accept Amini, who would be a reform candidate.

Then there was a predictable sort of backlash that, well, if Amini is put in by the Americans, then there's probably going to be pressure by the Soviets or other foreign powers or other unknown people, who will try to undermine that. There was always that sort of dynamic tension that whatever happens, there's somebody else who's going to try to undermine it. So there was a little bit of that.

But in my early days in Tabriz, I didn't have any sense of impending political crisis or anything like that. There were various events, including, later on, an attack on students at Tehran University. You know, a lot of heads bashed in and that sort of thing. So that in the news from Tehran there was a great deal of periodic ferment and questioning and people wondering what's going to go on. But in Azerbaijan things just went sort of quietly on from day to day and people didn't seem to be all that concerned about these various indications of ferment down in Tehran.

Q: You mentioned this thing about official U.S. pressure on the Shah to appoint a reformist candidate--to appoint Prime Minister like Amini. Was there something to that story, that there actually was U.S. pressure?

Bolster: I don't think so, but on the other hand the Shah was always extremely well aware of what was going on here and what

perceptions were in Washington. The fact that he, during his reign, went through a series of Presidents-- I mean, it's really incredible how long-- when you look back on it, how long he had a major role. We were dealing a lot of times with dictators or strong men who came and went. I mean, Syngman Rhee and Menderez and, you know, you can cite a lot of people over time that we dealt with-- Diem in Vietnam and so on-- who came, had their day and went. And the Shah went on and on for a long period of time. So he had a tremendously

[TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

Q: We're talking about the Shah and his durability, I guess.

Bolster: Well, and his very great knowledge of what was going on in the States. He had perceptive Ambassadors here. You could say what you wanted about their backbone or lack thereof, and they were all pretty much his creatures. Whatever he wanted done, they did. But they reported a lot of information back, and he also read widely and visited a lot of people. I mean, he had people coming in to see him all hours of the day and night. He was a fairly open person, despite the controls around him. He did see a lot of people at all kinds of weird times.

So he was well aware of what was going on in the States and what people were thinking about Iran. I know just from the ambience of the time that he was aware of Kennedy's feelings about support for right wing leaders. If they wanted to continue

to have our support, they had to show that they were willing to bring some reforms into their governments. So he didn't need to be pushed by the government to do this. He knew that this was something that was desired by the Kennedy Administration and I think that's why he appointed Amini. He felt that Amini was well regarded, and he was. I mean, when Amini was first appointed there were a lot of favorable articles in the U.S. press about how the Shah picked this reformist Prime Minister, a man with all kinds of knowledge and training in economics. You know, who would do a creditable job of reforming the country. So I think that's why he picked him.

But as soon as he made one move like that, then the Iranians always thought of, you know, whose interest is undermined? And does the Shah really support him all the way? Having picked him, does the Shah still support him? There was always that question. Is the Shah still behind Amini or is he sort of maneuvering to let Amini go too far and then to be yanked out, and which then started to happen.

Q: Early in Amini's role as Prime Minister, there was-- he ruled by decree for a while? I guess the majlis was dissolved, I think it was some time in '61. There was lots of agitation, controversy over this by the National Front Administration against rule by decree and this solution of the problem and so forth. Was there much opposition evident, opposition activity evident in Tabriz at all over this? I think you sort of

suggested that it wasn't.

Bolster: No. It was quiet.

Q: Did the National Front have much of a presence in the town at all? The National Front people? Was there any constituency there?

Bolster: There was some, but I think it was minor. Many times people considered all these machinations in Tehran to be sort of foreign to their interests. They weren't really bound up in it.

I think what brought Tabriz and Azerbaijan into political ferment really was the Shah's reform program, because as common-sensical as some of the reforms sound to us, they were quite dramatic changes in a more traditional area like Azerbaijan. For example, the most controversial one in my area of Azerbaijan was giving women the right to vote. I mean, that was just unheard of. You know, land reform sounds like a very revolutionary idea, but, in fact, it wasn't. It had been already tried and done to some extent during the Pishevari regime. He had redistributed land to poor people and claimed that he was leading the way to effective land reform. So people, when they first heard about the Shah's plan for land reform said-- oh, well, you know, we've had some of this before and Pishevari meted out land to people he liked, and took it from the big landowners and gave it to people who were beholden to him. So the Shah will probably just

do something similar. You know, there was a lot of skepticism about the whole thing, but it wasn't revolutionary in the way that giving the women the vote was. That was just something that Azerbaijan couldn't understand, because liberated women were not unusual at all in Tehran, but they were in Tabriz.

And there were liberated women. There were women who were teachers at the University and there were women who organized seminars on various issues or meetings, in which they discussed women's rights. There was some ferment along that line, but it was very carefully controlled, and most people just-- you know, they thought of the woman's place as in the home. Just very simple. The man did everything outside the home. He even did all the marketing. You'd see men coming back from the bazaar carrying, you know, all the food for a week. The main food that they buy. Milk and-- other merchants came around with carts and sold food right in front of the house. I mean, you'd have the guy come by-- the greengrocer would come by in a cart and you'd see women coming out with their chadors on and bargain with him for potatoes and things like that. But anything that required going to the market, going to the bazaar, was done by men, and the women stayed in the house. They went to see other women, the chador was their clothing out in the street, and then into the house, and off comes the chador and they're wearing a Paris gown underneath, with the latest short skirts and high-heeled shoes and whatever. Lipstick-- whatever. But in the street they were always covered up.

Anyway, the idea that the Shah was going to let women vote was really incredible. I had one Colonel who lived near me. I talked to him about some of these issues. He came in for sort of a neighborly chat and I said, "What do you think about giving women some rights?" He said, "Well, you know, it's a scientific fact that women only have half as much brain as men and I think it's dangerous to give them the right to vote, because who knows what they'll do? They might vote for anything. They just don't have the brains that men do." I mean, this was a Colonel in the Iranian Army who had this view of women.

So the idea that one of the Shah's reform points was giving women the vote, that was really a hard pill to swallow in Azerbaijan. The literacy corps, the health corps, the land reform, the Houses of Justice, so many things that were part of the White Revolution's reforms at first, I think six points and then nine and twelve. I mean, it just grew like Topsy. But women's rights were really the toughest one to sell in Azerbaijan.

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1] [BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

Q: You said you did some political reporting from Tabriz during this period?

Bolster: Yes. We shared it to some extent. The Consul did most, because he had obviously much more access to leading

people. I mean, he would see a Governor-General much more often than I would, and he would be involved in high level meetings and ceremonies all the time. When the Shah came on visits, which he did a couple of times while I was there, if the Consul was there, he was the one who was invited to the ceremonies and so on. Although I was invited too and so I shook the Shah's hand on a couple of occasions.

He had more of the exposure, but I did some of the more routine political reporting, like the biographic reporting and factual material on political parties that might start up and political activities where some research was required. You know, to take the time to study the press or gather background information.

Eagleton was very well checked out, not only on current issues, but also on a lot of other issues: government policy and the attitudes of Azerbaijan is toward the central government. Maybe he would have some interviews occasionally with Azerbaijani political figures sitting in the majlis or in Tehran when they returned to Tabriz. He would have a line on that.

He was succeeded by John Howison, who was another very capable officer, who had been in Iran earlier than most of that period. And Howison also spoke Turkish, so he could make a stab at Azerbaijani Turki. They distinguish between Azerbaijani Turki and Islamboli Turki, which was the real Turkish, but Azerbaijani Turki was a sort of variant language. So that's the way we split it up.

Q: Did you have contacts with the local government, the provincial government there, that you met with from time to time to talk about politics? Who were some of the people that you got to know?

Bolster: Well, of course I met the Governor-General on a number of occasions, and I would speak to other officials, like the Provincial Chief of Education or the Provincial Head of Agriculture. A lot of my contacts were in relation to land reforms--the political, but mainly economic aspects of land reform. So I would go to see Mr. Behbudi.

Q: That was the Governor?

Bolster: No, he was the Provincial Agricultural Chief during part of the time I was there-- to get an angle on what was happening in land reform. From his standpoint, you know. When it spread-- from Maragheh it spread eventually out from that pilot area to larger areas of the country. So then the original methods that were used in Maragheh were supposed to be practiced by agricultural officials throughout the country. So, whereas at first it was a pilot program, then it was spreading out.

One of the men that I got to know fairly well down in Maragheh was a Mr. Khalkhali. He was a career agriculture official from Tehran. A very soft-spoken, but very intense guy,

who really I thought had a lot of good ideas. I saw a lot of other officials down there, but he's one who stands out in my mind as a very effective person.

So as the land reform program went on-- well, first, we of course reported on the plans, and then when it was inaugurated, we reported on the specifics of how it was being done. Then when the Shah came up to hand out the first deeds, I wasn't there, but John Howison was invited, so he went down and observed the affair and reported on all aspects of that. It was fascinating, because he was at this affair where the peasants come forward and each one would, when his name was called, step forward to get deeds to his land. They would all, you know, drop down on their knees and kiss his feet, or put their hands on his feet, and grovel before the great man. And then he would majestically lean down and sort of lift them up, you know, like, well, now you can come up in the world and you can be like a real man. And then he would present them the deed and, of course, they would then bow again to him and maybe try to kiss his hand or something, and off they'd go and the next one would come forward.

Well, after all this was over, there was going to be some kind of a luncheon or something. And John said he was looking around for a place to relieve himself, looking for a men's room somewhere, and he was going to this building. And he happened to go around a corner and caught a glimpse of the Shah in this room, with an attendant swabbing down his arms with alcohol. To clean off--

Q: From the dusty peasants.

Bolster: Clean off the germs he might have gotten from these peasants, who were holding onto his hands and kissing him as they got their deeds.

So this was sort of the ambience of the period. I mean, it was really a dramatic change. And I still-- maybe my mind is colored a little bit by nostalgia, but I was really impressed with the beginnings of land reform. I was determined to present an objective view to the Department, because I talked to a lot of people in the diplomatic or consulate community before land reform ever started. Some of them had been there longer than I, so I wanted to get their ideas. And I remember the French Consul, he was just--you know, just totally dismissing it all. You know how the French do. "C'est ridicule!" [Imitates French diplomat] You know, it was just one more silly thing that was never going to happen.

And I thought, well, you know, maybe it won't happen, but I've got to be in position to at least analyze this. So we started doing a lot of reporting. And John was very good about it. He gave me free reign to do a lot of research, and, of course, everything I wrote he had to approve, but I tried to be very methodical about it and report the facts as I got them. I was interested, I've still got the reference upstairs: there's a book put out by the Land Tenure Center up at the University of

Wisconsin that's sort of a source book on materials about land reform, and there's a citation there, "U.S. Consulate Tabriz Reporting", with my name, saying there's a series of basic reports on this program, including sample land deeds that were--see, I went down there and talked to these officials, and I said, I understand you're going to be presenting deeds to the peasants. How do you figure it, and all these special terms about the six divisions of a village. Some landlords owned many villages. Some owned parts of villages, that totaled many, many villages, but they were just parts of each village. So that was called parakandeh, which means parts of different villages spread out in a certain region.

There were all kinds of intricacies to the whole subject of land reform. So I reported everything that I got, that I felt was factual, and tried to integrate it into factual presentations and then analyzing what was happening and what we thought of these developments.

One neat trick that they did, for example, was they based the valuation of the landlord's villages on what he'd paid in taxes in previous years. So obviously a landlord who had under-reported the value of his land for years, in order to get minimal taxes, would then be told, well, we're going to apply this formula, the value is X times what you reported over this period of time is the value of your village. And then he would scream, oh, my God, you're taking away my villages. And aha! here are your returns. You reported the value of your land. So we're

just basing it on what you yourself said. I mean, I thought it was really a clever way to handle it.

And they really did, in the beginning, try to not only take the land away from landlords, which was the easiest part, but they tried to set up a support structure for the villagers. They had cooperatives, where they provided seeds and fertilizer and various inputs at cost, and they provided credit. They tried to get the villagers to come forth and form these cooperatives, where they put money in and then got services out. And they really, in the early days, did a very good job at that. I talked to a lot of peasants who were really very excited about the idea that finally this land was going to be theirs. You know, they kept telling all these stories about how they'd farmed the land for all these years and everything had always been taken away. I won't go into all these details, because it's a very complicated subject that many writers have written on. Ann Lambton and, of course, Hooglund [Eric] has written a book, which I have upstairs, about land reform in Iran.

But there are some pessimistic assessments that have been made, with which I disagree, on the early stages. I felt the net result in the first year or two of land reform was very positive. I felt that the output of crops actually increased. Now, of course, you have to factor in weather, and as I recall, the weather was favorable the first couple of years of land reform. So you could say that's a variable that has to be evaluated. But aside from the weather, I felt that the people

who got land were going to put a lot more effort into it.

You know, the landlords spread the word that these peasants really didn't know what to do with the land. They'd always depended on the landlords to tell them what to plant where. And that was really a lot of bull, because I'd talked to these people and they'd said, well, the landlord is always away and his overseer comes to me and says, what do you think about putting in the barley on such-and-such a day? And I tell him, well, I think maybe we ought to wait another week, because of so-and-so. I mean, these people were experienced on the land. They knew from year to year what had happened, and they were very knowledgeable.

The landlord was always away. A few of the good ones would come out and show some interest in their property, but a lot of them would just live in Tehran, and as long as they got the money from the overseer, they were satisfied. So the overseer, or manager, was the one who really represented the landlord, and some of them were pretty brutal. Some were fair. There was a wide range of experience. But I think, generally speaking, the peasants were the ones who really had the know-how, and the idea that they couldn't function without the landlord to guide them is ridiculous.

Q: In terms of what you saw around Azerbaijan and Tabriz, was the distribution of land more equitable after land reform? I mean, substantially more equitable? Were there still inequities

that existed?

Bolster: It was much more equitable, yes, because obviously they started with the most vulnerable people, the landlords who owned hundreds of villages, or thirty villages or whatever. So that was more uniformly popular. Obviously when they got to what they called the second stage, where they started going after the smaller landlords, then they got into a lot of sensitivities, because land was an investment for many people and you found small merchants or, say, college professors and-- you know, all kinds of people who had money would put it into land. So then, when they decided that after taking away all these large landlords, they were going to start going after the people who just owned, say, less than a village. Then you got into tramping on a lot of toes, because you got some guy who said, well, I worked thirty years in my job and I spent money as an investment to own part of this village, and now it's going to be-- part of it taken away from me. It's not fair.

So there were a lot of smaller fish who were much less happy about this. The landlords, the big landlords, were obviously sort of an easy target, but when you spread it to smaller holdings, you got into much more unhappiness. But I think basically what happened is just that the pilot program, as good as it was, once it was spread further throughout the country, it was just beyond the resources of the government to maintain this sort of support activity, which they did in

Maragheh to make a good start.

So land reform became somewhat less effective later on. Ted Eliot and I wrote a lot about this together, because when I went to Tehran then, after Tabriz-- after a home leave, I came back-- we did several analyses over time of land reform programs. Myself doing it from the political standpoint and Ted more from the economic standpoint. Although there was a lot of inter-mixture, because I did some studies of villages, where I had some data from the University in Tehran on specific villages, and I went back to the same villages, using a sort of benchmark study. In considerable detail, like I would go and call on a particular person-- Mr. Abdulahi, for example, whatever the name was. And I would say, now, Mr. Abdulahi, I'm here just to find out information about your village. I have these studies that were done by the University of Tehran and some people talked to you then and I would like to just see what's changed and get your ideas, if you don't mind talking to me.

They would always agree and I would say, "Well, now you had sixteen sheep before and thirty chickens and this many hectares of land. How are things for you now?" And he'd say, "Well, I've got many more sheep." I mean, he just told me all the things that had changed, and I tried with these studies to get some idea of what was happening at the village level, and there was a lot of progress over time.

So anyway, we cooperated on some of these analyses, under which my village studies were sort of individually done. Some

conclusions were brought together from those into this reporting that we did, and I think we did a reasonably good job of trying to analyze country-wide how the land reform was progressing.

Q: Was there much of a U.S. technical role in assisting the people in Tehran who were planning the land reform programs? Was there any technical assistance given by the United States to expedite land reform?

Bolster: Very little. Because the Iranians wanted to make it their show. They didn't want it to be an American reform. I mean, there was some support on a technical level, I would say. If they wanted to get better seed or this or that, they would ask for some advice and help, but on the ground in Maragheh it was an Iranian show. Arsanjani was a fantastic character and--

Q: I was going to ask you about him, actually.

Bolster: I had a lot of respect for him, and obviously he-- he got in trouble, because he built a base of support by his very energetic pushing of the land reform program. There was the handing out of deeds in Maragheh, at which he was present. And then they had a tremendous meeting down in Tehran, the first anniversary of land reform, as I recall. They had this tremendous Congress of the Shah and the people-- is that what it was called? Anyway, it was about land reform. And the Shah

spoke and Arsanjani spoke, and I think after that the Shah quickly realized that Arsanjani was building this base of support that made him a potential rival.

Because, you know, that's the historical context in which you operate there, that the ruler is always-- you know, there are similes about the wheat field. The ruler looks at his subjects as a wheat field, and as long as they're all at the same level and predictable, then it's okay, but if a few stalks start to go higher, then you've got to be ready to cut them off, because he can't afford to have anybody rivaling him.

So in that context, once Arsanjani sort of began to-- and the Shah knew that he might use this program as a political base of support-- not that he was challenging the Shah. He didn't challenge him in any open way. It was always "under Your Majesty's wise leadership" and so on and so on and so on. But, you know, in the popular mind Arsanjani became associated with the success of the land reform program at the beginning. And so the Shah just took him out of the job and sent him off to be Ambassador to Italy.

Q: I've seen some State Department reports from that time. I think early 1963, mid-1963, when Arsanjani was on his way down. They suggest that there was some concern in Washington that he might be moving too fast on land reform in any case--that might be upsetting established interests and there might be problems with investment and economic instability because he was pushing

so fast in the program. Was that a concern in Tehran and among U.S. officials in Iran, that he was pushing too fast on the issue?

Bolster: Yes. Yes, it was. And again I'll show my personal bias, because in my view this is one of the typical attitudes you get on the part of people who make a profession of agricultural development. I mean, this may sound really negative, but I've read a lot of stuff about land reform and there's a school of thought that says you can't do anything until you have accurate records. At the beginning of everything, you've got to have a cadastral survey and know exactly who owns what piece of land and so on.

Well, in my view this means you'll never do anything, because land reform is very difficult anyway. In every country there is a complex pattern of how ownership has evolved over the years. And family ownership and primogeniture rules and--everything. I mean, it's just fantastically complicated. If you say you can't do anything until you have all the mechanical tools in place, then you never do anything.

And my thought was that Arsanjani and his people had just the right balance. They went in and they looked at the facts. They tried to get as much information as they could. They really did a lot of basic survey kind of work. But once you decide to do the program, you've got to take certain facts as given and go on with it. Otherwise you'll never do anything. And I think the

agricultural people in AID were guilty of over-emphasis on structural problems. Sure, land reform's great, but unless they provide support for the farmers, it's going to be terrible, because production will go down and it'll be a disaster and investment will fall off.

I think that's just not true, because if you give people the land which they've been cultivating, and they have help in getting the tools which the landlord has been providing, then they work hard and they spend the money that they get. I mean, the money circulates and I think development will continue to take place. I don't think that you could say that these landlords were an engine of development, because they just took the money down to Tehran and enjoyed going to nightclubs and traveling to France--

Q: Sent it off to Swiss banks?

Bolster: and living well and sending it to Swiss banks. They didn't want to invest anything in their villages. They just wanted to take. There were obvious exceptions. I mean, my Dad knew, because as agricultural attache he went out-- in the days when he was there, he got to know a lot of these landlords and we visited their places on occasion. And a lot of happy peasants who felt that he, the landlord, was concerned about them. But there were also an awful lot of cases of just total serfdom, where people were required to do corvee labor, just like back in

the Middle Ages, the droit de seigneur, where the landlord just took whatever young girls from the village that he wanted and made them servants in his house and used them for his sexual pleasure too. I mean, there were all kinds of variations of good and bad.

But I think they took a middle ground there, where they said we can't do every kind of detail on the surveys, we'll never get started, but we also have to be careful not to be arbitrary. So let's go in there and find out what that land's being used-- but a lot of things, they were just very rudimentary. I mean, they would say that, you know, my boundary goes from this tree over to that big stone there, and then over here. The divisions of land among the peasants within a village were often very arbitrary, and sometimes the landlord changed them. He gave a favorite guy better land and somebody he didn't like, he gave them more stony land over here.

So it was very hard to say even which peasant farmed which land traditionally, because they'd been moved around. So you had to make some decisions how you were going to divide things up, and there were some inequities. But in the very beginning, when they saturated the Maragheh area with agricultural experts and seeds and fertilizer-- they even brought brand-new safes into these villages. I saw them. They installed a safe in this room and said, "Okay, this is now your cooperative fund, and for every amount of money that you contribute as villagers, we're going to match it with so much government funds." And they did that.