

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.

Q: I saw a letter by Jack Miklos, who was a desk officer at State, who said, "We have marching orders from Nixon and Kissinger to give the Shah what he wants."

Williamson: I might have drafted that message. [Laughs] I came back.

Q: You mentioned that you went back for a meeting in Washington.

Williamson: I had to come back and say, "Look, I can quote, I think, reasonably close to verbatim the President and the Shah. Now, if you have a debate with that, let's bring it out in the open. If not, please don't constantly hit me on the shins while I'm trying to run a race."

Q: In May '72, as you stated, Nixon told the Shah he could have pretty much what he wanted, short of nuclear weapons.

Williamson: Short of nuclear, yes.

Q: Before that, what kind of restrictions governed Iran's access to American weapons?

Williamson: President Nixon was, to my mind, repeating or supporting a position that had already been taken. From my

standpoint, I already had the same working orders. There was always a question when you got into one of the various intricate intelligence electronics high-level deal, there's always little questions of that sort, but basically, the overall view was, "If they want it and they're willing to pay for it, they may have it."

Q: You touched upon this issue a little bit, but maybe you can expand upon it. What was the MAAG's relationship with the corporations that actually produced and sold the weapons systems that Iran would be purchasing during this period?

Williamson: Our relationship in every instance was one of evolution. When it first came up, if there was more than one U.S. producer, we couldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. We could not be involved when a commercial producer and an Iranian were discussing the subject. Now, many of the commercial people came over and said, "I have this proposition. I have this that I would like to discuss." And I or some of my people personally arranged to identify the Iranian that would be the contact guy, we arranged the meetings, scheduled them, but we didn't go.

Quite frequently, commercial people came over, came into my office, set up their charts, and reviewed their presentations with us, and we listened. Quite frequently we said, "They won't understand it if you present it that way. I suggest you let us work together and you make another chart." Our draftsmen made

charts for them. So we supported the commercial people quite a bit, but when they were contacting the Iranians, we were not present. If an Iranian asked me about a commercial presentation, all I could do was to get some information. I'd get him as much information as I could. I would explain the information, I would do everything I could to ensure that he understood the information, but I could never--and I never did--say, "I think you ought to buy this one as opposed to that one, because this one is produced by one company, that one is produced by another company." I couldn't get into that.

Q: You mentioned you gave them some support, like technical assistance.

Williamson: Oh, yes.

Q: What other kinds of things did MAAG do that would expedite the efforts by the companies to get to the Iranian market?

Williamson: Well, quite frequently, General Toufanian would say, "Look, somebody came in here from Northrop and they said they could do this, that, and the other, so and so." I'd look and he'd say, "Yes, they said they could furnish this, furnish that, so and so, and the price list."

I'd say, "Yes, but look. I don't see any spare parts." It's habitual when you buy this military equipment, to buy the

item plus one year's worth of spare parts, estimated use of spare parts. I said, "Yes, that item looks relatively cheap there, but there's no spare parts. I don't see any list for the technical manuals. I don't see any list for the technical training that will be required before that can be put in use." In other words, I tried to help them ensure that the presentation from the commercial field was complete and understood. But I could not ever say, "This is one type airplane I think you ought to buy this instead of this one." I didn't get involved in that.

Q: You said you met with a number of the representatives from the companies from time to time. Can you recall some of the individuals that you met with, more frequent visitors, I suppose?

Williamson: I guess the one that came over most often was Frank Sylvester, vice president of Bell Helicopter Company. Jim Atkins, the president of Bell, came over. There were a good many other people from Bell. Now, as far as Teledyne-Ryan, Barry Shilitoe was president of Teledyne-Ryan, he came over. He used to be Assistant Secretary of Defense before he retired from that. He's just retired from Teledyne now. But Barry came over several times.

Q: Tom Jones of Northrop?

Williamson: Tom Jones. I saw him several times. Glen Lord came over from the same company.

Q: How about Kermit Roosevelt?

Williamson: Roosevelt came over several times, but there was a real rough go there. Kermit had been very active in the CIA activities previously.

Q: In '53, yes.

Williamson: A lot of people felt beholden to Kermit. They appreciated what he'd done for them and all that, but then Kermit, in their minds--and I'm telling you all from one side, so this is a one-sided story entirely, and it might be wrong--the Iranians got the impression that Kermit Roosevelt was trying to capitalize on his friendship. So when he went to the Hawk missile approach, they weren't happy with that at all. In fact, they were just against him. Kermit did more harm than he did good. They didn't want him over there at all, because they felt that he was just saying, "Now, I helped you a long time ago, and I think I ought to have a little commission on this activity."

Q: ~~He was trying to sell the Northrop Hawk missile?~~

Williamson: Yes, he was on the so-called improved Hawk. When they finally signed the contract on that thing, one of my very specific instructions was to, what we call, wire-brush it, brush it good and carefully and ensure that the contract did not include any commission for him as an individual. So things like that got kind of sticky ever now and then.

There was a Captain Pollard, a retired Navy captain.

Q: He was in the embassy, too, in the fifties, I think.

Williamson: Yes, he was.

Q: A naval attache.

Williamson: He represented Grumman, I believe it was. I'm not really sure now. I believe it was Grumman. But he got quite pushy.

Most of them came over, at least they gave the air of being low-key, gave the air of "I want to help you." Gave the air of "I have the capability to help you. If you need me, holler." Some of them came over and really took on the attitude of, "You don't have a choice but to deal with me," and the Iranians didn't appreciate it. So it ran the complete spectrum. Some of them were pretty good, most all of them. A few clinkers.

Q: Later on, during the mid-seventies, it became known that Grumman had agreed to very large payoffs in order to expedite the sale of the F-14 Tomcat, the fighter jet. Were there any hints while you were in Iran that they were up to something in this regard?

Williamson: A little stronger than a hint. I'm just trying to think of the name. There were two Iranian brothers who were very prominent in that field, and they were constantly trying to pull an end-run to get Grumman in ahead of the pack. Grumman, from this side, pushed very hard on the Navy Department here.

We, as you may know, at that time were developing two advanced state-of-the-art aircraft. One was the F-14, one was the F-15. The Navy was F-14; the Air Force was F-15. Those two aircraft were being developed along absolutely divergent views. I'll try not to make this too long. The F-14 was a very, very sophisticated, advanced state-of-the-art, the best that could possibly be produced for that purpose. It was a Navy project, designed principally to work off of aircraft carriers, and this is a very key point, that it was designed to operate in clean air. By clean air, I mean the fleet takes to the high seas and, in effect, it says, "Anybody that comes within challenging range of me, I'm going to shoot him out of the sky." So the fleet usually centered on a large aircraft carrier, steams out into the ocean, and it says, in effect, "Don't tread on me. Don't mess around. Don't come close. If you come close enough to be a



threat to me, that's a hostile move." I'm talking about wartime, of course.

So the F-14 was designed with a very advanced radar that would reach out way, way out. It would pick up a target and identify it up to 80 miles out, sometimes a little more. Then it had a missile on that plane that would engage that target 50 miles out. So it was a real mean bearcat if there ever was one. A two-place plane--pilot and ordnance man. But it was designed to take off on an aircraft carrier and just clean the air out around the fleet and said, "Nobody comes close to this damn fleet."

The Air Force was told to develop a highly sophisticated maneuverable airplane that could go in and tangle with anybody for a point defense basis. In other words, defending airfields, things of that sort. Airfields don't move; they're right there. So they would go up and fight them in much closer than the F-14, but the F-15 was a more agile one-place plane, one pilot. It was much more agile, it didn't have near the range for its weaponry, so they were two completely different type airplanes.

Then when the Iranians started thinking in terms of, "Gosh, those things sure look good prospectus. We'd like some of that," well, we weren't ready to sell them at all. We hadn't developed them. We were in the process of developing and testing and what have you. So we weren't ready to even come close to a price or an availability; we just weren't ready to sell. But the Iranians pushed so hard that our government made an agreement. We agreed

that we would give parallel briefings on the development of the two aircraft, and we'd give them a briefing about every four to six months.

Q: This is while you were there?

Williamson: Yes. And that the briefing team would come from the United States, present its pitch, and go back. We weren't in the sales business at all.

Well, the first briefing team came over, and they came in my office and set up their stuff. We rehearsed it and modified their briefing just a little bit, pure and simply so that it would be more understandable to the Iranians. This was one of the very, very few times that a group went in with the Shah. The Shah was there, had his top military commanders there, and they gave a very good briefing, and everybody was happy.

On the second or third one, I'm not sure which it was, the team came over, and we went up to the palace and gave the briefing. We had had a rehearsal, too. But much to the great surprise of everybody, every American in the group, the Navy admiral reached over and pulled out a little model of the F-14 and says, "Your Majesty, this is the Navy Tomcat. It is developed, it is ready, and we are ready to do business." And he presented that thing. I thought the Air Force man was going to blow a gut cord.

Well, we came out of there just absolutely livid, and the Navy just figured, by God, they were going to get ahead and make that sale, and the Iranians were going to buy their aircraft. The Air Force man was just livid and insisted that I send a message, which I did. I sent a message back and told the Secretary of Defense that from our viewpoint, there had been a major breach of faith, and that the Navy had overstepped their bounds. I said, "I had nothing to do with it except report it."

Well, the next time they came over for a briefing, the same admiral was sent back. The presentation was going along, and the admiral had a little film, maybe a ten-minute film, to show. He started showing the film, and both the Shah and General Khatami said, "Oh, we've already seen that." Well, that really blew it. So the Navy admiral was retired right quickly, the Grumman people were in trouble, and we just had an awful mess on that. Grumman pushed too hard. Grumman got the idea that they weren't going to be team players. So we did have a very hard time on that.

The Shah asked me which to buy, and I told him that was not my business, I couldn't tell him to buy one or the other, but I would like to discuss the characteristics of each. I told him that the Air Force plane was designed for basically point defense, a relatively small area of defense, one position, very agile, a very good airplane, could do a lot of things for him. I said, "The Navy plane has a lot of good agile assets, too. As far as the state of your training at this time, the culture of

your people, I think your people would probably work better in pairs than as individuals. I think that is a very good plus, but you have one real disadvantage. If you use the F-14, you get into one of these what we call neighborhood fights, you start reaching out and shooting at something 50 miles away, I would be very fearful that you'd shoot down a commercial passenger plane passing over just across the Afghanistan border, Pakistan border, something like that." I said, "I just have real heartburn when I think of what would happen if you started launching a bunch of planes with the capability of the F-14. You need to consider all that."

Well, the decision as to what to buy was made after I left. He decided to buy some of each. But that gives you an idea of the commercial competition. And this wasn't very often, but sometimes it just plain got out of hand.

Q: Each service was pushing its own fighter. There were inter-service rivalries also, besides the commercial rivalries.

Williamson: Oh, sure.

Q: How did this affect the work of the MAAG? Did this have an internal effect within the MAAG at all?

Williamson: A little bit. We all came from our source. I was an Army officer charged with being a purple suiter, as we called

the joint people. I was trying my best to be impartial. In that case, it was relatively easy, because it was the other two services. So I had no personal vested interest at all, and I was trying to be even-handed.

We did have some Air Force-Army competition with respect to antiaircraft targets and things of that sort, but not many. As a rule, we got along extremely well together. Not what you'd call animosity developed because of our backgrounds.

Q: How did the Shah explain to you his interest in these advanced fighter jets? For example, I read that with Nixon, in May '72, he talked about his concerns about Soviet MIGs that were flying over Iran near the border there. Did he ever discuss these kinds of concerns with you? Is that a fact that he was concerned about that? Did he discuss these kinds of issues with you?

Williamson: Yes, he did mention the flights, and I think a good many of them were, in fact, confirmed. No, I don't think it was imagination on his part. They were there. Sometimes they cut short when they were going down to the Middle East, on the other side of the Gulf.

Q: How serious a problem do you think that was?

Williamson: I don't think it bothered him. I really don't. He always thought of the Russians--I think I've already mentioned to you that he didn't trust the Russians at all. Historically, Iran is not friendly with Russia. They didn't like the Russians at all. But I don't think that concerned him too much. It didn't seem to.

Q: Did he say anything else about why he thought he needed these fighter jets, whether the F-14 or the F-15?

Williamson: I think I mentioned previously that the Shah had an obsession with two things: the best and now. He wanted the very best of anything that came along. But to give you the other side of the picture, he had made the comment that he was just interested in advanced state-of-the-art anything, whether it was medicine, agriculture, what have you. He just had an insatiable desire for increase in knowledge, so it just tickled him to death to learn something new.

He made a remark one time to me that, "If anything unusual, anything really advanced state-of-the-art comes along, I'd be interested." Well, we had some of our F-111s coming over to Europe, and I don't think I initiated this, but I did get in on the early stage.

Someone thought, "Well, it would be a good training flight for our people to whip down there. Ask the Shah if he'd be interested in seeing it."

So I asked him. He said, "Yes, I'd love to see one." I don't know where they came from, but it was in England or somewhere, a fair distance away. That's, I guess you'd call it, the Intruder-type airplane that flies really on automatic control right from the word go. The pilots just sort of go along as passengers to abort the mission, as much as anything else. They turn those things on, and they go a zillion miles an hour, down right on the deck, under the radar screens is the purpose of it.

But two of them came flitting in there one time and sat on the runway there for three days, I think. The Shah informed me when he was going out and asked if I'd like to join. Of course, I did. He walked around, got in the cockpit. Incidentally, he was a very accomplished pilot himself. He wasn't just one of the guys that sat in the seat. He did all the gadgets and knew what he was doing with them. So he was very interested in it. He talked to the pilots about this, that, and the other thing.

After he finished, he pulled me off to one side and said, "Now, why were these sent down here?"

I said, "Don't you recall a few months ago, you mentioned that you were interested in seeing things that were new?"

He said, "Yes, I recall that conversation quite well, but why were these sent down here?"

I said, "For two reasons. One is the training flight is beneficial to our pilots and the people who are controlling the

pilots. And two, we thought you were interested in just seeing them."

He said, "Then you're not suggesting that I buy any?"

I said, "No way in the world. I see no reason in the world that you even need a thing of this sort."

He said, "Okay. I just wanted to be sure we were thinking together," and dropped it.

Q: Back to the F-14 and F-15 for a little bit more. I've read that some Pentagon officials opposed sale of advanced aircraft like those because they were fearful or worried, rather, that if Iran had them, this might compromise U.S. security in some way. Were you familiar with those arguments at that time?

Williamson: I'm repeating myself from an hour ago. There was a large group here in Washington that was against sales of anything to Iran.

Q: Because of the security issue?

Williamson: No. They just felt that Iran was becoming too strong. They felt the balance was coming out of line. So they were dedicated to, as a minimum, slowing the development in Iran. So we always knew that anything that came up was going to be opposed by some. But I did not get into the negotiation of the purchase. It was still in the development stage when I left.



Q: When Nixon and Kissinger visited Tehran in '72, did you discuss with them the F-14 or F-15 issues?

Williamson: I don't believe so. I don't recall that subject coming up.

Q: Also around this same time, the Shah expressed an interest in buying laser-guided bombs.

Williamson: Yes.

Q: Did he discuss this issue with you?

Williamson: I discussed it with the Iranians. I did not discuss it with President Nixon or Kissinger.

Q: Or the Shah?

Williamson: Yes, I discussed it a good bit.

Q: What did you think of that?

Williamson: We just talked about the capabilities of them, the support of them, the use of them. As you know, you can get the job done with considerably less number of bombs, less number of

missions flown, but you do need more backup support and more sophisticated in the training and things of that sort. So we just discussed the requirements.

Q: I mentioned that some people in the Pentagon, from what I've read, were concerned about the sale of these advanced systems partly because, I guess, some made the argument that they might endanger U.S. security if these were held by Iran and lost to somebody else that was reputed to be unfriendly. Were these concerns discussed in the MAAG?

Williamson: Yes, but the concerns that you're talking about didn't center on that as much as two other subjects. The concerns that were most often discussed were the intelligence pods, the ability to monitor the enemy. We had some very sophisticated equipment in that field, often pods that fitted on airplanes and flew along the border. There was a real concern in the intelligence community that our most advanced state-of-the-art things of that sort should not be outside U.S. control. So we had some people, and I was a little bit sympathetic with them, I think their concerns were somewhat legitimate. They just didn't want that equipment to fall in the hands of anybody that might mistreat it, whether it was Iranian or Iranian-controlled and then inadvertently or intentionally given to somebody else. They just didn't want those things to get out.

Q: I see.

Williamson: There was one other type equipment that gave us real heartburn, real concern, and that was the hand-held anti-aircraft weapon.

Q: You mentioned that.

Williamson: Those things, in the hands of terrorists, would have been just atrocious. So those two fields were even more legitimate complaints than the so-called smart bombs. The smart bombs didn't give us real heartburn. We felt we could manage that all right.

Q: You mentioned the MAAG wire-brushed contracts, to make sure there weren't commissions involved or payoffs. What was the general policy by MAAG or the Defense Department, generally, toward commissions or payoffs to Iranian expeditors?

Williamson: It wasn't just Iranian expeditors. When the Shah had his October '71 big party, his debutante ball, as I call it, a coming-out party, he said, "We have taken our rightful position in the community of advanced nations." He felt that very strongly. "We are now talking with advanced nations on a co-equal basis." And as part of his thesis, "We don't have to

pay anybody a tax to get through the door. We don't have to pay for permission to talk to anybody. We don't have to pay any improper undercover bribes to anybody, whether it's Iranian or American or Russian or anybody." And he used that as a patriotic approach. "We have arrived. We don't have to grovel anymore. We don't have to beg. We don't have to bribe." So he insisted that every single contract that they signed be what we call wire-brushed, checked very carefully.

We, in our country, had what we called at one time the Five percenters. We got some pretty bad publicity among ourselves on that.

He insisted that we check every contract to be sure that there were no inappropriate commissions in there. The Iranians initially misunderstood it to mean no commissions. He had to come back with a clarification on that. He said, "Anybody that does a service and earns a commission, that's entirely appropriate. That's all right." That's when the Kermit Roosevelt thing came to a head, because they felt that he was asking for a commission that he had not earned. So they wanted us to check every contract just as carefully as we could, so we had a little joint team to do it.

I don't know whether I told you the Iranians questioned that we were going through a contract one time, and finally, one of the Iranian generals sort of snickered a little bit, and he said, "Well, I see what we're doing. I see that we're trying to keep everybody honest, and we're trying to keep everything up above

board. But our culture is a little different from yours. You don't quite understand us, but we don't understand you either." He said, "When we start talking about inappropriate payments, improper bribes and commissions and things of that sort, when I visualize them, I think of your country. And to save my life, I can't explain to my 15-year-old son why your football players advertise beer." And he said, "I cannot explain to him why a woman named Suzanne Sommers takes off almost all of her clothes, jumps up and down in front of a television screen and sings 'Ace is the Place of the Helpful Hardware Man.'" He said, "What does a naked woman have to do with selling hardware?" [Laughs] So that's the arena we were in.

But as this developed, I found one thing. I found that the Iranians were pretty well ahead of the Americans. The American businessman was much more prone to say, "Oh, heck, it's only a few thousand dollars. Pay the guy." They were much more prone to do that than the Iranians were to let it go, which is sort of heart-breaking to me. It irritated me. It wasn't unusual at all for an American contract man to say, "Oh, it's trivial. That's not much percentage-wise. Don't waste your time on that."

Q: That's interesting. I have a question about commercial goals and arm sales. In the early seventies, there was a slump in the U.S. aerospace industry as the Vietnam War was winding down, a depression in the aerospace industry. There was a growing concern in Washington about trade deficits. From your