

by Masoudi, said, "Yes, this is a constructive idea. I like it." But he said, "It will take time, and I've got to educate public opinion." Well, I telegraphed London, and I told them we'd have to move with every step written, and I also asked him, I said, "Who shall I deal with." Because I knew that Ardeshir Zahedi, the Foreign Minister was not in favor of any settlement on Bahrain. He was very emotional on the thing -- had had a big scene in my house one night about it.

Assar: Saying what?

Wright: Saying, "I will fight for my country. Bahrain is as much a part of Iran as Surrey is of England." So I asked the Shah, "Who shall I deal with? I can't bother you every five minutes." So he said, "You'll deal with Afshar." And that's how Afshar got involved. Well, the next day -- Christmas Day -- I was summoned by Afshar. The Shah had seen him between my evening interview and going to India the next morning to tell him to get on with this. So that was a good sign. Then I thought I'd have to wait several months while he prepared public opinion, but not a bit. On the 4th of January at a press conference in New Delhi, he was asked a question about Bahrain, and he said that he would not want to use force and would be guided by the wishes of the people. And I remember reading this in Ettela<sup>c</sup>at. I used to get the paper every evening, and I read this in the Persian edition. My Persian wasn't that good, but I understood, and I got very excited, and I telephoned my counsellor -- it was in the evening -- to say, "Look, this is the first breakthrough we've got." And from then onwards,

negotiations proceeded. But the Shah, actually without telling anybody what he was going to do, and it was a very, you might say, bold, wise and courageous decision. Because as you know, the United Nations got involved, and they sounded public opinion where it came out of the BBC. The UN heard there was overwhelming support for independence, and the Shah accepted it.

Assar: And what about the other islands?

Wright: That was quite separate, and I'd retired when they were settled. I left in April, and there was no deal on islands versus Bahrain. I mean, the islands were treated quite separately. But we told the Shah that we will look at this as sympathetically as we can. And I was involved in the early days on the island things, and Sir William Luce was brought back from Qatar --  
[end of side two, tape one]

Assar: This is tape number two with Sir Denis Wright on the 11th of April, 1986, at his home in Buckinghamshire.

Carry on. You were saying about the other islands.

Wright: Yes, well on the other islands -- I was not there when it was finally settled -- but when I retired in Tehran, April, 1971, I went down the Gulf completely for my own interest, because I'd never been able to go there when I was in Iran. And I did see the Sheyks with Sharjeh and Ra's al Khaymah, the two sheyks involved, and did my best to persuade them to do a deal with the Shah. Because I said, "If you don't reach an amicable settlement in which

you agree to split the oil an that sort of thing with you, he will take them by force. And one of them -- I think that it was Sharjeh -- did the deal and let the Shah have the island. The other one didn't, and the Shah took it by force. I've forgotten the details, but I wasn't there.

Assar: So what I would like to do now that we have sort of more or less covered your own career in Iran as Ambassador is more the details of it. You traveled a lot in Iran. And I believe that once you went to the Alamut and wrote a book about it or you did something with James Morris.

Wright: I did a book with James Morris just called Iran or Persia. It's called Persia in England and Iran in America. But that was just a travel book of photographs by Roger Wood, and I did the descriptions.

Assar: The captions as we call them --

Wright: Yes, there were two hundred, three hundred.

Assar: But you did travel a lot in Iran. Could you tell a bit about your travels and your impressions of the country, of the people?

Wright: Well, both my wife and I found great delight traveling. We loved Iran, and we loved its people too. And by the time we had been there a couple of years, we talked reasonable Persian and were

able to get around without an interpreter. We didn't like formality, so the Iranian government knew me well enough to know that I didn't want to have great "Esteqbals" when I went to places. And we used to travel simply in a landrover, take a tent, and very often we also went with a friend of ours, an Iranian, who was really I think an Armenian from Georgia originally who'd come as a young boy from Tampasian -- still in Iran today. But he loved Iran and was a great horseman, and he would arrange mules or horses, and we would go off a week at a time and sleeping on the floor of cottages and things like that and had enormous enjoyment out of this and got to know parts of Iran not normally seen by a European. We did one marvelous one in, what's it called, Dodangeh up in the northeast of the country. Then twice we rode across the mountains to the Caspian Sea, you see, fairly rough conditions. And I think I went to every town of importance in Iran. And my wife and I on another occasion, with the governor of Kurdistan, we rode across Lorestan from one end to the other -- spent three days riding across it. So we did do a lot, and we developed an enormous affection for the country and the people and were very sorry when we left and very unhappy to know what's happened subsequently.

Assar: Because the people, you know, like our friend, Tony Parsons, said that one of the changes that came over the Iranians in the last twenty years was that the people changed. They lost their sense of humor, and they became surly -- that's his word. You know, I recall as my childhood -- this is before those times -- people having a terrific sense of humor, and so did you feel a change?

Wright: No, I felt there was a change of mood in Tehran. There was too much interest in money and so on. But I would say this about Tony Parsons' criticism. I remember going and staying with him, and because he'd served mostly in Arab countries, and they had a different approach. And I remember taking Sheila Parsons out shopping one day in the Ferdowsi, and she came back and expressed great surprise to find the Iranians so nice, you see -- shopkeepers and so on. And I got the impression that she at any rate had built up a wall against the Iranians without really getting to know them. I mean, she didn't talk any Persian, decided that she, at any rate, tended to misjudge them. But of course, the shops she went into were mostly Iranian Jews in the Ferdowsi, but I remember her coming back and, you know, telling how nice they are, you see. But against that I would say that the Iranians -- the businessman, the ministers and all that -- were inflated with their own success in the world -- I mean, of Iran's position in the world -- and had become really rather intolerable. I remember Hoveyda, the Prime Minister, gave a lunch for me my last visit, April, 1977. And I came away very depressed from this lunch, because he was somehow -- I don't know, there was something about him -- his arrogance, which he didn't have in the old days. He was a changed Hoveyda, I thought, you see. Everything was right as far as he was concerned and nothing wrong with the country. And that was April, 1977. And rather we bore your appearance. We're doing much better than you. You know, there was that sort of feeling.

Assar: All the while that you were there, Hoveyda was Prime

Minister. What were your dealings with him, your impressions of him, any stories, anecdotes, confrontations, dealings that you had with him.

Wright: No, I don't think so. I always enjoyed dealing with him, but I don't think he really had any admiration for the British. And he was basically a Xenophobe, I think. Of course, there was a big change in the whole attitude of the Persian government which -- a change in some ways for the better. Because when I first went there when the Minister of Foreign Affairs was Abbas Aram, and he would be rather scared of talking direct to the Shah. He was a man of very humble origin himself and would summon me or the American Ambassador to get our views and would then go to the Shah and say, "This is what the British Ambassador thinks," really getting across his own views a bit further, but in order to shield himself. And likewise, Ali Mansur, when he was Prime Minister, he was all too anxious to carry favor with me and the American Ambassador -- summon me up to his office -- he was living up in summer in Shemiran somewhere and had an office -- and wanted to know what the British thought about this, or would just phone me. So to get an announcement in the paper, the British Ambassador was consulted. To me it was a sign of his uncertainty and insecurity. Now, Aram, for instance, Foreign Minister, used to encourage me. He said, "You will see the Shah every month and talk to him." And I said, "No, I don't want to see the Shah every month. I'll see him when I have business." But there was that use of the British and the Americans, but British because, as you know, the Iranians have a great belief in our invisible powers, which

right up until Zahedi became Foreign Minister and Hoveyda became Prime Minister, existed. After that the Iranians were much more nationalistic and did not want to get the British Ambassador's view or the Americans to the same extent. That's in some ways a very good sign. It shows they've grown up with their duty. But nevertheless, it was a change of atmosphere very much as far as I was concerned and I think to the American Ambassador too. But, no, my dealings with Hoveyda were always correct. I never fell out with him at all. And one felt that he was in many ways a good Prime Minister, because he was acting on the Shah's orders at a time when the Shah was successful. I mean, I don't think he ever stood up to the Shah. He was just a yes man to the Shah. But nevertheless, he was a good administrator, and he didn't, as Amini had done, go and make long speeches to the press and that sort of thing. He kept a low profile. So on the whole, I have a very healthy respect for Hoveyda as a Prime Minister.

Assar: And what about Asadollah Alam? You said that he was very useful.

Wright: Well, Asadollah Alam was a personal friend of mine. I'd known him before when I was there, and he was Minister of the Court most of the time I was there or Prime Minister. He was very close to the Shah -- closer than anybody else. And from my point of view -- And I was very lucky, the Shah, as soon as I got there in 1963, he told me I remember, the first time we had a little Ballet Rumba come to Tehran, and I was sitting immediately behind the Shah at the performance. I'd only been in Tehran a couple of weeks, and he

said, "I want you to see my Prime Minister regularly." This was, of course, Alam. And so it was arranged, and I would ride with Alam every Friday and trot about on the Shah's horses. He didn't always come, but usually he was there. Week after week we wouldn't talk any shop at all, but occasionally I could talk to him about problems, and he was invaluable to me as a direct line to the Shah, which meant that neither the Foreign Minister nor the Prime Minister could go and tell things to the Shah which would be misinterpreted. I could always get straight to the Shah, and this was invaluable to me. And so I regard Alam from my point of view as a great asset. He was, I think, in some ways a weak character -- particularly as far as women were concerned -- but he never, in my experience, ever showed any desire to profit by his friendship or the business which went to British firms. We talked about oil and that sort of thing, but he never hinted to me that he would want his ten percent rate commission or something, because, I mean, so many stories about him acquiring great wealth. And his daughters live in great splendor in London, I know. But as far as I'm concerned, his hands were absolutely clean.

Assar: It never went through you anyway.

Wright: Never. No hint of it either.

Assar: Any other personalities you want to talk about who struck you or any other anecdotes that were symptomatic of what was going on.



Wright: I don't think so. Well, an example of the Shah's suspicion of the British, you may remember in 1964, then Ali Mansur was Prime Minister. And a bill went to the Majles to give immunities to American forces. And it's a time when Ayatollah Khomeini made a name for himself. And the Shah had told the American Ambassador that there'd be no trouble. This would go through the Majles at the same time as a bill on the Vienna Convention about diplomatic immunities. Well, instead of it going through without trouble, there were some seventy odd deputies either voted against it or abstained. And the Shah was furious over this, because it was contrary to what he told the American Ambassador, and he was not used to the Majles taking an independent line. The Americans were very unpopular at the time, and I think a lot of deputies thought this would please the Shah. But at first he blamed Ali Mansur very much for this the first day or so. And then two or three days afterwards, I was telephoned by both Alam and by Aram, the Foreign Minister, and asked to go and see him urgently. Alam was about to go off to Philadelphia. He was Chancellor of the University of Shiraz -- had a link with the University of Pennsylvania -- and was off to America that day. And he said, "I want to see you before I go urgently." Aram gave me the same message, but he said, "I'm in bed with influenza. Come and see me at my house." So I went to see Alam, and he said, "Look, somebody has convinced the Shah that you, the British, are behind this hostile vote in the Majles." And he said, "The Shah has told me to come back via London to see whether this was you, Denis Wright, or whether it's the British government's policy." And he said, "Somebody has convinced him all his deputies are friends of

the British." So he said, "You must act quickly." Then I went to see Aram. He told me more or less the same thing and said, "You must act very quickly," and he said, "You must see the Shah and clear this up." "Well," I said, "I'll see the Shah tomorrow night, because his brother is marrying Dr. Eqbal's daughter, and there's a big party at the Officer's Club, and I am bound to talk to the Shah. He always talks to me at these occasions invariably." Well, I went to the party, and the Shah ignored me entirely. I went back to Aram, who was in bed still, and said, "Look, the Shah wouldn't take an edge on me at all." He said, "Well, that's deliberate." He sat with Ali Mansur. This is to show his confidence in Ali Mansur. But he said, "You must act quickly." He didn't tell me that, he said my counsellor was to be expelled. This was Horace Phillip, but he didn't tell me this right. It comes out later. So I phoned up Qods Nakha, who was the Minister of Court, and said, "I wish an immediate audience with the Shah." And so I went to see the Shah that same evening and after the exchange of pleasantries, I said, "I understand Your Majesty thinks I'm trying to upset your government and have inspired this trouble in the Majles. Why should I be doing this?" And looked him straight in the eyes. And he flinched, and he said, "I accept your word." But that was a major confrontation with him really. And I said to him also at the same time I said, "When Ali Mansur became Prime Minister, I went to him and told him that Alam was a friend of mine, and I rode with him every Friday, and I would continue to do so, but he wasn't to think this was against him." I said, "What more could I do?" And anyway, the Shah dropped it. He wouldn't talk about it, and so that was that. But that gave you a measure of his suspicion.

Another occasion there was a man, Teymur Bakhtiyar, the head of SAVAK, who was in exile. And he knew our Consul in Nice. I've forgotten his name now, but anyway he was on his last job -- retirement in Nice. So Bakhtiyar went to call on him without any warning, and the Consul very properly took him out to lunch. The Consul reported this to me and to London, and I said that we must tell the Shah immediately because he's so suspicious of Bakhtiyar and the British that he will think we are intriguing. So we told the Shah that Bakhtiyar got in touch with our Consul and he gave him lunch. About a year later when the Shah was having trouble with Iraq and the Kurds and so on -- he was battling the Kurds, you know, but there had been an entente, and Bakhtiyar was by this time, I think, in Baghdad or somewhere at work. Alam got hold of me on the instructions of the Shah. He's very angry with the British. He had information that you are intriguing with Teymur Bakhtiyar through British Consulates in Europe, and he's absolutely furious about this. I telegraphed London and said would they check up on all Bakhtiyar's known friends. I mean the only one we knew was this consul, and Nancy Lambton, who was a friend of his -- I don't know, maybe one or two other people. Well we checked up, and nobody had seen him except the man in Nice and only that one occasion. So I went back to the Shah and said, "On such and such a day, I told you about the meeting in Nice between the British Consul and Bakhtiyar. Have you any other evidence?" He said, "No." And that was that. It's an occasion when his memory went wrong, you see. But that was the sort of thing we were up against all the time and one of the reasons why one couldn't afford to have dealings with the opposition. Because after all, an ambassador has got to do business

with the ruler of the day.

Assar: Now when I interviewed Tony Parsons, Peter Ramsbotham, and various other people, they said this, that they had absolutely not an inkling of what was up -- especially with the mullahs and so forth -- and that it is a myth that the British have had any dealing with the mullahs or the opposition or they knew what was happening. In other words, the official version of the events --

Wright: That I'm certain is true.

Assar: That the official version of the thing the way Tony has written in his book and so forth are absolutely correct. Well, just by chance, I had drinks at a party the other evening with Lord Erskin.

Wright: I never heard of him.

Assar: Well, he's a lord, but he's a businessman -- a wealthy man who had a lot of dealings with business and a lot of dealings with Persia -- great lover of Persia -- went there three or four times a year, apparently. In connection with his visit --

Wright: At what period?

Assar: Towards the end. Now what he said, and this has intrigued me, is that as early as 1975 the British Ambassador told him, "Things are very bad." Oh, the British Embassy. I don't know

whether it was the Ambassador or somebody else. But anyway, things are very bad, and there's trouble brewing, and could he get out his business as quickly as possible, and how quickly could he get out? And he had said, "Well, in a few months or something." They had said, "Oh no, no, do it as quickly as you can, because we have very good intelligence and fear that big trouble is brewing and that this regime won't last." So if they knew in 1975, how is it that Tony Parsons said that he didn't know and there was no intelligence as late as 1977-78?

Wright: I don't believe Lord Erskin. That's all. I went to Tehran in 1975. Let's see, who was ambassador? It may be Ramsbotham. But there was no indication of that either from the MI6 people or the Embassy; either if he was talking to some Iranian and he put it in, you know. Because Iranians were apt to build up so and so. But I just do not believe it. Because if that had been so, the Embassy would have reported. And if what Tony says in his book, which I believe is absolutely true because he had access to all his own papers because he was maybe working for Margaret Thatcher. He was able to refresh his memory. He makes it quite clear that though he saw there was instability and discontent, that on balance the Shah had the position in control, and he was recommending to British firms right up to the end that they should come and work there. Rightly or wrongly, that was his line. But I don't believe for one minute that anybody in the Embassy had said that .

Assar: How would a man like that invent such a thing and pull out his business?

Wright: Well, somebody may have got at him but not of the Embassy, because the Embassy was convinced I think in 1970 and 1975 and right up -- I told you a story about my seeing Eqbal in 1977 when he told me how much corruption, etc. there was, but even then the Embassy would not report it that things were going wrong. And I saw when I was in Russia two weeks ago -- I had lunch at our Embassy with Vinigradof, who was the Russian Ambassador at the time of the Revolution.

Assar: Did you? What happened?

Wright: He was very interesting. I didn't know him, but our Ambassador brought him around to lunch. You know, it's very difficult to get Russians to lunch, but he used me as a bait, you see. And he told me that they had no idea of what was going on. And he said that none of us had. It's said that Israelis had some intelligence about it, but in the last few months. But nobody has had, and I just do not believe Erskin. It was not done on a tip from the British Embassy.

Assar: What did Vinigradof say about it? You obviously talked with Vinigradof about the events in Iran and so forth. What was his view of the situation?

Wright: Well, I mean, in so far as we talked at all, the situation is more what's going to happen in the future? He thought the Ayatollahs were going to continue reigning. He didn't think there

would be any big change.

Assar: After Khomeini.

Wright: Yes. I think that's the general view that we have in England too.

Assar: That it will go on. Why is that, because there is no alternative?

Wright: Well, because there's no opposition. This Iranian lawyer I taught, who gave me the caviar two or three days ago, who goes back to Tehran two or three times a week, but he's based in Paris. But he told me just the same thing. He said, "There's no real opposition in Iran at all." The opposition here doesn't count. Bakhtiyar and people like that, I mean, they haven't got a ghost of a chance in my opinion.

Assar: What about the Army -- somebody out of the Army?

Wright: Well yes, if somebody emerges from the Army, you see. That's what one would like to see Reza Khan, but not with a British label on it -- with an Iranian label. I mean, the last thing that should happen is for anybody to emerge who got an American or a British label on him. It's a kiss of death. And that's why I think all these people in Paris are just barking up the wrong tree, you see. Somebody has got to emerge in Iran. It'll happen eventually. But no, that's very interesting about Erskin, but I've never heard

of him one thing. Lord Erskin of what is he called?

Assar: Of something or other. Tell us about this famous pub.

Wright: Well, it's not famous. It's a pub which, as far as I can discover, was named after Nasereddin Shah, in a village: The Shah 1873. And nobody's ever heard of it or thought of it until some enterprising member of the Iranian Embassy in the 1960's saw it and then complained to the Foreign Office -- this was when Mr. Aram was Foreign Minister -- went to the Foreign Office and said, "This is very insulting to call a pub --" And the Foreign Office tried to explain that to have a pub called after you was really rather -- We had lots of pubs called after our kings and queens. It was not an insult, but rather a compliment. So nothing happened.

Assar: Yes. Have you ever been there?

Wright: No, but I've been in touch with the owners of it.

Assar: What about other members of the Royal Family? Did you have any dealings with Princess Ashraf, Princess Shams, or others or --

Wright: I kept Princess Ashraf at arms length. I had no use for her at all.

Assar: Why is that?

Wright: Because she had such a reputation for corruption and



immorality that I didn't want to be associated with her in any way. And I never asked her to the Embassy the whole time I was there. And I had to go once to a party at her house, but I never went again. And so that was my view of Ashraf. Others -- Gholam-Reza -- he was a rather lazy non-entity, but amiable, and I raised him to a trip to England. He stayed at Balmarrel -- with the Queen. And the one I saw most of -- was Prince Abdol-Reza, and his wife, because they were in disgrace with the Court. And they used to entertain down at their base on the Caspian.

Assar: Why were they in disgrace?

Wright: Because the story is -- I never got to the bottom of it -- but I think the story is that Princess Parisima is alleged to have warned the Italian Princess whom Shah wanted to marry in the 1959 period against the Shah. In January when I was in Tehran, everybody was waiting for the Italian Princess to turn up, and she never did. And this was said to be because she was warned off by Parisima who told her what a bad lot the Court were. That may or may not be true. Parisima denies it, but I've talked to her about it. But anyway, you may remember, she was not even invited to the Coronation of the Shah. All the other princesses were. And she was never invited to the Palace. And they -- Prince Abdol-Reza and Parisima used to have a farm up on the Caspian near Rasht, and then they had a place on the beach -- a beach hutch. And the arranged weekend parties there, and I used to get invited once a year with my wife. And we'd go down by special train or carriage on the train. And they would have -- usually there might be one other ambassador there

-- the American or the French ambassador -- and then a lot of mutual friends -- usually the Farmanfarmaiyans. And we used to play charades and games, and it was a very friendly two or three days of relaxation. And I would invite them to dinner with us once or twice a year. But apart from that, I kept the Royal Family at arms length, because I did not wish to be identified with the Royal Family particularly. I mean, not just because it was the Pahlavi family, but when I was in Ethiopia as Ambassador, I took the same feeling. I did not want to be regarded as being in the pockets of the ruling family. And given the controversy about, oh, the Shah and about Ashraf and so on, I kept them all at arms length.

Assar: What did you think of Prince Abdol-Reza?

Wright: Well, he was intelligent. He was the most intelligent. He was ambitious, because before the Shah had a son, I think he saw himself as possibly being the heir presumptive. He never asked any favors of me. But I believe when money started coming in in a big way, that all the Royal Family got involved in business deals. But at that time, he was interested primarily in big game hunting and in running his estate up on the Caspian. But I was never close to any of them really.

Assar: And what about the whole Farmanfarmaiyan family, because they were considered as the second family of Persia, being so numerous whereas --

Wright: Well, I liked them. They were very intelligent and very

amusing.

Assar: Which ones did you know?

Wright: Well, I knew Aziz. I knew Manuchehr. I knew Safiyyeh Khanum. She was married to Firuz. I knew Eskandar Firuz. Sirus I knew. Ali I knew. Hafez, who is now in the University of Texas. And I knew Mary Ra'is, you see. I knew them all pretty well -- well not all, because there were thirty-four of them -- but I knew a number of them, and I liked them. But again, I was careful to keep them some distance, because as Ambassador, it always struck me that one should not be identified with any clique or group of people, and particularly, you might say, the upper crust of society. I tried to spread my contacts as widely as possible and --  
[end of side one, tape two]

Assar: You were telling me about a famous party that you gave -- a stag party -- for the Shah the 2nd of February in 1967.

Wright: Yes, well the Duke of Edinburgh was coming out on his way to Australia, I think, and the Shah had invited him to stop in Tehran and do some shooting. So the Duke of Edinburgh said he would like to give a party at the Embassy for the Shah. And I went to the protocol people at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and they told me that the Shah would never go to any foreign embassy unless it's a state visit. So then one of my morning rides with Mr. Alam, who was arranging the shooting up in the Caspian for the Duke -- I said that I was told the Duke couldn't ask the Shah to the Embassy. And

he said, "Nonsense. I think he will come to your Embassy, and I'll write to him." He was in Switzerland, I think, at the time. And a few days later I got a message, "Yes, the Shah would be very happy to come to the British Embassy to dine." So I then arranged a party which would be six people on the Iranian side and six on the British side. As the Duke was out is the Queen, I decided to make it a stag party. And it was a very successful party, because the Shah stayed late, and the Duke is a good conversationalist, and there was a lot of bragging and talking and things. It was a very good party. And I thought there would be a lot of problems over security. And I didn't tell the servants until the day before or tell the cook the Shah was coming, but I asked about security -- whether I should provide food for a lot of -- and was told, no, there will just be the Shah's two or three ADC's who will be with him. So I arranged for them to have dinner in the next room -- we had a small diningroom -- and to have it with my wife's secretary, who was living with us -- a girl -- and the Scotland Yard Sergeant, who was looking after the Duke of Edinburgh and the Ministers Office of the Embassy. And the three Iranians were top level soldiers -- generals and admirals. Anyway, they had to have leftovers from our dinner. But it was a very successful evening. There was no publicity. And for two or three years, I mean, I kept quiet about it and didn't tell people. But it was a unique occasion, because I've never heard of the Shah going to a foreign embassy except for a State visit. He did do me the honor, if you like, of coming to our Embassy and having this dinner.

Assar: And did you go shooting with the party?

Wright: I don't shoot. I didn't. The Duke flew up there and went shooting himself.

Assar: And who accompanied him?

Wright: Mr. Alam, I think, went up with him.

Assar: That's all?

Wright: I think so, yes. I think it was him.

Assar: Any other salient events of that kind that happened during your tenure of office?

Wright: Well, there were others. I can't remember them now. I'm gradually sort of trying to amass them together to make my own memoirs, and I've done four chapters. But I'm doing them for 1953 period first, you see. No, I mean, one has bad moments, but on the whole, I was extremely happy in Iran. I enjoyed it, and of course, one reason why I enjoyed it, because as I said earlier, the Iranians believe almost anything about the British. And going back to ancient history, really, 19th century history, about which I've written two books, and they gave me a position of people thinking I was far more important than I was. Here was I representing a second class country, and they thought I had as much power as the Americans or the Russians, and of course, I hadn't. But it made my position a very interesting one, because I was always being consulted or blamed

for what went wrong, and more often than not it was blame, but it was great fun.

Assar: How come that you stayed two terms instead of one?

Wright: Well, there were various moves, which I heard of later, to move me. One was some talk about going to Moscow as Ambassador, and the Foreign Office officials took the line that I hadn't been in Iran long enough and was to stay there, and so I didn't go to Moscow either. Then another occasion -- I think, I'm not certain -- after my full term, there was a possibility of my going to India. But at the last minute, Harold Wilson, who was Prime Minister amalgamated the Foreign Office with the Commonwealth's Relations Office, and the job had to be found, but he had only Commonwealth's Relations Office, and he was far better qualified than I was for India because he'd served there before. He'd served in Pakistan. So he went, but I was never offered the job, but I believe that I was meant to go there. And the third one was just a few year before I was due to retire. I was offered the job or told that if I wished to go as Ambassador of the Organization for Economic Cooperation in Paris -- OECD -- this would be very acceptable to all the other ministers in White Hall, because this was a Treasury Board of Trade. But the Foreign Office said if you prefer to stay in Tehran, we are happy to leave you there. So I said, "Leave me in Tehran." Because I didn't want to go to Paris, and so I escaped and stayed eight years in Tehran, which for me was very enjoyable and very happy times.

Assar: But when after the Mossadeq, Roger Stevens became -- you were Charg d'affaires -- you left and Roger Stevens became Ambassador. Unfortunately, he's dead, as you know, and we can't talk to him. What did he tell you about his sojourn there at the time -- you know, at the beginning of the Shah's sort of consolidating his position and trying to modernize and that kind of thing.

Wright: Well, Roger Stevens wasn't there, you see, at that time. He left in about 1958 or something. The Shah hadn't really started then. I mean, the Shah didn't really take off until 1963. And it was Geoffrey Harrison who in his -- Roger Stevens' view of the Shah was as critical as mine at the time, and he had very little use for him. He thought he was a weak man, and he had no use for the Royal Family at all. And I would have probably agreed with that view at that time. And when Geoffrey Harrison left Tehran, he talked about the beginnings of this reform, and so on, and he saw changes coming. But they didn't really start coming until the end of 1963. I'll dig out something.

Assar: In other words, all the while that you were here.

Wright: All the while I was here, yes.

Assar: So you really witnessed all the changes and so forth?

Wright: While I was there, yes.

Assar: Were there any resistance to the moves, to the changes? I

mean, you talked about the Moharram --

Wright: Yes, and then it was quiet.

Assar: After that.

Wright: After the 1963-64 riots, but not until 1969 you got this urban guerrilla movement coming, and you know there's a little bit of that about 1969 or 1970. And the first real serious indication of anything was when a group raided a police station up at Siyahkal on the Caspian, you may remember in December or January, 1970-71. It may have been a bit later. Because I was planning as my last trip in Iran before I retired, of riding to the Caspian Sea from Qazvin with my wife in April. Instead it was lots of parties in Tehran. We decided to spend the last weekend or week in riding across the Caspian.

Assar: On horseback?

Wright: On horseback. And so we arranged this through a wife of a translator. She was a translator in the Embassy. Her husband was a local man up in Siyahkal up in the Caspian. And April -- unfortunately, it was very wet and cold. And all my other trips on horseback, I'd never been accompanied by the police or anything. I'd always gone by myself or with Ielda, my wife. This time because of this trouble at Siyahkal, where they'd shot up and killed -- I mean, it's a famous incident in this urban guerrilla movement -- they gave me, I think, four gendarmes to accompany us. And so



they were very cold, because the first night we rode through slough and mud, and my wife was frozen and had to be lifted off her mule, you see. And then we got up into the Caspian -- to the hills -- and of course, by the time we got to Caspian, it was spring. But it was the last trip we did. And that was the only time we ever had an escort all of my eight years, you see. So all the time I was there, it was calm after the Muharam riots. I'll just read you my last dispatch -- I'm not allowed to keep them -- but I kept --

Assar: Your last dispatch to the Foreign Office?

Wright: Foreign Office, yes.

[tape interrupted]

Wright: Marie Gabriel of Savoy. Did you not know that?

Assar: We are going back to what you were mentioning before?

Wright: Yes.

Assar: The Italian Princess that the Shah wanted to --

Wright: Yes, 1959, yes. It was all arranged -- bedrooms prepared and everything.

Assar: And she was called Marie?

Wright: Marie Gabriel.

Assar: The Savoy?

Wright: Yes. And then he put out feelers to a Princess Alexandra too.

Assar: And Princess Alexandra said no?

Wright: Well, it never got that far. She would never be asked. They would never allow it.

Assar: Why not?

Wright: Well, because one is a Muslim, and the other is a Christian, and you know, their difference in ages but -- Did you ever know that? That was done before my time, but I know it was -- Alam told me that he'd asked Geoffrey Harrison to --

Assar: The Shah had asked Geoffrey Harrison?

Wright: Well, Alam had asked Geoffrey Harrison on behalf of the Shah. No, I can't find this thing.

Assar: This is your last dispatch?

Wright: Yes, it's just quoting just a sentence about the discontent. Ah, my last dispatch of all -- the one I wrote on my sixtieth birthday, the 23rd of March. I said, "The white

revolution, having solved the immediate problem with Iran's post war society, has stimulated the expectations of the rising generation in a way which could bring a fundamental challenge to all the autocratic concepts on which even the white revolution was founded. This challenge will almost certainly come in the Shah's lifetime and possibly in the next few years." That was in 1971.

Assar: 1971 before you left.

Wright: That was the 23rd of March. And then on the 20th of April literally my last -- I'd said the Shah had done quite a lot of good and development, and I said, "However, despite the progress and prosperity of recent years, much criticism goes on. Student unrest has increased and imposes a new problem as well as a warning that the future will be far less simple." So, you know, I was put it. And then when I first went to Iran in June, 1963, I was very skeptical about the Shah then. "I do not believe for one moment that the weakness of character and judgment that he, the Shah, has shown in the past has been exorcised, though he now give the impression of maturity and better understanding of international problems. The country is waiting for leadership which somehow, despite all the brave words, the Shah never quite provides. So long as the Army and security forces remain loyal, and without them the Shah is doomed, and allow no alternative leader -- no Mossadeq -- to emerge, the country will probably tag along for some time behind the only leader they have. But unless some progress is made to satisfy the material hopes raised by the reform program, there will eventually be trouble." That was in 1963.

Assar: Prophetic.

Wright: Yes. So I wasn't so far wrong, you see, although I never put my finger on the mullahs. I thought he --

Assar: You thought if the trouble would come from the --

Wright: The intellectuals and the students and the liberals. And I don't think in 1971 the mullahs were that much of a menace. I think it was only when you have these huge movements from the countryside into the towns and captive audiences and the mosques and the lack of work, lack of housing, the importation of thousands of foreigners to do the jobs, and inflation. I mean, all these things, you see, which happened long after I left. And that's, I think, when things started going wrong. 1971 was a turning point, because you know the three things that happened then. One, he won his battle against the oil companies. And February or March he got the price of oil up. You know, he was leading the OPEC countries. That went to his head. Secondly, there was the Persepolis jamboree -- kings and queens -- not our Queen. I recommended she shouldn't come.

Assar: You recommended. Why was that?

Wright: Because I said we'd had a lot of trouble with the Shah over Bahrain and things like that, you know -- over the islands. There was a lot of hostile press over oil. You know, generally the

Shah was being highly unhelpful to the British, and I thought why the hell should the Queen come and please him? And so I recommended she shouldn't come, and she didn't come. And the third thing was, of course, we pulled out of the Persian Gulf, and that left a vacuum. And the Americans quite rightly said the Iranians were the people who should hold the peace there, and we agreed with that. But what we didn't agree with -- we were never asked -- was giving the Shah carte blanche to have all the arms he wanted. And after that, you know, he went berserk. Did you see what I wrote about -- the Shah's obituary I wrote. Did you ever see that?

Assar: Where was it?

Wright: It was in the Spectator I did it. But you aren't going to read it, because that, I think, is my Persian -- Yes, there, you can read that if you like.

Assar: You read the interview.

Wright: It's too long. No, it's too long to read. You can get it. Make a note of it -- the Spectator, the 2nd of August, 1980.

Assar: But if there's anything you want to quote from that, go ahead.

Wright: No, it would take too long. Well, I've talked about his successes in 1971. I said, "These successes turned an already vain man into a megalomaniac who would tolerate neither unpalatable

advice nor criticism." Such was his sensitivity that he ordered a vicious press attack on Sir Roger Stevens, a former British Ambassador to Iran, because of a book review he had written, which was published in the Spectator in February, 1977. Shortly afterwards when I visited Tehran for the last time, I remonstrated with the Shah for authorizing this attack. But I see he was criticizing BBC and everything, and I said, "Well, why do you attack Roger Stevens, one of your best friends, you see?" And I quote, "pointing out that Sir Roger Stevens was a well known friend of Iran, and his review could only be regarded as favorable to the Shah's achievements. The Shah curtly answered that Sir Roger had no right to refer to his reforms as moderate. They were radical." He would listen to no one. And that review -- Parviz Raji telephoned me and said had I read this review? He telephoned me about something else, but it was to ask about Widenfeld doing a book on the Shah, and I advised against it. I said it would only be sycophantic, and it won't do any good at all. And then he said, had I seen this review in the Spectator. It's a very good review. So I looked at it, and that's it. And a very good review it was -- very favorable to the Shah. It mentioned SAVAK in passing, but nothing unpleasant. Roger was a really great friend.

Assar: Review of what? What was the review of?

Wright: Two books on Iran. But somebody in the Iranian Embassy -- the SAVAK man I suppose -- telegraphed, you see, to Tehran and said this monstrous man, Stevens, is calling your reforms moderate. So the Shah says, "Right. Attack him." So they have a vicious

article in Keyhan written by that Amir Taheri, I think.

Assar: Really. And what did the article say?

Wright: Well, I've forgotten, but it was attacking Roger Stevens, and when I saw the Shah, I said, "Why do you allow this sort of thing? Roger is one of your best friends." I said, "He's regarded in England as I am -- as a friend of Iran's, and this article" -- I didn't dare let on that Parviz had said it was a good article, because that would have been the end of Parviz, you see. Anyway, it was incredible.

Assar: So

what about the trips you took to the Qal e Alamut? You took several trips.

Wright: Yes, I went there, I think, three or four times. Only once though did I go right the way over the pass and down the other side to the Caspian, and that was -- I've forgotten what year -- but my wife had got shingles and couldn't come with me, but I went with my friend, Camp, I mentioned earlier, to Tampasiyan. And we had great difficulty getting mules, because we went to the end of the landrover route, and then we camped for the night and tried to get mules the next day, and we couldn't get them. There were two girls with us, my wife's secretary and Camp's girlfriend, whom he's since married -- a German girl. And so I had to walk really most of the way, and I had a chronic attack of diarrhea, and I was very, very weak -- had to walk right up this pass to about 13,000 feet.

And up at the top, although we had tents with us -- we had one mule carrying them -- there was a couple of huts up there -- peasant houses -- and we slept on the floor in them and then went down the next day. It took two days to get to the Caspian through the most marvelous country. I mean, starting with shrubs and then getting trees and forests, but it was absolutely lovely. And so I have very happy memories of that one. And then I did one or two other trips in Talesh, you know, which is further near the Russian frontier, looking for trout and fishing for trout, but there were few trouts there. But no, my trips in Iran were ones I have very happy memories of. Usually my wife was with me, but not always. Sometimes I went with just Camp and a couple of men on my own.

Assar: Were you aware during your eight years in Iran, for instance, of Russian intrigue in Persia? I mean, there was the Tudeh Party, but the Tudeh Party was such a --

Wright: Yes, but it had been in a way sort of silenced. No, one was aware that the Russians were broadcasting from Azarbayjan or somewhere, and they were broadcasting also from Bulgaria, I think, to Iran hostile propaganda. But outwardly, of course, the Russians were on friendly terms. They were doing the pipeline from the south to -- Masjed Soleyman to Astara. They were building factories, and on the whole, the Russians were careful not to get into trouble in Iran. So I don't think there was any major intrigue at that time. The Russians -- I think, I don't know, but I think -- were more concerned with keeping the Shah off his guard



really and penetrating the country peacefully with factories, developing of copper mines or whatever it was -- of coal mines in Yaz", the steel mill outside Esfahan and that sort of thing -- and were careful -- although there were occasional scandals when somebody was expelled, I think they were Russians. But on the whole, I was not aware of any great intrigue going on at the time.

Assar: Was this their long term plan do you think? Or were they too busy with Afghanistan?

Wright: Well, I think their long term plan would be to see -- as it is around the world -- to see a communist government. But they had tried, you see, 19 -- After the Shah broke off relations, negotiations with the Russians in 1959 -- I told you I was involved in that -- there was very strong propaganda against the Shah from Moscow and attacking him, but it didn't succeed. And therefore, I think in 1962, the Russians decided to make the best of a bad job and come to terms with the Shah, and they had some -- I think the Shah gave an undertaking not to allow any foreign military establishments in the country, and there was an air agreement, and thereafter, the Russians tried to work with the Iranians and had these joint enterprises like the steel mill and things like that. So I think that the Russians' aim was to go about it long term wise and a game of chess, not to rush at it. And I think that's still their policy.

Assar: With the Khomeini regime?

Wright: Yes, I think the same thing.

Assar: You don't think that they are trying to penetrate the revolutionary guard who are setting up as a separate entity rather like Hitler's SS. Apparently they are setting up their own Army and their own --

Wright: I have absolutely no idea. You see, I'm out of touch now, and I just don't know. I mean, it would be idle to speculate. I just don't know. But long termwise, one knows the Russians want communist regimes everywhere, and wherever they can get them, they will, whichever way suits them. But I think at the moment they're a bit perplexed at which way to jump, because Khomeini takes an anti-Russian line. He's anti their policy in Afghanistan, and so they're keeping a low profile.

Assar: He doesn't do anything about it, does he? He doesn't help the Mujahedin.

Wright: No, but he's not -- He rounded up a lot of Russian spies, didn't he, two or three years ago. I mean, expelled a lot of Russians. The Russians didn't react very strongly. So I think they're just being careful and keeping a low profile.

Assar: And what about the British? What do you think they're out to get now? What is going to happen?

Wright: Well, I'm not that closely in touch with affairs anymore,

but my guess is, and the impression I get from talking to my friends who are more directly concerned, is that the present regime, even after Ayatollah, is going to continue -- that the exiles abroad are not going to achieve anything at all, and that if there is to be a change in Iran, it's got to come from inside -- possibly some leader in the Army like Rezakhan would arise or somebody like that -- a strong man who will be accepted as a man of the people and who will get rid of this present oppressive regime. You know, it's idle to speculate. One can't tell.

End of Interview.

Name-----	Page-----
Afshar, Amir Khosrow,	27-30, 33
Ala', Hosein,	3, 14, 15
Alam, Amir Asadollian,	19-21, 39-41, 43, 52, 53
Alexandra, Princess of England,	29, 30, 58-59
Amini, 'Ali,	22, 23
Amuzegar, Jamshid,	14
Aram, 'Abbas,	38-39, 41-42, 46
Arfa', General Hasan,	14, 15
Baghdad Pact,	14, 16
Bakhtiyar, General Teymur,	43-44
CENIC,	16
Eden, Sir Anthony,	3, 6
Edinburgh, Duke of,	52-53
Eisenhower, Dwight D.,	16-17
Elizabeth II, Queen of England,	61
Entezam, 'Abdollah,	4-6, 20, 22
Eqbal, Manuchehr,	14, 15, 24, 30, 42, 46
Erskin, Lord,	44-46, 48
Events of 1953,	10-13
Events of 1963-64,	19-20
Farmanfarmaiyan Family,	50-51
Forughi, Mohsen,	6
Harrison, Geoffrey,	15, 55, 59
Hoveyda, Amir 'Abbas,	37-39
Iran-Soviet Non-Agression Pact,	15-16
Keyhan Newspaper	63
Khomeini, Ayatollah Seyyed Ruhollah,	41, 47, 66
Lambton, Ann,	23-24, 43
Lauden, John,	22
Lloyd, Selwyn,	16
Louis, Roger,	11
Luce, Sir William,	38
Mansur, Hasan 'Ali,	41-43
Marie Gabriel of Savoy,	58
Mas'udi, 'Abbas,	32
McGee, George,	10
McMillan,	16, 17
Meyer, Armin,	23
Morris, James,	35
Mossadeq, Mohammad,	1, 9-12, 55, 60
Nasser, Gamal 'Abd,	10-11
Nationalization of Oil of 1950-51,	3-5, 10, 12-13
OPEC,	61
Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza Shah,	3-8, 11-46, 52, 53, 58-63, 66
Pahlavi, Prince Gholam-Reza,	49
Pahlavi, Prince 'Abdol-Reza,	49-51
Pahlavi, Princess Ashraf,	49
Pahlavi, Princess Parisima,	49-50
Pahlavi, Queen Farah,	19, 21
Pahlavi, Queen Soraya,	7, 8

Name	Page
Pahlavi, Reza Shah,	48, 67
Parsons, Sir Anthony,	27, 37, 44
Peron, Ernst,	2, 4, 5, 7
Philip, Horace,	42
Qajar, Naseroddin Shah,	48
Qaragozlu, Mohsen,	15
Qods Nakha'i, Hosein,	42
Raji, Parviz,	62, 63
Ramsbotham, Sir Peter,	1, 44, 45
Revolution of 1978-79,	44-48
Rowhani, Fu'ad,	22
SAVAK,	22, 63
Shahrokh, Banram,	2, 4, 5, 7
Shapuriyan, Ali Monammad,	29-30
Shawcross, Lord,	29
Soheyli, Ali,	7, 8
Stevens, Roger,	7-9, 55, 62, 63
Tabataba'i, Seyyed Ziyaoddin,	17
Taheri, Amir,	63
Thatcher, Margaret,	19, 45
Vinogradof,	46-47
Wilson, Harold,	54
Wood, Roger,	35
Zahedi, Ardeshir,	26, 27, 33, 39
Zahedi, General Fazlollah,	3



