The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

HENRY PRECHT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is March 8, 2000. This is an interview with Henry Precht being done by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Henry, could you tell me when and where you were born and a little about your parents?

PRECHT: I was born June 15, 1932 in Savannah, Georgia. My father was a clerk in a local fertilizer factory and my mother was a former school teacher and secretary in a bank. Nobody in my family, except my mother for two years, had any college education. I went to Armstrong Junior College in Savannah and then to Emory University where I had a major in history.

Q: Let's go back. What was the background of your mother? Was she a native Georgian?

PRECHT: My mother's mother was a native Georgian. Her roots in this country go back, we think, to before Oglethorpe came to Savannah in 1733. Her family was Middleton from South Carolina. My grandfather was a Welshman who had come over with his parents to farm in Kansas and when that went bust and he got tired of school, he ran away and became an itinerant printer, eventually came to Savannah and worked in the print room of the Savannah Morning News where my grandmother's father was the foreman. He married my grandmother and produced the family.

Q: And on your father's side?

PRECHT: My father's parents were German immigrants. My grandfather came over to escape Bismarck's draft and had various ups and downs. At one time he and some other Germans owned Santa Belle Island. They lost it. Another time they started a soft drink factory in Savannah. Had people preferred raspberry soda to Coca Cola, I wouldn't be sitting here today. Instead, the business failed. When my grandfather died, my father had to go to work to support his mother, as there was no money by that time. So, he never went to college. But, both my mother and father were deeply interested in education and made sure that the 38th Street School worked for us, as well as for the kids in the neighborhood.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

PRECHT: I had one younger brother who became an engineer, building power plants.

Q: How did you become interested in international affairs?

PRECHT: My father was interested in history and I had an excellent history teacher in high school. Of course, there was World War II which absorbed us all and we learned a lot about geography and world affairs at that time. The curriculum of Armstrong Junior College was the Great Books. We had plenty of discussion and little emphasis on traditional fact-filled studies. The classics opened up my mind to a lot of things that a standard English and history curriculum wouldn't have found.

Q: How heavily did the War Between the States rest on you during this time?

PRECHT: Not very. The Civil War was virtually forgotten. My grandmother was born a few years after it and she had stories about it from her mother. But, our family was half German and was removed from that history. Savannah was a city in which most all of the 100,000 of us were born there. Only with World War II did Yankees move in. Only then did I fully realize that there was a different world beyond our city limits.

Q: I have to add that my grandfather was a major in the German regiment that came through the troubles in 1864-65 from Wisconsin. But, that German influence left rather quickly. What about the race situation from your point of view?

PRECHT: We grew up in a neighborhood that was roughly one block from the white/black line which was a jagged line running on the western side of Savannah. The people who lived beyond that line, the Negroes, we didn't know at all. We knew them when they worked for us as maids or came to us to sell shrimp and crab with baskets on their heads or pushing carts. Otherwise we didn't have any real contact with them. They rarely even walked down our street. They didn't dare walk across the little park where we played ball. It was an isolated community. My parents had the same attitudes everyone else did in the neighborhood. Today they would be called racist. I grew out of that, I think, perhaps because of the influence of Time magazine and a general radicalization of

my political thinking that crept over me beginning in high school but mainly in college.

Q: What about Roosevelt at that time? I think people were much more aware of the New Deal because of the depression.

PRECHT: Roosevelt was enormously popular with the Crackers in Georgia. My family weren't Crackers.

Q: You might explain "Crackers."

PRECHT: A Cracker is rural Georgian. They controlled the state. It was pretty much a rural-based Democratic party machine-run state. My family and most of their friends and relatives, were a repressed minority of Republicans. My father had a "Win with Hoover" tag in back of his Model A until he sold it in 1947. I think most Georgians, who were having a hard time during the depression, and had had a hard time before, were enthusiastic supporters of what Roosevelt was doing. They were not enthusiastic about Eleanor Roosevelt because she was what they would call a "nigger lover" and that was anathema to them. When Harry Truman integrated the armed services, it was the beginning of the end of Democratic control of the South.

Q: What was the elementary school like that you went to?

PRECHT: The 38th Street School was an excellent school. It was an old sandstone building with separate yards for girls and boys. The teachers were quite determined and tolerated no nonsense. My mother was president of the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association]. She raised money for a movie projector for the school which was a modern innovation at that time. She also got a federal lunch program started which meant free lunch for a lot of the kids. She found money from one project or another to buy shoes so some kids could come to school. We got well founded in the basics at 38th. I still read rather slowly but that was not the school's fault, probably my own deficiency. I can't say that we learned much about the world beyond the school, but we were firmly drilled in basic education.

Q: Part of this time the war was on.

PRECHT: Yes, I think I was in the fourth grade when World War II began.

Q: For a lot of us World War II was a great geography lesson. You learned where Guadalcanal was and Tobruk and Berlin and Moscow, etc.

PRECHT: Even before that, I can remember when we would play war games we were Finns versus Russians. Because the Finns had neat white uniforms and fought on skis, they were our heroes.

Q: Was there a library there?

PRECHT: There was a good public library, a Carnegie library. My father had a fair number of books and when I was in high school I wrote a paper on early Germanic tribes with lots of footnotes from the six volume set of [Edward] Gibbon's The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire he had. I wrote another paper based on encyclopedias on Indochina before Ho Chi Minh and company got started. There was no mention of anybody there being unhappy with their French masters. So, I had a slow introduction to the real world. That changed completely when I went to college.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

PRECHT: I went to Savannah High School which was the only white public high school. There was a Catholic high school for boys and another for girls and, I believe, one for African-Americans. When I was in junior high school a wealthy ex-Savannahian, who had made money in Philadelphia, gave $50,000 to the school system so that poor but bright kids could go through high school in three rather than four years and thereby get out and start earning money earlier. I was a member of Accelerated Group One, which compressed these four years into three allowing me to graduate a year earlier than otherwise I might have.

Q: What were your favorite subjects?

PRECHT: History and English. The English teacher was a friend of my uncle so I did fairly well in that.

Q: I keep coming back to what in those days was the heart of Dixie, was there a heavy Southern hand in history class?

PRECHT: No, I can't remember much emphasis on the Civil War being taught although we had a fair dose of Georgia history starting with Oglethorpe, etc. By the time I was in high school, of course, the Second World War was over and the Cold War was beginning. But, the Civil War really was not something that figured in our thinking.

Q: You went to Emory. How did you pick that?

PRECHT: When I graduated with an AA [Associate of Arts degree] from Armstrong Junior College, my father asked me what I wanted to do and I said, "I guess I will get drafted." The Korean War was still on then. He said, "No, I have arranged for you to go to Emory." My uncle had a friend who was the director of admissions and he said he could get me in. I got a scholarship covering tuition, or most of it, which was $300 a quarter which was six times what it had been at Armstrong. I spent two years there. I wasn't very happy. Most of the young men - there were no women - could easily afford the tuition. That is, they seemed mostly the sons of Buick dealers, bankers and professionals from Georgia. I had to join a fraternity because that was the only way I would have some social life. I ended up earning my meals by clearing tables. I was getting pretty radical by that time and feeling class consciousness to a fair degree.

Q: You majored in history?

PRECHT: Yes.

Q: What were you pointed towards or did you have any idea?

PRECHT: I was interested in international affairs, the world around us. I was more interested in European history than American history although I took courses in both. I was not at all interested in science and mathematics.

Q: Did you find that there was a feeling of class distinction within the university?

PRECHT: I suppose there was. It wasn't that strong. People didn't shun me or anything of that kind. I was known to have a sense of humor and was accepted. I didn't have any hard time with anyone. I just felt inside myself a difference. Also, I studied a lot. I was kind of a grind, I guess, because I was afraid when I first went up there I was going to flunk out and when I didn't, I was too weak of character not to get the grades that I got the first quarter. So, I sort of separated myself from the fraternity. I guess it was me more than it was them.

Q: You graduated when?

PRECHT: In 1953.

Q: Then what happened?

PRECHT: When I was a senior a friend had asked me if I wanted to go down to Macon, Georgia, and take the test for the Navy Officer Training and I said, "No." He said, "They pay your way to Macon. Have you ever been to Macon?" I said, "No." He said, "Come on and we will have a free weekend in Macon." So, I took the test. Again showing my weakness in character after passing it, I felt had to go through with it. So, I went four months to Navy OCS [Officer Candidate School] and after that miraculously was sent to Naples, Italy where I stayed three and a half years.

Q: This would be when?

PRECHT: This would be early 1954 to the summer of 1957. I was a communications officer which meant I stood watches. Then I became communications security officer, which meant I worked a five day week. I had plenty of time off. I had an apartment overlooking the Bay of Naples. I had a car and went everywhere. I went as far north as Verona and as far south as Sicily. I traveled every moment that I could. I was living in a golden age. First of all, there were all these opportunities to absorb Italian history and life and secondly, the booze was so cheap in the Officer's Club. Marian Olds, who later became my wife, was a school teacher there my last year and I extended six months until her year was up. Then I came home and got an assistantship at Emory University teaching freshman history. Marian was in Washington so I quit and decided I would go

find a job up north. I failed to do so in New York because a recession began in January 1958 and I was unemployed for six months. I finally got a job as a typist in the Bureau of Public Roads.

Then I took what was called the management intern test and became a management intern in the Department of Labor where I stayed for three and a half years. We were married in 1958. Some time later I decided I wasn't going to advance in the Department of Labor unless I was either a lawyer or an economist and I was neither. So, I took the foreign service exam and passed it. In order to come aboard I had to take a substantial cut in salary, something like 40 percent, to become an FSO-8.

Q: What moved you towards the foreign service?

PRECHT: Well, I always had this interest in international affairs and I had lived in Italy for a long time. I wasn't interested in making money in private industry, I was interested in public service and I thought the foreign service would be that, and it would be overseas which would be pleasant and interesting. Why not live your life doing something that rewards you intellectually and aesthetically?

Q: Did you have any contacts with the consul general in Naples while you were there?

PRECHT: I used to date a young Italian woman who worked in the consulate. When some of the consular officers were having trouble filling their box in the opera they recruited me to be part of theirs at the San Carlo. [Other than that], I had limited contact with them. My circle was mainly in the Navy or with the few Italians that I knew.

Q: Did you get around Naples much?

PRECHT: Oh, yes. I knew Naples very well.

Q: A lot of the Navy people seemed to stay cooped up there.

PRECHT: But so were the consular people. It was two different worlds. I used to go to the Officers' Club, but less and less so, particularly after Marian arrived and we would do things in the local community.

Q: When did you take your foreign service exam?

PRECHT: It must have been in 1961 because I came on board in October/November of 1961.

Q: Do you recall the oral exam and any of the questions they asked?

PRECHT: Actually, I had taken the oral exam earlier when I came out of the Navy and I flunked it. At that time I remember a fellow asked me why I liked Italy and I said because I think there is more personal connection between individuals, institutions, shops and that

sort of thing. I said that you could go and talk with the wine man. It was not like a supermarket. He said, "Don't you shop at Bart's Bakery in Savannah, Georgia?" It turned out he was from Savannah. I can't remember much of what happened in the second oral exam. Oh, I do remember that the water jug top wouldn't come off and I said, "Is this a trick? Are you testing my ability to deal with this frustration?" That is all I remember.

Q: In November 1961, you were sworn into the Foreign Service. You had already been in the government for a time, did you sense a quickening and more excitement because of the Kennedy phenomenon of working for the government?

PRECHT: No. I was about 29 and felt separated from the rest of the junior officers who were just out of college or graduate school for the most part. One or two others were convertees from the government. Morton Abramowitz, for example, had been with AID [Agency for International Development].

Q: In 1961, when you came in, did you have any idea of what you wanted to do?

PRECHT: I wanted to go to Italy and as I began to know a little bit more about it, I wanted to be a political officer. I ended up going to Italy but in those years you rotated jobs which was what I did for two years.

Q: When did you arrive in Italy?

PRECHT: I arrived in Italy in February 1962.

Q: So you were there from 1962-64. Where were you in Italy?

PRECHT: Rome.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you arrived?

PRECHT: Frederick Reinhardt.

Q: What were you doing?

PRECHT: I started off in the consular section and had the great good fortune to move into that section behind two other young FSOs, both of whom flunked out. They were failures for reasons of personality I guess. With my experience I was an accomplished bureaucrat and knew how to operate in a government environment. I did very well and was given plum assignments such as when Kennedy came and Johnson came, I was one of the control officers at the Excelsior Hotel. After the consular section, I moved to the commercial section, the economic section and then the political section.

Q: *What was going on in Italy during this time?*

PRECHT: The DCM [deputy chief of mission] was Outerbridge Horsey and he was

adamantly against what was then known as the *apertura alla sinistra*, the opening to the left, that is bringing the Socialists into coalition with the Christian Democrats. That was the main issue, I suppose, in Italian politics. The left was still strong, the Communists and Socialists, and he didn't want to see any cracking in the control of the Christian Democrats. He controlled reporting out of the embassy it was said. It never touched me, but he was a very tough personality so I believe it was true. He wouldn't permit any reporting that would suggest a change in American policy towards the left might be thinkable. Finally after the inspectors came, he did permit some reports to got to Washington by adding a footnote at the end saying "of course this officer has only been here two years." He would put in a sort of demeaning comment at the end to make sure American policy remained solidly behind the Christian Democrats.

Q: What type of job did you have when you were doing political work?

PRECHT: My main job was to report the Italian press back to Washington every day. I also did other reports. During this time Eisenhower decided we had to reduce expenditure abroad and part of that was the closure of our consulate in Venice. I was assigned the job of going over to the foreign ministry to see some ambassador and tell him that we were going to bring Venice to an end. He said, "Mr. Precht, surely you have some officers who do not have the ability to make it to ambassador but who have worked very hard in very unpleasant places. Venice is a very decent way for them to end their careers with dignity." But, we closed it – being bereft of that kind of Italian sentiment.

I did more adventurous work in the commercial section. I spent two weeks manning a booth in the Bologna food fair, which was a wonderful place to be and eat. I handled a trade mission of leather manufacturers from the United States who were trying to sell leather goods in Italy. I think they were secretly trying to line up sources in Italy. Italy at that time in the '60s was moving into its boom period as contrasted with Italy in the '50s when I had been there in the Navy and the economy was just beginning to gather speed.

Q: At that time I assume contacts with the Communists were out.

PRECHT: We had one officer, Steve Peters, who was an Albanian American, who I think did the left wing of the two socialist parties. I think another officer, John Baker, did the Communists. I don't know if he had contact with them, but the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] must surely have had contact with them. We had ways of monitoring them.

Q: Was the feeling on the part of the younger officers that Outerbridge Horsey was sort of sitting on them re the left?

PRECHT: This was a different epoch. We weren't rebellious. We did our jobs. It was a golden assignment to be in Rome in those years. No one wanted to get into trouble. We weren't out to make a statement. Horsey was just one of the atmospheric factors that we had to deal with. I don't recall anyone protesting what he had to say. The first day I was in the embassy he summoned me to his office. Apparently the chief of the consular citizenship section, Doris Allen, had offended an American and he wanted me as a

witness to that episode to tell him the story. So, I had to tattle on my superior. Horsey was that kind of guy, but I don't think anybody looked on it as an oppressive environment. We also succeeded with the Reinhardts and were frequently invited to the residence to do the young foreign service officer thing of greeting people, learning their names and introducing them to the ambassador at official functions.

Q: Did you get involved at all in the reporting of the political scene? It always seemed to me that the Italian government for so long was a very static situation with a continuing evolving set of people serving as cabinet ministers.

PRECHT: Yes, that's right. The same names lasted for decades. That was the nature of Italian politics and we didn't question it.

Q: You were there when Kennedy was assassinated. What happened then?

PRECHT: I was at a party, some embassy function, and we were telephoned. We went down to the embassy immediately. My job as junior officer was to greet dignitaries who began to come in to sign the condolence book. The next day, I had to go out to buy a black tie and went to a shop on the Via Veneto and asked to see one. It was 1600 lira. I exclaimed, "What?" The man in the back said to the clerk, "Isn't that the signore that we saw on television last night? Let him have it for a 1000 lira." Kennedy's assassination was a great blow to Italy where he was extremely popular.

Q: How did his visit to Rome go?

PRECHT: Very well. I was one of the control officers in the Excelsior, as I mentioned. At one point Kennedy was going to visit the mayor of Rome on the Capidoglio and a member of his staff came to me and said, "After his meeting he would like to speak to a crowd in the square when he comes out of the mayor's office." I said that there would be nobody up on the Capidoglio except for a few tourists at that time of morning. He said, "Make sure there is a crowd there." So, I got USIS [United States Information Service] to round up all of its staff and they reported to the square and cheered the president.

More interesting was the visit of President Johnson during which I was also on control officer duty. First of all, we had the preparation. The shower head in the Excelsior Hotel had to be precisely so many feet and inches from the floor. Cutty Sark scotch had to be in the room. The bed had to be such and such a size. All of these things were arranged. He came in on a Friday or Saturday after having been in Iran and Turkey. When he arrived in Rome he went off to dinner with PM [Prime Minister] Fanfani and others. Just at that time there was a big earthquake in Iran. Johnson said, "We will go back and offer our condolences." At his direction we sent a message to Washington saying, "Notify the White House that the Vice President plans to go back to Iran to offer condolences." He had invited Mrs. Fanfani and all the people sitting around him at dinner to ride on Air Force Two. Within a few hours a message came back from the White House: "Maintain schedule." But, Johnson wasn't put down. The next thing we knew the following morning, Sunday, was the Vice President wanted to buy a hundred ties and five oil

paintings. He wanted the paintings not to cost more than $125 each and preferably to include some cows. Well, on Sunday everything in Rome is closed down. I told Mr. Horsey that we couldn't buy these things. He said, "You take care of the paintings and I will take care of the ties." Somehow he got a Via Veneto merchant to open up and he sold a hundred ties that morning. I called USIS again and said, "We need five oil paintings, top price $125, some with cows before the Vice President leaves tomorrow morning." Just as they were packing up, five paintings arrived from USIS. Most of them were abstracts of one kind or another, but there was one that was very blue and had a cow or two on it. It was still damp, cost exactly $125 and was painted by a USIS employee.

Q: You left there when?

PRECHT: I left there some time in February, 1964 and was assigned to Alexandria, Egypt. The State Department had not heard that most of the Levantines had been obliged to leave Egypt by Nasser's policies and they still thought of Alexandria as a French-speaking post. I had four months French training which I never used in Alexandria except with a the few old ladies. I arrived in Alexandria in the summer of July 1964.

Q: You were there from 1964 to?

PRECHT: To August 1966. My job was consular and admin officer combined. There had been two junior officers before me and they abolished one of the positions and I replaced both of them.

Q: What was Alexandria like at this time?

PRECHT: It was like a lot of places I've lived including Savannah, Georgia, where people would say, "You should have been here yesterday." It was always better in the past than in the present. We lived in a huge house which was on what was then known as Sharia Lumumba, having had its name changed, after the Congolese leader had been assassinated, from Rue de Belgique. If you told a taxi driver either of those names he wouldn't recognize them, but if you said the Villa Coutarelli, he would know exactly where to go. Coutarelli had been the cigarette king of Egypt and had died after marrying a rather disreputable, it was said, Italian lady whom the family disapproved of. She was afraid that her huge house with an immense garden right around the corner from the consulate would be taken away either by the Egyptian government or by her husband's family. So, she rented it to an American vice consul for his housing allowance in order to safeguard it. And it worked, at least for us certainly.

Q: This was the height of the Nasser regime wasn't it?

PRECHT: That's right. Nasser had been through the enormous popularity of the Suez war and then he had socialized everything in Egypt in 1961. So, it was a time when the middle class Egyptians, particularly Copts, were very uncomfortable. Lower class Egyptians were still favorable towards him. But, those who had some money were feeling very squeezed. It was very much a police state. It was a one party, one man show.

Q: How was the American presence seen there?

PRECHT: Not badly. We had a number of friends at the university. I had a very good friend who was a journalist and another who was in the Arab Socialist Union. But, nothing went on in Alexandria. All the decisions were made in Cairo. So, it was not a place of political importance. Our consul general was a rather formal and stuffy old line man.

Q: Who was that?

PRECHT: David Fritzlan, who was an Arabist and used to send in airgrams based on what his language teacher would tell him during the day. That was the depth of the reporting. Our economic officer, the number two, was equally an old line foreign service officer standing on his dignity. It wasn't a very venturesome place. My wife and I traveled as much as we could, picnicking in the desert or visiting villages in the delta. We went to Sinai once. But, we didn't leave Egypt very often. Once I turned down a trip to Beirut because I figured that was an artificial life. Oil people went over there and got apples and peanut butter and I thought we should stay in Egypt.

Q: As a consular officer what kind of work did you do?

PRECHT: We didn't issue immigrant visas and very few non-immigrant visas. We had a small American community so I had a fair amount of work. I guess most of my time was taken up by administrative officer's work. A lot of that was looking after the official residence and Mr. Fritzlan and his British born wife, as well as the consular building, and wrestling with the embassy in Cairo to get what we needed. It was not easy dealing with Cairo. Whenever I had time, I wrote political and economic reports which seemed to be fairly well received in Cairo and Washington. They were always airgrams. We didn't have anything but a one-time pad to report anything on an emergency basis [via cable].

Q: What type of economic activities were going on?

PRECHT: Well, Alexandria, of course, was a big port. Cotton was the major foreign exchange earner for Egypt and that was monitored there by our economic officer. But, Egypt was rather a depressed place then. As I mentioned, businesses had been nationalized and there was no foreign investment. It was a stagnant economy I think you would have to say. The population was growing as it has in Egypt for decades in this century.

Q: Were you followed?

PRECHT: The phone system worked so badly everyone said it was because the Egyptians were listening to us. I figured it just worked badly because it was decrepit. I don't recall being followed. Although, there certainly was the belief that the secret police were omnipresent and were watching you somehow. So, you had to be very careful in

that regard. Just the number of police in the streets gave one the feeling that this was a very different kind of society.

Q: Did you get many American tourists?

PRECHT: Very few in Alexandria. We had the occasional cruise ship which would come in. I once had a dead body on a cruise ship.

It was a time of increasing tension between our two governments. The Egyptians shot down an unarmed American plane in the Delta which caused a certain tension in our relationship. The plane, possibly an oil company plane, refused to land when directed and the Egyptians shot it down, it caught fire and I had to deal with the dead bodies of the two pilots. We cut off aid and things were building to a crisis. But, still we had friends and my contacts were not affected by the official deterioration in relations.

Q: Was Israel thrown into your face all the time?

PRECHT: Yes. You couldn't say the word Israel. There was a great hostility towards the Israelis even among the moderate Egyptians. There were still a few Egyptian Jews, mainly old people whom you would see occasionally. They would come to our Fourth of July reception. But, basically, Israel was anathema for all the Egyptians we were in contact with.

Q: What was your impression of the embassy?

PRECHT: When I served in Rome I had a feeling that I was having a wonderful work experience, and it indeed was that. The people on the embassy staff in Rome were just first rate. I had the greatest admiration for every officer at every level from the ambassador on down. As I look back, I don't think I was wrong. In Cairo, I knew the officers less well. The ambassador, Luke Battle, I certainly had admiration for him and he liked me as well. David Nes, the DCM, I have a great deal of admiration for him. Don Burgess was Political Counselor at first and I thought very highly of him. I didn't know a lot of the others. My contacts were mainly in the administrative section with whom I was forever wrestling to get things for our post. I can't remember any of them who I deemed not up to their job. They seemed to me truly in an elite class. I wasn't as enthusiastic about the people I served with in Alexandria and maybe if I had known the people in Cairo better my opinions would be different.

Q: Well, Alexandria for us was the equivalent of the Italian's idea of Venice.

PRECHT: That's right. It was a parking ground for people for whom no other job was available.

Q: Were you intrigued with the Middle East?

PRECHT: Not really. When it was time for me to go, an inspector said that I had done

very well there and why didn't I sign up for Arabic, a two-year course. I said, "I am not coming back to this region. This assignment is it." I had established a good reputation by that time. I had been promoted twice in Rome and I think once in Alexandria. So, when I came back I was told I would be assigned to NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Agency]. I said, "You know, I don't have any interest in scientific affairs." They said, "Well, the important thing is that someone who is likely to be an ambassador must have the experience of working in a different agency." I said I had spent three and a half years in the Department of Labor and didn't need that experience. They were not to be dissuaded and I was assigned to NASA for a two-year tour.

Q: You were at NASA when?

PRECHT: I was assigned there for two years, but I broke the assignment I was so unhappy. I just didn't have any interest in space flights or the peace treaty in space that they were negotiating. I was a wordsmith for them and got my only trip ever to California out of that. I went to a launching one time in Florida with a bunch of ambassadors. So, I lived well and they liked me, but I wasn't comfortable. I continually worked on the personnel office to change me. In June 1967 after a year I was moved out of NASA to the Arab-Israel desk headed by Roy Atherton.

Q: NASA was quite an alien environment wasn't it?

PRECHT: That's right. As in a lot of international affairs agencies, there was deep suspicion of the State Department. But, I overcame that and got along with the people well. It was run by Arnold Frutkin, who was a terribly tough minded bureaucrat but also a very intelligent and capable one. There wasn't anything, however, that caused me to work after 5:00. As a State Department officer, you want total life commitment.

Q: This was at the time we were driving to go to the moon and all. But, your particular slice of the action wasn't that was it?

PRECHT: I worked on the space treaty that we negotiated with the Soviets and some business in the UN [United Nations] as I recall. There were projects of cooperation putting experiments from various countries on our satellites. It was all a kind of frill to give international prominence to our space program. We were in competition with the Russians at that time.

Q: You moved over to the Arab-Israeli Desk [NEA/AE] when?

PRECHT: It must have been in July 1967, a few weeks after the 1967 war. I took Mike Sterner's place who moved down the hall to work on Arabian peninsular affairs. Mike was an experienced Middle Eastern Arabist. I had two years at Alexandria, which is not the Arab world but more the Mediterranean world. I didn't speak Arabic and had not had anything to do with Arab-Israel affairs. I was generally aware of what was going on and had read articles and books, but was very much a raw recruit for that desk which was as busy a place I had ever been before.

Q: You were doing this from 1967 to when?

PRECHT: I was on the desk from 1967-68. Luke Battle, then the assistant secretary, who had been my ambassador in Cairo, asked me to come to the front office to be his staff aide. I agreed to do that. He left a few months afterwards for COMSAT [Communications Satellite Corporation] but I stayed on for a few months under Parker T. Hart and the balance of a year with Joe Sisco, leaving in the summer of 1969.

Q: Let's go back to the Arab-Israeli desk. The place must have been reeling because the 1967 war was such a cataclysm as far as your particular responsibilities were concerned.

PRECHT: Yes. The desk was headed by Roy Atherton. Jim Bahti was the number two, the economic officer was Jim Mather. George Lambrakis did political military work. And then there was me, I was the bottom man. When I arrived Mike Sterner had left a couple of days earlier so my in-box was quite full of dispatches from the field. I stayed late for a night or two reading those papers but the in-box level never went down. I guess that is the way you learn something in the foreign service by relentlessly reading all of that stuff that comes in from the field. I did that for the rest of my career. Unfortunately it meant that I rarely had time to read books or any kind of political or historical works on the countries in which I served. I mainly read communications written by other State Department officers. I think that was a failing that should be corrected by official policy.

At any rate, it was a very busy time. Roy was involved in the negotiations with the White House. He was the right-hand man to the assistant secretary and Joe Sisco played an active part. He also managed to direct us. I did a lot of routine work I suppose you would say, gradually building up my level of competence. We had a set speech that we used to deliver going around the country. I wrote a new speech, getting tired of the old one, mine then became the set speech for months. State Department policy is often made between the hours of 9:00 am and 12:00 noon. When you read something in the New York Times or the Washington Post, you have to react to it by the noon briefing. So you have to get a position closed by then. I recall the time that the Israelis established their first settlement on the West Bank called a Nahal. They said it was for security purposes. This was on page one of the New York Times. I put together the State Department answer which was (1) this was an impediment to a final peace settlement and (2) it was illegal under international law to move your own citizens into an occupied area. That became American policy, which lasted until the Reagan years, when Reagan dropped the violation of international law bit and until the Clinton years when they didn't even speak about it any more.

Q: Was there the feeling at that time that there was going to be some sort of settlement of the West Bank and it will end up back in Jordan?

PRECHT: When we thought about the future of the occupied areas I think most of us whose roots were on the Arab side of the line felt that it was going to be very difficult to persuade any of the Arabs to sit down and talk to Israel, which was the Israeli demand for a final peace treaty. The White House wanted to close out this conflict. We didn't see

Arab leaders taking that kind of risk. We didn't see Arab public opinion tolerating the recognition of Israel. We felt any settlement of the Sinai and West Bank situation was very doubtful. Therefore we were very pleasantly surprised in November, 1967 when a UN resolution was reached by all parties which provided the framework for negotiations. We were not surprised that Ambassador Jarling, who was appointed to seek a settlement under that resolution, made so little headway. In part because of his own excessive caution and in part because nobody, especially the United States government, was pushing him.

Q: Was the Arab-Israeli desk the primary point of contact for the embassy in Tel Aviv?

PRECHT: Yes, we were the home base for the embassy in Tel Aviv. However, the ambassador was Wally Barbour who had been there some years and was said to be so completely on top of the job that he came in in the morning, did a few hours work, went out and had a two martini lunch, took a nap and then played golf. If I, as the desk officer, sent an instruction to him to tell the Israelis we don't like something they had done or said, he would decide whether this message came from the Secretary of State or from the desk. If he thought from the desk he would certainly not carry out the instruction himself and might assign a junior officer to do it. He was very much in control and no one in the State Department was going to direct him to do anything that he considered unwise. Usually his wisdom was to take care of Israel and American policy would be safe in this region.

Q: You were the new boy on the block. Did you feel a divide within the State Department between the Arabists and "Israelists?"

PRECHT: There were no "Israelists." The whole Near East and South Asia [NEA] bureau was inhabited by people who had lived in the Arab world and understood the Arab world. Roy Atherton, I think, was as balanced as anyone was and therefore he was in charge of the desk. Joe Sisco, who was head of the International Organizations bureau was deemed to be pro-Israel because he was more in line with what the Johnson White House wanted to do. He and his staff assistant, Pete Day, were the "Israelists" if you would call them that, although that is probably an overstatement. There was a difference of opinion between them and the NEA position on most Arab-Israel questions.

Q: Did you feel that you were very much under the scrutiny of either the Congress or the press on anything we did re Arab-Israel matters, or did that come later?

PRECHT: Congress was not as blatantly pro-Israel as they later became. You had Senator Fulbright, who was fairly balanced, as were a number of senators and congressmen. Even in the State Department, as you went further up the line, I think there was a fairly balanced outlook. I remember once, after I had left the State Department and was at Fletcher, having lunch with Dean Rusk, I said, "We used to send you memoranda on the Palestine question and we never got a reaction. Did you ever get those memoranda?" He said he did get them but wouldn't comment on them further. My feeling was that he was probably sympathetic with our point of view but was restrained by the Johnson White

House.

Q: How about contacts with Arab embassies and the Israeli embassy?

PRECHT: Our contact was with the Israeli embassy. The Arab embassies had their own desk. The Israeli embassy, I think, regarded us as staff workers. Roy was a special case, he was the chief. But, the rest of us had very little contact. I don't think I was ever invited to an Israeli embassy affair. When the Israeli ambassador would come in to talk to one of the senior officers of the Department, I would inevitably be summoned to take notes, but that was the very limited contact we had with the Israeli embassy.

Q: During this period were we concerned with Palestinian groups around the periphery?

PRECHT: One of the big issues at that time was the second wave of refugees. That is, in the 1967 war a lot of Palestinians had been pushed from the West Bank into Jordan. We thought they ought to be allowed to return to their homes in the West Bank or wherever they were from. I think there were several hundred thousand of them and the Israelis wouldn't allow them to return. There were also raids across the line from Jordan into Israel causing Israeli inevitably to make retaliatory strikes which we called disproportionate and scolded the Israelis. We had no effect in changing their behavior. There was constant activity of that kind.

The Suez Canal was the front with Egypt but wasn't terribly heated up at that particular moment. This was before the war of attrition had gotten started.

Q: The war of attrition was when?

PRECHT: I think late 1969-70.

Q: Did the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) play any role at this time?

PRECHT: Not really, to my knowledge. Actually, I had been present in Alexandria when the PLO was created. It happened just a few days after I arrived. I was staying in the embassy rest house in Alexandria and Don Burgess was there as political counselor to cover the meeting of an Arab summit at the Palestine Hotel a few miles down the coast in the Montazah Palace Gardens. But I don't think immediately after the 1967 war the PLO figured very much. Essentially Nasser was the key figure.

Q: How were we viewing events within Israel? Were we concerned that this tremendous victory was going to change the Israeli attitude, psyche, etc?

PRECHT: Yes. After that tremendous victory, a euphoria, self-confidence, if not arrogance, prevailed, not only in Israel, but in the American Jewish community. They were not in a mood to compromise. They were in a mood to reap the fruits of that victory. I think that mood convinced the State Department Arabists that it only was going to make things very, very much more difficult in reaching the peace we sought.

Q: Was this the beginning of the massive aid to Israeli or had that been going on?

PRECHT: It was beginning then. The big issue at the time I was on the desk and later when I worked for the assistant secretary was Israel wanted to buy 50 Phantom aircraft [F-4s], our most advanced fighter bomber, and Johnson was unwilling to sell them. This was looked on as giving up a chip that we might need at some future time. Those 50 Phantoms were the subject of innumerable questions when we went out, as we frequently did, to speak at synagogues around the country, as well as letters from the congress. It was just before he left office that Johnson finally authorized the sale of those planes.

Q: You mentioned making speeches in synagogues. What were you doing?

PRECHT: Typically we tried to explain the Middle East, through the image of the three circles of violence. One circle was the Arab-Israel conflict. Another was the Inter-Arab conflict. And the third was the U.S.-Soviet cold war conflict. We tried to explain the region in those terms. Most of the time we would go to synagogue groups of one kind or another. I only once spoke to an Arab group outside of Boston. Occasionally we spoke to a World Affairs Council or that sort of organization. It was good experience to get on a rostrum and learn how to do it. You start off by reading a speech. Later on when I was president of a world affairs council, I learned that not many State Department officers know how to talk to the public.

Q: What was the reaction that you were getting from the synagogue groups?

PRECHT: To a man, I think, the audience looked upon us as the enemy. That is, the State Department peopled by Arabists was hostile towards Israel. They were right and perhaps they didn't understand the reasons for the hostility, but I think they were basically correct in their assessment. They were friendly, we were the diplomatic corps of the country and due a certain amount of respect, but we were looked at as people who were doing the wrong thing by a country for which they felt a great affection.

Q*: Did you feel that we were trying to be true to an even handed policy and yet the congress, the political masters at the White House and Ambassador Barbour at our embassy were essentially going their own way?*

PRECHT: Yes. I felt a great deal of frustration. I did this job writing memoranda and cables for two years and finally decided I didn't want to do this anymore. I wanted to do something that would get results. Policy on this issue was being made in the White House by people who were sensitive to domestic political forces. Therefore, whatever rationale that we were able to produce had very little effect. That is the way it appeared to me at the time. It was exceedingly frustrating when you had an administration that preferred domestic political caution or advantage, to what seemed to be the more prudent step from the perspective of international relations.

Q: Most of the group that you were working with were Arabists. Did you feel it was

American interests that was the driving force, or was there an over familiarity with the Arab world, sort of localitis?

PRECHT: I think both. I think certainly there were those who were enamored with the Arab world, not a great number of them, but the predominant sentiment was that of being aware of what would work and what wouldn't work in the Arab world. They tried to steer American policy in directions that might have a chance with Arab leaders. For example, the question of whether there should be direct negotiations between Arabs and Israelis for a peace treaty. I think most of the Arabists would say that that is a non-starter. In retrospect though, given time, this kind of pressure of consistent U.S. policy helped to bring the Arabs around to accept Israel. The unfortunate thing is that by the time the Arabs had come around and accepted Israel, Israel had hardened considerably. But, if the Arabists had been more farseeing and more adventuresome in their thinking, they might have found a way of accelerating that process. Certainly, I think the Israelis were not in a giving mood, particularly when it came to areas that were important to them such as Jerusalem, the West Bank and Golan Heights. Even at the beginning they were not inclined to be ready to trade those places for words on paper with Arabs.

Q: There are two things you can count on in the Middle East. The Arabs to shoot themselves in the foot by doing something that looked kind of stupid and that the Israelis would miss the boat.

PRECHT: Or vice versa.

Q: What about our consul general in Jerusalem? Was this a different window? Was there a split from your perspective?

PRECHT: Right. I can't recall precise details, but quite clearly the consulate general was a window on the Arab world, a different perspective. I felt there was a fair amount of pressure from the embassy in Tel Aviv on the consulate general. The consulate general never prevailed over the embassy, of course, in any kind of political struggle. The embassy always had the last word. But, still, it was looked upon as something important to salvage and generally we had good people there reporting on conditions in the occupied areas. I think it was an office that the State Department could take pride in.

Q: Were we concerned with Israeli police or military excesses in Gaza and the West Bank at that point?

PRECHT: I don't think you had what you had later on during the Intifada, that is, a lot of clubbing and arrests. My recollection of that period is that the Palestinians in those occupied areas were pretty well subdued. In fact, a great deal was made of how well they were doing relative to their time under the Egyptians or Jordanians. I think that was a fair amount of baloney, but I think still the Palestinians were people without any kind of self-confidence. Their cause had been beaten badly and they were without any real hope. The Israelis showed their toughness by blasting across the line into Jordan whenever there were Palestinian incursions from that direction. That was the most troubling aspect of

violence for us.

Q: How did we see the "Soviet menace" in the Middle East at that time?

PRECHT: Well, Egypt during the '60s was quite heavily influenced by the Soviet Union. They were building the Aswan Dam and all sorts of things in Egypt. In my experience in Alexandria, this was never relished by the Egyptian people. I think Americans, for all the difficulties between our two governments, were certainly far more popular than Russians were in Alexandria. The Russians, though, were deemed to have a great deal of influence as presumably they did in Egypt and Syria. When I worked for the assistant secretary, Mr. Sisco went to negotiations with the Russians on the Middle East, but don't think they went anywhere. However, it was recognition of the role that Moscow played in those countries.

Q: Was the Black September movement during your time?

PRECHT: That was afterwards.

Q: You went to become Luke Battle's assistant when?

PRECHT: I think it was late summer of 1968. Mr. Battle used to come down to Alexandria with his children and stay in the guest house, which had been given to the American government by a wealthy Alexandrian Jew rather than have it fall into the hands of the government. Although it was located in an area that had become a slum area, it had a lovely garden and swimming pool. My job was to keep the swimming pool clean. I also managed at one point to buy him a Greco-Roman head of Apollo at an exceptionally good price in the Alexandria bazaar. After that he told Jim Webb of NASA that I could do anything. So, I went to work for him. He left shortly thereafter to become vice president of COMSAT.

Q: Then who took over?

PRECHT: In the fall Parker Hart took the job. He was one of the most prominent Arabists. Then the election of 1968 defeated Johnson. I recall the briefing that we set up for Secretary Rogers, Undersecretary Richardson and the new Counselor. I was there carrying charts, or whatever. The briefing was on the search for peace. We had three presentations. Roger Davies talked about the background of the Palestinian question. Mr. Hart talked at length about the Arab world. Mr. Davies talked about the Arab world in a very sympathetic way and Mr. Hart in a very scholarly way. And then Joe Sisco who was Assistant Secretary for IO, talked about the search for peace. He said succinctly, "Mr. Secretary, when you come into office you will have three choices. These are blank, blank, blank and these are your three options, blink, blink, blink." Within a week, Joe Sisco was assistant secretary for Middle Eastern Affairs and Parker Hart was head of FSI (Foreign Service Institute). Joe was action oriented; Hart was more of a scholarly persuasion.

Q: What was your job, first with Battle and Hart?

PRECHT: My job was to make sure the paperwork shuffled up from the bureau and into the assistant secretary's office. There were two of us. Don McConnell, later an ambassador, was my assistant. We made sure papers arrived on deadline, decided what the assistant secretary would see, and made sure there were note-takers at meetings. We were the contact with the Seventh floor. It was kind of a super flunky type of job, a staff job. I continued to make speeches around the country from time to time. The job wasn't substantive in any way.

Q: Did you get more of a feeling about political pressures on our policies?

PRECHT: Oh, yes. When Mr. Battle was in charge, I was told to monitor all telephone calls so there was always an invisible ear on the phone. Throughout my year, although I don't know if Hart and Sisco knew that I was on the line, I continued to do so. I read all the messages, listened in on all the calls and became ever more aware of the realities of American policy.

Q: Did you get the feeling that there is reality and maybe the foreign service approach had logic to it, but it was almost irrelevant and that maybe there should be more instruction about the real world?

PRECHT: Well, let me give you one example of how this worked. At one point I recall a cable going out to Wally Barbour to tell him to go in and see Golda Meir and tell her that we knew the Israelis were developing nuclear weapons and we wanted them to open their facility at Dimona for inspection. I can't remember the exact words of the instruction, but the Israeli program had been going on for some time and the issue was coming to a crunch. We wanted to put a stop to Israel's nuclear program or at least to bring it out into the open. Wally Barbour went in and made his pitch which he described in a cable and the bottom line was a flat "No, we are not going to budge." We waited for further instructions to come down from the seventh floor. What we next saw was a message which commended him for his very effective presentation of our point of view and did not ask that he pursue the matter any further. That was the end of it. So, it was that kind of reality. We weren't prepared to push the Israelis very hard on any kind of difficult questions.

Q: Did you see a real change when Joe Sisco came in?

PRECHT: Absolutely. First of all, as I mentioned, he was considered the enemy by many of the Arabists in the bureau. That presumption was, I think, quickly changed by his energy and effectiveness. For example, under his predecessors, the Pentagon bureau for international security affairs (ISA) walked all over the State Department. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Near East Affairs was Harry Schwartz. He generally got his way whatever the issue was. With Mr. Sisco, that changed. He got his way more frequently. He was a terrific bureaucratic infighter. Not only laterally but up and down. Once, before he became assistant secretary, I had taken notes when Gene Rostow, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, had spoken to the Israeli ambassador. He spoke in

deviance to American policy towards Israel. He was way off base from what the standard line was then. I faithfully recorded it and took it to NEA. They raised an eyebrow but signed off. I took it to Joe Sisco in IO and he crossed out what Mr. Rostow said and put in what he should have said, which was not what the Israeli ambassador or I heard. But, that is what went out to the field as guidance. So, it was that kind of tough minded courage that I think impressed a lot of people in NEA and changed their attitude towards him.

He was intent on pushing his own point of view. He had his own lines to Henry Kissinger in the White House unbeknownst to Mr. Rogers, who was Secretary of State, but known to me who was monitoring the telephone calls. I heard their conversations. Poor Ambassador Yost in New York thought that he perhaps was doing the Lord's work but he was effectively undercut by the people back in Washington. Joe was single-minded about Arab-Israel issues. Nothing else mattered very much to him.

I'll give you one little story. When he took over the job he told me, "I will be going home this afternoon but I want you to call me if anything comes up and if it is important I will either come in or you can bring it out to me." He went home and I called him. I said, "We have an Operations Immediate, highly classified message and I will be glad to come out and let you read it." He said, "Where is it from?" I said, "Colombo." He said, "Never mind." Whatever it was in Sri Lanka at that time didn't measure up to his standards of urgency and importance.

A similar thing happen in Afghanistan where Bob Newman was the ambassador. Newman had been out there for some years and desperately was trying to get a posting somewhere else. He sent in a lengthy two part cable on 50 years of the Afghan monarchy. I said to Mr. Sisco, "You have never read any message from Kabul. If you read these two messages, which are very well done, you will never have to read another one. You will know everything about Afghanistan." He took them and within ten seconds he had opened the door between our offices and flung them at me. So, Arab-Israel issues were all important to him. The other business of the bureau could be assigned to other officers.

Q: Supposedly in this early time of the Nixon administration, Kissinger was giving Secretary William Rogers his head to play with Arab-Israel affairs while he turned himself to Soviet affairs and other issues like that. Did you have that feeling?

PRECHT: I had the feeling that Rogers was irrelevant. Kissinger and Sisco were running the policy the way they wanted it, while letting Rogers think he had a role. Our ambassador in Moscow was Jake Beam. Sisco was setting up Two Power talks and the ambassador was to play an active role in those talks. Sisco said to me, "If you want a negotiation to go on forever, you give Jake Beam the job and he will never bring it to conclusion." There was that kind of cynical view. I came to the conclusion that what was important for Kissinger was Vietnam and the Soviet relationship and the Middle East simply had to be kept from causing trouble to disrupt that relationship.

Q: You already mentioned Colombo and Afghanistan. Let's talk about India and

Pakistan. Was that something that at that point Sisco was paying attention to?

PRECHT: No attention. I recall that Chester Bowles, who was our ambassador in New Delhi, sent in a long, highly classified think-piece message on "India looks to the future." Absolutely no one paid any attention to it in the Department of State. Within a couple of months or so it appeared in the Atlantic Monthly or one of those magazines as Mr. Bowles' farewell to the foreign service. It was a region that wasn't causing us any problems and no one was very interested in it.

Q: What about Iran and Iraq?

PRECHT: Iraq was out of it. I can't think of anything that happened in Iraq that caused anyone to look up the airgrams that came from there. Iran was a little different. In Iran we had to pay attention to the Shah. Ted Eliot was the Iranian desk officer at the time, and working for him was Bill Hallman. Their job was to keep the Shah happy. I used to think they were masters of the flowery prose that had to be generated to keep that happiness alive – birthday greetings, greetings on anniversaries, etc. However, I don't recall any particular issues that seemed to put a strain on the relationship. No one wanted any problems in that quarter and no one found any.

Q: While you were both on the Arab-Israel desk and working for the assistant secretaries, did that four letter word "oil" appear?

PRECHT: No, oil was not a problem at that time. We were remotely aware it could become a problem, but no one ever felt there was a threat of an oil embargo or anything else of that kind. It flowed very cheaply and everyone was quite contended.

Q: You left the job of special assistant to the assistant secretary when?

PRECHT: Before Joe Sisco came along in January 1969, I had decided that doing this flunky job for a year was quite enough time. My former colleague on the Israel desk, George Lambrakis, had had a year at the Fletcher School [of Tufts University] and was enthusiastic about it. I thought that sounded like a great thing to do. I was really facing burnout. I had been so absorbed in the Arab-Israel question and was tired of it, that I put my name in the academic year hat. When Sisco came on board, we got along very well. Then came summer and I told him I was scheduled to leave and he was very offended that I should leave his employment. He and I had developed a good relationship and he wanted me to stay on. But, I felt committed to departing and left in the summer of that year and went to Fletcher. If, I had stayed on and gone on with Sisco when he became Under Secretary for Political Affairs, I might have gone on to greatness, but that was not to be.

Q: Let's stop now. We will pick this up with your time at Fletcher. You were there from 1969-70, one academic year.

PRECHT: Okay.

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Q: Today is March 17, 2000, the first St. Patrick's day in the new millennium. We are going back to 1969-70 when you were at Fletcher. Could you describe your impressions of Fletcher and how it worked when you were there?

PRECHT: I thought it had passed its prime. It seemed to me it was a school that had a number of well-regarded but probably over-the-hill professors and a not very exciting curriculum. Also the student body and Dean Gullion didn't seem to mesh very well, this was the time of the Vietnam war. But, I looked eagerly towards the experience because having registered at Fletcher I could take courses at Harvard and Tufts graduate school. I decided to work for a masters degree. I don't think I have worked harder since I had summer jobs in college. I took a lot of courses and audited other courses because I thought this was the only opportunity to sup at the academic table. So, it was a very rich year for me in many ways. I took a course with Barrington Moore, a sort of well-established radical at Harvard. I took a course on comparative urban studies at Tufts. I started a Middle East study group for Fletcher students. I took a course on the Middle East with Nadav Safran at Harvard. I wrote a paper for him suggesting that Israel's effort to rely on alliances with the region's non-Arabs – Ethiopia, Iran and Turkey – was bound to fail. Those regimes would prove unstable and the Israeli connection might weaken them further. When I saw him years later, Safran congratulated me: "two-thirds right."

This was the period of heightened agitation over Vietnam and one of the most interesting things was my experiences of dealing with students, many of whom regarded me as the enemy. Their radicalism was quite an eye opener.

Q: Was there a strong contingent of foreign students, particularly those who already had or were on their way to embark on international careers in other countries?

PRECHT: Yes, there were a number of foreign students. Some countries had the practice of sending their new entries into the foreign service to Fletcher for training. I'm not sure but maybe Pakistan and Japan or Korea might have been doing that.

Q: Was there a threat you were getting while you were there, because this was the height of the agitation over the Vietnam War, including the Cambodian incursion?

PRECHT: And, the students were shot at Kent State during that period.

Q: Yes, that was part of it.

PRECHT: Sometime after I left, the office of Dean Gullion was firebombed by students. So, it was a rough period. There were frequently demonstrations or sit-ins.

Q: Were studies shut down a lot or was it a continuing process?

PRECHT: I never felt any interruption in the work I was doing. But, there were plenty of extracurricular demonstrations and that sort of thing going on all the time. My interest was mainly the Middle East so I went around town to attend the various Middle East lectures on offer and to give some myself.

Q: Did you get a pretty good mix on the Middle East issue?

PRECHT: I think there was a strong pro-Arab sentiment in the community there. For the most part the Middle East specialists that I met leaned towards the Arab point of view.

Q: When you left Fletcher, where did you go?

PRECHT: Well, there was a bit of confusion in my assignment process, which I guess is natural when you are out of Washington.

Q: Yes.

PRECHT: I was first assigned as labor officer or something like that in Tunisia. I didn't care for that very much and thought I could do better. Then I was assigned as DCM (deputy chief of mission) in Togo where upon a new ambassador was appointed and he brought his own DCM with him. So, when it became time for me to leave I was without an assignment. Finally, I was assigned to Mauritius as DCM to Bill Brewer, whom I had known somewhat in the State Department. I thought that this was the end of my career. Lost in the Indian Ocean. My wife went to the library, however, and got a book on Mauritius and said, "Be quiet. This will be a great tour" and it was.

Q: You were in Mauritius from when to when?

PRECHT: From the summer of 1970 to the summer of 1972.

Q: The capital of Mauritius is what?

PRECHT: Port Louis.

Q: When you arrived there how would you describe the economy, politics and people?

PRECHT: At that time there were about 700,000 people on an island about 25 by 30 miles. The single crop was sugar. Sugar cane was grown everywhere. There was high unemployment, high literacy and an ethnically divided society. The majority were Hindus who had been brought in to cut cane when slavery was abolished and the black slaves, mostly Creoles went off to the coast to fish. Creoles constituted about a quarter of the population. Then there was a large contingent, maybe 10 percent, of Muslims largely from Pakistan or Muslim areas of India. There was a small Chinese community. Their kids always won the exams and prizes. And, a much smaller contingent of descendants of the original French inhabitants who had owned and still owned many of the sugar plantations. They were the social elite of the island. These communities were organized

into their own political parties. There was a Muslim political party; a labor party, which was largely Hindu; and the Creoles had their own party which included the Chinese and the Franco-Mauritians. The Hindus basically ran the place.

During the time I was there a white Franco-Mauritian, Paul Berenger, who had been a student in Paris rebellion of 1968, came home to organize a multi-community political party, the MMM (Mauritius Militant Movement). He succeeded in organizing sugar cane workers which had never been done, as well as the port workers. He would call strikes. At one time the port was shut down for two weeks with nothing coming in or going out. Our communications were cut at one time. The depressing thing about Mauritius was that nobody in Washington cared about what was going on. When our communications were cut no one seemed to miss us. Mainly the place was of interest to the U.S. Navy which didn't want the Russians establishing a base there. (I think there was little prospect of their doing that). The Mauritians before independence from the British had had jurisdiction over Diego Garcia, which the British leased to the US Navy. There was some residual Mauritian claim for that island which was to become a major U.S. base in the region. On Diego Garcia there were ex-Mauritians called Illois earning a living picking coconuts. Those people got a very minimum settlement on independence and were shipped back to Mauritius where they were destitute. I made them a cause while I was there with no results. Subsequently, they managed to gain decent compensation.

We were an eight man embassy, counting secretaries and the Peace Corps director. In addition to being DCM, I was the Aid director and the USIS head. We had a million dollars of food aid. We had $50,000 in self-help money for small projects. I used to bring in speakers for the USIS program. I put on a folk festival at one time and published a magazine on American education. There was plenty of scope to do whatever I wanted to do.

Q: How did Bill Brewer fit into this?

PRECHT: Bill is a very formal, some people would say stuffy, foreign service officer. For example, whenever I would write a message back to the department and referred to Mauritius as "the island," he would say it was more than an island, "this is a nation." It was his first ambassadorial post and he was making the most of it. He was very genial and I got along very well with him, but there was this kind of formality that I think the Mauritian government really weren't quite up to in some respects. For example, when I first arrived he gave a big dinner for us and the prime minister was there. It was a long table and I was seated at the end where the prime minister was and Bill was at the other end. After it was over, he rose and said very formally, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Queen." The old prime minister, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, leaned over and said to me, "I didn't know America had a queen." Mauritius was that kind of sort of informal, slightly wacky place.

Q: Why would we be toasting the Queen?

PRECHT: Because she was the titular head of Mauritius. Mauritius was in the British

Commonwealth. There was a governor-general there who represented the Queen. It was very much a mixture of the reality of Mauritius, which was very informal, and the British-imported formality.

Q: We had this policy that we used to call "strategic denial," which was basically to keep the Soviets' hands off these islands. It was our playground but not their playground.

PRECHT: I think that was part of it. There were two abandoned oil tanks on the other side of the island from the harbor, Port Louis, which had been used during World War II. The Navy was concerned that the Russians might get that tiny harbor as a base for their fishing fleet and Navy vessels. The military attaché from Madagascar flew over once and photographed the island and then later sent us prints which he had unfortunately printed backwards so that north was south and south was north.

Q: Were the Indians at that time showing interest in making the Indian Ocean more Indian?

PRECHT: Their ties to India were sentimental and cultural. Mauritius looked toward Europe. Every Mauritian aspired to get off the island and study in England or France. Everyone could speak British English, but preferred to speak Creole French. After I left, the incipient industry for textiles and electronics got going and unemployment disappeared and tourism boomed. I understand it has become quite a different place from what it was when we were there.

Q: Were we trying to do much to develop industry or tourism?

PRECHT: Our aid program was essentially importing rice. It was sold to the Mauritian government and the funds generated were used largely to build roads. We didn't have any specific projects. With the smaller self-help money we built a youth club here or a clinic there, etc. But, in Mauritius these things counted for something and we were well regarded.

Q: Were UN votes an issue?

PRECHT: They naturally had a vote in the UN. Occasionally I would have to go to the foreign ministry which consisted of a politically appointed foreign minister who could care less about UN votes and one guy who took care of the diplomatic work and their missions in Europe, New York and Washington. I would go to see him and carry out my instructions and he would make a note. I doubt that he ever went to trouble and expense to send a cable to New York. The Mauritians generally went along with what we wanted, but it was probably our ambassador in New York that did the trick.

Once, when I was chargé, during the crisis of the Pentagon Papers which were about to be published by the New York Times, Mr. Kissinger sent a message to all posts worldwide, NIACT [Night Action - meaning regardless of the time, the Communications Section should decode and present cable to a substantive officer] IMMEDIATE, saying

that he wanted personal assessments from each chief of mission as to how the publication of these Pentagon Papers would impact on our relations with the host country. That is, if the host country found out we couldn't keep secrets, would they be willing to confide in us and work in partnership with us. I think I must have had one of the first answers back on his desk. I said, "On this island no one had kept a secret more than 30 minutes and they would find it strange if the United States were able to do so." This was just the opposite of what he wanted.

Q: How was living there?

PRECHT: Splendid. We had a large house with tennis court. Each person in the embassy had his own beach house. Ours was on the less fashionable side of the island because it was windy, but it had a wide long, if windy, beach. I had my own lateen sail boat. It was an unwritten rule that no one on the island entertained on weekends. Our daughter went to the English girls school and our son went to the French lycée. As my wife had predicted, it was a great place to live.

Q: In 1972 how did you feel about leaving?

PRECHT: It was time to go. You didn't want to make your career living on Mauritius. I was told I was going to Tehran to be the political/military officer, a key position in the embassy.

Q: Oh, yes.

PRECHT: The Shah was keenly interested in military matters. I had been in the Navy but had no experience in military matters. I couldn't tell an F-4 [an aircraft] from a M-4 [an armored vehicle]. After my Harvard experience I wasn't terribly keen on being part of the military industrial complex. Nevertheless, it sounded like a challenging experience. While on Mauritius we had an R&R (rest and recuperation trip) and used it to go to India and visit friends in Iran, so we had been to Iran and it seemed like an appealing assignment. So, I went off bravely to a new challenge.

Q: You were in Tehran from 1972 until when?

PRECHT: Until 1976.

Q: You had a full tour there then.

PRECHT: Yes. I originally went for two years but the ambassador asked if I would extend and I said that I would for another year. Tehran was not an easy place to live in, but there were places in Iran we wanted to visit. After three years were up, I got in touch with the department and asked about my next assignment. They said that there were no three-year tours in Iran, only two or four years, "So you are there for four years." I didn't complain, but I warned that after three years I would think I knew everything and no one would be able to instruct me. In the event, I think my prediction proved correct.

Q: Did you get a briefing before you went to Tehran?

PRECHT: I had three or four days in Washington. No language training was deemed necessary for my job as military liaison. I spent most of the time on the desk in the Department and the Pentagon. When I arrived there I asked the desk officer, Jack Miklos, if he could recommend something that I could read that would bring me up to date on modern Iranian politics. He said, "There are no books on Iran." There were, of course. There was the classic Nationalism in Iran by Richard Cottam, but Mr. Cottam was a friend of those in opposition to the Shah and was persona non grata. No one got access to the Department of State who opposed the Shah.

The other remark that I recall from the desk in those four days was Jack Miklos telling me that I would no longer have to worry about what arms we might or might not sell to the Shah. Previously, before I arrived on the scene, there had been a regular debate between the Pentagon military elements and the State Department on how to deal with the Shah's continuing requests to buy sophisticated American equipment. The arguments against it were that his people weren't able to maintain or operate such advanced equipment or whether threats to Iran justified the sale. Earlier there had been questions about whether he had resources for purchases, but oil money and aid money had made Iran a success story in the '60s and he was no longer on the aid list. He could afford whatever he wanted. Jack Miklos said that those bureaucratic questions would now disappear because Kissinger and Nixon had been in Iran in early June of 1972 and had reached agreement with the Shah that he could buy whatever he wanted short of nuclear weapons and the Americans wouldn't second guess him. So, Jack told me he was drafting a memorandum for Kissinger to send to the Executive Branch saying exactly that. He said that that should solve a lot of my problems in Iran. Actually it made a lot of problems.

Q: I think it is always interesting to catch the impressions of the new boy on the block before he gets absorbed in the details. Were you getting from other people questions about the Shah? About his role? As you were to experience later there was this thing that maybe we were overly sold on the Shah.

PRECHT: Absolutely not. There was no one in the Department of State who questioned the Shah's stability. There hadn't been when I was a staff aid in late '60s. There was no doubt in the official mind that the Shah was good for Iran and Iranians loved the Shah. When I arrived at the embassy, I was struck by the absence of any political expression. My job was not to monitor internal affairs at all, but this was a country where no one had any opportunity to criticize the government -- not even on the local level and certainly not the Shah himself. He was absolutely off limits. I wondered how it was that a man trained to be a Ph.D. in the United States and coming back to Iran to practice his profession or a businessman could accept their inability even to protest the local taxes or inadequate services of the government. The conclusion I came to was that this was a country that for the first time in its history was really making it. People who had never had much of anything now had not only refrigerators and cars and new apartments but

were able to send their children overseas for education. Politics was less interesting to them than their economic well-being. They knew if they got into politics they would jeopardize their economic standing.

Q: I have read recent accounts about Iran and it is hard for us to go back to a time when it really was a terribly primitive place. I'm talking about in the early 20th century.

PRECHT: Well, I'm currently reading a book by Lord Curzon who was in Iran in the 1890s and the descriptions of travel in the country are just as primitive as you can imagine. There were few roads. Nothing had been developed along the lines Europe had taken.

Q: When you arrived there, who was the ambassador and what was your impression of what the embassy was doing?

PRECHT: The ambassador was Joseph Farland, a political appointee who had been in the Dominican Republic, Panama and Pakistan previously. He had brought several friends of his from the staff in Pakistan to Tehran. It was a large embassy with a large military mission. There was no longer an aid program but we still had the Peace Corps. We had a [four-person] political section: the political counselor and three officers - one for international affairs, one for domestic affairs, and me for military affairs. In effect, I worked directly with the DCM and the ambassador. Later in my tour, I was made counselor of embassy because it was, truly, an independent function. I was interested in the local scene although there wasn't a great deal to sink your teeth into politically in Iran, but whenever I got the opportunity I did so. My job was exclusively working with the MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group], our military mission, and the defense attachés. We had another mission to the Iran Gendarmerie which is sort of the rural police force and I worked with them occasionally. I learned a lot in a very short period of time.

Q: What was your feeling about the expertise in the embassy about this country?

PRECHT: I thought it was pretty good. I thought the political section was not very impressive because they had nothing to do. The economic section had more to deal with commercially. Iran was buying a lot. We had a heavily engaged consular section issuing visas to Iranians and occasionally I would go over and help them out issuing visas just in order to get a chance to talk with some regular Iranians who weren't in uniform. We had a very busy USIS program and a big English language program. It was quite an active embassy. Mr. Farland, I think, was not quite up to the job. He was supported by a very good DCM, Doug Heck, but he didn't exert any real leadership in the embassy.

Q: You were in the political section and usually the political section talks to the media, talks to the intellectuals and gets a feel for things. I have heard, at least at other times, they were under wraps. Was there that feeling?

PRECHT: Yes, the Shah plainly didn't want us messing around with his opposition, such as it was. The domestic political officer, Stan Escudero, once had the gall to schedule an

appointment with a mullah down in the Tehran bazaar area. A few hours before he was to leave for his appointment there was a call from the Ministry of Court saying that it would not be a good idea for Mr. Escudero to have this meeting. So, the ambassador said, "Stan, you stay at home."

In 1974 or '75 I was the escort officer for Congressman Solarz, who was a liberal Democrat. I met him at the airport and was driving in with him and gave him his schedule of appointments. He wasn't going to see the Shah because the Shah didn't see liberal Democrats in those days, but he did get to see the court minister. He said, "Am I not meeting with the opposition leaders?" I said, "There are no opposition leaders in Iran. There is no opposition." He said, "Of course, there is opposition. Every country has opposition. Surely there are students who oppose the Shah." I said, "Yes, there are students who demonstrate." "I would like to meet some of those." I said, "Okay." So, I went back to the embassy and got USIS to organize a meeting on Friday afternoon of a group of students who could talk to the congressman. They did that. Friday morning we got a call from the ministry of court saying the meeting with the students was canceled. It was that kind of very tight, very closed political system. A CIA friend, formerly assigned in Moscow, told me the Iranian regime was more autocratic than the Soviets.

I once met a journalist who had just come back from a year's scholarship at Harvard. I talked to him and he seemed interesting so I said, "Well, maybe we could have lunch." We met in the embassy restaurant for conversation and I repeated that engagement with him every six weeks or so. He was the only Iranian I met in four years who would venture a word of criticism about the regime. I would go back to the embassy after we had had our steak and beer and send in a memorandum of conversation, not a cable, recording his views. I want to let the desk know that there was one person in the country, at least, who didn't fall in lock step with the Shah's regime. Of course there was no official reaction to my contact with someone opposed to the regime – perhaps the only such contact the Embassy had.

Q: It is interesting when you think of a comparable situation, say with Chiang Kai-shek, where the political idea was you either were for Chiang Kai-shek or you are a communist, or something of that nature, there was always talk about Chiang Kai-shek and the corruption and all this. I find it an interesting phenomenon at the time how little opposition there was within the body politic in the United States to the Shah including the embassy. This is really almost non-American.

PRECHT: Well, Iran wasn't entirely free of criticism. To jump ahead, after the surge in oil prices and the big spending spree that the Shah launched in 1974, Business Week, Time, Wall Street Journal, several others, had a series of articles on corruption and autocracy. Congress began to hold hearings. This upset the Shah terribly. He once told our ambassador that he was going to put a stop to it. He was having word sent to Jerusalem to call the American press off. It was his thesis that Jewish interests controlled by Israel could influence the American press.

So, there was criticism at times but it was never sustained and it was never, never shared

by the Department of State. The Department of State towards the end of my tour was constantly having to go up to testify on the Hill about human rights in Iran and arms sales and to defend Iran which we felt was our obligation to do.

Q: I am trying to capture the spirit because we are talking about the early '70s. This was the time when we had junior officers practically setting themselves on fire and opposed to policy. This was a great time for young educated people to demonstrate but Iran seemed to be off the radar screen of protest within the Foreign Service.

PRECHT: There was one officer, John Washburn, who was the petroleum officer and had quite a liberal and free ranging intelligence. When he left, after four years in Iran, he wrote a long memorandum to the ambassador describing what he knew of corruption in the regime. One copy to the ambassador only. I don't think anybody else ever saw it. It was that kind of sensitivity. You would never put that into a cable back to the department which might be leaked. That was our great fear.

But, there are two other factors. First of all, opposition wasn't easily manifested. It wasn't readily apparent. There were students who demonstrated regularly. In Iran the students had anniversaries. Troops had gone to the university and shot a bunch of them so the next year and the year after on that day there would be demonstrations and they would be put down again. There were several of those occasions during the year. But, beyond that, there was nothing. People didn't throw manifestoes over the embassy wall or light themselves on fire in a public square. The demonstrations occurred on the university grounds where they were put down or in the United States on university grounds. So, you didn't come naturally into contact with people like my journalist friend.

The other thing was some people in opposition were shooting at us. While I was there, terrorists assassinated six people, three of whom were friends of mine. It is awfully hard to say you should invite such people to tea. We tended to dismiss these events as a nasty bit of business, but not something that was seriously threatening the regime's stability.

During my four years, each year there would be a delegation from the National War College that would come over and I would be the person who arranged their schedule. Inevitably there would be a visit to the Shah who would spend an hour with them talking for ten minutes and then answering questions. Rarely have I seen anyone so well versed in international affairs, someone with a wider range of knowledge than the Shah. They would ask him if he preferred to pilot the F-4 or F-5. What did he think of the drought in the Sahel? Usually there would be a question about his domestic opposition and he would dismiss it. "A nuisance," he would say. This is the "red and the black" conspiracy. Communists and religious fanatics, but they will not stop us from our work on development. We are bound to become a power second only to Germany, or whatever. His megalomania at that stage prohibited him from recognizing that there was a problem with domestic dissent. I am not able today to say how serious that dissent was. You didn't get the sense in 1972-76 that any kind of revolution was brooding.

Q: Our concern at that particular point would have been the Communists and the

Soviets. How did we feel about that?

PRECHT: Well, the Communist Party, had largely been eliminated. I think SAVAK (the Shah's secret police force) was still trying to find some under rocks and our CIA was interested in what the Soviets were up to. But, internally, no one took it as a very serious matter.

Q: What about the religious side?

PRECHT: It was absolutely not something we worried about. In 1975 or 1976, I was the escort officer for Senator Percy who came over. He got the standard embassy briefing that everything was hunky-dory in hunky-dory land. Then he said to me that he would like to see the unofficial Israeli ambassador and have a briefing from him. So, I took him there. I had never been in the Israeli non-embassy, which was a kind of bunker. The ambassador was Uri Lubrani, one of their top diplomats. He had been in Ethiopia and was later in a senior diplomat for Lebanon. He told Senator Percy that the most serious problem that the Shah had domestically was from the religious elements who were hostile and very difficult for him to deal with. I never heard anyone say that in the American embassy. I never heard any journalists say it or any Iranians say it. This was the first time that I heard that analysis. By that time I had acquired some knowledge of Iranian history and had known the religious folk had led a boycott of tobacco in the 1890s and were put down brutally when they objected to the Shah's father. And religious figures had been big in the Mossadegh period. But, I had never heard that in the '70s.

Q: During Mossadegh's time had the religious side allied with him?

PRECHT: They were with him at the beginning, I believe, and then turned against him. Their defection seriously weakened Mossadegh.

Q: Did you feel the hand of the CIA there?

PRECHT: The CIA was big stuff there. Their chief of station would see the Shah separately, alone, as did the MAAG Chief and later the Special Representative of DOD [Department of Defense]. Otherwise, the ambassador was the only other person that did. When Helms was the ambassador, of course, the Agency never tried anything without full consultation with him. But, they were clearly a big factor in Iran.

Q: What could they do? Normally the CIA are either chasing Soviets or they are trying to find out who is doing what to whom within a country.

PRECHT: It was more than that in Iran. They had their liaison with SAVAK which was a much feared organization by the Iranians but not much respected by our people. I got to read some of their reports occasionally and found them appallingly simple. They also did their thing with the Soviets and the Eastern Bloc countries. Beyond that they had listening stations which were terribly important to the United States for monitoring Soviet missile launchings. Because of the geography, Iran was perhaps the only place where we

could get a bead on Soviet missiles being tested. When the revolution came, that was one of the grave concerns we had - the loss of those sites.

When the Shah was into his military buildup phase, the CIA was going to help him have an IBEX system. That is intelligence, monitoring, listening devices that would give him his own full range of technical systems for gathering intelligence - which presumably he would share with us. This whole business was super secret and I didn't know anything about it until I read Seymour Hersh's exposé in the New York Times. So the Agency was active in that kind of thing. I think the CIA chief also served as a back channel for the Shah from time to time - but that was hardly necessary with Helms on the job.

Q: Helms took over in April, 1973. Did that cause a change? He is quit a different man than Farland.

PRECHT: I can remember when the DCM called us together and told us that Richard Helms would be the next ambassador. We were amazed that the White House would send a man who after all had such associations with the CIA, which was deemed by every Iranian responsible for the fall of Mossadegh. It seemed to us to abandon any pretense of a sort of a neutral America and to confirm that the Shah was our puppet. But, Helms turned out to be a fine ambassador, probably the best I have ever worked for. He knew the names of practically all the local employees. He was interested in Iran. He was fair minded. He was smart and knew all the world's major players and how games were played in Washington. His descriptions of politics were rich with telling details

Q: Did you feel any change in the political section alone the lines of let's find out a little more about what is going on in this country?

PRECHT: Not really. The same rules applied. Our policy of support for the Shah remained unchanged. On the other hand, Helms insisted that we get to understand the country better. Each week political and economic officers were required to give him a memo listing the contacts we had had with Iranians. That was hard. Pretty soon, when it had became a matter of repetition, the requirement was dropped.

I think the ambassador wasn't happy when anyone ventured too much criticism of the regime. For example, Andy Killgore, who was our political counselor, made a trip to Mashhad. In a staff meeting after his return the ambassador said, "Andy, how was your trip?" He said, "Mr. Ambassador, I just wish the Shah had bought one fewer of those F-4s and paved that road." Well, that kind of remark didn't go down terribly well with the ambassador. Andy's tour was a short one.

Q: I doubt if anything would have changed there, but it sounded like we had deliberately put blinders on a system that is suppose to be observing?

PRECHT: That's true. I think Henry Kissinger and Nixon didn't want to know that the Shah had any problems domestically. They didn't encourage the embassy to inquire if the country was stable before making a military commitment. They assumed that it was

stable and didn't want to look further into such questions.

Q*: The White Revolution, I guess, was in full force by this time, wasn't it?*

PRECHT: Land Reform happened in the sixties. No one in the embassy talked much about it or went out to investigate what really happened or whether it had positive or negative political effects. It was assumed that the country people loved the Shah.

Q: So no one was going around looking at land reform and asking who gets the land, etc.?

PRECHT: Not in my time, no. The political section would do reports on things like rivalry between the Shah's twin sister and his wife. When I arrived there were two parties which we referred to as the "Yes, Sir" and "You're right, Sir" parties. He abolished them and had a single party, the Rastakhis party. Our political section took that stuff seriously and did thoughtful pieces on what this meant for political development in Iran, etc. The Shah's top-down political system was ridiculous stuff – completely devoid of meaning.

Q: Did we have other posts in Iran at that time?

PRECHT: We had three. When I arrived we had a post in Tabriz and in KermanShah (later moved to Shiraz) and when Bell Helicopter moved into Isfahan we opened one there.

Q: Sometimes just by their very nature, being away from the central government, you get a different perspective. Were we getting anything from our consulates?

PRECHT: Nothing radical, but I think you are right that there was a bit more independent judgment there. They talked to a wider range of people than the embassy did. A lot depends on the reporting officers. I think the people we had in the consulates were people who were inspired by traditional foreign service work. They were going to get out and talk with people and reported honestly. We didn't have much of that kind in Tehran.

Q*: Well, let's get to your job.*

PRECHT: I arrived and the big question had been whether the Air Force or the Navy would sell its top fighter to Iran. Nixon had said to the Shah that he could buy anything he wanted. Would it be the F-14 or F-15? The F-15 was Air Force fighter bomber and the F-14 was a carrier-based plane that had great speed, etc. The decision was going to made by the Shah. So, the embassy took the position that there should be no lobbying by the services. That meant McDonald Douglas, which made the Air Force plane, and Grumman, which made the Navy plane should stand aside, perform flybys or what was necessary, conduct tours and provide technical information, but no sales pitch. Well, I suppose that was a naive hope. I remember the DCM called in a visiting admiral in charge of sales once and told him that his activities of pushing this sale by constantly coming over, etc. were contrary to policy and he should cease and desist forthwith. The

admiral said, “Well, that may be the embassy’s policy, it is not the U.S. Navy’s policy. The Navy’s policy is to sell these planes.” Obviously if they sold 60 or 70 planes to Iran, the unit cost would go down for the Navy.

So, there was a big competition. I think the Air Force was a little better about holding back its salesmen for a little longer. Finally, the Shah made his decision and bought the Navy plane. Subsequently, we learned when General Toufanian, the Shah’s chief procurer for military weapons, called me in and told me that two, possibly naturalized Iranians, the Lavi brothers, had received bribes from the Grumman corporation. They had presumably passed these on to somebody in the Iranian government who was deemed to be making the decisions. The decision was to be made by the Shah so I don’t know, unless he was taking bribes. These guys had received something like $23 million from the price Grumman charged and Iran wanted that money back. They wanted the price that they paid reduced by $23 million. That started a process in which Grumman acknowledged that they had paid the Lavis the money and they would make good on the $23 million by providing Iran $23 million in spare parts for their aircraft once they were delivered. One of the Lavis came to see me and said that we were accusing him of terrible things and ruining his business. But, there was a fair amount of that later on. But, I have jumped ahead of the story.

When I arrived in 1972, the Shah decided that he needed helicopters. So, there was a competition for helicopters and he bought Bell helicopters. Part of the deal was that they would be manufactured or assembled in Iran at Isfahan. He was going to buy other stuff as well, and he recognized that he didn’t have the qualified personnel to handle all of this equipment and he would have to have Americans come in and train. Well, there was still a great deal of sensitivity about the escalation of troops in Vietnam and Secretary of Defense Laird said he was putting a ceiling of 600 American military personnel in country and would not go above that. So, one of the first things that I had to do was to participate in negotiations with the Iranians for pricing and establishing of small teams called technical assistance field teams (TAFTs) who would come over. There would be one for the helicopters and one for the F-4s another for F-5s, etc. These would be supplemented by contract technicians provided by the manufacturers. Bell would supply its own technicians for their helicopters and there were no limits on those people. They came in as the company was willing to provide them and the Iranians were able to pay for them.

In December 1973 practically the entire embassy, except for the ambassador and the petroleum officer, Dave Patterson, went skiing up in the mountains behind Tehran over the Christmas holidays. We were all staying in a hotel and we got a call from the ambassador saying the Shah had called him in and said he was going to raise oil prices. Remember there was an embargo after the Arab-Israel war and the price of oil was going to go up. I don’t remember how much, but it was to be a substantial increase. After that surge in Iranian income, civilian and military development just took off and there was no saying no to the Iranians. There was no saying no to American firms who came over to sell them something. I was constantly being briefed by these entrepreneurs on what they were selling or obliged to go to receptions that they would give for the Iranian military,

etc. Tehran became boom city. The amount of money that the Shah put into projects was vast. It was a situation seemingly out of control.

Q: What part were you playing, your actual job?

PRECHT: I monitored and advised. I really worked more closely with the MAAG chief of staff, a two star general, than I did the political counselor. I was his sort of chief and would write messages if we needed to have the rationale for the Shah's decision to buy something. When I first arrived they would pass messages for my clearance before transmitting to Washington. Perhaps you are familiar with Pentagon English. At first I labored trying to make it into literate English. Then I decided the person who would be reading the message was the same kind of person who was writing it, so it was foolish of me to try to change their means of communication. If they understood each other, that was what mattered. I stopped editing for spit infinitives, which pained me.

Whenever anything had a political content I became involved. I attended briefings. I went to see General Toufanian usually about something like this bribery scandal. If the Pentagon wasn't performing fast enough for him or pricing things wrong, he used me as a channel to express his unhappiness. Often the ambassador would go to see the Shah and come back and call me in and tell me that the Shah wants to buy such-and-such, or that he is going to send troops to Dhofar to help the Omani government put down a rebellion. I would write the reporting cable - that sort of thing.

Q: I can remember reading articles and it was the talk around the State Department wondering what we were doing. The Shah's regime wasn't the greatest regime. There was disquiet in the media and atmosphere.

PRECHT: Later on in my tour there were press articles and liberal Democrats questioning our sales to Iran. The law was changed so that any military sales had to be vetted by the congress. The Shah disliked that intensely. He wasn't keen on having people discussing his internal affairs or his defense needs, etc. It was a slowly evolving development. But, policy never changed in the Executive Branch. In the embassy and within the Department of State, we took our lead loyally from the White House.

Q: During your time there was there any talk about the personality of the Shah and the quality of the advice he was getting?

PRECHT: No, not really. I would see him on occasions [when I escorted] the War College or other visitors. Once I went with him when the U.S. Navy gave a demonstration on the Kitty Hawk, an aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Oman. We flew down and landed on the carrier and he was the guest of honor, obviously. The CIA and MAAG chief both saw the Shah separately. They were enthralled with him and there was little to counter them with. Ambassador Helms once told me that Dean Rusk had said that the Shah of Iran was the best informed world leader on world affairs with the exception of the President of the United States. I think it was true.

We kind of snickered at his grandiosity - his saying he was going to make Iran a great power and that this leap was going to take place in a very short period of time. All you had to do was to drive outside of the developed modern neighborhoods of Tehran and you would see that you were dealing with a country that had a long, long way to go.

There were questions about his health from time to time. I recall once the ambassador said that French doctors had come over and the Shah was writing his will. But we all have wills and see doctors. So, we didn't consider him vulnerable in any way.

Q: You mention a military advisor?

PRECHT: Yes. During this great military boom, the Secretary of Defense, wanted his own man in Tehran to advise the Shah on what he should buy. People in Washington were getting a little bit concerned that maybe the Shah was on the going overboard – buying so much that he would weaken his armed forces. So the Secretary of Defense appointed one of these defense intellectuals, Richard Hallock, I believe his name was, who was a very secretive guy and had his own small group of defense experts and set up an independent office. It was rather a bizarre arrangement. Mr. Hallock would go to see the Shah and the MAAG chief would go to see the Shah and the Shah would sometimes tell him something that Mr. Hallock had told him to tell the MAAG chief. There was great friction between the MAAG chief and Mr. Hallock, obviously. I developed a good relationship with Hallock and used to go to him and as far as I knew he was pretty open with me. But, he had his own office and he disliked the MAAG chief as much as it was reciprocated. Later on there was an accusation of some hanky-panky and that operation came to an end. He was replaced by another DOD whiz who was then in the open, Eric von Marbod, and was made sort of supreme czar with the MAAG chief reporting to him. That was another source of friction between a military man and a civilian. There was so much money and so much at stake that it was easy to see how these things could happen.

Q: What was the hanky-panky that Hallock was accused of?

PRECHT: I don't recall. There was something peculiar that caused Hallock to be closed down, but I don't recall the details.

Q: Were you all keeping an eye on what was developing in Iraq at the time? What was all this military buildup for?

PRECHT: Iraq was the principal threat. Certainly, no one thought the Shah was going to defend Iran against the Soviet Union. That was just not part of the equation. But, Iraq was the threat that we erected to justify these purchases because there was no other. I have to say I didn't take it seriously. There was plenty of tension between Baghdad and Tehran and in 1974 it became active as a result of Henry Kissinger's asking the Shah to help the Kurds make problems for Saddam Hussein.

As I understand it, Kissinger wanted to divert Iraq's attention away from Arab-Israel issues as he went through negotiations with Egypt and Syria. To keep him occupied on

the home front, the Shah was to provide arms to the Iraqi Kurds so they could cause trouble for Baghdad. The Iraqis took the bait and responded and some shells began to fall on the Iranian side of the border. That is, Iran was getting more progressively involved with the Kurds in Iraq and at some point, it must have been early 1975, the Shah sent his head of the army over to the border with Iraq to see how well the Iranian forces were positioned if there was going to be a real fight between Iraq and Iran.

This general came back and said they are not up to it. It was the kind of situation where if the Iranians wanted to move forces towards the Iraqi border they would have to stop at the gas stations along the way to gas up. There was no military infrastructure for a real war. Having been discouraged by his chief of staff from the military enterprise, the Shah reversed field and made a deal with the Iraqis. This had to do with where the boundary was on the river between them. There was the Algiers accord in March of 1975 which resolved that issue and cut the ground out from Kissinger's enterprise. This incident showed the Shah was capable of doing things purely in his own interest from time to time – not just following Kissinger's orders.

Q: Here you were doing political military stuff and we are flooding the place with very sophisticated equipment. What was the evaluation of your military colleagues of the Shah's military morale and readiness?

PRECHT: Well, sometimes, what the MAAG senior officers would say was that Iran had problems and describe them as serious if they were discouraged at the moment. But, basically they were upbeat. The military people who were assigned to Iran as advisors were can-do people. They would say, "We want this relationship." "We want these sales." "Let's make it work." Each of the services wanted a piece of the action. Even the Corps of Engineers came over to try to get a piece of the action. From time to time - only rarely - the military would say a particular weapons system was not suitable. Usually it was a system being pushed by another service.

I, as a civilian, was suspect by the Iranian uniformed people. I couldn't talk to an Iranian colonel that I might meet at a party and think I would get anything out of him. But, I persuaded the MAAG chief to send his technical people to see me, people who were based in the field as training experts, to come in and debrief me when they came to Tehran for a visit. So, I was able to get a sense from these guys who were sent out to advise how to maintain an F-4. Some of them would speak very frankly to me. I would write up a little memorandum, send it to Washington. Like anything else that I sent in that was not what Washington wanted to read, it would be filed away. But it gave me a sense of what the Iranian military was like. While I also got to know most of the senior Iranian generals, the relationship was strictly at arms length rather than the type you would develop with Iranian diplomats. You did what you could and used whatever means that you could to find out what was going on.

Q: The guts of any military organization are the non-commissioned officers. Can they maintain the equipment, how capable are they at leading, what is their relationship to their officer? Were you picking up any of this?

PRECHT: Not much. Some of the advisors that we had were non-commissioned officers themselves. Generally their relationship would be with a commissioned officer. There was not very much about what went on down below. Occasionally I would visit Iranian military installations. I am not an expert on military installations around the world, but they didn't look too spiffy to me. They were not third world-ish, but they were certainly not first world.

Q: An F-4, for example, probably has hundreds of thousands spare parts. It is a huge operation to keep a modern military plane or helicopter going which means you have to have quite a sophisticated backup system.

PRECHT: Yes, and towards the end of my tour we were setting up a sophisticated supply system, computer based, etc. to bring the Iranians the spare parts from US suppliers when they needed them. I don't think the Iranians ever considered that maybe some day their relationship with our country would reach a bad point and that that chain would be cut and they would be frozen on the ground. This was viewed, I think, on both sides as a kind of eternal and mutually satisfactory relationship. There were rough points from time to time but basically it was terribly advantageous to both sides.

One little example. As the Vietnam War was changing shape with the peace agreement, etc., Kissinger needed a squadron of F-5s to be added to the forces of South Vietnam. The Vietnamese air force had F-5s and he wanted to enlarge their forces up before we were precluded from sending anything to them - before this treaty went into effect. The only place he could find F-5s around the world was in the Shah's air force. So, one Sunday afternoon I was called over to the DCM's house and he said, "We have a message from Kissinger that says he would like the Shah to give him a squadron of F-5s." He called the court minister and within about 30 minutes we had our answer which was positive.

Within a week an American crew came over and boxed up the planes or flew them out. I thought at the time, this squadron was sold to Iran so they could defend themselves against an ostensible threat. Suddenly that threat is less important than our need for them in another country. And, what will be the reaction of the pilots who no longer have these planes? What will be the reaction of the strategists who rely on these planes as part of their force? I think that the idea was that the Shah knows best and one doesn't dare think for oneself. That was the best answer I came up with.

Q: Were you watching or other people in the political section watching the infusion of these Texas mechanics from Bell Helicopter? Isfahan is a religious city, isn't it? It is not a sophisticated capital. Was this a concern?

PRECHT: Bell Helicopter technicians rode motorcycles through the lobby of the Shah Abbas Hotel. Did anyone care? I think we cared. The American population grew and grew as this boom went on and technicians arrived, not only military but civilian as well. There was an American school - there had always been an American school. My wife and

I went up to a football game one weekend. There were cheerleaders and a marching band and fully uniformed players in the stadium. In the background were the Elburz mountains of central Asia. My wife said, "There is something quite unnatural about having small town America in this part of the world. It seems somehow not right." So much for wives and what they know about political military and geostrategic matters, I thought. But she was intuitively on target.

In 1975, Henry Kissinger came over for one of his periodic meetings after visiting the Middle East, Russia, etc. to brief the Shah. Both men enjoyed those conversations. After one, the 1975 stopover, there was to be a press conference. The ambassador called me up before hand on a Sunday afternoon and said, "Henry, can you come down to the embassy? Henry Kissinger is going to have a press conference and they will ask him a question about the number of Americans in Iran. You are the only one in the embassy who has a handle on this." (To backtrack a bit, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had sent two staffers over to study the number of Americans in Iran and they had written a report saying Americans were likely to be held hostage in Iran if things go badly between us and the Shah.) I went down to the embassy and Helms said, "Now you sit here in my study and think a few minutes and come up with the number of Americans in Iran. In five minutes I will bring Henry Kissinger in and you tell him exactly how many Americans there are."

So, I sat with pencil and the back of an envelope and figured there were so many military technicians, so many in the embassy, so many in the oil industry, so many tourists, so many dependents. I totaled up the figures and rounded it off. Kissinger came in and I said, "Mr. Secretary, there are 25,000 Americans in Iran." He said, "Thank you very much," went to his press conference and gave that authoritative figure. The next day at the embassy staff meeting I told the ambassador that I had made a very rough calculation and thought we needed to do a little more scientific counting. Why not send survey letters to all the companies here and get a figure that was more reliable than my guess. He thought that was a good idea, so I sent out these questionnaires. When they were returned we totaled them up and the figure was 50,000. I don't know if a correction was ever issued but we were quite surprised. However, no one thought the numbers were a bad thing, that we were overstretching. There was no way that you could keep Americans from traveling abroad to do business unless you passed a law or issued a regulation. So, they came and the community flourished. I think many Iranians resented the conspicuous number of them, particularly in places where large numbers of Americans had hardly lived before like Isfahan, Tabriz, and places where they were more conspicuous than elsewhere. That unfortunately did not seem a concern to the Department of State or Department of Defense.

Q: How did you and your wife find life in Tehran?

PRECHT: A difficult city. The traffic is terrible. It was every man against every man. Tehran is not an interesting city to live in compared to Cairo, which is a living medieval city. We had fewer friends in four years in Iran where we had an excellent relationship with the regime, than we had in two years in Alexandria, when the relationship was tense

all of the time. The fact that I worked with the military people who didn't want to socialize sort of cut us off. But, the children went to the community school which is an international school and a good school. We had a nice house. My landlord was said to be a 5 percenter with Defense contracts. We had good friends in the embassy, but didn't know many Iranians. I decreed at one point, in order for our souls not to corrode, that we needed to get out of town once a month which would mean we would go on a picnic or to a small town nearby just for tourism. It was a pleasant life but not a paradise like Mauritius or always interesting like Egypt. I was busy. My wife took Farsi lessons and went to a class on Persian poetry given by Mrs. Helms.

Q: Then in 1976 you came back.

PRECHT: Yes, I came back and was regarded as a political/military officer and assigned to the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM). When I came back, the desk officer was Charlie Naas who was a pretty opened-minded, questioning person, although not disloyal to the basic concepts of the Shah-America friendship. He said, "How are things going over there? What do you make of it really?" I thought the economy was a big problem because in 1975 the oil prices had sort of leveled off and began to decline a little bit for Iran. They had to scale back their purchases and construction somewhat. There were problems with procurement. At the same time inflation had begun to take off. The Shah's answer to that was a typical authoritarian answer of decreed price controls. Once when we were traveling in the northern province of Azerbaijan I went into a small grocery store and was amazed to see pasted on every tin can a piece of paper with a new price. The owner said that the price had been lowered for all these items and if you didn't comply goons would come around and beat you up.

So, I said to Charlie that there was no economist there to tell the Shah how to get a handle on the uncontrolled developments in the civilian and military sectors. He said, "Wonderful that there should be such a blessed country with no economist. Wonderful." I was getting a little concerned, however. Although there still weren't any signs of political unrest, on the economic front a lot of people were unhappy. My idea was that the people who support the Shah - the middle class, shopkeepers, the mainstays of his regime - were being hurt. If he was making them unhappy he was not doing himself a favor. So, I came back with some feelings of disquiet, but not a lot of evidence to back it.

Q: You were doing this political-military job in PM from when to when?

PRECHT: I did that for a year, 1976-77.

Q: What was your job?

PRECHT: It was in the office that dealt with security assistance, sales of arms overseas. The chief of it, Steve Winship, and others in the office regarded me, I think, as not one of them. They wanted to reduce the number of arms deals. They thought a guy coming from Iran where sales had exploded was a heretic to the doctrine of the professional State Department. So, they didn't trust me and didn't give me very much to do.

That was in the fall and then Carter was elected. One of the first things he did was to fulfill a campaign promise which was to create a policy which controlled arms sales. I was commissioned to draft that policy. I had to consult with all the people in the Pentagon, State Department and White House who were interested and finally came up with something called PD-13 [Presidential Determination-13] after much compromising back and forth. It had so many loopholes and escape hatches that meant it didn't amount to very much.

I decided that I really didn't care for that job. When an opening developed in NEA as deputy director of the office of regional affairs, I took is because it not only dealt with arms sales but also dealt with human rights and other regional problems. I moved there in the summer of 1977 and stayed until 1978.

Q: Who was the head of NEA at the time?

PRECHT: Hal Saunders.

Q: Now, this was early in the Carter administration and one of the big things Carter emphasized was human rights. How did that sit with the traditional diplomacy?

PRECHT: The emphasis on human rights had started earlier with congress requiring an annual human rights report. By the time I arrived in NEA this was a routine. You get this information, put together a report trying to appease the human rights bureau on the one hand and those who were interested in a particular country and wanted to preserve the status quo on the other. The under secretary frequently monitored these reports and tended to side with the human rights bureau but, in the case of Iran, managed to give the Shah what he wanted.

Q: I would think that you would have two very hot subjects on human rights. One being Israel and the other Iran.

PRECHT: Right, on the human rights score. But, you know, you are able to handle these things even though they cause you some stress. You had letters from the public and Congress and the press would be critical. Arms sales continued to be a problem. Arms sales to Saudi Arabia, which I helped to manage, were opposed by a strong Israeli lobby. You had to work the congress in order to prevail. We always did prevail, but it was tight and extremely difficult. Then the Shah wanted to buy AWACS.

Q: This was an aerial radar system for controlling large areas.

PRECHT: Yes, an airborne warning and control system [AWACS] for vectoring in fighters or bombers against targets. Highly sophisticated equipment. The Shah wanted to buy this state of the art equipment. I thought it was a terrible idea. They were having trouble with the stuff they already had and I didn't think the newer equipment was appropriate. In fact, I went privately to Les Gelb who was PM assistant secretary and told

him that this sale would be a disaster. We have this arms control policy and you are going to have to make a waiver under it to sell him the AWACs. The Iranians can't manage this and it is going to ultimately work against us. He listened to me but I think the White House had already made its decision that they were going to go ahead with the sale. The Administration got approval from congress after considerable difficulty because the Congress had great reservations. Happily the revolution intervened and they were never delivered. But, I think we did sell them to Saudi Arabia where American crews manned the planes for some time, I believe. There was a lot of effort spent with the congress on arms sales at that time.

Q: Did you get involved at that time, before Camp David, on arms sales to Israel?

PRECHT: Once there was a three-country package of F-5s to Egypt something else to Israel and Saudi Arabia. Everybody got something. That was a big problem in congress but basically it went through. But, no one ever questioned any sales to Israel the way that they did to Saudi Arabia.

Q: Other than human rights and arms sales was there anything else you followed on a regional basis?

PRECHT: No big issues that I recall.

Q: Did water ever come up?

PRECHT: No. There were minor things but I don't recall any big issues over water. Congress was a large part of the problem in the office that I dealt with.

Q: Where was congress being a problem?

PRECHT: I mean in that the liberal Democrats wanting to emphasize controlling arms and human rights and the Republican administration having quite a different view. But, I must say that when the Carter administration replaced the Ford administration, there were surface changes but not anything basic in terms of policy shifts. Certainly there was a change in the willingness of President Carter to engage himself on Camp David and the Arab-Israel question. But, on arms sales and human rights, I don't think there was any real muscle put into those issues. As a matter of fact, Charlie Naas, the desk officer, told me, and he heard it directly from Sullivan, who was the new ambassador appointed to Tehran, that Carter, told him when they met that we essentially were going to continue the same policy with the Shah. That is, we are not going to clobber him with human rights, arms sales. And, they didn't. The Shah had been quite nervous about Carter. I remember when I was still in Tehran and Carter was engaged in running for the nomination, the Shah was afraid he would succeed. He remembered the last Democratic liberal president he had to deal with, John Kennedy, who had his own ideas how the Shah should conduct his government in terms of land reform, etc. He was afraid Carter would turn out to be another Kennedy. Well, he wasn't. He wasn't really interested in Iran at this time; his overriding concern was the Arab-Israel conflict.

Q: While you were in the NEA bureau, was there the feeling that Carter at that particular time was focusing very heavily on Israel and Arab affairs as opposed to Iran?

PRECHT: Yes, but I think that had been true since the 1973 war. That had been the center of the Middle East concern and what happened to the Shah nobody gave much thought to. Egypt was important because it was in confrontation with Israel, but no one paid much attention to any of the other countries in the area. Once the oil embargo had been lifted, you didn't have to worry too much.

Q: Did you get involved with Pakistan and India?

PRECHT: Marginally. Typically nobody in the bureau paid much attention to what was going on in Pakistan and India or Afghanistan. They just simply didn't rate attention on the 7th floor.

Q: I think this might be a good place to stop. Where did you go in 1978?

PRECHT: Jack Miklos had been the desk officer when I originally went out to Iran. Then he replaced Doug Heck as DCM and Charlie Naas replaced Miklos as desk officer and later as DCM. Charlie was asked by Hal Saunders who should replace him and he said that Henry Precht was the only one around who knows anything about Iran was available. I guess I was the right grade and was named to move to that desk. What we later called the revolution had already started but maybe you want to continue that at the next meeting.

Q: Yes. So you came to the desk?

PRECHT: June of 1978.

Q: Okay. Next time we will pick it up at that time.

PRECHT: All right.

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Q: Today is March 24, 2000. Henry, you took over the Iran desk in June, 1978. Will you explain what the "desk" was in terms of that time?

PRECHT: The Iran desk dealt only with Iran and consisted of a country director, his deputy and an economic officer. Occasionally there was an intern. There were also two secretaries.

Even though I was a strong candidate for the Iran desk, I had two choices. One was to be country director of Iran; the other was to move from deputy director to director of regional affairs. Iran was certainly going to be complicated in my view and for that

reason I took it.

The troubles had started in Iran, basically in January, when the Shah's people and newspapers insulted Khomeini and religious students had demonstrated in Qum at the seminary. A number were shot, touching off a series of mourning demonstrations. That is, celebrations to mark the death of individuals after three days, after 40 days, etc. That began in January and every time there would be one of these mourning demonstrations, sometimes in Tehran, sometimes in Tabriz, or other cities. Each time the troops would crack down again. So, there would have to be more celebrations commemorating those who were killed. Things were getting out of hand and the Shah was getting a little nervous. He began promising things like a more liberalized regime, etc. Unfortunately, people weren't buying that.

I had been concerned about what was happening in Iran. The embassy indicated some worry but the press, which was not represented by American reporters, downplayed the incidents. All the papers had stringers who we always thought had dual employment, the other employer being SAVAK, the secret police. So, the level of concern was muted at best. In June when I came on board things had, in fact, quieted down. The mourning ceremonies had come to an end. There was tension but not recurring violence.

Q: At that time was it the perception that you were getting from other people and your own analysts that the problem was that the Shah has got to liberalize the SAVAK, or in a way become more conservative and religious?

PRECHT: Basically people didn't believe that the Shah, who had been through a lot of trouble from his reign since 1941, was in any real danger. Some people thought liberalization was the answer. That is, to lighten up. No one suggested that he join the church or start contributing to the building fund, because religious people weren't so prominent in American thinking at that stage.

Q: Was it also because we couldn't talk to mullahs and also Americans particularly in those days didn't think in terms of Islam or church in any place. We are secular people and have secular solutions.

PRECHT: Don't forget we are looking at this in retrospect. There had never been an Islamic revolution before. There had been political demonstrations led by clerics, the last one being 25 years earlier led by Khomeini at which time he was jailed and sent off in exile ending up in Iraq. The religious aspect wasn't the main focus at that time, in the spring of 1978, it was a popular uprising. It wasn't even viewed as being a long-term thing. After all, the Shah had a pretty tough secret police apparatus and an army deemed to be loyal. The presumption was that it might be messy and might take a little while but they could do the job. I recall a cable coming in from the embassy in May, 1978 which identified Khomeini, who was figuring in the troubles but wasn't revered yet as leader of the stature that he later acquired. The Embassy had to identify him to the Washington audience in that cable, which tells you something about how much we knew about Iranian internal politics and Khomeini's role in it.

I came to the desk and one of my first visitors was the Israeli embassy officer who handled the Middle East, David Tourgamen. He had been born in Iran. When he came in to see me he said, "We are already in the post-Shah era." I had not heard that before. He felt the Shah was in deep trouble. He was basing that, I guess, on what he knew of Iran and was getting from the unofficial Israeli embassy in Tehran.

Another incidence occurred just shortly after I came on board. I was told that Henry Kissinger had just returned from Iran and gotten in touch with the State Department to report on his conversation with the Shah. The Shah told him that he didn't see how it was possible for a bunch of ignorant mullahs to lead demonstrations so precisely organized and so effective. There must be some other force behind them. He concluded that the CIA must be behind them. He asked why would the CIA do this to him. Why would they turn on him? He came up with two answers which he gave to Kissinger. One was that the Americans felt that, with his dealings with the Soviets for gas for military and non-lethal equipment trucks and maybe a few other items, he was too cozy with the Soviet Union. If Americans thought he was soft, maybe the religious people would be more staunchly anti-communist and stronger in their containment policy. His other theory was that the Americans and the Russians, as the British and the Russians in olden days in the beginning of the century, had decided to divide Iran into spheres of influence. We would take the south which had most of the oil and the Soviets could have the north, as they had in the past and was of interest to them, the area around the Caspian Sea.

Q: Basically the pre-World War I division.

PRECHT: These were his two theories as to why the CIA should be stirring up trouble against him. I thought this is the man on whom we are relying to save our terribly important interests in Iran. He is a nut. This is the kind of person I am going to have to deal with. The job was going to be a lot more complicated than I thought.

Then Bill Sullivan, who had been named ambassador when Carter came into office, came back for home leave. I think I mentioned earlier the Shah had been terribly concerned about Carter's ascension to the presidency even before he was nominated, fearing he would be another Kennedy who would force him down liberal paths that he didn't want to go down. When Carter was elected, I guess, the Shah's anxiety was mounting. But, although President Carter had had planks about human rights and unregulated arms sales in his campaign, while he was in office he didn't really want to implement those planks in the same fashion that he had announced them. In fact, he didn't want any trouble in Iran. He didn't want Iran as an issue. The Arab-Israel question was looming large on the American agenda as was the Soviet Union and China. Iran in turmoil was an unnecessary addition to our agenda. Carter had chosen Bill Sullivan, a tough minded highly competent professional diplomat, to reassure the Shah of our continuing support.

We heard from Sullivan after his meeting with Carter, but before he went to Iran, that he didn't want any pressure applied to the Shah on human rights. Carter wanted to continue the relationship that the United States had always had with the Shah. We would sell him

whatever arms we could, maybe being a little more cautious, but wouldn't press him on human rights. Essentially it was to be business as usual. That was my understanding of what Sullivan told us.

Now Sullivan in June 1978 had been in Iran for, I suppose, a year or so, came back to go on home leave in Mexico. He came through the Department to consult and obviously the months of disturbances were on everybody's mind. I went to all of his meetings in the Department. Sullivan's line then was that it's all been taken care of. The Shah's people have found the right address with the mullahs and, providing them with money, satisfied their earthly needs. They would go back to their mosques and remain quiet. Essentially they had been bought off. It was a very optimistic report. And, nothing of concern was happening in Iran at the moment. He went off to Mexico for two months.

Then the Shah disappeared from the media. I think Lady Bird Johnson went over there and Charlie Naas took her to see the Shah on the Caspian. He was a little bit subdued. He was not in the papers or on television. We didn't know what was wrong with him. There was concern that maybe he had been shot by one of his bodyguards. Charlie and I weren't terribly concerned so we didn't raise a ruckus. But, we were aware of his disappearance. In retrospect, I think he may have been having some physical examinations and learned the bad news about his health. That is pure speculation on my part. We had never been told anything about the Shah's health.

Q: Had you ever gotten an equivalent of a psychological profile from the CIA?

PRECHT: That came later during the revolution. It was so bland that it was worthless.

Q: Okay.

PRECHT: He reappeared around the first of August and was back on the job. Around mid-August there was some kind of problem. I think a mullah of some prominence was hit and killed in a highway accident. The immediate supposition was that this was the work of SAVAK and there were big demonstrations and riots in Isfahan causing it to be placed under marshal law. August coincided with the month of Ramadan in the Muslim calendar. Subsequently, towards the end of August, perhaps the 25th, there was a fire in a theater in Bandra Abbas and I think 700 people were killed because the doors were locked. It was a terrible disaster. The Shah's people blamed the mullahs. During the previous month of demonstrations, movie theaters had frequently been targeted by the clerics because they showed those sinful western movies. So, SAVAK let it be known that this was another act of the mullahs. Nobody in Iran believed that. They all believed that the regime had done it and blamed the mullahs. That showed you the level of mistrust of the regime. No one would take its word on anything. We received at that time a very short - couple of sentences - CIA report which said that SAVAK had been responsible according to one of the Agency's SAVAK contacts. Whether it was true or not, who knows?

About that time Sullivan returned from his home leave to find that Iran had not cured

itself with bribes and weariness of demonstrations, but remained considerably agitated. Things were looking bleak again. He made another round of people in the Department still showing optimism that the Shah would be able to take care of things. After a meeting with [National Security Advisor] Brzezinski, Brzezinski said that the Shah was our man and we have to stand behind him at whatever cost. There would be no compromise and we would do whatever was necessary to support him. Brzezinski's position was much tougher's than Sullivan's.

Then Sullivan went off to Iran and when he got there, around the end of Ramadan, one of the first things he did was go to see the Shah whom he found terribly depressed. He couldn't understand how his people had turned against him. He had done so much for them and they were so ungrateful and disloyal. He was really down, Sullivan said in his reporting cable. He thought we had to do something to buck him up. So, he drafted a message from the president to the Shah bucking him up. I looked at it and took out a couple of sentences praising the monarchy, which I thought were not appropriate for a democratic country to say, and got it cleared around the government.

At this time there were huge demonstrations all over Iran. Millions of people were out in the streets non-violently protesting.

I should note that during this period, the month of August when things were heating up, Hal Saunders, Assistant Secretary of State, was totally preoccupied with preparing for the Camp David conference. He was drafting papers for this conference. Bill Crawford was Deputy Assistant Secretary with jurisdiction over me and Iran. An Arabist, he knew little or nothing about Iran and left me to do most of the business on Iran. I got Sullivan's draft letter cleared and sent it to the White House. There it was put in a suitcase for people going to Camp David and who were then sealed off from the outside world. So, there went Sullivan's effort, to spend a week or two in a suitcase.

The demonstrations continued. The day before September 7, I believe it was, the Shah imposed martial law in Tehran. Nobody was allowed on the street. The head of the army was named martial law commander. It was imposed on a Thursday, I think, and on the Friday (later known as Black Friday), the Muslim's Sabbath, people hadn't gotten the word and came out to demonstrate. In Jalali Square in south Tehran, the troops shot down these martial law violators. How many people were killed? If you ask the opposition, it was well over a thousand and if you asked the Shah's people it was well under a hundred. The embassy finally came up with something like 125 which they got from their official sources. No one really knew. The perception, however, was that a heck of a lot of people had been killed and that the structure of the regime had been severely shaken.

The day after the massacre, I was taking my morning shower and the thought came to me that the Shah was indeed finished. This was a war between him and his people and he could not prevail in such a war. When he went and how he went I didn't know. Whether he would be able to make some compromise that would diminish his powers, I didn't know. But, it was clear to me that the Iran of the future was not going to be the Iran of the past. The opposition elements would play a much larger role and the Shah a much smaller

role and we needed to adjust to that. That was a view directly contrary to American policy. It was not a view, to my knowledge, that was shared by anybody else in the American government, certainly not Dr. Brzezinski, and to my knowledge nobody above or below me. So, I reckoned that if I announced my conclusions in the Monday morning staff meeting I might well find myself at FSI studying a language that wouldn't be Persian. So, I thought I would just have to play this slowly and at the margins. I would have to try to modify policy so that it begins to conform to what my conception of the reality was not to confront it head on and end up bringing myself down while not changing the policy.

But back to Friday: At the end of the day there was a big meeting on the 7th floor chaired by Dave Newsom, who I think was the ranking official in town, on what are we to do in reaction to the massacre. Well, it was clear that the letter, Sullivan's draft, was overtaken by this event. We decided it would be best to use the telephone. So, the following morning Hal Saunders called me at home from Camp David. He said that Sadat had telephoned the Shah and so had Begin and the president was going to. What should he say?

I had just come out of the shower. I said, "It seems to me that we have to support him. We can't turn our back on him. But, we have to say something that indicates we understand the situation in Iran. And the message should be very brief." I can't remember whether I dictated it over the phone or how that worked out, but in one paragraph we restated our firm support of the Shah, with in a second stated our belief in the liberalization measures that would bring a better future for Iran. That was the message that Carter delivered to the Shah. I guess we heard from Sullivan that the King was pleased - so much so that he published the text of the message the next day. Well, I guess we should have anticipated that.

It didn't work out the way we had hoped. What it said to the people in the streets was that the Americans were standing behind the Shah, supporting his shooting of the people in Jalali square. So, it really worked very much against us. The lid stayed on, but things began to get progressively worse. There hadn't been real labor unions in Iran before this - only so-called labor leaders appointed by the regime. Now real labor groups began to develop with their own programs supportive of revolutionary objectives. They were still not calling it a revolution. Progressively you had oil workers going on strike, then government people, central bank staff, etc. You had these industrial actions that shut down the country. And, there were demonstrations, but martial law was still in effect.

The Shah began to move towards a bifurcated policy. On the one hand, they had shot down a lot of people. On the other hand, he tried to appeal to the population by appointing a new prime minister having jailed his former prime minister. He also jailed other people who were deemed to be corrupt. He let some people out of jail. It was a confusing time if you were not an Iranian. Is he soft or is he hard? In fact, he was both, groping for some solution.

During this period, September/October, there seemed to be any number of occasions that

needed to be celebrated by Washington. That is, the president needed to send a public message congratulating the Shah on his birthday, the crown prince's birthday, etc. It was part of the traditional flattery that showed what great friends the two regimes were.

Q: But, it was particularly pronounced in this case wasn't it? It sounds like compared to other leaders we were spending an awful lot of time flattering the Shah.

PRECHT: That's right. He had an ego that had to be frequently anointed. With my new, private perspective on the Shah's future, I tried to tone down the flattery. The Shah continued to broadcast each of our greetings. I felt it was not a very smart thing for us to do. I also thought that we ought to begin to know the opposition. Neither the Department nor the Embassy had ever had any contact with it. Richard Cottam, the political scientist who was persona non grata at the State Department contacted Gary Sick, who was the national security staff handling Iran, suggesting that he meet with Ibraham Yazdi, who was an Iranian doctor in Texas on his way to Paris to work for Khomeini. Yazdi would be passing through Washington. I thought that was a good idea, but Gary thought that perhaps his level was too high for this encounter. Maybe I should be the one to meet with Yazdi. I readily agreed and an appointment was made. Then Warren Christopher, the Deputy Secretary, got wind of it and instructed me not to meet with Yazdi. There shouldn't be any conversation with an American official. I was disappointed but thought we ought to find some way to contact these people. The embassy at that time had no contact with the opposition.

Along about mid-September, early October, the press still wasn't paying attention to what was going on in Iran in a fashion that was showing adequate knowledge of the situation. However, the Washington Post one morning carried a headline saying "Iran suspends (or cancels) big nuclear power contract." This was big money, but due to labor unrest the Iranians had been unable to carry out those contracts. We had known about it for it had been reported by the embassy days before. Nevertheless, I got a call from the 7th floor asking what was going on and what should they do? My theory at the time was that there is a period when a crisis is developing in which the desk officer is in complete charge because no one above him knows anything about it or takes any interest in it. Then there is this golden moment when the seniors take an interest and they ask the desk officer's opinion. From then on the crisis proceeds, but people on the 7th floor are in charge and the desk officer is diminished. This was my chance to brief people, for from then on the 7th floor was seized of the Iran problem.

Around the same time I was at a party for George Sherman, the NEA press officer, and Marvin Kalb was there. George introduced me to Marvin Kalb, a network anchorman. I said to him, "Man, you are missing a big story. The Iranian story is not figuring on your program or any of the nightly news, but you can be sure it is going to be much bigger and you better get on it now or you will lose it." I wanted people to pay attention to what was going on in Iran and I couldn't get them to do it. Press attention was the only way that the 7th floor would wake up to a problem. Everyone was focused on the Arab-Israel question. Iran wasn't getting any sustained attention. This began to change as things in Iran got worse and worse.

At one point in October, the U.S. Navy wanted to sell the Shah some more F-14s and Mr. Duncan, number two in DOD, was going to make a trip to Iran to talk to the Shah about a buy. I said that they were crazy. The F-14 was one of our most valuable military resources and Iran was now an unstable country and it was absurd to sell them any more. Well, they went off to Isfahan where the planes were based and they were pinned down in their hotel unable to leave because of the fighting outside in the streets. It was little incidents like this that began to convince Washington that they had a serious problem in Iran.

Q: We talked before about controlled reporting in Iran because we didn't want to upset the Shah, how did you feel you were supported by the reporting on events and developments in Iran?

PRECHT: Reporting from the embassy was generally terrible and I told John Stempel, the domestic reporting officer, in August that they really needed to get geared up and give much better coverage to what was going on in Iran. Sullivan had begun to push the embassy into reporting like a normal embassy and talking to some opposition leaders. I think it was in November when they finally decided to do that. I continued to think they were not doing a good job. It is very hard for a desk officer to help his colleagues in the field, however. I felt practically almost everything from them was frightfully unhelpful. There was a seven and a half hour difference between Washington and Tehran. When I arrived at work at 8:00 in the morning they would be home or going home and Charlie Naas or Sullivan and I would review what had happened during the day.

As the crisis developed tensions within the American government began to build. We had the liberals in the human rights bureau. We had the conservatives in the White House, if you want to call them that. Back in August, CIA had prepared a national intelligence estimate mentioning there was trouble but nothing serious in Iran. The Shah has it under control. There was one notable sentence saying Iran is not even in a "pre-revolution situation." Well, I wouldn't sign off on it. In a footnote I said that I didn't agree with these findings and the State Department would not be a participant in the report. I don't know if it was ever published.

Particularly over these messages of congratulations, I began to feel tension building up between me and Gary Sick. I had known Gary from days when I was at Alexandria and he was an assistant naval attaché at Cairo. When I was moving into the Iran desk, he had my wife and me to dinner with Jessica Matthews and several other people from the NSC staff, introducing me as the guy who really understood Iran. Later on though, when things became increasingly tense during the fall of 1978, we parted ways. If you read his book, <u>All Fall Down</u>, he puts it in rather melodramatic terms that we had been close friends, but I use to laugh at him and lecture him and shout at him in such a way that he just stopped communicating with me. I suppose I did rant and rave at him because I was so deeply frustrated that he was supporting the Brzezinski line and wouldn't listen to any other argument. I didn't think he had particular knowledge of Iran and he wasn't listening to anybody else.

But, in the State Department, people at my level began to group around me so we had a kind of working level cabal. I began to describe rather graphically at staff meetings the problems that the Shah was facing. There was always a good audience for that. Gradually I was building up some support for the position that I had.

Later in fall the MacNeil-Lehrer show, the PBS [Public Broadcasting System] evening news, wanted to do a segment on Iran and contacted the State Department for someone who could talk on Iran. Nobody wanted to talk, so the request found its way down to me and I said fine. Well, I wasn't going to sit there and condemn American policy in front of a national audience. Joseph Kraft was on the show and he was expressing deep concern about the Shah. I was trying to make people feel better. They asked me at one point, "Do you think the Shah might leave Iran?" I said without a moment of hesitation that there was no chance at all of that happening - while not believing that myself. In fact, I lied. That was what we needed to do because we had a dilemma. We couldn't pull the rug from under the Shah because there was no structure to replace him. I didn't want to panic him and have him do anything drastic. What I wanted was some kind of gradual response that would phase into a new situation peacefully and with the preservation of America's position there.

From that meeting I got to know the producer for Middle East news on the show. Journalists by that time were coming around frequently. There were also frequently high level meetings in the White House and in the State Department. So, the government was now galvanized. I used to attend meetings in the White House situation room, generally with Hal Saunders. Sometimes the meeting would be chaired by Brzezinski and occasionally by [Vice President] Mondale. I recall sitting in one of those meetings and looking around the room at the others present, all far senior to me, and thinking that there was nobody in the room who knew anything about Iran except me and I knew how inadequate my knowledge was. So we were really in the soup during this crisis.

Q: As I have done these oral histories and from my own experience, it seems that the greater the crisis the more the action oriented people are apt to grab the reins and deliberate and the more they squeeze out those who have been on the ground and could tell you there is no road between a and b if you are going to send in tanks.

PRECHT: That is the point I was making earlier. There is a moment when the desk officer is listened to and then after that he is pushed into the background.

At the end of October, the Shah's son had a birthday. This young man was 18 years old. At the Shah's wish he had been assigned to flight training in Lubeck, Texas, and had been equipped out there with a nice villa, an elaborate stereo system, a Swedish girlfriend - all things an aspiring fighter pilot and prince should have. The Iranian ambassador, Ardeshir Zahedi, was going to have a party for him in the thick of these troubles. I had gotten to know the ambassador when I took over the desk and went to call on him at his grand embassy. Well, he invited Marian and me to come to this birthday party. Brzezinski was there. Carl Rowen was there. It wasn't the creme de la creme of

Washington society but not bad. I was quite impressed by the young prince. He seemed well-informed and quite mature for an 18-year-old. But, there was no indication from him or anyone at that gathering that Iran was in serious trouble.

The demonstrations and strikes continued. Perhaps as a safety valve, the Shah had allowed the press to publish rather freely. November 4, however, was the anniversary of student killings in the university and the Shah had to impose martial law again because there were riots all over the city. Some people said the Shah, himself, had instigated them. At that time another prime minister was appointed, this time the head of the military, General Ashari, a mild mannered loyal gentleman. A few days beforehand we had word that something like this was going to happen - that a military regime was going to be imposed.

Sullivan by that time, often in the company of the British ambassador, Tony Parsons, was seeing the Shah quite frequently and the Shah was always depressed. Sullivan's idea still was to buck him up. There was a debate in Washington as to how to advise the Shah to deal with his problems. There were essentially two lines of thought. One was a kind of weak kneed: to continue liberalization or accelerate it. The other was the iron fist. That is, to send troops out and shoot down as many people as necessary and bring an end to the rebellion once and for all. Dr. Brzezinski was the advocate of the iron fist, but President Carter was not buying that kind of policy. He would not sign off on that kind of measure. So, what you had was Brzezinski in touch with Zahedi sending messages to the Shah of his own design and we in the State Department, good and proper bureaucrats, clearing our instructions all over the government and sending out to Sullivan in regular channels, suggesting he encourage the Shah towards moderation. The Shah, poor fellow, was confused by the conflicting advise. He was getting one line from Brzezinski and another from Sullivan and was desperate to know what to do.

In retrospect, we know now that he knew he was a sick man and what he wanted more than anything was to pass on to his son a viable monarchy. He wanted his son to inherit the throne. He was afraid if he slaughtered people in the streets and turned over to a teenager a situation that he could not handle, the dynasty would be swept aside. He was trying desperately to find the most stable way of constructing a succession.

Along about end of October or early November, Sullivan sent in a message captioned "thinking the unthinkable." You had to read it very closely, but the inference was that maybe something was happening to the Shah. He didn't say clearly that the previously presumed 100 percent support for the Shah was weakening. It was an effort, I guess, to get the Washington community to think more broadly and creatively. Well, it went up stairs and didn't prompt anything. Nobody reacted. And Sullivan didn't follow up.

I, at the same time, was terribly concerned that we were going to apply the iron fist. So, I devised a message saying that the military would be unable to end the popular revolt. The military leadership was not capable of running the country. The Shah was going to weaken the regime rather than strengthen it, if he depended on a military that was very much untested in this kind of business, untrained and of questionable loyalty in the end.

Soldiers would be firing their rifles at their brothers across the barricade. How long would they continue to shoot them down?

I don't remember if the telegram was actually released or not. Unofficially, I sent it to the post and, I think, they began to think in terms of a non-military solution.

Q: Were you getting any questioning reports on the Iran military from our military attachés who had a very close relationship with the Iranian military?

PRECHT: My thoughts were based on my experiences in dealing with the Iranian military, largely with the senior generals. The position you have just described is what most people, including many Iranians, believed. They felt our military was in bed with the Iranian military and knew everything about them. Bear in mind that our military advisers, first and only, deemed themselves as non-political; forbidden to be interested in loyalty or political questions of that kind. They were interested in whether the Iranians could crank up an F-4 and fly it. They didn't have any language ability, didn't socialize with the military except in a very structured environment. Of course, we had the attachés whose job it was to understand the Iranian forces, but they were fenced off both by the Iranians and the American advisors. So, our military was useless. CIA had no lines into the military that were useful. Finally, the embassy, as I mentioned, began to contact opposition people. One of their first forays occurred when Steve Cohen, who was one of our Human Rights Bureau people and anti-Shah, visited and insisted that the embassy take him to see opposition people.

Along about November I was asked again to be on the MacNeil-Lehrer show. I was also getting the sense that I was getting too much visibility from the media. Perhaps I had better pull in some. So, I declined the offer but told the producer he should invite Ibrahim Yazdi to be on the show. After the show, he should invite him to dinner and I would come along. We went to dinner at a Washington restaurant with some of the participants on the show and Yazdi and I had a chance to talk to him. I wrote a memorandum of my conversation with him outlining his position. He was the most senior person in the opposition we had met at that time.

So, what you had was a period of increasingly difficult times. Carl Rowan filmed an interview with the Shah in Tehran and gave a private showing to the staff of the Iranian Embassy and me. When the Shah appeared, pale, obviously depressed and hesitant, the audience of loyalists gasped in shock. Towards the end of November Mike Blumenthal, Treasury Secretary, went to Iran. Senator Byrd, who has an Iranian son-in-law also went over at the same time. Both went to see the Shah. They found him at lunch, propped up, popping pills and virtually comatose. His wife did all the talking. When they came back they were in a state of shock. Ham Jordan had said to the press that the Shah is our man and he is the only person we support in Iran. I think it was Blumenthal who said that if we don't have anybody else we better find someone quick because this guy doesn't have the stuff.

Nevertheless, Gary Sick prepared a memo prescribing a more active leadership role for

the Shah. In effect, the king should mount a white horse and show himself to his people as often as possible in person and on television. He should act out a stern father figure role. I thought Gary was wacky. The Shah was hated by his people and the sight of him would enrage them. Moreover, he was in no mental condition to inspire anyone. Like so much that was written or said during that period, no one grasped Gary's ideas. No one had any good ideas and no one had confidence or knowledge enough to accept or reject the proposals of others. The government was largely passive.

Along about early December, Brzezinski asked me to come to his office. Already it was clear that there was tension between me and the White House and Hal Saunders said he would also come to back me up. Brzezinski said that he wanted to see me alone. I went over and we had a businesslike meeting. He began to ask me questions about the future of Iran because he had clearly been told by the Iranian ambassador that a Khomeini victory would lead Iran to fragment - the Kurds would go one way and Baluchi another way. I disagreed. Then at the end he said to me, "All right, if I point a pistol at your head and say to you,'You have to tell me what you honestly think is going to happen in Iran or I will shoot you,' what would you say?" I said, "I would tell you that we have three months at the most for the Shah. If we don't work out some kind of deal between him and the opposition between now and then, he will be gone in three months." It turned out I had two weeks to spare - it ended in mid-February. But I never said anything about that meeting afterwards. I came back and never quoted or referred to my conversation with Dr. Brzezinski, which I thought would embarrass for him.

Q: Did you feel that Dr. Brzezinski was having second thoughts?

PRECHT: I didn't think he was having second thoughts, I thought he was trying to be a professorial type with me to smoke out what I really thought. Essentially he was a cold warrior. He was a Pole with terrible feelings about the Soviet Union and he didn't want to see that part of our containment barrier weakened. That is, the Shah was our barrier to keep the Soviets from moving towards the Gulf and we needed to support the Shah because of our Soviet policy.

Q: *Were the Soviet Union or the Tudeh party factors as this was going on or not?*

PRECHT: I think there may have been a few elderly Tudeh gentlemen who the Shah let out of jail or let return from East Germany, but they didn't figure in the equation. The Russians seemed as baffled as we were about what to do. We had very little contact with them about Iran. Still, I think they may have been a little ahead of us. Most foreign governments, I think, were ahead of us. The French, I think, were probably as far ahead in their thinking as anyone but they never shared information. Only occasionally would you get word of what French perceptions were. The British were quite good in sharing Ambassador Parson's reporting and I thought he was excellent. He was cautious but quite insightful and he was bringing to the attention of London the terrible situation he saw. I tried to bring his reports to the attention of the 7th floor because we weren't getting the same message out of the embassy in Tehran. The Israeli government along about this time began to change its tune having woken up to the dire future the Shah and they faced

in Iran. It was clear to me that the Israeli government had become alarmed at the situation and instructed its man in Washington to urge Americans to urge the Shah to crack down. Clearly they were afraid of what was going to happen.

It was a week or so before the 10th of December and we were now in the Iranian month of Moharam. The Shiite calendar has a series of mourning days in which their early leaders who were martyred are mourned and in some communities the scene of their martyrdom is reenacted. The radio will play nothing but mournful prayers and such. People go around lashing themselves with chains, etc. We began to feel quite nervous how this was going to be treated and how it would effect the safety of our people in Iran. At one meeting in the White House in December someone brought up a letter in the Washington Post from the wife of a sergeant who said, "Here we are in this country where shots are being fired at crowds on the street and American lives are in danger." (Actually, I think, maybe one American at that point had been killed and virtually no hostility towards Americans had been shown.) She continued that "we have had no information from our embassy, we are exposed out here and all of us are at risk." Help, in other words.

Someone read that letter and said if American casualties occur as this mourning period reaches its peak, we will be held responsible. Maybe we should start to evacuate people from Tehran, dependents and non-essential personnel. I said, "If you do that, the Shah will get the message that you have lost faith in him and maybe he will pack up and go to Nice. You have to take the risk and protect your position there." I was told to go back to my office and prepare a message of evacuation. "Handle it as skillfully as you can, but get this letter writing lady out of there." So, I went back and called Sullivan who agreed with me. He said, "Don't send me any instructions to evacuate. The effect will be disastrous for our position." So, I called Ben Reed's office in the Administrative Bureau of the State Department, and told him the White House wanted to evacuate people from Tehran. How can we get them out without calling it an evacuation? Can we give them all a holiday and airline tickets and let them go? Nope, U.S. government regulations say that the only way you can provide people with airline tickets is with evacuation orders. I said, "Can't we just call it advanced R&R or whatever?" Nope, it has to be an evacuation.

So, I drafted the cable, got it approved and placed it in my in-box over night and went home. Subsequently I thought, if Americans had been killed because I was trying to protect some foreign monarch's skin, I would have no excuse whatsoever. It was wrong of me to do that. The next morning I said to Sullivan that perhaps that perhaps he should alert the Shah in advance. He went to the Shah and told him that we were going to evacuate non-essential employees and those dependents who wanted to go. It was going to be strictly voluntary and low key. The Shah said, "I understand." He never mentioned the subject again. Not too many people left but a fair number did. We had a very large embassy there. It was the slow start of a movement that became a flood of people leaving.

Q: It was just the embassy but this would also send word to the Bell Helicopter and everyone else, too.

PRECHT: That's right, but they had contractual obligations to stay on the job. All the civilian and military people attached to the mission were covered by this. Thus, at first not too many left, but progressively more and more people left as the embassy encouraged them to do so.

Also around this time, Carter asked George Ball to come to Washington and undertake a study. The President saw the State Department and Brzezinski at loggerheads, things drifting steadily downhill and nobody with any bright ideas. He wanted a wise man to reassess the Iran situation and suggest solutions. So, George Ball, distinguished former deputy secretary, came down. In his book he said he went to see Dr. Brzezinski who said that he wanted Ball to talk to everyone, except the Iran desk officer at the State Department who was hopelessly biased against the Shah, and come up with an independent judgment on the Iran situation. Ball says in his book, naturally the Iran desk officer at State was the first person he called on. He had Hal Saunders and me at dinner in his suite at the Madison hotel. I talked quite freely about Iran, not pulling any punches. Gary Sick, Brzezinski's man, was there taking notes. Then Ball went off to talk to Iranian Americans and a variety of people in New York. He came back after a week or two and made his report while things had continued to go downhill. The report called for the convening of a council of elders, wise Iranians from a variety of sectors, who would consult and decide how the Shah and his regime should adjust to the opposition they were facing. On the list were people from the opposition, supporters of the Shah, a bag of people many of whom would never have entered the same room with the others. But, it was months too late. New Year's was now approaching and by that time there was really no initiative from the United States that could take hold.

Q: Were we making any attempt through our embassy in Paris to make contact with the opposition which was Khomeini in Paris?

PRECHT: Thank you for reminding me of that. After Yazdi and I had dinner that night in Washington he went to Paris and I had his telephone number. So, we had a channel of communication. I would call him and he would call me. But, we also had the embassy as an intermediary. Warren Zimmerman was political counselor there. A superb officer. We would send Warren a cable requesting him to go see Yazdi and tell him such-and-such and see what he says. So we had two means of communication, either formally through Warren, who did a splendid job, or informally from my house via telephone to Yazdi.

Q: These calls from your house were...?

PRECHT: Open line.

Q: So there was no more "don't have contact?"

PRECHT: No, by that time things had eroded quite a bit. There had been a few Iranians other than Yazdi who would come around and the embassy was beginning to have contacts. Professor Cottam visited Tehran over Christmas and introduced the Embassy to Ayatollah Beheshti, the most senior cleric we knew.

During this period also, the press was after us with a vengeance. Not so much over what was going on in Iran, but on the internal conflict that was dividing us on in Washington. Any message that we got from Tehran describing how bad things were would likely appear in the Washington Post the next day. The rule became write your messages for publication because they were constantly leaking. I devised one approach which was to send an unclassified message, an administrative message, and add on several paragraphs about some sensitive, but not super sensitive, matter, because no one would read those. Finally we got a system setup in the operation center which was online. We would type out a message which would immediately play on the screen in Tehran and then they would type out a reply that would come back to us. Then we would make two copies, one for the White House and one for David Newsom. I usually sat in on these sessions.

Q: Who was leaking, do you know?

PRECHT: White House people suspected me but I can assure historians who listen to this tape that I did not leak. Other suspects were in the human rights bureau who desperately wanted our policy towards Iran changed, but they denied the leaks. Who knows? When you have messages in the State Department there are so many copies it is almost impossible to track them down. But it was disastrous and I firmly agreed with those people who thought you couldn't conduct policy that way.

To leap ahead, after the Shah had left and Bakhtiar was prime minister, Marvin Kelb did an evening news segment on the situation in Iran in which he said "the official U.S. policy is to support the Bakhtiar government. But, if you ask State Department officers, they say he has no chance whatsoever. So this policy is really quite hollow and doesn't have the support of people who know the country." The next day Hal Saunders said to me, "You have to come with me to the White House."

So, I went to the White House with Hal and we entered a room with a huge round table. Seated around that table was everyone above me up to Vance: all the assistant secretaries, under secretaries, deputy under secretaries. Then Brzezinski, Ham Jordan, Jody Powell and Carter came in. Carter was in a rage. He said, "Somebody is talking to Marvin Kelb and that broadcast last night was disastrous for our policy. Someone is feeding him information and it is quite impossible for us to conduct policy. I am telling you that if this happens again, the person who is guilty is going to be fired and not only is he going to be fired but his superior is going to be fired. We are going to put a stop to this. I can't tolerate this kind of disloyalty." He and all the White House people then filed out of the room. Mr. Vance, a paternal figure, said, "We have a serious problem in our relationship with the White House. We can't function in this way. We have to be able to stop this problem." I looked around and everyone was looking at me, people like Les Gelb and Tony Lake, and said, "I think the president is quite unfair. He doesn't know who did this leaking and to threaten us this way is unfair."

I agreed with the president. I thought it was impossible to conduct a policy with such leaking of information. I acknowledge that some people may have told Marvin Kalb of

my views. I had spoken to him myself but never told him anything sensitive. However other people may have said that the Iran desk doesn't support Iran policy. That is quite possible. But, it wasn't me. Two or three weeks later there was a short article in the Atlantic Monthly or Harper's which described our White House meeting quite accurately.

Q: Normally in those cases it is pretty much the White House operators who are more politically attuned and playing by a different set of rules. I am not absolving the Department of State, but these are people with a short term agenda.

PRECHT: Sure, there are people who leak to advance their political objectives, but these were leaks against policy and were quite destructive.

Okay, now let's get back to the end of December. Things are getting worse daily. Sullivan, I believe it was Sullivan, came up with the idea that in addition to the exchange of indirect messages with Yazdi, it would be important for some American official to meet with Khomeini. Washington agreed. We appointed Ted Eliot, a retired foreign service officer who had been country director for Iran in the late '60s and ambassador to Afghanistan, and became Dean of the Fletcher School [of Law and Diplomacy of Tufts University upon retirement]. An excellent choice. He knew the country well. He came down to Washington. I devised talking points for him. Sullivan went to see the Shah telling him that we were going to do this. The Shah said that it was quite understandable that we would want to protect our own interests in this crisis and you might talk some sense into this crazy man. Everything was all set to go.

Then there was an Economic Summit meeting on Martinique. Carter and Brzezinski attended. My understanding was that Brzezinski felt the Ted Eliot trip was a bad idea. When Carter came back he vetoed the plan. There would be no trip for Ted Eliot. So, we sent a message to Sullivan. Sullivan went into a rage. He said, "What numbskull made this decision? This was probably one of the most important gestures that we could make in this crisis and now it has been ruined" I had to get on the phone to Sullivan, on the classified line, and say, "Listen, it was the president." He almost lost his job then. But it would have seemed unseemly to have pulled out the American ambassador at that time. Anyway, he went back to the Shah and told him the trip was off.

Meanwhile, Brzezinski was still insisting on the idea of an iron fist and a crackdown, but he couldn't persuade Carter to go along. As a compromise - and this is how policy is made - Carter said, "Look, we will send an American military official to get in touch with the Iranian military leadership to see how well prepared they are to handle the situation if it should collapse. General Huyser, who was the deputy CINCEUR in Europe [Deputy Commander in Chief - Europe] and who had been to Iran several times, was named to go to Tehran. He didn't have any particular knowledge of Iran or the senior generals concerned. Sullivan wasn't too keen on the idea but then Sullivan didn't want a rival in the embassy. After Huyser arrived, he and Sullivan worked out a relationship that was pretty productive. Huyser talked to the generals and Sullivan stayed in control of the entire show. None of us knew exactly what Huyser was doing, however. The idea was that if Brzezinski's plan was being followed he was telling the generals they ought to get

ready to pull a coup when necessary. Huyser stayed until his life was threatened and it was pretty clear that the game was about over.

Another DOD official went to Iran. Eric von Marbod, whom I mentioned earlier as the senior defense representative in Tehran. During the time I was there he was in charge of the generals and all American military programs. He had been active in Vietnam and was now back in Washington as the chief military sales guy. The Iranians payment system had collapsed, owing to the strikes at the Central Bank and ministry of finance. They were not able to pay bills owed and did not want to take delivery of some items. So, von Marbod was sent out there to regularize things. He drew up a long memorandum of understanding between the Iranians and ourselves canceling a variety of sales, putting off others, diverting funds from one operation to another. He did it all by himself with no input from anybody else. It was a way of resolving this particular crisis. What he accomplished remains the big issue on the claims agenda at The Hague now: How these unresolved sales are to be settled and will Iran get money back from them.

In early January 1979, I don't know whether Sullivan suggested that the Shah leave the country or it was the Shah's idea or somebody else suggested it to the Shah. But, the Shah said that he was going to leave. I was asked if that would be a good idea. I said that I think the Iranian population would be delighted. So, we found a place for him to go to, the Walter Annenberg estate in California. Annenberg said we could have it for a month but then there was going to be a wedding there and he needed it back. Well, that was fine. We told the Shah we had this place for him and he packed his bags and around the 15th of January flew out to Egypt.

As he left someone advised him not to leave the Middle East. Whether it was Zahedi or Brzezinski, he was told to stay in the area because the Americans once were able to save his skin when he left in 1953 and went to Rome. They could do it again. I think he believed we might just have a plan to save his throne. So, it was better that he be nearby so that he could fly back in triumphant after the Americans pulled something out of the hat. He stayed in Egypt for a few days, Sadat being one of his great buddies. But, as Sadat was having some trouble with Islamic folk himself, the Shah took off and went to Morocco, where he was when the revolution crashed through on February 11.

In the meantime, Bakhtiar had replaced the military prime minister. Bakhtiar was one of the old national front stalwarts, a real opportunist, I had always thought. He became prime minister and immediately began to throw his weight around as if the Shah no longer counted for anything. However, no one really paid serious attention to him. Bakhtiar allowed Khomeini to return on February 1. When he came down in an Air France plane full of journalists and his entourage, there was a tremendous reception by the Tehran populace. It even surpassed the festivities when the Shah left.

So, that was February 1 and Khomeini quickly established himself in Tehran. His people soon began to move in while Bakhtiar was still hanging on. There were almost two governments at one point. Then there was some kind of ruckus at Doshentapi airbase in southern Tehran. A group of technicians there, people who were recruited and specially

trained, brighter than your normal troops, were demonstrating their loyalty to Khomeini on the 9th or 10th of February. There was a conflict between them and the powers that be on the base. These men underscored an analysis that I had always maintained. The Shah had recruited his military on the principle of loyalty and approved every promotion over major, colonel, or whatever. But when he began to buy all that sophisticated American equipment, he had to breach that principle and go to people who had technical skills. People who have technical skills think for themselves and that is what these Air Force technicians were doing. There was a clash on the base and the military collapsed. They opened up all their arsenals and in a matter of days or hours it was all over. Bakhtiar fled the country and Khomeini's group was in complete charge. The military group went into hiding, fled the country or were arrested and held in jail. The revolution had succeeded by February 11.

In Washington, as this was going on, I spoke to Sullivan on the phone and he said he had just come off the phone (there was still fighting between military units at the Air Force base) with Brzezinski. Brzezinski had told him to tell General Gast, who was our MAAG chief and senior military officer (General Huyser having pulled out) to tell the Iranian leadership now is the time for a coup. They must overthrow Bakhtiar and take control of the country and do whatever is necessary to restore order. And Sullivan said, "I can't understand you. You must be speaking Polish. General Gast is in the basement of the Supreme Commander's headquarters pinned down by gunfire and he can't save himself, much less this country." That was the last gasp and the Iranian regime collapsed at that point.

Q: This would be a good time to break. Would you like to note where we should pick up at our next meeting?

PRECHT: This is February 11, the end of the revolution, and the beginning of another set of problems with Iran.

Q: Okay great.

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Today is March 29, 2000. Henry, we were at February 11, 1979.

PRECHT: Before we get back into the chronology, let me offer a couple of observations on the revolution that may not have gotten into my narration. First of all, on the one hand in Dr. Brzezinski's book, one footnote describes me as being very anti-Shah. That is inaccurate. On the other hand, my son, who was a senior in high school at the time, was very much motivated by liberal ideology, human rights, etc. and he wanted me very much to be the way Brzezinski described me. He was disappointed. I was not anti-Shah, although I can't say I admired the Shah's lack of adherence to democratic principles and human rights. My real preoccupation was in protecting American interests with Iran during this period. I wish I could have satisfied my son by being a human rights activist, but that wasn't to be. I was somewhere in between my son and Dr. Brzezinski.

Q: I want to catch the perception while we are at it. During this period did you have the feeling that you were seen by the whole NSC as being anti-Shah and was this a problem?

PRECHT: Oh, definitely. That was the second observation I wanted to make. I and Gary Sick had been friends and we fell out. Accordingly to his book, my ranting at him and preaching to him led him simply to stop talking to me. I thought he was a non-thinking slave of Dr. Brzezinski and should know better and should listen to my argument. At any rate, that failure of the two responsible people at the working level to work together was disastrous for American policy. I didn't realize it at the time that there was great friction between Vance and Brzezinski as well. Brzezinski throughout the revolution was communicating with Zahedi or the Shah himself, to give his own personal opinions of how Iran should conduct itself in the revolution without coordinating with Vance. Apparently he promised Vance at one point in the fall of 1978 that he wouldn't do that anymore. I didn't know that. Once I mentioned to Hal Saunders that I had heard from Sullivan, who had heard from the Shah, that he had been on the telephone with Brzezinski. Hal said, "Come with me." We immediately went up to Vance's office where he was having an early morning staff meeting and Hal said, "Now, tell the secretary what you just told me." And I repeated it. None of the gentlemen in the room would look at me. They looked down at the floor. They were disturbed but didn't want to show their concern to an outsider. So, there was that tension.

Then there were the divisions within the Department of State. There were the human rights folks pulling in one direction, there were other people pulling in another direction and the Defense Department pulling in their direction, as was the CIA. Everyone was pursuing his own ends, leaking to the press to obtain those ends. It was a textbook case of how not to conduct diplomacy in the modern era. People fighting each other and pursuing their own ends and disregarding the president's policy.

Years later, when Mr. Marcos fell in the Philippines [February 1986], I asked one of the people who had been managing the Philippine crisis at the White House at the time how they had managed to accomplish that transition in American policy from Marcos to his successor. He said, "Henry, we went to school on you. We learned our lesson from all the mistakes made with Iran. We didn't fight. We resolved our differences and the government stayed together. And the transition was successfully handled." I think the Philippine crisis was also assisted by the fact that America knew that Mr. Marcos had a fatal illness and wasn't going to be around a great deal longer. We didn't know that about the Shah. People who believed that he was our necessary instrument didn't see any end to his employment in our service.

Q: We see this all the time. People nail their colors to the flag staff of one particular leader of a foreign country and all of a sudden they don't know how to back away from it and take a more nuanced posture. Particularly those who are not dealing with it directly but have their own ideology. Do you think this was coming in?

PRECHT: I think that is part of it. There is always this concern in foreign relations of

after a particular leader what? After Nasser what? After Nehru what? There is bound to be a period of instability and things we have gotten used to will no longer be exactly as they were. With the prospective fall of the Shah, though, there was no successor we could imagine. There was the Khomeini group coming in and clearly our understanding of what they would bring to Iran was flawed. Late in the revolution Judy Miller published in the Washington Post an article of excerpts from Khomeini's book "Islamic Government," something he is said to have written in the early '70s, which pretty much prefigured his attitudes toward women, Jews, etc. I wondered whether this was the Khomeini we have been hearing such progressive things from while he was in Paris? I asked one of our contacts of the opposition, Shariah Rouhani, who was Yazdi's son-in-law. He said, "Oh, no, no. That is not the ayatollah speaking there. Somebody has fabricated those points. He hasn't published any such book. Those are notes someone has distorted." So, I didn't rely very heavily on that perspective. Of course, he was misleading me. We were all mislead by Khomeini in Paris. When he returned to Tehran where he had not lived for almost 45 years, he came under the influence of the conservative clergy that he had not experienced in Paris where he had westernized people buffering him from the press, etc.

Q: One more question as to how you fit in. Could you talk a little bit up to this point about the role of Hal Saunders and did you feel anyone was trying to yank you out of there and if so, who was protecting you.

PRECHT: I was protected by Hall Saunders to be sure. I hadn't known Hal very well before coming to the Iran desk. Since I came to the Iran desk in the summer of 1978 and virtually through the revolution, he was absorbed with the Arab-Israel situation, being one of the principal drafting negotiators before and after Camp David. It was a full time job. My immediate boss was Bill Crawford, the principal deputy assistant secretary. He had virtually no knowledge of Iran so he didn't offer me any particular guidance. Jack Miklos, who had been both country director and DCM in Iran was a deputy assistant secretary but he was in charge of South Asia. Once I went with Jack in September 1978, I think it was, to testify informally before the senate foreign relations committee. Jack offered just a basket of reassurances that everything was going to be all right and rely on the Shah, etc. I certainly didn't share his perspective but I couldn't contradict him in front of the senators. However, Jack really didn't have a role in Iranian affairs. His area was South Asia.

Thus, there was nobody in NEA telling me what I ought to do. The person I had more contact with above me was David Newsom, the under secretary. He became in effect the real desk officer for Iran when the crisis got heated up and I worked very closely with him. As I mentioned earlier, I attended meetings in the White House, etc. But, there weren't a lot of people in the Department at the time who knew anything about Iran. They just weren't available. The few officers who knew something about Iran were in other places or elsewhere in the Department where they didn't have a day-to-day line input. They would occasionally drop by my office and share their views with me, but they didn't sign off on memoranda or that sort of thing.

There was this terrible tension between the State Department and the White House. I

heard later on, from a White House source, that Dr. Brzezinski saw an intercept. There was an Iranian young man, an intellectual, who was connected to the elite, who came to the Department and told me that he was investigating Washington's perceptions of Iran for his relatives in one of the Tehran banks. He convinced me that he was legit and I was frank with him that I saw things pretty bleakly. It turned out later on, his name was Shariah Ahi, I recall, that he was really working for the Shah gathering intelligence and reporting back. His reports were picked up by NSA [National Security Agency]. A message that Brzezinski read suggested that I was fighting US policy. I guess I was indiscreet speaking to this Iranian so frankly. I frankly don't recall what I said to him but it was something that Brzezinski held against me and according to my source in the White House, he was convinced, therefore I was not reliable. I, of course, knew nothing about it and considered myself innocent - just doing what the State Department always told us to do to, that is, dissent from policy in a constructive manner.

Anyway, February 11. Shortly after, the next day or so, there was a meeting to which I was not invited but Hal Saunders went. When he came back he said to me that the decision had been made to try to reconstruct a normal relationship with Iran. The country was too important for us to ignore. We have to rebuild some kind of a connection. He said, "You will be pleased by that." Well, I was pleased, it was a challenge, but it seemed to me a rather unrealistic proposition frankly. We had been perceived by the opposition, the Khomeini forces, as being on the side of the Shah and against them.

Q: Well, we were, weren't we?

PRECHT: Yes, we were, although the Shah thought we were undercutting him in the clumsy, conflicted way we were trying to support him. Rebuilding from ground zero was going to be extremely difficult, but that was the order.

The first event after that, I think, was Valentine's Day and I was asleep at home. It was about 5:00 am. At that time, the Department had an operations center in which teams of officers would be on duty around the clock. The Ops Center was constantly getting calls from around the country, as well as international. The fellow on duty, who was not one of the swiftest guys, called and said, "Henry, there is a problem in Tehran." I said, "What is the problem?" He said, "They are shooting at the embassy." I said, "They have been shooting at the embassy for weeks. It is 5 am, what can I do about it?" He said, "Let me connect you with George Lambrakis on the telephone." George was the political counselor. I was connected with him and he said, "I am lying on the floor in the ambassador's office, shots are coming in the window and we are under heavy siege." You could hear shots over the phone. Then the op center fellow came back on the phone and said, "Don't you think you should come in?" I said, "What can I do if I am in there? I will be in in a few hours. I have to catch some sleep sometime." "Secretary Vance is on his way in." "I'll be in in half an hour," I replied.

That was also the night Spike Dubs, ambassador to Afghanistan, was shot [and killed during a hostage crisis in Kabul]. So there was one room in the op center where the Afghan task force with Jane Coon in charge worked and another room where I and the

Iran group worked.

The embassy in Iran was seized and we lost all communications with them but managed to establish communications with an assistant naval attaché who happened to be outside the building and who got himself to a place where he could look down on the compound. It was only later that we learned that the staff were all taken by this mob and then freed by Yazdi, soon to be foreign minister and Ayatollah Beheshti, one of the senior clerics. The people who had seized the embassy were convinced that we were hiding people from the Shah's regime in the basement or somewhere and they wanted to take them out. They were afraid we were going to use these people in a counter coup. But, before we knew that the embassy was freed, Secretary Vance was suppose to take off at 8 or 9 o'clock to go to Mexico. He didn't want to leave because he didn't think that would be responsible to go off to Mexico to whatever meeting he had. So, through this naval attaché we devised an answer that everything was all right. I wasn't at all certain that it was all right, but it seemed to be headed that way. So, the Secretary took off. It wasn't until some time later that the final marine guard, who had been wounded and taken to a hospital, was returned to the embassy and things got back to "normal."

Bill Sullivan, the ambassador, and Charlie Naas decided to reduce the staff to zero practically. I think they went down to six or seven people, and immediately began evacuating people on a large scale including private Americans as well. This had been going on for a while but it was now stepped up. One of the things that occupied us heavily the last weeks of the revolution was arranging for TWA [Trans-World Airlines] charters.

I have left out one key episode that I ought to step back and fill in.

Q: Go ahead.

PRECHT: The Ross Perot story. Ross Perot through his corporation EDS (Electronic Data Systems) had a contract with Iranian social security administration to computerize their operations. This involved big dollars. In December, I believe it was, a judge, one of the Shah's appointees, arrested the two top officials of the Tehran office of EDS and held them under something like $36 million bail. He said their investigations had proved was the amount of money EDS had paid in order to get the contract - in other words, a bribe. This judge, who wasn't a revolutionary but was an Iranian nationalist of some integrity, would not listen to any plea we made at whatever level. He was adamant. EDS pays up or they don't get their guys out of jail.

Well, I don't know if you ever experienced Ross Perot in action, but he felt personally responsible for these guys in a way he must have felt about the POWs [prisoners of war] in North Vietnam. He mobilized everyone he could to bring pressure on us to get these guys out of there. I and Dave Newsom were the focus of this pressure. Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts called me up. Why? Because one of these guys was from Massachusetts. Admiral Moorer, former chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, called me asking for an appointment to come and see me. I had to shift him off to the third guy on

the desk because I was called to a meeting up on the 7th floor.

Every day I would call Charlie Naas or Ambassador Sullivan and would open with "What have you done for Ross Perot today?" They would say, "Forget about Ross Perot, we are trying to organize the evacuation of Americans or protect F-14s, etc. Nothing can be done for Ross Perot." I would say, "Listen Charlie, we are going to start getting calls in half an hour or so. Tell me something that I can tell these people." He said, "Well, our consular officer went to visit these guys in jail and found out that they were being well treated." That kind of thing. Two or three times a day I would be on the phone with Ross Perot from December, I think, and into January and February. His people would be coming to see us, writing letters, telephoning.

Once we had a big meeting in Dave Newsom's office with all of Ross Perot's lawyers. I said, "Why, do you suppose they suddenly went after EDS of all the American companies operating in Iran? Who was your agent?" Abdol-Fath Mahvi was the answer, a man who had been excluded from defense business by the Shah because he was so notorious as a 5 per center involving military contracts. He was not allowed to participate in any military deal because he had such a terrible reputation for raking off money. The lawyers said that he was absolutely innocent, "simply the man who guided us through Iran." I said "no one would believe that. Everyone would believe that he was your bag man distributing money for you around the country. You should have checked on his reputation. That was obviously the root of the problem." Well, they wouldn't believe me. They wanted us to bring their men home. So, I said, "We can go to the Shah, and being the supreme autocrat of the country, he can order the judge to release them. He could send the troops in and put them on the plane. However, he is already in a very weak position and if we order him to do that it will be devastating politically. He would be seen as our puppet, doing our bidding for an American company that is perceived to be corrupt. We can't do that. Short of that there is no way to get these guys out of there." After his prolonged and unsuccessful haranguing of us, Perot went to Tehran to harangue the ambassador and Charlie Naas. Finally, he decided to pay up. They were going to put their money up and had to do it in a complicated way. This $36 million had to be transferred to Iran through banks in Oman, etc. It was a very complex procedure.

In the midst of that process came February 11 when the revolution succeeded and the walls came tumbling down. All the jail doors opened and people walked out. Many of them, as did the Perot pair, got on donkeys or taxis and went to the Turkish border and walked across making their way back to the United States. The Iranians, though, when they saw what had happened -- that not only had political prisoners walked out, but the Perot pair as well -- were furious. We had evacuation flights leaving twice a day and they would hold up the flights to inspect them to see if the Perot pair were on one board. In effect freedom for the Perot pair put the safety of other Americans in jeopardy.

Later on, when I was in Cairo, Ken Follett the author, telephoned me and said he was writing an account which he wanted to be as factual as possible about the Perot episode. I said, "Fine." "I would like to send you the chapters for your review and I will take your views heavily into account." Well, I did that, this was 1985 I think. Lou Goetz, who was

our consular officer at the time and the man who was the connection with the Perot and the responsible officer, refused to have anything to do with this author. So, he got damned in the book. I was furious because Lou wouldn't talk to him for his own personal reasons.

Q: He had had so much of Perot that he couldn't stand it.

PRECHT: Yes, that is right. Anyway, he became the villain. I also was a villain. At one point somebody in the book referred to me by a foul word. When I came back to Washington in 1985, I found out that this author's agent was an old Navy friend of mine. I called him up and said, "Listen, I am going to sue you all if you publish this thing. I'm serious. I don't want to be maligned in your book." So, they took it out. I found out from Charlie Naas that the author had also contacted him. He had better terms with Follett than I did. Charlie said that the author told him that Perot had guaranteed him a certain income, that is, he should write the book the way he wanted to but if it didn't sell Perot would make sure that he didn't suffer financially. I don't think that is generally known and, of course, was not ethical even in that kind of trade.

Q: The book was <u>On Wings of Eagle</u>.

PRECHT: Back to the time after the seizure of the embassy on Valentine's Day. We were still having lots of meetings in Dave Newsom's office. The Shah by this time had left Iran for Egypt and then Morocco. His fellow monarch Hassan in Morocco began to feel a little uncomfortable with this long staying guest. He also had an Islamic component in his society that was quite disturbed by the Shah's presence. So, Hassan wanted him to move on. The Shah thought he would take up our invitation of January to go to the United States. So, after one of these meetings in Newsom's office, he asked me to stay behind. Then he said, "It appears that the Shah is coming to the United States, a decision is about to be made." I said, "You cannot do that. This is not January. Iranians will not be happy to see him come. You will not be able to reconstruct a relationship with Iran if that happens." He kind of blanched. Then I went down to my office and telephoned Sullivan telling him that they were about to admit the Shah to the United States. Sullivan said "if they let him in they will bring us out in boxes." He conveyed the same message to either Newsom or Vance and it reached Carter some how. Carter declined to admit the Shah which meant that he first had to go to the Bahamas and then on to Mexico. He mobilized his supporters in this country who were quite influential – David Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, Brzezinski inside the White House, etc. There was intense pressure that we admit the Shah. I argued against it. Carter wasn't buying it. He said, "What will you do when they take our embassy." So, he was firm on that point.

That was one of our problems but we had any number of problems in dealing with a new revolutionary regime. The situation in Washington, however, from my standpoint improved enormously. I no longer felt the tension with the White House. They weren't playing a role, as far as I could tell, in what was going on in Iran, leaving it to the State Department. No voice from Brzezinski or Gary Sick came down. I pretty much had my own way, although it wasn't an easy way because the Iranians were terribly suspicious of

us. The American press became a problem. During the final months of the revolution the media had been anti-Shah and supportive of Khomeini and the revolution. When the revolution succeeded, they immediately became anti-Khomeini. There were reasons for their shift, of course. The Iranians began executing people with abandon. Any Iranian senior military officer or other official was likely to come before the Islamic courts accused of being corrupt and then executed.

In March, I got word that former Prime Minister Hoveyda was going to be executed. He had been jailed by the Shah as a gesture towards the opposition who thought him corrupt and a Bahai (deemed to be apostates by the clerics.) Hoveyda didn't leave when the jails were opened up on February 11. Perhaps he thought he should stay on until he was officially cleared. It was a Saturday, I believe. I called Charlie Naas and said, "Listen, do something about Hoveyda. Save him." I sent him a little message with those instructions. He went to see Yazdi, the foreign minister who said, "We understand." Charlie said, "You shoot Hoveyda and it will not be understood in the United States where he is popular." "We will do our best," he replied. The next thing we knew the news came out that he had been executed hours before Charlie's conversation with Yazdi. This illustrated how chaotic the situation was. Then some of the more progressive revolutionary clerics were shot down in the streets by unknown parties. The revolution began to turn on itself. Khomeini imposed sanctions against women who marched in the streets against the veil. The left wing marched against religious people. It became quite difficult.

All this time the embassy was trying to put together a normal relationship. It had to clean up the old relationship which meant all the cars and household effects left behind had to be shipped out of the country. But then we had this huge tangle of civilian and military contracts. The Iranians had ceased paying so a lot of people had pulled their employees out and conflicting claims had to be resolved. There was constant turmoil and suspicion and tension between us and the new regime. The Iranians would shoot some Kurds and when the US press attacked them, they thought we were guiding the press. It was the same way the Shah thought. When he got negative publicity in the United States, he would sent word to Jerusalem to control the American press which he deemed to be controlled by Jewish or Israeli interests. The revolutionaries felt the same way and they also blamed Jewish interests in New York as controlling the press.

Q: Speaking of Jewish interests, a little later in the game I became involved in determining whether Iranians were refugees or not. One of the cases put was that any Jew was considered a valid refugee because Khomeini was anti-Jewish and had shot at least one or two prominent Jewish leaders.

PRECHT: Yes, I am familiar with that position and generally agreed with it. In May, and I will come back to this later, they did shoot a very wealthy Jewish businessman, Elghananean, I think his name was. In general, Khomeini tried to prevent lawlessness or street justice (although religious courts often weren't much better). His attitude towards Jews, Christians and Zoroastrian, the three primary minority religions of Iran was protective. Under the new constitution they were given their own representation in

parliament. I think the concern they felt was basically about the unstable conditions for everyone in Iran at the time. Jews, because of hostility towards Israel which was manifest, felt it most strongly and many of them wanted to leave the country. We felt this was legitimate and it would be risky and unwise to oppose their desire to do so. Christians also left but there was not the same kind of compulsion - similarly the Zoroastrians. Anyone who was middle class - and most of the minorities were - wanted to get out or get their children out. The current Iranian scene was not conducive to a normal life.

On the subject of Israel, the Israeli embassy, or non-embassy, was maintained there until the end. But, when the revolution succeeded what was going to happen to these staff members? Well, Charlie Naas got word from the Israeli embassy that they needed help. I heard the same thing and asked Charlie to help them leave. He got them out with the connivance of the foreign ministry. The new regime didn't want any additional trouble with Jews - which would mean trouble with the US and Europe.

There were all sorts of little things like that that had to be cleared up. There were the CIA listening posts that we had in Iran and had been seized. The Iranians allowed us to close them down quietly and move those people out. They didn't make a big stink about it. Essentially, the new Iranian government came in under Bazargan and his secular colleagues. They wanted at least a decent relationship with the United States. They wanted to reestablish it on a basis in which they could express their independence. They wanted all past business between us reviewed. They weren't going to buy a lot of arms from us or spend a lot of money on projects, but they didn't want to fight with us because they knew they had a big enough agenda on the home front.

Anyway, visas, not only for Jews, but for lots of Iranians who wanted to get out of the country, were a big problem. Lines around the embassy, which were long before the revolution, became much, much longer after the revolution.

Q: Did we change our visa policy?

PRECHT: I think we became very liberal with minorities and others who might suffer unduly in the post-revolution chaos. We had a problem with Iranians who were in the States claiming asylum. My position was "Let's file it." Some of them may have deserved asylum and some of them didn't, but to make that choice seemed to me to invite a problem with Iran. I recommended that we defer decisions until things settled down. Then we could address the situation. So, we just let any Iranian who reached our shores remain here without any problem at all. We had problems with American companies who didn't know whether to venture back or not. The situation within the American government was a lot smoother than it had been. But there were those occasional instances when people who were unreconciled to the Shah's defeat would leak something that was unhelpful to us. And, the press was always difficult.

Well, in May, Charlie Naas thought it would be a good idea if he could make an official call on Khomeini and get that unfinished business out of the way of a new ambassador.

Every other diplomat in the city seemed already to have called on Khomeini. We hadn't done it as we had been prohibited from doing so by Carter/Brzezinski. Charlie arranged through Yazdi to see Khomeini before we appointed a new ambassador.

Q: Sullivan had returned?

PRECHT: Sullivan had returned to the US in March and retired without a great deal of ceremony. He was not very well liked with the Carter administration at that time. The embassy was down to minimal staffing. Our consulates were closed. Charlie stayed on but was suffering from the strain. The administration selected Walt Cutler, who was then the ambassador in the Congo and who had served in Tabriz as vice consul in years before, to be the new ambassador. I thought he was the perfect selection. He picked a lot of staff who were going to go with him. Then the Iranians executed this wealthy Jewish businessman with close ties with the Shah and the senate, led by Senator Javits, passed a resolution condemning Iran for its brutal policies, etc. Bingo. The Iranians went up in smoke. I learned subsequently from Yazdi that they had to show the Americans "they can't treat us this way." Khomeini instructed him, "we don't want to break relations with them but go right up to the point of doing so. Make them know that they can't insult us this way."

So, they rejected Walt Cutler. They said that he served in the Congo where he was bossing Mobutu around and they didn't want that kind of guy here. But, that was only an excuse. Well, Cutler was out of the picture although some of his selected staff continued on to Tehran. We had to find somebody to replace Charlie. I believe I suggested Bruce Laingen, who I knew had once served in Iran. I didn't know him personally but I called him in Minnesota where he was on vacation and asked him if he would like to go out for a few months until we got things in better shape. He was somewhat reluctant at first, but he went.

So, during the summer the embassy began to grow a little bit. At one point I got word that they needed desperately another officer to help resolve commercial claims and we sent them one. Then there was a request for visa officers. We gradually built up the embassy and had more Farsi speaking officers than the post ever had had. Almost everyone who was there wanted to be there. While some were running away from their wives, or went because it was good money, the greatest number wanted to be there because it was a challenge and they really thought they could make a contribution. I thought we had a superb embassy.

Back to the question of the Shah. In July 1979, the question of the Shah remained an active one and we were constantly getting letters from congressmen and there were editorials and that sort of thing. The Shah by this time, I think, had reached Mexico. Congressman Steve Solarz invited my wife and me to dinner and to go to Wolf Trap one evening to talk about Iran. I described everything that we were doing. At the end of the evening I said, "I have told you what is going on. What are we doing wrong? What would you suggest we do differently?" He said, "It seems to me you are pretty much on the right track, but one thing I think you are failing in. You have to handle the question of the Shah

in a better way. People simply do not understand how you could turn your back on someone who has been such a valuable friend of the United States. You have to find a more creative way of dealing with that problem." I thought if a liberal congressman has that point of view, we are alone in the United States in opposing the Shah's entry. We have to do something.

I drafted a memorandum for Newsom in which I said that we had to address this problem in some fashion. The best way to do so was to declare that it was not *whether* the Shah would come to the United States but *when*. The *when* would be dependent on when the American embassy in Tehran had adequate security. We would plan (my suggestion) on admitting the Shah when the provisional government of Dr. Bazargan had changed by elections under their new constitution into the definitive government. Khomeini had started such the process for a new government in about six months. When that happened, presumably around January/February 1980, we would see if the security was adequate. If it was, we would tell the Iranians that they now had their government, no longer a provisional arrangement - they were big boys - and both of us need to settle down and make some definite arrangements for the future. We would tell them we are going to admit the Shah and we expect our embassy to be protected. Embassy security was the key to making the decision on the Shah.

I sent that memorandum to David Newsom. I also sent a copy to Bruce Laingen, marking it, "burn this as soon as you read it." Bruce, I think, was a short time later asked what he thought and he had a similar view that we should not admit the Shah now. So, that question went into abeyance.

Along comes September. Yazdi came to New York to attend the General Assembly. Vance was up there. We had a big meeting in New York to discuss Iran's military claims, bringing up officials from the Department of Defense and the PM bureau to try to explain to him our military programs and what we could and could not do for Iran. The Iranians wanted spare parts for their equipment. We weren't selling them much. They wanted ammunition and we didn't sell them very much at all. So, we made some compromises and began to work towards a modus vivendi on arms sales. We still had a small training mission in Tehran. We thought it important to have some connections with the Iranian military, decimated as it was by the revolution. We wanted to try to rebuild the connection with them - but nothing resembling what we had in the past, to be sure.

At any rate, the meeting with Yazdi went pretty well. He seemed to understand what we were explaining. At the end of it he was on his way out and I asked if he could step aside and I spoke to him. I said, "I just want to tell you personally how difficult I find the distrust between us and how sorry I am that we were unable to send a new ambassador and get things going." I made some personal appeal in that unofficial way. He said, "We need a new ambassador. We want you to send an ambassador. I have a suggestion. Send Richard Cottam, the American professor, as ambassador." I said, " I can't tell you who will be the new ambassador but I think we will be doing that soon."

In October, my daughter was on her junior year in London so I decided, as State

Department officers sometimes creatively do, to visit her on my way from an official visit to Tehran. All the people who had worked for me on the desk had been out on several months' duty in Iran to help the embassy out. I would go out and see how Iran looked after the two years that I had been absent. And, I would stop in London on the way back to see Katherine.

I can't remember precisely, but the day was Friday I think October 18, that I was to leave and go to Iran for ten days. That morning Peter Constable who had replaced Bill Crawford... Let me interject that after the revolution, there was kind of a purge of NEA. Warren Christopher got rid of Crawford and Jack Miklos replacing them with Peter Constable and Jane Coon. Peter, who had mostly south Asian experience, was a very good person for me to work with on Iran. He had excellent judgment and although he didn't know Iran he had a good sense of what was possible in Washington.

Anyway, I went to Peter's office to check out with him; Rocky Suddarth who was principal aid to Newsom was there. Rocky said, "You ought to know that we are about to admit the Shah to the United States. A decision is about to be made in the White House." Peter said, "You had better stay here and cancel your trip." I said, "What shall I do, send a message to Tehran saying 'Shah is coming here -- too dangerous for me to come out there. Good luck'." I couldn't do that. I protested vigorously. My standard argument was that if you admit the Shah you do the right thing in human terms, but you have to abandon any hope of reconstructing a political relationship with Iran. It was clear that Carter was trying to meet the obligation to the man and also reconstruct a relationship. There was no mention of closing or reducing the embassy staffing. The Shah was sick it was said and he needed treatment in the United States. Carter was in an impossible situation.

So, after my customary big mouth objections, they said I should write a memorandum. I went down to my office and got out a long piece of yellow paper and wrote, "If the Shah is admitted to the United States you can anticipate one of the following." Then I listed all the horrible things I could think of headed by "embassy personnel taken hostage." I put that in the out-box and went home and packed my bag. I didn't say anything to my wife but when I got on the plane I thought maybe I should write a letter to her as a sort of farewell. I decided not to because I couldn't think of the right words. I got to Tehran where I was staying with Bruce Laingen at the ambassador's residence. He was out at a party so I went to bed. The next morning after I met him for breakfast I said, "Bruce, I have some tough news for you." He said, "I have it in a telegram."

He had scheduled the first meeting with Yazdi, the foreign minister, and we went to see him and told him the Shah was sick and needed medical treatment and we were going to bring him to the United States. Yazdi said, "Come with me." We left his office and went to the office of Dr. Bazargan, the prime minister. After repeating the story to him, Bruce said, "Mr. Prime Minister can you guarantee protection for the embassy?" Yazdi replied something to the effect that we were building a fire but they would do their best. It wasn't exactly an iron-clad assurance. Bruce sent in a cable saying that the Iranian say they will do their best to protect us. To me it looked like more of a positive response than the

Iranians gave us. I didn't object to the language, however. I think the decision had already been made in Washington to admit the Shah.

That day when we told senior embassy staff in a staff meeting they were quite concerned. They were all convinced they were in danger. But, the Iranian press played it low key. You know, on page two or three. Khomeini said that the Shah was going to the United States, "maybe we can now sue him. The Americans tell us we might get back the money he has stolen." During my visit, I made as many calls as I could cram in. I had told Yazdi during our meeting that we would try to conduct ourselves like we would in a normal country. That is, "We want to have contact with your opposition, with everybody in your country who is significant as we never did under the Shah. We want to act like an embassy should act." He said, "Fine. Are you going to see the religious leaders?" I said, "They won't talk to us because they have put the embassy on some kind of blacklist and wouldn't have any communication with Bruce Laingen or his people." He said, "I will fix it up," and he did.

I had a very rich series of appointments. I went to see the leadership of the Jewish community. I went to see all the opposition leaders. I went to see the Bahai community. I went with John Limbert, a linguist, to the Friday prayers as Yazdi suggested I do. He sent a foreign ministry car with an officer inherited from the old regime who clearly was unhappy at losing his day off. We went to the university some blocks away and the streets were packed with people laying down their prayer mats to pray. Our escort said, "Oh, we can't get through, sorry, we have to go home." I said, "No, we will walk in." So, we walked through the crowd up to the gates of the university and our guide, this elegantly dressed officer, said to the guard at the gate, "Two distinguished visitors from Senegal." We were admitted and stood in the crowd when these mullahs waving AK-47s shouted, "Death to Americans." No one took any note of us.

I went to see Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's deputy, with John. He said how wonderfully pleased he had been when he learned in the Shah's prison that Carter had been elected because Carter supported human rights and he thought American policy would change. The only thing he deplored was the influence of the Jews in American that made our policy towards Israel so bad in the Muslim world. Anyway, he was quite friendly besides that remark. With Bruce I visited Ayatollah Beheshti, one of the real powers in the new establishment. He was also cordial. We talked about Iranian exiles coming back. They would be admitted back if they accepted the revolution, he said. There was no mention of the Shah in any of these religious gatherings. No mention at all.

So, we relaxed, I guess, in this kind of era of good feeling. But something began to change in the atmosphere. I was there a week or so and then at the start of the second week two things happened. One, a group of students seized the Hilton Hotel or the Intercontinental and were going to make it into a hostel for the poor. The striking thing was the government did nothing to get them out. These students were able to have their way until finally somebody talked them out of it and after two or three days they left. But it showed you how weak this provisional government was. It couldn't control the Komités, these little groups that established themselves in neighborhoods to control the

population. They simply didn't have the backing of Khomeini to do the kind of thing the government ought to do. The second thing that happened was something had gotten under Khomeini's skin and he made a speech in which he said that everything bad that happens in this country is the fault of the Americans. It was that kind of tone which began to creep into the press that made me uneasy.

Over the weekend some of the junior officers said they had never been to the bazaar so I blithely said, "Let's go down to the bazaar." It probably was not a smart thing to do. The mood of the bazaaries was not what it had been. There was a kind of resentment that you could sense. When you joked with the people in the shops they didn't joke back. There was a kind of ill feeling towards us - obvious Americans that we were. Secondly I had a meeting with all the junior officers who were doing visa work and they all said, with one exception, that we are crazy to be here. "This is a wild place. These people don't know where they are going. There is no control. This is a dangerous place and we ought to get out and close down the embassy." Only Joe Stafford, who is still in the Foreign Service, kept mum, good soldier that he was, but the others were completely frank with me. I didn't hear this from the more senior officers at the embassy, but these junior officers who had day-to-day experience with Iranians had quite a different attitude from official American policy.

At any rate when I left on a Wednesday for London, I was quite uneasy the way things looked in the embassy. That Friday there was going to be a demonstration in Tehran. But, I continued on my way and had a day in London and arrived back in Washington on Friday. I called the desk and my deputy said that nothing happened. There had been a demonstration, but it was kept away from the embassy. The embassy had reduced staff, the people went out of town and all seemed okay. I was told that I didn't need to come in. Saturday was parents' weekend at Colgate where my son was a freshman so my wife and I drove up and spent the day. On Sunday driving back I tried to think creatively about improving our relations with Iran and getting things onto a decent track after the Shah's admission to the States. I turned on the radio and heard the noon news broadcast that the embassy had been seized. I was somewhere in Pennsylvania at the time. I though, "we are really in the soup now."

I got back to Washington and went in to the Department. It was plain that things were bad and that the embassy was in for a long siege. That became quite clear when, possibly the next day, Khomeini issued a statement supportive of the students who had seized the embassy. I know from Iranians who were in his entourage at the time that he had initially objected to the takeover: "What do these people think they are doing? They can't make this kind of decision affecting the entire nation. Get them out of there." But, then, hard line clergy got to him and got the mob to stand outside his house saying "we must support the students." He was persuaded that as it was a question of the Shah and the US on one side and Iran and the clergy on the other, he had to stand with the latter. It was true of Khomeini that whenever there was a decision that might lead to a weakening of the clergy, he would always protect them. Preserving the Islamic Republic under religious rule was his number one priority. When he supported the students I knew we were going to have great difficulties. But, we couldn't admit that to ourselves.

Throughout the hostage crisis we had to believe that we were going to end it soon. The long haul was simply unthinkable.

We were then thrust into the despair of trying some more desperate means. That immediately came up. Are we going to threaten to strike with force if they don't give up in 24 hours? Well, if they didn't yield in 24 hours, what would we do? Our bluff would be called and we would have to let them have it and the hostages would likely be killed. We had just been through the experience of the post-revolutionary period where the Iranians had freely executed their enemies. Who knew if they would execute the Americans. I knew most of the staff who were there. I had selected them to work in Tehran. I had encouraged some of them to go out there. I couldn't put their lives in danger. That, I admit, was putting the personal before the national interest, but that was how I felt. Again, I think it was Brzezinski who wanted to play rough and threaten and, if necessary, use force. Carter wouldn't go along but did allow planning for force to begin. We in State, being opposed to the idea, were not included in the super secret work.

The great dilemma was that the administration had to be seen doing something. There was a loud outcry in the country. The administration couldn't just sit back and say, "We hope something positive will happen." They had to be active. So, I was asked to draft a letter from the president to Khomeini. The rule we followed in those days was that anything you drafted as a secret communication you had to phrase it in a way that was acceptable to be seen on the front page of the New York Times. I thought, however, that it was a mistake to try to push Khomeini. We had never met the man or had any exchange with him at all. The letter was to be delivered by Ramsey Clark accompanied by Bill Miller. Ramsey Clark was a former attorney general who had befriended many of the Iranian oppositionists when they were in this country. Bill Miller had served in Iran and I think resigned in protest over our close relationship with the Shah. They were going to carry the letter. Stan Escudero, a Farsi speaking officer, was going to go with them along with a security officer. I was also to go, but because of lingering attitudes in the White House, I was told that I would fly over and brief Ramsey Clark on the situation in Iran but would get off at the last stop before Tehran. I would not enter Iran. Dr. Brzezinski didn't trust me to do the right thing.

Anyway, I wrote a letter which was I guess too much of a valentine, too sweetly persuasive, neither tough nor threatening. It was redrafted in the White House in a tougher tone - suitable for American public consumption. Equipped with that letter we went to the airport, boarded Air Force One and took off about 5:30 in the afternoon. I was told that we had not received permission to come from the Iranians. We got out over the Atlantic and heard that our mission was on the evening news, as usual. When we got to Spain to refuel, the Iranians said that we could come but not in a big American plane. Our supposition was that they didn't want a battalion of troops to jump out of the plane and take over the country. We went to Athens to pick up a small plane. When we got to Athens the word came that we could not come in a U.S. military plane. We could only come on a commercial airliner. So, then we flew to Istanbul and when we got there Bob Houghton, our consul general, said, "The Iranians say you can't come at all." Khomeini had said that no Iranians could have any meetings with Americans. So, we moved in with

Bob Houghton.

The next day, the Bazargan government resigned and a new government was appointed with Bani Sadr as the prime minister and Ghotbzadeh as foreign minister, neither of whom we had ever spoken to. We had no one to talk to. So Ramsey Clark went to work on the Turkish telephone system taking hours to get a connection to Tehran or Beirut. One of his first calls was to Yasser Arafat in Beirut. Clark was part of the radical network and he was going to get the PLO to help us out. Anyway we settled down while waiting for the telephone connections to be established for Ramsey Clark.

The second day, Rocky Suddarth told me over the phone from Washington that I was on the front page of the Washington Post: "Your memorandum to Newsom saying that the Shah should be admitted to the United States in January or February has been found by the students and published. They call it proof that Americans had always been planning to let the Shah in and this was just part of their treachery." I thought if this memorandum - "burn after reading" - had been discovered in Bruce's files, everything that we had in the embassy was likely to be discovered. And so it was. That gave the whole hostage crisis a new dimension, an unfavorable dimension.

To backtrack a bit, when I had visited Iran in October I had been sitting in the political section one afternoon when one of the officers was going through files and he said, "Look, there is a picture of somebody in 1936." I wondered what are they doing with these files in the embassy, because back in January or February the political counselor, George Lambrakis, had told me because of the dangerous situation here they were shipping all their files back to Kansas. Fine, I thought. But somebody had returned the documents to Iran. So all these historic files -- the works -- were back in Tehran. I didn't say anything to the embassy. A desk officer doesn't like to go out and tell people on the scene what they should do. I didn't say anything, but I didn't think it was a very good idea to have all that paper there. It now became clear when the embassy was seized there hadn't been time to burn these files. That meant that the Iranians could say, as they did, that this was, in fact, not an embassy but a nest of spies. These diplomats were plotting against the revolution and conducting espionage. Not only were there State Department documents, but also CIA documents. The discovery of the files was a terrible blow to our efforts to free the hostages.

After a day or so, Peter Constable telephone me and asked, "What are you doing out there?" I said that I was sitting around with Ramsey Clark waiting for something to happen and nothing is happening. He said, "You had better come back here. We need you here." So, I left Clark, returned to Washington, and they followed in four or five days.

You can't imagine the hectic nature of that situation. The first thing I would do every morning was to call the embassy. We had established with AT&T that no one could call the embassy from the United States. We didn't want crackpots, journalists, and other people calling the embassy, so that line was blocked. Only we in the State Department could use the line. I would call and some English speaking person would answer saying, "nest of spies." Every day I would try to cajole him or whoever answered the phone, or

threaten them or reason with them. Sometimes when hostage families would be there I would put them on the phone. Wives would break down crying requesting that messages get through to their husbands. None of that had any effect at all. None of those messages got through at all. It was like talking to a stone wall. That was the ritual. I would do that every day until finally someone in the White House or wherever woke up to the fact that I was making the calls. Thinking that I was not equipped to do this sort of thing, they brought in a CIA psychiatrist and a professional hostage negotiator who got on the phone in my place. They got no further than I did with those guys in Tehran.

The other daily call I would make was to Bruce Laingen who was held in the foreign ministry. He was there with Victor Tomseth, the political counselor, and Mike Howland the security officer. They had been on a call to the foreign ministry when the embassy was seized. They would tell me what was being shown on Iranian television and I would tell them things in guarded terms. When I wanted the Iranians to know something I would talk in unguarded terms. We assumed we were monitored. But, every day I was able to do that and thanks to this telephone system that the Shah had bought from AT&T we had a very good connection.

In the early days, Victor Tomseth, who had served in Thailand, had a Thai cook who was outside in Victor's apartment. Victor was able to call this fellow and speak Thai. I don't think there was an Iranian in Tehran who could understand Thai. So, it was effectively an encrypted message and he would send this Thai around on errands to do this or that.

At that time we had no idea who was in the embassy, who was captured. The Iranian captors would not divulge names or numbers. We soon found out, though, first from the British that six Americans were on the loose. Two consular officers and their wives who had also been working in the consular section plus two other officers had been outside the embassy when it was seized. They had all gone to the British embassy. The British, afraid that they might become involved in this crisis, sent them to the Canadian embassy where they were taken in. So we knew these six people were being kept by the Canadians. Otherwise we didn't know who was inside the embassy at all. We had no way of communicating to Tehran since Khomeini's ban on talking to Americans prevented them from talking to us. During the first few days I made a call to Ayatollah Beheshti and had spoken to him and he said, "I'm off to a meeting I hope we get this resolved," and hung up and nothing happened.

Then we had a period when no foreign country would or could communicate on our behalf. We simply had no communication. We would read what they put in the press and they would read what we put in the press. It was a horribly frustrating situation.

Q: What about measures we were taking such as freezing funds?

PRECHT: Well, in about the second week in November Bani-Sadr, the new prime minister who was an economist of sorts, made some remarks about Iranian assets in the United States. Maybe they ought to take possession of them. The Shah had a lot of money in American banks, hundreds of millions of dollars, and when the revolutionaries took

over either, because they had other things on their minds, or they were inexperienced or had no better place to put the money, they left it there. So, this money was on deposit here. The fear was that this new regime was going to pull it out. One evening there was a big meeting on the 7th floor and I was invited to attend with Vance and Secretary of Treasury Miller to discuss how to handle the Iranian assets. The question was whether we would freeze their funds. Miller asked, "Will it help us get the hostages free? Does anyone know what the effect on the hostages will be?" Then everyone looked at me sitting down at the far end of the table. It was another of these high level meetings where nobody had any real expertise. I said, "If we don't freeze those assets the Iranians will withdraw the money and all the claims we have against them will never have a chance to be resolved. On the other hand it will create an issue between us and them that will complicate freeing the hostages. But, I think we should freeze the assets." So, we did. And, that became a major issue in the end. It was seen by the Iranians as another act of hostility against them and was the impediment to hostage release in the final act.

It was that kind of situation. Whatever we did, they objected. Then there was talk as they began to release more and more documents that they were going to put the Americans on trial for espionage. Can you imagine what a difficult situation that would have been if there had been a trial with death sentence threatened? Every morning Americans would wake up to see if the death threat had been implemented. It would be impossible for the administration. So, we sent a message to Tehran via the Swiss embassy which was the protecting power for us, telling them that if they put the Americans on trial we would "interrupt their commerce." Now what did that mean? I don't think anyone in Washington had any idea how they would do that, nor did the Iranians, but that effectively ended the discussion about putting the Americans on trial.

Sometime in the second half of November, Yasser Arafat went out to Tehran and was able to persuade Khomeini to release the black women hostages. I think there were 13. But, two women, Ann Swift and Kate Koob (USIS), refused to leave, saying they were officers and were going to stay there until all officers were released. The other women left. Some time thereafter the relationship between the PLO and Iran fell apart so that option was no longer available to us. There was effectively no way of reaching Iran. Throughout the crisis we had to rely on intermediaries to do our bidding for us. We had a phone bank staffed by 10 or 12 junior officers and volunteers, including my wife. Penny Laingen and other wives manned another office up in the op center which maintained contact with the dependents of the hostages.

Q: You were talking about the banks of people who were answering telephones.

PRECHT: We got all sorts of calls. Suggestions were offered. For example, we got a call from someone telling us that she was the white Russian girl friend of Ghotbzadeh when he was in college and maybe she could contact him. We got a call from the estranged wife of the deputy head of the central bank. We pursued each of these calls in an attempt to find some way of getting our employees out.

Q: By the way, early on the Iranians in the United States did not endear themselves

because Iranian students were demonstrating when our embassy was taken over in support of the students.

PRECHT: Well, I think Iranians in the United States had been demonstrating against the Shah for years and that certainly intensified during the revolution. I don't know how many demonstrated in support of the captors but a lot of Iranians became distinctly unpopular. My Iranian friends had a very miserable time during that period being castigated by Americans who probably couldn't tell Iran from Iraq.

Q: I know I was consul general in Naples at the time and I got a call from my friend who was deputy in the visa office who said, "We would like to designate Naples as a place where Iranians can apply for visas." I said, "Not in Naples you won't. We are trying to keep them out." There was concern about Iranian threats against other posts.

PRECHT: Because we couldn't reach the Iranian authorities (if you could say anyone - except for Khomeini - was in authority) we would send out messages to everybody we could think of who might have some influence. We sent messages to every diplomatic post to contact religious leaders in their capital and ask them to get in touch with Iranian religious leaders. Contact student leaders in your capital and ask them to get in touch with the students in the embassy. Each message was complete with suggested talking points as to what they should say. Contact labor people. The works. We constantly sent these messages out to posts requesting help in doing whatever they could in an attempt to make contact with Iranian authorities. Nothing worked.

American religious leaders went over at Christmas time and they got nowhere. Then the UN got into it. We had earlier gone to the World Court, to the Security Council and all were futile because the Iranians didn't pay any attention.

Finally, after Kurt Waldheim, secretary general of the UN, had been out to Tehran and been abused by the Iranians, Hal Saunders and I were summoned to the White House to meet two men who thought they might be helpful to us. The Shah, by this time, in December, I think, had made his small contribution to the effort by leaving the United States, I think at Carter's suggestion, and moving to Panama. Panama, you may remember, had benefitted from Carter's very risky political decision to negotiate the canal treaty so Torrijos was going to repay the favor and agreed to take the Shah. They gave him a small island where he could set up household. Two men came from Panama to Washington to offer their services. One was Hector Villalon, an Argentinian adventurer with a little Latin mustache who had been a friend of Torrijos, and the other was Christian Bourget who was a radical French lawyer with long hair and had known Iranian revolutionaries in Paris with Khomeini and earlier. They might be able to get in touch with Ghotbzadeh, the foreign minister and see if they could use their influence.

Well, what a pair. Were we reduced to this? One guy looked like he was a sharkster and the other one looked like he was a complete flake. But, we had nobody else. At the meeting in the White House we sat down with them and they said they would call Ghotbzadeh and see if he would be willing to be contacted by them. He agreed. We know

they talked to Ghotbzadeh because we listened to the telephone call. So, okay, we have a channel now, what are we going to do with it? Hal Saunders, a master negotiator, fresh from Camp David Arab-Israel meetings, devised the idea that we would work out a scenario of events. The U.S. and Iran would take reciprocal steps ultimately leading to the release of the captives after we had acknowledged past sins against Iranians e.g. during the Mossadegh period.

We went off to Geneva. Ham Jordan, Carter's principal aide, was involved. I can remember when I first met him he said, "You are the guy Brzezinski used to talk about in the staff meetings as being the one who is trying to defeat American policy in Iran. I am delighted to meet you." I don't think he was very keen on Brzezinski. We all took assumed names and persuaded the Swiss to give us space in Bern. We left the States secretly and were taken to a wonderful hotel in Bern while we talked with Bourget and Villalon and drafted a scenario which was conveyed to Ghotbzadeh. During February we got a detailed scenario worked out. Our two contacts were living in Paris so I was there as liaison with them and Hal Saunders and Ham Jordan returned to Washington. I remained there for several weeks. Then it fell apart. We did our first reciprocal step, they didn't do theirs. We did our second and they didn't do theirs. The whole thing collapsed. In retrospect, it seemed we were asking too much of inexperienced Iranians. Our scenario was simply too complex for them. There was another explanation, perhaps the true one.

Khomeini wasn't buying it. "We are not negotiating with the Americans. Nobody in the American government today is going to decide on releasing the hostages. This is a question that is going to be addressed by the Iranian parliament, they will make the decision." Well, the Iranian parliament didn't exist. They hadn't been elected. The earliest that might occur would be in September and we were now in March. We were faced with months of waiting for the Iranian political process to unfold.

But, we didn't give up. We continued to seek ways around Khomeini. At one point Villalon concocted a false message that he said came from Washington and was published in the Iran press showing how conciliatory we had been and we were. We were obliged to deny the message. We were dealing with a bunch of amateurs and getting no where.

In early April, I guess it was, I went with Ham Jordan on Air Force One to Paris. Ghotbzadeh was there and Ham said we were going to make one last attempt. We went to Villalon's apartment. Ghotbzadeh came in. He had met previously with Ham once or twice. He would meet with Ham because he wasn't a foreign service officer, he wasn't an official of the government. He was deemed to be private and political therefore both on a higher level and more independent than we who were deemed to be slaves to American politics. Ham opened the door and said, "Henry, come in. Sadek, I want you to meet Henry Precht from the State Department." Ghotbzadeh thought he had been bitten by a viper because Khomeini had prohibited any contact with Americans officials and here was one ushered into his presence. We got over that pretty quickly. But, nothing happened at that meeting. Ghotbzadeh gave no assurances. So, very glumly we flew back on Air Force One with nothing new. It was, I learned later, a last chance for a peaceful

solution.

Then, we decided to go around the capitals and see what else we could do. Hal Saunders and I went to Rome and talked to a Palestinian priest, Bishop Cappuci, I think his name was, who had contacts with the Iranians and tried to persuade him to exercise his influence. Nothing doing there. We went to Geneva because a Red Cross representative had just been in Tehran and had visited the hostages. I went to see this representative and he told me that he had seen all the hostages and they were all well and were all in the embassy. The Red Cross doesn't make public these kinds of contacts. I filed a report back to Washington. In Washington, I stayed with our UN ambassador. The next thing that happened was Warren Christopher called me up and asked, "Did the Red Cross man say the hostages were all in the embassy?" "Yes," I said. "When did he see them?" "Just the other day." That was all that he wanted to know. I wondered why he was calling me to ask those questions? Something must be in the works - a rescue mission?

I guess it was another week or so when Hal Saunders called me about 5 in the morning and said, "You know that thing we have been worrying was going to happen? Well, it happened and it didn't work. Can you come down to the Department, we have some telephone calls to make." So, I went down to the Department and the rescue mission had failed. We had to call the dependents and tell them. Carter was going to make a speech taking responsibility for it, but we had to call the dependents first to let them know what had gone wrong and what little we knew. It was a grim period because we knew that this was going to mean a further setback, as if we needed one, in our efforts to free these people.

Q: Were the Soviets playing any role in this?

PRECHT: No one asked the Soviets to do anything. Nobody thought about asking them. What we decided after our abortive diplomatic venture through intermediaries and our abortive rescue mission, was that we would go back to traditional diplomacy. We had put in place sanctions and broken relations with Iran. I will come back to that later. Hal Saunders and I made a tour of European capitals during which we tried as desperately as we could to enlist the support of foreign ministries in France, England and Germany. In Austria we went to see Bruno Kreisky. We started to get more formal again. It didn't produce any better results but at least it gave us the feeling that we were doing something.

As part of Carter's decision to get tough in April just before the rescue mission, we broke relations with Iran. Since the revolution succeeded, Iran had maintained an embassy here. During the last days of the Shah's regime, the embassy split apart. There were some on the staff who were revolutionaries. After Zahedi, the ambassador, left, the number two man, Homayoun, was trying to maintain a traditional embassy as he had been trained to do. But threatened by revolutionaries on the one hand and loyalists on the other, he had to struggle just to survive. He was threatened and felt his life was in danger. I intervened to help him. Once the revolution succeeded, he was thrown out by the new regime. People who had represented Khomeini in this country or were deemed acceptable to him, were

moved in. Ali Agha, who had been living in America and was a very religious person with no diplomatic experience, became the chargé. He was advised by Mansour Farhang, a secular professor/journalist. When our embassy was seized, we continued to maintain contact with them and we hoped that they were sending positive messages back to Tehran. So, we kept them in business.

Q: In normal diplomatic practice these things were tic for tac. Was there any consideration of taking them hostage at the time?

PRECHT: We didn't in part because we were maintaining a fiction that our embassy in Tehran had been seized by students not by the Iranian government. Of course the "unofficial," but actual Iranian, government of Khomeini had endorsed the seizure by doing nothing to prevent it. But, we didn't take the logical diplomatic step of breaking relations because Iran still in those days was an important country and we knew if we broke relations, stitching them back together again might take forever. So far, we have been proved right. In fact, Ali Agha, the chargé of the embassy was relatively sympathetic to our position, although he annoyed us by defending Iran's perspective on the hostages on US television and in the press. But, we let him sit.

Finally, Carter had had enough of all this and we broke relations. In doing this there is an amusing little story I will tell you. The plan was that we would summon Ali Agha to the Department and Warren Christopher would give him a note saying he had a specified number of hours for his staff to depart the country. This was the proper diplomatic procedure. I invited Ali in and he came with a sidekick, Lavisani, a snake-like creature whom I really despised. We sat in my office while the note was being typed in Peter Constable's office. There was some error in the note and it had to be retyped.

I was sitting there making idle conversation with Ali while he was waiting to go see Warren Christopher. Down the street comes a band of Iranians chanting anti-American slogans. I said, "Why don't these people go back to Iran if they don't like us?" Ali said, "You don't understand our Islamic doctrine that you have the technical knowledge here and you should share it with us. We are here as human beings to partake in what you have to offer which belongs to all mankind. That is the Moslem belief." I said, "You mean like Iranian oil, we can go over and share it with you?" The conversation took on a sour note. Finally, I said, "You know, Ali, life would be so much more pleasant for everyone if you would simply let the hostages go. If you could prevail on your government simply to give these people their freedom so that they can get back on track again with their normal lives. These are innocent people being badly treated in an un-Islamic manner." Finally, the snake says, "They are being well treated. We are taking excellent care of them." I said, "Bullshit," whereupon Ali Aga said, "I have waited here for too long and you have insulted my country, I am leaving."

He rose and strode out with me following behind them because I knew this note had to be delivered or otherwise a great diplomatic fault would be committed. We got to the elevator bank and they entered one. I stood in the door and said, "Ali, come back. It will only take a few more minutes and we will go see Mr. Christopher." "No." So, I picked up

the phone in the elevator and called Peter Constable's office and said, "Is it ready yet?" He said, "No, we are still typing it." Ali said, "You are keeping us hostage here. Let us go free." Well, I couldn't resist that kind of appeal, so I stepped out of the door of the elevator and let him go down.

Ali went to the diplomatic exit. I went to tell Peter that there wasn't going to be any delivery of the note. On his way out of the building, Ali ran into Marvin Kalb who asked him what was wrong. He said, "My country has been insulted by Henry Precht." I returned to the op center. We finally got the note typed and I got a junior officer to take it over to the Iranian chargé at their embassy. He left. The next thing I know I got a call from Vance asking "What did you do with that note? Did you deliver it?" I said, "No. I sent it with a young officer to the Iranian embassy." He shouted, "What? He will be taken hostage, get him back here." By that time it was too late. Then I got a call from Marvin Kalb saying, "What did you say to Ali Agha? He was black with rage." I told him the story and he went on the air with it. It was published in the press everywhere.
My daughter, who was in Rome at the time, thought I was going to lose my job because I had committed a diplomatic error. She went weeping to the American embassy. The DCM telephoned me and I calmed her down. He then explained to her that I was a national hero, as indeed I became. I got a commendation from Carter, tons of mail, proposals of marriage, an award from the American Legion and the American Police Association. I have never had such fame in my life. It was truly my 15 minutes of fame. The next day Ali Agha and his staff were bundled up and sent out on a plane. I felt sorry for him. I didn't try to offend him it; my reaction was just automatic. The episode was one of the few moments of comic relief in the long hostage ordeal.

Then summer we got word that one of the hostages was sick. Richard Queen, a junior officer, developed multiple sclerosis, was released and sent home. I immediately got on the telephone to anyone I could reach in Iran and said, "Look, see what is happening to this guy. If you have someone who dies over there you are going to get another show of American force." Again, zero, nothing happened. We proceeded into another long period of inactivity.

Q: What was this doing to you? In a normal game you would be taken out and given some rest.

PRECHT: I worked day in and day out. Every single day I was in that office. My wife was there most days although sometimes she didn't come in on weekends. It was my life from early morning to late at night. On Easter Sunday I was in working and got a call from Mr. Vance asking me to come around to his office. I walked into his office and on a chair was seated this giant Easter bunny, maybe five feet high. He said, "Henry, I would like you to meet Bunny Sadr." That was the first and only time that I heard Mr. Vance tell a joke. Then he said to me, "What do you think would happen if we tried to use force to free the hostages?" This was before the rescue mission and I thought this was further proof that something was coming. I felt it was my only chance to block it. I said, "I think it would be disastrous, Mr. Vance. I think there would be anti-American riots not only in Tehran, but in the Gulf, in Pakistan and elsewhere. A lot of Americans could lose their

lives and a lot of damage could be done to our interests. Private Americans could be in danger...” At the end of my harangue he said, “I agree with you. I think it would be a very bad move.” Obviously he felt strongly and – beyond my knowledge -- had been arguing against it and did resign after it was tried.

Reflecting on that rescue mission, it was planned in complete secrecy by people in the Defense Department and CIA. Whether they were on instructions from Brzezinski or not they didn’t trust us in the State Department. They never consulted us at all. We knew that something was happening because you can’t completely keep a secret like that in the American government. I think that kind of secrecy was damaging to the operation because, for example, they planned to set the plane down on an airstrip near a highway in the desert not knowing that in warm weather people travel at night in the desert. And, sure enough here comes a bus down the road when they landed and it gave the alarm. It is that kind of secrecy -- failing to draw in people who know something because you don’t trust them -- that is destructive to American operations. The tension was getting to everyone by that time. It was amazing that we held together as well as we did.

During this time I had several meetings with Carter and Brzezinski that were all cordial. Carter met with the families of the dependents and clearly this touched him in a very personal way. You were swept up in the emotions of this thing and at the same time you had to maintain a clear head in order to achieve what was possible in our constrained circumstances.

At the end of the summer, I was then asked if I would like to be ambassador to Mauritania. I think it was the Department’s idea of a reward, although I wasn’t exactly sure. I had thought earlier that, after going through a year of the revolution and being at the center of so much conflict in the Department - although tours are normally two years - that I should leave. But I decided to stick it out. After another year going through the hostage business without getting any results, I thought it was indeed time to let someone else give it a try. It was time for me to step aside; perhaps I was part of the problem. So, I agreed to go to Mauritania.

In September I started the process of becoming an ambassador. After a medical it was found that I needed an operation for a hernia, so I went to Georgetown hospital for that. They wheeled me into the holding area on a stretcher before going into the operating room. I looked over and there was another person lying there, waiting his turn. It was Loy Henderson who had been ambassador in 1953 when Mossadegh was overthrown. I thought “present at the creation and present at the destruction.” After I was able to walk around, I went to his room. I told him that my experience of the Shah was of a person with great ego and arrogance whose personality crumbled during the revolution and his ego seemed to wither away. I asked him what he was like in his time in Iran. He said, “He didn’t count. He was insignificant. He was a weak person. And, yet we had to deal with him.” So, he confirmed what I had suspected - that the Shah had been inflated by the power that had come to Iran with the jump in oil income plus the adulation of Nixon and Kissinger and other foreign leaders.

When the Shah died in July and we hoped that would bring an end to the crisis because after all the students had seized the embassy to get the Shah back in Iran. Conditions had changed; they ignored his death. Khomeini had said that only the yet-to-be-elected parliament would decide the fate of the hostages.

In September when I was about to go into the hospital, Hal Saunders said, "Will you be free to come back and do some Iran work?" I said that I was supposed to go into hospital. That was the beginning of the negotiations through the Algerians and I thought I would miss out on that, but I was not going to try to horn my way in because maybe fresh heads would be better. Anyway I went through all the usual rigamarole of training for preparation to go to Mauritania. While the negotiations were going on in Algiers I tried to keep as informed as I could, but I wasn't intimately involved by any means. Plainly the Iranians were trying to get the best deal they could out of the frozen assets.

About the time that Carter was defeated, I was also defeated. I went up for my hearing before the senate foreign relations committee which was in Republican control and run by Jessie Helms. He blocked me. He said that I had brought down one king that we liked and we are not letting me get close to another king, the King of Morocco. So, I was vetoed in committee by one vote. Before the presidential election, the administration said they would send me out to Mauritania as a recess appointment and I could be reconfirmed later. Well, I wasn't at all sure that I would be confirmed and declined to go putting myself in limbo for some months. In any event, Carter was defeated, thanks in large part to our continuing crisis.

When the hostages were freed, as we hoped they were going to be, on January 20, 1981, I was asked if I would like to go on the plane that Carter took across the Atlantic. So, Peter Constable and I and Vance, Mondale and others, flew across to Frankfurt. It was a very relaxed group with the bitterness of the election now. The President's Counsel, Cutler, was there and he broke out the champagne. Ham Jordan was seated in the back. Peter and I were sitting mid-plane with Mondale. As the plane was nearing Frankfurt I was asked if I would go in and brief the president on the hostages. I went in and went down the list of people I knew and told him a little about each one. I said, "Mr. President, you know I expect many of them are going to hold you responsible for their captivity. You made the decision to admit the Shah and because of that decision they were locked up 444 days. You might find that some of them are going to be quite bitter." He said that he could understand that and seemed quite prepared to deal with it. I also thought that they are going to be quite bitter towards me because when I had last seen them before the embassy was seized, I was trying to jolly them along and encourage them in the State Department way of putting an optimistic look on everything. I was afraid I was going to have a nasty moment.

We got off the plane in Frankfurt and went to the hospital where the ex-hostages were being examined and there was some coolness towards me. Some were glad to see me and some were not. I felt bad because I had tried my best to get them out and certainly didn't want them to put them in harm's way. Anyway, that is the way life works some time. We flew back on Air Force One and there was complete euphoria. Mondale had a great sense

of humor and he said, “Well, we have this plane. It’s Reagan’s plane but we are in charge of it now. Where shall we go? Shall we go see Maggie Thatcher?” There was that kind of mood.

We arrived back and there was an emotional scene with the hostages reuniting with family and friends. Later on I had the younger officers all over to our house for dinner. They had all taken Persian language training with my wife. These same officers had been very hard on our maintaining an embassy in such a wild country when I visited them in October 1979. Again that evening they - with the exception of Joe Stafford - were quite hard on me. They said, “You did this to us. You are responsible.” My daughter, who happened to be with us, broke down in tears and fled from the room because they seemed so bitter. They were a little hard. I took it because I thought I deserved the criticism.

Then, with the Reagan administration being set up, Chet Crocker, assistant secretary of Africa, called me in and asked me if I still wanted to go to Mauritania. I said sure but couldn’t believe that I would be any more acceptable to the Senate Republicans than I had been and I didn’t want to create a political burden for the administration. He said, “Let’s see if we can’t do it.” So, he sent my name over to the White House and it came back rejected by the Reagan White House. That was the end of that! I settled down to wait until something might turn up. I worked on a few arms control and other issues.

A few months later, Bob Dillon, who was DCM in Cairo, was offered the ambassadorship in Beirut and Roy Atherton, the Ambassador, asked me if I would like to be his DCM. I couldn’t think of a better job and accepted it.

Q: *Okay. I think this will be a good place to take a break and we will pick this up next time in 1981 when you are going out to be DCM in Cairo.*

PRECHT: Good.

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Q: Today is March 30, 2000. Henry, we talked about how you did not get an ambassadorship to Mauritania but subsequently went to Cairo. You were there from when to when?

PRECHT: The summer of 1981 to the summer of 1985.

Q: And you were the DCM?

PRECHT: I was the DCM.

Q: Can you described what you picked up about our relations and embassy in Cairo before you went out there.

PRECHT: People who have been following these tapes will know that I served in Egypt

before in 1966 in Alexandria and then worked in the Near East bureau 1967-69. But, I had no real contact with Egypt since then, having worked on Iranian affairs which were quite absorbing. I had kept in general touch with Egypt through the newspapers but not in any detail at all. So, when I went back in 1981, it was a return to a place that I was familiar with but in effect was a different country. When I left Egypt you couldn't say the word Israel without provoking an argument. When I got there in 1981 Israel and Egypt are at peace with each other and Israel was being treated more or less like a normal country. The embassy in Cairo was completely different. Of course, Egypt had grown. When I left Egypt in the '60s I think Alexandria was two million and Cairo was four million and Egypt itself was something like 23 or 24 million. When I came back, Alexandria was around four, Cairo around 12 and the country itself was pushing 40 million. There was also a change in the vitality of the country. Under Sadat the country had had a kind of opening up and capitalist boom. There were a lot of Mercedes on the streets. We loved Cairo. It is a city of dirt and noise, crowd and confusion, but it is perhaps the world's only functioning medieval city.

We could have lived out in Maadi, a suburb, but we didn't have any children. Our predecessor had lived in a large house there owned by the Department of Agriculture. He commandeered it and I earned the eternal gratitude of Agriculture by declining to live in it and opting for a two bedroom apartment in town. After a couple of years, my wife found it too small and we moved into a larger apartment in Zamalik. We wanted to be in the middle of the city. I could easily walk around the city – if I could escape the guard who was with me 24 hours a day.

Q: I'm told also that the Egyptians are a pleasant people to be with. Is that true?

PRECHT: Absolutely. They can laugh at you, but also at themselves. They have plenty of grievances with the past but they don't get hung up about them. In Iran you always felt the tension of the people. I describe it as the difference in the traffic. Tehran traffic was Hobbesian - the war of every man against every man. In Egypt it was kind of a joke. If you smiled at somebody, they would let you go ahead. That would never happen in Iran. In Egypt, traffic regulations were generally ineffective but I found that the symbol of authority in Egypt was the hand held radio. Whenever I would go to a meeting being driven in an embassy car, my Egyptian guard seated in the front seat would simply hold up his radio when we came to an intersection and the way would be made clear for us. You could drive on the sidewalk holding up a radio and nobody objected. My biggest regret after four years in Cairo was that I spent so much time, practically every day, in the American embassy rather than in Cairo delving into its Pharaonic or Islamic past. My wife, having little to do when I didn't come home until very late, took courses at American University in Cairo on Islamic art and architecture which we benefited from on the rare occasions I could get away from the office.

Q: What were relations like between the United States and Egypt during the time you were there?

PRECHT: In the summer of 1981, Sadat had been in power more than a decade. He had

made peace with Israel, was a great friend of Henry Kissinger, and had been a better friend of Jimmy Carter at Camp David. He was still in power and we had excellent relations. What I hadn't understood from my reading of the New York Times and short briefings in Washington before I went out was Sadat's standing in the community. We thought he was our man and fine with the Egyptian people. On arrival, I sensed a different kind of attitude among Egyptians I met. We arrived in June. Late in the afternoon we settled into our apartment overlooking the Nile and were having a drink on the little balcony as the sun set. I got a call from the embassy security officer who said, "I hate to introduce myself this way, but a mob of armed religious fanatics is believed to be marching on the embassy." Having thought Iranian stress was behind me, I thought, here we go again. Fortunately the mob got lost in Cairo traffic or the report was erroneous because they never arrived at the embassy. At that time friction between Muslims and Christians was reported in the press. Christian shops were burned. It was a strange thing because there had not been that kind of tension before. A lot of people questioned whether it was real. Some thought maybe Sadat was provoking strife in order to justify a crackdown.

A couple of weeks or so after I arrived, the ambassador took me to call on Sadat. He had a residence in Cairo but he also had a residence in the village where he been born. It was a large new and modern compound constructed outside a traditional mud brick village. We drove down into the delta to see him late one day. The ambassador introduced me and we had a talk and then a helicopter was heard overhead. It arrived bearing the vice president, Hosni Mubarak. Sadat and the ambassador did all the talking and the two number twos remained silent. It was an interesting meeting, particularly to me because I had no idea how Americans and Sadat worked together. Sadat told Atherton that he was going to make a trip to Washington in August for his first meeting with Reagan and he would be interested in advancing the Camp David negotiations. Before Jimmy Carter left office all negotiations had come to a halt. Egypt was isolated in the Arab world and there was no movement on the Camp David process addressing the Palestinian issue. Sadat wanted to restart negotiations. He felt he needed that kind of energy to maintain his popularity in the Egypt and regain a position in the Middle East. He told Roy Atherton that when he went to Washington he would describe to the Reagan team what he wanted to achieve in negotiations with Israel and, on a very secret basis, what he would be willing to accept. That meant we would know his fallback position in advance so that we, as the honest broker, could work between the Israelis and Egyptians and have complete backdoor cooperation from Egypt in order to make some progress with Begin, the Israeli prime minister. This astounded me that he would be taking us into his confidence that way, but that was the way it was going to be. He was going to look for a very intimate relationship with Reagan - as he had had with Carter.

So, Sadat went off to Washington with Roy Atherton accompanying him. When he came back I was told by Roy that the Reagan administration wasn't interested in any kind of negotiation and, in effect, gave Sadat the cold shoulder.

When it took office the Reagan administration baffled most of NEA Arabists with their position that they were going to make Israel a "strategic partner" in their struggle against

the Soviet Union. Alexander Haig, the Secretary of State, was very much a cold warrior and for the Reaganites the overriding concern was to arrest or roll back Soviet power. Israel was going to be an asset for them in that struggle and the Arab states would be asked to join this new holy grouping against the Soviet Union. We thought the chances of that were extremely slim, but, that was their position. Haig and company were not terribly warm towards Egypt, for Egypt obviously wasn't going to divorce itself completely from the Arab World it once led.

Sadat came back from Washington disappointed in his efforts to woo and coax a warm relationship with the Reagan administration. I think he must have realized that the magic was running out of his time in office. He was slipping in the popular mind. He wasn't producing new thrills and promises for them and life for them - and for him - was going to be difficult. He also sensed the rising Islamic tide and hard days ahead without a helpful American friend to assist him.

My theory is that in reaction to the cold treatment in Washington, he realized he had to do something drastic to control his country. He couldn't charm his people any more and lead them to the promised land they hoped for. He began to arrest people who were deemed his enemy. He put anybody who had an Islamic tinge in jail and to balance that he jailed some Christian Copts as well. Coptic Pope Shenouda was put under monastery arrest, being confined to his place in the desert between Alexandria and Cairo. Journalists who were critical of him were locked up. Anybody who was suspected of less than complete loyalty was thrown into jail. It was a real crackdown. Nobody was shot, just put into handcuffs. It was a tense time.

Q: Were we doing anything?

PRECHT: No, we were not protesting. It wasn't something that we could second guess. I thought it was odd and not likely to be productive for very long, that kind of behavior, but what could you do? Sadat wasn't the kind of person you could advise on matters of internal affairs.

Q: Did the specter of Iran weigh heavily on our policy there? There seemed to be a parallel.

PRECHT: It weighed heavily on me. I can tell you, I was determined that we were not going to make the same mistakes in our embassy in Cairo that we did in Tehran. Let me just say, Roy Atherton, for whom I had worked when he was chief of the Arab-Israel desk in 1967-68 and who I had known well since then, made his career as a negotiator of Arab-Israel peace. He had been assistant secretary for the Near East, negotiator for the secretary and now ambassador to Cairo. He looked to me for the day-to-day running of the embassy. We had huge AID and military missions. I was experienced in dealing with military missions so was heavily involved with them, but to a somewhat lesser extent with the AID program. We had a consulate general in Alexandria which was under my jurisdiction. So, I had a very full plate. I took a key interest in political affairs, particularly since I had been a political officer and also because I didn't want a repeat of

the Iranian mistakes in Egypt.

When I arrived the whole senior staff of the embassy turned over. We had new political, economic and admin counselors. Practically every other position in the embassy was also filled with new people. So, it was a fresh new team, and a very good team. We had a strong embassy, I think. There were very few, if any, weak spots that I can recall.

At any rate, my instructions to the political section and the economic section were to monitor what was going on with the population of Egypt. I asked one junior economic officer to be constantly concerned with the average Egyptian's well-being. Once she did a survey of the price of bread showing the cost of various loaves and how much the average Egyptian's income was used for the staple. There was some thought at the time that - at our urging - the government might increase the price of bread. I encouraged the political section to get out and talk to sheiks and they did. We had several excellent Arabic-speaking officers.

Q: Who were some of your officers?

PRECHT: Mark Hambley was the Lawrence of Arab of Cairo. He was our internal affairs officer, arriving from Saudi Arabia. Speaking excellent Arabic, he did extremely well on the street, getting an understanding of what was going on, especially among the Islamic groups. Tom Carolan was the political counselor. Dan Kurtzer was the skillful Arab-Israel negotiating backup to the Ambassador. Doug Keene and later Edmund Hull were the political military officers. Dave Dunford was the economic officer. Shaun Donnelly and Liz McKune worked for him. They were a splendid bunch of people. Six of the eight I named made ambassador; the other two were DCMs and Consul Generals.

My job was also managing the embassy. One of the things I started to do was to pay attention to the local employees. Many of these employees had been with the embassy for several decades and they had been there when relations were broken in 1967 and restored in 1974-5. That was a very difficult time for them and I thought they deserved some recognition. I would hold meetings with the senior locals to discuss their grievances and problems and then see what could be done in Washington.

Earl Bellinger was the administrative counselor and he shared my perspective. I think we had an effective embassy although it was a huge embassy, perhaps the world's largest. Cairo is an extremely difficult place to get things done. I thought we should have a resident plumber in our apartment because nothing ever worked for very long. There were lots of complaints, but we did our best to resolve them.

To return to Sadat and his troubles. They came to a head, I guess you would say, on October 6, which was the anniversary of the outbreak of the 1973 war. Roy Atherton, with all the other ambassadors, went to witness the celebratory parade from the reviewing stand seated behind Sadat. I, as normal, came into the embassy to work, although the embassy was closed. I turned on a TV set to watch the proceedings while reading cables, etc. Suddenly I suddenly saw the TV start spinning about and heard "pow, pow, pow."

Then an announcement came on in Arabic and the television went dead. I called Eleanor Hicks, who was an Arabic language officer in the political section. I said, "Eleanor, were you watching the parade on television? Did you see what I saw? Is there something wrong with my set?" She said, "No, that was on my set too." I said, "Then there is something wrong out there at the parade, so you had better come into the office." I called the op center about 10:00 am Egyptian time and probably 4:00 or 5:00 am Washington time. I said, "I am not sure what has happened, but it seems to that there may be some trouble at this parade and I want to alert you that we face a crisis." He said, "Okay, we will stand by." Then I tried to get through via the Marine guard who had a radio connection with the ambassador's guard. The ambassador and I had cars and guards equipped with two way radios. I tried repeatedly to reach him but there was no answer. Finally, we got through and Roy sounded shaken. He told me that shots had been fired into the stand and he couldn't tell who had been hit. He didn't see Sadat or Mubarak, but he saw a couple of other people who were down, wounded or killed, including a Coptic Bishop and an Australian diplomat. He was on his way back to the embassy. Then, I called and relayed that to the op center and was told I should speak to the secretary. I spoke to Haig, woke him up, and told him. He said, "Please keep me informed." I said, "I will."

After that we kept an open line with Washington because they were keen on knowing what had happened. When Roy Atherton got back to the embassy, we organized an alert and called in all the Arabic language officers, the senior officers and the security staff to get out and learn exactly what had occurred. The Egyptian radio was saying nothing and we had no way of knowing what had happened. When the staff arrived at the embassy I sent them out to police stations, hospitals - wherever they might find information. But, Washington woke up a few hours later and then we really came in for a siege. We had this open line with Washington and they were relentless and demanding that we tell them what had happened. Well, we had no way of knowing what had happened. Roy Atherton was calling all the ministers he could reach without any luck. No one would say anything. Few would even return his call.

Then, we got the call from the Minister of Defense Abu Ghazalla who told Roy that Sadat had been slightly wounded, but was okay and Mubarak had been hit in the wrist and he was okay. The government would be making an announcement soon assuring the world that everybody was safe. It was a flat lie, I suppose because the Egyptians wanted to get their own ducks all lined up before making an announcement of Sadat's death. I relayed what we had been told to Washington. Washington was getting more and more frantic as the press bore in on them. Meanwhile, we were beginning to get bits of information from unofficial sources. That is, from somebody who was a policeman or a doctor's brother-in-law, etc. saying something bad had happened to Sadat. About 6:00 p.m. the Egyptian television began to play funeral music and then a sheik came on to chant Muslim prayers for the dead. It became obvious what had happened. So, I informed Washington of that. Then there were some remarks from Mubarak explaining that Sadat had been killed.

The Muslim custom is to bury people within 24 hours after death. The funeral was going

to be the next day. They got organized in Washington and we got organized in Cairo. We took over an entire hotel near the airport. Washington sent over a planeload of VIPs and a planeload of press. Top people arrived from every other country. Anybody of any significance seemed to come. My wife went to work with the protocol officer for the dinner after the funeral. We got the list of who was coming and an embassy officer was assigned to each of them as control officer. There were great stories out of that whole experience.

Q: I would like to catch a little flavor of that.

PRECHT: There were two women in the entourage, Jeane Kirkpatrick, ambassador to the UN and Mrs. Annenberg, who was chief of protocol. I assigned Eleanor Hicks to one or both of them and she was in attendance when Mrs. Annenberg asked her to open a coke can because she had long nails and didn't want to break one. Eleanor Hicks, a political officer who was black and a former jazz singer, said, "I don't do coke cans." The next item for those ladies was an announcement that only the men would attend the funeral. Moslem men visit the males of the family of the deceased, drink a cup of bitter coffee with them and walk behind the casket a short way to the burial site. Women do not attend. Women of the bereaved family do not attend. Ms. Kirkpatrick and Mrs. Annenberg said they were going to the funeral because they were official representatives. It took Betty Atherton, marvelous diplomat that she is, to convince them that they could be a great help to Mrs. Sadat, going to call on her at this time, and sitting with her, rather than trying to be in the procession to the burial site. They finally agreed to do that.

The list of the people who came from the US included former Presidents Nixon and Carter, former Secretaries of State Kissinger and Vance, Secretary of Defense Weinberger, Secretary of State Haig. Practically anybody who was or had been somebody in Washington was there. Then there was Bobby Brown, a rather plump lad in his late teens, from South Carolina who had written Sadat a letter when he came to Washington and they had struck up a correspondence. The Egyptian embassy put him on the official delegation. My wife had the task of doing the protocol seating for the banquet dinner at our hotel. It turned out that Henry Kissinger, a former official, was at the bottom of the list except for one person, Bobby Brown. So, he was going to be seated next to Bobby Brown at the end of the table. He said, "I did not come 3,000 miles to eat with a teenager." So, here we are. I had assigned an attractive young woman from AID as Bobby's control officer. I said to her, "Why don't you see if he wouldn't rather have a hamburger in the snack bar and forgo this formal dinner?" Well, marvelously, Bobby did and we substituted Walter Cronkite to sit next to Henry Kissinger.

Before this famous banquet took place, there was the funeral at a mosque and the usual walk behind the coffin. All of the elaborate security and diplomatic rankings completely disintegrated and the procession became one great mob scene. Security officers had little luck trying to stay near their principals and maintain some cohesion.

Q: That happened at the Nasser funeral, too.

PRECHT: That's right. It was just chaos. People got all mixed up and confused. Egyptian television showed all that and then it showed scenes of Egyptians mourning while watching the procession. It repeatedly showed scenes of the same identical Egyptians mourning. The striking thing was there was no Egyptians mourning. Nobody regretted Sadat's death. Egyptians frequently told me, "We are sorry he was assassinated, that is a terrible thing, but we aren't sorry that he is gone." So, the American government, the American embassy in Cairo, were completely unaware of this sentiment of what the people of Egypt felt about their government.

After the funeral, there was a formal call on Vice President Mubarak by heads of delegations - dozens of them. Egyptian television at that stage - and I suppose still - filmed VIPs visiting the president in complete silence. It is a silent film of people shaking hands, sitting on the sofa with a narration telling who it was seeing the President. They just don't have a clue how to jazz up television presentation. Anyway, when we got back to the hotel, we were all seated in the lobby having a drink before dinner when Roy Atherton was summoned up to Haig's room. He came back and called me aside and said, "Haig is in an absolute rage." The Secretary had had his call on Mubarak and had come back and watched the presentation of all these calls on his TV and saw the Russian representative and the French and the Israeli and the British, and he didn't see himself. Finally, when he did see himself he was sort of sandwiched in between the Ugandan and the Finn or people like that. He said to Roy, "These people have to realize that we are giving them several billion dollars a year and supporting them politically and this kind of second class treatment is an affront to our relationship. Can we depend on them? Can we rely on Egypt? This is absolutely unacceptable. I want you, Mr. Ambassador, to go and have them rectify this by giving the American Secretary of State the complete and prominent coverage our country merits." Atherton said to me, "What can I do?" I said, "You can't do anything. Who would you call and what would they do? Every Egyptian who watches this sort of thing thinks it is completely normal, this kind of artless presentation. If you tell them they have to do something like Haig wants it will take days, weeks, for it to be done and it will probably not be done. Just ignore it, he will be gone soon and will forget it." They flew out and it was all forgotten, but it made me think that we had a Secretary of State who somehow was off the beam a little bit with that kind of colossal ego. His inability to control his ego was very disturbing.

At any rate, Mr. Mubarak was elected by the legislative assembly to the presidency. He quickly put things on track very promisingly for the country.

Q: What had been the embassy's estimate of Mubarak? We had been pleasantly surprised when Sadat took over from Nasser because everybody had said that Sadat was a non-entity and a tool of Nasser and we shouldn't expect anything much from him. I would have thought there had been a lot of rethinking and looking at Mubarak more closely before he became president.

PRECHT: I think Mr. Haig - on the basis of unknown information, maybe from Israeli intelligence, or his own intuition - thought Mubarak was not to be trusted. That was my impression. The embassy had a rather neutral opinion of him. He had been a bomber pilot

in the Air Force. We hadn't known him very well. He seemed like a rather colorless individual. I mean the Egyptians called him "La Vache qui Rit," [The Laughing Cow], [the brand name of a] French cheese with a cow smiling in the background on the packaging. Mubarak was regularly pictured on television standing behind Sadat with a dumb smile, never saying anything. There was a feeling he wasn't any great shakes. Sadat didn't want anybody who was too charismatic who might threaten him; he wanted a reliable, loyal supporter with good military credentials. That is what he got in Mubarak.

But, Mubarak, on taking office, proved to be a different sort. He appointed very competent people to work for him. He let people who had been jailed out of jail, except the Coptic pope who he kept locked up because he kept the Islamic clerics locked up because they had been responsible for Sadat's assassination. He made it clear that the economy was going to be the first priority. He was well received. He was deemed to be honest whereas Sadat had a reputation of having at least tolerated corruption. Mubarak was best characterized, I guess, by a student who told an Egyptian friend of mine, "For decades we have had classy actors as president. First Nasser, then Sadat. They were always doing something exciting. Now we have a dull guy who will work from 8 to 5 every day and do a competent job. That is exactly what the country needs."

I think Mubarak was the perfect person to consolidate and restore calm. After the assassination there were shootings in the south and other places and the country was put under martial law. There were masses of soldiers everywhere. The outside world was very concerned although we went about our lives very normally. Nobody made any threats against us at the time. Mubarak helped to calm things down.

Q: Could you talk a bit about the AID program. Here you are looking at probably the major AID project that we had anywhere. There have always been these criticisms of AID that most of the money is spent on Americans in a country and the presence is so big it doesn't produce much. But, here you are looking at the real monster right in the face.

PRECHT: We had the largest AID program - apart in dollars from Israel - that the United States had ever operated. That is, Israel got what it wanted every year as a check to spend as it pleased while Egypt had to go through the project process. Accordingly, we had the largest AID mission. It was led by Don Brown, who was an exceptionally capable AID professional, extraordinarily strong in defending his organization and determined there would be no interference from the Department of State or the American ambassador, much less the DCM.

I thought the AID program wasn't producing the kind of political mileage that we could hope for. For example, one of the first projects had been to put buses on the streets of Cairo. This was before I arrived. Buses, I guess, were bought secondhand or from some shoddy manufacturer in the United States and they rapidly went to ruin. They rattled around the streets with fenders fall off, smoking, and were known as "Carter," the American gift. That was typical. The other things that they did such as sewage projects, took so long, were extremely disruptive and although ultimately beneficial, produced no mileage. I would from time to time go to a village and cut a ribbon on a new school or

village center, etc. The villagers were enormously gratified, but that was a relatively rare thing to happen. A lot of the money went for projects that AID thought were good ideas. AID professionals devised them and Egyptians signed off on them. They weren't projects that Egyptians would have spent the money on. They wanted the money to help them with their balance of payments and larger projects that we didn't want to get into.

But, the big problem with AID was staffing. They had a large staff of people, around 120 or 130, plus scores of contractors. We all considered it to be excessive. Could you get them to reduce a single division, a single body? Not at all. Roy Atherton didn't make a real effort at reduction but Nick Veliotes, who succeeded him, worked harder at it. People in Washington, however, would not budge. It was, after all, what they could do with their employees. It was not a bad post for family living compared with a lot of places that AID people had to be sent. I respected the AID staff. I thought most of them were quite good. But, there were just too many of them. That number of people, I think, is bad for the morale of the mission as a whole and for relations with the Egyptians, although I can't cite any concrete evidence to that effect. It was just that I had a sensitivity to a large American presence after my Iranian days.

We also had a large military mission. The military were keen on developing better and better relations with the Egyptians. They had pretty good connections with the Egyptian leadership who appeared to me, when I attended functions with them or meetings, to be more professionally competent - after all they had been at war - than the Iranian generals that I knew in Iran. The people that we sent out, the people to advise them, were by and large quite good. The problem that we had with the military program was that dreamers in Washington decided that we should do more with Egypt. They should be enlisted in our Cold War effort. Again Reagan policies were remote from regional realities.

Skipping ahead, CENTCOM, the regional command of the Pentagon for the Middle East [Central Command], was afraid, accordingly to what they told us, that the Russians would move their forces down through Iran to wash their boots in the Persian Gulf. It seemed to me to be a highly remote scenario. How could Russian troops make their way through Iranian resistance, however inept it might be, over the Zagros Mountains to the Persian Gulf? Any way, that was the supposed threat and the White House wanted Egypt to help them against it.

Q: I might add that in an interview with Chas Freeman, who worked with Norman Schwarzkopf back in 1990 before Saddam invaded Kuwait, he said Schwarzkopf had inherited this plan of somehow fighting a battle in the mountains to stop the Soviets from coming across Iran, which seemed ludicrous, but up to 1990 that was sort of the major thrust of CENTCOM.

PRECHT: One of the things that they wanted to do and the Egyptians allowed them to do it, was secretly to preposition materiel – tents, trucks, guns – in an Egyptian base in central Egypt. I think the Egyptians probably felt if they went to war, they might crank up those trucks themselves. Then the American administration wanted a base in Egypt because Saudi Arabia at that time didn't want to have American infidels on the soil of the

Holy Land. In the southeast part of Egypt on the Red Sea, near the Sudanese border, there is a fishing port called Ras Banas. There was an emergency Egyptian airstrip there but no real development - military or civilian - at all. People looking at the map thought that would be a good place to have an American base. I remember one meeting in which this project was launched, Poindexter, a Navy officer who was in the Reagan White House and Bud McFarlane all came over to tell us how important this initiative was. This would be a test as to whether the Egyptians were with us, etc. I was given the job, along with political/military officer Edmund Hull - this is now 1985, I guess - to negotiate Egyptian acceptance of this thing. We ended up in negotiations in the foreign ministry with Mubarak's chief foreign policy man, Osama El-Baz. What we wanted to do was to have a memorandum of understanding which would give us the right to construct the base there. Well, we would go over and have a session with Osama and he would reject certain language and accept other parts. We would take it back to Washington and they would propose, etc. This went back and forth for weeks and months.

Finally, Washington became very impatient with them. They said, "We have put together in the DOD budget, for the Corps of Engineers, money for this project. If we are going to get that money we have to be able to tell the Congress that the Egyptians approve. So get the thing wrapped up." I had told McFarlane that the much of the business of the Egyptian revolution in 1952 was about getting the British bases out of Egypt, out of the Suez Canal zone. Having a foreign base in Egypt is absolutely contrary to everything in Egyptian history. He said, in effect, "So much for history." We went back to Osama and said, "Look, we have to have a yes or no. We can't go on with this back and forth negotiation." In a short period of time the answer came back, "no." That was the end of it. All that effort and zero results. Washington was not living in the day-to-day real world of local politics - and history.

Q: This, of course, is one of the great problems about plans cooked up in Washington by people looking at a map.

PRECHT: Exactly. It is very hard to convey the regional realities to people in Washington who quite properly have a global perspective. Their agenda was the Soviet Union and China, the big threats we faced in the world, while our agenda was just a small country. Washington always seems to think the regional problems can somehow be pushed aside or smoothed over.

Q: Did the Iranian-Iraqi war have any impact outside watching these two people fighting?

PRECHT: Not really. It was interesting, when I arrived in Egypt in 1981, I asked university professors, journalists and people like that, what impact the Iranian revolution had had in Egypt. The students were enthusiastic, they said. A small country punching a great power. People in the streets overthrowing a regime backed by the Americans. I said, "Didn't they pay any attention when this new revolutionary regime began to execute people and impose restrictions on women, etc? They thought that was either lies, or propaganda or just a result of turmoil and that things would settle down soon.

Then, when Iraq invaded Iran, Egyptians favored Iraq, an Arab state against non-Arab Shia Iranians. There never has been much love between Egypt or any other Arab state and the Iranians. Each felt superior to the other. What was disruptive to Egypt was the jeopardy it placed the Egyptian workers in who were employed in Iraq. A lot of Egyptians were employed in the Persian Gulf, Jordan and Iraq and even got into the Iraqi army. That employment abroad became the biggest earner of foreign exchange for Egypt during this period.

Another active and profitable regional role for Egypt was the war in Afghanistan. We were intent on driving the Soviets with the aid of Islamic groups there. Saudi Arabia was big in this but also Egypt. Egypt had an arms manufacturing industry and was delighted to ship their arms to the mujaheddin or whoever were fighting the Soviets.

The Soviets really didn't figure very much in Egyptian thinking at this time and they didn't worry about the reaction from Moscow. President Mubarak may have trained in Russia and maintained a decent relationship but the Egyptians didn't no longer expected anything from the Russians.

Interestingly, the Reagan administration, in order to express their outrage at the invasion of Afghanistan and their abhorrence of the evil empire, prevented us from having any contact with the Russians. That seemed absurd to me. When we went to the nightly diplomatic cocktail parties we weren't supposed to talk to the Russians at all. CIA could go about their work but we were not supposed to have any kind of contact with them. I had had a relationship with the Russian counterparts before that, but had to end it. Not, that my chats would have done any good. But on the other hand you never know where you will pick up some information.

Q: It doesn't prove a damn thing.

PRECHT: I don't think it affected Soviet policy in Afghanistan the slightest.

Some of our people were deeply worried about the Egyptian economy which had been doing relatively well under Sadat but began to lose steam. Shortly after I arrived a new economic team, Dave Dunford and Shaun Donnelly, came to see me and said, "This economy is going into deep trouble - over the cliff. They are spending more than they are earning and they can't sustain it." They saw deep trouble ahead. I, having lived in Egypt before and imbued with the eternal nature of the country, could not imagine collapse. Egypt was always, in a sense, in a state of collapse. But, they were right in that things began to slow down and the Egyptian government, which was overloaded with subsidies for the poor and a booming population and terrible shortage of housing and infrastructure, had all the problems of any underdeveloped country.

Nasser had brought significant benefits to the average Egyptian after the 1952 revolution. During my first assignment in Egypt, traveling out to Delta villages, I had been able to observe the changes underway. Whenever I asked an Egyptian in a village or ordinary

people in Alexandria, what the revolution had meant to them they predictably answered, "Education for the children." Under King Farouk, in the British days, only the elite had received education. Nasser built schools and education was free through the universities. By the time I returned to Egypt, education had become a burden for the government and the people. Schools were overcrowded and didn't produce people who could pass exams. Families had to devote savings to special tutoring. There were double sessions of classes. Universities were so overcrowded that students never got to know their professors and it was amazing that anybody still got a decent education out of that system.

Similarly, the health service that Nasser established. There were clinics everywhere, free care, and heavily socialized medicine. It was fine for a limited population but virtually impossible for a large population. With the was the collapse of Nasser's system and the growing population burden, his legacy of socialist measures were costing the government millions in subsidies - a great burden on the economy. The World Bank and the American embassy began to try to persuade the Egyptians to ease out of this program but the government resisted. Sadat had experienced riots when he had tried to raise the price of bread in 1977. President Mubarak, a very cautious person, wasn't about to take that kind of a step.

One of the key things that was on our agenda was to persuade the Egyptians to raise the price of bread and other subsidized items. Finally, they took the step of introducing a new loaf of bread at two piasters a loaf which they said was a larger, improved version of the one piaster loaf. Then, gradually, they withdrew the one piaster loaf - in effect doubling the price of bread.

Q: Was there anything we could do about the economy or were we just watching it?

PRECHT: Well, we could talk to them. Our AID program didn't do much good. Towards the end we tried to use part of the AID money as a cushion if they began to put their budget in a better balance. They had competent people managing Egypt, it was just that they had these intense pressures and a very conservative attitude about what was possible with the Egyptian population. The Egyptian population is notoriously passive and acquiescent to authority. But, then on occasion, it can explode and when it does for a brief period you are in big trouble before it settles back down again. So, they were very wary of that kind of explosion.

One of our big activities in Cairo was visitors. It seems every congressman, every senior government official - from domestic as well as international agencies - visited. We had hundreds of visitors a year. The embassy, of course, had to manage all of that. We were constantly having to divert officers from normal duties to be control officers for a congressional delegation or some other type of visitor. I did what I could to try to limit the flow, but it was impossible. For example, the Department of HEW had projects in Egyptian medical science financed by the money we generated by PL 480 funds which they used very generously for their own travel back and forth and the travel of their Egyptian counterparts. I thought it was of little value to anybody except the participant and I tried to squash it. Well, they invoked C. Edward Koop, the surgeon general, to

defend this project, and I had several collisions with him. I lost.

The point is, it is extremely difficult for the American government to change any kind of existing program. And when you are overseas to buck what a Washington agency wants to do is also extremely difficult because it is rare that you find the State Department willing or effective in backing you up to take on another agency. But I tried my best with a couple of cases.

Every day, sometimes three times a day, I would have a telephone call in the morning over the classified line with our desk officer. That capability really facilitated this communication. I don't know how it is done now, but that was an improvement over the experience I had when I was in Rome and was control officer for the overflowing of a dam in northern Italy and the dispensing of our $25,000 of AID money. There was such confusion in cables between us and Washington that I remember Ambassador Reinhardt telling me very solemnly that there was nothing else to be done, I would have to telephone Washington. Then when I called, everyone in the office got on the phone to talk to me. In Cairo, I spoke every day over the classified line and sometimes the unclassified line to the Egyptian Desk at the Department.

Back to visitors. We had plenty of them. We had not only congressional visitors, but we had people working on Arab-Israel peace and the Lebanon fighting (Phil Habib was the negotiator for that). It was always of interest to go out to the airport and pick up Phil Habib. He would fly in on a small plane, perhaps with one aide. If we had a four star general he would come in on a very large plane with a complete entourage of people. But, Phil was of the old school. A very simple, direct person and the Egyptians loved him. When the ambassador wasn't there, I would take these people to see Mubarak, otherwise take them to see various ministers. So, I got to know the Egyptian leadership very well.

There was one little episode that merits mention. We had two concurrent House delegations come over, both sponsored by Jewish groups who were taking them to Israel and Egypt. The sponsors came along with them. With the sponsors and the two groups there would have been about 20 people. I said that that was entirely too many. To prove it, I called up the Egyptian chief of protocol and he said, "Oh, no. Nobody but the principals can come, along with you, to see the president. There is just not room." So, I said they couldn't come. Well, the sponsors prevailed upon the congressmen in one delegation and the congressmen said that if the sponsors can't come we are not going. I said, "You will offend the president." They said, "We are not going to offend our sponsors." So, I took one group of Congressmen (led by Dick Cheney who understood my position and was supportive). The other group went somewhere else. When I brought in the Cheney group Mubarak said, "Where is everyone? I thought there was going to be a big group." But, it struck me basically as a imposition. Why should these private citizens because they have money be able to buy their way into an audience with the president of Egypt? Tourism partly at US Government expense.

Q: What's new?

PRECHT: Whenever the opportunity presented itself, I would offer a lunch at my house for visiting VIPs. We happened to have, I think, the best cook in Egypt, an Egyptian who could read Gourmet magazine. I would stage a stag lunch, my wife wasn't interested in that kind of thing. I would invite academic people, journalists, politicians, ministers and most of them would come. Egyptians are quite social in that way. Those functions were some of the most interesting times that I had in Egypt. Once I invited Osama El-Baz, the president's adviser, to have lunch with Dick Murphy, the assistant secretary. We had a very good conversation. When Osama was leaving, he said, "I enjoyed myself very much, but don't you think that we aren't aware of all these left wingers you are having here." Who knows the power of the Egyptian secret service. They liked to foster the belief that it was a potent organization.

One other thing I should mention, I guess, is Betty Atherton, the ambassador's wife. I had known Betty obviously when I had worked for her husband and then when I worked on the Iran desk. At the end of the revolution we began to evacuate staff from Tehran. I was completely absorbed in the Ross Perot affair, trying to save the Shah and getting people out and my day was completely full. Betty came to see me and said, "Who is taking care of the people who have been evacuated?" I said, "I assume the admin section." "They are not. These people are being brought out of Teheran in typical Department fashion and are assumed to have parents and grandparents that they and the children can stay with. Some of them don't and are thrown into the street receiving an allowance of $1.90 a day." So, Betty said, "I'm going to do something." I said, "Betty, that is wonderful. You do it." When she sets her mind to something she gets results. She organized the Department of State. We had a meeting with Vance and these people in which they voiced their complaints. One junior officer stood up and said, "I'm sleeping outside the Department with the homeless because I can't afford anything else." She got them taken care of. She was splendid in that way.

When I arrived in Cairo, Betty had an office in the ambassador/DCM suite which a lot of people thought was highly irregular. She had a Top Secret security clearance so that she could go to staff meetings when she wanted to. Her interest was in the American population which was quite large in Egypt, something over 10,000 including AID personnel and American businesses, etc. And, there was a big American school which was developing a problem with drugs, etc. So, there were a lot of social problems that she felt were inadequately addressed in what was a small American town. She got money from somewhere and brought in two sort of social workers and set up a house in Maadi, a suburb where most of the American families lived. The center became a place where teenagers and family members could go with their problems. She was very active in managing and handling that organization. It was a very commendable effort that she achieved. When Betty Atherton goes after something, no one stands in her way. I don't know if the program survived after her time. When she returned to Washington she tried to extend that program to other posts.

Q: *Going back to a couple of things. In the first place, way back in the Iran time, how did you get on when the dependents of the hostages in Iran would come in? This must have been a very difficult thing to deal with.*

PRECHT: It was difficult for me. As I said, when I went to the State Department that first day, my wife came with me. The Operations Center gave her and other wives a room with a bank of telephones. So there were Marian, my wife, Penny Laingen, wife of the chargé, Sylvia Josif, wife of a retired foreign service officer, the wife of Harry Barnes, Moorhead Kennedy's wife. Marian and Sylvia Josif were there every day. The others were in and out. Mrs. Kennedy and Catherine Koob, who was the wife of a school principal in Pakistan who happened to be in Tehran on the day of the siege, organized a group of supporters that went on missions to heads of government in Europe. They appeared on television and thought that dramatizing the plight of the hostages and their conditions would help. They were constantly being interviewed. Mrs. Kennedy didn't care for me because she resented the fact that I had enlisted her husband to go to Iran and wouldn't allow her to go because we wouldn't allow dependents who were not working. She didn't want to work. She wanted to do her real estate work in Washington. I did allow her to use the telephone to talk to her husband as long as she wanted. But, she always, I think, associated me with his plight.

They wanted to know everything that was happening. Well, not very much was happening and what was happening was extremely closely held. We just couldn't afford to bring them into the picture and they resented that. But, basically I got along with them very well. Having my wife involved probably helped me. The State Department leadership was quite responsive to them and there were several meetings held in which dependents were brought in from all around the country and met with the president and got briefings. People did what they could, but they had their own concerns. Marian, speaking to these people on a continuing basis became aware of the stress in their lives and the personal problems that they were having with children or with in-laws or health problems, etc. The Op Center group of wives became a focus point for the dependents. After that hostage experience, we were very much alive in Cairo to the concerns of families at the embassy in a way I think we had never been before.

Q: With the Reagan administration coming out of the right wing of the Republican party, particularly their stand on abortion, etc., and looking at Egypt where birth control seemed to be accepted, Mrs. Sadat made a big point of this, did this cause any problems for you?

PRECHT: No, we had a family planning program, which was largely ineffective in Egypt, abortion simply being out of the question in a Muslim country. Mrs. Sadat had been an advocate of women's rights but after her husband's death she was shuffled into the background. She had been quite prominent and I don't think the replacement regime wanted to hear much from her. They weren't taking on family planning as an issue initially. It was a very sensitive thing. Subsequently, towards the end of my tour or later when I returned on visits, they realized the gravity of the problem and you began to see advertisements for condoms. But, the Reagan administration didn't interfere on that point.

The thing that struck me about the Reagan tenure at our embassy was that he had made a

big thing about reducing the size of government. Well, as a matter of fact, more people traveled to Cairo on government funds than ever before. It seemed to me that nothing was cut. There was this lavish expenditure on non-essential matters that reflected a desire to break the budget, to move it up to such an extent that it would become necessary later or to cut back drastically and the cuts would be in programs that Reagan didn't care for. My theory is that they boosted expenditures initially in order to be forced later on to cut back to a balanced budget. There was no indication whatsoever that we were in a period of budget retrenchment when I was in Cairo. It was quite the reverse.

Q: During this 1981-85 period, what about relations with Libya?

PRECHT: I don't remember whether we had relations with Libya at that time. But the Egyptians wanted to maintain a decent relationship with Libya because a lot of Egyptians worked over there and was a good source of income. So, their counseling was to take it easy on the Libyans, but we didn't give much heed to them. We had our problems with Qadhafi and the Egyptians weren't fond of him, but they did want to maintain a decent kind of relationship.

A more serious problem in the neighborhood was with Sudan, where Nimieri was toppled in 1985. In the olden days under British rule, Egypt and the Sudan were one country. Egypt didn't want to take over the Sudan, but they did regard the sources of the Nile, which flowed through Sudan and principally came from Ethiopia, as critical. So, they were always quite concerned about what was happening in Sudan. We regularly consulted with them on Sudan which was a sensitive subject for Egyptians. They were keenly aware that the Sudanese felt Cairo regarded them as inferior and tried to control them. Butros Ghali, who was minister of state for foreign affairs, was kind of my beat and Roy Atherton did business with the foreign minister, Hassan Ali. Butros had Africa and was constantly traveling and perhaps even then was campaigning for the Secretary Generalship of the UN. As a Copt he probably didn't have the same kind of influence with the Arab states, but he did speak fluent French, so France was his beat as well.

Q: During this time, Israel invaded Lebanon. How did that play?

PRECHT: That was in 1982. The Egyptians were outraged because there was a general perception that we Americans under Secretary Haig had given the green light to Israel to invade.

Q: That has never been resolved has it?

PRECHT: No. Whether that is true or not I don't know but that was the perception. Mubarak, contrary to Sadat, allowed the press pretty free range. They weren't allowed to criticize him, but they could criticize America and Israel with relish. The Egyptians wanted to keep demonstrations under control but at one point students from American University in Cairo wanted to march on the embassy to show their displeasure. The police wouldn't allow them to do so. So, I volunteered to walk over to the university and allow them to express their displeasure to me in the auditorium, which I did. The

interesting thing was that there weren't very many students in the auditorium, there were mainly faculty members. The people who were the most vociferous in denouncing the United States and Israel were the Americans, the faculty.

Another anecdote: During the weeks after the Israeli invasion I was chargé. Butros Ghali would call me over to the Foreign Ministry and give me a lecture on the terrible things Israel was doing in Lebanon. While I returned to the embassy to report to the Department, he would summon the Egyptian press and describe our meeting. The following day, with the Department's response in hand, I would return to deliver it to Butros. Another lecture from him; another press interview for him. This pattern persisted for days. Then, one day, I read in the Egyptian press an account of a meeting between Butros and me over Lebanon - when there hadn't been a meeting. I telephoned him and asked how he explained that. He replied, "So you saved yourself a trip over here." It was essential for the Egyptian government to be seen playing a part in this crisis, a role of some importance - when, in fact, Washington paid little or no attention to them.

Quite plainly, Egypt's relations with Israel suffered a lot. Another thing that got in the way of the relationship was when Israel withdrew from the Sinai, they did not withdraw from one corner that was up against their border and the Jordanian border where they come together at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. Taba is the name of the area. It was said that one of the Israeli leaders had an interest in a resort hotel on that spit of land and wanted to retain it. They wanted to retain it to show the Egyptians and other Arabs who might subsequently negotiate with Israel that international boundaries were not sacrosanct and Israel could impose its will by carving out a piece for itself. But, the Egyptians were not giving. Sadat vowed that he would regain every inch of Egyptian territory and Mubarak was not budging. The Israelis weren't either. Finally it was left to the World Court, I believe, and was resolved in favor of Egypt. That kind of thing just exacerbated relations and contributed to the cold peace that the Israelis regularly complained about. The Israeli ambassador to Egypt was Shimon Shamir, an academic, an excellent man who spoke Arabic, but because of who he was, very few Egyptians would have anything to do with him. This was unfortunate because he had a lot to contribute.

Q: Did you find the Israelis a good source of what was going on there?

PRECHT: Not nearly as good a source as they were in Tehran. I suppose they had sources but we didn't use them. Much better sources of information were the English and French. I also used to see fairly regularly the DCM from the Hungarian embassy who had had long service in Egypt, spoke Arabic and knew the country extremely well. There was an extremely active and large diplomatic corps in Egypt. Every country in the world thought it had to be represented there and they all had national days. I went to almost every national reception. Roy Atherton went to every one. When Nick Veliotes came on board he stopped going to them because he didn't enjoy that kind of life and I had to go to them all.

Q: How long were you working with Nick?

PRECHT: Roy left in 1983. I was at a party, Roy was on home leave and I received a call from Dave Schneider in NEA saying they would like to get agrément for Nick Veliotes right away. I said it was Saturday night. He said, "Please do your best." So, I called Osama El-Baz who was notoriously unreachable but somehow the embassy telephone operator found him. I told him that we would like to have agrément for Nick Veliotes. He said, "I will get back to you." Within half an hour he did. I conveyed that to Washington. I don't think Roy Atherton knew about it until he read it in the newspaper. He was very popular with the Egyptians. The most popular American was Hermann Eilts who was the first ambassador after the break in relations. He was regarded and I think still is as a father figure by many Egyptians. He spoke Arabic as did his wife and they were regarded as family. Atherton didn't speak Arabic but still was well regarded. Nick Veliotes was more out to do a job rather than to win hearts and minds. He also had some heart problem and wasn't going to over exert himself. He didn't put in the hours that Roy did which meant I put in a lot of hours. He was a good man to work for but a different kind of personality than Roy Atherton.

Q: Did the Achille Lauro happen during your time in Cairo?

PRECHT: That happened after my time there.

Q: By the time you left in 1985, how did you see Islamic fundamentalism?

PRECHT: Well, I thought it was a real concern. When I made my farewell call on President Mubarak, he said, "Henry, you were here four years and we didn't have an Islamic revolution." I think he had been wary of me all along. The assassination of Sadat and the troubles at that time never reappeared. But, still it seemed plain to me to contrast Egypt then with Egypt in Nasser's time - more women in head scarfs, more veiling of students in the eighties than in the sixties. All of that had some social as well as political meaning. You never knew exactly how much of one or how much of the other. Plainly Egypt was changing. The Islamic tide had risen in Egypt. If you went, as I did, to a minister's home during Ramadan they would adjourn to another room and pray. It was the sort of thing you didn't experience previously in Egypt. I think during Mubarak's time the religiosity in Egypt definitely became deeper and more widespread.

At any rate, after I had had four years in Cairo, Nick Veliotes asked me to stay on for another year. However, in an effort to cut down on AID's staff and others I had encouraged people not to stay longer than four years. I really believed that when you have been in a country four years you get to know the answers to all the questions and it is best to move on. So, I moved on. Bill Clark succeeded me, coming from Tokyo. I thought he would have the most severe cultural shock of anyone in the Foreign Service - coming from Japan where everything worked as soon as you uttered a thought, to Egypt where it took weeks for things to happen.

So I came back to Washington. I had not been offered a job by personnel. They had suggested to the ambassador in Rome, Chuck Raab, that I might be his DCM, and that pleased me. He called telephoned me but I think he already had somebody in mind

because he said, “I want somebody who speaks Italian.” I said, “I used to speak Neapolitan.” He said, “Well, I think I have somebody.” So, I lost out on that one. Then I was offered DCM in Saudi Arabia and probably could have gone there as Walt Cutler’s deputy, but I asked my wife and she said no. I thought that after all these years of her following me, I should follow her one time. So we came home. I was slated to go to Fletcher as the diplomat in residence. I asked Hank Cohen if I was still on the blacklist at the Reagan White House for an ambassadorial appointment and he said he would check. He called me back and said, “Yes, you are.”

I went to Fletcher for a year and Personnel still didn’t have a job for me and wanted me to come back to Washington. I said that I was not coming back to walk corridors. By that time we had our house in Maine and I said that I would like to stay up here, give me six more months. So, I retired in January 1987.

Q: Let’s talk a little bit about Fletcher. You were there from 1985-86?

PRECHT: I was there from 1985-87. I was the diplomat in residence. When I arrived Ted Eliot, who was a friend and the dean, welcomed me there but then left taking a job out on the west coast. So, his residence, right on the campus was vacant and the Fletcher administration installed me in it because they said that if we don’t put you in it the university will take it away from us. But, if we say we have a State Department VIP in it, they won’t touch it. You will have to move out when we get a new dean. So, I stayed there for four or five months. I taught a course in Middle Eastern politics and economics, a graduate course. And I taught an informal one at the Kennedy Center on the Middle East. I attended lots and lots of lectures around town and gave some. I began to write my memoirs which I never finished. I stayed into the next year doing the same sort of thing.

After I retired in January, I completed the academic year. During those months I was approached by the Cleveland Council of World Affairs to come out and replace former Ambassador Coby Swank as the president. I knew nothing about Cleveland and decided that was not what I wanted to do. Finally they invited me to come out to see the city and I did. I liked the spirit. It was obviously a rusted out city in decay but it had a very strong booster leadership and it has an excellent museum and orchestra and theaters. So, we moved out, bought a house and my wife worked as a volunteer in the textile department of the Museum. I had a wonderful time in Cleveland running the World Affairs Council. I also taught courses in the university. I used to write op-eds for the Plain Dealer and other papers. I conducted interviews of Council speakers on local public radio. Marian and I led tours to Egypt and Turkey. It was a rich experience. Then we decided to move back to Washington which we did in 1996.

Q: Well, thank you very much.

PRECHT: You are welcome.

End of interview