Foundation for Iranian Studies

Program of Oral History

JOHN STUTESMAN

IRANIAN - AMERICAN RELATIONS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

John Hale Stutesman, Jr.

Oral History Research Office

Columbia University

1989

PREFACE

The following oral history memoir is the result of one tape-recorded interview session with John Stutesman on June 22, 1988. The interview was conducted by William Burr in San Francisco, Calif.

This interview is one of a series on Iranian-American relations in the post-World War II era which were conducted as part of a joint project between the Oral History of Iran Archives of the Foundation for Iranian Studies and the Columbia University Oral History Research Office. Similar projects have been undertaken in England and France.

Mr. Stutesman has reviewed the transcript and made corrections and emendations. The reader is asked to bear in mind, however, that he or she is reading a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

JOHN STUTESMAN

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Born in Washington D.C., in 1920, Mr. Stutesman received his B.A. in history from Princeton University in 1942. At the end of the Second World War, in which he served as a captain, he entered the U.S. Department of State.

Following his first consular mission in Shanghai, John Stutesman was assigned to the American embassy in Tehran in 1942 where he served under three different ambassadors , as consular and political officer and occasional interpreter. His involvement with Iran continued during his assignment as the desk officer in the Iranian section of the State Department.

Mr. Stutesman had, during this five year period, an opportunity to observe at first hand the developments leading to the rise and fall of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq. His recollections, therefor, of events and personalities, both Iranian and American, connected with this part of Iran's contemporary history should be of great interest to the reader.

Form H

Dear Dr. Grele:

This letter will confirm my understanding and agreement with the Foundation for Iranian Studies Oral History of Iran Archives and Columbia University with respect to my participation in a series of interviews conducted by the Columbia University Oral History Research Office.

1. The interviews will be taped and a transcript made of the tapes. The transcribed interviews will be maintained by the Oral History of Iran Archives and the Columbia Oral History Research Office, and the Hoover Institution.

2. I hereby grant, assign and transfer to the Oral History of Iran Archives all right, title and interest in the interviews, including the literary rights and the copyright, except that I shall retain the right to copy, use and publish the Work in part or in full until the earlier of my death ~~or~~ _____ ~~19~~ .

3. The interviews will be made available for use by researchers at both institutions in accordance with Foundation and University rules and general policies for research and other scholarly purposes with (no) (the following) restrictions.

Mahnaz Afkhami

Dr. Mahnaz Afkhami
Foundation for Iranian Stuies

Very truly yours,

Ronald J. Grele

Ronald Grele
Oral History Research Office

John H. Stutesman

Date May 1 1989

CORRECTIONS

P.7 "Golhak" should be "Qolhak"

P.16 "Rasmara" should be "Razmara"

P.17 " " " "

P.19 "Mulla Quashani" should be "Ayatollah Kashani"

P.25 "Golhak" should be "Qolhak"

P.66 "Nassiri" should be "Nasiri"

DDR

Interviewee: John Stutesman

Interviewer: William Burr

June 22, 1988

Session #1

San Francisco, Calif.

Stutesman: My name is John Hale Stutesman. I was born in Washington, D.C., in 1920, educated in a variety of schools, and graduated from Princeton in 1942, a history major. Then I went to war and served as a Captain in the Field Artillery in the war in Europe, fighting in Italy for a couple of years.

I took my Foreign Service written exam in Italy at the end of the war in Europe, and when the war ended in Japan, I came home and took and passed the oral examination in the spring of '46, and was commissioned a Foreign Service officer in mid-year of 1946.

I asked to be assigned to the Far East, which I'd never seen, and was sent to be a vice consul in the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai. In 1949, I was chased out of China by the communists, and returned home and asked for an assignment to the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, because I had developed an interest in Central Asia.

One of the problems with America's perception of Iran, in my opinion, is the generalization that it is essentially like the Arab nations of the Near East. In fact, historically it is on the warring frontier between the eastward pushing Arabs and the

southwesterly drive of the Aryan and Turko peoples. I thought then of Iran as essentially a Central Asian country, and I still think it can be described in those terms.

I also wanted to get out of the consular work, which I'd been performing in the great port of Shanghai, and it is significant that Tehran is 1,000 miles from any port. I also married at that time, and so in mid-1949, I took a bride from San Francisco to Tehran.

The U.S. embassy was then functioning in the old German Embassy on a main city street near the British and the Russian compounds. The ambassador, John C. Wiley, was a subtle, experienced, superb diplomat, but he never came to the embassy. His entire tour in Tehran, he never entered the offices of the embassy. He remained at his residence, where he established his personal office. His secretary and his senior staff would join him there every day. I was present one time when he told a bemused security officer that his poodles would take care of any intruders.

The staff, at the time of my arrival, was very small, headed by Ambassador Wiley, who is no longer alive, and the DCM, Arthur Richards, who is alive, in Washington. An adjutant named Joe Wagner, a gentle administrator, long dead, had been brought by Wiley from their last post together in Lisbon. The economic commercial officer was John Ordway, who is still alive in Seattle. The political officer was Gerry Dooher, long dead, a charming Irish type, loved to play at intrigue, and joined with Ambassador Wiley in a variety of bewildering and generally unproductive games. The CIA chief of station was Roger Goiran, still alive in Florida, an experienced and deft professional. John Waller, who recently retired from one of CIA's most senior positions, Inspector General, was one of his assistants.

I was the junior officer, and therefore, despite my longing for a change, I was put in charge of consular affairs.

So began my involvement in Iranian affairs in mid-1949. It would last five years, except for a brief break of a month's home leave. The first half of that time I was at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, moving from the consular to the political section in 1950. I served three ambassadors there: John Wiley, Henry Grady, and Loy Henderson. The second half of those five years was spent in Washington, where I became the Iranian desk officer.

In those five years, I was a close witness to the rise and fall of Muhammad Mussadiq, the firy nationalist leader. I was in Iran when he came to power and drove out the British. I was in Washington when he was overthrown and the young Shah established a power base and friendship for the West which would last another 20 years.

I became a joyful admirer of the Persian people. More than most people, they are affected by their place on earth. I do not mean this in environmental terms as the jungle affects the Bantu or the desert affects the Bedouin; I mean their geographical location. They live on a bridge across which conquering hordes have moved since the beginning of martail man, yet they survive, and the present boundaries of Iran are astonishingly similar to those of Cyrus, who brought together the Medes and the Persians and set the stage for expansion west and east. The language of Iran today bears close resemblance to that of the Indo-European ancestors who rode in from the steppes of Russia.

The record of the extraordinary resistance of the Persian people to successive conquests compares to the Indo-European people who held the Anatolian plateau for

1,000 years until the Turks came. Then everything changed there--language, race, religion. But in Iran, there remains a remarkable similarity to the ancient past. The Arabs conquered Iran. In consequence, the Arab courts became glorious centers of Persian influence, reaching with the Islamic conquests into Spain, and ultimately to South America, where I was aware, when I was at an arid post in the Andes of Bolivia, that their Spanish colonial artifacts bore the clear impression and influence of Persian art.

Another characteristic of the Persians which has always delighted me is that a Persian will never "lie"; he believes absolutely sincerely in everything he says. The wise foreign correspondent Georgie Anne Geyer was astonished that Khomeini would tell her things that he would contradict completely in an interview with another correspondent shortly after. This is as natural as breathing to a Persian. It's like dealing with a flowing stream. I mention this because I think this is pertinent to any view of Mussadiq and his attitude toward negotiations with the West.

One other characteristic: the Persian feels the unseen hand in every moment of his personal and national life. This is not superstition, it's a palpable fact. Mussadiq rose to power on a wave of anti-British feeling, yet many--and perhaps even he--believed that he was a British tool.

In the last years of the Shah's reign and today, it is the American who is that unseen hand, and I don't think it would be hard to find a Persian today who could explain Khomeini in terms of his being a tool of American policy.

That's the sort of introduction that I had in mind, and now I am open to any questions that you have.

Q: That raises more questions in my mind that we can discuss as we go along. You mentioned Ambassador Wiley. What kind of relationship did he develop with Iranian officials or the Shah, for that matter, as ambassador?

Stutesman: I think John Wiley's attitude toward the Shah was deeply marked by the difference in their age and their experience. I won't say that Wiley scorned him, but I think Wiley looked on him as simply a young and uninformed man. On the other hand, Wiley always dealt with him properly in terms of diplomatic deference. There is a dispatch in the files of the Department, which is a very famous one, in which Wiley cut out from a Life magazine article pictures of the French comedian Fernandel, who bore a remarkable resemblance to Wiley. Wiley illustrated a report on an interview with the Shah with these pictures. It's a charming report to read, but it reflects the basic attitude of Wiley, which was that the Shah was not a significant person.

Wiley, on the other hand, maintained very good relations with senior advisors to the Shah, and he entertained them and developed an intimacy with them and, of course, with other members of the diplomatic corps.

Q: Do you recall any of the names of the Iranian officials?

Stutesman: The names elude me now. There was a doctor. No, I can't.

Q: I have some questions about American policy towards Iran at this stage, around 1949, 1950, the time you arrived in the country. How would you characterize, as you understood it, the Truman Administration's overall approach to Iran at this stage?

Stutesman: Without any doubt, the attitude of the Americans at that time was that Persia was a part of the British responsibility in the world.

Q: So they assumed that the British would more or less stand guard over various Western interests--oil, resources, and so forth?

Stutesman: Yes. They not only felt that the British would protect Western interests, but, in my opinion, they felt that it was not part of our responsibility to buck the British in Iran.

Q: Some of the documents I've seen suggest in some way that policy-makers at the time, the State Department especially, saw Iran as sort of a buffer between the Soviet Union and oil fields on the Arabian Peninsula. Was that a commonly held view?

Stutesman: Yes, in strategic terms. It seems to me that the phrase always was, going back to Peter the Great, who, I think, wrote a letter or wrote a memorandum or did something in which he made it clear that he was anxious to reach the warm waters on the southern shore of Iran. I think that was more cliche than a very serious bit of policy

thinking, but essentially, the Americans viewed Iran as a strategic factor in the world, in my opinion, rather than a source of oil.

Q: When you settled in Iran in 1949, where did you live? What headquarters did you have?

Stutesman: The first house we had was a two-room mud structure right across from the American embassy compound. We moved into it because the man I had replaced expected to return, and we simply were filling his house for that period.

Then we moved to a larger house near the Russian embassy downtown, where, on a memorable moment, if I can just pause, my son was one month old, and my mother-in-law was there, and my wife was there suffering from violent malaria, which she'd gotten in a blood transfusion. We celebrated my son's first-month birthday, built up a large fire, and the house burned down.

We then moved into the home of a fellow Foreign Service officer, Walter Howe, and stayed with his family for two months. To my great delight, I have just recently married his widow, Margaret Howe.

Then we rented a place up in Golhak, up high on the flank of the mountain, a lovely garden and very comfortable house. That's where we remained the rest of our tour.

Q: What was Tehran like in those days?

Stutesman: When I arrived in Tehran in mid-1949, camels were still moving through the streets, the entire city. While I was there, the city closed off access to camels and kept them in the lower section. The taxis were about equally motorized or horse-drawn droshkis. The water system was the famous jube system, which remained in effect while I was there. The great northern flank of the city rising up the mountain was essentially open ground, except for summer places. The southern part of the city was swarming slum.

Q: Did you do much traveling around the country during your three years in Iran?

Stutesman: Yes, I did. I went to Meshed, went up to the Caspian, went to Tabriz, and then I flew to Hormuz and drove a truck back from Hormuz all across the desert, up through Yazd and to Tehran and of course, I frequently visited Shiraz and Isfahan.

Q: What were your impressions of the conditions in the countryside outside of Tehran during that period?

Stutesman: I'd been familiar with western China and the Central Asian look of that part of the world. So psychologically, I was quite prepared for the misery and unclean conditions. The Persian villager struck me as somehow more passionate--it's the only word I can think of, intelligence isn't quite the word--than the Western Chinese. The trucks and buses moved through the communities, so they were not as cut off from the world as the Chinese of Central Asia, in my opinion. Radios were, of course, in

constant use all through the villages. It was a country that had not moved much from medieval times.

Q: During this period, what was the extent of the non-official U.S. community in Tehran, maybe Iran generally? Were there many American businessmen there, educators, clergy?

Stutesman: The non-official American community was dominated, in my recollection, by the Presbyterians, who were educators and medical people and had a couple of missionaries who were extremely courageous men, who would literally go into these small villages and preach Christ to these Muslims. Astonishingly, while I was there, none were attacked or killed. The teachers were much revered, much appreciated. There were very few businessmen. There were a few American women who had married Persians in the United States and then gone with their husbands, back to Iran. But it was not a very large community. When we gave Fourth of July parties, there would be a few Americans who would come and who, I believe, were deserters from World War II. There was a black man I remember, and we were all very careful never to pursue them, and to welcome them, indeed. But it was not a large community. The British was the dominant Western community.

Q: You said that during this period, 1949 and early 1950, you were consular officer at the embassy?

Stutesman: My first job there was to run the consular section. There was a vice consul and myself and an American secretary, and we were very active--visitors' visas for Iranians, and then a large number of Russian Dukhabour types, strict Baptists and so on, who had fled Russia, and some Poles left over from the Polish encampments there during the war, who were seeking emigration visas.

Q: You worked in the embassy proper, or was there a separate section for the consular?

Stutesman: We had one of the large rooms, the old ball room, in the German embassy, and it seems to me access was straight off the street, past a receptionist. The political and economic sections were on the second floor, and the administrative section was also on the ground floor, as I remember.

Q: Was there much social interaction between the various officers of the consular section, on the one hand, and the political section or the economic section?

Stutesman: We're talking about only five or six officers, and we all were close friends. We were all professional Foreign Service officers. Oh, yes, there was a very close relationship.

Q: Did you become a political officer in 1950?

Stutesman: 1950. I was about a year in the consular section and moved to the political section. When John Wiley left, Henry Grady came in. He was a much more organized man in bureaucratic terms, and the embassy took a more formal shape as sections developed. Before, as I say, Wiley and Dooher ran sort of a political section, but there wasn't any real sense of a section. Under Grady it took the shape, and I was the junior officer in that section. Roy Melbourne was my chief.

Q: During the period that you were in Iran, did you see the Shah at close range at any stage?

Stutesman: The Shah and I were about the same age. He and I were in school at Switzerland at the same time, not at the same school, but we had that common experience. My French is very good. And I was married to a very beautiful woman, so we were frequently invited to very informal parties where we played Blind Man's Bluff and musical chairs, and where the Shah and his sisters and Miss Cote d'Azur and others all joined in. So my personal relationship with the Shah was a very friendly one. As I say, we were of the same age, and we both had an appreciation of beautiful women.

Q: What impression did you pick up of him? How would you characterize the Shah as you saw him?

Stutesman: While I was in Tehran, I wrote a despatch on the Shah, which was classified. I have no idea if it's been declassified or published or anything, but it was a

long despatch describing in great detail aspects of the Shah's character and attitudes and his family. It was a despatch which was much read. I also wrote a long dispatch on Mussadiq "The Rise of an Iranian Nationalist," which also has been much quoted ~~ed~~ to. I recommend both of those to anyone interested in that period.

My own feeling about the Shah was then, and still is, although I was not involved with Iranian affairs in his latter years there, that he was a gentle person, a person of very good intentions, a person much influenced by the Christian European experience that he had as a boy. Also he was much influenced by his dominant father, both for good and for ill.

His attitude toward the West was, I think, very sincerely favorable. After all, his father had set the pattern. His father was a great admirer of Ataturk, and the father had set the pattern of trying to work Iran toward modernization. He didn't get as far as Ataturk did, but he was working in that direction. The Shah, I think, always felt that he was carrying forward some of his father's banners. He was a decent man. His interest in women sometimes got in the way. His twin sister certainly had an undue influence on him sometimes.

Q: Ashraf.

Stutesman: Yes, Ashraf. But his own personal instincts were decent and conformed very closely to general attitudes that a young man born and raised in the West had. This is my general appreciation of his attitudes. As I say, my despatch, which is a rather lengthy one, goes into a great deal more detail, but comes out with that conclusion.

Q: You suggested earlier that Ambassador Wiley did not have a serious attitude towards the Shah, or did not take him very seriously. Did Grady have a different attitude towards the Shah?

Stutesman: Grady reluctantly was forced to concentrate on Mussadiq, and his attitude toward the Shah, I believe, was that the Shah was a secondary factor Mussadiq was the person to deal with and to influence if he could. I don't think he scorned the Shah, but I just think he had to concentrate on what he thought was the main objective.

Q: After 1953, when the Shah's position was restored and Mussadiq was overthrown, there was a developing view in the U.S. State Department and elsewhere, that the Shah was like a linchpin of stability in Iran, that his position had to be supported as such to keep Iran politically and socially stable. To what extent was that view held in embassy or elsewhere in this period during the very early 1950s in Iran?

Stutesman: When I was in the political section in the embassy in Tehran and wrote that despatch on the Shah, which, of course, had to be cleared up through my masters, it came down with a very solid conclusion that the Shah was worth supporting. I certainly didn't use terms like "linchpin," but that he was the best of known hopes for the future.

When I was on the desk in Washington, the decision was made that Mussadiq should be overthrown and the Shah should be brought to a firmer status of power. I think rather like what happened in Vietnam, once you have a hand in overthrowing

somebody the way Kennedy killed Diem, then you become much more committed to the person who comes in. I don't remember, while I was in Washington, policies being built upon the feeling that the Shah was a linchpin. I think, more, it was a sense that, well, he was the best there is, and he was a legitimate ruler and that he was a popular ruler, which I think he was when I was dealing in those things.

Q: That's interesting. When you became political officer in 1950, what were your responsibilities? Did you have a specific assignment?

Stutesman: When I went into the political section, at that time in the embassy none of the officers spoke Farsi, nor did I. Gerry Dooher had spoken sufficient Farsi to get along ,but certainly was no linguist, and he was gone by that time. Perhaps in the CIA units there were some serious Farsi speakers; that's possible. But they were not being used publicly for the ambassador.

About the time I came to the political section, Mussadiq was becoming increasingly a figure. Grady could not speak Farsi, and Mussadiq did not speak English, but Mussadiq refused to have an Iranian in the room. The embassy had traditionally used a very fine, very honest and reliable man named Saleh, who spoke excellent English and was an Iranian, was the senior Iranian in our embassy. Mussadiq refused to allow him to participate in any of these intimate conversations, because he distrusted any Iranian. Therefore, they turned to me. I spoke French. Mussadiq had been educated in Neuchatel back in the late 1800s, and his French was not bad, although he used college expressions which would be sort of like "23 skidoo" and "cat's pajamas,"

which would pass right by me. But basically, for a period of time, Grady and Mussadiq had personal conversations with me acting as interpreter in French. It was not the best way to deal with very high policies, but it was the way we did it.

Q: So that was one of your responsibilities. Of course, you monitored the internal political scene, as well.

Stutesman: That's right.

Q: Did you develop contacts routinely with local political figures in the country, in Tehran?

Stutesman: Of course, some. But a broad range of contacts in the Iranian political community. I was still a fairly young man, and the Iranians place a great stress on age, and I did not speak Farsi. I think mainly I was engaged in, as I say, this concentration, this constant concentration on Mussadiq, and writing up the memoranda, the telegrams, reporting these conversations, preparing for them. And I did, as I say, some traveling around the country and did some reporting there. I can't remember anything else.

Q: How would you characterize the political climate in Iran during the first year or two that you were in the country?

Stutesman: The rise of Mussadiq was the dominant feature. I knew Rasmara a little bit, and my wife was in the bazaar the day that he was killed. When she came home that day, she told me that she had been in this great, teeming bazaar with a friend, and all of a sudden everything became very quiet, and that they became alarmed, these two women, and they left and came home. Rasmara was killed shortly after that. Mary always felt that the bazaar was well aware that Rasmara was going to be assassinated, and indeed, I've had Persians say to me about that time, that Rasmara himself had a sense of martyrdom and that he thought he was going to be killed that day. This is all Persian. Then as history shows, there were a series of efforts by the Shah to avoid having Mussadiq come to power. As I remember, Ala became prime minister for a while. I can't remember the details, but in any case, Mussadiq came to power in this great surge of nationalism, anti-British nationalism. That's what dominated the period that I was in Iran.

Q: While you were consular officer in October of '49, the middle class politicians organized the National Front, I guess initially to protest the lack of free elections. That's what I've read recently. Then they went on to the oil issue as they progressed politically. What was the embassy's attitude towards the National Front in the early 1950s, late 1940s?

Stutesman: I really don't know. You've got me on that one. I think I was punching visas, basically.

Q: Again, you may not have been close to this question, but you mentioned General Rasmara. I've read recently that embassy officials, especially Gerald Dooher, believed that the Shah needed to be backed up by a strong military figure like a general. Were Dooher's views very influential?

Stutesman: Dooher's views were very influential on John Wiley. The two of them, in my opinion, were like boys and games. For instance, they invented a fictitious major, Major somebody or other, who was an American agent riding with the tribes in the mountains, and they leaked this news. It even got in American newspapers. These were joyous people. Personally, I think Wiley was taken in by Dooher, who I don't think was a very serious person. But Dooher had influence on Wiley, and Wiley, therefore, had influence on Iran. But I really think that the Americans at that time were not being taken too seriously by the ruling class of Iran. I think Mussadiq took the Americans more seriously than his predecessors.

Q: There's a new book on Iran by James Bill. Dooher played an important role in convincing Wiley to urge the Shah to appoint Rasmara as prime minister in 1950. Do you know much about Dooher's role in this episode?

Stutesman: I would say that's right. I think Wiley and Dooher thought it was a good thing for Razmara to come to power, but I don't have any more details.

Q: Of course, one of Razmara's biggest opponents was Mussadiq, apparently. You said you were translator between the conversations with Ambassador Grady and Mussadiq. What were your impressions of Mussadiq?

Stutesman: I was very fond of him, and he was fond of me. It was almost like a grandfather-grandson relationship. I don't think he ever felt that he could influence American policy or even Grady through me. Nonetheless, I felt always that we had a personal relationship and that he was always pleased to see me. We'd have a little bit of genial chat when we worked together. One time he accepted an invitation to lunch at the residence. This was a great concession on his part, and it was Grady's effort to have him talk directly with the British ambassador. I remember Mussadiq said he would come only if I were present and would handle the translation, which really shook the British ambassador, I was expected to translate Mussadiq's French, which, of course, the British ambassador understood perfectly well. (Laughs) And the British ambassador would reply in French, but Mussadiq would wait for me to speak. It was part of his constant effort to distress the English.

Q: Any more comments you want to make about Mussadiq as a person?

Stutesman: For one thing, he was an older man. I mean, my God, I don't think anybody ever knew exactly how old he was, but he was a very elderly man, and he was a very, very successful speaker and whipper-up of emotion. I don't think he had the slightest intention of coming to terms with the English, and I think he had a great

abiding belief that America would eagerly replace the British and, therefore, replace the British on his terms. I think he was truly stunned that the Americans and the British hung together.

In addition, I think that Mussadiq was a man who really did not have a constructive program. He had a program of driving out the British, but I don't think he had a very clear idea of what would come next.

Q: How much contact did embassy political officers have with the National Front politicians besides Mussadiq? The later foreign minister was Hussein Fatemi. Did you ever meet him? Did other people deal with him?

Stutesman: Fatemi was a rather slick man with very good family connections out of the Qajar aristocracy, which, of course, had an abiding hatred for the Shah. Mullah Quashani was a different quality. I think Gerry Dooher played games with Quashani a certain amount. I don't remember ever meeting Quashani. My guess is the CIA had some better knowledge of Quashani and his entourage than I did. I don't remember the names of the others, but Saleh's brother was very close to Mussadiq. Saleh was the senior foreign national in our embassy and had two brothers, a doctor and a nationalist.

Q: You suggested that the CIA might have had contact with Quashani. Did the embassy have any contact with other clergymen?

Stutesman: As I remember, we had nothing but a sense that the Mullahs represented the past, and that the whole trend of events would move away from them. That was our basic attitude toward the tribes, despite the fact that there was a great deal of American interest in them, Justice Douglas came out and rode the mountains with the tribes, and Gerry Dooher was interested in the tribes, nonetheless, I remember John Wiley once saying that centrifugal forces such as the tribes were doomed, that everything was going to move toward the center, and Wiley, was wise in a very sophisticated sense. At the same time, he loved playing patsy with these tribal leaders whose father had been killed by the Shah's father, and who had an abiding hatred, of the Shah.

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

Q: Do you have any more to say about this question of the tribes?

Stutesman: John Wiley once made this comment, which I've often remembered, he said, "Americans think that foreigners are Americans who wear funny hats." Of course, therein lies our continuing tragedy in foreign affairs, where so many Americans, including our highest policy makers, time after time really think that they can deal with some alien on terms which make sense to them as Americans. Of course, the alien looks at them through entirely different eyes. I remember going into the villages in Iran, and I had frequently the sensation that people there would feel that if they stretched out their hands they would pass through my body, that I was as ethereal as

though I had fallen from the sky. The tribes had their own interests, which were not entirely consistent with ours.

Q: The nationalization of Anglo-Iranian oil company became a central goal of the National Front by 1950-51. How closely did you follow petroleum politics in Iran in the political section?

Stutesman: Really very little. Indeed, this just may be my memory, but I don't think that Mussadiq and the majority of the Persian people who supported him were that concerned about the oil. What they were concerned about was throwing off the British yoke. The oil apparatus was the first thing to strike at, was the clear thing to strike at. Clearly there had to be an economic element to this, but again, time after time, it seems to me that the Americans--for instance, the fatuous Mr. [Averell] Harriman, whose ridiculous mission worked on the principle, as I remember, that the Iranians had to have an understanding of the oil and had to have a recognition that they couldn't just sell oil on the corner--was dealing with people who just didn't think in those terms.

Mussadiq, I believe, expected to be rescued by the Americans. I don't think he expected to be left alone. He thought that he could drive out the British, that the Americans, like any respectable competitor, would welcome that, would happily move in and sell his oil. We didn't do it, and he fell.

Q: You suggested that the oil company was a symbol of British power and for the nationalists, it was a means towards an end, driving out British political influence and

social influence. Did you get a sense of how the oil company operated, the AIOC, operated in Iran during this period?

Stutesman: Yes. I knew the Tehran hierarchy of the AIOC, and, of course, I knew the British embassy people. Some very dear friends that I still have, Nicholas Lawford was the DCM in the British embassy, he now lives in Long Island; John Briance was one of the senior intelligence officers, he now is living in London. These are people I knew well socially, and also we talked, obviously, about current affairs. The AIOC was absolutely hand-in-glove with the embassy people. In fact, I think it would be fair to say that the AIOC had a much more dominant influence on British policy in Iran than the diplomats in the embassy.

The AIOC used money, used old connections, they used them brutally. I don't mean physical brutality, but just without much deftness. And the British embassy pretty much followed in their wake. This began to change as it became clear that the AIOC was simply incapable of handling the political difficulties. But for instance, there was the senior man, they called them Oriental Counselors, named Lance Pyman. He spoke absolutely fabulous Farsi, he had been involved with that country for many, many years, and he, as I remember, did not have any particular sense--he certainly had no prescience on the possibility and the probability that the Persians would break the concession and drive the British out. Nicholas Lawford had a much more clear view and, indeed, resigned while he was there and left the British foreign service, partially out of frustration with policy.

Q: You mentioned that Grady became ambassador and took over Wiley's position. I think this was around July 1950, according to my notes here. How sympathetic was Grady to Mussadiq and Mussadiq's purposes?

Stutesman: First of all, Grady came to Iran from India, where he had been a very important ambassador in a very important country. Before that, he'd made his reputation in foreign affairs in Greece, and, of course, before that, he'd been a very successful, prominent businessman in the San Francisco area. I don't think he was thrilled about being appointed to Iran. I think he felt that he had taken a step down. I have no idea what his preferences would have been, but I clearly got the impression when he first arrived that he felt that he had moved from the center court to a smaller court. However, he was a very decent man, a very hard working, honest man, and he identified the problems as he saw it, and went to work on them. He was, however, more at ease in economic policies, the use of aid, the development of economic relationships, than he was in the Byzantine intrigues and or the diplomatic side of things.

Again, looking back on Wiley and Dooher, those two men loved the intrigue. They moved through it like fish in water. Whether they had more impact, I don't know. I think there is always a danger of an American becoming too adept at the local game, rather than simply representing a kind of an American attitude. But there was no question that Grady was well wired into the authorities in Washington, that he was a distinctly honest American representative, and I think he was a good ambassador. I don't think any U.S. ambassador could have stopped the rise of Mussadiq or prevented

the British being driven out, all things considered. But it was a great change from Wiley. When Loy Henderson came, he changed the involvement of the American ambassador into a much more subtle and diplomatic kind of a relationship than Grady played.

Q: During this period, Grady's first half-year late in 1950, the British and the Iranians were trying to negotiate a settlement over the oil prices, oil revenue going to Iran. AIOC's share of the take was being discussed. The British were taking an obdurate position in the talks with Mussadiq and the Iranian Government. Did Grady make any efforts to convince the British to take a more flexible approach to the Iranians?

Stutesman: Grady would just groan when he would be writing his reports and talking with us. He would groan at the obduracy of the British, the blankness of their minds when it came to dealing with Iranians. I would say he was probably much more angered and frustrated by the English than he was by sweet old Mussadiq. (Laughs) Although Mussadiq was a far more dangerous foe.

Q: You mentioned General Razmara's assassination at a mosque in the bazaar. This happened a few days after he spoke out against nationalization, which was becoming a rising demand of the National Front. Shortly thereafter, the majlis passed a bill to nationalize AIOC. Within a few months, Mussadiq became prime minister, May of '51, something along that line. I've read that policy makers in Washington worried around this time that successful nationalization would have sort of a demonstration effect, that if

I encourage or inspire other governments with oil resources to nationalize foreign holdings, for example, Saudi Arabia or other Middle Eastern countries, or perhaps Venezuela in Latin America. Was there much concern at the embassy about this issue?

Stutesman: I have no reason to doubt you're right about what was going on back in the United States. As to the embassy, I have no doubt that there was that general concern, but the embassy, as I remember it, and like most embassies, was really concentrating on the local scene.

However, the house that I then lived in up in Golhak was part of a garden in which there was another house, and in that other house lived a man named Max Thornburg. Max Thornburg was a great buccaneer in the oil world, who had been very successful working with the Sheikh of Behrein, who, indeed, had given him an island. In any case, Thornburg was up in Iran, living there during this time. Now, I have absolutely no evidence or proof of this, but I believe that Thornburg had lines of communication with the National Front.

Thornburg once told me one evening, just sitting around, having a drink, he told me that if you drew a graph--I remember this so clearly because I thought it was so perfect--if anyone draws a graph showing the life of a foreign concession--he meant oil concession--in any foreign country, the graph rises slowly in terms of profits. The graph rises slowly as the investing foreign firm develops and then begins to make money and it rises up. Then there is always, inevitably, an abrupt fall as the concession is closed down. He considered that to be a force of nature, and I do, too. I think he was proven right. I don't really think it's just some kook who decides to throw the foreigners out.

It's as inevitable as the sun rising. So the British, in my opinion, were struggling against a force of nature, as well as Mussadiq-led Iranians. And I doubt very much if officers of the American embassy thought that the British could remain in control for the next hundred years or even 20 years or even two years.

Q: How would you describe the British response to nationalization? What did you think about the way they conducted themselves after the majlis passing a law nationalizing the AIOC?

Stutesman: I don't think they were very smart. I don't really have a great remembrance of details, but they began to send in some very, very powerful intelligence officers--Woodhouse, Briance, men of great experience and real ability. I have read that they mounted a coup which didn't come off. I'm not really sure about that, but I do know they had absolute ace personnel in there working on the subversive side, the clandestine side.

They didn't change the quality of their embassy people much, but it sure got better than it had been before, and clearly, the British Government was taking charge of things, and it was no longer just being run by the company. But if you ask me details of what they did and so on, it's too far away from me now.

Q: These details might have escaped you, but I read that even before Mussadiq became prime minister, the British had their alternative candidate for prime minister, Sayyid Zia

Tabatabi. They wanted to find ways to overthrow Mussadiq and install Sayyid Zia as replacement. Did you know anything about this planning?

Stutesman: I certainly didn't know about any of their planning, and I don't remember Tabatabi as anything more than just a face at a social function.

Q: While the British were developing their coup plans, some of which you mentioned yourself, the Truman Administration was trying to find ways to settle the dispute by finding a basis for compromise between Mussadiq and the British Government and the AIOC. Did the embassy staff play any kind of a role in the efforts to settle the dispute?

Stutesman: Yes, of course. I think the air was filled with Grady's telegrams and certainly his constant efforts to negotiate. We'd get an instruction to take something up with Mussadiq, and we'd make an appointment. (Laughs) Grady and I would go see the old man lying in his bed, in his pajamas, and then we'd come back and send off a telegram. I don't think Grady ever despaired, but on the other hand, realistically, there was very little likelihood that Mussadiq would come to an accommodation with the British on any terms that the British could accept. That's about it.

Then, of course, when the Harriman mission came out, typically Mr. Harriman had nothing to do with the embassy and thought in three days or ten days, whatever it was, he could solve these issues that these "small people" had not been able to deal with. And he and Walter Levy, who was a remarkable man--I hope you get his views--and, of course, Vernon Walters was the interpreter. Vernon Walters, with his extraordinary

ability, he learned enough Farsi in a few days--I mean, two or three days--to be able to translate to some degree in Farsi before he left. He's a linguist of extraordinary genius. He remembers those days. He and I have talked about it.

But the mission was doomed. It was all a part of a policy, I believe, directed from Washington, which, in my opinion, did not take true account of Mussadiq's intentions.

Q: So Harriman's party totally avoided the embassy, basically?

Stutesman: They couldn't do that, but certainly they treated us--I mean, Harriman sort of blew in, established himself, and it's not uncharacteristic of other special envoys. The American embassy in Iran has suffered special envoys long past Harriman's time. I happen to have a particular aversion to Mr. Harriman, who I think is one of the great disasters in American foreign policy, with the Geneva Accords being his greatest contribution to our tragedy.

Q: Apparently when Harriman met with the Shah, from what I've read, he discussed with him the possibility of replacing Mussadiq as prime minister. Do you know if he would have cleared that with the ambassador before bringing it up with the Shah?

Stutesman: I have no idea. It would be perfectly in tune with his character if he didn't mention it to the ambassador. I don't think Harriman would do that sort of thing without having at least some clearance in Washington. That's all I know.

Q: Was there much discussion at the embassy during this period, 1951-52, of the idea of replacing Mussadiq?

Stutesman: You know, that's a good question. I hadn't thought of that. Now that I do think about it, my answer is no. But I left Iran well before Mussadiq fell. I was desk officer. I came back to be desk officer when Acheson was still Secretary of State. Truman was still in power. So I was desk officer when the decisions were made in Washington to dump Mussadiq. But I don't personally remember anything like that being discussed when I was in the embassy. Remember I was a fairly junior officer, and that kind of discussion, by its nature, would be held in the highest circles.

Q: In an interview that Grady gave shortly after he left Tehran, he argued that the main obstacle to a settlement with Mussadiq was the nationalists' fear of future British political manipulation in Iran. For example, one of the sticking points in the negotiations was whether British technicians should help run a nationalized oil company or not. I think Mussadiq's supporters objected because they feared any future British role in the country at the technical level or the managerial level. How accurate do you think Grady's appraisal was of this problem?

Stutesman: Again, I'm speaking in very general terms and, you might say, unprovable terms. My own personal feeling is now, and was then, that Mussadiq had absolutely no intention of settling with the British on any terms that the British could accept, despite

his several offers of such settlements. I don't think that Mussadiq ever wanted to do anything except give the British a bloody nose and, along with it, went his abiding assumption that the Americans would take care of him.

Q: Yes. While the U.S. engaged itself in a discussion over a compromise of some sort, the administration back in Washington supported international boycott of Iranian oil. The idea was to prevent Iranians from enjoying the fruits of nationalization without compensation. Compensation had not been arranged at that stage of the game. Do you know if Ambassador Grady supported this program of a boycott against oil exports from Iran?

Stutesman: I don't. I have a feeling that he simply received information on that sort of thing. He may have commented. But I do remember when I was desk officer, I was at a meeting in Secretary Acheson's office. I was by far the most junior person there, and sort of sat off to one side, but I do remember they were talking at that moment about two tankers that were en route from, it seems to me, South America, en route to load Persian oil delivered by the Persian-run company. And there was a great deal of alarm and concern. I remember sitting there in a rather bemused condition, thinking, "Two tankers? Who the hell cares?" But there is no doubt in my mind that the senior policy makers in Washington were very, very alert to preventing the sale of Iranian oil to private entrepreneurs.

There was a man named Jones of City Service, the American oil company. Alton Jones?