

A lot. And some took an active role. I'm thinking especially of the younger men, or various sons or brothers of my friends. The komiteh system did not-- older people did not join it normally. You might have some older men who were advisers to a komiteh group or who had so little going in their own lives that they had the time for it, but basically older people weren't in evidence. And also, after the first week or so, it became, number one, dangerous, and number two, uncomfortable. That you had to stand guard all night long at the entrance to some alley. This is no longer something you want to do in your middle age.

Q: Were women involved in the komitehs? Female membership?

Metrinko: I don't recall any. Women were involved in a whole group of other things, in a lot of provision of services especially. I know the Taleqani group had a lot of women in it, but they were basically working in the clinic that distributed medical aid to people. Women standing behind barricades, in front of alleys, in front of streets, I don't recall.

Q: Now you mentioned earlier there were lots of ideological currents in the country.

Metrinko: A veritable cesspool.

Q: The Communists, liberal democrats and so forth, did the

komitehs correspond to those types of currents? Were there members of komitehs who called themselves Communists and others called themselves liberal democrats?

Metrinko: No.

Q: Or was there more diversity within the--

Metrinko: I would say there was more diversity, basically more diversity than that. Now what was happening, of course, was that people who were similar in political outlook-- the Mujahidin or the Fedayeen or the Communists or whatever-- had their own groups of activists, who were doing other things. And also infiltrating the komiteh structure at the same time. They would have representatives, not necessarily known to the normal komiteh people, but they would have people who were infiltrating the komiteh structure as sort of an insurance or for intelligence purposes. But normally, as far as I remember, the komitehs were basically sort of religious, and just, you know, pro-Khomeini and "anti-imperialist".

Q: In terms of the membership of the komitehs as you saw it, was it pretty much cross-class or was it that some social classes predominated? Or was there a mixture of social classes?

Metrinko: In the komitehs themselves you had somewhat of a

mixture for this reason. The komitehs were basically neighborhood groups or district groups, and so in the lower part of the city or the poorer part of the city you had the sons of the poor residents of the city. When you got up into the middle class and upper middle-class areas, you had their sons in the komitehs. Or their brothers. The men from those groups.

In many cases I ran across people-- men or boys-- who were in various komitehs that had taken control of this building or that building or whatever, who were really upper-class. In fact, some of them were very upper-class. I got to know one very, very well, a guy who spoke excellent British English. His father had been a Cabinet member for the Shah. He didn't advertise the fact. In fact, nobody knew that he came from such a higher class family. I got to know this as I got to know him much better. In fact, it was strange. He was a member of one of the groups like that and his uncle, who was a very high official, was executed at the same time. But you see, you had this too. And you have to remember that in the classic case of insurgencies and political groups of this nature, very often it's the sons of the upper class who join. A lot of Iranian students came back to Iran from their good private schools in the United States and England and Germany and France to take part in the revolution. And it did cut across in that sense.

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Q: Did you have much contact with active opponents of the revolution?

Metrinko: Yes.

Q: From what standpoint did they oppose the new regime?

Metrinko: A lot of it was self-interest. Property was being confiscated right and left. And even though you had been anti-Shah or claimed you had been all through 1978-- and, of course, by 1978 you were claiming you had been all your life, even if you'd been living in his bedroom up until then. If you were about to lose your house or your farm or, you know, this or that, or your business had just gone into self-destruct because there was no more business, you were becoming anti-revolutionary or anti-Khomeini.

Also, the middle and upper middle classes, their life style was being threatened very much by the revolution, and there were all sorts of stories by '78-'79, late '78-'79, of, you know, women who were badly mistreated because they didn't wear Islamic garb, or men who were taken and flogged because they'd been drinking alcohol. Well, these were things that the middle and upper middle classes did.

A lot of people also lost their jobs immediately with the revolution, because the companies they worked for disappeared. Lost their jobs, lost their income. And it only occurred to them then that when they'd been screaming that foreign companies should leave Iran that this meant that their foreign company, their employer, was also going to leave.



So a lot-- I'm not saying everybody by any means, but there were a significant number of people who were being badly hurt economically, socially, life style, or physically hurt by the continuation of the revolution and were getting upset about it. And they hadn't thought about this up until Khomeini's return.

And also, by the way, just to add this on, don't forget that there were significant revolutionary groups that had grouped together, banded together, in 1978 to get rid of the Shah, but they did not want Khomeini to take his place. And among these groups you had The People's Fedayeen, the Mujahidin. Very numerous too. We're talking many, many thousands. As well as the ones who considered themselves straight Marxists or whatever, Communists.

Q: Secularists.

Metrinko: The secular left. Lots of religious figures, who disagreed with Khomeini. An awful lot of clergy were defrocked when Khomeini came back. You had a fair number of people like that. Some of whom I knew, many of whom I didn't, but certainly in my normal going out every night, spending lots of time on the streets and people's homes and shops and businesses, I met a lot of people like that.

Q: I thought one of the organizations had a more religious outlook. I'm not sure if it was the Fedayeen or the Mujahidin.

I may be mistaken about that.

Metrinko: The Mujahidin still do have a fairly religious outlook, but they have never-- they never liked the idea of clergy. Or at least the hierarchy of high ranking clergy. The ayatollahs don't have any role in the Mujahidin concept of Islam.

You also had another super-religious group called the Forgan in the early days of the revolution, that concentrated on killing clergy, because they didn't think that clergy should mix in politics.

So you had a whole wide bouquet of pro and anti groups.

Q: Among the antis, I assume you got a lot of requests for American support in one way or the other?

Metrinko: Oh, God, everybody was requesting American support. America was being blamed for supporting every group and aid was being requested by every group. Sure. And our basic approach was to listen to people, but to stand back.

Q: What was the attitude of the women that you might have met during the course of your time there, their attitude towards the developing policies of the government towards the role of women in society?

Metrinko: You had a whole range of reaction. I met women who

were-- well, Iran was always filled with women who were very, very traditional, very religious. I knew a number of those. I knew a number of women who were getting more and more upset because the clothing laws were changing. They couldn't go out on the street in normal clothes any more. They had to wear a veil and they never had in their whole lives. They were normal upper middle-class women.

Women's reactions ranged from everything from full support of the revolution, except that it hadn't gone far enough, to outright hatred and disgust with the revolution. It was a whole combination of things.

Remember that it was the summer of 1979 when Gloria Steinem came to Tehran too, to take part in a big demonstration of women's rights.

But Iranian women were both pro, anti. It's hard to divide it by sex. You can't really.

A lot of women also at this period-- this reversed itself later, but in 1979 a lot of women were being bounced from their jobs in the government ministries and basically being told to go home and get married and get conservative. Sit in the kitchen.

Q: Did you have contacts with military people?

Metrinko: Sure. A lot.

Q: That was part of your responsibilities too?

Metrinko: Yes, because I was doing a lot of reporting on political and military subjects. Yes, certainly.

Q: What was the ranking of the military people that you met? Was it at all levels?

Metrinko: The generals were gone. No, I shouldn't say that. I knew a couple of generals who had been retired, who had long since been retired. Everything from lieutenant on up to colonel, Police. Some of them had had trouble, some of them had not. Some of them were out of their jobs, others were not. And there was certainly no problem with it. They were all part of the social scene in Tehran. We weren't planning any coups, but I was listening to what they were saying, because it was rather important that we know what the military was thinking, the revolutionary military, the new military. What was going to happen to the military structure. We still had a tremendous physical investment in the Iranian armed forces.

I might add, by the way, that that was only a peripheral interest of mine. We had a defense attache's office that was still functioning; still had people in it and their job was to maintain liaison contact with the Iranian military. So they would have been the professionals doing it.

Q: Now apparently during this period in the early months of '79, after the revolution had occurred, or after the transfer of power



to Bazargan and Khomeini, there was some discussion at the embassy about a possible meeting with Khomeini. Did you take part in any discussions of that question?

Metrinko: I heard certainly quite a bit about it. I know that we never did have a meeting with him. I'm no longer sure of the reasons. Certainly people in the embassy were quite willing. He was obviously the head of the country. The Soviet ambassador had already grovelled down to Qom, been yelled at in public, and kept going back for more.

We didn't do it. I'm not sure why now. I would guess because Ambassador Sullivan would not have been appropriate. He was too linked to the Shah. By the time he left, of course a new ambassador was about to come out. The Iranians refused to accept him.

Q: Because of the Javits Resolution?

Metrinko: I'm not sure. I think that may have been. I'm not sure of the actual reasoning that was used at the time. That was a particular sensitive issue, the Javits statements in Congress, considering that Mrs. Javits worked for the Shah. One had to wonder why it was Senator Javits.

Q: Making these resolutions?

Metrinko: Yes.

Q: That's interesting. Yes.

Metrinko: His wife was an agent for Iran Air or the Pahlavi Foundation. As far as I remember.

Q: I've read things to that effect.

Metrinko: We're talking self-interest here. It's amazing how you can get very, very sort of-- what's the word I want to use-- very political, when you're getting paid for it.

Q: Back to this question of Khomeini though. Did your political and religious contacts in Tehran, did they think that was a desirable thing to do?

Metrinko: We had it both ways. Any time we asked an Iranian an opinion of something, we'd get it in a whole slew of-- I'm not sure that Khomeini would have been too interested at that point. The thing about meeting him was that we had contact with lots of people around him, including members of his family. So it just didn't come off. I don't know whether that's fortunate or unfortunate now.

Q: Now one of the big issues that was raised by the Iran-Contra

affair last year was the question of U.S. contacts with Iranian moderates, quote, unquote. Now in some ways this issue seems to go back to '79, when there was contact with such people as Entezam, among others in the government.

Metrinko: Sure.

Q: Now how valid do you think the term moderate is in the context of the Iranian revolution?

Metrinko: Actually despite my refusal to use the word moderate in the last couple of years, it's a very valid word. There were and are Iranians in the government, in the power structure, in every possible profession, including clergy, including the Revolutionary Guard, including high-ranking military in today's revolutionary armed forces, who are benignly inclined towards the West and towards the United States. They have always been there. At some point or another their interests in this relationship with the United States will outweigh-- the benefits of the relationship will outweigh the disadvantages of it, and they will express-- you know, simply take up contact again. Are there people who are pleasantly, benignly, positively inclined towards the United States? Yes, an awful lot. Should they be encouraged? Yes, I guess so, if we're interested eventually in a relationship. Should we sell them arms? No. But are there people like that? Yes. Since 1979 a couple of hundred thousand

Iranians have come to and gone from the United States, back to Iran. These include Iranian officials, Iranian diplomats, Iranian this, Iranian clergy, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Their families, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins. They have family here and relatives here. They have interests here, they have interests in Iran, and many of them work for the Iranian government. A lot of them are not fanatic, not hateful, not evil, or whatever. Normal people. If by moderate you mean them, yes, there are lots of moderates.

One other thing about that. Moderate is, of course, such a political term now, because of the Ollie [Oliver] North brou-ha-ha. But it's always worth remembering that the United States and Iran have a lot of contacts still. Contacts of business, of education, of family relationships, communications ties. And you can't simply-- these have not been cut off by the revolution. In fact, a surprising amount of communication and contact has been encouraged by the revolutionary government. Iranian students continue to come to the United States. The best Iranian students from their universities, the top members of the graduating class are still given fellowships to come to America to continue on for master's and doctoral programs. Iranians have never been forbidden to travel here, to come here. I think I used the figure a couple of hundred thousand. It is something like that since the revolution, a couple of hundred thousand visas given. The phone is still direct dial between any American city and any Iranian city. In fact, that system was only put into-- was only



installed or opened up after the revolution.

Q: That's interesting.

Metrinko: It goes on like that. I heard an estimate once. There's something like five thousand calls a day between Iran and the United States, telephone calls. So what can I say?

Q: Exactly.

Metrinko: And I continue to meet Iranians at dinners and at parties and at receptions, who have just arrived from Iran yesterday, and whose husbands are high officials or they themselves are deeply tied to the Iranian government, and they're very pleasant, decent people. We don't like a lot of what they've done, but an awful lot of them haven't been responsible for what's happened. There are not fifty million people out seizing hostages.

Q: Now one of the issues raised by the-- one issue that-- during '79 some CIA people in Iran and outside of Iran were apparently in contact with some of the moderate figures, such as Entezam.

Metrinko: In '79?

Q: According to James Bill's account. They were trying to build

political relations with these people and cultivate them. So I've read. Was this something that was-- this was not-- you did not know about this? And the Embassy simply does not know about the CIA efforts?

Metrinko: I knew Entezam's family socially, but I knew them a long time before the revolution. It never occurred to me that anybody would be silly enough to try and establish a new relationship.

Q: I understand George Cave was among others engaged in those activities. In '78 and '80.

Metrinko: Entezam, you have to remember, is somebody who was educated in the United States and lived here for many years and has a fair amount of business investment in the United States. He owns-- or owned anyway-- a couple of restaurants in California, and he was one of many who were in that situation. That whole Cabinet was-- I mean, they were not anti-American. They would have been damaging their own interests if they had been. Yazdi's wife and children never came back to Iran. They simply stayed in Texas, because they are all American citizens and didn't want to come back to Iran. It goes on like that.

So establishing ties-- these were the same sort of people we had worked with before, except these didn't wear silk ties. They had open shirts.

Q: Now in his book James Bill also suggests that one of the reasons that the U.S. emphasized contacts with the moderates was by default to some extent, because there was so little contact with the religious leaders. Does that sound plausible in any way?

Metrinko: It sounds like something that can't be proved or disproved. We had contacts, normal sort of embassy contacts with a whole wide range of people. Did we purposely seek out moderates? It's a word that wasn't used then. As far as I remember it's a new word in the Iranian context. Did we purposely seek out a particular group of people and place all of our eggs in their basket? No. On the other hand, access to higher figures in the religious hierarchy would have been very difficult at the best of times.

Q: You're trying to say that it almost by default. Because the access was so difficult to the religious people, other ties were developed and emphasized?

Metrinko: Well, I don't know. People-- I never really thought about the political orientation of my friends or the people I was dealing with. No, I never really thought about whether they were moderates or liberal or conservative or whatever. They were just people I knew. It's hard to say.

Q: Okay. Now you mentioned it was very difficult to develop relationships with religious leaders, ayatollahs among others. Were there any contacts--

Metrinko: Let's put it this way. It would have been difficult for even normal Iranians. By the time you are an ayatollah or a ranking religious leader, you're existing in a very circumscribed world. It would be equally difficult for someone to develop a relationship here with a Cardinal, for example. By the time someone is that high-ranking in religious terms, access to them is strictly controlled. In Iran, during the time of the Shah, it would have been difficult for security reasons to meet people like that, as well as their own. I don't know of any Iranian ayatollahs who were particularly hospitable to any foreigner. You know, this is not their bag. They didn't particularly want to meet Christians or Jews anyway. You know why.

Q: How about the people around them? Were there contacts with their students, I guess, or their followers?

Metrinko: No, they weren't considered a political group as such. And think of it this way. How much-- the United States is an overt society. Would you say that? You could basically meet anybody here that you want to meet. You know, if you really--

Q: Certain social constraints.



Metrinko: Yes, certain social constraints, but basically, if you want to focus on it. But how much luck do you think a foreign diplomat would have in getting into a seminary that's training diocesan priests here? It would be kind of rough. And even if you were invited once to it, it's not as though you could hang around or start inviting the novices out to your house for dinner. It just wouldn't be normal. It's not-- it's a different type of society.

Now if somebody happened to be a scholar and were known for Islamic credentials or known to be writing a history of Islam or whatever, then it's a lot easier. Then you have a reason. But to try and establish a set of contacts with a religious seminary, it just isn't done anywhere really. It's not even done if you're the same religion particularly.

Q: I see the difficulty involved, yes.

Metrinko: Imagine an American official trying to establish a relationship with the members of a religious commune here.

[Laughs] You know, as an example. Good luck!

Q: Of course the thing has more significance in Iran, because the religious groups have so much political influence. I mean, it would be more logical to at least try to think about developing contacts because of the political power associated with these, as opposed to a seminary in this country.

Metrinko: Oo-oo-oh! [Laughter]

Q: Political influence, but not much of the commanding heights of the society.

Metrinko: Have you met any Cardinals recently?

Q: No. It gets complicated obviously.

Metrinko: Also their political influence was very much a factor in 1978. It wasn't necessarily true in 1975 or '76, even '77. And it was only-- not by chance, but it was a bit exceptional that all of the anti-Shah sentiment focused on Khomeini. It could easily, just as easily, have focused on some National Front leader or some Communist or some Mujahed or whatever. By the time it was clear that all the opposition was going to come under the-- sort of the umbrella of Khomeini's figure or Khomeini's name, it was really too late.

Q: In his book, James Bill suggests that one of the problems that the U.S. had in Iran in '79 and later was that the Carter Administration more or less refused to publicly announce as a sign of good will the acceptance of the revolution. To what extent did you and your colleagues see that as a problem?

Metrinko: It wasn't a problem. This is all, I think, sort of--

people trying to explain ten years later why something went sour. When the revolution occurred, when Khomeini came back into power, or when he came into power when he anointed or appointed a Cabinet under Bazargan, we immediately had normal relations with the government appointed by Khomeini. We had everyday, daily, weekly, whatever. We had meetings constantly with them. We kept the embassy open and functioning, and by the summertime, at the government's request, their government, we had reopened our consular section. It was a full service consulate, giving visas to Iranians. We had any number of visitors come from Washington at various levels to meet with new government figures. We had an ambassador in Iran until Ambassador Sullivan left. A new ambassador was named in the United States, Walt Cutler. He was supposed to come to Iran. The Iranians refused to accept him.

But certainly we continued relations. As much as possible, normal relations. And for anyone to say that we didn't recognize the revolution or didn't recognize the new government is simply ignoring facts. We stayed there. We processed things normally and we were building up our presence significantly again.

Q: Well, it's not I guess a question of recognition or non-recognition. I guess it's a question of whether the U.S. made a statement that it accepted the revolution.

Metrinko: That becomes absurd. Do we expect a foreign government to say that they accept the election of the President

in November? No. You simply continue relations or you break relations. We never broke relations. We continued and after the initial evacuation of most American dependents and families, et cetera, people started coming back. Businesses were reopening. It was the security situation in Tehran and the other cities that prevented Americans from coming back in larger numbers, but certainly we had an embassy staff that was building up and very decent relationships with a large number of Iranian Khomeini-appointed government officials. Including meetings with many of the top clergymen in Iran. Now it just-- what can I say? Bill is ignoring facts when he says otherwise.

Q: I read that I guess some of the moderates in the government-- Bazargan and Entezam, among others-- complained at various points that the U.S. was undermining their position by refusing to supply spare parts that were already paid for or to repatriate government funds that were held in the United States. Did those issues come up in conversations?

Metrinko: No, not that per se. I know that the spring and summer of 1979 we were spending a lot of time trying to sort out some incredibly complicated property matters with the Iranian government, including the seizure and confiscation of large amounts of American military property there. We had things like the APO, the commissary, the PX, large shipments of military freight, et cetera, et cetera. That was being sorted out. And