

US Government, Transcripts, [Meetings between US and Iranian Representatives in Frankfurt and Mainz, West Germany], TOP SECRET, October 1986

[Note: The American participants below are NSC staffer Oliver L. North, retired General Richard V. Secord, retired CIA official George Cave, and Secord's business partner, Albert Hakim, who mainly is interpreting for the Iranians. (Cave also speaks Persian and sometimes interprets.) The Iranian names are redacted but the participants are known from other accounts to include Ali Bahramani (mentioned above) and Ali Samii, a member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, although his name is likely a pseudonym. The double parentheses and question marks indicate indistinct passages; they have been inserted by the government transcriber. The authors of this volume have provided additional text for context within brackets and in italics.]

Frankfurt, October 6–8

((Tape begins with Hakim and [Ali] talking quietly together at times, even whispering. [...] Then U.S. parties enter the room and several conversations are taking place simultaneously. Then talks resume.))

SECORD: [...] I'm going to address this list. There are some terrific practical problems here. There are a couple of real, as opposed to philosophical, problems with this list.

[...]

SECORD: The first problem is political, based upon previous official requests of the Iranian government [...] and I would underline, desperate requests from him, for TOWs or HAWK parts and for high powered radars. We have achieved presidential authority for immediate air delivery of those items. [Redacted] can deny this or not deny this. It is irrelevant. We have documentary proof. It is not even worth discussing. And the president of the U.S. has approved a secret operation to deliver these items immediately, and we would have already delivered them except that we were asked to hold up so that we could have these higher level discussions.

[...]

NORTH: Let me, Okay? Everything that the general [Secord] said is entirely accurate. When we looked at this list, we estimated that, excluding these two items, the HAWK and the TOWs [missile systems], we are looking at a minimum of four shiploads of equipment. Thousands of people in the U.S., at a minimum, would know about that. If we are going to do something like this, it has to be very clear that we are doing this because we are working for a military balance in the region and a political solution, and honorable solution to the Iran–Iraq war.

[...]

NORTH: That Saturday when [*Ali Bahramani*] was in Washington [*on a visit arranged secretly by North that included a late night tour of the Oval Office*] and I flew up to Camp David to talk to the president, and I showed him the list, and he said, “Why are you thinking so small?” He took the list, that list right there, and he went like this with it – I was sitting across the table – and he said, “For someone who has seen so much war as you have, North, you should understand that I want to end that war on terms that are acceptable to Iran ... I don’t want to simply help go out and kill more Iranian youngsters. What about the 2 million people without homes? What about the oil industry which is already in ruins? What about the industrial base of Iran which is being destroyed? Stop coming in and looking like a gun merchant.” And he banged on the table. “I want to end the war.” And every time we get to the point where we can act in that regard, we find this obstacle sitting in the middle of the road.

[...]

HAKIM: ((Interprets)) [*For “Samii,” whom the Americans nicknamed “The Engine”*] I think like you do in the evaluation of the subject and its solution. And I also understand that the main problem is what you just discussed. But how can I defeat the prestige and honor of my country while I am not convinced that I have something in hand? I should be in a position when I go back and tell the leaders of Iran that I want you to put at stake your honor in trade for this which is the honor of the U.S. Add to this the problem that we have in Lebanon. I want to tell you that if these hostages were in our possession, like the matter of the American hostages in Iran [*in 1979*] ((few words missed)) we would have resolved it. He [*Samii*] wants you to know that if they actually had their hands on the hostages in Iran ((sic)) this should have been resolved the same day that the other hostages were released. And I want you to know that even today, as I’m sitting here, we do not have a guarantee that the Lebanese would 100 percent listen to what we have to say. We must put at stake the substance that would be equal with our existence. And you know that even up to this date, in connection with the Tehran hostages we are still ((few words missed)) in a mess. Therefore, please understand my problem. I cannot go to Iran and say forget about the 500 million dollars in the Hague issue [*regarding the status of Iranian assets frozen by the U.S. after the Tehran embassy seizure in 1979*]. And I do not expect in this meeting to resolve that.

[...]

NORTH: Let me make just one last point, and then it’s your turn. [...] Ronald Reagan is going to be president of the U.S. for two more years and will never again serve as president. [...] This president would like to have – I can tell you because I’ve listened to him – his vision is that when he leaves office in 1989 we will have full diplomatic relations between your country and ours. He would like to be remembered as a man who helped to bring peace, if you will, to the question and Muslim and Jewish people in this world. That’s why he [*chose?*] the phrase he did from our Holy Book [*a reference to Galatians 3:8, which Reagan inscribed in a bible that North gave to Bahramani in Germany as a token*]. It isn’t a [*word indistinct*] short-term thing just to get reelected or to solve the immediate problem and then forget about it. He really has a long-term vision. He knows that Saddam Hussein is a ((expletive)).

HAKIM: Do you want me to translate that?

NORTH: Go ahead, that's his word, not mine.

[...]

Tape A3

(Meeting at Mainz, W. Germany, October 29–30, 1986)

[...]

HAKIM: ((Interprets in Persian)) He was explaining that if we are not successful, not only will this group's work come to an end and ((few words missed)), but groups in the future which want to make contact will use this as an example – that Iranians ?are not reliable?. This will be studied.

[...]

HAKIM: ((Interprets)) If you don't have any more [*items*] on your side, he likes to let me explain what's happening on their side.

NORTH: Well, I do want to hear that. Let me just make one point about that ... He ((Hakim)) works for me – you ((Cave)) translate this – he works for me as a consultant. I don't know the Farsi word for consultant, but as a part-time contract employee. He has been this for four, five years for me since I have been at the White House and in the president's office. He does translations. The VOA broadcast in Farsi which you asked for and we gave, he translated those from my English to Farsi.

SECORD: And if we fail, we are going to shoot him, because somebody has to go. Like in Iran, somebody has to be shot.

[...]

CAVE: ((In Persian)) Mr. North and I are lucky. They won't shoot us, we'll just go to jail.

NORTH: Fired.

SECORD: The president may shoot North.

HAKIM: OK, he wants to explain his case.

HAKIM: ((Interprets)) I have addressed this issue earlier ?that? he's bringing up. He wants to clarify his position that people back home believe that a lot of times he talks about things which he should not talk about. Therefore, it is very important that whatever he tells us should not get into the official channels and get back to ?them? Because that would make life miserable for him and difficult for him. He has no financial interest ((few words missed)). One objective is to make sure that this thing is going to ((few words missed)). He has full trust in this group, especially in

General Secord. He has been very truthful with him, very helpful, and he wants to see that something good is going to come out of this. Therefore, please, whatever he discusses should not leave this room so he will feel comfortable to be able to get back to us ((trails off)). I discussed that earlier this week ((few words missed)).

[*The next passage relates to the Iranian political process*] He says you have to understand that Iran just finished ((few words missed)) and setting Imam Khomeini aside, the country is managed by shareholding ((word missed)). And once you put Khomeini aside, there are a number of people involved. There are three basic groups of this shareholding company. One is the radicals, and they are ((word missed)) radical and ((word missed)) radical within the same... Then the third group is the right-wing and then there's two ((few words missed)) who is headed by Hashemi Rafsanjani. And not only do they follow their own line, but they are also the connection in between the first and the third group.

[...]

He wants you to understand that the principle ... These three groups have the same objective and they all agree in the same way; when it comes to actual execution, they have different approaches. And they are not purely political ((a few words missed)) religious ((a few words missed)). As you probably know, Imam Khomeini has issued decrees ((few words missed)). In public opinion he ((Rafsanjani)) is considered the second man, second in command, basically because of these ((word missed)). When [redacted] raised the issue of establishing relations with the U.S. he was in favor of it, but for his own politics he decided to get all the groups involved and give them a role to play.

NORTH: Wait a minute, who's "he?"

HAKIM: Rafsanjani. He wants you to know who [redacted] is. [Redacted] works for [several words redacted] belongs to the radical group, the radical group that they were the university students who took the hostages in Iran. That's the group. When [redacted] contacted [redacted] in this approach to establish a relationship with the U.S., he, [redacted] asked for representatives of the three groups to be present and participate in this action, and ((two words missed)) support. In other words, this idea of having all groups participate in this is not new. It dated back a long time ago, and still he's going to explain more and still sticking to it. This issue as you can very well understand is very sensitive. [3 lines redacted] This approach of [redacted] was a double-edged sword – and positive and negative points... The positive point being that if it would be a failure and all parties are involved so there would not be an internal war. And the negative part is that because different views and opinions are under the same roof, it's very difficult to manage.

Mainz, October 29

NORTH: The big problem I've got is the whole damn appearance of bartering over... bodies. I mean if we're really sincere about this whole friggin thing, what we ought to be doing is, they ought to be exercising every possible amount of leverage they've got to get these people out, and

we agree that as soon as they're out we can do all kinds of good things, because that's where we are we're heading? [We?] will have? a friggin FMS [Pentagon Foreign Military Sales] contact team? [...] What we are trying to do is to close the bridge [on?] this secret shit, and get on with the real [reasons?]. You know, when we were in Tehran [see Document 23], okay, fouled up though it may have been, if you look at the document that I wrote and [former National Security Advisor Robert] McFarlane was prepared to sign, you will see that that's what we were talking about way back then, way back in May [1986] – is to get beyond the hostages and get on with a formal relationship. Everything we have done since the very first contact, whether it be step-by-step or whether it be all at once, that's where we've been trying to go. You guys don't trust us, and we don't trust you, and so we end up doing it a little bit at a time, and it takes forever.

[...]

NORTH: I'm telling you, we are so close to having done the right thing – you and I and [Ali?] and the men in this room, and yet we are going to foul it up. I can see it coming.

[...]

NORTH: When we were in Tehran, all McFarlane said was, “Look, we don't want you guys to lose the war, we want an honorable settlement and all you have to do is use your influence to get those hostages out, and we are going to do all kinds of things for you.” in fact, he said don't limit yourself to this, there is much, much more that could be done. The hostages have to get beyond us, we have to get beyond them.

((time out for tea))

HAKIM: They are convinced that we have ??good intentions?? He has said it before. He said, “After things broke up in Iran, and you left and then ?yet? you sent this stuff. That indicated to the Iranians that the Americans have good ((few words missed)). He has brought this up, but he says, in other words he's saying he knows that we have ??good intentions??

NORTH: So how the hell do we get from where we are today to where we've got to go?

[...]

HAKIM: ((Interprets)) He says a country like the United States – a superpower – is it not in their power to send two or three technicians Tuesday? I said, “Yes it is. We can send them on Monday, we can send them on Sunday.” [...] Then I said, “An imam like Khomeini – the first Shiah Imam for the first government of Shi'ahs in the world – he doesn't have the power of going to Lebanon and telling those assholes to release the three hostages? Such a great religious power?

NORTH: And his answer was?

HAKIM: “No. He doesn't know the details.” I said, “Well, our president doesn't know the details.” I'm trying to make the point that it's the wrong attitude to sit back there and say the

United States is a superpower, and we forget that [Iran] is a super religious country. It's very equal.

NORTH: [*Well?*], it is and the influence that the Imam has over those who hold the hostages is near total.

HAKIM: Of course. He can get those people back with one word. One word. I'm convinced. It's no bullshit. I think... He can. He can.

[...]

[Source: S. Rept. No. 100-216, 100th Congress, 1st Session, Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair, Appendix A: Vol. 1 (Washington, DC, 1988), selections from pp. 1571–1664.]