

VA

Interviewee: General Hamilton Twitchell

Session #2

Interviewer: Bill Burr

Bethesda, Maryland

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Q: The second part of the interview with General Hamilton Twitchell took place in Bethesda, Maryland on June 3, 1988. General Twitchell, when I met with Richard Arndt a few weeks ago, he mentioned in passing that your survey team in Tehran of 1962 included Alexander Haig and Richard Kennedy, who later was Haig's assistant at the NSC and at the State Department in the early eighties. What were their roles on the survey team?

Twitchell: They were both Army members of a team.

Q: Do you know how they came to be assigned to the team?

Twitchell: The Army nominated Haig. Ambassador Holmes suggested that I get Kennedy, because he had just returned from a tour in Iran.

Q: Kennedy was in Armish-MAAG in Iran?

Twitchell: Yes.

Q: Now when you were later appointed Armish-MAAG Chief in '68,

how much preparation did you receive? For example, were you given special briefings on Iran before you left for Tehran?

Twitchell: At that time they used to run a-- DOD used to run a course on military assistance. I think it was a two week's course. I attended that course, and, in addition, I did have briefings for over, say, a period of two or three days with interested government agencies. Primarily bringing me up to date on U.S. policy, developments in the area, any particular thoughts on problems that I might run into.

Q: Do you recall who the briefings were given by off hand?

Twitchell: No. Staff level members of State and Defense.

Q: Now when you were actually stationed in the country, how much access did you have to the Shah? For example, could you meet with him whenever you chose to or how did that work out in practice?

Twitchell: When I first arrived in Iran, I had an audience with the Shah shortly after I got there. Thereafter I met with him, I'd say, once every four or five weeks. I think on nearly all occasions the audience was based on a time when I felt that I had something that was worth reporting to the Shah.

Q: So you took the initiative for the appointment?

Twitchell: Yes, generally.

Q: How free was your access to Iranian military installations?

Twitchell: Basically, when I wanted to take a trip out of Teheran or when I wanted to visit some of the installations in Teheran, I arranged through my Iranian military aide to work out a program. I don't think I was ever denied access to any of the installations. Probably the one which foreigners visited the least was the Imperial Guards. However, I think I went there two or three times, and we gave them some suggestions on matters that were of interest to the commander. I never felt that I had any particular problem with visiting the air, navy or ground installations.

Q: You said you had an Iranian military aide? Who was that person?

Twitchell: His name was Mohammad Gadessi.

Q: Was he your aide all the way through?

Twitchell: Yes.

Q: What kind of things did he help you with? Did he make arrangements like the various tours that you mentioned?

Twitchell: He made arrangements for visits to Iranian organizations and provided liaison with the SCS staff concerning people to talk with or members of other Iranian organizations. He had a very close relationship with the officers of the Supreme Commander's staff, so that we had a very good contact there. For example, if I wanted to meet with General Aryana, or later General Djam or then Djam's successor, I would ask Gadessi to contact the SCS Chief's office and set up an appointment.

Q: I see. Now when you were Chief of Armish-MAAG, how much of Iran did you see? How widely did you travel during the three years that you were--

Twitchell: Well, first of all, when I went there in '62 I saw a good deal of the country. I went all along the northern border by jeep. I went to Abadan and I saw the Navy, such as it was at that time, in the upper part of the Gulf or on the Shatt-al-arab. I also visited the air and ground installations. I went again in '68 to '71. I visited all of the air and ground installations in the northwest, the north, the northeast, the southern flank, and also on the eastern flank as well as the west. So I saw a good deal of the country. By air and by ground.

Q: What were your impressions of the economic and social conditions in the country during your second tour?

Twitchell: I would say that-- the first time I saw Iran was at the end of '42 or very early in '43, and the change when I went back in '62 was very evident. In '68, there was a tremendous change even between '62 and '68. Particularly in '62, while our Economic Mission was still there, the country was beginning to develop some of its own civilian industries. The Military Industries Organization was primarily concerned with the production of small arms, batteries, copper wire. Then during my stay there from '68 to '71, they moved forward with more advanced and more sophisticated equipment and weapons.

I would say that in general the population appeared to be much better off materially than in the past, and it continued to increase. Later, problems arose when the economy overheated. People were led to expect many things in the mid-seventies and the government just didn't have the capacity to carry out all of their programs.

Q: I have some more questions on arms sales, the issues that we were talking about when we ended the last meeting. Did you review the contracts that the Shah negotiated with U. S. companies?

Twitchell: No. Once the Iranian government began to negotiate

with a firm, we did not participate in the discussions. The only time that I was involved was when I sat in on a discussion between Toufanian and representatives of McDonnell-Douglas.

Q: You sort of just observed? Yes.

Twitchell: One of the issues was whether the Iranians would deal directly with McDonnell-Douglas or whether they would ask the Pentagon to negotiate the contract. As a general proposition, Toufanian preferred to deal through the Pentagon rather than through individual contractors.

Q: I see. Now how much contact did you have in general with representatives of the U. S. firms that sold weapons to Iran?

Twitchell: As I remember it, representatives of firms coming to Teheran were supposed to check with the MAAG to let us know that they were there, to discuss why they were there. They were not there to seek our endorsing the program or with our trying to influence the Iranians. The main thing that I tried to explain to visitors was Iran's limited ability to absorb the equipment.

Q: Were there any kinds of rules or regulations that you had to follow when you met with these representatives?

Twitchell: I don't think I had anything more specific than that

I was not there to sell arms. I was there to advise the government.

Q: Who were some of the individuals that would come by Teheran when you were stationed there? Do you recall some of the companies or the names of the representatives?

Twitchell: The aviation companies were particularly active, and when I first got there the Iranians were considering whether they should retrofit the M-47 tanks with diesels rather than gasoline motors. I saw the representatives of several different companies who were coming in to make proposals to the Iranian government. Firms included Northrup, McDonnell-Douglas, General Motors, General Electric, Philco-Ford, Bell Helicopters, and Augusta Bell/Italy.

Q: Do you recall any names of individuals who were involved in that particular effort, the retrofitting effort?

Twitchell: Well, a retired General named Ennis, Mr. Gene Fornarb, and Mr. James Zand.

Q: Was Kermit Roosevelt an occasional visitor?

Twitchell: I don't think I ever saw Kermit Roosevelt while I was in Iran. I saw him when I got back here, in connection with the

Iran-American Society. Nor did I necessarily hear that he was there.

Q: Did the representatives of the arms companies also meet with the chiefs of the services that were in Armish-MAAG? Like the chief of the Army Mission or the Air Force Mission.

Twitchell: Yes. Particularly on the Air side, but I would say all three.

Q: To what extent could the service representatives promote the sale of weapons systems that their branch of the service favored back in Washington? Was there any effort on their part to promote sales of certain--

Twitchell: If they did, they never told me about them. We didn't run into the problem that arose in connection with the F-14, F-15 affair, if that's what you have in mind.

Q: I guess, yes. But they were careful? There was nothing that you knew about it in that respect?

Twitchell: That's right.

Q: Were there any circumstances where you or the service chiefs could get suppliers assistance in making sales? For example, by



helping them with their presentation to the government of Iran.

Twitchell: No. If you did that with one, you had to do it with all. I think the only time I became involved with anything which might relate to that was in connection with this tank retrofit program. We did suggest to the Iranians that if they were interested in going ahead with it and had some questions about the capabilities of the different companies to produce a retrofit tank, and since there was no way of actually making any judgments, that they ask the companies to send out a tank and have it tested. But I guess that's the only thing that I would have felt was involved.

Q: During this period, did any of the companies, any of the arms companies, have any trouble with the Iranian government? During '68 to '71? Were there any companies that had difficulties with the government in their use of go-betweens or expeditors, whatever?

Twitchell: I think, you know-- I'm not saying how far back it goes-- I think there was always the problem, the concern of agents, which became particularly acute in the Grumman affair. I guess, just based on general conversation one would assume that the feeling among the foreign firms-- and I say foreign, not just American-- was that somehow this was necessary. Basically-- that was one of the reasons that Toufanian preferred to deal

through the Pentagon, with the idea that that would reduce such a possibility. My general feeling is that the arms sales people with the industrial firms bore an important responsibility for this climate, because if they had not agreed to pay such fees this would have stopped a good deal of it. I just felt both sides were at fault.

Now you have to realize that the competition was not just between U.S. firms, but also included Italian firms, and there were British and French companies, too.

Q: Yes. International competition.

Twitchell: Then you have the subsidiaries of U.S. firms. For example, the Italian Augusta Bell. There were incidents. For example, the Italians pushed a very light helicopter, which we felt could not take off during the hot summer months at high altitudes. When the Iranians asked us for a technical estimate, we gave provided it. Then they determined whether to go ahead. In one case, where again a foreign helicopter, presumably an American designed and equipped Bell helicopter but assembled in a foreign country-- however, it did not have the same component parts in certain instances as the U.S. model. There were several other instances, in which there were similar problems.

Q: They had more oil income to use then and greater arms sales-- higher levels of sales being made.

Now during and after 1973, the Technical Assistance Field Teams, the so-called TAFTs, played a major role in training the Iranian military men to use the high tech weapons systems that the U.S. was selling in the '70s. I read that the idea of the TAFTs in Iran had their origins around '69, because of the problems of assimilating the F-4s into the Iranian Air Force. Was that the problem that led to the TAFTs or was it more complicated than that?

Twitchell: The problem that led to the TAFTs was that the Congress put a ceiling on the number of people that could be in MAAGs. The TAFTs were established to augment the MAAG in providing technical assistance and they were administrated by the Iranians. In other words, they were U.S. advisers. From the point of view of the individuals who were there as members of the initial TAFT teams, some felt that they were there as mercenaries, and there was a psychological problem. There were also administrative problems, particularly since most of them were billeted on Iranian Air Force installations. I think we would have been better off to say that they're part of the MAAG per se.

I generally recommended that, not with the idea of curbing the Iranian purchases, but with the idea that they should not be ordering equipment unless, at the same time, steps were taken to have properly trained personnel on hand when the equipment arrived. However, there could be a short indoctrination period,

just as in our own services, when a new and highly sophisticated weapon comes into the inventory. There are times when the qualified technicians are on hand, particularly for Air and Navy, to help make a transition to the new equipment.

Q: Now were the TAFTs used for the F-4 program when you were in Iran?

Twitchell: Yes.

Q: They were not under your supervision though?

Twitchell: They were under the general supervision of the head of the MAAG Air Force Section, who worked closely with the Iranians.

Q: How successful was this program in practice? How well did it work out from your vantage point?

Twitchell: Oh, I think from the point of view of providing the technical assistance it worked satisfactorily. They were supposed to be trainers, they were there to instruct the Iranians and teach them how to become technically proficient. One of the things that you had to be constantly on the alert for was the tendency of a TAFT member or an advisor to feel it was easier to do the job himself, and that was defeating the very purpose of

what was intended.

Q: Was the idea of the TAFT being used on a wider scale during the course of your stay in Iran? Was it used beyond the F-4 program?

Twitchell: Yes, later.

Q: Yes. After '73.

Twitchell: Before I left, that was the only case. Later on I think they did have a number of TAFT members for the helicopter programs. Williamson would know more about that or possibly others.

Q: Now during the nineteen-sixties and the following years, the Shah and General Toufanian had plans and programs to build up Iran's military industries, and you talked a little bit about this earlier, a few minutes ago. Did Armish-MAAG play any role in facilitating this development of an autonomous military-industrial sector in Iran?

Twitchell: I'm just trying to think. I don't remember whether we were, in terms of processing Iranian requests for technical assistance and so on. Certainly we played a role. We played a role in the case of the M-47 retrofit. Once the Iranians decided

that they wanted to go the retrofit route, we played a role, because those tanks, which were provided as alternate grant aid, were basically U.S. property. And so there was a DOD interest in the arrangements that were made in connection with the retrofit.

Q: Now at our last meeting you talked a bit about the annual review procedure and the degree to which the annual review constrained the Shah's assets to an American arms market.

Twitchell: That was in terms primarily of the amount of loans which the EXIM Bank would agree to. There was a country team approach to its review of the Iranian economy, the overall situation and the extent to which the Embassy should support the Iranian request.

Q: So this sort of eliminated the Shah's ability to get credits from the United States?

Twitchell: Not necessarily.

Q: This sort of limitation was eroding while revenues increased?

Twitchell: Yes.

Q: But besides this financial limitation, were there any other

controls over the Shah's purchases of U.S. weapons? In the late sixties or early seventies?

Twitchell: I think in one or two instances some of the requests on even certain minor items were denied, just as-- possibly as a general matter of policy back in Washington of transferring those items. But generally there weren't any-- again you got into the problem of-- the normal U.S. procedure was that when equipment first came off the line, it went to the U.S. forces first rather than to other countries. Now the Shah pressed for the most recent equipment, particularly when he began to pay for it. So there was that factor. That was not a country team assessment. That was a DoD and State assessment, and was a matter of overall priority.

Q: I have another question that relates to this last one. I've read that under the Johnson administration there was sort of a perennial debate in Washington over the extent to which the United States should supply the Shah with advanced weapons systems like the F-4 and other fighter jets. And the State Department generally supported the Shah's requests for advanced weapons systems, and I guess officials of the Pentagon, and ISA in particular, were generally more critical, more skeptical of the Shah's requests for advanced systems. How familiar were you with those debates when you were in Iran?

Twitchell: I really didn't have first-hand knowledge of the debates themselves. I think the general concern of those who had the reservation was again the question of the threat and the regional military balance, and the ability to absorb. I think many times State-- and I'm not talking just necessarily in connection with Iran-- is inclined to see the benefits of arms transfers in terms of political relationships, whereas the Pentagon, particularly before the days when Iran was purchasing equipment, looked at arms transfers primarily in security terms. The income from sales had some bearing on some of the decisions, at least it appeared so to me. The more critical problem was the extent to which Iran could maintain and handle the requested equipment, particularly the more sophisticated equipment. How are you going to arrange for major overhauls? There were also the overall DoD policies regarding the sales of equipment from a security viewpoint.

My own feeling is that as a general proposition it's important to recognize that the transfer of arms was in general of only temporary benefits.

Q: You mean politically?

Twitchell: Politically. There is the problem of a change of regime, as we saw in '79. You also have the problem of it being used against the U.S. or being used in ways that had not been agreed to. But secondly, while you have a compatibility of



interests in some respects, in many cases, particularly in terms of the regional aspects, there is not the same basic acceptance of compatibility.

Q: In terms of the political implications you were talking about a minute ago, did you have a sense that the officials in State assumed that arms sales would bring the U. S. more influence in a country like Iran or other arms recipients?

Twitchell: Let me put it another way. I think they felt that, because of the Shah's extreme interest, it was important in terms of our relationships. Under the Nixon regime and the Guam Declaration, arms sales took on all the more importance. The U.S. decided we should no longer be the gendarme around the world and we had to look to other nations. This coupled with the increases in oil income was the genesis of that tremendous build up. Certainly as events have shown, this backfired because of the change in the internal Iranian political structure.

Q: Now when the Nixon administration came in in '69, did the Pentagon's reservations about the capacity, they still continued? This question still--

Twitchell: I think they still had some concerns. I heard General Fish, who was the head of the DSA, say on a number of occasions that they had concerns over the levels or amounts of

equipment being transferred.

Q: Did you get a sense of where Secretary of Defense Laird stood on these issues?

Twitchell: Basically, I don't think anybody can deny the strategic rationale that from the point of view of the United States, it was desirable to try to develop capabilities of friendly nations in the various regions, to provide for the stability of the area. Secretary Laird developed what was called a total force concept, and that was the relationship not only between the active and the reserve military in our country, but also the relationship between our forces, those in Europe and the Middle East and so on. The twin pillar concept of Iran and Saudi Arabia as being the two most likely candidates in the Gulf.

Q: I was going to ask you about the twin pillars idea. Did you talk to the Shah about this concept or did he discuss it with you, this idea of Saudi Arabian and Iranian cooperation?

Twitchell: He talked with me on a number of occasions about the security of the Gulf, for example, he was concerned about Nasser, particularly when the latter went into Yemen; the fact that he was concerned about the security of the Gulf. As far as the Saudis were concerned, I think he felt a certain degree of sameness, if you will, in terms of the conservative Gulf leaders

and himself being among the last heads of state in the area, who had basically the same views regarding their security. The Shah did make an effort to reduce the concerns about an expansionist Iran. I don't think he ever convinced the Arab Gulf states of this. Particularly in '70, when he occupied Tunbs and Abu Mussa, he heightened this fear. On the other hand, when he went in to support Oman, I think he possibly lessened their concerns at least temporarily.

I think he looked upon Iran as having global potential, in terms of its size, population, and resources and so on, in addition to Iran being the principal stabilizing factor in the Gulf. He was also concerned about getting oil out of the Gulf, particularly once he had the oil coming out from the offshore stations.

So when the British announced-- he became more concerned about not only the Gulf itself, but the approaches to the Gulf.

Q: So he didn't quite see it in terms of the twin pillars, but in terms of the Saudis playing a somewhat more subordinate role, with Iran playing a primary role? Is that how he--

Twitchell: That would be my estimate. But he was certainly making efforts to deal more effectively with the Saudis.

Q: Did he discuss that effort with you or what he was trying to do in practical terms?

Twitchell: From time to time he discussed particular measures and incidents which he was cooperating with the Saudis.

Q: Do you recall anything in particular?

Twitchell: Well, he was particularly concerned in the situation in the Yemens, about the threat that situation posed to Saudi Arabia.

Q: Was he taking any steps at all to deal with that situation? Or was it more a question of discussion at that point?

Twitchell: First of all-- the MAAG was not there to get into discussions on operational matters with him. So we had to be very careful not to get involved in something that Iran was dealing with the other countries about. Generally they didn't tell us, and I'm not sure whether the other agencies, intelligence agencies, picked up things or not. From time to time, the Chief of SCS or Toufanian would mention an incident involving another country.

Q: I want to get back to this question of Laird. Did he ever visit Iran when you were there? Melvin Laird?

Twitchell: No.