unchallenged and definitive role in it. I mean to say that clerical domination was imposed just at the moment when the mullahs [Moslem priests] should have been replaced by laymen. And this was the laity's fault.

If we in the Freedom Movement [Bazargan's political party] — namely, we who believe in God and Islam but not in the clergy — had been more alert; if, instead of being distracted, we had behaved like a party — then this mess wouldn't have occurred. Yes, we could have prevented it. The fact is that we were so overwhelmed by the country's problems, by the urgency of getting it back in shape, by the need to prevent excesses, that we didn't realize we were missing the boat.

In that respect, all the political parties of the Islamic group went to sleep after the revolution. And that included the parties of the left, which have never been able to attract the masses in Iran and have always remained on the fringes of reality.

Yes, it was the lack of initiative by the laity that permitted the takeover by the clergy. In fact, it can't even be said that they had it in mind to monopolize the country. They simply seized the opportunity offered by history to fill the vacuum left by us. And in some cases they've even filled it very well, with exceptional young mullahs, alert, dynamic, progressive types, people who for years had worked in the resistance against the Shah. In other

cases, however, they have filled the vacuum very badly.

FALLACI: And now, how will you get free of them?

BAZARGAN: Ah! That's another story. But sooner or later we'll get them off our necks, since undoubtedly there's already a reaction to the despotism of certain mullahs in many Iranian cities. Mullahs who interfere with the Government, who even put themselves in its place by taking advantage of the scant power we're able to exercise in remote regions.

This odious business has been going on for months, and I've denounced it. But not everyone has been ready to recognize the growing danger of a clerical dictatorship. Many aren't even real mullahs. They present themselves as such because the dress and head covering of a mullah inspire respect and obedience.

But there's no need to exaggerate and involve the whole clergy in this accusation. Even in the clergy there are men who don't like the situation. Just think of Taleghani: so educated, so modern, a true standard-bearer of freedom.

FALLACI: Taleghani is dead.

BAZARGAN: But his thought lives on, and it has deep roots. You saw at his funeral [in September] how much he was loved. Millions of people followed him to the cemetery, citizens of every social class, of every political belief. And they wept as I've never seen people weep before. No, I don't believe that a religious dictatorship could be permanently established. In the end, the people would rebel. By now they've learned how to do it, and they no longer tolerate fear.

FALLACI: And yet, one can smell fear in Iran. Not necessarily fear of Khomeini, but of the crowd that sees in him a messenger of God, a remedy for all evils, and it's the same crowd that the mullahs and ayatollahs are making use of. Besides, if it weren't for that fear, why should so many Iranians flee abroad? The exodus is taking on proportions comparable to those of the Vietnamese exodus, Mr. Bazargan.

BAZARGAN: If I were to tell you that many also leave for business or tourist reasons, you wouldn't believe me. And yet this factor should be taken into account. Let's not forget that many families send their children to study in Europe and that, especially in this sea-

son, they're in the habit of going to visit them.

But let's not consider them, if you like, and let's take a look at the ones who flee — collaborationists with the old regime who are afraid of being punished, wealthy bourgeois who don't like the social and economic change and would rather settle in more comfortable countries, nuisances for whom nothing can ever go right, rebels who always have the need to say no. Finally, there are the impatient ones who don't care to live in so difficult a country as Iran presently is.

Revolutions aren't wedding invitations, you know, and they're not suited for impatient people. Sometimes it's easier to die in battle than to live with postwar sacrifices. They'll come back. You'll see. They'll come back when things get settled.

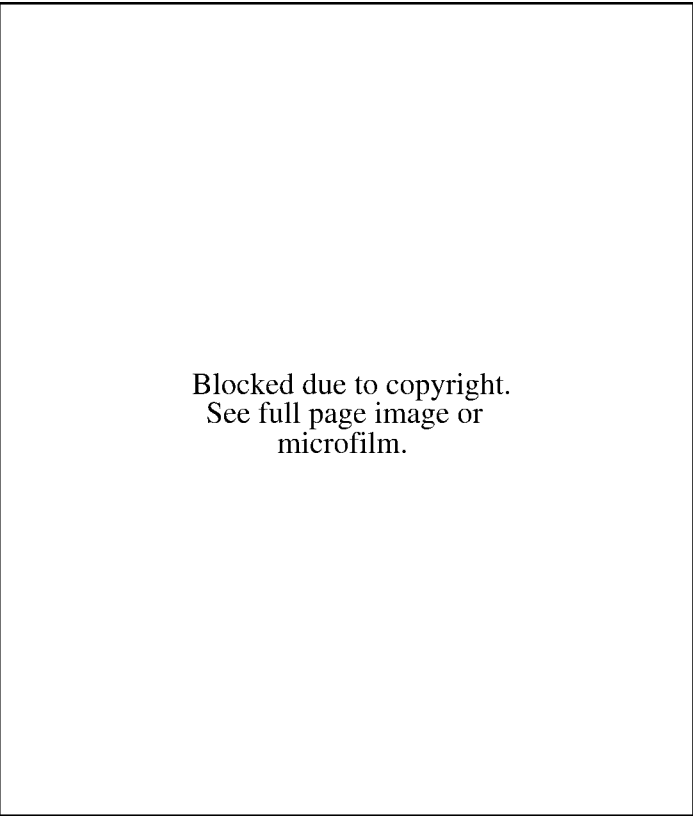
FALLACI: But if this phenomenon is so unimportant and harmless, why does your Government do everything it can to hinder it? Why does it require an exit visa for those who leave?

BAZARGAN: Because it's a phenomenon that is accompanied by a vice — the exportation of currency. If we don't check them, they exchange their rials for dollars or pounds and then deposit them abroad. A market actually emerged in that kind of transaction — even those who weren't leaving were changing their rials into dollars or pounds, then reselling them at a profit of from 40 percent to 50 percent. Now, only those who are leaving can change money — as long as it's not over a certain figure and as long as that figure is written in their passport along with the exit visa.

FALLACI: That may be. But I say that the cause of the exodus is something else, a sickness known as disillusion. Those Iranians escape because they don't want to submit to customs preached in a 1,400-year-old book.

BAZARGAN: You must understand that in the kind of disintegrated atmosphere that arises after a revolution, any idea can materialize and any excess can happen. That doesn't mean, however, that these things must also become crystallized and permanent.

It's not true that the Islamic movement is a reactionary movement, a doctrine whose goal is to disinter laws that were valid 1,400 years ago. It's not true that Islam rejects modern culture, modern civili-



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Teheran mourners display portraits of Ayatollah Taleghani, a

zation, science, the future. It's not true that we want to isolate ourselves in the past and that we refuse whatever good things the present has to offer. We didn't make a revolution for that, not for that!

I know some in their strictness go too far, but that's only a minority tendency, and there's no need to give it more importance than it actually has. Nor is there any reason to stress the xenophobia of those who are afraid that Western thought is in conflict with the thought of Islam. Are there not men who have studied in the West, who speak Western languages, who know Western philosophy among the clergy and in the Revolutionary Council?

It is not a question of isolating ourselves like a Cambodia; it's a question of not imitating you. As Khomeini has told you, his hostility to the West is entirely political, directed against ideological, economic and military domination — in short, against colonialism, the imperialism of right and left.

FALLACI: Yes, yes, he told me. I understood him. What he didn't tell me, what I didn't understand, is why your scorn is always concentrated on only one side. I never hear a word of reproach for the Soviet Union, for example.

BAZARGAN: Because there's more resentment in all of us toward the Americans

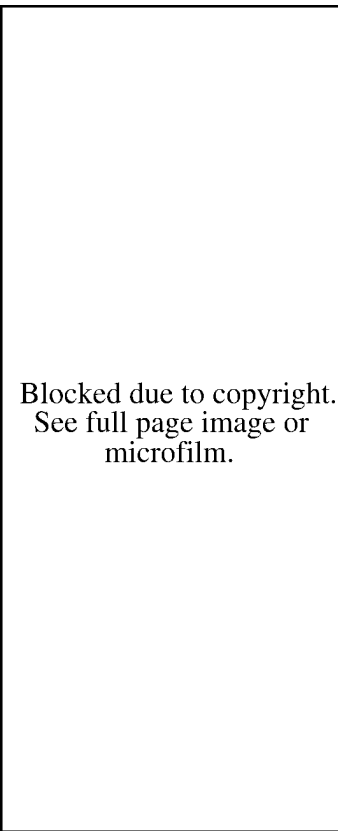
than toward the Soviets. The Americans supported the Shah much more than the Soviets did. Also, the American press is more hostile to us today than is the Soviet press.

But all that doesn't entitle anyone to conclude that we're about to align ourselves with the Soviets or that we're prepared to let ourselves be tyrannized by an Eastern power instead of a Western one. Don't forget, we believe in Islam.

FALLACI: Allow me a final question that has to do with the unity of the Islamic world and, specifically, with Libya, the country that, apart from Saudi Arabia, most resembles yours in its strict observance of the Koran.

It's known that Qaddafi was very eager to come to Iran, and you let him know that his visit would not be welcome. Why? Is it because of the mysterious disappearance of the Imam Musa al-Sadr [an Iranian-born Lebanese Shiite leader who has not been seen since August 1978]? According to Qaddafi, the Imam must have vanished after leaving Libya and arriving in Italy, but according to the Italian Government, he never set foot in Italy.

BAZARGAN: Yes, his mysterious disappearance is a very important factor in our lack of relations with Libya. He held a great place in the hearts of the Persians. And the



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liberal who died last month.

Italian Government is right in stating that he never reached Italy. I confirm it. Indeed, we have asked Libya to receive our inquiry commission and to help us in the search for Musa al-Sadr. Nor will we establish relations with that country until they do what we've asked.

FALLACI: But a few days ago Sheik Mohammed Montazeri, son of the Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri, took a very different tack. He had himself photographed with Qaddafi and Yasir Arafat [leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization] said that the Imam had been killed by the Zionists. And he ended by saying that Qaddafi would soon come to Iran, invited by Khomeini, to work out a common strategy for the triumph of Islam.

BAZARGAN: Sheik Montazeri is a disturbed man who ought to be under a doctor's care, and everything he says or does has to do with himself and no one else.

FALLACI: Mr. Bazargan, excuse me for asking, but aren't you afraid of getting killed?

BAZARGAN: That could happen. Yes, that possibility exists, though I'm by no means willing to let myself be thrown to the wolves. What would you like me to say? Each man's life is in the hands of Allah. ■