

Naas: I think when I arrived Roger Brewin was Counselor for Economic Affairs. George Lambrakis was a political counselor. I'm having problems with the rest of them, but there were the principal ones that I dealt with all the time.

There was almost a complete change of personnel. Myles Green, who had been my deputy as country director, came out and became Counselor for Political Military Affairs. Roger Brewin was replaced as Economic Counselor by John Mills, and I selected a-- while I was in Washington, the ambassador said, pick out a new administrative counselor, because the other one's time is up. So I interviewed a couple people and picked out Henry Mills as the new Administrative Counsel. So by the summer of '78, except for George Lambrakis-- certainly before the summer was over-- except for George Lambrakis as political counselor, we had pretty much a complete change of the key personnel.

Q: How would you judge or assess the over-all quality of the officers at the embassy during this period?

Naas: I think by and large each person did a pretty good job in there. I don't think there were-- looking back, there was probably not-- I include myself in this-- no person who was outstanding in terms of seeing the picture quickly as it developed. But we had no weak sisters that I can think of at any position. We had all very solid and very competent career officers. So I was very comfortable with it. I thought the economic commercial section was doing a hell of a good job helping American businessmen. Our Administrative Section was, as it turned out, extraordinarily strong, because a substantial number of the people, which I didn't know at the time, had previous experience in evacuation of Americans.

One-- our finance officer, I found out, when we started to plan evacuation plans-- I think this was his fourth evacuation. The

administrative counselor himself had been previously in two evacuations. So I suddenly found out really in a key area I had more expertise than I knew what to do with.

So I think we were very well served. I think on the political side, it was only a year or so that people had really been thoroughly encouraged to get out and meet people. So we were still very much in a learning stage.

Now the political section was very small. You had George Lambrakis and then as his deputy, or Number Two, John Stempel, who has written a really quite a good book on Iran. And then you had a Junior Officer who, say, after the summer went by, was named Greg Perret, who was in his first political job. So you had a very small section to move around, and every political section has an enormous number of basic requirements laid on it. Whenever a visitor comes to town, unless he's strictly in the econ field, it's usually the political section which takes over the care and feeding. So I'd say we were well served, but we were very small in number, and we were very badly off in terms of long-term experience in Iran. This was a key problem then. John Stempel was starting his-- into his second tour there. George Lambrakis was still in his first tour. Gret Perret was in his first tour as a political officer. So we were not well served in terms of having a lot of people around who really understood Iran. Over a long period of time.

I think this is true-- we'll put it delicately-- in other branches of the government that were in Iran.

Q: Were there any Farsi speakers on the embassy staff at this time? The political section or--

Naas: Oh, yes. John Stempel and Greg Perret were both trained in Farsi. I'd say Stempel was quite good. I don't know what his testing-- he was probably three plus four. Greg Parot had to pass the three to get there. So in the political section you had two. In the economic section you had one, two-- at least two in the economic commercial who had had Farsi training. I always make a distinction between people who've had the training and people who are really good in the language.

I think everybody except the Consul General in the consular section had had Farsi training, which is different than saying they were competent in it. In Shiraz you had Victor Tomseth, who became pretty good in the language, and the staff under him had language training. In Isfahan you had David McGaffey, who certainly got along very well in the language. And in Tabriz you had Mike Metrisko, who was really quite fluent in the language.

So, you know in all the books that have been written saying the absence of Farsi competence was a major problem, I think really missed the point. We had a very substantial number of people who had the training. We had a small number who were really good at it, because it takes time. I mean, you can go through the Foreign Service Institute and you know how to order food and get from one place to the other, but it doesn't mean you can sit down and have a very detailed conversation.

What we were missing is the point that I make in many, many talks and things that I've written. We did not have Farsi language officers who had served in Iran previously. We

did not have a Political Counsel -- and this is no criticism of George Lambrakis, because he did a very, very fine job with previous Iranian experience -- What would have been the most natural thing in the world is that somebody who had been to Tehran in the early sixties, had worked himself up within our system sufficiently, in terms of promotions, et cetera, that he would have been available when the political counselor job opened. There weren't any, because I went through the computer run at the time.

So that's what we were lacking. We were lacking simply people who had that gut feeling or people who had seen Iran on maybe previous occasions. George Cave's name right now, you know, has been in the press because of the Iran-Contra thing. You know, George is the kind of person who would have been fun to have, a good time to have had him in the late seventies, because he had served in Iran in the late fifties, early sixties, came back in the early seventies. He would have been great. And this again is no comment on the person who had those jobs.

But we just didn't have-- that's the kind of thing we didn't have.

[END OF SESSION]

VA

Interviewee: Charles Naas

Session #3

Interviewer: Bill Burr

Bethesda, Maryland

July 26, 1988

Q: A third part of the interview with Charles Naas took place in Bethesda, Maryland on July 26, 1988.

Now on September 22nd, 1977, shortly before President Carter's visit to Tehran at the end of the year, some leading left liberal opposition figures sent a statement with a list of signatures to the administration. The signatories were hopeful that Carter would apply his human rights approach to Iran and they wanted to see U.S. pressure applied to the Shah to get him to accept a role as a constitutional monarch and to allow open debate, free elections, and so forth. Now apparently this letter was sent a month before it was actually published in Tehran. It was published, I guess, in early '78, was sent to the administration before it was actually published and released to the general public. Do you recall seeing this letter? I don't have a list of the names that signed it, but does this ring a bell?

Naas: I'm going to disappoint you. I don't remember that at all. It's one of those things that's ten years ago. If I saw the letter or had the signatories, it might strike a chord, but it was-- I think one thing I can say safely is that the letter probably had no immediate direct impact, and since I can't remember it, I'm not even sure it was ever sent to the White House frankly. I mean, if they sent it directly to the White House, it would have gone there, and then it would have been sent-- under the normal practices-- to the desk.

The desk then makes a recommendation whether to reply or not reply, and if it makes a recommendation to reply, it gives a suggested text. I don't remember it, but--

Q: Okay. You don't even have recollections. Now when we broke up last time, you discussed your arrival in Iran in the late spring of '78. You discussed your duties at the embassy and the embassy staff. Now how would you describe the political atmosphere in Tehran around the time of your arrival?

Naas: Well, it had been going through the demonstrations which followed the deaths in January, and then there were subsequent deaths. So you were well into the forty-day cycle of

demonstrations. But I remember the early months that I was there as a certain degree of tension, a certain degree of concern, but the tempo of demonstrations and the number of deaths and injuries, to the best of my memory, had not reached that point where one felt terribly unsafe or anything like that.

I got there, as I mentioned, in May and Bill Sullivan went home in June, so I was chargé for June, July and most of August. And we did a lot of reporting about the demonstrations. As they went on, they were reported each day. And I think by the time of the end of my chargéship, if you want to call it that, came about in August, the political section had become steadily more concerned about the pace of developments.

As a matter of fact, there's a telegram that we sent in at the time, which Gary Sick comments on, in which we tried to set down sort of what we dimly saw. The telegram was meant at the time to brief the ambassador since he would be stopping in Washington after

his leave, to point out to him that things hadn't settled down really while he was away. They weren't as calm as they seemed early in June, when he first home in June. I don't think we really had a sense of great urgency. Uncomfortableness, nervousness, but not a sense of great urgency in June. At least I didn't have, and I'm sure the ambassador didn't, because he was perfectly prepared to go home and take leave, which he richly deserved. And I know when he talked in Washington, briefed in Washington, he did not give Washington a sense of great urgency. I think a few months later the situation had escalated a couple of notches, which we reported to him and, in effect, to the Department.

Q: Going back a few months to May or June, how did the political officers, or yourself for that matter, interpret the way the protests that had occurred since January? How did you analyze? What kind of sources did you see? What did you see as the source of these protests

Naas: I think at first we viewed them primarily within the tradition that after forty days there is a day of mourning. That was something we were all familiar with in the Islamic world, the fortieth day, of the family getting together to mourn. Well, of course this had gone public into massive political demonstrations. And so we interpreted them simply as political demonstrations, using the cultural tradition, and there was no doubt that they were very much anti-Shah.

But I think again-- I'm not trying to rewrite history-- I don't think we saw-- as of May-June, we certainly did not foresee the collapse of the Shah. We saw that he was in for a bad time. You know, I haven't reviewed the reporting recently of that period. Maybe we

put more urgency to it then-- but in looking back, I don't really think so. It was pretty much reporting of events. There was not that much interpretive reporting in that period.

Some time in May or early June George Lambrakis wrote a very long airgram on the religious basis of the demonstrations and the anti-Shah movement. Again you'll recall Gary Sick mentions he never saw that, because it was in aerogram form and somehow it didn't come across his desk. Which is too bad, of course. I'm not yet sure what difference it would have made, but you had an awful lot of people in Washington who simply had not read what was perhaps the best interpretive piece that the embassy had sent in. In return, the embassy probably made a mistake by not sending it in by telegram. But it was a very long piece and I guess some of us old-fashioned types felt the old airgram was quite sufficient. I know when I was country director, if there were long airgrams on certain subjects, I'd put them aside until probably a Saturday or a Sunday reading, when I'd go in. Or late at night, after all the work was done, I'd sit down and read them carefully. But somebody in a very busy position, up above a country director level, probably didn't see it. It was just one of those unfortunate problems.

Q: What did you hear about the Shah's thinking about these developments?

Naas: I don't recall much discussion of them, except in the rather traditional way-- that he was being opposed by both the Black and the Red was the way he put it. The Red-- the left, of course-- and then the clergy from the right. He put it to me in that fashion at the only time that I personally discussed internal affairs with him it was a very brief



comment, I don't know whether you and I talked about it before, I have in other circumstances. I went up to the Caspian-- it probably would be July.

Q: This was when you were charge?

Naas: Yes. I was with, as I recall, General Huyser. And General Huyser went through his business, which was on command control and communications for the armed forces for the better integration of the Army, Navy and Air Force. And the Shah turned to me and he said, "Mr. Naas, what do you think is going on in my country?" I must admit I was totally unprepared for the question, and as a charge very chary of getting into a lengthy discussion on the matter. It was more instinctive really, as a diplomatic reaction, to be very careful at that point, and I said that I thought that in a shorthand fashion he had put his finger on it, that he was being opposed by a combination of people from the left and from the right, and I dropped it there.

In looking back, I wish I'd been more insightful myself and had perhaps spoken at greater length, except that I think would not have been wise. Tony Parsons, as you know, the British

ambassador, at a couple points discussed quite frankly his views on the internal situation-- at the request of the Shah-- and then later found out in the book the Shah wrote after he left the country that these had been seriously misinterpreted and misunderstood by the Shah. So looking back I probably

instinctively made the right decision and said that, you know, he was probably right, that there was a combination of forces.

That's about the only way-- that's the only manner in which I recall he ever put the problem, beset by left and right. The Black and the Red rather.

Q: Now I've read that the consul at Tabriz, Michael Metrinko, reported that the protests in the spring represented a fairly deep hatred of the Shah, a hatred that was spreading throughout the country. And there was a series of articles in the Washington Post some time ago that suggested that his reports were held up by the embassy, because they contradicted this Black and Red interpretation. I guess some political officer shelved that. This may have been before you actually settled in Tehran, I'm not sure. Did you hear anything about Metrinko's reporting or read the essays he wrote?

Naas: I can't remember reading those in particular. I have talked to others about Michael's reporting. And way back, before the spring of '88, there was some feeling as a young officer that he was perhaps over-reacting to what he was seeing. Let me take a step back. This was almost a traditional problem within the political section, and the relationship of the political section to the Embassy's front offices, and then with the political section's and the embassy's relationship with the consulates. If you go way back in the sixties, when the younger officers were much more critical on what was going on, these views were generally not welcomed. In those early years it wasn't so much-- say, the mid-sixties-- it wasn't so much a question that our policy was so locked into support of the Shah as later it was. But I think it was the natural feeling that an older officer has that, well, this younger fellow hasn't seen this sort of thing sufficiently before. And he tends to

not pooh-pooh it, but to sort of want to dilute it a little bit. I think I mentioned before that one of the first things I did when I arrived in Tehran-- and this was with the ambassador's approval, of course-- I had a meeting of all the consular officers and I told them that their reporting would go in directly to Washington, that if we had strongly opposing views, we would submit them separately, but there would no longer be any censorship of their views. And there wasn't, to the best of my knowledge.

Q: That's interesting. Now according to some accounts, by June of '78, of not earlier, Ambassador Sullivan had decided that the embassy should initiate contacts with the opposition. To what extent had the embassy been in touch with opposition people before this particular decision was made? Or was it originally a dramatic increase in contacts with opposition people?

Naas: A substantial increase really started fairly soon after Bill arrived, because-- again I think we mentioned this before-- when Bill was being briefed in Washington, I told him frankly that I had never known less about a country's internal developments than I did about Iran, and that I'd been on the job, what, over two years by that time, but I had no sense, no feeling really of what was going on internally. And he agreed, after he reviewed the files, and he went back and urged the political section to start moving out. Which it did do, but that's not something where you decide to meet the opposition and within two weeks-- you know, meeting with a lot of them, it took some time. And it was a small political section.

Q: So you think that even before June '78 or so there were some contacts being made to say there was an increase maybe after June? Or there was an effort to widen the net of contacts?

Naas: It was continuous they had to widen the net, and I just simply couldn't-- my memory doesn't go back to when we set out contacting which individuals within the old National Front group. And that's basically where our contacts that we developed with-- a contact was made with Bazargan and that whole crowd. We got to know the-- Bazargan's unit, Entezam and others, we got to know them really quite--

Q: The Freedom Front?

Naas: The Freedom Front, yes. Got to know most of them really quite well by the summer of '78, because when I was chargé I met a few of them. Again just a courtesy kind of thing, since I felt that it was best to leave that kind of contact to the political officers.

Q: Did you meet Bazargan yourself?

Naas: I did not meet Bazargan until after the revolution, when he was Prime Minister, and when I was chargé I met with him on, I don't know, three, four, five, six, seven times, I forget.

Q: Did your contacts include any of the clergy, besides the National Front figures?

Naas: I simply don't recall that any-- I'll put it another way. I'm quite certain that there were no major contacts with the clergy, but whether we had some outside-- some contact on the fringes, I simply can't recall. Later in the year there was development of further contacts, but, say, by May, June, I don't recall any of substance.

Q: Did you get any reports about the Shah? I mean, at various times in the past the Shah had made clear his skepticism or his dislike of such contacts? Were there any comments made by the Shah's representatives about these contacts during '78?

Naas: None at all that I recall.

Q: Now a minute ago you said that when Ambassador Sullivan left in June you were fairly-- the situation seemed calm or calming down to some extent, but that by August there was more concern at the embassy about the political situation in Iran, which was evidenced in the report that you sent out for the ambassador to read when he was in Washington. What kind of developments in particular caused greater concern at the embassy late in the summer?

Naas: Basically that the demonstrations weren't winding down. When you started out having forty days, say, in one town, and a few days later it would be forty days from another town, so you're starting to get a pattern of almost daily events -- reading in the

newspaper or hearing about some sort of small demonstration. And so it was just the tempo was starting to build up.

And I think there was a sense-- at least I had the sense from Washington in early '78- - that there was a chance that these things would die down. Of course with each major demonstration somebody got hurt or somebody got killed, and they became self-feeding really. And it's the fact that they had persisted is what I think gave us the most concern. So we really started to take a much harder look than we had up to then. A little wishful thinking probably, on my part and the part above in mid-'78 is that somehow these things would burn themselves out, so to speak. But they didn't, and that's when we started to become a little more concerned.

Q: Now at what point did you realize that the Khomeini and the men around Khomeini were playing a decisive role in organizing opposition to the Shah?

Naas: I couldn't put my finger on a date, but as you know the demonstrations started because of that article or letter in the newspaper. And I don't think most people, most Americans, had given thought once to Khomeini since-- for many, many years really; from the time he was exiled. So that was the first indication really that he remained a major force.

During the summer one heard of tapes and one heard of statements by him circulating in Tehran and other cities. One heard that the telephone was being used a great deal for the tapes to be put on for other people to tape them at the other end. It's the kind of thing one heard, but I never saw a tape, I never had a tape translated for me. I never had

one of these articles appearing translated for me. It was just sort of a sense that he was very much a force.

We certainly did not have any information, or really feeling, that there was a major organizational effort going on, which we now know from the books that have been written, that various people, Beheshti and others, had really a superb organization. It was much, much later before we had a sense of that.

Q: Now on August 19th, the tragic fire at the Cinema Rex at Abadan occurred. What kind of reports did the embassy get of this incident? There were various charges and counter-charges made about the causes.

Naas: We had no direct-- our original reporting, of course, was primarily based on the newspapers on what happened and reporting the various statements by different leaders. There was some contact with, shall we say, government officials in the area, not too much later. And we heard, of course, the government position, that the fire had probably been caused by the opposition. No proof. And then, of course, you continued to hear from the opposition that it was caused by SAVAK. I heard not too long ago that an investigation subsequent to the success of the revolution came up with the conclusion that it was caused by the opposition. It was a way to obviously create a tremendous uproar.

At the time I never knew what to believe. I just simply could not, in my own mind, see what the government had to gain by such a barbaric act. Now had the place been-- had it been a meeting of the oppositionists, so to speak, and they burned them all up, well, then would have made a certain macabre sense. But to just have a lot of people sitting

in the theater burned, I never could see what the government had to gain, and I could see what the opposition had to gain. We had no proof one way or the other.

Q: Was Ambassador Sullivan back around that time or was that while he was still away?

Naas: He came back either a couple of days before or a couple of days after, I can't remember. But one way to check on that is when the new Prime Minister, Sharif-Imami, came in. I mean, the ambassador came back one day before Sharif-Imami was announced as prime minister.

Q: I think it was shortly thereafter, in the wake of the fire.

Naas: So the ambassador came back after the fire.

Q: Yes. Did Sullivan meet with the Shah around this time? Or did you get a sense of the Shah's frame of mind after the fire?

Naas: I can't recall.

Q: Now in the Foreign Service Institute book that you passed on to me, the book on authoritarian regimes in transition, Henry Precht says that when he became country desk Director in '78, the first thing he heard was the Shah had told a visitor that the U. S. had, quote, unquote, decided to do him in, that the U. S. was directing the revolution on the



grounds that a clerical backed regime would be more effectively anti-Communist than his own. Did you hear any stories or anything along those lines from your own contacts, that the Shah believed--

Naas: Oh, very definitely. During the summer of '78 the rumors were rife that the Shah was very distressed with his conclusion that we were working with the opposition and that we were behind the turmoil.

I never got this directly. I think I-- when I was chargé, to the best of my recollection I saw him three times. And except for that one time that I just mentioned before, we did not really get into any discussion on internal affairs. But--

Q: What were the meetings about?

Naas: Oh, one of the meetings was with General Huyser, as I mentioned. Another meeting was with David Newsom, Under-Secretary of State. Came out to discuss with the Shah primarily a tour d' raison of what the change of government in Afghanistan meant. It was sort of hand-holding sort of thing, but to exchange views. We had recommended-- Ambassador Sullivan had recommended-- that such an effort be made. Both he and I felt that the change in Afghanistan was a major change in the balance of power in the area. Or threatened a major change of balance in the area. It's amusing how ambassadors and DCMs sometimes develop a certain sense. I was writing a very lengthy sort of analytical piece on this, and the ambassador came in-- this happened two or three times during our working together-- and

he handed me sort of much more an operational kind of message, sort of what we should do, whereas mine was analytical. I think he might have used a paragraph or two of mine, but he said, and he was quite right, he said, "That's too much of a think piece. We've got to get some action here." And so he recommended that some senior officer come, some senior person, and talk with the Shah. Since I had been so heavily engaged in the Afghan affairs for so many years, I-- you know, the alarm bells really went off before I'd left Washington, with the changes that had taken place. And so when I got to Tehran, it was an opportunity to feed back some of my views that I already had. But, as I say, the Ambassador might have used a paragraph or two, but he wanted something more operational.

I think the third time I saw the Shah, which was really a social kind of thing, was when Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Lyndon Johnson, came out and he had a lunch for her. I think those were the three occasions.

Q: Now back to this question of how the Shah viewed the revolution and the alleged American role in the revolution. Were there efforts made to dispel such an interpretation, in direct efforts or whatever?

Naas: I simply don't remember whether at that time we recommended a letter from the President. That is the usual sort of thing that is done and that was often done with the Shah, that you'd feed back his mood and recommend that an appropriate occasion or appropriate event be used by the

President to send a message to the Shah, and I certainly can't remember whether we did on this occasion. In the summer the British chargé d'affaires pulled me aside and said that three senior former British officials had visited Iran in the previous couple of weeks and on each occasion the Shah had at considerable length expressed his concern about what the Americans were up to. So the British chargé said, you ought to know this. And I said, well, I'd been hearing rumors of this, but this is the first direct kind of thing I've had. And I so reported it. Whether I recommended a letter or something, I can't remember.

Now the Shah-- one has to look at this in a peculiar context. The Shah used this kind of fear now and then, knowing full well that expressions of concern, say to the British, would get back to us. So he was quite certain that we understood his concern, but then you say, okay, he said that, but what does he really mean by it. Because, after all, the visit in the previous November in Washington had gone extremely well with Carter. The December visit couldn't have been better. So what was the basis therefore for concerns that we were behind it? We probably fed a little of this concern later on when Dave Newsom came out and really for the first time in several years we turned him down on the purchase of a particular weapons system; Wild Weasel or something like that. To us it was essentially a decision of the military. The Wild Weasel was going out of production, I think, at the time, or soon would be. And I suppose it was a sop to the anti-- not the anti-Shah, but the anti-weapon sales people. This is not a terribly significant system particularly, so let's say "No," once. Let's say that it was a question of advanced technology production line in there. And so I think-- you know, we viewed it generally as a fairly normal decision, but, of course, to the Shah and the people around him, it was the first time we had said no. So "No," coming at the very time that he is being somewhat beset

domestically starts ringing bells in his head that we didn't particularly foresee or didn't fully understand. But one does have the situation that simply nothing happens in Iran without blaming an outside power. You saw this recently when Rafsenjani and everybody else in Iran is blaming us for their inability to carry on the war with Iraq. Look for the outside force.

The Shah had used this so often over the years, it's a little bit like crying wolf, because then after a while it's hard to take each one of these with a great sense of urgency.

Q: Interesting. Now after the fire at Abadam at the Cinema Rex, the Shah, as you mentioned earlier, appointed Sharif-Imami as Prime Minister, replacing Amuzegar. And there was some political relaxation, there were some political concessions made, they promised national elections.

Naas: They closed the casinos, all that sort of stuff.

Q: Political prisoners were released and so forth. What did you think of Sharif-Imami? Had you met him or had you had much contact with him?

Naas: I had met him only once for a fairly lengthy conversation, which I think still has to remain private, the day before he became-- was announced as Prime Minister. I had-- I don't think I'm putting what I know now in the context of the first [time]. I had mixed feelings. I didn't know that much about him. The one thing that we pulled out of the bio files that looked good was that he did come from a religious family, and so at least he

could speak, so to say, speak the language of the religious leaders. Yet the other side of it, of course, was that he did have a reputation for possible corruption, and, of course, he had been running the Pahlavi Foundation for several years. So one had sort of mixed feelings, that one way it looked like a good move, somebody who had the history and contacts with religious leaders, and on the other it looked again like one of the same old politicians coming back. After all, he'd been in the government in and out. He was Prime Minister in the early sixties, I guess it was, and so on. I had very mixed feelings about it, and these mixed feelings were accentuated by my meeting with him, frankly.

Q: Did you think that he would make much of a difference, that he would be able to stabilize things a bit?

Naas: I said I had mixed feelings about it. I felt really it was up to the Shah to appoint his own Prime Minister. We didn't have enough knowledge to say you ought to appoint this one or that one kind of thing. And he would have told us, you know, to bug off, if we'd tried to tell him.

Personally I felt that his immediate, obvious concessions were a mistake. I felt that at the time. It seemed to me it was too blatant, that it was simply the wrong way to approach the opposition. I think in the struggle at that time you didn't immediately make concessions. They were all of total insignificance except in perception. I thought it was the wrong way to tackle the problem, frankly.

Q: Now a few days later in early September, there was the Eid al Fatir Festival, which occurred, which represented the breaking of the Ramadam peace in August, and in Tehran there were very large peaceful demonstrations, representing, I guess, a cross-class coalition of the opposition. Students, workers, clergy, professionals, shopkeepers, and large numbers of women, from what I've read. Now how much information did the embassy have in advance about the planning for these demonstrations? Were you surprised when they appeared or did you know in advance that there would be demonstrations on a certain day?

Naas: Oh, yes. And a lot of this would be in the newspapers or your political contacts told you so. There were very, very few major demonstrations in Tehran particularly that would catch anybody by surprise. They'd be announced, and usually they had to have the permission of the police, you know, to have such a demonstration, which the police might say, "No, you can't have one," and they'd go ahead and have the demonstration anyway. So, no, we weren't particularly surprised by that sort of thing. Eventually the size of them started to really grab your attention really. And then, of course, we come to September 8th and 9th at Jaleh Square, which was--

Q: That's right. The Shah declared martial law the day before? The 7th?

Naas: That's right.

Q: And, of course, this led to the shootings in Jaleh Square, which you just mentioned, the event that became known as Black Friday. What kind of reports did you get of this incident?

Naas: Let me go back a step just for atmosphere, because it was an eerie day. I was standing outside my house and I heard some shooting and went to the office. And we could hear it and I remember later in the morning, quite late morning, I went back to my house and my wife was sitting in a little-- well, call it patio if you will-- listening to it. And next to us the rest of the embassy staff were playing tennis, so it was a very normal beautiful day, except you could still hear the shooting now and then.

We didn't hear until the next day-- probably it would be the next day-- the scope of what had happened. There were some schools near the area and various Americans who called up American colleagues saying that there'd been a hell of a lot of shooting and it appeared a fair number of people had been killed. Our main source actually was an Iranian individual who arrived at Jaleh Square shortly after the shooting started and was there during the whole period. And he heard the police talking about casualties.

And I think we tended to accept for some time his estimate. I cannot swear this, but I think he had the figures of a hundred and twenty, a hundred and twenty-seven, something like that, of people killed, and a number of others wounded. The later claims, you know, of a couple of thousand killed or whatever it was, I never quite honestly took seriously. I always felt multiply by thirty and you've got an opposition's estimate. And to this day I don't think anybody has a truthful picture of how many people were killed. What it did do, of course, was that it was a hell of a shocker to Iranians and everybody else that even

a hundred and twenty-seven people were killed in one shooting. I suppose it brings it home more when you're listening to the shots as they're fired. Quite a fusillade one could hear from the embassy grounds a couple of miles away from Jaleh Square.

But interestingly, I think, if I'm not mistaken, there was a period of quiescence after Jaleh Square, that things calmed down for ten days, two weeks. And this was one of the things that was always very difficult for me and for others to interpret that is that frequently after a severe crackdown-- and Jaleh Square, as it turned out, was a severe crackdown--the [er] of quiet ensued. It was one of those probably horrible errors. Most of the people who joined didn't even know that martial law had been declared, and really didn't expect the police, or the military, to be as brutal as they were. So it was one of those horrible errors. But frequently, after a really tough crackdown, things quieted down. So anyway, you kept being whipsawed. Then something would happen again, but they'd crack down again. So we were continuously trying to measure what all of these things meant.

Q: I have a question about the background of this all. A few days earlier, on September 3rd, John Stempel, the political officer, had met with Darius Boyander, who was special assistant to the Prime Minister. And there was a memo that I saw, it was in the captured documents, Boyander asked Stempel what would be the U. S. government's attitude towards reestablishment of order by force, unquote. And Stempel responded that the U. S. would be sympathetic towards efforts to establish public order, as long as internal political reform continued. And Stempel wrote that a statement would probably reach higher levels in the Iranian government.



Naas: Beg pardon?

Q: And Stempel wrote in this memo more or less approving the use of force to establish order would probably reach the higher levels of the government, after he told Boyander this. Was this endorsement of the use of force an authorized kind of a statement? Do you want to look at the memo?

Naas: I think in that document John mentioned that it was his personal opinion. "Speaking personally, I thought the U. S. government would be sympathetic." That, of course, is a key word or a key phrase, that he was not speaking under instructions. I would think, however, the manner in which he phrased it is that the U. S. government certainly was opposed to efforts to create chaos in Iran and that some effort to prevent that, as long as liberalization and other reforms went along--

Q: It was qualified by that?

Naas: Yes. I think that would have been supported at the highest levels of the U. S. government at the time. But John had-- as I recall it, had no specific guidelines on that. He was winging it, as we say, at the time to get a question. The fellow named Boyander, he was close to John. I liked him very much myself. And when you're hit with a question such as that, it's very difficult, when you've had a very close relationship, to say I really have no comment, I need instructions on this. So I think John did a very good job, ably,

of weaving in the continued desire of the United States for liberalization, and an understanding, as he said, that human rights did not mean that we supported the development of chaos in the country.

Q: Now after Jaleh Square, President Carter telephoned the Shah, expressing his personal support and friendship? Did the White House consult with the embassy about whether to make such a phone call or not? Do you know anything about that?

Naas: He was at Camp David at the time and I think the principal motivator was Sadat, who suggested that he-- Sadat had talked to the Shah earlier-- suggested that the President call because he had found apparently the Shah quite distressed by what had gone on. And for all I know, the Shah raised with Sadat what the American role was. "You're there, what are the Americans doing?" And therefore Sadat was the one who suggested that the President make the call.

I don't remember any quick consultation with the embassy, sort of do you think this is a good idea? I'm not saying it didn't happen. I just don't remember it. The call to the Shah was the sort of thing that I think the President would naturally do, particularly in the Camp David context. One of the members asked him to do something with somebody that the President, you know, was concerned about and deeply respected. It was a very natural thing for the President to do. Unfortunately, as you well know, the opposition used this mightily after that, that the President called him up, in effect, to congratulate him on the tough action he had taken.

I must say at the time I didn't see any great harm in the President's actions. The sort of thing, I think, if I were President, I would have probably done myself. But again, you had other people standing on the side of the opposition that were really quite distressed. I know Ibrahim Yazdi, who later became deputy prime minister and foreign minister, raised this telephone call on I don't know how many different occasions with me. So it made quite an impact on them.

Q: Now I've read in some accounts that the Shah was on the verge of nervous collapse some time in the wake of the Jaleh Square incident. Did you hear anything about his frame of mind in September, after September 8th?

Naas: I'd have to recall. One would have to go back into the record, because the ambassador was seeing the Shah really quite regularly. One would have to go back and look at telegrams. I'm sure from the captured documents, there probably are some telegrams from that period. I just don't recall them.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE:

Q: Now on September 18th, Central Bank workers circulated the list of about a hundred and eighty individuals who were transferring hard currency out of Iran. Was there much concern at the embassy about this problem of capital flight?

Naas: We reported the list and we reported that those capital flights-- and obviously it was a political, a major political signal. I'm not sure that we highlighted that as much as we should have at the time, and there was some doubt that the figures were correct. It did look as if it was one of those usual things of the opposition greatly exaggerating what was happening. It was probably not until somewhat later that I became aware of really how much capital flight there was in that period, but it was very substantial. People were seeing the handwriting on the wall and we probably should have paid a little more attention to it.

Q: As a sign of loss of confidence in the Shah's ability to govern?

Naas: That's right. People deserting the ship really.

Q: Now in October, after Khomeini was expelled from Iraq-- I think he was expelled from Iraq in early October, if I'm not mistaken-- there were more protests, and on the 16th, forty days after Black Friday, there was a general strike around the country, which lasted in some ways for several months, the strike. What kind of a strike-- what kind of impact did the strike have on daily life, say, at the embassy? Or communications with the consulates, those kinds of things?

Naas: The general strike had relatively little personal impact on Americans, simply because, you know, we had our AFAX, and we had our separate stores and all that sort of

thing. And most people had their own cars and were not dependent upon public transportation. So the impact was-- the personal impact on official Americans was fairly minor.

The success of the strike, however, was a further political indication, simply that we were well advanced at this point in a major crisis. I remember the British ambassador saying to me, "My God, they're going to call a general strike," a day or two before they did it, he and Ambassador Sullivan had been up to see the Shah and came back down to exchange notes, so to speak, and decide what they would report to London and Washington. I went over to the embassy and sat in while they chatted. As I was walking the British

ambassador to his car, he said, "You know, Charlie, I think they're going to call a general strike." And he said, "And the fat's really going to-- " Better not say he used the expression "fat's in the fire," but it was that kind of expression. Tony [Parsons] had spent most of his career in the Middle East and understood the major political significance of a successful general strike and of how things do eventually come to a halt. People can't get their money out of the banks, all of that sort of thing. And they start running short on petroleum and

kerosene, and that if you can maintain a general strike, it's very difficult for a government to survive long.

But he was right on the nose. I think it was the next day the call came for a general strike. Just as we were walking down the stairs, he came to that conclusion. I guess out of past experiences in the Middle East.

Q: Around that stage, did you still think that the crisis would be more or less manageable or were you having some doubts about the Shah's future? What was your assessment of things, say by the time the strike was under way?

Naas: It was clear to me that he was facing the most serious crisis of his reign, but I had not yet concluded whether he was going to be able to survive. I give a lecture at Foreign Service Institute, in which I very frankly go back on mistakes of perception and the misuse of history, for younger political officers.

And I think that-- I'll say of October 16th through the 20th, I personally-- I'm not saying others shared my view-- I personally felt that the Shah still had the opportunity to crack down and possibly to get away with it. Not in terms of defeating the opposition, but by creating a different political situation in which he might be able to adroitly negotiate the fist and conciliation. And I drew upon my recollections of the '62-'63 period, when he had quite successfully used the iron fist, as he said. The demonstrations were put down, Khomeini was exiled, and Iran went into a period of great prosperity and at least surface stability.

So I felt on the basis of that experience-- and certainly I was wrong, I guess-- that he still had that option and that there was a possibility that he could create a different negotiating situation. Or to sum up, by the middle of October, I had not concluded that all was lost.

Q: Now around October-- I'm not quite sure about the dates-- one of the leading opposition figures, Mehdi Bazargan, had developed or was developing a plan for a