

A Letter from the Publisher

The French poet André Breton, leader of the surrealist movement, once defined surrealism as the juxtaposition of the familiar with the fantastic. As TIME correspondents moved through the strange netherworld of the arms trade for this week's cover story, they reflected on their own surrealist experiences—sometimes comical, other times ominous—of encountering weapons both familiar and fantastic, in places both ordinary and exotic. TIME Correspondent Lee Griggs recalled watching a multiple rocket launcher known as a "Stalin organ" being unloaded from a Soviet ship at Luanda harbor in 1975 during the civil war in Angola. To his surprise, the Angolans did not seem alarmed by the arrival of such heavy firepower. "Organs go in churches," said one. "Churches belong to God. He will not let that organ make war."

The strangest "arms bazaar" that TIME Correspondent Bruce van Voorst had ever seen was a collection of grimy peasant tents spread out on a dusty knoll outside the town of Mahabad, in the Kurdish mountains of western Iran. There, a clientele of mercenaries and international agents milled about, examining Israeli-made UZI automatics, Chinese and Soviet

AK-47s, boxes of grenades, pre-World War II Czech-made Brno rifles and spanking new U.S. Colt .45 automatics. "For the serious customer," says Van Voorst, "a salesman would casually discharge a few rounds into a nearby hillside."

TIME's Bangkok correspondent David DeVoss found an equally thriving market in Dara Adam Khail, a mud-splattered tribal settlement in Pakistan's North-West Frontier. Visiting in the early days of January 1980, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, DeVoss asked the most venerable gunsmith in Dara for a "beginner's weapon." From beneath a pile of Sten guns, the man unearthed what DeVoss thought was a ballpoint pen. But the pen could accommodate a .25-cal. slug that would kill at close range.

The cover story was researched by Betty Satterwhite Sutter, who uses non-lethal ballpoint pens, but has worked on so many armament stories during the past five years that she admits, "My dreams are invaded by visions of AK-47 rifles and rocket launchers." Associate Editor Walter Isaacson, who wrote the cover, concluded after assessing the thousands of words filed by TIME correspondents: "The arms trade has created a global powder keg."

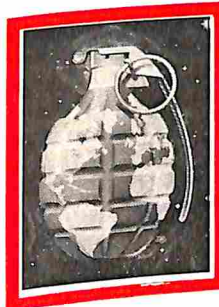


Van Voorst, center, with soldiers in Iran, 1979

John A. Meyers

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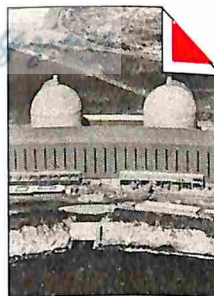
Cover: Illustration by Roger Huysen



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