

Chapter Nine

BAD PRESS

*The U.S. Embassy
London, U.K.*

True to form, Phillip Reeves, chief of the U.S. Embassy's combined political/economic research section, strode through the building's main entrance at 24 Grosvenor Square and past the Marine guards at exactly nine o'clock. He was dressed in an oxford gray pinstripe suit outfitted with a crisp white shirt, cufflinks, and a smart blue and gold club tie. He looked every bit the polished business executive he once was. Now in his early forties, he had been selected for the position because of his record of accomplishment at First Intercontinental Bank of New York. Reeves had joined the firm fresh out of the Wharton School of Business. Armed with an M.B.A. and a keen acumen for cutting deals, he quickly rose through the ranks to run the mergers and acquisitions group. He had an uncanny knack for analyzing all sides of a potential transaction to figure out who the clear winner would be in much the same way a skilled chess player sees the moves leading to checkmate. That was his strength.

Reeves took the elevator to the second floor and walked briskly down the hall toward his office. As he approached, he noticed Allan Anderson standing in the hallway just outside the door.

"Good morning, Allan."

"Good morning, Mr. Reeves," Allan replied. "I know you just arrived, but I've got something important to show you." He held up the *London Mail* for Reeves to see.

“Very well, then. Come on in.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“You don’t mind if I get a cup of tea, do you?”

“No, not at all,” Allan answered.

Reeves picked up the telephone on his desk and pushed a couple of buttons.

“Good morning, Margaret. Could I trouble you for my usual morning cup of tea?” He looked at Allan and placed his hand over the mouthpiece. “Would you like something, Allan?”

“No, thank you, Mr. Reeves. I’ve had my coffee already.”

“That will be all then, Margaret.” Reeves hung up the phone.

Reeves’s office was typical for an embassy staff member of his level. It measured twenty feet by twenty feet and had two tall, wide windows framed with elegant drapery that looked out over the London cityscape. The usual assortment of office furniture filled the room. The pieces included a large oak desk, two upholstered side chairs placed directly in front of the desk, a matching oak credenza behind it, and two four-shelf bookcases, which were placed against the wall on opposite sides of the room. A picture of the president and secretary of state hung on the wall behind the desk and an American flag flanked the credenza. It had an air of officialdom.

Reeves gestured toward one of the side chairs. “Have a seat, Allan.”

“Thank you, sir.” Allan took one of the side chairs and Reeves sat down in the other.

Phillip Reeves had come to like and respect Allan because he was a hard worker and had the makings of a good analyst. Allan’s sharp wit and ability to assemble seemingly unrelated bits of information into a clear picture showed tremendous potential. Phillip appreciated that and had made Allan something of a protégé.

“So, Allan, what’s on your mind?” he asked. “What informational nugget have you uncovered in the *London Mail* this morning?”

Allan unfolded the newspaper and held it up for Reeves to see. “Well, sir,” he began, “I came across this article entitled ‘Iran Offers Economic Assistance to Poor Countries’ and I thought it

would be worth reading.” He pointed to the article on the front page. “But I was quite surprised to learn that Iran plans to provide economic aid to a number of so-called poor countries in Latin America, beginning with Cuba.”

Reeves leaned toward Allan. “Tell me more.”

“During a recent meeting between the Iranian and Cuban foreign ministers in Tehran, Iran has pledged to build or rebuild roads, water supplies, and sanitation systems as well as modern communications networks and electrical power-generating plants across Cuba and Latin America,” Allan added. “I believe that the Iranian government is trying to curry favor with governments who do not agree with U.S. foreign policy in the hopes they can turn these countries into client states.”

“What makes you say that?” Reeves asked.

“This gesture is a radical departure from what would be considered the norm of supporting other Middle Eastern or Muslim countries. The majority of the population in Latin America isn’t Muslim—in fact over ninety percent are Roman Catholic. And even in Cuba’s case, where the population is technically atheist and believes in no God, there has to be a compelling reason for Iran’s theocratic government to make this kind of commitment.”

“What purpose would that serve, Allan?”

“That’s precisely it,” Allan replied. “It will give them multiple staging bases from which to launch terrorist attacks against the United States if they so choose. At the very least they know that we will have to take the perceived threat seriously. In addition to committing additional military and budgetary resources, it creates a diversion in our own backyard, which they may be able to take advantage of.”

Reeves sat there for a moment quietly thinking. He said nothing. Instead, he simply looked out one of the windows out across the broad London skyline. It was obvious to Allan that his mind was processing the last few moments of conversation, much like a computer’s hard drive whirrs and clicks as data is being input.

Finally, Reeves took a deep breath and exhaled with a big sigh. He stroked the back of his head and looked at Allan.

“So, what’s the bottom line here? What do you think the Iranians are really up to?”

“I believe it’s a clever ruse,” Allan suggested, “designed to be cover for staging terrorist attacks against the United States. Cuba is only ninety miles from south Florida. There’s no telling what they could do from that location.”

“I see your point,” Reeves replied. “But I don’t think the Iranians would be that bold—or stupid, for that matter—to risk a massive retaliatory strike against their nation by using Cuba or some other Latin American country to launch an attack against us. It would be very easy for us to connect the dots in this case—there would be no ambiguity in the evidence against them. They couldn’t hide their involvement, and I just don’t believe they’d chance it.”

“Then what do you think they’re up to?” Allan asked.

“There are plenty of places around the world besides the Middle East where U.S. foreign policy isn’t popular. That’s what they’re taking advantage of.” Reeves shrugged. “Iran is simply trying to annoy the hell out of us by meddling in foreign affairs under our very noses—especially since they know there’s very little we can do about it.”

Reeves smiled politely. “Great work, Allan. But I think Iran is really nothing more than a gadfly buzzing around our head—just a nuisance and nothing more. I wouldn’t worry about it.”

“Okay, sir,” Allan replied, refolding the newspaper lying in his lap. “I just thought I’d make you aware of it.”

Reeves nodded. “I appreciate it, Allan. If you do come across anything else that leads you to believe it’s more than that, though, please be sure to bring it to my attention right away.”

“I will, sir. You can bet on it.”

Allan tucked the *London Times* under his arm and stood up to leave. “Thank you for your time this morning, Mr. Reeves,” he added, making his way to the door.

Allan was seething inside. *Bring it to your attention? God-damned right I will. You can bet your Ivy League ass on it, mister!*