been a new way to ban anti-Shah demonstrations. You wrote a memo to Secretary Vance saying that the U.S. should, and this is a quote, "concentrate our influence on persuading the Shah to hold to liberalization," which you saw as the only sensible course for long-term stability. Now by this point, how did you define liberalization in Iran.

Saunders: Broadening the participation in the government. Trying to take the main centers of opposition and represent them somehow in the government. The Shah did broaden his government in September, but it was moved to the military not in the way that we had--. I think there's a fairly consistent strain of thinking in the Near Eastern Bureau along these lines, that actually you see articulated in the George Ball report much later in the fall. Ball--I don't know, you can ask him--he talked to a lot of people I'm sure. But I remember going to his suite in the hotel on a Sunday night to have dinner with him and Henry Precht and I--maybe it was just the three of us, maybe it was a fourth, I can't remember. But anyway, we spent three or four hours with him--this was later in the fall. By that time this idea of broadening the base had taken the form of a Council of Notables or something like that. In other words, it was elevated again one step beyond the idea of just broadening the base because the Shah hadn't done it that way. But that was the persistent way of approaching the problem in May from, I don't know, some time in the summer on. You can point it at least as early as August--it may have been earlier.

Q: Did you see liberalization in any way as including major structural changes in the regime. Like, maybe some diminution of the Shah's authority?

Saunders: In the longer term. I don't think we saw that as happening in the middle of a crisis. First step would be the practicalities of diffusing the crisis by bringing responsible people in from the bazaar, from the various groups that were in the streets. Later on at some point, yes, but when things had calmed down and people could be more deliberative in their approach.

Incidentally, that stream of thinking came out in other ways, too. Sending somebody to see Khomeini in Paris, and seeing whether you could get the military in January--the [General Robert] Huyser Mission. The thought behind that was, I mean one person's thought behind it, was to marshal the military to save the Shah. Another school of thought was, "The military may very well be the biggest single element of continuity if the Shah leaves and Khomeini comes. We'd be better off to have a military figuring out how to do business with the new leaders of Iran and preserving some coherence to a regime than to be out in the streets simply defending the Shah.". That line of thought, I think, was consistent in the Department throughout. Now it took different forms at different times, and it's another question of how we handled that idea bureaucratically. But I think Cy Vance was very much of this, I don't want to put words in his mouth.

Q: Okay.

Now in early September 1978, the embassy's political officer, John Stempel, met with a special assistant to the Prime Minister of Iran, and told him that the U.S. would support the re-establishment of order by force as long as liberalization continued--under the Shah's direction. Now shortly thereafter the government declared martial law, and you had what were called the Black Friday events. Now, I have a copy of the memo which I saw. Stempel's signal appeared to have some sort of significance, I would think. Could he have made the statement he did without authority from Washington.

Saunders: No, again I can't site specific dates and telegrams of instruction. But when you're getting to this point you're getting to the moment where, I think, Bill Sullivan's criticism of Washington was probably fair. That is, that he was getting two signals from Washington. There were two points of view. There was the Brzezinski point of view, which was to use the military to crack down, preserve order, and so on. Then you could move on to other things. Well, the way this got brokered out in this period--the way a number of instructions got brokered out--was precisely in the kind of way that you just described. The Embassy being instructed to recommend that the Shah be firm, but at the same time to recognize that the fundamental solution was a long-term broadening of the government and so on. Preserve order for the sake of broadening the government. But I think the other side of it is, I seem to remember a conservation--again I can't date it exactly, but probably in August or September, maybe it was right at this time you're mentioning--Bill Sullivan having this conversation with the Shah in which the Shah

said "I'm not going to rule Iran in a pool of blood," almost in those words.

I think it was at this time too that you began getting a lot of thought in Washington about the state of the Shah's psyche. I remember thinking to myself at one point--I don't have the vaguest notion whether this was hindsight of a couple of years of whether I was thinking of it at the time now--but at some point the thought occurred to me that the biggest single missing ingredient in the picture in Iran was the Shah himself. We became aware about this time that the Shah seemed absent in the psychological sense of the word. There were a couple of high level visitors--I think our Treasury Secretary visited Iran somewhere right in this period. The burning question at the American end of these high level meetings with the Shah was, "What was your impression of the Shah? Does he seem passive?," and so on. The reports generally that he seemed passive. If you think back to earlier periods when he had trouble, the 1960s and so on, out of the trouble in the 1960s came the White Revolution. He jumped out in front of the opposition, almost in the end co-opted it, or gave it a way to channel its energies, and won it over at least for a period of time. I think we kept looking in this formulation of broadening the government, kept looking for this time, not a White Revolution in the social-economic sense, but a political addendum to the White Revolution where you would broaden the participation. You remember, I think I said in one of our earlier interviews that the Shah said as early as 1969, 1970 that if "I don't solve this problem of institutionalizing political participation, my son will never rule in Iran." Well, a lot of us remembered that--not

that particular. It had been a stream in our thinking all through the 1970s, and I think it came out here again with the thought that if the Shah really wanted to deal with the opposition he needed to leap-frog it, get out in front, take some sort of dramatic step to capture people in some new political reform. That was, I guess, the model that was in our minds. But the problem with it--one problem among many, I suppose--was that the Shah did not seem ready, able to exert that kind of creative, imaginative leadership or to project a sense of leadership to the Iranian people. Now what was going on in his mind, was it just a natural reaction to what he saw going on in that sense of not knowing quite what to do about it, or did he really have a renewed sense of his own illness. Of course we didn't know that until fourteen months--thirteen months--later. But if he was struggling with that--a man knowing he was potentially terminally ill coping with all this going on out in the streets might just as well have psychologically given up.

Q: Had there been any rumors at all about possible illness? Any speculation that you can remember?

Saunders: No. I think if you went back through everything, all the CIA material and so on, you would find it true that the first inkling--now you can say that this shows a dereliction of intelligence capacity or whatever you want--the first real inkling we had of anything like that was this message in the fall of 1979 which led to the admission of the Shah to the United States for treatment.

Q: Right, right. Okay.

Also in September of 1978 Gary Sick of the NSC staff proposed to you--so he says in his book--proposed to you at the State Department hold informal talks with one of Khomeini's representatives, Ibrahim Yazdi. I guess Sick had the connection with Yazdi through Richard Codom. Do you recall what you thought of Codom's suggestions at that time, or Sick's suggestions at that time?

Saunders: Codom was one of the members of--I don't know how I ever drew a blank on his name--but he fairly early became a member of that academic group. I should have remembered his name before. We respected Codom highly, knew certainly to his numerous connections, and were always interested in taking advantage of the knowledge that people had of that kind. We did, of course, a little bit later than the month that you're mentioning--probably late November, early December--we did crank up a mission for Ted Eliot to go and se Yazdi in Paris. Since when we couldn't do that we authorized Warren Zimmerman in the embassy in Paris to go and talk with him and so on.

Q: This is one in September of 1978, a proposal.

Saunders: Yes, but you see even at the point when we did it it was turned off not in the State Department but in Gary's own shop. It wasn't us that rejected these ideas, it was his bosses.

Q: In terms of the September proposal, you were supportive of it?

Saunders: I can't remember the particular proposal at the time. I know that given our inclination to be in touch with people and to try to broker some kind of broadening of the base, it would have seemed natural to me to include an approach like that as part of your effort. You remember, I came at this moment from four years of involvement in the Arab-Israeli peace process, where we went and sat in the middle of the problem and talked to virtually everybody. If there some people, like the PLO, we didn't want to talk to right then we had a lot of ways of including them in the dialogue indirectly. So, our whole approach as a bureau and I think as an administration was to think in terms of political process. How do you put people together to move from a bad situation to a better one. The idea of liberalization, that's just an American political word that happens to be a short-hand way of talking about a political process that would have turned the opposition more constructively into support of a political process by which the Shah could have been retained, perhaps as a constitutional monarch down the road. All of these things, just the mentality with which the Department was looking at the problem. Everybody dealing with this was either intimately, as I was, or certainly lived with people who were intimately involved in that process. Most of all the Secretary of State.

Q: When did you, yourself, personally conclude that the Shah's days were over, in terms of the calendar you mentioned earlier.

Saunders: Gary Sick is very good on this point. Gary says that he thinks it's fair to answer that question as it refers to oneself only

by citing the moment when you put your judgment in writing. Gary had the opportunity in going back over files before he left the government and before he wrote this book, to do that for himself. I haven't done that for myself, so I don't know what a fair question it. If I answer you off the top of my head, I would think that probably some time in mid September when I came back from Camp David after Jaleh Square, and so on, I really found a different atmosphere, an even more concerned atmosphere in the Bureau. Crawford saying to me that we just had to pay more attention to this problem, it was getting worse, and so on and so forth. Well, the memo you cited there was as early as August, so it isn't that we weren't thinking. I think I probably belong somewhere in the September group.

Q: Okay.

Also according to Sick's book, which I relied upon pretty heavily since it's so thorough--

Saunders: Yes. It's a very good book. He did a very fine job. I really respect him and his work a great deal.

Q: This might be hard to remember--specific papers that you approved at some point, but he says that by late October some State Department officials--probably a number of them--feared a military takeover in Iran, and concluded that the ambassador, that Ambassador Sullivan, should play a stronger role in giving advice to the Shah so that he could build a more effective government. Now, do you recall--well I guess you sort-of mentioned what kind of advice you would have had

the ambassador give in terms of liberalization. But was this proposal discussed with Secretary Vance? This idea of having Sullivan take a stronger role in the situation, was that discussed with Vance?

Saunders: I don't remember, but again our picture in a variety of situations--and Lebanon is another one which is going on precisely at this time--where you had a country taking itself apart from the inside. You had a strong ambassador, an ambassador who felt his job was to keep Lebanon from disrupting the Camp David process. Ambassador [John Gunther] Dean operated by making himself a force within Lebanon, trying to keep factions in touch with each other, trying to bring people together who were straying apart and so on. My mentality at the time was that the most effective way of dealing with a situation where a country is coming apart from the inside, which now by this time applied also to Iran, was to have a strong ambassador with a political sense of how, perhaps, to construct the political scenario for achieving what you wanted to achieve. Certainly in Lebanon I did not feel I was smart enough, or probably that we were smart enough in Washington, to instruct the ambassador to do "a" this way, "b"-that way, go see "c" and tell him, and so on. We relied on the ambassador to play a role within certain broad instructions. I think what the mentality would have been at the time, that if you wanted to construct this political process that we had in mind, we couldn't design it from Washington. You had to design it on the scene, sitting in the middle of the scene. Having a strong ambassador talk to everybody, see what he could put together

just as a third in the Arab-Israeli peace process--we didn't sit in Washington and design some solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We went out there and had been out there since after the 1973 war, now five years before that, sitting in the middle of the problem, working with the people, talking about partial solutions, and so on. We made ourselves part of the political process. That was my concept of the way the ambassador would function. I didn't know exactly what he should do, whom he should suggest to the Shah be brought in to the government. That was his job. So, that's the prevailing concept. I again can't remember whether I wrote it to Vance in those words or what the record would show.

Q: By this point when you're making a suggestion like that to Vance, was he responsive to those kinds of suggestions?

Saunders: Yes. We were pretty much of the same mind. By "we" I include my colleagues in the Bureau as well as the Secretary. You asked earlier whether I spoke to Warren Christopher about this. The way the division of labor worked out on the seventh floor was that there was just some issues that Vance dealt with and some issues Christopher dealt with. It just happened that Arab-Israeli peace process, Lebanon, now Iran, Afghanistan--the big issues that were going to have to be dealt with the President, with the Congress, with the press and so on--were issues that naturally gravitated to the Secretary. So most of my work was with the Secretary.

Q: I got the sense from looking at Vance's memoirs that he refers to

Precht's views that the Shah was on his way out, basically, that new people had to brought into power somehow. He suggested he differed from Precht during the fall, disagreed with Precht's analysis, that he thought the Shah still had to be supported in some way.

Saunders: Precht was making two points. That analytically, something was qualitatively different, and it looked as if the Shah could not survive. In any case, whether that was true or not, all that said to us was, "We'd better think differently about we do in Iran." The point that followed from that was that if the Shah had any chance of survival or of prolonging his tenure, or of playing a constructive role in a transition, the way you did that was to broaden the base of the Shah's government. So, Precht wasn't advocating the overthrow of the Shah. Therefore, I think, Vance may himself--well, probably very few people would have said as early as Henry Precht did that the Shah was done for. They weren't ready to make that intellectual jump. I think Vance is saying that when he says we needed to defend the Shah and well; sure, we thought the way for the Shah to defend himself was to engage in the political process that I've mentioned.

Q: I've read then that in late October or so prominent people like John J. McCloy were urging Secretary Vance and others to use U.S. influence to support a crackdown against dissidence in Iran. Do you recall any pressure from people like McCloy, any phone calls?

Saunders: I don't remember any of them myself. Those calls normally came in to people on the seventh floor like David Newson or the

Secretary himself.

Q: McCloy never talked with you during this period?

Saunders: I don't think so.

Q: Okay. You never heard anything about such--

Saunders: Oh! Well, I don't know whether I did or not. It was not unusual at all to have all kinds of people getting on the telephone in the middle of a crisis like this. I would have expected it would have been the norm. Didn't register with me, obviously.

Q: November Second, a special coordinating committee of the NSC began reviewing policy towards Iran. I guess that's the first time that high level officials had started looking at it in a systematic way?

Saunders: If that's what Gary's book says. I'm sure that's the case.

Q: Before that point, had you or any of your advisors at the Iran Desk been trying to encourage such a process to begin? High level deliberations.

Saunders: I just can't remember exactly what we would have said to Vance. Obviously we were writing memos to Vance, and we were also in

touch by telephone with Gary Sick. So there was communication. At what point we began talking together about having a meeting of that kind I just don't remember.

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Q: On November Second, the Special Coordinating Committee held its meetings. They approved a message to the Shah saying that the U.S. would support him and anything he did to restore order, including the establishment of a military government. Now, at the same time Secretary Vance issued a statement that the Shah should restore order before he continued with liberalization, something to that effect. Now, did Vance or others discuss these messages with you before they were delivered? Do you recall?

Saunders: Yes. A message would have been drafted, and would have been in Vance's hands before he went to that meeting. What happened to several of these messages in this period is they went up to the President, Brzezinski expressed his views, and maybe the three of them plus others met in the President's office. You ended up with several major telegrams with this splitting of the difference. Sending instructions that Bill Sullivan regarded as internally not coherent. They wrote, "Crack down but liberalize." This is where the Vance-Brzezinski difference became--Carter, instead of coming down on one side or the other side, ended up as I say brokering the difference between them. If you had to list the policy failure of

this period, one of them would focus on this fact that we were neither fish nor foul. We were maybe doing two things at once that were inconsistent. We were telling the Shah to restore order--that was Brzezinski's primary concern and focus, and his options concentrated on actions to accomplish that end. The State Department, George Ball recommending broadening the base and a series of political actions. They were given lip service to, and messages but nobody put in the messages, any kind of supporting detail or argument that would have given that part of the effort equal strength. So, the commitment to broadening the governmental base was there, but the only action related thing at the other end was "Tell the Shah that we're behind him. Tell the Shah we support him in restoring order." So that's what came out of the action part of the telegram when it got to Tehran. What didn't come out was, "Why don't you suggest to the Shah at the same time time that he begin to pave the way for--" [the interview is interrupted].

Q: Were you personally uncomfortable with this approach at that time? What was your private assessment, your personal assessment, the best that you can recall?

Saunders: I think my personal assessment again was that the military crackdown by itself was going to result in unending confrontation to which there would be no constructive outcome. That the Shah couldn't ultimately prevail in any way that would be useful if he just relied on that. What we said earlier was that the answer is a political answer, not a military answer. Okay, you've got demonstrations in

the street. If you have to do some sort of police action to calm them down, as you've cited from the earlier memo, that that has to be coupled in some way with a political course of action which would give people who really didn't want blood in the streets but who opposed the Shah some way to go that would have drawn them out of the streets.

Q: In this period, the fall of 1978, did you discuss the situation with Iranian government officials, or private citizens who were Iranians? Did you have any contacts there?

Saunders: I probably did not have many myself. Certainly when you get in the middle of a crisis like this, dealings with the ambassador or the Secretary of State, or in this case you have the Secretary dealing with Ambassador Zahedi and you had Brzezinski dealing with him, and he was getting different signals. I did not have contact with the range of people that Gary Sick did, for instance.

Q: How much influence do you think that Zahedi had on Brzezinski? Did you get a sense that there was much going on?

Saunders: The books document this now, but I don't think--it's clear that Brzezinski was saying what Zahedi wanted to hear the U.S. government say, and it emphasized the Brzezinski line, which was to use the military. Remember, it was Zahedi's father who had run the military that had provided the environment within which the Shah was returned to Iran in 1953. So, it's natural that his mind would have

gone that way. So was Zbig's, in its own way.

Q: On November Eighth, a few days after the Shah appointed a military government, after protesters had burned down a number of buildings including the British embassy, Ambassador Sullivan sent a cable to Washington which he titled, "Thinking the Unthinkable." The implications of the message, I think, were that if the current policy failed, the Shah should leave, and the U.S. should foster a coalition between the younger moderate military people and the secular opposition leaders. I think I'm reading it more or less in terms of--I think I'm fair about what he says. How much of an impact did Sullivan's cable have at that time? Do you recall much discussion?

Saunders: Well, of course as any cable at that time coming in in the middle of a crisis it became the stimulus for further high level meetings and discussions. So yes it had an immediate impact.

Q: What kind of impact do you think it had, or how would you assess the impact?

Saunders: I think one of the consequences bureaucratically was the fact that, as Gary says in his book, that look the string of meetings in the NSC system at the White House level that will really date from about this point. What date does he say?

Q: November Eighth. The cable?

Saunders: No, the first meeting you mentioned a moment ago.

Q: November Second.

Saunders: But thereafter the meetings were more frequently White House level considerations--more frequent, more active, more continuous.

Q: Did you discuss this cable with Secretary Vance or [David] Newsom, that you can recall?

Saunders: I just don't remember now. Also remember it didn't depend on me to get it to him. I came in to everybody at the same time, so he would have received it the same time I did. I didn't have to go and call his attention to something like that.

Q: Okay. Now also in the cable, Sullivan suggested that if such a coalition came to power, someone like Khomeini would play a Gandhi-like role, sort-of aloof from the political process. To what extent by this point, say the fall or early winter, did State Department officials agree with that kind of assessment of a Khomeini role in Iran? Or was it even discussed at length?

Saunders: I think that would have been consistent with the kind of analysis that would have been evolving in the Department. Actually, the Sullivan telegram, in a strange way, is an articulation from the embassy of the analytical point of view they'd been taking in the

Department. I don't know what the symbosis was in this process--I don't know who led whom--you have to remember that the Desk Officer, and embassy officers were on the telephone to each other all the time. So during the fall, the only communications were not those that were in print. Communications were through visitors going back and forth, discussions, telephone talks, official and informal letters, all sort of things. So, who led whom in coming to these confusions I don't know. What's remarkable about the telegram is not that people were thinking this way--they'd been thinking this way for weeks if not several months--but the remarkable and notable fact was the ambassador put it down as a formal position, that then moved the policy community forward one step. It really forces the policy community to begin working from different premises, or at least re-examine the premise that it had been working on. Remember the earlier premise was, "the Shah's in trouble but the Shah will make it." Now the premise is, "it looks as if this may not be the case." We at least have to think about the possibility that it might not be the case.

Q: Later that same month, on November, before the month of Moharran began, the NSC held a special conference on Iran in the White House situation room--I think it's in the basement, there. Do you remember that meeting, whether you attended it or not? Sick doesn't mention it. Apparently it was a very big meeting, a lot of high level, senior--high level, middle level--officials involved in Iranian issues. Like Precht, and so forth. He doesn't mention whether you were there or not. This was an all day meeting on Iran.

Saunders: I suspect that I wasn't there.

Q: One thing he says about the conference is that there were a few major points of view that were articulated there. One was that the Shah would probably have to abdicate. The second was that he only had a 50/50 chance of surviving 1979. The other view was that he would be able to rule for several more years, but after that it was very murky. Would your views at that time have fallen somewhere along one of those three positions? That he would have had to abdicate, or just had a very dim chance.

Saunders: Yes, I think we stood in the middle. The fact that your 50/50 applies to 1979. But I think the point was that he was simply gonna have to give up the full range of powers that he had had in the near future as part of a political accommodation. That would have been the way that we would have formulated it.

Q: Were any people at State arguing, maybe like Precht or others, suggesting that he might have to abdicate soon? Was anybody coming around to that position by November?

Saunders: Well, he might have been closer to that. But the focus wasn't on, again, abdicating. Again, the focus was on whether or not by some negotiation he would stay as a figurehead and he would bring some regency group or something to power. I think we would have been focusing on how to preserve some sense of continuity rather than on

abdication.

Q: During this period did you discuss Iran issues with Brzezinski?

Saunders: I went to most of these meetings in the White House, so in that sense yes. I don't remember a one-on-one, I don't think there would have been an occasion for a one-on-one conversation. Remember we spent a lot of time in the same place together because, again you'll recall what was going on through all of this. That was that we had Egyptian and Israeli negotiating teams at Blair House and the Madison Hotel working on a peace treaty. We were in and out of the White House all the time because the President saw them on occasion, and so on. So there was lots of contact. Iran meetings and these other affairs. I was certainly in a group discussion with him, I remember.

Q: We only have a few minutes left. Why don't we discuss the Ball Report, and stop at that point. In late November, Brzezinski asked George Ball to do a special study on Iran. Do you recall how this request came about?

Saunders: I don't remember how the request came about. There was this very strong school of thought--it was mentioned in the Sullivan telegram--that there ought to be a political process here. I suppose Sick says something in his book about why he did this.

Q: But you weren't brought in to the process in terms of deciding

whether to get--

Saunders: It's one of those things that comes down from on high.

Q: According to Brzezinski's memoirs, Secretary Vance was initially unenthusiastic about the whole notion of having Ball do a study. Do you recall that, or whether there would be any reason--

Saunders: I don't recall that.

Q: You mentioned earlier that you discussed with Ball from time to time during this period.

Saunders: He did a very quick job! I remember mainly meeting within that one Sunday night at his hotel that I mentioned to you. He reported within a very few days after that. It wasn't a prolonged mission, it was a very quick one.

Q: Did he ask you for any advice at this meeting you discussed? Did he ask for your proposals?

Saunders: Yes. That was the purpose of the meeting. We talked extensively about various ideas of this kind.

Q: How would you characterize the general approach that he took in his paper he presented to Carter?

Saunders: If the Shah could no longer govern as he had, there was a need to put something into place in the Iranian body politic that would perform the functions of the Head of State. That this would necessarily have to be broadly representative. Therefore the idea of a regency council or a council of notables or whatever. I can't remember whether it was in the Ball report or not, but this time, of course, the idea of whether--to meet the demands of the Khomeini group the Shah would need to be abasent from Iran for a period of time and leave government in the hands of the regency council. That was the collection of thoughts I think, that was what the Ball memo was built around.

Q: Did you actually read it when he finished working on it? Did you read his report? Because I heard it was very tight, very closely controlled.

Saunders: I don't remember now. Again, we talked through it and so on. The ideas are what I had in my head.

Q: Okay.

What was your evaluation of Ball's approach?

Saunders: Well, it was certainly consistent with ours. Therefore we thought it was a good report. As in a lot of political situations you make proposals which you think will give you at least some chance of avoiding the worst scenario, and accomplishing something of what you want. It wasn't that we thought this would be an easy thing to do,

or even that there was anything approaching a fifty-percent chance of success. Again, just like the Arab-Israeli experience which was common for those of us involved in it, we never much felt we had much more than a twenty-five percent chance of success. If we got that high we were doing pretty well. That didn't mean you wouldn't try something to see whether you couldn't make it take hold--in some cases it did, in some cases it didn't. So, you asked whether we thought it was a workable proposal. We thought it was something worth trying. Whether it had a fifty-percent chance of success at that point, I suspect we thought that the odds were against any proposal. The likelihood was that the Shah would go, and Khomeini would come back. We were still trying to see whether we could broker some accommodation.

Q: Did you discuss Ball's ideas or report with Brzezinski? Oh! You said you didn't talk with Brzezinski too much. Do you think Ball's report had any chance of being approved at the highest levels? By Carter, or Brzezinski? Was it a very close call from your recollection?

Saunders: It's pretty clear Brzezinski wasn't going to like it, and that's what happened. I'm not quite so sure why Carter wasn't more responsive to it.

Q: Okay. Well, this probably might be a good time to stop. So we can continue with the developments of December at the next meeting.

Saunders: Okay.

[End of interview]

ALM

Interviewee: Harold Saunders
Interviewer: William Burr

Date: May 1, 1987
Place: Washington, D.C.

Q: The fourth part of the interview with Harold Saunders, by William Burr, took place in Washington D.C. on May 1, 1987.

From what I've read, I guess there was some difference in how government officials interpreted the revolution. For example I read that Brzezinski tended to see a Soviet hand behind the scenes. Were there conflicts about how people looked at the revolution, and how they interpreted its origins? Or differences rather?

Mr. Saunders: I think there were differences. I think there was a school of thought that did tend to see Soviet influence in the revolution. Or if not Soviet influence per se at least Soviet capacity to move in and influence the revolution once it got rolling. I think Brzezinski would have been more in that camp. Other people, or actually those in the State Department, saw it as essentially a revolution made in Iran.

Q: Did these differences have any kind of policy relevance? Did they make much difference in terms of practical policy?

Mr. Saunders: I think you have to put that perception together with other ways of doing business, because I can't really separate that from the people who also had a very strong sense of using force to

restore law and order, using the military as a way of solving the problem, and so on. In other words, for some reason those schools of thought tended to come together, with the person with a strategic perspective more inclined to use force and a person with the indigenous revolution view that tended to look to political solutions such as those we discussed when we talked about the Ball recommendations.

Q: This will come up again, I think, during this interview.

I guess you had conversations with Ambassador [William] Sullivan frequently during this time? Did you have phone conversations with him, or was it mostly through cable?

Mr. Saunders: Well it was mostly cable or a special kind of direct teletype kind of thing we had, which was like a telephone but wasn't. It was like a telephone in the sense that you could talk back and forth sequentially, but you did it in teletype rather than by voice.

Q: From those kind of communications, how would you characterize the approach that he took towards the revolution? What kind of policy did he favor, in terms of developing an American approach.

Mr. Saunders: He would have belonged in the group of those who saw this very much as a domestic political upheaval, and would have thought in terms largely of political solutions. He talked to the Shah, as you know from the telegrams, about the use of force and I think was persuaded that the Shah meant what he said when he said he

did not want to rule Iran in a pool of blood, or words to that effect. Later on, of course, when General Huyser was sent to Iran, Bill Sullivan worked hand in hand with him but I think it was--at that point it was--less a question of finding a military solution than it was trying to work with the military to be the bond that helped make the transition continue.

[telephone interruption]

Q: We were talking about Ambassador Sullivan.

I read in Gary Sick's book that around early December you sent Sullivan a copy of a draft proposal, or something that was kind of close to what [George] Ball was working on, sort of a proposal for an interim regime leading to a new government. Apparently Sullivan responded negatively to this draft. How would you account for that, since he seemed to be on the same wavelength in some ways?

Mr. Saunders: I can't remember exactly why he did. I think if I were to speculate from this perspective--as I said, I think, when we talked about the Ball proposals themselves--it was very late in the game to be thinking about rearranging the political environment. We started talking about things like the Ball proposals, things <u>like</u> the Ball proposals, back in the previous summer before the Shah rearranged his government in September. So, then it might have made a difference. By the time Ball was brought in, things were pretty far down the line. I think Bill Sullivan just saw chaos around him and really didn't see how all this could work.

Q: Could that be why President Carter might have rejected Ball's proposal to begin with? Or similar reasons?

Mr. Saunders: I suppose it's conceivable, although I don't know why Ball would have been invited in to make these suggestions [laughs] if indeed that was the judgment.

Q: You never got a really clear sense of why he--

Mr. Saunders: They just sort of dropped in to the void. They didn't reject them, they just--it's like a lot of proposals in government. Somehow they kind of disappear down a bottomless pit and you never hear from them again.

Q: According to an article in the Washington Post that was printed a few years after these events, around December 14th of the time that Carter was considering Ball's proposals, Brzezinski drafted a letter to the Shah urging him--the Shah--to turn the military against the protesters. Do you have any recollection of that letter or discussion of such a draft letter?

Mr. Saunders: I guess I remember it from [Cyrus] Vance's talking about it as a draft telegram to the Shah. That indeed was Brzezinski's point of view throughout. If I'm remembering the same instance, that telegram ended up being split in two--conceptually speaking--and ended up as an instruction to Sullivan to go talk to

the Shah and to talk about this, but I think not to press it on the Shah. To discuss it but not to push it. I think that was another one of the instances of President Carter splitting the difference between Brzezinski and Vance, if I remember the same episode that you're talking about.

Q: During the course of December, Brzezinski was joined by energy secretary James Schlesinger in proposing the sending of a high level emissary or envoy to convince the Shah to take a hard line. Again, this is another effort along those lines. Were you aware of this, at the time, about Schlesinger's and Brzezinski's proposal?

Mr. Saunders: Well I certainly was aware of Brzezinski's position and recommendations. They came up here and there again and again. I don't remember a specific proposal, piece of paper, that sounds like what you're talking about, but it was something that we were talking about all the time. As a matter of fact some of the Huyser Mission was in a way one of the ways of playing that out. Indeed, it's because of the two different points of view that Sullivan felt that he was getting bifurcated instructions all the time. One was to push a military solution, and one was to look for something less than that, to look for a negotiated resolution of some kind. I think he just felt that he was being pulled back and forth because some of Brzezinski's ideas were being sent directly through to the Shah, by telephone to Ardeshir Zahedi. Sullivan realized this, and sometimes we didn't in Washington.

Q: Around December 19, as the Shah's military government was collapsing, Henry Precht wrote you a long memorandum arguing, again, that the US should play the role of midwife in bringing Iran in to a post-Shah era. I guess this memo had some significance, because this was the first time he'd committed himself to paper at great length to discuss his thoughts about this problem. Do you recall seeing Precht's paper?

Mr. Saunders: Yes. I would be surprised if indeed it were the first time he'd put those ideas on paper.

Q: Sick's book discusses that, I guess, but I don't know if that's true.

Mr. Saunders: Again I can't think of what was on paper and what wasn't, but as I said, I had dinner the night George Ball came to town with him and with Henry Precht and a lot of these ideas were part of of that conversation, so they'd been--I think--around the Near Eastern Bureau for some time. I know Gary makes a point of when people put things on paper, but I think Gary himself would acknowledge that a lot of the thinking that goes on around a problem like this isn't necessarily thinking that is only that committed to paper. So I can't tell whether it was the first time Henry wrote a memo of this kind. It certainly wasn't the first time we'd had that discussion.

Q: I've got a copy from the captured documents. It's about six