



A Time to Betray: The Astonishing Double Life of a CIA Agent Inside the Revolutionary Guards of Iran

Reza Kahlili

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A true story as exhilarating as a great spy thriller, as turbulent as today's headlines from the Middle East, 2010 National Best Books Award-winning *A Time to Betray* reveals what no other previous CIA operative's memoir possibly could: the inner workings of the notorious Revolutionary Guards of Iran, as witnessed by an Iranian man inside their ranks who spied for the American government. It is a human story, a chronicle of family and friendships torn apart by a terror-mongering regime, and how the adult choices of three childhood mates during the Islamic Republic yielded divisive and tragic fates. And it is the stunningly courageous account of one man's decades-long commitment to lead a shocking double life informing on the beloved country of his birth, a place that once offered the promise of freedom and enlightenment—but instead ruled by murderous violence and spirit-crushing oppression.

Reza Kahlili grew up in Tehran surrounded by his close-knit family and two spirited boyhood friends. The Iran of his youth allowed Reza to think and act freely, and even indulge a penchant for rebellious pranks in the face of the local mullahs. His political and personal freedoms flourished while he studied computer science at the University of Southern California in the 1970s. But his carefree time in America was cut short with the sudden death of his father, and Reza returned home to find a country on the cusp of change. The revolution of 1979 plunged Iran into a dark age of religious fundamentalism under the Ayatollah Khomeini, and Reza, clinging to the hope of a Persian Renaissance, joined the Revolutionary Guards, an elite force at the beck and call of the Ayatollah. But as Khomeini's tyrannies unfolded, as his fellow countrymen turned on each other, and after the horror he witnessed inside Evin Prison, a shattered and disillusioned Reza returned to America to dangerously become "Wally," a spy for the CIA.

In the wake of an Iranian election that sparked global outrage, at a time when Iran's nuclear program holds the world's anxious attention, the revelations inside *A Time to Betray* could not be more powerful or timely. Now resigned from his secretive life to reclaim precious time with his loved ones, Reza Kahlili documents scenes from history with heart-wrenching clarity, as he supplies vital information from the Iran-Iraq War, the Marine barracks bombings in Beirut, the catastrophes of Pan Am Flight 103, the scandal of the Iran-Contra affair, and more . . . a chain of incredible events that culminates in a nation's fight for freedom that continues to this very day.

A TIME TO BETRAY was the winner of The National Best Books 2010 Awards for Non-Fiction Narrative. It was also honored as the "Finalist" in the "Autobiography/Memoirs" category. It is now part of JCITA's (Joint Counterintelligence Training Academy of DOD) Iranian Program's readings.

A Time to Betray: The Astonishing Double Life of a CIA Agent Inside the Revolutionary Guards of Iran Details

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Inside the Revolutionary Guards of Iran Reza Kahlili**

From Reader Review A Time to Betray: The Astonishing Double Life of a CIA Agent Inside the Revolutionary Guards of Iran for online ebook

Veeral says

Reza Kahlili (not his real name) of the Revolutionary Guards became a spy for the CIA when Iran came under the thumb of Ayatollah Khomeini. This is his story.

I read this book primarily because I wanted to know more about the events that occurred before and under Ayatollah Khomeini. As far as that was concerned, the book didn't disappoint.

Kahlili writes very clearly about the events that eventually toppled the Shah and thus made Khomeini the unchallenged leader of Iran. And while people were not totally happy under the Shah, they were at least content as they had some little liberties in their private lives which they cherished. Ayatollah Khomeini changed all that. As USSR became a totalitarian state under the guise of Communism, Iran became a police state under the pretense of religious fanaticism. Iran's rulers interpreted their religion as per their convenience.

After his childhood friend was tortured and shot by the fanatical regime, Kahlili became disillusioned by the Iran government's promise to build a proper state for its citizens. As a result, he became a CIA spy operating in Iran. I think he took this step more out of obligation to his dead friend, although he states in his book that by being a spy he wanted to let the US know what was happening in Iran which would eventually convince the USA to pressurize the Khomeini regime to mend its ways which would bring peace to his country. If he truly believed that, he was being naïve. And he actually admits that himself in the concluding chapters of the book. International politics has never worked that way. Never has, never will.

His spying didn't improve the conditions in Iran which he hoped might happen due to the intervention of outside world (Nobody intervened, as anybody might have guessed right from the start even without the benefit of hindsight), but at least Kahlili could have the personal satisfaction that he hurt the repressive regime in some indirect ways which took away his friend and everybody else's personal freedom in Iran.

Pritesh says

This book is a good read ! It is a page turner. The author beautifully captures the relationships, culture and the environment he grew up in Teheran. The book is a memoir rather than a spy thriller. There is a lot of focus on the tensions the authors spying creates with his family , his sense of guilt and describing the life of normal Iranians under the Ayatollah. He talks about the information he shared with the CIA but does not go into much detail on how he collects that information. There are a few moments of suspense & thrill , some clandestine meetings but not many details on his spying activities . I think some of it is driven by his desire to protect the people who are still in Iran as well as his handlers in the CIA.

As with most memoirs, facts and perspectives get skewed. The authors message is that the radical Islamic State in Iran is responsible for perpetrating unimaginable atrocities against the people of Iran as well as

funding radical activities in other countries in the Middle East. I don't know how true his descriptions are but the happenings in modern day Iraq and Syria seem to mirror his descriptions of Iran in 1980. There is definitely an element of embellishment and a decent amount of hearsay. I have a hard time believing that he could get authoritative information on Iran's nuclear program or that the program existed at all. By his own admission he was not very high up in the Revolutionary Guard totem pole. I have always been fascinated by the Middle East. It is the cradle of civilization. It is sad to see how long that entire region has been mired in conflicts of every kind.

Overall I like the book. Its a well written perspective of one man. It also resonates with the current times. We have our own mini-Khomeini going in Trump :)

???? ???? ????? says

Aside from the fact that it is hard to believe a spy - a professional liar (since we simply signed an unspoken pact of trust with him the moment we purchased the book), the author's motivation for spying, and other actions were simply ridiculous and he volunteers to highlight such ridicule by grave contradictions.

First, he says he's chosen to spy for the CIA so that America would save his country from its regime, something some would believe; but when he's offered a salary, instead of rejecting it defiantly and with hurt dignity, he just accepts. Just like that. But to be honest, he did say that money was not his motivation when he was offered the first bonus payment, that's before accepting it on the CIA agent's encouraging words, "Take it, it's yours, you deserve it." Oh, and he didn't it say it out loud, it was an inner dialogue but the clever agent felt his struggle that he couldn't express with a single dignified word (after all, who knows how those agents take such words? She might have apologized, taken back the money, and thanked him for his free work to save his country. But we, the good readers, wouldn't do so, would we? No, we trust an honest spy working for the Iranian government's guards on one side and the CIA on the other, for a pay.)

Now, what about those who thought that the idea of seeking help from the US to bring democracy was a stale joke in the first place - those who know its black history of supporting tyrants, imperialism, and unchangeable own interest-driven policies? Like who? Well, like the author himself. At one point he admits that the "foreign policy of the US 'sent mixed signals'" (now that's one good romantic expression.) Yet, while many people made the conclusion that the US will not really scramble to set things right in Iran, our good spy made a different one which nothing could shake, not covert negotiations and support at least.

I can go on like this listing situations where the author blandly shows his disrespect for the reader's intelligence.

There other nice coincidences as well to entertain. The guard who was suspicious about the author dies on their trip to the front right after the author finds out that he started digging. The other guard, the author's boss, whom he finally confronted of his despise for the regime, gets assassinated by an anti government group, while driving his car with the author riding beside him. Luckily, the author, who works for the same establishment, walks out of this unscathed, although the car stopped and the motorcycle-riding assassins could have just walked to him and shot him there. Phew! That was close.

And no, the author didn't wonder for a second about this, so I guess this means we shouldn't either.

An important point to ponder is that the author is a Shiite Muslim as almost all Iranians. Shiites changed a lot in the original Islamic beliefs and are considered non-Muslims by original Muslim scholars (it's hard to have faith in a religion that speaks of a human being trapped in a tunnel for hundreds of years and built on the foundation that he will return.) The author mentions several of such horrific and bloody beliefs (like raping female prisoners before executing them to prevent them from going to heaven) but it should be understood that this is not Islam. While he keeps saying that this is not true Islam, he means only fanaticism, which is wrong in all religions. But at the same time, he attempts to twist some righteous beliefs, like martyrdom, which is respected even aside from religion, for one's country for instance, to show it as brainwash.

All in all, I found the book to be far from believable and more of a CIA propaganda against Iran, although the foundations for Iran's atrocities are there, but it is hard to discern the truth from the lies with the above contradictions and irrationalities so stark.

Note:

For the audiobook, the narration was fine. The narrator used a heavy accent to impersonate the character and seemed to be a Persian speaker as well.

Esther Bradley-detally says

This was a hard book to read, and i have read a goodly amount about Evin prison, and a man who was Persian born, and a hostage, along with the other American hostage, but the extra one, asked me to write his book. I was too knew of a writer to do so. He has since passed.

Most people know there are 7 Baha'is in Evin right now, and much has been written of them. In fact the journalist who was freed writes about them also in her book. This book was hard, because the suffering was immense, the brutality so real, and his mission so gripping and I as a reader was always worried for his safety.

the hand of fate will simply visit those who torture others, and we in this generation cannot know when or how, and it isn't with vengeance I comment so; it's just that nothing we do goes unknown in a higher dimension.

I think the book it a must in that it gives tremendous insights into the suffering of the ordinary citizens of Iran and yet the heroic acts of some. My heart goes out to all who suffer.

Karen C. says

This book is a page-turner, hard to put down, nicely written, great balance between personal and work life; you get a real sense of this man's anguish between his love for his country and his fear of betrayal. I have to say that I had a hard time understanding his fear of disloyalty and unfaithfulness. The way I see it as an outsider is that his country has been stolen. There is no Iran of yesterday; it has been hijacked. His fight was and is to create a free Iran, for his people and by his people. Sadly, while people continue to need oil as they do oxygen, it will not be won back any time soon. The West will continue to appease the mullahs, with one eye on the oil and one eye on God. But may God bless the author for trying. I admire him with the utmost love and respect. He is a true hero in every sense of the word.

Thomas says

Excellent story of a man who lived a double-life, and the stress that doing so placed on him and his family. I thoroughly enjoyed this book, and would recommend it to anyone who has an interest in the country that Iran has become since their "revolution" in the late 70s / early 80s. Filled with insights from a man who was not only there, but was a first-hand witness to some of these events by virtue of his membership in the "Revolutionary Guard". At the same time, he was a paid agent of the CIA, reporting everything he saw or heard at great risk to himself and his family. It is a true human tragedy, what has become of the people of this once, very westernized and progressive country. More so when we realize how close to returning to some semblance of normalcy Iran was in 2009, during their protests. A small amount of help from the U.S. Government would quickly have tipped the scales in favor of those seeking freedom. Unfortunately, the leader of our government was apparently too busy with his perpetual re-election campaign to give any help to them. Opportunity missed.

As far as the book itself is concerned, the only problem I had with it were a couple of very strong "coincidences" that worked perfectly in the author's favor. I am not suggesting that they did not occur... I just wonder, given the nature of the subject matter, how much is being withheld. It may be that the sequences did not happen as portrayed, but that they worked better the way they were presented, for a book. Particularly suspicious in my mind were the sequence of events around the death of "Reza's" friend and Commander.

Shannon says

It started slow for me. I didn't understand there was great significance to his childhood stories until I got farther in the book. So don't yawn your way through that part. There is relevance. This book was an eye opener to me and brought me to have sympathy for an enslaved people who I didn't know lived under such horrible atrocities. I think I thought Iranians liked Sharia and they stayed because they wanted to. I had no idea the people live under such tyranny and were not free. Thank you Reza for bringing this information to light. I no longer associate that evil, misguided dictator, Ahmaddinnejhad, with the people of Iran. They are clearly not the same. I also understand a little more history on the difference to an Arab vs a Persian. I can see why if you are Persian, why you don't want to be lumped in with these Arab fanatics and extremists that run the government.

Ramon Remires says

I enjoy stories of intelligence and espionage combined with real testimonies, and therefore, Sometimes even in the wee hours of the night, I find myself sitting in front of history programs on television and finding it difficult to part from them.

Among other things, I enjoy reading or hearing stories about clandestine and dangerous activity in countries where the chances of success are low, and I expect that the writer will find it necessary to create a happy ending for his story, yet, most times it doesn't come to it.

This book is an excellent example of that. It's the story of an officer in the Revolutionary Guards in Iran who

became a spy in the service of the United States.

The book describes the life story of Raza and through his personal story also tells the story of Iran from the time of the Shah to the present day. Through this story, we learn how Iran has evolved from being a liberal and progressive state to a state that is today witness to the day-to-day conduct of the field.

For the most part, this is not a history book by definition. It is a document of human testimony composed of several circles that harmonize together. A history that is closely related to the analysis of the implications of Iran's changes to the world, stories about family relationships, relations of friendship, and how things that are independent of us can influence and transform our lives from one end to the next.

It is a story that shows how our personal history, values, family, friendships and tragedies influence and sometimes define our actions.

It is incredible to read so vividly and modestly how one person can influence and contribute to changes that affect the whole world - thanks to the courage to do the right thing despite the danger.

highly recommend.

Patrick Belair says

This was another one of my thrift store finds, The title being enough to reel me in (plus the price was right), I was pleasantly surprised on what a good read this was. Mr Kahlili gives the reader his back ground growing up in Iran during the time of the Shah.

He tells of his early life growing up in Tehran in a very close knit family, his relationship with his close friends, his Grandparents and parents. Revolution comes and everything changes. He works for the Government and one of his friends is murdered and he makes a fateful choice to spy for the U.S. The next years are filled with info passed on to CIA and his thoughts of betraying his country, and the truth as to what was actually happening. If you get a chance pick it up I think you will enjoy.

Nic Adams says

Wow! What an insightful and really sad tale of Iran from the almost "carefree" days under the Shah to the lies and deceit of Ayatollah Khomeinithe associated murderous and tyrannical rule over the years that followed.....the death of so many close to the author and his decision to become a "jasoos" (a traitor!) by working for the CIA in an effort to bring about change in Iran.

Considered weak by his own family for remaining part of the "new" order to be close to valuable sources of intelligence the author showed remarkable bravery in "spying" in the most difficult conditions.

A highly recommended read for those interested in how the changes in power in Iran many years ago have made life for Iranians a living hell still to this day!

Jill Tabatabaei says

This book evoked a lot of the same feelings I felt when I read *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. It was very eye opening and I haven't been able to stop thinking about it. My only criticism of the book is that it included a lot of political facts. Some were crucial to the story and others could have been left out. Sometimes I felt like just as I was getting totally immersed in the story, the author would spend 3 pages giving political facts. I know that understanding the politics helps paint the big picture, but I think the story could have stood on its own well enough without all the facts that he included. Overall I liked the book and would recommend it.

Jennifer Jacobs says

Absolutely a must read!! Highly highly recommended!!

This is one of my 'One night stands' like this book kept me awake all the night to the next day! And the result was a very tired but ultimately triumphant me, as I read the book literary in one sitting!! This book was THAT good:)

It is a tale of Reza Kahlili, a double agent who worked for both Iran and CIA! Due to 1979 coup/revolution and US embassy hostage crisis in the aftermath, CIA didn't have boots on the ground' of course, so the author was one of the very very few American spy on Iranian soil! The danger was real and stakes were very high for him! What a brave man!

The story is like super fast paced, I couldn't put the book down you won't either! Even these days he lives in anonymity and does interviews without showing his face time to time, the danger on his life being very real!

5 stars

Sassan says

As an Iranian-American who was born after the revolution but has had chances to visit Iran several times for significant periods of time, I find Mr. Kahlili's book to be both breathtaking and a testament to the horrors and pain inflicting upon the Iranian people to people like my grandfather to my little cousin. Reza Kahlili exemplifies his story as a young man attending USC to becoming a Revolutionary Guards member once the Revolution hit Iran in 1979. Mr. Kahlili allows the reader to understand how good and secular people were washed up into the fervor of the Islamic Revolution in 1979' and how such a madman such as the Ayatollah Khomeini was able to lie and brainwash a people with such a rich culture and ancient history.

Mr. Kahlili's book is written in a manner that both the simple reader can easily comprehend along with an elegant prose that the more extensive reader can quickly get through. His story is more of a human story that not only details his spying days, but of his relationships with his family members and friends since childhood that both contributed to both the revolutionary fervor that was able to sweep him up during the revolution along with the values and ideals that his parents and grandparents taught him that allowed him to say "enough is enough, it's a time to betray" in joining the CIA for the sole purpose of helping Iran become free from tyrannical tyrants.

"It's very important to understand this mentality of martyrdom and radical conviction. They truly believe that one day Islam will conquer the world. If we allow the Guards to go unchecked, the consequences could be devastating for the region - and the world."

This quote comes from Mr. Kahlili's book and I think highlights the situation so well with Iran. The Iranian regime is a regime that has occupied and sent Iran back into the stone ages for the past 32+ years in a process I uniquely term "de-evolution". This is a regime that does not think in "this world" but rather makes decisions based on prophecy and world ending messianic beliefs. They go so far as to rape virgins before executing them so that they "don't go to heaven". This is a barbaric and primitive regime that has occupied the once great nation of Iran and the entire international community must understand that negotiating is not an option with these madmen. This regime will not be happy and will not rest until the "return of the hidden imam" and will do everything to facilitate this end-of-the-world prophecy including starting wars and allowing millions of Iranians to die for their fanatical beliefs. The international community must stand by the side of the Iranian people in overthrowing this barbaric regime. It is the right thing and necessary thing to do for not only insuring that Iranians have the opportunities to live in dignity, peace, and freedom but the international community will get rid of itself of a barbaric and dangerous regime that endangers world peace with their nuclear activities and ambitions.

Doreen Petersen says

Excellent book to read. Run and don't wait to read it. It will change you forever.

Yogeeswar says

This book provides much needed insight into the minds of a 'Radical Islamist' and their policies for running a nation. The author was a Spy, an Iranian, whose story can easily be a blockbuster Hollywood movie. Awesome book from the hands of a insider in Radical Islamist regime.
