

reason or that reason or another reason, certainly much more plausibly so, say, in 1950 or 1960 than in 1977.

Q: Did you discuss these developments with officials from the other embassies, French diplomats or British diplomats, whatever?

Miklos: There's always the usual exchange of views kind of thing going on with other professionals.

Q: How did they read the situation, from your recollection?

Miklos: Pretty well. Certainly the British and French and Germans. The Germans were a little more alarmists, I would say, the German ambassador, anyhow, than the others, but the others, pretty much the same as we read it--troublesome, disturbing, but manageable.

Q: Your Iranian friends, like Amuzegar and others, how did they evaluate?

Miklos: This is a very delicate area.

Q: Certainly.

Miklos: And somewhere in the records is my last discussion with Jamshid Amuzegar, and we touched on some of this, but I, frankly,

can't remember basically whatever Jamshid's response was to explain it to me or to say, "That's not right," or whatever it was. We touched on it. But Iranians didn't tell me, "This is it. We're down the tubes." No.

Q: Were there any rumors floating around Iran or Tehran that year about the state of the Shah's health?

Miklos: Those rumors were recurrent. I know that after I left, in the summer of '78 there were very strong rumors, and he sort of disappeared up the Caspian and all that sort of thing. But there were rumors before that, which we were constantly trying to track down one way or another, and we'd keep getting back reports that his doctor in Switzerland would give him a clean bill of health, and he went there for an annual checkup, as you know. So the ambassador or I, whoever saw him, would always ask, "How's he doing? Is he in full control of his faculties? Does he look all right?" And sometimes he'd look kind of tired, and you'd say, "The guy puts in 18-hour days." [Laughter] I'd be tired, too. So certainly nobody knew about the cancer except the French, and they never told us.

Q: Did the French doctors, or the French Government, perhaps?

Miklos: I don't know how much the French Government knew, but certainly the French doctors knew. The French Government may

well have known, but they didn't tell us. That's all I can tell you.

Q: Around this time, March, April '78 or so, Michael Metrisko, who was U.S. consul in Tabriz, was reporting that the demonstrations reflected widespread and deep opposition to the Shah, so the Washington Post reported a couple of years ago in an article about the revolution. Did you talk to Metrisko about these reports?

Miklos: I talked to Vic Tomseth and Mike about their reports. Well, not only them, but there were others. I'm trying to think of the other fellow in our political section who was also focused mainly on internal politics. Mike may have characterized our conversation.

Q: We didn't get to that stage.

Miklos: I certainly discussed it with him. I do remember more specifically a couple of reports that Vic Tomseth had written. From Shiraz. That's what I was trying to think of. Shiraz.

Q: Right.

Miklos: And of course, the student element there was more focused and there was more contact there than there was in some

of the other places. I went over in considerable detail some of Vic's reporting on that, but I didn't suppress the report in any way. It went back to Washington.

Q: I've read, also according to the Post, that these reports were given somewhat lower status and were sent out as airgrams instead of cables.

Miklos: That's the way they were written.

Q: Oh.

Miklos: One, and two, they were a number of pages long. Generally, you don't send 20-page telegrams; you send it in an airgram.

Q: I read that they were in some ways treated with less priority because they contradicted the views of the political officers at the embassy.

Miklos: They were a report from our consul. That's a perfectly legitimate function for him. My legitimate function was to discuss it with him, and see what the basis for his assessment was, why he came to these views and so on and so forth. But that was it. It went back.

Q: Did you have any particular disagreements with either Tomseth or Metrinko about their reading or their interpretation of the situation? I haven't seen these reports, so I really don't know what they said.

Miklos: I don't say disagreement; I do remember having questions about it. But my question was more, "Why are you saying this? What's the basis for your reaching this conclusion?" That's what I wanted to know. Or, "Explain yourself. When you write this analysis, explain why it is that you've reached this conclusion or that you describe this trend." It was more the role, if you will, of editor, which is one of the roles of DCM [laughter] than a critic of the substance.

Q: In March, Cyrus Vance visited Tehran again for the annual CENTO meeting.

Miklos: Right.

Q: Was he briefed on internal developments? Did he show any interest?

Miklos: That was really more focused on--he had a brief meeting with the Shah, but it really was the CENTO ministers and CENTO business, and it was just one of those chores, as a matter of fact, that we said the Secretary should have gotten rid of ten

years ago. I mean, this just wastes everybody's time and doesn't really get you anywhere. It had a life of its own, and every Secretary, you'd always say, "Forget it," and they'd say, "No, we've got to go. They did it last year." So it went on and on and on. So it really was a CENTO meeting that happened to be in Tehran. It was very little to do with Iran-American relations, per se.

Q: Also in March, there was a debate within the State Department over whether to approve an Iranian order for tear gas to use for product control. What role did the embassy play in this debate?

Miklos: Not much. I think we were asked about it, or somehow or another it got to us, but this was a Washington question, as much as anything. I think the embassy may have recommended approval. The records would show this one way or another. I don't remember the debate much beyond that.

Q: Naas was obviously deeply involved in it. He was on the Washington end.

Miklos: Right.

Q: In the spring of '78, the embassy began to make contacts with various elements of the political opposition.

Miklos: Right.

Q: Had this process begun before you left?

Miklos: Yes. John Stempel was one. I think Archie Bolster was one. Was Archie there?

Q: He was back in Washington, then he went to the Hague.

Miklos: Certainly John, and I think there were a couple of others. Again, let me put this in context. Things are loosening up, there's a certain amount of ferment. We've got to know more than we do now about what's going on. But we can operate in this new environment better, with a better understanding of the authorities than we could have before, where any direct contact with the opposition, with any meaningful opposition, would be known immediately and misinterpreted as being somehow plotting against the government. Well, that wasn't quite the same, say, in the spring of '78, where it was more understandable, and we could explain ourselves in a more acceptable way if the question were raised.

Q: By the Foreign Ministry?

Miklos: Right.

Q: Do you recall how early in the year this was?

Miklos: I think it was right around the time of the Tabriz or before that, as things were beginning to bubble. We said, "Let's find out what the hell's going on."

Q: That's how you felt, that you supported this?

Miklos: Oh, sure. Christ, yeah. [Laughter] That was our job.

Q: Do you recall who were some of the figures the embassy was in touch with around this time?

Miklos: Bazargan was one I remember, just off the top of my head.

Q: The U. C. Liberation Movement for Iran, I guess that was his organization. Something along that line.

Miklos: And some of the old national frontiers and some of the bazaaris, a few people in the press, some academics. Who else? That's a fairly broad spectrum right there.

Q: Do you recall if any conclusions were reached or drawn from these early contacts with opposition figures like Bazargan?

Miklos: Not any hard conclusions one way or another. It was, in many cases, informative. You often got special pleading, you know, the United States should support us, but that went with almost any contact that you make--"You've got to support us," in their mistaken belief that somehow or other, the United States is going to make it happen.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

DDR

Interviewee: Jack Miklos

Session #4

Interviewer: William Burr

Oakland, California

June 30, 1988

Q: In our last meeting, you talked about congressional delegations that traveled to Iran from time to time. Which members of Congress did you find particularly helpful or sympathetic to administration policy on Iran during the course of the Seventies?

Miklos: I would say understanding; "helpful" is perhaps not quite the word I would use. Understanding. I think Lee Hamilton understood, had a grasp, although he didn't always agree necessarily, but I think he understood the situation, anyhow, and made considerable effort to understand. He was one member.

Who was the senator from--was it Connecticut? One of the eastern states, he's since retired, nore noted for his involvement with the Arab-Israeli.

Q: Javits?

Miklos: No, not Javits, although Javits had come to Iran. I didn't have any distinct impression one way or another of his attitude toward the administration's policies in Iran.

To tell you the truth, I remember the ones in opposition,

and rather vehement opposition, more clearly than I do those that seemed to have some understanding of the situation.

Q: Were were among the more effective critics of the policy that you encountered?

Miklos: Effective?

Q: Or knowledgeable, perhaps.

Miklos: Well, I didn't find an awful lot of people all that knowledgeable. Now, Chuck Percy was certainly one that was knowledgeable and was helpful, I would say, insofar as the administration's policy toward Iran was concerned. Who else?

Q: Under Carter and Ford, Nixon, as well?

Miklos: Yes, throughout the Seventies. Who else? I'm sorry. The names just don't come to me right now.

Q: After we met last time, you mentioned that Richard Helms and William Casey visited Tehran together at one point. Do you remember the circumstances of their visit particularly?

Miklos: No. I remember they came by the embassy, I suppose as much to say hello to me as anything. They didn't ask for

anything. As far as I know, it was just more bringing themselves up to date on what was going on there. Dick, by that time, as I recall, had his own consultancy company or enterprise. I guess it's enterprising one, basically. Other than that, no, I don't recall.

Q: I've also read that in spring or late winter of '78, George Bush and Ronald Reagan made visits to Iran. Do you remember that?

Miklos: When was this?

Q: Sometime in the late winter or spring of '78. George Bush and then Ronald Reagan made respective visits to Iran, separately, I guess. Do you recall anything about that?

Miklos: I do not remember those at all. Reagan? '78?

Q: Yes. I was looking at some of the captured documents, at the minutes of the embassy staff meeting, and they mentioned that Bush and Reagan were in town or would be in town sometime.

Miklos: The spring of '78.

Q: Thereabouts.

Miklos: Because I was there until May. I certainly don't remember it.

Q: Margaret Thatcher was also coming in the same time frame, and they joked about it being a conservative conference being held in Tehran.

You said you left for Washington in May of '78?

Miklos: May of '78.

Q: What was your assessment of the political situation around the time that you left the country?

Miklos: Well, I hate to keep sounding like a broken record, but that's what it was. I've said many times before, basically that the situation, not unexpectedly, was turbulent but, I thought, manageable. As a matter of fact, this is what I told Lee Hamilton when I went up to see him in a formal way. This wasn't a formal hearing or anything like that, just somebody back from Iran. Lee was interested in what was going on, always was interested, and I went up and talked to him about how I saw things. As I recall, this was very much the tenor, if not the exact words, of my conversation with him.

Q: What was your new assignment in Washington?

Miklos: As the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near East and South Asian Affairs, but my responsibilities did not include Iran.

Q: How would you describe them?

Miklos: It was the responsibility for the area of the subcontinent, if you will, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Seychelles, Nepal.

Q: There was another Deputy Assistant Secretary, wasn't there?

Miklos: There were three deputies. One was Bill Crawford, he was responsible for Iran on to the West, and a third was sort of North Africa.

Q: Hal Saunders was your boss?

Miklos: He was Assistant Secretary, right.

Q: So you did no work on Iran in the following months, basically?

Miklos: No, not on a sustained basis. Naturally, I tried to keep informed on all that was going on in the Near East and South Asian area. All of the deputies did, because we would sometimes

overlap, having to fill in or something like that. As I say, from time to time I would meet with people outside of the Department that wanted my opinion on Iran. As a matter of fact, I think, at one stage, that included Jim Bill, as an example, and some congressional people. When things started to get increasingly difficult, I did fill in for Bill Crawford on a Senate Foreign Relations Committee meeting.

Q: I've read about this, that you and Henry Precht testified together?

Miklos: Yes, which was a rather unhappy experience on both sides.

Q: That was September of '78?

Miklos: Something like that, yes.

Q: What was your outlook at that stage? Any different than a few months earlier?

Miklos: Yes, it was changing. In other words, it was obvious that it was becoming much more serious than I had felt it was when I had left, although I still sustained the belief that events were manageable. Now, you know, in hindsight, I have to say, not trying to defend myself per se, but one thing we didn't

know was that the Shah was quite ill. And I think that that had an impact on how events unfolded. Another thing was that he had lost his closest--up until that time, his closest advisors, Alam, one, and what's the name of the head of the--not Ebtehaj. But anyhow, people who had been with him back in the dark days of '59, '60, '61, '62, whom he had relied on heavily for advice and counsel. They were gone, and there wasn't really anybody around like that anymore. He had sort of outgrown everybody else, as it were. So I think that was a factor. There were, of course, many others.

Q: You said that the senators were unhappy with your and Precht's account of what was going on?

Miklos: I can recall Javits, for example, saying, in effect, "Why isn't the United States Sixth Fleet in the Persian Gulf right about now?" And that's the kind of rhetoric that's hard to address.

Q: So he thought you and Precht were being too calm about the situation?

Miklos: I think he thought that the State Department-- in effect, he was saying, "Is the Secretary of State concerned about this? Is he focused on this?"

And I kept saying, "He's well-informed."

This coincided, of course, with the intense Camp David Peace Accord exercise and negotiations. This was all going on at the same time, and obviously Vance was heavily preoccupied and involved with this, as were many other senior officials of the administration, senior officials in the sense of those dealing with foreign affairs. So there was some impatience and also a feeling that we really hadn't the insights that they felt we ought to have on what was going on there.

Again, since I wasn't involved with it on a day-to-day basis, I felt a little defensive about that, unfortunately. I think there were some stories about they were bad, although I didn't get that hostility. I remember John Glenn was saying--I'd known him from before, slightly. I mean, we're not buddies, but he was sympathetic to what was obviously a difficult position, and so were some of the others. They weren't hostile.

Q: Javits made the strongest statement?

Miklos: That I remember. Sam Nunn's questions were more sympathetic. I can't remember who all was around the table, but it was not a hostile meeting.

Q: Was this a full committee?

Miklos: I can't recall whether it was full or not, but there were an unusual number of senators for that kind of a meeting, an

unusual number of senators present.

Q: I was wondering if it was a subcommittee or a full committee.

Miklos: Yes.

Q: Be that as it may. According to one of the captured documents from the embassy, did you visit Iran again in the fall, in late October of '78?

Miklos: Yes, although I was not officially responsible for it, this basically was--I forget whether it was coming or going, I was on my way to my area of responsibility.

Q: So how long did you stop by?

Miklos: Just a day and a half or something like that, if that.

Q: Did you spend any time with Ambassador Sullivan?

Miklos: Yes. He kindly put me up at his residence. But as I say, I didn't have any message per se, or anything like that.

Q: Did he explain his outlook at that stage?

Miklos: Yes. I remember Bill showing me a cable that he had

written, that he was about to send back to Washington.

Q: "Thinking the unthinkable?"

Miklos: I don't remember whether, as I look back on it, that was the "thinking the unthinkable" cable or something else, but close to that.

Q: I guess by early November or even in late October, he was concluding that the Shah's position was near hopeless, and it was necessary to search for political alternatives to the Shah. Did he talk about that?

Miklos: Now you've reminded me. I guess I spent maybe two or three days there. And because I did know some of the personalities, Bill and I talked about alternatives. Again, I don't recall precisely whether it was in the context of thinking the unthinkable, but that was certainly on his mind, because I remember going to see Jamshid Amuzegar to inquire not about alternatives per se, but his evaluation or judgment, whatever you want to say, about certain opposition people, including Bakhtiar, whether he, as an old friend, not as an official--he was, of course, no longer prime minister at that time--but whether he could give me his frank feelings about some of these people.

Q: Including Bakhtiar?

Miklos: And if they were capable of inspiring the support and some kind of a coalition effort to bring order to what was rapidly deteriorating into anarchy, if not civil war.

Q: What did he think, to the best of your recollection?

Miklos: The names that I mentioned--and I can't remember all of them--I remember Bakhtiar as one, but there were some others. And Jamshid was understandably very careful about what he said. My overall impression, however, was that he found it difficult to see a viable coalition being led by some of the people that I mentioned or, indeed, a viable coalition emerging. And this was in the context, in part, of just Persian character, being unable to collaborate and cooperate with each other on a sustained basis. That was part of it, I think.

Q: Did you meet with anybody else besides Amuzegar that you recall, on Iranian leadership?

Miklos: Not in that specific context. I saw a number of them, but none that I posed those kinds of questions to.

Q: What kind of thinking did you encounter among the various people you met, about the situation generally?

Miklos: Obviously, some unease and some uncertainty, and always the question of, "What does the United States think about this?" or, "What do you think about it?" but meaning the U.S. Government in many cases. And "What are you going to do about it?" That sort of thing.

Q: Did you see much of Tehran when you were there, or did you pretty much just stay in the embassy?

Miklos: Not much, no. It was not a very extended period. It may have been two days at the most.

Q: Did this visit lead to any thinking on your part of the extent to which the crisis was still manageable?

Miklos: To be honest, I don't know that I gave it any deep thought one way or another. I had my own concerns and responsibilities. I was off paying attention to those.

Q: In general, what did you think the Shah's chances of political survival were at this stage?

Miklos: This is, as a matter of fact, as I recall it, the end of October, maybe even Halloween or something like that. I think I was still persuaded that he could survive. It was clear that he had to do more than he was doing or had done. I personally

wasn't convinced that a national front coalition was viable. In other words, I would share Jamshid's pessimism in that extent, to the extent that he expressed it himself that way. I would have agreed with him.

But I think the question in my mind was whether a more vigorous and rigid repression of dissidents would have not brought the desired results, and whether the Shah was going to be forced to that by what was going on or not, I wasn't clear.

He had remarked to Bill Sullivan at one stage that he wasn't going to have Iran's youth die to save the kingdom or the kingship, to save himself, if you will. That was not within his realm of options. I think he sincerely felt very strongly about that. In other words, somebody else might well have had the troops out a lot earlier and been a lot more brutal about it, and it may have come out to a different result, but that was not to be.

Q: Apparently, Brzezinski at NSC was arguing in favor more or less of a so-called iron fist policy. Was there much discussion in the State Department of promoting that in some way?

Miklos: Not in my hearing. I'm pretty sure it was discussed probably with the Secretary or with Warren Christopher, and it was certainly, I learned subsequently, the tenor of messages that went out to Tehran to Bill Sullivan.

Q: Stressing that option or stressing that point?

Miklos: I think so, yes. I think Bill talks about that in his book.

Q: That's right. At what point did you conclude the Shah had no chance of political survival? Or perhaps there was a consensus forming at State that this was the case? If so, when was that consensus formed?

Miklos: I suppose late November, beginning of December. It was pretty hard to argue that the game wasn't rapidly approaching a conclusion. I can't say that everybody felt that way, but as I say, it was increasingly difficult to argue the other way, that certainly nobody was saying, "Look, everything's peachy keen." It was perfectly clear that it wasn't peachy keen. I mean, for example, I don't recall at what point Brzezinski concluded that the game was lost. He may not have concluded that right up to the day the Shah left, or within a matter of several days. But I don't know.

Q: I think he became more and more concerned about pulling the armed forces together as a basis for some kind of stability.

Miklos: Yes. Then came the famous Huyser mission.

Q: Yes. Of course, late in the year, the Shah appointed Bakhtiar as the prime minister. Was that in any way a result of Sullivan's suggestion or positive support for Bakhtiar as an alternative?

Miklos: I don't really know how the Shah reached his decision to appoint Bakhtiar as his prime minister. As I recall--and here again, you really have to rely on other people's memories and memoirs--I think Bill said in his book that the matter of doing something on the political front was obviously a subject of conversation between him and the Shah, and the Shah wanted to know what the United States felt. But I don't know that any personalities, per se, were mentioned. Those in the embassy when I was there, or even back before that, back in Washington, always held that if we had ever mentioned anybody's name, that was an almost certain kiss of death.

Q: For that particular individual.

Miklos: Right.

Q: After the Shah left in mid-January and Bazargan pushes Bakhtiar out of power, I guess some analysts in the State Department, like Precht, among others, argued that Khomeini and his leadership would more or less stay in the background and let the moderate revolutionaries rule in the coming period. To what

extent did you share that assumption, that people like Bakhtiar were going to rule, and the religious leadership would stay in the background, not trying to govern themselves, not trying to play a role in the government, as such?

Miklos: I don't recall, with any great precision, that debate. I know it went on. Again, I had my own responsibilities and preoccupations. To the extent that I can recall what I thought about things at all, I thought that basically this was going to lead to anarchy. I expected, as a matter of fact, the resurgence of regional differences and conflict. Obviously, I was wrong, at least I was wrong about it the way it was dealt with, which was a very brutal suppression, I mean, as brutal as anything the Shah or his predecessors had indulged in.

But as to whether they were going to stay in the background and let the civilians, the entrenched bureaucrats, run things, I don't recall I had an opinion one way or another.

Q: Did you do any work on Iran during the course of '79?

Miklos: No.

Q: You were just focusing on your regional responsibilities?

Miklos: That's right.

Q: So when did you leave the State Department then? In 1980?

Miklos: '80.

Q: You went to the National War College?

Miklos: Yes. In mid-1979, I left my responsibilities in State, and went over to the National Defense University, and spent a year there, where I researched what I had written, what I eventually wrote, and participated in seminars and that sort of thing. I was a senior research associate there. Then I retired.

Q: Do you have any concluding comments you want to make on Iran? I have a wrap up question. Some analysts, like James Bill, among others, have argued the U.S. experience in Iran during the post-war era was a failure, in the sense it was a failure of intelligence and a failure of policy. For example, Bill argues that there's a policy failure because the policy makers began with a mistaken premise, that the Shah was basically invulnerable and had complete control of Iran. He also argues that there was an intelligence failure because the U.S. did not adequately understand internal political and cultural conditions in Iran. These failures were interrelated, in a sense, he's arguing. To what extent would you agree with that overall argument?

Miklos: I don't accept Bill's premise that, one, we didn't understand the internal situation in Iran. We did not foresee, it's perfectly true, the Ayatollah and the mullahs ascending to power, but I don't think James Bill did either.

Insofar as a policy failure is concerned, I would argue quite strongly the opposite. I would say, overall, our policy vis-a-vis Iran was a very successful one. We established a close and viable relationship with an important country in that part of the world, and sustained that relationship from 1946 until 1980. That's hardly a policy failure in my book, anyhow.

Now that it came to the end that it did, I think, has a great deal more to do with historical forces and trends than anything to do with U.S. policy vis-a-vis Iran. I really quite resent the implication--I don't think he meant it quite that way--but that as a consequence of U.S. policy, this is what happened in Iran. This is utter nonsense.

Q: I was just trying to recount his basic argument. I simplified it a bit.

Miklos: As I say, it's not just Jim, but there have been a number of others, and everybody's saying, "See, I told you so!" Well, if you keep saying, "We're going to have an earthquake in California," sooner or later we're going to have an earthquake in California, and everybody says, "See, I told you so!" I mean,

nonsense. Some of these things are just inevitable. I don't say that in the detail it has to be inevitable, but it is inevitable. Haile Selassie sooner or later had to go, and the King of Libya sooner or later had to go. I mean, this is just part of the historical evolution of societies in the world. You might even argue that maybe the United States has seen its peak for a while and we're now in decline.

Q: Kennedy.

Miklos: Mr. Kennedy, I gather, I haven't read his book, I've just read excerpts from it, but it makes a very persuasive case that maybe we've had it and it's somebody else's turn now. Pointing fingers and saying it's somebody's fault or failure is, I'm sorry, just nonsense.

Q: Thank you very much for your time.

Miklos: You're certainly welcome, Bill.

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