magazine?

Bolster: No, no, no.

Q: It was published internally.

Bolster: Yes, I misled you. No, I mean within the INR structure. In other words, producing a report that analyzed all these factors and then made a conclusion that it's likely the Shah will buy this material anyway. And it was Classified, but of course it's sent around all over the Department of State, both in Washington and overseas, as an information type of thing.

So that was looked upon unfavorably by the Embassy, because again I was taking an issue with the party line.

Q: I see the wisdom. I want to go back to this question of the contacts with the opposition a little bit, and then I have some more questions about some of the arms sales stuff in a few minutes. Now you mentioned that there are unwritten rules that junior officers could talk with opposition figures, whereas senior people were supposed to stay away from them pretty much. Was that rule ever broken in practice? Were there instances where the Ambassador or the Political Counselor met with opposition people and that led to problems with the Shah?

Bolster: Yes, there was at least one. There was at least one.

Q: Was this under Holmes or Meyer? I think I remember Meyer telling me that he had some problems, talking with one of Amini's relatives at a party or something like that.

Bolster: That may have been, but I was thinking of one where the Political Counselor, Martin Herz, had a meeting with a couple of people who had very definite ties to the bazaar and also, through other contacts, to some opposition people, and that was mentioned by the Shah at one of the Ambassador's audiences, that he was upset by learning that our Political Counselor had been in touch with these people. So that was where their policy originated.

And another factor along that same line, we discussed last time Arsanjani and what he did on land reform and how the Shah eventually perceived him as a rival and sent him off to pasture as Ambassador to Rome. After he came back to Tehran and returned to his law practice, I had been reporting on land reform for some time and I was interested in meeting with Arsanjani. And I asked Julius Holmes's permission to go and talk with Arsanjani. He said, fine. So I made the appointment and went over and talked to him for a whole evening. And found it fascinating, you know. Got his views on a lot of things. Obviously he was being careful what he said, but still it was a very worthwhile interview, I thought. And I wrote up a long Airgram on it and

sent it back.

That was to me an example of how the system should work. In other words, had the Political Counselor gone to see Arsanjani, it would have been, you know, big news. Rumors all over town that the Americans are talking to Arsanjani. What's up? I mean, the Iranians were just tremendous rumormongers. Whatever they heard, they saw all kinds of machinations behind the scenes, and they could always think of three or four tremendously complex theories that would be much more exciting than the plain truth, which might be a very simple, direct fact. But they didn't want to accept the obvious. They wanted to construct a great conspiracy theory that would be much more exciting to the rumor mill.

Anyway, I could go and talk with Arsanjani and make no splash at all, because I was just a junior officer in the Embassy and that was it.

Q: Well, by having this kind of division of labor, the Embassy was trying to avoid those kinds of rumors? If, say, Herz had met Arsanjani and there were lots of rumors, they wanted to avoid that basically? The Ambassador wanted to avoid that kind of rumor?

Bolster: Yes, this was, as I say, our modus operandi, that by doing this the Embassy could have the contacts, but at a low

enough level that it didn't excite anybody. Which I think was appropriate and which, when we talk later about my second period of time in Iran, '74-'76, I think we had unfortunately gone away from that precedent and did not have as much access as we should have had.

Q: But from Holmes to Meyer, this practice of junior officials' contacts with opposition people pretty much continued?

Bolster: As far as I recall, yes. But I didn't have very much time overlapping with Meyer, because I left in '66.

Q: That's right. Did the information that you picked up from your contacts, did you get any sense of how much interest people in Washington had in the kinds of reports that you were sending back about your meetings with opposition people and the information you gleaned from those?

Bolster: Oh, yes, we got occasional analyses of our reporting. There was even a set form that was used to evaluate reports from the field, and we would occasionally get a copy of one of these, showing that someone had read what we'd written and commented on what was good or what was needed to improve it or whatever. So there was a sense of some feedback.

Q: That's interesting.

Bolster: But, you know, as I mentioned the opposition, I remember that I wrote a lengthy airgram-- which is again back in the files there somewhere-- on the political opposition in Iran. And I stressed what I mentioned earlier, that there were lots and lots of people who had opposition views and talked about their opposition, and wrote pieces and even used poetry to make their points, everything, but there were very few people who did anything, and that there was really no active opposition in the country worthy of that name.

That pretty much was left in the report, but the way so much of our reporting ended up used to bother me, because it more or less ended up saying because the opposition is powerless and unable to really do anything about all their views and unable to get together, therefore our only recourse is to back the Shah, because he's the only factor that keeps this country together and that makes it work. So there would seem to be always an attempt to analyze all these other activities, but then always the conclusion was, therefore we have no option but to back the Shah fully, and he's the linchpin or the keystone-- you know, all these terms were used all the time. And I think it became a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy really. A lot of reporting ended up with that conclusion, and therefore policy makers in Washington just ended up with the conclusion that there was nothing in Iran

to do but support the Shah. There was never any alternative to the Shah. And I'm not saying there was in an operational sense, but I don't think that we had to go all the way to support the Shah in everything that he wanted to do.

Q: Besides your reporting on the opposition, did you do any other reporting on political developments in the country? Or was that your main activity through 1966?

Bolster: Well, the main focus was on internal developments, yes. So that was pretty much my bailiwick at that time. We had a large Political Section, as I think I mentioned before. So we had the luxury of sort of assigning people to fairly explicit areas of activity. You know, one would follow external affairs and one would follow, say, the university scene and students and other related activities. Somebody else could follow more on what other countries were doing in Iran. That is keeping track of other countries' activities in Iran and their contacts. It was really quite a luxury to have so many people in this section.

Q: I read recently that in the mid-sixties, I guess, Armish-MAAG provided counter-insurgency training to Iran, and it played a role in coordinating-- I guess to coordinate this training, this counter-insurgency training, the U.S. Country Team, as it was

called-- I guess the Mission and the various other U.S. agencies in Iran-- the Country Team developed an "Internal Security Plan" for the country? I guess it was a way to coordinate U.S. assistance for internal security, like counter-insurgency training and so forth. Do you remember anything about this plan, this Internal Security Plan? Does that ring a bell?

Bolster: I think the term, "Internal Security Plan", is probably an exaggerated one, because all I recall is a great deal of interest in Civic Action, which was the idea that you had this tremendous military and the way to make the military popular with the people, which it definitely was not, was to encourage them to take part in civic action. And so you had military teams going out to build roads and you had military health teams going out to provide inoculations to school children and, you know, the military going out to feed people when there were earthquakes or whatever.

There was a great deal of effort to try to make the military more popular among the village people, because traditionally the Army had just been seen as a very remote activity which only touched them in negative ways. That is, conscription of their sons to go in the military, maneuvers that might go through their area and knock down crops and all sorts of things. There was just the whole negative perception that people thought we should try to overcome.

And, indeed, this became a part of the Shah's White Revolutions, because you remember as we discussed certain key points, then they were gradually added to and you eventually had a Twelve Point Reform Program. But even from early on, two of the major programs were the Literacy Corps and the Health Corps. And the Literacy Corps was a brilliant idea, because what they did, in addition to using military officers to teach people in the villages, they actually recruited people from high schools into uniform and then gave them special training on how to become teachers in the Literacy Corps, and then sent them out to villages. And it was really a tremendous step forward. I've talked to a lot of Literacy Corps members. I've gone into villages and visited their schools and talked to them about how it was to be in the village. And these were real agents of social change, these guys. I mean, some of them got into trouble with the authorities, because they would live in a village and they would learn all the problems the village was having, and some of them tried to intercede for the villagers on various occasions. You know, go to some nearby town and talk to some official to try and get some perceived wrong righted, and sometimes they were told it was none of their damn business, that they weren't sent out to get into political activity, they were sent out just to teach people how to read and write. And, of course, some of them, some of the better

[END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE]

[BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE]

Q: You were saying?

Bolster: Yes. Some of the better Literacy Corpsmen obviously felt that there was no way to separate teaching people reading and writing from larger issues of how to try to organize their village better and make some improvements in their life. Because that was just part of even the teaching. I mean, you'd have books that would tell people how to read and write and some of the examples in books were about people living together and how they could change things for the better and how they could get together and cooperate to build a better bridge across a stream in the village, things like this. And a lot of the Literacy Corpsmen did get into that kind of activity, and sometimes, as I say, it ran afoul of some of the traditional power bases in these villages and got them into trouble.

Then the Health Corps was another very popular idea, because obviously the military had resources at its disposal-- the trucks and even in some cases airplanes and so on-- to have access to remote villages. So whenever they came to a village, they were always well received, because people had in the past, you know, just had to rely on their own resources and folk medicine and so on for any kind of a serious problem. It might

have been a day or two before they could get to a large enough town for a serious operation or something.

So the idea of the Health Corps coming out to a village, even on a sort of a circuit basis, where they might come to some village every two weeks-- on a Tuesday, whenever, something like that-- whatever the system was, it was better than they'd had, so they really, I think, got a good image of the military from the Literacy Corps and Health Corps programs. So I think the Shah was very wise and I was one of the people that, as we've discussed here and as one airgram I wrote later, I tried to show in some of the reporting I did in the seventies the way in which these reforms had over time borne fruit in some areas and given the Shah a certain amount of credit with rural people. Even though he was still considered very remote and almost no factor in their daily lives, yet still land reform and the literacy corps, health corps, some of these better reforms that they thought were important to their daily lives gave him a somewhat positive image.

And I think that is the kind of internal security we're really talking about in this plan. Because the military did not want to be perceived as a total drain on the country. You can understand that. When you have such a large country, with so many daily problems in people's lives, if the military in any way could help out with some of those, it was really seen as a tremendous change.

So I think it was a well conceived plan in that sense, because the Iranian military over the centuries has been considered a real scourge to everyone in the rural areas. So they had to overcome a tremendous backlog of prejudice.

Q: According to this report by General Eckhardt, who was running Armish-MAAG in the early sixties, he stated that Armish-MAAG played a major role in stimulating specific action programs organized by the Iranian government. Did the Embassy work with Armish-MAAG in specific action?

Bolster: Oh, yes.

Q: What was the role of the Embassy?

Bolster: Well, as I recall, we simply supported the whole concept and gave them advice on how to do it, how people should be approached and so on. The military had its own tremendous command structure. You know, Armish-MAAG was a very large operation and they had their own ways of doing things. The coordination was really at the top level, just to make sure that everyone more or less was in agreement on how to proceed, but in an operational sense we didn't have much input to it, as far as I recall.

Q: According to Eckhardt's report there was an uprising by the Fars tribe in southern Iran during the early sixties, that I guess helped stimulate the Shah's interest in counter-insurgency specific action and so forth. Was there much concern over this rebellion? The Fars rebellion? Do you remember much about that?

Bolster: Well, it was just one more incident of continued tribal unrest that flared up over many years, because the Shah's father, Reza Shah, had brutally repressed the tribes in the course of unifying the country. The Iranian history books are full of-- not to say history books, but discussions of their past history among themselves-- are filled with stories of brutality that the Shah wreaked on villages when he was taking over. That is, Reza Shah. Tremendous horror stories of people being killed and maimed and betrayed. In one incident he brought tribal people in to talk to his representatives under a cease-fire truce arrangement and then just put them in prison. There are all kinds of situations like that, which had resulted in quite a bit of enmity between the tribes and the government, and there were occasional situations like that that broke out, where some tribe would try to be independent in some way which would be perceived as a threat to the government and the government would send in troops and so on.

But some of it was just minor brigandage too. You had

situations where travelers would be attacked or something like that. Then the government would react to it, because it was felt that this was a blemish on the country's record, to have travelers attacked in some remote part of the country. So that there was that sort of thing that did happen on occasion.

But tribal relations were always a problem for the government, because they tried over a long period of time to-- particularly on into the seventies-- to resettle the tribes, particularly nomadic tribes who would wander across large areas with their flocks and so on. The government tried to settle people down in one area, so that they would not be this sort of divisive force, where they were always moving along through large areas. They felt if they settled them down, they could get a tribal structure that was more pliable and more amenable to government control.

Q: I've read in some of the Classified CIA reports from this period, that one element of sort of U.S.-Iran tensions--maybe a minor element, but it was an element of tension I guess in any case-- was litigation in U.S. courts by a former Iranian national named Khaibar Khan, who I guess was a tribal leader himself. And he claimed that the Shah and his family owed him several million dollars for a sports complex he was supposed to build near Tehran. And I guess he was able to attach some property owned by the Shah's brother or something like that?

Bolster: This is Khaibar Khan Goodarzi? [Goodarzian]

Q: Yes. I think so, yes. How much trouble did this episode cause? Do you remember anything about this?

Bolster: I think it was much more of a cause celebre in our reporting than it really was in fact. Because it became such an issue. Goodarzi made all these charges in the States and he made them in trials and that. They got a lot of publicity and so on, but I don't think it was really a major factor. It was an embarrassment to the Shah's regime, and they couldn't understand why we couldn't simply step in and quash this fellow for saying all these terrible things about the royal family. But we kept explaining that under our system people had the right to redress in the courts and-- you know. It was a very divisive thing in that period of time, an issue of very great concern to the Shah on occasion, but in the overall scheme of things it was not important.

Q: Apparently I guess he claimed that millions of dollars of AID money had been diverted to the Pahlavi Foundation, to various American friends of the Shah. I guess Loy Henderson and so forth. That's what he claimed. Were these charges discussed? Did these charges come to the Embassy's attention? This thing

about diverting money?

Bolster: Oh, yes, sure. Sure. But Goodarzi was such an unsavory character, there were so many reports about his own life style, the way-- I mean, he was a tremendous spendthrift and drove fancy cars and had a tremendous wardrobe-- I mean, just one of these people who were so given to excesses that when he said things, they were obviously dressed up for the maximum impact. I didn't really get deeply involved in the affair. Some other people worked on it more than I did. So maybe I shouldn't make any definitive judgments, but my impression was that Goodarzi was pretty much of a ne'er-do-well, who enjoyed the publicity of all these charges. I don't think he ever proved any of these way-out allegations that he made. He may have been owed some money. I don't know the details of that. But most of the comments he made were just invented, I think, for press consumption.

Q: Now during the years after 1963, when Lyndon Johnson became President, was there any change? Any change in the thrust or the emphasis of American policy towards Iran? Did it pretty much continue along the same lines as it had under Kennedy? Johnson's general approach?

Bolster: Well, I think there was a gradual change, because, you know, when Kennedy first came in he made such a point of our not

being willing to continue supporting autocratic regimes if they didn't start doing something to earn their spurs by helping the people. And that, as we discussed before, led to Amini being named by the Shah and so on.

I think that gradually dissipated when Kennedy was assassinated and Johnson took over, because Johnson was a different type of person and that sort of brave New World rhetoric that we had from Kennedy-- you know, no burden is too great for us to bear and so on, go out and help the world and so on, the Peace Corps. So many of these things that were looked upon by many people as really very inspiring, that sort of stayed as an aura of the early Kennedy period, and then when Kennedy was assassinated, it all became a sort of mythology. And I think people looked upon Johnson as the man behind the scenes, the power broker who came in, and he got credit for continuing all the policies of Kennedy, but I don't think that there was the same feeling that he wanted to push dictators to do good things for their people and so on. Even though he was doing a lot of great things here in the States. So many of our policies of civil rights and improvement of people's benefits and so on and so on were undertaken by Johnson and pushed through with great success.

But in terms of foreign relations, I don't think Iranians perceived him as having quite the same, if you will, altruism that Kennedy had. And then, as time went on, he became, of

course, more and more involved in Vietnam and what was happening there.

Vietnam was looked upon by a lot of Iranians as very negative. I remember talking to a lot of Iranians about it and they particularly-- well, before I left Iran, people were beginning to ask why we were doing this. They always, of course, brought things back to their own situation. They thought that we were doing something in Vietnam that was really disadvantageous to the people there, and they linked that to what they considered to be some of the excesses of American policies and American involvement in Iran. You know, they saw this as similar, even though obviously it was quite a different situation. But they perceived some similarity, that close alliance with the West means your own cultural values and your own ways of doing things are going to be eventually crushed by the weight of all this new modernism coming in to make itself felt.

Q: In the "Church Committee" hearings, there were lots of letters that came to light related to Northrop Corporation and Kermit Roosevelt and so forth. One letter I saw was from Kermit Roosevelt to an official at Northrop, General Timberlake, from April 1965. In a letter Roosevelt mentions the Shah's low opinion of the Assistant Secretary of State, Philips Talbot. And the Shah says, according to Roosevelt, that Iran could stand on its own feet, so that it need not worry about incidents in

Iranian- American relations caused by people like Talbot. Now was he referring to some particular episode perhaps? Or was he referring about Talbot's earlier involvement in the Task Force that was pushing for reform and so forth? Do you have any sense of what that was?

Bolster: I'm sorry, I really don't recall. But I would say, to keep this and other things in perspective, any time the Shah saw anything in the press or in public statements that he considered to be in any way pejorative in its reference to Iran, whether implicit or explicit, he would be upset, and he would make a point with any visitor or with his next audience with the Ambassador or whatever. Complain about these things bitterly.

There was also, I think, a feeling which he showed, and which most Iranians believed, that the U.S. controlled its press, and when you said, well, something came out in the press, we had no control over that, they just--

Q: Didn't believe it?

Bolster: Didn't believe it. They said, "You know, you can't tell us that your government doesn't influence and control what appears in the New York Times and the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times and whatever other newspaper." Because, of course, in their country, that's the way things were done. If newspapers

reported something that the government didn't want reported, their allocation of government-paid ads would mysteriously diminish or they would have trouble getting their supplies of newsprint or whatever. There were ways to make the press behave, and they couldn't understand why a powerful country like the U.S. couldn't do the same thing. And they just assumed we did. So when things came out in the press, they got upset about it.

Q: You sort of alluded earlier to the question of military sales, and one issue that came up in early 1966, I think before you left, was the controversy over the sale of F-4s. Apparently the Shah believed that the U.S. price was too high and he threatened to buy MIGs from the Soviet Union, where he could better credit terms apparently and a lower price. How much of this controversy did you know about at the time?

Bolster: Really very little. That was not something that I was concerned with, since I was working on internal relations. But this was, I think, a typical problem that he had. He wanted to stay with American arms, because he felt our arms were of good quality and he knew that we had a very effective policy of support for those arms. That is, he could get spare parts. He could depend on military advisers supplied by the U.S. to stick to their business and tell people how to run the equipment, but not get into political activities. All this was, I think, a plus

in his view.

But he also complained bitterly about the cost, and it got more and more sensitive from this period on into the seventies, because I remember many discussions that I'd seen in writing where he would-- you'd have some particular part from a plane and he said, "Do you know what this cost in 1972?" and "Do you know what it costs now in 1976?" or whatever. And he would cite the astronomical increases in costs of various parts and demand that we provide them at a reasonable cost, or else he would just have to go and buy Soviet equipment, because he just couldn't afford these prices.

So this was a consistent policy from mid-sixties on into the seventies, that, yes, I'll buy your equipment because I think it's good quality and well supported, but I've just got to have better terms one way or the other.

And then eventually another demand that came in with that was, "I'm not only going to be a customer, but I want some things produced in Iran." That brought in the whole co-production idea which has been with us for decades. I mean, not just with Iran, but Pakistan and many other countries have demanded that they get a chance to co-produce certain items that are maybe made to American specifications, but some of the work's going to be done in the country, so that they share in some of the benefit of being able to produce those items in their country, or components in their country.

Q: I guess in 1966 you were assigned to INR, Intelligence and Research Division, back in the State Department?

Bolster: Right.

Q: How did that come about? How is it you were assigned to that office?

Bolster: Well, it's a complicated procedure to find an assignment and it was considered not unusual for someone who'd been in a particular country to come back and work in INR, because they wanted people who had experience in the country to analyze developments, and it gave you a certain freedom to spend a lot of time researching certain issues that you may have had almost no time to do when you're in the midst of a busy Embassy. Because everything on whatever country you're working on-- or if there are several countries you're working on-- comes to a number of people in the building, but comes to the INR analyst, who's the one person perhaps in the whole building who's able to spend full-time on that one country. In every aspect.

You've got the desk that, of course, is working on Iranian affairs. Maybe they have two or three people, but they're doing the entire range of things. Planning visits, receiving visitors from the country, down to such details as writing toasts and