

Miraculous Escape From Islamic Terror

Hearing about the “vulnerable” individuals remaining in Afghanistan without a clear path to freedom after the U.S. exit took me back to the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979. I was serving as the general manager of the Iran-U.S. Chamber of Commerce at the time the Iranian students stormed the embassy compound; I watched in terror from my seventh-floor office, which overlooked the embassy, and witnessed the total meltdown of the Marine Guards.

Suddenly, I realized I might not be able to leave Iran and could be thrown into the infamous Evin Prison, where people were known to be tortured and even put to death.

Despite the imprisonment of the embassy personnel and the anti-American rhetoric and behavior outside the embassy wall, I returned to work for two consecutive days but frequently looked out my seventh-floor office window to see if I could detect any change in the occupation. On the third day, I received a call midmorning from a dear Iranian friend, the chair of the Iran Fulbright Commission. The friend’s message was this: Leave the office immediately. A cadre of Iranian revolutionaries just left the office of the United States Information Agency, where they arrested several Americans and declared your office would be the next stop. You are scheduled to be the next captive.

I immediately went down the several flights of stairs, thinking the revolutionaries would take the elevator to arrive at the office sooner, and I was right. Within a few minutes, the revolutionaries entered the office, ordered the office staff to group and inquired as to where I might be. When informed that I had just left, several of the revolutionaries took the elevator down and several ran down the seven flights

of stairs. Fortunately, I had arranged for a car and driver and slipped away just before they returned to the first floor of the building.

The driver transported me to the north part of Tehran; I dismissed him when we arrived at the home of one Iranian friend. I entered the front door of the home and immediately left from the back door. I didn't think I would be safe at the house, and the driver knew where he had delivered me. I briefly visited two other friends but left their homes within a matter of minutes. After about an hour of moving around, I arrived at a small, secluded condominium where a close Iranian friend had prepared a room for me.

The owner of the condominium made me promise I would not leave my room without his knowledge and only when he accompanied me. He repeated his willingness to offer me protection as long as possible but acknowledged that he and his daughter were putting themselves in jeopardy by doing so.

I remained cocooned in the one room for some two weeks, only occasionally peeking outside from behind a curtain once or twice a day. Every few days after dark, the condo owner would walk with me in a wooded area not far from the condo; the walks were always short and carefully planned.

I couldn't visit my wife and two daughters, who occupied an apartment we had rented a few months earlier. All three were dual citizens with the U.S. and Iran; my U.S. citizenship could bring them unwanted attention from certain revolutionaries. To add a little complexity to the situation, my wife had worked for the Ministry of Health for several years and enjoyed a good reputation among her peers. We feared the revolutionaries might come to arrest me and take my wife and daughters hostage at the same time.

Each day I would question how long I might need to hide out or when the revolutionaries might discover where I was hiding and

appear at the door and demand I accompany them to their headquarters or perhaps to the prison. I couldn't sleep at night; during the day I had to sit in a darkened room the friend was providing. Even an ant on the wall became an object of interest. The longer I remained secluded, the more nervous and irritable I became.

After about two weeks of hibernation, another Iranian friend appeared at the door of the condominium and announced that she had quietly worked with her acquaintances in the office of the prime minister and had been able to arrange an exit visa for me. Even with the visa, the friend couldn't promise my safe departure from Iran. The revolutionaries could, she explained, stop me at the airport and deliver me to authorities for trial and possible incarceration, even execution.

Several days later, the same friend obtained a ticket for me on Swiss Airlines and arranged for my uncertain departure from Iran. The day of my departure, the gentleman who had provided the room that psychologically swaddled me for several weeks drove me to Tehran International Airport early in the morning. My wife accompanied me until I got out of the car, but neither she nor our daughters were ready to leave Iran. They had paperwork to complete before departure.

I entered the airport alone without my passport or exit visa. The government of Iran had kept both. As I approached the counter check-in, I noticed the clerk was watching me very carefully. His demeanor terrified me, but I merely greeted him. He stared at me for several minutes and then handed me my passport and visa. I literally flew to the gate and entered the plane.

Finally, my family joined me in the United States, and my older daughter admitted she had worried about my safety, particularly the day I left Iran. Only a few hours after I flew from the country, several revolutionaries knocked on the family apartment door, and this daughter answered. The two men

at the door pointed their guns at her and told her to get under her bed. When she asked why they were there, they said they had come for “the American.”

They ransacked the apartment and asked several times where I was. She told them I had left the country.

Because of my personal experience during the Islamic Revolution in 1979, I can understand how Americans now quarantined in Afghanistan are feeling, but they should not anticipate much, if any, help from the U.S. government. They need to use their own ingenuity in freeing themselves and getting back to lives that are as nearly normal as possible.
{eoa}

Franklin T. Burroughs has served as President of Armstrong University and Interim Dean of the School of Business at Notre Dame de Namur University. He recently retired as a member of the adjunct faculty of John F. Kennedy University.

Franklin served as the Managing Director of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Tehran, Iran and as Consultant to the Ford Foundation and UNESCO in Saudi Arabia. In the United States, he has been a visiting scientist at the Department of Energy and Consultant to the Department of Commerce. He has served as an English-Language Officer (contractor) with the U.S. Department of State and as an international consultant in education, Middle East Affairs and cultural diplomacy.

Franklin was awarded a Nishan-e-Homayoun by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi for his work in the Iranian Ministry of Court and has received Certificates of Recognition from the California Senate and State Assembly.

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.