**GOVT 1882**

**HARVARD UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SCHOOL**

**THE CRISIS GAME**

It is April, 1984.

Less than five years ago, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Soviet forces swept into that country in order to prevent the fall of a government friendly to Moscow. This was the first time the USSR had enforced loyalty to its own bloc outside of its traditional alliance in Eastern Europe, the Warsaw Pact.

In the ensuing four years, Soviet forces stabilized the government in Kabul, but fighting broke out all over Afghanistan. The Afghan opposition is a collection of forces ranging from Islamic extremists to secular patriots who simply want the Soviets to leave. Refugees have streamed out of the country; there is evidence that there have been attacks by Afghan rebels across the border into the Soviet Union itself.

Three months ago, Iranian “communists” in the north of Iran declared that they wanted Soviet protection from the Islamic regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Several areas along the Iran-Afghanistan border went into chaos as the young Islamic revolutionary regime was caught off guard by a rebellion that was unexpectedly (and suspiciously) well-armed.

No one expected much of the disorder in the Iranian north, which was at least in part Soviet-sponsored. The world, including the U.S., assumed the mullahs would execute the rebels and be done with it.

That all changed two weeks ago. The Ayatollah and his advisors were killed, assassinated in a bombing in Tehran. Civil war almost instantly broke out in Iran, with many units of the Iranian military (those not bogged down fighting Iraq, that is) going into open revolt against the hated Revolutionary Guards.

Iran is now ruled by a coalition government that includes Iranian Communists who have called for Soviet “help.” In reality, however, the Iranian Provisional Government rules almost nothing beyond downtown Tehran, as no one, East or West, recognizes any of the smaller governments (ranging from Islamists to Communists) as legitimate.

Iran is breaking apart and there is chaos throughout the Persian Gulf region.

No major powers have been involved in this blood feud among the Iranians.

Until now.

To make matters worse, the two old men running the two most powerful nations in the world are both dead. Yuri Andropov, although only 70, was fighting kidney failure and died in late 1983. He was replaced by a man few people in the West have ever heard of, Nikolai Gvosdev. The only thing certain is that Gvosdev, knowing Andropov was dying, systematically removed all his competitors from the Soviet leadership, especially any known to be in favor of improved relations with the West.

Meanwhile, the oldest U.S. president, Ronald Reagan, passed away from natural causes at the age of 73, only three months into a landslide second term, and a week before the Iranian situation exploded. Reagan was so confident of victory in 1984 that he made history by placing a woman on the Republican ticket as Vice President, parting ways with George H.W. Bush after a single uncomfortable term in the White House together. When Reagan unexpectedly died, she became president, and the Senate subsequently confirmed her choice of a new vice president.

Two new groups of leaders.

A crisis in the most explosive part of the world.

Two massive alliance systems totaling some three dozen countries, hundreds of millions of people, and 40,000 nuclear warheads scattered all around the world.

Good luck.