

Oney: I don't know of anything to suggest that the Agency thought it was feasible. It might have been something that was kicked around at one time or another, but you know, as long as you had Farah there --

Q: Before the revolution happened, what did the CIA think would be a possible scenario had the Shah died?

Oney: The most reasonable scenario would be --

Q: Without the benefit of hindsight, just at that time.

Oney: Would have been Farah acting as regent until Reza became of age. That's what the arrangement was, technically, and at that point nobody had any reason to think that it wouldn't work.

Q: [unclear] to think that there would be enough [unclear] to invite the military in?

Oney: Not at that point, no. I think the feeling was that in the interests of maintaining stability that the military would go along with this. I don't remember who all was on the regency council at this point, but the regency council was spelled out and I think it included the armed forces commander on the regency council.

Q: Were you aware at this time in the '70s of the Shah's illness?

Oney: No. One reason being that over the years we probably had--just about every year or every other year somebody would report that the Shah was suffering from dread disease, that he was having a mental breakdown or he had syphilis and was dying. You name it. You can go through a medical dictionary and at one time or another the Shah was reported as suffering from it. Even at one time he was reported as suffering from cancer. So unless we had had an extremely reliable report, it would have gone in the file along with everything else. The Shah routinely had medical examinations out at Bethesda, at the Naval Hospital at Bethesda and he was in good health.

Q: Those check ups must have ceased at some point.

Oney: It did cease at some point. This is a speculation on my part, but these examinations might have stopped or been stopped by the Shah because he thought, for whatever reason, that he had something serious and he was afraid if it came to the attention of the United States that he was seriously ill, that then the US would start looking for somebody else to support. Apparently, although they had French doctors, we had no indication that the French intelligence knew this, either. In spite of the stories that got spread around, the Israelis didn't. There's a story going around that the Israelis knew it and had told the US and we

had ignored it. We went through the files at the time we heard that story. There was no indication in the information, papers that we could find, that the Israelis had ever passed the story on to anybody.

Q: Did generally the stories about Israel's, if you would, perspicacity regarding the revolution, the foreknowledge of revolution and the superior knowledge of events in Iran?

Oney: They had a good knowledge of events in Iran.

Q: Did they have a significant intelligence gathering?

Oney: Yes, I think they probably had a larger presence than we were aware of because, I'm sure every other country, Britain, France, Pakistan, whatever, had a larger presence than we were aware of because you never have a complete knowledge of what another country is doing intelligence wise. But they had a lot of good people. I assume they were good people. Iranian Jews who had immigrated to Israel and they could send them back, infiltrate them one way or the other and they'd be practically indistinguishable from the average Iranian because in everything except their allegiance they were Iranian. They had been born and raised in the Iranian milieu. It seems to me that if they had really been convinced that the Shah was going, that they would not have been caught with so many Israelis in Teheran with such a large installation still in place. You know, it doesn't

make sense that they would have risked so much if they were convinced that the Shah was going. They would have drawn down their embassy. They would have closed down some of their operations, just for safety sake.

Q: We didn't finish our discussion of the Shah's psychological profile. What was the conclusions of the CIA?

Oney: Well, in a nutshell, and without being able to quote it exactly since I haven't seen it for a dozen years -- Now, keep in mind this was done '77 or '78--'77 perhaps--while the Shah was under significant stress politically and perhaps individually. There were stories that he was having marital troubles with Farah and so on. But at that point he seemed to be handling all the stress well and no reason to think that he couldn't continue to handle the situation well. That was about the upshot of it.

Q: Why was the profile commissioned at that point in time? Or was this done periodically?

Oney: No, it wasn't done periodically for the Shah, but it was often done on significant foreign leaders, especially if they were in a sensitive country and under some stress. One had been done on Sukarno previously and one had been done on Nasser

Q: Did the psychological report indicate that the Shah would not act if pressure was mounted on him?

Oney: I don't recall if it did.

Q: I remember hearing this on television. Somebody who evidently had a hand in preparing the report said that he had told CIA that the Shah was a megalomaniac and things of that nature.

Oney: I think the Shah was not a megalomaniac, at least not if you -- This was a term that was used in the Jack Anderson report.

Q: That was the upshot of the report?

Oney: I don't recall that that was used at all in the report.

Q: So what sort of a character did the report see the Shah as? I mean what sort of a person did he come across in that report?

Oney: I think he came across as a strong personality who was capable of handling whatever pressures he might face in a rational manner. That he was given, as his father had been before him, to use force rather than -- Using force against his opponents if it became necessary. Not only the ability, but a willingness to do that. I think in reviewing the early influences, as I just suggested, there was some stuff about his relationship with his father, relationship with his family. It

kind of traced what seemed to be his development from a more or less uncertain, unsure of what he could do and what he couldn't do. There have been a lot of indications of what he wanted to do. Early indications that he wanted to play the same kind of role that his father had done, and also that he, in spite of what he wanted to do, tended to vacillate, unsure that he could really do it. It traced sort of the way in which his approach or maybe his personality had changed as he saw things going his way, as he saw, at least in his own mind, some of the successes that he was having, some of the advancement that Iran was making under his guidance. After all, if you look at Iran for the thirty years from 1941 to 1971, there was a very big difference. A lot of changes have been made, a lot, at least from the Western point of view, for the good or for the better. Ran into a lot of problems that he had handled. I think the key thing that was not in that profile, because we didn't know about it, was the fact that he had cancer, and the second, that he was being treated for it. In talking to some of the agency doctors later, after this became clear, they pointed out that the medication he was taken caused very strong mood swings, strong personality changes. I talked to a friend of mine, now retired, who was an Arab States specialist. His wife had died of cancer and she had been taking a very similar drug and I talked to him about this and he said, yes, indeed, his wife, when she was taking this drug, did have a very strong reaction to it in her personality changes and her moods. I think if we had been aware of this and factored it into the equation, it probably would have at least cast some doubt on

the fact that the Shah was able to maintain the strong and decisive actions he had had before. At the time in 1978, mid '78, either the American Ambassador or the British Ambassador was seeing the Shah about every other day, constantly talking to him. One day the Ambassador would report that the Shah was very upbeat, alert, right on top of the problems. The next day or two days later he would be depressed, be unable to make any kind of a decision, fling up his hands not knowing what to do. Again, when we were getting these reports from the British, American Ambassadors, we didn't know that the Shah was under this medication. But these mood swings, changes from one day to the next, fitted in very nicely with the response, which is a logical response that was produced by the anti-cancer drug that he was taking.

Q: Another issue comes to mind. Let me ask you about this. Iranians allege that sometime in the '60s there were certain rivalries between the British and the Americans in Iran. It came out in the form of a book at first that Rain wrote about masonry in Iran, and with a picture of Mr. Sharif imami in the full regalia of Masonry. It was charged that Rain was put to death by CIA to sort of debase the British ploys. Then the British came out allegedly with a list of America's golden boys in Iran.

Oney: I'm aware of Rain's book. I don't know that that was a product of any rivalry at all. I'm sure from time to time -- If you read the foreign office dispatches, those that are

available now, and read State Department stuff, you can trace a history of disagreements, arguments over this approach or that approach and so on. But I seriously doubt that it led to anything like that.

Q: The Suez Canal, it's a sort of an echo of the whole Suez Canal scenario. The fact that the US replaced the European great powers, the supreme foreign presence in the region.

Oney: I'm not trying to be flippant or insulting, but I think you could write a fun book about Iranian mythology in foreign affairs. I can understand where it comes from or how it arises, but in Iranian society there is a great capacity to see intrigue where there's only confusion. Rain's book was a kind of interesting bit of history of freemasonry, is kind of interesting, too, more or less in a nonintelligence sense. Except, I suspect that the British did use it for intelligence purposes.

Q: You mean the Masonry.

Oney: Yes.

Q: In other words, it had contact with the British and it did provide them with sources within the government?

Oney: I assume. I have no specific information on this. This would have been a very clandestine operation that they would not



have shared with us, but it makes perfectly good sense. Several articles have been written on it. How good the articles are, I don't know. I never really made a study. Free Masons were active in Egypt, active in Turkey. I believe there's an allegation that Al afghani was a Mason. The specific question that you had that this was a product of desperate rivalry between the British and America at the time.

Q: Generally, the years '65 to beginning after the revolution were a period of smooth sailing with the government in Iran. I mean you didn't have Mosaddeq, Amini or Razmara. So how much of the attention was focused on opposition?

Oney: Not much.

Q: So you were mainly concerned with issues such as oil policy and military policy?

Oney: Again, reverting to what I talked about earlier and might be worthwhile clarifying, information is collected against requirements that have been laid on mostly by policy makers. The Agency has a limited budget and a limited personal. When you look at the whole world and everything you might collect, looking specifically at Iran in the '60s and the '70s for budgetary reasons, and because there was no immediate threat perceived, budgets were reduced. Personnel were sent where there were more important things going on. So without the perception of a

threat, Iran got sort of a cursory treatment. If you look at the world as a whole, there were a lot more important things going on. So if you have three or four high priority things, you're going to aim your assets at collecting against those targets. You move down to second, and third, and fourth priority --

[end of side 2, tape 3]

Q: You were saying.

Oney: Just to finish off the last part because I think it's a useful and important point to make. There is not an infinite amount of time, personnel and funds to devote to any particular country or one particular target. The assets are constantly being moved around to meet more important situations. During the '60s and early '70s the personnel in both the Department of State and the Agency were reduced in Iran. In the Embassy there were fewer people, say, in like 1965 and 1970 than there had been ten or a dozen years earlier. That was a reflection both of budget and personnel concerns. So when you're operating within these constraints, you direct your effort at looking for answers to the questions that the policy makers ask you. It would have been nice to have been able to gather information across the board on everything, but simply out of the question. A single operations officer may be handling four or five different sources and that just about takes up all his time. By the time you factor in all the paperwork that he has to do to keep track of an operation,

all the financial reporting he has to do, there's a limited number of sources an individual officer can handle. So if you reduce your personnel by a couple of people, you have to reduce the coverage because you don't have personnel enough to do it.

Q: You stayed at the Agency until 1980, after the revolution.

Oney: Yes.

Q: How did CIA's perception of the government change? Do you have a particular recollection of those two years into the revolution? An analysis of the intelligence?

Oney: I ought to mention a couple of things, and keep in mind I have a personal reaction here more than an objective one. Just about every crisis that occurs produces a task force. In other words, all of a sudden you get people assigned to cover this, whether it's the great Turkish crisis or you name it. What happened in this case, first, by this time I had moved to an office that was doing more long range, more in depth research and I was working on Iran. The people doing current intelligence were mostly inexperienced with Iran.

Q: This is what year?

Oney: Along about 1976 or thereabouts. The current intelligence was reorganized. The Greece-Turkey-Iran branch was broken up.

Greece and Turkey was assigned to European Division. Iran was assigned to the Arab States Branch, which was named PGI, Persian Gulf-Iran because it was designed to take in that area. At that point, so I could continue research in Iran, I moved to another office. So the people, the man that was covering Iran in the Arab States branch was an Arab specialist and he was covering Iran as a second job, as a second duty. Of course, Iran was, as we have just said, seen as quiet and not much of a problem, so it didn't get all that much coverage in the publications or even the attention of a single analyst. At the time that the revolution occurred, of course, I kept up with things, but I was doing longer range research and not current stuff. In the middle of 78 there was another change and another Arab States analyst was assigned to Iran. He had been working on the country only about six months when things really got hot. Because I was in another office, I did not get in on the current reporting. When the task force was formed, I and this other new analyst ended up on the task force, but with very little to do because they had six other Arab States people assigned that did most of the work. To cast a personal reflection on it, it gave the appearance, at least to me and to this other new analyst, that because we had jointly not foreseen the other revolution, we were being replaced by these other six people who didn't know anything about it at all and so didn't have any prejudices. This is kind of more of a flippant personal reflection.

Q: But was this really the case?

Oney: Yes, I think it was really the case. Yes. But, you know, it was kind of a panicky reaction. The task force, there were good people on it. There were good analysts, but they simply had only a cursory knowledge of Iran.

Q: Who would teach them who's who? I mean, "This is Mr. Hoveyda. That is Mr. Alam. This is Mr. So and So."

Oney: If I was sitting there and they asked me, I could tell them. Otherwise they went into the files and tried to run down all this stuff.

Q: Was there a data bank available?

Oney: Not a data bank in the sense of a computer data bank because there was not much in the way of computers at that time. Our data bank was dozens--well, in the case of Iran not dozens, but four-drawer file cabinets filled with paper, grouped according to subject. Because the masses of paper--there was not a great deal of depth. Every year you had to throw away a lot of paper. I hated to do that. I loathed it. That's the reason I like the computer. It can hold all kinds of data. But in terms of paper, you had records management people whose sole job it was was to decide what to throw away, or decide what should be thrown away. I used to battle them all the time. "You mean we've got this old study from 1970? You're in current intelligence, you

don't need that." So I'd hide it some place else until they went away. That was one of the shortcomings of the Agency that I hope is being overcome now. At least from my point of view it was a shortcoming if you could only have in your file nothing more than two years old. But the very fact that there was so much paper produced made it almost impossible to keep everything you needed. Middle to late '70s there was a considerable amount of shifting around of personnel and changes in office structures and a lot of the institutional memory got lost. That was partly the reflection, I think, of a mindset among a lot of the higher administrators that an analyst was an analyst. No matter where you put him, he could sit down and go to work. Kind of like an auto mechanic. Doesn't make any difference what kind of a car he works on. He knows how a car works and he can repair it. That's not really true. Managers almost have to have that sort of a mindset because they in turn have to assign people to do jobs that need doing. So they have to believe that if you're an Arab States analyst, you're just as good an analyst on Iran or Pakistan or the Soviet Union. All you have to do is look at the information you have and analyze it according to some idea. I don't know. I have no idea if that's still a prevalent view or not. I always thought it was very erroneous because, simply arguing for my own case, I was a good analyst on Iran and Turkey and Greece, but it would have taken me years to become what I considered a good analyst on the Soviet Union. But for a long time the Agency, and maybe still now for all I know, there was the idea that an analyst is an analyst. It doesn't make any

Q: Of generally the National Front, that it was a viable, political force, more than a facade?

Oney: Yes, it was very much an over estimation. It is not an estimate that I, myself, would have made because even from the 1950's, I never saw that the Nationalist opposition was capable of putting together a government because they were never able or willing to come up with a solid program that could be sold. Even leaving aside the development of the Shah and his suppression of the Nationalists.

Q: In the long term analysis had you openly opposed the conclusions of any of these reports? For instance, on the viability of the National Front? Would that have had an effect?

Oney: No, because it wasn't my job or it wasn't my responsibility. See, they were doing current intelligence and I was over doing something else. I never in any of the stuff that I did, I never rated the Nationalists high in their ability to produce a believable government. By and large they were nice people. They were well educated. They had good ideas. I think this is one reason that they were over estimated by some people in the State Department, some people in the Agency, some policy makers. They talked the language of modern European style or American style democracy. They talked the language, but they couldn't produce the structure. It's too bad. They missed so many opportunities, but like Mosaddeq, mostly they couldn't come

to a gentleman's agreement with the Shah. They couldn't come to a compromise. By the time they might have been willing to do that, the Shah had already established a position that was unassailable.

Q: What was the impact or the contribution of field officers, from Ambassador to [unclear] people who were in Iran, to CIA's analysis at this time?

Oney: I'll tell you, before Ambassador Sullivan went out, he was thoroughly briefed by everybody. By State Department, by Agency, by DIA, and all of these problems were laid onto him. He knew what the concerns were back here. There was a lot of concern--there had been for a long time--a lot of concerns among the analysts or people concerned with Iran one way or another about the lack of reporting for such a long period of time, or lack of knowledge of the various elements of the opposition. He knew that there was a great unhappiness among the analysts just in general about the lack of a lot of good, solid information on the latest developments in Iran.

Q: And yet, the Ambassador before him had been a CIA man himself and would have been knowledgeable about what analysis entailed and what it required.

Oney: That's right, but he was good friends with the Shah. [They had been to school together in Switzerland.] Helms was a



good professional intelligence officer, but I think that he missed on this because, being now an Ambassador, he hesitated to act like an intelligence officer. This may be difficult to explain. Let's see if I can. Ambassadors are not professional intelligence officers. So by becoming an Ambassador, by accepting the post of Ambassador, I think that he perhaps thought--I don't know what his explanation would be because I never talked this over with him, but I think he may well have felt that because he was now an Ambassador, he had to by that very fact, had to draw back from too active a role in intelligence. This is just kind of offhand observation, but I think might well be the case.

Q: What about Sullivan's tenure of office? Did his period in Teheran help information gathering, analysis?

Oney: Yes, if you look at the material, immediately he made a very strong effort to reach out to contacts that had been lost before, to widen the coverage. He really responded to the complaints that he had heard here in Washington about the lack of reporting. So there was a great deal of reporting across the board, a big increase. Unfortunately, he wasn't there long enough to build up that kind of thing before the urgency of the situation overcame him. Officers had conversations with Shariatmadari and a couple other people in the clergy, all to their discomfort when so much of the stuff was published by the students. So far as the students, so far as the Khomeini regime

was concerned, anybody that would even talk to an American was immediately an American spy.

Q: Was there any indirect emissaries or talks conducted with Khomeini in Paris? I mean, I know people like Ramsey Clark or Richard Cottam went there.

Oney: Ramsey Clark, he's a loose canon.

Q: I know here [unclear] was first singled out as the official emissary, which he ended up not going, or at least not even meeting with Khomeini, but to meet with Yazdi, Bazargan, Bani Sadr, others. Was there any indirect effort made to talk and establish contact?

Oney: There was an attempt, which you may have heard about, at least a hope to recruit Bani Sadr.

Q: Before the revolution?

Oney: No, early in the revolution. Why anybody thought that would work, I don't know.

Q: To recruit him as an agent or as --

Oney: Informant, whatever.

Q: This was conceived by the Agency?

Oney: I don't know who conceived it. Seemed like a goofy idea to me.

Q: And it backfired, or what happened?

Oney: Bani Sadr wasn't interested in a thousand dollars a month, at that time. I don't know who thought it up. I don't know who thought it was a good idea. It might have been one of those things that, "Let's try it and see if it works."

Q: Why him? Why Bani Sadr?

Oney: Apparently because somebody thought they had access to him. You know, that's the biggest problem. If you want to collect a certain type of information, the first thing you have to find out is who's got that information.

Q: Even if such information was not immediately available to CIA? You know, who's who [unclear]?

Oney: Oh, yes, everybody knew who is who, but I suppose somebody had access to Bani Sadr. Somebody else thought, "Well, let's see. Maybe Bani Sadr can be bought." He couldn't. Maybe now he wishes he had. I don't know. I don't know Bani Sadr. All I know is some of the stuff -- He struck me as kind of a French

intellectual.

Q: Did the CIA ever gather any information or have any information from his student days?

Oney: From his student days? Not to the best of my --

Q: He surfaced for you really when the revolution happened.

Oney: Not to the best of my --

Q: Not only Bani Sadr, Qotbzadeh, Yazdi, Sadeq-e Tabatabai, Amir-intezam, did any of these feature before or all of them just became characters right at the onset of the revolution.

Oney: There were bits and pieces on a lot of these people in the biographic files. You know, if they had turned up in some connection or been mentioned, they would have gone in the biographic files, but I'm not aware of any specific activity. Well, Yazdi, for example, he's the guy that was down in Texas. We couldn't have collected information on him. First of all, he was not breaking any laws. The FBI would have had no particular reason to collect information on him. If we had had any information on him in the files, it should have been destroyed. Oh, no, wait a minute. Did he ever become an American citizen? We would had to have destroyed it. You know, this guy that was used to run the Iran Times, English language paper published down

here in Alexandria, I think it was. I had some information, bits and pieces where he'd been mentioned, stuck in the files. I didn't know he was an American citizen. I had him in the files using three different names. He was of some interest because it was an anti-Shah newspaper, just to see what the line was. But then I discovered that he was an American citizen and I destroyed everything. Threw everything away because the Agency is not permitted to keep that kind of information on American citizens, no matter what they were doing. Even if they were engaged in an openly illegal activity, that's the job of the FBI. So unless they've got information in the FBI on what these guys were doing when they were over here as students, we would not have collected it.

Q: Thank you so much, Mr. Oney, for your time.

Oney: I hope I haven't confused life too much.

Q: No, no, not at all. Thank you.

End of Interview

