

Key Iranian Judge Proud of Executions

Convinced Vengeance Is a Religious Duty, Khalkhali Is Determined to Pursue Revenge

By Jonathan C. Randal
Washington Post Foreign Service

QOM, Iran., Dec 15—His friends call him "The Wrath of God," his enemies "The Cat Killer," but all Iranians regard Sadegh Khalkhali as a man to be reckoned with.

The chief of Iran's revolutionary court system, known for his death sentences, Khalkhali is a short, squat man, convinced that vengeance is a religious duty and determined to seek revenge among the "corrupt on earth," both in Iran and abroad.

His sometimes outwardly vainglorious boasts about assassinating shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, his family and chief lieutenants are being taken seriously since the recent assassination in Paris of a son of the deposed monarch's twin sister, Princess Ashraf.

"I don't think I have made any mistakes," he said today when asked if it was true he had erred in some of his execution orders.

A perhaps apocryphal story recounts that when told he had ordered the execution of a man whose identity had been mistaken for that of a genuine suspect he replied: "No matter, in any case he will go straight to heaven."

Khalkhali's detractors recount a legend that Khalkhali's lifelong penchant for torturing and killing cats reached such proportions that he had to be interned for treatment in a mental institution in years past.

As the 53-year-old Moslem cleric tells it, his life under the shah was an unending persecution: first in prison for siding with his exiled teacher and hero, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, then in banishment in a variety of unattractive provincial towns.

He has no doubts about his present calling. He recounted today that when he told Khomeini he was being asked to accept a "heavy responsibility" in running Iran's revolutionary courts,

Khomeini replied, "I think you are not afraid."

Armed guards patrol outside his modest house near the railroad tracks in this holy city and visitors are frisked before they are admitted into the courtyard where the washing hangs on the line.

Inside, stony-eyed acolytes sitting on rugs follow an exuberant Khalkhali's every utterance as their leader interrupts his interview to deal with favor seekers and stamp proffered documents with a copper chop.

He appears proud of his controversial reputation and boasts of "anonymous letters and telephone calls" threatening his life.

"I was also threatened by the government and revolutionary council," he said cryptically.

Nor is Khalkhali bashful in conceding such opposition within the government to his penchant for executions.

"I've ordered more than 200 executions," he said laughingly, "more than the Nuremberg trials" of Nazi war criminals after World War II. Other sources put the number of executions since the February revolution at more than 600, although some no doubt were not condoned or ordered by him.

He specifically mentioned then-prime minister Mehdi Bazargan's opposition to the executions last spring of the shah's longtime prime minister, Amir Abbas Hoveyda, the former director of the SAVAK secret police, Nematollah Nassiri, and an earlier SAVAK boss.

Bazargan argued that Hoveyda and Nassiri were entitled to a fair trial during which the shah's alleged crimes could be exposed—a view that Khomeini has adopted in the present hostage crisis with the United States by calling for a show trial to establish U.S. guilt.

Khalkhali defended his decisions, arguing that, with their connections and money "they'd be freed by now" had he not had them shot.

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United Press International

"I have ordered more than 200 executions," Sadegh Khalkhali says.

"If Nassiri came back to life," he said, "I'd kill him again."

Perhaps oddly for a man with such decidedly rigid views, he said he hoped for the freedom of the 50 Americans held hostage at the U.S. Embassy, whom he referred to as "our guests."

However, he said he hopes "none will be executed," although that might be possible "if some are found guilty of ordering shooting of people."

But he seemed as interested in a trial of "all presidents from Carter back to Roosevelt," the current government approach, which insists that the United States has been responsible for all Iran's woes under the shah.

"The shah called his book 'Mission For My Country,'" Khalkhali said, "and I want to know who was responsible for that mission."

Carefully calculating his effect on a See EXECUTIONER, A31, Col. 1

Associated Press

Three alleged shah supporters facing a revolutionary firing squad last April.

Iran's Judge Has Penchant For Execution

EXECUTIONER, From A17

roomful of admirers, he took issue with Carter's decision not to light all the White House Christmas tree lights until all the hostages were freed.

"How come he didn't do the same thing during the Vietnam war when so many people were killed or last year when so many Iranians died fighting the shah," he asked." If Carter wants to deceive people, the hostages will not be freed for 10 years."

Slurping tea from a saucer, cracking his pudgy knuckles and raising his voice, he refused to say how many killer squads were abroad tracking down the revolution's quarry.

"They're trained by the Palestinians," he said. "And in Europe and even America, they are fluent in Eng-