

transitional government, and the idea was to replace the Shah's regime with a constitutional monarchy or a republic perhaps, and the means was through a regency council that the Shah would appoint. The council would appoint a prime minister, someone like Sanjabi, and the Shah would take an extended vacation while elections were being held for a new Majlis. And once a new government was formed, there would be a referendum on the future of the monarchy, and under this plan I guess Khomeini would be invited to return to Qom and he would insure that public policy conformed more or less along Islamic lines. Khomeini played a sort of a distant role, an advisory role, I guess, under this plan. And I guess in October Bazargan approached John Stempel with this idea of a transitional government, hoping that the U. S. would support it, because it would leave politicians with a liberal reformist bent in charge of the government.

Do you remember anything about this initial approach to Stempel or discussion of the Bazargan plan in October? I know it had come up later on, but I think that was the first time he'd broached it with an embassy official.

Naas: I've forgotten the exact date of it. It's the sort of thing that would have been reported. But I simply do not recall any serious discussion in the embassy about the plan. Nor, I'm quite sure, was there was any serious discussion in Washington about the plan. And I'm not sure whether it was that meeting or another meeting, but John was not particularly sympathetic in a sense, because, in effect, Bazargan really was basically asking us to facilitate the end of the Shah's rule basically, or the departure of the Shah. In either that meeting or another with an LMI [Liberation Movement of Iran] person some time later, Stempel became quite irate at one point. "You can't expect us to provide the exit

of the Shah."

So-- I don't know how much-- one had a great respect of Bazargan in those days. I had not met him. I'd read his bio file. I've forgotten most of it by now, but we had a great respect for him. You can understand, that quite literally, he was asking us to get into the middle and negotiate the Shah's removal. And so therefore there was not-- certainly at that period our policy was still very firm-- particularly in Washington-- as one hundred and ten per cent support for the Shah. So we didn't give it great analysis and say this has great merit, et cetera, et cetera. It was just reported and that was pretty much the end of it.

Q: I have the impression from accounts I've read-- maybe Gary Sick's book and other books-- that around October, or during October, Ambassador Sullivan put a fair amount of stock in the national elections that were supposed to be held for June I think of the following year?

Naas: June the following year.

Q: He was trying to get agreement on ground rules for those elections. To what extent was that the case, that he was placing emphasis on these elections and was trying to get ways to be sure that they proceeded on an orderly basis?

Naas: Going back to the memorandum that John Stempel wrote of his meeting with Boyander, I think that what we were hoping very much for, of course, was that the

opposition and others would work together toward that election. After all, the election, the Shah had promised. I suppose it was the hold of a drowning man, if you will, grasping at straws. If people would only follow this political process, there was a chance that, you know, something would work out that would still protect our interests there and prevent chaos in Iran. I'm not sure any of us had any great confidence that we were going to get to election time. So as a nation we were thoroughly supportive in this period of the Shah and the Shah's policies. He had taken steps of liberalization through Sharif-Emami and then later letting prisoners out of jail. Earlier in the year he had recommended changes in the military law. And then he made a couple of speeches, in one of which he said that mistakes had been made, and I guess in the next speech he said, "I have made mistakes," and talked about an election the following year.

So that gave to us-- it gave a political opening, or a political process that one could latch onto. And obviously under the Shah's proposal the monarchy would remain, but a more open political system would eventuate. So our support of that would-- going back to your other question-- would make us not terribly excited about the Bazargan approach, which was quite a different one.

Q: I've also read that around this time, in October, Ambassador Sullivan learned about the Shah's cancer? Did you hear much about this or were there rumors floating around Tehran about the Shah's illness?

Naas: No one knew about the Shah's cancer. Let me take a step backwards. In the summer of '78, when I was chargé, there were wild rumors around Tehran. No matter

what cocktail party or reception or whatever you went to, they talked about the Shah's health. There were rumors that he had been shot in the arm, that he had some dreadful illness-- all of this. And so one of my jobs when I went up to the Caspian was basically to look at him, and that was one of the first things I would report. It was probably a separate, as I recall it-- a separate little telegram, saying the Shah looked fine. And he did. He looked a little thinner. His cheeks were sort of sunken a little bit, but he was tanned, vigorous. And I looked carefully. He had not been shot in the arms. And so I concluded that he was under stress, but basically in good shape. And we did not know about his cancer.

Q: There was really no information on that until he was already exiled, as far as that goes?

Naas: That's right. Yes.

Q: Now according to one account in the Washington Post, during October Secretary Vance was getting phone calls from John J. McCloy and Nelson Rockefeller among others, urging Vance to back repressive measures by the Shah against the opposition. Did you hear anything about this sort of pressure from various establishment types like McCloy or Nelson Rockefeller? Was there word at the embassy about those kinds of calls?

Naas: I certainly don't remember them at all, and I'm ninety-nine per cent sure that the Embassy was never informed on them.

Q: Now according to some accounts, around this time in October the Shah told Sullivan that he had ruled out a major crackdown, because it would mean that it would become impossible for him to pass the throne on to his son, if there really was a major serious crackdown against the opposition. Did the Shah say anything like that to Sullivan?

Naas: Yes, he did. I'm not sure when the discussions started-- I suppose October and then became much more intensive in November-- of what the Shah's options were. And one of them was the iron fist. Well, I guess A was-- I forget what order they came to-- a sort of continued liberalization, moving on to the election. Certainly the other one was the armed fist, the iron fist. I forget what the third one was. I think the third one was that he would leave the country and just go off and forget it all. And he said he certainly could not desert his people and he could not use the iron fist, because a monarchy could not rest in the blood of its own people.

And this was said many times in October and November. The Shah had thought through this now. He simply decided in that period that the armed fist would not work. When he first said this, I personally didn't believe him. I later became quite convinced, obviously as he repeated it, that he simply wasn't going to do it, and I finally-- he's not going to do it. And people in Washington, I know-- Brzezinski and others for a long, long time did not believe that he had concluded this. And there's a famous telegram, in which Bill Sullivan went back and said, the Shah has in effect thought this through. This is the way he feels and this is the way it's going to be. And that would be in November.

The thing, of course-- had we known-- there's all these marvelous if's. But had we known that the Shah was as ill as he was, and the fact that he was worried about possibly dying within a year or two or three, and so therefore passing on the throne to his son was much more close than we had any idea, but we can see how his mind was working.

One thing I've never known and never will know, is whether the Shah assumed that we knew about his illness. And you play games in this and you double-think yourself in it. Not a hell of a lot of profit in it, but in retrospect I've wondered whether he assumed that the French doctors had told the French government and the French government had told us, et cetera, that--

Q: We'll never know. Now at the end of October, former DCM Jack Miklos stopped in Tehran during the course of a visit to South Asia. When I talked to him a few weeks ago, he says he remembers talking with Amuzegar, who was former Prime Minister, about various political alternatives and political leaders, various alternative political leaders. And there was some discussion about Bakhtiar, Shapour Bakhtiar, as a possible Prime Minister, hoping he could reconcile the various opposition peoples to the Shah's regime. Was there much interest in the embassy about Bakhtiar as a political figure who could perhaps work with the Shah in stabilizing the political situation around this time?

Naas: I certainly don't recall any conversations. It's very possible that Jack had a conversation with the ambassador at that time, but I don't recall that following Jack's departure that we sort of had a seminar to discuss this.

Q: I was wondering if he was out there under instructions to talk about this issue or not.

Naas: Well, Jack was very close with Amuzegar and, of course, was a very, very strong supporter of Iran, and whether

authorized-- you know, he would not need direct authorization simply to talk to Amuzegar, to draw out of him his ideas of what might work. Quite clearly-- I mean, as I said, we were in the middle of a major crisis and so Jack would feel perfectly-- as far as a deputy assistant secretary-- perfectly free to probe for ideas that might be useful to us right then.

Q: Now in early November George Griffin of the INR drafted a paper for Secretary Vance, in which he stated that the Shah had basically two choices at this stage. One was to stay on in Iran as a constitutional monarch, which meant allowing the moderate opposition to rise to power. And the other option was to abdicate, which would trigger a military takeover. He put it in fairly stark terms in his summary. To what extent did you see the situation in those kinds of terms by, say, November?

Naas: I certainly give George full credit. I did not see the situation in early November-- and we're talking about very early November, because there is a watershed in here in my own thinking and that of other people-- in such stark terms. As an aside, in my job at Freedom of Information I have read a substantial number of memos for the first time, that George wrote to the Secretary and I must say they were far closer to an accurate analysis of what was going on-- hardheaded, excellent analyses-- than probably anybody else was producing.

Q: Was that something that got back to the embassy in time?

Naas: I don't recall ever reading any of those. About the only thing that I recall coming from Washington at that time was when Henry Precht wrote a similar-- in what was probably November-- wrote a similar kind of memorandum to the Secretary. It was a much longer memorandum, but Henry laid it out pretty clearly too. Henry bootlegged a copy to us. He sent it in an envelope to the ambassador. I remember the ambassador reading it and giving it to me. He said, "Thank God there's somebody back in Washington who seems to have some idea of what's going on here." Didn't do much good.

Q: On November 5th, the day after the students were shot at Tehran University, there was widespread rioting and destruction in the city. Some people call this the day that Tehran-

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Naas: Burned.

Q: Burned, yes. And the next day the Shah reimposed martial law and appoints General Azhari as Prime Minister. What was the mood at the embassy at that stage? Was that the watershed that you were talking about earlier? Or was it something else?

Naas: That and the next four or five days was at least the watershed basically in my thinking. That was a wild day, believe me. Several very large buildings adjacent to the



embassy were burned, and so cinders and ashes were falling over my house and the embassy compound. And then all the shooting. So it was bad. A friend of mine was flying into Tehran with a military group. He was just going along for the ride, so to speak. And I had asked him to be my guest and to stay with-- because he was a very dear friend, Ambassador Bob Pugh, who was our DCM in Lebanon when the embassy was blown up. He's ambassador in Mauritania right now. He had been in Turkey with me, and they were flown by helicopter from the airport, and he said that it was just unbelievable. Plumes of smoke everywhere. And of course there was no way in the world he could get to my house, with the burning and the demonstrations, so he stayed in the northern part of the city with the military.

Clearly the situation had come to the boiling point on those couple of days. I was still silly enough, in retrospect-- I believed that this was the last chance of the iron fist, and I thought that the declaration of martial law and putting General Azhari in charge was very possibly that last effort. That's why I say that here's where to me the divide came, and the divide came with the ambassador, because he wrote his famous telegram on November 9th. I think I mentioned to you before, I discussed this incident with so many different classes, of how a DCM and ambassador sometimes can operate almost like Siamese twins and other times not so.

But on the morning of November 9th-- and I mean the morning like one o'clock, two o'clock in the morning-- I woke up and I went out and I poured myself a scotch and I sat around and just sort of worried. And I went in the next day and I said to the Ambassador, "You know, I didn't sleep much last night." And he said, "I didn't sleep at all." I said, "This is not going to work." He said, "I know it." And he threw me the-- on

yellow-lined paper in his handwriting the famous telegram.

Q: "Thinking the unthinkable?"

Naas: "Thinking the unthinkable." I don't know what it was. I think it was the fact that except for one night of shooting, the military regime was not a military regime. They clearly either were unprepared or unwilling or uninstructed, in fact, to crack down. You had the shootings when the crowds at night would gather and shoot Allah A-Akhbar, and the neighborhoods would go in a frenzy and you'd hear a lot of shooting. But this was a regime that was not going to take that last chance of cracking down severely, of going out and arresting people and doing what any military regime would be expected to do.

So I finally-- I guess that morning of December 9th with the ambassador, we both concluded that the claim of the Shah not to use the ironfist was deadly serious. He was not going to permit the iron fist to be used. And I felt once he had given up on that last opportunity to try it that we'd better start thinking of the future. Very likely without the Shah.

Q: Back to the cable, I want to ask you, were you in touch with Iranian government officials at this stage? I mean, people in the foreign ministry, were you dealing with them in November? Did you get a sense of their outlook on the future?

Naas: As a matter of fact I had a visitor from the United States in that period, and we were going to take a little trip around Iran. And so I was busy with them for a couple of days, and we got them out of town the night that martial law was declared. They've

never forgotten those few days, I'll tell you that. So I was not moving around very much. It was just my sort of instinct as I looked around. Within those days between the 5th and the 9th, I was at a function, a small function, at which I met with a number of the commanders of the services and chatted with them about what they were doing. And it was these talks that made me conclude that what I thought was happening was not what was happening, and that it was just a change of faces. It was not der TaG. Looking back, der TaG probably wouldn't have worked at that point. Whether it would have ever worked, I don't know, but clearly, you know, by that point the Shah's principle strength was the military. You know, he had the support of millions of people who were quiescent, staying at home, but the only strength he had in the streets, if you will, was the military, and if he was unwilling to use the military in the streets, then the streets were going to become the home of the opposition.

Q: Now getting back to this November 9th cable that Sullivan sent out, how much significance do you think this cable had in terms of -- I'll just leave it at that.

Naas: It clearly had absolutely no impact whatsoever. I have read the telegram many, many times since then and it probably was too carefully crafted to make that kind of an impact. We assumed that this was the opening shot of a serious reconsideration about our policy, at least a serious analysis of where we were. I'm not sure how much Bill consciously thought of tactics at the time-- but I'm quite sure-- Bill's a very, very shrewd operator, very intelligent-- he realized that if he hit Washington with a telegram that says the Shah is finished, it would have had the wrong impact. You sort of had to move into

this, step by step. Well, of course, nobody in Washington paid any attention whatsoever to it. So we never had a chance to get a reaction from Washington and then follow with a second step on our part.

I don't know what difference it would have made, but I must admit I was shocked. I shouldn't have been, I'd been in government a long time. When I came home in February-- March rather-- in '79 for a brief leave, to find out that nobody had paid really much attention to the telegram at all. And here we thought we had-- you know, we had come in our own minds to a conclusion that the Shah really was hanging on by his fingernails and that we ought to start thinking about a future without him. In fact, nobody paid any attention to it.

When I lecture at the Foreign Service Institute, I point out that it's very difficult at a time of crisis to get people to pull together. All these people were terribly busy. Camp David was still very much in mind, if not still going on. At least some of the ceremonies were. And to get people to challenge a policy which had been well entrenched, you know, for many, many, many years. So it was probably foolish of us to think at that point that such a process could have been undertaken.

Q: I've read the cable myself a couple times and I think it's-- to me it's worded a little bit indirectly in some ways. To me it shows he was sort of concerned about keeping the armed forces intact and that he saw a coalition between the military men and the moderate opposition as probably the best way to keep public order, assuming that the Shah wasn't going to be around. Is that sort of reasonable, to think he was trying to drive

towards that kind of a coalition?

Naas: I'm not sure that we-- you'd have to ask Bill this himself. We didn't have a particular firm road map laid out, but it was clear that Washington had not yet grappled or accepted the fact that there was a strong possibility that the Shah might not work his way out of this, and that therefore we should start developing a strategy which saw that as a possibility. I think if you've read the telegram, Bill says, "Of course in the interim we have no alternative but to continue to support the Shah." Well, part of that is a giveaway to the strong Shah supporters in Washington, but it probably diluted the message.

But we were very tentative, because it was perfectly clear that nobody wanted to think about it. And so we were tentative and thought we might have a few weeks for the process to unfold.

Q: There was no response? There were no phone conversations to discuss it? No cables?

Naas: Not that I recall. I don't recall one telegram from Washington. If there is, I've forgotten.

Q: Now around this same time three State Department officials came to visit Iran. Carl Clements, George Griffin and Stephen Cohen traveled to Iran to investigate the situation. Did you meet with them at any time during their visit?

Naas: I saw them a couple times, of course, because George Griffin was an old friend. Steve Cohen was an old adversary on human rights. And Carl Clements I knew. Yes, I met with them a couple of times, yes.

Q: Did they give you a sense of what the current thinking in Washington was about the situation in Iran?

Naas: I don't remember. I found it very difficult, because-- and this is no attack on Steve Cohen, who is a very honorable and a very nice person, but he and I had been strong adversaries. He had been in the forefront of the human rights people, and as director I'd had some really nasty and very difficult fights with that office. Not against Steve personally, but Steve was part of the problem, as I saw it.

And so I found it very difficult to get into the kind of conversation with all three people who were present. I was being very, very careful at that time. As DCM I always felt that it's the ambassador's role to take the lead when it comes to questioning policy and that I didn't want anything I said not to be in line with what the ambassador thought. So I must admit I was-- not aloof but I did not attempt to draw the three of them as closely to me in a chitchat as I probably should have done. But as I say, there had been an adversarial relationship and so I was very careful.

Q: Did they report upon-- I guess they traveled about Iran fairly extensively. Maybe not that extensive, but they traveled about?

Naas: They went around Tehran, yes.

Q: And I guess other cities as well?

Naas: And Clements went off to the south. He had been our consul down in Khoramshah. So he took a trip down to Khoramshah. I forget where the others went, frankly.

Q: Did they draw any conclusions that they discussed with you before they left?

Naas: It's hard putting my mind back. I just sort of get the sense that they really were sort of where we were at that point, that the Shah was in serious trouble. And Carl, who had previous experience in Iran and spoke good Farsi-- still does-- he found some of the things quite strikingly different. Much of it was in a train or a plane. A guy who sat down in the next seat was quite willing to be really very outspoken about the Shah. And that was a difference. To an old hand, you know, that was an alarm bell going off, because when Carl had been there, nobody would have dared to do it. So it was that kind of thing that had very much of meaning to Carl. I think some of the rest of us had slowly gotten used to it, but I must admit that the first time someone-- this must have been May or June-- took me aside and really tore into the Shah, I was taken aback, because I felt that people-- I'd always been told people were so cautious about this. And I reported that in a letter. But Carl got a lot of it. Old friends and people, and so he came back and sort of-- you know, "The situation was fundamentally changed since I was here." He was the

best, because he had the experience. Little things meant something to him.

Q: Now on November 11th the National Front leader, Karim Sanjabi, was arrested after returning from Paris, where he was meeting with Khomeini. And the arrest touched off more strike activity in November. Had the embassy had much contact with Sanjabi in the preceding months or around that time?

Naas: As I recall, either Stempel or George Lambrakis had seen Sanjabi now and then, but I never had, no. As I mentioned early on in this tape, the ambassador told me I was basically to manage the place. So I personally made no effort to meet top level opposition leaders. If I bumped into people at functions, fine, but I thought that was the political section's job.

Q: To what extent did you or other people at the embassy believe that the National Front leadership and others in the moderate opposition as well constituted a viable alternative to the Shah?

Naas: I can't speak for other members of the embassy, but it was always one of my assumptions, from the time I was country director on, that they did not have the ability to run a government, that they did not have sufficiently organized support, they did not have real organization, that they were seriously divided amongst themselves, and frankly I thought of them pretty much as a feckless lot, who would probably never be able to get together to run a government.



I remember as country director every so often I'd sit with my colleagues, a couple of them, we'd just chat about the future, and I guess there was a conclusion drawn from those days that I carried over, that while Mussadiq was important and some of the individuals in the National Front were certainly esteemed gentlemen, they simply did not really-- I'm probably looking at it from a policy point of view-- they just didn't look to me like an alternative government. But they were the visible opposition, and so they were the people we were trying to see.

Q: Now according to Gary Sick's book, by around November Brzezinski was concerned about Ambassador Sullivan's reporting from Tehran, and there was some discussion in Washington about an alleged lack of hard political information on the country. Were there any indications from Washington that there were problems along that line, that there was some concern about inadequate information or not enough information? Did this get back to the embassy, these discussions about an alleged lack of hard information?

Naas: I don't ever recall getting a message from Washington saying, you know, could you give us more of this or that? It may have occurred and we may have responded to it, but we were not aware in November of this attitude in the National Security Council, the National Security Council staff.

You'd have to ask Brzezinski himself whether "Thinking the Unthinkable," and the continuous reporting-- I mean, there was a pile of reporting of what was going on, just an enormous flood of messages he just simply didn't like what he was hearing and would have liked us to somehow be reporting more on all the pro-Shah strength. I'm not sure, but I've

seen that sort of thing in government, when "Why are you always reporting bad news?" Well, in fact, there wasn't much good news to report. And Bill could be very sharp with his pencil, so--

Q: Apparently as a result of this concern about the reporting in November, Brzezinski sent-- apparently he sent the former station chief, Arthur Callahan, to Iran as a special emissary to meet with the Shah?

Naas: Yes.

Q: What did you and Sullivan think about this move, sending a special emissary?

Naas: Frankly we were annoyed. It was the first sign that somehow we weren't getting our message across. Not annoyed at Art, because I had known Art a long time, Bill knew him, and Art's a thorough gentleman and we still see each other a couple of times a year. Art had had the four years experience. Bill was a little concerned at the time that Art was then working for Westinghouse, that later on there could be some people raising the question of conflict of interest. I don't know how much Bill really believed that or whether that was just one of his expressions of annoyance, of having somebody come in and look over his shoulder. You know, we were annoyed at the time. Not with the individual, but with the effort. I forget when that was. Was it the first week of December?

Q: Late November or early December, I'm not sure.

Naas: But Art was a thorough gentleman. He came in and he talked with Bill and he briefed Bill completely on what he-- I've forgotten the content of all of that, but briefed Bill completely on his meeting with the Shah and his impressions. He's in the Washington area, by the way.

Q: I interviewed William Lehfeltdt, who was with GE around this time, and he was Chamber of Commerce in Tehran?

Naas: He was with General Electric.

Q: Yes, right, but he was also working on it with a group of businessmen, a Chamber of Commerce group. He noted that during the last months of '78 that members of the non-official U. S. community in Iran were somewhat irritated with the embassy, because they did not think that the diplomats were especially concerned about their own personal security in Iran. What was the embassy's approach to the question of evacuation of non-official Americans and their families? Around November, say, or early December?

Naas: In November we were, I suppose, basically finishing our planning on the evacuation. We started early on, and I must say the ambassador and I were both very reluctant to get in the process of evacuation planning. We felt that that word of American's evacuation planning would seep into the community, seep into the Iranian community and slowly move

up to the Shah. And I'm talking about May, June, July. And that it was not the kind of signal we wanted to send.

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

Q: You were talking about the evacuation planning.

Naas: So, as I said, we were reluctant to get into the formal process of bringing the evacuation plan up-to-date. Every post has a basic emergency evacuation plan, which it's supposed to bring up-to-date every so often. Eventually it was pretty much the military element coming out of Heidelberg and our own military people who insisted, in a sense, that we start the process, pointing out how terribly complicated it was and that we were doing a disservice to the American community and others. So we went into a very formal process of bringing the plan up-to-date. So whether it was up-to-date in November, October I forget. My own feeling of this sort of thing is that what you've got to do is have a group of people with a basic understanding of the issues, problems and means of egress, et cetera, but no plan is ever going to answer all of your problems. And that turned out to be exactly that.

But we did run off forms that are necessary, where people promise to repay if they're evacuated, all sorts of different little forms that the consular section has to use. So we got a supply of those on hand, which I again with great trepidation authorized the consul general to have ready. I thought again that this was going to alarm the community.

And so I think Bill [Lehfeltdt], who is a very dear friend, and other people did feel that we weren't sharing with them. We were doing the planning, but we were not sharing with them our concerns. And I think that that was one of those difficult problems an ambassador and a DCM face. You have forty some thousand Americans. You've got to have plans. But if you let the forty thousand Americans know that you're terribly concerned, you may damn well have a panic on your hands, and we still had our-- we were pretty dubious things we were going to end up well-- we still had our fingers crossed.

And policy, as I keep mentioning, the policy was to support the Shah to the utmost, and one of the more visible means of supporting the Shah was the continued presence of thousands of Americans who were helping with his defense establishment. And a withdrawal of substantial portions of these people would be a final sign to him and to the opposition that we were giving up.

A couple of the most poignant messages that Bill [Sullivan] sent in, actually in early January, explaining all of this problem to the Secretary of State. Whatever we do, you know.

Q: Now during this period, I guess-- late November, early December-- former Prime Minister, Ali Amini, was trying to set up a consultative council to act as an intermediary between the opposition and the Shah. I guess Zahedi later on scotched this effort. I mean, he was making some effort to develop this contact with the Shah and the opposition. Did Amini have any contacts with the embassy? Was there much encouragement from the embassy to try something along those lines, this consultative council idea?

Naas: I can't remember whether we supported the consultative council idea itself. That's just gone from my memory. The ambassador met with Ali Amini on quite a number of occasions, and we did view Ali Amini as the kind of person who might be a bridge between the opposition and the palace. I don't know whether we ever sort of pushed this particular concept, but he was certainly encouraged by the ambassador to engage himself in the political process. Very definitely.

But again we had a problem there. History comes back to bite you. Ali Amini was incorrectly viewed as sort of an American stooge when he was chosen prime minister in the early sixties. He was very much his own man, but he had been ambassador to the United States. He had made a very favorable impression on the Kennedy people, and there was certainly a sense in the Kennedy administration that he was the kind of person who would make a good prime minister and do the economic reform that was absolutely necessary at the time. But Iranians viewed him as an American toady. So our having contact with Ali Amini and pushing him, you had to bear in mind what had happened twenty some years previously. So there were always certain constraints. But the ambassador was highly impressed by Ali Amini. He was a man of very considerable intelligence, and we simply hoped that he would play an important role.

Q: Now during this period, after November 5th or 6th, after the day Tehran burned and the following weeks, were there any instructions or guidance from the State Department in terms of how the embassy should conduct itself towards-- related to the opposition or the Shah? What was your sense of what Washington was thinking at this time?

Naas: I recall no such instructions, no such guidance. Again I don't want to waste your tape. I'm not saying there weren't such, but I certainly don't remember them. They made no impact on me at the time or I think something would ring a bell a little bit.

One of the real problems-- if you read the various books that have come out since-- is that Washington was having one hell of a hard time getting itself-- and, in fact, it never did get itself together. So getting out instructions to us other than to support the Shah, fully-- don't be seen as waffling in your support of the Shah-- it's highly unlikely anything else could have gotten out.

Q: Were you or Ambassador Sullivan in pretty close contact with Henry Precht at the desk?

Naas: Official and formal letters and some telephone calls, but again Henry was a loyal officer. There was a certain extent to which he would go in telling us what was going on. As I recall, he said, if Washington knows that you've got this memorandum, it could be the end of my career. The memorandum that I mentioned earlier. So he thought it was quite daring to send that out to us.

This is one thing that I-- at the Foreign Service Institute--keep going back to. That there's no substitute during a crisis for somebody from Washington at an appropriate level getting out to the field for three or four days just to talk policy and talk alternatives. Or somebody from the embassy going to Washington, where off the record you talk. As you know, in Washington when a telegram comes in, it's reproduced in I don't know how many hundreds of copies. And we were always very conscious when we were in Tehran of the

highly divided nature of our Washington constituency. Everybody would be ready to jump on a particular paragraph and run with it. That was something that was burdensome frankly at times. You knew the human rights people would jump on something if you said it, and you had that kind of highly divided atmosphere. So we were very careful at times. But there's no substitute for people who trust each other getting together and really hacking it over.

Q: According to Gary Sick's book, I guess in November there were discussions at the National Security Council staff. There was a staff meeting of some sort, and there was some speculation about what happened during Moharram. But in any case there was some concern whether the Shah would be able to last through that month. Was there speculation at the embassy?

Naas: We recognized, or we thought that the period of Moharram, particularly the last two days, would be a major threat and the major crisis for the Shah to survive. We thought that there was a likelihood of very significant bloodshed and that the situation could simply break down. And as I recall, Ardeshir Zahedi and others finally worked out a deal with the various demonstrators, that they could demonstrate and have the Moharram processions in certain parts of the city and not other parts of the city.

So those days passed a little more peacefully than we had feared. Frankly, I thought that all hell was going to break loose, that this would be sort of in a sense, possibly, the major uprising. It was a question of whether the troops and others would stand fast or they wouldn't stand fast. But they negotiated their way out of a major confrontation at



that time.

Q: Now by late November I guess Brzezinski and President Carter had requested George Ball to undertake a major study, or a special study, on political alternatives in Iran. Did you know much about Ball's assignment at the embassy? Were you told that or was Sullivan told it?

Naas: We heard about it and we received a couple of telegrams asking us for specific kind of information about individuals, but we had no idea really of what Ball was doing. I, to this day, have never seen the Ball report. It was never transmitted.

Q: Would it be classified?

Naas: I don't think-- I've never seen it. It would be a White House document, so there's no need for-- I mean, the White House is not covered, the Freedom of Improvement Act.

Q: Down in the Carter Library probably?

Naas: Yes. Bill Sullivan, as I recall, was pleased, in a sense at least, that somebody of Ball's stature was going to address the problem. And Ball had the idea of a council of notables or something like that and sent us a whole list of names for us to comment on. As I recall, we went back and said So-and-So wouldn't even sit in the same room with So-and-So, and added a few names to the thing. We knew that this was from-- I don't know

why we knew it-- was from Ball, but maybe the telegram said Ball wants this information. We were not part of his process except to answer questions.

Q: Now apparently there was ongoing discussion in Washington over who was responsible for the successful organization of demonstrations. For example, from what I've read Robert Bowie at the CIA argued that it was the Iranian left that was responsible. James Bill said that it was the National Front. Henry Precht suggested that everybody was underestimating the role of the clergy in organizing demonstrations. While others apparently, including Brzezinski, believed that Moscow was behind the whole thing. Were similar debates held at the Embassy, discussing what accounted for the success of the opposition toward organizing demonstrations?

Naas: We did a great deal of questioning ourselves of how these things were being so thoroughly organized. It clearly was a combination of different groups or elements, but we could not identify them. Certainly in that period we still did not have a sense of the melding of the bazaar and the clergy. We should have been. I mean, historically, culturally the Moharram demonstrations or the Moharram parades, and a lot of other events have been held by the bazaar and organized with the clergy, et cetera. We should have had a clearer understanding than we did.

One of the things I suppose that threw one off a little bit is that when you'd hear reports of young Iranians forming a "V" with motorcycle, "V"s, and with modern walkie-talkies, it

distracted one from the clergy and the bazaar. It shouldn't have, but it did. And there was an awful lot of fumbling around, looking for the hand of the left.

I remember one day I called the entire political section in. By entire I mean both sides of the aisle. And had them sit down and I said to them, "Look, I'm not your political officer, but I'm so tired of hearing about the red hand. Where the hell is it? I can't see it. Does anybody here see the red hand?" And all these faces-- no response. And I said, well, then who the hell is organizing these things? And again there was-- oh, people muttered about, you know, the young returnees from the United States who had learned effective demonstrations here. Somebody might have mentioned the clergy, but-- I suppose this meeting of mine might have been mid-November, I'm not sure any more. But I got tired of this red hand stuff myself, because I couldn't see any evidence of it. And through liaison with SAVAK we were not getting any evidence of it, and it flew in the face of everything we had believed for a long time that is the Communist Party simply wasn't strong, wasn't well organized. Sure they had hidden cells. They had the spies and agents and all that, but in terms of real organization, they didn't have it. So where are they? We operated an awful lot really in the dark on that.

Q: I've read that Brzezinski believed that Moscow somehow was behind the whole thing. Did those views filter back, that he was thinking along those lines? Apparently there was an article by Robert Moss in the New Republic that impressed him. Was this known in Tehran?

Naas: I don't recall. We were all afflicted frankly by the same syndrome. Don't forget my generation of foreign service officers and Brzezinski and others, we all grew up in the Cold War period and had come to believe in the great evil genius of the Reds and all that.

Q: I understand during late November Robert Bowie, whom I mentioned earlier, at the CIA and General Eugene Tighe of the Defense Intelligence Agency visited Iran and met with the Shah. What was the purpose of their visit?

Naas: It was a standard briefing. Once a year someone from DIA and CIA at a very senior level-- Tighe was either head or deputy head at the time, I forget-- would come and give the Shah an intelligence briefing. Sort of the world view. With again a heavy emphasis on the Soviet Union, weaponry, evidence of Soviet subversive activity, plus a tour d'horizon of the world. So this was traditional.

There was some question at the time whether because of the troubled situation they should come to Tehran, but the ambassador felt, and I agreed with him, that they definitely should come to Tehran, that that would be a further sign to the Shah and his supporters that we had not washed our hands of him. And since again Washington policy was to support the Shah, we felt that we might as well follow through on it. And as I said, frankly we still had our fingers crossed that somehow the fingernails would hold on somehow.

Q: Now another visitor was Robert Byrd, Senator Robert Byrd. Do you recall anything about that visit? I think he met with the Shah. Did he talk about what he--

Naas: Yes, Byrd met with the Shah and moved around Tehran a little bit. As I recall, he stayed with the ambassador. I'm not even sure of that. Because Byrd's-- either son or daughter is married to an Iranian. I forget which one. And so he did have some sort of a family gathering. And he met with the Shah. The ambassador had my wife and me and Mrs. Sullivan to meet with Byrd and his staff at the residence. And we briefed him on the situation as we saw it, and the ambassador-- but again, one is very careful on such things. And Byrd, as I recall, came to the conclusion basically that the Shah was in dire straits. I'm not sure he-- you'd have to ask him-- reported or concluded that all was lost. I don't remember. He clearly was quite distressed by what he saw in the Shah's personal demeanor. The Shah was tired, unresponsive. So he was quite distressed by the situation.

Q: How freely could you move around Tehran during the late fall?

Naas: It depended upon the day frankly. If the demonstrations were going on, you-- we had a network of people who'd call into our security office and say where the demonstrations were, so that the word would get around, don't use a particular road or this or that. Often a good part of the city would be wide open. Other days-- and I don't know how many of these occurred-- that we would send word to the community, stay at home, or don't come south. Takhtijamshid, which is where the embassy is, don't come south of that area, because most of the demonstrations were to the south. And a couple of the main arteries going to the north. So we'd tell people, stay away from the bazaar,

stay away from downtown Tehran. If you have to do any shopping, do it in your neighborhood. Sometimes when the ambassador had to visit the Shah, things were very, very hairy. The security people would go out an hour ahead of time to try to find a safe path for the ambassador to get through.

Q: Now from what I've read-- I guess this is in Gary Sick's book-- in early December Harold Saunders sent out a paper that raised the possibility of a more active political role, that the ambassador try to find ways to try to develop political alternatives, maybe stitch together an alternative to the Shah, whatever. And according to Sick's book Sullivan rejected that sort of activism, that sort of active role for the ambassador. Do you recall Saunders' proposal or what you thought about Saunders' proposal at that time?

Naas: Only vaguely. I don't have nice clear-cut memory of it. I do recall discussing it very briefly with the ambassador. He did not want to be put in the position of-- didn't feel that it would work, that American intervention of such a blatant nature would work at that time. Later on, of course-- really a few weeks later on he was playing a very active role, in fact. But I think sort of being asked to be pro-counsel and trying to pull everybody together was more than he felt he could do or should do. But he'd have to speak for himself on that.

Q: Was there much discussion among the political officers about the various possibilities? The possible roles that the