

Foundation for Iranian Studies

Program of Oral History

ARMIN MEYER

RESTRICTED

INTERVIEWEE: ARMIN MEYER

INTERVIEWER: WILLIAM BURR

WASHINGTON, D.C.: 29 MARCH, 1985

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History Office, Foundation for Iranian Studies

IRANIAN - AMERICAN RELATIONS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Armin Meyer

Oral History Research Office

Columbia University

1987

PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted for the Oral History of Iran Program of Foundation for Iranian Studies by William Burr with Armin Meyer in Washington, D.C. in March 29, 1985.

Readers of this Oral History memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Foundation for Iranian Studies is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein.

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PREFACE

The following oral history memoir is the result of one tape-recorded interview session with Armin Meyer on March 29, 1985. The interview was conducted by William Burr.

This interview is one of a series on Iranian-American relations in the post-World War II era which were conducted as part of a joint project between the Oral History of Iran Archives of the Foundation for Iranian Studies and the Columbia University Oral History Research Office. Similar projects have been undertaken in England and France.

Mr. Meyer has reviewed the transcript and made corrections and emendations. The reader is asked to bear in mind, however, that he or she is reading a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Form H

Dear Dr. Grele:

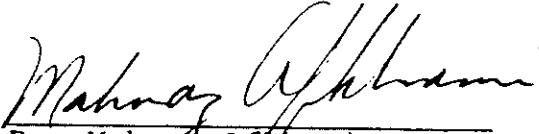
This letter will confirm my understanding and agreement with the Foundation for Iranian Studies Oral History of Iran Archives and Columbia University with respect to my participation in a series of interviews conducted by the Columbia University Oral History Research Office.

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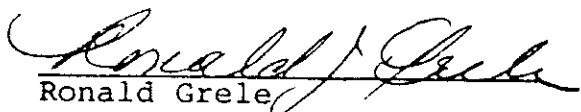
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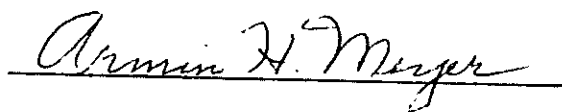
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Dr. Mahnaz Afkhami
Foundation for Iranian Studies

Very truly yours,


Ronald Grele
Oral History Research Office



Date October 12, 1987

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Mr. Armin Meyer was U.S. Ambassador in Iran during the latter part of the Kennedy and first term of the Johnson administrations. His ambassadorship coincided with the period of consolidation of power in Iran following the White Revolution and the Events of 1963-64. Moreover, Mr. Meyer was involved with Iran's arms procurements and some of U.S.'s key decisions in this regard. His close contacts with the key Iranian officials as well as the Shah himself, and his role in decision-making in Washington, make his reminiscences highly instructive.

CORRECTION LIST

P.9 Azerbaidzhan	should be	Azabayjan
P.10 Mossadegh	should be	Mossadeq
P.11 Mossadegh	should be	Mossadeq
P.14 Ali Amini	should be	^C Ali Amini
P.15 Amsari	should be	Ansari
P.15 Khadhourî	should be	Khadduri
P.15 Fu'ad Chehab	should be	Fucad Shahab
P.16 Camille Chamoun	should be	Kamil Sham ^C un
P.20 Samii	should be	Sami ^C i
P.20 Mossadegh	should be	Mossadeq
P.20 Abon Aran	should be	^C Abbas Aram
P.24 Moslem	should be	Muslim
P.27 Viet Nam	should be	Vietnam
P.27 Hovedah	should be	Hoveyda
P.33 Faisal	should be	Feysal
P.35 Mossadegh	should be	Mossadeq
P.38 luch	should be	lunch
P.45 Meshed	should be	Mashhad
P.47 Azerbaidzhan	should be	Azarbayjan
P.55 Nadr Shah	should be	Nader Shah
P.55 Amozegar	should be	Amuzegar

Interviewee: Armin Meyer

Date: March 29, 1985

Interviewer: William Burr

Place: Washington, D.C.

Q: --force on Iran made an extensive review of U.S. policy. What were the concerns that led to the development of this committee? What brought it about?

Meyer: I can't speak with certainty. The person who would really know better would be Phillips Talbot, who was the chairman of the committee, and was the Assistant Secretary of State. When Kennedy came in he appointed Talbot Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. The Kennedys did have a great interest--John Kennedy--in the third world. He was very concerned about Algeria, and I think he was concerned about Iran, had some general interest.

There was a person over in the Treasury Department named Ken Hanson, who had spent some time in Iran. He's dead now. He died at a very young age. But he had a real concern about Iran, and he had a relatively senior position in the Treasury Department. Hanson, even in the waning Eisenhower days, had been stirring up all kinds of trouble. In his view, the Shah was an s.o.b., and we Americans shouldn't be dealing with him. He considered him a tyrant, an oppressor, and all ^{that} sort of thing. Non-democratic. Hanson got an even a better position, as I recall, in the Kennedy administration, and energetically stirred up things about Iran. I think probably he, as much as anybody, was involved in instigating the idea that we've got to take a good look at Iran.

Also, it fit in with the Kennedy style. Kennedy, you know, abolished the Operations Coordination Board which Eisenhower had set up to implement foreign policy. Kennedy liked to work by task forces. Task force on Cuba; task force on Laos; task force on Iran. Here's a problem. Let's get together the people who know something about the issue. Hanson was on the Iran committee, for example. [Robert] Rob Komer was on it. He was a blow-torch type fellow from--

O: What was he representing?

Meyer: The National Security Council. He had a sort of a mid-level position in the National Security Council, as I recall, at that time. But he was one of the Kennedy people who really had sort of a gung-ho, aggressive attitude on policies in general, and on Iran in particular.

O: What was their main concern, do you think, that really led them to this kind of--

Meyer: Their main concern was that Iran was about to go down the drain. I was not sufficiently familiar with conditions in Iran; I'd been dealing with the Arab-Israel problem until that time. My feeling was that Iran had been around a long time, and probably would be around a little longer. They had the feeling the whole country was about to go down the drain. The Kennedys, as I say--I think Hanson had a lot to do with that. Maybe Bobby Kennedy did, I don't know. Komer may have been involved in it, and possibly Phil Talbot,

although Talbot was basically a south Asian hand. In any case, they decided that something had to be done about Iran. Our ambassador who was sent out there--it took him a little while to get approved by the Senate--was Julius Holmes. They called him back from time to time for this task force.

The Chairman of the task force was Phillips Talbot, who lives in New York, and whom you definitely would want to see. Talbot was asked to concentrate on this Iran task force in those first few months, which meant that I was pretty much running the rest of the Middle Eastern Bureau while he was running that. My own experience with it was very minimal.

One time Talbot was out of town and I went and filled in for him, including being chairman. We had a meeting on the seventh floor of the State Department of these people on the task force. All I remember is one famous saying. I would not want you to quote me as to the person who said it. It was Bob Komer, who is often described as "blow-torch." I just heard him give a speech at the National War College last week, and he's the same old Komer. He's really a delightful and intelligent fellow. I regard him with great affection, but he shoots from the hip. One day he pounded the table and said "The time has come for us to do something even if our better judgment tells us it's the wrong thing to do." The idea being that normally State Department people just don't do anything; they drift, and bureaucracy's got inertia.

But we had to do something. So, they drafted a program for Iran. They brought Julius Holmes back, and they explained it all to him. He was not very sympathetic with it, frankly.

Q: Why do you think so?

Meyer: Because he was out on the scene. He thought this was a lot of bright-eyed, bushy-tailed liberalism that they were trying to inflict on the Shah. The Shah was obviously a bit concerned about what the Kennedys were up to. So Julius I don't think was all that sympathetic. But he was a soldier, and he got his marching orders from that committee. The committee, in effect, determined how much aid Iran would get, and then in effect attached some conditions. One of the key ones, at least implicitly, was that the Shah ought to put Amini in as prime minister. The Shah never forgot that. He never forgot it. When I was there he often complained about the Kennedy period, when those Harvard boys thought they could tell him how to run his country; that they thought they knew more about Iran than he knew about Iran.

Q: Whose move was it to consider Amini? Whose idea was that? Do you have any idea or recollection?

Meyer: I don't have any idea whose it was, except that he'd been ambassador in Washington, and having been ambassador here people knew him, and they thought he was a good guy.

Here let me insert a digression. I don't remember what Walt Rostow's job was; I'm not sure he was even on that task force. But I do remember right after Kennedy came in a very interesting episode. I was up at the Iranian embassy at a dinner party one night. Rostow,

as usual, was the professor talking to the people sitting at his feet. They were talking about Iran and Iranian problems. There was some general, a dissident general who'd been thrown out of Iran, living here in Washington, attending that party. He made some comments during the discussion.

Q: Do you recall his name?

Meyer: I don't remember what his name was. In any case, the next morning was Saturday morning and Walt Rostow called me up, from the White House to the State Department. He said, "Armin, what was the name of that general last night at the party?" I said such-and-such a name. He said, "God, I was impressed by that guy. He's very good. I'm writing a memorandum to the President about that fellow. I think he was really quite an impressive guy." I said, "Well, Walt, I'm not too sure about it. I'd like to do a little checking on him. May I? I'll call you back." I called the Agency, and they dug out the file on the guy, and he'd been--

Q: What agency? The CIA?

Meyer: CIA. According to CIA's records, he was a crook, an embezzler, and a few other things. That was why he got cashiered from Iran. At least, that was their story. So I called Walt back and explained it to him. He said, "Oh Armin, thank you very much. I was just writing this memorandum recommending to the President that this be our man in Iran." Sort of shooting from the hip, the

scholarly type--not often consistent, but wants new ideas. The whole Kennedy team wanted to get things done. You know, "Do now. Move. Can do. We've got to move. Move, move." It was that that motivated the task force.

Q: In terms of the Amini appointment we were talking about a minute ago, did you recall any special efforts to get the Shah to go along with this suggestion?

Meyer: I was not involved, but I have every reason to believe that there were, because the Shah indicated that to me. According to his version, he put in Amini; Amini announced that the country was broke, and immediately, all the people who had any capital in the country took it out. He said they got into serious trouble, and it wasn't until he, the Shah, fired Amini that the situation turned around and Iran started moving back up the hill.

Q: I remember reading some suggestion that the Shah might have been offered some money, as a way to induce--

Meyer: Aid money. Aid money. The amount of aid, the 30 million or whatever it was, was conditioned on certain things. One of them--whether it was explicit or implicit--was that Amini be prime minister.

Q: But you don't recall any specific discussions that the task force had. Did they discuss policy options?

Meyer: I don't know, I didn't attend the meetings. I pass on those, except for the impressions already given you.

Q: Do you recall anything about what kind of ideas American officials had at this time of what they hoped Amini could accomplish as prime minister, or is that again something you weren't really involved in?

Meyer: I wasn't really involved but I assume it was to make it a more democratic country, and perhaps to curb the military yearnings, and ambitions, of the Shah.

Q: Once the task force sort of wound up its activities, did you continue to have any role in working on Iranian affairs?

Meyer: No, I played no role. Actually, I was appointed in October to go to Lebanon, so after that I had nothing to do with it.

Q: In other words what you've described is pretty much your involvement under Kennedy.

Meyer: With Iran, yes, but I was very much involved personally in the Arab-Israel affair. I started a whole Arab-Israel project for resolving the refugee problem. I got Kennedy to write letters to all the Middle Eastern leaders, which I drafted, and all the rest of it. That was what I was working on then. It was a bold initiative which

could have precluded the later emergence of the PLO, terrorism, etc. Unfortunately, after wonderful work by Dr. Joseph Johnson, the Kennedy administration two years later withdrew its support and Johnson's excellent proposals died.

Q: That preoccupation was during 1961, basically.

Meyer: 1961-1963.

Q: Okay. So I guess we can move on to the period you spent as ambassador.

Meyer: Right.

Q: How did you become ambassador in 1965? What circumstances led--do you recall anything?

Meyer: How it happened? I had been in the Middle East 23 years--dealing with the Middle East, mostly in the Arab countries, and Afghanistan. I was ambassador in Lebanon, appointed by Kennedy. When Kennedy was shot, Johnson came in and said he wanted all ambassadors to stay in place, so we stayed where we were. When he was re-elected, that's the normal time, all Ambassadors sent in resignations. The President can thus re-shuffle the deck. I was in Beirut at that time. I was greatly surprised one day to get this telegram "The President wants to appoint you to Iran."

Later on, I heard what happened. George Ball was Undersecretary

of State. He was on the committee that was choosing ambassadors. He likes to tell this story, and he's told it to me. When the subject of replacement for Julius Holmes in Iran came up, the group that was working on it, the committee, came up with several names. A couple of old Iran hands and one or two others. Ball looked at the list and said, "I don't like this. I want Armin Meyer, who's in Beirut." I'd done a couple of things in Beirut that had impressed him, including getting through the 1964 presidential election, working behind the scenes. The world will never know the work that was done, but George Ball was aware of it. Saved the country from blowing up that time as it had in 1958, six years earlier, when the presidential election came up. So George Ball personally did it. I didn't know him all that well, but that it was his idea.

Q: When you settled in Tehran that year, what were your impressions? Did you see a more stable, a very stable situation in Iran? There probably was more concern about instability in the early 1960's.

Meyer: It was very definitely more stable. There had been a number of things that had happened. Julius Holmes, when he came back for the task force, had made an interesting observation to me, that the Shah had gone through three "blue funks" as he called them. He said the Shah [was] in a blue funk at that time, when the Kennedy task force was operating. He said it was the third one--the first one being when the Azerbaidzhan crisis came up. We had a strong ambassador named George Allen, who in effect put spine in the Shah's back. Thanks to that, the Shah ordered his troops to go in, and the

Russians eventually had to leave northern Iran. The second time was the Mossadegh affair, when the Shah was waffling and Loy Henderson, our ambassador, put some spine in the Shah's back. The third time was in the 1961 period when Julius was there. The Shah was in some blue funk. I don't really know why he was in a blue funk, except that his oil revenues were down and the country was economically in very bad shape.

But by the time I got there, all that had changed. As I say, the Shah said it was because he got rid of Amini, and then things started going up. Actually, oil revenues started improving tremendously by that time. Iran's oil output was increasing rapidly, although the price of oil was still very low. But the Shah's oil income had increased to the point where I had the pleasure of closing the aid program.

Dean Rusk was basically disgusted how AID missions took on a life of their own. At a staff meeting when I was in Washington in 1961, Rusk said he would give a gold medal to any ambassador who closed an aid program. Well, I went to Lebanon and I didn't see any reason for us to continue our aid program there. The Lebanese were doing very well. It was the heyday, the high point in Lebanon's existence, and I closed the aid program there.

Then I went to Iran and said, "Look, they're doing very well now; the money's coming in from oil and other sources. There's no earthly reason why the American taxpayers should finance an aid program here. The Iranians can pay for it. So I closed the aid program there. It was not with the idea of being nasty, but with an aura of congratulation.

In both places we celebrated it. Iran was now on its own feet and could take care of itself. I arrived there when the Iranians had turned the corner and were able to stand on their own feet. So it was a very good situation.

Q: Was there any concern, in embassy quarters and so forth, about the possibility of long-term instability, or disaffection from the Shah? Did you see the Shah as being a popular figure in his own country?

Meyer: A fellow named Martin Herz was my political officer. He was born a cynic. He had even before I got there written a famous telegram or dispatch--it's been published; you may have seen it--saying that the Shah was not a popular Shah. Even the people who supported him really didn't love him, sort of predicting that one day the Shah's reign would come to an end. He had that feeling. I didn't have it so strongly. Neither of us had any idea that the religious factor would play a major part. He was pretty well connected with the Mossadegh crowd, the--what did they call it?

Q: The National Front.

Meyer: The National Front group. He bought their line pretty much. They later allied with Khomeini to throw out the Shah. Then eventually they got the short end of the stick.

Q: But there was no special monitoring, or looking at the affairs of

the religious nationalists, or concern about their activities?

Meyer: Hardly any. Hardly any in my time. It was just assumed that the old Shah had put them out of business, and the new Shah still kept them that way. There was a question of whether you went down to Qom; it might be a little bit dangerous--there were a few religious fanatics down there. But in all honesty there was not much concern by any observers for religion as a political force.

O: So embassy officials, like you, sort of assumed that the course that social and economic policy was taking would more or less ensure stability over the long term?

Meyer: We thought the Shah was moving in the right direction, yes. We had some questions--the military side. We'll get to that. We were very annoyed with his wanting so much military procurement, and taking money for that which should be spent on other things. But basically, his economic development program was, if anything, too fast. One of his ministers told me he's trying to get done in one or two years what it takes a lifetime to do. I think that was one of the problems; it was so fast. He was rushing to build this factory, build that factory. So I think he overdid the economic development side, and made it too fast.

The result was that the cities attracted large numbers of people from the countryside. The population of Tehran doubled in a short period, because why should you stay out in the country when there's money to be made in Tehran. Those people, particularly the young who

had been raised in villages where the mullahs still had influence, became the disaffected ones. With housing costs and inflation and so on, they were eventually the ones that moved into the streets in a big way.

But in land reforms--Wolf Ladejinsky, one of the world's foremost authorities, came through and said the Shah's was the best land reform program in the world. The Shah had not just cut everybody off, so nobody knew what to do. He had left each big landlord with one village, and then he had arranged county agents and other facilities for the new small farmers. So we were getting good reports from authorities like that about how things were moving well.

Q: The U.S. A.I.D. mission was still there. Was the U.S. still giving any assistance to those reform programs, in terms of technical assistance, or was that ended as well?

Meyer: I don't recall. We were doing a little bit in water work as I recall. Agriculture, education. But as I say, AID was phased out. I fought in vain to try to get Washington to let some people stay, but at Iran's expense. Because, like at the airport, communications, if we had advisors there they would advise the purchase of American equipment and the amount of equipment would help our balance of trade. That's another story.

Q: You mentioned there was contact between Martin Herz and some of the National Front people.

Meyer: Yes, and the political section generally, and I appreciated that.

O: Was that pretty much common--you know, business-like activity, the usual business?

Meyer: Normal political. But the Shah did not like the idea of associating with the opposition. I don't know if you've read that little piece that I did on dealing with the opposition at Georgetown. One time I went to a tea given by a lady named Amini. She was a widow. There were about twelve of us for tea. I asked her, "Are you related to Ali Amini?" She said yes, she was a distant cousin. I said I had never met him (this was about four or five months after I was there), and someday I'd kind of like to have a chance to say hello to him. I hadn't had that chance.

About a week later, I received a rocket from the State Department, from Deputy Under Secretary Eugene Rostow, who was a great fan of the Shah's. He took a special interest. Anything about Iran, he personally supported me in anything I wanted to do, because of his high regard for the Shah. But I got this rocket from Rostow saying in effect, "The Iranian ambassador has come into the department with a personal message from the Shah saying that you have made indications that you want to get together with Ali Amini. He's wondering what you're up to out there. Whatever you're doing, we're behind you, but if you want to give us any background we'd appreciate it." I explained what happened and they gave it back to the ambassador.

Next time I saw the Shah--I used to see him at least once or twice a month--I, as usual, gave him a little agenda of items we'd talk about. This item I didn't put on, the *bout de papier*, but after I'd finished my normal agenda I said there was one other matter I wanted to talk about. Referring to Ambassador Amsari's demarche, I explained this whole Amini thing to him. I explained to him how in Iraq, for example, when the revolution occurred there, people told people like Majid Khadhour, the scholar, that the opposition didn't have a chance to talk to any Americans. Our government people were only associated with the Iraqi government. When I was in Lebanon one day the president, [Fu'ad] Chehab, said "I hear you've been talking to Camille Chamoun," whom he didn't like, a former president and a rival. I said "Yes, I've ^{been} talking to him. I think it's to your advantage to have me talk to people like that. I'm accredited to you; I'm supporting your government. But for those not in power to have somebody to talk to gives them an outlet, and it can be very useful to you." He agreed with me. I explained this to the Shah. No dice; he did not accept it.

Q: He did not buy your argument?

Meyer: He did not buy my argument. He said, "No, in this country, people only respect strength." [For him, seeking to deal with the opposition was a sign of weakness.]

Q: Nevertheless, the sort of contacts you mentioned Herz had continued?

Meyer: They continued without change. And at official functions, we invited former prime ministers and former ambassadors. "Ali Amini came to a couple of such occasions at the embassy.

Q: So I gather that the Shah must have a fairly sensitive intelligence network if he could find out about that.

Meyer: Yes, It was remarkable how quickly he picked up the information from that tea party.

Q: I had the impression that there was some sort of concern in the embassy and the State Department about the political orientation and outlook of Iranian intellectuals. Was there any effort to sort of influence their thinking in some ways, any kind of informal or unofficial efforts to sort of have an influence on the intellectual climate in Iran in the 1960's?

Meyer: Well, there were various levels at which that occurred. We had some very fine people in the U.S.I.A., cultural people. Dick Arndt was our cultural officer. He had outstanding connections with the university people and so on. And Martin Herz's political people had very good contacts with intellectuals around the town. The same was true with our economic officers, notably Theodore Eliot (later Ambassador to Afghanistan).

Q: Did they have, like, programs to help people study abroad and so

on?

Meyer: Oh yes. The Iran-America society was a very active organization, doing just those things.

Q: Okay. Was there much concern about the Shah's treatment of domestic opponents--that it might weaken his political position in some way over time, or lead to problems? Was that something that you thought about at that time, or people thought about?

Meyer: Obviously, you didn't have too much information about it. You had some reports about it. You got the impression they were probably exaggerated, although there was probably some truth to them too. The Shah did believe in cracking down on potential revolutionaries. In that connection, when Carter came in years later and I visited [William] Bill Sullivan one time, the Ambassador had just seen the Shah the previous day. The Shah said "I've just released two hundred more prisoners yesterday. Of course, they're all murderers, but I hope it will make Washington happy." Those were the kinds of dissidents that overthrew him. But it was not considered such a major problem during my tenure, except the National Front was trying to keep it alive all the time.

Q: When you were ambassador how often did you meet the Shah?

Meyer: At least once or twice a month.

Q: What kind of impression did you have of him?

Meyer: A very impressive leader. He was familiar with everything that was going on in the world. He could tell you the price of rice in Mazanderan [province] as over against the price in the Philippines. In military things he was smarter than most of our Pentagon people. Very intelligent, very impressive person, and one who had very strong feelings.

But the way you worked with the Shah was important--and in all honesty I think I was the last American ambassador who could talk with him. I got him to change his mind on a number of things. For example, I got the median line problem solved in the [Persian] Gulf, between him and the Saudis. I got him to go to Saudi Arabia on a visit, although the first attempt aborted. But I got him to do that. I got him to solve the Bahrain question, the island to which Iran had a long-standing claim. He told me, "Look, I'm the only Iranian who can solve this. Whoever comes after me will not be able to solve it." He did it.

So he was somebody you could talk with. Above all, you could talk through an intermediary. The chief man he had as his confidant was Alam, [Court Minister] Asadollah Alam. When I went to Tehran Julius Holmes told me "Armin, if there's one thing that you learn from me it's that the key man in Iran you should know and with whom you can work is Asadollah Alam, because he's a close confidant of the Shah." Alam grew up with the Shah. The Shah trusted him. He was a very mild-mannered fellow, but he could get the Shah to agree to something, and change his mind, without any loss of face. Many a

time--during oil crises, which would come every year, I would be the middle man going to Asadollah Alam between the oil companies and the Shah. And we'd get them settled.

Q: What would you say made the Shah tick, in terms of his goals?

Meyer: Oh, ambition. He wanted to be the Cyrus of 20th century. He wanted to be the greatest Persian monarch in history since Cyrus. Very clearly. His goal was to make Iran a modern major power before he died; that was what made him move. He openly talked of Iran becoming "the Japan of West Asia."

Q: Who were some of the other Iranian officials at a high level, besides Alam, that you had dealings with?

Meyer: Many, many, but Alam was the key one because all the others were bureaucrats, technocrats. The members of the Shah's cabinet were all technocrats. When we dedicated a power plant one time, the Shah asked his Minister of Power, "How many megawatts in such-and-such a plant?"

"320, Sir."

"You're wrong. It's 325." I mean, bang, like that. But the people who could influence him were Asadollah Alam, period.

Q: There were no other centers of power to influence his--

Meyer: The Prime Minister to a certain extent; Hoveyda had some

influence on him, yes.

Q: No sort of organized factions, factions of Iran's society? Do you think he had absolute authority pretty much?

Meyer: Yes I think he had pretty much absolute authority, very definitely. But he was amenable to arguments as I mentioned. Actually, people like Mehdi Samii, who was at one time a Mossadegh follower, during my time served as the Shah's central banker and also his development plan chief. Samii would come to me and have interviews. Then he would write the discussion up in a memorandum and send it to the Shah. That way he got things through to the Shah that he couldn't tell the Shah himself. Most of his ministers trembled before they went to see the Shah. The foreign minister, Abon Aram, would regularly call me in after I saw the Shah to have me tell him what we talked about. That's how he would better understand Iran's foreign policy--from what I talked about to the Shah. He was a wonderful person, Aram, and that's why we got along very nicely.

Q: Did the Shah or his advisors give a pretty clear idea of what their foreign policy goals were, and what they wanted in the way of relations with the United States?

Meyer: The Shah did. The Shah definitely did. He wanted to be close friends with the United States. He appreciated American values; he admired the American economy. On land reform, he was doing things that he didn't think America really believed--that is,

that you should parcel up land into little pieces. Noting that America engages in large-scale farming, he tried agribusiness projects without much success. Basically he wanted good relations, and above all in the military. He valued his military ties with the United States.

Q: So was there a great convergence of interests between the Shah's goals and U.S. goals at this time as you saw it? Were there any important differences?

Meyer: Not to the extent that Kissinger and Nixon saw it, that he would be our surrogate out there. That was never my idea. My idea was let's maintain a relationship. When I fought for arms for Iran, I wasn't asking for three billion, as Nixon and Kissinger subsequently provided, per year. We settled for fifty million, but I had to fight to get that, because Defense Secretary McNamara and Foreign Relations Chairman Fulbright just didn't want anything to go to the Shah by way of military equipment. They opposed his diverting his resources to military expenditures.

Q: But you entertained no ideas about a surrogate role?

Meyer: None whatsoever, except I agreed with what eventually became the Nixon Doctrine. Nixon came through when I was there and went to see the Shah. I didn't go with him because I knew what the Shah would tell him. The Shah said look, "Look, if I get into a quarrel with Iraq, which is backed by the Russians, I want to take care of it

myself. You're my friends; you're my allies. If the Russians come across the border, sure, I expect your help. But if I get into a regional quarrel I want the equipment for self-defense. Iraqis are getting all those MIG planes; I need to be able to take care of myself. I don't want another Vietnam here. In Vietnam, the Russians get behind one side, you get behind the other. In the end there's a negotiation and in Iran I'd lose part of my oil resources. No thank-you, let me do the job myself."

That was the essence of the Nixon Doctrine. Let our allies take care of their own problems. Give them the equipment to do it. Why should American boys fight for Iran? In my judgement, the Nixon Doctrine germinated when Nixon visited Iran in 1967.

Q: So there was some thought at least that that would be a policy you could support, in that limited sense?

Meyer: Very definitely, but in a limited way. When Nixon and Kissinger came, a basically sound policy developed to excess. When we were there we believed firmly in maintaining our postwar military relationship with Iran. I fought for arms, but only enough that they could appropriately handle.

We developed what we called the Twitchell Doctrine. General Twitchell, with whom you ought to talk, was my MAAG chief. He came up with a beautiful concept. The Shah would say, "Look, I want all this military equipment." General Twitchell would respond, "You can't handle it." The Shah would then say, "Well, I want 'blue-suiters' to help us." He appealed to Lyndon Johnson, "Please send me

'blue-suiters' to help with the equipment." We said no blue-suiters are available; the Air Force doesn't have them, nobody has them.

The basis of the Twitchell Doctrine was that the Shah's military procurement program should be completely coordinated with his training program, and only equipment come in that Iranians could operate and maintain. That's where Nixon and Kissinger went wrong. They went overboard. They allowed thousands and thousands of Americans to come. Isfahan became a fleshpot. All these helicopter crews were down there, some bringing in their Vietnam prostitutes. In my judgement, this cultural issue was very much a contributing factor to the blow up that occurred in Iran.

Q: Before we get to the arms sales, first I want to ask a couple more questions. How would you characterize the Johnson administration's overall approach to Iran? Was there much continuity with Kennedy's policy or was it--

Meyer: No, I'd say there was a difference. Kennedy was very skeptical of the Shah, whereas Johnson didn't have much to cheer about, and if you'll read his book, he considers that one of the few bright spots in his whole foreign policy was his relationship with Iran.

Q: How would you characterize the Johnson's overall approach then? Support for the Shah, and no efforts to press him to take reform measures?

Meyer: No, he didn't worry about reform measures. He just primarily considered the Shah as a good friend of the United States at a time when we didn't have many friends. We were fighting alone in Vietnam. He was being battered by that. The Shah did send some token military assistance to Vietnam. Under the Johnson administration, our people could welcomed opportunities to come out and talk to the Shah, and he would try to be helpful in various ways. He helped us on China; he helped us on all kinds of things.

Q: When you were ambassador, who were the major players who worked on Iran issues back in Washington?

Meyer: Theodore Eliot, very definitely. (He was later Ambassador to Afghanistan and then the dean of Fletcher School of Diplomacy). Eliot was Iran Country Director, and he and I worked like a team. He would keep me filled in what the situation was in Washington, how McNamara was blocking this or how the AID people were blocking that. Ted Eliot was very definitely the key man in the picture back here. Also Gene Rostow, who had a special affection for Iran, in part because it was a Moslem country that was sending oil to Israel.

Q: Okay. I guess we can talk about the arms sales for a little bit.

Meyer: How are we doing on time?

Q: I think we're fine. You know, as long as we're here.

Meyer: Yes, right.

Q: Do you have any recollections about the arms sale issues, as it was dealt with? Was it one of the major problems that came up?

Meyer: Oh, very definitely. As I said, there was a strong feeling in Washington that the Shah should not spend money on military equipment. Developing countries shouldn't. Fulbright was fanatic on the subject. Even McNamara, many people didn't realize, was very strong on that subject. The AID people were strong on it. So whenever a request would come from the Shah--as he said, not to get arms free, but to buy them from us--there was always a negative attitude.

At one point there was even a bill in Congress that precluded all military sales. I got my congressional friend, Ross Adair, who was on the conference committee, to sit tight. By golly, he held the fort until the committee agreed to allow some sales, including sales to Iran. That's how the attitude was in Washington.

My feeling was that the Shah had an orientation toward America since World War II, militarily, because he bought surface equipment and little bits of air force equipment from time to time. We had a military mission there and also one advising the gendarmerie. My feeling was we ought to maintain that relationship. It assured us of some influence on the Shah. I did not favor a vast program of military expenditures, but at least you keep modest ties. Not cut the whole thing off, which is what critics were trying to do. So I fought for it.

This is a long story, and I'll try to keep it as short as possible. I went to bat, and I had a terrible time. Ted Eliot can tell you that, because he would keep me posted. The Shah would ask for this, and we'd get the answer that it's not going to be feasible.

One time I came back to Washington, and actually went to see President Johnson. (I tell my class this story; they don't believe it.) I explained to President Johnson how the Shah wanted to do his own thing. If there was a war with Iraq, which was being backed by the Russians, he was determined to protect Iran's oil. I drew a picture of the [Persian] Gulf, including Kharg Island, which was his main oil loading platform. I explained all this to President Johnson. I did mention that McNamara wasn't enthusiastic about it. After a half hour, President Johnson voiced to me what was a highly revealing conclusion, "Mr. Ambassador, you make a very good case. I hope you can get our government to go along with you."

So I went back to the Department. Rusk and Ball said, "We're not going to tackle McNamara. We've got too many problems over Viet Nam." So I went over and saw McNamara. I saw the briefing papers that the ISA people provided for him, which were all very good--a modest amount of arms. When I got there, he'd been up on Capitol Hill. Arms Committee Chairman Mendel Rivers apparently had just cut him to ribbons on other matters. Anyhow, he was in a bad mood. He saw me and said, "Let me tell you something. That Shah's not going to get a nickel's worth of military equipment from me. Kennedy knew how to handle him; he shouldn't have any military equipment." He went on for about five minutes. Then I got angry. I said, "Mr. Secretary, let me tell you a thing or two." Then I pointed out how

the Shah was going to get military equipment from somebody, and he's got this American orientation; it gives us some leverage. And so on. Anyhow, we wound up with sort of a draw when he instructed his staff, "Go out and figure out how much it would cost to send him a couple squadrons of F-4's."

Incidentally, before that I'd done what a normal diplomat does. As one of my former superiors once said, "When you don't know what else to do, send a survey mission." So I had a survey mission visit Iran hoping we could prescribe what modest procurement we would be prepared to support. An Air Force general was in charge of the mission, and damn it--excuse the language--if he didn't come up with F-4 Phantoms, which I had never dreamt of even offering the Shah. We had assumed a modest continuance of the F-5 program. But he recommended two squadrons of F-4's. The Shah heard about this, and he, of course, wanted them. He wanted F-111's, eventually. But that survey mission got us in a bad spot to start with, because it recommended what we did not expect. Then for us to say, "No, you can't have it," didn't make any sense at all. Anyhow, that's when I had to take on McNamara.

It is worth noting that after the military mission placed us in a corner regarding procurement, I recommended keeping costs down by providing rehabilitated F-4's from Viet Nam. Amazingly, McNamara vetoed this idea, asserting that if the decision were made to provide the planes, they should be new ones.

We finally agreed to provide fifty million dollars a year in military equipment to the Shah. Fifty million, subject to an annual economic review. Prime Minister Hovedah and his top economists would

get together with me, as head of the American side with a Washington military-economic delegation and our economic section in Tehran to figure whether there was enough money to support the fifty million dollars per annum program. That was our policy--for four years, fifty million dollars a year. When Nixon and Kissinger came in they just took off all the restrictions and went to three billion dollars.

Q: So your program sort of assumed some U.S. supervision over Iranian arms sales?

Meyer: Absolutely: depending on their economic situation, including their debt servicing capability. The Iranians were forced to go through an annual economic review. It was a rather humiliating thing for them to do, before they could buy--buy--fifty million dollars worth of military equipment.

Q: I'll turn the tape over.

[END CASSETTE ONE, SIDE ONE

BEGIN CASSETTE ONE, SIDE TWO]

Meyer: --Twitchell Doctrine that we developed, that he should not procure more equipment than he had trained people to handle.

Q: Who was Twitchell?

Meyer: He was the MAAG chief. General Twitchell was my MAAG chief,

and he and I worked this out.

Q: What year was this approximately?

Meyer: He came the last half of my tour there, roughly.

Q: All throughout your stay in Iran, there was total supervision over the arms sales? That was a factor?

Meyer: Oh yes, very definitely. Very much a problem all through my tour there.

Q: Did the Shah sort of chafe under this review?

Meyer: He was a little annoyed by it, but he realized he had to do it to get the equipment. He wanted to stay with us, although he needed us by buying a few Russian trucks and things of that kind during that period.

Q: When you suggested that some level of arms was necessary, in terms of your view of stability in Iran and the Middle East, was there much backing from the State Department for your position?

Meyer: Ted Eliot was completely with me. Rusk was with me. It was other departments in Washington that were against it.

Q: I've read that at some points during these negotiations during

the late 1960's, the Shah would threaten--

Meyer: And particularly Gene Rostow was enthusiastic. Go ahead.

Q: At some points during these negotiations the Shah would threaten to turn to the Soviet Union for arms purposes. Was that a credible threat as you saw it?

Meyer: Well, not too credible, although he did buy trucks as I mentioned. He bought some trucks from them to sort of needle us. But obviously, he didn't buy anything serious from them. He could have turned to the French, however, and the British.

Q: Did the Shah make those threats to you about turning to the Soviets?

Meyer: No, he never made such threats. I woke up one morning and read that he'd bought some trucks from the Soviet Union.

Q: Say, in terms of MIG's, or things like that, he never said, "We'll do that if you don't do this."

Meyer: No. He did point out that the MIG's were costing only 700 thousand dollars apiece to the Iraqis when our F-5's, which were a much inferior plane, were costing him twice that figure.

Q: You mention that arms sales gave the U.S. some leverage or