

also meetings were continuing with the defense attaches and the Armish-MAAG people, the military advisory group representatives, about things like items in the pipeline. That would have been worked out. It was in the process of being worked out.

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BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO.

Q: In the Political Section.

Metrinko: Oh, God.

Q: Can you mention any names or remember any names in particular?

Metrinko: My boss was Vic Tomseth. You know, I'm trying to think. It's been a long time. Ann Swift. John Limbert.

Q: In general, how knowledgeable was this group about the Iranian scene?

Metrinko: Some of them very. Ann Swift was new, but she had studied Persian for a year before coming there. John Limbert was extremely knowledgeable. He had lived in Iran for about ten, fifteen years. Spoke perfect Persian. Had an Iranian wife. Let's see, Vic Tomseth had already lived in Iran for at least

three years at this point. He had been the consul down in Shiraz. I had lived in Iran at this point for about five and a half years, including Peace Corps. You know, I'd say all in all it was a darned good Political Section.

Q: Did all of them have Farsi skills of some sort or the other?

Metrinko: Basically yes. But, of course-- you know, even going through school to learn Persian doesn't teach you to speak it. You have to be there for a while. And the Farsi skills ranged from o.k. to very good. Which was basically the way it was at the rest of the embassy too. We had a fair number of people-- in the post-revolution embassy, a fair number who spoke good Persian. Including three former Peace Corps volunteers. Myself, John Limbert and Barry Rosen. I mean Peace Corps volunteers from Iran.

Q: Rosen spent time as a volunteer? I didn't know that.

Metrinko: Yes. Sure.

Q: I have a couple more questions about some of the revolutionaries that you had contacts with. Were some of these people men or women you had met over the years?

Metrinko: Yes. Some I'd known from back in 1970. Others I had

met at dinner that night. So it was a combination of people I'd known from early days in the Peace Corps up to people I was meeting for the first time.

Q: Did your contacts include people who were members of the Fedayeen or the Mujahidin?

Metrinko: Mujahidin, yes.

Q: What kinds of attitudes did they have toward the U.S., if it's possible to generalize about that?

Metrinko: It's rough to generalize. Everything from the United States is responsible for everything the Shah ever did, because he was a puppet of the United States, to the United States is responsible and I want to go to Texas, can you help me get a visa? Don't forget that there were a fair number of them who-- including the most anti-American-- who had lived for long periods in the United States and always distinguished in their own minds in a very Persian categorical way between the country of the United States, with its people and its life style, versus the government. They had no problems with the country or the life style and wanted in many cases to come back as soon as possible and resume an American life style.

Q: Among those who were hostile to the United States government,

did they still-- did they therefore conclude that an accommodation was impossible or did they think that an accommodation should be developed nevertheless?

Metrinko: Everything. You had every combination of attitude you could possibly think of. Those who wanted all imperialist, quote, unquote, powers out. Those who wanted business as usual and bring back your companies and your technicians as soon as possible, please.

Q: Now over the course of the years the Iran-American Society had played a significant role in Tehran and other cities in terms of training, giving English language lessons, cultural exchange and so forth. It had some presence?

Metrinko: It had presence. I don't know how significant their role was. Wouldn't want to exaggerate it. There were lots of institutes that taught English or German or French or Italian. There were English high schools, just as there were French and Italian high schools. There were universities that taught in English. And the Iran-American Societies in a couple of different cities had been very active.

Q: Did they continue their activities after the revolution?

Metrinko: After the revolution? Let me think. Yes, because

Kate Cook, who was one of the hostages taken in November of '79, was the head of the Iran-American Society in Tehran. How active was the programming after that? I think not very. It was not a time to be propagandizing about the United States.

Q: This had occurred before the hostage crisis?

Metrinko: Yes.

Q: But they still continued their English language lessons and so forth?

Metrinko: I'm not sure. I really don't recall right now. Not in Tabriz. Not in Kermanshah. I suspect not in any of the provincial towns. I'm just not positive, but certainly not in those places.

Q: Now after the February occupation of the embassy, I guess from what I understand there was an American Embassy Komiteh which provided security for the embassy?

Metrinko: There were at least three.

Q: Three different komitehs?

Metrinko: Yes. It was wonderful. You had one-third of the

American Embassy compound taken over by Air Force homafars. Air Force personnel. They were living in a former barracks on the Embassy compound.

[TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

Metrinko: There was another group, which had been sent to the embassy on February 14th by either-- well, one group was sent by Yazdi, who was then the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Another was sent by the komiteh system in the neighborhood. The Yazdi group occupied the Ambassador's residence. It was led by somebody who was using the pseudonym Reza Farahani. It was a pseudonym. I've forgotten what his real name was, although I did know it at one point. They basically occupied the bottom floor of the ambassador's residence and were in theory responsible for protecting the ambassador's house. We also, of course, had American Marines staying twenty-four hours with the ambassador too.

There was a third group, led by the later infamous Mashallah, Mashallah Kashani, who with his brother had a large group of real thugs. I mean, interesting, picaresque thugs from South Tehran. Mashallah was a former butcher and the group that was with him were all members of the same sports club in his particular alley in South Tehran.

The three groups fought. They fought physically, they fought with guns against each other for control of the compound.

This went on for weeks, so that late at night there'd be bullets whizzing across the Embassy compound as one group was shooting at the other. I mean, this was really interesting.

Q: Were these some of the same people who had occupied the Embassy on the 14th?

Metrinko: No. In theory, no, but who knows? May have been. Some of them might have just stayed. But of the group, the Air Force group would change every second day or so and they would show up, driven in Air Force buses, normally chanting "Death to America" when they arrived. They were interesting. They were finally driven off the compound by the other two groups.

But this was really a circus. It was a three-ring circus, and we tried to carry on in the middle of it all as though nothing were happening.

Q: That state of affairs persisted until the fall?

Metrinko: No. Eventually-- the Mashallah group that was headquartered down at the main gate eventually drove out the other group that was in the ambassador's residence. The ambassador's residence group also really had no reason to stay very long, because once the ambassador was taken out-- you know, was sent back to the States or left for the States, they really had no *raison d'etre*. But they were pretty badly mauled before

that. It was a much weaker physically group. I mean, they were smaller guys and not part of the sports club scene.

Q: Not street toughs?

Metrinko: Not street toughs, no.

Q: Did the Mashallah group have any particular political perspective?

Metrinko: Oh, I'd say-- they claimed to be very Islamic, but they were really rather hypocritical about it. I mean, they confiscated liquor to sell or to drink. They were heavily into bribes. They did a fair amount of house looting and were visibly involved in torture of people they got. Things like that. It was a really vicious little group.

They were eventually driven away through the machinations of a couple of other groups in the area. It was just really interesting to watch this. This was the revolution in microcosm. A lot of self-interest, a dash of ideology, some religion, a lot of thievery, corruption. And some pure revolutionary spirit too. A lot of it anti-American, a lot of it pro-American.

To give you an idea of the sort of thing that went on. I just got a postcard from this guy the other day. I still have it sitting on the desk there, asking me to call him up. A couple of



our embassy officers, a couple of the consular officers, were picked up one night when they were returning back to the embassy compound. This would be in the summer of '79. Picked up and held by some Komitech Guards. They were held in one of the Komitech headquarters. Then they were released, when they proved they were indeed American diplomats. Well, the next day the head of the group that had picked them up called up and he wanted to talk to someone at the embassy about this incident. I was asked to handle it. Well, we wanted to keep the other embassy officers out of this, the ones who'd been picked up especially, just remove them totally already, to try and distance them and make him forget about them. So I met with him and he turned out to be a very pleasant person. He was bearded and tough looking and carried guns and all this sort of stuff, but very decent, pleasant. We hit it off. He invited me to his house for dinner. I went for dinner.

Well, I asked him why he had picked up the diplomats, why had he tried to arrest them? He said, "Oh, it was simple." He said, "I wanted to meet some Americans." He said, "I figured it was the best way." [Laughter]

He showed me his bedroom that he and his brother shared. And this is a family of the lower class. Nice, decent people. Lower class family. His bedroom was decorated totally with American flags. How do you explain this?

Q: I don't know. Maybe on that note we should stop. [Laughter]

That's very interesting.

Metrinko: Yes. He got political asylum in Germany. About two years later he defected from the Revolutionary Guard Corps. I should give him a call.

END OF SESSION #4

VA

Interviewee: Michael Metrinko

Session #5

Interviewer: William Burr

Alexandria, Virginia

March 2, 1989

Q: The fifth interview session with Michael Metrinko took place in Alexandria, Virginia on March 2, 1989.

At our last meeting you talked about how the BBC ran stories about demonstrations in Tabriz and elsewhere that were untrue. Why do you think they were doing that? Did you have a fix on that at the time?

Metrinko: I have no idea if it was conscious policy. Lots of Iranians-- lots of the old upper class, the loyal to the Shah Iranians, blame, of course, the BBC for doing just that. The Shah himself blamed the BBC for doing that and summoned the British ambassador to talk to him about it.

It may have just been for the same reasons that other news was misprinted or misreported. So many people claiming so many varied and contradictory events, some of it wishful thinking, others purposeful, purposeful confusion, disinformation. It was going on all over the place. It may have been just a simple matter of that. The BBC is not infallible. It's a news agency just like any other, subject to making the same mistakes.

Q: Now also at the last meeting you discussed some of your

contacts with various revolutionary groups in Tehran and elsewhere. To what extent did your contacts extend to Tudeh Party members or individuals who were close to the Tudeh Party?

Metrinko: I never met anybody who claimed he was a member of the Tudeh Party. Certainly up until the revolution nobody would have said that. After the revolution they were still being a little bit leery about it, a little wary about it. I have met in Iran people who claimed they were communists, did not use the name Tudeh. Basically contacts were in one-- I never followed up any contacts like that.

Q: What was your assessment of the Tudeh Party?

Metrinko: My assessment today or my assessment then?

Q: Then.

Metrinko: Then it was really a dead issue. Although one thing I might say, there were quite a few-- not the Tudeh Party, but the former communist regimes in Iran. Specifically the Pischevari government in Tabriz was not unfavorably looked at by many people in Tabriz. Quite a number of people, some of the older people in Tabriz, the Azerbaijanis, spoke favorably of it. It had apparently done quite a bit for the people in the area.

Q: Social reform agenda?

Metrinko: Things like that. Asphaltting roads, electrification. And I remember once an old Iranian friend, a Turkish Iranian from Azerbaijan, I had met at one of the universities when I was teaching in the Peace Corps days, who-- we were discussing Turkish and he could read and write in Turkish as well as speak it, and I asked him how he had learned, and he said, oh, I grew up and went to school in Tabriz during the Pischevari period, and he said Turkish became our official language, we were able to teach it and learn it in school, and he said, of course that changed when the Shah came back. This was something that for him had been very beneficial, the learning of Turkish. You know, learning to become literate in it. Iranians were basically not literate in it and books in Persian-Turkish were rather difficult to find. So that was the sort of thing that Pischevari had done.

Q: That's interesting. Well, actually I think at one of our last meetings you said that under [Jimmy] Carter the State Department was basically accepting the revolution in Iran. In August '79 Bruce Laingen, the charge, cabled Washington that-- and this is a quote-- that "an underlying problem for us has been the fact that much of the new leadership does not yet perceive that we have accepted the change in Iran." He went on to say that some of that was tactical, the need to keep revolutionary credentials intact. What do you think explained the Iranians'

perception that the Carter Administration did not altogether accept the revolution?

Metrinko: A number of things. First of all you had the remnants of the [Robert E.] Huyser mission. General Huyser had come to Iran and his mission had been a bit disorganized and a bit unclear. He wasn't sure if he was supposed to arrange a coup or prevent one. [Zbigniew] Brzezinski thought he was being sent there to arrange one. Carter, as far as I can see, thought that Huyser was there to prevent one unless he had to arrange one. It was all rather confused. But certainly Huyser's mission became well known in Iranian circles and was described with much disgust by military figures, who were put on trial during the course of the summer of 1979. General Rabii, the former head of the Iranian Air Force, had been one of General Huyser's chief contacts for his month or so in Iran in January of 1979. General Rabii spoke quite a bit about this mission.

So you had the continuing stories coming out of the trials, continuing revelations coming out from, you know, Army, Navy, Air Force, SAVAK, who were spilling their guts as they were being tried. Certainly the confessions that were being extorted in prison from people and politicians, et cetera. You had incidents like Senator [Jacob] Javits standing up in the Senate in 1979 and berating Iran.

Q: When [Habib ] Elghanian was executed?

Metrinko: Yes. Elghanian. I still think it was rather funny since as far as I know Senator Javits's wife was a paid agent for the Shah. There was also a tremendous amount of anti-Iranian publicity, with good reason, in the United States in the newspapers.

The Iranians have always claimed, as many third world countries do, not to be able to understand the concept of a free press. The Shah screamed at the British ambassador, because he thought the British government was totally responsible for the BBC. Khomeini's government did the same thing, because they thought the British government was responsible for the BBC. The French were blamed for Agence France Presse. The Germans were blamed for the German press. Americans were blamed for the American press. And you have all sorts of weird incidents happening that they thought were either insulting to the revolution or anti-revolution or pro-Shah or whatever. They paid very close attention to what was being written in the American press and what was being said in the American media, and there was an awful lot of fuel there to give them the impression that we were against the revolution.

There was also the fact that a lot of the old Shah people-- I don't mean the Shah himself at this point, but certainly lots of others, the generals, the colonels, were busily escaping and popping up in the United States. There was, from their point of view, reason to think we were anti-revolution.

Q: I have a question about the domestic political system in Iran. Now in a September 1979 letter back to the State Department, an economic officer, Andrew Sens, stated that he disagreed-- and this is a quote-- "with opposition that there is a dual government, that is to say Bazargan and Khomeini. I suspect the dual government analysis, analytical construct, is popular because it implies that we can influence at least part of the policy machinery." In other words, that if there is a dual government of [Mehdi] Bazargan and Khomeini, we can influence Bazargan at least, if not Khomeini. And he goes on to say that "to contend that Khomeini is the only real source of power means we then have to explain how we could protect our interests here." Let me re-read this. "To contend that Khomeini is the only real source of power means we then have to explain how it is we can protect our interests here only by indirect communications through a third party obviously not in sympathy with us on many questions." The implication is that the U.S.--

Metrinko: It's convoluted, to say the least.

Q: Yes, it's convoluted, but the implication seems to be that the U.S. has some kind of-- there's a third party that's working with the U.S. in talks with Khomeini at this stage in the fall?

Metrinko: That's not what I get out of it.



Q: Well, that's one thing.

Metrinko: I'm not sure what Andy had in mind, Andy Sens. I know that he disagreed with our view of the security situation and thought that things were much better than many of our reports suggested. Now if he disagreed with the dual government concept, I think facts and history have not borne out his opinion. Anyone who watched Bazargan retreat and then resign abruptly in November of '79, you could see that the analysis of dual government was correct, that Bazargan was a facade that was being used by the clergy who really had the power.

Bazargan was a pathetic creature. I remember him on television, complaining because some members of his own office had been arrested right in front of him. It's like an American politician who won't resign because of his being an embarrassment to his own party or to his own leaders. Bazargan at that point was an embarrassment.

You know, as far as dealing with Khomeini, you have to remember that we were dealing with his appointed deputies, both religious deputies as well as civilian. We certainly had quite a decent daily relationship with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister-- you know, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Prime Minister. It goes on like that. We saw them regularly or as regularly as any other embassy did. And we had a whole series of meetings with various members of the clergy. We were dealing rather closely with the Talegani Committee. [Ayatollah] Talegani

was a member of the Revolutionary Committee. We were dealing-- I don't want to say intimately or too closely with [Ayatollah] Beheshti, but we had had meetings with Archbishop Beheshti, yes, with Ayatollah Beheshti. That's a Freudian slip. You know, and other clergy like that. If Khomeini had wanted to deal with us, we already had a framework there for it.

Q: So when Sens talks about relying on third parties, we're not really talking about the reality of the situation at all?

Metrinko: No. Don't forget that at that point no government was really in touch with Khomeini. The PLO thought it was and wasn't. The French thought they were and weren't. Others thought they were and they'd go back and forth.

Q: Now in some accounts of U.S. policy during the revolution Richard Cottam's name comes up, because of his long-standing contacts with the moderate revolutionaries like Bazargan. From your perspective at the time, how influential was Cottam?

Metrinko: The name never came up. Just another one of the committee academics who had done books on Iran in the past. Everybody knew Iranians in the government. We didn't particularly use academics, you know, in that sense, to run passes for us or anything else; especially people who had really not been in Iran in quite a while and didn't have too much of an

idea of how much blood was being spilled. Their moderate friends were just as much on the outs as anybody else was.

Q: Now in his book James Bill mentions that the embassy provided some assistance to supporters of the old regime who were trying to leave the country. How much and what kind of support was given?

Metrinko: To the best of my knowledge the only sort of support-- and this is not really support-- would have been visas for some of the people and their families. But we were doing that for a large number of people. Everything from homeless students to business people.

Q: And no special assistance in leaving the country besides this giving visas?

Metrinko: We didn't have ability to do that. We have to remember the circumstances.

Q: Now according to James Bill's book, as well as other sources, by the summer of '79 the U.S. was much more visible in Iran and embassy officials were making more contacts with Iranians at all levels of society. He also notes that many Iranians worried about these efforts, because it suggested an effort by the U.S. to restore its position of influence.

Metrinko: Absolutely. That was our whole point. [Laughter]

Q: How much did you know about those concerns that the U.S. was perhaps being over-active in its efforts to re-establish a presence in the country?

Metrinko: Our efforts to re-establish relationships, to maintain, to re-establish, or to newly establish, to make new relationships were active. They went on as they would in any embassy, as we tried to get embassy business done, as we tried to make our views known, as we tried to establish a relationship with the new government. That's normal embassy business. It's not bad. This is what embassies do. This is how they get information and get the job done.

It was met by an equal-- in fact I'd say an even higher desire, a greater desire on the part of many of the new officials, to quickly establish working relations with us. They wanted technical aid. They wanted other aid. They wanted visas. They wanted information. They wanted to be able to go to the United States. They wanted the possibility of assistance and they wanted a continuation of military aid, just as the old Shah's government had. At least many of them did. This is normal.

Now did this bother some Iranians? Yes, it did. It bothered a number-- a fair amount obviously, who were very revolutionary and thought that they could get the United States