

Near the end of my tour over there, there was some international press releases, and we did hear some things about SAVAK being a little heavy-handed, and we heard some stories of political prisoners. I do know there were several gun battles with smugglers.

The Iranians were very adamant on the drug approach. They had a hard and fast rule. If a guy was caught with drugs they checked him carefully. If he had a very small amount of drugs he was put right in the hospital, and was considered as a medical case. After he was treated, as soon as they were convinced that he was free of drugs, they released him--no problem at all. If he had enough drugs in his possession that it looked like it might be more than his personal consumption required, he was five years in jail or something like that. Bang! Pretty cut and dried. If he had enough that it was obvious that he was a pusher, he was tried on Saturday, his case was reviewed on Sunday, and he was shot on Monday. Period. They had a standing order that, if required, the military firing range--the rifle practice firing range--would be used for the executions. Anyway, anytime, first thing Monday morning, the military was asked to give up the first ten firing positions. But there began to come out--and this was all international press--reports of political prisoners, abuse of power. If it had been going on, I'm not sure I would have known; I probably would not. If there had been widespread dissent I'm confident I would have known. Just absolutely confident. Because I talked with so many many

mayors of little villages, the religious leaders and thousands of workers.

Q: Did you get a sense, though, that the Shah himself had a strong base of positive support among the population? Did you get a sense that he was extremely strong?

Williamson: We used to discuss that when these international reports started coming out, discuss it in our brainstorming sessions in the embassy every now and then. If they had a complete, one hundred percent vote election, the discussion was, would the Shah win by 90 percent or 98 percent, or something like that. No one ever questioned that the people were behind him just almost one hundred percent.

Q: I've read some accounts that suggest that the Shah did have popular support in some quarters, but many people were more apathetic than positive in their outlook.

Williamson: I think probably that that could be the truth of the matter. But you've also gotto realize that the completely unsophisticated often believe what they heard last. And they had been told for a good many years that the Shah was a good guy. And most every public building you saw, and most every private home that I saw, had a picture of the Shah.

I had an interesting experience involving a picture of the Shah just recently. We had some Iranians over here, a woman who's husband had been in charge of the navy over their. So I told her I had a portrait of the Shah in a navy uniform. She wanted a copy of it. I said "I'll have it reproduced for you if you like."

I went to a little shop out here in McLean [Virginia] and took it out and asked the man if he could reproduce that. And he says, "Oh, sure." And he looked at it and he said, "Why do you want this reproduced?" And I said, "Am I talking to an Iranian?" And he said, "Yes. In fact I know who you are"

He said, "How many copies do you want of this?" I said, "Just one"--for the lady I was having it made for. He said, "Okay, fine, I can make it." I said, "Well, maybe somebody else might want one; how about making me three?" And then he said, "Why don't you have thirty made?" "I don't need thirty. So far as I know I don't need any but one. I have no requirement for thirty at all." He said, "Well, you know a lot of my countrymen, and a lot of them around here would love to have a copy of this. Let me make you thirty. And if you see any of them that want a copy, you can give them one. I said, "Well, how much will that be?" He says, "Oh nothing. Oh no. No charge, no charge at all." I said, "That's not fair at all. I'd like to buy a reproduction of this portrait." He said, "Oh no, no. I won't take your money. No charge, no charge at all." I said, "Then I can't have anything. Okay, if you insist, how about you do the labor free, I'll pay

for the materials?" He says, "Oh, we'll work out something." And we left it at that.

I went back to pick it up a few days later, all thirty were ready for me. But my man was gone and his assistant was there. I tried to pay him something, and he says to me, "I've got my instructions. If I accept even a nickel, I'm fired." So they believe--they're patriotic to a fault.

Q: You mentioned earlier that there were some controls over political dissent in the country. The role of SAVAK, the discussion of ill treatment of political prisoners, the political prisoners being held generally. To what extent was it generally assumed or believed that this was necessary in Iran?

Williamson: It just wasn't discussed in my presence at all. I'm sure that if you fight with the mean guys you've got to be a little mean. I'm confident that we have some police brutality here in our country. I'm confident that there must have been some over there, and it might have been of a higher magnitude than it is in our country. But if it was I didn't see it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

DDR

Interviewee: General Ellis Williamson, USA (Ret.) Session #3

Interviewer: William Burr Arlington, Virginia

Date: April 13, 1988

Q: I have some questions about the work of Armish MAAG in particular. U.S. officers who were with the MAAG, were they assigned to work with specific Iranian units? How did this all work out in practice?

Williamson: Some while before I went over there--let's think in terms of about six or eight years--we had small teams down to division and lower. At that time, we would have a few U.S. officers assigned to work with the smaller units. As they developed and came along, we eliminated the lower level trainers, as they were called, advisors, and went only to division level. Later on, we lifted it again and went only to corps level.

When I got over there, we had only the U.S. military personnel working at the central headquarters in Tehran, plus a field team, one in Isfahan, where they had a corps headquarters, and one in Shiraz, where we had a division and quite a few other units. Those field teams spread out and visited the units in their geographical area quite a bit, but by and large, they were

advisors to what you might call the middle level Iranian commanders. Basically, about 85 percent of our people were at the Tehran headquarters.

Q: What kind of work did they do at that level, most of the officers?

Williamson: We had my headquarters that was specifically working with the Iranian central headquarters, the joint headquarters, called the Imperial Army, meaning all three services, staff. So I had that group. In that group, of course, I had the personnel people, the intelligence people, the operations planning people, and the logistics people. That was with General Azhari. We were in the same building with him, we worked with him and his people on a daily basis.

In addition to that, I had an Army section under General Patton. General Patton had his group still in Tehran, but in a building about two, maybe two and a half, miles from us in the Army headquarters building. General Price, Air Force, also was over at the air headquarters. Navy Captain Harwood was in still another building in the Navy headquarters. So we did work at their top level with about 85 percent of our people.

Only a few of us were what we called out in the field, so that made a requirement for us out of the Tehran office, to travel a fair amount. I think I mentioned to you that I tried to get out of Tehran twice a week.

Q: The field teams that were stationed in Isfahan and Shiraz, what were their main activities?

Williamson: Basically, they were the same activities we had but at a lower level. They had little groups of about eight people that worked with the commander and his staff and visited the units.

Q: What kind of work did they do, in terms of when they worked with Iranian officers? Weapons training?

Williamson: When we started, it was in weapons training, individual training, small unit training, squads, platoons, companies, battalions. That was six or eight years before. But by then, by the time I got there, it had lifted on more or less the policy, the guidance basis. We did not have what you would generally refer to as trainers; we were more advisors than trainers. We did not conduct any specific classes, except periodically they would ask us to gather their leaders and explain a type subject.

For instance, at one time we gathered about, I guess, 30 general officers and a good many lesser ranks, and had classes on what can a ground forces aviation capacity do for you, or capability do for you. What would you require of it? What could it do? We had some on how to integrate intelligence information

into a military operation. When you start planning an operation, how do you approach the requirement for intelligence? When you decide what your intelligence effort needs, how do you go about getting the intelligence operators to respond to your requests? In other words, we were working with how to work with G-2 and the G-3 together. G-2 is intelligence, G-3 is operations.

How do we get those two to work together? We would get together with their logistics people and work with--you, as a logistician, are required to ensure that the force is supplied, is maintained, and you are also charged with medical evacuation. So when an operational plan is being envisioned in the initial stages, here's what the logistician should be thinking about. How do you get your job done without just sitting back and reacting to requirements? If you do that, you'll always be behind the power curve. You will always be hassling just to break even. But if you think your way through the operation in the initial stages, you may very well be ready to respond before the question is asked. That was our general approach.

Q: How responsive were the Iranians to those kinds of suggestions?

Williamson: I used the expression among my people a good many times, "You've got to do your homework. You cannot give a snap judgment." The reason I did that is they trusted us to a fault. They believed everything we said, to the point that we couldn't

joke with them. We couldn't pull a trick on them just for fun. We had to just rule levity out, which is, as you know, pretty hard for an American. But if we ever said something, they took it at face value to a fault. I repeat, to a fault, because if an American said it, they believed it, and they acted on it quite frequently.

Q: That's interesting. A minute ago, you were talking about intelligence organization, and in other interviews you have talked about the question of the need for more trained personnel. We talked about arm sales a bit, also. What other policy issues did you work on in Armish MAAG?

Williamson: Let's don't drop intelligence quite that quickly, because we had a bilateral agreement with Iran that was very, very specific. It was burned into my brain before I left

Washington: "The MAAG is not an intelligence agent." We were absolutely forbidden to participate in intelligence activities. Nobody in the American establishment could put a demand on us for us to learn something, for us to find something. We were not in the intelligence business, as far as trying to find out something they were doing or find out something that the Russians were doing in Iran, someone else doing it. Our military attache over in the embassy was charged with that. We weren't in on that.

Q: I meant to say that you worked with Iranian in terms of military intelligence organization.

Williamson: We worked on organizational establishments, we worked on how the things functioned, we worked on just the techniques. As an example, we had a maneuver one time that I observed carefully and was very interested in it, in the intelligence field. I noticed that the intelligence people had gone through all the ritual, gone down just by rote, down the techniques and the things that we do and all that, and one of them, they asked for aerial photographs of the area immediately to their front. The flights were flown, the pictures were made and developed, the pictures were delivered, and the photographs were put in the desk. [Laughs] Nobody ever read them. Somehow or other, we just hadn't gotten to that yet, that you ask for them for a purpose. So the intelligence man had the information that the operations man wanted very badly, but there was a gap. That was a simple thing, easy to correct.

But they were learning. They had not grown up in what we called a sophisticated environment. "In my school, in my lesson, they told me to ask for the picture, and I got the picture, and I looked at the picture, and I put it in my desk, in my file." That was appropriate. Part of it was very simple, some of it more complicated.

Q: You mentioned the influence the American officers had on the Iranians. You said they would listen to American advice closely or followed it closely. What impact did cultural differences have on the working relationship between American officers and Iranian officers?

Williamson: When you think of the Iranian people, you have to realize that they, at that time, did not have much of a middle class. It was either the educated and the cultured and the large masses. Most of the officers came from the relatively cultured group, so the gap wasn't near as big as you would visualize if you thought of the overall Iranian people.

A major portion of their officers had had at least short courses in the United States. A terrific number of them had been to Fort Benning, Fort Knox, you name it, six-month courses as a rule, six- to ten-month courses. They had been exposed to a good bit. Over the years, they'd been exposed to American advisors, so it wasn't subservient, it wasn't a second-class citizen approach at all. We worked together as friends, really, personal friends.

Q: Did anybody on the Armish MAAG staff have trouble working with Iranians in practice? Were there any difficulties in individual cases where there were tensions or problems?

Williamson: I think that probably during my time, I had four or five, maybe 600 officers in and out on assignment. I think I sent a total of three home. So it wasn't a problem. We were alert to that type trouble, to the point that we were almost jumpy, because we realized that if one of our people really went bad and did something that was atrocious, it would reflect on all of us, and the reflection would have been in the Iranians having their feelings hurt more than anything else. So if anybody didn't have the ability to get along with them, we got rid of them.

We got rid of one medical officer pure and simply because he just looked down, looked over his nose at the Iranians. We got rid of one other because he decided he would buy some items through the--we didn't have a regular post exchange or commissary, but we did have what we called a mailing service, so we'd get our mail stuff in without paying a large import tax on it. It's such a silly thing. He didn't make a total of \$50, but once we found out that he was involved in that, we got him out of the country at once. We were leery of someone overstepping the bounds and making a mess, but it wasn't a problem.

Q: How much interaction was there between the officers in Armish MAAG on the staff and the civilian population, generally? Did they tend to be isolated?

Williamson: Oh, no. Just the opposite. It wasn't isolation at all; it was a relationship that was varied at certain levels. My poor wife and I were just in a complete hassle all the time because the demand was far greater than we wanted and considerably greater than we could accommodate, because basically, I think we figured that we were in five different groups that intermingled some, but were always having their own thing. Of course, we had the U.S. military, we had the Iranian military, we had the Shah and his group, we had the U.S. Embassy group, and we had the so-called non-Iranian commercial group that were always on to something. So socially, we were just in a flat spin. I know my secretary always kept a record on social accountings and what have you. Not counting the affairs that we had at our home. We averaged about 40 social affairs a month, which meant that a good many nights we went to more than one, just put in an appearance and left. So the social requirement from the "formal" setup was quite demanding on the top people.

As you came down to the major and lieutenant colonel level-- basically, all of our advisors were supposed to be majors and above. We had a few captains, but not many. As you came down to the majors and lieutenant colonels, they, in a very short time, set up relationships and friendships among the groups that were just like they had at home, and they would play bridge, go to the movies, or go to dances, this, that, and the other thing. So the contact was continuous and somewhat friendly.

Q: With the Iranian population, people in Tehran.

Williamson: Yes, but very, very largely just the Iranian military. There were a fair number of civilians, but basically the military.

Q: Did any of the officers speak Persian?

Williamson: A few. All of us learned a few words. It's a strange language, a very strange language. In my travels, I learned to do reasonably well in German, French, Spanish. I got to where I could even talk to people in England a little bit. But I never could get my ear tuned in Okinawa, in Vietnam, or in Iran. I'd pick up phrases, but I never could follow a sentence. This General Patton I mentioned, this Army man, when he left, he stood up and gave them a ten-minute goodbye speech completely in Persian.

Q: Is that so?

Williamson: The Farsi language.

Q: That's interesting. You mentioned that you met frequently with the ambassador, whoever that happened to be at any given time. I've read that besides those kinds of meetings at the top level, I've read that there wasn't too much interaction between

the military people in the MAAG and the diplomatic mission. How true was that, that there wasn't too much contact or interaction at the lower levels or middle levels of both organizations?

Williamson: That's probably a true statement. I, along with my other general officers, were habitually included in the official diplomatic state luncheons, but the lesser ranks weren't very much. It wasn't by design. It was just a matter of they couldn't accommodate very many. When you have a dignitary in, he sort of expects the more ranking people to be present, so it wasn't a matter of sluffing them off.

I know shortly after I got over there and I saw the requirements, Iranian officers always have parties, and they have big ones. They have a feast, just fantastic. But they would always invite me, General Price, General Patton. So I went to them and told them that we certainly enjoyed being with them and appreciated the invitation, and I asked them how they would feel, when they were giving one that big--if it was small and special, that was a different thing--but when they were giving one of their big parties for 200, 300 people, instead of sending invitations to our individuals, I asked them how they would feel if they just sent me an invitation and said, "Here's an invitation for you and six couples or eight couples," something like that. They thought it was a great idea, and in a very short time, I found myself always including one of each rank down the

line, a man with his wife. That brought in the lesser ranks to the formal things, and worked very nicely.

But you are right, the embassy never did have habitually invite the working level embassy person and the working level military. But it wasn't a matter of animosity or anything like that; it was just the situation.

Q: At our last meeting, you mentioned the names of some of the top military officials in Iran, General Azhari, Khatami, Toufanian, among others. How well did you get to know any of these people?

Williamson: We were in each other's homes, with each other's families a couple of times a week, quite frequently. So I think I know them, I know their children, I know them quite well. General Azhari that you mentioned, his daughter lives right around the corner here now. She's a Ph.D. in psychiatry.

Admiral Rasayi, that might have been the name you were thinking about, Admiral Rasayi was the original Navy commander when I arrived over there. Admiral Rasayi's two daughters are both electronics engineers, of all things, and they live here. Admiral Rasayi is visiting here in town this week.

Q: If you can generalize about this, how able did you think these people were as officers?

Williamson: That's a rather difficult question for me to answer. If you say, "How do they compare with an equal rank of U.S. military officer?" I'd say there is no comparison; it's just not fair to even try to compare them. But if you say, "Take this major who is operating in a relatively narrow field and has been schooled in that field," I would say he was quite competent, very good. He understood his people, he knew how to respond to his people, he could work with them. So I think their competence was at a very, very acceptable level. Their broadened comprehension and things of that sort were quite limited.

Q: What do you mean by that?

Williamson: We've spoken several times about the Army aviation program being the largest and the most dynamic and the one with the driving time requirement and things of that sort. We did a lot of studies, we had a lot of field training teams, this, that, and the other. Once a decision of what kind of airplane to buy and all this was concerned, we decided to get an Iranian group and send them to the United States and let them visit units that were working with those particular helicopters, see how they were used, go to places where they were maintained, even go to where they were manufactured and things of that sort.

~~So I had a group here in Washington working on the visit.~~
They sent a schedule over, and it just threw the Iranians and me into a flat spin, because it was just, for us, a very impossible

schedule. For instance, I remember one day in particular, they said, "Now, at 9:00 o'clock, we will have one seminar on engines, one seminar on electronics. We'll have another one on the air frame." They had four or five seminars set up at the same time, and there was no question but what, from the Iranian standpoint, the people going to the seminars were all the same people. Any one of the seminars took everybody they had. They just didn't have enough people to go around. They hadn't developed up to that level. Everybody was trying to learn everything at one time, which was just counter to my specialists that I just mentioned. They were trying their best to get a base of individuals who understood the inner workings of all these requirements. But they couldn't respond to what the U.S. was trying to do for them, because all of their technicians were trying to learn everything at one time. So it was just a hodge-podge for a while and took us a long time to work through it.

Q: Observers of the Iranian culture have noted a strong degree of individualistic behavior and sort of a lack of a cooperative ethos. To what degree was that true of the military men with whom you worked?

Williamson: I only noticed that, I think, in the medical profession. They had a medical psychology that was somewhat different from ours. A man that was a specialist and a

recognized specialist sort of felt like, "I've got something that I know, other people don't know, and I'm going to capitalize on it. I'm not very anxious to bring in a new man and let him grow and be in a position to replace me." So there was something of a jealousy in the medical field.

As far as the pilots, the mechanical engineers, the communications specialists, things of that sort, I didn't notice that attitude at all. If anything, the Iranian culture had had driven into them in the last twelve years the requirement to learn. This White Revolution was an emotional thing and just spread through the culture. Everybody was encouraged to learn, learn, learn.

I might have already mentioned to you that an automobile mechanic that had a tenth grade education had a salary.

Q: Yes, you talked about that.

Williamson: The same mechanic with a twelfth grade education drew more money. So everybody was trying to learn, trying to learn. It wasn't a matter of learning at the expense of someone else; it wasn't a matter of learning more than someone else. Everybody was learning. You could walk around on Sunday (Friday over there) afternoon and see not just dozens, but hundreds of young people going to walk with a book in their hands, studying as they walked. It was just habitual to see people studying, studying, studying. They studied, from our standpoint, in an

improper manner; they were learning by rote. They overplayed the requirement for rote. But knowing their culture, that might have been appropriate at that time. But they still wanted to study.

As far as the skills being compartmented, as far as lack of coordination or cooperation among individuals or among units, I don't think that's a fair accusation. I think they were at least on a par with us.

Q: You mentioned last time that the Shah told you at times that he could not get his ministers to speak frankly with him on various policy issues and things that came up in meetings. How true was that of the military leaders?

Williamson: Very true. Very true.

Q: Same problem?

Williamson: You could go in among any group, any size group, there were twelve of them, thirty of them regardless of the number, you couldn't have a substantive exchange of ideas with anybody except the senior man there. Everybody else kept quiet. Now, that's true in the Far East, just as it is in the Middle East. It's a characteristic, and it's magnified by the type government they have, the monarchy government. But it's also true in Japan, to some extent. It's very true in Korea, it's true in Vietnam, it's true in China. If you get a group of

people together, the same man does the talking--period. They have a lot of little quirks, little things that identify the senior man.

I used to just crawl the walls every time they had a formal military formation. It was just like a three-act play, Mickey Mouse style. They would go out there and they'd line up the people, whether they were senior officers or whether they were military riflemen or what it was. They'd line up everybody and get the formation so that the troop commander thought that it was absolutely perfect, and he waited for the senior man to arrive. Without exception, I never saw it fail, when the senior man arrived, he made a slight change in the formation. He may have moved the troop line six inches, by half of a step, forward, back, right, left, just wiggled it around. He did it pure and simply to let everybody know that he was senior, he had arrived.

Now, that same philosophy applies whether you're at a formal dinner, a cocktail party, a conference, a commanders' meeting. People wait until the senior man expresses himself, and then they, in effect, say, "Yes, sir." It's their culture, and it was one thing that I worked on that one subject more than anything else, and I mentioned it to the Shah time and time and time again, that he would never have any flexibility in his military until he encouraged his junior leaders to be decisive. "Force your junior leaders to think, encourage them to express themselves. Show them that it is not fatal to make a mistake."

Q: How would he respond to that kind of suggestion?

Williamson: He listened very politely, and I think he believed me, because I saw several cases where he had made a special effort to try to get that point across. We didn't succeed. I mean, we made a little bit of progress, but not much. We didn't make much of a difference.

Q: Did any military leaders that you talked about, Azhari and Toufanian and so forth, have any real influence with the Shah, in terms of influence of their ideas on his thinking?

Williamson: I think they did. Oh, yes. I mentioned a good many times that the most marvelous thing that I observed about the Shah was there was a man who that been a King for 35 years and still had the ability to listen. When he had a subject or when General Azhari or General Khatami, General Toufanian--General Toufanian was the most outspoken of all of them--but when he had them come in, he asked them to tell him, and they would speak. They would talk and he would listen. He wouldn't interrupt them. He would listen to them. So yes, he got ideas from them on that, but any time there was an indication that the Shah was ready to express himself or the Shah had come to a conclusion, the discussion was terminated right then. Not because the Shah said it was terminated, but because they thought

he was ready. They thought he had the information--all that they were going to be able to give.

Q: This is from your own observation at the meetings.

Williamson: Yes. I met with the general officers almost every day, and I met with the Shah on a very irregular basis, but if you want me to spell it out, twice a week, something like that. I was in and out quite frequently.

Q: How loyal do you think the military leaders were to the Shah? Did you ever hear any criticisms of the Shah from them?

Williamson: Not even the slightest inkling. The merest criticism I think I ever heard was one time General Khatami had been in to talk with the Shah a good bit. Most of the time I went in by myself, but this was a special Air Force thing, and he already had a meeting set up with General Khatami, and at the last minute I was asked to go in with him. We went in. The Shah wanted him to do this, wanted him to do that. They came to solving--it wasn't an agreement, it was a statement that this would be done and that would be done and this schedule. When we came out, General Khatami looked at me and he said, "His Imperial Majesty expects so much of us, and we really want to do what he wants, but some day I'm going to have to get up enough nerve to

tell him I just can't quite do it that fast." That's the nearest I have, even an inkling of an uncertainty.

On all other instances when the Shah expressed himself, that was it, period, no more discussion. So I've given you a double answer there, kind of a waffle answer, and I didn't intend to. He did get ideas from his people, but he didn't get any ideas from them that they thought conflicted with his views.

Q: They kept within the framework he established.

Williamson: Yes.

Q: During our last meeting, you discussed the Nixon-Kissinger visit in May of '72. You mentioned that Nixon and Kissinger agreed with the Shah that Iran should play a major role in stabilizing the Persian Gulf and parts of the Indian Ocean. When you met with the Shah during this period, '71, '72, to what extent did you encourage or perhaps reinforce in his mind this view that he should play this kind of a role in the region?

Williamson: That was not in my contract. It just wasn't in my field. I did not take a stand either way. It was not my business. My business was to help him accomplish what my government and he wanted to do. I was not in the policy business. I never made even the slightest clue of "You ought to

extend down into the Indian Ocean," or "You ought to--" No, that wasn't my business.

Q: To what extent did you believe that the Iranian armed forces, as they were constituted, could accomplish the task the Shah and Nixon had in mind?

Williamson: I'm not sure I know specifically what Nixon and Kissinger had in mind, so I have to be a little careful there. But as far as the Shah's ideas were concerned, I thought he was very, very capable of doing just exactly what he told me he wanted to do up to one point. As you recall, he wanted to defend his borders against a neighbor, and he wanted to be able to have a delaying scorched earth policy against the Russians. There was no question in my mind but what he could, in fact, do that.

Q: They had the capacity to do that?

Williamson: Yes, I thought he could. I didn't question that at all. Now, as time went on, and I'm not really sure now whether it was before or after the Nixon visit, they began talking about extending influence, maintaining surveillance down in the Indian Ocean to the tenth parallel. He did not have that capability. He began developing it on a somewhat grandiose basis. He started building the tri-service base at Chah Bahar. Chah Bahar is a natural harbor south of the entranceway to the Persian Gulf. So

that was an open passage to the Indian Ocean. He started building that base, and that's a story within itself which gives you a lot of understanding of their thinking. Anyway, that base was to be set up so that it would accommodate and support oceangoing ships and logistics and long-range reconnaissance aircraft, plus fighter defensive aircraft and an armored ground force to defend the base. So it was developing into a very intricate, very big, modern base.

If he had finished that job, then, in my judgment, he would have been able to extend his influence on down into the Indian Ocean. He could not have fought much down there, wouldn't have had much of a fight. His fighter planes could have extended a few hundred miles, maybe. But he would have been able to give us this so-called AWACs aircraft warning control system. He would have been able to give the forces a much broader capability than they had at the time. But as far as fighting Iraq or possibly Turkey or Pakistan or Afghanistan, no question but what I thought he could do a real good job. [telephone interruption]

Q: We were talking about some of the regional issues in a broad sense, but I have some more specific questions about the Shah and the Persian Gulf. In one of our interviews, you talked about the Shah and the capture of the Tunbs Islands I think in late '71, fall of '71, something like that.

Williamson: Yes.

Q: The next year, in '72 and '73, Iran also played a role in combating an insurgency in Dhofar province in Oman.

Williamson: Yes.

Q: In '73, the Shah assisted the Sultan of Oman by sending in combat troops. How much did the Shah talk to you or tell you about these interventions?

Williamson: He did not mention Oman to me at any time. He told me about the Tunbs Islands operation before the operation, told me how it was going to be conducted. He never mentioned Oman. The subject never came up, so I never brought it up.

Q: Were there any other regional interventions besides the Tunbs that he discussed with you?

Williamson: No. I don't know that he ever had any others. I knew of the Oman operation, because I knew of several officers that went down and participated. In fact, my Iranian aide was called out and went down for a while. But the aide never discussed it with me, and the Shah never did. I knew it wasn't any of my business, so I never brought up the subject.

Q: The Nixon Administration's general approach to Iran was partly founded on what some people call the idea of the twin pillars, the idea of Iran and Saudi Arabia cooperating with each other and sort of jointly stabilizing the Persian Gulf region.

Williamson: Again, I have to repeat that was not my our field, and I did not participate in any of those type of discussions.

Q: In 1974, the year after you left, a State Department report suggested that the U.S. effort to help build up Iranian military power could lead to a regional military imbalance that might encourage countries like Iraq or Southern Yemen to lean more heavily on the Soviet Union, and this could increase arms competition in the region generally. How much concern did you or other officers on the MAAG have with that possibility of a regional arms race being fueled by Iran's military buildup?

Williamson: We didn't take that as a concern of ours. However, the knowledge that that debate was going on back home had a profound effect on us.

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

Williamson: We were affected by that internal debate back here in the States in, from our standpoint, a very repulsive sort of way. We knew that the argument was going on. We knew that our

marching orders were to not be salesmen, not encourage the Iranians to buy more, expand faster, anything of that sort, but to assist them as they made their own decisions. This sounds a little pious, but doggone it, we believed it and had it beaten in our brains. We were encouraged to take the viewpoint that if they're going to buy it anyway, it's better, from our viewpoint, that it be American. In other words, if they are going to buy, we'd rather they buy from us than from the French or the British or the Italians or the Germans, even the Saudis. But we were not salesmen, we were not pushing things.

When the Iranians asked to buy something and we had to send a message back for what we call a P and A, price and availability, we would send the message back, and basically, it would say, "The Iranians are interested in buying so and so. Please give us some guidance with respect to an estimated price and when can the U.S. make it available so that we can carry on a logical discussion with them."

Almost every request we sent back, we just knew it was going through the hopper and would be thrashed around, and there would be a large element, particularly in the State Department, but to some extent also in the military, both the services and the Secretary of Defense, there was going to be that group that was dedicated to "delay." We used to say that there were very, very, few people who can say, "Yes." There are a few who can say, "No," maybe a few more than there were who can say "yes." But there are a zillion who can say, "Wait." And sometimes it took a

very inordinate amount of time to get an answer to a very simple question.

Q: Was this before May '72 or after, or just throughout the period?

Williamson: Throughout the period. You answered my question. Throughout the period, the argument was always there. Quite frequently when we had visitors coming in from the States, I would start off my discussion by saying, "Now, which side of the debate are you on? Which view do you take?" Almost like saying, "Are you Republican or Democrat?" Because I knew if he was from the Department of State, he was going to be on one side or the other; he wasn't going to be in the middle. He was going to say, "I'm supporting," or "I'm delaying."

Now, there was almost a sacrosanct statement, "We will not say no to the Shah," particularly after Nixon's visit, because Nixon told him yes. "We will not say no to the Shah, but we will say 'wait' to anybody who is trying to represent the Shah." And that's the type of water we were swimming in.

Q: So they were interpreting Nixon's orders.

Williamson: They were just being obstinate. It was just unpleasant quite frequently.