

## Witness Seminar: The BBC and the Iranian Revolution 1979

6 March 2010

School of Oriental and African Studies

### Biographies

(in alphabetical order)

#### **Behrouz Afagh**

Behrouz Afagh was born and brought up in Iran and studied at Tehran University and then at the University of Surrey in Britain. He has lived in Britain since 1978. In 1983 Behrouz joined the BBC World Service and worked as a producer and then editor in the Persian Service and as an editor in the Vietnamese Service. He set up the BBC Central Asian Service in 1994 and became Editor of Eurasia Region in 1999. He was Head of Eurasia Region from March 2003 and became Head of the Asia Pacific Region in April 2006. He is currently Head of Asia & Pacific Region in the BBC World Service. He is editorially and managerially responsible for the BBC's broadcasts and multimedia services to the region extending from Iran to China. He was also responsible for launching the BBC Persian television in January 2009.

#### **Pooneh Ghoddoosi (former student)**

Pooneh Ghoddoosi has a BA in English Language and Translation from Iran, and she completed her post-graduate studies in Journalism and Photography at the University of Toronto in Canada. She began her journalism career in 1990, at the time of the deadly earthquake in roudbar, North of Iran. Since then she contributed to several American, British, and Canadian media including the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, PBS, USA Today, Daily Telegraph, Business Week, Toronto Star, and the Washington Post. She joined BBC Persian service in 2000 as a radio producer and presenter. She has worked as a producer for the flagship BBC Television News programme "Newsnight". She has presented "World Briefing" on the BBC World Service radio and worked as newsreader/announcer for five years. She joined BBC Persian Television as presenter of the interactive programme "Nobat-e Shoma" (Your Turn) in 2008 and is currently managing a project examining and promoting effective utilisation of social media across the BBC World Service.

#### **Mr Lotfali Khonji (former Producer at BBC's Persian Service)**

Lotfali Khonji was born in Bahrain and went through his primary and secondary education in Tehran. He studied mathematics at Birmingham University. From 1968 to 1999, he worked as a producer and broadcaster at BBC's World Service, Persian Section. He has translated many works, including Edward Said's *Orientalism* (into Persian) and Abbas Maroufis *Symphony of the Dead* (into English)

#### **Mehrdad Khonsari (former Press Attaché)**

At the time of the start of unrest in Iran, Mehrdad Khonsari (a graduate of Georgetown University and the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy) was a Visiting Research Fellow at the IISS. A young diplomat with a promising career (having already served in Washington and the UN in New York), he was appointed as Press Attaché following events at 'Jaleh Square' – a post he held at the Embassy until the time of his resignation from the Iranian foreign service in March 1979.

#### **Baqer Moin (former Programme Assistant in the BBC Persian Service)**

Baqer Moin studied Persian, Arabic and theology in Mashhad and Tehran and worked as a journalist with Khorassan daily. He held the role of Assistant-editor, Franklin Books Program, Tehran from 1969 to 1975 and then joined BBC Persian Service as a programme assistant in 1976. He became head

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of the Persian Service from 1990 to 2004 and a member of the UN Media Commission, Kabul in 2005. He contributed to *Negin* and *Rudaki* monthlies along with a number of books and has written "*Khomeini, Life of the Ayatollah*", I.B. Tauris, London, 2009. He is currently a journalist and co-director of *Jadid Media*.

#### **Richard Oppenheimer (former Topical Unit Organiser for the BBC Eastern Service)**

Richard sees the month he was in Teheran (August-September 1978) as pivotal. It started with disturbances in Teheran University and the Rex Cinema fire in the south of the country, saw the first big peaceful demonstrations in support of Ayatollah Khomeini (at Id-ul-Fitr) and culminated in the army opening fire on demonstrators in Jaleh Square and the imposition of Martial Law. He will suggest one reason why western supporters of the Shah underestimated and were taken by surprise by the strength of the anti-Shah movement."

#### **Christopher Rundle (former Research Analyst in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office)**

After joining the Foreign Office Christopher Rundle studied Persian at SOAS under Professor Lambton and had postings to Tehran and Kabul. In 1978 he was a research officer in London dealing with Iran. In 1979 and 1980 he spent some months working in the British embassy, and on 21 January 1981 he began a four-year posting to Iran. At present he is Honorary President of the Centre for Iranian Studies at Durham University.

#### **Dr Shadab Vajdi (former lecturer of Persian at SOAS and former producer at BBC's Persian Service)**

Dr Shadab Vajdi was born in Shiraz, Iran. She obtained her BA in Persian Literature and MA in Social Science at Tehran University. Subsequently, she obtained her PhD in Linguistics at SOAS, London. From early 1970's to mid 1980's, she worked as a producer and broadcaster at BBC's World Service, Persian Section. Thereafter, she taught Persian language and literature at SOAS for a number of years. She is also a poet and translations of her works have been published in English, German and Swedish. She has translated Liang Heng's *Return to China* and Paul Harrison's *Inside the Third World* into Persian.

#### **Andrew Whitley (former resident BBC correspondent in Tehran)**

Andrew Whitley was the resident BBC correspondent in Tehran from August 1977 to August 1979, when he was expelled by the Islamic Republic authorities; he subsequently returned to Iran during 1980 for the *Financial Times* and then again in 1993, when he was working for Human Rights Watch as its Middle East director. Earlier, he had worked first in Tehran as an academic and then in London with BBC World Service Radio, which included a spell with its Persian Section. His 40-year professional career to date has been varied - spanning journalism, academia, human rights, management consultancy and the United Nations. He currently heads the North America office of UNRWA, the UN agency responsible for the Palestinian refugees.