

Metrinko: Yes.

Q: How much did you know about the Huyser mission at the time?

Metrinko: Nothing at all. I didn't even hear about Huyser until after the revolution. I mean until after February of '79.

Q: I was wondering if his arrival had any impact on opinion in Tabriz? You know, any impact on the revolutionaries or--

Metrinko: No. Nobody ever mentioned his name to me. In fact, the first time I heard of him I think I was already back in Tehran and had to ask who he was, because I had no idea. His visit was not publicized, to the best of my knowledge, in Tehran, or in Iran.

Q: I think word maybe got out in Tehran to some extent.

Metrinko: It all seems sort of silly in retrospect too.

[Laughs] If you want to stem a revolution, which particular person do we know who can go and talk to the few Generals, right?

Q: Now in that same month many cities had mass demonstrations against Bakhtiar, calling for the return of Khomeini.

Metrinko: By wintertime demonstrations were going on all the

time. And there were no normal days any more. And by wintertime also I'm only-- just to put this again into perspective-- by wintertime, when it was getting dark at five o'clock or so, five-thirty in the afternoon, martial law started not much later than that. And November, December, January there was a great deal of chanting in the dark. Tires would be rolled out and set on fire in the streets. It was very eerie. Sorry for interrupting.

Q: No, that was-- those were responses to my question. Now the Shah finally left the country in mid-January. I guess the 16th?

Metrinko: Right.

Q: What was the mood in Tabriz?

Metrinko: The mood in Tabriz--

Q: At that stage?

Metrinko: I can describe that exactly. I had a squad of about fifteen or twenty Iranian soldiers, most of whom by chance-- well, none of whom were from Tabriz itself. All of these guys were Kurds from Kurdistan or they were from the Caspian Sea area. When they heard that the Shah had left, they almost became emotionally berserk. They were very, very upset, extremely

upset. The city of Tabriz had burst out into sort of wild jubilation, with people honking horns and throwing candy and cookies and things like that, and roaming around in cars with the tops down or the windows down or whatever and sort of singing and chanting "Long Live Khomeini," et cetera. Because the consulate was on the main street, or one of the main streets, and because it was the American consulate, every one of these cars and trucks and buses of course passed by the front gate.

Well, very, very quickly, when the soldiers were still extremely upset, one of these cars passed by, stopped, and was honking and yelling out whatever-- "Death to the Shah," I'm sure, and "Death to Carter," I'm sure, and, you know, "Long Live Khomeini." A whole group of the soldiers-- seven, eight, ten of them-- rushed down and were about to attack the car. They pulled their guns and I stopped them and gave a long lecture in Persian. Basically, put your guns away, you fools. But it worked and I got them to go back into the little barracks they had there and to-- I was afraid if they had done any shooting, that would have been the end of the consulate right there.

Q: I dare say.

Metrinko: It was interesting. It was all my years of teaching Iranian-- my years as a teacher in Iran, where I could start to scream at Iranian students, telling them what to do. Except that was the most serious time it ever happened.

Q: Now you're still performing consular duties at this stage?

Metrinko: Yes. Absolutely.

Q: This is as usual during the day to some extent?

Metrinko: To a large extent, because-- well, now I had a lot of Iranians, a lot of the officials and members of the upper class coming in. Coming in via the Iranian equivalent of the back door. Calling me up and saying they wanted to see me in private and coming over with their passports, their family's passports. Certainly many of the top people from the local administration, wanting to get visas as an insurance, in case they had to get out of the country. And, in fact, some of them got out on those visas.

Q: Now when Khomeini returned on February 1st, he announced the demonstrations would continue until Bakhtiar fell from power. What kind of response did the Ayatollah get in Tabriz?

Metrinko: By February, Tabriz, I would say, was more in the hands of the revolutionaries than in the hands of any local administration. Certainly-- I'm trying to remember, you know, the days now, but I think it was about the end of the first week in-- or by February 8th, 9th, I don't remember the day that the Armory fell in Tabriz. But there were constant demonstrations.

Lots of general noise in the street. Lots of gunfighting. And Tabriz for about a week was an open battleground. It was about a week and that ended on the-- I left Tabriz on I think the 15th or 16th of February. But certainly up until the 14th, when I was still free, it was true that there was lots of fighting on the streets, lots of people got killed. A fair number of houses, including two houses in the immediate vicinity of the consulate, were put under siege, because they were police officials or SAVAK officials in the houses. One of them joined the back wall of the consulate. The back wall of the house joined the back wall of the consulate, and that house was literally laid siege to by a mob. The occupant of the house was a SAVAK commander from a different city, who had come to stay with his parents, and the crowd had discovered this. This went on for quite a while.

And once, of course, the Armory out at the Army base was broken into, a lot of weapons got distributed, and the shooting just continued then for many days in the second week of February.

Q: So this is shooting between the revolutionaries and what was left of SAVAK and the military that was still loyal?

Metrinko: SAVAK, military that had turned and turned back again, and police officials.

Q: So some had turned towards the revolution and then turned back?

Metrinko: Well, in the sense that the military had laid down their weapons, had, you know, done what they called the surrender or the submission to Khomeini. And then were attacked by crowds, who overran some of the bases, and had to try and defend themselves.

I don't think-- you know, I traced this period in a couple of different cities. An awful lot of people died in that second week of February, people whose names have been totally forgotten, and their families are gone and dispersed, so nobody really knows about it any more. But an awful lot of policemen especially. It was hard if you were a policeman and had been seen in uniform every day for years and years. It was hard to suddenly pretend you were a revolutionary. And I know of two different towns, small towns, where the local police forces were basically butchered. You know, every one on the police force was butchered. And Tabriz certainly lost a lot of policemen at that point.

It's a bit strange. I was never-- I'm still not sure whether that was truly a popular reaction against the police or whether it was something that was led by the Mujahidin or the Fedayeen as part of a plan to get rid of the old security forces. You know, one of those first steps in causing chaos that you can benefit from.

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Q: Or a combination of the two?

Metrinko: Or a combination. Or just the general exuberance that comes out in a crowd when they get too much adrenalin.

Q: Now during this period in early February, Ambassador Sullivan and DCM Naas were trying to facilitate a normal transfer of power from Bakhtiar to Khomeini and Bazargan. How much did you know about these negotiations?

Metrinko: Nothing at all.

Q: Were you out of the loop, as they say these days?

Metrinko: I usually couldn't even be reached by telephone.

[Laughter] I was communicating with the Embassy basically via radio.

Q: Is that so?

Metrinko: Yes. Because communications were down and open and dead and up and down and, you know, basically I was using a radio and that was it. No other way was possible.

Q: Now in Tehran, of course, between the 9th and 11th of February, the Bakhtiar regime collapsed after the Air Force cadets and technicians began a mutiny outside of Tehran. And you prepared a memo to describe your experiences in Tabriz during

this period, which was later put in the captured documents published in Tehran later on. Anything you want to add to that?

Metrinko: No, the memo's a good jog in my memory, but, you know, I certainly couldn't-- I know what's happened to some of the people as time went on. Did the memo cover-- I haven't re-read it totally, but does it cover what happened to the people who actually attacked the consulate later on?

Q: I'm not sure about that. In later months or--

Metrinko: In later months, yes.

Q: No. No, just on that week.

Metrinko: I don't know that you're going to read this into the tapes, are you?

Q: We can add those as an appendix to your transcript. I think it might be useful.

Metrinko: The one thing that I can add is that the people who actually attacked the house, some of them were later killed, I know that, in the fighting, and one of them in-- I did this memo in March. I went back to Tabriz about a week or two weeks after I did this memo. It would have been about six weeks after the



attack. And I went back because I was being given back-- or the consulate was being turned over to the American government again. It had been in the revolutionary hands since February when I left it. Well, all that was fine. I went back and it was occupied totally by a group of Air Force homafars, sort of Air Force technicians, who were extremely friendly and hospitable. In fact, the first couple of nights that I was there, I stayed with them in the consulate instead of sleeping in my own bedroom, which by this point looked like a stable. I slept with them on the floor of my old living room. They had turned it into a barracks. But that was the first night.

The second day I had gone out somewhere into the city, I had come back, and the head of the homafar group saw me coming into the compound, came over and said, "I have a surprise for you. I want you to meet somebody." Fine. And he pulled this other guy over-- you know, a normal Iranian with a beard-- and said to me, "Do you know him? Do you recognize him?" And the guy looked familiar. I said, "He looks familiar, but not really. I can't place him. Could be anybody." And the homafar said, "This is the guy who was head of the group that attacked your consulate a month and a half ago and took you to prison. I want you two to make up." [Laughs]

But what can I say? The items that were stolen at that time from the vault included the Tabriz visa seal, my passport, my diplomatic ID card, a variety of other items. They disappeared. I mean, they were in a sealed bag and they disappeared with this

group.

I'm trying to think of when this happened. About three years ago or four years ago I got a call from the State Department saying that this bag of items had shown up again. An Iranian woman in Tehran had gotten in touch with the Swiss Interest Section in the Swiss Embassy, told them that she had been going through a trunk that her son kept locked in his bedroom, because her son was no longer in the country, and had discovered this bag of items, and she anonymously returned them all to the Swiss and they returned them all to us.

Q: So the visa seal is back?

Metrinko: Yes, it's back. Although you wouldn't get very far today on a visa issued in Tabriz. [Laughs]

Q: Now when did you arrive in Tehran? I guess in mid-February?

Metrinko: I'm just trying to think. The embassy was seized and held on February 14th. I was picked up on that day or the next day. It must have been around the 17th, I'm guessing.

Q: How long were you in Tehran before you went back to work?

Metrinko: I went back to work immediately.

Q: Right away?

Metrinko: Nobody could work inside the embassy chancery, because it had been so badly tear-gassed trying to get the demonstrators out that it became impossible to occupy. If you're ever in a situation like that, remember that carpets, drapes and upholstery suck up tear gas and hold it. So if you want to go back into a room that's been gassed, you have to remove all the carpeting, wall-to-wall carpet, all the drapes, all of the upholstered furniture. It took a long time. And people had to do it wearing gas masks. But anyway, we worked out of the DCM's house or the ambassador's residence or wherever.

Q: What were your new duties in Tehran?

Metrinko: Political Officer. Political Officer and general factotum. We had very few people left. Most of the Embassy staff was evacuated. I think we went down to about twenty-five, thirty people. Out of several hundred.

Q: This was during the spring, I guess?

Metrinko: This is in February. This is when Ambassador Sullivan was still there. DCM Charlie Naas was there. And it was before Sullivan was gotten out of the country. But basically a little bit of everything. Partially my responsibilities included

maintaining a general eye on and liaison with the variety of groups that had occupied the Embassy. And also establishing liaison with all the new revolutionary groups. It was an interesting time. And doing reporting. Like some of the reporting you've seen, starting again immediately in February. What people were saying about the revolution, what was happening to former officials, former leaders, former friends of the United States. I met with a whole series of people who were en route out by escaping, who just wanted to touch base at the embassy before they took off across the border. And with people who thought they were going to be part of the new government. You know, it just went on like that. Business was booming. We were extremely busy. There were hundreds of people who were trying to see us, or thousands, if you prefer. For a whole variety of reasons. Everything from "please give me a visa," to "I'm an American citizen, I need help," to "I'm a new member of the revolutionary government."

Q: Now one prominent person who escaped was General Toufanian, who I guess was in prison, then he got out of prison somehow?

Metrinko: I don't know--

Q: Was there any embassy role in helping him out?

Metrinko: I've never heard of any. I know Toufanian is here in

the United States. But Toufanian was so rich that he would have had no trouble bribing his way out.

Q: Now did you return to the U. S. at any time during this period in '79? Did you come back to the United States?

Metrinko: Roughly in July. I think it was July. I shouldn't have said that about Toufanian having so much money. It just always surprised me that a general on such a low salary could be such a well-known multi-millionaire. But I guess many Iranian generals have the morals of Marcos. These are normally the ones who blame Carter for the revolution.

Q: Indeed they do.

Metrinko: And the more they have themselves, the more they blame Carter. For not having given them more of an opportunity, I guess.

Q: Speaking of Carter, now how would you describe the Carter Administration's general stance towards the new regime in Iran? Say during this period, during the late winter and spring of '79?

Metrinko: The late winter of '78?

Q: '79.

Metrinko: '79. The revolution's happened, Khomeini's in power?

Q: Yes.

Metrinko: Not immediately-- certainly not immediately unfavorable. We had people like Andy Young calling Khomeini a saint. He was the U. S. Ambassador to the United Nations. We had various American officials who had tried to see Khomeini in Paris. We were certainly working with the Iranian government immediately, the new government. You have to remember that a lot of the new officials were old friends of the United States, or had studied in the United States or had just come from the United States. This would be the Bazargan Cabinet, people like that.

I would say, you know, at that period my recollection is not anti-Khomeini. You know, the jury was still out on him. They were doing some awful things, but it was a revolution and people understood that. It only started getting bad as time went on. But there was a long period when we worked-- you know, I mean when I say worked with them closely, I mean that we certainly had a fairly friendly relationship. And certainly cooperation, getting embassy work done. You know, getting things through customs, getting shipments in, getting personnel in, getting personnel out, all that sort of normal administrative work was going on quite well, considering what was happening to the rest of the country. And we dealt-- it was a bit more chaotic and you had a lot more officials who didn't know what they were doing on

the Iranian side, but basically we had no problems that were not surmountable.

Q: Now since we had such a high level of commitment to the Shah over the years, were there any officials in the State Department and the embassy who were sort of embittered by the revolution, given their lengthy support, their outstanding support for the Shah and the old system?

Metrinko: The problem was, those people, those American officers or officials who had dealt with Iran for a long time were losing numbers of friends to the executioner squads. It was very, very difficult, if not impossible, to be neutral about that. When you saw the photograph of a friend on the front page of the paper-- you know, and your friend was lying on a marble slab, having just been executed, it's really difficult to be bland.

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BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE.

Metrinko: And the higher up the officials were in the United States, who had been dealing with Iran over a long period, the more likely it was that they knew a lot of people who were in serious trouble.

On the other hand, there were an awful lot of Americans who had always disliked the Shah. The Shah was an anachronism. I

mean, someone who claimed to be a total monarch or a total dictator in an age when dictators and monarchs had long since become museum pieces was an anachronism. He was certainly out of his time and never tremendously respected anyway by the American officials. Too many people just felt that he had been supported or had been put back into power, dragged back from Rome by the CIA and installed again on his throne, and too many people knew what his sisters and brothers were like. He was not Mahatma Ghandi. Or even Mother Theresa! Or even-- I don't think anybody really cared about him, to tell the truth. You could see part of that with the Carter decision not to let him into the United States.

Q: At first.

Metrinko: Yes, at first. It went on for months and months too. I think the Carter Administration, the people in the White House, sort of stood there saying, what do we owe him? He had the country in his hands for thirty or forty years and screwed it up. We don't owe him anything. There were others, of course-- you know, some of the banks, the Rockefellers, Kissinger, people who had financial interests in the Shah, who wanted him into the United States.

Q: This will come up again, this question of the return of the Shah.



Now at this stage of the game, in early February, March, April '79 and the following months, how much of a grasp did you and the political officers get or develop of the workings of the political system that was emerging during this period?

Metrinko: That's difficult to answer. We knew an awful lot about individuals, about a lot of individuals. The system itself was still so veiled. It still is heavily veiled in Iran. I don't think anyone, including any Iranian that I ever spoke to then, could have explained, could have given a very good sort of black and white portrayal of how the government was working. Things were still in too much chaos. There were still too many revolutionary groups, too many people with power bases, who were often in conflict with one another. Too many groups that were fighting each other, although both were so-called revolutionary groups. But too many of all of these conflicting factors to say that the system is as follows. Don't forget the country was operating then without a constitution. There was no legal basis for the government-- no legal sort of framework for it. So you can't really talk about the system. The system was in a lot of cases chaotic. Executions were carried out by people who had no authority. Prisons were being filled right and left. You had people from the government who were being hauled into prison. You know, people who were working for the revolutionary government would be taken out of their offices and put in prison that day. There was certainly an awful lot of chaos in the

smaller towns and cities.

Q: Now apparently there was a Revolutionary Council at the top. How much was known about it and its membership?

Metrinko: Very little. In fact, there were conflicting reports about who was on it. You know, this will sound a bit strange. I am not convinced that the members of the Council necessarily knew that they were in charge of the country. For example, when Talegani died-- Talegani was the ayatollah, one of the leading revolutionary ayatollahs from Tehran-- there were conflicting stories from members of his family on television, about whether he was or was not a member of the Revolutionary Council. I think it was his wife who said he never had been, and then his son said of course he was. I don't remember details right now, but I remember there was a real conflict in all the accounts of it. Khomeini, of course, would have been consulted or would have been the spiritual leader of such a thing. But then again, which other clergy were on it? You would have had people coming and going from various of the major cities, and they would have sat in groups on the floor in Khomeini's house or in some other clergyman's house. And I would suppose that that night they constituted the Council, and the next night in some other house, some other group.

Q: It was sort of inchoate, I guess.

Metrinko: I think a lot of it was, yes. And a lot of the people we know of today, of course, were not powerful enough then to have been on it. Remember that a lot of the early leadership was wiped out, either by assassination very quickly or by being blown up. Or by running away and deciding they weren't revolutionary and really wanted to live in California.

Q: To what extent did you see factional divisions among the revolutionaries?

Metrinko: Oh! [Laughs] Order of the day.

Q: How would you describe the factional divisions that you saw?

Metrinko: Oh, God, I was talking to everything, from people who called themselves Communists to people who were dividing themselves up by which of the religious leaders they followed, to people who said they were mujahidin, people who said they were Fedayeen, people who said they were pro-American, people who were this, that, the other thing. It was every possible group you could think of. Liberal democrats, all sorts. People who wanted the Shah to come back. People who wanted Khomeini to reign forever, because they thought he was immortal. It was the spring of chaos.

Q: When you were meeting with the various revolutionary

individuals in Tehran, was there any suspicion of you because you had such fluent Farsi and toured the country?

Metrinko: Iranians have always suspected people who could speak Farsi. They're paranoid. And they could never understand why anybody would want to learn Persian. Many Iranians don't speak it well themselves. They assume that anyone who studies it on purpose must have an ulterior motive.

But when I say I was meeting with revolutionary groups, it was all happening quite naturally. I didn't go out looking for local cells or sneaking around like that. It was just that I continued my normal social life, which was a different place for lunch and a different place for dinner every day of the week. And by doing that I was always in situations where there were five or ten or thirty or forty people present. And so my social activity covered the gamut of revolutionary, anti-revolutionary-- whatever.

And, of course, people kept changing too, depending on how their own interests were being met or preserved during 1979. There are very few Iranians who are ideologically pure. Their attachment is very often self-interest rather than ideology.

Q: Now among the revolutionaries, they were all members of komitehs?

Metrinko: A lot of people I knew were in various komitehs, yes.