

totally out of Iran and that the United States should be totally out of Iran. It presumably bothered Khomeini. Certainly the ones who went around saying "Neither East nor West," and all those other silly political slogans, it would have bothered. I've had Iranians tell me that it bothered them. I've had comments directed at me, when they thought that I couldn't understand and they didn't care if I understood. What are the Americans still doing here? We thought we got rid of them, that sort of thing.

Would the fact that they were bothered have stopped us? No. Nor should it have. Iranians are super-sensitive about too many things and their sensitivities are often childish.

Q: Also during the summer of '79 the State Department sent a closely held cable to Bruce Laingen, asking for an assessment of the consequences if the U.S. admitted the Shah to the country. Did you know about this cable at the time? I think it was around June or July perhaps.

Metrinko: The specific cable, no, but I certainly talked to Bruce Laingen about what various friends of mine were saying. I'm sorry, not necessarily Bruce. I may have discussed this with Victor Tomseth. I'm not sure which one it was. What I was getting from some of my friends, including some pretty revolutionary friends, was that it didn't make any difference any more, that he was gone, that he was finished, and they didn't

care what happened to him. And these were people who were qualified members of the revolutionary movement.

Q: So to that extent there was no real concern that if the U.S. admitted the Shah, that it would have some bad implications?

Metrinko: There were some people who were saying, yes, it would cause a problem, but that was one of those things that was still unclear.

Q: As of the early summer or mid-summer?

Metrinko: Yes. When the Shah had been admitted to Mexico, the Iranians definitely had made a squawk, and the Mexicans had basically told them to mind their own business, that it was a domestic Mexican affair. And the Iranians had shut up about it.

Q: Yes, this will come up again in a little bit. Now also during the summer, probably even before the summer of '79, there was similar violence against the Kurds, because of their demands for provincial autonomy. Did you learn much about this development from your Kurdish friends?

Metrinko: Yes and no.

Q: Or from other sources as well?

Metrinko: A lot of the violence in Kurdistan had nothing to do with demands for autonomy and nothing to do with the revolution. It was simple-- the sheer joy of looting and the sheer joy of fighting and getting something that you didn't own last week. But of course a lot of the revolution was derived from-- it certainly was an important part of the revolution, this desire to grab, steal or loot something. That's true of every revolution. It's especially true in Iran.

The Kurdish troubles, we had no officers in that area. We heard some stuff about it. A lot of it was in the press. But what more can I say about it? It was pretty well covered even in the national press at the time. And certainly some of the Kurdish religious leaders-- the trouble with Kurdistan is a mixture of things. You have on the one hand all the accusations of anti-revolution activity and specific charges by the Iranian central government and by the press that various old Shah officials were raising trouble in Kurdistan and they complained a great deal and charged that General [ ] Palizban, the Kurdish ethnic general, who had been the last military commander - the last governor-general of Kermanshah Province, they charged that he was fomenting anti-revolutionary activity and fighting in the Kurdish area.

They said the same thing about various other people. I remember at one point [Ibrahim] Yazdi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, even complained that there was a whole group of suspicious Americans-- or had been a whole group of suspicious

American doing something-- you know, spy activity in the village of Nagadeh.

Q: In Kurdistan?

Metrinko: In Kurdistan. Nagadeh, of course, as we pointed out to them, was the site of a very large and a very, very world famous archeological site that had been developed by the University of Pennsylvania, and they all left the year before, during the revolution. But you had this sort of accusation.

Activity in Kurdistan ranged from simple villagers fighting villagers to get each other's property to some anti-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary activities, to demands for autonomy, to the general sort of chaos that was going on all over Iran, where people made lots of noise, bang-bang with their guns, and you didn't know what in hell they wanted. The whole mixture.

Q: But there was some state repression against--

Metrinko: Oh, God, yes. They bombed some of their own towns. One of the first missions the Iranian Air Force was sent on by the new central government was to bomb the town of Mahabad. No, the anti-Kurdish activity by the central government started immediately. If you'll recall the pictures then, this happened in '79 and a whole number of Kurds were executed, including in one case a group of Kurdish doctors and nurses were executed for

treating people who had been injured by the central government forces. A lot of that got hotter after the hostage situation. It went on into the 1980s, especially '80-'81, and there was some really serious fighting in Kermanshah.

Q: Some have argued that Khomeini over-reacted to the whole Kurdish situation, so that he could use it as a lever to strengthen his version of Islamic control. Was there something to that?

Metrinko: Absolutely. Yes. A lot of the Kurds were Sunni, to begin with. Some of the Kurdish religious leaders, Sheik Isadeen, Hosseini, for example, were anti-Khomeini. There was a fair amount of trouble there and the Kurds saw a chance to gain some independence. They had been suppressed for a long time by the previous regime. This regime had made promises to them. The promises were not being kept and the Kurds revolted once more.

Q: You might have alluded to this at one of our earlier meetings, but according to some accounts that I've seen, in September '79 the American Embassy komiteh that was protecting the embassy-- protecting in quotes, I guess-- this komiteh was disbanded and the Revolutionary Guards took over embassy protection. Now what accounted for that change?

Metrinko: No, not the Revolutionary Guards.

Q: Oh, okay.

Metrinko: Just a quick chronology. When the embassy was first attacked on February 14 of 1979, three groups of security guards were sent to the embassy compound to protect it. There was one group that was basically Air Force, Air Force homafars. They had control of about one-third of the compound and they lived in a former police barracks which we had in our compound. There was another group, which had been sent by the Central Committee. These were Mashallah Kashani and his group. They were down at the main gate. And a third group sent by Foreign Minister [Ibrahim] Yazdi. They were headquartered in the Ambassador's residence and had control of that area.

In the course of time the Air Force group pulled out. I'm not sure any longer of lengths of time, but for about a month or two, perhaps longer, the other two security forces stayed there, constant rivalry and tension between them. To the point of open fighting. And even when Ambassador [William] Sullivan left Tehran, there was fighting over that. He was protected on his exit out by one group, who purposely did not tell the other there might be people leaving. With good reason. There might be trouble.

Eventually Mashallah's security group got rid of the other group.

Q: The Yazdi group?

Metrinko: Yes. And as time went on the police were able to move in and Mashallah's group was removed. There was some fighting and some fisticuffs over that. I no longer remember exactly. It was a long time ago now.

Q: So the city police were doing the job?

Metrinko: The police, yes.

Q: Did that make any difference in terms of security at the embassy, that the police were doing it?

Metrinko: When things were quiet outside, we had good security inside. When things were noisy outside, security decreased. We no longer had the sort of quiet, well-run, orderly, manicured compound that Middle East posts used to have in such-- you know, what we used to have in Iran. In 1979 it was no longer possible. It was more like a Middle Eastern circus.

Q: So the local police were the security people up through the November crisis?

Metrinko: Yes.

Q: Now in September of '79 the State Department sent another message to Bruce Laingen about admitting the Shah to the U.S.,

raising the whole question of what the implications were, in terms of foreign policy and the Mexico situation. Did you see that cable or know about that particular cable or of the series of cables?

Metrinko: I just don't remember. Don't forget, that was the sort of thing where the political counselor, Vic Tomseth, would have seen it. Or we all would have seen it in the briefings. He would have discussed it, but it's hard to remember after ten years which things I saw and the things I didn't see. I can't even remember the ones that I wrote. [Laughs]

Q: Was this a subject of fairly constant discussion at the embassy?

Metrinko: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes, absolutely.

Q: But you mentioned a few minutes ago that there was some division as to the implication?

Metrinko: There was lots of talk about it, what would happen, but in a sort of intellectual sphere. I've always felt a bit of disagreement with other people from the embassy, who complain or who say that they told Carter, they said that this would happen.

A lot of it was simply covering their asses afterwards.

People talked about this. No one that I know of acted on



the belief that if the Shah were to be let into the United States, we'd be in serious trouble.

[TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

Metrinko: Let me give you an example. If the people in the embassy had really believed there'd be serious trouble against the embassy, I think they would have taken some steps to remove embassy documents, embassy files, to bring the embassy down to minimal staffing. There were all sorts of things that could have been done to sort of have a-- you know, a bank vacation, that sort of thing, for a while. It would have been very, very simple to do and any excuse could have been used, whether it was reconstruction, whatever.

That's why I say there was talk about it, but only on the intellectual level. Nobody really paid attention to what it might really mean.

Q: Including yourself?

Metrinko: Including myself, yes. I'm as guilty as anyone else. But I was up in the air, because I didn't know if there would be trouble. I really didn't think there would be.

Q: Now all the files had been brought back, right, to Washington? Or a great number of files, right? During the summer? Spring and summer?

Metrinko: The files, I don't think they ever left the embassy.

Q: I think some of them were shipped back temporarily.

Metrinko: No.

Q: No? I read that some were shipped back and then they were sent back again.

Metrinko: None that I know of were shipped out. At least not in my section, the political section.

Q: Now by the fall of '79-- say September, October-- what was your assessment of U.S. relations with Iran? How did you think things stood at that stage?

Metrinko: Spotty. Getting better. They were certainly getting better with the provisional government and with Bazargan and his group. There were hundreds of thousands of Iranians who wanted to go to the United States. There was lots of interest in the United States with what was happening in Iran. Assistance programs looked as though they might be picking up again. There was an awful lot of chaos in the streets and a lot of security trouble, but it wasn't all directed against us, it was affecting everybody. The country was still running on an adrenalin high and Khomeini was as bizarre as he was later to prove. But other

than that, not all that bad. There was an awful lot of anti-American rhetoric, but there was anti-everything rhetoric.

Q: What was your take on the Bazargan government? Did you think it was weakening or did it seem fairly stable at that point?

Metrinko: It seemed as stable as it had any right to be, and it looked as though they might be able to pull it off. Although it was clear to everybody that there were other people in the country with real power. You know, in the telegram we discussed on the security situation in Iran, it's pretty clear that there were lots of security problems, and a government has to be able to control the security in the country. If it doesn't, it's not really an effective government. The Bazargan government was there in Tehran, but in lots of places there were still lots of problems and it looked like they weren't getting any better. There was still an awful lot to be sorted out.

Q: Now on October 22, '79 the Shah flew to New York for medical treatment. Did you know that this would happen? Were you given advance notice?

Metrinko: Yes. Yes. But I don't really remember what we did. I think we may have closed the embassy down for a day or two or over a weekend, but I'm really not sure any more. What was the date again?

Q: October 22, 1979. Give or take a day. What was your reaction when you heard this?

Metrinko: My reaction was "So What"? [Laughs]

Q: Did you have any discussions with your contacts about the Shah's arrival in the U.S.? What did people say to you when they heard this in the Iranian press?

Metrinko: There wasn't that much interest in it actually among my friends. Most of them didn't care. He was already something - you know, the position of the Shah was of importance to the politicians, to the old Shah supporters, the high officials, and to some of the people who were still rabidly anti-monarch in the new government, but most people just did not give a damn. In a lot of ways all of the emotion about the Shah's arrival in the United States was an artificial, made-up cause celebre. It's like the cause celebre that's been made of Salman Rushdie's book. No one in Iran has read it. They don't care about it. But it's a political drum that they have to beat.

Q: Also in his recent book James Bill argues that the managers of the Chase Manhattan Bank might have pushed the Shah's admission into the United States, in the hope of provoking a diplomatic crisis that would help the bank protect its exposed financial position in Iran. They'd made many loans in the late

seventies and there was some concern about the security of those loans. Had there been any discussion at the embassy about the Chase Bank's financial problems or its exposed position?Metrinko: Not that I knew of, but if that were true, I would think they'd be trying to cause revolutions and similar trouble all over South America and all over Eastern Europe, since Chase Manhattan was exposed in many places. [Laughter]

Q: Is there anything that you've heard in the following years that might have confirmed or disconfirmed Bill's interpretation?

Metrinko: There is a book written on that particular subject, but I've never-- and there was a long article in Playboy about two years ago. But other than that-- I have the book here. I really haven't read it. It seems a little bit farfetched.

Q: Okay. Now on November first there was a big demonstration against the U.S. admission of the Shah in Tehran. Apparently after it was over some embassy staff officials believed that the worst may well be over, that the demonstrations were over.

Metrinko: That they'd shot their wad.

Q: Was that your thinking as well, that this was a reaction to what had occurred and that that would be it?

Metrinko: Honestly I don't remember now. I really do not remember. You know there's a problem with the demonstrations. When I try to remember how I felt on a particular day, demonstrations were a way of life in Tehran. They went on every day, about something or other somewhere or other. Whether it was against women not wearing the veil or women wearing the veil or, you know, frozen meat as opposed to unfrozen, they quite literally-- oh, yeah, Khomeini had come out against frozen meat at one point, which led to a lot of butchering of fresh young lambs on many sidewalks.

But demonstrations were going on all the time. Groups would form. There'd be fights. There'd be shooting. And it had been going on since the middle of 1978 in various forms. It just continued all through 1979. So one tended to get the reasons for demonstrations mixed up, and it was just a-- when you saw one, you simply walked around it or turned a block earlier, lest you be caught up in it. And the embassy was always a focus of demonstrations.

Q: Now at the same time of this November first demonstration Khomeini was calling upon the students to attack the United States. Do you recall hearing about that?

Metrinko: Yes. But it wasn't the first time. Khomeini had been railing about the United States since the day he came to power.

Q: But was the rhetoric his way of saying, we should attack the United States or its representatives?

Metrinko: I remember feeling that this was going a lot farther. That's about it. It certainly didn't stop my social life or my business life.

Q: What do you recall of the mood of Tehran for the next few days, before the taking of the embassy? Anything striking going on or just the things you were telling me?

Metrinko: More street activity, but other than that-- let's put it this way. What was going on in the city and the country was not so outrageous that it stopped normal business. Even the day of the attack on the embassy, it was a normal business day in the embassy. We had lots of Iranian visitors in the embassy and the visa section was filled with people trying to get visas. I had appointments scheduled for the morning. I had a lunch appointment for twelve o'clock. I had a dinner appointment for that evening. And all of these had been made that day or the day before by normal Iranians with me, and there was just no reason to think this day would be really different than any other day of business being carried out in a harried, noisy sort of frenetic environment.

Q: What are some of your recollections of what actually happened

that day? Where were you at the time the students went over the wall or broke through the wall? The gates, I guess.

Metrinko: In my office waiting for a couple of Iranians who had made an appointment with me, and basically started hearing noise and realized pretty quickly that a mob was forming around the embassy.

What I had done that morning specifically was to wrap up-- to rewrap a gift an Iranian had sent to me, which I did not want to accept because it was too valuable. Actually rather funny and very typical of Iranians. It's worth repeating. An Iranian revolutionary figure, without going into names, had asked me if I could help out a particular Iranian well-known professor and his family, who wanted to get visas. Because of the person who asked me, who was well known, and, as I say, a revolutionary personage, I arranged for the visas. The gentleman who got the visas, a former university president, called me up and said that he would like to come to my house to thank me. I agreed to let him come. He said that his wife wanted to meet me, and his children, before they left on their trip to the United States.

He came to my house and when he walked in-- it was just a five-minute courtesy call, but he had been so insistent that I said okay. And I was never averse to making more contacts. But when he came to the house he handed me a large package and he said, "This is from Isfahan." I thought it was a particular candy, since it was wrapped in a paper that the Isfahan candy was



always wrapped in. I thought it was a particular candy that Isfahan was famous for, called gaz, which is a white nougat candy. So I simply thanked him, put it on my kitchen table, where I had other boxes of candy and, you know, wrapped packages of candy and nuts and things of that sort, and didn't think about it.

About two days passed or three days passed and I had some more guests, and so I went back to the kitchen to get some candy to serve to the guests when they came in, unwrapped this and discovered a huge silver bowl, a rather beautiful Isfahan bowl. It was really funny, because I got so angry. I thought that I had the candy for the guests and instead there's this massive piece of silver.

So I rewrapped it, wrote him a note that night, and said, "Thank you very much, but I can't accept it," et cetera, and the next day took it to the embassy, called him, called his office and explained that I would not be able to accept it, that I was leaving it at the front gate with the receptionist and would he please come and pick it up. And he said that he would send someone to pick it up.

But I mean, that was the sort of day I was having, and I had more people who were supposed to be coming in. It was otherwise a normal day. I've always wondered whether he got the bowl, because there it was, a rather nice piece of silver. So-- well--

Q: So you heard the crowd assembling outside the embassy?

Metrinko: All around the embassy. Looked out, and instead of the normal group of ten or twenty, there was just a sea of faces. And when I looked out, they were already over the walls and, you know, crossing the yard. So I locked my safe and went over to where everybody was gathering in the ambassador's area.

Q: And then what happened?

Metrinko: Oh, basically the local employees and others were brought up from the main floor. We gathered on the second floor of the embassy, closed the doors behind us. Gas masks were distributed to protect us from tear gas, and the Marines took up positions with weapons at the various windows, and we just waited. We were in communication with the chargé, Bruce Laingen.

Q: He was at the foreign ministry, right?

Metrinko: He was at the foreign ministry. We had gotten to him by phone. We were in communication with a number of other offices. They all told us not to worry, things would straighten out. Help was on the way. The Imam was not going to let this happen. And all the other claptrap, for which the Iranian government later became infamous.

It took us a while to start burning documents and to start destroying things, because we assumed that-- we'd locked up, of course, and simply assumed that this would be dispersed. It did

not get dispersed.

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1;

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1.

Q: How soon after that did the students start invading the embassy building as such?

Metrinko: It's really hard to remember. That's sort of pretty well covered too.

Q: Yes, that's true, that's true.

Metrinko: Within, you know, the next hour or two hours.

Q: What did the students tell you about their purposes? You could communicate with them better than some of the staff members, I suppose.

Metrinko: I tried not to have to, but ultimately did.

[CROSS TALK]

Q: Yes, ultimately.

Metrinko: I was bound and blindfolded and not talked to by

anyone the next couple of hours. Just led over to an uncomfortable seat in the ambassador's residence and sat down and that was that, and nobody talked to us for the next couple of hours, or talked to me. So we didn't really have a chance to question them.

Q: My impression is that the takeover was originally supposed to be symbolic and temporary. Did you get that--

Metrinko: We had the feeling it would be over soon, but the soon just dragged on.

Q: Were there any indications that Khomeini knew about the plans?

Metrinko: I'm sure he did. There were clergy with the students.

Q: Now Gary Sick argues that Khomeini saw the hostage taking as a way to strengthen his hands against his opponents and to win an upcoming referendum on a new constitution.

Metrinko: I think he's right.

Q: To what extent would you agree with that?

Metrinko: I agree. Khomeini is totally unprincipled and he