WOMAN Sir Simon, could you tell me how much influence Britain had in Iran before the upsurge of nationalism in 1951.
MAN Britain was probably the most important power in Persia up until '51. There had always been rivalry between the Soviet Union and Britain for, I would almost say the control and the influence over Iran during the war we divided it, and we were responsible for getting rid of the Shah's father, so that up until 1951, both politically and because of our considerable economic state with an Anglo Iranian Oil Company, we were probably the most important power, although clearly the Soviet Union and the United States were also very important, and immediately after the war, the Soviet Union tried to extend that influence, by taking Asvijan which they held for a time for no good reason evacuated.
WOMAN So were we actually prepared for the events of Spring 1951, in other words .........assassination, and replacement by Doctor.......or did it take us completely by surprise.
MAN One is never prepared for assassination of a Prime Minister, such as........, but certainly the two Oriental councillors in our embassy Colonel Wheeler and Lance Palmer were extremely well informed, and were anxious that the position
was by no means stable, and they had been working very hard, er with the oil company hoping to improve the terms of an agreement that could be offered to the Iranian's, because one could feel that pressure was building up, and you wouldn't be able to keep the old position very much longer.

But we were in fact quite surprised.

We were surprised with......was assassinated, I think ones always surprised when somebody is assassinated, but a lot of intelligent observers realised that things were getting very difficult.

And what kind of government did Doctor......represent.

He represented a real Iranian nationalist government, one could say that it was probably the first representation of the Iranian people, he had tremendous support, and was hailed with very great enthusiasm. Personally as a young man, I was initially completely in sympathy with his movement, because they were going to re-establish Iran, as a great nation as an independant nation, free of great power control. And this by itself is admirable.

How did Great Britain react to the nationalisation of Anglo Iranian Oil.

They were very angry, they said that this was illegal, and they expected that there would be immediate compensation. And er, the Stokes Mission was sent out, and there was a great deal of ........with ........who at that time was playing a brilliant political role, you think of this funny old man, he pretended to be about a hundred, I think he wasn't more than about seventy, he was always in his hospital bed, he received ambassadors in his hospital bed, he made fabulous
speaches to the people, he spoke I remember once for four and a half hours, at the end of which he said, perhaps this is the last time you will hear my voice, well I will shed the last drop of my blood to save my beloved Iranian people from Imperialism and Imperialistic oil companies. And of course the old boy was on top of the world, he was tough and really ready to do anything, there was a story about him once in the......in the Iranian parliament when he was making a speach, and he made another one of these marvellous passionate speaches, and at the end, he fainted, and he was carried out by four of his ...... henchmen, and it was noticed just as he was leaving, he opened one eye and he looked up and went, another time he used to eat water mellons and er wuld appear to be ...... blood, in fact it was water mellon juice. He was a great actor, but he was a marvellous politician, and at that time he had all the people with him. Everywhere you went, they would say......Doctor.......Doctor Mohamed..........which means long live Doctor.......the beloved Prime Minister of Iran, and they didn't care much what he did, he clobbered the imperialists, he nationalised the oil company, Iran was a country again, it was great stuff, fairly moving. Were we humiliated at what he'd done.

I suppose in a sense we were, we were angry and upset, and er of course it was a very important interest that we wanted to sort out.

So we weren't in a mood to make any concessions.

Oh yes, we were in-spite of that, we would have been prepared to make an agreement that would have been quite favourable to
...........and he was there, he was the man to be dealt with, and we did really try to make an agreement with him, and he operated like a carpet seller, and er every time the price of the carpet went up, and er he even sold the carpet in the evening, but the following morning he'd say sorry er I want.......because he was incapable of concluding a final agreement. He was a brilliant negotiator, up to the moment of concluding the agreement, and then he stopped. We did try very hard.

The American's believed that we could and should make a settlement with Doctor.......in fact a compromise and that his government was anti communist, and in fact was not a threat to the west, how did our own view differ from that.

Well initially one hoped that he was really not a threat to the West, and that this was a genuine nationalist government, and not communist, and .......himself was not a communist, and if he had been able to control the Iranian's and keep a proper nationalist policy, it would have been right to do a deal with him, if he for his part had been prepared to, but it became clear gradually that he was not in control of the communists, they had helped him to power, but they were manoeuvring him and it seemed that the longer he stayed in power, the less his control and the greater control of the communists. So that if the thing roled a year or two with him power, there seemed every danger that the communists would take over. And one came to that conclusion fairly soon, at last I think in 1951, but certainly when I was in Tehran in 1952, we thought that this was the way things were going.
WOMAN

How seriously did Britain pursue the negotiations with Doctor.......and why didn't we make the concessions that American had been asking for.

MAN

Well we made considerable concessions, and we did pursue the negotiations right through '51 and right through '52. And it was very serious, because I remember I had the honour of working with George Middleton who was then our ........a brillian man if there ever was one, and who was extremely good with ........and he used to go and see him two and three times a week, I couldn't go because unfortunately ........spoke French, so I couldn't go and interpret. But George used to come back from these meetings saying I think that we have got it this time, I think old ........is going to agree and I was always rather pesimistic and he said Oh Sam you are so bloody negative, we've really done it this time. All you think about is his old reactionaries. I said now you'll see, and he came back the next day and of course ........had shifted his ground, and there was no agreement, and it went on like this, we were very serious, right through 1952, trying to come to terms, I don't remember now it's so long ago, what difference there was between what the American's thought we should do, and what we thought we should do, but I don't think that almost whateverwe'd offered unless it would have been a complete compitulation that we could have made an agreement with him. He was not a man who made agreements.

WOMAN

But did we seriously want to settle with Doctor..........

MAN

Oh yes, certainly we did, if we could have settled with
MAN CONT
Doctor.......and he would then have had a financial
stability that the settlement would have given him,
it would have given him greater power to hold the forte
against the communists.

WOMAN
How quickly did you decide when you arrived in Tehran
in March '52, that Doctor.......should really be thrown
out.

MAN
I would say very very quickly indeed, within a few weeks.
Because er he seemed as I said to be unable to conclude
any positive agreement, and one could see that the communist
party was increasing.

WOMAN
Can you say when you first started seeing the ......brothers
and under whose instructions.

MAN
I went to see the ......brothers for the first time in
March 1952, and it was of course the policy of the British
government that we should keep in general touch with them,
but we were not doing anything, we were simply keeping
close contact and talking with them. They were, they were
a lovely treo, I always remember them because they never
appear to take anything seriously, and even when they went
to prison for a little while, in that summer of '52,
they had everything laid on, they had all their meals sent
up, they had telephone communication with the outside world,
they had their girlfriends to visit them, everything as if
they hadn't been in prison. They were wonderful operators.
Very stimulating.

WOMAN
What was the purpose of our seeing them, and in fact paying
the money we did as I believe.

MAN
Well first of all it was really er a sort of opinion sounding
exercise, they were in......

How seriously were we pursuing these negotiations,
Well we were pursuing them very seriously. And we
hoped that they would work, but as there was some doubt
as to whether they would work we had a contingency plan.
Can you tell me what that plan was.
And this plan was that we would muster public support
against......and that we would induce the Shah to
appoint somebody else who would be easier to negotiate
with. And erm we hoped that this would be non violent
and we thought that as the......regime ran on, people would
get more and more fed up, economic conditions would get
more and more difficult, and that the bassar particularly
which is very powreful as well as the mullers would be
discontented and would be prepared by a sort of popular
demonstration to shake the position of......and that the
Shah would appoint a new Prime Minister.
How strong was the Shah in this period.
The Shah was exceedingly weak, it seems strange to say
that now when he is regarded as the wicked ruthless
dictator, but he was.......and he was afraid and he just
didn't know what to do. He didn't like......he realised
that......was threatening his position, but he was
unable to screw up the courage needed to dispose of......
When he did once he got into terrible troubles over........
And later it was again very very difficult to screw him up
to take an effective action at all.
WOMAN: Can you tell us when did you first start seeing the brothers, and under whose instructions.

MAN: I started seeing the brothers in March 1952, and this was a policy of our government and of the embassy in order to have a contingency plan incase the negotiations didn't succeed.

WOMAN: How were they to assist in the overthrow of Doctor and why were they the suitable type of people.

MAN: They were suitable because they had er a very wide range of contacts, particularly in the Bassar, and the money, and the hopefully monied classes were getting worried, they saw that their prosperity was being threatened and opinion was building up amongst those classes against ...and they also had contacts with the ...with the ... and a sort of nurtured religious movement going through to the people and a little bit of rend a crowd sure to have provided a strong popular demonstration against......and in favour of the Shah. And the brothers claimed that they were able to do this, and indeed as it proved they were.

WOMAN: Were we paying them money and what was this for.

MAN: We were paying them a small amount of money, I don't no because I wasn't involved myself, but this was for passing a few .........to a likely lad, paying the crowds, you can't do anything in Iran or anywhere else without money, but the interesting part about this operation was the small amount that was used for the results achieved.

WOMAN: Could you tell us about the......operation.

MAN: I think operation is almost putting it too high, it wasn't a really concerted operation of any sort. Er, .....knew
that er if he came into power we would be pleased and
it was likely that he would be able to negotiate with us
I don't say that he would have given us all we wanted, but
he would have been much more reasonable to negotiate with,
than.........had got into a huff about something, I can't
remember exactly what it was, and the Shah then appointed
........but it was clearly premature because popular feeling
was still very strong in favour of.......and the national
front,.......was in the light of hinge-sight not the right
man and he came too soon but this was not I would say a
real erm covert operation that failed. It wasn't as high
as that.

WOMAN You went to see.......I understand.

MAN I went to see him and I thought he was quite a perky old
boy, but he was in his seventies. And er one wondered if
he was to be the leader of the nation, but I suppose that
it was worth a try.

WOMAN Was it a big set back for us when this event failed.

MAN Yes. It was a set back, I think one should probably have
know that it wouldn't work, but obviously it set us back,
if he'd have come in it would have saved a great deal of
trouble and a year or two.

WOMAN Can you tell us why General.......was considered a suitable
candidate, and what type of government did he want to have.
Can you tell us why General ........was considered a suitable
candidate, in 1952, and what type of government did he want
to have.

MAN General.......was considered a suitable candidate, firstly
because he was tough, and had courage, secondly a good point
in his favour was that he'd been put in prison by the
British during the war for collaborating with the German's.
Er, thirdly he was er well er regarded by the American's and he was well regarded by the Sháh, and it seemed that he would get sufficient popular support as well as having sufficient strength to cope with this very difficult situation.

You went to see him as well.

I went to see General ..........on one lovely Autumn afternoon I drove up in an ancient car parked about a hundred yards away from the General's house, I had a puncture, and the General himself looking very handsome came and helped me to change the wheel. And we had an interesting little talk.

How did he strike you?

I thought that he was a fun man. He'd got lots of humour and er a real Persian..........he seemed tough, he wanted to be quite sure that the Shah was with him, and the American's. But he was very ill-disposed to..........he could see that ..........was leading the country to hell on a wheel-barrow. And he obviously liked the idea of power and all the perks that went with power. But he was an entertaining chap to be with.

Was, what was the effect of Iran breaking off diplomatic relations, with Britain, was this a set-back to our plans.

It was a set back because we couldn't operate on the spot, and I think it's always unfortunate and makes things more difficult if you don't have diplomatic relations. And we couldn't negotiate on the spot, nor could we er continue our contingency plan from an Iranian base.
But, what did you in fact do when you left Iran.

Er if you are asking me personally what I did, I went to Beruit where I was going to have a lovely job sitting on the mediterranean but before I did that I talked er in Beruit with Lord Derbyshire about the future, and then I went off to Washington with Monty Woodhouse to talk to the American's.

Did you in fact discuss any possible ....... with the American's in Beruit.

In Beruit I don't remember talking about that very much, we talked about the general situation, but we didn't go into any details of a coup....

Can you now tell us about what you did when you got back to London.

I didn't do much in London, what I did most was er in Washington wehre I'll tell you that if you'd like to know. We went there really, I would have said to pursuade the American's at that stage, that we weren't going to get anywhere with .........and that his remaining in power was very dangerous to both our interests, and also to tell them a little bit about the means we had at our disposal for changing the government. And we had a very interesting time there, we saw.......and Alan Dallas and some number of state department officials, and their attitude at the time was well if we can still make do with.........we would like to do it. There were varying opinions with various people, but er at one time one official said gee I hope old......doesn't die on us. And er because he thought that old......was just the man to make a deal with, but that was not the general opinion. And we felt that after we had been
in power would eventually lead to a communist take over and that point having been made and er they having been convinced of the......of er our brothers, erm the field for close co-operation. And with the new er regime the new administration it seemed better, there was a little point that pleased me during this storm,...president Isenhower just having been elected, one of them said well .........we don't like soldiers in government, but apart from that little thing they accepted that there should be and they all agreed that......was the man.
Why couldn't we or didn't we persuade the Shah to launch this operation?

The Shah as I said earlier as we were talking was very weak very ...... and he would not have been prepared to launch such an operation at the time because he thought he would probably loose, he was aware of the strength of ...... and the strength of public opinion that was supporting ......... and indeed if he had launched it too early, it might well have gone off at half cock.

Why did we need the American's on our side in this.

Well as a matter of general principle I think we should always work closely with the American's, there was another unfortunate incident a little later when we didn't and you know what happened, but really our interests in Iran are basically the same, there may have been some small oil company rivalries but they were not important, the great anglo American interest was that Iran should remain the friend of the west and should not be taken over by the communists, it was obviously sensible that both on the general principle of combining and because the great American resources that we should work together on this, anything else would have been foolish and might not have worked.

Could we have in fact launched the coup without the American's practically speaking.

We might have done because we had very good contacts, and er we er knew Persians and the people concerned and not very
much money or many resources were involved. But on the other hand I think both the Shah and General.... would have been unhappy to do it just for the British, they would like to have felt that the American's were with them, after all we had been to some extent the enemy and the Anglo Iraninian company had not entirely endeared themselves to the Iranian people.

Could the American's have in fact successfully staged a coup without our contacts.

I think they probably could, they certainly had the resources though our contacts I think, although I'm biased were the best possible, and I think that the way it was done, the combination of our contacts with American resources was the best way of doing it.

Can you say exactly what the resources were.

The American resources? I can't tell you exactly, except that they are a great and mighty nation with lots of wealth and lots of people, and er good information from Iran, and they always had an embassy in Iran, they were on the ground and we weren't, and that was very important.

Do you think that the Iranian opposition as you knew them would have housted.......themselves.

I doubt if the Iraninian opposition in '52, '53 would have been strong enough without prodding to get rid of Doctor....., and the danger was that as he stayed in power the communists became stronger, and the time would have come when no opposition could have got rid of Doctor .......without force.
Firstly what was the effect of Suez on .....position in Iraq?

The effect of Suez on .....position in Iraq was disastrous because up until that time he had been our probably principle ally in the Middle East, and we had had excellent relations with him, and he was a great rival of president Nassah and secretly I believe....said there would be no bad idea if we took action against President Nassah. But he did say that if you take action the one thing you must never do is to do it with the Israeli's, and much better not to do it with the French. Well the government of that time did all those things, which made the position of a pro-British Arab Prime Minister absolutely intolerable. He should strictly speaking have cut off the oil and showed his disapproval of the British. But he murmured a little, but did nothing at all, as a result everybody said there you are.......studge, enemy of Arab nationalism.

Was it known generally in the Arab world that he had supported the British?

Well it was not known that he had whispered that it might be a good idea, but it was certainly known that he took no action. Because other Arab states took greater or smaller action against us.

And how did that influence his position? His strength in the country?
The Suez weakened the position of ... absolutely disastrously, he was already not too strong, because he was out of date, he was relying on support from the Sheiks, his development plan, though admirable, was going too slowly and was not showing results, so the people thought that the money was all going into the pockets of the government, and the Royal Family, and no benefit was coming to them, and they also saw Iraq ally of Britain in the Baghdad pact, which was against Nassah. So that his somewhat already......position was made very much weaker by Suez.

From your experience of the nationalist in Iraq, what was the nature of their opposition to ......

I was very fortunate that on the very first day I arrived in Iraq, almost before I got off the plane, I found myself at a lovely supper eating fish by the Tigeress with a large group of nationalist politicians, who told me very simply firstly they had been indignant about Britain after the first world war, in not letting them have an independent United Arab State, and then imposing a mandate, but at the moment their indignation was first that we were supporting ......against Nassah against what they saw as a true Arab......that because of us Iraq was outside the mainstream of Arab nationalism, and that in the international political play and internally by supporting a government that was as they saw oppressive and repressive, and fudel we were hindering a proper progress towards a democratic neutral nationalist Iraq.

Er you were aware of nationalist pressures, but the British in Whitehall thought that Iraq was safe and pro British. now why was there a difference between the two.
Well you say that the British in Whitehall thought that Iraq was safe, they could see that there was a risk, but they still thought that was in control, and was a powerful and a persuasive man he and our Ambassador had extremely good relations and although our ambassador did indeed warn him that it was necessary to make economic reforms, and to lessen the power of the sheiks, took no notice, and said that the sheiks were reliable and were his main support, and he knew his people and there was not going to be any trouble. Further more we know that he was warned by his chief of secret police by politicians and by the army that something was brewing and he was indeed warns against Brigader...... but he said.....is a friend of mine he wouldn't do anything against me.

But you were in a position to be able to tell both your ambassador and presumably......the danger from the nationalist forces in the country you had conversations with the nationalists.

I had a lot of conversations with the nationalists, I would mention particularly the splendid man called......who later became prime minister of Iraq to my regard was my tutor in Arab nationalism and he sketched the situation precisely as it was, as I told you earlier at our dinner, and I of course told this to the ambassador who thought that I was representing a section of opinion but not the total indeed he said to me this is all very interesting, but I think that you have got the balance wrong. He was talking to different people, and they told him different things.
MAN CONT: But I would like to say quite clearly that the ambassador was aware that there was a danger and that he did mention this both to ....... to the King and to the Crown Prince. And he said that they must get on with reforms or there was going to be trouble and the development plan must be something that the people could understand.

WOMAN: And what was ...... reaction to this, do you have any comment about ....... position at that time.

MAN: ....... position was that he was too old, he had been a very great man, he was out of touch, he thought he knew his people he had known them, but he didn't know the modern people, and he didn't understand post Nassah nationalism he was unaware of the tremendous appeal that er president Nassah had, I remember going round the country at the end of '57, and everywhere they had these little transistors, and they all had the voice of the Arabs, and the voice of the Arabs was tearing her up to pieces, as imperialist studges, traitors to the Arab cause, the people of Iraq in the North all said that ...... sorry got that one wrong, said that Nassah was ...... the people in the north said that Nassah was the prophet, and in the south they said that Nassah was Alah. So that there was this terrific Arab nationalist inspiration that was stiring up the whole of the population against ......the King and the Crown Prince.

CUT

5/TAKE 1

WOMAN: Er wht evidence did you get of the Iraq view of Nassah.

MAN: The Iraq view of Nassah, I made a tour of Iraq fairly soon after I arrived, when I went to the north they said that he was the prophet, and when I went to the south, they said that he was Alah himself. Now the reason for this was they
felt that President Nassah had restored the self respect to the Arab nation, that they had lost for hundred of years under the....and then under the French and the British, at last the ARab nation with its greatness with its history was reviving again, and Nassah was their undisputed leader. And so because of that, the fact that the Iraq government was opposed to Nassah, made it even more unpopular than it would have been in its own right. Now the coup took place on the 15th July, what, can you describe your experience of the coup. The coup in fact took place on an historical day the 14th July, and if we had been .........we might have been able to think of that one, I slept on the roof of my house, which happened to be a couple of hundred yards away from the kings palace, and just about dawn on the 14th July, I got up to look towards the sunrise, and saw lots of soldiers running round the kings palace, my first thought was that is a funny place and a funny time to have manoeuvres, and then my dull brain awakened to the fact that there might be something wrong, I listened to the radio, and opened it and I heard a voice shouting this is the Arab republic of Iraq ...............that sounded very funny to me, so I rang up the Ambassador, and was told his excellency is asleep, I said of course his excellency is asleep every sane man is asleep at this time of the morning, but wake him up, tell him there is a revolution. Don't think that Iought to do that sir he said, I said you bloody well wake him up. And they did wake him and I spoke to him and he said alright Sam come in, so Sam tried to come in
When I got in my ancient car and drove towards the embassy, and when I got about half a mile, I ran into a mob and er there was some soldiers who ran towards my car looking a bit threatening, but they simply made gestures at me and said......which means get the hell out of here quickly. So, I got the hell out of it and went home, and that was the first beginning, shortly after that the erm mod attacked the British embassy, burn't down the ambassadors house, killed two of our officials and took a pot shot at the ambassador and missed him and the staff locked themselves up in the registry until er the Iraq army came and rescued them, that was a fairly unpleasant little operation, but the following day and I went with the ambassador to see the new leader of the coup.......and this was in itself a fascinating occasion, we went to the ministry of defence, and all the way up the steps was lined with revolutionary soliders all with tommy guns pointing inwards and we were led into ........and seated with him whilst his deputy at the........with whom he later had a lot of trouble and the so called president a nice man called General.......and an old friend of mine who was a nationalist politician called Mohamed .........and we had a conversation which is one of the less of easy bits of translation I had to do in my life, because the ambassador said he had come to protest because these people were being killed and the embassy being sacked, to which ......said you started it, you fired on our chaps what had happened in fact was that one of the Iraq soldiers got so excited when they were attacking the embassy that he shot himself in the foot, and so people thought that he had been shot form the embassy, and then they stormed it. Well we had an uncomfortable
conversation, in which the ambassador demanded compensation and .......was relatively polite, but then.......broke in and he was very cheeky, and he said it's all your own fault, and if you hadn't supported imperialism this would never have happened. Well we made our point, and later indeed got compensation. But of course two men had been killed. You can get no compensation for that. You also drove round the....didn't you.

I drove round the.......er that same afternoon, because er in the course of this rather odd interview with....... I made an appointment with Mohamed.......who was minister of finance in the new government, to go and talk to him, and he said that I could go and have coffee that afternoon, so this was the fifteenth of July, and erm on the way to Mohamed.......my driver suddenly said, they've got....... and we heard a noise about a couple of hundred yards away, and he said we had better get out of the .........,and we drove out on to the ......which is a sort of ......going all the way round Bahgdad, and outside that you had about two hundred and fifty thousand villages who had come up to Bahgdad seeking work, which was a very poor area of Bahgdad well the15th July, temperature about a hudnred and twenty in the shade, they just heard that ....had been killed, the news had got across to them in two minutes, they all had green flags outside their huts, they were all outside their huts, and they were all dancing and chanting and they were chanting ...............and they went on, that meant that the traitor...........has been killed, well you can imagine this was afairly frightening situation, that they didn't see anything in this innocent old car driving along the bund..... and we got away again. And I then went to drink coffeee
And er I said to him, we must have good relations with you if we can, the only one thing I beg of you, don't kill anybody. Because if you start killing the old regime, it's going to make it very difficult for my government to have any relations with you. I'm not commenting on what's happened, but don't kill Mohamed... and he said... which means father of... which means what they call you in the Arab world, when your son is called Sam... er it's not in my hands, the military rule this, but I'll do what I can. And I remember that, then I spent the next few days going round to see the other ministers who were old friends, trying to persuade them not to kill.

And what was your recommendation about British intervention. Erm, at the coup for the British.

The question of British intervention was a very interesting one, because there was at the time a... union...

The question of British intervention as you know, there was a... union between Iraq and Jordan, and King Hussen was deputy ruler of the union, now as Fissal had been killed, when they attacked his palace, Hussan was now head of the union, that meant that he could legitimately call on British support, and er in international law that would not have been wrong, and I've no doubt that the British government at the time considered that, and I discussed it with the ambassador, it seemed to me that popular opinion was so strongly on the side of the new government, that any intervention would have been doomed to failure. And for what its worth my advice given at that time was do not intervene in Iraq at any price, it would be absolutely
new government was in charge, and that any hope that the people might have had for the first few hours after the revolution that the loyal army so to speak would take over was ill founded, the ambassador was in an unhappy position because he had known the king, crown prince and... very closely and they had all been murdered, and er he knew of course that I had these nationalist contacts and he hoped that there might be a counter coup, so I said I was keeping in touch with the new government and he said yes that's fine Sam you string them along, so that we can string them up. But it didn't work that way.

Do you think it would have been another Suez if they had tried to intervene or worse?

Yes, I think that it would have been absolutely disastrous I don't think that you can intervene with a foreign power when public opinion is overwhelmingly against you.

And you admit that it was a very popular revolution.

Yes, it was very popular at the time. Nobody loved the king very much, they tolerated him, they hated the crown prince, ...... they had respected once but they didn't want him anymore. And any attempt by the British to intervene to restore the old order would have resulted in a horrible disaster.