

Iranian politics?

Oney: I think during that period Iranian politics was analyzed pretty much in terms of the positions of the Shah and his programs. Of course, it wasn't until after '62 that the White Revolution got really under way. The Shah was already making noises to indicate that he was getting increasing power and influence, so this was the important factors in doing our analysis. What the Shah's position was on a variety of things, how he interacted, not only with the military, which finally was pretty simple because he dominated the military, but also his relationship with the other politicians that showed up from time to time. Eqbal, for example. I mean, he was interesting because the Shah, I think, appointed Amini reluctantly.

Q: Before we get to Amini, let me ask this. A lot of questions about this have been raised. That after the fall of National Front in 1953-54, that the US maintained some kind of contact with it. That, say, for instance, someone like Dr. Shaygan came to America, he taught here. All of these, at least in Iran, were seen as ways of putting these people in a pickle or trying to prevent them from going to the left, radicalizing by sort of giving him some kind of attention. Can you elaborate on that?

Oney: Well, I think contact was maintained to the extent that it was maintained, primarily to find out what they were doing, what they were thinking. There was considerable--not support, but

considerable sympathy with the Nationalists and the National Frontists because most of them had an "out of Iran" education, Europe or the United States. Politically they spoke in terms of democracy that we understood. Intellectually I think they were probably closer to most of the Americans that they talked to than they were to the Shah or they were to the mass of Iranians. So I don't think that there was consciously any attempt to keep them in kind of a fall back position of "If the Shah falters, we've got these guys to put in." Or, on the other hand, keep track of them so we could tell the Shah what they were doing. That was never the case, either.

Q: But did you envision eventually a role for them in Iran? Did CIA see that?

Oney: Early on I think some people might have envisioned a role for them in Iran, but frankly, the Nationalists and the National Front were so ineffective that it was almost pitiful. After abdicating the possibility of power to the Shah, then they simply thrashed around with unformed ideas, platforms that were so general they could have applied to anywhere, practically anywhere in the world. I think to some people they were a disappointment because they were so ineffective. I think, as I said earlier, my feeling is that the Nationalists missed several chances of establishing a respectable position because of such an adamant opposition to the Shah, particular in the earliest days when the Shah was, relatively speaking, weak. By the time the '60s

arrived, and particularly by '62, the Shah had pretty well established his supremacy and the Nationalists no longer were in a position to do anything.

Q: Then comes the Amini era.

Oney: Yes. Well, as I said, I think the Shah was somewhat reluctant to appoint Amini.

Q: Was pressure brought to bear from Washington for his appointment?

Oney: I know that's the story and a lot of Iranians thought it was the case. It's possible that when the diplomatic stuff becomes publicly available there may be something in there, but I don't know of anything. I was in Iran at this time.

Q: What years were you there?

Oney: '62 to '64, end of '64. That was my second tour. There was a -- Okay, Amini had been Ambassador in the United States. He had a good reputation with American officials, with State Department, people and a variety of others outside of the Agency. Various American officials and the Ambassador had spoken well of him and even talked about him as a potential Prime Minister. I suspect, although I can't prove it one way or the other right now, I suspect that this general feeling among

American officials about Amini's qualifications to be Prime Minister, may have been interpreted indeed by the Shah and other Iranians as a signal that the Americans wanted Amini.

Q: It seems to many that America was looking for an alternative because there's also allegation at this time that they were checking Bakhtiar. They were looking at Bakhtiar more seriously and the whole story of when Bakhtiar went to Washington and met with Kennedy and led to his removal eventually. There was this sense as of -- Did you have this feeling that America was looking for someone else?

Oney: No, I don't --

Q: And if they were, what was the reason?

Oney: No, I don't have that feeling. On Bakhtiar, he did a lot of talking to the Station Chief, a lot of griping about the Shah.

Q: To the CIA Station.

Oney: Yes.

Q: This is in late '50s?

Oney: No, this would have been, say, in the year before he finally left Iran.

Q: At that time Station Chief was Yatsevich, no?

Oney: I believe it still was, yes. So we had a pretty good idea of what was bothering Bakhtiar, which was practically everything that was going on.

Q: But what was it exactly? Because right now it looks like the Shah's regime was moving on smoothly. What were with the main problems of which Washington was aware of or that Bakhtiar was aware of?

Oney: Well, without recalling the material in detail, I think it was economic problems which Iran was having at the time. Things that the Shah was doing or was failing to do that Bakhtiar thought he could do better. It was the sort of thing -- You know, over the years there were dozens of reports of plotting against the Shah. Sometimes military officers; sometimes combinations. So this sort of thing was endemic. It never came to anything. Most of these people, I finally assessed them as people frustrated for one reason or another getting together and doing some kind of low level wishful thinking or wishful plotting. I think Bakhtiar's griping was on a little higher level than that. Whether or not he was doing this and telling it to the Station Chief for the purpose of winning American support for a move, I don't know. I never saw anything to indicate that that was the case. I never saw anything to indicate that that

wasn't the case. When Bakhtiar was removed, I'm not aware that there was any great weeping and wailing about it, which would have been the case, I think, if the Agency or if the United States had planned on him to be some kind of a strong man. I think there would have been a considerable amount of unhappiness. It was just the Shah showing his teeth again, if you like, and at the same time, you remember, he removed --

Q: Hedayat, Qarani.

Oney: Hedayat, Qarani and --

Q: Vosuq, General Vosuq.

Oney: There was another. Alavi-moqaddam.

Q: Why were they removed? There was always the charge that money was contributed to the Republicans and it was alleged that the money was brought out of the US Military Aid.

Oney: I don't know anything about that. I think our assessment at the time was that the Shah just decided it was time to make a complete sweep of people on this level, getting rid of Bakhtiar. All of these people had been in their positions for some time and I'm sure they were gathering supporters and a certain amount of power and influence.

Q: But Bakhtiar's trip to Washington was the result of his complaints to Yatsevich? As a result, was he invited to go there?

Oney: No, I'm not aware that that was -- I'd have to look at the chronology again. It's a little hazy. Supposedly he came over on a business trip.

Q: Right, and then he met with the President, and then the people who were accompanying him reported this to the Shah.

Oney: Well, I tell you, the only contact I had with that was with alinaqi Alikhani.

Q: Right, right, who was one of the people who was on that trip.

Oney: He was on the trip. He was also a Department 7 analyst, political analyst.

Q: [unclear].

Oney: I don't know whether he knew that or not.

[end of side 2, tape 1]

Q: Okay, you were saying about Alikhani.

Oney: I knew him pretty well because he came into Savak, I think, in 1957, the same time that I went in as a trainer. He was in some of my early classes, so I knew him from the earliest days. Although I only saw Alikhani for a short time when he was here, at whatever hotel they were staying at, all he said was that Bakhtiar had come along for business reasons and Alikhani had come along because he was an economist and kind of an advisor to Bakhtiar on things like this. That's all I know about it.
[tape turned off]

Q: But was this practice of talking to the Station Chief in Iran by the military officers, was it regular or was that case of Bakhtiar an exception?

Oney: No. So far as I know, the military mission--let me put it the other way around. The Station had very few, if any, contacts with the U.S. military mission, or with the Iranian military. Conversely, the American military mission had good contacts with the Iranian military, but they provided next to no useful intelligence information, as a matter of policy. The military mission argued that they were there as a military mission, as trainers to the military and not as intelligence reporters and that if they were perceived by the Iranian military as collecting intelligence, that would reduce the effectiveness of their primary job. I know I sat in several meetings where we argued with military types about this because I had access and could have provided interesting and useful information, but they were

dead set against that on, I guess from their point of view, a reasonable stance that they were trainers and didn't want to do anything that would jeopardize that mission.

Q: Generally at this period, very quickly after the coups of '53, the news that CIA had involvement spread very rapidly. Was there a leak or how was it that everybody quickly became aware that this was foreign instigated?

Oney: I think it was from an interview that Alan Dulles gave to--who was it? A couple of reporters, a man and wife reporting time, I think perhaps on the Saturday Evening Post. Golly, I should remember what the names were.

Q: Well, that we can check later.

Oney: Apparently this was the first time that it had been mentioned publicly and Alan Dulles mentioned it. Whether it was a leak, or whether he did it deliberately, I have no way of knowing.

Q: But that's how it got spread.

Oney: That's where it started publicly, although I'm just not familiar with what the gossip might have been in Teheran at that time.

Q: And then you were saying about the Amini government. That once it came into power it --

Oney: Oh, yes. Although I believe the Shah was reluctant to appoint Amini, he finally did. Perhaps because of the perception that because so many Americans had said such good things about Amini, the Americans must have wanted Amini. As I said before, I'm not aware that there was any particular pressure or suggestion that Amini should be appointed. It's possible that this was the case, but I'm just not aware of it. Of course, Amini had also been involved or mixed up in a plot a couple years earlier, a few years earlier when he was Ambassador here, the Qarani Affair.

Q: What was that affair, if you recollect? Why was he removed? Was that a coup?

Oney: I can never make up my mind. It lasted such a short period of time. As the story went, Qarani had drawn up a list of cabinet officers for a new government, which he hoped to form. Whether or not this was with or without the Shah, I don't know. Obviously, the Shah would interpret it as being without him. There was a third secretary of the American Embassy said to have been mixed up with it. Qarani had invited this guy to come to a meeting.

Q: Just to inform the Americans of his intentions?

Oney: Yes, I think that was it. The interpretation that was given publicly was kind of mixed. Although publicly the press talked about it in terms of a coup attempt that involved the Americans, very rapidly the tone changed. This was a young foreign service officer, not well experienced, and he had talked to his superiors about it and said, "Well, go ahead. Just see what he has to say." I have no firsthand knowledge about this. I don't find it surprising, particularly, that the foreign service officer might, after clearing it with the Ambassador, go to talk to somebody like this. This, after all, is part of their job, trying to see what was going on in the opposition. On the cabinet list Amini was noted as a possible foreign minister. This was in '58. Of course, the whole thing blew over very rapidly. Amini was recalled from Washington, probably for that reason, although the official reason that was given was that he had made some kind of statements about oil policy that were not in line with Iran's official position. The whole thing died pretty rapidly, but I think probably the Shah maintained some kind of a feeling in his mind that maybe Amini wasn't quite as loyal as he should be.

Q: Who discovered this coup?

Oney: I don't know. All of a sudden it just turned up in the papers. Somebody apparently leaked it.

Q: And did this have to do with the removal of those generals a few years down the road?

Oney: I don't think so, no.

Q: That was separate. Amini, the Shah thought he might not be as loyal as one might think.

Oney: Yes. Nevertheless, he was appointed Prime Minister and did a very creditable job under the circumstances. Of course, he finally resigned in frustration, which is not surprising. He maintained a good relationship with the Embassy. His big gripe, big complaint was that the United States didn't come through with enough funding to help him with Iran's economic problems. When he resigned, he obviously resigned in a very depressed state and he publicly made some complaints about the lack of American support and comments about the American Ambassador. But almost the next day he came to the Ambassador and apologized, saying he was just under so much strain that that kind of got out. He always maintained a high reputation with the Americans because, by all counts, he was an honest man. He was competent. He had good ideas, but the situation was just too much for him.

Q: What was the main source of pressure on him? Economy or the opposition? National front?

Oney: I think most of it was the economy, and I think he felt

that the Shah was not supporting him as much as he should. He obviously felt that the United States was not coming through with the funding that he thought he needed. Of course, this was at the beginning of the Shah's White Revolution and there was arsenjani in the cabinet, I think, probably running in some competition with Amini, not only for the ear of the Shah, but also credit for getting land reform under way and this kind of thing. I think it was just a variety of things that Amini felt wore him out.

Q: How much was the United States behind the White Revolution in the sense of pushing the Shah in that direction?

Oney: Oh, I think the Shah was well aware, from conversations that he had had with the Ambassador and various American officials that the US was interested in some kind of reform. Something that would stimulate the economy, be a little more attractive to the population as a whole. Of course, remember, in those days, too, land reform all around the world was the buzz word. That was the big thing with everybody, land reform. It looked good on paper. It probably looked better on paper than it actually turned out to be, but I think that probably wasn't the fault of the idea so much as the execution. Although, I think, now, I haven't read all the literature, but I think from some of the stuff now, 25 years later, there is some rethinking about whether or not land reform was really as important as it was thought to be at the time. But one of the buzz words in Third

World development at that time was land reform. So I think that the reform program probably came from two sources. One, a genuine interest on the part of the Shah in land reform. This went back to his earliest days as Shah, although you have to trace it kind of tenuously because there wasn't any consistent or long range thought out program. In some of these earliest conversations, after he became Shah, he talked about the sort of things that he would like to do, and land reform was one of them. Now, the fact that he never got around to doing anything for 20 years is something else again. But it was something that had long been in his mind, as reflected, as I say, by some of the earliest conversations that he had with the American Ambassador. Let's see, he became Shah in '41. '43, '44, along in there. Plus the fact that there was an obvious foreign interest in land reform. I think at least these two and maybe more strands kind of came together and he was in a position by that time to pretty well get what he wanted. All the points of the White Revolution, after all, were nothing that anybody could argue against. I mean from a Western point of view. Literacy corps, land reform, women's rights. Started out with the six points; expanded it to eleven or twelve. I've forgotten all of them now. But he was talking the language. He was talking liberal language at the time and I think, in most respects, felt that what he was doing was a good thing to do and the right thing to do. In other words, I don't think he approached it necessarily cynically. I'm sure he figured that it would gather him political capital, not only abroad, but in Iran, but I don't think he did this strictly

in terms of a cynical approach. Unfortunately, I think the big problem was in the execution. What he was trying to do, all in all, seems to me required more dedicated and more competent administrators than he had available. In other words, the job was bigger than the bureaucracy that he had to do it. I believe that he labored under the illusion that once he gave an order, it would be carried out, without realizing, perhaps, how many roadblocks, bureaucratic and otherwise, there were along the way between his order and getting something done. The scope of what he wanted to do -- Well, put it in other terms. His capabilities--his ambitions out ran his capabilities. I'll get it pretty soon. His intentions were one thing, but his enthusiasm didn't always filter all the way down to where it counted, and that is, the grass roots.

Q: You were in Iran at this period.

Oney: '62 to '64.

Q: How much contact, for instance, did you have with government people and elite and members of cabinet?

Oney: Most of my official contacts were with Savak.

Q: You were there on a particular mission or was it general?

Oney: First time I was there, '57 to '59, I was training Savak

in analysis, analytical techniques, the establishment of data bases, kinds of things that were important and things that weren't important.

Q: And same with '62 to '64?

Oney: And the second time, by that time most of the training had stopped. Savak was pretty well able to do its own work then, so I was primarily in a liaison capacity at that time.

Q: Information exchange.

Oney: Yes, and because I had been there as an advisor before, I still acted in an advisory capacity, although that was not officially part of my job. It was something I couldn't avoid.

Q: And while you were in Iran, you were still doing your analytical function at Langley or was someone else?

Oney: No. One of the other people in the branch took over that.

Q: No, the model on which Savak was established, this was implemented with help of CIA, i.e., how many bureaus there would be, what bureau would do what?

Oney: No. Agency involvement was at the request of the Shah.

Q: In what year, do you remember?

Oney: Late '56, early '57. You'd have to check. The Shah came over here on a visit and, of course, he talked to the President. I think he raised the problem with the President and the President put him in touch with the Agency. They talked it over and there was finally an agreement to help establish an intelligence organization. Originally, the Agency had suggested only a foreign intelligence organization and not internal at all. This would be more like our system where we have the FBI and police functions separate from the intelligence. But it was at the Shah's insistence that they put the internal security in the same organization.

Q: Why was that, do you know?

Oney: Yes. The Shah had been troubled by so much competition, officials running to him with a bit of information here, a bit of information there. Army officers coming to him with information. Cabinet ministers coming to him with information. Some of it good, bad, indifferent. I think he just got tired of all this and said, "Okay, let's put it in one organization so we don't have all this competition. When a report comes to me, I want it to be the best ideas that you all have.

Q: Was there a nucleus when you went to Iran at that time?

Oney: In Savak?

Q: I mean a nucleus upon which then Savak was built.

Oney: Yes. It was the intelligence section of Bakhtiar's military government, plus for internal security, the secret section of the police. The secret police section in the police was bodily moved into Savak.

Q: And how much was there? Was there anything substantial in place already in the form of these two?

Oney: You mean doing this function?

Q: As far as their competence, extent of their operations.

Oney: Well, there was Military Intelligence, G2, and then there was Police Intelligence. Then there was Bakhtiar's intelligence section in the military government. All these had been performing what we consider an intelligence function, collecting information and reporting it. My impression was that mostly these agencies provided and sent to the Shah simply raw information without any attempt analysis or evaluation. So this was supposed to be the point of our exercise.

Q: You were alone or there was a team?

Oney: There were five of us, I think.

Q: And you educated them in Persian or in English?

Oney: In what?

Q: In what language would you communicate for this education purpose?

Oney: Well, I was told originally that I would do it in French because most of the army officers and the civilians would have had a French education. As it turned out, not that many of them knew French, so I did it in English and I had an excellent translator that did the simultaneous translation into Persian. A fine, old gentleman with a beautiful command of English, retired from AIOC. He was invaluable, not only because of his facility with English, but also because by himself he was impressive. He was a great help in understanding the Iranian bureaucracy and bureaucratic attempts. So as it turned out, after all my preparation, I finally did it in English and translated in Farsi. As I recall, my first class, maybe fifteen people. Three or four of them knew some English. Maybe about the same number knew some French and a couple that knew German, and the rest --

Q: What was their backgrounds? Were they brought from other divisions of the army?