Parsons: Mid [nineteen] seventies. He went to be Ambassador in Australia or New Zealand or somewhere like that. Oh.

Q: That was when Mr. Alam was Minister.

Parsons: That was when Alam was Minister of Court.

Q: And he was the second in command, as it were, and his wife. [They were Khosrow and Shirin Akmal]

Parsons: Yes, he was the next one down. I simply can't remember. His name begins with Alef. But I can't remember. They were great friends of ours. But, of course, when they were in our house and we were all relaxed they were different people to what they were in the environment of the court. This was something we weren't really used to.

Q: Have you ever been to the court here? Wouldn't that be a little protocolaire?

Parsons: Well, yes. The court here is protocolaire. But, of course, the difference, I suppose, is this, that the court here is symbolic and ceremonial. Whereas, the court in Iran was actually very much an integral part of the government of the country. And this is the distinction. Courts, monarchical courts are almost as part of their nature, rather protocalaire, rather stiff. But, of

course, if they're purely symbolic and ceremonial presentational that's one thing. But if they're actually part of the government of the country that's something else.

Q: Yes. Was Lady Parsons critical of Persian women in the way they behaved or in the way they dressed, the way they acted?

Parsons: I think, again, both of us found - and I mean particularly my wife - that it wasn't exactly -- I mean it was a very class concious society in those days. I don't think we're very class conscious people. That there was a very kind of stringent social hierarchy and so on which makes in our view for some kind of artificiality. Also, I think, having been in the Islamic world for so long, my wife particularly was rather shocked by the un-Islamic attitude of a lot of the ladies.

Q: In what way?

Parsons: Well. You know, the disregard of Ramazon and all that kind of thing. I think she found it rather odd, rather strange that this should be the case in a Moslem country.

Q: They were so Westernized, you think.

Parsons: Yes. They were in a way, agressively Westernized. I think what my wife found was that -- For example, when we were in Egypt -- Educated Westernized Egyptian ladies, you know, were

still at the same time very good Moslems. They always fasted in Ramazon. They always went through all the motions, went to the Mosque and so on and so forth. And to find this total divorce from the country's traditions amongst the upper classes, it was rather odd. It was kind of surprising to us. Our previous experience of your part of the world had been four or five years in Turkey which is a very -- compared to you - informal country. Very, very informal country. Very little stiffness of any kind. Also, in spite of Ata Turkism a very religious country. Even in the nineteen fifties, the mosques on a Friday were fuller in Ankara than they would have been, say, in Cairo. And this went right up and down the entire structure. The Arab world, of course, much more traditional. I think we were surprised. It was something alien to our experience. And when we'd been there a short time, we realized of course that this was very much a function of the upper Westernized class and it was quite different from the Iranians we met at a different level.

Q: Yes. Now I -- Although I find your wife's attitude understandable in so far as she was -- She noticed a difference. I wonder why it shocked her? I mean, it seems to me that the reason why Persians when they become educated they become irreligious, is because they're fundamentally not really congenial. I mean, Islam is not fundamentally very congenial to the Persian psyche. They really are very different from the Arabs. I feel that it's something that has never stopped, hence all the troubles. I mean as you know, all the heresies in Islam have come from Persia. There

must be some reason for it and to my mind is that fundamentally the Persians would be much, much happier as Christians or as Zoroastrians, let's say than they are as Moslems. And so when they become educated, the first thing they shed, so to speak, is the appearance of Islam. I don't know why Lady Parsons should be shocked by this.

Parsons: Well. I think perhaps I've used Islam in too narrow a sense. I think really what we felt was (shocked, again, perhaps is the wrong word) -- I think what we both felt and perhaps my wife more than me was that in England, for example, if you have, say, a landowner obviously he has a different level of education and a different accent probably to the people who are actually living on his estate. But in their tradition there is common ground. They kept in touch although there is obviously a social hierarchy. The same is true in urban society to a great extent. I think what we felt was that there obviously was a very deep traditionalism with which Islam is strongly associated in Iran. And that the upper classes, in our time, seemed to us to be divorced not only from the religion of the people, maybe that's not so important, I rather agree with you there, there're also divorced from the general tradition. I mean, they seem to be totally different people.

[end of side two of tape two]

Q: You were just saying that you remember a very --

Parsons: I remember a very wise Englishman (I forget who it was) who'd been staying with me out there, saying to me when he said goodbye to me at the airport, "Well. This has been a very nice stay and it's been fascinating to have spent some time in the last Czarist state in the world." What he meant by that was that he'd discovered a society where the upper classes were completely, totally different to everybody else. I mean rather like Tolstoy's Russia where, you know, everybody was speaking French and hardly even knew how to speak Russian. I don't think you can say it was like that in Iran because, of course, everybody spoke Persian. There seemed to us, you see, this enormous divide which, of course, doesn't actually exist in the Arab world.

Q: It doesn't?

Parsons: No. No. I don't think it does. It may have, of course. It may have existed, say, in monarchical Eqypt where the upper crust were basically non-Egyptian. They were of Turkish descent. They preferred to speak French rather than Arabic. Some of them didn't even know Arabic. They didn't have a genuine Arab society where everybody is ethnically the same from top to bottom. That gulf -- I'm not saying Arab countries are wonderful or anything like that, God knows they've got plenty of -- But that kind of gulf doesn't exist. Nor does it, for that matter, in Turkey in my experience.

Q: Yes. Well. Probably it was something new because in the old days, for instance, when I was with Bakhtiary tribe the Khan's used

to live with them and in fact do the migration with them. Whereas later, of course, they were called to the capital and they became totally alienated. So it is a recent, probably a recent phenomenon. No?

Parsons: Well. I think this is probably true. You see, I suppose in a way -- If I use the word shock, I don't mean shock in the sense that we were alienated by it. But it came as a shock because society seemed to us to be so different to everything we'd actually read about Iran in the past. You say that Bakhtiary Khan or Qashgrai Khan or somebody like that, obviously in the old days he was much more like the English landowner I was talking about. Although he was richer and upper class, as it were, he still had an organic link right through to all the people of his tribe and area. This is what seemed to us to be lacking in latter day Pahlani Iran when we were there. The upper classes seemed to be a different race of people entirely from the ordinary people.

Q: Now that, of course, contributed probably in the long term as we've just suggested with the comparison with Czarist Russia where suddenly people turned, so to speak. Do you see?

Parsons: Yes. I think it did. I think it contributed to a kind of mutual misunderstanding. I remember an Iranian friend of mine telling me -- After the revolution when neither of us were in the country any more, that he had been extremely surprised when he'd been to the Bazaar one day with his wife and his wife had a short

dress on and somebody in the shop refused to serve her. He said that this came as an enormous shock to him. He couldn't understand why this man was upset. And he's a highly intelligent man; this demonstrates a complete severance between one class and the other. He had lost his own tradition completely. This came to us as a surprise, a shock I think probably is the wrong word. It certainly worried me from the political point of view because it seemed that it was very difficult for the people and the upper classes to conduct any form of dialogue either way when there was this divorce between the two of them.

Q: That's right. That really leads to the question that I was going to ask after that. You lived in Arab countries a long time. You had a great experience with that. Aside from what we have just talked about, how did they sort of compare, the Arab countries that were trying to develop and were trying to modernize and Industrialize -- How did they compare in various aspects of their work like development, human rights, their attitudes towards each other and towards the West?

Parsons: Well. It's difficult, of course, to generalize because the Arab countries do vary so much one from the other. I mean, I never felt as strongly about the human rights business in Iran as many people in Britain did, in Parliament and the press and that kind of thing, because their standard of comparison was between Iran and Britain. My standard of comparison was between Iran and the rest of the region and I didn't notice much difference except in one

or two cases such as smaller Arab countries where the situation was much more relaxed. In developmental terms it was very interesting. Wealth in a significant sense had come to Iran very late, really in the [nineteen] seventies and so, developmentally, Iran had started a long way behind in time. A much smaller Arab country like Iraq, for example, had had oil wealth which could actually have an impact on a much smaller population much earlier than Iran, because Iran is so huge. The same amount of money obviously went a much shorter distance. Some of the rich Arabs and of course obviously the small sheikhdoms in say Kuwait, had had a very long developmental start over Iran. I think what impressed me enormously was the actual quality of the human raw material. It struck me, going around a lot of industry as I did in Iran, that although the people working on the shop floor were pretty new to it - certainly their fathers had probably never heard of a factory. They probably had only been in the thing for a year or two themselves. But they were every bit as good in every way, technically and inventively and imaginatively as any European work force that I've ever come across, that I've seen at close quarters, including our own. This was enormously impressive and far, far more so than anything I'd seen in the Arab world. This gave me a strong feeling that, if the Shah's very rapid plans could succeed, he actually had a human base which would enable Iran to take off in a big way. I remember talking about the Peykan factory with the chairman of Ford, U.S. I think it was, I can't remember. It was some great American automobile grandee. I remember asking him. I said, "How does the automobile industry compare in manufacturing terms with its equivalent in Europe and the

United States?" And he said, "Extremely well." He said, "We've got nothing better in America in terms of actual performance." And he certainly couldn't have said that in most developing countries. This was enormously impressive. The problem, of course, was that because of the size of the country and the size of the population, the Shah had an enormous long way to go in a very short time. And, of course, this led to disruptions and dislocations and all the rest of it. But, essentially, I think if he'd been able to achieve what he'd set out to achieve, he would certainly have found that his human material was up to the challenge, as it were. They were perfectly capable of handling a totally different, transformed society.

Q: So it compared better even though -- In relation to other Arab Countries? Or, I mean --

Parsons: Oh, yes. It compared well I would have said with any country. We had a lot of British manufacturing joint ventures, about fifteen or twenty, in the country. I've seen the equivalent all over the region and we never heard the British managers complaining about quality, about hard work on the part of the work force, about their actual skills. They were perfectly happy with the Iranian work forces. They didn't have to bring in a lot of foreign management or anything like that. You would have one Englishman supervising the basic contract, whatever it might be. Then the whole of the rest of the thing was Iranian. Right from the beginning. This was very, very impressive indeed. So there was

enormous potential there, I think. And, of course, if the worst had not come to the worst in [nineteen] seventy-nine, Iran really was on its way in this sense.

Q: It seems such a pity that the clocks should be put back now.

Parsons: Oh. I agree. I think it is. You take the military side too. Take for example the tanks. The Chieftan tank is one of the most complicated tanks in the world to operate. You need a very high standard of skill and education, to be able to handle the thing. When you drive a Chieftan tank, you're not actually sitting up behind the wheel. You're lying flat on your back looking into a system of mirrors. Now that's an extremely difficult thing to do. And I very much doubt, for example, whether the Soviet Union would ever adopt a tank like that because they simply wouldn't be able to get soldiers who would be able to work them. But the Iranian soldiers work them extremely well with minimal training. And, of course, it's interesting in that context that the work force in the modern sector of the economy, although it was still only a fairly small proportion of the economy by [nineteen] seventy-eight, were just about the last to join the revolution. And they really only joined the revolution when no more raw materials were coming into the country. So the factories had to close and they had nothing else to do except go on the street. I felt when I used to go around all these factories that these people were actually changing in the same sense as English people changed through the Industrial Revolution. They were becoming different people and were shedding

these traditions and perhaps becoming over-materialistic but looking at life in a different way. And, of course, if that had spread through the country it would have all worked. But (a) I think there wasn't time and (b) I think because of this (I don't like these expressions) kind of cultural alienation between the upper class and the masses, the ruling powers didn't see that driving the whole thing too fast was actually having a reverse effect. Now if it had just been, you know, difficult, O.K. But it was actually making it worse. The faster they tried to drive them towards the modern world, the more they dug their toes in and the greater the resistance grew. If there'd been less of this alienation, a little more understanding, well maybe different tactics, different presentations would have been adopted and we wouldn't have come to such a crisis.

Q: From the point of view of human rights -- It was thought that the human rights situation wasn't any worse than anywhere else in the Third World, so to speak.

Parsons: Well. Yes. Of course, it's impossible to tell. How does one know? Most countries are full of rumors. And the thing, of course, that makes things happen is that everybody always believes the rumors. They may not be all true. Maybe ten percent are true, maybe ninety percent, maybe fifty percent. How do you find out? Of course, according to the rumors the situation in Iran was absolutely awful. All I know from my own experiences, although I don't doubt that some terrible things were happening under Savak, I think when I

was, for example, in Egypt in the height of Nasser's time (very early nineteen sixties), I actually knew personally far more people who either themselves had been in prison and had been tortured or had close relations who had been in prison and had been tortured or executed or whatever it might have been, than was the case when I was in Iran. So the only assumption I could make, with no first hand knowledge (How could I get that unless I went every day to every jail or something), without any first hand knowledge -- My conclusion was that -- The balance of evidence was there probably was much that was true and that much was not. And when the Shah used to ask me why the Western press and Parliament and all the rest of it were always being so anti-Iran, the only explanation I had for all of it (maybe I've said this before) was that -- He used to say, "Why do they always attack me when they don't, for example, attack what's happening in Iraq?" My only explanation, and I found it difficult to explain, was because he was insisting that the outside world judge him by European standards whereas the Iraqis were not. Therefore, the Western media, et cetera, more or less took it for granted that the Iraqis would behave in that way. But since he expected to be judged by Western standards, he got a worse time. But I don't know. I just simply don't know whether things were actually qualitatively better or worse in Iran than in neighboring countries. My guess would be nothing much in it.

Q: Yes. It now emerges from everything one hears that it -- Really the situation wasn't as bad as it was --

Parsons: Well. Certainly, I rather agree with that. When I left the country, the whole thing had collapsed, I followed very closely all the news I could get about the revelations that the revolution would produce about the behavior of Savak and the prisons and the tortured people and all the rest of it. And, in fact, there was jolly little in the end.

Q: Hardly anything. Thirty years of rule and according to their own to this lot's figures, a couple of hundreds.

Parsons: Yes. That's right.

Q: I mean, that's a couple of hundred too many, you might say --

Parsons: Yes. Sure. But it wasn't the hundred thousand that everybody --

Q: Also they were all people who were engaged upon destructive activities.

Parsons: You know, obviously, I had a difficult time from my own side of that, from the British Parliament, from the press and all the rest of it. And it was a factor in the equation. But I don't think it was ever really a very important factor in our inter-governmental relationship.

Q: No?

Parsons: No. I don't think so.

Q: And what about the relation, the attitude of other Arab countries towards Iran? What did you feel when you traveled around our country. How do you envision them? Were they afraid of Iran or were they proud of it and saying that we could do the same thing or --

Parsons: Well. I suppose when you get two distinct but contiguous cultures of that kind, you always get mutual dislike rather like the British and the French I suppose. There's no doubt that Iranians don't like Arabs and Arabs don't like Iranians as a general proposition. Certainly, this has been my experience.

Q: Well. I know why Iranians don't like the Arabs. But I wonder why the Arabs don't like the Iranians, simply because the Iranians have been conquered by the Arabs and you always dislike the conqueror but --

Parsons: I think certainly in the kind of way the join comes, as it were, down the Persian Gulf -- I think the Arabs are genuinely afraid of Iranian imperialism, of Iranian expansionism. I think the general view amongst Arabs, as I know it, about Iranians is that Iranians are over sophisticated, supercilious, consciously different

from them -- And look down on them. And, therefore, they reciprocate in kind.

Q: During the last period of your stay in Iran, you saw a great deal of the Shah. Indeed, it seems to me that he turned to you a great deal for comfort and advice and you obviously gave the best advice you could. But you also agreed with him that he shouldn't use too much force and not use the Army and so on. But do you suppose that you influenced his choice of General Azhari [Army general, Prime Minister during the pre-revolution] as opposed to somebody who would have been stronger like Oveissi [Army general] who probably would have been able to control the crowds or -- I mean --

Parsons: I doubt it very much. I don't think so because we never actually discussed individuals in that sense. I just felt (as he did too) -- he always said to me, that there wasn't a military solution to that situation. That in a country like Iran, the more people that were shot would simply accelerate the pace of the revolution - because particularly, I think, in any country where you have a system of extended families and so on, any time you kill one person, you make another five hundred enemies. And unless a population is very easily cowed, which I don't think the Iranians are (and obviously weren't), I just simply don't think that kind of thing works. Equally, if one's going to be really cold blooded about it, it never occurred to me that the Iranian armed forces and security forces would be prepared to act in the way that Northern

Europeans have acted. Russians or Germans. For example, when the strike started -- I imagine if that had happened in the Soviet Union that they would have got hold of the first five hundred ringleaders and started shooting them from one end of the line until they all said, "Look, we give up." And that would have happened in Hitler's Germany. For all the reputation that the Shah's security forces had, it never occurred to me that they would be prepared to behave in that way in a country like Iran. And unless they were going to behave in that kind of way, I couldn't see any military way in which a nationwide strike would be broken. It seemed to me it was only possible to break it through political means. The old fashioned idea which a lot of my Persian friends believed that, you know, you've only got to go and fire a few shots at these chaps and they'll run away, was just totally misplaced.

Q: Yes.

Parsons: They were coming on in larger numbers, in fact.

Q: That's right. So you don't think that if instead of General Azhari it had been General Oveissi who was much tougher and had quite tougher ideas about the situation, it would have made a difference?

Parsons: No. I don't think it would. You see I don't think it would for two reasons. First of all, if it had been practicable just to get tougher like that I think it would have probably made

things worse. But equally, you see, by the time that the military government came in (within a few days in fact of the military government coming in) the problem was not so much that the streets were full of rioters and demonstrators. That phase was over for the time being. The problem was that everybody had gone home. So what would Oveissi have done? Gone from house to house and pulled everybody out of their houses individually and started beating them on the head and shooting them or something? It was just impractical. The streets were empty.

Q: I see. What about earlier when there were hundreds of thousands of people out in the street?

Parsons: All I can say is that everybody expected that Jaleh square would have that effect. I don't know how many people were killed in Jaleh square but certainly in three figures, not in two figures. I mean hundreds not tens. I know that they were fired on by the machine guns from these light tanks, the Scorpions. So a lot of casualties must have been inflicted. That certainly didn't cure anything.

Q: Yes. So it wouldn't have made any difference.

Parsons: My own feeling all along was that the people who thought that the tougher policy would work were still under the spell of what had happened in 1963 when there'd been a short, sharp exchange in the Bazaar and that had been that. But by [nineteen]

seventy-eight the whole country had risen just about (by the late summer of [nineteen] seventy-eight). Not just in Tehran but really throughout the whole country. It was something of a different dimension altogether. And then when there was an equivalent of the Bazaar of 1963 at Jaleh square and it failed to have any effect except a reverse effect, I certainly became convinced that a tough policy just was not going to work.

Q: That's right. What about Sullivan? [American Ambassador in Iran in 1978] What did he think?

Parsons: Sullivan, I think, as far as I remember -- We used to talk a lot and I think he felt exactly the same as I did.

Q: Did he consult you? Sullivan?

Parsons: Oh yes. I mean, we used to consult. Perhaps that's the wrong word. But we used to discuss the situation very frequently. And occasionally we saw the Shah together. Much less than has been suggested, you know, in the press. I don't know how many times I saw the Shah but I suppose I probably saw him with Sullivan only, say, three or four times and that was always at the Shah's request, not at mine or Sullivan's for that matter. We would find that the other one was there when we got up to the palace. But we used to discuss the situation a great deal. We went to see Sharif Emami together on a few occasions because he sent for us together. So we were very close and I would say that, broadly speaking, we shared exactly the same view of the situation.

Q: What did you think of his book? Of Sullivan's book?

Parsons: I enjoyed it. I can't remember much of it now. In fact I forget books so quickly. Considering the circumstances in which he left the American diplomatic service - I mean, he was pretty upset at the way the whole thing had gone - I think he was actually fairly discreet. He could have said much more than he did.

Q: Oh, I see. What I don't understand is that -- Do you suppose that the Shah just consulted you and Sullivan and asked your advice and so on because he didn't have anyone else to ask -- Was he the victim of the old myth that you --

Parsons: I don't know. I --

Q: Some power.

Parsons: I find this very difficult to answer. I mean, to start with I believe that he was consulting Sullivan because after all the Americans are a super power and they had a vast presence in the country. And the whole texture of the relationship between America and Iran was higher quality, as it were, than between Britain and Iran. We were very much a secondary power. To start with I did believe that he was talking to me simply because he wanted somebody to talk to who was not in any sense parti pris in the action. Wasn't part of the revolution or anything. Toward the end I did have a ghastly feeling that he somehow did expect me to be in a

position to work some miracle or other. That I was really going to pull in the strings and so on. I reckon myself, you know, everybody is human, probably with half his mind he believed one thing and with the other half his mind he believed something else. Right up to the end.

Q: I see. You just mentioned Sharif Emami. He was apparently the head man of the Freemasons in Iran which have their counterpart in Europe --

Parsons: Yes.

Q: Apparently when Mr. Alam died, the British government wrote that he -- very good things about him, I meant the newspapers or other and that he had been a friend of Britain. Well now, I realize that when you and I say a friend of Britain --

Parsons: Yes.

Q: It just means that.

Parsons: Yes, quite --

Q: When in Persia you hear somebody's a friend of Britain they think that they actually are absolutely like puppets and listen to what they say and probably are on the payroll. But this we know was not the case. But, none the less, was Sharif Emami considered also

a friend of Britain and was he in any way connected with the Freemasonry here? In other words was there some kind of influence, some kind of interrelation between the British Freemasonry and the Persian Freemasonry and Sharif Emami and the British government or any of those things?

Parsons: No. I don't believe so for one second. I mean we, the British as a whole, successive Ambassadors and all the rest of it, had been dealing very closely with Asdollah Alam for a very, very long time. We all knew him extremely well and we were all good personal friends of his. Sharif Emami was not a well known person to us at all. We knew all about him and that kind of thing and we knew what he'd done. But none of us really knew him very well. I mean his first foreign language was German. He wasn't really at home with English people. The Freemasonry thing had absolutely nothing to do with it in my judgement. I'd never myself had anything to do with Freemasonry. I don't particularly like that kind of thing. This is a personal view. I don't like secret societies and that kind of thing. I've never been a Mason. I certainly never would become one. I think I did know that Sharif Emami was a Mason. But it wasn't a factor in our equation at all.

Q: You don't think that his choice had been influenced by the Freemasons here or anything?

Parsons: Oh, I don't believe so. I don't believe so. It may have been influenced by the Freemason clique within Iran but it would

have had nothing to do with us. Whatever people may or may not believe about Freemasonry in Britain, it may have some influence in commerce and that kind of thing. But as far as I know, it certainly hasn't if it ever has had, any influence in government and politics for God knows how many years.

Q: That's right. It seems to me that it's not a political force at all in this country.

Parsons: No. It's the kind of thing that people with conspiracy theories try to prove, you know. They say, "Ah, you'll find half the cabinet are Masons," or something like that but I personally think all that kind of thing is all rubbish. I always have.

Q: In his book "Answer to History" do you know why the Shah more or less suggests that Mr. Shappur Bakhtiar was a choice of the British government and he mentions that in reference to Lord Brown's visit to the Shah.

Parsons: Yes. This was very odd. Again, I think, this showed that by that time or at least perhaps even just after the event that the Shah was influenced by the folklore. Shappur Bakhtiar had never been at all well known to us, the British. After all we all know his whole background is French. I think he was actually in the French Army in the War, wasn't he?

Q: He was in the Resistance.

Parsons: In the Resistance. That's right. Because of that in a sense, I mean, he hadn't gravitated into the Anglo --

[end of side one of tape three]

Q: You were just saying that you never met Bakhtiar until seventy-eight.

Parsons: No. I didn't meet him at least not conciously. I may have just shaken hands with him at parties and so on. But I didn't actually talk to him or anything until [nineteen] seventy-eight. George Brown's visit was entirely personal. He had some connection with an Iranian businessman in England and came out entirely on a personal basis.

Q: Who was that?

Parsons: I was trying to think of his name. I'll remember his name in a minute but I've forgotten it. But this was generated entirely on a personal basis. I saw him, of course. He came to see me and had lunch with me but I was at pains to make clear to the Shah that George Brown was there in a personal capacity. He had nothing to do with the government at all. Hadn't had anything to do with the government for years. And that anything he said to the Shah, the Shah must accept that he was saying it in this personal capacity and that there was no question of him being a kind of disguised agent of

the Prime Minister or anything of that kind. And I remembered telling the Shah this with great clarity. George Brown was a politically active man. He'd been Foreign Secretary and all the rest of it. He was intensly interested in the situation and I think he did come to the conclusion that the best hope for the country was Shappur Bakhtiar. For all I know (I wasn't there when he saw the Shah) he probably --

Q: How did he arrive to that conclusion?

Parsons: I think through this circle of Iranians with whom he was associated. I mean, unassociated in any financial sense but, you know, associated meaning he just knew them. And they were Bakhtiar supporters. And he probably did tell the Shah this. I had told the Shah in advance that whatever George Brown says, he really must accept that this is a purely personal thing. And, you know, we had no axe to grind in this whatsoever. And I personally never thought that the unfortunate Shappur Bakhtiar had a hope of succeeding. And told him that, in fact, before he actually tried for the Prime Ministry. I remember having lunch with him one day and discussing rather hypothetically, you know. Well it was clear when I left the lunch that it was in his mind. It was before he had even declared himself. I remember saying that anybody who takes it on is a very brave man but I said, "In my judgment, anybody who is actually appointed by the Shah at this stage (this was December, I suppose) is a dead duck, straight away." So I never thought he had much hope.

Q: Did you tell that at lunch to Bakhtiar or Brown?

Parsons: To Bakhtiar.

Q: To Bakhtiar.

Parsons: To Bakhtiar.

Q: By then, you had met him.?

Parsons: Yes. By then I had met him. I'd say I'd met him once or twice over a period of three or four months, I suppose. This was the end of the year.

Q: And what was his reaction to that suggestion?

Parsons: Well I remember I came with somebody else, some other politician. After lunch (I forget who it was now), an Iranian politician, and Bakhtiar left the lunch first and we both agreed after he'd gone that from his reaction to the things I'd said that he obviously had it very much in his mind to have a go, as they say. I remember saying when I left the house, "Good luck to him. He's a very brave man but I don't think it's going to work." So this business which came in the Shah's book - I felt a bit distressed when I read it because I feared when Brown came out that the Shah would jump to this conclusion, that he was a kind of emissary from

the British government and that we were really backing Bakhtiar when we couldn't say so openly through me and so on. And that he would draw these false conclusions. I tried my utmost to avoid this. I don't think it made much difference. The game was over by that time.

Q: What about the meeting at Guadeloupe? There was, you remember --

Parsons: The Summit.

Q: The Summit. Apparently every single Head of State suggested that the best course of action by then was for the Shah to leave the country. And Mr. Callaghan came, obviously, to the same conclusion. Was that the formal position of the British government at the time?

Parsons: No. We really had no formal position. In fact, as far as I can remember there's been a great hulabaloo about this business at Guadeloupe. Guadeloupe, of course, was an economic Summit. One of the economic Summits. And the principal Third World or non-aligned Third World foreign policy issue which was discussed was Arab/ Israel and the Camp David agreements. That's what they all really were talking about. I think I saw a copy of the minutes of the meeting in so far as it was relevant to Iran. All I can remember seeing was one very short paragraph. The whole subject was scarcely raised. There may have been much more than I ever saw but certainly it was never brought to my consciousness as an Ambassador that a

major decision had been made by the seven heads of government at Guadeloupe about Iran. It didn't come into it in my consciousness. No. We never had a formal position on this.

Q: You mean, in other words, Iran was mentioned en passant say, "Oh dear, there is also that trouble" --

Parsons: Oh dear. There's a frightful thing. Now what on earth's going to happen in Iran. And I'm sure, you know, they talked about it a bit and went around in circles. But I don't think there was a --

Q: They said, "It's better if he left."

Parsons: Kind of decision that the Shah'd better leave and that kind of thing. I think that's absolutely nonsense. And our position remained unchanged to the end. I mean, we obviously believed that the best possible thing for the country would be for the Shah to stay. At the same time, we couldn't for the life of us see how this was going to be achieved and the tension in the country relax at the same time, because the strike looked as though it was going on forever. But there was no question of us suggesting to the Shah he ought to go. I describe in my book this last conversation I had with him. You know, the difficult conversation I had with him when I said goodbye. But if he'd said to me on that occasion, "I've decided to stay." I would have said, "Fine, I hope it works." And, "What do you think's going to happen?" I know no Iranian will ever

believe this but we just didn't regard it as our business. We obviously wanted the best outcome for Iran. Obviously the monarchy from the point of view of British interests, Anglo-Iranian relations, the strategic dimension, every thing you can think of was going to be better than any Republican regime which followed it. Therefore, the outcome which suited us best would have been for the Shah to stay in some form or other and for the situation to relax and normality be returned. But we equally realized we had no power on earth to bring this about. We just hoped for the best. And, as I've said in my book, all the conversations I had with the Shah and all the advice I gave him was entirely out of my own head. It was my own judgment at the time.

Q: So why does Carter, do you suppose, give the impression in his book that the matter was discussed and that the conclusion was --

Parsons: Who gives this impression?

Q: Carter in "Keeping Faith." He wrote a book if you remember.

Parsons: Oh, yes.

Q: And in which he says that the question of Iran was discussed and that the conclusion was reached by everyone that the best course of action was for the Shah to leave on that particular occasion.

Parsons: I haven't read the book and that's news to me. I don't know. I mean, I can only say this that if a kind of formal decision had been reached at Guadeloupe amongst the seven Western Heads of State in government that the Shah must go, surely I, as Ambassador in Iran, would have received some formal notification of this.

Q: And you didn't?

Parsons: I didn't. I do remember some time afterwards seeing what is in my mind's eye about a quarter of a page of typing which was the extract from the record of the Guadeloupe meeting where they discussed Iran. And it was just what we call in English a kind of generalized wringing of hands. I mean, probably -- I'm sure Carter's telling the truth. I think what probably happened was, you know, they all started wringing their hands and saying how awful it was. And then they all started saying I shouldn't think the Shah's going to be able to survive. He may have to go. Good God, will he really? You know, that kind of thing. [chuckle] I would guess that it was at that level.

Q: I see.

Parsons: And certainly in so far as our diplomatic activity was concerned, it had absolutely no impact at all.

Q: So it wasn't sort of -- It didn't come from Callaghan to you as a formal --

Parsons: Not that I -- I mean, I'm sure if it had I would remember because it's after all something quite important. I have no memory of it at all. David Owen very sensibly gave me freedom to play the hand because he reckoned there was no point in even sending me instructions as to what I should say to the Shah if the Shah asked me this question or that question because it was all happening so quickly and I wasn't going to know what question I was going to be asked. So he left it to me. I'd been there a long time. I went on playing it like that right up to the time the Shah went and never had any instructions. In fact, I don't think I ever had any instructions as to what to say to him.

Q: But then how did the Shah learn that the matter was discussed in Guadeloupe and that they all had reached the conclusion that he ought to leave?

Parsons: Well. I just don't know. But, of course, it was rather different, I think, on the American side. To start with, the only communication between the British government and the Shah throughout the whole period so far as I know and nobody's ever told me otherwise, was from me. But this wasn't the case on the American side.

Q: Oh, I see.