

Exclusive report

Gen. Jones OK'd, but not Mr. Carter

by Konstantin George

I had the privilege of attending the hearings conducted June 16 by the Senate Armed Services Committee on the renomination of General David Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Jones's answers during certain portions of the questioning undertaken by members of the Committee—interchanges which received no coverage in any of the major press the following day—could bloom into a fatal scandal. Should some of the lines of attack on the Carter administration that emerged there be pursued in future hearings involving Jones's civilian superiors—Defense Secretary Harold Brown, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Carter—Carter's political demise would not be far off.

Jones was reconfirmed by a vote of 16-1, but that is only all the more indication that the committee's investigation is going to be "kicked upstairs." The same Senate Armed Services Committee is continuing to conduct the probe of the "rescue caper" it began last April. Just 10 days ago, a report commissioned by the committee and classified "top secret" was suddenly leaked to the press, charging the administration with massive bungling. And if anything, the question-and-answer period that preceded General Jones's confirmation provided plenty of ammunition for any future attempt to topple the Carter government.

The following interchange occurred between Sen. Harry Byrd (Ind-Va.) and General Jones on the subject of the aborted April 24 Iranian rescue mission:

Byrd: Were there Soviet reconnaissance aircraft over Iranian airspace, immediately before, during, or immediately after the mission?

Jones: No [after some hesitation].

Byrd: Were there Soviet aircraft of any type over Iranian airspace . . . ?

Jones: No [again, after some hesitation].

Byrd: Was the hot line activated before, during, or after the aborted mission?

Jones: It was not, to my knowledge, activated during or

before the mission. . . . But I do not have access to all the information concerning the mission.

A hush descended on the audience in the hearing chamber after this assertion: The Joint Chiefs have been kept in the dark by their civilian superiors.

What emerged during the Committee proceedings is that the administration has consciously constructed a two-level cover up of the real events before, during and after the aborted Iran caper. The first level is reflected in the Jones statement cited above. The second level emerged in an interchange between Georgia Senator Sam Nunn, and General Jones: The administration thus far refuses to make available to members of the Committee even the half truths and cover-story "facts" ostensibly known to the Joint Chiefs.

Nunn, a Democrat from Carter's home state who has refused to endorse the president for renomination to date, questioned Jones as to whether he would make available to the Committee, or to selected Committee members, the same material under review by an independent panel of six active and retired military officers.

Nunn: "Will this Committee be denied access to the same material available to the independent review panel? [The question was repeated several times] General Jones, is the answer 'yes' [meaning a denial]?"

Jones: "Yes."

Nunn: "The Committee will not be granted access?"

Jones: "Yes."

Nunn: "How could active duty officers conduct an independent review . . . without jeopardizing their careers?"

Jones was finally compelled to indicate that he would not exclude the possibility of a select oversight group drawn from the Senate Armed Services Committee being granted access to the same material.

The remaining portions of the Jones testimony constituted a low-keyed yet stark indictment of Carter defense policies. This emerged in the course of questions fired by Texas Sen. John Tower, the ranking minority member of the committee.

Tower: "In your present view, do you believe that we are better or worse off today with the administration's cancellation of the B-1 program and the slowdown of the MX and Trident submarine program?"

Jones: "We are worse off today than if we had developed those systems or kept them on their original schedule."

The indictment of Carter, Brown et. al., ended on the pointed comment by Jones, "The United States has moved [under Carter] to the verge of inferiority with the Soviet Union in strategic nuclear weapons."