

ambassador could play in the situation?

Naas: I don't really recall. The ambassador considered himself the number one political officer, and while he kept me well informed, he would call various officers in and chat with them, but he felt that he was it. And again, even with his own staff, the Ambassador always felt that he had to be careful in expressing his honest-to-God feelings, because this would be reflected in their feelings and what they might say.

Q: Now on December 7th Saunders told Sullivan about George Ball's plan for a council of notables, which you discussed earlier, and Sullivan rejected the plan because he thought-- this is what I've read-- that the Shah would not accept it. It was as simple as that. Is that fairly accurate?

Naas: Fairly accurate. As I said, Bill pooh-poohed the idea, as I said basically, saying most of these people wouldn't sit in the same room with each other and that the Shah wouldn't buy it. There were too many-- the telegram's around some place-- there were just too many people on the list that the Shah hated and didn't trust. He just thought it wouldn't work.

Q: Now in mid-December, maybe a week or two later, the Shah was meeting with National Front figures, like Sadiqi and Bakhtiar, and apparently Sullivan was encouraging those kinds of contacts, according to the various accounts that are extant. What did Sullivan do to encourage those kinds of contacts? Did he simply say to the Shah that it

was a good idea? Or did he also encourage the National Front leadership to try to make contacts with the Shah?

Naas: I forget what Bill says in his book. You'd find that in his book. But again, all of this evolved from the fact that over six weeks or two months they had been talking what options does the Shah have. The iron fist. The other is abdicate, leave the country. And the first one was to continue liberalization and work towards the elections and a more democratic form of government, et cetera. So as the Shah moved in that direction and indicated he felt it was time for the end of martial law-- Azhari, by the way, about that time had had a heart attack, was ill, was not enjoying the role because he felt he had no particular power.

Q: December 20, or something.

Naas: And so the Ambassador encouraged the Shah to think in that direction. We didn't know that much about Sadiqi, except from the bio files. I still don't know that much about him. And Sadiqi, just to go on, made-- I just don't know how vigorously-- made efforts to find a group of compatible people who would agree to form a new government. And at one point, when Bill was talking to the Shah-- and asked how the Shah thought Sadiqi was coming along in his efforts to form the government, this had been going on for several days, and the Shah said, "Sadiqi needs or says he needs another ten days." Ten days, two weeks, something of that nature. And Bill said something to the effect, "Your Majesty, you're sadly mistaken if you think he's got ten days." And eventually Sadiqi gave up the

effort. Bill was right. He couldn't get enough people and time was running short at that point. And then when he turned to Bakhtiar again, we felt "fine", that this was an effort that should be made.

Q: At this stage of things, Sullivan was basically encouraging discussion and contacts?

Naas: Oh, absolutely.

Q: But he was not playing really an active role in arranging the contacts? Or was he?

Naas: No. We frankly didn't know Sadiqi. The ambassador knew Bakhtiar and George Lambrakis knew Bakhtiar, but we weren't picking individuals. We were just encouraging him to get the process going.

Q: Had you met Bakhtiar yourself?

Naas: No.

Q: What did you think his prospects were, once he was appointed Prime Minister in late December? What kind of prospects did you think that he had?

Naas: Zilch. And this caused another problem with Washington. At this point, of course, there was total distrust between us and Washington. Unfortunately. And we reported very

candidly that despite his talents, obvious talents, the political process by this time had gone too far and that Bakhtiar could not last. And we said that I don't know how many different ways.

Q: What brought you to that conclusion? His background or the situation itself?

Naas: No. It had nothing to do with him personally. He was probably the best of the lot. He was a man of real character and real strength and real guts. We just thought the situation had gone so far and the time had come in our view where some other kind of coalition, which brought in the Khomeini forces and those closest to him, was going to win. And our main hope at that time was that the armed forces, the integrity of the armed forces would be maintained, that the country would not go into real chaos, and that somehow in the process over the subsequent months we might be able to have some kind of a relationship which supported some of the U. S. interests. There was absolutely no question in terms of-- that Bakhtiar was a first-rate man, but it was too late.

Q: My impression is that through much of '78 the assumption was that the armed forces would remain loyal to the Shah. But I think by late in the year was there less and less confidence in that possibility?

Naas: I think we had full confidence really until mid-December, late December. I think we always had full confidence that the officer leadership would remain loyal to the Shah. There was increasingly a question of whether the troops would be. And we were getting

reports indicating troop dissatisfaction and AWOL. You had had some time in November and December the shooting in the Imperial Guard. A sergeant came in and sprayed the dining room and killed a number of officers before he was killed. We had a number of different ways of getting information that all was not well in the forces at the lower ranks, but I think there was still a feeling that the officer class by and large would support the Shah.

Q: Now apparently by around December 20th Sullivan was worried that the military might splinter into opposing factions, that maybe some of the officers might gravitate toward the opposition and some would stay with the Shah, that this would happen unless an agreement was reached with the opposition. And towards that end he asked Washington to send a high level envoy to Khomeini.

Naas: That's right.

Q: This was the aborted Eliot mission?

Naas: Yes.

Q: What did Sullivan think would come out of talks with Ayatollah Khomeini?

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Naas: Well, it goes back to the point I just made. I'm not sure of the dates of when and how he and I came to the conclusions that the efforts to find a middle path of the Sadiqis and Bakhtiars, et cetera, wouldn't work. We felt that the Khomeini forces-- we had finally become aware of the strength of Khomeini and all the rest-- that something had to be worked out with them. And he hoped that some sort of a-- understanding would be better, I suppose-- would be reached with Khomeini and those around him, providing for the maintenance and the integrity of the armed forces and a political process, a peaceful political process. We had our fingers crossed. Bill would have to speak for himself, but I'm quite sure that since our policy was entirely the support of the Shah, he hoped that somehow the monarchy could remain.

But the basic thing was that-- and it's very difficult in American politics, you see it with the PLO, for example-- is that if you're going to operate in the climate in Iran--or the climate in say the Middle East and a lot of other places-- you simply have to talk to the people who've got the power. You may not like them. They may be detestable or what have you. But if they have power and are a major element of an equation, not to talk with them or at least try to understand them or deal with them, you're bound to fail.

And it was as much of that as anything, that this guy has got the power, it's about time we talk to him to find out what he is really up to. Is there room for compromise? And that's why we wanted to talk to Khomeini.

Q: So the idea was to find ways to make an accommodation between the moderate revolutionaries-- like Bazargan, say-- and the clergy?

Naas: Later on that was-- we didn't have to work out an arrangement between Bazargan and Khomeini. He had done that himself. It was a question of how could we later on be useful, or find out whether there was some way that we could be useful, so that the armed forces remained intact, remained loyal to Iran, and that we didn't slide into civil war.

Q: Now in Gary Sick's book he complains that no one was keeping the White House informed about these talks that were being held in Tehran with the various opposition figures concerning Khomeini. How closely were Pecht and Saunders informed about these discussions?

Naas: It depends on what date you're talking about. In late December anything that we did-- and the people who were doing most of it were John Stempel and George Lambrakis, with the ambassador now and then meeting with Ali Amini and a few others--was reported by telegram. We had no clear plan, but just trying to get a process going.

After December 28th, 29th, some place in there, it is possible that Gary Sick did not see all the information. My good friend Bernie Gwertzman of the New York Times on the-- one could check this-- 28th and 29th, 27th, 28th, but on two successive days on the front page of the New York Times reported an excellent summary of our reporting, basic reporting telegrams of options and alternatives and our views of the way things were going. This absolutely blew our minds. I mean, we were becoming slightly psycho anyway in Tehran over the pressures and the leaks that were just all the time hitting the American

press.

So Bill [Sullivan] informed the State Department that we were going to set up a special communications channel. Which we did. The regular reporting went on and was spread around, but there was a period in which at night Bill and I, and sometimes General Huyser, would use-- special communications to the executive secretariat in Washington. We would sit there and dictate what we wanted to say. The typist of it, the communicator, would send it and it would appear in

Washington, no further copies distributed. And we always insisted on knowing when we opened up those meetings of who was present in Washington. And Sullivan would report whether he was alone-- which he never was, but he would say "Naas" or "Huyser and Naas" present here. Who's there? And so I think there were several of those sessions in which Gary and others weren't there.

I forget the content of a lot of those meetings, but that's where some of the most sensitive exchanges were going on. And Gary, I guess, at least for a week's period has a legitimate gripe if Washington didn't brief him, that he wasn't aware of what we were thinking. But having gone through two successive leaks of the most sensitive telegrams that we could write-- and believe me, if you want to look them up in the record, they're very accurate-- we just decided we couldn't afford to do it any more.

Q: As we said earlier, Bakhtiar was appointed Prime Minister on the 28th, but there was still some concern that he's not going to be able to hold on to power. So there's some effort to find somebody that's more workable by the embassy? That's what were trying to do?



Naas: No, it was not that. I may have the dates wrong. It seems to me Bakhtiar was not confirmed by the Majlis until January 14th or 15th, something like that, and the Shah left on the 16th. So you had a long period in there in which it was problematic whether Bakhtiar would be confirmed or be able to pull together a sufficient number of people with him to form a cabinet. And, in fact, he had real difficulty. He never did get a full cabinet.

We maintained the same contacts with the LMI, plus others, that we had been doing before. We were under absolutely firm instructions to support Bakhtiar to the fullest. And we did that. But at the same time we continued the same contacts that we had developed in previous months.

Q: And this included support for the plan to send an envoy to Khomeini towards that same-- ?

Naas: Oh, it was actually-- yes, it was early-- late December or early January when we proposed that. So we were operating on different levels. We did not see a conflict between those. I personally can't remember whether Bakhtiar was aware of the idea of approaching Khomeini. Certainly the Shah was. We took no step without discussing it with the Shah, so he was perfectly aware of what we were proposing and was quite distressed when he was finally told that the President had called off the whole idea.

Q: Did you ever get an explanation of why that decision was made?

Naas: I've never had a clear explanation of it, no. It was when he was at the meeting with French Prime Minister, Giscard--

Q: At Guadeloupe, right?

Naas: At Guadeloupe. And it's always been a question in my mind whether he discussed it with Giscard and Giscard said, "Don't worry. As a matter of fact, we'll take care of the Khomeini discussion," or something like that.

I've never been satisfied, but I think part of it is also Brzezinski's normal reaction. You know, our policy is to support the Shah. And you don't talk to somebody like Khomeini. Well, of course, if he doesn't have any power--

Q: I understand that by late December the assumption was that the Shah would leave the country once Bakhtair had formed a cabinet. He would take a vacation. And according to Sullivan's account, by early January the talks with the opposition had produced a list of a hundred military leaders who would be expected to leave with the Shah, and their replacements were to be picked by various opposition people. In return for this arrangement, I guess, the military would not suffer any retribution by the opposition. Is this fairly accurate?

Naas: I've read about this telegram many times, and it's one of the few things that apparently did happen that I just simply don't remember at all.

Q: This was the hundred generals?

Naas: This was the hundred generals. Now I'm ninety-nine per cent sure that we never sent the list of a hundred generals, but that one of the LMI people said to us that they had a list of a hundred generals. If we ever got that list, I sure as hell don't remember it. But to your previous point, it was well understood and discussed frequently with the ambassador by the Shah himself that once a government was put in place, he would leave the country on vacation.

Q: And this was decided by, say, late December?

Naas: Some place. About the time that Sadiqi was appointed.

Q: Didn't Bakhtiar take the position on the assumption that the Shah would in fact leave? Wasn't that the understanding?

Naas: Yes. Yes, that's what I recall and what I've read is that that was the only basis on which he would take it. I think he had the idea that if he could work out a political settlement, there would be some sort of a referendum of whether the monarchy would be maintained or not. But he realized that it was bad enough at that point being an appointee of the Shah, but to have the Shah hang around with control of the armed forces, et cetera, that he would be a man with no power.

Q: Now Gary Sick argues in his book that it was because Sullivan had gone so far in approving a list-- if he had approved the list, that's still the question, but say he had approved such a list-- that because Sullivan had gone so far in that direction that he was rather hostile to the Huyser mission, because Huyser was supposed to urge the military leaders to remain in place, where, in fact, allegedly he was somewhat more interested in having the military leaders leave with the Shah. That's sort of a contradictory policy approach. Huyser was supposed to keep the military in their place, whereas Sullivan was apparently concerned with having certain military leaders leave with the Shah when the Shah goes. Is that-- ?

Naas: You'd have to ask Bill whether there was any relationship whatsoever in those two ideas. Certainly he never expressed that relationship to me. We were more opposed at first to Huyser coming, simply out of the traditional Embassy view of not having somebody else come in looking over your shoulder.

Q: Just like Callahan?

Naas: Yes. That's a very natural embassy reaction. We all knew General Huyser and there are very few officers that I've ever had more respect for. In fact, there are none I've had more respect for as a human being, as a very capable officer.

But he didn't know Iran. He knew the leaders. I mean, he knew the military leaders because of his role in EUCOM. But he was not an Iranian specialist. And this clearly was a-- if you were going to have a special emissary-- and we could have found somebody deeply steeped in Iranian culture, history and knowledge, that might have been acceptable. But the basic feeling was that the last thing we needed at this point was somebody else.

Q: Did the White House ask for Sullivan's approval before Huyser was sent?

Naas: The first, I think, that we heard about it is as Bill reports in his book, when he had a telephone conversation, I guess, from General Haig. And I forget whether we objected to it or not, but we were not enthusiastic. It's a good book, by the way. You ought to read Huyser's book.

Q: Yes, I've read parts of it. It is interesting. Now part of Huyser's instructions were to encourage a military coup if the Bakhtiar government fell or was pushed aside. Now Huyser, did he talk about that final option?

Naas: It was never to encourage a coup. As I remember Huyser's instructions-- I always said they looked like instructions written by a committee, so that nobody would eventually have responsibility for them. His first job was to encourage the military to remain loyal to the established government. There was great concern that since their loyalty was personal to the Shah, that once the Shah left the country the military just might fall apart.

That was his first job.

His second job was to help them prepare for a coup or taking over, if that became necessary. But the first job was always considered the most important, to get the military through this terribly difficult situation, in which loyalty was transferred from the Shah personally to a government headed by a prime minister.

Q: Bakhtiar?

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

Q: About Huyser's instructions as you saw them?

Naas: I gave you the two main thrusts of it and that was the key thing. The lure was that we would continue our close relationship with the military in terms of supply, et cetera, et cetera.

Q: Now what impact did Huyser's presence have on Sullivan's position? Did it make it harder for him to undertake negotiations with the opposition? With Huyser in the background, with the military?

Naas: As it turned out, no. Huyser and Bill worked very, very closely together, and we were fortunate. If we had to have another force coming into the situation, we were fortunate we had Huyser. He was a great gentleman. And I doubt if there's one

important word that he said or the generals said to him that he didn't report thoroughly and faithfully to the Ambassador.

Q: I guess I was thinking more, would Huyser's presence have an impact on the opposition's perceptions of the U. S. role?

Naas: No. As a matter of fact, later on, I think-- at the time I'm not sure what they thought, but it enabled us at times to coordinate meetings, or try to coordinate meetings between Bazargan and his group and, say, General Garabaghi or other people. We had two lines out, one to the military and one to the politicians. It didn't work on several occasions.

But I think it probably had a dual effect on the opposition. One, it made them terribly concerned because of their misunderstanding of the extent of U. S. influence and the ability to pull the strings, that we could instruct the generals to pull a coup. Later on, as they looked back upon it, many of them looked upon it as very fortuitous assistance to them, that we had acted responsibly and had held off a coup. That's probably not true either. I know that in my later discussions with some of these people I did point out that we had been very close to the military in that period, which they're familiar with. I mean, they knew everything that was going on. And that we had not encouraged a flood of blood in the streets. So I think they had ambivalent feelings.

And if you're talking about the moderate opposition, Bazargan and all these people, they too wanted to maintain a strong, integrated military, as you said before. They wanted to get rid of a hundred officers. Had a hard time bringing that particular thing into focus,

but they wanted the military to stay strong. If you're going to run a government, you want somebody to crack down on the others if you have to. And they were concerned about the Soviet threat and all the traditional things.

So our efforts to keep the military together, I think they basically welcomed them, while at the same time being fearful of what we might do with that presumed control.

Q: If you look at Sullivan's and Huyser's accounts and the various other accounts of the way they looked at things in January 1979, they both had very sharply conflicting interpretations of the internal strength and cohesion of the Iranian military. Huyser seemed to think that they could hold together, whereas Sullivan was very skeptical about the internal cohesion of the military leadership. But even if you look at Huyser's account, he shows there was lots of internal bickering at the high command level. Why do you think he had such an optimistic view of the military's capacity to hold itself together in the face of the opposition and other problems?

Naas: I think each time that he found-- if you want to call it weakness or dissension-- among the group, within the group that he met, he felt that he'd pulled them back on the main track. Planning among the lower officers, the Colonel and Captain on the Navy level was going ahead, it was pretty good planning. And I think he felt his own force of personality and the sense that the force that he probably had as a special representative of the President of the United States, and that he could hold these people together.

We in the embassy were far more dubious. This was not in criticism of the individual generals and others, but it was clear that underneath the generals the Army was slowly



disappearing. It was still an effective force, but it was rife with dissension. We just felt that without the leadership of the Shah being right there-- after all, we had encouraged the Shah to leave-- that they simply weren't going to have the ability to crack down. There was no single leader. They didn't have a charismatic general pulling everybody together. And our feeling that things had come to that point.

I'll give you a poignant point that Bill [Sullivan] never put in his book, and I told him he should have shown me the book in draft. General Huyser, in I think one of his last telegrams from Tehran, he reported to Washington his views that the military would hold together, but, he said I want ambassador Sullivan to add his comments. And you asked how close and honorable the relationship was. And Bill and I sat down and he wrote and we chatted for a second. He wrote a very brief paragraph, saying that he, in fact, did not believe that the military would hold together and be a unified force. I forget the exact language, but Huyser said, "I'm going to report that exactly how you wrote it, Bill." As he left, Bill got up and, red in the face, slammed his fist together and he said, "Well, Jesus--" he said. "I have prided myself as a political officer my entire life. I've always wanted to be right." And he said, "I just sent something in to Washington and for the first time I pray that I'm wrong." And I put my arm around his shoulders and I said, "Bill, unfortunately you're right." And he looked up and said, "Do you think so?" And I said, "I wouldn't have agreed if I didn't. Yes, you're right."

Q: Now James Bill in his book suggests that-- I think others have suggested this as well, that one of the main reasons that the Carter administration wanted to hold the military together was to assure U. S. access to the monitoring posts in northern Iran. Now how

important was that consideration in the scheme of things?

Naas: To the best of my recollection it never came up at the embassy or in a discussion with the ambassador. It was probably one of those things that was a given, that the monitoring posts were important, so you don't have to talk about them. The monitoring posts, as you know, were put in with just simply the personal approval of the Shah. His departure obviously under any conditions put those in jeopardy.

No, I mean Bill and I were thinking in terms of the military as a potential stabilizing force as time went on and as a group with which we did have a close personal, professional and military and financial relationship. I never thought of the sites in that context at all.

Q: Apparently at this time though there were lots of goings-on at the monitoring sites in terms of-- there was a-- the local Iranian employees at the monitoring-- the stations held the U. S. employees as hostages until they got their back pay, something like that? Did you know about these developments? Were they reported?

Naas: Oh, yes. Oh, sure. We were fully informed of that, and some of the books point out that Colonel Tom Schaeffer, who eventually became a hostage, went up there with a plane load full of money and paid these guys off. Poor Tom, I don't think he ever got a medal for that either. He deserved it frankly. And we did get the people out and got them to Tehran Airport and sent them home immediately. It's one of those sidebars really,

which-- great courage by a colonel and his captain.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

VA

Interviewee: Charles Naas

Session #4

Interviewer: Bill Burr

Bethesda, Maryland

August 16, 1988

Q: The final part of the interview with Charles Naas took place at Bethesda, Maryland on August 16, 1988.

Now Richard Cottan among others, has suggested that President Carter's rhetorical emphasis on human rights as a general principle of American policy tended to encourage Iranian activists, leading them to take political risks that they might not have taken. How much of this was understood at the State Department and the embassy, this question of the impact of Carter's declaratory policy regarding human rights? How much was understood about the impact of this policy on Iranian politics?

Naas: It's hard to say what level you're talking to in terms of it being understood. Certainly I viewed it from two viewpoints really. One, it created a great uncertainty on the Shah himself and among those who were his closest supporters. They wondered what we had in mind. So I think even though the President was extremely effusive in both meetings with His Imperial Majesty and, except for minor items really, sold to the Shah most of the equipment that he wanted. So it was a declaratory policy, without any major impact on the day-to-day events. But it did worry the Shah. He continuously was worried what we might have in mind.

And the other thing that was quite clear, it seems to me, is that the opposition was greatly encouraged by this. In Iran people were always looking at the great powers. I mean, what do the Soviets say, what do the Americans say? And so this shift in declaratory policy definitely encouraged them to become more open. They felt somewhat protected by the President. I will not mention the high official who confirmed this, but he told me after the revolution that the human rights policy had encouraged him to write, for example, and to start speaking more openly.

I'd like to make one clarification. I mean, many Iranians like to blame President Carter and these policies for the downfall of the Shah. Well, that's obviously going to the extreme on it. It was a contributory factor, probably not a very great one, but as I said to you in a previous meeting, that when the opposition went onto the streets and violence erupted and this is pure guesswork on my part-- I'm sure that the Shah felt somewhat constrained in his policies of what he could do in reaction, because he was never quite sure that the President of the United States would stay with him. But in my view the forces that were unleashed certainly do not lie with President Carter or the administration's policy. But it was certainly a contributory factor.

Q: Now also Cottle suggests-- this is in his recent book-- he suggests that the Shah's actions during the '77-'78 period followed the same pattern as in the early sixties, that the idea was to ride out the crisis by giving the opposition more room to maneuver, with the expectation that he could avoid making any real concessions to them in terms of giving up power, and even if he saw the similarities, he appointed Sharif-Emami as Prime Minister in the late sixties and then he brings him back in August '78. Did anybody at the State Department

or the embassy take a look back to the early sixties and see if there were any patterns in the Shah's approach, follow up to examine the current crisis of '77-'78?

Naas: I don't recall anybody specifically going back to the early sixties. You had other periods in Iran in which the Shah hoped to ride out the storm and go right back to the Mussadiq period, which he hoped to ride out. He was unable to.

And then, of course, in the early sixties, when he was under pressures from the United States, he appointed first Ali Amini, and then when Ali Amini seemed to be getting too strong, there was an excuse to get rid of him. Then in the mid-sixties, after Ali Mansur was assassinated, Hoveyda was given a considerable amount of leeway, which he grasped and ran with. So you had these sort of fits and starts.

Then, of course, in-- I forget when the Rastakhiz came in, was it '76? I guess '76, but don't hold me to the date-- in fact, he put a hold on political developments-- put the tether back on the political process again, because it was getting fairly open. So you had these fits and starts. We were all aware of that pattern. Whether we specifically went back and looked-- you know, at one of them and examined it-- I know I can say, no, we probably did not. But most of us were familiar with his political style. I mean, there's no doubt, that for a very, very long time he hoped that he could ride it out. The appointment of Sharif-Emami, in retrospect, was probably a bad choice, because he did not have the most savory reputation. And it was a thought, here was a tried and true supporter, a man who had been helpful in the past in many different positions and whose father was a well-known religious figure, sort of hoped to bridge the gap there. Of course Sharif-Emami then outlawed the casinos and went through-- oh, you know, a whole variety of what I call very

minor reforms, all of which in my view-- and I can say this without hindsight-- was sort of the wrong way to approach a political situation. I don't think you start feeding the alligators at that particular point.

Q: Now last meeting you talked about Mehdi Bazargan and his organization. I think you said you met him a few times? What was your assessment of Bazargan?

Naas: I did not meet Bazargan personally till after the revolution when I was chargé, and I met him, I guess, two or three times. I dealt primarily with Vazdi and Abbas Amir Entezam. Those were my regular contacts.

I knew some of the history, of course, of Bazargan. I was not intimate with his political history, but I had a pretty good over-view of it. And I had considerable admiration for him. This was an individual who in my view was democratically inclined. He did want, in my view, a fairly open political process, but a man who felt deeply tied to his own culture and religion. And I think probably some of the things that happened during the sixties and seventies-- not just what the Shah did in terms of political opposition-- but what was happening to Iranian society deeply disturbed him.

Yet at the same time he was a traditionalist in terms of Iran's foreign policy. He wanted good-- not overly close-- but he wanted solid ties with us, and he also expected to have good relations with the Soviet Union. I mean, this came to me quite specifically from him, and the actions of Yazdi and Entezam sort of bore that out. In fact, during Entezam's trial, Bazargan, I think, quite courageously stood up in front of that motley crew who tried Entezam and defended him strongly. He said what Entezam had done in terms

of his close relationship with us, his frequent meetings with us, et cetera, were at his behest as prime minister. He took responsibility. He had wanted this policy.

I don't know-- you can meet an official many times, and I did not meet him that many, but you can meet an official many times and you don't really know him personally. But I had the impression of a kindly man, a man who, as we all know now and knew at the time, was deeply distressed at the conditions in Tehran, what the revolution had brought and that it hadn't come out in the nice cleancut fashion that they'd hoped.

And he wrote, again quite courageously, wrote to Khomeini-- and these were public letters at times to Khomeini-- he asked to be relieved on a couple of occasions of his duties, because of his inability to govern effectively.

I wrote in a final one or two messages that he was apparently a decent person, a true Iranian patriot, somebody with whom we could have had a useful relationship. Nothing like the relationship we had had with the Shah, of course, but that the relationship could have been based on a few basic principles and fundamentals that would have been quite satisfactory to us.

Q: You mentioned Entezam a few minutes ago. Were there contacts between the embassy and him before the revolution?

Naas: Yes. And with Bazargan as well, but most of these were carried on by John Stempel. As I recall, John was the principal contact.



Q: Now in his book Brzezinski makes light or makes fun of a statement by William Sullivan, comparing Khomeini with Gandhi. But isn't it true that many of the embassy's opposition contacts saw Khomeini that way, as sort of a spiritual leader, and not as a political figure? That there was some sort of validity in terms of the way the opposition saw Khomeini, to make that kind of a statement.

Naas: I think in retrospect the choice of "Gandhi" was unfortunate. I had to live with a little story we'll tell later on. But you're right. Your question-- you really answered your own question. As I said probably in these tapes before, as I've written, lectured, Khomeini is an aberration really within his own Shi'a faith. Religious leaders ought to give spiritual faith, guidance, et cetera, to be critics, not to govern. And so most people expected and hoped that Khomeini would follow more the traditional role of the Ayatollah, would stand back and in a sense be the guardian, if you will, of the conscience of the people and that kind of thing.

I'm not sure how many-- I'm curious myself whether Entezam and Bazargan and all these other people had read Khomeini's works that he pulled together when he was in Iraq. If you read his book, he spells out quite clearly that what he meant is the governance by the clergy. Many people in government were led by their hope as much as by evidence of knowledge of Khomeini. After a brief sojourn-- and I forget how long it was, but a fairly brief sojourn in Tehran-- he did go to Qom for a brief period. In fact he was there quite a few months, and the ministers would have to fly down to talk to him.

So I think we were being guided in part by what-- or impressed in part by what our Iranian colleagues hoped. And, of course, as I say, we really had no historical reason to

believe that Khomeini was going to become quite as intrusive as he, in fact, turned out. I'm talking about that February-March period. Later on-- it was some time in April-- no, it was in May-- I received a telegram from Washington asking me whether I felt that we should-- whether an effort should be made to meet with Khomeini. And they threw back at me the only other telegram on this subject, Sullivan said that perhaps like Gandhi he will be in the background. Well, I did not wish to be in opposition to my ambassador and good friend. I went back, I think rather delicately, pointing out that a few months had passed and that Khomeini was clearly the principal power in the country and I felt that we should sit down and talk with him. I said I personally did not look forward to sitting talking with him on Iranian television and being berated and castigated by the old man, with little opportunity to speak myself. But what I felt we should do-- and I felt it might clear the air before the new ambassador came, this was when Walt Cutler was scheduled to come-- to sort of get through what was undoubtedly going to be a very difficult session, in the hopes that the ambassador could start out more or less on a clean path. I also said that I would not attempt to do so unless Bazargan himself approved. I was then given instructions, or at least permission, to raise this with Bazargan.

[TAPE PAUSE]

Naas: I was given authority to raise this issue with Bazargan, who was extremely enthusiastic. He said that he would arrange such a meeting. He saw the obvious benefits to him. If he was going to try to maintain a decent relationship, or an acceptable relationship, with us, it was necessary for Khomeini to be brought along. He told me that

he would personally arrange the meeting and go with me to the session.

Q: We'll get back to that in a little bit, but some time in late January, before Khomeini returned to Iran, Prime Minister Bakhtiar declared the Ayatollah would not be allowed to return. I think he said this in public. Did Bakhtiar or any of the generals during this period, I guess mid- to late January, consider any plans to keep Khomeini out of the country?

Naas: I think plan is much too strong a word. There was a fair amount of rhetoric, as if they would keep the airport closed or not. And they did, you know. There were several days in January when the airport was closed. There was some wild talk that the plane would be shot down. There was some wild talk that the airplane would be diverted to one of the southern islands. I'm not sure which one it was any more. And that Khomeini would be kept there isolated from the Iranian masses, et cetera. But to the best of my knowledge, there was never a plan and certainly there was no such thing discussed with us, although we heard these stories. But it became perfectly clear that with the hundreds of thousands of people on the street and the hundreds of thousands of people who were coming to Tehran, that the government would be able to keep Khomeini out only with massive slaughter, and Bakhtiar intelligently saw that and backed down.

Q: Now on February first Khomeini returned to Iran. Did you and Ambassador Sullivan have any kind of a strategy or approach to deal with the situation that his arrival would create?

Naas: No particular plan, until the very day that Bakhtiar-- until the very day that the government was overthrown, which was-- I guess they picked the tenth, eleventh or twelfth, I'm not sure.

Q: Yes. It was a weekend.

Naas: But Washington seemed to keep hoping that Bakhtiar would somehow survive. In this period, for a brief period, we did have conversations with Bazargan and the other people around him. Of course Yazdi came in on the plane with Khomeini, and somebody, had arranged a contact with Yazdi. An American had helped us. So that George Lambrakis fairly early on made contact with Yazdi.

We were in a rather helpless condition, because our policy was still not, in my view, recognizing the realities that life had changed tremendously. We were terribly concerned at the time about our own security. Ambassador Sullivan and I were almost certain that in one way or another the embassy would be attacked. He and I spent a great deal of time with the security officers and the Marines and others, in terms of how we would handle such a situation. At one point we talked with a military commander, who had a base, a little walled base at the corner of our compound, whether we might-- if it could be done and under great duress had to flee, would he protect us? And he said, certainly. And I suppose-- not I suppose, we were well aware that the handwriting was on the wall. I think it was the twelfth of September that little base was blown up, or at least the opposition blew a hole and seized it. Obviously somebody knew what our plan was, and that was sort

of the writing on the wall that our safety was certainly imperiled from then on.

And for a few days-- we kept as many of the staff, we told as many of the staff as possible to stay home, not to come into the embassy.

Q: Once Khomeini was in Iran, were there any proposals to get in touch with him? Was there any discussion at the embassy of getting in touch with Khomeini, indirectly or directly?

Naas: Certainly not in those first few weeks, no. As you know, Khomeini declared a government headed by Bazargan. I think the ambassador's written this in his book. At least it's been written some place. And the ambassador had set up a few days that an appointment with Bazargan to talk about the situation. But once the government, the so-called government, was set up-- oh, eighth, ninth, tenth, some place in there, of February-- the ambassador informed Bazargan that he could not, under those circumstances, meet with him, since we were still supporting the government of Shapour Bakhtiar. And Bazargan understood this.

As you know, at the very time that we were being attacked on February fourteenth, the ambassador's driver was taking a note, a formal diplomatic note, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to state that we would continue relationships with Iran, in effect with the Bazargan government. We don't go through a formal recognition process any more. And so the events of Ten, Eleven, Twelve were perfectly clear. The revolutionaries had won and Washington gave us authority to condemn relations. So shortly thereafter we started having-- the ambassador had some contact, not very much, with Bazargan, in that period.

Frankly, from February fourteenth well on into March, we were basically trying to dig ourselves out from the attack on the embassy, evacuating--directing the evacuation of several thousand Americans. And so there was very little policy thinking going on. In fact, I think Ambassador Sullivan pointed out he really didn't need any guidance, because, the policy-- he was very critical and caustic in this telegram-- that for the time being he just didn't need much guidance, because he was operating an exhausted and depleted embassy staff and that instructions in the past had not proven particularly helpful.

Q: Now someone suggested that after Khomeini arrived and appointed Bazargan as prime minister that some embassy officials and the Iranian military negotiated with the Bazargan group to arrange an orderly transfer of power from Bakhtiar to Bazargan-Khomeini. Was there any indirect embassy role in trying to facilitate the transfer of power to get Bakhtiar to acquiesce in the situation?

Naas: It was an awkward situation in the sense that we were hoping that the military would not collapse, it would not break up, and that the transition could take place. And I must admit in my own mind I'm a little unclear precisely of the dates on this, but, yes, we tried to play a major role in getting the military, the top military people, to talk with Bazargan and Ayatollah Beheshti and others. This would probably be the last week of January, first week of February, in that period.

I remember once we thought we had-- and John Stempel played the major liaison role on this. We thought we had a meeting all set up between the two sides, a face-to-face meeting. And then the sort of thing that drives people wild, a great dispute developed