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Tribunal on Shah May Be
Needed to Free Hostages

By Norman Jameson

NEW YORK (BP)--An international tribunal to investigate charges of Iranian students against their deposed dictator may be the catalyst necessary to effect the release of Americans now held hostage at the embassy in Tehran, according to a Baptist with a firsthand perspective on the crisis.

John Walsh, a Southern Baptist home missionary and chaplain at Princeton University, was part of a seven-man fact-finding group of American religious leaders and Mideast affairs specialists just returned from two weeks in Iran. Jimmy Allen, immediate past Southern Baptist Convention president and newly elected president of the SBC Radio and Television Commission, also was part of the fact-finding group.

Walsh, citing documents given the group by the current Iranian government, said, "Such a tribunal would probably expose areas of U.S. involvement in the misuse of power during the Shah's regime."

Aware of the probability they will be dismissed as amateurs and emotional religionists, the members of the group, while not condoning the students' action in seizing the hostages, appear convinced the students point out legitimate grievances.

The invitation of the Iranian charge d'affairs in Washington made it possible for the group to talk to top Iranian leaders in the two-month drama that began Nov. 4 when Iranian students seized the U.S. embassy and 63 Americans with it.

After their fact-finding trip which included an hour with the Ayatollah Khomeini on Christmas Day, five hours with the students holding Americans at the embassy, visits with the prime minister and foreign minister and appearances on Iranian television and radio, the group feels the posture of Iranian principals has moved from "whether" the hostages will be released, to "when" they will be released.

Members of the group emphasized they spoke only as individuals and they disagreed among themselves as to the position they should take upon their return to the U.S. All were cautious to avoid saying anything that could be construed as an attempt to intrude improperly into the negotiations for the hostages' release.

Pending contact from official negotiators with the Iranians, members of the group would only indicate that they made progress in opening new avenues of understanding between the two countries.

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The United States, they said, has not begun to negotiate in a manner it can expect will gain release of the hostages because until now, Americans haven't understood the decision-making process now at work in Iran.

Allen said the decisions are made in something like a tribal council meeting in which advisors bring information to the Ayatollah Khomeini, discuss it, and reach a mutual decision. Advice from the Ayatollah has the weight of law, however, because of the high regard Iranians have of him as a religious leader.

Although members of the group felt a great part of their success in getting to see the principals in Iran was due to the respect Iranians have for religious leaders, they said they also found themselves handicapped by the Islamic perception of Christianity as personified by the office of the Roman Catholic pope.

The rich trappings of that office are seen as a barrier to empathy for the poor, and the majority of Iranians are desperately poor. In contrast, Khomeini owns nothing but his clothes and he lives as a guest in the house of another family in Qom.

Allen said Iranians didn't argue that their actions in taking American hostages were legal. But they felt it was action to achieve a just end and "they were amazed at how exercised we were" over the matter.

They couldn't understand, according to Allen, the American failure to empathize with the pain suffered by thousands of Iranians at the hands of Savak, the secret police who, according to Iranian claims, tortured and killed tens of thousands of their own countrymen.

After a ChristmasDay message to Khomeini, during which Allen emphasized the common respect of Islam and Christianity for Jesus and Jesus' love of freedom and regard for human rights, Khomeini questioned their true commitment to human rights.

"Where have you been all these years?" Walsh quoted Khomeini as asking the group. "You who are followers of the Christ who gave his life for freedom, what have you been doing for the poor, the oppressed in South Africa, and the blacks in your own nation? What have you done for us?"

Allen felt the group's visit began to establish a credibility for human concerns where the students thought the U.S. had none.

The group did not see the hostages, but Allen pointed out that the students have as much at stake in keeping the hostages alive as Americans do. A single death would discredit both them and Islam, of which Allen and Walsh say the students are staunch defenders and to which they're extremely devoted.

While there is increasing doubt in America that those holding the hostages are indeed students, Allen said the students they talked to are dedicated Muslims and are extremely anti-Marxist. The students denied that there are Palestine Liberation Organization elements among them at the embassy.

One of the revolutionary guards is a 1979 graduate of Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Mo., according to Walsh, who said the guard knows his parents who live there. Two other guards had also been students there.

Allen and Walsh said the threat of military intervention against Iran is futile. Death is not the ultimate personal disaster in the Islamic mind, and they believe hundreds of thousands would die, seeking the glory of martyrdom. One pilot, who had visited the First Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, where Allen was pastor from 1968-79, told him that in the event of war, the Iranian pilots were willing to crash their planes into U.S. ships.

Walsh feels that many Americans have known for years of the harsh tactics employed by Savak and even now would admit that the atrocious things Iranians claim actually happened. The group saw an armless six-year-old boy whom Iranians said lost his arms when Savak agents cut them off in front of his father to get him to confess anti-regime activity. They saw a small girl whose eyes, they were told, had been plucked out.

"But, in effect, American actions said we don't really care," Walsh said. The effect of the visit of this group of Americans may be to say that "we do care" and maybe even more importantly, to say we understand.

Walsh said he used to chuckle at the Iranian students in the U.S. who wore sacks over their heads, when protesting against the dictatorial regime, to avoid identification by Savak agents and subsequent reprisals against relatives in Iran.

Now, he said, "I'm not laughing anymore."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers.

Doctrinal Statement Causes
Tuition Grant Suspension

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DALLAS (BP)--Authorities have suspended more than \$70,000 in tuition grants for students at Dallas Baptist College after the school required faculty and staff members to sign a new doctrinal statement.

The suspended funds include state tuition equalization grants and matching student incentive grants by the federal government, both paid to students with the school acting as disbursing agent.

The state's action came in the midst of a controversy over new "articles of faith" which the school's trustees adopted in November and require all faculty and staff to sign.

G. Marvin Watson, president of the school since last summer, said he will meet with the state commissioner of education to appeal the suspension of grants by the student division of the Texas College Coordinating Board in Austin.

Mack C. Adams, head of the state student division, said the tuition grants "are not cancelled, but they will not be disbursed until allegations are investigated."

Watson said he wasn't aware of a 1974 ruling by the Texas attorney general when he asked trustees to approve the "articles of faith," an amended version of the Baptist Faith and Message statement adopted by the 1963 Southern Baptist Convention.

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The attorney general's ruling, which resulted from a suit by a Jewish woman seeking a job as a librarian at Houston Baptist University, said, "An institution requiring an employee to adhere to a particular religious belief would be ineligible to participate" (in the grants).

"The question in the state's action is not the articles of faith per se," said Watson, "It's whether we have to let anybody and everybody represent us in our institutions. Does the state have the right to make that kind of decision?"

Watson said that since the implementation of the signing of the pledge by the faculty would not be until the end of the current school year, June 1, 1980, he did not believe the immediate suspension of funds by the state to students was correct.

Prior to the Christmas holiday break, Watson said the students were told that their grants would be honored from "some source." When asked about that source, Watson said, "I had to raise the money."

"If we lose the tuition equalization grant, we will still survive," said Watson. He said that he would not pull back from insisting the staff and faculty of Dallas Baptist College sign the statement of belief because "we must believe something on this hill to carry the name of Baptists."

The Texas Tuition Equalization Grant program was enacted into law by the 62nd legislature in 1971. The program was expanded last year and now provides for grants to students in Texas private institutions of higher education up to \$1,136 per year.

The grant program is one in which a student applies for the grant, is approved under stipulated guidelines, and is paid individually through the college or university through which he is enrolled.

The guidelines adopted by the Baptist General Convention of Texas in 1961 and reaffirmed in 1966 and 1978 stipulated that "...loans and grants to individual college students (are considered) primarily a transaction between the citizen and the state and therefore within the framework of our interpretation of separation of church and state." Students majoring in religion or Bible are ineligible to receive the tuition grant.

According to Adams, of the Texas College Coordinating Board, students in the eight Texas Baptist colleges qualified for \$3,433,000 in tuition equalization funds for the 1979-80 school term.

The "articles of faith" were approved Nov. 15 by the college trustees who required they be signed by all faculty and staff.

The college announced at the time that the trustees had approved the statement of Baptist Faith and Message, adopted in 1963 by the Southern Baptist Convention. However, it was later revealed two changes were made in the 1963 statement, the first in the portion on the Scriptures and the second on the nature of man.

In the Scriptures portion a sentence was added that states, "We believe in the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament as verbally inspired by God and inerrant in the original writing, and that they are of supreme and final authority in faith and life."

In the portion on man a sentence was added stating, "By this statement we affirm our belief that man was created by a direct act of God in his image, not from previously existing creatures, and that all of mankind sinned in Adam and Eve, the historical parents of the entire human race."

Several members of the faculty have not signed, and other faculty or staff members made changes in it or called attention to the changes before signing.

Watson noted most questions about the changes had pointed at the word "verbally." He said that he did not mean the word to imply persons signing the statement must believe in a mechanical dictation theory of biblical inspiration. To him, the word "verbally" means "correct," he said.

Watson said he believes his changes give the 1963 statement the meaning Southern Baptists really intended when they originally adopted it. The convention has resisted repeated efforts to change it, however, the latest in Houston in June. The Texas Baptist Convention recently overwhelmingly rejected an attempt to amend the Scriptures portion.

The Dallas Baptist College statement preface states any trustee, faculty or staff member "must sign" the articles and they also must pledge to teach and practice in that context.

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Baylor Climbs
In Final Polls

Baptist Press
1/4/80

WACO, Texas (BP)--Baylor University, an upset winner over Clemson University in the Peach Bowl, finished 14th and 15th respectively in the final college football rankings of the Associated Press and United Press International.

The Southern Baptist school, which went into the game 19th ranked in both polls, defeated then 17th and 18th ranked Clemson, 24 to 18. The defeat dropped Clemson out of the top 20.

Another Southern Baptist school, Wake Forest University, which lost 34 to 10 to Louisiana State University in the Tangerine Bowl, had also been ranked in the top 20 most of the season, but dropped out the final week of the regular season. LSU was unranked.

Both Baylor and Wake Forest ended the season with 8-4 won and lost records.

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