

Robert Kennedy and some other students and dissidents that took place in 1963. Do you recall anything about that?

Talbot: I remember that they called on him, that he received them. We had felt that it was unwise for him to receive them personally. He did it anyway. He listened to their complaints. He gave them some assurances that the U.S. legal and judicial processes would be followed out in this country, in other words, we would not permit outsiders to come in and not have [?] it with our laws in dealing with individuals. He was somewhat careful though in what he said to them, actually. It was the symbolism of his receiving them that caused the anxieties.

Q: Did this get back to the Shah?

Talbot: Oh, yes, absolutely.

Q: Were there complaints about this?

Talbot: Oh, yes. I had the Iranian Ambassador in my office immediately complaining about it.

Q: How would you respond to that kind of situation?

Talbot: By pointing out that to in those Americans cabinet members have a certain freedom of action that--we were sorry if he felt that the U.S. government was encouraging these people by

this, whereas in fact, as the Attorney General had said, we would follow American laws exactly on this. And we would be as happy as he if the Iranian students could have more enthusiasm for their government.

Q: I'm sure they were not too pleased at that response. Now all and all, looking back at the Kennedy Administration, how would you characterize the state of U.S.-Iran relations during this period. It seemed like there some troubled moments that you're suggesting?

Talbot: Oh, I'd say that the Kennedy Administration was hopeful of an improved relationship, of improved conditions within Iran, that it regarded the Iranian relationship as important, regarded the Shah with both appreciation and skepticism and, therefore, it supported the Shah's major activities. It sought to draw the Shah into policy discussions more widely than just Iran. And it pressed the Shah, if that's the verb, to do a better job at home.

The Kennedy Administration wanted to see the CENTO area, the Northern Tier countries, increase in prosperity and justice and modernization. So it was, if you will, a middle course between cutting off the Shah because we don't like to deal with dictators on the one side, and on the other side embracing the Shah as happened in the 1970s.

Q: Now, after Lyndon Johnson became President in late 1963, was there any outwardly shift or modification of policy toward the Shah, or did he continue pretty much on the same basis under Johnson?

Talbot: My impression is that it continued pretty much on same basis. My impression is that Iran was not at the top of his agenda or near the top. He had less of the, if you will, missionary zeal to try to see conditions corrected in other countries. My recollection is that, by then, we didn't find issues in Iran quite as compelling for us in relation to other issues in the area. This bureau as I mentioned was handling also Arab-Israel problems, also with Greece, Turkey and Cyprus. In 1964, we had a major Cyprus crisis. Also, Pakistan and Afghanistan--at a time when Pakistan closed the Afghan border, forced it into doing all its trade with the Soviet Union except for the little bit that went to Iran. And of course India-Pakistan, the 1965 war. So there were a good many other things happening in that part of the world that, as I recall, meant that somewhat less energy went into the question of our relationships with the Shah.

Q: There were some sort of relaxation of interest in pressing for reforms to some extent?

Talbot: Some relaxation in pressing for reforms, yes.

Q: The one issue that came up in 1964 was the updating of the military agreement under which the government of Iran would exempt U.S. military personnel from prosecution under local law. Do you recall that you discussed or dealt with when you were as Assistant Secretary of the State Department?

Talbot: This was an issue which was coming up then with respect to several countries. It was part of the nationalist upsurge. It arose in, oh, if I recall, Pakistan, maybe Thailand, some other countries as well. It was an awkward issue for the U.S., because on the one hand we had traditionally not required extra-territoriality. On the other hand, to have American soldiers on duty there subject to local jurisprudence could raise some very difficult questions. Because soldiers do get drunk and they do have accidents in their cars. They make women pregnant and all those kinds of things. So we were trying to resist that pressure if we could. You may know how it came out. My recollection is that we saved most of it, perhaps giving Iran some jurisdiction over certain things in cases or something.

Q: Let me just stop this and turn this over.

[end of side two, tape one; beginning side one, tape two]

Do you recall much about the Iranian reaction to this treaty?

Talbot: Well, I know that there were Iranian influences that didn't like it. But I guess I don't really remember.

Q: Okay. Also, I have read that public opinion polls in the early 1960s showed that young Iranians had a rather critical view of the U.S. role in Iran and U.S. policy. The polls showed that they thought, for example, that the U.S. was propping up the status quo or that U.S. aid was designed to make the rich richer and things like that. Part of these polls that were taken--well, I guess USIA or

something like that. But was there any effort to sort of influence opinion in Iran, to try to change the U.S. image in the public mind?

Talbot: Well, this was the USIA's mission, of course.

Q: Yes, of course.

Talbot: And it was a mission that in some respects was very successful and in other respects not at all. This was a time when Iranians became increasingly keen to get to this country for education or whatever, when our libraries and Tehran and other cities, the USIA libraries, were full of people coming to get at books to read. If I would describe it as the opinion, cultural relationships with Iran were strong. The U.S. had culturally and intellectually in its universities and so on what lots of young Iranian wanted. In the opinion field, we faced the same problems in Iran which we did and have done in so many countries of the world, a feeling which the Russians always express, that the American people are good people but the government is bad. The argument precisely in Iran was as it has been in Pakistan, in the Philippines, in many other countries, that we are supporting a dictatorial regime rather than the people of the country. Wherever there are dictatorships of the left or of the right, this is the kind of issue that comes up. We live with the charges, try to have enough programs that reach out to the people to blunt those charges. But, as I say, the attitudes and opinions expressed on this issue tend to diverge sharply from the cultural relationships in terms of what individuals really want out

of life. It's a phenomenon of our day, I guess.

Q: Well, what kind of efforts were there to, say, influence opinion forming elites in countries like Iran? Were they out to just influence the press there. What were the information programs that were carried on there?

Talbot: Well, the information programs included a whole variety of things. We sent cultural groups of various kinds to Iran for performances or whatever. We sponsored academic seminars and conferences that would bring Iranian and American scholars together. We put out various publications telling more about American life and emphasized such things as community debates about policy, lots of things we hoped that Iran might pick up. We had some scholarships and fellowships for Iranians to come here. We tried to be in touch with a lot of Iranians outside the court circles.

Q: Was this a function in which the CIA, the agency, participated in any way, in terms of more covert information programs or covert efforts? From the other countries there have been documentation about efforts to influence the media and so forth. Was this ever the case in Iran that you can recall?

Talbot: I don't recall, no. I don't. The agency in Iran had two missions, really. The principal mission was to develop a channel of information about the Soviet Union and the Eastern European Block. In other words, much of the agency was external to Iran. The agency

also reported on political attitudes and so on in Iran.

Q: Those were the two main functions, sort of reporting, in terms of Iran being a border country, monitoring. How valuable or useful did the State Department officials find CIA evaluations of the situation in countries like Iran, their evaluations of stability, their prognosis for the near term future and so forth?

Talbot: They became pieces in the mosaic of judgment. Sometimes these were big and important pieces. Sometimes they were not. They had to be analyzed and judged the way anything else would be. Sometimes the agency would report that a particular person, strategically placed, one night when he was upset about something had poured out his heart on one thing or another. This could be really quite interesting. Other things could just duplicate what the consuls or the political officers in the embassy were picking up in their routine.

Q: Another thing that came up in 1964, I guess the Shah approached the U.S. Government for foreign military sales credits. Do you recall anything about that approach--the attempt to get anti-
for military sales?

Talbot: This is one of the techniques of course by which recipient countries got bit more than was possible through the regular aid legislation, the grant aid legislation. I'm sorry. I don't remember anything special about it.

Q: I read that Johnson was at first reluctant to approve the request, but later on approved it when he met with the Shah in June of 1964. Do you recall anything about that visit, the state visit in mid-1964 by the Shah?

[tape interruption]

Talbot: I guess I don't recall very much about it. It was a successful visit, again, in that we were able to get some points over. He got some points over. The relationship was strengthened rather than weakened. As I said, I think we pushed less hard that time on some of these changes.

Q: Did arms sales issues come up very often, the Shah's requests for special weapons systems? Was that an issue that came up in discussion at the agencies?

Talbot: Yes, yes, yes. The Shah was ambitious for modernization of his armed forces. I would have to say that, in our little group, there continued to be divided opinions but not very strong support for the Shah's ambitions.

Q: Was the Pentagon more responsive, perhaps?

Talbot: Sometimes, not always--sometimes.

Q: Were there any pressures for arms sales, commercial interests

that were pressing to make a sale to Tehran? Was that ever a problem at this point? It was later on.

Talbot: It didn't come to my level if it was. I think the commercial people usually worked more in the environs of the Pentagon than the State Department.

Q: You mentioned earlier about petroleum, the Shah's interest in increasing his share of income from petroleum revenue. Was this something that he brought up from time to time, in terms of his share of income from the consortium operations? Was that a question that came up?

Talbot: Yes, he was convinced that the producers ought to get a larger share of the profits of the industry. And he was pressing the producers in Iran to change the terms of the contract. The British, of course, were strong in their own industry in Iran at that time. So they took a lot of this heat. But they kept us informed.

Q: Did the State Department have a response when the Shah brought these things up? What kind of a response did it make?

Talbot: I don't recall that we took it as a matter of principal very strongly at that point. It was a question really of the Shah's negotiation with the companies.

Q: What did that at that level--

Talbot: At that stage, it was all within the context of
or exactly .

Q: During 1963 to 1965, Senator McClellan chaired hearing on charges made by an exile tribal leader named Khaibar Khan.

Talbot: I don't think I know about it.

Q: Apparently he charged that the U.S. aid funds were diverted to the Shah's court, to the Shah's family and so forth, which, I guess, McClellan held hearings on these by a special operations committee or subcommittee. Do you recall this being an issue that came up with the Shah's representatives here in the embassy?

Talbot: The detailed hearings, as I recall, were handled mainly by AID. It seems to me that, again, the Iranian ambassador was very unhappy that this was happening. And we had to tell him that this was part of our process, that there was nothing to be done about it except to try to be sufficiently responsive with information to disprove whatever charges they may made.

Q: Do you know how the issue was resolved? I'm not quite clear about it myself what happened in the end. McClellan stopped his hearings at some point but--

Talbot: I don't know. I don't remember.

Q: Okay. By 1965 or so, how did U.S. officials see the situation in Iran? Did they more or less assume that the Shah was taking a course that could assure him a more secure position over time in terms of his internal reform program? Were they fairly confident about his position at this point compared to let's say the early 1960s?

Talbot: I think there was a belief that he'd made some progress. There was disappointment he hadn't done more. And there was anxiety because some of the vulnerabilities had not yet been taken care of. I think that there was the opinion that we would be dealing with him for quite a long time and that we were only partially influential in our dealings with him.

Q: Are there any other major developments that I haven't mentioned that you can recall that might be worth talking about, any incidents or issues which we haven't covered up to this point?

Talbot: They don't come to my mind right now, no.

Q: I forgot to ask you earlier, when you went to Iran who were some of the major personalities that you dealt with besides the Shah? Do you have any recollections of any specific individuals in the Shah's cabinet that left an impression with you?

Talbot: If I could dig back to my own date book, I would get that fairly closely. I'd rather not mention one or two because I may be

forgetting the ones that are more important.

Q: That's okay. So in mid 1965 you became Ambassador to Greece and later on you were president of the Asia Society. Did you have any connections with Iranian issues at any of those later years or was it pretty much off your agenda?

Talbot: It was pretty much off the agenda. Now, in the Asia Society, we would occasionally have an Iranian exhibit or program of some kind where I would meet people. My one other substantial contact with Iran was attendance at a symposium arranged by the Shahbanu (Empress Farah) in Persepolis in 1974, I think it was.

You've seen that book, haven't you?

Q: I think so.

Talbot: Well, this was arranged really by the Aspen Institute and brought an international group of people to listen to technocrats in Iran, talk about what they were doing and to react, to comment. And it was a very interesting session.

Q: So you spent time in Iran at that point.

Talbot: Yes.

Q: What were your impressions of the country compared to, say, ten or twelve years earlier. What did you see?

Talbot: Signs of real development in a variety of ways, more factories, again the same litany almost, that the roads were better. They seemed to be a broader educated group. There had been education that certainly had gotten farther into the villages. A number of these indices looked better. It was interesting in retrospect that one of the critiques offered by the foreign participants in that conference was the question as to whether in this pell-mell push for modernization--and by that time the Shah had said he wanted to make Iran the next Italy--whether enough attention was being made to keeping the country cohesive and involving everybody or whether some fragmentation would be possible.

Q: Did you see the Shah at that point? Did you meet with him?

Talbot: No, I did not. The Shahbanu, at that point, I think, was trying hard to introduce some influences to counter what by then had become--these are my words, certainly not hers--more megalomaniac, with less sensitivity to what oppositionally held groups were doing.

Somewhere in that period of the increase of oil prices, the Shah concluded that he could do it on his own and that the Americans and everybody else would have to listen to him. This may be more difficult to deal with. Again, I don't know what Douglas MacArthur may have said to you. But it seemed to me that that was a time of--the Shah was on a track that was bound to cause trouble for us. George Ball has identified the turning point as about 1972. And I think that probably is right.

Q: In terms of the expansion of arms sales and the militarization--

Talbot: And, as Gary Sick says, the kind of abrogation of American independent judgment as to things in Iran, and the Nixon-Kissinger approach that the Shah is our man and therefore we support him and will accept his judgment on what's not to be done and provide him arms aid, and so on. This was an extraordinarily different approach to Iran from the one that we had in the 1960s.

Q: I appreciate your time with this interview.

Talbot: Okay.

Q: Thank you very much.

[end of interview]

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