

Parsons: To start with you see, Brzezinski got into the habit of just telephoning the Shah direct. Ardeshir was back in Iran and was, of course, telephoning his friends in the White House and that kind of thing direct and so Sullivan probably didn't even know what was passing on that channel. Then there were Americans coming and going the whole time. Big shots from the Administration and so forth, Generals and I don't know what else. So there were dozens of different channels operating between the Americans and the Shah and so probably one of these channels, you know, passed this on. I just don't know. It's impossible to say but as far as we're concerned, I do know because there was only one channel.

Q: Yes. So that, according to you the attitude of the British government in the Foreign Office 'til the end was, you know, it would be lovely if the Shah could stay and survive.

Parsons: Yes.

Q: And then --

Parsons: I do remember when I come to think of it that after the Shah's attempt to persuade Sadigri to be Prime Minister, the end of the year, just before Bakhtiar, and then when Bakhtiar was appointed, I do remember saying to myself that I would take no initiative to go and see the Shah. If he asked to see me it'd be fine but I wouldn't in any way suggest that I should go to see him. Because I felt, by that time, that I had no optimistic advice or

constructive ideas to offer; that all I could say if he asked me a question was, "I think the end has come." Because I felt that every option had been tried and had failed. I didn't want to be in a position to have to say to him if he said to me, "What do you think we should do now?" and that meant I'd have to say, "I think you're done for." And so I lay low for a couple of days. He sent for me of course eventually and that was that. And this did bother me because right up to that date I'd always had some kind of idea in my mind and so would he which we could discuss, Sadigri or I don't know other possible options and combinations and propositions, and so on. But by that time I felt, you know, there was nothing left and I just didn't want to have to tell him that I thought he was done for.

Q: Did you ever, when he sought you out again, and at the very end, did you get into a position, cornered into a position where you had to tell him, "I'm afraid this is it." You did?

Parsons: Yes. This is where, I think, he -- I can't remember whether he says this in the book or not but where people have accused me of trying to persuade him to leave because he put three options to me. And I told him that I thought that none of them would work.

Q: Which were the three?

Parsons: The three options were -- He said, "Some people are trying to persuade me to go to Bandar Abbas and stay down there

while the Army deals with the situation; and some people have told me to stay here in the palace and get tough; and some people are saying that I must leave and then everything will calm down and I can come back. And what do I think?" And I said, "Well I really would prefer not to answer you because you'll probably think whatever I say is *arriere pensee* and there's some *arriere pensee* behind what I'm saying. So I'd rather not answer." He said, "No, I insist you answer." So I said, "Well, I think, Your Majesty." I said, "I think that, as the Americans say, you're in a no win situation," (I used this expression). I said, "If you go to Bandar Abbas, the revolution will consider they've got you halfway out of the country and they'll go on pushing until you're the whole way gone. If you stay here and tough it out, as you've put it, the strike will continue and the country will continue to die and I don't see an end to that. And if you leave the country, you'll never come back." "Well," he said, "I've got to do one of the three. So which one would you choose?" So I said, "Well I just refuse to answer." But he went on and on so eventually I said, "Well, Your Majesty, if you actually insist that I answer, I'll tell you." I said, "If you stay here I believe the strike will continue indefinitely. They can keep it going. The basic materials, the supplies are there. They can keep it going indefinitely. I just don't see a break and Bandar Abbas is just ridiculous." But I said, "I suppose it is just conceivable that if you left, that might relax the tensions." I said, "I wouldn't put the odds at better than (I think I said) either a thousand to one or five hundred to one against. I think it's incredibly unlikely. But if you insist that

I choose between those three," I said, "I think probably that is the least bad. But," I said, "I still believe that, if you do go, you won't come back." And that was really how we parted.

Q: Yes. And then after he left -- I mean after the fall of the Shah, as it were, there was a price rise in oil, wasn't there? Which, of course, affected the price of North Sea oil.

Parsons: [chuckle] Yes. Yes. No. There was a price rise in oil. Yes. I mean, through that whole period there was. I mean, once Iran stopped exporting oil, the price, of course, went up.

Q: Yes. When we discovered North Sea oil in this country and became oil producers, did that in any way influence British policy towards oil exporting countries and towards the Middle East and in general towards Persia in particular? Was it a factor?

Parsons: Not really. It's a strange thing and you'll find this very difficult to believe but, before I went to Tehran, I was on the Joint Ministerial/Official Committee in Whitehall from July, [nineteen] seventy-three until the end of the year, which was set up in July to deal with the energy crisis, coal, oil, price, the lot. And the one thing we were all absolutely dreading was a major price rise. This was regarded really as being more or less the end of the world. I don't remember any of the great economic experts at this committee I was on, which had Senior Ministers and outside economists on it -- I don't remember anybody saying that, of course,

as soon as the price goes up we will be able to exploit the North Sea: we haven't been able to so far because we need a price of seven dollars a barrel from a production standpoint. But still that's what happened. No. We were much more upset about the price going up. My whole brief was to do everything in my power to prevent the Shah from making a move to put the price up any more.

Q: So was that detrimental to British influence when after the fall of the Shah the price went up.

Parsons: Yes it was. In fact, I suppose you would say now that as North Sea oil went up too, that it was beneficial because, of course, now the whole oil picture has changed, has it not? But, I remember again when I came home, I was briefly in the Foreign Office directly under the Secretary of State and one of the things I was concerned with was the oil situation. I remember very serious meetings in Whitehall about the price rise and of course the shortage. You see we didn't have all that much oil out of the North Sea by that time. I can't remember the figures. But the taking out of this five million barrels a day from the International Market; we did see grave shortages again, as happened in [nineteen] seventy-three. And there was tremendous concern about this, you know. Certainly we weren't in any mood to want the price to go up. This business of holding prices up now is a function of an oil glut situation. Quite a different kettle of fish altogether. No. This argument which the Shah produced, as you know, about taking the oil

off the market, the price going up, more profits and that, really is the most terrible nonsense.

Q: Really?

Parsons: Yes. What happened as far as Whitehall was concerned; everybody was worried stiff in [nineteen] seventy-nine when five million barrels a day were suddenly taken out of the market.

Q: So, just to finish that, you don't think that the petrol situation in general had anything to do with the attitude of the British government towards Iran or --

Parsons: No. We were very worried indeed in December [nineteen] seventy-three when OPEC raised the price to eleven dollars a barrel which was very much the Shah's initiative and we were very upset indeed about that. And, as I said my brief as I arrived on the heels of that was to stop any more of this - use all the arguments I could to get the Shah to moderate these price rises and not have any if possible. It, of course, made us very determined to have a maximal export drive to Iran to get back some of the foreign exchange which we were losing through the additional oil price. There's no doubt about it. That oil price rise did create a major financial crisis throughout the Western world of which we are still feeling the effect.

Q: You think it was a grave mistake on the part of the Shah?

Parsons: Well. I think probably, looking back historically, it was. Because he saw it as having hit the jackpot at last. Now he had the money to do all the things he wanted to do. Yet so long as he was developing the country at the previous speed, the opposition was not actually gathering speed at all fast. It was fairly static. But of course it accelerated with the acceleration on his side. So, I suppose, with hindsight, yes. I suppose, probably it was the worst thing that ever happened.

Q: And wasn't there at the time a British Ambassador, an American Ambassador, a French -- somebody who could have told the Shah, or indeed through Mr. Alam for instance, that this was a grave mistake with far reaching causes.

Parsons: Well, we did. All the Ambassadors were sent in with instructions, you see, when we heard that this OPEC meeting was going to make this decision but he was riding so high in those days he just brushed everybody aside. He was the great expert and he knew better.

Q: Yes. When the students took the hostages and invaded the American Embassy a lot of documents were published by them.

Parsons: Yes.

Q: And after that, also, there were lots of other allusions to the fact that in the State Department in America and in the government of America, a lot of people were very worried about the build up of Persian Armed Forces and American weaponry and so on, saying that once petrol started to run out, these weapons then would be used to intimidate Iran's neighbors and to take advantage of them and so on. What do you feel about that?

Parsons: I don't think we ever felt that. We always thought that the Shah's military strategic policy was highly exaggerated. He had these extraordinary ideas of, you know, naval deployments down to Australia and South Africa and all that kind of thing. We always thought that was a bit of a joke. But the basic core of his policy seemed sound enough to us. Geography and history, God, whoever you like has given you some fairly difficult neighbors to say the least of it. The Soviet Union, Afganistan, Iraq and so on. It seemed to us not unreasonable that the Shah should want to have fairly substantial Armed Forces. Equally he was our ally in a treaty, so why not? Equally, commercially it was very good news for us selling these tanks and all the rest of it. I don't think we ever felt that. We felt that the Shah, in fact, after our withdrawal from the Persian Gulf had actually behaved in a very statesmanlike way to the small Arab states. He got on good terms with them.

Q: Very much --

Parsons: They were very much coming and going. He and I used to discuss the whole thing because he knew I knew about the Gulf and the people down there. It struck me that he had an extremely good policy towards the Arab world. In fact, by [nineteen] seventy-seven I should think it's safe to say, that Iran was on better terms with the Arab League as a whole than it had ever been before. His foreign policy, in that sense, was extremely successful. And although some of the smaller states might have been a bit apprehensive of this very over armed Iran next door, I don't think we ever had those apprehensions. The only time that the Iranian Army had been used in Dhofar, in Amman and it had been wholly beneficial to the situation. Without them it would have been very difficult.

Q: So why do you think the Americans began to be worried? Was it because they were ignorant of the Shah and his policies and so on?

Parsons: Well, you see, I would really have to see all these documents. It's so easy to take things out of context. And if you take a large Embassy, to start with you will get a multiplicity of views. In my own Embassy, I encouraged people to have different views and I encouraged people if they had different views from me to express them because the only way I felt I could come to the right conclusion and recommendations to London was if I had the maximum spread of different viewpoints put in front of me. And, of course, there were people in my Embassy who felt that this overarming was wrong and it was dangerous and the Shah was a megalomaniac and all

the rest of it, and I'm sure if the students had got into our Embassy and got into all my files (they couldn't now anyway, even if they wanted to, we burned them all) they would have found memoranda from Second Secretaries and First Secretaries expressing those kind of views. Perfectly normal in a well run Embassy to have all kinds of views expressed all over the place. But what actually matters is what the Ambassador actually sends off to his capital. That's the only view that eventually counts. So, one would really have to look at these documents much more closely and see them in their context. I'm sure there would be people in the American Embassy who held those points of view. This whole business of the Shah's strategic policy was the subject of a lot of discussion amongst all of us. I, personally, thought it wasn't unreasonable, particularly of course, since Iran started re-arming very much later than its neighbors did. In fact, there was never a time when the Shah had more tanks than Iraq had or more planes. Iraq had just started earlier.

Q: So coming to a question which is a rather thorny one, although we have talked about this before and I know your views on it. But I still would like to ask you. It's the question of the BBC.

Parsons: Oh yes. Yes.

Q: Well. Where does the budget for the BBC come from? It comes from the government?

Parsons: The budget for the overseas services comes from the Foreign Office.

Q: From the Foreign Office. So, as we say, he who pays the piper calls the tune. How can we say that the BBC foreign affair business is totally autonomous, and independent, and can express any views they wish. If somebody else is paying for it can we possibly say well look, I think I could hold it there or go steady and so --

Parsons: Well. You see, it's something really you should understand, Shusha, because you know this country so well.

Q: Well I do.

Parsons: If you read the BBC Overseas Service Charter, I used to have a copy of it. I don't think I have any more, it is laid down absolutely clearly in the charter of the Overseas Services that although the budget comes from the Foreign Office, the editorial policy is independent and unless the BBC (I can't remember the exact words) is behaving in some way as to damage the national interests there can be no question of Whitehall interference with their editorial policy.

Q: Unless there's a question of security?

Parsons: Yes. I suppose, of national interest in general. I suppose it's fair to say that if -- I mean - take a ludicrous

example. If the BBC French Service say (I'll take a grotesque example) started pouring out stuff or the BBC German Service started pouring out stuff saying, "Wouldn't it be a good idea if Germany and Britain both left NATO and joined the Warsaw Pact or something," I think the government probably would say, "Well, this is against national interest. Just stop it." I'm taking, obviously, an extreme, absurd case. In normal times the BBC adheres to its virginity, in this sense, with great tenacity and will not have anything to do with the Foreign Office at all. In fact, I've had BBC people put the telephone down on me when I've even just wanted to chat with them about how things are going. They're very, very, very fanatical about this, as you would imagine, knowing England. I often discussed it with them before the revolution because from time to time I used to get into the most frightful trouble. You know, they only had to say something and the Shah was sending for me and all this. I never made an impact on them at all. It was very, very difficult indeed. This whole business of freedom of information, freedom of the press, freedom of the radio, the media and so on, you know it's a Sacred Cow in England. The only thing that we were suggesting was the opposite -- that the BBC should cool it. We certainly weren't advising the BBC to go and stir up the revolution. And the BBC did say to me, I remember, if you can prove or the Persian Ambassador in London can prove -- anybody can prove that we are actually, in football terms, offside, that we are reporting things that are not true, or are stating things that are deliberately provocative, or whatever it may be, we will of course listen to what you're saying and act accordingly. There was a time

in Portugal -- after the revolution in Portugal when Salazar was thrown out or when that regime fell, that the new Portuguese government accused the BBC of Communist propaganda in the Portuguese Service. And it was investigated by the Embassy or by somebody I think --

[end of side two of tape three]

Q: You were saying that --

Parsons: Yes. I was saying that --

Q: That they had found out that there were two Communists.

Parsons: There were two Communists. Portuguese Communists who had got jobs in the BBC and they were broadcasting their own version of the news and comments. Well this was proved and the two men were sacked and everything was put back. The problem in the last days of the revolution was that I was getting these constant complaints from the Shah, from Sharif Emami, from everybody under the sun. They were never substantiated and whenever I actually got hold of the actual tapes of broadcasts, it was impossible to find anything in them which, you know, went beyond what one might call reasonable coverage - no provocative remarks, distorting the news, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. It's a very difficult ethical problem, I think, this whole business of broadcasting in other people's languages. And I don't know in my own mind what's right and what's

wrong. If you have a radio service in Persian, is it to be forbidden from reporting truthfully what is happening in Iran simply because the Iranian government themselves are not reporting those truths to their own people? Should that be the rule? And if it should be the rule --

Q: No. I don't know how true this is but apparently there has been some information from within the BBC. That there were directives (I don't know from where) prohibiting broadcasts in Persian that could be construed as anti-Khomeini.

Parsons: Well I don't know where those directives are coming from and they're certainly aren't coming from the government. I can't believe myself that they were coming from within the BBC. You see again we did check this out with the Persians, the actual Persian nationals who staff the BBC, and the BBC checked out credentials, their past and everything like that to make quite sure that they were not like the Portugese situation.

Q: But, according to what you said, it was in the interest of Britain that the Shah's regime would continue even if it changed somewhat to appease public opinion.

Parsons: Yes.

Q: But that it should continue. It was in their interests. And, therefore, shouldn't have there been some directive to the BBC

saying look what you're doing -- actually doing the work of propaganda for Khomeini?

Parsons: Well, you see, this is the point. You know as well as I do how these things go and how touchy public media are about government interference of any kind. Now we were of course having by this time a continuous dialogue with the BBC, and a very difficult one, sometimes a very bad tempered one. And of course, you see, what was happening was this. For example, there was a BBC correspondent (I forget his name) in Tehran. He was reporting not just for the Persian service. He was reporting back for the BBC as a whole to go on the home service and --

Q: Is that John (what was his name?) John Burton? [not the name]

Parsons: No. No. That was long before. He was kicked out of Iran ages ago. No, Whitley. [BBC Correspondent] Andrew Whitley his name was. He's in South America now and he's working for The Financial Times. Well he received a report, for example, that it had been broadcast in Tehran in the Bazaar that there was going to be a strike of the electricity workers in Mashhad the following day or something like that. The BBC then put this onto the Persian service and onto all their other services in, you know, English and other interested languages, and the home service. Then the Shah would send for me or somebody would send for me and say look, you know, the BBC is simply encouraging the strike. We haven't reported this on our own radio because we don't want to encourage the strike.

Well I think this does raise a very very difficult point indeed. What he was reporting was (a) true, (b) perfectly clear of comment. Now I think in a situation like that you have to really adopt an all or nothing attitude. Either the BBC Persian service closes down altogether for the period of the revolution and reports nothing about Iran at all (I mean just has music and folk songs and stuff) or, if it is allowed to report, to comment at all on what is happening in Iran, well then, if it is something that everybody knows and it's true, then they must be allowed to do it. It's not an easy question to answer. It would be a very major step in circumstances like that for anybody's government actually to use its powers as a state. It would be jolly difficult, as it's against the Charter anyway. They actually have to prove that it's against the national interest. They would go to Parliament. There would be a debate: the BBC would kick up hell about it. They would actually have to prove that to report the truth to a people from whom the truth was being withheld by their own government was damaging our national interests and therefore the BBC should be formally stopped. You can imagine the fuss there would be if any government tried that on. If it had been that the BBC was kind of acting as Khomeini's mouthpiece, as a lot of people say, that would have been a different matter. But, of course, whenever I asked the Iranian government to substantiate these allegations, they never could. I'd say, "Look if you can give me chapter and verse that they have done what you say, I shall send it straight back to London and there'll be hell to pay." I never got it. And I'd say, "Look, if you'd rather go

through Parviz Raji , do it through him. Get him to go to the BBC. Give him chapter and verse." You know, it never happened.

Q: Could it be that as I know there were some young Iranians working for the BBC Persian service who were very, very anti-regime --

Parsons: That they were --

Q: They were influencing?

Parsons: Well, you see, this is what I was always being told. I had been told by the Shah, by Azhari, by people like that, that this is exactly what's happening. And I would say, "Well, all right, then. Monitor the damn thing yourself and give me the transcript of what you've monitored. And if it is so, then we will raise hell. And I'd tell them about the Portugese incident that I've just mentioned. They never could. They were going around saying, "Did you listen to BBC last night? Did you listen to BBC? They were saying this. They were saying that. They were saying the other." I mean -- this kind of thing is so difficult to substantiate. I remember saying to Afshar [Khosrow Afshar, Foreign Minister], I think it was, who was by that time the Foreign Minister, "Look, you've got a radio set in the Foreign Ministry, for God's sake. Tape it every night. And when you find something like this, get me along and we'll listen to it together, every word. And then I'll send the tape home." Never happened. I just got these

unsubstantiated accusations. The point is still extremely difficult. If you have foreign language broadcasts to countries where information is restricted whether or not there's a revolution, are you justified in telling the people of that country, whatever country it may be, perfectly true information which their government is choosing to withhold from them? It's a very difficult question to answer.

Q: I wanted to ask you now about personalities that you knew. First of all, before we get to the Persian ones, when the Americans sent Ambassador Sullivan to Iran he was a new hand in the Middle East, was he not? So he consulted you obviously because you were such an old hand in the area. How did you rank him? What did you think of American policy in Iran?

Parsons: Well I thought Sullivan was a highly intelligent man. I liked him very much at first sight. He had a very quick brain, very sharp indeed. And, in a sense, I rather welcomed the fact that he was new to it. Because so many of us had been so deeply dyed in the whole region that I thought it was rather a relief to have somebody with a very quick political sense, a really acute political observer who was fresh to the whole thing. And the strange thing was that Sullivan's first impressions of Iran were very much more pessimistic than my view was at the time.

Q: What was it?

Parsons: I remember him coming to have tea with us when he first arrived, before he'd presented his credentials. It was a tradition. Ambassadors are meant to be in kind of purdah before they present their credentials but between European, West European community Ambassadors and American Ambassadors, British Ambassadors, we always had the tradition where they came and had a kind of a quiet meal just alone. I remember him coming to tea. He didn't eat lunch so he came to tea. And I remember him saying, "How do you think everything's going?" This was [nineteen] seventy-seven, I suppose, early [nineteen] seventy-seven. I gave him a conventional rundown on economic development and all this. And I remember what he said, "Well I've only been here a week. I know absolutely nothing about it." He said, "I get the impression that everything's going wrong." And I said, "Really, do you? How very interesting." Took me very much by surprise. And this was the fresh mind in a sense. He did see through to things that we'd got so used to, as it were, that we weren't seeing clearly. And I always thought his judgments were very good. The only thing --

Q: Didn't you say what -- why do you think that?

Parsons: Yes. I did. I said, "Why do you think that?" And he said, "Well the whole economic development program seems to be an absolute shambles and it isn't working. It's all in a mess." Well we'd got so used to the mess, I suppose, that he actually saw it much more clearly. We were all living in it, as it were, and we'd ceased to notice it. But he was right. He was talking about

shortages. He was talking about lack of transportation. He was talking about factories that weren't getting built and factories which were producing things that wouldn't be sold and that kind of thing. I suppose that we'd got all so used to it we hardly noticed it anymore. He said, you know, "This is a mess. It's awful." He was also rather impressed by the Shah; but he didn't find the Shah a tough character at all when he first met him. The only thing I felt clouded his judgment, but maybe it didn't cloud his judgment, maybe it was a good thing, was that he was basically a Far East man. He loved the Phillipines, Southeast Asia, the people. He knew them. He knew the languages and everything like that. I don't think he ever felt any great affection for Iran. It was new ground to him. He was too old really to, you know, steep himself in a new culture and all that kind of thing. I think he regarded it very much as a job that he had to do and it was an interesting job. But I don't think he ever really felt at all personally involved with the country.

Q: Why did they send such a person who was obviously a Far East expert? Why didn't they send somebody who was a Middle East expert?

Parsons: Well, who knows? That's just their system. We were all rather surprised. Of course as a professional, he had a very, very high reputation. A very first class operator, which he was, too, I should think. And certainly when things got worse -- He couldn't have been a better colleague to me and he got the hang of it all very quickly and I thought his judgments were very sound.

Q: Did you try to do something about what he thought was going wrong?

Parsons: [sigh] I think he used to talk very bluntly to the Ministers, Majidi and people like that, and everybody who was concerned with the development program and asked them some pretty searching questions and so on. Probably more than I did because I suppose I was more used to it somehow. Certainly by that time the whole thing was an awful mess. I remember saying, "I'm a debt collector not an Ambassador." Because so many British firms were having to actually stop work because they simply couldn't get money out of the Ministries. And I was going from Ministry to Ministry saying, "If you don't give this firm a progress payment they're going to have to stop building the road and leave the country because they've run out of asphalt, they've run out of money, they can't pay wages, et cetera, et cetera. For God's sake, let them have something." And eventually --

Q: Why didn't they?

Parsons: What?

Q: Why didn't they?

Parsons: Well the whole thing had just become a kind of shambles. And most of our big projects were stuck because they weren't being paid. And some firms did pull out. I'd have terrible troubles and

then promises and promises and the stuff wouldn't come. I remember going the whole way down to Zahedan to prove the point because we were building a road down by the Pakistani border to Zahedan and the firm told me that everything was a mess and I had said, "Well, I'm going to come down there and see for myself." I drove the whole way down to Zahedan. It was an exhausting journey. And found it was exactly that. They had a labor force of about four thousand who hadn't been paid for a month. They had no asphalt to put on the road. They had spares for their equipment. They were just stalled. Simply because the Ministry, whatever it was, wouldn't pay. And I went back and I saw the Minister and I more or less sat in his office for about two days and eventually extracted some money. Enough to get them all going for another week or so. It was like that. It was a mess. But somehow, I suppose, we'd got so used to it that it didn't kind of bother us all that much.

Q: And Sullivan didn't try to do anything about --

Parsons: Oh, I think he probably tried to do much more, in a way, than the rest of us did. But I think the whole thing had become chaotic, you know. The Administration had kind of broken down. And Jamshid Amouzegar was trying to economize and he was cutting budgets and, as a result, when he started cutting budgets, people just didn't pay firms and so on. It was awful, there's no doubt about it.

Q: So you think that Sullivan was not a bad choice, after all.
That he --

Parsons: I wouldn't think so. I mean, I can't think really of anybody who would have done much better in the circumstances. He was only there eighteen months. He arrived really just before things started to go seriously wrong.

Q: Yes. Now I would like now to go to your Iranian connections. As you said, you had met already Hoveyda and my brother and so on in Ankara, in Turkey.

Parsons: Right.

Q: So you had some Iranian friends when you arrived. Just tell us from top to bottom all the Iranians -- not all of them, of course, that you knew and what you thought of. For instance, I was talking to Peter Avery last weekend and he was saying that there was, that there is no one as great and marvelous as is a good Persian. When they are good, they're really great.

Parsons: Yes.

Q: But when they are not, well they are a pain in the neck, so to speak. Now I know exactly what he means. They're much less stereotyped.

Parsons: Yes.

Q: You have saintly people and you have the most wicked people. So there is this kind of variety in the national character. But among the people that you knew let us start from the top to the bottom. Attitudes, personalities that, you know, impressed you. The characteristic of the country. The characteristic of the culture. Starting with the Shah. As a human being, somebody you went to the pictures with, what was your assessment of him?

Parsons: Well, again. The Shah was not, to use the word I've used before -- he wasn't a cozy man. I had a great respect for him. He was never, in talking to me, in the least arrogant or patronising. He was a good listener. He was an interesting person to discuss things with. He had an encyclopedic mastery of foreign policy and strategic policy and so on. I mean, any conversation one had with him on any foreign policy subject, you never had to explain it to him from the a, b, c. He knew about it. One went straight into it. He was a very good person to do business with in that sense. He had a sense of humor. We used to have some laughs about things and that kind of thing. I liked him.

Q: How did the sense of humor manifest itself. I mean, any jokes, any anecdotes?

Parsons: Can't think of any specific ones but, I suppose I've got a kind of lighthearted manner in dealing in things. It was never

difficult to make him laugh. He wasn't solemn and grand and regal the whole time. We were alone always, you know, when I saw him. And I always thought, with him I got on very well. I liked him. I enjoyed my talks with him and this was long before the revolution, of course. They were always interesting. He always had something interesting to say. He had original ideas, and so on. I was always worried about his remoteness. He used to occasionally make remarks which did reveal that he really was desperately out of touch with what was really going on. You know, he would tell me that some project had actually been finished and was actually in action when I knew perfectly well that it was still on the drawing board -- they hadn't even turned one piece of earth. And so on. And one did get a bit of a shock and wonder, my God!

Q: Did you point that out?

Parsons: Yes. And he just wouldn't believe me. I'd say, "Look, Your Majesty, I was out there last week and they hadn't even started turning the ground over yet." "No, No. It is in production now and that's where you are wrong." Well we'd go on like this for a bit and we'd kind of get up and sit down, you know. [chuckle] There are things like that. But, generally speaking, he was a very impressive person to talk to. Because, of course, I did talk to him about foreign policy matters most of the time. Obviously he had problems with projects and I used to discuss them with him and so on but mainly we were discussing foreign policy matters. And he was very good on all that. [cough] My friends in the Cabinet I thought

were, as I said in my book, -- I thought they were the most glittering array of talent as I'd ever come across in any government I'd ever had to deal with. People like Jamshid Amouzegar, and Majidi and people like that are absolutely first class men by any international standards. There's no doubt, no question about that. The only thing is what we were saying earlier on that always did strike me that, they weren't politicians. Although they were Ministers they didn't have political constituencies. They were technicians in a sense, very, very high level technicians. But they were not only very impressive men. They were also very nice men. We got on very well. And I greatly enjoyed having, say, three or four Ministers and their wives to dinner because it was fun. And it was interesting. One talked about everything under the sun. It was very stimulating. It wasn't boring and diplomatic and all that kind of thing at all. All those people. They also knew, of course, so much about what was happening in the outside world. What was the name of the Minister of Industry who's now in America? Najm-Abadi. He knew infinitely more about British politics than I've ever known. We used to have long discussions. About the Labor Party and the Conservative Party and the whole pattern of British politics. His wife was a very nice and lively person. It was terrific fun. These people all became great friends. I'd, of course, do business with them but they were also personal friends. Delightful people to be with. There's no doubt about it. I think it's absolute tragedy that all this enormous talent is now being wasted just in exile. It's awful. Because they really are -- I mean, I say it again. They're first class people by anybody's standards, highly

intelligent, highly educated, with very lively minds, you know. Interested in everything, talk about any damn subject you like whether meaning of life or Greek philosophy or economic development or family life, whatever it was. It was good fun. And, I suppose, I look back on those days with enormous affection. The ones I've met, since the revolution, in New York and that kind of thing, I was delighted to see them again. We had great times together. This makes it all the sadder, I think.

Q: That they've all gone?

Parsons: That they've all gone.

Q: Yes.

Parsons: I mean the country is losing so much in not having those people around.

Q: That's right. Yes. What about the Shahbanou. Did you get to --

Parsons: I was enormously impressed by her. Again, I thought she was very intelligent. I thought she was very sympathetic. I mean sympathique in the French sense of the word. She had a very attractive expression in her eyes. She seemed to know an enormous amount about what was going on in the country. More than the Shah. Again, always interesting to talk to. Certainly I didn't share some

of her tastes. I didn't share her taste for avant-garde art and that kind of thing but that's her personal difference of taste, nothing in that. Didn't see nearly as much of her as I did of the Shah. But everything I did see of her I liked enormously. And everything she was involved in, you know, like the Festival we had in [nineteen] seventy-seven. She was very efficient and everything worked and that kind of thing. It was very good.

Q: She helped a great deal the Arts.

Parsons: She helped the Arts enormously.

Q: She was a real -- I remember -- Who was the music critic of -- Andrew Porter.

Parsons: Yes.

Q: The music critic of Financial Times. He said to me once, "You know, I have actually written that she is the real queen because she is a patron of the arts and of culture."

Parsons: Yes.

Q: I mean she revolutionized -- It's funny. One can say these things now because it is not flattery any more because she's in no position of power. She revolutionized Persian taste. I remember

when I was a child everything Western was good. Everything local was bad.

Parsons: That's right. She changed all that.

Q: She changed all that. Suddenly, Persian antiques became fashionable.

Parsons: That's right.

Q: There were these ladies going and buying Persian antiques which before they preferred a plastic bowl to.

Parsons: That's right. There's another thing that impressed me enormously which she had a great deal to do with. I used to travel a great deal in the country because I enjoyed it. And she had done so much by way of preserving and restoring old houses, domestic houses in the provincial towns. Old houses on estates, things of that kind. And, of course, with the increased mobility of the middle class (not the upper class, the middle class), everybody had a car, you were getting internal tourism started which in that part of the world was a very rare thing. I mean, most people think if they're going to be on tour and if they've got enough money, they go to Europe or some other place.

Q: This was all due to her.

Parsons: And, you know, you would go to some interesting house, an eighteenth century house in Nain or somewhere and it wouldn't just simply be full of foreign diplomats; it was always full of middle class persons with their Peykans who had also stopped there to have a look around. And this struck me as a marvelous thing. This really was reviving the traditions of the country. And she of course was the prime mover, I think, in all that kind of stuff. That was all terrific. I did disapprove, I must say, of some of the really extreme things at the Shiraz Festival and that kind of thing.

Q: She wasn't responsible for that, you know. She had appointed certain people --

Parsons: But she should have stopped it. That was what I thought.

Q: How could she? She didn't know what was happening.

Parsons: Well, that's the problem. People didn't know. I mean that --

Q: She didn't know that this theater troupe that they had invited --

Parsons: Yes. [chuckle]

Q: Was going to take off their pants in the street.