

in my part of the NSC. Some people left, other people came in. It stayed quite small. No, I don't think--

Q: Okay.. Now, in '66 though '68 you were working on Vietnam issues solely, but in '68 you were nominated Ambassador to Turkey. You were there in Turkey--

Komer: Sixty-eight, and '69.

Q: Did you work on any Iran-related issues when you were in Turkey?

Komer: Yes.

Q: Mostly relating to CENTO questions? What was the state of CENTO at that period?

Komer: Comatose. We had CENTO council and I was the U.S. member, except when the Secretary of State came out for the annual meeting. We had a small CENTO military planning group and I was interested in what it was doing. I knew its head. So that was about it.

Q: The U.S. was not a member of CENTO. Was it an advisory role?

Komer: Well, no, it wasn't. We were not a member but we acted like a member. We went to all the meetings and we participated in all the sub-organizations and we contributed money. There was one big issue and that was the Iran-Turkish railroad, which did not seem to have much economic justification. But the Iranians and the Turks were eager. I think we finally contributed something like \$20 or \$30 million.

Q: It was foreign aid funds? What was Iran's role in CENTO at this point? Did it have much of a role?

Komer: Yes, the Iranians were always very supportive of CENTO. As you know, the Paks went out at one point, then the Turks lost interest--well, not really lost interest, they didn't have much funds--but the Iranians were the most enthusiastic member of CENTO from beginning to end.

Q: I got the impression the Shah was a little disillusioned also at the way CENTO--

Komer: Oh, yes. The Iranians bitched about it and tried to get us to take a more active role. That's one of the reasons why we funded that goddamn railroad, which AID was strongly against. It wasn't the first railroad AID had built but they were strongly against it. I wasn't enthusiastic either but the State Department agreed and I didn't feel strongly enough about it to go to the President.

Q: Was the focal of point of CENTO like military planning, war planning?

Komer: Yes.

Q: Contingency plans and so forth--

Komer: There weren't many. It was all against the Soviets and the CENTO staff, small though it was, served as a means of pulling together the CENTO countries to face the U.S.S.R. We had no commitment under CENTO to go to war to defend Iran or Turkey or anybody else, but the Soviets may have thought differently. I was asked when I was in Turkey, by the State Department, was CENTO worthwhile pursuing, staying on. I said, well, it's in a state of near bankruptcy, but the simple fact of the CENTO organization exists and that there's a treaty

relationship has a deterrent impact on the Soviet Union, so it would cost more for us to get rid of CENTO than it was costing us to keep it going. My conclusion was don't increase our CENTO effort, don't change our CENTO effort, but let's not sink CENTO because that may send the wrong signal to Moscow. So far as I know my cable had some influence. The department never went ahead with whoever had thought of getting rid of CENTO.

Q: You're arguing that, in other words, if CENTO was abolished the various members would have to spend more on military purposes to compensate for their lack of alliance?

Komer: Yes. The Soviets might increase their efforts to penetrate the area. So I thought that just keeping CENTO in existence wasn't very expensive as long as we didn't spend money on railroads. So I thought that the cost of getting rid of CENTO would be higher than just keeping it going along.

Q: Do you recall the names of any of the Iranian participants in the CENTO planning at this time or any figures that come to mind?

Komer: The Iranian ambassador was the--

Q: In Turkey.

Komer: Yes, was the Iranian member of the CENTO council. I don't even remember his name. I would if I thought about it enough.

Q: Any of the military people, the Iranian military people, that you might know?

Komer: No.

Q: Did you take part in actual military planning, yourself, or that was more left to the--

Komer: No. It was left to the military. We had a three-star general there, "Moose" Donovan, and the head of the military planning group was a two-star American general, a soldier. I got along very well with "Moose" Donovan and with this two-star and they sort of kept me clued. When I had a view, I expressed it to all. I had just previously been in Vietnam and knew a lot of military.

Q: Now, you joined the RAND Corporation in '69, after Turkey? Did you look, in the following year, sort of catch up on Iran-related issues? Mostly naval stuff, naval operations.

Komer: No. NATO.

Q: NATO. Now, in '77 you joined the Carter administration.

Komer: Right.

Q: Undersecretary of Defense for NATO Affairs.

Komer: No, no. It was as Advisor to the Secretary of Defense on NATO, and after two years he made me the Undersecretary, which was a global responsibility.

Q: As Advisor, what were your general responsibilities, just keeping him abreast of NATO issues?

Komer: No. Everything that had to do with NATO I bought a piece of and I became, very quickly, the Pentagon man on NATO. I did not regard my mission as being to keep him informed. There were a lot of people at the Pentagon keeping him informed. My mission was to do something about NATO, to help revivify it, and

I did. I was very active on that score and I became the top advisor in the U.S. government on NATO.

It's long been one of my concerns that, on an issue like NATO we don't provide the necessary institutional structure in the U.S. Government to pay the degree of attention to it we should. We earlier talked about CENTO. That was a peanut problem. NATO was an enormous problem. It was sixteen of our closest European friends, allies, and nobody in the entire U.S. government above the grade of colonel or office director was really paying any attention to NATO.

I thought it deserved at least an assistant secretary, which I was in effect though I didn't have the title. It didn't make any difference. It was better not to have the title. So I concocted a lot of schemes. We had two summits to which we sent Jimmy Carter to advance our proposals. We made lots of proposals. The long-term defense program was I guess the biggest and most complex but we made host nation support agreements with the Germans. We agreed to pre-position equipment for a marine brigade in north Norway. Oh, lots and lots of things.

It was a full-time job, but then I became undersecretary in late 1978. At that point I remained NATO advisor but I had to start looking at the world again, and one of the things that was most bothersome in the world was the obvious decline of the Shah in Iran. That made us start looking more seriously at defense in

what we called Southwest Asia, to distinguish it from Near East. And then of course the Shah fell and we had the intermediate government of Bakhtiar and Bani-Sadr. Then Khomeini took over and we had a whole new situation.

Well, one of our concerns from a defense point of view was that the Soviets might see a big opportunity to penetrate the area. They might even see an opportunity to attack and get a warm water port on the Indian Ocean. Then they moved into Afghanistan, which increased our fears several degrees, so we began to look seriously at defense of the area. We had had contingency plans for defense of the area prepared by CINCEUR [Commander in Chief Europe], the top American soldier in Europe. He had a big planning staff that covered everything over to Pakistan. His plan called for sending a large number of Americans to Iran in case of a Soviet attack, but it was not a very good plan. In fact I don't know how he ever would have gotten the divisions there.

But when Khomeini took over and was very anti-American, and all these other developments, the hostages and the Afghan business, we decided to get very serious about defense of Iran. But I found very few senior people in the Pentagon knew much about Iran. Half of them I don't think even knew where it was. I did. I'd just been out there. I had been the U.S. council

member on CENTO. So I wrote a memo to the Secretary in which I pointed out a few facts of life.

I said we're 8,000 miles from Tehran and the Soviets are only 400 miles from Tehran, but that's not the entire problem. The entire problem is that the Soviets, as soon as they cross the border, run into a lot of mountains. First the Elburz Mountains, when they get farther south the Zagros. I said CENTO, when it looked at this problem, and the British when they looked at the problem before CENTO--you know the Brits were concerned with this area before World War I, before World War II, and after--and they said, if you're going to try to defend against a superior force coming south, you'd better defend a mountain line. Since the mountain line in the north was too far away, we decided to defend the Zagros which, by the way, protects both Iraq and Iran. If you're going down to the Saudi oil fields it's easier to go through Iraq, through Ruwandiz Pass than it is to go through Iran.

As I said, we probably could have a very good chance of deterring and a somewhat lesser chance of defending if we got some troops into the Zagros Mountains. But the problem is how the hell do we get them there? We have no bases in the Indian Ocean or in the Persian Gulf which is causing the great problems now. I had previously gotten a base, or been the key man in getting a base, at Diego Garcia but I pointed out that was 2700

miles from the Straits of Hormuz. That's pretty far away. We had put a lot of stuff at Diego Garcia, now it's an invaluable base, but it ain't adequate for operating in the Persian Gulf. So I said we need more airlift, more sealift, fast sealift, and we need more bases in the area, and we probably need a separate command. Well, we created a separate command, a rapid deployment force, which is now Central Command. And I said, you can't defend the oil fields in the oil fields. If you have operations going on an awful lot of the oil facilities are just going to get wrecked. So the best way to defend the oil fields is to find a defensible place a couple of hundred miles north of them. Well, a couple of hundred miles north is the Zagros which defend Khuzistan and where the Iraqis were stopped in the Iran-Iraq War originally. Well, I laid this all out in about a thirteen-page memo. Then we got a request from Mr. Brzezinski over at the NSC.

Q: Was this before the hostage crisis?

Komer: No.

Q: This is during.

Komer: It's during.

Q: Okay.

Komer: Anyway, just a week later along came Brzezinski with a little note asking, what does the Defense Department plan to do in event of a crisis in Iran or a Soviet attack? Well, the Secretary said, you do it. That was part of my job as Undersecretary for Policy-- to maintain relations with the White House or the NSC. So I took my little memo and sent it over, saying this is our concept of contingency operations in the Persian Gulf. Well, they didn't know shit from Shinola about it so they bought it. The State Department bought it too. The only people who didn't buy it were the Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS].

Q: What accounts for that?

Komer: Very simple. The Navy wanted to defend Iran--the oil fields--with naval vessels, which we pointed out couldn't even go into the Persian Gulf. You notice even today we're not sending any carrier battle groups in. We've got one out there but we're not sending it anywhere near the Gulf itself. It stays out in the Arabian Sea. The reasons seem logical, but the Navy still wanted to be the key service.

The Air Force wanted to defend the oil fields by bombing the living bejesus out of any Soviet attack. Well, I said, where are

you going to base your aircraft? Oh, they said, we'll use eastern Turkish bases. This was raw meat to me. I'd say, you're not going to get Turkish bases. The Turks aren't going to let you use them. Later on the Turks told that, told us politely we could not use their bases.

Well, the Marines had their own idea. They would sail over there in all their amphibious shipping and would land way down by the Straits of Hormuz in a amphibious assault and take over. Well, there aren't enough Marines to do it and there isn't enough amphibious shipping. Besides which, when you're down at Hormuz, you're way behind the oil fields, not in front of them.

So, the only guys who came up with something sensible were the Army. They said we ought to defend and I said, where? Well, they said, we don't know yet. I said, make it the Zagros. Since I was a personal friend of the Chief of Staff, he listened. I explained it to him and so we got the Army. Well, since the Chiefs were divided four ways, we said the hell with it, we won't even consult the Chiefs. They can see what we're doing and if they have any objections to it they can inform us. I don't even know whether there's a JCS concept yet, but a friend of mine, whom I had recommended as the first chief of the RDF [Rapid Deployment Force], P. X. Kelley, agreed and started doing contingency planning on the basis of my memo as the concept. I didn't do any detailed contingency planning--that's a military

matter--but my paper became, with certain modifications of one kind or another, the concept. I emphasize it was a high-risk concept, you know, there's no assurance we're going to get enough forces out there to hold in the Zagros, in timely enough fashion. If we've got a year to do it, we can do it.

Q: Was the plan basically a conventional military operation?

Komer: Yes. I never discussed with anybody any nuclear options. If the JCS had a couple of colonels working on nuclear options they didn't tell me and I didn't ask. But obviously it's an option; if we can't get out there fast enough or if we're losing out there, we can drop a few nukes.

Q: I heard there was talk of using nuclear mines, that's what I read somewhere.

Komer: What?

Q: Nuclear mines or something like that.

Komer: Yes and no. We did not have any weapons out there, But we had looked at nuclear mining in Turkey, and we looked at it other places too. But it was not a serious thing because this

was at the beginning of the 1980s and I didn't believe we were going to fight nuclear wars anywhere. Certainly not in Iran. I'm telling you all this because I believe that it was my concept, which in turn had its origins in CENTO planning, which became the approved U.S. plan. Now that may be classified so you want to be careful about that, although people have written about it in just the sense I described. And that, I guess, was the last thing I had to do with Iran.

Q: _____.

Komer: I was involved in reviewing some of the planning for the rescue mission. We were under such pressure from the White House to come up with options to make the Iranians cry uncle and release the hostages that we finally came up with the rescue mission which I thought was a brilliant idea but probably too difficult.

Q: You thought that before it took place?

Komer: Yes, and then I was no longer invited to meetings.

Q: When you expressed your skepticism?

Komer: No, it had nothing to do with my skepticism. I think that was encouraged. I would encourage the Secretary and the Chairman, with whom I worked closely, to have me involved, but what apparently happened was that we decided that this was the preferred option and when we were going operational the fewer people who knew about it the better, so they just didn't clue me. That was why I wasn't invited to the later meetings. When it happened I was very surprised but I had been in the first couple of weeks of the planning. It's a damn shame that we had such bad luck.

Q: Now, in late '78 when the Shah was falling from power, did you take part in any discussions of policy with Iran at that point.

Komer: Yes, we had constant discussions over at the NSC with Brzezinski.

Q: You were involved in those discussions?

Komer: Yes. Well, it was not the NSC level. It was the next level down. I was the representative who handled all the NSC stuff, and there was a lot of it. So before anything went to the NSC we would have plenty of discussions, interagency discussions,

at the working level, and I was at the top of the working level. So I would participate in the discussions and keep the Secretary clued so when we did have an NSC meeting--I don't even recall whether they had one.

Q: I don't think so. No, not a full meeting as such.

Komer: But they had plenty of meetings and, you know, I would keep him clued and express my views vigorously--which were not to get excited at--what?--59 hostages, 159? I forget what the number was.

Q: This was during the hostage crisis.

Komer: Yes.

Q: Oh, I was referring to the downfall of the Shah in '78, whether you were involved in any meetings at that point.

Komer: Yes. You know, Brzezinski was a great activist but the only thing he could do was have meetings. Every time he had a meeting I had to go over.

[End side one, tape one; beginning side two]

Q: What was your outlook at the time of the Iranian revolution and what role did you think the U.S. should play in _____?
_____?

Komer: There was no official position because we were never asked for one. The Secretary was very clever at avoiding official positions he didn't have to take. They might restrict him at some later time. I would say that most of us in the Pentagon felt that we should have supported the Shah and his military much more vigorously than we did, and the military. Now this was natural for the U.S. military. They'd been working with the Iranian military. As for the civilians, remember this was a U.S. democratic regime, liberal democratic regime. Harold Brown's a liberal democrat, so am I, so were most of us, and we generally felt that the Shah had probably reached the end of his rope. He's not a strong man. He went in for a lot of bluster, but not a strong man. We thought some other civilian regime could have been worked out. None of us knew anything about or took adequately into account the fundamentalists. We had no experience with the fundamentalists. Our intelligence was very poor. Khomeini seemed like a fanatic. Fanatics tend to get eaten up by revolutions. But, generally, the Pentagon didn't want to get so excited about the hostages. The Pentagon also

tended to be more favorable towards the Shah and that was about it.

Q: Did you take part in any of the discussions that led up to the Huyser mission?

Komer: No.

Q: No? In January '79 I think that was.

Komer: Yes. Poor "Dutch" [Huyser] sort of bitched about it and came around to see me a couple of times when he was back, but I always let the Secretary handle that personally. It was really a White House operation, and Al Haig was bitching about it constantly.

Q: Yes. My impression from reading Huyser's memos _____
_____. Now, you talked a little bit ago about contingency planning going on during '79 and I guess '80. Now, before the hostage crisis there was some sort of equilibrium developing with the Iranian government. I mean it was not--you still had relations with Tehran and there were discussions going on of the future. Were there any informal military discussions

of these kinds of issues? There was just more planning on the Pentagon that was not collated with Iranian planning at all?

Komer: We knew what Iranian planning was. After all we had had a military relationship with Iran that started in 1942. But we normally don't discuss our planning with friends. I thought we should have. I think we should more frequently than we do, myself, because we've got to get there and who in the hell's going to hold the place until we get there? These were the kinds of issues I dealt with as the titular chief planner in the Pentagon. I didn't have enough time to deal with them, I'm sorry to say. So, that's sort of the end of my connection with Iran.

Q: I have no further questions unless you have any comments you want to make. Okay. Well, thanks very much for your time. You were saying?

Komer: I had a great deal to do with our policy toward Iran really from 1961 in the beginning of the Kennedy Administration right on through to time I left the Defense in '81, but I've described really most of the things I was involved in. It's an example, I have to admit, looking back on it, not only of Presidential diplomacy, Presidential interest in these issues, which was very high under Kennedy and Carter--Carter primarily

because of the hostages--but also an example of where second and third level people are heavily involved. Some of the issues that we've talked about Johnson just didn't take an interest in. I merely kept him broadly informed.

Q: Was that because his priorities were different?

Komer: Yes. His priorities were primarily domestic. He didn't know much about foreign affairs. He didn't know much about Iran. I was with him in '62 when he met the Shah. He gave Johnson the big, you know, the generous treatment--including golden caviar. But Johnson could have gotten involved anytime he wanted to. He was a good delegater and he didn't let anything happen unless he thought that this was a sensible way to go.

Carter was all confused about Iran and other issues. He had a bum run of luck and now we're in the latest episode.

[Laughing] I think by and large our policy is sensible except for the mines. We have always neglected mines. You know a second ship got hit by a mine. I've always recommended mining options because they're cheap, because the other guy has to do something in order to trigger them, and they somehow are less provocative than a bombing raid or an offshore landing or something like that. But that's a completely different matter.

Komer - 2 - 81

Q: Okay. Thank you.

[End of session #2]

KOMER, ROBERT W.

-----Name-----	-----Page-----
Abd al-Rashid, Ali,	22, 23
Amini, Ali,	12, 13, 32-35, 39-41
Amory, Robert,	4, 6
Arsanjani, Hasan,	18, 41
Ayyub Khan, General Mohammad,	26
Baghdad Pact (CENTO),	30-32, 45
Brown, Harold,	77
Brzezinski, Zbigniew,	70-71, 76
Bundy, McGeorge,	6-10, 21-22, 24-26, 38, 51
Carter, James, E.,	9, 79-80
Cline, Raymond,	4
Coolidge, Charles,	4
Critchfield, James,	42
Diem, Ngo Dinh,	24
Donovan, General "Moose",	65
Dulles, Allen	7
Eisenhower, Dwight D,	6, 9
Events of 1953,	11
Forrestal, Michael,	9
Gandhi, Indira,	38
Grant, James,	10, 32
Haig, Alexander,	78
Hanson, Kenneth,	15-16, 43
Haynes, Richard,	8
Holmes, Julius,	12, 15, 27, 42, 53
Huyser, General "Dutch",	78
Johnson, Lyndon B.,	22, 24-31, 38, 46-51, 57, 80
Johnson, Robert,	17
Kelley, Paul X.,	72
Kennedy, John F.,	6-10, 12, 14, 18-26, 28, 36-38, 46-47, 57, 79.
Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhollah,	45, 58-59, 68, 77
Khrushchev, Nikita,	36
Kuss, Henry,	53
Langer, William,	4
Lincoln, Evelyn,	19
MacMillan, Harold,	19-22
McComber, William,	52
Meyer, Armin,	53
Nasser, Gamal Abdel,	7, 11
National Security Council (NSC),	4-6, 9-10, 17, 28, 30, 36, 37
Nixon, Richard M.,	50

KOMER, ROBERT W.

-----Name-----	-----Page-----
Nuri al-Sa'id,	32
Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza Shah,	7, 11-14, 17, 29-37, 39-45, 46-51, 52-56, 58, 62, 75-76, 77-78
Rostow, Walter,	6, 27
Saunders, Harold E.,	9, 34
SAVAK,	42-43
Sloan, Franklin,	52
Smith, Bromley,	10
Smith, Walter B.,	4
Talbot, Philips,	7, 10, 12, 25, 32, 51, 54
Twitchell, Hamilton,	13-14
White Revolution of 1963,	12-14, 18, 39-40, 43-44
Yatsevitch, General Gratian,	27, 42
Young, T. Cuyler,	17-18

