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

AMBASSADOR ALFRED LEROY ATHERTON, JR.

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Q: Ambassador, you've had an outstanding career in the U.S. Foreign Service, having served in a number of posts throughout the Middle East and South Asia, in particular. You were Director General of the Foreign Service, Director of Personnel in the Department of State, Ambassador to Egypt, Ambassador at Large for Middle East negotiations and Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and South Asia for the years 1974 through 1978. You were appointed a Career Ambassador of the United States in 1981. This, everyone will agree, is a most illustrious career in the Foreign Service. I wonder, first of all, Mr. Ambassador, if you would give us a bit of your family background, where you were raised, where you went to school, what made you decide to go into the Foreign Service, why you chose certain universities that you did? In other words, give us a bit of the background that brought you into the Foreign Service.

ATHERTON: Let me talk a little bit about how it all started. As I've reflected on this, it occurs to me that I had a very unlikely background to have brought me eventually into a Foreign Service career. As far as I can recall, there was no real international experience on the part of my family, my father's family, my mother's family. My father's father, my grandfather on his side, ran a hardware store in Worcester, Massachusetts, and he was a cabinet maker-I'm told a very good one. I never met him, he died before I was born. My father's mother was perhaps the stronger person, in various ways the family matriarch and a very strong-willed person. She was determined that her sons would be the first members of the Atherton family to get a college education. And my father, as well as his older brother, went to Worcester Tech and both became engineers.

Q: I assume you were living in Worcester?

ATHERTON: Well, this was before I was born. I was going back into the generation where my roots were. My mother's family lived in a small town of about, as I recall, two hundred people, up the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My mother's father was a self-made businessman, a small town businessman. He mined coal, he cut and sold lumber, and he drove the delivery truck himself. It was not a very big operation. I remember that, because I used to visit my mother's parents when I was very small-take a train from Pittsburgh up the river to a little town called Templeton. But certainly I don't recall any discussion of the world or world events in my very early years at all.

My world, until I was 12 or 14 years old, was really a very inward-looking world of a small neighborhood of friends. We lived outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I guess what would today be called the beginning of the suburbs. It was an area that was in transition between rural and being where commuters who lived and worked in the city would live. My father worked for Westinghouse as an engineer in East Pittsburgh, and we lived in a little place called...I guess it was between towns, but the nearest town was a little place called Verona. The school I started out in was basically a rural school. On one side of our house was a farm, and the other side was beginning to get built up, so we were right on the dividing line of rural and suburban. I can't remember exactly what year, but after I had been in this little school for a couple of years, maybe more, maybe it was through elementary school days, my parents decided it was not the kind of education they wanted me to have, so they made arrangements for me to go to school in the town of Wilkinsburg, which is a suburb of Pittsburgh, for the last part of elementary school or the beginning of junior high. That was the system when you had six years of elementary school, three years of junior high, three years of high school. My recollection was that it was somewhere towards the end of elementary school, the beginning of junior high, that they made arrangements for me to be transferred from the school district where we lived, to the school in town. I think they had to pay some small fee to the Town of Wilkinsburg for me to attend that school. And it was a proper city school with larger classes, more structured.

So that really was how I spent those pre-teen years. But at the same time, as I recall, while my daytimes were spent going on a rural streetcar into Wilkinsburg, going to school and coming home on the streetcar, my free time was spent visiting one of my very best friends, who lived on a farm on the hill not far from us. I would go up and spend weekends with him, and learn to milk cows and do all the things that farm children do. It was an interesting family. Could I digress a little bit on this, because it's always stayed with me?

Q: Yes, please.

ATHERTON: His father was a high school principal in Pittsburgh.

Q: Not your high school, though?

ATHERTON: Not my high school. And I gather he was a very strict, old-fashioned disciplinarian. He certainly was, with his family and with his children. He was also a fundamentalist, Bible-reading Christian. For example, if I spent Sunday with them, we spent it listening to the Bible being read and perhaps playing educational-type games, but certainly nothing more than that.

Q: No cards.

ATHERTON: There was a game called Authors, remember that? They were on cards, but it was instructional. You had the authors and a bit of their biography and what they'd written. It was good.

Q: I haven't thought of that for 40 years, make that 50.

ATHERTON: Maybe I hadn't either. But that was the kind of very limited circle of friends, when you live in a place where there are not lots of people. I wasn't part of a large group. I didn't belong to teams, I didn't play team sports. I was pretty much on my own. I had a younger brother, six years younger, so we were not terribly close. There was too big an age difference between us.

I remember visiting, as I mentioned earlier, my mother's parents, by taking the train, 50 miles or so I suppose, up the river to this little town. There, again, I was a stranger in the town. They were sort of clannish, and I wasn't part of that gang of young people, so I didn't have many friends there either. As a result, I used to read a lot when I was younger, perhaps more than a lot of people nowadays. But what I can most remember was a very uneventful, even kind of life.

Some vague recollections were the worries of my parents during this period. It was the Depression, and there were lots of people at Westinghouse being laid off. My father did not lose his job, but they all had to take a cut in salary. It was a belt-tightening experience for my family, for all of us.

And then the world all suddenly changed, very suddenly, in 1935, when I would have been, I think, 14 years old, when my father was transferred from Pittsburgh to the Westinghouse office in Boston, Massachusetts. In a way, it was going home for him. He was a native of Massachusetts, and he had gone to Pittsburgh because that's where he was first offered a position after graduating from Worcester Tech. It was where he had met my mother and they were married, and I was born and then my brother was born.

But in 1935, suddenly the whole world changed. To me it was going to a place I had only heard my father talk about. Boston, Massachusetts. I didn't go right away, actually. I was in the middle of a school term. As a result, my parents went ahead. We by then had given up the house and were living in an apartment hotel in Wilkinsburg within waking distance of the junior high. So I just simply stayed on at the hotel, living there with the manager as kind of my guardian. My parents had said keep an eye on him and make sure he gets to bed and does his homework. So I was really kind of on my own. I can't remember honestly how long it was, but it seemed like a long time.

Q: Quite an exciting experience.

ATHERTON: Well, it was exciting, and in a way it was also kind of lonely, because I didn't really have many friends whom I could spend a lot of time with. When we lived out in what we used to call the country, I had a dog which we had to give away, a traumatic experience. But in any case, we survived it. My brother was living with my grandparents, and there was an elaborate arrangement to get the family all together. My grandparents brought my brother to Pittsburgh, and reservations were made on the Pullman car on the train. And my brother and I, I in charge, traveled alone on a sleeper from Pittsburgh to Boston overnight. I can't remember how many hours it was, but it seemed like a long, long trip. And we were met by my parents.

My father worked for a year in the Westinghouse office in Boston. We settled down in a suburb of Boston called Needham, Massachusetts, which then was more separated from Boston than it is today. And that's where I basically finished that last year of junior high school. It turned out that we were only in Needham for about a year.

My father was then transferred again to become one of the deputies, I think, to the works manager of the Westinghouse plant in East Springfield, Massachusetts. So we moved from Needham after about a year. Again, in the middle of the school year. All of our moves seemed to take place in the middle of the school year, disrupting friendships, and always the classes were out of kilter. But I do recall leaving in the middle of the first year of high school. So I finished a year, and I went for a summer and into the first year of high school in Needham, and then suddenly picked up and into the middle of my first year of high school in Springfield. Actually we lived in Longmeadow, a suburb. Longmeadow today has its own high school, but in those days it didn't. It had only a junior high. Once you became of high school age, you went to one of the four high schools in Springfield.

Springfield had then what I think was known as the Springfield system. It was a track system. There was Classical High, which is where those who were expected to go on to university, liberal arts, college prep, went. Then there was Technical High, which was in a way also college prep, but for those who were more scientifically inclined and were probably going to go to one of the technical colleges. Commerce High was clearly indicated if you were going to be clerks and typists. And then there was Trade High, which was of course a trade school, where you would go to learn a trade. How it was decided which one of these schools you went to, I never really understood.

Q: You couldn't choose?

ATHERTON: Well, I think you had a choice, but also you had to be accepted, as well as have a choice. There were certain academic minimums. It was always assumed, the question never arose whether I would go anywhere except Classical High. So I went in the middle of my first year. I graduated from there in 1939, so this was the end of the fall term of 1936. I had almost a full three years in Classical High.

It was a remarkable school. In some ways it had a faculty as good as many colleges. It had, for example, a math teacher (and I was not good in math, but I did take some of the high school math courses) who every week would disappear for a day and go down and teach an advanced math course at Columbia University. We were all told that for many years they had tried to get him to become a professor of mathematics at Columbia, but he liked living in this smaller town, and he liked teaching high school mathematics. My forte was in the humanities, English, and I took German from a teacher who was a native German-speaker. Then you hear a proper accent from the beginning. I went onto the high school paper, and by the time I graduated I was the editor of the high school Recorder, I think it was called. I forget how often it came out, it was probably monthly. But anyway, I had begun to get some sense by then that maybe there was a world beyond whatever town or school I happened to be in.

Q: At that time did you find that you were pretty good at writing, say, if you were in journalism there?

ATHERTON: I did like to write. I can remember usually doing pretty well in essays or book reviews. I was in the advanced English class, because I had pretty well covered the ground that was in the standard English class. It was a special class for seniors who were up to it. It was really like taking a freshman college class in that respect. Heavy, heavy reading. An honors course. So I did this. I was editor, but I also did a lot of writing, editorials, and got into other extracurricular activities. I was a great joiner-German club and the school paper among others.

Q: Were you good at German?

ATHERTON: Academically. I couldn't speak it. You know they never taught us to speak languages. The emphasis was on learning grammar and memorizing vocabulary, on being able to read it, being able to conjugate verbs and decline nouns, learn all the rules, but in a mechanical way. So I had a good foundation in the instruction of German, but I never really thought about speaking it. You sang songs. I never thought of it as a language I would ever use as a spoken language. It clearly was a school and an environment in which one's horizons could be broadened.

And of course on top of that, one couldn't help but be aware, if you just read the newspapers, that there was a war in Europe, even then. But I became acutely aware of that because of two things. First of all, I met my international cousins. My father's older brother, who was also an engineer, had in fact taken a position as an overseas representative of General Electric Company. He was living in Switzerland.

I should add, by the way, that my father never traveled outside the United States in all of his life. He never left the country, except perhaps to visit Canada. And my mother never left until after I joined the Foreign Service, when she visited us. After my father died, she came to live with us. But she had never before been out of the States. As far as I know, my mother's father and mother spent their whole lives in a little corner of Pennsylvania. Not always in the same town, but in the same general area, Western Pennsylvania, north of Pittsburgh, in places in transition themselves from farms to small towns. But I did meet the children of my father's older brother, Carl. Uncle Carl had a daughter and a son who were a little older than I, but not much, and they had been brought up in Europe. To me a very romantic thing. They talked to each other in French.

Q: There is sophistication.

ATHERTON: They were very sophisticated. They had gone to private schools in Switzerland and France, traveled all over Europe, and were back now because my uncle saw the clouds of war coming and decided to move his family back to the States. And so he brought them back and into private schools. He obviously had a lot more money on his side of the family than we had on ours. And my cousin, Betsy, who was the older of the two, went to a very, very posh, private school in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, called Miss Halls. Miss Halls still exists. I learned just this last year when I was up there for a Tanglewood concert that their dormitories are available during the summer for the young people to come and play in the Tanglewood orchestra. A place to study and to play . David, the younger of the two, was sent to a private school in New Hampshire.

But, anyway, there was that sort of an opening up, listening to them talk. They talked about very different things. Betsy had spent some time visiting, traveling in Spain. And of course it was the time of the Spanish Civil War. The war pictures in the newsreels in the theaters, and the terrible destruction, the scenes in Spain. I remember going to the movies, and seeing how upset she was. To her it was very traumatic.

Well, the next thing to which I trace the awakening of my interest in the world outside was probably in the summer of 1938 when my parents, who clearly made a lot of decisions, thought it would be a very broadening thing if I went on a hostel/bicycle trip to Europe. We were members of a church in Longmeadow which had a youth group. My father hardly ever went to church, but he and my mother encouraged me to have some church affiliation, and most of it was this youth group. The youth group leader organized the trip under the auspices of the American Youth Hostel Movement to go to Europe in the summer of 1938.

Q: Just in time.

I broke away from the hostel group, got permission from my leader, and spent a little time visiting them in their very fancy apartment on the shore of Lake Geneva. It was an apartment of a size and of a style that I had never seen in my life before. Old Victorian sort of place.

Anyway, that was great, but I had to get on a train, catch up, and rejoin the group finally in Paris. In Paris, I had the first champagne in my life. And then headed for North Germany, crossed over into Denmark and then to Norway. And we were going to tour the fiords, and then a very quick tour of Norway, across the Channel to England, and to be at Southampton by a certain date when we were to get back on the Staatendam. Three of us decided we really wanted to see more of England. We didn't care that much about biking up and down all the hills, even with three speeds. So we got permission from our leader, and he gave us our share of the money to get us through the trip, and gave us our passports, and we were off. We took a little cross-Channel steamer called the Blenheim, as I recall, which ran from, must have been Oslo to Newcastle. It was one of those typically rough Channel crossings. I had been a pretty good sailor, but I remember being deathly seasick. Having eaten a great jar of Norwegian goat cheese didn't help.

We got to Newcastle, the three of us, and discovered that we had neglected one thing. We were not just transiting, we were coming to spend a couple of weeks in England, and we didn't have visas. So we got a rough lecture from the British immigration inspector, and then he looked at us and let us in after the lecture about how we shouldn't come to England without visas. And we literally spent what must have been ten days or two weeks going through Scotland, all the way down through the lake country, down to London, London to Southampton.

By that time we had spent our money. We were down to something like the equivalent of a dollar a day for a week before it was time to get on the ship again. So we gave up staying at youth hostels and began staying in the country. We'd go to farms and say: "Can you put us up? We'll do some chores for you." They were wonderfully hospitable. We never had anyone turn us away, and they usually gave us a meal. And we eventually ended up in Southampton and met the group and got on the ship and came home. A whole new world. The impressions of that trip were with me for years, and particularly the impressions of Germany. The impressions of being in youth hostels with very tough, hard, disciplined youths of the Hitler Jugend.

Q: That impressed you.

ATHERTON: What impressed me was, I guess, these youths were convinced Nazis. They wanted to lecture us on what a great thing Hitler was doing for Germany and for Europe, and how they were going to bring this new civilization to all the countries of Europe. One of our members was Jewish, one woman in our group, and when this occasionally would come out, this was potentially always an awkward situation, because, of course, they were strongly anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish. This was long after Kristallnacht. Restaurants would have the big juden verboten signs. It was frightening what we saw happening in Germany. I didn't totally take it aboard. My recollection was that a very frightening thing happened, but I didn't understand what it was or why. But it was there, and it became clear afterwards.

I did go back and finish the last year of high school. Then another thing happened to me. I had a very good academic record, but my parents decided that I really wasn't quite mature enough to go away to college. They thought I needed a little maturing time, and so they decided I should go for a year to a private prep school between high school and college. They may have applied to more than one, but I ended up at Phillips Exeter Academy, in Exeter, New Hampshire.

Q: Pretty good choice.

ATHERTON: It was a damn good choice, in retrospect. It was probably another turning point in my life, because I met, first of all, people from different backgrounds. I was there on scholarship. I waited on tables as part of helping to pay for the cost of my education. My family was not affluent. Dad had an engineer's salary, but there wasn't a lot left over. Mother didn't work. Mother had been a kindergarten teacher, but when she married she gave it up. She had never gone to college, by the way, only kindergarten training.

And so I went to Exeter for a year and, again, did well academically. Took more German, this time from a German-German teacher who did try to teach us a little bit about how to speak the language. I had discovered, by the way, on that youth hostel trip, that I couldn't converse at all in German, despite all that training. It was terribly frustrating. I could read the signs and order from the menus, but I couldn't make conversation, because I was always thinking mechanically: What kind of an ending was there? Was it masculine or feminine? I tried to construct things mechanically instead of from the sense of really knowing the language. It got a little better, I think, the year at Exeter, because Herr Gropp did get us to talk a little German.

I had discovered that one of my great loves academically was history, and I took all the history I could, wherever I could, plus what I had to take. I had to take more English and foreign language. I had to take one science course, so I took beginning chemistry, which I did miserably in. It was the only course in which I came very close to failing.

But, anyway, otherwise I did well, and the question came: What next? My parents' thought had been that this would be a one-year transition to a small New England college where I wouldn't get lost in the crowd. And Amherst was one which fit in with the thinking in these terms.

In those days, Exeter's main mission was to persuade, if not all of its graduates, all of its academically qualified to go to Harvard. The sister school to Phillips Exeter, Phillips Andover, prided itself on trying to get most of its graduates to go to Yale. But Exeter tried to get a good reputation of sending some of the best to Harvard. Well, I was urged by Herr Gropp and my faculty advisor to apply to Harvard.

So I applied both to Harvard and Amherst, and I was accepted to both. Harvard offered me a better scholarship, so I went to Harvard, which was never in my wildest dreams a college that I thought, or my parents ever thought, I would go to.

I graduated from high school in 1939. In fact, this past year my high school class had its 50th anniversary, which I did not get to, unfortunately. So I graduated from Exeter in the class of 1940, and I'm about to go to my 50th reunion this May, the anniversary of the graduation at Exeter.

And then came the experience of being in college in wartime. We didn't get into war until '41, but the writing by that time was very much on the wall. One of the effects was that we never really had a class with a sense of cohesion. Our class never graduated as a group. Some were drafted and left early and came back after the war was finished. Again, my father had the foresight to say he was quite sure I would end up in the military. War was almost inevitable, and he recommended that I take ROTC, so I did. Well, that really made it possible for me to graduate before I went into the army, because if you were taking ROTC and if you accelerated to finish the requirements, the program earlier, there was a deferment. I had a low draft number; that I can remember. I would have been drafted, but because of the ROTC I was allowed to finish up the year.

By going to summer school and taking extra courses, I graduated in June of 1943, a year early. By that time, two of my room-mates had gone off. One had volunteered for the Marines and the other had been drafted in the army. And the class really wasn't a class. We didn't have any sort of class events that I could remember.Could I go back? I have just remembered a couple of things that happened before graduation that perhaps are relevant.

Q: Yes, of course.

ATHERTON: I got caught up, in my freshman year, in a group of people who were politically very liberal and very conscious of causes. Some belonged to the "keep America out of war at all costs" group, and others were "we've got to stand by our English friends, and we can't be isolationist." So this was a big argument for most of us.

Q: The America Firsters, I think they were called.

ATHERTON: One of the things that I did, I plunged right into extracurricular activities. I became the editor of the freshman yearbook, and I ran for and was elected as a delegate to represent my class at the American Youth Congress in Washington, D.C., sometime during that freshman year. So it was sometime in the fall of '40, the spring of '41... What I do remember is coming to Washington on a bus with all of the other delegates to the Youth Congress, and it was an eye opener, because what suddenly became quite obvious was that the congress leadership was dominated by the American Communist Party.

Q: Now what year was this?

ATHERTON: This was before we had entered the war, and during the period of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In other words, it was before the Germans invaded Russia. It was the period when the pact between Germany and Russia was still in effect. Therefore, the position of the Communist Party of the United States was: Keep America out of war. At least that was the Russian position. And this was a very divisive issue in this congress, because, of course, many young people were quite idealist. One of the speakers at the congress was Eleanor Roosevelt, who gave a rousing talk about how we should stand by our good friends and was hissed by a little claque, who clearly tried to drown her out. It was a real eye opener with the totalitarian minority trying to dominate a majority. Because they were well organized, they almost did it. Resolutions of the congress passed. They had to do with all the right causes, except they were on the side of keeping out of war. Washington, of course, in those days was a southern city, and it was segregated. One thing I can remember very well was going into a restaurant near where we were staying-we stayed in peoples' houses-to eat, and having one of the leaders of the Youth Congress come through the restaurant shouting at the top of his voice that this was a Jim Crow restaurant and you could not eat here. So we all went out, and I can't remember where we did eat, because all the restaurants in Washington were segregated in those days, but maybe a cafeteria somewhere. But anyway, that again was an eye opener.

I had become quite conscious, by that time, of what became known later as the civil rights problem, because in college, in my class, by pure coincidence, in my freshman year, I lived near and got to know two of the perhaps three or four blacks who were at Harvard in that class, and we became quite good friends. I got some insights into what it was like to be a black in the United States, even a privileged black going to Harvard.

One of them, who became my roommate the next year, was the son of a graduate of Harvard, and he told the story of living in Chicago in that time. They had a summer place on Lake Michigan, but they had to plan the trip so they could do it all in one day, because there was no place on the route in which they could stop to stay or eat. His father was a quite well-to-do businessman in Chicago.

This chap, Alexander Louis Jackson III, and Hallowell Bowsen, both black, became friends. When it came time after freshman year to choose a house to live in and to choose roommates there were two of us, white, who said we would like to move in with these two friends of ours, who happened to be black. I really don't think we were trying to make a point necessarily or trying to crusade on the issue. Oh, I suppose, subconsciously, we felt pretty proud of ourselves for taking a stand, but it wasn't forced. We had a lot in common, we were good friends, we did a lot of things together. And we had one of those big apartments with four bedrooms, which we shared for two years. I have one vivid memory of the housemaster, when they were about to make room assignments, calling me in and saying, "You know, you don't have to do this." And I was puzzled by this, I didn't know what he was talking about, and suddenly realized he was saying you don't have to live with your black classmates. This was liberal Harvard. I found it very, very confusing.

Well, by that time I was an editor of the Crimson. I was not writing news stories, but writing editorials. And I can remember writing a series of editorials in those days about the evils of the treatment of blacks in the southern United States, which I knew about only second hand..., writing about what became the civil rights cause later on. That was one of the two issues. The other was to take a stand against the Nazis and stand by our British friends.

Q: You wrote about them in your paper.

ATHERTON: I used to write editorials about this in the Crimson. And I guess I was an advocate of civil rights before it was a major issue. But it was part of my college experience. That, plus the war, and the fact that my class really never got its act together.

Q: No way you could.

ATHERTON: When I graduated and got my degree in '43, I literally went right from college into uniform. I guess I got to go home for the weekend to see my parents, but all of us who were in ROTC, as a group, were given orders and inducted into the Army at a little camp down in Connecticut, which was just a place to get us all together. Interesting, because it was a military police camp, and the commanding officer was one of the Generals who had been disgraced at Pearl Harbor, and his punishment assignment was to have to be in charge of this little backwater military police camp somewhere in Connecticut.

So we were there for a period, waiting until there was a class beginning at Officers Candidate School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. This was an artillery ROTC, and you didn't graduate with a commission. In peace time you did, but then when you finished ROTC, you got corporal stripes. Anyway, we were inducted into the Army, I think, at this camp. We were all assembled there and just held there, doing guard duty and KP duty and otherwise just a part of the garrison, until a new class started at Fort Sill. And then we were all piled on a troop train together and crossed the continent by train to Fort Sill and went through officer training camp there. I guess it was a 90-day-wonder thing. My recollection is that it was a tough three months. That really summarizes what I need to say about the college years.

Q: You didn't tell us what you studied.

ATHERTON: My great fascination in those days was history, and I majored in history and literature, which was a combined major at Harvard in those days, putting together courses from both departments, with an emphasis, in particular, on German history and literature. I took some government courses and some other general European history, and it wasn't all German literature. I took sociology. I avoided science and economics like the plague. I took no economics, or perhaps I took Ec. A, which was the freshman economics course. I didn't take any science or math courses.

I had a choice of whether I was going to be a candidate for a B.A. or a B.S. In Harvard, in those days, to get a BA, I would have had to take two more years of Latin or Greek. I had had two years of Latin in high school and had dropped it. I decided I didn't want a B.A. badly enough to go back into Latin. So, even though I took no science courses, I graduated from Harvard with a Bachelor of Sciences degree, because I hadn't studied enough Latin or Greek or some combination of the two. Also, I think, after considering the uncertainty of what was going to happen, leaving college in wartime, knowing that the next thing would be going into the military, did not encourage giving much thought to the long-run future. And I really didn't think very much about anything beyond getting my degree and getting into the army and not much of what I would do after that.

Q: Were you aware at that time there was such a thing as a Foreign Service, a Diplomatic Corps?

ATHERTON: No, I was not. I had studied diplomatic history, as part of my history program, so I knew there were diplomats, but it never really occurred to me that they were part of a professional corps called the Foreign Service.

Q: You just hadn't always wanted to be a diplomat.

ATHERTON: I had no desire to be a diplomat. I think, if I had thought of anything beyond the war, it would be in journalism. I had been editor of the high school paper, I was one of the editors of the Harvard Crimson. I was also editor of the freshman yearbook, as I mentioned. I liked writing, and more and more I was getting interested in writing about international and world events, as well as civil rights problems in this country. I also let my academic record slip. The incentive to excel really wasn't there.

The first thing that happened after the end of my second year was that I lost my scholarship, because I didn't keep my record up to the required, whatever it was, B average. I slipped and had a C. And I will admit I was not applying myself very well. I would cram for exams rather than study for them over the period of the course.

I did a lot of extracurricular things, a lot of them were just fun things... partying. I guess that was part of the spirit of the time. You didn't know if you'd be alive in a year, so you enjoyed life. This was the age of the big bands, and so there was lots of seeking out wherever Tommy Dorsey was playing, or Benny Goodman, or whoever. Getting a date and going off to dance to the big bands or finding the little jazz spots in downtown Boston. One of the benefits of being with a black roommate was he had entree to places I might not have gotten to see otherwise.

And I can clearly remember a little place in Boston off Massachusetts and Columbus Avenues. I've been by there recently, it's a pretty seedy part of town now. I don't know what it was like then, probably was seedy then, too. But it was a little cabaret with a bar and a three- or four-piece outfit. It was called The Savoy. We used to go there Saturday nights and listen to some very good improvised jazz, in a very mixed, white/black kind of a place.

There was another place, and I can't even remember the name of it, in a different part of Boston. One of the musicians turned out to be one of the legendary trumpeters, who died very young. His name was Frankie Newton. I still have some records of his, he was an outstanding trumpeter. So a lot of the college time was spent learning jazz, learning to be friends, neglecting, to some extent, the academic program.And I worked when I lost the scholarship. My folks had put aside just so much money to help support me, and I had to fill the gap. The freshman year, I had waited on tables at the freshman Union. When I lost the scholarship, I needed more money than that paid.

I had a friend, a very enterprising classmate, named Robert McGivern, who ran the newsstand in the freshman Union and turned it over to me when he went into the Service. By that time, the freshman Union was no longer for freshman, it was for a Naval training group. It was a gold mine. They didn't have time to go anywhere to buy their newspapers, their cigarettes, their candy, their chewing gum. They'd just come by and get it from me, and I really cleaned up. I ran this little business on the side, and I found myself not only covering my expenses, but making money to boot. When I graduated, I sold the news stand to somebody else. I can't remember now, but it seemed to me at the time it was for a fabulous amount of money.

So I actually ended up in college with my bills paid and making a little bit of savings. But with not a very good academic record. I really went downhill. I graduated, but I didn't graduate with honors.

Q: So now we have you in the Army.

ATHERTON: That happened very quickly. As I say, we went as a group, all of us from that class who were in ROTC, to the staging camp in Connecticut. And then off to Fort Sill and did our few months and got our Lieutenant's bars. And then we were all sent in different directions. Many of my ROTC colleagues I never saw again in the service. Two of us ended up in the same outfit, but I went off from Sill to a casual officer assignment at Fort Bragg, in Fayetteville, North Carolina. That I remember only because I spent a very lonely Christmas, 1943, there in bachelor officers' quarters.

Q: You were in Artillery then?

ATHERTON: I was in Artillery, but I wasn't assigned to an outfit. I literally was just there waiting for assignment, and while there got orders to join the 739th Field Artillery Battalion, which was heavy artillery, eight inch howitzers, to join them in Fort Jackson, Tennessee, just in time to go on maneuvers. It turned out that I was the junior officer, a brand new Second Lieutenant. I was 22 years old. And I was assigned to this battalion, the cadre of which was a Utah National Guard outfit. All of them Mormons, tough, hard-bitten, hard-drinking Mormons.

Q: Drinking?

ATHERTON: Oh, yes. They were all of Scandinavian origin. You know, names like Hansen, Johanssen and Rasmussen and so forth. Close, they had grown up together, they really ran the outfit.

Q: They ran you.

ATHERTON: You can imagine their attitude towards a brand new, 22-year-old Second Lieutenant fresh out of Harvard. I had to prove myself. The battalion commander was a National Guard officer. The senior officers were all out of the National Guard, all with practical experience-not with this outfit. It was the noncoms that were the Utah National Guard, not the officers, but all the senior noncoms, the First Sergeant and all the Master Sergeants and Staff Sergeants, they were a little clique.

Q: The old Army.

ATHERTON: They were the old Army, and they were good. I learned a lot from them once they realized that I knew I didn't know very much, and I was there to learn to exercise whatever authority a brand new shavetail could exercise. And so in the end I think I was accepted. We went off to maneuvers together, and out of maneuvers to join the war.

Q: Where did you go?

ATHERTON: We all went off to England, Wales... We went over on the Queen Elizabeth I, which had, of course, been converted to a troop ship. And when it was fully loaded it took the equivalent of an army division; so it was not a very exciting crossing as I recall; blacked out and zig zagging to avoid submarines.

And to this day I can't remember where we landed. I've been back to England many times, and I've gone down that Welsh coast, down the southern coast, and tried to figure out. We must have off-loaded on barges or something, but I just don't have a clear recollection of where we came in...where we came ashore-perhaps it was in Scotland.

But in any case, we ended up in a camp, in Abergavenny, Wales. And the purpose of that was to draw the battalion's equipment from warehouses that were all over the UK. So little teams would go out from Abergavenny to pick up the howitzers here, and the prime movers there, and the trucks here, and all the heavy equipment that we would use-the organic equipment for equipping an artillery battalion. We were a separate artillery battalion, not attached to a division. Heavy artillery was corps artillery. We were to be assigned somewhere as heavy artillery support, but under the corps, not under a divisional headquarters. But at this point, we were just getting our equipment, getting it assembled, getting familiar with it.

But I drew probably the best detail of all. I had a Jeep, with a driver who was a Georgian, almost totally illiterate, and one of the best drivers. I had him all over Europe. I always wondered why he was so good at driving at night, blacked out. Well, it turned out that he used to drive a truck with bootleg liquor on it, down South, and he could drive in the dark and see where he was going. He was really remarkable.

Anyway, we went off to pick up our equipment. But since we were picking up the small stuff, like gunsights and things, we didn't have to go with a large group, just the Jeep and the driver and I. And we did our mission in time to have a couple of free days before we were due back in camp. We weren't allowed to go to London. This was the days of the V-bombs. Is that what they were called? The pilotless rockets were coming into London and we had strict orders not to go to London. So we went to Stratford on Avon. And while my driver went out to the local pub and got smashed, I went to the Shakespeare Theater and saw a performance of whatever it was, I think it was Twelfth Night or something like that. Right in the middle of getting ready to go across and join the war. It was kind of carving out a free weekend to see Shakespeare at Stratford.

And then back to camp, organized, got on a transport, and crossed the Channel. By that time, it was well after D-Day. The D-Day landings had taken place, and the front had moved rapidly, once they drove out of Omaha Beach and Utah Beach. The liberation of Paris had taken place.

Our orders were, first of all, to go across the Channel and take up position, initially assigned to some headquarters on the Brittany Coast, to try to use our heavy artillery to bombard an island off the coast where a German garrison was still holding out. The Germans were retreating, but they had been cut off on a little island called Saint Malo. It was very famous in those days. The Madman of Saint Malo was the German commander who wouldn't surrender. So we got a lot of target practice, because we were set up on shore and they couldn't shoot back. So we were in pretty good position. It was good practice.

My assignment was as a forward observer, to adjust fire on the pillboxes and the slits, anywhere you could see a soft spot.

One thing about the eight-inch howitzer is that it was one of the most accurate artillery weapons ever invented. I mean, you could literally adjust the thing, despite the fact that it was a big shell, you could adjust the reading down to within as close as 50 yards of advancing troops, to support the troops, and not worry about a stray round killing off your own people. So it was an excellent, precision heavy artillery piece.

This was very good practice for those of us who were going to have to adjust fire eventually under much more rigorous combat conditions. Eventually the mad Colonel of Saint Malo did surrender, and our mission was completed.

And then we were told that we were now to join General Patton, by which time he was rushing madly across Eastern France on his way to cross the Rhine, which he was hoping to do. We were a big, heavy outfit, and went lumbering up what was then called the Red Ball Highway to catch up and report for duty to the corps that we would be attached to, to support Patton's advance, the Third Army. Eventually we caught up with Patton, because he had run out of gas and had bogged down just west of Metz in Alsace Lorraine.

Our first real combat. I don't count bombarding Saint Malo as combat, because it was very one-way, it was target practice. But here it was the real thing. We had put our position in a field, dug in, and across were the hills of Metz, the fortifications of Metz, which go back to the War of 1871 and had been modernized. They were quite modern, well-defended fortifications. They had 88s on pneumatic turrets, and they could go up and shoot and go down again.

We discovered that, because the very first night they began shooting at us. We were in foxholes, and it was not very much fun at all. It was a miracle that we did not take any casualties that night. Why we didn't, I'll never know. Well, it was quite apparent that whoever had assigned us this field had made a mistake, because we were on the forward slope, and we should have been on the rear slope. We were told to change our position. And so, under cover of darkness, we did manage to get into a more protected spot. I had, by that time, been told that I was going to be one of two aerial observers assigned to that job. We had two Piper Cubs and two pilots who were also trained observers. But there were two seats in a Piper Cub, and the decision was that you really needed an observer up there. The pilot was busy flying the plane, and you had to be ready to spot targets and call the fire commands back on the radio.

So I was assigned as one of the aerial observers. One of my colleagues from my ROTC group had ended up in the same battalion, and he became the other aerial observer. So we were known as the Harvard Couple. We became the two aerial observers flying with two pilots, who couldn't have been more different types, by the way. One was a crusty Southern gentleman. The other was a very rash, younger, impatient officer named Herb Heiden, who had had his dental training interrupted. He wanted to get the war over with and get back to his dentistry training.

But, anyway, we were the aerial eyes of the battalion, really, for the rest of the war. It had its advantages, because you had to be based at an air strip, which was usually somewhat behind the lines. You had to be back a little bit. You were still within target range of long distance artillery, but you were out of range of small arms fire, mortars and things like that. And usually you didn't have to sleep in a tent or foxhole. You usually bivouacked in little towns or farms, and exercised the right of the military and commandeered them, and you had beds to sleep in. I can remember sleeping in some wonderful old farmhouses, comfortable places to stay, and getting to know the farmers.

Q: Real chicken eggs, too.

ATHERTON: Real chicken eggs and some very good schnapps. The one place that we spent most of the winter of 1943 was in an area where Patton's advance bogged down. Like all the towns in Alsace Lorraine, it had both a French and a German name. On the maps that we had, which were maps that had come up from the French side, it was called Chateau Rouge, but the signs, because of course it had a German history too, were Rotdorf, so Chateau Rouge was Rotdorf. The farmer we stayed with, an Alsatian I guess, had a mixture of French and German names. His first name was Francois and his last name was Ehl. And they spoke French and German interchangeably. By that time, my German had gotten to the point that I could handle a conversation, so we were able to converse in German with our host, who was French, but very suspect because of his German background. We were bogged down there. Patton was not able to break through, and we spent most of the time firing at these forts, and they would fire back. We had a lot of combat missions flying back and forth along the lines, waiting for one of their turrets to pop up, and then calling down fire on the turrets. Eventually, there was an infantry attack to capture the one fort that was the most troublesome; the one causing the most damage, had the best view and the best field of fire, and therefore clearly had to be cleaned out before an infantry advance, otherwise you would have them shooting from behind you.

So it was decided there would be an infantry assault on this fort. And our mission was to button them up until the infantry got close enough to throw grenades in the turrets. That's where they used the heavy artillery, because we were heavy enough to keep them buttoned up and accurate enough so we could fire and the infantry could get very close without the risk of getting hit by our own shells. The fire mission that was probably the proudest of the whole war was adjusting each of the four guns of one battery, individually, on four different targets.

You adjusted one gun at a time. You got that gun adjusted, and then you called for gun number two and adjusted that on the next target. One gun at a time. And once they were all four adjusted, they just kept lobbing shells every so many seconds. I mean it was impossible for the turrets to come up, and the infantry could get very close. And by this time, I think the troops in the targets were getting shell-shocked because of the noise. A minor footnote in the big war, but it was an interesting episode.

And that's where we were on Christmas, and I can remember Francois Ehl broke out for the occasion one of the best of all his bottles of schnapps, and we all got slightly plastered on schnapps on Christmas Day, 1943.

New Year's morning, 1944, is when the Germans decided they would bring in the Luftwaffe, and one of the planes came right over our position. None of us was quite prepared and we had to seek cover. A lucky shot by a machine gun had brought it down. This Luftwaffe plane skidded to a belly landing right outside of our fire position. The Messerschmitt pilot was killed. His credentials said that he was 19 years old on the first of January 1944. It was a static front, and there wasn't much across the river at that time. Just enough so that you were vigilant. Not much risk from the Luftwaffe. So we sat in this front and waited for the higher powers to decide what would happen next.

You may remember what happened next. It was a German offensive called the Battle of the Bulge. We didn't know anything about it, except that during the night we noted an awful lot of movement: tanks and trucks and things like that, the infantry and the armored cavalry up in front of us.

We woke up in the morning and there was nothing there. They had all been moved overnight to reinforce the troops who were trying to contain Von Rundstedt's offensive, which was in the Bulge up north. And literally we suddenly realized that everything except the heavy artillery was already gone. So there was nothing between us and the Germans across the river. Of course, there weren't very many Germans, because they had all been thrown into the Bulge. We were sent out as reconnaissance officers on the ground, and not by air, as a sort of probe to see what was up there.

I remember going out, and it was an eerie, eerie thing. There was snow on the ground, it was wintertime and an eerie silence across what we had always assumed were the German lines, and no sign of anything.

Q: They had all pulled out.

ATHERTON: They had left a screening armored cavalry so thin that if the Germans had had enough reserves to make a second thrust to where we were, they would have walked all the way to Paris. But they didn't come.

And eventually we got orders, when the front stabilized and the Bulge was contained, to move north into the Saar as support for the 9th army getting ready for their eventual massive assault across the Rhine. Montgomery was in charge of all the Allied troops in that sector. He was a great believer in massed artillery, so we couldn't help but have artillery pieces hub to hub, softening up the other side of the Rhine for the infantry, and also for the paratroopers we were going to drop.

I was up with my pilot flying a reconnaissance mission looking for targets of opportunity. And suddenly we realized that we were in real danger of being shot down by our own artillery, because there was so much artillery. The plane was shaking, and every time you heard this whoosh you knew that was an artillery shell that had just missed your airplane. But we didn't get hit, and we watched the paradrop and got back to base and back to the airstrip. And the crossing, of course, was first at the Remagen Bridge... We weren't at Remagen, we were north of that. And, again, we could not keep up with the rapid events at the front. We were moved forward into new positions as the front stabilized.

We ended up at Magdeburg on the Elbe River, and that's where we were when the war ended. By that time, the decision had been made to divide Germany into occupation zones. East of the Elbe River was to be the Russian zone. We were in what was to be the British zone. So our biggest problem then was coping with the throngs, not only of some Germans but displaced persons who had been in concentration or labor camps who had suddenly been liberated and who did not want to end up under the Russians. So they all came across and were looking for haven in the British zone.

I quickly converted, at that point, from being an artillery officer in an artillery battalion. I can't even quite remember, I think the battalion was basically demobilized at that point, various people went off. They began already to send people home depending on how many points they had.

Q: Now, had the Germans surrendered at that point?

ATHERTON: The Germans had surrendered.

Q: So it was just the Japanese war.

ATHERTON: The Japanese war was still going, but the war was over in Europe. The job was then the responsibility of military government. Having some German, I was a logical person to be pressed into service. So I was asked to join a government group, which was in a small town near Frankfurt, and spent about three months, I guess, in a little town called Nidda, if I remember correctly, as one of their few German-speaking officers. Not that my German was that good, but it was better than anyone else's, except the few native-speaking Germans who had fled Nazi Germany. I went to Paris and had a little vacation and training time in Paris in military government work.

But I really wanted to get home. I wanted to get on with my life, too. I had no desire to prolong my stay in the military, but there was still a war going on in the Pacific. So I decided to apply for flight training-not for the Air Force, but to become an artillery pilot instead of just an observer. The pilot I had been with decided it would be good if I were to know enough about handling a cub in emergencies so that if he were hit and I wasn't I could still land the plane. So he gave me some unofficial lessons on how to land the plane in an emergency. I was never any good. I kept bouncing in, but I could usually get it down. I decided, why not? Instead of being the backseat driver, I'll be the front seat driver. So I applied for pilot training to become the pilot of an artillery spotter plane. And that got me back to the States fairly quickly, in August of 1945. I was in New York City, having just landed, when the war in the Pacific ended. I was in New York City, in Times Square, on V-J Day.

Q: My, you hit them all. My goodness.

ATHERTON: So I had a big celebration. Went home and saw my folks. But I still had orders to report to Shepherd Field in Texas. The wheels ground on. I actually reported to Shepherd Field, and I actually went into this course, and I actually had some flight training.

The day before I was to have my first solo flight, the word came out that we all had to make a choice. Either we would continue the pilot training and then be assigned to occupation duty in Japan, or those of us who had enough points could leave the service. I had enough points-combat stars and air medals for flying so many missions.

I didn't lose any sleep over that at all. I never took that solo flight. I just declared that I wanted out. Having made my decision, I had to then report back to Fort Sill, where I had started, because that was the place where I was to be separated. I had some terminal leave coming, so I was technically still entitled to wear my uniform. I had my separation payments, whatever they were. It seemed like an awful lot of money at the time. My separation would be effective three weeks later, and then I would have to go out of uniform.

The way to travel in those days was to go to an airbase and sign up for space available on any Air Force plane going the direction you wanted to go. Well, I was already in Oklahoma, and I had a girlfriend in San Francisco (not Betty, but Betty knows about her), who had been my last girlfriend before I went into the Army. She was in the WAVES and was staying in San Francisco. So I got myself on a bomber of some kind. I think I was probably in one of the bombardier compartments.

Q: The bomb bay?

ATHERTON: No, it was one of the gunners, one of those bubbles. I went to San Francisco and looked her up, and actually had a rather pleasant sort of interlude. Got to see San Francisco, spent some time in the bay area, and then decided it was time to go home. Home was in Springfield, Massachusetts.

By that time, my folks had moved out of the house that we lived in and were living in an apartment hotel in Springfield. And I bummed my way across the country, using various military airplanes. The last flight left me at Bolling Air Force Base, in Washington, D.C. Rather than wait for another flight north, I just got on the train and took the train up to Springfield, and then I was home. I was home in the fall of 1945, having joined the Army in spring of 1943, so I had had about two and a half years service, which is really very short for someone in World War II, but I had enough.

The fluke was, that if you were an aerial observer in the artillery, you got, first of all, the ribbons that went with the campaign you were in, which gave you points. Then every so many missions you flew you got an air medal, and then a star on the air medal. That was a very unbalanced system. As an aerial observer, I had many more points than anybody else in the battalion, which didn't seem very fair somehow. And then because of that great desire to bestow all the medals they could on people toward the end of the war I actually got a silver star for that fire mission in backing up the crossing of the Rhine; and that gave me some more points. So I had enough points to get out. I was out probably earlier than a lot of other people who went in as late as I did.

And then the question was: What to do? I was really concerned, living at home with my parents. I said there is only one thing to do. I learned that there was something called the G.I. Bill. The Veterans Administration would pay to send me back to college, and I had to go back, first of all to pick up where I left off. But more than that, to correct that really rather bad academic record of my last year in college. I hoped they would let me back in with that record. So I wrote to the man who had been my senior tutor in college, a professor who was still there, and said, I think you know me. You must remember. I think I had potential but my record went down that last year; so my record doesn't look too good. But I would like to go to graduate school and redeem myself and decide what I'm going to do with my life. He recommended it, and they admitted me.So I went back as a candidate for a Master's Degree in history at Harvard. I started in January 1946, spring term. The other thing that had happened during that period, between the time I got to San Francisco and then, was that my former girlfriend in San Francisco had found somebody else. So I had been jilted, and I was feeling very sorry for myself.

But, anyway, back to college, with the serious intent of doing well. And it was really a very good year. I took a seminar with William Langer, who was one of the giants of the history department at Harvard in those days. He was doing, already, his history of World War II. And so all of his graduate students obviously were writing their papers, their Master's papers or their seminar papers, on what became source material for his book. They were helping with his research. And I did a paper, which to this day I think was a pretty good one (I've got it in storage somewhere), on German-Japanese relations during the period leading up to Pearl Harbor, leading up to the time that we came into the war; and how we came in and declared war on Germany after having been attacked by Japan. The beauty of writing it then was that, because of the war, so many of the German documents had already been made available. The German Foreign Ministry documents were already available in German. They had been reprinted by the War Department, as I recall. There was enormous effort to publish quickly the war documents of the German Foreign Ministry, the records of Germany's war crimes, in effect. And a lot of them were dispatches out of the days of the alliance between Tokyo and Berlin. A lot was going on in the German-Japanese relationship-an unnatural relationship, but still it was an alliance. And so I did my paper on that little bit of history, pre-Pearl Harbor.

Q: Who particularly were these sources?

ATHERTON: They had copies in the Widener Library. I was able to do my research at Harvard. In fact, I think some of them had already been translated into English, but I could read German, so I did a lot of the research in German. That was the main source. There were secondary sources that I used, too. I can remember reading dispatches from Joseph Grew, who was then U.S. Ambassador to Japan. And I was beginning to say: you know, this is a new world out there. I still hadn't really focused on what I wanted to do when I finished my Master's Degree. A Master's at Harvard you can get in a year, by going three terms.

About that time something else happened. I met Betty, who was then studying for her Master's Degree at Emerson College in Boston. We had common friends. I was in a rooming house on Beacon Street, and she was living at home. She had been widowed in the war. Her husband was killed early in the war, and she had a daughter, our daughter, Lynne, who was at that point already almost three years old. So I met Betty and we began to see each other a lot. She was a widow, and I had been jilted; and we decided that maybe this was a pretty good match. And it went pretty fast. We met in March, we were engaged in April, and married in May 1946. And I suddenly acquired a wife and a three-year old daughter.

We moved into the apartment where I had been living as a bachelor, on the fifth floor of this old mansion that had been converted to a rooming house, on Beacon Street in Boston. Betty got her degree before me, and she got a job to help supplement the G.I. Bill. And I worked. I became the librarian in Leverett House at Harvard in my spare time, so I had that job. She had various jobs. We plugged away, and put Lynne in a nursery school at Harvard, what we would call now a day care center, for the children of graduate students if they had any. And I was plugging away in this happy academic world which would pretty soon come to an end. And then, I asked myself, am I going to be a teacher? Am I going to be a foreign correspondent?

One day I saw on the bulletin board in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences a notice saying: Apply to take the examination for the Foreign Service of the United States. And that was when the bulb went on. Literally it was only then that I suddenly said, "That's what I want to do with my life."

While waiting, I went outside to the park that has the lily ponds in it, and chewed my nails until the time came to go back to learn whether I had passed. I though if I don't make this, I don't have anything else to do. I've got a wife and a child. The G.I. Bill is about to run out, and no job, no qualifications to do anything. But I passed, and went back, finished up the year at Harvard.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, at the end of the last tape I believe you were discussing your entry into the Foreign Service. You had just passed the Foreign Service exam and you were ready for your first post, which I believe was in Germany. Would you mind then carrying on there and tell us all about your first post?

ATHERTON: Ok. Well, the year was 1947. There was one little step before I actually went to my first post, or before I in fact knew what my first post was. And that was to come down to Washington and go through the basic officer training course, which, even then I think, was called the A-100 course. And it was at the end of that, we were all called together and given our assignments.In fact, it was a very busy time, because Betty was very pregnant with our first son. And in the middle of the course, the doctor advised her to get on a train and go home, because we had no arrangements to have the baby in Washington. I put her on a train, she went up on the sleeper, and the next day I got a phone call saying that labor had begun. So I took a couple of days off and went up myself and met my new son.

But by then we knew where we were going. It was Stuttgart, Germany. There were two of us in fact out of our course, both going to Stuttgart, Germany. Bill Kerrigan, who has subsequently also retired, and myself. We discovered, when we got to the post, after one of those long and, in retrospect, very enjoyable sea voyages on the SS America, with our daughter, aged four, and our son, Michael, aged two months, that we were the first new batch of Foreign Service officers assigned to the Consulate General in Stuttgart.

Q: What exactly month and year was that?

ATHERTON: This was 1947. Our son was born in August, and we went out to post in, I believe it was September, October. He was just a couple of months old. We're still in the fall of 1947.

On the ship, incidentally, was our new Consul General, A. Dana Hodgdon, and his wife, who had been on home leave. We had in fact met him and Mrs. Hodgdon in Washington. They had invited us to have a meal with them and get acquainted at the Army-Navy club, in which I had never set foot before. So it was an exciting first. There were a lot of firsts in those days.

He was going back on the same ship as we were, so when we arrived, there was more than the usual attention, more than a new Junior Vice Consul would have gotten, because the whole Consulate, practically, was on hand to greet the boss and his wife, and we benefitted from the attention.

I should say that getting from Cherbourg, where the SS America docked, until we got to Stuttgart, was itself a bit of an experience. We had to take a rather long train ride, as I recall, with this babe-in-arms. And with post-war rationing, it was not the most luxurious of conditions for travel to Paris.

Once we got to Paris we discovered that there was a transportation strike, and we had to wait awhile for Embassy vehicles. But we finally did get to the hotel where they had put us up. It was the Hotel Crillon. Very luxurious, even in those days. Very close to the Embassy.

The only problem was that I hadn't brought enough money to pay for the hotel bill for more than one night. No one had told me that if I had gone into a bank in New York, I could have bought French francs at a much better rate than I could buy once I got to Paris.

We were really very close to broke. So broke in fact that I went over to the Embassy mess and got a meal and brought it back to the hotel so the family could all eat, because we didn't think we could afford to go out to a Paris restaurant. In any case, between the high prices at that rate of exchange and wartime and post-war shortages, we'd probably do better getting our meals at the mess.

The only problem was that I took our daughter with me to go get the food and take it back to Betty in the hotel, where she was with the baby. And in the midst of the dinner at the hotel, the waitress spilled a bowl of hot soup over our daughter, who was already in a state of some anxiety, the whole change of culture and all.

Q: Just what you needed.

ATHERTON: Just what we needed. And the result of that was that she went into hysterics. It was not a very restful night. The Embassy said that it might be several days before they could get us on the train, which was the first leg of the Orient Express headed east to get to Stuttgart. We said we couldn't wait. We didn't have any money to wait. And they finally got us one compartment. And so all of us: Betty, our daughter, aged four at that time, the baby, and myself, with some 20 pieces of luggage, got into one sleeping compartment on the Orient Express for an overnight trip.

Q: Shoe-horned.

ATHERTON: It was still glamorous. Going into the dining car and sitting with the Consul General for dinner was exciting. Going across the border in the middle of the night, having our passports taken by the night porter so we wouldn't have to be awakened. I had been told never to let our diplomatic passports out of my hands. The first thing I was told was that if I didn't want to have to get up in the middle of the night at the border crossing, I'd have to leave them in the custody of the porter. So after consulting the Consul General, I decided it was worth taking that risk so we could sleep through the night.

We did arrive the next day in Stuttgart and, as I said, were royally greeted by the Deputy Consul General and put into the consular club, which had quarters for transients, until we could get into permanent quarters.

It was not a typical Foreign Service post. The Consul General was, of course, an old line Foreign Service officer. The number two was named Fred Mann who had also been in the Service before World War II and had been in Japan when the war broke out. He was interned for some time and finally exchanged, and got as far as what is now, I guess, Mozambique, Portuguese East Africa, and was immediately assigned to the Consulate in Lourenï¿½o Marques, and that's where he spent the rest of the war. He finally got to Germany. So we had two rather senior career people. Bill Kerrigan and myself, very junior, were new career people, and all the rest of the staff were what were then called staff officers. They had been appointed, many of them recruited locally, and their main job was running the visa program, which had been approved by President Truman to issue 100,000 visas in Germany to people who had come out of concentration camps, out of displaced person camps.

No Germans. There was no immigration program for Germans, of course. Not at all. This was still a military government. It was still a period of de-Nazification. Germans were all being checked for their political credentials.

So we had a staff of people, many of whom had just come out of uniform and had been hired right on the spot to come into the Consulate. Except for the head of the consular section. The man who ran this program was Reed Robinson, who was on loan as a reserve officer from the Immigration and Naturalization Service. This was under the Act of 1946, which created the reserve officer category. He knew the immigration laws inside out, and he was in charge of the operation. Bill Kerrigan was assigned to the citizenship section.

Then, as still today, my first assignment was to do visas. I think I was in the visa section for a year, perhaps a bit more, dealing largely with non-Germans, with people wanting to get out of Germany, out of displaced person camps, to the United States, supported by voluntary agencies, most of them church-affiliated, one kind or another, all nationalities, most of them without identification papers.

Without documentation, there was a great deal of difficulty in establishing whether there was fraud in any case. We had a security officer whose job was to try to determine if any of these were trying to escape the political crimes committed during the war or whether they were really who they said they were. Interrogation of these applicants for immigration under that program was pretty intensive.

Q: Were they mainly eastern Europeans?

ATHERTON: Eastern Europeans. Many Jews, who had survived, somehow, the concentration camps-not just in Germany, in Poland and all across eastern Europe-but had ended up in refugee camps in the neighborhood of Stuttgart, which were converted former German Army barracks.

One thing that we learned was that the one language they all had in common was what was called DP, or displaced person camp German. And, of course, that was the language that I had studied, the language in which I had passed the Foreign Service exam. I was not very good at speaking it, but I quickly began to. And I used my German to interview these applicants. My speaking, and their speaking, in what was neither of our first languages. I also had German interpreters if I needed them.

The cases all tended to be a lot the same. We were not issuing visitors visas except to very special Germans who were sponsored by the military government, who had been cleared of Nazi affiliations, some of whom were being hired to take on jobs as local employees of Foreign Service nationals, but for positions within the military government.

Q: Did you find you had a lot of attempted fraud?

ATHERTON: There were always a few real cases. But in most cases, the fraud consisted only of trying to establish their real identity, since they didn't have the documentation to prove it. Manufacturing birth certificates was a major industry. Now, very often, I think the information that was put in these manufactured birth certificates was probably correct. It was probable what they said was true, but they couldn't produce the original documents from the place of birth or from the registries where they came from.

I must admit that the people doing the visa investigations and giving a clearance before we could issue the visas were themselves, I think, in some cases, rather over zealous. I often suspected that they were really against all of these foreigners going to the States, and they were trying to find ways to disqualify them on the basis of fraudulent documentation, which I thought a spurious reason for not issuing a visa.If you refused a visa, you had to have it countersigned. The officer refusing it had to get another officer to review it and countersign, and say he or she agreed that this was a justified refusal under the laws.

I can remember, once, deciding that the refusal was itself, I thought, fraudulent. I declined to sign the document that would have made this a legal visa refusal, thereby incurring the displeasure of my senior. But in fact, I did so. I just couldn't do this. I can't remember whether they got somebody else to sign it or whether that person got a visa, but at least I didn't sign it.

Q: What were the investigating agencies that had come up with this idea that it was fraud?

ATHERTON: They were officers who were assigned to the Consulate. They were hired, in many cases, from positions directly out of the military. Some of them had been in military investigation, they had investigative backgrounds. One of the people doing this in fact was a locally hired Dutch national. He was assistant to the American who was head of the investigations for the Consulate. And I came to feel, after awhile, that on his part at least, and maybe on the part of some of the others, too, there was a certain amount of anti-Semitism involved here, when it came to the Jewish refugee applicants; that they were in fact trying to find reasons not to let Jews go to the States.

There was another force operating, which I only later understood the significance of when I began to know more about Palestine and the Middle East. Various Jewish organizations, the American Joint Distribution Committee and HIAS, for example, were active in trying to document and support and persuade Jewish displaced persons or Jewish refugees to go to what was soon to become Israel. This was 1947, and there was a certain amount, I think, of pressure on the refugees to go to Palestine, certainly in terms of affidavits of support. The impression was that they were much easier to get if you were seeking support to go to Israel than if you were looking for support to go to the United States, though many were also assisted in emigrating to the U.S.

And that was a bit of an education, to learn about the politics of immigration to Palestine. Actually, the Palestine mandate really had ended, because by then it was late 1947, early 1948, and the partition resolution had been passed by the UN General Assembly in November, 1947. The British had turned Palestine over to the UN. It was that interim period that led up to the Israeli declaration of their state in May, 1948, and which, of course, led to the first Arab-Israeli War.

But that was a backdrop that I was only vaguely aware of. I was in Germany; I had no idea that I would spend, later, a great deal of my career dealing with that problem.

Q: I do remember the AJDC was very active in providing documentation and so forth for Jews who wanted to go to the States. At the same time, they worked on sending ships from Hamburg to Palestine.

ATHERTON: Well, I'm not saying they did not assist and document those going to the States, but there was certainly a very major effort by some to persuade them that they ought to go to Israel, be part of the new state.

Anyway, that's what I did, basically, for the first year or more, work in the visa section issuing visas to displaced persons. But you didn't, in those days, have the rigid core system in the Service that subsequently developed. And, while I was in the visa section, I also was at my first post, and it was envisaged that I would rotate in the course of that assignment, to other parts of the Consulate.

I became very interested, and I thought I would like to try my hand at political reporting. I had met, through the visa section, some of the refugees who were ethnic German refugees from east Europe. So-called Volksdeutsche, from places like Bessarabia, or places that had been part of Germany before the war and that were transferred, as part of the post-war settlement, to Poland or other East European countries, or people who had fled ancestral homelands where Germans had been settled for a generations, going back way into the early Czarist period in Russia, who had been expelled or who fled in order not to live under Communist control. For example, there were the Germans from what was the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia, which had reverted to Czechoslovakia after the war. So we had these groups of ethnic German refugees, many of whom registered as non-Germans and as refugees, even though they were of German origin and they spoke German. I can't remember whether any actually qualified for immigration. I became interested in the politics of these groups, because they were beginning to form into political pressure groups in Germany.

And I can remember the very first political report I think I ever wrote in my life was about the politicization of ethnic German groups in the Stuttgart area. I don't know if anyone ever read it. I wrote it and gave it to the chief of the Political Section, and it maybe went into somebody's files.

Q: It may be in the archives.

ATHERTON: But, anyway, it was an attempt to use my position in the visa section to gather information, which could be useful for political reporting. This is something that I would hope officers still do today, and which I encouraged when I was still in the Service-that while doing their obligatory service in the visa section, they should look at it as an opportunity, and not as something to get behind them. It is an opportunity not only to get to know the language, to get to know the people of a country (you can see a lot more natives in the visa section than anybody else in the Consulate), but also sometimes to become one more eye and ear of the Ambassador or the Consul General, for doing what is one of the main jobs of the Foreign Service-to analyze the situation in the country and report what you learn.

I eventually was able to move out of the visa section into the citizenship section of the Consulate. We worked issuing passports and registering the births of Americans, getting to know that side of the Consulate's work, the citizenship laws. I think it was during this period that the post had an inspection, the first time I had been inspected in the Foreign Service.

I'm getting a little ahead of my story. I should have added that in this first period, I can't remember precisely when it happened, but in that first couple of years in Stuttgart, the Consul General, Mr. Hodgdon, had a stroke and died.

We were assigned a new Consul General, James Wilkinson, who was very much an old-school Foreign Service officer-basically, a man with many biases, I have to say. He was not very fond of women; he certainly was against minorities of any kind. I'll give you an example of the kind of problem, at least from my point of view, we encountered when we worked under Jim Wilkinson as Consul General.

In February of 1948, which was the spring of the beginning of the year after we arrived in Stuttgart, there was the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia. A great many Czech refugees ended up in some of the camps around Stuttgart.

And one group consisted of students from Charles University in Prague, who came out and immediately organized a university in exile, in their camp outside of Stuttgart, to continue their education. Some of their professors had fled with them, so you had students and professors, and they organized what they called the Masaryk University in Exile for these Czech university students. One of the things they wanted, and there were many of them, was to learn English. Some had some English; some didn't. Betty and the wife of the head of the Political Section, Rosser Finger, volunteered to teach them. The head of the section was Max Finger, who later spent many years in the U.S. Mission to the U.N. in New York, with the rank of Ambassador. Max was then head of the Political Section. I eventually got out of the consular section entirely, and my third assignment in Stuttgart was to work in the Political Section with Max Finger as the chief. So Betty and Max's wife, Rosser, got to know each other pretty well, and they volunteered to teach English to these students. The Consul General got wind of this and called Max and me in, and he said, in effect: "I want you to understand that I don't want your wives going out to that camp and having anything to do with these refugees. Who knows, they may be Communists, and we should not be mixing with them."

So I got a direct order that I should tell Betty to stop teaching English to the Czech students, which was the first time since I had joined that I really began to wonder what kind of service I had gotten into. Is this what all senior officers were going to be like, arbitrary and, I thought, in this case, very wrong? Am I going to have to kowtow to the arbitrary views of people, particularly people who were themselves prejudiced, and who certainly had a view of the role of women and families in the Service that was not my view?

So I had mixed feelings about the latter part of that tour, although the job was interesting. Max Finger eventually moved on and another chief of section came in, and I had the satisfaction of being able to do some analysis. By then Germans were beginning to have local elections. Not national, of course. This was still military government. This was the American Zone, and they were having elections for state bodies-part of the military government program, beginning to build institutions of democracy in Germany under military government. It was interesting to follow, and I did some analysis of these elections, and that was one of my contributions to the political reporting of that particular period.

The other thing that I found particularly interesting was that, as political officer, I was invited to attend the periodic staff meetings of the military governor. All of us in the Consulate didn't quite fit into the military hierarchy, and they didn't quite know how to assimilate us into their ranking system.

One of the great things that Dana Hodgdon did was to persuade the military government housing authorities that, as a Consul General, he was the equivalent of a three-star General, and his Consul was therefore the equivalent of a two-star General, and therefore Vice Consuls were one-star Generals.

Q: Very handy.

ATHERTON: Very handy. So we got housing that was probably better than we had for many years after that in the Foreign Service. We had two servants and all the amenities of living in an occupation regime.

But, also, it was an artificial situation. We had to do our shopping at the commissary and PX. Until the currency reform in early '48, when suddenly goods began to return and the German mark was worth something, you really couldn't buy much on the local market. And whatever you did buy, you had to do with cigarettes or coffee.

It was a barter system; it was a black market system, basically. It was corrupting, the whole black market system. I knew very few Americans who didn't, to some extent, indulge in it, and didn't sell their cigarettes or their coffee to get marks at the black market rate of exchange to use to buy things which were at inflated black market prices. If you had bought the marks at the legal rate of exchange, it would have been prohibitively expensive. Some of us whose consciences were a bit bothered by this used to go periodically to Switzerland, where you could buy marks legally at what was the free rate of exchange and bring them back into Germany.

But there was a kind of a corrupting aura about being in Germany during these days of the occupation, focusing on the black market and on the artificiality of being part of an occupation system. Although non-military, not part of a military government, we were still part of the establishment, and the Germans were the conquered people. There was still a lot of the residual attitudes towards Germans, that they should be treated as the enemy.

We certainly didn't pay much attention to it. We began, as soon as we could, associating with Germans. One of our daughter's best friends was the daughter of a next door neighbor who was German, and whom she kept in touch with many, many years after that.

But, still, it was not a typical Foreign Service environment at all. Obviously, we represented one of the few civilian departments in the military occupation, in a situation where nobody quite knew where we belonged. I had the feeling that many in the military never really quite understood what a Consulate was, what we were doing there in the first place.

I did enjoy very much being part of the periodic staff meetings of the military government, learning what was going on on the military government side. We got to know some of our military counterparts rather well, particularly those who were in the public affairs and political affairs side of the military government. They were often good sources of information.

In retrospect, I wonder why I was reporting things that they were probably also reporting through their channels, except that much of what they were reporting was probably going back to the Pentagon, and I hoped that what I was doing was going to the State Department, and assumed that maybe the two never talked to each other in Washington.

Q: Had the kreis officer program been begun yet?

ATHERTON: Yes, the kreis officer program had started.

Q: Did you liaise under them? What was their relationship?

ATHERTON: Not much. We got to know a few of the kreis officers in our part of Germany, as friends. The ones we got to know, in those days, for the most part were not Foreign Service officers. I know, at some point, new Foreign Service officers were assigned as kreis resident officers. Many of my contemporaries or colleagues a few years later started their Foreign Service career as kreis officers in Germany, not in more traditional jobs. We did get to know a number of the kreis officers socially, go out to visit them, get a bit of a sense what was going on in the countryside that way, but we weren't part of that network really.

Most of the time I was in Stuttgart, my job was in visas and passports. We were in Stuttgart for three years. That last year was not the happiest of times, because of the tensions I felt caused by the Consul General's attitudes and really rather tyrannical behavior, as far as junior personnel and junior officers were concerned. He did not like the fact that Max Finger, who was the head of the Political Section, was Jewish. If he had his way, and this was not a secret, because everybody that knew him knew this, there would be no Jewish officers in the Foreign Service. He had that much of an old-fashioned prejudice. It really disturbed me, and it disturbed a lot of my colleagues.

As I said, Bill Kerrigan and I were the only junior career people there at the beginning. The other officers doing visa and citizenship work were not in this as a career. They were doing a job, and then they were going to go on to other things. But for those of us who had chosen this as a career, we began to wonder if this was what all seasoned Foreign Service officers were like and if this was what our careers would be like.

Just about at the right moment, along came a man who, I guess if I'd known the phrase then, I would have said became my mentor in the Service. His name was Bernard Gufler. He was an old Eastern European and German hand, had served in the Baltic countries before they were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. He had served in Germany before the war, and he had been sent back and assigned to establish an office, not in Frankfurt, which is where the headquarters of the military government was, but in Bonn, which was going to be the capital of the new West German Republic. And he was recruiting staff to work with him in Bonn.

There were two offices established in Bonn in those days. By now, the military government had begun to evolve into the Allied High Commission, and the military governor had become a High Commissioner. It was the first stage of converting to an independent West German state. But we were there during that transition period when the military government was beginning to evolve into the High Commission, meaning more authority obviously being transferred to the Germans.

Gufler was to establish in Bonn an office called the Foreign Relations Division of the U.S. High Commission. The other office was being established by Charlie Thayer, and that became the Internal Affairs Division of the U.S. High Commission. It was, in the beginning, called a Liaison Office, and the purpose was to have somebody in Bonn who had liaison with the just-beginning-to-be-established West German authorities.

This was when a very limited, Basic Law was promulgated, and the West Germans had their first post-war parliamentary elections. As the government began to take shape, it began to reconstitute the German Foreign Service.

Q: Would that be about the summer of '48 or later?

ATHERTON: No, no, it was later, I should have said. Let me go back in the chronology. We didn't go to Bonn until 1950. I was in Stuttgart from late '47 until the summer of 1950. We went home and had our first home leave, and went back to Germany, and then we were assigned to Bonn.The reason we were assigned to Bonn was that Bernard Gufler had been traveling around Germany looking for people who were about ready to transfer and who might like to have a tour of duty with him, and who spoke German, had spent some time in Germany, felt somewhat at home there, and had an understanding of what was happening. So he asked if I would be prepared to go to work for him in Bonn.

Those were the days when senior officers could request officers and the personnel system generally complied. At least it happened that way in my case. I should say that, incidentally, we had received orders already through the routine personnel system to go to our second post, which was to have been Oslo. When I said that I thought it would be nice to spend some more time in Germany, Gufler was able to get the orders changed and have me reassigned to his office in Bonn.

He had two other people in the new office. One was a junior Foreign Service officer, whom I had not met before, who had come directly to Bonn, someone whom Mr. Gufler had known, named Stephen Koczak. Steve and I became the two career people in Gufler's Foreign Relations Division. The third officer was hired as a reserve officer, because he had studied in Germany before the war, spoke fluent German, and knew a lot of the people who emerged as figures in the new German government, such as Carlo Schmidt, for example, who became, during this period, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, and Willy Brandt.

So it was like night and day, going from Stuttgart to Bonn, working for Bernard Gufler who was a humanist who cared about his people. His wife was wonderful. She taught Betty a lot about what wives of the old Foreign Service were supposed to do. We became, in effect, not only colleagues but also very close friends. He restored my faith in a career which I could respect, in which I would hope some day to become a senior person myself and in which I would like to stay.

But we came very close in that last year, before Gufler came along, when I would say we were almost rehabilitated psychologically, very close to making the decision that this was not where we wanted to spend the rest of our lives. It was that stressful, in terms of the office atmosphere. I'm speaking of the office atmosphere that this created within the Consulate in Stuttgart.

Q: I gather your first two chiefs were not typical.

ATHERTON: Not typical. As it turns out, neither one was typical. But I didn't know that at the time. They were the only chiefs I'd had.

Can I back up once, because there was one other thing that occurred in Stuttgart that I really should mention.The inspector who came was an old buddy of Mr. Wilkinson. He stayed as a houseguest in the Consul General's house, something which was later not permitted. The Consul General would bring various staff people around to lunches and dinners and let the inspectors observe them in a social setting.

The inspector met with all of us on the staff individually, and in confidence, we were told. And many of us, certainly I did, let our hair down about how unhappy we were. We learned later that he told the Consul General. That didn't make our relationships with our Consul General any better. So that was another of the factors which really led me to think that this was not the business to be in.

But the light suddenly came on again when we got to Bonn. I had an interesting job, a pioneering sort of job. We were a very small office: Gufler, Cal Ancrum, who was the somewhat older German-speaking specialist, and Stephen Koczak.

Q: Tell me, were there other foreign missions there at the time?

ATHERTON: Well, there were French and British, because, you remember, this was still the High Commission.

Q: Yes, but it was in the American Zone, wasn't it?

ATHERTON: No, no. Bonn was in what was the British zone.

Q: No, Bonn wasn't British.

ATHERTON: Anyway, it was not the American zone. But the tripartite High Commission was in Bonn because Bonn had been designated to become the capital. You see, this was after the breakdown of functioning quadripartite control. The Iron Curtain had come down.

We were in Germany during the blockade of Berlin and the airlift, when the Soviets stopped all land travel to Berlin. I remember driving up the Autobahn by Frankfurt, and observing the endless takeoffs and landings of old DC-3s or 6s, which were part of the airlift of supplies and people from the western allied occupation part of Germany to Berlin.

It was a heady time. There was a lot, you know: the beginning of the Cold War, the breakdown of quadripartite rule, the beginning of the development of a German government. And while my job was pretty junior we were there, and we were part of what was happening. On the tripartite High Commission there were a series of tripartite committees under the High Commissioners. One was the commission that dealt with matters that might be considered more foreign policy than domestic policy, such as travel control, the oversight of the beginning of the establishment of the German Foreign Office and of its Foreign Service, and others which I've long since forgotten.

But we had periodic meetings of this committee. Gufler was the American member, and there was a British member and a French member. I was Gufler's staff person. I prepared his meeting papers, wrote up the notes, helped him write up his reports to the High Commissioner and back to Washington on these meetings, and worked very closely with the British and the French counterparts at my level. So we had a tripartite working group as well, to lend support to the committee in terms of support of the High Commissioners.

The actual headquarters of the tripartite High Commission was in what had been an old hotel or something, I'm not sure anymore, but it was a very grand building on a mountain across the river from Bonn in Petersberg, which was where the High Commission's Secretariat was, the tripartite Secretariat. And there were Americans and British and French on the Secretariat who were all part of our community.

So there were other Americans in Bonn besides our little group in the Foreign Relations Division, and at the liaison office for internal affairs that Charlie Thayer had established in a different building in Bonn. There were Americans assigned to the office of the Secretariat of the High Commission. There was a very small American community, and we all lived scattered throughout German neighborhoods in Bad Godesberg, south of Bonn. This was before the American housing development was built in Plittersdorf. Our office was in an old mansion on the Rhine River that had belonged to a wealthy German whose name was Deichmann. This mansion, estate really, was called the Deichmann's Ave or Mehlemerand because it was in a place named Mehlem. It had been requisitioned and taken over by military government, and this was where our office was.

We went to Bonn in 1950 at the end of home leave. By then plans were well under way to move the whole U.S. High Commission staff, which was quite large, from Frankfurt, which had been the capital of the American zone, to Bonn, to become part of what was the nucleus of, eventually, the U.S. Embassy. But at that point, it was still the U.S. High Commission.

There were, however, already many Foreign Service officers in the High Commission. It was a mixture of people who had transferred out of military government and people under the State Department who were different generations of Foreign Service. For example, the political advisor to the High Commissioner was a very senior career Foreign Service officer named Samuel Reber. And his deputy John Patton Davies, whose name was famous as one of the China hands, who was ultimately hounded out of the Foreign Service during the McCarthy period. They were people of the caliber of Davies, whom I think of as being extraordinarily able, committed Foreign Service officers of that era.

And so our happy little community rapidly expanded once office space and housing had been built. Plans were implemented to build a housing compound in Plittersdorf, between Bad Godesberg and Bonn, and to expand the villa where we had as our Foreign Relations Division office to accommodate the entire staff of the U.S. High Commission.

Q: Which was how many?

ATHERTON: Well, it was hundreds. It was literally hundreds. And the building that was built, into which we eventually had to move as well, was what became, after the West German government became independent, the new U.S. Embassy. And it is still, to this day, the U.S. Embassy in Bad Godesberg, in Mehlem south of Bonn. But, of course, it was built to accommodate the staff of the High Commission at its peak. A lot of the functions that were performed were going to be transferred to the new West German government, and there would be a great reduction in the size of the staff. So that, as it turned out, I don't think that the U.S. government ever really filled that office building with just its own people. Already, even in those days, the plan was to look for German government offices that might take over part of the building.

I can remember, to this day, a piece written by the Paris Herald Tribune correspondent in Bonn, Don Cook, who still is around, by the way; I've just seen his new book about that period. Don Cook wrote a very amusing piece about the new office building on the Rhine, in which he said: "It is reported that when this is converted to the U.S. Embassy, it will be much larger than needed, and, therefore, some elements of the new Bonn government will be absorbed. This will probably be the first time that an embassy has ever absorbed some of the government to which it is accredited." It in fact happened.

So Bonn was rapidly growing from a sleepy university town into the seat of the West German Government-but still with a small town atmosphere. I'm sure people from that period will all remember that the Germans rather laughingly called it the Bundeshauptdorf, which meant Federal Capital Village. This reflected the fact that, at least in that period, very few people thought this was more than transitory. The attitude was basically that it was only a matter of time, and hopefully not too much time, before Berlin would again become the capital, and all of these government offices would be absorbed into the central German government offices in Berlin.

I can remember one of the young German Foreign Service officers in the first class that became part of the new German Foreign Service, whom I got to know and have kept in touch with ever since-I can remember getting into a big discussion with him, very early on in those days in Bonn, about his predicting that this was all very transitory, and it was only natural that Germany would again be a single state in time, and that the West German Foreign Service would be expanded into an all-German Foreign Service. I can remember arguing with him and saying, "Kurt, I think it's conceivable that we will never see a reunited Germany in our lifetime." Well, I was wrong.

Q: But it's been a long time.

ATHERTON: It has been a long time. It was certainly a lot longer than my friend Kurt Mueller thought.

Incidentally, I should mention that before the actual establishment of the West German government and the Foreign Ministry, there was a kind of shadow Foreign Ministry, consisting of former German Foreign Ministry and Foreign Service officers who had been cleared under the de-nazification procedures. All of them were cleared, and all of them, of course, at that point, were unemployed. These were people who had been on the world diplomatic scene, including as was traditional in the old German Foreign Service, men of the old German nobility. For example, one name I remember from that time was Hasso von Etzdorf.

Q: Were they brought to Bonn?

ATHERTON: Well, this was interesting, and this again is a bit of a flashback to Stuttgart. They formed, outside of Stuttgart in the American zone, an organization called Das Deutches Bureau fur Friedersfrager, in rough translation the German Office to Study Issues of Peace. And that was another of the things that I did during my political reporting in Stuttgart. I got to know some of these people, and did some of the original reports, along with Max Finger, about what was happening in this group of former German Foreign Service officers. It was obvious that what they were doing was trying to stay together as a group until there would be a Foreign Service, since they all hoped to go back into the Foreign Service. Some of them in fact ended up getting some very senior positions once the German government was established.

Q: Excuse me, but it seems to me there's a rather important point there you're bringing up. You didn't know that all this was going to happen, that it was going to develop.

ATHERTON: Not when I was in Stuttgart.

Q: No, but by your going out and meeting with all sorts of people, you got to know people who later on were very important and learned their opinions.

ATHERTON: That's right. You're quite right. This established some contacts, interesting people just to get to know. And it got us out of purely military government circles, and was a way of getting to know Germans who had a certain common background.

Q: Didn't this take more of your time than normally you would have spent in the office? Wasn't this sort of extracurricular in a way?

ATHERTON: A lot of it was done evenings, a lot of it was done at social gatherings, usually at a local bierstube. We began to entertain in our home. As I recall, I don't think I had any entertaining allowance when I was a junior Vice Consul in Stuttgart. We had some modest receptions and begin to invite Germans to the house, not just all military government people. So we got to know some of these people socially, and we began to get some sense of not just who they were, but what they were thinking about the future shape of their country, the rehabilitation of Germany into the world community, the European community.

Once the West German government was established, and I was by then in Bonn, some of these people turned up in Bonn. I could go see them, even though they were many times senior to me, because I was one of those people who had, in a way, sought them out and met them and gotten to know them when they were on the outside, really, when they were still suspect as former servants of the German state, living and working and doing some study papers about various issues in the future, about Germany and its role in Europe, in this little office outside of Stuttgart. So when they showed up at the Foreign Ministry, and I'm sure a lot of their papers eventually became the official papers of the Foreign Ministry, I had at least some entree and some contacts.

Another thing that was very enjoyable was the decision, basically I think it was Gufler's idea, to make it a point to try to, not influence directly, but help to shape, if you will, the development and training of the new group of young German Foreign Service officers.

The West German government established a school for diplomats in Speier, on the Rhine south of Bonn. Gufler and I used to go there and sometimes some of the others from our office. Periodically, we'd be invited to go down and meet with these new German Foreign Service officers and talk to them about our Foreign Service, talk about policy issues, have little seminars, social gatherings and work together, and begin to develop channels of communication outside of the office. We talked to them about issues that they were interested in. A lot of them were just professional issues, how you select officers in your Foreign Service, how you train them, what about language qualifications. They would also be interested in substantive policy issues.

A big issue in those days was: Should Germany be rearmed? It was before there was a German Army. And a lot of talk about, for example, was there a role for Germany in NATO? Everyone understood this to mean West Germany, because the division of Germany by then was quite complete.

Q: Wasn't reunification a terribly important thing on their minds as well?

ATHERTON: Yes, they all talked about that. They didn't have any answers. But obviously they had by then come to realize that reunification was an issue that was caught up in and subsumed by the Cold War. As long as there was a total division between the Soviet sphere and the rest of Europe which was by then beginning to establish its own Western European community and NATO, I think they realistically recognized that reunification wasn't just around the corner.

A lot of their attention was focused on thinking about the question: When reunification comes, how do we do it? Not only in terms of how do we manage internally. They were not thinking as much about how to combine ministries, currencies, and all the things that are now issues for a reunified Germany, as they were thinking about the role of Germany in Europe and in the world.

There was intense interest in Soviet studies, for example. There were new publications coming out, and Germany had its share of Kremlinologists. We got to know some of them. Some were very stimulating intellectuals who had a background in Soviet studies. We got to know a number of very able Germans in those days, who had been on the outs when the Nazis were there. Some of them had been in exile, some of them had been in jail. Obviously, their credentials were very good in post-Nazi Germany. Many of them were editors of new publications, newspapers, new officials in the government, the politicians.

I can remember developing very interesting relations with people who were at a level where normally a junior officer would not have contacts. But our office was so small that Gufler couldn't see everybody, and those of us who were working for him often had entree, often on levels that were more senior than one would have expected.

Q: Did they seek you out?

ATHERTON: They would often seek us out, but we also would seek them out. By then the Bundestag had been established; there was a parliament. One of the things I used to do was to go sit in what was by then the diplomatic gallery and cover the debates in the Bundestag, and then go and call on the deputies, corner them in the corridors, and try to get a little material to report on this or that issue.

Q: I would assume that by doing all of these things, they all got to know you, by face anyway. They all knew who you were.

ATHERTON: Yes, I was one of several. I wasn't the only one covering the Bundestag, there were others. We divided the work up by issue. I was there to cover more the foreign policy debates and the issues having to do with foreign relations. Charlie Thayer's group was there to cover party politics and internal affairs generally.

I can remember hearing Kurt Schumacher, who was one of the legendary leaders of the Social Democratic Party and a great orator, even though I think he had had one leg and one arm amputated due to cancer. But he was still dynamic and an extraordinary orator. My German was good enough so that I could enjoy listening to him dominate the proceedings of the Bundestag. After Schumacher came Carlo Schmidt, who was a young, up and coming member of the Social Democratic Party.

I used to be able to talk with Willy Brandt in those days. That, incidentally, did not happen by accident. He had been in exile, I think it was in Norway, during the war, so he also spoke Norwegian. And Cal Ancrum, the member of Gufler's staff who had been a student in Germany before the war, was a great linguist, who also spoke Norwegian. He and Willy Brandt used to converse in Norwegian, and it was through Ancrum that I met Brandt.

Q: I gather your German was very useful.

ATHERTON: German was extremely useful in those days. While most people in German public life today, it seems to me, speak English, that was not the case in those days. The ones who spoke English well enough to use it in conversation or as a working language were a minority. And so those of us who had German had a real workout. I hate to think if I took the FSI test today what my rating in German would be. Obviously, it hasn't been used really actively since we left Germany in '52. But, then, I got a 4, 4+ in language tests, so I know it was good. I was quite comfortable using it in those days. So that was a very heady experience, being in a position where I was having contacts at a level higher than I would probably otherwise have had, and probably wouldn't have again for a long time, where history was being made, where a government was evolving, where a whole new democratic tradition was just beginning to be established, where the Cold War was increasingly a shadow over German.

Q: Somehow, after having an experience like that, your following experience would seem sort of anticlimactic, wouldn't it?

ATHERTON: Well, I clearly had an exciting tour in Bonn where I felt I was at the center of things and not on the periphery, and with a boss who was extremely generous and helpful-Gufler gave his staff as much head as he felt they could take. He didn't rein us in, and he encouraged us to stretch ourselves.

I can remember my first interview with him, when he was deciding whether or not in fact he wanted me on his staff, was conducted in German. He wanted to test my German. He was very good in German, so he interviewed me, partially, at least, in German, enough so that he could see that I could use my German as a working language. He tested me in the language, as well as in my knowledge of Germany and my interest in the issues of the day.

Remember, when Gufler rescued me from Stuttgart and took me to Bonn, I had been in the Foreign Service three years. I was a very junior FSO, in those days class Six, which was the entering grade. It was also the period when the McCarthy witch hunts were going on, because McCarthy's investigators, Mr. Cohn and Mr. Schine, came to Germany.

Q: Cohn and Schine. Yes, I remember.

ATHERTON: They were particularly looking for the old China hands who happened to have been in China when the Communists took over, and whom McCarthy charged with the loss of China. One of them was John Patton Davies, but we also had a younger officer in Bonn, Al Siebens, who had been assigned just in the last days before China fell to one of the consular offices in China. And he was, as a junior officer, a suspect just because he had been in China and knew Chinese. He had a wife who spoke Russian, by the way. She was born in China of missionary parents and had a Russian governess, so she had learned Russian. And the fact that she knew Russian was very suspect in those days.

Q: Well, that was a very sad period.

ATHERTON: And, of course, as you know, John Patton Davies eventually was hounded out of the Service. And Reber, too, for other reasons. So that was a shadow. It didn't affect me directly. I didn't have any of the wrong background, but I was disturbed to see this happen. Many of us were. I suppose it was another period when one began to wonder what kind of a business I was in, this Service. Was there going to be a witch hunt all my career, either being bullied by a tyrannical Consul General or surviving a witch hunt by a mad political ideologue like Joe McCarthy?

But it had its compensations. Gufler, incidentally, was transferred during this period.

Q: He went out to India, didn't he?

ATHERTON: It was Ceylon. He went to Ceylon as Ambassador. And when he went to Ceylon, he was replaced by another great person, George West. George West was my new boss, and he was the boss for the rest of the time that I was in Bonn.

I had been in Bonn just about two years, when orders came through from Washington for me and for another colleague of about the same generation, who was working on the internal side, under Charlie Thayer, to go back and take what was then called the mid-career course at the Foreign Service Institute. This was 1952, so I had been in the Foreign Service less than six years. I was a little disturbed to think that they thought this was mid-career. But it was called the mid-career course.

Q: I remember. I never took it.

ATHERTON: John Davies sent a message to the Department, as all of us have done at some point in our career, asking the personnel system to change this assignment. I can still remember him saying that both Pete Hooper, in the Internal Affairs side, and I, in the Foreign Affairs side, were playing such key roles at the working level in the Mission (by then it had become an Embassy in all but name; it became an Embassy after I left, when the Federal Republic formally was established), that we were so key, that the whole American operation would fall apart if we left Germany. This was the implication of those communications-somewhat exaggerated, obviously. Of course, the Department in its wisdom ignored them, and our transfers went forward.

Pete and I went down to Frankfurt and boarded a PanAm flight-it was one of those old propeller-driven Constellations-and headed back, leaving our families behind. Our transfer eligibility dates had not yet come, so there were no travel orders and no funds to pay for our families to go back to the States. So Betty was left with our three children.

I should have said that our second son, our third child, was born in Bonn while we were there. Betty was, by that time, very active in the local Little Theater group. She had helped to establish a Little Theater group, first in Stuttgart and then in Bonn. She had taken speech and dramatics in college. So she was busy directing a play that I never got to see, because I left before the play was actually produced. By this time there was a theater and all of the amenities in the new housing development in which the American community was housed. We never moved into it, by the way. Because we had been assigned a house before housing was built, we were allowed to stay in our house in Bad Godesberg, as part of the normal German community, with German neighbors and friends, rather than having to move into this American ghetto, as it has later been called. It was a real little America. We went to visit it, but we never became part of it. But that was where the theater was, and Betty was producing her play in that theater.

Pete Hooper and I came back and were assigned to the mid-career course and waited for the transfer eligibility date so our families could come back to the States. We were eligible, at that point, for home leave, after the training program was finished.

Q: Could you just say one thing about the mid-career course? I assume you don't really want to spend much time on that, do you?

ATHERTON: I don't. I wondered why I was there. I don't think I learned a great deal.

Q: I think we can skip that, don't you?

ATHERTON: I honestly have very little recollection about it, except that I didn't very much enjoy being a bachelor in Washington and having to go out and find a room in a boardinghouse somewhere. I remember finding a room in a place off Dupont Circle where there were bats in the bedroom at night.

Q: After being so active and doing such interesting work, it isn't very exhilarating to come back to study stuff that you know already.

ATHERTON: Things you either already know or think you don't really need to know. But I do regret one thing. One of the parts of the course was run by people from the Department of Commerce. They were trying to persuade Foreign Service officers that commercial responsibilities, responsibilities for helping American business and helping develop American markets abroad, ought to be taken seriously by the Foreign Service, and that it was worthy work for Foreign Service officers. And I'm afraid that I was part of that generation that said, "Well, that's not for me. I want to be a political officer and get on that fast track."

In retrospect, I think it was part of the reason why we, the Service, bear some responsibility for having, by default, let the commercial service be taken out of the State Department. That part of the mid-career course was a part that I later regretted not having taken more seriously. I didn't find it all that exciting. But I do think it was important to demonstrate to Foreign Service officers that this and visa work and administrative work and all the things that, in those days, we used to say were for others, were and are important. All we wanted to do was political work and move up that track.

Q: Talk to Prime Ministers. Well then, after that, what happened?

ATHERTON: What happened was already started before I left Germany. I had made a career choice, really, when I was in Bonn. In retrospect, ...a career choice.

I had been asked by the head of the American section of the tripartite High Commission Secretariat, Joe Slater, who was being transferred to Paris to help set up the Secretariat for what became the European Recovery Program, the predecessor of AID, if I would like to be, in effect, seconded, I guess would have been the phrase, or put on loan from the Foreign Service to join the Secretariat staff in Paris, with the promise for rapid advancement and all sorts of exciting responsibilities. It would have been out of the main stream of Foreign Service work, but it was tempting.

By that time, by the way, Max Finger and his wife had moved to Paris, and they were very good friends of ours. We used to visit them when we could get away and drive to Paris. I always loved going to Paris, and it was a temptation to take a job on the frontiers of a whole new dimension in foreign policy: economic assistance and the administration of the American contribution to the economic recovery of Europe-the beginning of the economic integration of Europe.

But I had also met a British colleague who was my counterpart on the working group of the tripartite High Commission, who had just come to Bonn from a tour of duty in Damascus. He filled us with tales about what an interesting part of the world the Middle East was, how much he had enjoyed his tour of duty in Damascus, and how this was a part of the world where lots was going to happen.

By then, I had pretty well decided that I was going to have a long and happy career in the European circuit. I spoke German. I had studied French, though it was not a spoken language for me at that time.

But I also had this vague feeling that maybe I ought to, before it was too late, see another part of the world, so I would have some basis to judge. I didn't really want to get out of what I thought was the mainstream of the Foreign Service, so I turned down the offer to take the job with the Secretariat of the European Recovery Program.Incidentally, if I recall correctly, we would have been working under Averell Harriman. I would have been working with Joe Slater. Other people who did this, some people who did go with him, had meteoric careers, in some cases.

Q: I'm sure it was very interesting.

ATHERTON: I'm sure it was fascinating, and I was not going to be leaving the Foreign Service. I would have had, in effect, reentry rights. My recollection is that the Department didn't say no, but the attitude basically was to raise a question whether it would be good for my career in the long run. I was not encouraged to take it by the Department, though I'm sure if I had said yes, it would have been approved.

But, meanwhile, I had become attached to the idea of staying in a mainstream Foreign Service assignment and seeing another part of the world. Also our British friend, Peter Male, had given us enthusiastic descriptions of what the mysterious East would be like.

Incidentally, we met at his house one night the Syrian Ambassador-to-be to the West German government. He was an old line, career Syrian Foreign Service officer. I can still remember the name-Ibrahim Istuani. By the time I got through hearing from him about the Middle East, I decided we really ought to at least see that part of the world.

I really had no knowledge of the area. I had studied history in college, but it was European history. My languages were German and some French. Except for world history courses and studying the Crusades, I had never read about the Middle East.

I had begun to get interested and knew a bit about the origins of Israel and the Palestine problem, because of Max Finger. He was Jewish, and to him it was a very important development, the emergence of Israel.

I'm having a flashback again to Stuttgart. When Israel declared its independence, the Jewish community in Stuttgart (the expatriate Jewish community, there was no native Jewish community), the representatives of the Jewish voluntary agencies working with displaced persons, had a little celebration, and Max Finger was invited. Max came back glowing about what a wonderful experience this was, to help celebrate the birth of this new nation. So that was interesting. It planted a seed that I didn't think much more about until Peter Male began talking about the Middle East.

These were the days when, once a year, we filled out a form called the April Fool's card (because it was due April 1st) indicating where we would like to go, and some rationale for it, when we were eligible for transfer.

My recollection is that most of the career planning that went into my career was my own career planning. I don't remember getting very much career planning from the State Department. We had, technically, career counselors, but I can't remember ever really getting counseled about what would be good for my career. I developed my own concepts, one of which was what later became known as excursion tours. After five and a half years by then in Germany, and having seen a bit of the rest of Europe by traveling to France and traveling to Italy and to Switzerland on leave, it just might be time to not get too Eurocentric, to get out and see another area, an area that clearly was going to be important in the world in that period.

So I put down on my April Fool's card that I would like to go to the Middle East. We had to list three posts, and I listed Damascus, Beirut, and Amman, as I recall, and in due course was informed that in fact I was going to be transferred, after the mid-career course, to Damascus.Nobody thought of language training at all. By then Betty had come back and we had rented an apartment in Washington. I think the kids were staying with her parents. After finishing the mid-career course (by then I had orders to go to Damascus), I did take an area studies course at FSI. Two weeks, a month, I can't remember. It was not a very long course, but it gave a compressed survey of the Middle East, of the problems of the area, of the countries, and of the people. One of the principal lecturers was Ed Wright, whom many people remember as dominating the Middle East studies program in those days, at the FSI.

But there was no talk of taking time out to learn Arabic, at all. Betty said, "Well, one of us had got to know a little Arabic." She found a colleague who knew Arabic, because he had been brought up in Beirut and spoke Arabic until it was almost a second language, named Bill Stoltzfus. And Bill agreed that, in his spare time, he would give Betty some basic Arabic lessons. She also got the records (they weren't tapes in those days) out of the FSI language institute and began to do some self-study in Arabic. When the time came to go to Damascus, Betty had at least enough Arabic to handle servants and do shopping and things that you needed to do, but with no knowledge of the written language at all. But she has a good ear for languages, and she had picked up enough spoken Arabic so she could manage to get by on a very elementary level.

I didn't even have that, and went off to Damascus with not one word of Arabic and only time to have begun, belatedly, to read as much as I could about the Middle East, the history mostly. Fortunately, in those days we traveled by ship, and we went out on one of the Four Aces, passenger freighter ships that took the better part of three weeks.

Q: Twenty-one days.

ATHERTON: I think they sailed from Hoboken, not from New York harbor, because they were freighters, basically, with about 100 passengers. Once they got across the Atlantic, they stopped at every port of call from Spain all across the Mediterranean.

Q: Beautiful ports.

ATHERTON: Beautiful ports. And we went ashore and enjoyed touring in all the ports, while having a free hotel room on the ship to come back to, so it was very cheap touring.

We had the kids with us, but there was a very nice Purser, and on some days he said, "You might not want to take the kids. Leave them on the ship and I'll take care of them. Go off and enjoy the tour." We often took up his offer, particularly for the youngest, Reed. By now this was January, not the best time of year. We sailed in January 1953 from Hoboken, and Reed had been born in August of '51, so he was only a year and a half old. He did not yet walk when we got on the ship. The Purser took care of him. Most of the time we took Lynne and Michael, who were by then eight and four years old, with us on most of the tours, but we did have a chance to do a lot of touring at the ports where we stopped.

Equally important, there was time to spend some of that three weeks reading up on the Middle East, so I would have some background by the time we got there. Not the language, but I did try to tackle a bit of history and a little bit about what the main issues of the day were-something called the Palestine problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict. There had been a war just a few years before.

Q: Really only one issue.

ATHERTON: And that was our introduction to the Middle East. We landed in Beirut. As I recall, it was not one of those sparkling days that one usually gets. This was winter; it wasn't one of Beirut's best beautiful days. We must have spent a night in Beirut.

What I remember most was the delay in getting off the ship, getting expedited through Customs and getting located. I guess we did get located temporarily in a hotel, not for long. But Reed, our youngest, who had not walked when we got on the ship, had learned to walk during that three weeks on shipboard. And it was very strange, because it was a rather rough crossing actually, in January, and Betty was in bed a lot of the time. She was not as good a sailor as Michael and I. But when we got off the ship in Beirut, Reed suddenly couldn't stand up, because he had learned to walk on a moving deck and suddenly the deck wasn't moving. It was really quite amusing.

Anyway, we went to Damascus. I can't remember whether we went right straight to Damascus that day or whether we had another night in Beirut. But certainly we didn't tarry. We got across the mountains and across the Bekaa Valley and to Damascus in fairly short order. By then I guess it was February, because we had had a late January sailing from Hoboken, and it was February 1953 when we arrived on the scene in Damascus.

Q: Who was there?

ATHERTON: The Ambassador was James Moose. The DCM was Harlan Clark. The head of the Political Section was Bill Brewer. The number two in the Political Section, who eventually I phased-in behind and replaced, was Bill Eagleton. The Economic Counselor was Paul Geren. The Admin Officer was Bob Lindquist. The PAO was Grant Parr, the Press Officer Harris Peel.

Q: Pretty stolid group.

ATHERTON: In those days there was no government housing. We had to go on the market to find a place to live, with a housing allowance which was not overly generous. We were lodged temporarily in a boarding house on the Baghdad Road. It was run by a lady, I think Danish-born, who had married a Syrian named Antoun Saadeh. Her husband was a Syrian Christian who was very active in the PPS, the Partie Populaire Syrien, or the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party, which was the Greater Syria Party. He had gotten on the wrong side of the ruling dictator of Syria and had to flee. I think he was in exile in Beirut. But Madame Saadeh had to run the boarding house. It had the advantage of being cheap, convenient, had fairly wholesome food, and was reasonably clean. I can't remember how long we were there. It seemed like a very long time, and it was the cold season. This was Damascus in the winter.

Q: Desert cold.

ATHERTON: Desert cold and no central heat. It was an old house, and all we had for heat were mazout stoves, fuel oil stoves which, if there was a strong downdraft, would backfire and send soot all over the room.

Q: What was your position?

ATHERTON: I went in as the junior Second Secretary in the Political Section. Bill Brewer was running it. I was told in my first meeting with the Ambassador that it was customary that the junior officer of the Political Section would also be his Protocol Officer, so I had better learn quickly about protocol. I didn't get a great deal of training. This was learning on the job. Sink or swim.

Q: They're pretty strict about that in Syria, the protocol.

ATHERTON: The protocol in those days was very strict. Ambassador Moose was a very old-school Ambassador. He did not really believe in giving buffet dinners. In Syria buffets were the main kind of entertainment. He insisted that their dinners would be sit-down and black tie.

Q: In that beautiful garden in the back.

ATHERTON: In the good weather, in the beautiful garden. In the cooler weather, in the house. My duties as Protocol Officer meant that Betty and I were always on standby, because Syrians would accept invitations and then at the last minute they wouldn't come, and there would be a set table with a seating plan. Our job on these occasions was to be present at the residence in black tie and dinner dress when the party started, in case somebody didn't show. And it happened occasionally that we had to fill a place or two places at the table. This often involved after-dinner bridge, which was played for money. Betty and I had never played much bridge, so you can imagine how we lost money at these games.

Q: They had a few peculiar rules. It was known as Syrian bridge.

ATHERTON: Yes, it was not always our style of bridge. They also provided a poker table. I was somewhat better at that, because we had played poker in Stuttgart, and then when we first got to Damascus we had gotten into a poker circle, so we were better at poker than we were at bridge.

Q: How did you get along with all these people at the dinner parties there? These were the high government officials, were they?

ATHERTON: They were usually high government officials or people in the business community. It was before the Baath revolution, before the nationalization program. Syria had a very active and a very aggressive and a very successful private sector, agricultural, commercial and industrial.

To go back a bit, one of Betty's and my first problems was to figure out what to do about languages. We spoke pretty good German by that time, but German was obviously not spoken in Syria, except by a small expatriate German community who, it turned out, had mostly been officers in the German Army during World War II. They were under contract to the Syrians as military advisors. It wasn't quite clear whether we should even have anything to do with them. Some of them might well have been Nazi, and we weren't supposed to have anything to do with Nazis in those days. There was a German Embassy, we could deal with them. But basically, except for the few Syrians who had made the transition from French to English as their second language, we didn't have a common language. And I clearly wasn't going to learn enough Arabic to be useful in the time available.

So I went to the Ambassador, in my first call on him, and said, "Mr. Ambassador, I know you're an Arabist, you've studied Arabic."

Although he, by the way, did not use it very much, he was very erudite. He could read and write classical Arabic. But I'm told by those who listened to him speak Arabic that he spoke it with a very strong Arkansas accent.

I said, "I have no Arabic at all. I can start taking intensive lessons, but it will probably take my whole tour here before it gets to the point where it would be of much use. I could probably get my French, which I have studied, up to a useful level. I've never been in a French-speaking country, but I studied French in college, and I have a grounding in the grammar and vocabulary."

I could read it reasonably well, and I could probably find a tutor and get my French up to the point where I could use it as a working language. Most of the Syrians who had a single foreign language had had French, although increasingly many were also beginning to learn English.

And that's what I did. The Ambassador's advice was not to try to become an Arabist, an instant Arabist, which nobody can become, but to bring my French up to a working level as quickly as possible.

So I found a tutor. The problem, which wasn't a major problem, was that she happened to be Belgian rather than French, and therefore I'm told to this day that I speak French more with a Belgian than a French accent.

So I was launched. My job was basically doing whatever I was asked by the head of the Political Section and by the DCM, and obviously by the Ambassador, to do. Mostly it was keeping track of domestic political affairs.

A principal issue the Embassy dealt with involved liaison with the U.N. Truce Supervision Organization, problems in implementing the Syrian-Israeli General Armistice Agreement, the U.S. role in this when there were alleged violations of the armistice agreements. Other priorities were the regional relations between Syria and its neighbors, and obviously the main reason why we were there: the relations between Syria and the United States.

But basically my job was try to understand and interpret what was happening on the domestic political scene. And obviously to do this, I had to rely very heavily on one of the senior local employees, or Foreign Service national employees of the Embassy, who was head of our translation unit, but also came from a family that had certain status in Damascus and was well connected in the local community. He was a political analyst basically, and he was our man on the spot. Both Bill Brewer and I relied very heavily on this man, Fouad Ghamyan, and John Shammi, his number two, to make sure that we were not out of touch with things that were happening on the local scene and to help introduce us very often to the people on the political scene that we wanted to be in touch with.

Q: What was the government at the time, and were there opposing orientations?

ATHERTON: This was the period when Syria had experienced already three military coups d'ï¿½tat, as I recall. It was a military dictatorship. There were two traditional political parties whose leaders came from the old ruling class, the landowners, both agricultural and urban, the new industrialists to some extent.

But there was no traditional political life, except in coffee shops, and the salons, and the dinner parties, where the people whose political leadership roles had been usurped by the military coups talked a lot about how they were going to come back to power someday. These were the Adib Shishakli years, the dictator at the time we arrived. They talked a lot about how they were going to restore parliamentary government. And Shishakli would every now and then remind them who was boss by rounding some of them up and sending them off to jail for awhile.

But it was all very civilized. They would go in and out of jail, and it was kind of a mark of honor. I remember one of these old politicians, whose name I've long since forgotten, complaining bitterly because there had just been a roundup of political opposition leaders and they had overlooked him. And he felt that this was a sign that they didn't recognize how important he was.

You know, looking back, I think some things are perhaps clearer than they were at the time. I was, I think, very fortunate to come to Syria and to the Middle East right at this time.

This was a time of transition. Having just come from Germany, which was also going through a period of transition of its own, we lived in exciting times. The Middle East, as a region, clearly was going through transition, part of the global transitions that happened in the wake of World War II, and to a large extent because of the restructuring that took place as a result of World War II. Remember, this was 1953. This was only five years after the declaration of Israeli independence, the establishment of Israel; four years after the conclusion of the General Armistice Agreements, which governed the relations between the Arab countries and Israel.

It was a very new situation. You had the Arab World still not accepting the permanence of Israel, and not really having psychologically recovered from the shock of having actually lost the war to these intruders in Palestine, and having to sign armistice agreements to stabilize the borders.

So this was a brand new factor on the scene, replacing the British control of Palestine. It was also a period when European influence, particularly British and French domination of the countries of the area, was phasing down very rapidly. Their influence, post-World War II, declined. The French had had the Mandate for Syria under the League of Nations between the two world wars, and the French had therefore been the dominant influence in Syria. But they were out. The British were out of Palestine. British influence was still there in Jordan and in Iraq, and the French influence in Lebanon was still strong. But basically you had the phasing down of the British, and in a way a kind of vacuum of external influence, which in the end the United States to some extent was looked upon to come in and fill.You also had a third area of transition. Internal political, or socio-political adjustments were going on within Arab societies at the time, with old elites being challenged in some of these countries by new political movements. Syria was in many ways the cauldron of a lot of this. Syria looked at itself as the guardian of the ideals of Arab nationalism, pan-Arab nationalism. It had taken on also the position of the defender of the Palestinian cause. Well, in a way this was their image of the historical role Syria should play, even though they had just come out of two decades of being a Mandate under French control, and before that, five centuries of rule by the Ottomans. But remember that just before the First World War Arab nationalism had a renaissance, or maybe it was the first real birth of Arab nationalism, against the Ottomans at that time. And at the center of that was Damascus; Beirut to some extent, but Damascus to a very large extent. Therefore, there was the sense that they had led the struggle for Arab nationalist aspirations and Arab independence. It was to Damascus that General Allenby came to mark the liberation of this area from the Turks. And it was to Damascus that King Faisal was supposed to come as the first king-one of the sons of the Sherif of Mecca, whose sons were to be rewarded for his having sided with the Allies against the Turks by being given pieces of the liberated and newly created independent Arab states.

It's no time, really, to go into the whole history of that, but, clearly, part of the turmoil was the Arab feeling of betrayal. And the Syrians felt it very strongly, that the Allies, the French and the British in particular, had let them down and not fulfilled their promise of independence after the First World War, and kept them under their domination all during the inter-war period. So this was a kind of a reaction to their resentment of British and French rule.

And after the establishment of Israel in Palestine, that resentment also transferred to some extent to the United States, because we were seen as one of the principal sponsors of Israel at the establishment of its independence. There was always a kind of a love/hate feeling about the United States. On the one hand, they had looked to us (and remembering Wilson and World War I and the post-war treaty negotiations) as the advocates of self-determination. They had really, I think, believed that the United States was somehow going to see that Arab aspirations for their own self-determination were fulfilled. What they saw instead was the establishment of Israel, on what they considered Arab land, with American support.

So we got off on less than a good foot with some of these new Arab regimes. Not so much the old elites, who really felt that their future lay in trying to have good relations with external powers. This was much the tradition. But the new military rulers who took over, and even more, the new political movements just beginning to take shape, tended to adopt a very nationalistic, in some ways xenophobic, anti-Western, including anti-U.S. ideology. It was very pan-Arab.

This was the time the Baath Party was beginning to develop as the rather typically Syrian, or initially typically Syrian, version of Arab nationalism: a blending of Socialist economic doctrine and Arab nationalist political doctrine.

There had also been a revolution in Egypt the year before we got to Syria, 1952, and you had Nasser coming to power in Egypt, with his pan-Arab movement, his doctrine of Arab socialism.

So there was a lot of ferment, and it reflected itself in rivalries among the Arab states, between the traditional regimes and the nationalistic modernizing regimes. It reflected itself in the conflict between Israelis and Arabs. And it was a reflection of, in some ways, the growing Cold War. You had the Soviets trying to get a foothold in the area, or so it was perceived by the Eisenhower Administration. And during our time in Syria the Soviets made their big breakthrough by selling weapons to the Egyptians and to the Syrians, initially through the Czechs, but eventually, directly, when the U.S. declined to provide them arms against what they saw as an Israeli threat.

So I guess what I'm saying is that this period of our tour in Syria turned out to be an extraordinarily seminal time in terms of what became the trends of the future. A lot of things were just beginning to happen. I take no credit for recognizing it at the time. We were much too close to it, and much too focused on the Syrian scene. But now, looking back, it was a time when a lot of future developments were taking shape, and the molds into which the area became frozen were established to a large extent-the Arab-Israeli conflict, which dominated almost everything most of the time.

Q: What sort of attitudes did you have in the Embassy toward all of this?

ATHERTON: That's a very interesting thing to reflect back on. I had come, obviously, with no particular involvement in the issues, the arguments, and the debates that eventually led to our recognition of Israel, the establishment of Israel. But the Ambassador, certainly, and some of the older hands very much belonged to that school which felt, as Loy Henderson had said at the time, that the establishment of Israel was going to destabilize the area, was going to offer opportunities for the Soviets to move in, that it would complicate our lives to the extent to which we, the United States, were seen to support Israel, and that we would be seen as hostile to, or at least not supportive of, Arab positions and the Arab cause.

So I think there was a kind of a polarization. My recollection is that the American Embassies in the area at that time in the Arab world tended to be advocates for the Arab points of view. And the other side of the coin was that the American Embassy in Tel Aviv tended very much to be an advocate of the Israeli point of view. And very often you wondered whether the war between the Arabs and the Israelis was any more intense than the war between Embassies Tel Aviv and Damascus, or Tel Aviv and Baghdad, or Tel Aviv and Amman.

I remember one of the revealing aspects of this happened when it was the turn of Embassy Damascus to host the periodic regional Chiefs of Mission conference. Ambassador Moose would be the host Ambassador, and the Ambassadors from all of the surrounding countries would come and meet, prepare their assessments of the situation, exchange views, and presumably make some recommendations for Washington about our policy in the area. The Ambassador from Israel was looked upon almost as an adversary, and his attitude was that he was entering the enemy camp. It came through very clearly. And I think it was reciprocated by the Ambassadors from the Arab countries.

Q: They thought he was a spy.

ATHERTON: So it was really very strange. I had to deal with this, as Protocol Officer. It fell to me to make sure that the right seating arrangements were made at the conference table, and the right pecking order was established so far as the official affairs were concerned.There were two problems. One was the tension between the Ambassador from Israel and most of the others. But there was another interesting sidelight to this, and I guess since they have both passed away, one can tell the story now.

Q: John Davies?

ATHERTON: No, the Ambassador to Saudi Arabia at the time was George Wadsworth. The Ambassador at that time in Amman, I think, was Lester Mallory, who had come out of the commercial side.

And the question was: What is the rank order? What is the order of precedence of the American Ambassadors for seating purposes, for protocol purposes, and all these things? And I hadn't realized it, but apparently there was a longstanding rivalry of sorts between James Moose and George Wadsworth. And Moose, as the host, instructed me to draw up a rank order which would have had the effect of putting George Wadsworth, who was by far the most senior person in terms of his rank in-service, at the bottom of the list.

I said, "Well, how do we do this?"

And he said, "Well, you take the length of service in-country. Lester Mallory has served longer in Amman than George Wadsworth has in Saudi Arabia, and therefore he should be the senior visiting Ambassador."

I found this very difficult, but I didn't know quite how to handle it. My instinct told me it was a mistake, it would not work, and George Wadsworth would not put up with it. If you took the in-service ranks, he was by far the most senior of all the American Ambassadors at this conference. I think I enlisted the help of the DCM to persuade the Ambassador that this just wouldn't do. It wouldn't look right, it wouldn't be understood. And finally reason prevailed, and George Wadsworth was the ranking visiting Ambassador. But it was an interesting little insight.

Q: It would have been a little revolution in Syria.

ATHERTON: Well, there was a clear polarization of the area, not only between Arabs and Israelis.

Q: How did that affect your relations with the Syrian government, or did it?

ATHERTON: Well, not really, because, in a way, the Syrians didn't blame the people on the spot. They, I think, sensed that they had some friendly ears they could talk to.There was much internal intrigue going on within Syria. There were always groups plotting against each other. And then there was the concern about coups stimulated from Baghdad. Remember, the rivalry between Damascus and Baghdad is not a modern phenomenon; it's been there a long time. And the Iraqis were always being accused of trying to promote coups inspired by the British, who had strong influence over the Iraqi regime. Shishakli had overthrown an earlier regime, which was suspected of having come to power with the support of the Iraqis. The Iraqis in those days, by the way, were still the royalists. It was still the royal family, King Hussein's cousin Faisal, and it was also Nouri Said, the perennial Prime Minister who everybody assumed was a British agent. So this was seen as an Iraqi-British plot to try to overthrow the upstart military leader of Syria.

I think it has to be noted, by the way, that certainly one of the causes of this instability and of these coups d'ï¿½tat was the defeat of the Arab armies and the Arab regimes by Israel. It was a very big element, the attempts to discredit politically those who had been leading the Arab countries at the time of the first war with Israel in 1948, which led to the armistice agreements in '49. There were many leaders overthrown and assassinated, it wasn't just in Syria during that period. And one of the charges always was that they had been associated with the loss of Palestine. There may have been lots of other reasons why there were attempts to replace them, but that was always a very powerful argument-that you, wherever you happened to be at the time, were involved somehow in The Defeat, which, incidentally, the Arabs then never really accepted as a defeat so much as a betrayal by somebody else. There was very little acceptance in the Arab mind and in Arab politics of Israel as a permanent part of the Middle East.

The armistice agreements of '49, which were supposed to be just transitions to peace treaties, quickly became the new status quo. Those were the days when the maps of the area didn't show Israel, they showed occupied Palestine.

I think it might be instructive to tell the story of my attempt to break with this tradition. In 1954, we'd been one year in Syria at the time, and I had certainly heard plenty of the Syrian and Arab point of view towards Israel and towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, not only within the Embassy, but from others in the diplomatic corps and certainly from the Syrians. And I just felt that there had to be two sides to this argument.

I should add, by the way, that we had a lot of contact with the U.N. observers. I think the head U.N. observer in those days in Syria was an American. The Chief of Staff of the U.N. Truce Supervisory Organization was a Canadian, but I think the top man, or if not the top man the number two man, at least, in Syria was American. We lived in the same building, so we had a lot to do with the U.N. people, and we used to get their perceptions of who was at fault for various incidents that became violations of the armistice agreements which had to be adjudicated. Their attitude was that the Israelis were very often responsible, by trying to occupy and cultivate the demilitarized zones. That was always one source of the problem, of Israel not only pushing towards the limits of what the armistice agreements allowed, but beyond the limits of what the armistice agreements gave them as rights under those agreements. So the atmosphere was pervasively one of sympathy, basically, with Syrians and the Arab cause, and criticism of the Israelis, which was totally different from the perception on the American political scene or from the Embassy in Israel.

But I felt that I had heard this side, and I wanted to get a sense of Israel and what the other side was. So I decided the way to do that was to take my local leave by making a trip to Israel. I went to the Ambassador and told him I would like to do this and thought I'd have to get his permission. His first reaction was really very negative.

He said, "You know, if you do that and the Syrians hear that you have spent your leave to visit Israel, they may declare you persona non grata. It may adversely affect your ability to do your job. But I won't interfere if you really want to do it. It's up to you."

So I decided I would. We left the children with the nursemaid and the neighbors to look after and drove down to Jordan and visited some friends in Amman, and then drove over to Jerusalem and stayed with Slator and April Blackiston; he was then Consul. They lived on the Arab side, since the Consulate General then was divided between the Arab and Israeli sides of the city.

We had made arrangements in advance, to save paperwork. This was all done in those days through the Consul General in Jerusalem, who was allowed to cross the line dividing the city, and the U.N. forces, to get permission for us to cross over and to take our car with us. The way you did that was simply to take off your Syrian license plates and put on one of any number of American license plates (outdated license plates from the States) that the Consul General kept on hand for such occasions. So we put a couple of expired American license plates on the car, put the Syrian plates in the trunk, and, armed with our passports and our passes, drove through the Mandelbaum Gate in No Man's Land from Jordanian-occupied East Jerusalem to West Jerusalem, which was Israeli.

It was going from the Middle East to Europe in some ways, because what struck one is how European Israel was. The Israelis were mostly Europeans, German-speaking in many cases, which gave us the first chance in a long time to use our German. After going through the exercise of discovering that I didn't know Hebrew and they didn't know French or English, then we would say, reluctantly, why, I guess we have to speak German.

We spent the better part of a week, or maybe more, driving around much of Israel. We didn't get down into the Negev. We didn't get to Beersheba, but we went to Askelon near the Gaza Strip, to Galilee and Tel Aviv, and to Haifa.We had friends in the Embassy, by the way, in Tel Aviv, who showed us around. Steve Koczak who had been a colleague in Bonn, and his wife. When I was assigned to the office of Bernard Gufler, he was one of the people in that office. He was, by that time, Political Officer at the Embassy in Tel Aviv. So we had some insights and introductions to Israelis. I found it all very fascinating, and I heard, obviously, a lot of the other side of the story and saw what the Israelis were doing in terms of creating a state. One had to admire a great deal of what one saw.

We drove up the coast to Haifa. We had a Consulate in those days in Haifa, and we visited the Consul, whom we had known in Stuttgart. And then up to the crossing into Lebanon at Ras Naqurah. The Israeli border guards very obligingly helped us take the American plates off the car and wire the Syrian plates back on, and then we drove through that No Man's Land into Lebanon and up to Beirut.We drove, eventually, back across the border into Syria. We didn't, obviously, have any Israeli stamps on our passports. They were very careful to put any stamps on a separate laissez-passer so it wouldn't show on our passports that we had visited Israel. And back to Damascus.

The first night back, we went to a diplomatic reception, and at that reception was the Secretary General of the Syrian Foreign Ministry, Ibrahim Istuwari, whom we had first met when I was still in Germany. He was one of the people introduced by our British friend who had persuaded us that we ought to ask to be assigned to Damascus. So we knew him even before we arrived in Damascus. And he struck up a conversation. By the way, he was one of the few people whom I could speak German with in Damascus, because he had studied in Germany. So it was some German, some English, and some French. But I remember very well the conversation, though I can't remember any more which language it was in.

He asked, "Have you been away?"

And I said, "Yes, we have been on holiday."

"Oh," he said, "where did you go?"

I said, "Well, we went down to Jordan and to Jerusalem."

There was a long pause, and he looked at me and he said, "Did you cross over?"

And I figured they probably knew, that Syrian Intelligence probably knew, so I saw no sense in dissembling. And I said, "Yes, we did go across to visit Israel."

And his eyes lit up and he said, "Tell me, what's it like?"

And that was the only repercussion that we ever heard of our visit to Israel. It did not produce anything but curiosity on the part of the Syrians that knew about it. We didn't go around advertising it, but we didn't hide it. It certainly didn't cause our career to be foreshortened. In fact (I get ahead of my story a little bit), we had a second tour of duty in Syria, when we transferred from Damascus to Aleppo, and spent another happy two years there at the end of our Damascus tour.

Q: Could I ask you a question here? During your tour there in Damascus, what sort of problems did you personally have to take up with the Syrians, and who did you take them up with, the foreign office?

ATHERTON: I think we were pretty well limited in our official contacts to dealing with or through the Foreign Ministry. There was a very pervasive police-state atmosphere, no doubt about it. Syrian Intelligence was everywhere. The assumption was that you were under surveillance. Private Syrians, even those who were opposed to the government, were discreet, not about seeing us, but about what they talked about. So my contacts were either officially with the Foreign Ministry (usually at my level with the American Desk of the Foreign Ministry) or with private people in business, in the university, members of the old political, social, economic elite who were very circumspect about what they would talk about, about politics. Not entirely. Some were more willing to be outspoken than others.

But for the most part, to get really inside, non-governmental political information, for example about opposition movements, our main source, I have to admit, was our local employees, particularly those who were in the Political Section assigned to the press unit, who were very good, and very well connected. And they kept us, as it turned out in retrospect, very accurately informed of what was happening among the opposition, and particularly among the people who eventually became the founders of the Baath Socialist Party. People like Michel Aflaq, Akram Hurani, who were in Syria or in exile at the time. I guess they were mostly in exile, some of them in Beirut. But they had their own followers, very strong, particularly in Ham. And most of the information that we got was either picked up by the local employees from them or, to some extent, by getting to know people in the press. For some reason, the press seemed a little more free to talk to us, or maybe they were a little more courageous. So we did have contacts with some representatives of the Syrian press. They were also sources with information.

But political reporting was pretty much based upon putting together the jigsaw puzzle. A little bit of information would come through a Syrian employee or from a Syrian friend in an unguarded moment, or reading between the lines of the newspapers. We were not, I think, grossly off base, though there were many times when we didn't know inside details. For example, I don't know of anyone at the Embassy who had any advance knowledge of the coup d'ï¿½tat which, while we were in Damascus, overthrew Shishakli. But we knew in general there was growing discontent which was a threat to the regime.

There had been some student demonstrations against the regime. And I can remember once, as a good Political Officer should, going down to a demonstration outside Damascus University, going down in the car, trying to observe what was happening and get a sense of the discontent that this reflected, when the police moved in to break up the demonstration and began firing tear gas, and I ended up with tear gas in my eyes. The wind was blowing that way.

But we did try to keep our finger on the pulse by a lot of physical reconnaissance, going around asking ourselves: "Where has the Army got its tanks?" That was one of the things that was almost always a giveaway; if you knew where the Army was positioning its tanks, you knew where they thought the trouble was coming from.

Q: Did we have any military attachï¿½s?

ATHERTON: Oh, yes, we had military attachï¿½s, and they were doing their thing on the military side. We would obviously get together and compare notes. We would feed what we had into the Political Section, and the military attachï¿½s would feed what they had. And we had CIA representatives.

Q: Were they effective?

ATHERTON: Reasonably, I think, especially in gathering and in expanding the sources of information, helping analyze it.

The coup, which was successful, was mounted by a combination of military leaders, some members of the business community, and some of the older civilian politicians, taking advantage of general disenchantment with Shishakli, on the part, in particular, of the Druze community of Southern Syria. There had been armed clashes between some of the Druze communities in the south and the Syrian military, and Shishakli was blamed for having been too tough on the Druze. I can't even remember what it was that the Druze were expressing their opposition about, but it turned into some military clashes. And that, I think in retrospect, helped precipitate the consolidation of the opposition to Shishakli and the successful putting together of a military coup, which actually started in the north, in Aleppo, but quickly spread. Shishakli escaped and went into exile.

The civilian parliamentary government was restored. The old political parties returned to power. There were two principal parties: the Nationalist Party and the People's Party, which basically represented groupings of the principal leading Sunni Muslim families of Syria, the big landowners, the wealthy families. And also the parties represented, to some extent, the geographical centers of Syria. The People's Party was stronger in Aleppo. The Nationalist Party was stronger in Damascus. And the Baath Party, which was an opposition party and had been illegal up to that time, was strongest in Ham . So you had these regional groupings, plus family groupings, plus, in the case of the Baath Party, an ideological grouping. The Baath Party opposed the old ruling elite, the old politicians. Its leaders represented a new class of younger Syrians who were secularist and pan-Arabist in their politics, Socialist, and, in some cases, Marxist in their economics.

Q: Who does that leave? Who was with Shishakli?

ATHERTON: Shishakli, at that point, had nobody left. Shishakli had had the military. He did not really have a political base, which was one of the problems. His base was only in the army, and not the whole army. That was one of his weaknesses. He never really did build a strong grassroots base of support. He had certain military units and officers in key positions who were loyal to him. When they began to defect, he had nobody to turn to. The streets did not pour out to defend Shishakli.

It was a very interesting coup. We watched it all from the balcony of our apartment. Tracer bullets in the air. None of the foreigners ever had a sense of being in danger during this period. It was like watching a show from one of the best seats in the house without feeling that you were in any way really part of it. There were curfews, and we had to stay indoors nights for awhile, but no great inconveniences.

And then came the restoration of civilian government, the old President and parliament. Basically, the civilian leaders took over from the coup leaders, with the coup leaders' approval. In fact, the coup leaders reinstalled the civilian government. Their position was that this was simply a continuation of the legitimate government which had been interrupted by the series of coups d'ï¿½tat, and they simply reconvened the parliament, which had existed before the coups had dissolved it. And Hashim al-Atasi, the old President from Homs, was reinstalled as President.

It was in a way turning the clock back, as though nothing had happened in those intervening years. Back to business as usual. The problem with business as usual in Syria was that the old parties were more preoccupied with their rivalries among themselves, and they were rivalries that had very little to do with political differences. They mostly had to do with family rivalries or with regional differences, economic differences, political influence.

It seemed to many of us that they were turning back the clock, but were unaware of the world around them, of the new forces that were coming to the surface from other sources, from other causes. The new pan-Nationalist, pan-Arab forces in the area and in Syria. The growth of the strength of the Baath Party. And also there was growing, in parallel with this, a Syrian Communist Party. So you had the Baath, who were Socialist and, in some respects, Marxist economically, and also pan-Arab, pan-Nationalist, and anti-Communist. And you had the Communists, who looked to Moscow and were therefore not considered good nationalists. And then you had the old political parties who actually constituted the government. They held the parliament, they held the presidency, the prime ministry and all of that. But the world was moving on, and they were not keeping up with it.

By the way, there was one little incident which I think is worth reporting, even though I'm backing up a bit. Immediately after Shishakli had been overthrown, it wasn't quite clear yet who was going to be in charge and who the new government was going to be; we didn't know yet whether there was a government to recognize. Did we or did we not have diplomatic relations at that point?

As the junior person in the Embassy Political Section, I was sent down to test the waters at the Foreign Ministry, and the person I went to see was the Chief of Protocol. It was felt that he was one contact that we could have. So I went and called on the Chief of Protocol, who was a member of an old family of Syria, Walid Majid, who eventually ended up in exile and became a U.S. citizen after the revolutions threw his class out of power. But he was the Chief of Protocol, and I went into his office.

This was just literally a day or so after Shishakli had been overthrown. And the first thing I noticed was that over his desk, where there had always hung a picture of Shishakli as long as I'd been there, was a picture of Hashim al-Atasi, the man who had been President before and who was coming back.

I looked up and I said, "Walid, what happened to Shishakli? You've already got old Hashim al-Atasi's picture up there."

He laughed, and pointed to a storage area in the wall. He said, "Oh, we keep them all up there, because they come and go."

They had no trouble finding a portrait of Hashim al-Atashi and rehanging it, as though nothing had happened in the intervening years.

There was a formal arrival parade, and I can remember going downtown with Fouad Ghamyan to watch the procession from Homs as the new President and all of his supporters, in good Arab fashion, were dancing, clapping, and cheering, supporters lining the streets. One of them said something to Fouad in Arabic, and Fouad laughed and turned to me and said, "Do you know what that man said?"

I said, "No."

He said, "We cheer them when they come, and we curse them when they go."

All the pictures of Shishakli had disappeared from all the stores, and pictures of At si had suddenly reappeared from nowhere.

Syria was back to the parliamentary government that had existed briefly after the French departure, after Syria had been given independence, and before the series of military coups began.

It was during this period, however, that the real source of political action and political power increasingly shifted to the younger officers in the military, who were in very large numbers adhering to the new political forces, in particular to the Baath Party.

We did not have contacts with the military directly, but with people who were in turn in touch with the military. The military really, except for the formal contacts between the Defense Attachï¿½ and their counterparts, had very little direct contacts with foreigners. There were one or two exceptions, and the one or two exceptions usually got into trouble.

But we did put together, I think, a pretty good picture that the real training ground for political indoctrination of this new breed of ideological, pan-Arab, anti-imperialist, and, to some extent, anti-Western officers in the Syrian army was the Homs Military Academy. There had been some officers on the faculty of the academy who were converted to the ideology of the Baath Party. Mostly, it was a reaction to the failures they saw of the old regime, its association with the old socio-economic-political order, and with the West. They were very idealistic, and they saw the old regime as having learned nothing, having lost Palestine, having lost the war with the Israelis, holding on to political power and the wealth of the land and the large agricultural estates.

Q: Were they primarily of one religious faith?

ATHERTON: These were almost entirely Sunni Muslim. That is, the old elite was Sunni Muslim plus a few wealthy Christian families, like the Homsis of Aleppo, for example. Those who were coming up in the ranks of the military, opposing them, tended to belong to the non-Sunni Muslim minority, though there were some Sunni officers among them.And that's where the Alawites began to get a foothold. The Alawites are a minority heretical sect of Islam that was now mostly located around Latakia up in the north in the mountains, who had always been on the outs in Syrian political and economic life and who were really considered second-class citizens in many respects.

I can remember that the young girls, what we would call child labor, who used to be hired out to the wealthy families in Damascus and Aleppo to work in their households, were usually young Alawite girls who were, in many cases I think, indentured servants. They were in effect sold to work for these wealthy families in return for payments to their parents.

During the period of the Mandate, the military academy had been run by the French. And French policy, as all good colonialists have always done over the years, I suppose, was divide and conquer.

They tended to give advantages to the minority Alawites and Christians, as a counterweight to the majority Sunnis who produced the nationalist leaders and were considered unreliable and anti-French. So they tended to get more spaces in the military academy. You began to get a whole generation of young Alawite and, in some cases, Christian and a few Sunni officers coming out of the military academy, indoctrinated in the ideology of the Baath Party, which was really a revolutionary ideology.Basically, their goal was a social, political, economic revolution. It would throw out the old class, and nationalize the big estates, nationalize industry, nationalize the banks and all of the sources of wealth in the country. It would lead a pan-Arab movement that would submerge national differences. They viewed, in many respects, the political entities of the time as artificial, including Syria, whose boundaries were the result of the division of the area between the British and French after World War I.

Q: Would you say that they were pro-Nasser at this point?

ATHERTON: Many of them had become followers of Nasser. Many of the younger officers looked to Nasser as the model. He was going to lead the Arab world into a new renaissance. Though I'm no Arabist, I did learn very quickly that the correct rendering of Baath Party into English was Arab Socialist Renaissance Party. It spoke of a rebirth. It wasn't something new, it was a rebirth of Arabism, of the pan-Arab nationalist movement or, some would say, myth. Nevertheless, people believed in this thought that Syria was the natural focal point for a rebirth of Arab nationalism.

I have to say, at this point, that while these fascinating changes were taking place, and revolution was under the surface with an increasingly politicized military exercising influence behind the scenes, on the surface, life was quite normal, quite enjoyable and quite stable. The new regime, even though they were very opposed to American Middle East policy, was friendly to individual Americans, and so we had lots of good Syrian friends. It was not politically dangerous at the time to deal with Americans, so we could see our Syrian friends, they could see us, we could go to each others' homes, and go on family picnics together. And we really did develop quite a group of friends. Particularly, increasingly, English-speaking people, some in government, some in the Foreign Ministry, but many of them in business, many of them in the professions: lawyers, doctors, professors at the university.

It was a time of some opening up of things in Syria. It had been a very closed kind of society. There was even opposition press, there were opposition statements in the parliament, and lots of ferment going on. A very exciting time to be there, not only in terms of what was happening in Syria, but in terms of what was happening in the region. In the backdrop all the time, of course, was the Palestine conflict, the Arab-Israeli conflict, recurrent crises along the armistice lines, but never getting out of hand.

By that time, 1956 was approaching. We had gone to Syria in early '53, so we had had three years and a little more in Syria, and clearly were due for home leave and probably a transfer. I was, as we all did in those days, looking around the world to see where do we go next (Is it maybe time to think about heading back to Europe, which is where I thought I was going to spend the rest of my career?) when the decision was made in Washington to accept the recommendation from the Embassy in Damascus that the time had come to open a Consulate in northern Syria, in Aleppo. Aleppo was considered sufficiently important commercially and politically (that's where the coup against Shishakli had started), that we ought to have permanent representation there. We had had, always, a practice of sending an officer from the Embassy in Damascus for a few days each month to Aleppo, because there was so much consular business at Aleppo.

Q: What type?

ATHERTON: Visas, mostly. A lot of applicants for immigration visas, applicants for visitors' visas. Aleppo was in some ways a more Westernized city than Damascus. People don't often think of it this way, but they were, in those days, about the same size and population. They were both maybe half of million-four hundred and fifty thousand, five hundred thousand inhabitants in Damascus, and about the same number in Aleppo.

Syria as a whole is predominantly Muslim and predominantly Sunni Muslim (I think the overall population of Syria was then perhaps 15 percent Christian), there was still, though you rarely met them and they weren't talked about, a small Jewish community which remained after most Syrian Jews had left and gone to Palestine, or to Israel after it was established, or to the United States. Many had left because they had felt unsafe in Syria after the establishment of the state of Israel. But Aleppo was then about 35 percent Christian, both Syrian Christian and also a very large Armenian Christian population.

Aleppo is where many Armenians, who were driven out of Turkey in the 1920s in what to this day the Armenians say was genocide, before the word was invented, ended up and put down roots. Many became very prominent, mostly in the business community, and running what was then the biggest hotel. Baron Hotel in Aleppo was run by an Armenian family named Mazloumian. Armenians were also prominent in the medical profession, the legal profession, as well as in business, but not in politics and government. Politics in the Armenian community were Armenian politics, between the two parties that had traditionally striven for control of Armenian politics. They just carried their politics over into exile.

There was enough consular business in Aleppo, particularly among the Armenians, who had many relatives in the States, wanting to immigrate, or get visitors or student visas to the States, to justify having somebody go up and interview applicants in Aleppo. We screened out many, and did a lot of preliminary processing there, so that when applicants were ready for the final visa issuance, they would have to make just one trip to Damascus and get the final papers.

That was a very coveted assignment, and there were several of us who were rotated doing the monthly, three-day or so consular trip to Aleppo. It was always considered a good opportunity, not only to get out of Damascus (Aleppo had, in some ways, better restaurants than Damascus), but it was a different mood, a different flavor. It was also a chance to put one's finger a bit on the political pulse in Aleppo and try to get some sense of what the currents were up there, the attitudes towards Damascus, towards the government. Aleppo always had a very suspicious view of Damascus. If there were to be opposition and threats to the government, this might be where they would germinate. So there was a lot to be done. At Aleppo, we could talk more freely. We could usually get pretty good bits and pieces of political intelligence, political information.

Q: Is this the type of city where everyone talks politics?

ATHERTON: Yes, everyone talks politics. Even the Christians, who in Damascus tended to try to stay out of politics because they were so overwhelmed and outnumbered. Some of them were very wealthy and doing very well, but they were largely excluded from politics by the large Sunni majority. Not so much in Aleppo. They were more politically active and politically engaged themselves.

There was a large consular corps in Aleppo, a few career consuls, including British and French, but most were honorary consuls. They were Syrians, mostly Christian, who had been named Consul by those countries to represent their interests. A few were nationals of the country they represented, but not career Consuls, permanent residents of Aleppo. So it was a very lively sort of social life.

There was also an American community, a very compact little American community, because of Aleppo College. Aleppo College was an American-run secondary school, which had been there, originally started by missionaries, and still very much related to the Congregational Church, but not proselytizing; it was an educational institution. They were well wired into the local political scene, so we could always go up there and talk with Americans at the College and get a sense of what was going on: What were the issues? What were the subjects? Who was doing what to whom? Who was trying to replace whom in what position? What were the attitudes towards Damascus and towards the government? Some good political reporting came out of these trips to Aleppo.

So when the word came that Ambassador Moose's recommendation had been accepted that we should open a Consulate in Aleppo, Betty and I had a consultation, and I said I would like to ask for that job. I'd like to be the first Consul at Aleppo, even though it would mean an extended tour in Syria. We had already been three years in Damascus, and therefore it would presumably be at least two more years. But we liked Syria, we were enjoying it, it was an exciting time. Lots of things were happening in the region that involved Syria. So I put my name in the hat, and I was chosen.

Now at just about that same time, when I heard that I was going to be named Consul at Aleppo and given the job of opening the Consulate General there, I was also approached by my old boss from Bonn days, Bernard Gufler, who, incidentally, had been an inspector in between and had come through Syria and inspected us at one point, so we had reestablished contact.

He had been named the new head of the U.S. Mission in Berlin, and he asked if I would like to come and join his staff.

That was a very tough choice, because I had always thought Germany was where I wanted to return. I was confident that it was the one place where my language would stand me in very good stead. And I liked Bernard Gufler. I admired him, and I had enjoyed working for him, and Berlin would be an exciting assignment. On the other hand, I would have been one of a large mission.

At Aleppo, I was going to be in charge. I was going to be Numero Uno. I was going to open the Consulate General. And I would have a staff, at least initially, of one Vice Consul; one American all-purpose Secretary; a junior American staff assistant to do the administrative work; and a small Foreign Service national staff, a couple of whom were transferred to Aleppo from Damascus. They had come originally from Aleppo and were glad to go back and work in Aleppo.

So I started out with an experienced local staff. I subsequently hired several people locally, recommended by Aleppo College, some Aleppo College graduates. One was a sort of all-purpose contact person. He came with less than fluent written English, but he knew that city, and he knew everybody in the city. He was the kind of person you needed if you were going to get anything done in Aleppo. The other was an interpreter/translator. There were also a couple of drivers and visa clerks. The chief Foreign Service National visa clerk was transferred from Damascus to Aleppo. So we started off with a staff that pretty well knew what they were doing.

Again, I'm getting a bit ahead of the story. My job, obviously, in the first instance, was to find a piece of property. We didn't own any property in Aleppo. We didn't have any place to set up shop.

Well, before going to Aleppo, I went off on home leave, in the summer of 1956. My father had just died, and I was going back to the States to see my mother and help her pack up to join us and become part of our family. When we came back to Syria, she came back with us.

But, of course, the summer of '56 was also when the rumblings were getting louder of what became the Suez Crisis and the Suez War. By the time home leave was over and we were ready to go back to Damascus as a base from which to go up and open the Consulate General in Aleppo, concern about possible war was growing. Tensions were high between Israel and Egypt and Jordan. Nasser had nationalized the Suez Canal Company, and the British and French were threatening Egypt.

Basically, what this meant for us personally was that the decision was made not to permit families to return to Syria because of the unstable situation. So when the time came for us to go back, in September I guess it was, the orders did not include my family. Betty and our two sons and my mother, who had by then joined our household, had to stay in the States until the Department approved travel for families back to the area. The anomaly was that our daughter could go, because she was going to boarding school in Beirut, and Lebanon was considered stable. So our daughter and I went back, I put her in the American Community School in Beirut and went on to Damascus.

By that time, this was already October, and it was quite obvious that the area was moving more and more towards crisis. There were plenty of intelligence reports of the movement of British troops to Cyprus and the mounting of an invasion capacity. There were reports of mobilization in Israel. But still nobody knew whether it was going to be brinkmanship or whether there would really be a war. However, the signals were by then serious enough that we had evacuated Embassy families from Syria.

I was sent to Aleppo from Damascus with a double mission. One, to get in touch with the American community in northern Syria and say that their government advised them to evacuate to a safer place, since it looked like there would be a war. And, secondly, while there, I was to look for property for the Consulate General. The right hand and the left hand in Washington obviously hadn't coordinated too well.

And I did look. I went and looked at a number of properties. I set up, by the way, temporarily, in the Hotel Baron, as a place from which to work until I could find space. I did in fact identify a very nice new apartment building in which we could have two floors. One whole floor would be our residence, and the ground floor would be half office and half apartment for the Vice Consul. We in fact got lawyers and drew up a draft lease, which I took back to Damascus to get approved.

I had, by that time, notified all of the Americans at Aleppo College. And I had been able to reach by telephone some missionaries in northeastern Syria and give them the warning. I must admit that most of them didn't heed the warning. But we were not ordering them to evacuate, just advising them. Some of the families left, but, for the most part, they said: We'll stick it out.

Q: Were they going to Beirut?

ATHERTON: Yes, Beirut was the safe-haven. All of the American Embassy families in Syria were evacuated to Beirut. I was living with Bob Strong at the time. He was the DCM then, and he was also the Chargï¿½, because we, at that point, were between Ambassadors. I can remember many poker games in the evenings, because there were blackouts by that time. We had to cover all the windows and keep the light in. We couldn't go out, there wasn't much to do, so we had a very active poker circle. Just waiting to see what would happen.On the way back to Damascus from Aleppo, having drawn up the lease and talked to the Americans about leaving, we stopped, as we always did on that trip, in Homs, where there was a very nice restaurant (it was about the halfway point) to have a coffee break and a bite of food. The radio was blaring away. I was with Hussam Malandi, who was our interpreter/translator and political assistant, who had been with me and was going to be with me at the Consulate in Aleppo when it opened. Everybody in the room suddenly stopped talking, but the radio kept on going, and I turned to Hussam and said, "Come on, give me a translation, what's happening?"

He said, "The Israelis have invaded Egypt. The Israelis have attacked the Egyptians. The British and French have issued an ultimatum that they have to disengage or the British and French will come in and separate the parties."

It was October 29, 1956, and that was the beginning of the Suez War, while I was sitting in a coffee shop in Homs.

Well, I went back to Damascus and simply went through a period of waiting for the war to be over. Syrian relations were broken with the British and the French. I can remember having a farewell dinner in one of the hotels with my British and French colleagues. Our British colleague in Damascus was about as indiscreetly critical of his government's policy as it's possible for a British diplomat to be.

Q: Many of them were.

ATHERTON: Yes, many of them were. And then it was just a case of waiting. I went back to Aleppo and set up quarters in the Hotel Baron. Had a room where I slept, and they gave me one of the small rooms off the lobby as an office. I hadn't officially opened the Consulate General, but I was a presence there, and people knew this was the beginning of the American Consulate. And I began, while the war was going on, getting my contacts established, meeting my colleagues in the consular corps, and just generally beginning to settle in, getting the property in shape, getting furniture, getting ready so we could move in. It took a long time. That was October. We finally were able to have the official opening planned for the second of January, 1957. But in an informal way I had already been there for some time. Let me add a little footnote about one of the dilemmas of that time.

American families had all been evacuated with, I might say, very generous per diem allowances. They were all living very well, staying at the best hotels in Beirut, certainly not hurting financially, as they had evacuation allowances. My family, because they had not left the U.S., were not evacuated and therefore didn't get any of these allowances except a pittance of a separation allowance.

Betty said, "Two hundred and fifty dollars a month for your family to live on!" Betty and two sons and my mother. Well, Mother had friends to stay with. Betty and the boys moved in with her folks. She went to work teaching school as a substitute teacher, and managed somehow to hold body and soul together while I went happily about the business of getting the Consulate General operating in Aleppo.

The big question was what to do with our daughter. The American Community School in Beirut was closing down for Christmas holidays, and the boarding department was closing. We didn't have anybody I could ask to take her in, in Beirut.

The other person in the same situation was Ambassador Moose, whose daughter was also in the American Community School in Beirut.

So he and I had a pact. He said, "We won't tell anybody, we'll just bring our daughters back to Syria for the Christmas holidays." So his daughter went back to Damascus, and our daughter then came to Aleppo.

We had an official reception, opening the Consulate General in Aleppo on the Second of January 1957. And, in the absence of Betty, our daughter, Lynne, age thirteen, was my hostess. Ambassador and Mrs. Moose came up, and we had a receiving line with the Ambassador and Mrs. Moose, myself, and Lynne.

Q: Wasn't that a rather good period with the Arabs, too?

ATHERTON: Because of our policy, we took a very strong position in opposition to the Israelis, to the French, to the British, and we were in very good graces. The Syrians loved us for awhile. They all came to our parties, they accepted our invitations, they invited us out. It was really a very heady experience. It was a good time to get acquainted. I had the interesting job of having to get an office running, but also of getting a household running, and hiring servants, and getting a cook, and getting a butler, and being, you know, just part of the social life. And Aleppo had a very busy social life.

The big question, of course, was how soon we'd be able to get the family back together. You may recall that, even though the war was over, we were still in a Cold War to some extent with the Israelis, trying to get them to withdraw from Sinai. The British and French had withdrawn, or made commitments to withdraw, but the Israelis were hanging on, and there was a bit of pressure exerted from John Foster Dulles and the Eisenhower Administration. And one element of that was creating the impression that this was still a somewhat unstable situation by not removing the restriction on families returning to the area. So our family and the families in Beirut were all caught up as sort of pawns in this power game.

Until finally, sometime in the spring, sometime maybe in March as I recall, I was able to get permission for Betty and the two boys and my mother to come as far as Beirut. I said, "After all, our daughter is already in Beirut." And so the Department in its wisdom agreed that they could come as far as Beirut. And that's what happened, they came and spent awhile in Beirut, staying in the least expensive hotel as we could find-Lords Hotel down on the water. It was a nice location.

Then, eventually, within a couple of weeks, the ban was lifted, and finally I was able to bring my family to Aleppo, sometime around April I guess it was, when I was already four months into my tour. And we settled down to a very happy tour of duty in Aleppo, which was punctuated by just enough excitement to keep it from being dull.

One of the excitements, of course, in 1958 was the revolution in Lebanon. The attempt was attributed to Nasser's inspiration, though I think a lot of the blame, in retrospect, obviously also went to the President of Lebanon, Chamoun, for trying to prolong unconstitutionally his period in office. But in any case, everyone knows very well that the perception of Washington was that this was an attempt to overthrow the legitimate government of Lebanon by forces sponsored by Nasser, and somehow encouraged by the Russians, and, therefore, suspected of being part of a Communist international conspiracy.

I should add, by the way, that the honeymoon by then had worn off. We had won a lot of credit with the Arabs for opposition at the time of Suez. It was perceived to be in support of Nasser, but it really was not so much in support of Nasser as to prevent the Russians from having a field day by getting all the credit for opposing the Israeli, British and French invasion. But it didn't last long, because we declared, not too long after that, what became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. We encouraged all of the states in the region to let bygones be bygones and join in a common defense against the Soviet and Communist threat to the area.

It seemed, to those of us looking at it from where we sat, totally unrealistic and out of touch with the mood of the times. We were telling the Arabs, in effect: Your enemies are the Russians, who have just come to your support during the Suez Crisis. Your friends are those who have just attacked you. And so it was a non-starter, an attempt to organize the area in Cold War terms.

But it did have one effect, which was to put an end to the honeymoon between the Arabs and the United States. We were seen again as the imperialist trying to get the Arabs to abandon Palestine and accept Israel, join with the Israelis and build a defense front, which started out being the Baghdad Pact. In July of '58, when that government of Iraq was overthrown and Iraq was out of the Baghdad Pact, it became the Northern Tier, and eventually CENTO, the Central Treaty Organization, with Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, but without the Iraqi member.

In any case, the revolution in Beirut provided a certain amount of excitement. There was, as you may remember, a lot of suspicion that the Syrians were sending reinforcements across what was then an open border, between northern Lebanon and northern Syria, to reinforce the forces that were fighting the Chamoun government. One of our jobs in Aleppo, because the Consulate General was located right near the road that led out of Aleppo towards the west, was to observe the convoys moving out. And we were able to report evidence of Syrian military troops heading in the general direction of Lebanon. Now, how far they went and what they did when they got there, we couldn't say. But we could certainly confirm that there were Syrian reinforcements moving towards the Bekaa Valley and the Tripoli area of northern Lebanon, which were areas of Lebanon with large Muslim populations sympathetic with the forces opposing Chamoun.

Of course, this also was the time of the revolution in Iraq, in July of that year. That was what really, I think, led the Administration to see the hand of a major Soviet Communist conspiracy. A revolution in Iraq and a fight against the legitimate government in Lebanon led to the perception in Washington that they were all somehow guided from Moscow, which, in retrospect, I think was nonsense.

But that was the perception, and it led to the decision that to stem the revolutionary tide we should send in the fleet, send in the Marines, and that was the great Marine landing on the beaches of Beirut in July, 1958.

There were repercussions in Aleppo, which is a little piece of history but rather interesting. Immediately, mobs began to form down in the city to march on the American Consulate to protest the U.S. invasion of their sister state, thus opposing the march of the Arab nationalist revolution led by Egypt's Nasser.

Q: That's when you wished your apartment wasn't in the same building.

ATHERTON: As the office. Exactly. I sent the Vice Consul, who was then Art Lowrie, down to talk to the Chief of Police and say that we had received a message that we should alert the local authorities that U.S. troops would be landing in Lebanon. By the time we got the message and could deliver it, the news was already on the radio that this was happening, but I did send the Vice Consul down to carry out the instructions, but mostly to say that we presumed we would get protection in case there was a mob reaction.

And his reaction was: "What are you doing in Lebanon at all? That's not your country. It is our country." It was not a very friendly reaction.

But deeds were what we wanted. They did call out police reinforcements, and they blocked any mob attempts to reach the Consulate. The mob had really two objectives: the Consulate and Aleppo College, which were seen as an American entity in Aleppo. And the police protected us, they did their duty, and we didn't have to evacuate, though we were getting ready to evacuate. We were putting together evacuation kits, getting out the evacuation plans, and deciding which way we'd go and where we'd go if we had to leave. But we didn't.

Then we went into a period of deep freeze, when our Syrian friends were afraid to talk to us, and the official Syrian position was rather hostile. Though some Syrian friends would talk privately and tell us, if they had a chance to see us privately, that they really agreed with what we had done. These were usually Christian Syrian friends, who thought what we were doing was fine.

Another interesting footnote of all this was that we had with us as house guests, when all this was happening, Colonel Bill Eddy and his wife. He, of course, had been a Marine officer, and had been the U.S. Minister in Saudi Arabia, and was then the Tapline (Trans Arabian Pipeline) representative in Beirut, as I recall. They had come over to stay with us and were trapped, because all of a sudden the invasion happened, the border was closed, there was no way to get back to Lebanon. So we had this ex-Marine officer chomping at the bit to get back to Beirut where the action was, and he was stuck in Aleppo with the Athertons. There was nothing to do but wait for the border to open. Eventually it did, and eventually he got back to Beirut.

Then came the period of the phony war between Syria and Turkey. There were reports that the Turks were mobilizing troops on the northern border of Syria. Again, to a large extent, concocted reports, but they were part of the Syrian government's attempt to whip up internal solidarity. The Turks, after all, were part of the Central Treaty Organization, and allies of the United States, and were seen as threats. They were a good whipping boy for the Syrians. We rode this out. Most of our Syrian friends didn't have much to do with us, so we went on picnics. We sensed no personal hostility, it was just that the word had gone out: Don't be seen with the Americans.

I can remember the Turkish Consul General having his National Day party in the middle of all of this, and the only Syrian official that showed up was the Governor, who came and put in his obligatory ten minutes and left, and one very courageous private Syrian, Edmund Homsi, head of one of the big Christian families of Aleppo, who thought this was all nonsense, and he came to show he wasn't going to be intimidated.

It was a roller coaster period in our relationship with the Syrians. It was up and down and up and down. And it was almost turned off and on with a switch, depending on what the word from the Syrian secret police was at the time to the people: This is a time to not see Americans; this is a time to see Americans. But, again, it was never unpleasant, it was just a bit lonely. We certainly didn't have any feeling of personal danger in all this. The Syrians were very proper about maintaining the security of the Consulate and maintaining law and order.

The end of our tour in Aleppo coincided with the resurgence of some internal stresses and instabilities, including within the military, and a growing concern in the Baath Party, which was by then becoming a major political force in the country and the military, even though they had not yet taken over the government. And there was a threat from the Communists, who were also trying to achieve a position of power. The Chief of Staff of the Syrian Army at that time was widely believed to be a Communist and a Soviet agent. The concern became so great that the Syrians, including the Baath, called upon Nasser to rescue them. This was a Syrian initiative calling for Egypt to join with Syria and establish what became the United Arab Republic.

I had actually had a preview of this and reported it to Damascus. At a dinner in the home of a Syrian landowner family, the Hassan Jabris, I met their daughter's fianci¿½, a pro-Baath army officer, Lt. Jlas, who predicted it-the same Jlas who is now Syrian Minister of Defense.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, toward the end of the last tape, you had been telling us about your experiences in Syria. First, your assignments to Damascus and, later on, your assignment to Aleppo. Now I wonder if you would tell us what happened after that.

ATHERTON: The union of Egypt and Syria, which took place towards the end of my tour in Aleppo, meant that we didn't have an Embassy in Syria any more. The Embassy in Damascus became another Consulate General, just like Aleppo, and our Embassy was in Cairo. We were constituent posts of the American Embassy in Cairo, which was the capital of the United Arab Republic of Syria and Egypt. And our Ambassador was Ray Hare, because it was his time as Ambassador in Egypt.

Q: Did you yourself move to Damascus?

ATHERTON: No, no, we continued. We functioned as though nothing had changed. We were a Consulate anyway, and we were simply a provincial city of Syria, and we then became a provincial city of the Syrian Province of the United Arab Republic. But in terms of our functions and our responsibilities, we continued to do the normal consular reporting, consular work, in our consular district.

There was one difference, of course. There was suddenly an Egyptian presence in Syria which had not been there before, including a very senior military man who was assigned to the military command in northern Syria, a very cultured and delightful Egyptian of the old school, whom we got to know rather well. And subsequently, in fact, on one of our trips to Egypt, I remember visiting him in Giza.

Q: Who was he?

ATHERTON: His name, I still remember, was Colonel Niazi. I can't remember the first name, but the family name was Niazi. Our circle of acquaintances broadened, obviously, to include Egyptians for the first time in the social circles of Aleppo.

Though I must say the Aleppans tended to be a little less than enamored of the way in which the Egyptians seemed to take over. The Egyptians did tend to be a little heavy-handed, and it was not quite clear sometimes whether they were there as invited partners in this republic or as the new rulers. Some of them acted more like the new rulers.

But I do remember, before I move on to the next phase, one rather interesting episode that occurred right after the union. You may recall that Syria's pride had to be taken into account. It was clear that Egypt was going to be the dominant partner in this union, and yet the Syrians felt very much that they were the initiators of the union. They had done it to keep the Communists from taking over Syria, they had done it in the service of Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism and Gamal Abdel Nasser. The problem was to find some role for the Syrians.

And so what they did was to take Shukri al-Kuwatli, who was one of the leaders of the old Nationalist Party of Syria, and bestow upon him the title of the First Citizen of the United Arab Republic.

And he came, with a great deal of ceremony, on a visit to Aleppo. The consular corps was summoned to go out to the airport and meet him and then go back into town and go to a reception that was being held in his honor at the Mohafazat. On the way from the airport to town, my car had a flat tire, and I had to drop out of the cortege. A couple of cars behind me was the Egyptian Ambassador in Syria, who later became the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mahmoud Riad. He stopped his car and said, "Can I help you?"

And I said, "Yes, indeed. I would like to go on to the reception."

So he took me in his car. I arrived with the Egyptian Ambassador at the reception for the First Citizen of the UAR.

Q: That must have caused some raised eyebrows.

ATHERTON: Well, we kept in touch over the years, actually. I saw him not too long ago in London and recalled that event. He'd forgotten about it, but I hadn't.

So that was really the end of the tour in Aleppo. Aleppo life went on pretty much the same, except for the addition of the Egyptians and the increasing disenchantment of the Syrians with the results of the union, in terms of their role in it.

Q: Before you finish completely, could I ask you a question about that? Did this establishment of the UAR and the presence of Egyptians in Aleppo make any difference at all to your day-to-day operations?

ATHERTON: No, it did not. Not really, because our operations were with the municipal authorities and the private business community, to a very large extent. A lot of our role there was dealing not with the government so much as with the private community. And that went on pretty much without change as it had been. Later, of course, there was a move towards establishing the kind of political-economic system in Syria that Nasser had established in Egypt, including nationalization of industries, banks, and agricultural estates and all of that. But that came after our time, in fact after the end of the union with Egypt in 1961 when the Baath Party came to power. When we were there, they had not yet begun to change the basic social or economic structure. It was just the political structure that was affected.

It had an impact on our children, who became ardent Nasserists. Our two sons, particularly our older son, got caught up in the spirit. He went to Aleppo College, which is almost entirely Syrian youth being taught in English. He was one of the few non-Syrians at Aleppo College, which was run by Americans. Michael, then age eleven, became quite imbued with the spirit of pan-Arabism and of Arab Socialism, which was basically what Nasser's philosophy was all about. He insisted that we have posters of Nasser at the Consulate.

Anyway, this was nearing the end of our tour, and I had already been told who my replacement would be. I had thought we were going to be there longer, but the Department personnel system, as is often the case, changed the signals, having more or less assured us that we would be there at least until the following spring.

They changed what I thought was a commitment. I've learned since that there are no assignments in the personnel system that cannot be changed for the needs of the Service. And it was suddenly decided that what was best for the Service was for the Athertons to be transferred earlier than we'd planned.

This was because they wanted to put in Aleppo a very senior officer with Arab world experience named Philip Ireland. Phil Ireland was my replacement, in effect, as Consul General. He had been in Salonika, and, I later learned, someone in the personnel system wanted to go to Salonika. So I was at the end of the chain, the most junior person involved.

We packed up and turned over the residence, which we had just by then really begun to get furnished. It took us a year plus for the Department to find enough money to properly furnish the residence. We finally had it looking pretty good, just in time to turn it over to the Irelands to move in. And we moved on.

The personnel system, in effect, had finally caught up with me. I had, up to this point, never had a Department tour of duty. This was now almost 1959, and I came into the service in 1947, so I was overdue. It was 12 years from the time I came in the Service until I had my first Department assignment, other than the very brief training at the beginning and a couple of quick courses in connection with home leave at the FSI.

I was assigned to the Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs. In those days, we still had offices rather than country directorates. I was assigned as the number two officer on the Iraq/Jordan Desk, which was part of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs. And I learned my first lesson in making the transition from being a big fish in a little pond to a little fish in a big pond.

I was The Boss in Aleppo, albeit of a post that only had five Americans including myself. It started out with four Americans plus a small Foreign Service national staff, mostly Syrian and a couple of Palestinians. And so I represented the United States, flew the flag on my car, called on the Governor, and called on all the religious dignitaries at appropriate religious holidays. Aleppo had something like 13 Christian Bishops and Archbishops from all the different and obscure sects of the Eastern and Roman churches, plus, of course, the usual Islamic dignitaries. It was quite a heady experience for a fairly junior, young officer to be representing the United States, even if it was only in Aleppo.

To go back and find that I was suddenly number two on the Iraq/Jordan Desk took a little adjusting of my perception of where my place was in the universe of the Foreign Service.

I was the Jordan Desk officer, in effect. I worked under Bill Lakeland, who was then the Officer in Charge of Iraq/Jordan Affairs. The Office Director was Stuart Rockwell, and Armin Meyer was his Deputy in those days. Armin eventually became the Director, and Nick Thacher came in as the Deputy. But when I first went in, it was Stu Rockwell and Armin Meyer. There was an Assistant Secretary but I rarely got beyond the front office of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs.

Q: Who was it?

ATHERTON: It was Bill Rountree in those days. But I rarely saw him.

One of my first official jobs, very shortly after I had gotten in place, was to be at the focal point for planning and carrying out the visit of King Hussein of Jordan on his first state visit to Washington. (I guess it was his first. We're talking about 1959; he was still quite a young man.) He was coming on a state visit, and my job was to make sure that all the pieces fell into place. Working with Protocol, working with the front office, working with the Jordanian Embassy, obviously, and everybody else who gets involved in that kind of a visit.

I'd never been through this before, and this was real on-the-job training. I learned as I went. I, fortunately, had some good teachers, including the Deputy Chief of Protocol, Clem Conger, who was an old pro. And so they all helped me get through this ordeal.

The King came in his own airplane, and there was a great royal arrival ceremony. The visit went very well, and it included a white tie dinner hosted by the King at the Mayflower Hotel.

And then, by contrast, a very private party was given by Dick Sanger, who had been DCM in Amman. He and Marian Sanger gave a very nice informal family party to which they invited a younger crowd, because the King was young and they wanted him to get out of the protocol limelight and be able to let down his hair and relax. I can still remember the King riding a motorized race car, one of the kind that the kids rode in those days, up and down the street out in front of the Sangers' house. The visit came and went, and there were no great disasters.

The near-disaster was the visit of the new Prime Minister of Jordan, who came in the course of my tour of duty. He came in on a commercial flight to National Airport, and my job was to be out there with Assistant Secretary Rountree, the Office Director who was by then Armin Meyer, and the newly designated American Ambassador to Amman, Shelly Mills.

I had only made one mistake. I had never realized that there were two terminals at National. The Prime Minister was coming into the north terminal, and I was there with Shelly Mills, fortunately. The plane was pulling up to the ramp, and there was no sign of the Assistant Secretary or the Office Director. Well, it turned out that they had gone to the main terminal, and you can imagine who got the blame for that. I had a lot of explaining to do because I had not properly briefed the Assistant Secretary and the Office Director that the arrival would be at the north terminal.

But other than that, the Jordan Desk experience was the usual experience of the desk officer, doing the briefing papers and backing up the front office. I did not finish that tour.

Q: Excuse me, before you go on. The main issue while you were on the Jordan Desk, was that the Palestine problem or refugees? Do you recall the main issues you were working on?

ATHERTON: Well, let's think of the years. This was '59 and '60. It was really, as I recall, between periods of American activism. It was after the attempt to help the riparian states of the Jordan negotiate an agreement on the proper division of the Jordan River waters. That was the Eric Johnston mission, and that happened while we were still in Syria. And then, a little later, but after this time that I was on the Desk, came the Joseph Johnson initiative to try to find a solution to the Palestine refugee problem.It was not a period, as I recall, of great activism in American diplomacy in the Middle East. We were maintaining bilateral relations. We had taken over, to a large extent, the aid program for Jordan from the British. And I was, of course, focusing pretty much on U.S.-Jordanian relations, not the larger picture in the Middle East. Basically, it was bolstering the King, bolstering the economy of Jordan, working on the economic assistance programs to Jordan, worrying, from time to time, about the stability of the Hashemite regime.

This was a time of some ferment. It was the time when Nasser was expanding his influence around the region and, at least it was believed, trying to subvert regimes like the regime of Jordan and the monarchies of the area, and encouraging the younger revolutionaries, or so they were viewed at the time, in these countries to rise up and install modern, secular regimes. So it was a time of some concern about the destabilizing of the traditional regimes, such as Jordan, such as Saudi Arabia, by Nasserism, the Arab Socialist doctrine that was emanating from Cairo. And, of course Nasser's appeal reached all over the Arab world by Radio Cairo, which was a major propaganda tool.

Now that you've asked me, the more I think about it, I think the concern really was much more then with simply trying to preserve the stability of our friends in the area and trying, at the same time, to maintain some kind of a relationship with Egypt (but an Egypt that was increasingly at odds with us on a great many of our objectives and priorities) while supporting the kind of regimes that Nasser was trying, in various ways, if not directly to subvert, certainly to destabilize. This was the time when Nasser could bring the crowds into the street in any Arab capital.

Q: So Nasserism was sort of a basic...

ATHERTON: My recollection is that this was a major concern at that time-this and a preoccupation with the perceived Soviet Communist threat. I don't recall any major initiatives to deal with the Palestinian problem, other than the annual attempt to get Congressional funding for UNRWA, to support the Palestinian refugees.

Q: Were arms supplies a problem then?

ATHERTON: Arms supplies, yes, because the Cold War really came to the Middle East in the mid-50s. And by now there were established relationships with the Soviet Union providing arms to revolutionary regimes: to Egypt, to Syria, and, of course, after 1958, to Iraq, after the revolution there.

We were increasingly being importuned by our friends in Saudi Arabia and Jordan to help balance the equation. And, I might add, also by our friends in Israel, though at that point we had not yet taken the leap to become a major supplier of arms to the Israelis. We were still in the position of being able to look to others. The French were still a major supporter, in those days, of Israel. We were, therefore, able to stay a bit on the sidelines and to keep a rather lower profile than we later had as an arms supplier of Israel.

Q: Had we become a major supplier of arms to Jordan by then?

ATHERTON: I don't think major. I can't really honestly remember when that happened. This was a period when the British were still, I think, very much in evidence, and very much trying to preserve their position, to the extent that they could, though we had begun to replace them so far as economic support was concerned. We had largely taken over (maybe by that time, totally; I can't be entirely sure without checking the record) the annual subsidy of the Jordanian budget, which the British used to carry. And we had become the principal foreign financier of Jordan's perennial deficit, which was seen as a way of trying to stabilize Jordan. Of course, when you think about it today, the sums of money concerned seem insignificant. I think we were talking in terms of, could it have been $20 million a year? That seems high, almost, even for then.

Q: I don't remember.

ATHERTON: But, anyway, they were certainly not, by later standards, enormous sums of money. And we were trying not to become the sole supporter. We encouraged the British to continue to play a role in the area, particularly in the areas where they had had traditional relationships, and Jordan was certainly one of them. But, inevitably, we were drawn more and more in. And we did have, by then, an economic assistance program, an AID mission, whatever it was called. I can't remember whether it was called AID in those days or whether it had an earlier name.

Q: Was it Point Four still then?

ATHERTON: I frankly don't remember what the bureaucratic structure was then. But it was a time of more or less focusing on the bilateral relationship, and on trying to keep our friends in the region, and our Arab friends in particular, insulated, to the extent we could, from the shocks emanating from Cairo.

There were occasional incidents on the borders, along that long frontier between Jordan and Israel. There were constant tensions within Jerusalem, because the city was divided right down the middle, with Jordanians on one side of the No Man's Land and Israelis on the other, staring down the gun barrels at each other. There were occasional outbreaks of shooting, and incidents would occur.

It was the time when the job of handling and trying to adjudicate these incidents was in the hands of the United Nations. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, UNTSO, and its Chief of Staff, and its Mixed Armistice Commissions had the main responsibility for preserving the armistice agreements. It wasn't a peace, it was an armistice, but trying to keep hostilities from breaking out again.

Q: Jordan was still administering the land up to the divided part of Jordan...?

ATHERTON: Oh, yes. East Jerusalem was under Jordanian administration, and West Jerusalem was under Israeli administration.

Q: And the West Bank?

ATHERTON: The West Bank was entirely under Jordan, of course. There was a long, long armistice line, and occasionally it was penetrated by commandos trying to raid across the border into Israel. This was before the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The PLO was not established until 1964. You didn't have the large, well-organized, armed guerrilla movements that grew up later, and in particular, after the 1967 War. It was a time when there was relative quiet on the Arab-Israeli front.

My recollection was that after the '56 War, the United Nations Emergency Force was in place in Sinai on the Egyptian front, the U.N. truce supervision observers were in place on the other fronts, the other armistice lines: Syria and Lebanon and Jordan.

There was an apparatus and a system for dealing with these incidents, through meetings of the Mixed Armistice Commissions. It was the one place where Israeli and Arab military people used to meet, under the auspices of the Chairman, who was a U.N. officer, and they used to convene periodically.

Some had more relaxed relations than others. I think the Israeli-Lebanese Mixed Armistice Commission tended to be the most relaxed. The Syrian-Israeli meetings tended to be pretty stiff and formal. And I think the Jordanian-Israeli came somewhere in between. They were proper and correct, but not exactly collegial.

But it was a time when the Arab-Israeli conflict was not on the front burner to a large extent. It was there. There was no basis, at that stage, for trying to find a solution to it, because there was no disposition on the part of any Arabs to really accept Israel as a permanent part of the Middle East. Their maps never showed it. It was simply shown as occupied Palestine. And the Israelis, for their part, were busy nation-building internally absorbing immigrants and watching their borders. Remember, Israel had only been a state for just over a decade.

And so it was a time, as I look back on it, compared to later years, of relative tranquility in the Arab-Israeli conflict, except for the occasional border incident. The fact that I hardly remember any great deal of focus during that time on the Arab-Israeli problem I think means that probably it wasn't a major preoccupation. These were the final years of the Eisenhower Administration, whose preoccupation was with the defense of the region against the perceived Soviet threat.

Q: It was certainly not a matter of national concern politically or...

ATHERTON: In any case, my time on the Jordan Desk was shorter than I had anticipated it would be. I went back the very end of 1958, and my recollection was that about a year and a few months later, sometime in early or perhaps mid-1960, there were some personnel changes in the Office of Near Eastern Affairs. I was not an Arabist, I was not one of the group who had committed themselves to the Middle East by learning the language, partly because nobody had ever suggested I take time off to learn it-although, to be honest if I had been asked, I'm not sure what I would have said. I guess I still wanted to keep the European option open.

I was informed one day that the Bureau was going to make a few internal changes. They had an officer coming back whom they wanted to get into the Office of Near Eastern Affairs, and the job they wanted to get him into was the job I was in. I was going to be moved over and assigned to a different office within the Bureau: GTI, Office of Greek, Turkish, and Iranian Affairs, which, in those days, was part of NEA, part of the Bureau. And, specifically, I was to be assigned as the new Officer in Charge of Cyprus Affairs. My first reaction was to be a bit put out. I felt that I had committed the last four and a half years to learning about the Arab-Israeli problem, and I had just begun to feel that I really knew enough about it to be productive. I knew nothing at all about the Cyprus problem. But I learned quickly, and the move was made.

About the middle of 1960, I suddenly found myself with a different front office. I was then working for the Director and Deputy Director of the Office of Greek, Turkish, Iranian, and Cyprus Affairs. The Director was Bob Miner, and his Deputy in those days was Ollie Marcy. I worked with colleagues who dealt with a totally different world from the world I'd been dealing with.

It was a very interesting time to do this, actually, because it was the time when the British were in the process of letting go of Cyprus as a colony. It was the period after the London-Zurich agreements had been negotiated, and Cyprus was moving from the status of a colony to becoming an independent republic with a very complicated constitution which was supposed to balance the minority Turkish and the majority Greek communities, in order to protect the Turkish political rights while recognizing that the island was more Greek than Turkish.

It was a period when a serious effort was made by all concerned, and some of the leaders of the two communities tried to make the united Greek-Turkish Cypriot constitutional system work. There were those who didn't want to see it work, and they are the ones that we remember now in history, such as Archbishop Makarios on the Greek side and Denktash (who I guess is still a factor in Cyprus; even then he was) on the Turkish side. But there were people like Glafkos Clarides, who was one of the more moderate people on the Greek side, and his Turkish counterparts.

I can remember, in particular, one of the highlights of the attempt to make this rather complex and delicately balanced new constitutional system work was an invitation from our government to bring to this country, together, the new Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Justices of the united Supreme Court. They were delightful people who also happened to be personal friends. There weren't too many friendships between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. And their wives got along; they played bridge together. There was a third Justice who was appointed, a German I think, who was a third-country national. But the two, the Greek and Turk, came together, en famille, as what I guess we would call IVs these days, Important Visitors, invited as guests of the State Department. And my job, as Officer in Charge, was to be the control officer of this visit. So we got to know them quite well, actually.

It was also a period when I was able to do a certain amount of traveling to the area to witness this moment of history.

I remember my first visit to Cyprus was when there was still a British Governor, Sir Hugh Foote, who later became Lord Caradon. And I remember meeting him when he was still Governor and was presiding over the transfer of colonial authority and the beginning of the Republic of Cyprus, with its reserved rights for the British to keep bases on the island, which still exist today. But it was the honeymoon period of the first year of Cypriot independence, when many people were, I think, trying to make the system work. It was the best time to deal with Cyprus affairs.

In retrospect, I was not unhappy about the transfer. At the time, I thought I was being moved out of my natural home, which by then had become NE, Near Eastern Affairs. But it didn't take long before I shifted my perspectives. I enjoyed the job and enjoyed dealing with a new set of problems, which also had their economic as well as their political aspects.

In fact, it was dealing with attempts to analyze and figure out ways to inject some capital and some new dynamism into the Cypriot economy, to try to make a single economy out of what had been recently two separate economies, that got me thinking that I probably didn't know as much about economics as a Foreign Service Officer should in the world I was working in.

So I began to think about filling that gap in my academic background by asking for some economic training. This was reinforced by both Betty's and my desire to move on as quickly as possible and get out of Washington. I mean, we had not joined the Foreign Service to spend a lot of time in Washington.

It had not been an easy adjustment. First of all, it had not been easy financially. Betty had taken a job teaching in a private school, and that had one advantage. We had chosen to live in Bethesda, because Montgomery County was reputed to have the best schools in the area. The high school was a new high school, and it was a very large high school, and our daughter never could make the adjustment from the small community school in Damascus, and the school in Beirut, and then a small French school in Aleppo to this enormous American high school. In the end, we shipped her off to live with her grandparents and go to a small town high school in Massachusetts, where she adjusted much more readily. And our younger son, who was just starting first grade, didn't make his entry too successfully. But Betty got a job teaching at Potomac School in Virginia, and so our younger son got free tuition. So he started his school years, except for a time at the Frere Mariste in Aleppo, as a student at Potomac School. The only one of our three children who ended up in the Montgomery County school system was our older son, Michael, and he did not have the best of experiences. It was not as good a system, at least for a child who was not a naturally gifted student, as we had expected. He had more trouble learning than others. We concluded later that he had mild learning disabilities, but the school never diagnosed this and was not geared to accommodate a child coming from a different educational system abroad.

For a lot of reasons, we were ready to get on with our lives out of Washington. And that coincided with my feeling that I needed to learn something about economics, so I asked the personnel system if I could apply for a year's economic training at a university.

There was a program for sending some officers off to a university for a year training in various fields. Some places it was economics, some places it was African studies, what have you. But I thought economics would be a good thing.

I had no serious academic economic background in college. I had avoided it like the plague. I began to realize that the world was not either political or economic-that there is a political economy, and you can't really separate them into compartments-and that I had better learn something about how the economic system works, and about macroeconomics, and, particularly, international economics, if I was going to go on in the Foreign Service.

I applied, and since we were an East Coast family, I indicated a preference for going to a West Coast university, and specifically asked to be given economic training at the University of California in Berkeley.

I can remember my personnel counselor saying he thought I was making a mistake. I was a little behind my class in the promotion cycle, and he said, "You know, that will take you out of sight (and out of sight, out of mind) for a year, just when you really need to be making a record to get yourself over the hump." I was Class Four at that time, the old Class Four, based on a system of eight classes which had been converted from six when I entered. So I was sort of halfway. I had just turned 40 years old. And he said, "Well, that's the saying: Four at 40." But I looked around me, and some of my colleagues at 40 were already Threes. My counselor thought perhaps this was not the best time for me to take a year off. I said, "Well, there are a lot of other reasons for wanting to do it, including personal, but also professional reasons. I think in the long run I will be a more useful officer, even if I take this year out."

So I was assigned to spend an academic year at Berkeley, the academic year 1961-62. My mother, who had been living with us in Aleppo and stayed with us after my father had died in 1956, went ahead to Berkeley to start looking for a place to live, to do some house hunting. We packed the family up, got in the family station wagon with a camping trailer attached to it, and we camped across the country.

We stopped in Illinois and dropped off our daughter, who was entering as a freshman at Monmouth College, where Betty had gone. This was just the beginning of the academic year, and we got her registered. So Lynne went off to college.

Then we broke out the camping gear, and we camped from the Mississippi all the way across to the West Coast. Took about two weeks to do it. Went to national parks. Ended up on the Oregon coast and then drove down to California, and arrived in Berkeley to discover that my mother had found just the house and had already made a commitment, put down a deposit to hold it until we could get there and look at it. We settled in, in a very nice, small, modest but comfortable redwood-shingled house. I registered and started what turned out to be a very challenging and not always easy but rewarding academic year studying economics. It was really back to the student life.

There were three or four of us at Berkeley that year from the Department, all doing economic training. We had a little Foreign Service group, but we didn't see too much of each other. We developed our own circles of friends and largely went our own ways. Each of us had a different area of economics that he was particularly interested in. We overlapped in some courses, but we also were in different areas.

Q: How did you choose?

ATHERTON: First of all, I made the choice not to go for a degree. I didn't want to be tied down to all of the course requirements and, particularly, the research paper requirements for a graduate degree. I already had a Master's Degree in history. I wouldn't be there long enough to even be able to start on a Ph.D. I didn't need another Master's Degree. And I wanted the freedom to audit courses and sort of look around. I didn't have the academic foundation, so I had to take some fairly basic courses to get some macroeconomic theory and international trade theory under my belt. I did not do much in micro economics. I focused much more on the macroeconomic and international trade side. Had some excellent lecturers and excellent section people.

I did have to take the exams. I had to produce a record that could be sent back to the Department to show what I had been doing for my year. There would be no normal efficiency report. My academic grades, the papers I produced and got graded on for those courses, the comments of professors, some of whom took it more seriously than others, became, in effect, my performance report for that year at Berkeley.

I did reasonably well on the academic side. But the best news of all of that year was that about halfway through the year I got a phone call from the person in career counseling and assignments who looked after people like me, Arch Blood, whom I had known before, to say "Congratulations, you are on this year's promotion list." So all of that worry that I was going to lose a year and fall even further behind in promotions turned out to have been bad advice.

I got promoted and finished at Berkeley as a Class Three officer, which helped a little bit on the income side because of some increase in salary. And, of course, Berkeley was a much less expensive place to work and to live, at least in a student lifestyle, than Washington was.

Our younger son went to the local elementary school. It was a good school and a good, solid year. We had put our older son, who was entering ninth grade and had had an uneven, disrupted school experience up to then, into a small, private day school in Berkeley, where he could get more attention. And Betty did some tutoring at home to help supplement this. My mother and she kept busy in volunteer activities of one kind or another.

And I kept very busy. It was 15 years since I had been in an academic environment, and it was a total change from the kind of routine I had become used to in the Department, where you'd work long days, but once you came home at night, you had a drink, had dinner, relaxed, and that was the end of the day until the next day. Here, you came home at night, had dinner and, maybe, if you really were feeling relaxed, you'd have a beer, and then go up to the study after dinner and work till midnight on the reading and the papers or whatever else you were getting ready for the next round of exams or whatever it was for the next day. I found I fell into it more easily than I expected I would be able to.

So that was the year. It was a delightful year of academia. And I met a lot of people who lived in different worlds from the one that I had been in for the previous 14 years.

I did have one friend on the faculty at Berkeley, George Lenczowski, who was a professor and basically THE person for Middle East affairs in the political science department. I had met George when he came on his annual trips through the Middle East. He came through Aleppo, updating his contacts for the books he wrote or for his job as consultant. He was always updating, writing and rewriting. He was also a consultant to some oil companies, and he used to do these trips as a consultant every year. But he was at Berkeley, and we saw a bit of the Lenczowskis.We saw a bit of our other Foreign Service colleagues, but also met a cross-section of my student colleagues. I was a bit older than most of them, but they didn't seem to hold that against me. We also found time in the vacation periods. The great thing about being in an academic world is that when the exams are over you've got a couple of weeks with nothing to do until it starts up again. And so we used those times to good advantage-we traveled to Los Angeles and Disneyland.

The academic year was nearing its end, and I was waiting to see where we would go next. I had indicated that I thought I'd like to go back to a Near Eastern post somewhere. I liked being a principal officer, so I looked around for some small Consulates where I might aspire to be the principal officer.

Q: And get that flag flying again.

ATHERTON: Get that flag flying again, and go back to those days of glory. I can't remember now all the ones I put down on my post preference list. I think I also did indicate that I might be prepared to at least have one excursion tour back in Europe. I can't quite remember whether I did that or not. But I was thinking in those days of trying to maintain one foot in the European side, and particularly the German side where I had spent so much time, and where I did have the language at least, and where lots of things were going on. And I thought it might be nice to have a career that varied between, say, Germany, Central Europe, on the one hand, and the Middle East, Near East, on the other.

Well, all of that was fantasy, because the Personnel Bureau had decided that I would be assigned to the Consulate General in Calcutta, India, which had been the furthest thing from my mind. I would go out as head of the Economic Section. And, of course, they had me there, because I clearly owed the Department a tour of duty as an economic officer, having had this big investment for a year making an economist out of me. They said, "That's the one that's available in this Bureau, and you're in NEA, and that includes South Asia, as well as the Near East, Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey." Well, in those days, one didn't fight assignments the way people have done in more recent years, particularly when you were 3,000 miles away. You couldn't drop in and try to negotiate a change of an assignment. So we said, "Fine, off we go to Calcutta." This was June of 1962.

The only problem was, I had finished my exams, was all through at the university, and I had no travel orders. And after some attempts to find out what happened, I finally was told that the Department had run out of money for travel, and we couldn't go anywhere until the next fiscal year. The travel money had been totally expended for the regional conferences that had been organized and presided over by Chester Bowles in his capacity as Under Secretary of State in the Kennedy Administration. Bowles organized these enormous gatherings of American Ambassadors, regionally, in different parts of the world, and that apparently totally blew the Department's travel money. So literally they froze all travel until the beginning of the new fiscal year, July 1st. And we were told, "Sorry, you have got to stay in California."

Fortunately, we could extend the lease on the house, which was to have run out right after mid-June. What to do? Well, get out the camping trailer. So we got out the camping trailer and got the kids and took off for Yosemite. And we did a great, grand camping tour of Yosemite National Park, plus some other sights in California.

Back to Berkeley, we waited until July 1st. I had orders that said we could begin travel any time after July 1st. So we went through the by then familiar experience of getting packers, of deciding what we would get rid of, what we would put in storage, what we would take to Calcutta, and deciding how we were going to go there. My mother decided she wanted to go directly to Florida, because I had a brother and his family in Florida, and she would take our older son, Michael, with her. He wasn't much for long trips. So they would fly directly from Berkeley to Florida, en route to Washington. It seems strange to go across the Atlantic to get to India when you're already on the West Coast, but we had to go to Washington for consultation and a little, quick area training course. Berkeley had a good South Asian program, fortunately, and I was able to audit a political science course on India. So I did have a chance to learn a little bit about India and get a few books and a reading list to take and read on the trip.

We left California in perhaps the most unusual way anyone ever did going from California to India. We left by train. Betty, Reed (by then age 10) and I took a train from Berkeley overnight, several nights, by sleeper to the Grand Canyon. In those days, the car you were in was simply detached to another siding, you went off to the Grand Canyon, and you stayed in the sleeping car. You had built-in accommodations, did the sightseeing, and the next day they took you back and reconnected you to the main train. We went on to Albuquerque, and at that point switched from train to plane and flew on, joining the rest of the family in Florida for a family visit. Went to Washington, took the brief area course, got all the processing done, then it was off to Calcutta.

We decided, since it was a long, long way, we would break the trip and visit some of our old haunts. So we flew to Beirut, and we broke the trip in Lebanon. Had some friends in Beirut to visit with. Went up to Aleppo, where they hadn't forgotten us. It hadn't been all that long since we'd left Aleppo, and we had a very nice, sentimental visit with a number of our Syrian friends. Let's see, how long had it been? We'd left Aleppo in late '58, and this was only late '62, so really it was only four years later.

What had happened in the meantime in Syria was that there had been a Syrian coup against the union with Egypt. That happened while we were in Berkeley. I can remember, on my way to the campus one morning, waiting for the bus, looking at the headlines in the newspaper, in September '61, and seeing this headline: Syrians Break Union with Egypt. So it didn't last very long, and the Syrians were back on their own. And, of course, they went into a period of some instability. There had been a move towards nationalization, land reform. A lot of our wealthy friends were not quite as wealthy as they had been. But still, in many ways Aleppo was still Aleppo, and we saw a lot of good friends and enjoyed very much the stay.

Also met a new colleague at the Consulate in those days, named Richard Murphy, whom I had not met before and who, as the record well shows, went on to a very illustrious career, indeed, including Assistant Secretary in NEA.

Then the fantasy had to end. And so we, having got ourselves thoroughly exhausted by going around and visiting friends and not taking time to get over our jet lag, got on a plane and got even more jet-lagged flying to India.

Arrived in Calcutta and plunged in. I was replacing an officer named Tom Hoctor for a contact transfer, which in those days was more possible than it is now. So I was able to spend the first week or two understudying the man whose job I was taking. It was a two-officer section, and the junior officer was Terry Arnold, with whom we have kept in touch almost ever since. It was a big Consulate General. There was a Consul General, and he had a Deputy whose only job was being deputy, named Bruce Buttles. We got there just as Consul General Bill Baxter's predecessor, Gordon Mattison, was having his farewells.

We got there just in time to go through a round of farewell parties for Gordon Mattison, which is one way to meet a lot of people in a hurry. It was also quite an introduction to the social life of Calcutta. We discovered that, although the British had been long gone, the British customs stayed behind. Almost every evening there was a black-tie affair.

We arrived there in August, maybe early September; it was still part of the very hot season, and air conditioning was not as widespread in those days as it has become. We were put up, temporarily, in a small residential hotel near the Consulate, which had no air conditioning. I can remember the first evening, getting into my black tie and being soaked through by the time I walked out the door to go to the reception at one of the clubs, a farewell for Gordon Mattison.

We stayed for maybe a couple of weeks in the hotel until the Hoctors left. And then we were able to move into the apartment that had been their apartment (it was assigned housing) and began to do the usual things. Where do the kids go to school? Where do you shop? I was getting oriented to the office, but the family was getting oriented to the whole new life from their point of view.

The job was, well, to put it mildly, all very new to me, and I was very lucky to have overlapped with Tom Hoctor, but even more lucky to have Terry Arnold as the number two officer, who had been there for some time, and who was a better economist than I, even though I had just had a year of economic training, and who already had developed quite a network of contacts.

So I was able to plug into the world that I would be mostly dealing with, which was the business world and the state government's economic departments that had responsibility for food distribution and other matters of special interest to the United States.

There was a big AID program in India in those days. We had a program shipping grain to India. We had technical assistance projects throughout our consular district. Because the Embassy in Delhi was so far away and the AID mission was so far away, a lot of the monitoring of these projects was done by Consulate personnel going out around the consular district, sometimes with visiting AID officials.

The consular district, of course, was enormous. Everything in India is enormous. We had a consular district of 125 million people, counting the states of West Bengal, Orissa, and Bihar, and a couple of the smaller tribal states that bordered what was then still East Pakistan on the north, running up to the foothills of the Himalayas. And the problem was, in the first instance, to get acquainted with the consular district and with who the key actors were in the economic life of the area. It was a very complex economic system in the Calcutta consular district.

Calcutta itself is a port city, and it's a very large, traditional commercial city. Calcutta was the capital of British India for a long time, and almost all the communities of India are represented in Calcutta.

It's Bengal, the language is Bengali, but there is a large Marwari community, a large Maharashtran community, a large Punjabi community. They all pretty much led their own communal lives, but at the top there was social intermingling.

And there were large merchant houses. The British were still very big in the business world. So it was still a very important city from the point of view of commerce and trade.

But the consular district also included what was basically the Ruhr Valley or the Pittsburgh of India. The heavy industry is largely in that part of India, the steel factories, heavy-machinery factories.

We had to learn about and analyze the Indian attempt to pattern their economy to some extent on the Soviet model. They had five-year plans. They had physical production quotas. They had public-sector heavy industry, steel plants and a very large heavy-machinery plant, where they manufactured machinery to make machines, and there were a couple of older private-sector steel plants nearby, too. So one could compare the performance of public and private sectors. In most cases, the private plants were the more efficient. We had a good chance to observe an attempt to superimpose a Soviet model on an economy that had been, before that, much more free enterprising.

Q: Where actually was this? In Calcutta?

ATHERTON: No. The steel complex, the heavy-industrial complex, is in Durgapur, which is north of Calcutta. And one of the oldest steel plants in the country was the private-sector plant, Tata Iron and Steel. The Tatas were an enormous economic factor in India, with interests in heavy industry, airlines, hotels. They are a part of the small Farsi community, centered largely in Bombay, the Farsis came originally from Iran. They were not more than 100,000 people or so when we were in India, but they were an enormous factor in the economy of the country. They were enterprising entrepreneurs, capitalists.

Q: I've heard them described as the Jews of India.

ATHERTON: I think that is more often applied, frankly, to the Marwari community than to the Farsis. The Marwaris are the merchants, the bankers, the traders. They also were well represented in Calcutta.

It was not a melting pot, because they all kept their separate communities, but it was a place to get to know all of India without ever leaving the consular district.

We did a lot of traveling. We did try to get to know the rest of the consular district. We had a certain schedule of required economic reports that had to be done. A lot of the legwork was done by very able Indian employees of the Consulate, but obviously I was responsible ultimately for the final reports, and I felt I had to have first hand knowledge and to make my own judgements. And so we did a lot of traveling out of Calcutta.

Again, on-the-job training. Most of what I've learned in the Foreign Service has been on-the-job training. Not school training, not even formal training courses, and, except for that year at Berkeley, not even in-service training.

I had a good teacher in Terry Arnold and learned a lot, in a very short time, about how this complex economy worked in the public and private sectors, the commercial, industrial, and food sectors.

Of course, in India, that's the key. If you had a bad monsoon year, you had a food shortage. They had terrible memories of earlier famines, of people dying on the streets of Calcutta back in the '40s. No democratically elected government could let that happen, so they had to be sure they had plenty of food in reserve, and U.S. wheat in particular. PL 480 was a major source for financing Indian food reserves. Because Calcutta was a port, a lot of these grain shipments came into the storage areas in Calcutta. One of our jobs was to keep an eye on this and make sure that it was properly stored. It was mostly a job for AID, but the Consulate was very much used as a sort of extension of AID to do a lot of things that AID people couldn't always come down from Delhi to do. And we would frequently do some of the field surveys on their behalf. We would also go to the inauguration of small AID projects.

The AID program gave us a lot of entree. It opened doors into circles that we might not otherwise have been able to penetrate. And, of course, being a believer in the inseparability of politics and economics, I not only did the necessary economic reporting and analysis, but also was able to get a handle on what were in some respects political as well as economic issues.

West Bengal was extraordinary in this respect. It had its very traditional wealthy class. It also had one of the best-organized, most effective Communist parties in India. While the Congress Party dominated, there was a very active Communist opposition in the West Bengal parliament. In the Indian federal system, the local government has considerable authority. Jyoti Basu, who was the head of the Communist Party, a very able politician and a very charismatic street politician, did eventually become the Chief Minister. But in our days the Chief Ministers were Congress Party politicians.

I had been in the Foreign Service by that time-'47 to '62- 15 years, and three of my posts had been consular posts: Stuttgart first, then Aleppo, and then Calcutta. The only traditional Embassy I had ever served in was Damascus. Bonn was a High Commission in transition from occupation to Embassy. So I never served at an Embassy again until I went to Cairo as Ambassador. But already, in Calcutta, I was on my third consular post. It was a consular post that did everything, because we had such a large district, and we were so far from Delhi.

The Consulates in India in those days were like little Embassies, really. I can remember one visit by Ambassador Galbraith to Calcutta when I was there. He was replaced in mid-term by Chester Bowles. I can remember only one visit by Chester Bowles to Calcutta. Ambassadors in Delhi didn't much like to go to Calcutta. And so we really were quite autonomous in many ways. Our substantive reporting went directly to Washington, with copies to the Embassy. We didn't have to filter things through the Embassy.

But there were some events during our time which were national events and not just local. The very first thing that happened, literally in the very first weeks of our tour in Calcutta, was the sudden and unexpected invasion by China of the Indian northeastern provinces. The Chinese came across the border into our consular district, in effect. We got there in late summer, and it was fall of '62 when this sudden, out of nowhere, Chinese invasion came across the border. They poured down into the eastern part of West Bengal, and nobody quite knew where they were going to stop.The Indians asked for help, and the U.S. government saw a chance, with very strong recommendations from Ambassador Galbraith, to increase our stock with the Indian government. We were in a period when the Soviets were seen as the special friend of the Indians. But it was to us they turned for emergency military supplies following this invasion.

It was assumed that the airlift, bringing in emergency military supplies, would go to Delhi. But somebody looked at the map and realized that the closest place to unload military supplies for an invasion coming into the upper part of West Bengal was Calcutta.

So Dum Dum Airport was suddenly converted from a civilian airport to receive an airlift of American military supplies, on very short notice. And the Consulate was the only official American institution on the spot to help put this together. So our job suddenly became, in these very early weeks, organizing communications between the airport and the Consulate and the Consulate and Delhi, finding accommodations, liaison with the Indian military command, to whom these supplies were to be turned over.

I think, considering that we were not a very large number of people involved in this, we did remarkably well in helping get the airlift organized. Basically, it was the responsibility of the American and Indian military, but we were the people who helped build the system they could take over, the infrastructure, if you will, communications and all. The Indians then took the equipment and transshipped it at the airport to their own transport planes and off to the front.

Q: I'm curious, what was the pretext for the invasion?

ATHERTON: Well, you know, it's kind of lost in history, but there have always been border disputes over where the border lies between China and India up in the Himalayas. My recollection is that the Indians had been asserting, by forward patrols, their claims to the border being where they said it was. And the Chinese, from their perception, thought the Indians were trespassing on Chinese territory. At least the theory at the time (and I must admit it's been a long time since I've thought about this or even read about it) was that the Chinese decided that the Indians had to be taught a lesson.

There has always been enmity between China and India. There is a very strong enmity, which is one of the reasons why the Indians, I think, looked particularly to the Soviet Union. They felt the Soviets were a counterbalance to the Chinese threat. They've always seen China as the real threat to them in Asia. The Soviets were nearby, and the Soviets gave them military equipment and helped them economically. And they saw this as a way of balancing the Chinese threat. But it was interesting, it was nevertheless to the United States that they turned for emergency military supplies when the invasion came.

Well, the Chinese came quite a long way into India, as a matter of fact. And we suddenly found ourselves dealing with the problem of helping our military and the Indian military liaise and get the system working.Communications were incredibly primitive in just getting messages to Delhi and back. Telephones didn't work very well; we did not have high-speed radio transmission. It seemed forever, getting through to the Embassy and getting responses, to say nothing of the Department. I don't know that we had any direct classified telegraphic links at all with the Embassy or the Department. Our reporting was by despatch, pouch and courier. But somehow the airlift did get put together and worked.

Meanwhile we suddenly found ourselves facing an influx of American missionaries who had all been up in this area and had fled, or had been urged to leave, I guess. Technically, we decided on evacuation and got word out through the grapevine network that had been set up under the E&E plan that they should all come to Calcutta. And so there was an influx of American, mostly Baptist, missionaries, from way up in the tribal country of northern West Bengal and Assam, Tripura and Manipur, who had to be dealt with. Again, we did what you always do in situations like this, you mobilized the spouses. It's not considered very popular to say it any more, but it was two for the price of one.

Q: It's free labor.

ATHERTON: Free labor. So the Consul General's wife, and Betty, and Bruce Buttle's wife, and all of the ladies, and some of the men, too, consular officers, had to work out the logistics arrangements. Fortunately, there were missionary headquarters in Calcutta, and most of them could go to their own missions. They set up emergency sleeping quarters and pretty well took care of themselves, but we had to be there to backstop. We had to document them. We had to find out who was there. We had to make sure that we had a record of them, that nobody was missing in action, in effect.

Q: You didn't take a course in advance on how to do that.

ATHERTON: No, you just learn as you go. It's more on-the-job training. But we had quite an influx of evacuees, some of whom resented having been asked to evacuate. Some of them said, "We wanted to stay with our people, with our flocks." They felt that they had abandoned their little Christian communities to the Chinese, in effect. It was interesting, this reaction. Many of them were resentful that the U.S. government had asked them to evacuate. But who knows what would have happened to Americans in that area, given the state of U.S.-Chinese relations in those days, if they hadn't evacuated.

In the end, the Chinese left almost as quickly as they came. They didn't march on Calcutta, which some people were afraid might happen. They were pretty extended, and they had the Himalayas behind them. The Indians were in their own territory, so I think while the Indians were caught off guard militarily, they probably in the end could have held the line. But the Chinese did not stay. They had made a point, they had given the Indians a lesson. And then they withdrew as mysteriously as they came.

Q: A lesson learned.

ATHERTON: A lesson learned. But that was the introduction to the duties that are not in your job description at a Consulate. A Consulate that size, a large consular office by today's standards, could not have total divisions of labor. Everybody had to do some of everything. I can remember I took weekend duty officer duty and had to deal with the sailors off the American ships who got in jail, or who missed their sailings and came to the Consulate to be documented and financed to get back to their boats or back to their home ports. We all had our share of dealing with consular emergencies on the weekends or during the night.

We lived in a compound in an apartment building which was just a wall away from the Consulate building, and the Consul General's house was on the other side. So it was compound living, which was pretty much the custom in those days. You didn't have individual houses. So we had more than our share of emergency calls, being that close.

One of the other major things that occurred early in our tour there was the assassination of President Kennedy. It was the middle of the night in Calcutta when the Marine guard rang. I was the duty officer, I guess, or the Consul General was away. I can't remember why he called me. He called, and I vaguely remember Betty saying, "He's very tired, can't this wait until morning?"

And the Marine guard said, "Ma'am, tell him that the President of the United States has just been assassinated."

Well, that woke us all up. And we quickly organized all the things one has to do: get black-bordered stationery printed, arrange memorial services, and arrange a condolence book at the Consulate for people who'd want to come and sign. We were totally unprepared for the overwhelming reaction. We had the foresight to set up two condolence books. We thought one would be for VIPs and one for everybody else. And in no time at all there was a line of Indians going all the way around the block and into the next. It was incredible, the outpouring of sympathy.

Kennedy had caught the imagination of India. There was an upsurge of hope for better American-Indian relations. We were seen as doing a lot for them economically by that time. Galbraith had been quite a figure. He was the embodiment of the United States in India, and he was very visible. So there was a reservoir of good feeling there which came out in an expression of grief for the death of our President.

All kinds of people, from the humblest to the dignitaries, all got in this line. Very unIndian, normally, to have the castes mixing that way. We would go out and try to spot people we knew who were dignitaries, and say, "Won't you come up to the head of the line?"

And many of them would say, "No, no, I'll wait my turn." Quite incredible.

So we had the period of official mourning and services for the American community. And then back to work after that was over.

I guess the next major event that overwhelmed the routine preoccupations of the Consulate must have been in '63 or '64 when there was suddenly an outbreak of the periodic communal violence between Hindus and Muslims.

This started over a story, which in the end I think proved not true, of the desecration of a mosque by Hindus in East Pakistan. Muslims in East Pakistan turned on the Hindus, so the Hindus in Calcutta turned on the Muslims. There were a lot of people killed and a lot of burnings of each other's communities.

This always happens to the poor. It was not in the well-to-do sections of the city. It was always in the slums and the poor sections.

None of it turned xenophobic, none of it turned anti-foreign or anti-Western. There was a curfew. We had passes, consular people who had to get out could get passes. Never did we feel threatened at all by this.

I can remember we had a cook who was actually Christian, but he lived down in one of the poorer sections of town, and he was afraid to go home one night after work. It was a Saturday, and he wanted to be home because he wanted to go to church the next morning. He was a very devout Catholic, originally from Goa. We did not have a car and driver, by the way, only the Consul General and the Deputy Principal Officer had their own drivers. But Betty got in our car and drove the cook home, through the part of town where stores were burning and people throwing stones. There was absolutely no hostility towards Westerners, and she was able to deliver Peter to his quarters, where he felt safe, and drive back all alone to the Consulate.

In retrospect, one wonders, but it never occurred to us at the time that we were in danger. These were Indians killing Indians. And it never did turn anti-Western in any sense of the word.

It was a typical sort of Indian explosion, convulsion you might almost say, of which India has seen many. This was nothing compared to the communal riots and massacres which followed partition. But it did lead to a new refugee problem. A lot of Hindus left East Pakistan, who had still stayed on there. In many cases, they were Biharis, not Bengalis. They came across and poured into the Calcutta area, adding to the already large street population. There were still refugees in Calcutta in those days, living in shanty towns around the railroad stations, which is where they ended up after the partition in 1947. Fifteen years later, you still had them there.

Q: No assimilation.

ATHERTON: Children had been born, and people had died, and they still were living in these lean-to shanty towns right around the railroad stations-Howrah Station in particular, because that was the station that used to connect Calcutta with East Pakistan. And that's where a lot of the Hindus came from.

Q: One always hears of these beggars sleeping in the streets of Calcutta. Are these refugees?

ATHERTON: No, just poor people. A lot of the refugees in fact worked. They lived in shanty towns, but they weren't all unemployed. But you had a lot of people who did not have any place to sleep-the homeless population. Nobody knew, they never took a census, but it was several hundred thousand, probably, maybe even half a million. You would see them huddled under blankets on cool winter nights, on the main thoroughfares around the big hotels. They would go off and do whatever they do during the daytime.

Very often, if they were able, they would work, and a lot of them were rickshaw pullers. This was the one place in the world, I think by then, where you still had man-pulled rickshaws. In most places, they had converted to bicycle rickshaws. But the man-pulled rickshaw, which had been brought originally to India by immigrants from China, still persisted in Calcutta. You could still go out and hire a rickshaw. When our cook would come back from the market and he had too many groceries to carry or bring on the bus, he would hire a rickshaw. He would always give my wife the accounting for what he had spent on the marketing, and every now and then on the bill there would be something that was all one word, and we finally figured out it said: "rickshawfar," in other words, rickshaw fare.

It was probably the city the most impossible to fix of any city I've ever seen. And yet it goes on. It had a pulsing economic life because of the industrial hinterland and because of commerce and the port. It was a very difficult port, a river port, not on the Bay of Bengal. It was on the Hooghly River, which was one of the tributaries of the Ganges Delta-one of the outlets of the Ganges into the Bay of Bengal. But it had been a great port. It was still a large port, but there was a lot of silting. They were constantly dredging to keep the channels open so that large ships could get in and out. A very expensive port; turnaround time was very slow.

That was one of the reasons why we had so many problems with the seamen, because their ships would be in Calcutta Port for so long and they would get in trouble. There wasn't all that much to do except get drunk. So there would always be problems. You know, what do you do with a drunken sailor? They come to the American Consulate, if they don't go to jail.

Anyway, I'm getting off the story a bit. But the refugee problem was just compounded by this new influx of new refugees coming across from what was still then East Pakistan.

The next and final crisis of our tour of duty was in 1965, when there was one of the periodic outbreaks of warfare between India and Pakistan. This one was mostly in the east, so we were on the side of the country where most of the military action was, rather than in Kashmir and on the main border with West Pakistan.

We actually had a couple of air raid warnings around Calcutta. A lone Pakistani plane would come over, drop a couple of bombs. Usually they fell in the river. But there would be an air raid warning, and everybody would head for the totally inadequate air raid facilities, unless you happened to have one in your house. There were signs all over the place saying that in case of air raid take shelter in a pukka house. Pukka houses were the strong stone- or concrete-built houses and therefore presumably able to withstand shell fire or bomb concussion blasts more than the non-Pukka houses that were built of mud and were without foundation, and would collapse.

Anyway, this crisis came at a very inconvenient time for us. We had by then been in India three years, and we were coming to the end of our tour. We hadn't had home leave. We had opted for a three-year tour and then home leave and transfer. I had orders to report back to the Department, and we thought, well, we're going to do this right. We've got lots of leave time, and this will be the last chance for a long time for the family to take a boat trip. So we worked out elaborate arrangements, and got reservations for all of this, to go by train from Calcutta to Bombay on the Bombay Mail, the overnight sleeper which is really one of the luxury trains of India.

We traveled a lot in India by train and went by car some, too. Got to know the Indian system pretty well. We knew the south even better than the north, because our two sons went to boarding school in south India, in Kodaikanal, a hill station near Madurai. So every year in May, which was the worst month in Calcutta, we would spend the month at 7,000 feet in the hills in Kodaikanal. Betty and the children would. I couldn't go for that long at a time, but I would go down for part of the time.

Anyway, we decided we would take the Bombay Mail across to Bombay from Calcutta. We would embark on a British steamer coming from the Far East at Bombay, and from there up through the Suez Canal, and eventually to Italy. In Italy we could connect up with an American flagship, because we had to transfer to American flags at the nearest possible place, and that would have been Naples. We had this elaborate trip worked out to join either the Independence or the Constitution and sail from Naples to the States. It was going to take us several weeks. We knew the Department would say, "Well, part of that's leave," and we said, "that's fine." We had a lot of leave coming. It was all allowed under the travel regulations. It was a chance to get the family to rebind, because our two sons had been off at boarding school, and we hadn't been together as much as we would like to have been as a family.

Our daughter, by that time, incidentally, had been out to visit us, but she was in college in the States. I had gone back in '64 to sit on a selection board, and when I was there, met the young man she announced she was going to marry. The wedding was set for early October of 1965, and so our whole trip was timed so that we could get back to the States in time to be in Chicago for our daughter's wedding.

And then, most inconveniently, the Indians and the Pakistanis went to war. And the decision was, I suppose rightly made, that they couldn't have people leaving the Consulate while there was a war on.

By then, incidentally, I was the number two at the Consulate, the Department having decided there was no need for a Deputy Principal Officer. That position was abolished, and it was decided the next senior person would also function as the Deputy and would be the Acting Consul General when the Consul General was away. And I was that person.

I think as we finished the last tape I had just recalled that my tour in Calcutta was coming to an end. We had orders to go back to the States. We had elaborate plans for a long sea voyage by way of the Suez Canal and all of that. Then the war broke out between India and Pakistan, and all the people were frozen in place. We were standing by for the possibility of another evacuation of Americans.

So the first thing we did was to cancel the first leg of the trip, which would have been from Bombay through the Arabian and Red Seas and the Suez Canal and into the Mediterranean to Naples. But we tried to hold onto the second part, which was to have been from Italy back to the States. In the end, we had to cancel all of our plans and fly the whole way, with just a one-night stopover in London, because we had a deadline at the other end, namely our daughter's wedding in Chicago on the second of October. So we finally left, with no time to spare. And of course because of the Indo-Pak War flights had been rerouted. I think we went out on British Air. Normally they flew from Calcutta to Karachi and across that way, but because of the war, they had to reroute the flights. I think we had to go via the Persian Gulf, with a stop in Doha, and from there up across the Arabian Peninsula and eventually to London.

Q: Before you get out of India, what was your role during the Indo-Pak War there at the consulate in Calcutta?

ATHERTON: As it turned out, we didn't have much of a role. The war was far from the city, obviously. We had occasional air raid alerts, and a couple of Pak bombers actually did get across and drop a few bombs, as I recall, up the river from Calcutta. I don't recall that they ever did any serious damage.

But our job basically was to just be there in case there was a need to evacuate Americans. We didn't have any role in dealing with the Indians on this. This was all done through the embassy in Delhi. We reported, obviously, the attitudes of the people about the war from our consular district. We did try to keep Delhi and Washington informed of what the war looked like from the vantage point of Calcutta, and the Calcuttans and the Indians in this area thought about it.

Calcutta had a large Muslim population, and there was always concern that there would be Pakistani sympathizers in that area, so Indian security was tightened considerably, as I recall. But there was no immediate impact of the war on our lives, except that it froze us in place. We couldn't leave.

Perhaps our major contribution, ours being the consul general's and mine in particular, was to resist pressure from Washington to order the evacuation of Americans from various parts of the consular district.

Our reading was that it was not going to be the danger zone, that the war was not going to create that kind of a crisis situation. And as you know, once you've started evacuation, it's very hard to reverse. It takes on a life of its own, and you disrupt a lot of lives. A lot of these were not just the official Americans, they were the private American business community and missionaries. So we did take the position that we did not think evacuation was justified and, in effect, I think came very close to just being ordered by Washington to call for an evacuation. We took the position that this was a call for the people on the ground to make, who had a better feel than somebody sitting way back in Washington. I think, as I recall, that the embassy in Delhi supported us. They said they would take our judgment. Bill Hitchcock was then our Consul General, and he had a good standing in the embassy and a good reputation with the Department. He was a particular friend of Carol Laise, who was then I think the director of South Asian Affairs. And so we prevailed. We did not go through an evacuation. And it turned out that we were right. There had not been a need for it, and it would have been a great expense, and a great disruption, and probably created a lot of ill will among private Americans for panicking. And so, that's my main memory of that period, the resistance to the evacuation and the general sense that the war was somehow far away, and that it was not something we seemed to be terribly caught up in.

In any case, it didn't escalate, and eventually, after several attempts, I got approval from Washington to continue with my transfer. I had orders at that point to come back and report for a year at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. And I made the point that if I was going to do that, I had to get back in time to go to our daughter's wedding and get to the War College before the term was over.

So we got permission. We traveled back and got to New York, rented a car and drove straight through to Chicago, where our daughter's wedding was, and got there just in time to go to the wedding rehearsal and host the dinner the evening before.

Betty had not met our new son-in-law before, or our new in-laws. I had met him and his mother (his father was dead) when I was back about year before to sit on a selection board, and I had gone through Chicago on my way back to Calcutta, across the Pacific and on to India. So I had met the future son-in-law and his mother, but Betty had not. So this was really a first, in many ways.

That behind us, we went off to Washington, reported to the Department and discovered that while we were in transit the mysterious wheels of the personnel system had been turning and my assignment had been changed. I was not going to the War College, I was going to be assigned to Washington as deputy director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs.

I thought I had left NE, and the Near East, and the Arab-Israeli problems behind, having gotten out of that circuit way back (seemed way back at that point) in 1960, when I moved to the Cyprus desk. I left involvement in the Arab world and its problems behind and took on the Greek-Turkish Cypriot problem for that year, and then went off and studied economics, and went to Calcutta and learned a lot about the problems of South Asia. And I really didn't have any great burning desire, frankly, to plunge back into what I thought was going to be a totally stalemated-for-lifetime Arab-Israeli problem. It didn't look to me as though it was a place where a lot was going to happen. I don't mean to discount the importance of our tending to the problem, our being engaged in the area, and doing our best to preserve our relations with the Arabs as well as Israelis, but I hadn't really thought of plunging right back into that set of problems.

I thought that with the economic experience and the experience in Calcutta, it would have perhaps made some sense to build on that, but the Department thought otherwise. And I discovered that I was to fill in behind Harry Symmes, who had been made office director, filling in behind Rodger Davies, who had moved up to the front office as a deputy assistant secretary. And so I suddenly found myself not only back, but back in a big way as the deputy director of the office. This was when the bureaus were still organized in geographic offices-Office of Near Eastern Affairs; Office of South Asian Affairs; Office of Greek, Turkish, Iranian, and Cyprus Affairs-before the fragmentation into the country director system. So the Office of Near Eastern Affairs covered all of the Arab countries of the bureau, plus Israel, plus all of the problems that grew out of the Arab-Israeli conflict, with which I had been out of touch for five years-since 1960.

So the first thing I figured I had to do was to get back in touch. And that involved making an extended trip back to the area to get reoriented and meet a lot of the people who were there, some of them I knew and some of them I didn't. I didn't realize, incidentally, that, by joining the NE front office at that time, I was coming in just in time to help preside over the end of that office. It was only six months later, roughly, that the offices were abolished and the country director system was established.

Q: What year was that?

ATHERTON: As I recall, that happened in the summer of 1966. I'm talking now about the end of '65 and the very beginning of '66, when it was still an Office of Near Eastern Affairs.

I did, as I recall, almost a month's trip. I visited almost every country in the Office of Near Eastern Affairs. I got to all the major countries, including Yemen and South Yemen, which was then Aden and was still a British colony. I did not get to Qatar or Oman, and I didn't get to the sheikdoms that later became the component parts of the United Arab Emirates. Remember, in those days the Maghreb, the Arab countries of North Africa, were still in the African Bureau, so my trip really was from Egypt eastward to the Persian Gulf and from Syria in the north to Aden in the south. But it was a long trip, and I got back in touch as a result of that, and came away from it with a certain number of impressions about what the issues were that we were going to be dealing with.

Just to recall what the issues were at the time, this was a period when there were strains in our relations with the Egyptians despite early efforts by the Kennedy Administration to improve relations. The Egyptians had sent an expeditionary force to support the revolution in Yemen, and this had frightened the Saudis. We had had to choose, and had chosen to stand with the Saudis, and therefore we were seen as opposing the Egyptians. There were other reasons as well, over Palestinian and Arab-Israeli issues, and over Egypt's relations with the USSR and its threats to Arab governments friendly to us. We had suspended Public Law 480 wheat sales to the Egyptians, because of attacks by President Nasser on our policies. So that while we had people, both in Cairo and in Washington, trying to maintain a dialogue and a relationship between Washington and Cairo, there were strains in the relationship.

The ambassador at that time in Cairo, whom I visited, was Luke Battle. I recall the visit very well indeed, because, among other things, he showed me the property that he was trying to get the Department to agree to buy as the new ambassadorial residence in Giza. But that's another story, I'll come back to that later.

Q: Luke told it on his tapes, too.

ATHERTON: Did he? Well, he took me around to look at it on that trip, and I agreed it was absolutely splendid. The house needed some renovations and enlarging, but the location was good, and the basic house was a charming old Cairo villa that would have been just ideal. And the reason for wanting to move was that the residence, while it was a grand residence, was in an increasingly congested part of town in Garden City, and we didn't own it, it was on lease. And Luke felt, I think rightly, that rather than buy and stay in that area, which was clearly going to become only more and more congested, making it less pleasant living and a bit of a security problem, although not as much as in later years, that we should seize the chance to buy a very representational piece of property with a lot of land around it right on the banks of the Nile. An unusual opportunity. But later we'll talk about what happened to that, when we get back to Egypt.

In any case, one of the big issues in the area at the time, and it tended to affect our relations with a number of countries, was the civil war in Yemen, and the Egyptian intervention on the side of the revolutionary regime, and the Saudi support for the monarchy, so you had a civil war with two of the principal Arab countries aligned on opposite sides, and the United States trying to keep good relations with both of them. In the end, our relations with Egypt suffered, and our relations with the Saudis prospered during that period.

Other issues? This was a time when the Israelis were seeking to acquire more arms from the United States. We had not been a major supplier, or really a supplier at all of arms to the Israelis for a long time. But we were now in the Johnson administration. There was a generally friendly attitude towards Israel and a feeling that Israel deserved to have some help in modernizing of its equipment. I think we had already sold them the Hawk anti-aircraft missiles during the Kennedy period. But they were seeking, at that point, aircraft, and particularly, to start with, the A-4, which is a ground support bomber, basically, and of course also an increase in economic aid. There were certain pressures within the Congress coming from the Israel lobby and from Israel itself to be responsive. They cited the rhetoric coming out of Cairo as evidence of threat, the rhetoric coming out of Syria, the anti-Israeli rhetoric of the region, though there were certainly no indications that there was actually going to be a war, at that time, in early 1966.

One thorn in the side of U.S.-Israeli relations at that time was the Israeli development of a nuclear reactor, with French assistance, at Dimona. As we learned more and more about this, we became concerned that it was perhaps too big to be just a research reactor and that it might have other purposes. We were concerned, obviously, about the perception that Israel was developing a nuclear weapons capability. We had therefore requested, and for a period, in fact, were granted by the Israelis the right to inspect that reactor, to satisfy ourselves that there was no reprocessing capability, that it wasn't being used for nuclear weapons development. The inspectors were never fully satisfied that they saw everything. The inspections could not be surprise inspections, they all had to be scheduled ahead of time, planned ahead of time, and so they never could be assured that there weren't parts that they were somehow not getting to see, or there weren't things going on that were temporarily suspended during the inspections. But we went through the motions.

As I recall, there was also the question of some unaccounted-for uranium shipments that some people suspected had gone to Israel from, as I recall, Latin America. We thought we were able to track their acquisitions, but there was always a lingering suspicion that they had some material that we had not been aware of and able to keep track of. So this was a strain.

During this period the President appointed Governor Averell Harriman to be in charge of the discussions with Israel, to find a way to try to get more cooperation from the Israelis, to reveal more about, and perhaps put limits on, their nuclear program, in return for our being more forthcoming on conventional arms sales. There was definitely an attempt to work out a package deal of this kind, with Averell Harriman, and I think Paul Warnke, who was the Assistant Secretary in Defense for ISA, working with him. But in the end, the inspections never really satisfied anybody that they were accomplishing their purposes, and we eventually stopped inspecting. We reached the point where we just felt that they were a failure, a farce, from the point of view of serious attempts to find out what was going on.

So there were cross currents in the U.S.-Israeli relationship. But the overall relationship was, if anything, warmer than it had been at many times in the past. It probably had hit rock bottom at the time of the Suez War in '56. We are now ten years later, and it was a period of mending. I think it was Nadav Safran, in one of his books about U.S.-Israeli relations, who spoke of "seven lean years." The seven lean years were the Dulles years, basically, the period of the Eisenhower administration, when we were obsessed by the threat of the Soviet Union and international communism to the region and trying to improve our relations with the Arabs and keep the Israelis at arms length. The Suez War was part of that, and contributed to the very strained relations between Israel and the United States at that time. But now, ten years, nine years later, things had warmed up. And in any case, it was a period when, so far as I can recall, the Arab-Israeli conflict, as an issue that the U.S. government was seized of in the sense of trying to do something about it, was really on the back burner. We had no active peace plans going at that time; we had made attempts in the past. We were much more focusing on our bilateral relations with the Arab countries.

The administration was by then very absorbed in Vietnam, and was not looking for other foreign policy problems which might overextend our diplomatic resources and our resources generally. So there was no great drive at that time to try to do anything about the Arab-Israeli conflict in terms of looking for solutions. We were just trying to keep the lid on and hoping that it didn't blow up, and meanwhile focusing on our bilateral relations, and on trying to see if we couldn't find a way to help unwind the Yemen War. That was the one active conflict in the area which was potentially destabilizing to the region.

There were, however, some rumblings of Palestinian unhappiness that the Arab countries didn't seem to be giving them the support they thought they needed and that their cause was not on the front burner.

This was a period when many of the constituent elements of the PLO were becoming active as independent guerrilla-type groups, paramilitary-type groups, some with political bases in Palestinian communities in Kuwait and in the Gulf countries. It was also the time when the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization had just been established. The PLO was founded in Egypt as an Arab summit conference in 1964, just a couple of years earlier. But it was clearly founded not as a way of giving the Palestinians their chance to become an independent factor in the conflict, but as a way of keeping them under Egyptian control. The early PLO was headed by Ahmed Shukairi, who was very much seen as an instrument of Egyptian policy. So the PLO was not seen as a major independent force at that time, although it was established as a separate entity and given membership in the Arab League. But in practice, its headquarters were in Egypt and its leadership pretty much subservient to, or at least influenced by, Egyptian policy and by the Egyptian government.

Another thing about this period that I remember was looking at the role of the Department, particularly the role of the Near East-South Asian Bureau, in dealing with the Middle East. I became increasingly aware, having returned to this area after a five year absence, of the pro-Arab image of the bureau. The bureau was seen as basically sympathetic to the Arab side of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

And I think there was some historical basis. In the early years, it was the professionals in Near Eastern affairs who had recommended against the establishment of Israel and against recognition of Israel and in favor of trusteeship when the British said they were going to get out of Palestine. So there was this historical image, particularly in Israel and among pro-Israeli elements in this country and in the Congress-that the Near Eastern Bureau was suspect from the viewpoint of Israel's interest.

I had a very graphic introduction to this. One of the things I was expected to do was to go on the speaking circuit. We had lots of invitations to speak about the Middle East. One of the principal sponsors of these occasions was the ZOA, the Zionist Organization of America, which was very active in organizing meetings to discuss Israel's interests, and the Arab-Israeli problem, and the Middle East in general, mostly in Jewish congregations at synagogues around the country, or at educational institutions, or often sponsored by local Jewish community groups in hotels. It seems to me there was hardly a week went by that I wasn't going out (usually they took place on Sundays), that I wouldn't be invited to go to one of these meetings. And the pattern that emerged, very clearly, was that there were three people on the platform: there was the ZOA representative, who was the chair of the meeting, there was a representative of the Israeli government, usually from the local consulate or from the embassy, and then there was me, as the representative of the State Department.

Q: The opposition.

ATHERTON: And it became very clear, from the beginning, that I was seen as the representative of the Arab point of view, since no Arab would share a platform like that in those days. And I suddenly realized that here I was, being set up to be the spokesman for the Arab point of view, which I tried to avoid doing. But it was pretty hard, because you were put in impossible situations, explaining what the Arab position was, which clearly was badly needed, without appearing as an advocate. There was an Arab view, and people needed to understand it, but for an American State Department official to explain it tended to identify you with that position.

Q: To espouse it.

ATHERTON: I must say I did try to do a little bit, during that six month period when I was deputy director of the office, to change a bit the image. I looked for ways, sometimes symbolic, to do that, for example by having a more open door to representatives of the Jewish voluntary agencies as well as for those that were serving the Palestinian refugees, looking more carefully at our personnel policies, which in some cases in those days tended to discourage people from serving in both Israel and the Arab world, instituting some cross-assignments. I began to try to say; "This image is wrong. I think that this bureau is really much more objective about the Arab-Israeli problem. There may be individuals in it who have their own sympathies, but I think we are carrying out the policies of the government, which are to have good relations with Israel and try to create balance in our relations with both sides." I thought it important to try to do things that would make those officials who dealt with the Middle East, who had lived in that part of the world, less suspect, or more credible, if you will, in the eyes of Israelis, of Congress, of the public, and to some extent, I must say, of the administration itself.

Q: I should think that the fact that there was only one Jewish state and many Arab states tended to make things look as though you were more pro-Arab than you actually were.

ATHERTON: Yes, you're right. That was clearly part of the problem. The Israelis always felt that they were outnumbered and under-represented. And of course if you look at the votes in the United Nations, for example, there is no question that is true. Their position was, and I think has always been, that they have one sure friend in the world, and therefore it's very important for that friend to be more than just impartial. That friend should be a supporter of their position as much as possible, and not just try to have a balanced position between the two sides.

Q: Are you going to cover Nasserism as a problem at this time?

ATHERTON: The problem for the United States or for the region?

Q: For you, in your position.

ATHERTON: That was another of the problems that I encountered during that period in NE. There was a tendency, and it's always a problem, I think, in the Service and in the Department, in explaining your clients' point of view, to sometimes defend them. And there was a tendency to try to defend some of Nasser's indefensible public statements and positions. I did try to begin to change a tendency to explain and defend Nasser when he had said something particularly outrageous, or did something particularly outrageous, from the point of view of the United States. Nasser's goal was to spread the revolution of Egypt throughout the Arab world, in terms of its political and economic philosophy. He sought to undermine old traditional regimes by various means, and to win followers who would bring to power governments around the Arab world that would look to Nasser and Egypt as the model. And that did very often put us at odds with him, not only over his attitude towards Israel, which he exploited as a way of building up support for himself by becoming the defender of the Palestinian cause, but also over his attacks on some of our best friends in the Arab world. So Nasserism was a problem for the United States, and one of our jobs was to figure out how to keep the channels open to Cairo, because we certainly recognized that Egypt was the most important state in the Arab world, in terms of its resources, population, strategic location, and its influence. There were periodic attempts to look for ways to improve the relationship. And there were occasional invitations, if Nasser wanted to reciprocate. He was not, I think, totally and irreversibly anti-American by any means. He was very pro-Arab and pro-Egyptian, and he was suspicious of the United States. But he also did not want to be seen as what he really was, to a large extent, a client of the Soviet Union. And we didn't want to say that's Soviet territory and therefore we'll take a hands-off position. We prided ourselves on trying to have relations with both Arabs and Israelis, whereas the Soviets were increasingly in those days solidly in Egypt, in the more radical Arab camp, the camp of the Nasserists and the governments that followed Nasser. We used to call them "radicals." Later on they didn't look so radical in retrospect.

But in any case, a recurrent problem was to try to manage the influence of Nasser in this region, both in terms of keeping it from stirring up the Palestine issue, the Arab-Israeli issue, stirring up anti-American views by appealing to the image that we were neo-colonialists, that we were the successors of the imperialists who had dominated them for so long. We were a convenient whipping boy for Nasser, particularly in the period when he was bogged down in Yemen and he was not as able to demonstrate success for his policies as he had been earlier in his political career. And it was convenient, I think, to divert tensions from that sometimes by picking fights elsewhere or with the United States. Still, with all that, I don't recall that there was any sense that the area was, in such a short period, suddenly going to explode.

I mentioned earlier that I took a trip out, in early 1966, to get reacquainted with the Middle East, as the new NE Deputy Director. Well, a little more than a year later, there was no Office of Near Eastern Affairs. There were individual country directorates. This was a concept of Secretary Dean Rusk's, to have in charge of each country, or in case of perhaps several smaller countries, a senior officer who would, in a way, be seen as the Washington equivalent of the ambassador in the field, and who would be able to deal with the ambassadors of those countries, getting the bilateral relationship in Washington down to the level of the people who were dealing with the problems of those countries on a day-to-day basis, rather than being dealt with always at the Secretary of State or the Assistant Secretary of State level. So his concept was to give more authority to the country directors and eliminate one layer, namely the geographic office directors, between the country officers and the Assistant Secretary and his deputies. Under the old system there was always the desk officer or the officer in charge of a particular country desk, and then there was the office director and his deputy, and then you went to the front office and you had the Assistant Secretary and his deputies. This was layered, and layers were considered not good management. So the idea was to eliminate a layer and have more direct communications between a country director and the front office, the assistant secretary or the designated deputy assistant secretary. In those days, the front office was a lot smaller than it later became. I think the assistant secretary of NEA only had two deputies. He had a principal deputy, and then he had a deputy more or less for economic affairs.

Anyway, the country director system had been put into effect, and when the Office of Near Eastern Affairs was abolished, Harry Symmes, who had been the office director, became the country director for Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs. It was still necessary to have some place where those problems that cut across country lines would be dealt with, that dealt with the Arab-Israeli issues, the Arab boycott of Israel and the problems that arose out of that, that dealt with the armistice agreements and the problems arising out of the armistice agreements. And so those were all put together in a new office that became known as the Country Directorate for Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs, or IAI. Harry Symmes became the director of that.

I became the director of what was called Arab States North. We were always looking for acronyms- ARN. Basically that was the combination of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq. They were all put in one directorate, and I was the officer in charge of that group. Then there was another directorate for Arabian Peninsula Affairs, and that took care of the old Office of Near Eastern Affairs. We had had an economic unit within the Office of Near Eastern Affairs which disappeared, and the economic officers went to the individual country directorates. So there was no more NE, but there were three country directorates.

Anyway, some personnel changes took place fairly early on, and Harry Symmes was reassigned. I was transferred from ARN to IAI. I moved over and became the director of Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs, sometime, as I recall, in early 1967. I'm not quite sure where Harry Symmes went at that point. He eventually ended up as ambassador to Jordan, but he didn't go there directly at that time, because Findley Burns was ambassador in Amman at that time. Anyway, Harry went to something, and I became the new director of IAI. And the new director of ARN was Bob Houghton, an old colleague from earlier periods.Bob and I said we both have new areas to get to know and to deal with, why don't we take a trip together to the area: the director of the Arab states most involved in the conflict with Israel, and the director of Israeli affairs. So Bob and I organized a joint trip (we called it our Gemini Trip), and we went out together and did an extensive visit to all of his countries, plus Israel, plus the usual stop in London on the way back to consult with our British colleagues, and to go to the theater among other things. It was a good trip.

It took place at a particularly interesting time in April and early May of 1967. With hindsight, we know that by the end of May the crisis loomed that became the Six-Day War. We were there at the end of April and early May.

I wish I could say I came back warning that war clouds were gathering, but, in fact, neither Bob nor I came back with a sense that a major crisis was impending in the area, that a war was about to break out. There wasn't any war talk at that time. There were flare-ups. Some of the militant Palestinian groups, which were not responsive to the PLO-Nasser leadership, were conducting occasional raids across the border into Israel. And the Israelis were retaliating. This created periodic flare-ups, which the mixed armistice commissions and U.N observers tried to handle. But actually, there was a combination of things happening, cross currents, if you will, of forces at work, the interaction of which did produce what became a sudden and, I think, totally unanticipated crisis. There were, as I said, occasional flare-ups between Israel and its immediate Arab neighbors, which were precipitated by border raids into Israel, and then Israeli retaliation. And sometimes, the Israeli reactions seemed to many to be over-reactions. Most spectacular, probably, was an Israeli-Syrian air battle. The Israelis used to send in their planes for air cover, when they would run a retaliatory strike across the border against Palestinian strongholds. Once in early 1967, in April sometime, I think, the Syrians sent up planes to intercept the Israeli planes. And the Israelis shot down, my recollection is six or seven Syrian fighters in one quick dogfight, without losing any of their own. This was quite an embarrassment to the Syrians, who immediately began criticizing Nasser (with whom there was the Arab League Defense Pact and, I think, in addition, a bilateral commitment to mutual defense) for not coming to their support against Israeli aggression. So, in addition to the Arab-Israeli tensions, you had Arab-Arab tensions, tensions among Arab countries. You had Nasser being accused by the Syrians of not coming to their rescue. You also had Jordan under King Hussein, who had always looked for any way he could to needle Nasser. He had no love for Nasser who tried to overthrow him, or tried to get his people to overthrow him at times. So Jordan, on its radio and in its press and public statements, was also criticizing Nasser for being bogged down fighting a fellow Arab country in Yemen, when the Israelis were doing all of these terrible things on their borders. So you had internal Arab conflicts. And then, remember, this was still the Cold War. The Soviets defended the Arabs side and portrayed the Israelis as the enemy, under the control of the United States. So you had all of these cross currents. And the crisis that finally blew up, in my opinion without anyone having wanted it, was a result of an interaction of all of these things. I've already mentioned the Syrian disagreement with the Egyptians, and Nasser being criticized by fellow Arabs. He felt, I think, that he had to somehow demonstrate that he was still the defender of all of the Arabs, and the defender of the Arab and Palestinian cause. Then you had Soviets warning the Egyptians that the Israelis had a plan to attack the Syrians, of which there was in fact no evidence. And you also had a situation in which Nasser was trying to recoup his image. One of the results was that the situation escalated very quickly through a series of power plays by Nasser.

This was really the beginning of the chain reaction that led to the '67 Six-Day War, but before going further I want to set the stage in terms of how the Department viewed the area at the time, or at least those who were working on this problem. I can remember coming back from that trip in late April, early May, and making a report to the staff meeting of the bureau, Bob Houghton and I, and basically what we reported was that we didn't see that the area was on the verge of an explosion. The Arab-Israeli crisis seemed to be on the back burner. Many of the Arab countries were more concerned with their own domestic, internal economic problems than they were with trying to fight this war. But there were two questions when we came back. One, the Syrians were talking much more militantly than the other Arab governments. They seemed to be still very much living in a state of war mentality at the time. Talking about getting ready for the next round. We didn't hear this kind of talk in Iraq. So we didn't come back reporting that we had discovered that a war was about to break out. We had reported that there were a couple of question marks. One was the Syrian attitude, with the Syrians in a position, perhaps, to trigger something. The other was question marks about the new stirrings of Palestinian nationalism, which we began to sense. I can remember writing a memorandum at the time, the title of which was a question mark. It was: "Palestinianism, Anachronism or Wave of the Future?" That sticks in my mind because it really was something that not too many people were even thinking about in those days. But there was just enough talk about Palestinians taking matters into their own hands. And they certainly had the capacity to create crises around the periphery of Israel by terrorist raids, guerrilla raids, even though they were the principal losers. If you count the casualties, it was the Palestinians who lost the most lives in these raids, or combination of the raids plus the retaliations. But nevertheless they were in a position to keep the pot boiling. But still, despite these counter-currents, Bob Houghton and I both really did not feel that we had left an area that was about to blow up. And yet it happened very quickly. As I said a little earlier, Nasser felt, I think, the taunts of the Arabs, and there was what seemed at the time to be false intelligence, disinformation about Israeli plans to attack Syria, coming from the Soviets. Nasser needed to refurbish his own credentials in the Arab world, among his Arab constituents and at home as well. This led to what turned out to be the very fateful decision by Nasser to call for mobilization and to move some of his forces actually into Sinai, on the grounds that he had become persuaded that the Israelis were about to attack Syria, of which we had no intelligence, and the Israelis flatly denied. But Nasser claimed, and the Soviets claimed that their information backed this up, that Israel was about to attack Syria. And of course moving the troops to the Sinai led the Israelis to begin the process of mobilizing their reserves. And then Nasser upped the ante by calling for the U.N. forces, which had been stationed as a screen between Egypt and Israel ever since the '56 Sinai War, to be withdrawn, followed by the unexpectedly rapid compliance with this by Secretary-General U Thant. So all of a sudden, you had no U.N. buffer, you had Nasser moving troops into the Sinai, and you had Israel mobilizing its forces against what it thought might be an attack from Egypt. And that suddenly created a war fever. We're talking now about roughly the third week of May, I think, of 1967.

At that point the decision was made that we'd better go on more of a crisis basis in the department, and a task force was established in the operations center. And it was felt that, as the director of Arab-Israeli Affairs, I was the logical person to be head of the task force. So I was sent up to the operations center for the rest of the crisis. And that's really how I guess I got hooked, and why that Washington tour, which I thought was going to start out with a tour of study at the War College in Carlisle before I was suddenly diverted back into the Arab-Israeli area, that's how it grew from what I thought would be just a normal three or four year Washington tour to a straight thirteen and a half years in Washington working on this problem. It all started when I was sent up to the task force, mobilizing the resources of the Department in case the crisis turned into a war. And of course that's exactly what happened.

The crisis was handled really at two levels. There was the operational level, the task force, and I drew upon the bureau and other parts of the Department: the Intelligence and Research Bureau; the people in charge of the emergency and evacuation plans, in case we had to evacuate Americans; military liaison officers sent over from the Defense Department to sit in our task force; people from the consular bureau to be there to handle any Americans who might be evacuated. We had a full-fledged inter-departmental, inter-agency, task force operating to deal with the flow of communications, memoranda that would go to the principals of the Department, and very frequently, several times a day, at least, situation reports or sitreps on the situation as of that time. So this was one level.

Q: Excuse me, how large was this group that you're speaking of, including everyone, secretaries, etc...?

ATHERTON: Well, it was around-the-clock, and so you had to have three 8-hour shifts, as I recall. Or maybe it was two 12-hours shifts; it seemed that we worked awfully long hours. At any given time, maybe a dozen people, maybe a few more. It was not an enormous number.

We were all in one area of the operations center, and we had our own self-contained system, with the full support of the communications of the Department of State.

We were drowning in paper. We saw everybody's situation reports, and everybody's intelligence reports, and everybody's telegrams coming in from the field, trying to put it all together and make some sense out of it.

Of course the pace increased tremendously as the war approached and after the war broke out. But even in this cold war period, if you will, there was a lot of concern, following the stages of mobilization, the movements of troops. How close were they getting? Were there indications that, in fact, there were offensive moves being planned or being prepared? Did the dispositions suggest somebody getting ready to attack somebody? Never totally clear-cut. It never is, in circumstances like this.

We were there to be the information managers, for filtering and trying to analyze and pass on information for the principals of the Department and for the White House, which had its own people in its own situation room dealing with this problem.

But then there was another level, where the policy and diplomacy of this problem went on. And I think it's interesting, because this level reflects the perception of the Department's policy, or of the Department's attitude towards Israel and the Arabs, on the part of the people who really were in the inner loop, obviously starting with the President, but not the Bureau of Near East Affairs. We were there, but we were not at the center of things.

At the center of things was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, who was Eugene Rostow, dealing with the National Security Advisor in the White House, who was Walter Rostow, his brother, and therefore very close to the President. Then the other principal figure was Arthur Goldberg, who was the ambassador at the United Nations at the time. A lot of the activity was up there, trying to find ways to defuse the crisis, use the U.N. mechanism to try to buy time and see if the war could be prevented. And his base in the Department of State was not the NEA Bureau, not the Bureau for Near East and South Asian Affairs, but the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, whose Assistant Secretary was Joe Sisco.

So the people who were the closest to the action, as I saw it from where I sat, were Joe Sisco, Arthur Goldberg, the two Rostows, and President Johnson.

To some extent, Luke Battle (I'm sure you must have covered this in your discussions with him) was certainly involved in these discussions. But the impression one had was that he was not making the policy so much as being used to help mobilize the resources of his bureau, that the NEA Bureau was not in charge of this crisis.

I think there was a definite feeling that it would look bad for NEA to be in charge of a situation where the public perceptions and the congressional and the political perceptions in this country were that Israel was being threatened by the Arabs, and by Nasser in particular, who already had a pretty bad public image in this country.

He'd thrown the United Nations Emergency Force out, he'd mobilized his troops, he'd issued some very strong rhetorical statements, some of which were interpreted as meaning that this was a battle to the end, to finally drive Israel into the sea.

I'm saying this was the impression people had, that this was building up to a life and death struggle for Israel. And therefore it was, I guess, viewed as perhaps not politic to have the bureau of the Department which was perceived to be more on the Arab than the Israeli side, running this crisis.

So while, at the operational level, the task force really had a job to do, we were not writing policy recommendations or policy memoranda or even being told what the high-level policy decisions were right away.

I used to occasionally get an idea that I thought would be useful to feed in, and I can remember I had a channel for doing that. It was not to funnel it through the bureau, but to write an informal memorandum and give it to Bob Grey or Tom Enders, who were the senior staff assistants to Gene Rostow. And they would try to get it into Gene Rostow's hands or on the table for a discussion of the group that Gene would pull together from time to time in his office to discuss the next stages of the crisis.

There was one view in the Department, and I tended to favor this, that things had passed the point where a war could be prevented. It had all the smell to me of a Guns of August kind of situation. People had blundered into a situation none of them really wanted. I don't, to this day, believe Nasser wanted a war. He wanted the fruits of victory without having to fight the war. And I don't think the Israelis premeditated, but they were very quick to take advantage of the situation and turn it to advantage. But I think they really were caught by surprise by Nasser's mobilization. They certainly were not thinking in terms of the war in the early days of this crisis.

Q: Did we try to take some actions to defuse it?

ATHERTON: Yes, we did. One of Gene Rostow's main initiatives was to try to organize an international naval force, an international flotilla, whose purpose would be to ensure that the seaways to Israel's southern port of Elat were kept open, which Nasser was threatening to close. By calling for the U.N. forces to be withdrawn, he was, in effect, saying that he was going to go back to the situation that had existed before the 1956 War, which meant blockading the Straits of Tiran and the approaches to the Gulf of Aqaba and to Elat, Israel's southern port. That, Israel had always said, would be a casus belli. But Nasser went ahead. The blockade hadn't been tested, but the assumption was that if Nasser had been tested, he would have had to make good on his threats that he was going to deny Israel the right to passage through the Straits into the Gulf and to Elat.

So Rostow's concept was to develop an international maritime force, with other countries, not just the United States involved, that would exercise the right of free passage there and would, in effect, be there and keep the Gulf open for Israeli shipping.

A little research revealed that in fact there had not been very much Israeli shipping through that port in those days. The port had not been all that much developed. So it was not so much a threat to Israel's economic life as it was a political threat, to turn back the clock to a situation that had existed before the '56 War. Israel felt that it had been denied the fruits of victory after the '56 War by U.S. pressure to withdraw from Sinai. One of the compensations it achieved was the opening of the Straits of Tiran and the beginning of the development of Elat as a port, so Israel would have a window to the south as well as to the north. The principal economic ports were still Haifa and, I guess, Ashdod, which were both on the Mediterranean. But still, from the Israeli point of view, it was understandable. They saw the one thing they had accomplished, they felt, from the victory in the '56 War, being wiped out by Nasser's unilateral action.

And so the focal point was: How do you keep the Straits open and therefore prevent the Israelis from doing it by force. Because they had said that this was a casus belli-they had never made a secret of it.

They also said that they had a firm commitment from the U.S. government, in the time of Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles, that we would use whatever means we had to use to ensure that the Straits were kept open.

Well, the first thing we discovered was that we couldn't find any record of that commitment in the Department archives or the Department records. The Israelis produced their memorandum of those conversations, which, from their point of view, clearly demonstrated that they felt they had such a commitment. My recollection is that we finally found the American record in the Eisenhower Library, in Gettysburg, at some point.

But there was a lot of confusion about how firm and unequivocal the American commitment to Israel had been. And clearly they felt we were not acting strongly enough, that we were looking for ways out, we were trying to get out of a unilateral responsibility by bringing in the international fleet that they had very little confidence would succeed. And they were right. It didn't succeed.

But there was an effort to find ways to persuade the Israelis that there were alternatives to military action.

There were, I think, arguments internally in Israel at the time, between those who wanted to move quickly, militarily, while they still had an element of surprise and before Nasser and the Arabs were fully mobilized, and those who said we mustn't move against the wishes of the United States, we must find a way to give the United States time to try to deal with this diplomatically.

And these two arguments were brought to a head when the Israeli government sent Abba Eban, who was the Foreign Minister, to Washington for meetings. As I recall, the key meetings took place before and on May 26, 1967, with the Secretary of Defense, with the Secretary of State, and with the President.

I should say, incidentally, that Secretary of State Rusk was following this and occasionally intervening, but he was not one of the principal actors on a day-to-day basis. One of the reasons why the President and the American government were trying to prevent a war, and trying to avoid getting us in a situation where we might have to actually intervene militarily, was that we were already deeply engaged in the Vietnamese War, and we didn't want a Middle East war that would further complicate things.

There was a definite effort, therefore, to try to persuade the Israelis to delay, while the Israelis were concerned that they were going to be the fall guys. And it came to a head in this round of meetings, with Abba Eban seeing the President and Secretary Rusk, seeing the Rostows, seeing Goldberg, seeing the Secretary of Defense, who was McNamara.

Eban clearly did not receive assurances to convey back to Israel that were persuasive enough to carry the day for delaying military action. And there are many who say that the actual decision was made then, even though the war didn't start for another week or so.

Another development which may have weighed in the balance of the Israeli judgment that they had to go ahead and move was Nasser's offer to send his vice president to Washington to talk about how to defuse the crisis. This was announced publicly, and we announced that we would welcome a visit by Vice President Zakaria Mohieddine. And I suspect that probably reinforced the Israelis who wanted to move militarily because it looked as though a deal was in the making, between the United States and Nasser, which would leave them in a position of having mobilized and the Egyptians still in Sinai. They couldn't demobilize if the Egyptian armies were mobilized in Sinai. For Israel mobilization, on a sustained basis, was a very expensive proposition. It meant that all the able-bodied manpower in the country, all members of the reserves, were activated to join their military units. It meant a lot of people taken out of the civilian economy. It cost a lot of money, and Israel could not sustain indefinitely a state of mobilization without resolving it one way or the other. So there were all sorts of pressures upon the Israelis to move. And that's, in effect, what they finally did.

On the morning of the fifth of June they launched a preemptive strike against the Egyptian front and in the first instance an air strike against the Egyptian Air Force, catching it on the ground and virtually immobilizing the Egyptian Air Force from the very first hours of the war.

I have said earlier that some of us had tried to suggest a somewhat different posture for the United States at the time, feeling that war was coming, that we couldn't stop it, that irreversible forces had taken over and it had gone too far. This was also based on the premise, those of us who had come up with this, that the Israelis had the military strength to prevail, that they were not in danger of being defeated or being driven into the sea, that they would win a war on all three fronts simultaneously, if it came to that, with superior organization, motivation, equipment and everything else, and therefore that the United States ought to try to put a little distance between ourselves and the Israelis-not to be seen to tell them that we were turning our backs on them, but basically to stop trying actively to prevent the war. Because everything we did to try to prevent the war-for example to international maritime force idea-was seen in the Arab world as an attempt to defend Israel and to prevent the Arabs from taking advantage of the situation. We were being seen increasingly as clearly leaning on the side of the Israelis in this pre-war period, by statements, by public opinion, by the press, by the way our media was handling this, and by our own diplomacy. We were having intimate discussions with the Israelis. So some of us felt that maybe we ought to be a little more passive, let the war happen, not be seen to have been a partisan once removed, so that when the war was over we would be able to play the role of an honest broker in trying to pick up the pieces and put things back together again. We would not be seen as discredited, if you will, through ties with one side of the conflict. We were concerned about relations with the Arab world, which obviously was very important to us.

But anyway, this was a point of view that needless to say did not prevail. It was not really welcomed. It's unheard of when you think a war's going to happen, if you don't try to stop it. And the image was that this was very much a case of white hats versus black hats in this war. The American public was overwhelmingly on Israel's side in this war and saw Nasser as the devil incarnate practically. And so every report of Israeli victory was that much more welcomed. And when the war went from Sinai to the West Bank and Jerusalem and then the Golan Heights, and Israel, in six days, had occupied all of the Sinai and all of the West Bank of Jordan, and of Gaza, and all of the City of Jerusalem and a large piece of southern Syria, the map of the Middle East had been changed. As it turns out, 23 years later, probably in many ways irreversibly.

Well, the scene shifted of course at this stage, once the cease-fire was put in place, to New York and: What do you do now? Do you go back to the status quo ante? Do you take this as a new status quo and try to build on it for the future?

Q: Could I interject something here? Could you tell us a little bit here about the influence of the Soviets in this whole picture and what our attitude was? How the Soviet attitude sort of influenced our thinking and our policies.

ATHERTON: Well, we clearly felt that the Soviets had played a mischievous role, to say the least. We had intelligence evidence that they had been telling the Egyptians and others that Israel was going to launch a strike against the Syrians, that they had contributed to the crisis. And of course the Soviets were the arms supplier of both the Egyptians and the Syrians in this war. Not the Jordanians; they had American arms and British arms, mostly American by then. But the Soviets were clearly seen as the backers of two of the three Arab participants in the war. And we were seen as the backers of the Israelis.

There were communications with the Soviets. One thing I remember very clearly, in the very first hours of the war, when we were just beginning to get reports that the Israeli troops were moving into Sinai and the air forces had moved, Secretary of State Dean Rusk walked into the operations center and said, "I want to send a message to Gromyko."

One of the very first messages in that crisis was the message from him to Gromyko, the gist of which was that I assure your government we do not have anything to do with starting this war, and our objective is to limit it and try to bring it to an end. And we expect similar reactions from the Soviets. I'm not quoting precisely, but that was the sense of the message. So one of the very first things on our minds was to not let this turn into a U.S.-Soviet confrontation.

And the Soviets quite reciprocated. Once the war started, they couldn't have been more engaged in trying to work towards a cease-fire. Of course they called for a cease-fire with a return to the lines where the war began. They wanted the cease-fire and for the Israelis to pull back. And we were working for a cease-fire in place.

Of course that was the only way it was going to end. The Israelis had such a total victory, moving all the way to the Suez Canal and all the other places they had seized, there was no way that they were going to pull back. Even if the U.N. had passed a unanimous resolution calling for them to pull back to the lines from which the war started, which were the old armistice lines, they clearly were not going to do it.

And we were not about to ask them to do that. Our position was that a cease-fire was not a time to try to restore the status quo ante. American thinking quickly came to the conclusion that we should take advantage of this situation to try to create an opportunity for resolving the crisis, the conflict, not just going back to the old armistice regime that had existed before.

That was the main thrust of the first major policy speech which President Johnson gave very soon after the war. The 19th of June sticks in my mind as the date of Johnson's statement of policy, the thrust of which was that there should be no turning back of the clock, that the Israelis should be permitted to remain where they were until there was peace, until the Arab side made peace with them. Implicit in our position was that Israel had suddenly acquired all of this territory, which we saw as occupied territory, and these territories were chips in Israeli hands to trade for Arab acceptance and peace.

If you go back and read that speech of Johnson's, it was full of language which eventually found its way into Resolution 242, of November 22, which was the resolution that finally provided the framework for peace efforts. The concept of trading territory for peace-peace and not just a new armistice agreement, a genuine recognition of each side by the other, and a solution to the refugee problem, and I think there was also something in it about putting the lid on the arms race in the region, trying to get some real arms control.

The action really was largely in New York at this stage, and it stayed there from June until November. Attempts were being made to draft resolutions that would be supported by both the United States and the Soviet Union and by the Arab states and by Israel and by the world community generally to resolve what was still obviously a crisis situation with the Israeli army in occupation of a lot of Arab territory. A new refugee problem had been created. A lot of the Palestinians who had been refugees from the first Arab-Israeli War, living on the West Bank, had fled again and were now across the Jordan River in Jordan.

And we were busy in the Department working on various peace ideas of our own, but of course we were working in something of a vacuum until there was an international consensus.

The Arabs wanted as much as possible to go back to what had existed before. They didn't want to commit themselves to recognition and peace with Israel. Having just had a humiliating military defeat, they were, I think, in a state of psychological shock. It was probably impossible for them, in that state, to think about sitting down with the Israelis and making peace.

The Israelis had no sense of urgency. They felt secure. They had no military threats, for the first time in their memory as a nation, on any of their frontiers. I can remember Ave Harmon, who was the Israeli ambassador here at the time, saying "Never again will Syrian guns be firing on Israeli civilian settlements, because we now occupy the high ground." And of course one of the ironies is that when the next war broke out in '73, there were new Israeli settlements up on the Golan Heights, and they were the first victims of the Syrian advance.

But anyway, at that time there was euphoria in Israel and depression virtually, if you use that term to describe a national mood, in most of the Arab world. Certainly humiliation. I didn't realize at the time how much of a trauma that defeat had been. Many years later I met a lot of Egyptians who told me about their own personal reactions. Many felt they had been deceived by their government, that Nasser had lied to them.

Perhaps we ought to go back a little bit and recall what happened in the first days of that war, when it was obvious that the Israelis were moving very rapidly militarily.

Radio Cairo charged that the United States Air Force had been supporting the Israelis, and that's why they were having such victories. At the time this charge was accepted by public opinion very broadly in the Arab world. Even King Hussein, who was basically more inclined to be prudent and rational, got caught up in this hysteria.

So there was a general reaction against the United States, against our citizens. Relations were broken almost overnight with us by most of the Arab countries, including Egypt.

There was a very worrisome time while we worked on plans to get Americans out of this area. We had not had time for an advance evacuation; the war came on so suddenly. But evacuations had to be arranged as the war went on, so a major part of our efforts as a government were in trying to organize transport and evacuation plans. The Americans in Cairo went by train to Alexandria. Ships had to go in to take them off. People were airlifted out of Jordan, out of Syria, out of Lebanon. Lebanon of course never was in the war. But still, we evacuated everyplace, leaving skeleton staffs in some cases.

With relations broken, we quickly made arrangements with other countries to represent our interests. In Cairo, the Spanish government became the protecting power for American interests. But by agreement with most of the governments, we were able to keep a small American staff. In Egypt, we had a small number of Americans who stayed on under the Spanish flag. Jordan never broke relations. We had a period of coolness, but they did not break relations. None of the Gulf Arabs broke relations.

The Iraqis did. I can remember having a very poignant discussion with the Iraqi ambassador, who was quite a nice man in fact.

This was during a period of civilian government in Iraq. Iraq had begun to return to civilian rule after its 1958 revolution, and was concentrating on its economic development.

I was the one who had to call the Iraqi ambassador. They had given our ambassador 24 hours to get out of Iraq, and therefore I had to give him 24 hours. And he was quite outraged at this. He came to me and said, "Why do you have to do this? Because my government does this to you, that's my government. But you have always been very friendly and civilized."

But we stuck to our guns. Well, what he did was go to New York and got himself assigned to the Iraqi U.N. mission, so he didn't leave the States right away.

There was a lot going on, with the evacuation of Americans from most of the Arab countries and looking for countries to be our protecting power. All the Americans left Syria, as I recall, and I think all of them left Baghdad, too. The Italians were our protecting power in Syria.

So we were in a post-war period now, when there were efforts going on in the U.N. to try to find an international consensus for converting the situation the war left to something better. We were busy preparing briefing papers and position papers and all that. Just to keep busy, I suppose, as much as anything, but waiting really for something to come out of the U.N.

There were many efforts at resolutions. The Latin Americans had a resolution at one point in the summer of 1967 which was much closer to the Arab point of view than what finally emerged, because it called only for the Arabs to terminate the state of belligerency with Israel in return for Israel to withdraw from all the territory it had occupied in the war. It would have been a pretty good result for people who had lost the war. But it was not acceptable to some of the more extreme Arabs, because they didn't want to admit that they should be called upon to end the state of belligerency with Israel. They missed the chance.

The Israelis at that point might have accepted that kind of a resolution, when their thinking had not evolved beyond the euphoria of: We finally have convinced the Arabs that we're here to stay. They have to accept to us now. And if they accept us, we will give them back most of their territory.

There was no question but what the mood, at least of the majority of members of the Israeli government, conveyed by Eban to Dean Rusk and Arthur Goldberg and others who were meeting in New York, was that if the Arabs were prepared to end the state of war and really decide that now the time had come to accept Israel as a state in the Middle East, not just a new armistice agreement (the Israelis did insist on this) that they would return most of the territory occupied in the war. It's hard to believe in today's world, but Eban said they would return not only all of Sinai in exchange for peace plus demilitarization and some security arrangements; they would also return all of the Golan Heights to Syria on the same terms. There was less clarity about the West Bank, because Eban said there were several currents in Israel's position about this. What he of course meant was that they had a coalition government and it included Menachem Begin as well as the Labor Party. And Begin's position was to not return any of the West Bank. So they were having trouble resolving internally their attitude toward returning part of Palestine. The one thing they were all united on was that they would not pull out of any of Jerusalem. Jerusalem would remain united under Israeli control.

Now while the U.N. was working on trying to find an international consensus for a solution of the problem, there were certain things happening on the ground.

One of the things that happened, very early in the summer of '67 to my recollection, was the decision by the Israeli Government to extend Israeli law to all parts of the City of Jerusalem. Not formally annexing it, but bringing East Jerusalem, which Jordan had controlled, in effect under the Israeli legal and governmental system. Whereas the rest of the occupied territories, they said, will operate under the laws that are there-the Jordanian law, the Syrian law, the Egyptian law in Sinai-East Jerusalem was to come under Israeli law. And at the same time, they enlarged the boundaries of East Jerusalem beyond what they had been under Jordanian administration, to include areas that we had considered the West Bank, and still today legally consider the West Bank.

The other thing was, very early, the destruction of some of the Arab villages that had been evacuated by the Arabs, in strategically important areas such as the Jordan Valley, and the area known as the Latrun salient, a little bit of the West Bank that protruded into the narrow approach from the coastal regions of Israel to Jerusalem. There were a couple of villages right on that salient, and those were evacuated and destroyed. In other words, they were clearly improving the tactical military situation in the Jordan Valley and on the approach to Jerusalem.

Some of these issues got into the U.N., and we had to take positions, and did take a position against the extension of Israeli law to East Jerusalem and the extension of the boundaries of the city. So we're on record as saying that nothing should be done to change the status quo, pending a peace settlement, for all issues to be kept open for negotiations.

I can even remember drafting a letter on this subject. I thought it was very important to get the U.S. government on record very early that this was an opportunity for peace, and that therefore the Israelis should look at this territory as a bargaining chip and not begin to get territorial appetites, that they should be prepared to settle for pretty much the borders they had lived in all those years, but convert those borders to peace boundaries rather than armistice boundaries, recognizing that some adjustments were probably necessary where the borders made no sense.

My idea was a proposed letter that would go from President Johnson to Prime Minister Eshkol, in which the President would say, in effect, that we are sure Israel will understand the importance of being magnanimous in victory, and phrases like that, stating that genuine acceptance of peace is much more important than territory, trying to stake out a U.S. position that there should be no territorial aggrandizement, that Israel should not try to get peace and territory. My feeling was that the Arabs might at some point be willing to accept that they couldn't defeat Israel and move towards a peace settlement, but certainly not if they had to give up territory in addition.

Well, we're in the period immediately after the 1967 Six-Day War. Lots of efforts were going on in the U.N. to try to find a basis for moving the Arabs and Israelis a little closer to each other, away from war and not back to a situation that existed before the war.

The Israelis, in the immediate aftermath of the war and in the euphoria of having such a startling victory, when many of them felt that they had been in serious danger of being overrun by the combined Arab armies (I don't think their military ever thought that, but many civilians were concerned, and I think there was also concern in this country), the Israelis were not talking in those early days about anything other than getting the surrounding Arab countries to make peace. The conviction was that their defeat had been so resounding that they would understand that they could never hope to defeat Israel militarily, and that they would be prepared to finally recognize Israel and give it legitimacy and accept it as a state in their midst. And for the most part the Israeli government envisaged returning the territories that had been occupied in the Sinai, in the West Bank, in Gaza, and the Golan Heights. Jerusalem was a special case, but for the most part the Israelis were more in the mood to make peace than to try to enlarge their borders significantly.

I remember Ambassador Barbour in Tel Aviv expressing concern that Israel's territorial appetite would grow the longer they stayed in these territories. They would feel secure and comfortable; the thought of going back to the rather confining armistice line borders would become increasingly difficult politically and psychologically.

So out of this came an idea, of which I was one of the sponsors, that perhaps we ought to pin down our view that Israel should not be looking for territorial enlargement but for peace. And I remember drafting what was to be a proposed letter from President Johnson to Prime Minister Eshkol, the main theme of which would have been that we had learned from our experience, and we hoped Israel would agree, that it was important to be magnanimous in victory, that the way to ensure peace in the future was not to create resentments on the part of your enemy, but to try to win him over, not to create irredentism of any kind. And therefore it was important not to lay claim to any of the territories that had been occupied in the war, but to see those as territories to be returned to Arab rule when the Arabs were ready to make peace.

This, incidentally, was basically the underlying principle that found its way ultimately, albeit formulated with some ambiguity, into Security Council Resolution 242, calling for withdrawal from occupied territories in return for acceptance by the Arabs of Israel's right to exist and making peace with Israel.

So I drafted a letter which basically made these points and sent it up through channels. It had to go to the Secretary and then on to the White House, not only through NEA but also it had to be cleared with the Bureau for International Organization Affairs, which was in charge of United Nations matters. This was the home bureau in Washington for our mission in New York. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, who was our permanent representative at the United Nations, was a very central player in attempts to find a solution in the U.N. and pass a resolution the world community could rally around that would lay the basis for a peace process.

Q: Could I interrupt just one minute? I wonder if you'd mind just enumerating for us the various individuals that this had to go through on the way up to the president, by name.

ATHERTON: It had to go through the Assistant Secretary for Near East and South Asian Affairs, who was Ambassador Lucius Battle. It had to go through the IO bureau, and there the Assistant Secretary was Joe Sisco. It had to go to Under Secretary Eugene Rostow and Secretary Rusk. It would go also for the approval of Ambassador Goldberg, who, in addition to being the ambassador to the U.N. also had Cabinet status, as most U.N. ambassadors have had. And of course it would then eventually have to go to the White House through the National Security Advisor, who was Walter Rostow, and to the President. There may have been others who would have been involved as well, but these would have been the key players.

It never got past the IO front office. I remember the draft coming back with a handwritten notation on it. I can't remember the precise words, but the sense of this note, as I recall from Joe Sisco, was that Goldberg won't agree to this. And that's where it stopped. It never saw the light of day, except as a draft. It never had any formal status.

So that's a footnote in history at this point. In fact I'm not sure that that draft is even around any more. But I remember it very clearly, because I thought it was very important to get our president on record telling the Israelis that we support you fully in your demand that the time has come for the Arabs to recognize you and accept you and make peace with you, but we cannot support your seeking both peace and augmentation of your territory.

At that point, many Israelis, I think, would have not found this all that surprising. But there were, even then, voices in Israel obviously not wanting to give up any of the West Bank. These were the voices of what was then the Herut Party of Menachem Begin, which later became one of the parties of the Likud coalition and eventually the government party after 1977. But that was ten years later. At this point it was not a majority party. It was a member of the grand coalition. Israel had a wartime coalition, and all the parties, except the Communists, as I recall, were in the government, including Begin, as well as the Labor Party.

Q: Would you want to comment on why Sisco thought that Goldberg would not send it on up?

ATHERTON: Well, I think it was basically that we were taking the posture in those days, as a government, that we were not going to try to dictate the terms of peace, that we had principles, and the principles were peace for the return of the territory, but that this should not be a peace that was, in effect, dictated from outside. It should come about as a result of Arab-Israeli agreement, and that clearly meant that decisions on the meaning of Resolution 242 should be reached in Arab-Israeli negotiations.

Abba Eban had a memorable phrase. He said, "The Arabs say they want their territory back, but they don't want to talk to us, and they don't want to negotiate with us, and they don't want to recognize us. They want peace by immaculate conception."

And there was a certain validity to this. I think the goal of trying to get the parties to talk to each other was right, of getting the Arabs to realize that the only way that peace could be made would be between the parties that were at war and not through some deus ex machina.

But the idea that you could start with a totally blank slate I think was wrong. There were certain principles which the President himself had laid out in his speech on the 19th of June, which ultimately found their way into Resolution 242. And those principles were the parameters within which the parties would have to make peace. They didn't start from scratch, they started from the understanding that there had to be some tradeoff between the return of occupied territories as Israel's bargaining counter for getting acceptance and recognition from the Arabs. So I didn't see an inconsistency in saying that basically the details have to be worked out by the parties, they can't be worked out by the United States or some combination of powers, but clearly the parameters, in terms of broad principles that should govern the peace settlement, had already been agreed upon. And there was a general consensus, I think, in the world community that this was a reasonable framework.

In fact there was obviously a consensus, because eventually this concept of land for peace found its way into the resolution passed in November, 1967, which became the basis for peacemaking then, and still is today, 23 years later, the agreed basis for all peace efforts. But there was a sense in the summer of 1967 that we don't want to crowd the Israelis. Give them a chance to negotiate the best terms they can get, in effect.

And this was certainly the position of most Israelis. Even though they were not claiming territory, they didn't want to tie their hands ahead of time. Their position was: Everything is negotiable, but we want the Arabs to agree to sit down and negotiate with us. We want face-to-face negotiations. And until they do that, we don't want to give away any of our cards whatever the principles underlying those negotiations.

So I think that was basically it. It was just that we didn't want to tie Israel's hands before the negotiations.

I happen to think that we could have asserted a bit more our commitment to what should have been the outlines, the principles of a settlement. We eventually did this. We eventually came to that point, but we didn't do it in the summer of 1967 when we had that opportunity, when things were still much more fluid than they became later, to try to mold a bit the mindsets with which the parties approached the peace settlement. Now it's true the Arabs were calling on the U.N. to draw up the terms of peace and impose peace on the parties. They didn't want to sit down and negotiate. So it wasn't a case of the Arabs being all ready and the Israelis being difficult to get. The Israelis wanted negotiations, and the Arabs wanted their territory back and were willing to give the minimum that they would have to give to get their territory back. They were light years apart.

But anyway, as I said, that draft letter was a footnote, and didn't get anywhere. What followed was a summer of negotiations in New York. I was not there and was not a part of this, but kept up-to-date through report of meetings taking place in New York. There were endless drafts of resolutions in the General Assembly and in the Security Council, looking for a formula which could involve some combination of Arab acceptance of Israel and Israel's return of territory. Those were the features in all of these. There was a Latin American resolution, which called on Israel to withdraw from all of the territories occupied in the war, and in return the Arabs would be called upon to end the state of belligerency to ensure the peace. That would have been, in retrospect, a very good deal from the Arab point of view. It was something that we at that point (it was early in the summer of '67, not too long after the war) were prepared to support. What happened was that some of the more militant Arabs rejected it because it called on them to accept Israel. Algeria, for example, objected to it. Syria objected to it.

Q: Did this imply formal recognition of the State of Israel?

ATHERTON: No, it was an end of belligerency. It did not call for peace. It did not call for diplomatic relations. It didn't call for recognition in the full sense, but it did call for terminating the state of belligerency and a commitment, in effect, not to return to a state of belligerency. So it was a step towards peace, but it was certainly far from normal peaceful relations.

Q: Far from what the Israelis wanted.

ATHERTON: And very far from what the Israelis wanted. I think you have to project yourself back into the psychology and the perceptions and the mindsets of the time. This was a period when, in the United States certainly, and I think to a large extent in Western Europe as well, there was great sympathy for Israel. Israel was seen as having been the victim of an unprovoked Arab aggression, led by Nasser of Egypt who had very few friends in the U.S. He had thrown his lot in some time ago with the Soviets, for Soviet arms, Soviet support, political support, financial support, economic support, and he had tried to rally the more nationalist, militant, radical elements in the Arab world around the banner of opposing the West and opposing western imperialism and opposing Israel. Although I don't believe, as I said earlier, that he really wanted a war with Israel in 1967, he wanted the benefits of a war without the risks of a war.

In any case, the perception was that Israel deserved sympathy, that it had won by its own valor. The David-Goliath image was often used, with Israel obviously seen as David, and Nasser and the Arabs as Goliath. And David slew Goliath, in effect, in this war. So there was not much of an inclination to be sympathetic to the Arabs, and there was a strong inclination to be sympathetic to the Israelis, in our domestic opinion, in Congress and public opinion in most of America and around the world.

So those of us who were saying let's at least stake out a certain position-in this case the no territorial ambition position-were really not representing a popular view. We were representing a professional judgment that if this wasn't done, the time would come when Israel would become accustomed to these territories and it would become increasingly difficult for Israel to give them up. And therefore that would complicate the problem of making peace based on trading these territories for peace.

One other thing happened during the summer, too. In August the Arab leaders of the members of the Arab League got together for a summit conference in Khartoum, in Sudan. The purpose was to find a common Arab position that would somehow recover what the Arabs had lost in the war, with a minimum price to be paid for it, but, in effect, to legitimize some kind of deal. The Arab intention was to say that those Arab countries that had been in the war with Israel-basically Jordan, Syria, and Egypt-would not be enjoined to resume the war and try to recapture what they lost militarily, but to seek through other means, political means, to resolve what was then called in Arab terminology "the consequences of Israeli aggression".

The Arab position was that Israel had started the war and they were free to liquidate the results of that aggression without having to resort to military force. They had been totally defeated. The air forces had been largely wiped out, and they had no possibility of going back to war even if they had the desire to do it, which clearly was not the case.

The Arab summit came up with a formula which came to be known as the "Three Nos". The leaders of the confrontation states were told that they could seek political solutions, but within certain limits. The limits were:

No recognition of Israel;

No negotiations with Israel; and

No peace with Israel.

And there were big arguments about the Arabic word used for peace, whether it was formal peace, or reconciliation. But never mind; the way it came across in the perception of the United States and most countries of the West was that the Arabs really had not made up their minds that they were willing to pay the price of peace with Israel to get their territory back.

A formula that was developed in that period on the Arab side, attributed, I believe to the then Egyptian secretary-general of the Arab League, Mahmoud Riad, was that there were two stages. The first was to liquidate the consequences of aggression, for the Arab governments concerned to get the territories back, get back the Sinai, Golan Heights, the West Bank, Gaza. And then the next phase would be to work for the rights of the Palestinians. Riad separated these two, one from the other. The first was that the states that had been parties to the war and had lost sovereign territory to Israel, or in the case of Jordan territory to which it claimed sovereignty (since many did not recognize Jordan's claim to the West Bank) should get that territory back. But that would not resolve the Palestinian question. Remember, the PLO existed, but the PLO had not claimed to be a state or a government. And there was little focus on what would be a solution to the Palestinian problem. It was still largely thought of in terms of a solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees, which had been the focus of U.N. resolutions since 1949. There was little talk in those days about a Palestinian political role. Resolution 242, when it was finally passed in November of '67 at the end of that long summer of negotiations, embodies the principle of territory for peace, but it also doesn't ever mention the word "Palestinian." It simply says "a just solution for the refugee problem." It was known that it was meant to mean the Palestinian refugee problem.

The Palestinians were not seen as a separate party to the conflict in those days by very many people, though they had the PLO, which was established in '64, was a member of the Arab League, and under Egyptian influence.

Incidentally, Resolution 242 also did not mention Israel by name. It simply speaks of the right of all states in the region to live in peace within secure and recognized borders. All states meaning Israel, as well as the Arabs. There are lots of ambiguities in that resolution. It also speaks, in the English language version, of withdrawal from territories occupied, not from all the territories or even from the territories. That, ever since, has been the basis of argument about how much territory and which territory Israel should trade with the Arabs for peace and recognition.

Resolution 242 was in large measure the work of Lord Caradon, the British permanent representative in New York, but a lot of the negotiating was also done by Ambassador Goldberg. It was necessary to get the Soviets aboard, and for the Soviets to help get the Arabs to agree to certain things. Nobody wanted to pass a resolution if the parties themselves rejected it, so the job was to get the Israelis to agree and to get the Arabs to agree.

Our particular chore there, in addition to bringing the Israelis to accept this resolution, was to get King Hussein, because we had the closest relations with Jordan. We did not have relations at all with Egypt. Even though Hussein had joined the war against Israel he had not broken relations with the United States when many of the other Arabs did. And so we worked on Hussein to accept the resolution and to persuade Nasser and the other Arabs to accept the resolution as well.

Hussein has felt, ever since, that he received a very firm commitment from the United States, in return for accepting this resolution and persuading Egypt and others to accept it, that we would work hard to bring about a settlement in which Hussein would recover the West Bank. There was some talk of minor modifications or corrections to the old armistice lines, but basically the thought was that he would get the West Bank back, not all of it, as it had been before the war, but a substantial part, not as the nucleus of a new Palestinian state or anything like that, but as part of Jordan. The King thought he had a firm commitment that we would work for this kind of outcome, leaving vague what would happen to Jerusalem, which was the hardest nut to crack of all. The Israelis control all of Jerusalem, and it was obvious that they were not going to give up any of the city in any solution. There would have to be shared arrangements of some kind at the most. Perhaps some way could be found for Arabs, both Muslims and Christians, to have some status there at least.

In any case, Hussein did agree to support the resolution, and he used his influence and eventually it was passed and was accepted by the parties to the '67 war except for the Syrians. They took some years afterwards before they finally accepted Resolution 242. But it was accepted by Nasser, and by Hussein and by the Israelis, each country with its own interpretation of precisely what the resolution meant. I think Joe Sisco used to say, "It wasn't one resolution that was passed that day, it was two resolutions." It meant one thing to the Israelis and their friends, and another thing to the Arabs and their friends. And that ambiguity probably made it possible to pass the resolution, but it has plagued peacemakers ever since, because the differences in interpretation have made it more difficult to translate the resolution and the principles of the resolution into the terms of negotiated agreements.

Anyway, once the resolution was passed, the clear policy of the Johnson administration, was the resolution had been passed, the principles were there, and now it was up to the U.N. We're talking now about 1967, about an administration which was increasingly concerned about developments in Vietnam and really didn't want to stay engaged up to its neck in Middle East diplomacy.

The Secretary General of the United Nations was enjoined by the resolution to appoint a representative to try, as a line from the resolution says, "To promote agreement and assist efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in accordance with the principles and provisions of this resolution." The Secretary-General appointed Gunnar Jarring, who had been the Swedish ambassador to Moscow and had been also the Swedish ambassador to western countries. He was much respected, knew the Middle East very well, had a relationship with the countries there. His job was to try to persuade the Jordanians and the Egyptians and the Israelis. The Syrians opted out; they did not accept the validity of the resolution, and they never agreed to see Jarring. One Syrian diplomat in Cyprus made the mistake of meeting with Jarring in Cyprus when he was transiting the area, basically I suppose trying to get briefed on what was happening. He was immediately recalled to Damascus and thrown in jail for having violated the rules that there would be no contact with Jarring and nothing that would lend any Syrian blessing to this betrayal, which was the way it was portrayed by the rejectionist Arabs, by the Syrians and some of the other more radical Arab states. And incidentally, I don't think the PLO, of course, would have accepted the resolution. But they weren't a state, and nobody paid much attention to them.

Anyway, our policy was hands-off, let Jarring go to work on this and see what he could do. So things went on, and Jarring made many trips to the area. And he kept running up against the ambiguities of the resolution, different interpretations. He was trying to promote some kind of a conference, some kind of a negotiation to get the parties together. And the Arabs were adamant in rejecting the thought that they would sit down at the same table as the Israelis, having just been defeated in a war. There was obviously a pride problem, a humiliation problem, psychological, on the Arab side. And the Israelis said in turn: We won't make any commitments until we get to the table, even to what withdrawal means in terms of territory. We won't commit ourselves to any borders.

This, by the way, was a bit of a backtracking from a position which the Israeli government had taken right after the Six-Day War and had stated, in formal conversations with Secretary of State Rusk and Goldberg and others, that the view in Israel was that they were prepared to return all of the Sinai and all of the Golan Heights in return for peace and security arrangements, and that there was divided view in Israel about what to do with the West Bank and Gaza, which were Palestinian-inhabited territories. This was relayed at one point, as I recall, by Abba Eban, in a conversation in New York, that while there were different views in Israel, the predominant view favored territorial withdrawal even here, but not from Jerusalem, which was a special case. The people who of course opposed this were Begin and the Herut Party, whose position had always been (was then and has been ever since) that all of Palestine west of the Jordan River should be part of Israel and that none of it should be given up. This division never really was put to the test, because there were no Arabs willing to sit down and talk about it in terms of peace. So Jarring went around and around trying to get agreement on formulas-an exercise in diplomatic nuances designed to move the process forward.

Meanwhile, we were not interjecting ourselves, until one, only one effort was made. In the summer of 1968, which was then eight months since the resolution had passed and no progress had been made, there was concern that the cease-fire was beginning to come apart. There were incidents along the cease-fire line, or occasionally Palestinian guerilla raids, out of Jordanian territory across the river against the Israeli positions. So there were reasons for concern that the situation was not going to remain stable without some progress for satisfying the Arab desire that they get their territory back. The Israelis were comfortable with the situation. They thought they were strong and in a good position and they could live with it, but there were rumblings on the Arab side, and concern that this could get rough.

By that time there was a new ambassador in New York. George Ball had become the American ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations.

Ball felt it was time for some American involvement, and he persuaded the Secretary, and the President that he should be sent out on a presidential mission to try to see if we could find some basis that would help Ambassador Jarring. It was all put in terms of helping Ambassador Jarring get this mission off dead center. And so there was in fact, in July of 1968, a Ball mission to the Middle East. He said he was going to take Joe Sisco along as the Assistant Secretary for U.N. Affairs; it would be a Ball-Sisco mission.

Somebody said: Where is the Near East and South Asian Bureau in all of this? Who is going to be there that knows a bit about the Middle East? And finally it was agreed that they should have an NEA representative. Ambassador Luke Battle recommended that I be sent along as the NEA representative with Ball and Sisco on this peacemaking mission.

So I got to go along. I was a little bit outranked, since I was then a country director, and I think I was maybe Class Two in the old system. I was pretty junior, and it was clear that I was not going to be a major partner in this thing. I was to be the person whom they could turn to for expert advice if they needed some factual information, note taker, write up the telegrams reporting the meetings, the minutes, and maybe help with briefing papers, but basically I was not there to try to help them shape policy.

It was quite an interesting trip. The itinerary, I think, reflected the perception of where our interests were - misreflected to some extent in my view. The first stop on the trip, actually, was Paris. Maybe it was London and then Paris. We flew commercial to Europe, then Ball had arranged a VIP airplane, which belonged to the U.S. military, to be put at his disposal, at the orders of the president, so he would have his own plane to fly around the region. It was, by the way, not a jet. It was an old Constellation, as I recall, but it was comfortably outfitted, just a bit slow.

The first stop on this mission was Israel. We went to the Ben-Gurion airport then to Tel Aviv and up to Jerusalem, and talked to the Israelis. In those days the deputy prime minister was Yigal Allon. One of the things that happened was a preview by Allon at a luncheon at his kibbutz on Lake Tiberias, or the Sea of Galilee, where he revealed, for this first time to our knowledge, what became known as the Allon Plan. This was his plan for trying to solve the West Bank dilemma. He had a map and said, you see, we must give back these populated areas of the West Bank. We don't want all those Palestinians under Israeli rule; those areas should be returned to Jordan. But we have to keep a security belt so there will not be any surprise attack from across the borders, and therefore we must preserve Israeli military positions down in the Jordan Valley and in a few strategic places on the high ground. But basically we would return the bulk of the West Bank to Jordanian control under the Allon Plan. He didn't say anything about the Golan Heights. In fact he was very busy in those day helping to establish Israeli settlements on the Golan Heights, where, unlike the West Bank, most of the population had fled to Damascus so they were largely depopulated except for some Druze villages, whereas some one million Palestinians lived on the West Bank. Anyway, we did get a preview of this plan. Allon, incidentally, was deputy prime minister at that time.

In another meeting Eban said that he was authorized by the government to convey through Ball and Sisco to King Hussein, we were going next to Jordan, a message which basically was that, in return for peace, Jordan would recover not all but most of the West Bank. And this was a very key phrase. It was a little difficult to reconcile that with what we had seen of the Allon Plan, which looked as though it wasn't returning most of the West Bank. What the Israelis were keeping under the Allon Plan was at least a third of the West Bank, as I recall. In any case, it was a fairly significant proportion, but not the heavily populated portion however.

Anyway, the next stop, I think we went to Jordan, flying out over the Mediterranean and over Syria, as I recall, and then on into Jordan. The countries we went to were Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. I know we went to Israel first, and I can't quite recall if we went next to Jordan or next to Lebanon. We did those two, and then Saudi Arabia.

Q: I would have thought you'd fly over Elat and then right up through Jordan.

ATHERTON: Well, whichever way we did it, we had meetings with the Lebanese, who were not a direct party. They had armistice agreements with the Israelis which they insisted were still in effect, although the Israelis denied it. But it was a touching of base visit.

There were demonstrations at the Beirut airport because some of the more extremist elements said that this mission was going to be a sell-out of the Arab cause. We were still seen basically as advocates of Israel. There were demonstrations, and I remember when we started to come out of the terminal, some bottles were thrown off a balcony and George Ball was hit a glancing blow by a bottle, although it didn't do him any serious damage. He was joking about it later as we sat up at the ambassador's residence, saying he was glad it was a Coca Cola bottle, because Pepsi Cola hits the spot. Typical Ball pun.

In talks with the King in Jordan the message was conveyed to him from Israel that if he made peace he could get back most, but not all of his territory. Finally, we were off to Saudi Arabia. A question I raised at one point was: What about Egypt? Egypt was a major party to this conflict, and it seemed to me that any talks about Jarring's mission had to include Egypt. I was told that that was out of the question. We didn't have relations with Nasser. He broke relations and was not somebody that we wanted to have anything to do with. In effect, he was the Soviets' man; let the Russians talk to him. We'll talk to our friends.

We did however have to overfly Egypt, to get to Saudi Arabia. To do that, we needed permission through air traffic channels to fly the regular international air routes over the Mediterranean, over Cairo, up the Nile to Luxor and then across the Red Sea into Saudi air space to Jeddah.

So the trip ended in Saudi Arabia where we talked to King Faisal about what we were doing in trying to help the parties make peace. The Saudis did not take part in the war, but they were certainly in a state of belligerency with Israel. We were looking for Saudi support, to get Saudi political and financial support to help bring about peace. One of the concerns we had was that the Suez Canal had been closed by Egypt during the war. It had been blocked by sinking ships in the canal. So the canal was closed and this was causing some disruption in maritime trade; the flow of oil was interrupted. And one of the things Ball did was to try to persuade Faisal that this was not a good thing for the Arabs, and that Faisal should use his influence to get the canal reopened. I don't recall that we made much headway with the King, who was not about to be seen to be deviating from the decision the Arab chiefs of state had taken at Khartoum.

Anyway, the mission didn't produce any results. The short of that is that the Ball mission was the only foray in the Middle East until the end of the Johnson administration. It didn't produce any movement at all. It didn't give Jarring anything he could use that he didn't already have to try to persuade the parties to come to the table.

Well, we were by now in the last days of '68, and there was an election campaign. Johnson had already announced that he wouldn't run, because of Vietnam. It was a Nixon victory, and the Republicans took over. It was clearly going to be an administration with a strong foreign policy, with the combination of Richard Nixon in the White House and Henry Kissinger as his National Security Advisor. Their foreign policy agenda included getting out of Vietnam honorably, and working for detente in U.S. relations with the Soviets.

The Nixon administration, in addition to trying to work out a basis for detente with the Soviet Union and to find our way out of Vietnam, also wanted to strengthen relations with De Gaulle, which had been strained because among other things the French had taken a rather strong pro-Arab, anti-Israeli position during the 1967 crisis in the Middle East.

There were two proposals waiting for the Nixon administration when they took office, two proposals on the Middle East. One from the French proposing that there should be four-power talks among the four permanent members of the Security Council, leaving China out because it was then still Nationalist China and not really an active player. But the British, French, Soviets, and the United States should talk about trying to help resolve the crisis in the Middle East; this was a French proposal to deal with the Middle East. Whether they were really as concerned about the Middle East as they were about being seen to be part of the big-power network is questionable. But it was a serious proposal that the administration had waiting for it when it took office.

There was also a proposal from the Soviets to inaugurate bilateral talks between the Soviet Union and the United States to try to deal with the crisis in the Middle East. And the Soviets had an incentive. Their friends had been badly defeated in the war, and they were looking for some way to salvage what they could, for the Egyptians in particular and for the Syrians, through diplomatic means, since they couldn't help them militarily.

So the Nixon administration had to deal with these two proposals. The way this was finally dealt with was a decision that we would enter bilateral talks between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, defined generally as an attempt to put together a framework of principles which could be agreed between the United States and the Soviet Union, and recommended to Ambassador Gunnar Jarring as a basis for trying to get his mission off dead center. The thought was that if Jarring could go to the parties and say I have this statement of principles which the two superpowers have agreed to-your friends, the Soviets, he could say to Nasser, and your friends, the Americans, he could say to the Israelis and to the Jordanians-that this would carry some weight, and that perhaps Jarring, with this in hand, could break some of the impasses that he had found in trying to get any progress at all towards a settlement.

The agreement was also made that there would be parallel talks, four-power talks, at the ambassadorial level in New York, with the permanent representatives of the U.K., France, the Soviet Union, and the United States in New York. They would have periodic talks about the Middle East, and there would be coordination so that what went on bilaterally in the U.S.-Soviet talks would be fed into the four-power talks, and vice versa.

The two-power talks were to be conducted on the Soviet side by Ambassador Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador in Washington and his counterpart was to be Joe Sisco.

Q: And where were you at that point?

ATHERTON: I was at that point country director for Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs, and Sisco had moved over from the International Organization Bureau to the Near East and South Asian Bureau. He was the Nixon administration's Assistant Secretary for Near East and South Asian Affairs and my new boss.

Battle had left with the change of administration, and had been replaced briefly by Parker T. Hart, Pete Hart, as Assistant Secretary, an old Middle East hand, very knowledgeable about the area. But he was not very long in the job when the Nixon administration decided that it wanted Sisco in that spot.

This was I think part of the feeling that in trying to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the Israelis, and particularly with the strong pro-Israeli sentiment in the country in those days, with a strong Israeli lobby and Jewish community very sympathetic to Israel, you did not want the people handling the Middle East to be seen as having a history of being friendly to and supportive of the Arab cause. At least this is how many of us interpreted the change. The NEA Bureau, as I think I said earlier, had something of that image. Pete Hart was an accomplished Arabist and had served in a number of posts in the Arab world. The perception was that he was very much identified with the image of the Near East Bureau as the Arab Bureau. Exaggerated, in reality, but that was the perception. So I think there were some politics in this, and the result was that Pete Hart wasn't very long in the job, and Joe Sisco was named Assistant Secretary for NEA. Sisco had good credentials with the Israelis and with the White House, and had the experience of being part of the inner circle that dealt with the Middle East in the UN after the Six Day War and with the negotiation of Security Council Resolution 242.The Secretary of State for whom he was working was William Rogers, Nixon's old friend and law partner. It was not quite clear then, that early in the administration, how much of the foreign policy power would be delegated to the Secretary of State and how much would be retained in the White House, exercised by the President and by Henry Kissinger. Most people assumed that Nixon was going to be a very hands-on President and therefore Kissinger would be in a strong position, sitting in the White House. It wasn't quite clear where Rogers was going to fit in all of this in those early days. But it emerged fairly soon, became clear that basically the Middle East was to be Secretary Rogers's area, that he to be given a chance to deal with the Middle East, while other foreign policy problems-relations with the Soviets, Vietnam in particular-were to be pretty much run from the White House.

This general delegation of authority didn't mean isolation from the White House, but operationally, Middle East affairs were being handled out of the State Department, under the supervision of Secretary of State Rogers, by Joe Sisco. And I was asked to work with him, even though I was not in the front office in those days. I was country director, sitting down the hall. I had been head of the task force during the war, and I was familiar with the history of the situation.

We took aboard an officer who had good Soviet experience and who had been in the Intelligence and Research Bureau, Walter Smith. He also spoke Russian, and we needed someone on the delegation who had been trained in negotiating and who knew something about the Soviets and had some experience in that field, since I had had none. Joe Sisco had Soviet experience during his days working with United Nations affairs.

Anyway, the team that basically spent hours and hours and hours in negotiations with Ambassador Dobrynin was Sisco, Atherton, and Smith, with occasional experts drawn in, but we were the hard core.

The Soviet team was Dobrynin, and his official deputy was Yuri Vorontsov, who of course now, many years later, is a very senior deputy foreign minister and I think, as a matter of fact, has just been made their ambassador to New York, if I'm not mistaken. I think he's the new Soviet representative in New York, here in 1990, but at that time he was the deputy chief of mission and Dobrynin's number two in the Soviet Embassy. They may have had someone else on the Soviet side, but that was basically the team.

This started early in the administration, if I recall correctly, as early as February, and it went all through spring and summer in Washington and one round in Moscow and in New York during the meeting of the U.N. General Assembly that fall of 1969. Lots of papers were produced, lots of positions were put on the table. It was early on agreed that in the Sisco-Dobrynin talks the structure would be to try to develop a framework of principles which would govern a settlement between Israel and Egypt, which then was still called the UAR, the United Arab Republic, because it had had that name ever since the aborted union with Syria. That made some sense, because we were obviously very close to the Israelis, and the Soviets were very close to the Egyptians.What to do about Jordan, which wanted to be part of any peace process, in fact thought that it had a commitment from us to be part of it? Well, it was agreed that the Jordanian aspect would be folded into the four-power talks in New York, headed on our side by Ambassador Charlie Yost, who was the new U.N. representative. I forget who the French, Soviet, and U.K. representatives were, but it was Yost for the United States.

We exchanged memoranda of conversations and reports of these discussions, so our mission in New York knew what was said in the talks between Sisco and Dobrynin, and we knew what was said in New York.

But clearly, the ones in New York were to a large extent marking time. The real action was in the bilateral talks. This was basically the policy; we were not to let the four-power talks in New York get out in front or become the focal point. The focal point would be the talks with the Soviets.

This wasn't just for Middle East reasons. It was the desire of the administration, and the Soviets shared it, to show that in this approaching era, when we were trying to improve relations and communications between the Soviet Union and the United States, working for detente, that we and the Soviets could talk about other areas of crisis in the world, as sort of the superpower guardians of law, order, stability, and peace. So these talks were as important in the context of U.S.-Soviet relations as they were in the context of what was happening in the Middle East, from our point of view, and I think also from the Soviet point of view.

A document slowly began to take shape out of these talks, which was hopefully going to be the outline, not of a peace settlement, but of a draft of a framework for the settlement, which would be more specific in some respects than Resolution 242.

Q: Were you in effect the drafter of many of these things?

ATHERTON: I was the drafter of many of them. Walter Smith and I would spend a lot of time together thinking of different formulas to deal with the problems. Sisco himself made a major contribution. He was a hands-on sort of person. He also had his hand in much of the drafting.

We took specific aspects of the problem and we tried to deal with those elements of Resolution 242 in more specific and more detailed terms.

For example, the problem of freedom of navigation, which was in the Resolution. The immediate cause of the war was Nasser's closing the Straits of Tiran and interrupting freedom of navigation for Israel through the Straits of Tiran into the Gulf of Aqaba and into Israel's southern port of Elat. So freedom of navigation became important.

A just settlement of the refugee problem. That meant we had to deal with the question of the Arabs' position, based on U.N. Resolution 194 of December, 1948, that Palestinian refugees had the right of return to the lands from which they or their parents or grandparents had been expelled during the '48 War. This raised an array of questions. Return to where? To Israel or to those parts of Palestine that had been occupied?

Then there was the question of withdrawal. What did this mean? Withdrawal from territories occupied? We tried to spell out whether this meant all territories which the Russians wanted, or to leave open the possibility that it meant something less than all the occupied territories, which we wanted. The Israelis would have preferred that we didn't spell it out at all.

What about the rights of all states to live in peace and security? What does peace mean? What would be the peace commitment?

And then, the bottom line question, how do you negotiate all this? It's all well and good to put together a great set of principles, but until you can get the parties talking about them, it's all very much in a theoretical vacuum. Direct negotiations were very important for Israel, and very difficult for the Arabs.

The most difficult issues to find agreed formulas on, between us and Soviets, had to do with the withdrawal question and also with the peace arrangements. We finally (we the United States), at some point in the negotiations, having been told by Dobrynin that if we could be more forthcoming on territorial issues, then the Soviets would find it possible to be more forthcoming on what the Arab world, in this case the Egyptian, commitment to peace would be. Finally Sisco got authority from the Secretary, and they checked this out through Kissinger with the White House, to table language which basically would not have excluded withdrawal, with proper security arrangements and assurances for freedom of navigation, essentially to the old international border of Sinai. This really meant, in effect, that if you could get the right kind of security arrangements, the right kind of demilitarization, and international supervision and all this, we would be willing to say that Israel could not claim to retain permanent control over any parts of Egyptian territory, as defined by the international border. There was an international border here, after all, between Israel and Egypt. It had been the border of the Palestine mandate; that was the language that was used actually in the draft. This was quite a step.

We were not giving these formulations in textual form to the Israelis. We were giving them general briefings, but we were not consulting them. We were not getting their approval to take these positions. It became apparent that the Soviets, at their end, were consulting every step along the way with Nasser, and any positions that they put on the table they had assurances that Nasser would agree to them. Whereas we did not have assurances that if the Israelis saw the language they would agree, and we had in fact rather good reason to think that they would be quite unhappy about some of the things that we were saying that they should do, such as pulling out of Sinai.

The Israeli position at that point was that they would retain permanent control of Sharm el Sheikh and the approaches to the Straits of Tiran and the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba; they would never give that up, they would retain control of Gaza, and they wanted some security positions on the Egyptian side of the old international border as well.

So we had a pretty good indication there that what we were saying would be very difficult to sell to the Israelis. The fact was that we were getting out in front of the Israelis, whereas the Soviets were not getting out in front of Nasser.

The quid pro quo for our having tabled this rather forthcoming language on withdrawal, the Soviet quid pro quo on peace that we were looking for, was the commitment that they were talking about formal de jure peace between Egypt and Israel, and not just an end to belligerency or an end to the state of war or some of these half way houses.

That quid pro quo was not forthcoming. What apparently had happened was that the Soviets had not been able to get Nasser to agree that he was prepared to make an absolute commitment to peace in the de jure sense of the word, partly because he felt constrained by the Khartoum position. There were all these hangups about recognizing and making peace with Israel, which had just defeated them in a war which they saw as an Israeli aggression.

So the talks gradually petered out. There was a final attempt to salvage something from these talks during the fall 1969 session of the U.N. General Assembly, when Rogers talked to Gromyko, in turn, to see if they couldn't come up with some solutions, including a formula for negotiations, without any great success.

Meanwhile, we had just about decided, the U.S. side, that the Soviets weren't going to produce, and that we had to disengage in some ways from this exercise. The four-power talks, by the way, were getting nowhere either, because they couldn't get out in front of the two-power talks.

There was another concern. There was about to be another Arab summit, and there was concern that there would be some rather extreme positions by Arab leaders at the summit, critical of us, critical of the West, critical of Israel, and maybe even talk about preparing to mobilize to resume the battle.

In order to forestall that kind of a summit, we thought we had to get our position out on the table. And we thought our position would be welcome, at least in part, on the Arab side. The device for doing this was for the Secretary of State to make a speech, and to incorporate in that speech the elements of the position we had favored in the talks with the Soviets and the four-power talks, go public with our ideas on the elements of the peace settlement. And that was done. That became what history still records as the Rogers Plan. The Rogers Plan for a just settlement based on Resolution 242 was a speech by Secretary Rogers, in December of 1969.

I guess the speech achieved something, in a sense. It was rejected by both the Israelis and the Egyptians.

By the Israelis, who were livid because we had, they thought, undercut their bargaining position by, in effect, saying that there should be no major territorial changes. There was some language in there that was designed to deal with the Jordanian side of the equation, and that spoke of withdrawal, with minor rectifications in the old armistice lines. I think the phrase was minor rectification. But it called, in effect, for withdrawal from Sinai, provided there were adequate security arrangements, securing passage through the Straits of Tiran, and all this. The Israelis let loose quite an assault on the administration.

Nasser, for his part, said that he couldn't go so far as to end the state of war and establish de facto peace with Israel, even though it did not call for direct negotiations, did not call for an exchange of diplomatic relations with Israel or anything like that.

It did call for a negotiating formula, which was known as the Rhodes Formula. Rhodes was of course where the 1949 armistice agreements were negotiated.

Q: Where they had separate rooms.

ATHERTON: Where they had both Israeli and Arab delegations in the same hotel, but they met in separate rooms. And then Ralph Bunche would occasionally get them together for a social moment or for a formal signature ceremony. But the actual negotiations had taken place with Ralph Bunche, the U.N. representative, the mediator, going from the room where the Israeli delegation was, to the room where the Egyptians were or the Jordanians or the Syrians, depending on which armistice agreement he was negotiating.

So somebody said: Let's take this historical precedent. We will have negotiations according to the Rhodes Formula. Of course everybody had different interpretations of what the Rhodes Formula was. But that was the language that was used.

Well, having put our position on the table and having had it rejected, we sort of said: Let Ambassador Jarring see what he could do with it for awhile. We had shot our wad, in effect. We didn't have any ideas of where to go from there.

Meanwhile, the cease-fire was seriously deteriorating, along the Suez Canal and also along the Jordanian cease-fire line. The only one that was really quiet by that time was the Syrian line. The Syrians kept that very quiet. There were Palestinian raids across the Jordanian line against the Israelis in occupied territory. And there were actual artillery duels and rather serious breakdowns of the cease-fire at times, along the Suez Canal cease-fire line.

Q: You're talking around 1970?

ATHERTON: We're talking now about early 1970. We really had underway, not a full-fledged war, but a war of attrition. It was mostly the Egyptians trying to wear down the Israelis along the canal by artillery bombardments. And the Israelis trying to wear down the Egyptians by counter-fire or by air. The Israelis were able to launch air strikes across Egyptian territory, whereas the Egyptians didn't have an air force. They had a pretty good air defense system.

Q: They had these SAM missiles there...

ATHERTON: They had SAM missiles provided by the Soviets. But still, the situation was getting increasingly nervous. The Israelis were striking deeper and deeper with their air power into Egypt. And they were using new aircraft that had been provided by the United States, so we were kind of associated with it. They had recently received their first installments of F4 Phantoms, which then was the state of the art. The Phantom plane was a good fighter bomber, it had good range and was superior to anything in the area at the time. The Phantoms were getting behind the Egyptian lines, not just across the canal, but further back, including installations along the Nile, and I think there were some bombing raids that were on the outskirts of Cairo.I can remember Don Bergus, who was then head of our Interests Section in Cairo, sending in a message saying: The concussion from the last Israeli strikes broke all the windows in the American Community School. They were not hitting at Cairo, they were hitting at industrial sites outside of Cairo, but still it was close enough so that they did have some broken windows at the school.

Anyway, the situation was getting dicey. The Soviets were under pressure to put in personnel and air defenses to protect Nasser against the Phantoms. And we got into one of those arguments about the Israelis wanting more aircraft. Bill Rogers took the position that that would inflame the Arabs, and we should be working to calm the situation, and therefore we should put on ice the Israeli request for additional aircraft. They wanted more Phantoms.

This was one of the big splits that occurred over the Middle East between the White House and the State Department. Kissinger took the position that we should support our allies; the Israelis were our friends. And, as he put it, you can't let American arms be defeated by Soviet arms. And therefore if the Soviets are going to put in anti-aircraft missiles, we have to counter this with more aircraft for the Israelis. He saw this in a Cold War context as a U.S.-Soviet showdown, whereas we in the State Department saw it more in Arab-Israeli terms-a conflict where we should try to calm the atmosphere and get the Jarring mission working again.

This was when finally we came up with another initiative, which later became known as the Rogers Plan Number Two. Secretary Rogers proposed a cease-fire along the cease-fire lines.

Q: Excuse me, we always talk about the Rogers Plan. Who actually wrote it?

ATHERTON: Well, the speech that became the first Rogers Plan was pretty much drafted, to my recollection, by Rogers and Joe Sisco, with some help from Bob McCloskey, who was the spokesman, and I got asked to provide bits and pieces of language.

The second one was a double-barreled proposal. It was a proposal to restore the cease-fire along the Suez Canal and also along the Jordanian-Israeli armistice line, because there had been some breakdown there, too, but not as serious. But also it included a formula which we would ask all three parties-Egypt, Jordan, and Israel-to accept as a basis for getting the Jarring mission to move. It had some new language, the nuances of which I can't remember any more, about withdrawal and peace, the same old formula, but it was a new way to package that formula and try to get something that was acceptable to both sides, and it called for a cease-fire.

By this time, by the way, we were dealing directly with Nasser through our mission in Cairo. We were not dealing any more through the Soviets as we had during the Dobrynin talks, when we had relied on the Soviets to talk to Egypt and we had talked to the Israelis, to the extent we talked to them at all. We decided we would carry out our own direct dialogue. We would negotiate this as a U.S. negotiation with the Egyptians and with the Israelis and with the Jordanians, and simply brief the Soviets and keep them informed.

The Soviets' incentive was to try to let us succeed, because, though they didn't like being cut out of it, they were concerned that another war might break out and that there would be a further bloodying of their friends, or that they would be called upon to put in forces to try to save Nasser. They really were quite concerned. They already had large numbers of military personnel in Egypt, training missions for the equipment that had been supplied, but also training the Egyptians on manning the anti-aircraft batteries right up in the combat zone. And there were some Soviet fighter aircraft in Egypt, which were principally there to protect the Soviet personnel. Clearly it was a situation fraught with danger for the Soviets. There were some documented cases, though the Soviets never admitted it, where the Israelis caused Soviet casualties. And they could see themselves getting drawn more deeply into this conflict, which must have looked like a no-win situation to them-the lack of any real Egyptian military capability and the fact that the Israelis were very strong and had this new Phantom aircraft in their inventory, which were long range and had quite a lot of firepower. So the Soviets had some incentive to see the cease-fire restored, and therefore they didn't try to interrupt the efforts. We kept them briefed, but we dealt directly with the Egyptians and the Jordanians and the Israelis.

And an unwritten part of this, which we clarified, was an understanding that not only would there be a cease-fire, which was scheduled to go into effect after we worked out all the meticulous details, there would also be a stand-still. Once the cease-fire went into effect, no military equipment could be moved closer to the cease-fire lines. That was designed to keep the Egyptians, with Soviet help, from moving the anti-aircraft defenses even closer to the canal and therefore closer to Israeli-occupied territory.

To the great surprise, to some extent our surprise, certainly it was a great surprise to the Israelis, we got word that Nasser accepted our cease-fire proposal and the formula for getting peace talks going, which had language in it that he had not accepted back in the days of the Sisco-Dobrynin talks, about peace. But he was willing to go a bit further then with this commitment. So he accepted the language without changing even a comma in this formula, and said to let him know when the Israelis were ready, and we will pick a time, and I will give orders for the troops to stop firing, and the Israelis will do the same. Incidentally, at some point along the way Hussein also accepted the formula.

The problem then was to get Israeli acceptance. The Israelis were quite happy to have the cease-fire, but they did not like the language of the formula. It sounded too much like the Rogers Plan to them, and therefore they wanted to rewrite the formula. There were long, long conversations between Wally Barbour, our ambassador in Tel Aviv, and Mrs. Meir, who was then the prime minister, and between Joe Sisco and Ambassador Rabin, who was then the Israeli ambassador in Washington. The final conversation that I recall was in Joe Sisco's office. I was on another phone, listening, and he talked directly to Prime Minister Meir, in Israel, saying, "Madame Prime Minister, this is a very important moment for this formula. This is an opportunity to bring not only an end to the shooting, but to try to launch a peace process. But you must accept on the same basis as the Egyptians and the Jordanians"

And her argument was that she accepted the principles, but they wanted to say it in their own words. But of course the words were the key. If you said it in different words, it wouldn't be the same formula. The key to the success was having all parties accept the same form of words. But she was quite adamant that she would not do this, that she didn't have authority from her government, the Knesset would have to discuss it. It was quite a tough conversation. She could not persuade Joe, but it was a draw because she couldn't persuade him and he couldn't persuade her that this was the only way to go.

And then the decision was made that we would simply announce that all the parties had accepted the peace proposal. And so that's what we did. We simply made a press statement that the Egyptians, as well as the Israelis, had all accepted our proposal, and we would give the formula to Jarring who could be back in business, and we would work through the two sides to try to get the cease-fire in effect. Working in Israel, as I recall, through Dayan, who was minister of defense.

Anyway, there were frantic exchanges of flash telegrams going back and forth, right up to the minute that the cease-fire was in effect, to make sure that the orders got out to the troops to stop firing. There had to be a lead time. But it did go into effect, and reports came back that it was holding, that everything was under control. And Jarring was already announcing that he was coming to Cairo, and he was going to Jerusalem and he was going to Amman, and it looked like we may have had a success on our hands.

And then two things happened. First of all, in Israel, the coalition collapsed, because Mr. Begin, who had been in the coalition up to that time, said that this formula, which accepted that Resolution 242 calling for withdrawal from occupied territory applied to the West Bank, was not his understanding of 242. It was not his party's decision, and he could not accept. So he took his party out of the coalition. Not because of the cease-fire, which he supported, but because it, in effect, called for Israel to withdraw from part of Palestine. We should have known from that, that when he became prime minister that would become the new Israeli position, that 242 did not call for withdrawal from any of that particular bit of territory, that was his interpretation of Resolution 242. The result was a smaller coalition government in Israel, with Begin out of it.

But the other thing that happened, which was really the devastating blow to the whole peace formula, was that intelligence reports came in, first to the Israelis and then to us, that the Egyptians, with Russian help, were moving some of their anti-aircraft missiles up closer to the canal, which was a direct violation of the stand-still provisions of the cease-fire. To this day it is hard to understand how they thought they could do this and get away with it. I think that there was some claim that they hadn't really understood that this was what it meant. There was a lot of double talk.

The fact was that the Israelis announced that they were going to freeze the peace negotiations. They were not going to receive Jarring. The peace formula would be on ice until we had rectified the violations of the cease-fire. The question was: What do you mean by rectified? The answer was: Force the Russians and the Egyptians to pull back those anti-aircraft missiles to where they were.

Well, we did remonstrate with the Egyptians and the Russians, but we couldn't, without sending in the Marines, force them to withdraw. And Nasser was not about to. He had gained military advantage under cover of the cease-fire, and he was going to hang onto that military advantage.

Therefore the Israelis said: Well, if you can't rectify the violations by restoring the status quo ante, then the other way to rectify it is to give us additional military equipment to offset this.

So that became the basis for an Israeli request for more airplanes and more sophisticated equipment, including some rather sophisticated electronic equipment, radar detection, etc.-things that we had, up to that point I think, only used with our own forces in Vietnam, that, to my knowledge, had never even shared with our allies, although I could be wrong about this. Certainly some of the electronic gear was really state of the art.

In any case, we did agree, after a bit of a struggle between the White House and the Department. Secretary Rogers still wanted to try to restore the diplomatic process and hold up on the arms as a way of not provoking the Arabs, and maybe a little pressure on the Israelis in the process. But it didn't hold politically. The president, in this case, backed Israel and over-ruled the Secretary and agreed that we would move forward with the arms that Israel wanted and that we had had on hold for some time.

The diplomatic side of Rogers Plan Number Two never got off the ground. The Jarring mission didn't get back into business. He went through the motions of talking about it, but he had really nothing to work with.

But the cease-fire did hold. That cease-fire held from the summer of 1970 until the outbreak of the so-called Yom Kippur or the Ramadan War in October of 1973. So it did have some success, but it didn't help the peace process.

Let me back up and give a little background to all this. Sisco and I had previously made a trip to the area, in April 1970, to try to see if we could put the diplomatic efforts back on the track. Rogers sent Sisco out to see Nasser and to see the Israeli government. There was also to be a side trip to Jordan, but it was canceled because of the security situation there. Sisco and I had a meeting with Nasser (the only time I ever met Nasser), seeking to restore a direct channel to him and to elicit his cooperation in new peace efforts. We got no commitments at the time, but Nasser gave a speech May 1 calling on the U.S. to take an initiative, which was part of the stage setting for what became Rogers Plan II. Events elsewhere in the region were also part of the background, however.

This was the summer of the Palestinian uprising against King Hussein, the war waged by Fedayeen, in Jordan, the state-within-a-state which the Palestinians had established on Jordanian territory. They were operating independently of the Jordanians, using Jordanian territory as a base for launching raids into the Israeli positions across the cease-fire line, and increasingly were challenging King Hussein's authority. It was at this time that Hussein finally felt he had to reestablish his authority, and it led to the crackdown by the Jordanian Army against the Palestinian paramilitary forces in Jordan.

That led in turn to the incursion of the Syrians across the Jordanian border, in support of the Palestinians.

Kissinger got in the act at this point and persuaded the Israelis that they should go through some military deployments that would signal to the Syrians that if they threatened Hussein, they might have to contend with the Israelis. So in a way you have a tacit, but by no means acknowledged cooperation between Jordan and Israel against the Syrians. The Jordanians were fighting the Syrians in the north. The Syrians had actually crossed the border with tanks. And the Israelis were mobilizing troops to send a signal to the Syrians. An additional military factor was that the Chief of the Syrian Air Force refused to commit air cover for the Syrian incursion into Jordan. That was General Hafez al-Assad, who in a coup the next year seized power from the Baath Party faction that ordered the incursion. The net result was that the Syrians did pull back.

In the summer of 1970 the Jordanian Army and the Palestine Liberation Organization armed forces were having, in effect, a military showdown in Jordan, the King having decided the time had come to reestablish his sovereignty and authority over all of Jordanian territory, at a time when the Palestinians had created a virtual state-within-a-state within Jordan, outside of the control of the King.

President Nasser of Egypt tried to mediate this. He tried to find the basis for resolving the conflict between the Palestinians and the Jordanians, saying we shouldn't be fighting among ourselves when we have the common enemy Israel, that we should be worrying about preventing a spectacle of disunity among the Arabs. In fact, as I recall, Nasser had brought Arafat and Hussein to Egypt in an attempt to get them to find a way of resolving the conflict that would meet both of their requirements. He had not succeeded in totally resolving it, when he had a heart attack. This was September of 1970, and many people said Nasser's heart attack was at least in part attributable to his exhaustion from efforts to resolve this conflict.

In any case, that left a big question about who would be the next leader of Egypt. The PLO-Jordanian situation was resolved, in effect, by a Jordanian victory, and the PLO pulling its forces out of Jordan. The Jordanians had put up a good military showing against the Syrians, against the background of the Israelis, encouraged by Kissinger, signaling to the Syrians that if they seriously threatened Hussein, they would have to contend with the Israelis.

This was also seen by Kissinger as a signal, by the way, to the Soviets. He saw the Soviets as putting the Syrians up to this. Historically, I think the evidence doesn't support that. And there were many who contended it was a distortion to turn this into a Cold War kind of issue, that it was very much a Syrian attempt to support Palestinians against the Jordanians, and that the Soviet role was nonexistent or certainly marginal. But in any case, the account of it is in Kissinger's book and his version was that it was a lesson to the Soviets. Certainly Richard Nixon looked at it that way. Many others, including myself, who were involved in the situation at the time, never saw convincing evidence, frankly, that the Soviets were putting the Syrians up to this at all. Obviously if Hussein had been overthrown by the Syrians, it would have been an advantage to the Soviets to have a state that they were closely supportive of, defeat a state that was closely associated with us, namely the Jordanians. So the Soviets would have stood to benefit from it, but there was no evidence that they were involved in trying to stimulate it.In any case, that was resolved for the time being. The PLO withdrew its military forces and began to reestablish itself, in the only territory in the area where they could establish an independent base, and that was in southern Lebanon. Southern Lebanon became the new PLO territorial base, beginning in 1970-1971.

Meanwhile, shifting to the Egyptian side, there remained the question of the successor to Nasser. Interestingly enough, we, the U.S. government, were quite caught off guard by Nasser's death. We didn't have diplomatic relations at the time , remember. We had an Interests Section in Cairo, and they tried to keep us informed of what was happening, but we did not have an ambassadorial level diplomatic representative. And there was a very big question mark about who was going to take over after Nasser's death. In fact there was something of a power struggle for the succession.

The immediate succession, under the constitution, went to Anwar Sadat, who was speaker, as I recall, of the Peoples' Assembly at the time. The constitutional provision was that the speaker would take over until there could be an election of a president. The election normally was carried out then, as is now the case, by the Parliament. The Parliament would vote on the successor, and then there would be a referendum to endorse it. It was not a popular election. It was an election within the Peoples' Assembly, which is the Egyptian Parliament.

In any case, Anwar Sadat, who was very little known to most of us in Washington, suddenly emerged as the temporary ruler. But quite clearly he had not established that he was going to be the People's Assembly's choice. There were many contenders. Some of the Nasser lieutenants who had ensconced themselves in the security services, and in the military in particular, felt that they were the logical successors, they were the Nasser loyalists. Sadat, though he had been chosen by Nasser to be the speaker, was never quite part of that inner circle. In fact he had been considered a bit of a maverick.

It turned out, incidentally, that through either foresight or luck, Sadat had been brought to the States as an IV, important visitor, under the program that the USIA sponsors to bring potential senior figures of other governments to this country.

The person who perhaps knew more than anybody else about Sadat, in Washington, was Michael Sterner. Mike Sterner was assigned as Sadat's escort officer on that visit, and went around the country with him to places like Disneyland and others, and so he got to know him. Luke Battle, who had been the ambassador in Cairo before the '67 War, had known him in those days. So there was some knowledge. But in the historical memory of the State Department, there wasn't a lot of information about what kind of a person he was, how he would perform. Was he really just going to be temporary and overthrown by stronger forces trying to replace him? Well, as it turned out, Sadat was stronger and cannier than all of the others, but it wasn't immediately apparent.

What was apparent was that there was an opportunity, with Nasser's death, to begin to mend the relationship with Egypt and possibly even get Egypt back engaged in some kind of an effort towards resuming the peace process, or getting the peace process started, since it had never really got started.

In those days, remember, we were still talking in terms of the U.N. mission, headed by Gunnar Jarring, as the instrument for negotiating or for helping the parties negotiate a peace.

In any case, the opportunity presented itself to try to improve the relationship. The first step in this, after some preliminary exchanges, was the decision that Secretary of State Bill Rogers should visit the Middle East.

The Jordanian situation had been brought back under control. The cease-fire, which we had helped launch, was in effect. The fighting of the war of attrition along the Suez Canal cease-fire line with Israel had ceased. The cease-fire was holding.

It seemed like an opportune moment to try to see if there wasn't a basis for negotiations based on Resolution 242, beginning with Egypt and Israel.

So the visit was basically a visit to Egypt and to Israel by Secretary Rogers. I think he made a couple of other stops, but without checking the record I'm not entirely sure where else he went. But the important stops, from the point of view of our policy efforts, were clearly Egypt and Israel.

I was along as a member of the party, along with Joe Sisco. I was by this time deputy assistant secretary of the Near East bureau, and Joe Sisco was assistant secretary.

We had a fascinating exposure to Sadat, the kind of person he was. He was very frank. He was very forthcoming in the meetings with him. Made no bones of the fact that he wanted to see an improved relationship with the United States. Talked rather freely, and some people thought perhaps he was a little indiscreet, about how he didn't want Egypt to continue to be seen as a Soviet client. Even talked very frankly to Rogers, in a private meeting, which Rogers later conveyed to us, about his internal problems with some of Nasser's lieutenants who were trying to pull a power play and seize power from Sadat.

Sadat told Bill Rogers, "You watch, I'm going to have to take some very tough measures over the weeks ahead. And once I've done that, then I want to get back and talk to you about where we can go in the peace efforts."

And sure enough, Sadat got rid of a potential coup against him. He mounted a counter-coup. Two of Nasser's principal lieutenants were arrested. Ali Sabri, being the principal one, was sent to jail, and in fact were still in jail when I went to Egypt in 1979.

Q: Who was the other one?

ATHERTON: Ali Sabri is the one I remember. I can't remember who the other one was. But he also changed chiefs of staff. I think the chief of staff was involved in this, or some of the senior military men at least.

And the result was that Sadat turned the tables on this power play. He ended up pulling the power play and establishing his authority, and then legitimatizing his position through the carrying out of the provisions of the constitution for election and popular endorsement.

This was 1971. The Rogers visit, by the way, was in June of '71, maybe it was April, anyway it was early in the year. And everything Sadat predicted to Rogers he would do, he did.

Rogers went to Israel after Egypt, as I recall, and reported to the Israeli government some of the encouraging indications that perhaps there would be a new wind blowing in Cairo and perhaps there was a chance to move from the war of attrition, from a cease-fire towards some kind of a negotiating process.

The Israelis were quite interested in this and wanted to convey back to the Egyptians, to Sadat, that they would be interested in any thoughts and proposals that might be forthcoming. So Joe Sisco and I were delegated by Rogers to fly back to Cairo. We went on, as I recall, from Israel to Italy, and then Joe and I turned around in Rome and flew back to Egypt and had a follow-up meeting with Sadat and some of his people and probed a bit more what his intentions were and also conveyed to him, the receptivity of the Israelis at least to listen to potential ideas about negotiations. There were no specific proposals as I recall, and the positions were still very far apart, but there was a change in the mood, in the atmosphere, we all sensed.

Sadat followed this up actually with a proposal that he made in a public speech. The proposal was for what came to be called an interim Suez Canal agreement. Sadat's idea was that you could arrange for a mutual Israeli-Egyptian pull-back from the canal, create a neutral zone or zone free of forces. The main objective of course was to get the Israelis to pull back from the east bank of the canal some distance, and then begin the process of clearing out the Suez Canal and getting it open again to international traffic. This would be a token of everybody's intention to return to a peaceful situation .

This idea, I think, was first floated by the Israeli idea, originating almost certainly with Moshe Dayan, but floated through an Israeli writer, I think he was a professor at the time, who did a story which appeared in The New York Times Sunday magazine. And it had in it the germ of this idea of perhaps putting some demilitarized space between the Israelis and the Egyptians.

Mrs. Meir, who was then the prime minister of Israel, responded in a public statement, taking note of the Sadat proposal and sort of indicating that this was something the Israelis would be willing to talk about.

So it looked to us, in Washington, as though there was an opening, and therefore another mission to the Middle East was cranked up. At Secretary Rogers's instructions, with the approval of the White House, though with skepticism at least on the part of Henry Kissinger that anything would come of it, Joe Sisco and I were sent back to try to put together the elements of such an agreement.

We spent some time at first preparing what seemed to us the elements of the agreement. We actually did some drafting. We had some ideas we reduced to formulations on paper that would, when you put them all together, constitute the elements of what could become an Egyptian-Israeli limited agreement on getting the canal open, as a basis for creating a better atmosphere for resuming the broader peace process. We drew heavily on some of the language in the old Rogers Plan, a lot of his formulations. It was never designed to be the draft or the blueprint of a peace treaty. It was not that far reaching. It was just what its name implied, an interim agreement focused on getting the Suez Canal open, but as a basis for further negotiations to get some kind of process started which could be built upon.

We laid out all these suggestions. We had had some exchanges also with the Egyptians, and thought that we had a proposal that the Egyptians would accept, which the Israelis, as the occupiers, who were going to have to pull back from the canal, would buy. And we spent several days laying this out step by step, meeting with Mrs. Meir and members of the Cabinet, discussing it. And at the very end of the, almost a week I think, we were there, with the Israelis having detailed discussion, and then we had to cool our heels while the Israeli government took a couple of days to debate internally whether or not to accept what became by then known as the Sisco proposals as a basis for getting the Egyptians engaged. It was a rather pleasant couple of days, to my recollection, because Joe and I spent a lot of time around the swimming pool at Ambassador Barbour's residence, and went out and played some golf at the Caesaria golf course, and finally got our summons that we were going to get the Israeli answer.

The Israeli answer was a flat no. Mrs. Meir didn't object to the concept, in fact she had accepted the concept. But we felt to make it salable to the Egyptians, there would have to be some symbolic Egyptian establishment of its presence east of the Suez Canal, in the area that the Israelis would pull back from. And so our proposal contained the provision that the Israelis would agree that there would be some very limited number of Egyptian lightly armed security forces, but not military, not with heavy military equipment, but uniformed personnel with some light arms, in the area east of the canal. Sadat thought this was the minimum fig leaf so he would be able to say that he had reestablished Egyptian sovereignty in this area.

And that was the part, I recall, more than any other part, that Mrs. Meir and the Israeli government generally rejected. I can recall her words: "Not one Egyptian soldier will ever again set foot on the east bank of the Suez Canal." Well, this was 1971. Two years later, several Egyptian divisions were on the east bank when the '73 war broke out. By that time she was determined that there would be no military presence.

There was apparently quite a debate about this, internally. Our information was that Dayan had wanted to accept it, he had been encouraging her to be more flexible. You have to understand that, even at the close of the '67 War, Dayan had opposed the idea of a static defense line on the Suez Canal. Once Egypt had been driven back, he favored leaving the east bank unoccupied, so that the Egyptians wouldn't see the daily humiliation of Israeli troops right across the canal from their troops. He felt that, psychologically, it was important that the Egyptians not be seen to be opposite the gun barrels of the Israelis, so to speak. And also he felt, I think, that militarily it was a better situation not to get tied to a static defense line.

And of course he was overruled, and the Israelis established the Bar Lev line, which was a very strongly fortified line, with interconnecting trenches and tunnels and reinforcements, right on the east bank of the canal. That's where they were dug in, and they were going to stay there.

I have to tell one little anecdote, which I think is revealing in light of later events. One of the things that Joe Sisco and I did during this period, while we were not negotiating with the Israelis, was to take a tour down to see the defense line along the canal, to see the ground. We were flown down by the Israeli chief of staff, Chaim Bar Lev, after whom the line was named, who had a pilot's license. And he flew us down in a small observer plane, bouncing along. We did not fly all the way up to the canal, but to a landing strip back from the canal, and then went by road up to the canal, by a reasonably safe route, so we weren't under direct observation of Egyptian gunners.

By this time, of course, the Israeli media had picked up what it was that was being discussed, that there was discussion of a possible agreement under which Israel would pull back some distance from the canal.

The commander of the forces on the canal at that time was Ariel Sharon. And as we were leaving, Sharon went to see us off, and Joe said, "Nice to see you, and I hope we'll see you again some time."

And Sharon said, "Yes, right here on the canal."

He was dug in. He was determined that they would not sign this agreement. Hard-liner to the end.

So we didn't get the agreement. We had to report to the Egyptians that it did not work.

Sisco was always full of new ideas. He wasn't one to say: Well, that didn't work, too bad, and forget it. He came up with a proposal for what became known as a variation of the concept of proximity talks. Let's try to get Israeli and Egyptian representatives in the same hotel, and then we can shuttle between them, behind closed doors of the hotel, and see if we can't work out some of these differences. Let's not give up. And so the concept of hotel talks became the next subject of discussion-without, again, ever getting off the ground.

In fact, by the end of 1971, it was clear that there was no bridging the gap between the Egyptians and the Israelis on an interim Suez Canal agreement . And in fairness, Sadat had wanted much more than just a token pull-back. He had originally wanted to have the Israelis pull back behind the Sinai passes, which was a good distance and quite a strategic withdrawal. We had to tell him from the beginning it was unrealistic to expect that in an interim agreement, the Israelis were going to give up their principal strategic strong points in the Sinai. There were lots of gaps between the two sides, and this idea gradually faded.

Also we were approaching an election year in the United States in '72. Then the word went out pretty much from Nixon through Kissinger that they didn't want any rocking of the Middle East boat during this election. It was quite obvious that any active diplomacy, any active peacemaking efforts, would involve some strain, as they always do, in our relations with Israel and probably with Egypt, too. That wasn't so much of a concern, but there was concern that the president not get into the election year 1972 having a fight with the Israelis. So the word was out to cool it this year, and we would get back to the Middle East after the election.

The other factor that figured in the equation at this time was the continuing effort to find some basis for detente in the U.S.-Soviet relationship.

Sadat clearly was casting around for other ways. If he couldn't get an agreement with American brokerage, then to try to get the superpowers, to get the Soviet Union and the United States, jointly, to take on the Middle East issue and try to get things moving. Sadat clearly had made the decision, right at the beginning , after he had consolidated his power, that he had to get Egypt out of the dead end situation that it was in as a result of the '67 War. He had to find a way to recover the Sinai and recover Egyptian territory, give up the idea of winning it back militarily, and turn Egyptian resources from getting ready for the next war to trying to do something about the woefully rundown Egyptian economy.

And Sadat had a plan. It wasn't always articulated as a full blown plan, but at least it became apparent, in retrospect. He was indefatigable in suggesting various proposals, various ways of trying to get at the problem of getting Israel out of Egyptian territory, as part of the process of resolving the conflict. So that was his priority.

He declared at one point that 1972 was going to be the year of decision, when these problems would have to be resolved. He called upon the world community, and the U.S. and the Soviet Union in particular, publicly to engage themselves. He apparently put great stock in this being a major item on the agenda of the U.S.-Soviet, Nixon-Brezhnev summit conference in 1972. The results of the conference, in the communique, made it clear that, in effect, there had been an agreement between the two superpowers to put the Middle East problem on the back burner, not to try to resolve it. We were as far apart as the parties themselves were, in our ideas for a solution. And therefore in order not to let U.S.-Soviet differences over the Middle East get in the way of larger issues of disarmament, detente generally, it was resolved by very general communiquï¿½ language, which really didn't deal with the fundamental issues.

Sadat was very unhappy about this result, and even more unhappy when, after the election, with Nixon beginning his second term, we didn't really come to grips with the Middle East in a way that Sadat had hoped.

Well, we began to get intelligence reports from various sources that Egypt was drawing up war plans, and even some reports of collusion, of cooperation between Egypt and Syria, since the efforts to resolve the issue through superpower and major power diplomacy, to try to activate the major powers, had not produced any results.

The general mind set in Washington, and I think clearly also in Israel at the time, was that there was no way that Egypt could launch a successful military attack against the Israelis dug in as they were in Sinai, and that this was probably either bluff, or misinformation of some kind, or an attempt to scare the world into doing something about the stalemate on the peace front. In any case, nothing happened. There were no serious efforts, there was no major American initiative. Everybody was looking basically to the United States.

Even as 1973 wore on, we began to get rather ominous warnings from some of the other Arab countries, and in particular from Saudi Arabia, that the situation with continued Israeli occupation, a humiliation of the Arabs, could not go on indefinitely, that this was intolerable from an Arab point of view.

And that was when we first began to get hints out of the Arab world that they might be compelled to put a squeeze on the oil supplies to the West. This was a time when we were not as dependent, as we later became, on Arab oil, but our allies were. A squeeze on them would indirectly be a squeeze on us as well. So there was some foreshadowing of what became, within the year, the Arab oil embargo. But again, there was a tendency in Washington to discount both the possibility that the Egyptians would start a war that threatened Israel's control and that the oil-producing countries would really seriously go through with this. The reasoning was that they would hurt themselves as much as anybody else by cutting off income from the sale of oil to the West, to anyone that was seen as supporting Israel in any way, which meant first of all the United States, but to some extent the western European countries as well.

Now in the early fall of 1973, there was a change of leadership at the State Department, when Secretary Rogers resigned and Nixon appointed Kissinger as Secretary of State. There were lots of reasons for it. It wasn't the Middle East issue, so far as I know. I wasn't privy to them, and I wouldn't want to speculate about all of them, but the fact of the matter was that there had been increasing strains between Kissinger and Rogers over many, many foreign policy issues. Rogers, in the end, felt that he was being shut out of too much of the action, and he, for reasons that have been amply discussed in various public records since then, handed in his resignation. Henry Kissinger was named as our new Secretary of State and still remained, for the time being at least, as not only Secretary but also kept his position as National Security Advisor. So he was wearing both the White House and the State Department hats for that period.

His first foray as Secretary of State into the Middle East issue, that I'm aware of, came right after the opening of the General Assembly, in the fall of 1973, when the Secretary of State traditionally goes to New York and meets with the foreign ministers of all the countries, and has a kind of tour d'horizon of the main foreign policy issues, makes a speech, listens to speeches.

I think it was a recommendation from those of us in the Department, working on Middle East affairs, that he ought to try to get to know the principal players in the Middle East conflict. And one way to do this would be to have a gathering to which he would invite all of the Arab ambassadors to the U.N., or the Arab foreign ministers who were in town and, in their absence, their representatives. And he did this.

It raised a bit of a question about whether or not the Palestinian Liberation Organization ought to be invited, because they by then (I'm pretty sure I'm correct) had an observer mission in the U.N. But in any case, that was resolved by the decision that we wouldn't. They didn't have any standing, they were not a state, they were not a government. And so it did not become a major issue.

There was a luncheon for all of the Arab foreign ministers or representatives, and also the representative of the Arab League, who was then Mahmoud Riad, who had been the Egyptian foreign minister and was now Secretary-General of the Arab League. Kissinger hosted the lunch in the U.S. mission, and in his remarks to the guests, he made his first official pronouncement, that I'm aware of, on the Middle East, in a talk which, again, many of us had worked on, drafting talking points for him. It came out, as it always did, in his words, but the basic message that he was conveying was that he understood the Arab frustration about the stalemate in the Middle East-after all, this was six years after the Six-Day War, their territories were occupied, no progress had been made, the Suez Canal was still closed-and that he intended to devote his attention to the Middle East situation and to see if he couldn't help move it towards some kind of a resolution. It was a talk that was basically meant to reassure the Arabs that he, now being the Secretary of State, was going to give this higher priority on his agenda. It was a talk designed to win the sympathy, or at least to get the attention and hopefully some understanding and some forbearance on the part of the Arabs. After all, we had been hearing reports of possible military action. We had been hearing reports of using the oil weapon against the U.S. and the West in general. His attempt was really designed to try to defuse this.

Well, it was too late. In retrospect, it was quite obvious that Sadat had already, in collusion with President Assad in Syria, made the decision that they were going to have to take military action in order to unfreeze the situation on the ground and also diplomatically.

And it wasn't very many weeks after that, within a month, to my recollection, that the crisis suddenly erupted into full scale hostilities. It was a master bit of deception on the part of the Egyptians and the Syrians. They obviously had to make preparations. They had to do certain things that could not be hidden from photographic and electronic surveillance.

But what they did could be interpreted in different ways. It was interpreted by Israeli intelligence, and by most of ours, as Sadat wanted it interpreted, namely that it was simply preparations for military maneuvers in the eastern part of the country. Since the Israelis and we both had started from the premise that Egypt didn't have the military capability to launch a successful attack, we therefore interpreted the intelligence to fit that preconception.

In fact, as history tells us, the war broke out on the day of Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Hebrew religious calendar, and it also was during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. So the Israelis have ever since then called this the Yom Kippur War and the Egyptians have called it the Ramadan War. Those of us who tried to be neutral about it would call it the October 1973 War.

But it was obviously a well-planned and a major coordinated attack by Egyptian forces against the Israelis east of the canal, and by the Syrians against the Israelis in the Golan Heights. There was no action on the Jordanian front. The Jordanians had not been part of the plan, though they had picked up intelligence about it as many others had.Needless to say, there was a certain amount of scrambling in the halls of the Department of State, in the White House, and up in New York. I won't take time to go into all of the details, because this has been more than documented in Kissinger's memoirs, and other people have gone on the record by now, but I think it is important to know that Kissinger was in New York at the time, and Joe Sisco was with him, and this is an amusing story. I was in Washington, so I only heard this afterward. Because of the time difference, since the war started early in the morning in the Middle East, it was of course in the middle of the night in Washington. We were all awakened. I was awakened and brought down to the Department of State to the operations center to be on the spot. Joe got word in New York and woke Henry Kissinger up, and he got Henry to try to call the Egyptian and Syrian foreign ministers or ambassadors, whoever he could reach in New York, and say: We're sure there must be some mistake. Just give it a little time, we're sure this can be worked out. Well, we were obviously light-years behind the power curve at this point. The war had started. The war caught everybody, except the Egyptians and the Syrians, off guard.

One of the first messages to come into the operations center was a message from Golda Meir, prime minister of Israel, to our government, before the actual fighting had started, by which time it seemed they no longer had any doubt that this was a serious attack, or that one was on the verge of being started. And the message was that Israel would not fire the first shot, would not strike if the Egyptians did not strike against them.

Of course that was quite different from 1967. The start of shooting in that war was the Israeli decision to launch a preemptive strike against the Egyptians, before the Egyptians could get the jump on them, assuming the Egyptians in fact intended to. And in 1973, they chose not to launch a preemptive strike, and the Egyptians and Syrians in fact did get the jump on them.

Well, by the time daylight broke in Washington, the fighting had started. All of the usual buttons were pushed. The Security Council was convened. Kissinger, being in New York, instructed Brent Scowcroft, as his deputy at the National Security Council in the White House, to call a meeting of the Washington Special Action Group, or whatever it was called in those days. It was basically the representatives of the National Security Council: Kissinger, had he been there, Scowcroft in his absence, and representatives from the Joint Chiefs and Defense and CIA and State, to my recollection.

And since Kissinger, the Secretary, and Joe Sisco, the senior assistant secretary dealing with this problem, were at that time in New York, I was asked, as the senior member of the Department's Near East Bureau in Washington, to go to that meeting. Obviously, the real decisions were going to be made in New York, where Kissinger was, in consultations with the President, but he wanted this meeting to take place to get the collective assessment and judgment of the senior members or their representatives on the National Security Council, the agencies and departments directly concerned.

This was very early on. The situation, as is always the case, was rather confused, and it wasn't quite clear at that point how the war had started. The assumption was made by a couple of the people at that meeting that, like '67, the Israelis had jumped the gun and had started the fighting. I recall one who put this theory forward was Jim Schlesinger, as then, I believe, Secretary of Defense. He had been CIA, but I think by then he was Secretary of Defense. This was his immediate conclusion.

Nobody at the meeting was challenging this, and so I had to speak up. Even though I was there with cabinet officers, feeling relatively junior, I said, "I think that you're wrong. This is, first of all, Yom Kippur, the least likely day in the year when the Israelis would start a war. Secondly, we had a message from Mrs. Meir that she was not going to start a war."I saw no evidence to support a thesis that the Israelis, this time, had fired the first shot. I thought that they had been caught as much by surprise as everybody else. And so, in retrospect, it turns out that I was right, this was the right analysis, but it was not the initial reaction.

Well, very quickly the task became first to try to stop the fighting, to try to position ourselves, in the United States, so that we could influence not only the end of the fighting, but the post-hostilities situation as well.

And again, a task force was formed in the State Department. I was not asked to be the head of the task force, because I was then deputy assistant secretary, and this was normally a job for a country director, but I was obviously to oversee the general mobilization of the Department's and other agencies' resources for dealing with the crisis. Actually, this was a crisis that Kissinger very much ran himself. He was, in effect, the desk officer for the crisis. All of the major meetings, major messages, major discussions were handled by him, with backup support obviously from intelligence analyses, situation reports, which was the job, as always, of the operations center to keep the best and most current information available to the principals. But it was not a committee operation. It was basically Henry Kissinger working pretty much with a very small handful of people, Joe Sisco, Scowcroft in the White House, trying to do basically two things.

First of all, Kissinger, as always, was preoccupied with the fact that behind the Egyptians and the Syrians were the Soviets; behind the Israelis stood the United States. And you could not, as he liked to say, let Soviet arms defeat American arms. Therefore we had to be certain that the Israelis would not be defeated. There were of course other reasons as well for not wanting to see the Israelis defeated, having to do with our long term commitment to Israeli security.

But at the same time, Kissinger had another goal, which I think all of us who had a voice in trying to make recommendations were urging, which was the opportunity to see whether the war could not be turned into the basis for getting the peace process going. We knew that Sadat wanted to try to move towards a peace settlement. And so Kissinger's goals were really twofold. One, not to let the Israelis be overrun militarily, but at the same time, not to let the Egyptians be defeated and humiliated in a way that would make it impossible for them to talk about peace.

So this was a most remarkable situation, where Kissinger was having frequent exchanges with the Israelis, mostly through Dinitz, the Israeli ambassador in Washington and very close to Kissinger, and at the same time exchanging communications with Cairo, through the Egyptian national security advisor, Hafiz Ismail, a senior Egyptian retired general and diplomat. Sadat had named him national security advisor to have a kind of counterpart to Kissinger. And so messages were going back and forth all of the time between Kissinger and the Egyptian government.

My recollection is that the initiative for this exchange really began with the Egyptians. At about the time the war started, a message came through saying that Sadat wanted the American government to understand that this was not a war to defeat Israel, it was not a war to destroy Israel, this was simply an attempt to reassert Egypt's right to recover its occupied territories. Sadat had no intention of trying to invade Israel proper.

Incidentally, the exchanges were between Cairo and Washington. I don't recall any exchanges with the Syrians at all during this period, though they had certainly launched a simultaneous attack. And in fact, at one point, the bigger threat to Israel came from the Syrian front. The Syrians did have a breakthrough and were very close to overrunning Israeli positions on the Golan Heights and threatening the coastal plains of Israel. The Egyptians had succeeded in the very early hours in getting a large number of forces across the canal and pushing the Israelis back. So you had, in the first part of the war, the Israelis militarily on the defensive, having to give some ground to the Egyptians in the first instance and to the Syrians.

But all of this time the messages coming through from Cairo were: "We have nothing against the United States. We hope the United States will understand that Egypt is only asserting our own right to our territory. And there is nothing for Americans in Egypt to fear. There is no need to evacuate the Americans, they will be protected." Very different from the atmosphere in 1967.

I have to take a little diversion here to go back over some of the groundwork that took place in that period of '72-'73 that helped us understand a little better what Sadat's objectives were, and perhaps interpret a little better his professions of wanting a peaceful solution, because there had been some rather high-level channels of communication between Sadat and Washington after Sadat took over.

Sadat gave up on the State Department as a channel for trying to reach the President of the United States, and tried to open up a direct channel between himself and the White House. And that was when he appointed his national security advisor to be a kind of counterpart to Kissinger. I'm backing up to the point where Kissinger had not yet become Secretary of State, into '72.

There was in fact an initial meeting between Kissinger and Hafiz Ismail, who was a very senior retired Egyptian general and had been also an Egyptian diplomat, a very fine public servant, a good choice. He came to Washington, and the visit to Washington was a public visit, as President Sadat's representative, and had a formal meeting with Secretary of State Rogers at the Department.

But the important meeting was an off-the-record and at that time still-kept-secret meeting between Hafiz Ismail and Kissinger at the White House. And that was where Kissinger first really began to engage himself directly in discussions with representatives of the Arabs in this conflict. This was in 1972, I can't remember quite the month.

But it did open up a channel and led to the scheduling of a second and still at that time secret meeting between Kissinger and Hafiz Ismail during one of Kissinger's visits to Paris. He was then conducting the Vietnam talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris. And under cover of those meetings, which were obviously publicly known, arranged a secret meeting with Hafiz Ismail in Paris, in May, I think it was, of 1973.

The original plan was that he would be accompanied to the meeting only by Harold Saunders, who was his Near East person on the National Security Council staff. This was to be kept secret from all of the normal people who ought to know about it in Washington, except the President, who had to know, and the CIA people who had to arrange, through their channels, the meetings. They had to find a safe house, and then a way of getting Kissinger there and Hafiz Ismail there, without the French government knowing about it, without the U.S. Embassy in Paris knowing about it, and certainly without the media and the press knowing about it. It was to be a typical Kissinger operation, a very secret meeting that was in fact kept secret.

He did inform the Secretary of State (it was still Bill Rogers at that time), and Rogers said that if this is what the President wanted, of course he would defer to the President's wishes. He had just one request, that there be a representative from the State Department added to the party that was going to meet with Hafiz Ismail. Kissinger accepted the Secretary's desire, provided this person would be discreet and it would be clear that he was there as part of Kissinger's team. I was named to be that person.

So the next thing I knew I was being contacted by representatives of the CIA who said that they had airplane tickets and I was to get onto such and such a flight at Dulles Airport, and I would go to such and such a hotel and wait there for further instructions. And this is what I did.

There was a bit of a problem, because when I got to Dulles Airport, there was someone I knew very well from the Department going on the same flight to Paris on totally other business. The question was: What was I going to Paris about? Well, I sort of fudged it up and said "Well, it's Department business I was going over to do," and that was that.

But I did get to the hotel, the name I've forgotten. It was a hotel I'd never heard of before, an ancient hotel, not one of the main tourist hotels. And lo and behold, I found myself sharing a room with Hal Saunders, who had been brought to Paris by the same people, but separately. And we were told that we would be contacted when the time came. So we waited at the hotel, and eventually a messenger came saying that the car was downstairs and would take us to Henry Kissinger. And we were whisked out of the hotel and to a side entrance of the American ambassador's residence, and taken in and shown into a sitting room and told we were to wait there until Kissinger was ready to see us.

Nobody had seen us come in. But who should wander into the room at that point while we were sitting there but Jack Irwin, who was ambassador in Paris. And he looked rather surprised; he knew us both from Washington days. He said, "What are you doing here?"

Q: That sounds like a cheap thriller.

ATHERTON: He was looking over the art work at the embassy. He had a lot of his own personal collection there, I think, and he was coming around and checking up where the picture were and where they were to be hung. So Hal Saunders, who had been through this with Kissinger before, said "Well, you ought to know, Mr. Ambassador, but it's got to be kept very quiet, because we are here with Henry Kissinger for meetings with Egyptian representatives under cover of the Vietnamese talks." So Hal told him the essentials; he couldn't tell the ambassador less.

And Irwin's only question was: "Does the Secretary know about this?"

I assured him the Secretary knew, and I was there at the Secretary's request. And he said, "Fine, I don't want to hear any more." And he walked out.

Soon we were summoned to see Kissinger, who it seemed had taken over most of the second floor at the ambassador's residence for his offices, his living quarters, his staff, his security. And we had a briefing session with Kissinger, getting ready for a meeting the next day with Hafiz Ismail and the Egyptian team.

A very interesting session. Kissinger had a briefing book, which Saunders had prepared for him and I had never seen, suggesting points that were going to be made in this meeting with the Egyptians and what to expect from them. It was to be a feeling out in the meeting to try to convey to the Egyptians our concern, our interests, but the limits within which we were working. It was not a time when President Nixon was prepared to take on in a major way the problems of the Middle East. He wanted Kissinger to help keep the lid on basically and keep the Egyptians engaged, but not make any far-reaching proposals.

Q: Could you give us the time frame of this? Was this before the war?

ATHERTON: Yes, I'm sorry. I had to back up, because I suddenly realized that I had forgotten a very important part of the groundwork for what became a very close relationship between Kissinger and the Egyptians.

Q: It is '73, though?

ATHERTON: This is May, I think, of '73.

Q: Fine, thank you.

ATHERTON: So we're five or six months before the war. This is turning back the clock past some of the earlier discussion.

It was quite an exciting experience, I must say. First of all, going through this briefing with Kissinger. I had never encountered Kissinger close up, except sitting in the back row of some of the meetings in the White House Situation Room, which he had chaired, and I was there to back up the Secretary or whoever was representing the Secretary. But I had never sat in as part of an intimate group where he was being briefed. And I have to say I was very impressed with how quickly Kissinger would grasp the essentials of the situation and his approach to the meeting. He seemed clearly on top of it given what was obviously a very limited brief for what he was doing.

But what I remember most from that meeting was Kissinger's concern with me and being told, "Now, Atherton, I don't want you sending any separate reports back about these meetings. The reporting will all go from me."

I guess I must have hesitated for a minute, because he looked at me and said, "Is that understood?"

And I said, "Well, I understand what you're saying, but I'm here representing the Secretary. I certainly have no intentions of sending separate messages or telegrams or anything, but I have to report to the Secretary of State and to Joe Sisco when I get back because they're the ones I am here representing."

And there was a long pause, and I was expecting to be thrown off the delegation and sent back to Washington.

And he suddenly said, "All right." And that was the end of that. He accepted what I had said.

Hal Saunders told me later in private, that I did just the right thing, that if I had caved in, he wouldn't have had any respect at all. Hal said I did absolutely the right thing in terms of winning his confidence. Now I would be part of the team. And it turned out to be quite that way. I was consulted. My advice was listened to in some of these meetings.

The meeting with Hafiz Ismail was really almost a James Bond kind of experience. We went out in a totally unmarked car, no police escort, with a general who was seconded for this purpose, for the operation in Paris, to be the arranger of secret meetings and safe houses, working through CIA channels although he was a military officer.

Kissinger relied heavily in those days on CIA communications. He felt that the State Department communications were not secure and too many copies went to too many people. And when he wanted to communicate with Scowcroft and with the White House, he did it always through CIA channels. And they organized the meeting. Which was fine, because the CIA also had its own liaison with the Egyptian intelligence services. They had a professional relationship, and for a meeting with the Egyptians it worked well.

The meeting took place out in the country, outside of Paris, near a very picturesque little village. It was an old, old French farmhouse which had been restored by and belonged to a wealthy American, with a water wheel some lovely gardens.

We had an all-day meeting with Hafiz Ismail and his team. I was delighted to see that one of the senior Egyptians with Hafiz Ismail was Gamal Barakat, who had been the Egyptian consul general in Aleppo when I was the American consul in Aleppo. So we had a reunion; hadn't seen each other for years. There were other Egyptians, some of whom I knew and some of whom I didn't. On our side were Kissinger, Saunders, and myself.

The talk went on at great length. Hafiz Ismail presented his brief, listing the things that Egypt felt were essential to get what Sadat needed in order to be able to satisfy his domestic constituency, and to say that he was working on recovering Egyptian territory and ending the conflict in an honorable way. But he wanted the moon, and Kissinger was saying there was no way that Israel is going to give you these things, when you are clearly militarily the defeated party in this conflict, there is no way that Israel is going to do it. And the United States is in no position, of course, to make these concessions for Israel. Sadat wanted Israel to commit itself to give back all of Sinai, far-reaching proposals which were not very realistic under the circumstances. We and the Israelis discounted the possibility that Sadat had a viable military option.

It was a very amiable talk, and I think probably the big advantage was that it gave Kissinger the chance to convey to the Egyptians for their record some very detailed analyses of and insights into the dynamics of the Israeli political scene and also of the Israeli-American relationship. So it was the beginning of the process that Kissinger carried on for most of the time after that, in his meetings with the Egyptians and the other Arabs, of really educating them about the limits on what the United States could do in terms of trying to put pressure on or use leverage with the Israelis. The Arab attitude basically was that we provide Israel with all its needs and all we have to do is threaten to cut it off and Israel will do whatever we want. So Kissinger began these long explanations of the special relationship between Israel and the United States, the support for Israel in the U.S. Congress and U.S. public opinion that a President has to take into account.

So it was, I think, useful in giving the Egyptians a more sophisticated understanding of the dynamics and also the limits and limitations and constraints of this situation as far as U.S. policy was concerned.

Of course, there were other constraints which Kissinger didn't talk about, as I recall, but which were there in the background: the constraints of being embroiled in trying to get out of Vietnam, the domestic criticism of the President, the build-up of the anti-Vietnam war movement in the United States. Nixon didn't want to take on an additional source of domestic political trouble, which trying to knock heads together in the Middle East would have been.

So it was quite clear that there was going to be no breakthrough from these talks. But still, it paid off later I think.

Now to go back to the story that I interrupted, the period during the early days of the October 1973 War, when these channels of communication were used. They were mostly messages between Henry Kissinger and Hafiz Ismail, the two national security advisors, that were being handled in this channel. So all during the war this channel of communication was open, to explore ways to bring the war to a stop so we could get on with the peace efforts and help Sadat achieve what he had told us he wanted to achieve.

But, of course, wars have a way of taking on a life of their own. The situation on the battle front in the early days had the Israelis with their backs to the wall. And therefore the Egyptians were demanding very stiff terms for a cease-fire. The Russians were supporting the Egyptians. We were trying to argue that the cease-fire should involve a cease-fire back at the lines where the fighting started, which would have meant, in effect, that the Egyptians would have pulled back across the canal, which they weren't about to do.

Well, of course, the tide of battle eventually changed. The Israelis began to first stabilize the front and then recover some of the territory that they had lost, which had been occupied territory anyway, on both the Syrian and the Egyptian fronts. The borders of Israel were never threatened during this period at all. There was no Arab military threat against Israel proper; the threats were against the Israeli military forces in Sinai and the Golan Heights.

The Israelis realized that they were in for a tough fight. They had lost a lot of airplanes in the early days of the war. One of the costs of not having a first strike was that they could not knock out the Egyptian Air Force on the ground as they had done in 1967. And the Egyptians had really been outstandingly effective in their anti-aircraft defenses, not only in fixed defenses but also in shoulder-held SAM 2's, I think they were called. The anti-aircraft missiles that were launched by individual soldiers were very effective, and the Israelis lost a lot of aircraft.

They began to get worried about their reserves and asked us to mount an airlift of equipment to replenish their losses. The Egyptians had also sent a request to the Russians. And pretty soon you had a situation in which the Russians were resupplying the Egyptians and we were resupplying the Israelis, and each of us accusing the other of keeping the war going. Henry Kissinger was saying, "Well, we must assure the Israelis enough to continue militarily, and at the same time we must try to stabilize the situation so that Sadat isn't defeated totally.

First of all, the Israelis recovered from the Syrians the territory they had lost in the Golan Heights, and had driven the Syrians even further back beyond where the cease-fire line had been, to the point where the Israeli forces were threatening the main approaches to Damascus. And they did a very daring thing on the Egyptian front, a military maneuver masterminded by General Sharon, which succeeded in putting some Israeli units back across the Suez Canal onto the Egyptian side. So the war had reached a point where in a way both sides were hurting. The Israelis had very heavy losses, and to get all of the Egyptian forces out of the Sinai would have probably incurred enormous additional losses. At the same time, the Egyptians had lost the initiative, and in fact had the Israelis across the canal behind their own lines. The Syrians were virtually out of the war, and the Israelis were in a position where if they wanted, they probably could have gone on to Damascus. So there was a kind of stalemate on the military front, or at least the signals coming from both the Israelis and the Egyptians were: Let's get serious about the cease-fire. And that was when a message came from Brezhnev to President Nixon saying in effect: We would like to negotiate a cease-fire with the United States and the two of us impose it; this fighting must stop. Obviously the Russians were getting worried that the Egyptians were going to be defeated again as they were in 1967. So Brezhnev asked Nixon to send Kissinger to Moscow.

Kissinger started to put the team together and the same day organized the flight to Moscow. I was again asked to go along as a member of the team, along with Joe Sisco, plus Kissinger's new appointees including the new head of policy planning, Winston Lord; Bill Hyland, who was the Intelligence and Research chief and Kissinger's particular advisor on Soviet affairs.

We left Andrews Air Force Base sometime in the early morning hours, because Kissinger had a dinner the night before with the Chinese and he didn't want to break off the dinner. So we all got on the plane and waited several hours for him to finish his dinner with the Chinese in Washington. He came out to the airport, and then we took off for Moscow. We had to stop in Copenhagen on the way to pick up Hal Sonnenfeldt, who was there on another mission. Kissinger wanted him along as part of the team. It was a very exhausting flight.

We got to Moscow in the late afternoon and went to the Soviet guest houses and thought we would have a night's sleep and probably start talking to the Soviets the next day, when the word came that Brezhnev would see us that evening before a late dinner and negotiations in the Kremlin. So all of us, numbed with jet lag, went off to the Kremlin to a meal we didn't need and negotiations that Kissinger determined would not take place. He said, "I can't refuse an invitation from the general secretary to meet but I can refuse to negotiate with him. Also, what's happening at the military front will exert more pressure."

So we did go and have the meeting, and Kissinger strung it out, parried all of the attempts to get on with declaring the cease-fire. The serious negotiations took place the next day, and they were completed in a day. Once we got started, we worked out the text of the cease-fire and conveyed it to the parties, conveyed it back to the delegations in New York and it was introduced jointly by the Soviet and American ambassadors in New York as a joint U.S.-Soviet-sponsored resolution to bring about a cease-fire in the conflict. Security Council Resolution 338, in addition to calling for a cease fire, called for negotiations "between the parties under appropriate auspices" based on Resolution 242 of 1967. A side agreement stated that "appropriate auspices" meant U.S.-Soviet auspices.

There were some problems. The Israelis did not immediately stop their military movements when the hour came when they were supposed to. There are lots of details which I won't go into. They're all in Kissinger's book. It was a fast-moving situation. The net result was that the Israelis continued their advance west of the Canal even after the cease-fire went into effect on October 22. The initial impression given purposefully by the Israelis was that they were going to march on Cairo, when in fact they turned around and went down south towards the city of Suez and totally encircled and cut off the Egyptian Third Army, which was thereby, in effect, their hostage, without supplies, without not only military supplies but without food and medical supplies being able to get through to them. This left a somewhat unstable situation, after the fighting finally stopped. The recriminations went on and on about how the Israelis had taken advantage of the cease-fire to continue their advance.

This was when the Russians responded. Sadat was desperate enough so he called on the U.S. and Soviets to send in troops together to stop the Israelis, to rescue the Third Army. The Soviets announced that they would respond. And Kissinger said, "This is intolerable. We can't have Soviet troops introduced into this situation." And that was when Kissinger ordered putting the U.S. forces on the alert, basically saying to the Soviets: You make a move to put troops in Egypt, we are prepared to countermove. And so we had a temporary crisis on the U.S.-Soviet side, although really there was probably not as much of a crisis as some people thought it was at the time.

It was over very quickly. Sadat withdrew his request for the introduction of Soviet and U.S. forces, and we and the Soviets together got a resolution passed that U.N. forces should be introduced. The nearest U.N. forces were in Cyprus, so the plan was to have some of the U.N. peacekeeping forces in Cyprus come in and begin to insert a United Nations presence along the cease-fire lines, to try to stabilize them.

Q: Which at that point were where?

ATHERTON: Well, that was what the argument was all about. The Egyptians and the Soviets were saying that the Israelis had to pull back to the lines of the hour on October 22, when the cease-fire was passed. The Egyptians and the Soviets were pressing us to press the Israelis to withdraw to the lines where they had been when the cease-fire was supposed to be in effect. That was the only point where there was an argument. The forces east of the canal had stopped shooting at each other, and they were drawn up where they had stopped fighting. There were still Egyptians east of the canal. They had crossed the canal and were on what had been the Israeli side of the canal, the Israeli-occupied side. But the Israelis, who had crossed the canal in the other direction, were on the Egyptian side. Nothing was happening on the Syrian side. The Syrians were totally stalemated by the Israeli presence within artillery range of Damascus.

And this is where I think one of Kissinger's brilliant initiatives took place, because he began to develop the concept of not wasting a lot of energy to try to force the Israelis a few miles or a few kilometers back, but of using this as a basis for beginning to negotiate a much broader and more stable resolution of that particular military confrontation.

But there was the problem of what to do about the Egyptian Third Army, which was still without a means of resupply. There were some preliminary discussions about this in Washington with the Egyptian foreign minister, Ismail Fahmy, and with the Israelis. And then it was decided that Kissinger should make a trip to the Middle East, that he should go to Cairo and meet Sadat, deal directly face to face with Sadat. And that became really, in retrospect, a very historic, momentous moment and in some ways a turning point.Kissinger had never been in an Arab country, he had never dealt with an Arab chief of state. He had been to Israel earlier in his life. He really didn't have much Middle East experience, but he was a fast learner. We all pumped him full of all the information we could about the people he was going to meet, their points of view, their perspectives, their hangups, their concerns. And he took off. We all took off. Again I was part of the team. We made quick stops in Morocco and Tunisia, to talk to our friends the King of Morocco and with President Bourguiba in Tunisia, to ask them to use their good offices with the Egyptians to be receptive to Kissinger and basically tell Sadat this is a man to deal with, because obviously there was a need for a certain amount of getting to know you.

We arrived in Cairo; I remember it was the 6th of November 1973. And Sadat, always a master of the dramatic, staged a meeting at the palace where he had set up his war headquarters. He was still in uniform because during the cease-fire it was still a wartime situation. We were all invited, the delegations, the Egyptian, the American, to sit out on the lawn while Kissinger and Sadat withdrew and had a totally private tete-a-tete. No note takers, nobody present.

It went on and on and on. The rest of us ran out of small talk. We had friends, some Egyptians friends with whom we could talk and get reacquainted with each other. One of the Egyptians was Ashraf Ghorbal, who had been head of the Egyptian Interests Section in Washington and was brought back to join the National Security Council by Sadat. But we all sat and cooled our heels while Kissinger and Sadat had this long getting acquainted meeting, at the end of which they announced that they had basically reached agreement on the principles for relieving the Third Army and starting a larger process of negotiation, which would look towards the disengagement of forces, not just a return to cease-fire lines. And it was left to Kissinger and Ismail Fahmy to work out the details.

And they did. They negotiated an agreement of a certain number of points to convey to the Israelis, the main elements of which were to open up the lines for medical supplies, food, and water, but no military, no arms, to go through the Israeli lines to the Egyptian Third Army, with U.N. troops brought from Cyprus to man the checkpoints through which the Egyptian supplies would go. It was a rather complex setup, but the arrangement was worked out fairly quickly, though with the usual hitches and distrust by each side or the other. Finally it became necessary to send Hal Saunders and Joe Sisco on to Israel to explain and to get the Israeli government's agreement with these points which had been negotiated with the Egyptians. The rest of us went on to Jordan and eventually on to Saudi Arabia.

One of the things Kissinger had on the agenda was to go to the Saudis and try to get them to relieve the oil embargo. I haven't mentioned it, but one of the first things that happened after the war broke out was that the Saudis made good on their threat to organize an Arab oil embargo against many countries supporting Israel. It went into effect the day that the United States announced the resupply of the Israeli forces in the war. And it really was a total cutoff of shipments to the United States and some allies, though some disassociated from us in order to get the oil supply. So in the end it was basically an embargo of the United States and I think Holland who stuck by the Israelis and was embargoed.

So one of Kissinger's jobs, in addition to negotiating an agreement that would stabilize the front and relieve the tension that was created by the total encirclement of the Egyptian Third Army, was to try to persuade the Saudis that now that he was working on a just, peaceful solution of the problem, they should lift the oil embargo.

Q: Were there other Arab oil-producing countries involved, too?

ATHERTON: Yes, it was the Arab oil-producing countries. The Iranians, who were part of OPEC, did not join, but the Arab countries did. The Saudis clearly were the prime movers in this. They were the ones to persuade. If they could be persuaded, we would see if they could persuade the others to lift the embargo, too. Meanwhile there was an attempt made to organize a U.S.-European oil reserves system where we could help each other. The United States was in a position then, with its own reserves and its production, to help its allies. But clearly the allies were very uncomfortable with this. They felt that we should be tougher on the Israelis and more understanding of the Arabs, so there were some strains in that period between the United States and our allies in western Europe as well.

So Kissinger had a lot on his platter. Every time it looked as though this agreement was going to work that he had negotiated for relief of the Third Army, a message would come in from the Israelis saying the Egyptians are cheating, or a message would come in from the Egyptians saying the Israelis were going back on their word. And Kissinger realized that he was going to have to continue to handle this. They were always turning to him wherever he was.

Where he was, was on the way to China. He had a very elaborate trip worked out. He was going to go from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, where he would meet with the Pakistanis, and then fly on to China for talks with the Chinese, which had long been scheduled. He kind of squeezed this Middle East trip in with the program for a longer-term meeting with the Chinese.

The plan was that he would change teams when he got to Islamabad; his China support team would meet him there, and his Middle East support team would leave him there and fly back to the States.

But as he became aware that the Middle East was going to dog him wherever he went, he said, "I need somebody with me in China to handle the messages that are going to come in and draft replies and help me, staff me for the Middle East problem while I'm dealing with China."

I was awakened very early in the morning by one of Kissinger's staff aides, saying, "We need your passport."

And I said, "Why?"

He said, "You're going to China with Kissinger."

I said, "I'm going to China? I thought I was going back to the States."

"Everybody else is going back to the states, but you're going on to China."

And so I was drafted to become part of the team that went with Kissinger to China.

OK, the time is November 1973, and we had just come, Henry Kissinger and his traveling team, from visiting the Middle East, his first meeting with Sadat, touching base with Israel and some of the other Arab countries, to try to pin down the understanding he had worked out between Egypt and Israel on stabilizing the cease-fire and laying the groundwork for later peace efforts.

Kissinger was on his way to China, and I had been asked to stay with him for the China trip to handle any Middle East traffic that might come in while he was there. He anticipated there would be a certain number of loose ends that would have to be dealt with.

We stopped in Islamabad to change teams. The China team from Washington joined him there, and the Middle East team left him there. That meant Joe Sisco, Mike Sterner, at least as I recall, who were to go back through Europe and brief our European friends about the status of his Middle East efforts, while we went on to China.

The one thing that happened, in addition to changing teams in Islamabad, was that Kissinger had promised Sadat that he would send a representative of ambassadorial rank to Cairo. Even though we had not yet formally restored diplomatic relations, he would send someone with the personal rank of ambassador, upgrade our Interests Section in Cairo, and Sadat would do the same in Washington.

The decision was made that the best person for this assignment would be Ambassador Hermann Eilts, who at that time was on the faculty at the Army War College, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. So a message had gone out to Hermann to pack a bag and meet Kissinger in Islamabad. Kissinger had never met Ambassador Eilts, he had heard about him from several others who unanimously recommended that Hermann obviously would be the person to do this, in terms of seniority, in terms of his knowledge of the area and his reputation.

So Hermann showed up, and he and Kissinger got acquainted. Kissinger decided that he agreed Hermann would be a good choice; he had liked him right away. He gave Hermann his marching orders and said, "Go to Cairo."

Hermann said, "You mean I can't go back home first? All I've got is this suitcase."

And Kissinger said, "No, I want you to go right to Cairo, get settled, get to know Sadat, and then you can get home at some point to pack up and bring your family out to Cairo."

Parenthetically, as it turned out, this was early November, and Hermann did not get back home until Christmastime. He lived out of his one suitcase, I guess, in a hotel, as far as I know. I'm not even sure. Maybe he stayed with somebody. But he was there for quite an extended period, because there was just too much going on. There was all the follow-up to Kissinger's attempt to stabilize the cease-fire, to lay the groundwork for further negotiations, dealing with a very nervous Egyptian government, and particularly a nervous foreign minister, Ismail Fahmy, who was sure that the Israelis were going to pull a fast one, and he was always trying to keep one step ahead. So Hermann had his hands full.

He also had to cultivate relations with the Soviet ambassador, because Kissinger was talking about a joint U.S.-Soviet effort to convene an international peace conference at some point. Remember that we and the Soviets had jointly sponsored the cease-fire which ended the 1973 October War. Kissinger had developed a dialogue with Gromyko and with the Soviets on the Middle East, and we wanted to keep them engaged, at least give the appearance of keeping them engaged. Hermann's job, really, was to work in tandem with Polyakov, the Soviet ambassador to Cairo. All of this was a pretty full platter.

You know, looking back at this particular moment, I don't think many of us realized it at the time, or maybe we only perceived it rather dimly, but we were really, as it turned out, at this point, November '73, after the October War and the first meeting between Kissinger and Sadat, at the beginning of what turned out to be one of the most creative and productive periods of Middle East diplomacy in the whole history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It really began when Kissinger and Sadat met each other and decided that they had a common strategic vision and that they would work together. Sadat invited Kissinger, in effect, to be the peacemaker, and Kissinger agreed. This was a period that was to continue, with certain periods of hiatus but without any major breaks, right down into 1979, with the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

It might be good to take a minute to stand back and try to summarize, to see what concept Kissinger had in mind, the strategy that had clearly evolved out of the experience of the war and the immediate post-war period, and particularly his meeting with Sadat, because it did really guide the policy of the administration, for the rest of the administration, towards the Middle East.

First of all, there were certain things that were driving the U.S. here. It's important to remember that the U.S. resupply of Israel during the '73 War had triggered something that had been threatened for a long time-an Arab oil boycott against the United States and in this case against its friends as well, but particularly against the United States-and that was still in effect.

So there was a certain amount of domestic pressure to get the boycott lifted. It was beginning to pinch. We were having long lines at the gas stations; there was a question whether there were adequate reserves for our military forces and our allies. It had lots of implications. It could lead possibly even to rationing. So there was pressure to try to get the boycott lifted.

And clearly that was going to require demonstrating to the Arab world generally, but particularly to the oil-producers (and the key country there was Saudi Arabia, obviously), that the United States really was going to work for what the Arabs would see as a just peace.

And by "just peace" they obviously meant a peace which would result in Israel's returning territory occupied in the 1967 War and in some way, undefined, recognizing what the Arabs called the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.

So there was a certain incentive, in terms of U.S. interests and also U.S. domestic pressures, to try to relieve the pressures and to get the U.S. back into a posture where it would be seen as not allied with Israel against the Arabs. It was the perception that many Arabs had-rightly or wrongly.

There were also, of course, internal and built-in pressures on the Egyptians and the Israelis. The Egyptians still had their Third Army cut off by the Israelis at Suez. Kissinger had arranged for resupply, but the situation on the ground was still potentially unstable, which meant that the cease-fire could break down, you could have a renewal of hostilities. And neither Egypt nor Israel was ready for that. They both wanted to stabilize the situation. They'd had a very bloody war, and it was a very costly war for both of them. It was a particularly costly war psychologically for the Israelis. They had started off being on the defensive in this war and had suffered quite large losses of equipment and also of lives. So there was factors pressing all sides to try to work towards a solution.

The strategy that Kissinger succeeded in persuading Sadat to agree to and to follow was not to try to go for too much too fast. Don't go for a total settlement, all the territory at one time. Take it step by step, in order not to demand more of Israel, which was going to have to give up territory, than its own domestic political situation could handle. Start with limited steps, but limited steps that were seen as steps towards a larger goal.

And that led to the idea of working first for what Kissinger called the disengagement of forces-get the armies separated from each other. Which meant, in practice, the Israelis would have to pull back somewhat in Sinai, and therefore there would be some symbolic Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian territory along the Suez Canal. And presumably at some point the same formula would be applied on the other front of that war, which was the front in Syria.

So as this idea evolved, there were a number of elements to it. I think it might be useful to look at these because they tended to run through all of the diplomacy, not just at this stage, but through subsequent years.

First of all, establish the principle that Israel would withdraw from occupied territories, that these territories occupied in 1967 were not to remain permanently under Israeli control, that it had to find ways to return territories, with whatever security arrangements, and in some cases possibly adjustments in the frontiers, in the old armistice lines, could be negotiated. But the principle of returning occupied territories to the Arabs was part of the strategy from the beginning, with the goal of genuine peace between Israel and the Arabs, and not simply a reversion to the armistice agreement regime that had existed before.

Another element that was important, at this stage at least, from the American point of view, was to defer coming to grips with the Palestinian aspect of the problem. The Palestinian cause was very much a part of the Arab position. The Arab world, the Arab governments, including Egypt, said that any settlement had to meet the legitimate national rights, as they put it, of the Palestinian people, without being very precise about what that meant.

To the Palestinians, it meant getting their own state. It meant that the part of Palestine that had been under Jordanian administration, plus a small part in Gaza under Egyptian administration, which was occupied by the Israelis in '67, should from the Palestinian point of view, not simply go back to Egypt and Jordan, but should become the nucleus of a proper Palestinian state.

But the whole idea of even dealing with the Palestine Liberation Organization, the PLO, which asserted that it represented the Palestinians, and of their claiming the right to have a sovereign state alongside Israel, was so beyond the ability of almost everyone in Israel to comprehend or to talk about even, that had this become the first item on the agenda, it was almost certain any attempt at negotiations would have been stalled.

So Kissinger's strategy was: Let's deal first with the problems of the armies that were fighting each other and get them disengaged. That means Egypt and Israel in Sinai, it means at some point Syria and Israel in the Golan Heights, and at some point perhaps Jordan and Israel in some part of the West Bank, to establish that the principle of withdrawal applies on all these fronts. But defer the question of how you work the Palestinians as a separate political factor into this process. Deal with the Arab governments and defer coming to grips with the Palestinian issue.

Another element was to keep talking to the Soviets. This was important in not just the Middle East context, but in terms of the policy of the Nixon administration towards detente with the Soviets. Try to deal with the Soviets on regional conflicts as well as in bilateral relations. So try to keep the Soviets engaged in a discussion. Hold out to them the prospect that there was a role for them to play in the peace negotiating process, but at the same time keep them at arm's length. You exclude them from an actual participation in the process, at least in the initial stages. Kissinger felt that the Soviets would be the advocate of the Arab side, and the U.S. would end up being the advocate of the Israeli side, and the Soviets would complicate and would try to take advantage of the situation to strengthen their own position, or reestablish some of the positions they had lost in the area, particularly in Egypt. So his view was: You've got to deal with the Soviets, you've got to give them a sense that they're being consulted, but, in effect, neutralize them.

I don't want to say that this strategy was all written out on a piece of paper. It was more or less in Kissinger's mind. Those of us who were working very closely with him understood the elements of this, and I think in some cases we were his sounding boards, to see that he got all the facts. We were consulted (we being a very small inner circle; it was not a big operation). Kissinger, at least on the Middle East, was very much his own desk officer, as I think I said once before. But there were a few of us who were involved in the discussions of strategy, in helping develop the tactics to implement it, in drawing up papers, talking points, writing up the memoranda of conversations, doing all the things that had to be done, getting ready for encounters with the press at various places, and so forth.

That group basically consisted of Joe Sisco, who at that point was the Assistant Secretary for the Near East and South Asia. He only became Under Secretary later on. In the early stages of this period, 1973-early '74, Joe was still the Assistant Secretary, and I was his deputy. We also had Harold Saunders, who had been on Kissinger's staff at the NSC and had moved over to the State Department. Also, whoever the ambassador was, in the country where we were, would be involved in the talks in that country.

We began to become a team which understood and agreed to this general approach. None of us were saying this is a mistake, we ought to be going all the way for the brass ring, for a final settlement right now. We all agreed that the disengagement concept seemed to be the only practical way to make any progress at all, the step by step approach.

So the next step was: How do you get it started? Well, the idea had evolved, in talking with the Soviets in particular, but also with the Arabs and the Israelis, in Kissinger's talks with them, that probably you needed the structure or the umbrella of an international conference.

Kissinger got back from the China trip, which, incidentally, turned out to be a very relaxed time for me, because there wasn't all that much business to do. I got to do some sightseeing in China while Kissinger was busy dealing with Mao Zedong and Zhou En-lai. I also got to meet some of the Chinese leaders and go to the big banquet at the Hall of the Peoples and got a little bit of the flavor of U.S.-Chinese relations.

We made a quick stop on the way back. As I recall, we stopped in Tokyo overnight and had breakfast there, went on to South Korea, had lunch there, and then flew non-stop, with a refueling stop in Anchorage, Alaska back to Washington-all in one day and night-and immediately plunged into the preparations for the next round on the Middle East.

The next round on the Middle East at that point was to try to lay the groundwork for a possible international conference. This involved also enlisting the support of the Secretary General of the United Nations, who at that point was Kurt Waldheim, and keeping our European allies informed so they wouldn't feel they were being left out, talking to the Soviets. It was really keeping a lot of balls in the air at the same time.

It involved setting out on a trip to the Middle East, I guess sometime in the first half of December, I can't quite remember precisely, to get things in place. The goal was, if possible, on that trip, to assemble everybody in Geneva, Switzerland, for the convening of an international conference.

This involved not only talking to the parties that would be invited to the conference, who would be the immediate belligerents-the Syrians and the Israelis and the Egyptians and the Jordanians (although they had not been in the last war, they'd had territory occupied in the previous war, in '67, so they were clearly a direct part of the conflict)-plus the Soviets and the United States. The concept was that these would be the parties for the conference.

Initially there was some question about how to deal with the Syrians. Kissinger, all through this, was consulting, in addition to the parties directly involved, very closely with the Saudis, and particularly with the Saudi foreign minister, Omar Saqqaf, whom Kissinger felt had a lot to offer, and then, of course, with King Faysal himself. So there were lots of side trips to Saudi Arabia to consult with the Saudis and enlist their help. It was the Saudis, in particular Omar Saqqaf, who said, "You've got to develop a relationship with President Assad of Syria. The Syrians are key to this, and I (Saqqaf) will be glad to help clear the way." So the decision was finally made that we would ask if Kissinger could visit Damascus and have a meeting with President Assad, whom he had never met.

We had no relations to speak of, at all, at that point with the Syrians. As I recall, there had been no Americans in the Interests Section in Damascus, where the Italian government was representing our interests. Unlike Egypt, where we had a small number of Americans in the Interests Section under the Spanish flag, I don't believe at that stage we had any Americans under the Italian flag. It was just Italian staff, in both our embassy in Damascus and our consulate general in Aleppo, looking after our properties there is what it amounted to.

Kissinger was assured by the Saudis that he would be received and well received, and so the decision was made to go to Damascus. That was one of the first stops on this round of preparations for an international conference, and led to the first meeting between Henry Kissinger and Hafiz al-Assad.

I will never forget that first meeting. I think we had allowed maybe a three-hour stop in Damascus, including the transit time to the airport and back, in order to go on to Amman with King Hussein. King Hussein was giving a dinner that night for Kissinger in Amman.

Well, after the photo opportunities and the initial large gatherings, everybody was asked to leave the room, and Kissinger and Assad and two interpreters were closeted. The rest of us sat around downstairs in the presidential office building, not knowing what was going on, waiting for them to break up so we could go out to the airplane and go to Amman and have dinner with King Hussein.

And that meeting went on; my recollection is that it ended up going on for something like six hours. At one time the door opened, and everybody jumped up and we thought they were coming out. It was Kissinger going to the bathroom. Then they went in and the door closed again. And it went on and on. Finally Kissinger did come out and said, "We're now saying our farewells." We all trooped in and shook hands with the president and went off to the airport.

Well, it turned out that again the personal chemistry had worked pretty well. Kissinger had been fascinated by Assad, and Assad had been fascinated by Kissinger. As Kissinger described it to us, they spent a lot of time talking about global problems in the world, not all on the Middle East by any means. They spent a lot of time getting acquainted and having a kind of broad geopolitical discussion before getting down to the purpose of the visit, which was to see whether Syria was interested in taking part in an international peace conference. Kissinger came away with the impression that Assad was in favor of this idea.

Well, there were lots more of these quick trips, more visits to Damascus and Saudi Arabia and Cairo, and we went to Israel to talk to the Israelis, and went to Amman to talk to the Jordanians.

Incidentally, the dinner with the King that night finally got underway well after midnight, with everybody dead on their feet already.

But we began to put together a formula for convening the conference. Basically what this was, was to get the Secretary General of the United Nations to be the convener of the conference, to issue the letters of invitation, with the understanding that the United States and the Soviet Union would be the co-chairmen of the conference. We would have a convener and two co-chairs. Kissinger basically drafted the letter of invitation and the negotiating terms with the principal parties. But it was to be a letter from Waldheim to the parties, which basically would say: I understand that you have all agreed to come to the conference in Geneva to talk about a settlement based upon the principles of Security Council Resolution 242 of November 22, 1967 and 338 of October 22, 1973.

One issue that held it up initially was the question: Shouldn't the Palestinians be at this conference? The Egyptians, in particular, and the Syrians both raised this issue. And Kissinger said, "Well, that's going to complicate things very much if we bring them in at this stage. Can't we defer this until a later stage?"

So finally the language that was used in the letter (and this I do remember because we all worked very hard on it) was "the question of other participants from the Middle East area will be discussed during the first stage of the conference."

Now everybody knew that "other participants" referred to the Palestinians, and that this would be something that could be discussed after the conference was underway.

The final surprise, if you will, came when Kissinger thought he had everything pinned down, everybody had agreed to this letter, and he was just running around and making one more check before it was formally publicly issued as an invitation from Waldheim. He went to see Assad, and he had a long session with Assad. And Assad said, "Yes, this sounds fine to me. But there's only one thing wrong with it. It says Syria has agreed to go to this conference; I haven't agreed. I'm just agreeing with it as a procedure. This is fine. We, the Syrians, won't try to prevent the conference, but we don't plan to be there."

So we philosophically said, "Well, that's too bad, but we're going to send the invitation to the Syrians.

And so Waldheim sent the invitation to all the parties and said please convene in Geneva on such and such a date, which was very close to Christmas by then. The conference finally convened on the 21st of December.

One final question that had to be settled before the conference convened was the seating plan. How were you going to have the delegations seated? Remember, this was a time when the Israelis and Arabs had not talked to each other since the armistice agreements, except for the Egyptians and Israelis who had had some meetings among military officers to try to negotiate implementation of the six-point agreement that had stabilized the cease-fire. These meetings had taken place at kilometer 101 on the Cairo-Suez Road. In Geneva it turned out that nobody wanted to be seated next to the Israeli delegation.

Well, fortunately, as it turned out, the fact that the Syrians had decided to boycott the conference meant there was an empty place reserved for them at the table, and that gave a little bit of room to play with.

Finally, the solution to this, proposed by the Israelis and agreed to by Gromyko, was that the Soviets would sit next to the Israelis, and then there would be an empty table on the other side. Everybody was around what was, in effect, a seven-sided table, with Secretary General Waldheim, as the convener, in the chair, and with the Americans between the Egyptians and Jordanians. Basically what this did was to have the Israelis between the Russians and an empty place, which they took philosophically.

So the conference in fact opened, with opening statements by everybody and a statement by the Secretary General. And by prearrangement (and this, of course, is important to understand) it was agreed that after the opening statements, all the formalities, the conference would be declared in existence, and then it would be adjourned sine die, while the American Secretary of State was asked on behalf of the conference to try to negotiate the disengagement of forces between the parties, with the blessing of the conference, and then come back and report to a reconvened conference the results of his efforts. This is, of course, what Henry Kissinger wanted, which was to have the blessing of the conference and get the Soviets to be part of the formalities of it, but leave the substance to him. Of course, it was not just Henry, it was what Sadat wanted, too. So that's basically the way the process finally was launched.

Q: So the conference was convened, they met, they turned it over to Kissinger, and went home.

ATHERTON: We all made it home just in time for Christmas. We did all agree that we and the Soviets would leave somebody in Geneva to give an appearance of continuity, to be in touch.

Q: Answer the telephone.

ATHERTON: To answer the phone and to consult. And the lucky person who was chosen to do this for the United States was Michael Sterner, who therefore did not get home for Christmas, as I recall. Incidentally, another member of the American delegation that Kissinger had decided to add, for many good reasons, was the venerable Ellsworth Bunker. Ellsworth Bunker, Joe Sisco, and Larry Eagleburger, who was Kissinger's senior executive assistant, were there, and Hal Saunders and myself, and also Walter Stoessel, George Vest, and Peter Rodman. We had a pretty good-sized delegation. But we did manage, except for Sterner, to get home in time, just barely. I got home Christmas Eve, as I recall. After Christmas, the American and Soviet representatives in Geneva were Ambassador Bunker and Soviet Ambassador Vinogradov.

Christmas was a very short holiday that year. We had to immediately begin to carry out the Geneva Conference mandate, which was to negotiate an agreement on the disengagement of forces.

That led Kissinger to plan another trip to the Middle East. (I'm not going into all the details, obviously, because it would mean I'm writing a book, and it's all in Kissinger's book anyway.) But Kissinger did have lots of ground laying meetings with the foreign ministers of the various countries, who visited Washington, and worked out, one on one, as many of the details as he could ahead of time. In this case, he was dealing with the Israelis and the Egyptians, getting ready for an effort to work out an agreement to disengage the still-entangled forces of Egypt and Israel, along and on both side, as it turned out, of the Suez Canal at that point.

Finally, as much groundwork as possible had been laid in this way, so Kissinger assembled the team, and we all flew off to be in the area to talk to the Egyptians and to the Israelis about a negotiating effort to get an agreement on paper and signed by both parties that would be the first stage of this step-by-step process of disengaging the forces.

The trip turned out to be the first of what came to be known as Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy. It wasn't perceived as that at the beginning. When we first went, Kissinger had really not planned, I think, to stay out in the area as long as he did. He thought he could somehow get the process started, leave somebody behind, and the parties themselves would be encouraged to get together and work this out.

Sadat said to him, at the very first meeting, as I recall, "Henry, why don't you stay here, and you can do it. You can talk to the Israelis, and you can talk to us. And you'll find me very cooperative. I have confidence that you're the one who can negotiate this."

Suddenly Henry found himself committed to stay in the area, at least to make an all-out effort to get an Egyptian-Israeli agreement on the disengagement of forces. And that meant flying back and forth in the Secretary's airplane between Egypt and Israel-sometimes a couple of times a day-for negotiating sessions.

It was more complicated because this was wintertime, the season when Sadat went to Aswan. Sadat lived in various places. He had various guest houses or villas or palaces, which belonged to the government, that he used, and it was his custom always, in January, to spend that season in Aswan, in upper Egypt. So it wasn't just a case of going to Cairo, we had to fly all the way to Aswan, which was at the other end of Egypt, the southern end. So that became the anchor for one end of the shuttle, and the other end was the Israeli government in Jerusalem, which meant flying between Ben Gurion Airport and Aswan Airport. Sometimes, a couple of times a day.

It also meant having an operating staff in both places. The Egyptians made available to us a fairly modern hotel in Aswan, the New Cataract, next to the Old Cataract, which was a Victorian-era, grand hotel of the British era. The New Cataract was more modern, relatively speaking, and there we established an element of the Secretary's staff, the secretariat. Then we did the same thing at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. So there were certain people who stayed all the time in Aswan, and other people who stayed all the time in Jerusalem.

Then there were the rest of us, the negotiating team and the accompanying press corps, because Kissinger always took the correspondents accredited to the State Department (or at least as many as could fit into the airplane) along on these trips. So we had a traveling press corps, which consisted of some names that became pretty well known over time, such as Ted Koppel, who was part of that press corps, Dick Valeriani, who was then NBC News, and Marvin Kalb of CBS. I can't remember all of them. Marilyn Berger of the Washington Post, Jerry O'Leary of the then Washington Star, which subsequently became defunct, Bernie Gwertzman from The New York Times, and many more. It was a good group of very interesting people. A lot of the time was spent by Kissinger giving them backgrounders, trying to help them understand what we were doing, trying to get good press coverage.

The shuttle went on for the better part of two weeks, to my recollection, certainly at least ten days. And out of it emerged a document, with a lot of crises and moments of pique, particularly by Sadat's chief of staff, General Gamasy, who felt Sadat was giving too much away to get this agreement, but who loyally, in the end, stuck with him and supported the agreement.

This was basically a military settlement about how to separate the military forces of Egypt and Israel. Two lines of separation were negotiated, with the Egyptians remaining on the east bank of the Suez Canal so they could say they had not given up territory they had recovered, the Israelis moving a bit east but still controlling the strategic Sinai passes, and a kind of no-man's land in between where nobody could be.

The other part of the agreement, and this was very important, was a commitment that this was only a step on the road to a just and lasting peace, and that it would be followed by further efforts by the parties to resolve all the differences between them. So built into the agreement was language that provided that this was simply a step to get the military forces separated and stabilized and create a better atmosphere, a better situation on the ground, so that Egypt and Israel could then contemplate further steps towards an ultimate peace settlement, without any deadline as to when that final settlement was to take place. It was a statement of good intentions.

The next step was to work out the very complicated technical annexes to the disengagement agreement, which would provide precisely in what steps and by what timetable the two armies would pull back. This was obviously a job for military people, and so a military working group was established-a military working group of the Geneva Middle East Peace Conference. It was to meet in Geneva, chaired by a representative of the UN secretary general, with a delegation from Egypt and a delegation from Israel, and observer delegations from the United States and from the Soviet Union to sit in while the two military teams together worked out the technical annexes, which would become the orders for the military commanders who were pulling back their troops.

The provisions for monitoring and supervising were very important. There had to be someone that had the good faith of both parties, and that someone at this stage was the United Nations.

You remember that, in October, when the effort was being made to get the cease-fire in place, one of the issues was relieving the siege of the Egyptian Third Army. And to do that, a U.N. contingent was established, or reestablished really. It was the United Nations Emergency Force-UNEF-which had existed before the '67 War. It was, in effect, reestablished by vote of the Security Council, and staffed initially by troops that were pulled out of the U.N. forces in Cyprus, to get them there quickly. They were in the area. But the U.N. was given the job of overseeing the disengagement of forces and making sure that the parties abided by their commitment.

This was, after all, an agreement negotiated in Geneva under the auspices of the Secretary General's representative. He designated the chief of staff of the U.N. forces, who was, as I recall, a Finnish general named Silasvuo, who became, in effect, the chairman of this military working group. It was his job to get the two parties to work together.

And it worked pretty well. The Egyptians and the Israelis had no hangups about sitting down together and talking. So they spread their maps out on the table, and the Egyptian and Israeli generals and their staffs would go at it.

There was a Soviet and an American observer delegation there in Geneva. Hal Saunders was asked to be the head of the American observer delegation. After some initial hitches, it went pretty quickly; it didn't take more than a few days to get the technical annexes finished and signed and sealed.

Q: Were there any other European nations or any other nations at all at the conference and in the negotiations, or was it just the U.S., the Soviet Union, Egypt and...

ATHERTON: Well, the Syrians didn't show up, but the Syrians were carried as a participant in that there was always a place reserved for them at the table. And the Egyptians, Jordanians and Israelis. No one else. That was the conference. The western Europeans were not a party to that. They were kept briefed.

The Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement was completed. The parties were in the process of implementing it, which meant, in effect, pulling back their military forces. Eyes then turned to what the next step should be.

There was a general consensus. The Egyptians had very much urged that the next step ought to be a parallel disengagement agreement between Syria and Israel. There was general agreement, I think, that this would be the logical next step, since Syria had been the other belligerent in the '73 War, with Egypt, on the Arab side, and since the Israelis, as a result of that war, were in occupation of a larger part of the Golan Heights in Syria than they had occupied when that war began. They were, in fact, within artillery range of Damascus and very close to the main north-south highway that runs from Damascus down to Amman. It was not a situation that was tolerable in the long run, or stable, from the Syrian point of view. And the Israelis had indicated that they were prepared to try to negotiate some adjustments in this line, which would involve some disengagement of forces on the Golan Heights.

So the next month, really, was spent trying to lay the groundwork for this. Assad sent a representative to Washington, and we had discussions with him. He was a military officer, a general, who was one of Assad's trusted confidants. Then there were parallel talks in Washington with the Israelis. There were also constant conversations with the Egyptians to get their advice and support.

Now I have to mention that while all of this was going on, there were also some changes taking place in the Department during this period. Kissinger had decided he would ask Joe Sisco to become his new Under Secretary for Political Affairs, to move up from Assistant Secretary to Under Secretary; from, in effect, the sixth floor to the seventh floor of the State Department. And much to my surprise, I was told that Kissinger wanted me to replace Joe Sisco as the Assistant Secretary for NEA.

My first reaction was, "Heaven forbid!" This was now 1974, I had come back from my last overseas assignment at the end of 1965, so I'd been back in Washington almost nine years, and I'd been through a very strenuous series of assignments. They'd been rewarding and exciting, but I still felt that I was a Foreign Service officer, and that Foreign Service officers were supposed to spend a good bit of their time not in Washington but overseas. So I really had hoped that at this stage I would be released for an overseas assignment, and did not welcome the thought of suddenly getting locked into what would clearly be several more years' commitment. I'd been close enough to that job to know the demands and the strains and the responsibilities of it. And quite honestly I had some trepidations about moving up into that job at that stage, in terms of what it would demand of me, and some question as to whether I could follow in the footsteps of a Joe Sisco, a Luke Battle, a Ray Hare, and all the people who had been before me. As I recall, it was Larry Eagleburger whom Kissinger had delegated to tell me that I was his choice, and I asked Larry, "What would happen if I decline? What if I said I'd rather not take this on?"

And Larry said, "That's unheard of, but I will convey the reaction, that you have some questions about whether you want to take this on."

I put it in terms of being more than ready to go back overseas at this stage.

The next thing I knew, I was summoned to the deputy secretary's office, who was Kenneth Rush, and given a stern lecture about how when the Secretary wanted you to do a job, you stood up, saluted, and did the job. And no more of this nonsense about having a choice.

Well, I got the message. I obviously had been coming home and talking to Betty about it, and I said, "Well, what's this going to mean? It's going to mean another period of my traveling a lot, and when I'm not traveling, I'll be in the office late every night and most of the weekends. It's going to mean another sentence to a very limited family life, really." Fortunately, Betty had a job teaching, and she had her own professional activities to keep her busy. And the children had grown up; we didn't have any children at home with us. It turned out to have been a very rewarding assignment, and it led to some very good things, but at that stage all I could see was an endless Washington tour stretching out in front of me, with no prospect of getting back where I really wanted to be, which was back overseas.

"But, of course," I said to Betty, "I didn't say yes until I talked with you."

All this raised another question, a somewhat personally delicate question. I was not the senior deputy in NEA, I was the deputy to deal with the Near East side of the Bureau, and there was a senior deputy, and then there was another deputy handling South Asia. The senior deputy was Rodger Davies, who had been my boss. Suddenly I was being asked to become the Assistant Secretary, in effect, jumping over Rodger Davies's head. And I was very diffident about this. I had great respect for Rodger; I had always looked at him as kind of my leader and mentor.

So I said, "This would be an awkward situation for all of us, and I think Rodger more than richly deserves an ambassadorial appointment at this time." And, of course, it turned out to be a fateful one, because that's when he was chosen to become ambassador to Cyprus and had not been very long in Cyprus when he was assassinated. I've always had this sort of gnawing regret that somehow, though I don't feel guilty about it-it was part of a chain of events that I was involved in-that Rodger should have been the Assistant Secretary, and then he wouldn't have gone to Cyprus, and then he wouldn't have been assassinated. But, in the event, it worked out differently and was Rodger's great tragedy.

Maybe this is a good time to note that we were in the era of terrorist attacks against American diplomats. This was not the first. The first had been the taking of hostage and then the murder of Cleo Noel, who had been our ambassador in the Sudan, and George (Curt) Moore, who had been the chargï¿½ there. They were in the process of handing over the embassy, from Curt Moore to Cleo Noel, and at a Saudi Embassy reception when Palestinians took the embassy over, took them hostage, and, after some attempts to negotiate their release in return for Palestinians in prison in Jordan, killed them. That was Spring 1973, and then Rodger Davies, in 1974. And jumping ahead a bit with this little footnote (this big footnote is what it is), two years after that in June, 1976, our ambassador and his economic counselor in Beirut were assassinated, in the midst of the Lebanese civil war, Frank Meloy and Bob Waring. So it was a period when American diplomats were targeted specifically for political assassination. Earlier acts by the Palestinians, which were called terrorism, had not involved specific threats to diplomats in most cases, as I recall, and had not really targeted Americans. There had been hijackings of airplanes, but this was a new era. In that very short space-'73 to '76-we lost five excellent senior American diplomats, three of whom were ambassadors.

Anyway, to go back to the main story. The next goal, in the spring of 1974, was to try to negotiate a parallel disengagement agreement between Syria and Israel. Having laid as much groundwork as possible in talks in Washington, Kissinger again assembled his Middle East team, with a few new faces, and set off for the Middle East again. Thus began what clearly from the beginning was understood would have to be a shuttle-because if he'd done this for Sadat, he had to do the same for Assad-shuttling between Damascus and Ben Gurion airport, although this was not as long a flight as it had been to Aswan.

We had to go through the fiction each time of filing for clearance to fly into Cyprus airspace, since the Syrians would not give clearance for a direct flight between Syria and Israel. So we always filed with the Syrian flight control that we were going to Cyprus, and then after you were in the air, called in and said we're going to change our flight plan. It became a pattern. These shuttles frequently involved two and, I think in some cases, even three round trips a day.

That was the toughest of all the disengagement negotiations. Assad lived up to his reputation of being one of the toughest negotiators. Of course, on the other side we weren't dealing exactly with a pushover, because the prime minister of Israel was Golda Meir. So the job of trying to persuade Golda Meir and Hafiz al-Assad that they had an interest in compromising to sign an agreement with each other was almost a tour de force.

It was a challenge certainly, just to get them within the same negotiating ballpark. The Syrian's proposal was that the Israelis would pull back entirely from the Golan Heights, except for a few strongpoints at the very edge of the Golan Heights. The Israeli idea of withdrawal was maybe a hundred yards here and fifty yards there. That left a lot of territory to be negotiated.

And, of course, there were all the other things that had to go with it. How do you ensure compliance with an agreement if you reach one? You need, again, a peacekeeping mechanism of some kind, which didn't exist at that point, except for the old U.N. Truce Supervision Organization, which was an observer group, not a peacekeeping force.

So there were lots of items on the agenda, lots of drawing of lines on maps, and long, long sessions with Assad and Kissinger. Kissinger used to call them his "seminars." He would spend the first part of any meeting talking about what the U.S. was doing in Europe or what was happening in the Far East. Assad loved these geopolitical discussions, and I think probably never found too many people in Syria that he could have this kind of discussion with. So he obviously enjoyed the opportunity.

They were, of course, prolonged discussions because the substance was extensive, but also because they all had to be done through interpreters. With the Egyptians, it was all conducted in English, and with the Israelis, it was all conducted in English, but with the Syrians, it was conducted through interpreters. Assad had his interpreter.

Kissinger had as his interpreter probably the most accomplished and eloquent interpreter that I have ever seen, in Arabic and English, named Isa Sabbagh. Isa was a native-born Palestinian American citizen, best known as the voice of the Arab service of the BBC, broadcasting from London during World War II. He ended up as an American citizen and a Foreign Service officer with USIA, and had been assigned to our embassy in Saudi Arabia, where he did some interpreting for Kissinger with the Saudis and with King Faysal. Kissinger was so impressed, he took such a liking to him that he asked to have him assigned to be his interpreter for the negotiations with the Syrians.

And it was a marathon. Some of these sessions would go on for four, five, six, seven hours, with an occasional break but not much more.

It was a marathon for the note takers, too. All of us were pressed into service to write the memoranda of these conversations. No one could survive seven hours of note taking, so we used to have a team. We would take turns, I can remember, with Hal Saunders and also Bob McCloskey, who was press spokesman at the time, but also was pressed into service to be one of the note takers. We'd have a seven-hour meeting, and then we'd stay up most of the night dictating the memorandum of conversation, and then preparing the briefing papers for the next day's meetings and the contingency press briefing notes. There was very little sleep.

We stayed initially at the Syrian presidential guesthouse in Damascus and the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The presidential guesthouse left a lot to be desired, and the Syrians admitted that. I can remember Assad once saying, in a light moment, that he apologized that, unlike Egypt, Syria had not been a monarchy, and therefore did not have grand palaces to turn into guest houses for distinguished visitors and had to use ordinary apartments, whereas in Egypt we often had a palace at our disposal. The Syrian guest house wasn't the most comfortable quarters, rather crowded. Also, at one point during this stay, I think this fell partly in the fasting month of Ramadan, as I recall, and we were right next to a mosque, so there were constant calls to prayer and just when you had gotten to sleep, suddenly you'd be awakened by this loudspeaker outside the window.

One of the interesting relationships that developed during this period was between Kissinger with the Syrian Foreign Minister, a very bouncy, loyal Baath Party official named Abdul Halim Khaddam. He was very intelligent, very energetic, and very tough-minded, but with a good sense of humor under the surface. In one of the meetings when we were staying at the guesthouse, Kissinger said to Khaddam: "Tell me, what time does the mosque go off tonight? What time am I going to be awakened by the call to prayer?"

After the initial visit, the decision was made that, except occasionally for appearances sake, we would arrange always to end up in Jerusalem at night and therefore would sleep in our rooms at the King David Hotel. So we didn't really have very many nights in Damascus. Most of the nights were in Jerusalem, with trips back and forth during the day and sometimes also in the evening.

The flight was not very long, which had its advantages, but also its drawbacks, because usually we used the flight times to get some paperwork done, for example to draft arrival statements for the press. They were always waiting. The flight was certainly less than an hour, and therefore you worked like mad on the airplane. The secretaries were all typing during the takeoff and during the landing. You often didn't bother sitting down and fastening seatbelts or anything, you just worked right through the flight from the time they closed the door until the time you got off the airplane. Fortunately, there was good service on the plane, and the stewards usually had some food ready and a drink or two.

That shuttle, as it turned out, went on for more than thirty days. It was that tough a negotiation. It was perhaps thirty-two days, something like that, and I must admit that we all eventually lost track of the time or even the day of the week. I think there was only one day off in the whole time, when we actually had a free day in Jerusalem and the chance to sit around the swimming pool at the King David and have a day of relaxation. But other than that, we were literally shuttling all the time.

And one of the people who showed great stamina on this, considering his age, was Ellsworth Bunker, who was part of the team. He had had his 80th birthday on one of these shuttles, so he was in his 80s. And the other person who was getting on and showed remarkable stamina, whose name I should have mentioned earlier, was Carl Maw, who was Kissinger's legal advisor at the State Department. Carl showed remarkable stamina, too, all things considered. He had also been on the Egyptian-Israeli shuttle. But we all got used to having very few hours sleep, I have to admit. I used to admire Ellsworth Bunker, because he had a very great knack of being able to take catnaps while sitting bolt upright and looking as though he was awake and alert, in his dignified sort of New England way.

Q: It would be hard for him to stretch out, wouldn't it? Not while he flew.

ATHERTON: Yes, that was a problem. But anyway, it was a marathon. A couple of times we were drafting the communiques announcing the failure of the talks. We got to the point where we felt they were not going to make it.

The Syrians simply wanted more Israeli withdrawal than the Israelis were going to give. And the Syrians were very reluctant to make any kind of commitment to work for peace with Israel. They wanted to hedge all the commitments that they could and get all the territory back that they could. The Israelis, for their part, wanted to keep the strategic high points of the Golan Heights that they had captured during that war.

The final critical issue became getting the Israelis to pull out of the City of Qunaitra, which is the main city of the Golan Heights, which had remained in Syrian hands even after the '67 War and was overrun by the Israelis during the '73 War, and the Israelis were in occupation. The city had been deserted by its native population, but it became the symbol of Syrian success in getting some degree of Israeli withdrawal from Syrian territory. So the final negotiations had to do with getting out of Qunaitra while maintaining the strategic high points of hills just west of the city, which the Israelis insisted they would not give up because if they did, they would lose the observation and intelligence-collection advantage that being on these hilltops gave them. So literally the maps were out on the table, we were getting down to negotiating over a hundred yards here and twenty yards there, to determine how far back the Israelis would pull. There were also long discussions about where you would draw the withdrawal, the disengagement line, on the ridge of Mount Hermon, which the Israelis had occupied-very strategic territory, and Israel didn't want to give it up. Mount Hermon is the highest in the area, and the Syrian-Lebanese border runs along or near the ridge. So there were long, long discussions, detailed discussions about coordinates on the map. It got very technical. Writing those memoranda of conversations was a real challenge.

Q: Did Kissinger do all of this personally, or did you have sort of working groups who would come up with things that you would refer to Kissinger for his study?

ATHERTON: Kissinger did most of this personally. He would occasionally say to our side, "Why don't we let Joe Sisco and his people go out and talk to Khaddam and his people." But the really crunch sessions were Assad and Kissinger, with others gathered round. There were very few tete-a-tetes. In these stages there was usually a small support team on both sides.

I can remember one particular issue that Kissinger and Assad did turnover to Sisco and Khaddam to try to resolve-the question of who was going to monitor the disengagement lines and the no-man's land agreement. At issue there, as I recall, was that the Israelis said there had to be more than just an unarmed observer force, you had to have a peacekeeping force of some kind. And the Syrians did not want the concept of a force of foreign military on their territory, even though it would be wearing the U.N. blue berets. They didn't want anything called a peacekeeping force, they wanted an observer team.

Q: I thought the Israelis objected to this idea.

ATHERTON: Yes, but this was on Syrian territory, you see. It would be entirely on Syrian territory. Oh, no, the Israelis always objected to having any U.N. forces, even observer forces, on their territory. But all of this was going to be on Syrian territory. It was just a case of a little pullback on the Golan Heights. It was further complicated because the Israelis eventually were willing to pull back pretty much to where they had been when the '73 War began, but the Syrians said, "That's not enough. We've got to get back some of the territory that was occupied in '67." And that's where you got down to talking about a hundred yards here and fifty yards there, so that Assad could say that as a result of the war he had actually gotten back some of the territory they had lost in '67, not just what they had lost in '73.

This was a very late, almost all-night session, with Khaddam and Sisco and the rest of us trying to hammer out formulas that would go into a disengagement agreement, language that would be in the disengagement agreement, describing the peacekeeping arrangements, the monitoring arrangements. And it got down to the question of whether these were observers or forces.

And finally light dawned, Sisco's eyes lit up, and he said, "Why don't we call it the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force?" That would make a nice acronym, UNDOF.

Khaddam paused a minute and said, "Maybe. I will consult the president."

And that was how UNDOF was born, and it exists to this day. It is still there-United Nations Disengagement Observer Force.

But there were still a couple of places, mostly around Qunaitra, as I recall, and maybe a bit on Mount Hermon, where Assad wanted more and the Israelis had dug in. That required some last-minute, quick shuttles back and forth between Jerusalem and Damascus.

At one point Sisco was left in Damascus while Kissinger went to Jerusalem to try to make one final effort with Mrs. Meir. He came back and reported to Assad that he had not succeeded, and that we had better sit down and write a communique explaining that we were ending or suspending the talks, the negotiations, in effect saying we had failed while trying to put the best face on it. We actually worked up some language and started to walk out of the room to go out and announce this.

And just as Kissinger was about to walk out the door, Assad called him back and said, "Let's try one more time." Everything was a cliff-hanger with Assad.

So Kissinger went back in, and this time he was left alone with Assad and Isa Sabbagh, and Assad's interpreter. Maybe Sisco was there, I can't remember, but certainly I wasn't there, and I don't know if even Sisco was there. And at the end of it, Assad and Kissinger called the delegation back in and said, "We've come to an agreement."

Kissinger still had to report to Golda Meir, to persuade her that this was the best he could do-but he was pretty sure she would agree. I can't tell you now what all the details were, but it was not a big global issue. It was really moving a line a little bit on the map, and then maybe changing a few words to achieve a mutually acceptable agreement.

The net result was that the Israelis agreed and we had a deal, having really thought that it was all lost. We had had a delegation dinner at the American residence that day or maybe the day before, where we had all concluded that there was no way to close the gap, and thought that last meeting even confirmed this, when Assad said, "Let's try one more time."

So it was agreed, and signatures were done by getting a copy to Jerusalem and another copy to Damascus and then exchanging copies, with Carl Maw, the legal advisor, as I recall, shuttling them back and forth.

That left only, again, the question of working out the technical military annexes. And this meant again reconvening the military working group of the Geneva Conference, in Geneva, so the military group could sit down and work out a timetable for the actual pullback of the forces. And that required working with the U.N., because the U.N. was going to have to put people in there. First of all, they had to create this force, which meant a vote of the Security Council and finding countries who would provide contingents to staff it.

That military working group was not as congenial as the Egyptian-Israeli group. The Syrians would not talk directly to the Israelis. So while it was the same room in Geneva, and the same kind of setup and the same U.N. general in the chair, you had no informal meetings between the two parties. It was the Syrians on the one side of the room and the Israelis on the other.

Fortunately, the Syrians had asked the Egyptians to help them through this. In fact, as I recall, the talks technically took place under the auspices of the Egyptian-Israeli military working group. The Egyptians assigned the same general officer who had been the head of the Egyptian delegation to the working group following the Egyptian-Israel disengagement agreement, a very easygoing, intelligent general of Nubian origin, named Maghdub. He was jolly and very friendly, and he fraternized with the Israelis during the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. He would go across the room and have his coffee with the Israelis, and then walk to the other side of the room and have a cup of coffee with the Syrians. It was all happening in the same room, but they weren't talking to each other. When they were in formal session, the Syrian delegation addressed all of its comments to the chair, to the U.N. general. The Israelis would talk across the table to the Syrians, but the Syrians would never talk back to the Israelis. Once again, there was a Soviet and an American observer delegation, and this time I was asked to be the observer.

How we got there is perhaps worth mentioning briefly. The problem was to get as quickly as possible to Geneva with the maps, which were the maps that had been laboriously negotiated and initialed by both parties, and were to be the basis for the military working group developing the timetable for withdrawal and the steps of withdrawal.

Ellsworth Bunker was to go with me, because he was to be Kissinger's representative to deal with the senior Russians while we were in Geneva. The U.S. Air Force came to the rescue with an airplane, but it was not a nice modern jet, it was an old troop transport turboprop plane which flew into Damascus. Ellsworth Bunker and I rode from Damascus to Geneva in this noisy, slow, rumbling U.S. Air Force transport plane and sat through several days of the military group negotiations, which I have described. The only compensation was that Geneva has some very good restaurants, and Ellsworth Bunker knew them all. So we did manage to have at least some good evenings and meals and relaxing time while the negotiations were in recess.

It took several days to resolve the details, the U.N. took over its job of monitoring the withdrawals and getting the disengagement agreement in place. And it was back to Washington.

This all took most of the month of May, and it was now June of 1974, and already the next big event was in the planning stages. There was an understanding that once these disengagement agreements had been completed, the next major event would be a visit by President Nixon to the Middle East, to put his personal stamp and blessing on them, and help to underline the point that the United States was very engaged in the peace talks, that our intention was to stay with it, and that we saw this all as laying the groundwork for further progress towards what we hoped would become that elusive, comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement.

So the next big event was organizing, planning, and carrying out a visit by President Nixon to the key countries in the area. Which meant, in effect, going to Egypt, Israel, Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. It was quite an operation: A really enormous press entourage and all of the accoutrements of a presidential visit, including many, many, many long hours of planning in advance what we wanted to come out in the communiques, what we could put in them that would be seen by other countries as some kind of reward for all that they had done in helping get the peace process started.

This was June of 1974, and that, of course, was after the Watergate story had begun to dominate the domestic news in the United States. The Watergate events shadowed the trip all the way through. The President was clearly preoccupied by Watergate.

He did all the things that presidents have to do on trips like this, and he did them very well and very professionally. He went through all of his meetings and said all the right things, had his press encounters.

But when he was not in meetings or in briefing sessions or public events or banquets and all of the other paraphernalia that goes with leadership, he was closeted with his lawyers, working clearly on the Watergate news and how to deal with the crisis that he faced, that his presidency faced as a result of Watergate. On top of this, he was suffering from a flare-up of his phlebitis and was clearly in great physical discomfort much of the time.

But the public view of this visit was that it was a kind of triumphal tour, to cap a very triumphal period of American diplomacy. The President was welcomed as though he were the savior. At least in Egypt he got an enormous popular acclamation. There were the nearest Egyptian equivalents of ticker tape parades, I guess.

The highlight of this probably was a trip from Cairo to Alexandria on a train. The presidential car was, I would guess, something from the Victorian era, with an observation platform in the middle and then a compartment at each end. One compartment was for President Sadat and his party and the other for President Nixon and his party. It stopped in every major town along the way. That train trip would normally take three hours or so, maybe even a little more. My recollection is that it took five or six hours, because they had to stop and the presidents had to come out on the platform and wave and be seen and photographed at every stop along the way. There were Egyptians on all the rooftops.

From a security point of view it was a nightmare. There was no way you could have been absolutely sure that the presidents were secure from an assassin's bullet. But the Egyptians seemed confident that they had the situation under control, and our Secret Service people really couldn't refuse to let the President take part in all of these public events.

There were press all over the train. The official party had accommodations in one car, and we were all invited at various times to come up and have our tea or lunch or a meal with the presidents. But it was basically a media event. And I can remember the different TV crews coming through one at a time for their separate interviews with the presidents. I remember particularly the CBS crew coming through, with Walter Cronkite and his cameraman in the press car, tromping through our car to the presidential car, getting their interview and then tromping back. And John Chancellor was there for NBC. I forget who was ABC. It was quite a good show.

And in Alexandria there was a parade through the town. The President was put up at one of the major palaces of Alexandria. One of the palaces was made available for photographic sessions.

And then there had to be an exchange of visits between the President where he was staying and Sadat at his villa outside Alexandria, which was one of the homes he used. As I said earlier, he spent January in Aswan, but he always spent this summer period in Alexandria, so he was out in his summer villa. And all of the traveling back and forth was done by helicopter. President Nixon's own presidential helicopter had been brought to Alexandria on a U.S. Navy ship, which was moored offshore.

A Navy ship also brought all of the White House china, crested china, so that when the President gave his return banquet for President Sadat, in the Ras al-Jin Palace, which had been King Farouk's palace at one time, right on the harbor, the table would be set with White House china. And all the food had been brought from the States and the Navy stored it in their freezers. The serving personnel all came from the White House. So it was transporting a bit of the White House to Alexandria for the dinner for Sadat.

Sadat was very taken with the President's helicopter, so the President gave it to him. Of course, that having been done, Kissinger was given the job (which he then gave to some of us) to figure out how to make this legal. Who's going to pay for it? Against what appropriation will this be written off?

We all stayed at Ras al-Jin Palace. The President and Kissinger had pretty grand quarters. Brent Scowcroft, who was then the national security advisor, did pretty well. Sisco didn't do badly. But the rest of us were put in rooms that must have been the servants' quarters at one time. They were all that was left, down on the ground floor, with great big cockroaches. I remember the cockroaches.

We had to produce a communique with some goodies in it. One of the things that came back to haunt us was language that we would cooperate with Egypt, and we had similar language in the agreement with Israel, in developing their nuclear power capability.

After the visit of President Nixon to the Middle East, the next step in Middle East diplomacy was to try to build on the two disengagement agreements. And the first step was to see whether or not it would be possible to have a third agreement which would involve Jordan. The idea was to try to get some at least symbolic withdrawal of Israel from some of the territory that it had occupied on the West Bank in 1967, so that Jordan could be seen to be a party to this step-by-step peace process that Kissinger was pursuing. And that became the focal point of another Kissinger trip to the area.

The groundwork in a way had been laid during the Nixon trip, so Kissinger was going to follow it up by attempting to devise a formula that clearly would not be a very far-reaching disengagement, but would at least give some symbolic withdrawal of Israel as a first step towards engaging Jordan and Israel in a more far-reaching substantive peace process.

It was a tough one, because the Israeli body politic was much more divided over the question of whether to give back any of the West Bank (any of Palestine, in effect) to an Arab authority, than it was over Sinai, where there was a general acceptance that if there was a peace settlement, they would be withdrawal from Sinai. And even with respect to the Syrian Golan Heights, while most Israelis had at least some trouble contemplating letting the Syrians reoccupy that high ground overlooking Israel, there isn't the same emotional and religious and ideological attachment. It was never part of the history of Israel in the sense that Palestine, including the West Bank and Gaza, was.

So this was a very tough one for a new Israeli government under Yitzhak Rabin, who had just recently taken over from Golda Meir and was trying to broaden the base of his government. Clearly, if he had agreed to any symbolic relinquishing of any Israeli positions, he would have brought down the wrath not only of the Herut Party, Prime Minister Begin's party, which later became the basis of the Likud coalition, but also of the religious parties, some of the religious parties, who felt this was all part of the historic land of Israel. So Rabin asked Kissinger not to press Israel on this.

As for the Jordanians, they had trouble agreeing to something that would give them less than Sadat had gotten and less than Assad had gotten. And yet it was quite clear that they would not get the same kind of a pullback all along the line. Because of the Israeli concern about maintaining security positions right up to the Jordan River, it would have been what Kissinger at one time described as "sausages," little sausage-shaped pieces of territory that might have been turned back to Jordanian authorities.

In any event, it proved impossible to get started. Kissinger at one time spoke to the Israelis about the danger of not agreeing to some disengagement between Israel and Jordan that would engage Hussein in the process and in a way legitimize Hussein as the negotiator for this territory, which had been under Jordanian control before 1967 but which, of course, the Palestinians saw as their homeland. Kissinger said to the Israelis, "If you don't agree to give Hussein something here, in the end you will find yourself dealing not with Hussein but the PLO in negotiating over this territory. And, of course, he was prophetic, because this was, as I recall, the summer of 1974, and by the end of 1974 there was the summit conference of Arab rulers in Rabat where they said that they would recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate spokesman for Palestinians, in effect, delegitimizing Hussein as a negotiator for Palestinian territory.

1974 brought the end of the planning of the Nixon presidency, of course, the denouement of the Watergate crisis, and the assumption of office by Gerald Ford, who pretty much left the running of the Middle East policy (I don't know about other aspects of foreign policy) to Henry Kissinger. But Ford informed himself about it and became engaged when necessary.

A sort of symbolic change in atmosphere after Ford became president took place with a visit of King Hussein of Jordan to the White House as the guest of President Ford. It was a full-fledged state visit, as I recall, a very fancy affair. There was dancing until late at night in the White House, with everybody in very good spirits, and a sense of the change of atmosphere from the last months of the Nixon administration, which had been a very depressing time. It was a happy time, and it was kind of a good omen, if you will, for Ford's hopefully playing a role in the Middle East peace process. He and Hussein hit it off very well.

This was followed up by a meeting that Ford had with Sadat on a trip to Europe. This was their first really get-acquainted meeting, a very good, relaxed meeting with Sadat in Salzburg, Austria. The Austrians made available the facilities (which Salzburg has lots of), palaces and all that. And that was, again, quite a nice event. There was a lot of talk with Sadat about the need to go for another step in the peace process, and that led to an attempt to negotiate a further withdrawal in Sinai, what would eventually become known as Sinai II.

Q: I take it that you were with Kissinger on all of these efforts, in Salzburg and so forth.

ATHERTON: I was there on all of these. Yes, I was there, part of the Kissinger team on all of these. I had, by that time, become assistant secretary. I had been moved up from deputy assistant secretary at NEA to assistant secretary, because Kissinger moved Joe Sisco up to become his Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and Joe had been the assistant secretary. I think I may have mentioned earlier that I wanted to go overseas. I had been in Washington, by then, I thought, already longer than I had ever thought a Foreign Service officer should have without an overseas assignment, despite all the travel. Betty, my wife, always said I was really overseas, I just lived in Washington. I came back to get my laundry done. But in any case, as of April of '74, I had become the assistant secretary.

So the groundwork was laid, and attempts were made to have another shuttle. Kissinger again went out and was shuttling between Israel and Egypt. My recollection is that on this occasion it was not quite as arduous, because Sadat was either in Alexandria or Cairo, but he was not in Aswan, where he was during the first Sinai settlement, so we didn't have that far to fly on these various trips.

Originally, Sadat's objective was to see the Israelis make a major withdrawal, back all the way to a line that would start on the Mediterranean coast at al-Arish and run down east in Sinai, leaving Israel just with a foothold, for security purposes, in the eastern part of Sinai. And in return for that he was prepared to go further towards an end to belligerency, still not talking about a total peace settlement. That, he said, would come over time. But at least there would be another major step towards peace.

The Israelis were not prepared to consider that major a withdrawal. They were prepared to withdraw to the vicinity of the key strategic passes in Sinai, the Gidi Pass and the Mitla Pass, which had played such a role in both the '67 and the '73 wars. They were part of their strategic route for armies going across Sinai in either direction, particularly tanks.

Sadat finally said, "Well, at the very minimum, I must be able to say that I have recovered control of the Sinai passes in any second disengagement. And in return for that, among other things, I can make a commitment to get the Suez Canal open again and functioning, and lots of good things will flow from this. And I can certainly make a commitment that we will work for further peace agreements between us. But I can't agree with anything if I can't tell my people that we have recovered the passes in Sinai, which is the only place where we could ever defend ourselves if the Israelis come back again and try to recapture the canal."

So that became an impasse, in effect, and these talks finally had to be broken off. Kissinger had a very dramatic meeting with the Israelis, in Jerusalem, in which he said that you're haggling over a few hundred yards here and you're just missing a chance of peace. It was really quite an emotional and rather strong lecture he gave the Israelis. But the net result was that the Israeli government did not budge on its need to retain military control of the western approaches to these passes. So the talks had to be suspended. They were left there, with a certain amount of groundwork done but no further progress, until later that year.

Later in '75, there was an occasion to reopen the talks with Sadat at a very high level. King Faysal of Saudi Arabia had been killed by a deranged relative. There was a major funeral, and President Ford sent Vice President Nelson Rockefeller to be his representative at the funeral. I was sent along to be Rockefeller's political advisor for this event. He had been briefed ahead of time by Henry Kissinger about the issues, the status of the negotiations, and what the options were. He was well briefed.

As always happens at state funerals, there were bilateral talks between various combinations of senior people, and among one of those was a meeting between Rockefeller and Sadat, who was also at the funeral. In that talk, Sadat, in effect, said: Tell my friend Henry that I want to try again to have this agreement in Sinai; I think it should be possible. And he hinted at some possible formulas that might work.

So out of this meeting between Rockefeller and Sadat came a decision by the President and Kissinger to make another attempt for a second Sinai agreement. And that led to another shuttle.

By this time I think it was August of '75. That was a long one. Fortunately, since Kissinger always took Mrs. Kissinger with him on these trips, one of the other senior members of these delegations could bring his spouse, and it was my turn, so Betty went with me on this trip.

Well, it turned out that, in effect, there were two negotiations. They began actually in Washington and then continued in Jerusalem. Since it was summer, Sadat was staying at his summer place at Alexandria, so the two terminals of the shuttle were Ben-Gurion Airport in Israel and a military airport in Alexandria. So Kissinger would see Sadat there, and Sadat made available to the Kissinger party the very grand old Ras al-Jin Palace, which was originally built by Mohammed Ali in the 18th century and whose last resident was King Farouk.

It soon became apparent that there were going to be, in effect, two negotiations. One would be the Egyptian-Israeli negotiation on the terms for a second disengagement and the commitments that would be involved, by Sadat to Israeli security and further steps towards peace, and by Israel to further withdrawal. And it boiled down ultimately to this tough question: Where do you draw the line in the passes? It involved some very clever legerdemain and splitting hairs, if you will. The end result was that Sadat was able to say the Israelis were out of the passes, and the Israelis were able to say that they had still maintained strategic positions. It was a crazy kind of splitting of hairs, but it took.

Now the other negotiation was U.S.-Israeli. The Israelis were asking for certain commitments from the United States if they were to take what they saw as a major security risk in giving up land that they had won in battle and held since '67. It was still not going to be peace, but no longer war. There wouldn't be a peace treaty, although Sadat reiterated that his intention ultimately was to move to a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement, but in steps.

So we negotiated a memorandum of understanding, in fact two memoranda with the Israelis.

One had to do with further supplies of military equipment to Israel, some sophisticated equipment to help them compensate for the loss of the strategic buffer between Egypt and Israel in Sinai.

The other dealt with a number of political issues. There were lots of details to this, and I won't even try to remember them all, but the one that really came back to haunt us was the Israeli insistence that there be a commitment that the United States would prevent admission of the PLO to the negotiations, when we got back to Geneva to negotiate for an overall peace.

And that was the origin of this bilateral agreement between Israel and the United States, after a lot of haggling. The Israelis wanting us to make a pact that we would have no contact with the PLO. Kissinger kept saying, "I can't tie our hands that much. There may come a time when it's in our interests to have contact with the PLO."

The language finally agreed on was that the United States would not negotiate with nor recognize the PLO (which did not include Kissinger's interpretation of dialogue or contacts) until such time as the PLO accepted Security Council Resolution 242 and Israel's right to exist. That was basically the set of conditions. This later became reinterpreted into a much more rigid prohibition on having anything at all to do with the PLO. But at that time Kissinger argued that we would maintain some freedom of action on this.

Now the context of this, clearly, was with a view towards the resumption at some point of the Middle East peace conference. Remember when we talked about that earlier, the question of possible Palestinian participation in the peace conference at some future date had not been ruled out, it had simply been deferred. In order to get the conference started, the language was that the question of future participants will be dealt with at a later stage of the conference, "future participants" meaning unmistakably the Palestinians and who would represent them. The Israelis were adamant that the PLO was not an acceptable negotiating partner. They believed then and still think today that its ultimate goal was the destruction of Israel and the recovery of all of Palestine, and that they should not give it any legitimacy. They certainly did not want to then. And remember this was a Labor government. The Likud government of today would be even stricter about dealing with the PLO. Some Labor people today have come around to say that there must be acceptance of the PLO as the representative. But in those days the Labor government insisted on no PLO.

So the language was finally agreed, but it was clearly understood that it was in the context of attempts to reconvene Geneva, and that we would not make any deals behind Israel's back for Palestinian representation.

So later, when this was used as a basis for preventing any contact between the United States and the PLO, by congressional pressures, by Israeli pressures, for other reasons, it was really out of context, and it became a problem for us in trying to retain some flexibility in the negotiations.

But at the time, Kissinger's judgment was that this was an essential commitment we'd have to make to the Israelis to get their signature on the Sinai II Agreement. They were, in effect, saying we can't sign this agreement with Egypt unless we get these side commitments from the United States.

There were lots of other political and military supply commitments. There was a provision about Israel's oil supplies, because one of the things it was going to have to do, when it made this second withdrawal, was to give up oil fields that it had developed during the long period of occupation in the Gulf of Suez, and in parts of the Sinai where it had exploited existing oil fields. These had become an important part of its oil supply, and it was going to have to give up some of them. So it wanted some assurance that the United States would be there to help it.

There were lots of bilateral commitments. And they all ended up in a marathon negotiation in Jerusalem to get the final bilateral agreement negotiated. The Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement had pretty well been completed, but we were still putting the finishing touches on this bilateral agreement before the Israelis would put a signature to the other.

I'll never forget that night. It was, as I recall, August 31, and we literally stayed up all night negotiating, with Kissinger coming in and out. I had been his designee to do the basic negotiating of this bilateral agreement while he was working on the Egyptian-Israeli agreement, but he of course made the final decisions.

I should say, incidentally, that Betty and I spent most of that shuttle in Jerusalem. We didn't go back and forth on every trip, because we were working with our counterparts while Kissinger was off in Alexandria working with the Egyptians. Hal Saunders, who was with us, was at the other end, working on the Egyptian-Israeli agreement.

Q: Who was making the decisions for us at that time?

ATHERTON: Oh, Kissinger was really making the decisions. He would make regular reports to the President. And remember that Brent Scowcroft was the National Security Advisor. Brent had been Kissinger's deputy. So it was Kissinger, Scowcroft, and the President. But the President in most cases had given Kissinger a great deal of freedom of action. He had made a lot of decisions without having to refer them back to the President. He'd simply report where we were, and what we were doing, and what he thought we ought to be doing next. He was making the decisions, and anything that I did with the Israelis on this bilateral memorandum was all ad referendum, obviously. He would come back to Jerusalem from Alexandria, be brought up to date on where we were, and would make the decisions about what we would try to accomplish the next day while he was gone.

But we did literally stay up all night getting this document concluded. I managed to get maybe an hour's sleep-by then the sun was up-and then the group was reconvened for a signing ceremony with the Israelis.

As soon as that was finished, off we went down to the airport to get on the airplane and fly off to Alexandria. Well, by the time we got to Alexandria, it was already late in the evening. We were helicoptered to Sadat's villa, which was set up with a big table and a green covering out on the lawn, and that's where the signing took place. But Sadat was not going to sign this; the prime minister was going to sign it, with Sadat there to bless the whole thing.

Finally, by then it was late, late, late in the evening, and all of us were zombies from jet lag and lack of sleep, the agreements were signed, the press was called in, the pictures were taken, and we all thought, "At last, we can go back to the Ras al-Jin Palace and fall into bed."

And then Sadat said, "Now we're going to have the dinner."

We were all invited into the house, and there was an elaborate spread, with giant Mediterranean shrimps and fish, enough, you know, to feed an army. It was mango season, lots of fresh mangoes. And we literally had to stay and go through this dinner. The ladies joined us: Mrs. Sadat was there, Betty was there, and Mrs. Kissinger, as I recall.

We finally got back to the palace and into our rooms. It had to be after 1:00 a.m. and I was just about to get undressed and go to bed when the knock on the door came. It was one of Kissinger's staff, and he said, "Kissinger wants to have a quick staff meeting about tomorrow." The next day we were to fly to Syria and brief the Syrians, the next morning early. So we all gathered, and fortunately Kissinger had realized by then that we all were at the point of exhaustion. What we did instead was send messages to all the future stops just saying we were going to be delayed, that we're not going to leave as early as we had planned. So we did not have to get up quite at the crack of dawn. Finally got to bed and got a little bit of sleep, and then resumed the trip.

There was one other aspect to that agreement which was important: the question of who was going to oversee the security arrangements in Sinai, who was going to monitor to make sure that, in effect, there was no cheating by either the Israelis or the Egyptians on the areas that were to be demilitarized.

Sadat had said, "I think that we ought to ask the United States to do this." And the Israelis felt they had more confidence in us than they did in United Nations forces.

So in the end, Kissinger agreed, and that was the origin of what became known as the Sinai Field Mission, which was an American mission, headed by a Foreign Service officer, Ray Hunt.

He wasn't the first, though, there was a retired Marine officer, who had joined the Foreign Service. I forget his name now, a very energetic man. He initially set up the Sinai Field Mission and put in quite elaborate monitoring equipment. We also helped the Egyptians equip their monitoring stations with electronic devices. The Israelis had their own. They had retained one very strategic location for their monitoring station, which could still look way down into the interior of Egypt electronically.

But that was one of the results of the agreement, establishing the Sinai Field Mission, manned by U.S. civilian Foreign Service personnel, plus a contractor with some technicians, who were brought to help do the housekeeping side of the mission.

It was built in the middle of the desert, out of prefab modules from a Holiday Inn, I think it was, and the Department had bought them on the cheap. So we had, in effect, a little Holiday Inn out in the middle of the Sinai desert between the Egyptian and Israeli lines.

Well, now we were pretty much towards the end of the administration. It was the end of '75, and I think there was a feeling that it was not desirable to press for any further agreements before the 1976 elections.

This had been, from the Israeli point of view, quite stressful and in some ways traumatic politically and psychologically to have to give up territory that they had occupied for all those years. They had put enormous resources in the Sinai and built an elaborate defense system, and they felt that they were making a major concession, taking a major security risk. They hadn't yet come to believe that Sadat really was serious about ultimately making peace with them. So the feeling in Washington was that it was probably premature to press for any further agreements at this point.

Attention turned to other areas. In my area of responsibility, there was some attention given to the North African states, to the Arab states that weren't directly involved in the Middle East conflict, and to Iran and South Asia. Joint economic commissions were established with Tunisia, Morocco, Iran. Quite a lot of traveling in those days. I remember trips to Afghanistan, to Iran, to India and Pakistan, to North Africa. Some were with Kissinger. On others, I was sent out to head delegations to these economic commissions. So even though we weren't doing any more Arab-Israeli shuttling, there was still a great deal of traveling involved during that period.

The main focus for the balance of the Ford administration and the Kissinger era was not on the Arab-Israeli conflict, except to keep in touch with the parties there and make sure that nothing was coming unraveled. Kissinger would say to them that after elections, with the continuation of a Republican administration he would continue as Secretary of State and could see that the step-by-step process will slowly have to merge into a return to a search for a comprehensive peace. We would build on what we had done. There was some talk about reconvening the Geneva Middle East Peace Conference at some point, which had been only convened for three days in 1973. Everything that had been done since then had been done under the umbrella of the Geneva Conference, and all of the disengagement agreements referred to the need to have a reconvening of this conference at some point. And Kissinger was very careful to keep reporting to his co-chairman, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko, about the progress that he had made.

The Soviets, incidentally, had become increasingly disenchanted about Kissinger's seriousness when he said he'd want to go back to cooperation with them on the Middle East, in Geneva, and yet the diplomacy shut them out. If I could back up a bit, a sign that they finally had become totally disillusioned came at the conclusion of the Sinai II Agreement in September, 1975. There was the usual meeting in Geneva of the military working group to put the final touches on the military annexes of the agreement. The military had to draw their lines on the map and work out the timetable for the steps of withdrawal and then the monitoring of the steps-a fairly technical agreement. My job was to be the American observer at this military working group meeting in September of '75.

I think I mentioned this was one trip where Betty was with me, so we did this together. I remember we were stopping in London, and Kissinger and his party were on their way back to the States. Betty and I were given a small Air Force executive jet, and we flew off to Geneva carrying the initialed maps of this agreement, which had to be the basis for the whole working group to carry out its work.

I'm filling in a little chink; this is a flashback. I've moved beyond this in the narrative, but I thought it was important to recall that the working group did meet again. It was the third time, after the third disengagement agreement in 1975, having met after the first Egyptian-Israeli and after the Syrian-Israeli agreements in 1974. The difference this time was that the Soviets turned down the invitation to send an observer as co-chair of the Geneva Conference. They did not show up as observers, because they felt they had been deceived and excluded by Kissinger, and they weren't about to be a party to it.

OK, back to '76 and the end of the Ford administration. The election of '76 did not return Ford to the presidency, but Jimmy Carter. And therefore there was a new team: Cyrus Vance as his Secretary of State and Brzezinski as National Security Advisor.

Carter, in the first weeks of his administration, made clear that there were several areas that he was going to focus on in foreign policy, and one of them was going to be the Middle East. In other words, it would be very high on the agenda. And the objective stated by the administration was to reconvene the Geneva Middle East Peace Conference. That became the initial objective in the Middle East diplomacy of the Carter administration.

Very, very early on, Carter invited the principal leaders of the countries that would presumably go to Geneva to come to Washington to get acquainted. At this time, it was still the Labor government in Israel. There was a meeting with Prime Minister Rabin. There was a meeting with Sadat, who also came to Washington. And I might say, incidentally, that the chemistry from the beginning was very good between Carter and Sadat. They took to each other very quickly.

Not so good with Rabin, who was put off because Carter had made a statement earlier, I think it was during the arrival statement or at some point to the press about Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories. And Rabin thought this was going to be difficult for him to handle with his political opposition back home. So there was a bit of a cloud over the first meeting between Rabin and Carter. King Hussein came, and there were meetings with the Jordanians. Carter was carrying out his commitment to discuss a lasting peace.

And it was also during this period that Carter made a statement about the Palestinians which got the Israelis upset. He spoke of the right of the Palestinians to their homeland. He didn't say a state, but he said a homeland. And that was very close to saying a state. In fact, it was so close that the Israelis reacted rather strongly and adversely to Carter going public with this. But it was there, it was on the record. It came, by the way, as a total surprise to those of us in the Department who were supposed to be preparing the briefing papers for Carter. It was not something we had put into any of his briefing papers. I think the record will show that probably it was something that Brzezinski had suggested, but that's documented somewhere in Carter's memoirs. My recollection is that's the way it happened.

Once the initial contacts had been established, then the next step was to send the Secretary of State on a trip to the Middle East to begin to lay a basis for getting Geneva reconvened. And so Secretary Vance was off on a trip.

I should add, incidentally, that I had been told I would be continuing under Carter as assistant secretary. They weren't going to make a change in the Middle East team. In fact, it became in some ways even more of a team. One new person was William Quandt. Bill Quandt had been in Washington before, earlier in the Republican administration, but he had not been there towards the end. He was then brought back as the Middle East advisor to Brzezinski on the National Security Council. Vance, from the beginning, tried to have a good working relationship with Zbig, and so we always took, on any Middle East trip, and included in any Middle East planning discussions that we had in Washington, Bill Quandt from the NSC, as well as Hal Saunders and myself. And often Tony Lake, who was then the chairman of the Policy Planning Council, very close to Vance. This was the group of people that drafted and helped put together the briefing papers and policy papers and planning papers and press statements and all of the other things that go along on one of these trips.

I think the first trip took place in February or March, very soon after inauguration. One of the stops on that first trip was London. The Israeli foreign minister, Yigal Allon, happened to be in London, so there was a luncheon meeting between Vance and Allon at the American Embassy, as I recall. It was just before the parliamentary elections in Israel, and all the opinion polls indicated that Labor would probably lose some seats to Begin and his Likud Party. Allon was saying confidently that he thought Labor would have a slimmer majority, but expected to form the government.

Well, of course, the election in early '77 in Israel was a total upset. The Labor Party lost for the first time in the history of the state. Begin and his allies took over the government, and we suddenly had the man who was the perennial leader of the opposition, Menachem Begin, the heir to the revisionist tradition in the Zionist movement, which meant basically those who said Israel should not accept partition of Palestine, and should insist that all of Palestine has to be part of Israel, all of Palestine west of the Jordan River.

So at the very time when the Carter administration was trying to get peace talks going in Geneva which would be focused not only on Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan, but also on what we do about the Palestinian question, you had coming to power in Israel a government whose ideological position was not to give up any West Bank territory to anybody. Now it wasn't all that clear at the time that this was going to be a hard, bedrock position, but certainly it was the position on the record of Menachem Begin.

When Begin came to power, the next Carter meeting clearly had to be with him. But I'm getting a little ahead, because during the first trip that Vance took, Rabin and Labor were still in office. Vance touched all the usual bases, including, I believe, Syria on this trip.

I should say, incidentally, that the one leader who did not come to Washington, but who would have to be involved in this, was President Assad of Syria. And because Carter thought it important that he meet Assad as well, it was arranged, on one of his European trips for other purposes, to have the meeting with Assad in Geneva.

Q: Was he simply not invited to...

ATHERTON: Relations were not very good between the United States and Syria, and I don't honestly recall if there was ever any serious thought given on either side of having Assad come to Washington. Assad was seen somewhat as a client of the Soviet Union.

But Carter felt it important to meet him, and so the meeting actually took place in Geneva. It was rather a good meeting, although it turned out later that there were misperceptions on both sides.

But Vance did do the rounds. When the government in Israel was still Labor, one of the things he was busy doing was trying to put together a formula which all parties would accept as a basis for participation in Geneva. And this meant that you had to deal with the question, which had been deferred before, of Palestinian representation at the Geneva Conference. Who was going to represent the Palestinians at the negotiations? In addition, Carter had made very clear that he felt that if you were going to ask Israel to withdraw from occupied territories, then the Arabs had to make a commitment to establish full peaceful relations with Israel and not just an end to belligerency.

There were two trips by Vance to the Middle East in the early months of the administration. In addition to pursuing the question of Palestinian representation and the question of the Arab commitments to peace, there were other issues that had to be dealt with. One of them was related to the question of how do you involve the Palestinians, since they do not have a state, do not have a government. What do you do about the West Bank, which Israel clearly was going to fight very hard not to give up. The thought of going directly from a situation where Israel was in possession of the West Bank to one in which it turns it back to Arab rule, was going to be very difficult both from a security point of view and given Begin's ideological position.

So the concept began to evolve very early on in these Middle East talks, in the spring and summer of 1977, within the American delegation, that you might think in terms of transitional arrangements. You wouldn't go directly from total occupation to total Israeli relinquishment of territory in Palestine to an Arab authority, but would perhaps have to have some kind of interim of transitional arrangement which would leave Israel there for security purposes, have perhaps a role for the U.N., turnover some of the responsibilities of the military government to Palestinian representatives.

These were still ideas that were evolving and a little amorphous, but they came out of discussions with some of the Arab leaders and among ourselves. And, of course, one will recognize that these later became the essence of the Camp David Agreements. The second part of Camp David, more than a year later, was based upon this concept of an interim or transitional arrangement for the West Bank and Gaza. So those ideas were already being kicked around in the summer of 1977.

No agreements had been reached. There was a major effort by Carter and Vance in the summer of '77 to get out of the bilateral commitment to the Israelis, about not recognizing or negotiating with the PLO, which had been entered into by Kissinger as part of the Sinai II Agreement. Carter and Vance (in fact, it was rather ironic) had taken a much more strict constructionist interpretation of that commitment than Kissinger himself had had when he negotiated that agreement. They in effect said that it meant we will have no contact with the PLO until it accepts Israel's right to exist and Resolution 242, while Kissinger had not ruled out such contact if it would serve U.S. policy objectives.

Efforts were made through third parties, through the Egyptians and through the Saudis, to try to persuade the PLO to state in some authoritative way its acceptance of 242 and its recognition of Israel's right to exist. Various formulas to do this were conveyed, and we heard later that they were, in fact, debated within the PLO executive committee, that Arafat as head of the PLO had wanted to agree but had been outvoted by a majority of the committee who were not prepared to take this step.

Q: So both Saudi Arabia and Egypt did take that proposal to the PLO and support the proposal...?

ATHERTON: Yes. There was a little twist added to it by Vance and Carter to try to make it more palatable to the PLO. The PLO's argument was that Resolution 242 never mentioned Palestinian political rights, it spoke of them only as refugees.

And so it was suggested that if they would go on record as accepting Resolution 242 as a basis for a peace settlement and acknowledge that this meant acceptance of Israel's right to exist, they could if they wanted add that they did this even though they considered 242 incomplete because it only referred to the Palestinians as refugees and did not recognize their political rights.

That could have been a unilateral statement by the PLO, to help them sell this politically. And Carter had said he would be willing if they were prepared to go this far, to convey to others that we would deal with them as a party to the conference. But it didn't work. We went through the summer, and the PLO had missed this opportunity to become a negotiating partner.

The decision was taken to make a major push towards getting a formula for reconvening the Geneva Conference during the meetings that took place between foreign ministers and, in some cases, chiefs of state at the U.N. General Assembly in the fall of 1977. So there were talks set up. Carter went up to New York, and Vance carried on many Middle East discussions. I was there, of course, for days on end, as were other Middle East advisors to Vance and Carter.

There were discussions about the same old issues. What formula do you find for Palestinian representation in Geneva? What formula do you find that would deal with the nature of peace by the Arabs? What kind of language do you use that will embody the commitment to exchange Arab commitments to peace for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories...?

And also there was an argument, principally between the Syrians and the Egyptians. (The Syrians were involved in these discussions; we were trying to get them to Geneva, too, which they had boycotted in 1973.) The Syrians wanted all the Arabs to be in one Arab delegation; they did not want separate national Syrian, Jordanian, Egyptian, Palestinian delegations. They didn't really trust them, the Egyptians in particular. They wanted a veto over any Arab position at Geneva. Sadat didn't want that; he wanted separate, national delegations. So one of the offshoots of Geneva was a fight among the Arabs themselves. And Jordan was trying to find a formula that would bridge this gap-maybe have all Arab delegations at plenary sessions, but then have separate national delegations in committees that would deal with bilateral issues. There were all sorts of ideas.

In parallel to this, President Carter had agreed to try to negotiate a U.S.-Soviet statement on the Middle East that would seek to get U.S.-Soviet agreement on some principles that might make it easier to sell to the parties themselves, once the major powers had agreed.

So there was a parallel negotiation, which began, actually, in Washington. I was asked by Vance to be the U.S. negotiator, dealing with the Soviet counterpart, whose name was Sytyienko. He was head of the office in the Soviet Foreign Ministry dealing with the Middle East. He later ended up as a Soviet member of the U.N. Secretariat, based in New York. But at that time, he was my counterpart for negotiating this bilateral statement. And we labored away and obviously referred various drafts to our principals.

We finally got to New York with an agreement that had just a few brackets in it, where we and the Soviets had not been able to agree. These were to be dealt with by Vance and Gromyko in sessions between the two delegations, headed by foreign ministers while in New York.

I remember still, in one of the brackets was language about the nature of peace. The Soviets had wanted the traditional "state of peace" or something like that, and we had said no, you've really got to get something in there that is more forthcoming toward the Israelis. We were insisting that it had to say the parties agreed that there were to be normal peaceful relations between them, which was quite a lot to ask at that point, psychologically, from the Arab side. But we insisted that this had to be in there. The Soviets opposed that language, which went beyond anything the Soviets were willing to say, or at least to commit the Arabs to say-particularly the Syrians up to that time.

Our reading was that the Soviets would be willing to perhaps state positions that went beyond the positions of some of the Arabs..., because they were very anxious to get back in the Middle East game. They wanted to be back in the negotiations. And if Geneva could reconvene, then they would be a co-chairman and would be seen again as a full partner with the United States in the peace process. So the Soviets went rather further than I had considered was possible, to get this joint statement agreed, with language that we felt acceptable. Although it didn't have everything we wanted, it was still a pretty good statement and included the "normal peaceful relations" language.

Well, that was finally signed and then announced on the first of September, 1977 in New York. And it unleashed a fire storm. There had been inadequate briefings of the foreign relations committees of the Congress that we were negotiating this side negotiation with the Soviets. In fact, I'm not sure they had been told at all. There had been clearly inadequate briefing of the Israelis about how far we had gone with the Soviets. And so there was a blast from Jerusalem, there was a blast from the Congress, there was a blast from the Israeli lobby.

While Moshe Dayan, who by now was Likud foreign minister, had been briefed, we had never given him the precise language. He felt that he had been blind sided, and protested. Vance said, "We can't undo the communique Gromyko and I have signed, this U.S.-Soviet statement."

And then Dayan proposed an Israeli-U.S. statement that would reassure us on some points.

So we spent almost a whole night, as I recall, negotiating the elements of a side agreement with the Israelis, which was announced the next day. It took the heat out of the Israeli objection, but, of course, by the same token, the Arabs felt that it negated whatever positive things had come out of the U.S.-Soviet statement.

I don't know, at that stage, whether or not we could have worked our way eventually to an agreement for reconvening the Geneva Conference. I have my doubts, personally, that we could have solved this problem, dealt with Palestinian representation to everybody's satisfaction, or the commitment to peace and all the other things that we felt had to be in a formula that would be the basis for reconvening Geneva. But, in any case, we never had a chance to test this.

I should say, parenthetically, that King Hussein has often said since then that we were very close to an agreement. I'm not at all sure we were that close.

But the whole thing was sidetracked, because it was at this stage that President Sadat went off on his own and announced that he was prepared to go to Israel and deal directly with the Israelis and talk about peace, and cut through all of this red tape and all of this haggling over words and formulas, with not only the Israelis but also with the Syrians.

Sadat had tried earlier to find some way to get things moving, and he even made a proposal at one point that there be convened in Jerusalem an international conference attended by all the permanent members of the Security Council and the Palestinians and the Syrians and the Israelis and the Jordanians and the Egyptians.

We in Washington felt that this was not very practical, and sort of threw cold water on it. The idea of doing something was clearly in Sadat's mind. President Carter became rather discouraged. He had, at one point, sent a message to Sadat saying, you know, I may need to ask you to take some bold initiative to try to help us get to Geneva. I don't think he had any idea that the initiative Sadat eventually would take would be the announcement that he would meet directly with the Israelis in Jerusalem.

Q: In your opinion, what prompted Sadat to do this? Why was he so eager to get this solved?

ATHERTON: There were several things. First of all, remember that Sadat planned the '73 War as a way of getting a diplomatic process going. He didn't plan the war to defeat Israel and win back all of the occupied territories. He wanted to create a situation where Egypt could hold its head high as having made a good show militarily against the Israelis, to get the attention of the Soviet Union and the United States, get the Middle East problem back on the front burner. He wanted to get Sinai back. He wanted to get the Suez Canal working. He wanted to divert Egyptian resources from military to economic development purposes.

He had a strategy at this point. He was to finally put an end to the unending war between the Arabs and Israel, with Egypt taking the first step. That's why he was pushing peace in any way he could. And he had finally, I think, become fed up and was frustrated at the slowness of these efforts through the summer of '77 to find formulas for Palestinian representation. He was angry at the Syrians for making it more complicated. He thought Hussein was an additional complication.

And so he decided the only way to go was to go off on his own. One, he wanted the meeting. He had already invested a lot in laying groundwork and taken a certain amount of criticism for going that far with the Israelis. And secondly, he became quite frustrated about the prospects that U.S. multilateral diplomatic efforts would lead to a conference. But thirdly, and I think this is very important (we learned this later; at the time I didn't know it, and I'm not sure anyone in our government knew at the outset), he and the Israelis had been having private secret exchanges, through their representatives, under the auspices of King Hassan of Morocco. There were meetings between Moshe Dayan, representing Begin, and a very strange Egyptian named Tuhami, who was close to Sadat and a sort of Islamic fundamentalist mystic, as it turned out. Tuhami and Dayan had had meetings in Morocco, about which we were subsequently briefed by Dayan. And Sadat had also sounded out the one Eastern European leader who had relations with Israel-Ceausescu of Romania. And Ceausescu had said Begin was somebody you could deal with.

So Sadat had all these signals, and he decided, in effect, here's a man I can deal with in Israel, the Israelis have given me certain signals through these meetings in Morocco that if we make peace, there will be a lot in it for us. That was the message he was getting from Begin, while the United States didn't seem to be able to make things happen. And so basically he just took a leap of faith and announced that he was prepared to go to Jerusalem.

Now this was an add-on to a speech in the Egyptian parliament; it was added to the prepared text. And I think most of us read it and said, "Well, that's grandstanding and rhetoric." But pretty soon there was a response from Israel that Sadat would be welcome in Jerusalem if he were to come. It was a sort of diplomacy by public statement.

And then the media got into the act. I can remember, sitting in Washington, a telephone call from CBS one evening saying, "We just want you to know, you can tell the Secretary that on the evening news tonight Walter Cronkite is going to air an interview he's had, back to back, with Sadat and Begin, in which they both say that they are prepared to meet." And that did come on the air that night. So I went around to Secretary Vance and said, "I guess maybe this is going to happen, Mr. Secretary. I think maybe we are going to actually see a Sadat trip."

And lo and behold, Cronkite went on and this was announced, and the next thing we knew Sadat was sending an advance party to Israel to work out the details of his trip, and it all took place, very fast.

We were all sitting in Washington playing catch up ball. It took a while for us to accept that the whole ball game had changed. Geneva was maybe down the road, but right now Sadat and Begin were going to take the ball in their hands and run with it.

Well, it took a couple of days for Washington to come out publicly and welcome all these developments and wish them well. But in private channels, after Sadat did this, we were asking what are you going to do next? Where do you see this leading? And Sadat, never at a loss for new ideas, said, "Well, I'm going to convene a conference in Cairo and we're going to call it the Preparatory Conference for the Geneva Middle East Peace Conference." And he issued invitations. Invitations to the Israelis to come to Cairo. Invitations to the Soviet Union, to the United States, to the Jordanians, to the Syrians, and to the PLO to come to a conference in Cairo, hosted by the Egyptians, a preliminary conference to prepare the way for Geneva. Oh, he also invited the United Nations, the Secretary General, to have somebody there.

Well, Vance, of course, responded that the United States would be happy to accept this invitation, and that he would personally travel to the area to help give a U.S. blessing to it and then would leave behind a delegation to represent him at the conference, which he announced I would chair.

Of course, the Syrians rejected the invitation, the Soviets rejected it, the Jordanians rejected it, the PLO rejected it. The Secretary General of the U.N. said he would send a representative as an observer. So the only delegations, in addition to the U.N. observer delegation were the Israeli, the Egyptian, and the American.

It was soon apparent that the action really was going to happen somewhere else. Begin had made a quick trip to Washington, via London, to unveil his ideas for solving the problem. He met with Carter and laid out a proposal which would, in effect, return all of Sinai to Egypt in return for peace, if Egypt would agree to certain security arrangements. This was more than Labor had ever committed to. Labor had wanted to retain positions at the Straits of Tiran, Sharm el Sheikh, and places that were seen as points of vulnerability for Israel's security. Begin was prepared to give back all of Sinai, subject to negotiation of the right kind of security arrangements, to ensure Sinai would not present a jumping off place for the Egyptian military.

The other part of Begin's proposal had to do with the West Bank. And there, he said, "We are prepared to talk about granting autonomy to the," as he called them, "Palestinian Arabs of Judea and Samaria and the Gaza district," which meant, in our language, the West Bank and Gaza. He said "Palestinian Arabs" because, he said, "After all, the Jews are Palestinians, too, so you have to distinguish between the Jews and Palestinian Arabs." This clearly was his attempt, as later became apparent (though it was not as clear at the time) to get a separate peace with Egypt and hold onto the West Bank by coming up with a proposal which offered autonomy for the Palestinians, while leaving open the ultimate solution. It was clear he wanted not to have to negotiate over withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza.

So he unveiled this plan to Carter and also to the British in London on the way through. Sadat had given an invitation to Begin to make a return trip, in return for Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. He had invited Begin to come and meet him on Egyptian territory, but not yet in Cairo. So they agreed that they would meet on the Suez Canal, in Isma'iliya, on Christmas Day, the 25th of December 1977, which also happened to be Sadat's birthday.

The Cairo Conference convened first. That is where I was with my little delegation, and with the Israeli delegation, headed by somebody that none of us had met before, Eliyhu Ben-Elizar, who was a member of Begin's Likud Party, who had a long history of working in the intelligence service in Israel, and who was a very ideological, committed Likud Party member and a confidant of Begin's. Incidentally, he eventually became the first Israeli ambassador to Egypt. There were also on the Israeli delegation some people we did know, who came out of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, some of whom we'd worked with on earlier negotiations.

The head of the Egyptian delegation was Ismat Abdul Majid, who had been the Egyptian representative in New York when he was designated to become the head of the Egyptian delegation.

The conference convened, and there were a lot of last-minute scramblings because, even though all of the other parties had declined to come, the Egyptians wanted to fly all the flags, including the Palestinian flag to which Israel objected.

The conference was held at the Mena House Hotel, right next to the Pyramids in Giza, where Churchill, Roosevelt, and Chiang Kai-shek had a meeting during World War II, one of the big summits. It was a place that could be made secure, and the Egyptians were worried about security. The whole area was simply cordoned off, except for delegations and the press. It swarmed with security. Even the Pyramids were blocked to tourists, except for groups with very special permission. It made a lot of tourists very mad, by the way. And, of course, Mena House is a very popular tourist hotel, and the whole thing was taken over by the Egyptian government for the conference, plus another hotel nearby for the press.

There was an incredible turnout of the world media. All the big names were there from the U.S. John Chancellor from NBC and Walter Cronkite from CBS-you name them, they were all there.

The opening of the conference was one of the most spectacular photo opportunities I have ever witnessed. There were so many photographers that they couldn't all get in the great big plenary room at one time. The photo opportunity went on for more than an hour, because they brought in one group and took them out, then brought in another group.

And finally the conference got under way. As things developed, it was known by now that Begin and Sadat were going to have a meeting a few days later at Isma'iliya, and clearly no delegations were going to preempt their principals, so there were very nice exchanges, speeches, and it was a pretty light conference schedule, I must admit. It was more of a PR event; it was really largely PR, but it did provide an opportunity for some of the Israelis and the Egyptians to get to know each other better. There was lots of socializing, and they had a chance to talk together and meet together and argue points together. It wasn't exactly collegial yet, but at least they were civil to each other.

Everybody made opening speeches for the record for the meeting, and then, since there wasn't a great deal on the agenda because we were waiting to see what would come out of Isma'iliya, the Egyptians, being great hosts, organized sightseeing trips. I saw more of Cairo and the environs then, as a tourist, than I ever saw when I was ambassador there.

But the conference did provide a symbolic bringing together of Egyptians and Israelis around the conference table. It did provide a chance for Egyptian and Israeli diplomats to begin to interact. It provided a lot of good feeling. The Israeli delegation, for example, was seen going down to the Khan al-Khalili, the bazaar in Cairo, shopping, and the Egyptian merchants would come up and say to the Israelis, "Welcome to Cairo, welcome to my store." A lot of bubbly warm feeling came out at that point.

The conference, in the end, only agreed, as I recall, on two major decisions. One decision was that we would observe the Sabbath of all three delegations, so the conference would not hold sessions on Friday, Saturday or Sunday, out of respect for the Muslims, the Jews, and the Christians. And secondly, while we were there we had received word that Philip Habib, who was well known to everybody there, had had a heart attack, and so the conference immediately passed a unanimous resolution to send wishes for a speedy recovery to Phil Habib. And those were the only two resolutions that were passed there, to my recollection.

There was a lot of effort to put together public statements, and I think we may have issued a bland kind of communique at the end. But on Christmas day came the real communique, out of Isma'iliya. And, incidentally, a lot of the press deserted us then and went down to Isma'iliya, to be present at the second Sadat-Begin meeting, which was Christmas day.

We had a Christmas party meanwhile, in Cairo. The American ambassador, Hermann Eilts, had a traditional party every year for the American community, or at least the American Embassy community and some of the private community, and he invited the three delegations to come to this party. It wasn't Christmas day, but it was a reception with Christmas carol singing. And I still have a picture in my mind of sitting around the big entrance hall in the residence in Cairo, with somebody playing Christmas carols on the piano, and members of the Israeli, Egyptian, and American delegations all singing Silent Night, Holy Night. It was quite a festive occasion. We had a Christmas tree in our delegation room in the Mena House Hotel, which somebody found for us, and we had a little reception there for the Egyptian and Israeli delegations and the U.N. delegation. We had a lot of conviviality, but there was very little substance, because the substance was going on down at Isma'iliya.

And by the way, there were no Americans at the Isma'iliya meeting. This was Sadat and Begin and their delegations.

Sadat had just announced, just before that, that he was appointing a new foreign minister. He had, by the way, lost his foreign minister, who had resigned over disagreement with Sadat's going to Jerusalem. Several other senior people agreed with the foreign minister, who felt that Egypt should not break with the other Arabs and go off on its own. So Ismail Fahmy, who had been the foreign minister since 1973, had resigned, along with one or two others and Sadat had to appoint a new foreign minister.

So he appointed an Egyptian diplomat, an old friend named Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal. They had been in jail together under the British. Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal was at that point the Egyptian ambassador in Bonn, happily ensconced in Germany, when he was summoned back to become Sadat's foreign minister. Sadat felt he was a personal friend who would be a loyal foreign minister and would not resign or otherwise oppose Sadat's decisions for the peace. He wanted a foreign minister who would be quiet, who would do what he wanted, because there was a certain amount of resistance among some of the Egyptian nationalists and pan-Arabists in the Foreign Ministry, and in the media, to the whole decision by Sadat to move unilaterally with Israel.

It was a popular move in the street and among many of the merchants in Egypt, who were glad to see the war come to an end. But there were critics among the intellectuals, in the think tanks of Cairo, in the Foreign Ministry and academic circles. Heikal, who was the editor of al-Ahram and very close to Nasser, had broken earlier with Sadat and criticized this move to make peace with Israel.

Sadat just wanted a team that would work with him and wouldn't give him any problems. He was going to go ahead no matter what, and damn all those torpedoes coming from people sniping at him from the side, and even more, sniping at him from the other Arab capitals. So he named Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal as his foreign minister and believed he now had a team that would support him and back him.

The Isma'iliya meeting agreed on a communique which basically said they would create two mechanisms to continue the negotiating: a military committee, which would be headed by ministers of defense and would deal with military questions of the peace settlement-security, withdrawal, and all those things; and a political committee, which would deal with the political questions of the peace settlement, headed by foreign ministers. The first meeting of the military committee would take place in Cairo, and the first meeting of the political committee would take place in Jerusalem.

Sadat agreed to all this, much to the embarrassment and chagrin of some of his government, who did not want to go to Jerusalem. They felt that going to Jerusalem somehow recognized Israel's claim to it, so they didn't like the idea of having meetings in Jerusalem at all. But Sadat had agreed, and they all stood up and saluted.

Begin and Sadat invited the United States to send Secretary Vance to be present as an observer, really more, but less a participant than a facilitator, if you will, at the political committee meeting in Jerusalem.

The military committee, it was felt, could meet without benefit of American presence. The Israeli minister of defense at the time was Ezer Weizman, who was a great showman and quite supportive of this whole new initiative with Egypt, and had made a good impression on Sadat. He had a way of playing up to Sadat, saluting Sadat when he came in the room, and just making a general show out of all of this. Weizman became very popular in Egypt.

Weizman also had a very good personal relationship with General Gamasy, who was the minister of defense in Egypt. He was the one, by the way, who gets credit for the military plan that surprised the Israelis when the Egyptian Army crossed the Suez Canal. So Gamasy and Weizman had a good relationship. Weizman came to Egypt, and there were a lot of photo ops of Weizman seeing Cairo and meeting with Gamasy in Egypt.

The political committee meeting was something else. Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal was acutely uncomfortable. He was a strong Arab nationalist, and while he was loyal to Sadat, he was not happy about being Sadat's foreign minister to negotiate what he believed to be a separate peace with Israel. He subsequently wrote a book, by the way, once he was no longer foreign minister of Egypt, critical of a lot of Sadat's policies of that period.

So the political committee meeting convened in January 1978 in Jerusalem at the Hilton Hotel. The American delegation spent a lot of time going back and forth between the Israelis and the Egyptians, trying to help them sort out their next steps, what their objectives were, what they wanted to do next. And, of course, there was a problem getting a meeting of the minds. Sadat's instructions to his delegation were that he wanted them to work for a declaration of principles, which would be agreed with Israel-principles governing a total or comprehensive peace settlement which then could be presented jointly by Israel and Egypt to the other Arabs as a basis for their negotiating their own peace settlement, principles such as Israel will withdraw from the occupied territories in return for Arab recognition, and the Palestinians have national rights. These were all things that seemed quite unexceptional from the Egyptian-Arab point of view, even perhaps making too many concessions for peace with Israel, but were anathema to a Begin government. Would Israel agree to withdraw from more territory? Certainly not from the West Bank. Palestinian national rights? Unheard of.

So the atmosphere at the Jerusalem conference was rather strained. And the final blow was a dinner party, at which Begin got carried away in his toast and said some rather critical things, and referred to Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal as "young man." He was rather condescending to Kamal. Kamal was offended and replied, with some dignity, very briefly. And the report of this meeting went back to Cairo.

That evening there was to be an American dinner as I recall, with the Egyptian delegation. Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal asked Vance for an urgent private meeting and said, "I've just been told by Sadat he wants to break off the meeting and summon my delegation back to Cairo. He's very unhappy with the way this meeting is going and with Mr. Begin's attitude."

And so Vance spent a lot of time trying to get Dayan to talk to Kamal and to try to persuade him that Begin had not meant to offend, that it was very important that this first serious meeting of the delegations after Jerusalem and Isma'iliya not be seen to be broken up.

But Sadat's orders were firm, and so the Egyptian delegation decamped, went off to the airport and flew back to Cairo.

Q: Do you think Begin meant this to offend?

ATHERTON: No, I don't think he meant to offend, I think he was insensitive, you know, being Begin.

Q: Did your delegation have any instructions from Washington about what kind of outcome you wanted to get from this conference?

ATHERTON: Well, we were still talking in terms of trying to get an agreement between Egypt and Israel with which we could persuade the other Arabs to join in a peace conference. That was still the only objective. Yes, we were still talking in terms of Geneva. And we basically agreed with Sadat's concept that if you could get a declaration of principles everybody would sign onto, then you've got an agenda, in effect, for an international conference. So we had no problems with this as an objective, to get agreement on a statement of principles that would be acceptable to both Israel and the Arabs.

Q: But you didn't have a blueprint of what...

ATHERTON: We didn't have a blueprint. Vance had general instructions from Carter, and he was the Secretary of State; he was there to influence and facilitate the Egyptian-Israeli talks and also to make American contributions. He had considerable carte blanche, he felt, to put forth American efforts to help the process along.

But there was no persuading Sadat to have the Egyptian delegation stay. And then the question: What do you do now? This was the one forum which was going to carry on what Sadat started when he went to Jerusalem, and it had now suddenly collapsed. What do we do next? How do we get from here to there? Nobody had a game plan. It was quite apparent at that point that Sadat really didn't have a detailed game plan. He had a vision of where he wanted to come out, and his vision had certainly achieved a major breakthrough... But still it was a long way from there to the peace treaty.

And the Israelis clearly felt that they had put their plan on the table. Their plan was a negotiated peace settlement with Egypt, and autonomy for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to keep them happy, and keep the other Arabs out of the negotiations. Maybe make a separate deal with Hussein at some point. The Syrians weren't ready. So basically the Israelis were talking about a bilateral peace settlement with Egypt, with some cosmetics for the Palestinians.

Sadat was talking about a comprehensive peace. He really, I think, was genuine and sincere in saying that he wanted to bring all of the Arabs into this. He didn't want to make a separate peace with Israel and be accused of having deserted the Arab cause.

Well, while everybody was trying to figure out what to do next, the decision was made that Secretary Vance could not spend all the time Kissinger had on Middle East trips; he had to tend to some of our interests in the rest of the world. And therefore what was needed was someone who would become his representative, to keep in touch with the parties... a lot of traveling in effect shuttling around the area. Vance recommended and the President agreed I was the logical one to do that. But I couldn't possibly do that and continue to run the Near East and South Asia Bureau, with all of its responsibilities for other parts of the region. So the decision was made that I would move from being assistant secretary to a position of Ambassador-at-Large for Middle East negotiations, thereby freeing me of any responsibility for running the Bureau. And Hal Saunders would move up and become the assistant secretary and run the bureau.

That happened in April of 1978, and my job then really became the traveling salesman for a peace process, with a lot of trips to the area, mostly between Jerusalem and Cairo, seeing Begin, seeing Sadat, seeing their foreign ministers, seeing whomever they delegated. The whole focus was on the concept of trying to get agreement on a declaration of principles.

Before we pick up the chronology where we left off last time, I'd like to go back and fill in a gap which I neglected to cover, but it was an important one in discussing the period right after Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and the Cairo conference and the Isma'iliya meeting between Begin and Sadat at the end of December of '77.

President Carter had planned a trip, right after Christmas and into the new year, to Europe and Iran and New Delhi, and had decided that it was important to have a meeting also with President Sadat. It would be the first chance to meet with Sadat after Sadat had gone to Jerusalem. He had had a meeting with Begin, who had come to Washington on his way to the Isma'iliya conference, but my recollection is he hadn't had a chance to see Sadat. And there were a couple of issues on which Sadat felt it was important to have a meeting of the minds with Carter.

One of them had to do with the Palestinian issue. (I'll explain that in a minute, but first, just briefly...) The President was going to be stopping in Warsaw, Poland, on this trip, and I got instructions that I should find a flight and get to Warsaw to join the presidential party and be with them from then on, for the swing through Iran and India and on down to Egypt, which I did.

The Warsaw visit was just overnight. I had nothing to do with the visit there at all. I was included in some of the events in Tehran, including that New Year's Eve party where the President gave a very fulsome toast to the Shah, calling him one of the world's great leaders, which came back to haunt him later on when the Shah's regime began to collapse.

But it was quite a good evening, and I had a particularly enjoyable time because I was able to reestablish contact with an old friend of mine, Amir Hoveyda, who had been an Iranian vice consul in Stuttgart when I was at my first post and subsequently ended up becoming at one point prime minister of Iran, and at this time I think minister to the court. We stood on the side and he made ironic comments about various people at the party who were fawning over and flattering the Shah-respectfully, obviously, but still he had quite a sense of humor and he couldn't resist the temptation to jibe and jab here and there. Hoveyda was one of those executed following the revolution.

The President gave his toast, the party broke up. The next day there were some more formalities, and we took off for New Delhi.

There were some official business matters to be dealt with, one of which was a particularly sensitive issue. I don't remember precisely what the subject was, but the President thought it was important to have a private meeting with Prime Minister Moraji Desai rather than deal with this in the full delegation meeting.

So he met privately with the prime minister, and then came out of that meeting for a meeting with the two delegations in the conference room. He sat down next to Secretary Vance at the table, during what was supposed to be a photo opportunity, while the assembled TV and press people and the microphones all were focused on the President and the Secretary of State, who were seen huddled in what was obviously meant to be a confidential conversation.

Jody Powell, who was the President's press secretary, and I could see disaster looming and wished we could warn them, but there was no way we could get through this phalanx of press people to get to the President and the Secretary and say you're being recorded.

And, sure enough, this conversation was recorded and was on the radio within a matter of hours, and on the international media, for that matter. And what got recorded was the President saying to Cy Vance, in effect (I haven't got the exact words), "I did not get a satisfactory answer to my request. It was not a very satisfactory meeting, and I would like you, Cy, to send him a very stern letter."

Well, it did cast a bit of a cloud over the visit. But Desai rose to the occasion and did not make a big issue out of it. He said, in effect: "Chiefs of state sometimes commit indiscretions; we all have much on our minds." It was papered over, and the visit went on and the communiques were issued. We then boarded the presidential aircraft to go on to Egypt, which is the main reason I was there.

The flight to Egypt was used in trying to prepare for the meeting between Carter and Sadat. This was wintertime, and President Sadat was, as usual, spending the winter in Aswan, in upper Egypt. So we were going to meet with him at the airport in Aswan. The President and he would have a private meeting in the guest house, and the two delegations would simply sit and pass the time of day in the VIP lounge, such as it was, in the Aswan airport.

One important issue that Sadat wanted to come to talk about was to try to get a statement from the United States on Palestinian self-determination. This was very important to Sadat, because he had been accused, after the visit to Jerusalem, of, in effect, getting ready to sell out the Palestinian cause and the Arab cause and simply look after Egypt's interests by making a separate peace.

I believe that he had not ever intended to do this. I think Sadat hoped to be able to negotiate a basis for peace between Israel and the other Arabs including the Palestinians which they could all accept. He wanted to deal with the critical reaction of not only the other Arabs but also some of his own domestic constituencies.

We spent much of that trip (we being Gary Sick, who was the NSC representative on that flight, myself and Cy Vance) trying to come up with various formulations that would meet Sadat's desire to have us go on record supporting Palestinian self-determination-without using the words "self-determination," because this had a connotation, it was a buzz word for an independent Palestinian state. And with the PLO having never publicly accepted Israel's right to exist in peace, such a statement could be interpreted as endorsing the Palestinians' right at the expense of Israel's right to a state in Palestine. That could have been dealt with, but there would remain a political problem, since the Israeli government opposed a Palestinian state in any part of Palestine. The President didn't want to have whatever we said in this statement undermined by criticism from the Israelis or from the Israeli lobby in this country.

We finally, on that flight, came up with the formulation, which Cy Vance contributed to and the President approved, that "the Palestinians have the right to participate in the determination of their own future."

When the President and Sadat came out of their private meeting, they made a public statement before the assembled media, using this phrase, and Sadat nodded and agreed with it. So it did become then the new formulation. In fact, it would reach the Camp David Accords a year later. That phrase appears in Camp David. It was born on the flight from New Delhi to Aswan.

OK, I think that closes that gap. Shall we just go on now and pick up where we were?

We're in the period after Sadat's meeting with Begin at Isma'iliya, after the Cairo conference, in December, 1977.

You recall that there was an attempt to get a negotiating process started by convening two committees that Begin and Sadat had agreed at Isma'iliya should be convened: a political committee of foreign ministers and a military committee of defense ministers, Israeli and Egyptian, to talk about the basis for a peace settlement and security arrangements. As I discussed on the earlier tapes, the political committee ended up by Sadat's anger over Begin's position and recalling his delegation. So there was no negotiating process, really, in train, and the concern was that this had somehow to be restarted.

I had spent a great deal of time in the months right after the breakdown in January in my new role as Ambassador-at-Large shuttling between Jerusalem and Cairo to see if I could help formulate a statement of general principles that Sadat wanted to get Israel and Egypt to agree to as a framework for a more detailed peace negotiation. Something that would establish the principle of withdrawal from occupied territories, the principle of peace in return for withdrawal, the principle of self-determination in some form for the Palestinians, and a lot of others more detailed.

Anyway, this shuttling back and forth went on during February, March, April, May, and June without any visible progress, and tempers on both sides getting increasingly short. It was now a half a year since Sadat had gone to Jerusalem, and he felt he was being stonewalled by the Israelis. The Israelis felt that he was asking for more than they were prepared to give. They were at least talking about peace with Egypt; here he was trying to talk about the Palestinian question.

So it looked as though this grand gesture which Sadat had made, and all of the euphoria that went with it, might evaporate without any concrete results-something that obviously was of great concern to the world, certainly to the United States, and, I think, fundamentally to the Egyptians and the Israelis, too.

It was at this point that Secretary Vance proposed that he would like to bring the foreign ministers of Egypt and Israel together for a meeting, not to try to negotiate all of the details of a peace settlement, but to try to overcome some of these broad conceptual problems that they seemed to have in dealing with and in trying to talk to each other. They were really talking past each other. And also there hadn't been any direct meetings, at least at the political level, on the foreign ministers' side, as I recall, since the political committee had been disrupted, had been broken off in Jerusalem at the end of January.

Secretary Vance's idea was that if you could just get people together for a long enough period, they would begin to listen to each other, maybe understand each other's point of view, maybe begin to hammer out some broad principles as a basis for a more detailed negotiation of agreements.

The Egyptians had a problem in meeting in Jerusalem, which they would not recognize as the capital of Israel, and they felt that some of the other Arabs were critical of Egypt for going there, thus seeming to accept the Israeli claim to sovereignty. The Israelis wouldn't meet in Cairo if the Egyptians wouldn't meet in Jerusalem. Therefore the problem was to find neutral ground.

The Secretary's proposal was that the meeting be in London, and he asked the British if they would be prepared to host. The British said they'd be delighted to, but then they got to thinking about it and decided that London was perhaps not the place. There was great concern that some Palestinian extremists would attempt to disrupt the meeting, perhaps even pull off some spectacular terrorist act, and that therefore they needed a more secure place to meet.

The British offered at that point Leeds Castle, which had been converted into a conference center and had been modernized. By that time I think it was government property, but it had been owned for a while by a rich American lady with a titled English husband, and they had put in modern plumbing and electricity and all the amenities while keeping the ambiance of a medieval castle. It was a genuine castle and had been at one time Henry the Eighth's castle. It had a moat around it, grand dining halls, high-ceilinged rooms of enormous capacity for the guests, lots of space for all the principals to stay. So the decision was we would have the conference there. As I recall, it lasted the better part of a week, with one wing for the Egyptians, one wing for the Israelis, and the Americans had a third section of the castle for our living quarters.

Betty was there with me and, as I recall, Mrs. Dayan was there with Moshe Dayan, the Israeli foreign minister. Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal, the Egyptian foreign minister did not bring his wife. I don't think there were any Egyptian wives at the conference. But there was Mrs. Dayan, Mrs. Vance and Mrs. Atherton. Betty and I were given a grand bedroom, with a canopied bed and a fireplace, a really royal suite. And it was a very comfortable week. They had a good kitchen and a good wine cellar. It provided a more relaxed, informal atmosphere in which to try to get the Egyptians and Israelis to break down the psychological barriers, to get them to relax. Hopefully that would then lead to the opening of minds.

One of the problems was, at the first meal in the dining room the Egyptians were at one table and the Israelis were at another, and the Americans scattered themselves in between, and it was decided that the first thing we would try to do was to get them to have a little more intermingling, a little more socializing, if you will, at mealtime. So Secretary Vance decided, as host, to try to arrange the seating so that there would be alternating American-Egyptian-Israeli-American-Egyptian-Israeli around each of the tables.

Q: There were no British at this conference?

ATHERTON: There were no British at the conference, except the majordomo who ran the place, who was a grand British butler, wearing black tie all day, plus the staff. David Owen, who was the British foreign secretary, did pay a courtesy visit one day and called on the foreign ministers. But it was strictly an American-Egyptian-Israeli conference. It didn't have any very detailed, organized agenda. It may not even have had an agenda, but there were some obvious things to talk about.

One of the sessions I remember particularly well was when the Egyptian side made a full-dressed presentation of the Egyptian positions, going back to the decision to visit Jerusalem, a checklist of the reasons for that decision, Egypt's peace objectives, the reasons for them, the importance of its relations to the Arab world.

This was all done in a very organized, articulate way by the man who has often been called the eminence grise of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, Osama El-Baz, was senior under secretary to the foreign minister, also very close to Sadat. He had studied in the States, he was a Harvard graduate, and he had been the president at one time when he was in this country of the Arab Student Federation of the United States, very much of a political animal, very much of an Arab nationalist. And he was Sadat's speech writer. Whenever Sadat had to give a speech in English, El-Baz wrote the speech, because he spoke idiomatic American English. He also did most of the press statements in English for Sadat.

Anyway, he made the presentation on behalf of Kamal, the foreign minister, and at the end of it, I can remember Moshe Dayan, who was listening to him, saying in effect, "I want to congratulate you, Mr. El-Baz, on that excellent presentation. For the first time I think I have begun to understand the Egyptian position, what are your concerns."

And that was something of a breakthrough, because there was some reciprocity. I'm not so sure about Foreign Minister Kamal, who was uncomfortable meeting with the Israelis, but he was there because he was a loyal servant of Sadat's and Sadat had asked him to do it.

But some of the Egyptians heard what the Israelis were saying, and began, I think, to understand the Israeli concerns, where they were coming from, not only as Israelis, but as a people, as Jews with a historical memory of the war and the holocaust and what troubles they had had in establishing a right to security and a state.

So the conference didn't achieve any breakthroughs in terms of agreements on elements of a peace settlement, but it did, I think, constitute something of a psychological breakthrough.

In any case, the problem was what do you do next? There had to be follow-on. Vance suggested that the foreign ministers should continue this dialogue, without his having to be there, and since they wouldn't meet in each other's capitals, we would be glad to offer them the hospitality of the American Sinai field mission station, established in the Sinai after the second Egyptian and Israeli disengagement agreement, where we had an American staff, an American facility, an airstrip.., all the things you could need for the conference. So we suggested that there be a meeting of the foreign ministers. I was to be there as Vance's representative while they continued this dialogue, hopefully hammering out some agreements on objectives, on where they were going. I was asked by Vance to go to Egypt and present this proposal directly to President Sadat.

By now it was summer, and Sadat was in his summer villa in Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast. I went up to Alexandria with Hermann Eilts, who was our ambassador in Cairo.

As we came into the presidential villa, Hermann noticed that there was an unusually large collection of the press, the international press, much more than normally came. It was the kind of turnout that usually only came when you had a meeting between the Secretary of State and Sadat. For my meetings, there were usually just the stringers or the local representatives. So Hermann's immediate reaction was: He's got something up his sleeve assembling the press like this... one of his surprises, Sadat had a habit of pulling surprises out of the hat.

We went into the meeting, I made my presentation, Sadat listened politely and smiling and, I thought, somewhat restrained, somewhat distracted. I wasn't sure whether he was listening as closely as I wished he would. But when I got all through, he said, "Thank you very much, Roy, for that very nice message from Secretary Vance, but I have already made the decision. My decision is that there will be no more meetings between my foreign minister and the Israeli foreign minister until the Israelis agree to a statement of principles which includes Palestinian self-determination and Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories in return for peace with the Arabs." That's what this was all about. And he said, "Now I have made my decision, let's you and I go out and announce this to the press."

I said, "Mr. President, that's your decision, and I don't think it would be understood in Washington if I were seen with you while you made this announcement. I regret that this is your decision. I have to say I know the Secretary and the President will regret it. We feel very strongly that these talks ought to continue, the efforts should continue..." I made the effort and Hermann Eilts was backing me up.

The president heard us out but did not change his mind.

I said I thought it better if I left before Sadat made the announcement. So I left and made some inane statement to the press, Hermann and I got into the car and drove away, and that night saw on television and heard what Sadat had said. Well, this caused a certain amount of consternation.

Q: Who got...?

ATHERTON: Oh, I think it was his own idea. Sadat was a master of shock treatment and was very impatient with diplomatic bargaining. He felt that he had made the ultimate gesture by going to Jerusalem, conveying to the Israelis that the doors were open for peace, telling Israel Egypt would recognize and accept it, which is what it had always wanted and he was sure the other Arabs were going to follow. But in return Israel should keep its part of the bargain, which ever since Resolution 242 after the 1967 war was understood to be that the territories Israel had occupied should be held in trust until such time as the Arabs would accept peace. This was Israel's bargaining chip. Sadat also felt at this time that the Palestinians were a party to the conflict and they had to be seen as such and be given their legitimate rights as well. So Sadat was impatient. He felt that the Israelis, in effect, were not prepared to make the reciprocal gesture to the gesture he had already made, as he saw it.

The Israelis saw it differently, of course. You have to remember that it was now a different government. It was Mr. Begin, not the Labor government, whose whole lifetime had been spent in disagreeing with Ben-Gurion and all the Labor governments over the question of partitioning Palestine. Begin always insisted that Israel had a right to all of Palestine, and should not agree to return any of the West Bank, any of Palestine as part of a peace treaty, which would be an abandonment of his lifetime ideology.

So there really was what looked at the time to be an unbridgeable gap. Sadat enjoyed dramatic moves, and clearly he thought the time had come. I'm sure that this was his own idea. He may have been urged by advisors to break off the talks, or to call the bluff of the Israelis, or to force the American hand, or whatever. But I think it was typical Sadat, these dramatic gestures, sometimes rather quixotic. But it did get the attention that he wanted. Although I hadn't realized it at the time, because I was out in the field, it led to a meeting at Camp David of President Carter and Secretary Vance and Brzezinski, perhaps other advisors, out of which came a decision to invite Sadat and Begin to a conference, under President Carter's chairmanship, at Camp David.

None of this was known at the time to those of us in the field. It was held closely. The communication to Hermann Eilts in Cairo, Sam Lewis in Israel and me was simply that Secretary Vance was coming out to the area and would inform us of what the President had decided.

When Vance arrived, he told us that he had been sent out to convey from the President an invitation to President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin to come to Camp David for a conference to try to hammer out the elements of a peace settlement.

This was by now, I guess, August, if I'm not mistaken, or late July of 1978. It was getting on towards nine months after Sadat's trip to Jerusalem, and nothing had happened despite my shuttling back and forth and a lot of attempts by the United States to get an agreement.

Vance took the proposal, in separate meetings in Israel and in Egypt, to Begin and Sadat, and both of them accepted. Sadat, as I recall, gave Vance a draft of what would be the Egyptians' proposal. Sadat said he would present this position, but then he said, "You can tell President Carter privately what my fallback positions are."

And so Vance was given, in effect, what Sadat was willing to agree to. This was held very closely. Vance shared this, as I recall, with Eilts, Lewis, and me, and perhaps others, but it certainly was not generally shared within a larger circle, because he thought it was dynamite. It would be seen that the United States was colluding with Sadat on certain positions without thorough consultation with the Israelis. It was a delicate spot. But Sadat in the beginning thought he had a special understanding with Carter, that the two of them were partners, would work together to get the Israelis to agree to positions which Carter and he thought were reasonable, even if the Israelis didn't.

Well, in any case, the stage was set. It was agreed that Carter would meet with Sadat and Begin at Camp David in September of 1978.

The next step was to prepare the American side for this conference. Vance decided that he needed a little bit of quiet time, so he arranged to have the use of Averell Harriman's estate in Virginia.

What came out of this was a very intensive weekend of brainstorming, among Secretary Vance, Bill Quandt from the NSC staff, and Hal Saunders, who was by then assistant secretary for the Near East, and myself. We sat around the swimming pool, the dinner table, the garden and the living room, and we talked and talked and talked. We began to reduce some of this to paper, and we finally came up with what Secretary Vance said he would recommend to President Carter be the American proposal for Camp David.

The reason for doing this was a very strong feeling that, if Egypt and Israel were asked to put proposals forward, they would be so far apart that we would waste an awful lot of time in just trying to compromise the two positions. So the concept was, the way to get to genuine discussions would be for the United States to persuade both the Israelis and the Egyptians that they should agree to start negotiations with a single negotiating text, which would be a text prepared by the United States for them to react to.

The Egyptians and Israelis both agreed. They had given us their views, and we would take into account if at all possible the principal concerns of both sides. Obviously it would not be acceptable to either side at the start, but at least it was a basis for the beginning of negotiations.

And that was basically how Camp David proceeded. There was an initial statement by Sadat, a formal statement that he read, that contained Egypt's maximum positions, and that was received very coolly, I might say, by Begin and the Israeli delegation. It sounded as though it had been drafted by lawyers in the Foreign Ministry. The Israelis also presented their position.

And then, the formalities out of the way, we broke up into smaller working groups headed by Cy Vance, Moshe Dayan and Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal, with their immediate advisors-not the principals, not Begin, Sadat, and Carter. In fact, there was a tacit (maybe it wasn't so tacit) agreement made early on, on the American side, that the chemistry still was not very good between Begin and Sadat, and that probably the best way to have Camp David proceed would be to keep Begin and Sadat from talking to each other and for the negotiations to be conducted through their foreign ministers.

In fact, I don't think there were any more meetings, until the end of the conference, between Sadat and Begin. The Israelis had their own cabins, and the Americans had theirs, and the Egyptians had theirs. There was a lot of American mediation back and forth between the delegates. There were also meetings of delegations, but not at the top. Not even socially. Sadat took all of his meals in his cabin. Begin used to come to the common dining room with his delegation, but Sadat really was quite aloof during this whole thing. He was obviously being consulted by his delegation, and President Carter met with him, but he was not a party to the direct talks.

It was a very strenuous week. The talks went on morning, afternoon, and well into the night. Those of us drafting and redrafting papers and having new texts ready for the morning session had a lot of very short nights without too much sleep. There were a lot of informal exchanges when we were out walking around the gardens and around the pathways, and over meals and over drinks, without sitting around the conference table with people taking notes.

But soon the real hangups began to emerge, the critical issues. What the Americans introduced was a single text which would deal with all aspects of a final peace settlement involving Egyptians, Israelis, and also the other Arabs. It became apparent that the Egyptians did not simply want to deal with bilateral Egyptian-Israeli issues, they wanted an agreement that would take into account the interests of the other Arabs as well. The Israelis for their part were much more interested in having a bilateral peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

The solution to this, in which President Carter was personally involved, was to have two documents. And the President himself sat down with a yellow pad and fleshed out one night what he thought should be the main elements of a bilateral treaty between Egypt and Israel, while delegations continued to work on a more comprehensive document, which would deal with the Palestinian problem and all the other aspects of a peace involving the other Arabs.

Several concepts became clear. One, the Egyptians wanted very much to have a linkage between progress towards a comprehensive settlement including a solution to Palestinian issues on the one hand, and progress towards an Israeli-Egyptian settlement on the other. For example, Egypt and Israel would agree to normalize relations, ending the economic boycott, establishing trade relations, etc. Each of these steps would be keyed to some progress towards agreement between other Arab states and Israel, so that Egypt would not be getting out in front.

Another issue was how do you deal with the basically unbridgeable gap between the Begin government's position that they could not commit themselves to anything that would undermine their claim to all of Palestine, and the Egyptian position that the commitment to withdraw from occupied territory in Resolution 242 included a commitment to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza. This was something we had all wrestled with, even before coming to Camp David, and had come to the conclusion that this was not solvable in one step, and therefore we had to find intermediate steps. And that led to the idea of transitional arrangements or interim arrangements which would not prejudice the final solution. The idea of this actually had begun to emerge early on, and was developed further in a paper that Hal Saunders drafted after the Leeds conference. It was very much a part of the single negotiating text proposal that came out of our talks at the Harriman estate before Camp David. This was a concept which eventually found its way into the Camp David Accords.

So there were, in effect, now two negotiations going on-one on the terms of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty and one on the terms of a comprehensive peace. At the end of something close to two weeks, the negotiations had come down to just a few final issues.

There was now agreement that there would be two documents, one on an Egyptian-Israeli settlement and one on a comprehensive peace settlement. Neither one in itself was a treaty. These were seen as frameworks to guide negotiations for peace treaties.

Two big issues remained. One was the Egyptian insistence to have some statement on Jerusalem. The other was to have a commitment by Israel that it would stop its practice of establishing settlements in the occupied territory, which was considered by the United States and by Egypt to be a violation of international law governing occupied territories, and which would create obstacles in the negotiations.

The last night at Camp David, Carter and Begin with a few senior advisors (not including Eilts, Lewis, Quandt or me) met to try to resolve these issues. And at the end of the meeting, it was reported to us by Vance on behalf of the President that Begin had agreed to a freeze on settlements for the duration of the negotiations. On Jerusalem, it was basically agreed to disagree.

The procedure had been well established early on at Camp David that both sides, the Israelis and Egyptians, would look to the Americans to do the drafts; we would prepare the documents, and they would then react to them with counter drafts, suggestions, changes in the wording. Our first drafts of all the documents were prepared after consultation with the two parties, and an attempt was made to hammer out agreements in advance of meetings with the parties. We would use the draft on which we thought we had fair agreement from both sides, with differences and possible tradeoffs in brackets. But on Jerusalem this was not possible. There was no way that you could come close to a position acceptable to both sides. The position of the Egyptians was that the status of Jerusalem remains to be determined, that Resolution 242 required the Israelis to relinquish control of East Jerusalem which they had occupied in 1967, that there had to be a place for Muslims and Arabs in the final settlement of Jerusalem. The Israeli position was that all of united Jerusalem was the capital of Israel and non-negotiable, and they would guarantee the rights of the three religious communities. The American position incorporated quotations from statements that had been made on the record in the Security Council discussions about Jerusalem, initially by Arthur Goldberg for President Johnson right after the 1967 war and then a statement by Ambassador Yost, Charlie Yost, our U.N. ambassador under Nixon, who stated our position that East Jerusalem was occupied territory to be on the agenda in peace negotiations. This was unacceptable to the Israelis, and it didn't go far enough for the Arabs, for the Egyptians. In the end, this issue was resolved by annexing three letters to the Camp David agreement stating the Egyptian, Israeli and U.S. positions-in our case by reference to the Goldberg and Yost statements, without quoting them. Ours was a long-established bipartisan position.

The other position on settlements proved to be the source of a continuing disagreement. We never did get that reduced to writing and signed by the President and Begin, because meanwhile the clock was running out. The President had decided that he had given Camp David long enough. If we didn't lock in what we had, then the whole thing might begin to fall apart.

There had been a couple of worrisome moments at Camp David. At one point, for example, President Sadat had announced that he was going home. He had ordered to have his bags packed and asked that the helicopter be sent up to take him and his delegation back to Washington. He felt that the conference was not coming to grips with the real issues and he was going to leave. He was very impatient with the lawyers and the details of the negotiations. He wanted to make sweeping statements of principle and then let the negotiators fill in the details. Well, how much of this was a bluff and how much was serious we'll never know, but the President personally went to his cabin and reasoned with him and persuaded him that he should give it a little more time.

Another thing at Camp David was that the Egyptian foreign minister finally reached the end of his rope. Sadat kept overruling him with instructions the foreign minister felt should not be given. The particular issue which was the breaking point for Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal was when Sadat agreed to give up any linkage between Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations and the comprehensive peace settlement involving the other Arabs. Sadat agreed Egypt would not make agreement on a peace treaty with Israel dependent on progress on the other fronts. And this was too much for Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal, who privately tendered his resignation to Sadat and informed us. He didn't want to embarrass the President so it was not announced until later.

We had one great advantage at Camp David on being totally isolated from the news media. We were up there on the top of the mountain. The press was down at the town in the valley. Once a day the press spokesmen of the three delegations would get together and agree on a statement about the meetings, and Jody Powell, the President's press secretary, on behalf of all the others, would go down and meet the press.

During the negotiations, by the way, the President had consulted Vice President Mondale, briefed him and got his comments on how the Camp David accords would come across politically. He wasn't doing very well in the polls at that point, and this was something he hoped would help him. I don't want to say the Camp David negotiations were undertaken for domestic political reasons, but he also hoped to get some political credit and mileage out of it. It was decided on September 17 that there would be a grand signing ceremony at the White House that evening, so there was a great flurry to put it all together. The main documents were prepared, and then all of the annexes with the letters on Jerusalem and other subjects, which all became part of the Camp David. Accords, were put together, and the lawyers got them ready for signatures. The delegations all were loaded into helicopters, and off we went back to Washington and assembled in the White House that same evening, with the press and Sadat and Begin and Carter, and had a grand signing ceremony of the Camp David Accords, the basis for an eventual peace.

Then this would be followed by the President's meeting to report to Congress when, among other things, he stated there was an understanding with Israel that it would freeze settlements in the occupied territories for the duration of the negotiations. This was a very important point for Sadat. It was important for him to be able to say to the Palestinians and to the other Arabs, "I have gotten this commitment from Israel to stop taking Arab lands for Israeli settlements."

Q: At this point, had Egypt been thrown out of the Arab League?

ATHERTON: No. That came later. What the first Camp David Accord provided was that, to negotiate the bilateral treaty between Egypt and Israel, both countries would immediately send delegations to negotiations which would be held in Washington, and which were to be completed within ninety days, starting in early October, so that they would be finished in early 1979. The other Camp David document was simply a recommendation to the other Arabs as a framework for their negotiations with Israel. It included provisions about how the Palestinians would become part of the process with many ambiguities. To get agreement, there would need to be further negotiations with Israel. And this was where the Egyptian delegation felt Sadat had made too many concessions.

The best account, by the way, of Camp David, by far, is the book by William Quandt. It's the most complete, authoritative, and readable documentary account of Camp David-the background, and the day by day negotiations. According to Quandt, probably the person who gave up the least at Camp David was Menachem Begin. Sadat gave up linkage between bilateral peace with Israel and an overall Arab-Israeli settlement. President Carter had to settle for less than the comprehensive peace he had set as his goal, and he had to persuade Sadat to make certain sacrifices. The reason Quandt gives for this asymmetry is that, of the three principals at Camp David, the one that had the least to lose by a failure was Begin. Begin could have gone back and said, "I stood up to the United States and preserved our rights to our claims, to our security and to our land." Whereas Sadat had stated that he had gone to war to make peace, the war was going to be the last one, and failure at Camp David would have meant failure of his strategy. And Carter, of course, had taken considerable risk should Camp David fail. As it turned out he got a lot of credit domestically. The Egyptians got a favorable basis for a settlement of their problems with Israel, including withdrawal from all of the Sinai. The Egyptians argued they had laid the basis also for the other Arabs to make peace in turn, but they were rejected.

Anyway, to return to the very important issue of Israeli settlements. Carter said Begin's agreement to freeze settlements meant for the five-year period for negotiating an agreement on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza. Begin said he had agreed there would be a freeze on settlements for the ninety days, within which Egyptian-Israeli treaty negotiations were to be completed.

The participants in the late night meeting at Camp David had different recollections of what was agreed. The U.S. side introduced a draft to record the agreement, but Begin never signed it.

About the time that Carter was announcing this agreement, Begin had gone to New York and was saying that he had only agreed to a short-term freeze. So there was already a difference on the table, and it was too late, really, to try to resolve it. The Camp David Accords had been signed, the President had reported to Congress and the nation. There was obviously a difference hanging out there, that at some point was going to have to either be dealt with, or simply forgotten. But in the euphoria of the moment it was pushed aside. It was not confronted head-on at that stage.

The net result was a political success for the President, lots of very positive comments in the media about the President's role in pursuit of peace in the Middle East. Begin went back to persuade his parliament that they should ratify the agreement. Sadat didn't have that kind of a problem, but he went back to sell it to his constituencies, and also, obviously, to try to persuade the other Arabs that they should accept it.

One of the problems in terms of the other Arabs was that it was all negotiated in such secrecy and without consultations with the other Arabs that it had left a bad taste in the mouths of, particularly of King Hussein or Jordan, because the agreement basically included commitments or at least proposals that it was assumed would be acceptable to King Hussein and to the Palestinians and to the other Arabs as a basis for negotiation with Israel on what they hadn't been consulted.

We, I think rather naively in retrospect, made the assumption that Sadat would take care of the other Arabs and we didn't do much in that respect. There were several untidy loose ends on issues that were important to the Arabs-Jerusalem, Israeli settlements. It was agreed that something had to be done to sell this agreement in the Arab world and in Jordan and among Palestinians in particular.

It was decided that the Secretary of State should make another trip out to the Middle East and touch base in the various Arab capitals, brief them on Camp David, tell them why we thought it was an opportunity for them, that they should at least reserve judgment on it and not be quick to criticize

This was not an easy task, though, because there were lots of suspicions that Sadat had been dealing with Israel behind their backs, with the Americans and Israelis. But Secretary Vance did, I think, a yeoman job. He had, fortunately, great credibility as an individual, and therefore we thought the Arabs would at least listen and give him the benefit of the doubt. He had difficult talks with the Jordanians especially.

There was no briefing in Damascus. The Syrians, as I recall, said they wanted nothing to do with this sell-out. After all, they had fought the '73 War with Sadat and it had laid the groundwork, and they suddenly felt that they had been totally discounted. The fact was that they had taken themselves out. They hadn't agreed to take part in the Geneva conference. They had been invited to the Cairo conference by Sadat and had not gone. So you can say that they had no one to blame but themselves.

We went finally to Saudi Arabia, and the Secretary then asked me to go around to some of the other countries to do these briefings. He had to get back to Washington. Mrs. Vance and Betty were on this trip, and he agreed Betty could continue with me on a small Air Force jet. We went from Saudi Arabia to Kuwait, Kuwait to Tehran. This was now the fall of 1978. There had already been some rumblings in Tehran, and there was a night time curfew.

I did have a meeting with the Shah. Bill Sullivan, who was then our ambassador, and I went. It was my last meeting with him. I remember, when I gave him the briefing on Camp David, he said Sadat had no choice but to conclude the agreements and to tell the Secretary he would support Camp David. But it was a very strange meeting. The Shah was clearly preoccupied. We learned later, of course, that it wasn't just with political problems at home, but also that he was very ill with cancer. He was very secretive about it, it wasn't known to us. It was not a very dynamic meeting. Betty had gone into the city, and I remember her saying at the time, "I don't have a good feeling about it. I know something is going to happen. I can almost feel the tension in the atmosphere." She had forebodings of '79.

In any case, we did that and then we went on. I think our next stop was Turkey, then back to the Middle East. I had meetings with the Jordanians, who were quite skeptical, and then with Palestinians. I met with Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank and Jerusalem at a gathering that was arranged by our consul general in Jerusalem. They had a good delegation, with representatives from the Palestinian community who all were very skeptical about what was in it for them. They included no avowed members of the PLO. Most of them were clearly people who looked to the PLO as their representative, but they were not officials or formally members of the PLO. They couldn't be, since it was illegal in the occupied territories at the time. But they were all patriotic Palestinian nationalists, who felt that the occupation should be ended to give them a chance to establish their own state. They all had that basic view. They were not, any of them, from Jordan.

The one question that they asked above all else was: What about this commitment that Israel is not going to put any more settlements in our territory? Well, I had been briefed about how to respond to this question before I went out on this trip and given a statement to use. It was a written statement, approved by Brzezinski, that I could assure them that Carter was going to hold Israel to the commitment to freeze new settlements for the duration of the negotiations, and that this meant all the negotiations during the five year transitional period. So I used that. And then at some point during this process, I think we were in Jerusalem, came word that this was not acceptable to Begin; he would freeze settlements for ninety days only during the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations that would begin in October. This clearly was going to become a test of our credibility. I remember sending a recommendation at that time that we had better face up to this issue and consider suggesting to Sadat that the follow-on negotiations for the peace treaty be put in abeyance. Well, that fell like a lead balloon in Washington. The President didn't want the peace process to be interrupted, he wanted the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty concluded. And from his point of view I think in retrospect he was right not to risk losing the treaty. But it was simply putting off what was going to be a serious problem for the future, and it ended whatever chance there was of winning Palestinian and other Arab acceptance of the Camp David Accords.

Sadat did not try to delay the beginning of the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations. The delegations finally convened in Washington in October and began what were to be the negotiations leading up to the Egypt-Israeli peace treaty. The Blair House was made available for the negotiators. The parties both were staying, by the way, at the Madison Hotel. Both the Israeli and Egyptian delegations were on adjoining floors, which was convenient because there could be a lot of informal visiting back and forth by going up and down one flight on the elevator or the back stairs, and the press wouldn't know who was talking to whom, so it was a rather convenient arrangement.

But the formal talks were held at the Blair House when the negotiations opened. Very soon the habit developed of both of the parties having informal meetings in each other's suites at the hotel. And many of the talks that we conducted took place at the hotel-to the point where the head of the Egyptian delegation, who by that time was a new Egyptian foreign minister, Muhammad Ibrahim Kamal, having resigned. The new foreign minister was a retired general named Kamal Hassan Ali, who had quite an illustrious military record and had also been head of Egyptian general intelligence. In him the Egyptian government had a very loyal soldier, but also a very intelligent man who had very good political savvy. He was the head of the Egyptian delegation. The deputy head was the Egyptian minister of state for foreign affairs, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, assisted by a very good professional delegation of advisors from the Foreign Ministry. The Israeli delegation was headed by Moshe Dayan, also assisted by a very able group of supporters from the Foreign Ministry. On our delegation, Cy Vance was the head of it and I was his deputy, with the backstopping of the State Department and NSC staff plus military advisors. We were in Washington, so our whole backstopping was right there.

Vance opened the session, but I chaired a lot of the meetings. We had a lot of small, less formal meetings. And more and more the meetings took place informally at the Madison Hotel. It reached the point where Kamal Hassan Ali, the head of the Egyptian delegation, gave the Madison Hotel the name "Camp Madison." He said, "First the round took place at Camp David and now we're meeting at Camp Madison." And that name stuck, and everybody was soon talking about Camp Madison.

The negotiations were to be concluded in ninety days for the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Well, it turned out that would not be possible. There were just too many issues. The issue of linkage came up again. The Egyptians wanted to reestablish the linkage between implementation of their treaty with the Israelis on the one hand and progress in the negotiations for a Palestinian settlement on the other.

Incidentally, I remember now the names of the documents negotiated at Camp David. One was "A Framework for Peace Between Egypt and Israel." That was the guidelines for the negotiations in Washington. The other was "A Framework for Peace in the Middle East." Comprehensive peace. That was the framework rejected by the Jordanians and Palestinians, for whom it was primarily intended.

I won't try to go through all the negotiations, it would take much too long, and the linkage issue was an important one-linkage between the bilateral treaty and the comprehensive negotiations which we hoped would take place, although we had no commitments from the Jordanians or anybody else.

On the bilateral treaty there was also what became known as the precedence of obligations question, which was a very technical legal question, but it was also very important to the Israelis. How do you formulate Egypt's obligation to make peace with Israel in ways that will override any obligation that Egypt might have with the other Arab states? The Israelis were saying that this treaty takes precedence over all other commitments and agreements, and the Egyptians saying that we have Arab League treaties with the other Arabs, to come to their defense in case they are attacked.

Well, that was resolved. The Israelis consulted an eminent American lawyer, Eugene Rostow, who then was a professor at the law school at Yale. The Egyptians consulted their own people. The person who finally came up with the formula that resolved this, and it became Article VI of the treaty, was Herbert Hansell, who was the legal advisor to Secretary Vance and had joined the delegation as legal advisor. He came up with the ingenious formula that, in effect, squared the circle, in lawyers' language, and was accepted by each party, with their interpretations. And the interpretations were recorded in footnotes to the treaty. It was, again, a case of having each side agree to an ambiguous formula, but it was the only way of getting an agreement.

Another issue was Israel's concern that once it began withdrawing, because in the end it would withdraw from all of Sinai, Egypt would renege on its commitments. So Israel wanted time to put the security arrangements in place and test them before leaving all of the Sinai. What they were giving up even before that were oil fields that they had taken over in the occupation in the Gulf of Suez and in the Sinai itself, plus new oil fields, which they had explored and developed during the occupation period, 1967 through 1973.

Q: No small sacrifice.

ATHERTON: It was a big sacrifice. This was Israel's principal source of oil. The other source was Iran. The Shah had been providing them oil. But just remember, this was 1979, and in late '78 and early '79 the question was how long the Shah would be in power. The Shah's regime was beginning to look very fragile, and they were concerned that if there was another kind of regime in Iran they might no longer be able to buy Iranian oil. Israel had developed very good relations with Iran-not diplomatic, but they had a diplomatic non-mission in Tehran and a very good intelligence cooperation. And they felt quite confident as long as the Shah was strong and in place, but they had begun to get worried about the Shah's staying power and wanted one source of oil that they could feel confident of. They wanted an Egyptian commitment to continuing oil supplies from the fields they were giving up. They also wanted the company which had done the exploring and developing for them, an American company under contract to the Israelis, to be allowed to continue under the Egyptians. This had nothing to do with the company... oil in their territory under Israeli occupation...

It was a Texas company, by the way, and it became the focus of one of the charges or at least one of the allegations against Congressman Jim Wright. The committee investigating Wright was asking whether or not he had improperly used his influence on behalf of this Texas company. He did in fact intervene, but I felt it was proper. He was doing what any congressman would do-asking that his constituents get a chance to present their case.

In any case, the Egyptians did not agree that the American company could stay when Israel withdrew. Israel also wanted a commitment from Egypt that Egypt would continue to provide them oil, so they would have, in effect, the first claim on purchasing oil. They realized they had to buy it, but they wanted a guaranteed delivery of a certain number of barrels per day. And that was a tough one to get the Egyptians to agree to. Egypt had never entered long-term commitments in advance that oil would be available under any circumstances to anyone. The Egyptians said in effect: "We're not a member of OPEC, we don't have long-term contracts. We look at the market prices every quarter and export to the highest bidders. Israel can bid like anyone else." So the Israelis came to us and said they needed a side agreement with the United States-a contingency agreement that we would supply them oil if other suppliers failed. So we had to have a bilateral negotiation with the Israelis on this.

There was also the question raised by Moshe Dayan. We had made the assumption all along that, as the Israelis withdrew from the eastern zones of Sinai, there would be a limited armament zone and then there would be a demilitarized zone, and Egypt had agreed with this, and that the authority who would police these zones would be the United Nations, that the U.N. would be the one to provide peacekeeping forces in these zones to ensure that both sides were abiding by the military limitations in Sinai.

Moshe Dayan said one day, "What if the U.N. doesn't want to do this? What if the Soviets decide that they won't support this and they veto. Then we have no assurance that there will be anybody that we can rely on, to whom we can entrust our security, to keep the Egyptians from violating this agreement to demilitarize in Sinai." He said, "I think we have to have a fallback position..., and I suggest that be the United States."

Obviously, in the end, that's what we did, because we were too far into this treaty not to do what we had to do to make it work. So one article in the treaty provided that in the event the U.N. couldn't do it, the United States would undertake to put together the proper force and monitor the commitments of both sides to keep the peace in the Sinai.

These were the kinds of issues that came up. The linkage issue continued to be around. The ninety days were up, and the treaty had not been completed. It was agreed that there would be an adjournment for the parties to consult in capitals. We all decided to take stock where we were and where we had been, and what issues remained. I won't try to recount them all, because some of them, in retrospect, were really pretty technical and pretty small, but they loomed very large at the time in the minds of both sides.

An attempt was made to resolve them at the foreign minister level or equivalent. This was done by Secretary Vance, who invited Egyptian and Israeli delegations to come to Washington, and President Carter said he would make Camp David available. So we had a second conference at Camp David, without the President. It was Secretary Vance, an Egyptian delegation, headed by a new Egyptian prime minister, Mustafa Khalil, whom Sadat had appointed to oversee the other Egyptian delegates..., and by Dayan on the Israeli side.

It had been our hope that Begin would have come, as prime minister of Israel, since the prime minister of Egypt was there, to deal at a more authoritative level. But, in practice, Begin said he only dealt with Sadat and he would not deal with his Egyptian counterpart, because he was really the power in the Israeli system and the president was only ceremonial, and he, Begin, was the real decision maker, whereas Sadat was the decision maker in Egypt. The point was well taken.

The problem at this Camp David, which came to be called Camp David II, was that Mustafa Khalil did have a very broad delegation of authority from Sadat, whereas Dayan was on a very short leash from Begin. So there was no parity, and it turned out, again, that it was impossible to resolve the issues.

The next thing that was tried was for the Secretary and the President to send a delegation consisting of the State Department legal advisor, Herbert Hansell, and myself to the area, to shuttle between Jerusalem and Cairo and try to resolve some of the so-called technical issues.

By now we were early in 1979, and I remember it was cold in Jerusalem, Hansell and I did all we could. We had some meetings with both sides. We had various drafts that we took with us as the basis for language that would become articles of the treaty, because what we were trying to do was just negotiate solutions to articles in the treaty that had not been agreed on in Washington. It was a potpourri of unresolved issues, and our job was to try to find the solutions, or at least solve as many as we could.

Part of this process was, in effect, to negotiate side agreements with the Israelis and Egyptians, sort of bilateral memoranda of understanding, which would be interpretations of articles in the treaty which would satisfy the two parties. And we found that we were getting into a situation where one memorandum of understanding canceled out the agreement with the other side. In order to satisfy the Israeli government, their desire for a particular interpretation, we would come up with formulations which we showed the Egyptians, and they would want a bilateral understanding that would contradict the one we had just agreed on with the Israelis. And in the end this whole process came to naught. The whole idea of having these side memoranda was dropped. And Hansell and I came back to Washington, essentially having achieved no progress.

Q: How was the use of the Suez Canal by the Israelis handled?

ATHERTON: You know, interestingly enough, I don't recall that that was a major issue. The Egyptians had agreed from the beginning that once peace was in place, the canal would be open to Israeli shipping. It was a question of when that would start, the timing of Israeli access. But there was never any question that the Israelis would be given access.

There were lots of other issues. There was the question of timing of the exchange of ambassadors, opening diplomatic missions, bilateral agreements to implement some of the general provisions. The treaty had a general provision on normal peaceful relations between Egypt and Israel. The Israelis wanted explicit agreements on when observance of the Arab boycott by Egypt would be dropped, when the borders would reopen and when trade relations would be reestablished, banks would have offices in each other's territory, when there would be cultural exchanges, professors, students. They wanted all sorts of flesh on the bones of normal peaceful relations. And the Egyptians were trying to resist making commitments in such detail.

Q: You just put one blanket over all of it-sort of normal relations.

ATHERTON: Egypt just wanted a general commitment, but the Israelis believed that there had to be specifics. This was solved by annexes to the treaty saying that there would be subsequent negotiations on implementing in detail the principles of normalization.

Anyway, there ended up, still, a few unresolved issues. And by now we were getting into the spring of 1979 and some concern that the whole thing might begin to unravel.

I should add, parenthetically, that while this was going on, there were other things going on in the world.

Q: Hardly seems possible.

ATHERTON: Well, Valentine's Day, 1979, was the first takeover of the American Embassy in Tehran. And, I think the same day, Spike Dubs, our ambassador in Afghanistan, was taken hostage and killed, while the embassy siege in Tehran was ended.

Q: And they were all NEA.

ATHERTON: They were all major and all had to do with NEA. I was, of course, no longer there, it was Hal Saunders' problem-my successor as Assistant Secretary.

My recollection is that we left off last time during a hiatus in the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty negotiations. The negotiations had been suspended because there were a number of issues that had proven insoluble at that stage, and the Administration was casting about for ways to try to get the negotiations resumed, to get the delegations back to Washington to complete the treaty. By the terms of the Camp David Accords, the objective was to have the treaty all wrapped up ninety days after Camp David, which would have been by the end of 1978. But instead there were too many issues unresolved, and the negotiations were in abeyance.

One effort that was made was to have Secretary Vance convene the Egyptians and Israelis at Camp David, at what came to be known as Camp David II. I think I have already gone over that in the previous discussion, so I don't want to cover the same ground again except to note that that had not worked either. It had been impossible, at the level of secretaries and foreign ministers and, in the case of the Egyptians, the new prime minister, Mustafa Khalil, to resolve the issues. And it was finally decided that the only way, the last chance, really, the last hope was for the President himself to talk to Begin and to Sadat. Which meant a very big gamble, obviously, because the President would have put his neck on the line, in effect, to make a trip to the area. If this didn't succeed, then it would be very difficult to see what was left. This was the final court of appeal, if you will.

The trip finally took place in early March of 1979, and it involved very intensive discussions between President Carter and Prime Minister Begin and his cabinet in Israel, and in Egypt largely only with President Sadat, because he did not have a collegial government as the Israeli government was.

The issues that were the most difficult to resolve at this point had to do first of all with Israel's concern about Egypt's giving precedence to the treaty over its defense commitments to the other Arabs.

Israel wanted language in the treaty that would say, in effect, that the commitments under this treaty take precedence over any other obligations of the parties. Egypt was a member of the Arab League Defense Pact and also had bilateral defense agreements with a number of Arab countries. What that meant basically was that if there were another war between Israel and any of the other Arab countries, what the Israelis wanted was an Egyptian commitment that they would stand aside, they would not take part.

Egypt said it would not take part in an aggressive war, but if the war were an Israeli attack on another Arab, or if it were seen that Israel had provoked it, and they called on Egypt to come to their defense, then Sadat wanted to preserve the right to abide by his treaties to help defend his Arab allies.

This was Article VI of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, and that became one of the most difficult issues that held up the treaty right down to the wire.

Another issue was Israel's desire, once it gave up the oil fields that it had occupied in Sinai and developed in Suez, a desire to have a firm commitment from Egypt for the delivery of so many barrels of oil from the fields, a firm commitment that Egypt would provide or sell at the market price, that it would commit itself to sell in the volume of oil to Israel that Israel was getting out of those oil fields when it was in occupation of the oil fields.

There was also a desire on the part of Sadat to have somewhat earlier withdrawal of Israel to the first line of withdrawal in Sinai, to foreshorten the timetable of the first stage of Israeli withdrawal.

On their part, the Israelis wanted to renegotiate the understanding about the timing of the exchange of ambassadors. They wanted to get an Egyptian ambassador in Israel and an Israeli ambassador in Egypt sooner than had been agreed in the original draft.

So these were the kind of issues that had to be dealt with. But the principal ones, as I recall, were this so-called Article VI problem of the precedence of obligation and, secondly, the question of oil, of a commitment of oil to the Israelis. There were other issues, but those stand out, in my mind at least, as the ones that were the most difficult.

And Carter's negotiations with Begin and his cabinet were extraordinarily difficult and went on and on and on. The cabinet met all night, and they gathered again the next morning, and it looked as though the impasse was not going to be broken, that Carter was not going to get enough from Begin that he could go to Sadat and say: Now, this is reasonable, and I hope you will accept these compromises so we can get on with the peace treaty.

Carter was just about, in fact, to leave, and was planning to try to put the best face on his leaving, by statements that would say that perhaps after a couple of weeks the Secretary and the foreign ministers could try again, when the Israeli foreign minister, Moshe Dayan, took Secretary Vance aside and said to him that he was very concerned that all these efforts were going to come to naught. He had been the negotiator at Camp David. He had been the negotiator in Washington. He was quite committed to the objective of peace with Israel and felt that Israel was missing a chance, and so he said, "Let me try one more time." And he had another go around with another proposal on these issues that he tried out on Begin. And he did, in the end succeed, in moving Mr. Begin just enough to give something that Carter could take to Sadat and say: This is a concession to you.

One will have to read the record of this, preferably in Bill Quandt's book on Camp David, to get all the details of how it was resolved. But it was definitely Moshe Dayan who was the one who saved the day in the end by getting Begin to give a bit on the Israeli position.

Carter flew to Cairo. Sadat was waiting for him at the airport. They went in and had a private meeting and then came out on the tarmac at the airport. Carter announced that they had reached agreement and that the date had been set for the signing of the treaty in Washington later that month. That was a dramatic moment. For once, the hard-hearted press all cheered and several were seen to weep.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the Israeli position had been decided beforehand and they were just adamant, they weren't going to reach that final position without being pushed to the very end...?

ATHERTON: It wasn't that clear to me that they had their fallback all worked out. I think Begin thought he had given his fallbacks and they weren't enough. And it was Dayan who persuaded him that he had to go just a bit further. I really don't think this was all staged. My impression was that it really was genuinely a near-breakdown, and Dayan moved in to put it together. When all the diplomatic documents of the era, of that period, are finally published, maybe I'll be proven wrong and maybe you'll be right. But my impression at least was that this was a genuine crisis and a genuine impasse, and it took Dayan's ingenuity and persistence to find a way around it.

So that set the stage, and the parties descended on Washington. Begin and Sadat and their delegations all arrived in Washington for the signing. My recollection is that Sadat stayed at the Egyptian Embassy, and I'm not sure whether Begin stayed at the Israeli Embassy or at a hotel, I can't remember that.

In any case, there still were a couple of loose ends, I should point out. There was still not quite a final agreement on the question of Egyptian delivery of oil to Israel. The Egyptians said: "We can't give Israel priority here. We sell to the highest bidder." But they had come to a formula which was very close to acceptable. And the night before the signing of the peace treaty, Begin and Sadat had a private meeting and came to an understanding between them on the arrangements that were made on oil, which basically met the Egyptian point that they would not earmark a quota of oil to sell to Israel, they would not say "We will earmark so much," but that they would give Israel a chance to bid whenever they put it up for their quarterly auctions. There was a kind of an understanding that Israel would be given most-favored-nation treatment.

Q: Go to the head of the line.

ATHERTON: Go to the head of the line, without calling it that. And, in fact, that's how it has worked ever since. Israel never did get the commitment of a quota, but it's been able to buy all the oil it wants from Egypt ever since, as far as I know. Of course, the fallback, and the reason why Begin could accept something less than what he wanted, was the commitment from the United States that, if all else failed, we would be the supplier of last resort. They have never had to call on that commitment, because other sources, including Egypt in particular, have been adequate.

Well, this was March, and the treaty was signed with great fanfare on the White House lawn. Everyone basked in the glory of the moment. And then the question was: How do we now go on to the next stage, because the treaty included a side understanding, if you will, between Egypt and Israel, and which the United States had helped negotiate and, in a way, was a party to, that the two parties would move quickly to begin negotiations on the other part of the Camp David Accords having to do in the first instance with autonomy for the West Bank and Gaza-the Palestinian question.

Remember that the other Arabs had not accepted Camp David. The Palestinians had not accepted it, and Sadat had said that if Jordan and the Palestinians, who were invited also to accept this agreement, if they didn't accept it, then Sadat said he would, in effect, become the representative of the Jordanians and the Palestinians. Egypt would participate at least in the first stage of negotiations for implementation of that part of Camp David which called for an interim agreement on the status of the West Bank and Gaza as a basis for giving autonomy to the local Palestinian inhabitants, with a degree of self-government, which basically would replace the military government, while Israel remained there as a security force, and to create breathing space during which the ground would be laid to negotiate the final status. Camp David provided that there would be autonomy and that once an autonomy regime was in place, then within three years the Palestinian representatives, Jordanians and Egyptians, would begin negotiating a final settlement for the final status of these territories and that would be completed within five years.

So Sadat said: Well, I'll help get this process started. I will ask my foreign minister and a delegation from Egypt to be the surrogates, in a way, for the Jordanians and Palestinians, and we will sit down with the Israelis and begin negotiating the elements of autonomy which we can offer the Palestinians, and hopefully it will be attractive enough so they will accept it, and then they can become a party with the Jordanians to these negotiations.

So the problem was to begin getting organized for what became known as the autonomy talks, which dealt with the West Bank and Gaza but were carried out on the Arab side by Egypt in the absence of any Jordanian or Palestinian negotiators.

The question, of course, also was: Who was going to conduct these negotiations for the United States? It was clear that the United States had to be a party to them, and everybody agreed that we would be at the table. They were Egyptian and Israeli negotiations, but the U.S. would be there as a friend of both sides and help bridge any gaps.

The President decided he would appoint his good friend and political supporter, Robert Strauss, as his representative to head the delegation to the autonomy talks. I can remember, when Strauss was asked by the President and agreed that he would do this, the time came to brief him. And one of the first meetings he had was with Hal Saunders and me to bring him up to date on the issues and what this was all about, because Strauss, while he had an interest in this, had not been involved in these negotiations and had most recently been involved in the negotiations on the trade issues as the President's Special Trade Representative.

I can remember his first question on the autonomy issue was: "Have I taken on Mission Impossible?"

And my response to him was: "Well, if not impossible, it's going to be very uphill."

And he looked a little bit reflective at that point as though thinking "Well, what have I gotten myself into?" But he had made a commitment and he was going to do it.

And so he began assembling his team, which consisted of, basically, backstoppers from the Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs, plus his own personal assistant whose responsibility was largely to manage his program. It was basically Strauss plus the State Department backup from Washington. And then both the embassy in Cairo and the embassy in Tel Aviv designated one or two officers to join the negotiations when they took place, so there would be representation from the field. The Egyptians named a delegation, the Israelis named a delegation.

The Israeli delegation typically was a compromise, because of political pressures to have all parties represented. So the solution was to name Yosef Burg, who was the head of the National Religious Party in Israel, a minority party but a swing party in the coalition, to be the head of the delegation. But it also included Ariel Sharon, who was something of a hawk on the question of not giving up any territory-he very much represented Begin's point of view. And another minister representing the Liberal Party, I think, within the Israeli coalition government. Plus a lot of good, able professionals from the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Dayan was not a member, although he was the foreign minister. He, I think, took the position that he should be clearly the one in charge. He didn't want a delegation where he would have to be negotiating internally within his delegation as well as with the Egyptians. And so he, in effect, took himself out of it.

And the talks were all set. The Egyptians had their delegation staffed by very able career people from the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, headed by the foreign minister, as I recall, who was Kamal Hassan Ali-or was it headed at this point by Prime Minister Khalil? The record will have to show, I'm a little fuzzy. All I remember was that the staffing was quite good on all three delegations, very well thought of professionals who had been involved in the process and knew all the issues and knew the history of the negotiations.

I had by that time been told that the President was going to nominate me as the new ambassador to Cairo. Hermann Eilts, who had been there since the resumption of relations in 1974, was retiring to take an appointment as a professor at Boston University. And when I heard he was going to retire, on one of my trips out, I said, "I think I will go back and put my name in the hat for this job." And Hermann said he thought it was a splendid idea. So I did go to the Secretary and said, "I hear Hermann is going to retire. I have been back in Washington almost fourteen years now, and I really do want to get back overseas. I go overseas a lot on trips, but not postings. I would very much like to be a candidate for the new ambassador in Cairo." The Secretary took note, and in due course informed me that the President agreed and was going to make me ambassador to Cairo.

Once I got through the hearing and confirmation, which went very well and very easily, Betty and I headed for Cairo. Got there in late June, about three months after the peace treaty was signed.

Summer is the time in Egypt when President Sadat stayed in Alexandria, and the government functions out of Alexandria. Normally no credential presentation ceremonies take place over the summer. Ambassadors either don't arrive or they simply wait to present their credentials until Sadat comes back to Cairo. This presented something of a problem, because the autonomy negotiations were supposed to start almost immediately, around the first part of July, and I couldn't fully function if I wasn't fully accredited. So Sadat said he would make an exception and would receive my credentials, in Alexandria, at Ras al-Jin palace which had been Muhammad Ali's and all the other kings', all the way down to Farouk, on the Alexandria harbor. But since there were several ambassadors who had been waiting longer than I, there had to be a series of presentations. So, in a way, the pressure of getting me accredited so I could be fully functioning when the autonomy talks began, moved several other ambassadors ahead in getting scheduled to present their credentials.

And it was a grand ceremony. I was the last in this particular group, and when it was all over, Sadat invited me to stay behind and have a few words. I was now fully accredited. And just in time, because Bob Strauss was due to arrive on, I think, the third of July. This was 1979, and Strauss, with his delegation, was due to arrive. There were two other American visitors before that.

While we were in Alexandria and in Cairo in those early days, the first visitor, as I recall, was George Bush, who was then starting to run in the Republican primaries against Ronald Reagan, and he was making what was considered the obligatory pilgrimage that all presidential candidates make, which in those days included Egypt and Sadat. So Bush came to Alexandria for a meeting with Sadat. And Betty and I were out at the Alexandria airport and greeted him.

We had known him pretty well, in earlier incarnations, when he had been at the U.N., and Betty had taught the Bushes' daughter at National Cathedral School, so she had had the Bushes as parents of one of her students and particularly had parent conferences with Mrs. Bush. We had a fairly easy relationship, and we had a nice chat while he was waiting to go off and pay his respects to Sadat.

The other visitor who came and I greeted at the airport in Cairo was Henry Kissinger, who had been invited as a special guest in Egypt. I met him and took him to the hotel, and he told me what was on his mind and wanted to be briefed on Egypt. It also gave me a chance to talk to him about my concerns about Iran.

This was the time when the Carter administration was being pressed very hard to give asylum to the Shah of Iran, who by that time had been overthrown and was being sent around to Panama and various other places looking for a permanent home, and, although we didn't know it at the time, fatally ill with cancer. He needed treatment. I guess it was known by that time; it had not been known before that. And Carter was hesitating, because this would complicate our relations with the new revolutionary government in Iran.

And I had an additional concern, and I found out later that others had made the same point. I said if the Shah is admitted to the States, I'm afraid that we ought to evacuate all of our people from Tehran first, because I'm afraid that there will be those who will see them as potential hostages, used as a bargaining lever to press us to turn the Shah over to revolutionary justice. What they wanted most was to get the Shah back in Iran where they could try him for crimes against the people of Iran.

I had made the same point to David Rockefeller earlier, when I met with him before leaving the States. I had a consultation with him because he was then chairman of the board of the Chase Bank, and Chase Bank was very big in Egypt. He was a strong supporter of the Shah. Chase Bank had the Shah's account among other things.

Both David Rockefeller and Henry Kissinger said they thought it was unconscionable of the Carter administration not to show more gratitude towards this man who had been our friend for so long and let him into the States and give him asylum. And that was when I said that there was another side to it, that there was the risk our people would become hostages in Iran. Anyway, that was one of the issues in my discussion that I remember with Henry Kissinger.

Back to the main story, however. Bob Strauss and the delegation arrived in Alexandria to begin the negotiations, the second or third of July.

It was just before the Fourth of July, I remember, because we were having to organize a Fourth of July reception at the embassy in Cairo, at the residence, which we had hardly begun to move into. In fact, we hadn't had a chance to hang pictures or do anything. It had been refurnished for us, but we added a lot of personal touches. And then there was a great big American community Fourth of July affair for the Americans in Cairo at the Cairo American College-a school for the American and international community. We had to be present for that, so there was a lot of pressure to get organized in time to do the right things on the Fourth of July.

But I had to be in Alexandria for the beginning of the autonomy talks. And that also had its complications. The Egyptians were hosting this first round of talks, and then the next time they would be held in Israel.

The reason they were in Alexandria, by the way, was because the Egyptians insisted that they would not conduct these talks in Jerusalem, which Israel said was its capital. And therefore the Egyptians said: Well, in that case, we can't have the talks in our capital, which is Cairo. So they agreed that they would have the talks in Alexandria and then in one of the suburbs of Tel Aviv. That was one of the first problems.

The second problem was that the Egyptians just assumed that they would put all of the delegations up at what was considered at that time the newest and best, certainly the hotel with the best facilities in Alexandria, which was called the Palestine Hotel. It was built during the days of the Nasser regime. It was where, in fact, an Arab summit was held in 1964 at which the PLO was admitted to the Arab League. And I think it was named Palestine Hotel in honor of that occasion. The Israelis were horrified at the thought that they should be meeting in a hotel called the Palestine Hotel, and they said that public opinion would not understand having these talks in the Palestine Hotel. So the Egyptians, as good hosts, immediately said: Well, the next best hotel is the San Stephano down on the corniche, but it's very old, and one of the problems is that it doesn't have any air conditioning, and this is July. And lo and behold the Egyptians arranged to get air conditioners in every room that was going to be used by the delegations and in the conference rooms. They did it all on very short notice, and this old hotel suddenly came to life. And that's where the talks, in fact, actually took place.

There was one other difficulty. The hotel had a discotheque, and the first night the band kept Bob Strauss awake with its playing, and so we had to get the band shut off at bedtime.

But the talks finally got underway and with great formalities at the beginning. And that was the beginning of the attempts by Israel and Egypt to negotiate the basis for Palestinian-Jordanian entry into the negotiating process.

There are a couple of things that perhaps are worth noting about arriving on the scene in Egypt, during this period. It was not the Egypt of the earlier period. There were certain things that would not have been normal in earlier periods.

First of all, the Soviet Union, while it still was represented there, was under Sadat in the background. The Soviet ambassador, who used to always have direct access to everybody, had access to almost nobody. This was really an American show, and the Soviets were on the sidelines in Egypt.

There were almost no Arab embassies, because all the Arabs, except for Oman and Sudan, as I recall, had broken diplomatic relations with Egypt when Egypt signed the peace treaty with Israel. Now a few of them kept small interest sections open; others closed up entirely. So there was no Arab diplomatic corps in a capital that had originally more Arab diplomatic missions than any other capital in the world.

And there was no Arab League headquarters. The Arab League which had had its headquarters in Cairo from its beginnings, in '47 or so, right after the Second World War and at the beginning of the independence in many Arab states, had been pulled out of Cairo because of Egypt's peace treaty with Israel and had been moved to Tunis.

So there was no Arab diplomatic corps, except for two or three small embassies, no Arab League, very little Soviet or Eastern bloc presence, and a very large, almost dominant American presence. Large in numbers and also large in the role we were playing in Egypt in those days, and very large in terms of our commitment of resources in Egypt.

We had a very large AID program, which continued to grow both in money and in the number of personnel in the agency to administer it. We had an Office of Military Cooperation, to administer the military supply program that began in Egypt under Sadat and by now was becoming quite large.

There were issues, which I will mention in a minute, with respect to these programs and in U.S.-Egyptian relations, but for the most part, this was the honeymoon period. The Egyptians were euphoric that peace had arrived. Sadat and Begin were trying to get along and to make the peace treaty work. There were Israeli delegations in and out of town all the time. I saw more of my Israeli friends in Cairo than I had seen for years.

Most of these were government delegations, very few private visitors. Most of them were coming because they were there to negotiate with Egypt various implementing agreements to carry out some of the provisions of the peace treaty.

The peace treaty did not work out all the details of trade relations and banking relations and travel arrangements and cultural exchanges and all sorts of things which were very important to the Israelis, to put flesh on the bones of the peace treaty, to put flesh on that language about normal peaceful relations. So it was agreed in the treaty negotiations and in one of the annexes, I think, that after the treaty was signed and had gone into effect, there would be a number of implementing agreements negotiated and signed in cultural affairs, trade affairs, et cetera, et cetera.

And so these Israeli delegations were coming to deal with their Egyptian counterparts on these implementing agreements, which the Egyptians were not as inclined to move rapidly on as the Israelis were. While Sadat had said at the top, we have a commitment and we are preceding to do these things, there was a great deal of resistance along the line in the bureaucracy, particularly among the people in the Foreign Ministry, but others as well, who felt very strongly that they did not want to make it look as though they had made a separate peace treaty and that Sadat had forgotten all about the Palestinians. And therefore they didn't want to have too warm a relationship or too normal a relationship unless other Arabs were to join in the process with Begin and Sadat. They could then say that we haven't deserted the rest of the Arab world.

And it partly was self-protection, too. A lot of the Egyptians involved in this were concerned about their personal positions in relation to the other Arab countries. It wasn't just government people, there were professors who were not anxious to enter academic exchange programs with Israel.

I will give you an example of the kind of complications this caused for many private Egyptians and government Egyptians because Israel was still at war with the other Arabs. Many academics in Egypt, who were notoriously low-paid, used to go and lecture during sabbatical years or during the period when their universities were on holiday, at universities in the Gulf countries. They would go and lecture in Kuwait or in the Emirates or in Saudi Arabia, and quite frankly said they made more money lecturing for a month there than they made all year as professors at Cairo University. So this was very important, and if they were to be seen to be cooperating with the Israelis, they would end up on the Arab blacklist and would no longer be welcome in these countries. So there was a personal incentive, a financial incentive for a lot of Egyptians not to become too involved in the normalization of relations with Israelis-something the Israelis, of course, didn't have to worry about, and the Israelis were very anxious to press these agreements. Still, there was a lot of coming and going.

Begin had promised to send a friend of his to Egypt who was a big entrepreneur, with access to development capital, to help Egypt develop some of its agricultural resources. He offered, in effect, Israeli agricultural technical assistance, which Sadat had accepted and then told his government to meet with the Israelis and work out the details. There were a number of meetings of that kind.

I might add, by the way, that the one area of cooperation which really did get underway then, and very quietly, not with a lot of publicity in Egypt, was in the area of agricultural technology, because the Israelis did have something to offer based on their experience in desert agriculture and in irrigation. They had an agreement with the Egyptian minister of agriculture. The minister of agriculture, by the way, was one of the few senior Egyptians who really saw advantages in accepting Israeli offers of this kind. And so an agricultural technical team of Israelis was in Egypt continuously, as far as I know, all the time I was there. You never saw them, they worked in the delta. They kept a very low profile, worked closely with their Egyptian colleagues, and had very good relations with the Ministry of Agriculture. They even survived the general freeze that set in after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, by the way. That particular activity was protected and continued, because it was something the Egyptian minister of agriculture and others felt was of benefit to Egypt. There were some little chinks in this wall, that began to provide the Egyptians and the Israelis more normal relations.

There were other things that arose later on, but at the moment the overwhelming attitude was one of relief that the wars with Israel were behind, that there would be now a great American economic assistance program. The army was going to get good modern American equipment, happy to replace its aging Soviet equipment.

Sadat had a vision of strategic change in three areas. First of all, he would make peace with Israel and normalize the international situation in the area, which required shifting from close relations with the Soviets to the United States. Secondly, he was going to build democracy in place of the dictatorship of the Nasser period. And thirdly, he was going to liberalize the economy, to let the private sector flourish alongside the very large government sector which owned all major industries and dominated the economy.

So there were lots of things on the docket and lots of optimism that a new era was dawning. But there were little shadows on the horizon. One of them was the differences over the administration of U.S. aid to Egypt, which was very large and growing really faster than the Egyptians could absorb the monies that were being appropriated. The level of appropriations was determined more by political than economic considerations. I would give great credit to Donald Brown, who was the career AID officer who was head of the AID mission and put together a good group of people and conceptually a very ambitious program to try to use our aid not only for its political impact, but also to fund an economic development program, to get at some of the fundamental infrastructural deficiencies. The Egyptian infrastructure had been neglected pretty much in the later Nasser years; all the resources had gone into getting ready for another war, so that everything from electricity generation to transportation to roads, communications, water treatment, sewage, all these areas had to be tackled. And AID began to develop, with the Egyptians, projects in many of these areas. Some would say it tried to do too much too fast, it got too extended. And the program in general began to be criticized by various people on the Egyptian side, who charged that the Americans were trying to take over, were imposing their ideas on Egypt. Others were happy to have the Americans there, but they often wanted more money for their pet projects at the expense of others. The Egyptian government had a planning ministry, but it had very great difficulty in sorting out its priorities. It really wanted to do everything, and it tried to satisfy all the ministries by putting everybody's projects on the agenda and without much attempt to prioritize... So there was a constant debate over how to order the priorities in an aid program of this size. And speaking of this size, we're talking about an aid program approaching eight hundred million to a billion dollars a year.

Q: As ambassador, how did you manage to control all this?

ATHERTON: Well, it wasn't easy. In fact, I'm not sure I ever did totally control it. I had, on paper, the authority, because all elements of the mission were under the direction of the ambassador, including the AID mission and USIS and the military supply mission. I was to be kept informed of all that they were doing and give them policy guidance, and any major decisions were to be referred to me.

And, in fact, they all, I think, in their own ways tried to be cooperative. The problem was structural. The AID mission was separate physically and it had its own internal procedures and lines of authority and procedures for preparing feasibility studies and getting them approved and dealing with Washington. And it tended to take on a life of its own.

The biggest problem I had, I suppose, was the relationship between the embassy economic section and the AID mission. We had an economic counselor and an economic section whose job was to analyze and report on the Egyptian economy, to prepare both macroeconomic and microeconomic analyses, to be in a position to help advise American business, to encourage it to take an interest in looking at Egypt as a possible place to do business and to invest, to take advantage of Sadat's open-door economic policy.

But I never succeeded in totally overcoming the bureaucratic rivalries between the economic counselor and his economic staff in the embassy on the one hand, and the AID mission's economic analysis unit on the other. And they were frequently doing many of the same things. You would often find that the head of the economic analysis unit in the AID mission had made an appointment with somebody in the Ministry of Finance and would meet the economic counselor coming out the door, having been there for the same purpose.

I think we did finally overcome that to some extent by establishing a kind of clearinghouse arrangement and persuading AID to invite the economic counselor to sit in on its staff meetings, just as the AID people sat in on mine. It finally came down to personalities, having the right people willing to work together. But it was more individuals making a bureaucratic system work than the system working on its own.

It was difficult with that large an AID mission. The whole embassy staff, as I recall, finally began to level off, counting all direct-hire personnel, at somewhere around 400 or more. It was one of the biggest embassies in the world, measured in terms of direct-hire staff.

The overwhelming number, the single largest component was AID, which was 125, 130 or something like that. The military mission also grew as the size of the military program grew. That also grew eventually to be a billion-dollar-a-year program. Given all this, the administrative support side of the embassy had to be tremendous.

We had 12 general service officers, partly because you could not get many services done on the Egyptian economy. The level of skill for such simple things as electricians, plumbers, carpenters, for a mission this size, was just not high enough. For one thing, all of the really skilled Egyptians had been siphoned off to work for good money in the Gulf countries. So it wasn't just our problem, the Egyptians had the same problem and complained about not being able to get their automobiles repaired, et cetera, et cetera. So we had a motor pool with our own mechanics. We had a general service unit with our own carpenters, our own plumbers, our own electricians. And you had to have people to oversee them.

We ran all the housing, some government-owned and some leased. There was nobody out on the private market trying to find their own housing, so we ran this enormous housing program for that large official American community.

And that was another story in itself, how you try to be equitable in the assignment of housing between different elements of the missions, with AID people feeling that State people got preference and State people feeling that AID people got preference.

And the military had their own internal rank order problems. There were three service attachï¿½s: a defense attachï¿½, who was also, when I got there, the air attachï¿½, but had been traditionally the Naval attachï¿½. This came about before my time, under Hermann Eilts. Henry Kissinger had an Air Force general officer who had been working closely with him, and he wanted the defense attachï¿½ position shifted from naval attachï¿½ to air attachï¿½ to accommodate this officer. When I got to Cairo, the defense attachï¿½ had the rank of colonel. The head of the military supply mission was a general officer. The defense attachï¿½ was traditionally the senior military officer on the ambassador's staff, but the Secretary of Defense looked to the ranking officer, who happened to be the head of the Office of Military Cooperation and a general officer, as the defense representative in Egypt. And that led to endless frictions within the military components of the embassy.

So an ambassador had to spend a lot of time dealing with these kinds of problems. And I did spend an enormous amount of my time on them, as did my DCM, Freeman Matthews, who had been the DCM when I got there. He was Hermann Eilts' DCM and he stayed on for the transition period. It took an enormous amount of his time and my time to deal with these management issues and oversight of the AID program, oversight of the military program, being sure that decisions weren't made which had policy implications that we were not aware of, not on purpose but inadvertently. When you get this kind of a program going, it takes on a life of its own, with individual senior members of the AID mission dealing with their counterparts in the Ministry directly, and soon the line becomes blurred between operations and policy.

One of the problems we had was AID people making trips to Alexandria, because we had projects in Alexandria. We had a consul general in Alexandria, and there was a standing instruction that no one would go to Alexandria and have appointments with government people there, in the Alexandria consular district, without clearing it through the consul general and making sure the consul general knew they were coming and what they were doing and given the opportunity to take part. Well, that was violated repeatedly, until we got a consul general who really put her foot down. It was Frances Cook, who became consul general later in my tour. And she was the first one to establish that this was not just pro forma, this was serious, that we had to have coordination within the mission and the consul general was part of the mission.

It was just a very large and difficult-to-manage conglomeration of agencies and individuals, all very dedicated, all doing important things, and all with lots of program money. On top of that, we had a large American private community: business community, AID contractor community, educational community, big press corps in those days, all of which needed a certain amount of attention.

I should add, by the way, one of Betty's and my prouder legacies in Cairo, and really Betty gets the credit for this, was recognizing that this American community, which had mushroomed tremendously, was without any internal integrated support system. And a lot of people would come out, not so much in the embassy as in private business community or in the American School, which had a very large faculty who had difficulty adjusting to life in Egypt. The school was called the Cairo American College, covering from kindergarten to twelfth grade, with about 1200 students. About half the students were Americans and the other half all other nationalities, including some Egyptians with special permission. But this large American expatriate community didn't have the kind of support system we take for granted in the States. There were no mental health counselors, no counselors to deal with drug problems or teenage problems, orientation in the school, a whole range of things. And the result was that there were community problems, including families that couldn't adjust and had to be shipped back home. There were problems with some of the teenagers experimenting with the more potent versions of hashish and marijuana that grew there. In the early days we didn't have a hard drug problem, though that came later. But we did have alcohol problems, and we had hashish and marijuana problems. And we had just general discipline problems. And, you know, a big American community in a Third World country, usually living in a fairly concentrated neighborhood, creates community relations problems. We were worried about our image, about the large American presence becoming itself a liability in terms of U.S.-Egyptian relations. We needed the personal level and at the popular level the equivalent of what was a very good relationship at the official level, a very cooperative relationship. So Betty had the idea that we ought to try to establish some kind of a community support network. Originally the concept was basically to deal with mental health problems, and the embassy, with Betty's prodding, was able to persuade the medical division in the State Department to give some seed money out of the mental health program to help get such a program started in Cairo. The seed money was used to bring a couple, whom we had heard about who were doing counseling in Kuala Lumpur, to Cairo to be interviewed by members of the American community, to see if they would be willing to establish, in Egypt, a counseling service of the kind that they had run very successfully, we were told, in Malaysia.

Q: This is for young people?

ATHERTON: It's for anybody in the community. It grew as it went along. The first thing was to pull together a core group of Americans who would commit themselves to try to make this happen. Betty organized it, but she had to get a group of people to work with her. And that meant relying to a very large extent on the private business community, particularly the large companies who we thought could perhaps contribute money.

The seed money was used to pay the travel costs of this couple from Malaysia to come and meet with the core group and any other members of the community who were interested, in Cairo. It didn't take very long for a number of people, Betty's friends and others that she had pulled together, to say that this couple has a role to play, we really need to build a support system for the American community, to deal with adjustment problems, to deal with family stresses, to deal with teenage problems, to work in the school as well as in the community generally.

And that was the origin of what became known as the Community Services Association, the CSA. It grew from this couple to a large staff and a budget that eventually got up to several hundred thousand dollars a year, plus a lot of support in kind.

For a long time the embassy provided an apartment, which it had on lease, for the couple to live in and also for office purposes. Amoco, one of the big oil companies, put an automobile at their disposal, and they also gave money.

My first experience at fund raising was having a meeting of the leaders of the business community at the embassy, with Betty, to tell them about this program and to urge them to help support it. And that was the beginning of what became a self-supporting organization. They also charged modest fees for some of the services, to help provide income.

Eventually it became a resource for the school, as well as for the private and official community. And it's still going today, very strong. That couple has now left. They were asked to set up a similar organization for the American community in Taiwan, and that's now where they are. But they left a very viable organization behind them, which continues today to perform a very essential role in the community.

We had great cooperation, for example, from some of the Marine security guards in working with some of the kids. We had great cooperation from some of the embassy security officers in dealing with the local Egyptian police in the communities where the Americans lived, to work on police-community relations and on community relations for the Egyptians and Americans. I think we probably nipped a lot of problems in the bud that might have strained, at a personal level, relations between the American and Egyptian communities. Not entirely. They still to some extent existed, but I think we were able to do a lot to ameliorate them.

There were other issues, to just mention in passing, because of the rapid growth in the official community. There was a need to improve the housing available for Americans in Cairo. And therefore the Foreign Buildings Office, FBO, had already, even before we got there, made a decision that they would build a couple of apartment complexes to house members of the AID mission, plus others. It was to be interagency housing, which helped break down the barriers between the different components of the embassy. If you have people living in the same compound, in the same complex they get to know each other better than just seeing each other in the office.

In addition, the decision had been made and FBO was well advanced in drawing up plans to build a new residence for the ambassador, on property that had been acquired way back before the 1967 War by Luke Battle when he was the ambassador there.

Q: Luke Battle has covered that very amusingly in his interview.

ATHERTON: Well, I won't cover it again, except to say that it turned out to be a debacle in the end. But, in any case, when we got there the decision was already made and plans already approved by FBO, architects already chosen, to construct a new residence.

We were living, as did the Eilts before us and our successors ever since then up to this day, in a very nice old, not lavish but comfortable villa on the island of az-Zamalik, which had been, before the '67 War, the DCM residence.

The DCM residence we owned; the ambassador's residence had been leased. When the war broke out, the lease was allowed to expire and we lost that building. And when we resumed relations in 1974 it was too late because the Japanese government had bought it and it was now the Japanese ambassador's residence.

But we did have this property right on the Nile in Giza, across the river from Cairo, very nice location, and the plan was to build a new residence and eventually move out of the villa in az-Zamalik and into this new residence.

Also the decision had been made to build a new embassy office building. And that became a bone of contention, because the original plan was to build a seventeen-story-high tower, which at that point would have been the tallest building around in that part of town. Later, other buildings have gone up higher, but then it would have dominated the landscape.

And some people in the embassy, particularly some of my political officers, felt that this was the wrong statement for the Americans, that we were trying to keep a low profile, because we were so big in our programs, in order not to convey the image of the imperialist power behind the throne in running the government of Egypt through the American embassy. And therefore the feeling among some people in the embassy was that we ought to rethink the design of the building.

I thought this made sense, so I did send in a recommendation to Washington that we rethink this whole concept and if possible keep the existing chancellery, which was a lovely old villa, and then build an office attached to it. But instead of going up into the air, just go up two stories and have it lower profiled and broader based.

I was told by the FBO and by the architect that it was too late to try to make that radical a change, and anyway the old chancellery was probably not worth saving, because it was too old and it would cost too much to repair the plumbing and the electrical wiring and all of those things.

So my next line of defense was to say, "Well, in that case, let's rethink the size, the height of the building."

AID had moved eventually, from being scattered all over Cairo, into rented space in a new office building, across two or three blocks from the compound and the chancellery, up on the upper floors, so it had the security of not being on the ground floor and having other tenants in the building. And they were quite well ensconced in this rented building. They were consolidated, it was convenient.

The plan for the new embassy chancellery had been drawn up with the assumption that it would house everybody, including the AID mission at its maximum size.

Q: Forever.

ATHERTON: Forever. And my argument was that you're building a chancellery that you want to have into the next century. By definition, an AID program should always be self-liquidating, and hopefully by the time this building is built, or at least after it has been inhabited awhile, the AID mission will have decreased in size and you won't need all that space.

I had in mind, as I think I said earlier in these interviews, the building of the chancellery in Bonn. It was built for the maximum size of the U.S. presence, and then the presence shrank enormously and we had to end up leasing large parts of the embassy in Bonn to the German government.

Well, finally, this got the attention of the planners back in Washington, and, in fact, they did decide to lower the number of floors, on the assumption that AID would not need all that space. And that was where it was left. The actual building didn't start until shortly before Betty and I left, in 1983, when they broke ground and began actually constructing the building. And that's somebody else's story. But we stayed in the old chancellery and in the old residence for the duration of our tour.

And the building program was an enormous operation, and it took on a sort of life of its own as well, all the time we were there. Trying to stay on top of that was not easy.

Well, I think I've said perhaps enough about what the housekeeping problems were, the kind of problems that arise in a rapidly growing mission, large dollar programs, feeling our way towards what kind of a military supply relationship we would have with the Egyptians, the Egyptians wanting the latest and best equipment in very large numbers, and our saying don't take it faster than you can absorb it. You have to train to use it and maintain it. And there were always some tensions between us and the Egyptians over that. But they were amiable enough so that they were contained, they never became major crises in the relationship-during those days at least.

What did later become a problem was that this was a military sales program in those days, we were providing Egypt credits not grants, which they eventually were required to repay, to purchase their military equipment. And this was during the Carter administration high-interest-rate period, so that a lot of these loans that the Egyptians were getting had interest rates on them of 12, 14 percent. And today, in 1990, those chickens have come home to roost, because the Egyptians are now strapped repaying those enormous loans and enormous principal and interest charges, which are putting the squeeze on an already difficult economic and financial situation for them.

So, the programs were moving rapidly. Another thing I should have mentioned was the attempt to interest American companies to invest in Egypt. And Bob Strauss, in addition to his job as the President's negotiator for the autonomy talks, took a special interest in trying to encourage American investors. And when he arrived for that very first meeting, which I told you about, in July of 1979, he brought with him a planeload of big time American businessmen, headed by Duane Andreas of Archer Daniels Midland, a big agricultural food processing company, to talk to the Egyptians about possibly encouraging Americans to come and invest in Egypt. American investments never really took on the dimensions that had been hoped at the time, largely because of the difficulties of dealing with a very large and entrenched Egyptian bureaucracy, which still, at its core, was very suspicious of the private sector and also saw this as a threat to its purpose. If you had a free market, you didn't need a large planning ministry and investment authority to control prices and control imports and control investments, and tell them what margin of profit they could have, and all of these things. But the American investors, many of them, found that it was very difficult cutting their way through this..., despite efforts at the top on the Egyptian side. Down below the top there were still enormous obstacles to getting approval for any major joint venture.

Q: Were these mainly manufacturing schemes or were they infrastructure construction schemes?

ATHERTON: Well, they weren't manufacturing in the sense of heavy industries. An example, which did succeed finally, was Union Carbide establishing a battery factory. That took a long time, but that finally succeeded, and it's been going well ever since. American Standard is doing well manufacturing plumbing equipment. There was a lot, though, connected with building industries, cement plants, the infrastructure, to build up the basis for meeting Egypt's tremendous housing shortages.

Also there was a lot of interest in getting into the trading sector. And, of course, Egyptian fortunes were made in the free market Sadat created. It had a downside, because a lot of the free market was used to import luxury goods. You see many Mercedes cars and all sorts of expensive conspicuous consumption type items for those Egyptians who had struck it rich in this new free market that Sadat had created. So you really created a nouveau riche class in Egypt, of people who had gotten rich very quickly and were showing it. And this was one of the criticisms of the Sadat regime, that he permitted the economic and social discrepancies between classes in Egypt, which Nasser to a large extent had not eliminated but had certainly narrowed, to reemerge. But in the Sadat era, one of the criticisms, in fact, that gradually began to be levied against Sadat was that he had permitted a new rich class to emerge, which was not at all appropriate in a country as basically poor, with as many poor people as Egypt had. And it was not only economically unfair, but it was socially potentially destabilizing.

Q: You'd had such very close relations with Sadat on political matters..., Egyptian-Israeli treaty and so forth, now that that was sort of not on the front burner, what did you discuss with him from now on during your period as ambassador? Or did you see him very often?

ATHERTON: I didn't have to see him all that often at that point. Usually I would see him when we had important visitors coming and I would have to accompany them to see him. We had an endless stream of members of Congress. I think more congressmen came to Egypt than to any other place except maybe Israel and Ireland.

Q: To see where the money was going?

ATHERTON: To see where the money was going and to be seen to have their picture taken with Sadat. It was a very good thing to show your constituents back home, that you were shaking hands with this man. We forget what a popular hero Sadat was in this country. He had a knack of projecting his image in America. He was very good on American TV and in dealing with the American media and with American public opinion. So congressmen came through all the time, and that always involved meeting with Sadat.

Military delegations usually would make a courtesy call, at least. And there were occasional issues having to do with glitches in the autonomy talks that needed to be discussed at a higher level. Usually it would be a meeting with Sadat by Bob Strauss, on which I would go along. I would have occasional private meetings, but they were not too frequent, because we didn't have that many issues.

There were some economic issues which had occasionally to be discussed with Sadat. And that was difficult, because Sadat really was not an economist, he didn't really understand how a complicated macro economy works, and he didn't really take seriously the advice he got, not only from Americans but from many of his own economists, that Egypt had to institute some genuine economic reforms, that its economy was going to become increasingly moribund. It had an enormous-and still does-system of subsides built in to keep the cost of living down. There was almost no inflation for the poor Egyptian in terms of basic foodstuff: bread, sugar, tea, cooking oil, heating fuel, rice. The things that basically most Egyptians subsist on were all subsidized and the price was controlled. But they were subsidized by an enormous element in the Egyptian budget which was creating budget deficits and therefore inflation in other parts of the market where there weren't controls. They were also subsidized at the expense of the agricultural sector. Low productivity undermined export competitiveness adversely affected the investment climate and employment.

Q: And the growing population, I gather.

ATHERTON: And the population was another problem, which I will turn to in a minute. The Egyptian economy was full of anomalies and distortions. There were almost no mechanisms for a market system to send signals that would help it regulate the economy. It was not a market economy. Sadat imposed a market economy in certain sectors. Egypt came to have, under Sadat, two economies. It had its private sector, its free market, which flourished. People made a lot of money, lots of goods were brought in. You could buy anything in the stores of Cairo if you had enough money. And then you had the controlled economy, which was the heavy industry and the control over imports, exports, investment, and all of these things, which kept the prices down for the man in the street. Electricity prices were heavily subsidized, and the result was that Egyptians were very wasteful of electricity because they got it so cheaply.

It was the classic problem of trying to move from a controlled command economy, with subsidies and artificially suppressed prices, to a market economy. It's the kind of thing that, since the changes in Eastern Europe, all of the Eastern European countries are going through. They at least are countries that have had an industrial base and an economic infrastructure. Egypt was starting from a much lower level, and, faced with these problems, it tended to put them off. Sadat did not like to deal with economic issues.

One of the big arguments when we were there was whether you tried to get more production out of existing farmlands or brought more lands under cultivation. Egypt, which at one time not too many decades ago was self-sufficient in food and even sometimes exported food, by the time I was there had become a heavy importer. A big component of the American AID program was shipping some highly subsidized foodstuff, mostly grain, into Egypt under PL 480. The argument was how can Egypt do more to feed itself.

Sadat used to say: Well, there's no real problem, because we have all that land. It is desert, but we also have all that water from the Nile-and you put the water on the land and you can expand agricultural land indefinitely.

AID finally brought in a consulting group to do a study which hopefully would persuade the Egyptian government that that was a very over-simplified economic theory. And they based it on what it cost for the power that you have to generate to raise water from the level of the river to the level of the fields, to irrigate on a mass scale. They pretty well proved, at least to AID and most economists' satisfaction, that putting enormous resources into reclaiming desert was not economical. Egypt could get a lot more use out of the existing fertile land it had by better agricultural methods and by better irrigation, and it could also save water in the process. But that was the kind of thing that Sadat preferred not to get involved in.

Another issue, which you mentioned in your question, that was and still is terribly important is the rate of population growth in Egypt. When we went there, it was a net increase of about a million a year, with a population of 39 million, roughly. When we left, four and a half years later, it was a million every ten months, and the population was pressing 50 million-with all that that implies.

AID had in those days a family planning program, a unit in the AID mission that was working with Egyptian counterparts on family planning. There was a family planning unit in the Ministry of Health. There was a very active private family planning organization in Egypt, with rather enlightened, for the most part urbanized, westernized Egyptians. Mrs. Sadat was the honorary head of the family planning organization in Egypt.

And AID brought over a computerized demonstration, funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation, I think, under their Resources for the Future program, to demonstrate to Egyptians, by computerized model, what the implications were ten years, 15 years, 20 years down the road if their population continued to grow at the present rate, which was 2.7 percent a year, or something like that, net increase, in terms of the need for additional urbanization, for additional roads, for additional schools, hospitals, employment creation, all those things.

The head of this team, by the way, was Marshall Green, our former ambassador to Indonesia, who became converted to the importance of family planning because they had a successful family planning program when he was ambassador in Indonesia. And, in retirement, his mission was really to try to preach the need for family planning in underdeveloped countries.

He came to Egypt with a young man who operated the computer and its model, having fed in all the software based upon Egyptian statistics. They took the Egyptians' own data base (so the Egyptians couldn't say: You've distorted our data base), and then, in a group of people, of ministers and officials and some private people, he would say: Now, let me show you where you are. Let me show you what happens if you continue to have family sizes averaging five children. Let me show you if you cut it back to three children-the difference ten years from now in how many schools you will need, how much food you will have to import, et cetera, et cetera. And it was pretty graphic. And then, because some were skeptical, he would say: All right, you give me a question, you give me the data, and I will feed it in, I'll take your assumptions. And it would still come out with this very gloomy picture.

And I think he made a lot of Egyptians suddenly realize that they were on a path that eventually was going to collapse of its own weight. I don't know what the maximum population for Egypt is, but if you went to zero population growth in the 1980s, when we were there, by the end of the century you would still have 80 million people. If you didn't reduce the rate, you would have over 100 million. And by the year 2020, or something like that, 2025, you're talking about a population of, I think, 175 million, which most people would agree probably Egypt can't support, because it doesn't have the water or the resources or the habitable land.

Q: That's only 30 years away.

ATHERTON: That's right. Today it's only 30 years away; then, it was 40 years away. Now the real problem is to get leadership at the top for this project, and that means, in effect, the president.

Once upon a time, a new AID Administrator came out, Doug Bennet, and paid his courtesy call on President Sadat, and I went with him. He had his brief, and one of the questions he was briefed to ask the president was: What are you doing about family planning in Egypt?

And so Doug looked for an opening after the usual discussion of the AID program and Sadat's usual lecture about the enormous potential of Egypt, and he said, "Mr. President, we are concerned about the rate of population growth in Egypt. What is your attitude towards family planning?"

And Sadat stopped, and he looked down, and he said, "Young man (Doug Bennet looked like a young man), my wife nags me all the time on this. Are you going to nag me, too?"

And that was the end of the discussion. You couldn't get Sadat's attention. He didn't want to deal with it. First of all, he came from a rural village where the tradition of large families was deeply rooted in the culture. Not so much in the religion, but in the culture. And secondly, it was a very touchy political subject. Many Muslim clerics will tell you that there is nothing in the Koran that prohibits family planning methods. It's more cultural than religious. But still many of the conservative clergy were opposed to it. And they would cite chapters of the Koran to support this. Others, liberal clergy, would cite chapters of the Koran to say that there was no objection. Abortion, of course, was out of the question in Islamic culture, but family planning, birth control, the pill, etc., all quite accepted by many people in Egypt. But the problem was to get it disseminated into the uneducated, rural population, where the great problems were. And the problem was to get Sadat's attention.

Q: Can I ask you, it's sort of branching out quite a bit here, but did you have any problems with your relation with the intelligence community?

ATHERTON: Not really. And I would like to answer that, but I have one more point to add on family planning, because I think it was a nice little anecdote.

I managed, one time when I was with a congressional delegation visiting Sadat, who was then down in Aswan, it was obviously in the winter, to get into a conversation with Mrs. Sadat, and I said, "You know, Ambassador Marshall Green has a very good demonstration of the problems of growth of populations. If we could just arrange to get the president to see this, I think it could make a difference."

And so she said, "I will see what I can do."

So Mrs. Sadat and I conspired, and finally she persuaded the president to have Marshall Green bring his computer and his little spiel and have a private meeting at Sadat's residence in Cairo, with Mrs. Sadat and one of his ministers and Marshall Green and a couple of us from the embassy and the president, and that was it. Marshall Green went through the briefing, and at the end there was this long silence. I thought, "Oh, God, Sadat is either asleep or he hasn't listened." And then Sadat said, "It's a nightmare." And so I said, "Hey, we got through to him. He realizes this." But the fact is that he never stood up and took a public position. He never made it his issue, even though he personally, I think, at that point realized there were problems.

Let me turn to your other question-the intelligence community. I was very fortunate in having a good succession of chiefs of station in Cairo, who worked well with me at all times and worked well with their counterparts in the embassy and the Egyptian government. The chief of station was declared as CIA representative in his liaison with his Egyptian counterparts. He was not under deep cover. He was under what I guess you might call superficial cover, but certainly the Egyptians knew who he was. There was no attempt to hide him. And he was very much a part of the social scene and a very cooperative person, as were the people on his staff.

The only problem I guess that we had was the general problem of: How much intelligence do you conduct in a friendly country? In the days of Nasser, when the Russians were big in Egypt and Egypt was considered a Soviet client, it was fair game to conduct as many clandestine operations as you could, to try to find out what the Russians were doing in Egypt and what the Egyptians were doing with the Russians. But here we suddenly had a totally reversed situation. The Russians were the bad guys, we were the good guys. We were on friendly terms, and there was a genuine concern that we not through intelligence operations in Egypt do things that would embarrass Sadat or embarrass the relationship. And that put certain constraints, self-imposed restraints on what could be done in terms of intelligence collection, other than overt activities in Egypt itself, and put the intelligence relationship more on the basis of Egyptian-American cooperation in the intelligence field on external problems but not do very much internally, other than just keeping one's ear to the ground, which any good embassy officer, whether intelligence or not, is supposed to do, keeping your finger on the pulse as much as you can, of what's going on in various aspects of Egyptian society.

Q: In recalling the fate of President Sadat, were they pretty well tuned in to political affairs and things like that?

ATHERTON: The Egyptians shared very well, I think, their information, and certainly there were plenty of pieces of intelligence information, and not all of it necessarily covert, although some of it was, of plotting against Sadat. I mean it was no secret that there were various groups, mostly Islamic fundamentalist groups, who had been trying for years to destabilize not just Sadat but his predecessor, Nasser. In fact, Nasser put most of the Muslim Brotherhood leadership in jail, except for the ones he executed. There were some plots against him. But one of the first things Sadat did when he came to power was to decide that the real threat to him would come from the left, particularly since he had alienated the Russians, and he was afraid of the leftists and the crypto-communists in the small Egyptian communist party. And so he amnestied all the Muslim Brotherhood leaders and made them respectable again, in the thought that they would be a counterweight to the threat from the left. It turned out in the end, of course, that they were the threat-not the Brotherhood itself, which by that time was an aging, more respectable group, operating within the law in its opposition to secularization and many of Sadat's policies, but certainly not engaged in destabilizing efforts. But there were spinoffs of the Brotherhood, militant spinoffs, clandestine spinoffs, who definitely looked to violent political action as a way of trying to change the regime. Their objective was to achieve what Islamic fundamentalists basically had as their goal-to get the country back to the Koran, to make the Koran the law of the land, Islamic law and Islamic tradition, governing education, governing all aspects of society and all policies of the government. And that included not making peace with the infidel Israel, not being allied with the western devils, the United States, and certainly not allowing women in public life, like Mrs. Sadat who became a public figure in her own right. But there were lots of things that Sadat did, and Mrs. Sadat did, in their public life and in their public image, as well as in the policies of the government, that built up a very strong head of steam among the very conservative Islamic elements in Egypt against the regime. Again, I wouldn't lump them all together. There was an Islamic renaissance in this period, and it did lead to a growth of religious sentiment, manifested in a tendency to turn to Islamic dress on the part of women, and a tendency of the men, the young in particular in the universities, to adopt the beard and traditional dress. You would see them in throngs at the mosques on Fridays, very disciplined. And there was a lot of concern that this was all going to become increasingly a threat to the general direction of Egyptian society which, ever since Muhammad Ali, had moved towards a western model in the economy, western political models, secularization, separating religion and government.We're now at the point where the search of the shah of Iran for asylum had begun to run out. By that time it was generally known that he was fatally ill with cancer. He had had it for some time, but it was a very well-kept secret for a long time. And he was given, in effect, the hospitality of Egypt by President Sadat, who welcomed him and his family and supporters, and made available to them one of the old royal palaces of Cairo so that they could live in royal style that was befitting the shah and his family.

And it was not too long after that that the shah died. There was a very impressive state funeral. He was to be buried, or his body interred, at one of the old mosques in Cairo, the one that had been originally built during the Shiite period in Cairo and so therefore had some associations with the Shiite branch of Islam, to which, of course, Iranians belong. Many dignitaries and some heads of government came to the affair.

There was a policy argument about whether or nor I should go, representing the United States government. We were in a very delicate situation vis-ï¿½-vis the revolutionary government in Iran and there was concern in Washington it might complicate our efforts to see whether or not ways could be found to get the hostages out of Iran if I went as the president's representative to the shah's funeral.

Q: Your official position at that time was what?

ATHERTON: I was ambassador to Egypt. And I consulted with the British and others to see if we could get a common position. The original decision was that it would be better perhaps if I gave private condolences to the family on behalf of the Carters but shouldn't go to the public funeral. And it was my impression at that time that this would be also the position of the British. I learned later that the views of the British Royal family prevailed and the British ambassador was instructed to go to the funeral.

I sent Washington a message that I thought I would be conspicuous by my absence among all of at least the western ambassadors in Cairo, that if I didn't go. While I could understand the sensitivity vis-ï¿½-vis the Iranian regime, we didn't seem to be having much luck with them anyway, but we did have a certain amount at stake in our relationship with Egypt, and it would be misunderstood by Sadat, who had given asylum to the shah, if the U.S. ambassador wasn't there for the last rites, to pay the last respects to this man who had been such a strong friend and supporter all his life of the United States. So the decision was that I would, in fact, go to the funeral.

The most senior American at the funeral was Richard Nixon, who came in his private capacity. It was a hot July day. We walked all the way to the mosque, broiling in the Cairo sun. Sadat was at the head of the procession, wearing his full uniform with choke collar. The Shahbanou also walked. We all walked. And we walked through some of the narrow, tortuous alleys of old Cairo, with people on the roofs and people all over the place.

I suppose there was a potential security problem. If somebody wanted to knock off Nixon, or any number of ambassadors, or President Sadat, this was a perfect time to do it. I'm sure that Egyptian security had gone through the area ahead of time and had done their best to sanitize it, but you never can be sure. In any case, the funeral went off without any incidents, except for the usual jostling and crowding.

I had received instructions to deliver personal messages from President and Mrs. Carter to the Shahbanou. I called Egyptian protocol, who were handling protocol for the shah and his family, and asked if they could arrange for an appointment for me to go and deliver messages from the Carters to the shah's widow. And the answer came back, almost within an hour, that the Shahbanou would receive me an hour later that same day. It was late in the day, as I recall, and I think it was the day just after the funeral, if I'm not mistaken.

So I pulled myself together, got in my car, went out into the traffic, which was pretty bad as I recall, and got to the palace and was waved through the gate, and entered the palace. Who should be there at the entrance waiting to greet me but Ardeshir Zahedi, who had been the Iranian ambassador, the Shah's ambassador to Washington, and was part of the family circle, and who was there at the funeral. I hadn't seen him at the funeral. But he was there, and he greeted me as a long-lost brother, and we had a little chat. And then he escorted me into the room, and I delivered the Carters' messages to the Shahbanou, which she obviously was very anxious to see; she read them eagerly. And then, I must say - she is a woman of great character and strength - after I had said the usual things on such an occasion, she said, "Now I want to talk about getting my children into the American School here in Cairo."

Q: First things first.

ATHERTON: First things first. I said, "Well, you know, the American School is not a government school. I can only pass this word to the principal, but the decision will obviously be a decision of the admissions people at the school." And she looked at me as though she couldn't believe it. As if to say, if the American ambassador says they'll be admitted to the school, I'm sure they'll be admitted, was her attitude. Well, in fact, they did get admitted. It created a bit of a security problem, because there were Palestinian students at the school, there were Israelis, and there were all sorts of other nationalities. And there were lots of people who were not very friendly to the former Iranian regime. They had to have high security protection, and that was always disruptive of the normal life on the campus. This was high school. And it included the son who is now, I believe, the heir apparent. I can't remember now. But he was the crown prince, he was the eldest son.

Q: Sometimes he is called the pretender, sometimes the crown prince, heir apparent.

ATHERTON: The dï¿½nouement, as I recall, of the Iranian episode, came with the attempt by the Carter administration to mount a rescue operation to get the hostages out of Iran.

The first communication that Egypt was going to be asked to help in the attempts to rescue the hostages came through a message, conveyed through the secretary of defense, Harold Brown, to the Egyptian vice president, Hosni Mubarak, asking if they could make available some Egyptian airfields that we could use as a place to preposition equipment and personnel that would support a hostage rescue operation.

The message came through a back channel, and it was basically an instruction for our senior defense representative, who was a brigadier general, David Rohr. Dave Rohr was head of the Office of Military Cooperation, which administered our military assistance program in Egypt. And it was an instruction from the secretary of defense for him to go call on the vice president. It didn't say anything about informing the ambassador or asking the ambassador to take part in it. But fortunately the message had been delivered through the station chief. Incidentally, this was not a clandestine position; he was acknowledged and declared to the Egyptians, so that I'm not giving away anything I shouldn't when I say that we had a station chief who was a member of my staff and an official liaison with his counterparts in the Egyptian government.

And he came directly to me and said, "I have this message that I'm supposed to give to the general. But I know my instructions. No messages are to be given or accepted without the ambassador's being aware of it." So he gave it to me.

I called in the general and said, "There is a message to you from the secretary of defense about calling on the vice president. I think it really should be addressed to me, and before you take any action on it, I'm going to go back and try to get this in the right channel. What I will do is request that you and I jointly call on the vice president."

And I got on the secure phone and called NEA in the department and talked to Morris Draper, who was then deputy assistant secretary in the NEA front office, and said, Morris there has been a glitch. I have this message that wasn't even supposed to come to my attention, and I told him what it was. And he said, "I'll get right back to you."

And it was almost no time at all that a correction came in saying that the secretary had certainly not meant to by-pass the ambassador, there had just been some mistake with routing, and would I please arrange for a meeting with the vice president. . .

Q: So NEA did not know about the message either?

ATHERTON: So far as I know, NEA at that point hadn't known about it either. But they did know now. It got back in channels fairly quickly. Dave Rohr and I got an appointment very quickly and called on the vice president, presented the request. He said he would have to talk to the president, but added, "I think I know that the answer is going to be positive. And I think I know the best place for it." Mubarak was an Air Force officer, he knew the airports very well. He said, "We have a very isolated base, which is not an active base now, but we have a small maintenance detachment there." It would be out of the public view, in the area between Cairo and Luxor, east of the Nile, in a secluded valley called Wadi Qena, with good runways and good basic facilities, power and water and all that. And we did get word very quickly that this base would be made available to the US for staging a possible rescue operation.

And that's exactly what happened. It wasn't very long before we had an American military detachment there with an Air Force PX and all the usual things that go along with an American detachment, AWACS reconnaissance planes landing and taking off.

Q: And word never got out about this?

ATHERTON: Well, it eventually began to seep out. The Egyptians just simply stonewalled it, of course. It was interesting, the local foreign press began to get wind of this and began to make inquiries, but they couldn't get anybody to confirm. They just got stonewalled. They didn't get anybody to give them hard information. And there was no way you could get there easily. You couldn't just take off and go to it. In fact, they weren't quite sure where it was. It was not on any of the maps that we had. I think the first time people began to get suspicious was when young American tourists with short haircuts began to turn up at odd hours from nowhere on special buses to view the ruins of Luxor. It wasn't quite clear where they had come from or where they were going back to. I went down, actually, and made a visit once, and was given a flight in one of the AWACS on one of its reconnaissance missions. My one and only ride on an AWACS. Anyway, it was there, and the Egyptian military all knew about it. But it was one of the best-kept secrets, as far as making headlines was concerned. I think today there have been stories about it, but it's sort of old-hat now. But it was quite active in those days.

Anyway, the next thing that happened with regard to this base was another message through General Rohr who was the direct liaison for the commander of the base. Rohr was an Air Force general, and after that first glitch on the meeting with Mubarak, he kept me well briefed. Rohr did tell me (strictly on a need-to-know basis, not for general dissemination, because it was being handled in absolutely the most secret way) that in fact D-Day had come, and that they were going to be bringing people in for this operation and staging through and to Iran, with other stops on the route. I think they also had to regroup somewhere using facilities we had available in Oman, en route to launching the helicopter raid, which ended in such a disaster in the Iranian desert.

So I was generally aware that the operation was going forward. I didn't see the operational plans. There was no need that I should. I did say that I assume that the Egyptian government was being informed through their military channels. There were no official messages to go tell Sadat we were mounting the operation. It was at that point so sensitive and no one wanted to complicate the life of the president and the people who were trying to make this work.

In any event, I received a very urgent message the next morning, which basically said I should immediately seek an appointment with the highest available official to inform him that the attempt to rescue the hostages, which they had helped us mount, had failed and there had been a tragic accident, with loss of life of American crews. So I had to go and convey this word to Vice President Mubarak, whom I saw almost immediately. He was obviously crestfallen. Not that we had tried this, but that it hadn't worked. I also had been told to inform him that the president would very shortly be making a public announcement of this.

One complication was that on this particular day the president's mother was visiting Egypt as a guest of the Egyptian government-Miss Lillian-and the embassy was giving her official escorts and accompanying her on some of her visits.

I had the job of getting word to her as early as possible, before the press got to her, to tell her this, before she was leaving for a very early program, visiting medical facilities and other things that she was interested in, in Egypt. Our message to her was that the president was soon going to be announcing the failure of the attempt to rescue the hostages, and it might be a good thing if we could arrange her schedule so she could avoid encounters with the press.

And her only comment was, "Poor Jimmy."

Well, that was really the end of that episode. That was april 24, 1980, towards the end of the Carter administration, and there were no more attempts to get to the hostages. It was clear that Ayatollah Khomeini had made the decision that he was not going to release the hostages to President Carter. And, of course, he did the most humiliating thing that he could, which was to release them as soon as President Reagan had been inaugurated. It was both a humiliation of Carter and an attempt, I guess, to clear the decks and clear the air with the new administration.

Carter was defeated in the elections in November and, like all ambassadors, I went through the procedures of making my resignation available to the new administration. In due course I got word back that President Reagan wanted me to continue as ambassador to Egypt.

One of the very first things that happened after that was a visit to the Middle East by Secretary of State Al Haig. He came as one of his early priorities to meet the principal actors of the area, including, obviously, President Sadat, but also the Jordanians and the Saudis and the Israelis, and to reaffirm that the Reagan administration wanted to build on the Camp David agreements.

Remember where this was at the time. This was after the peace treaty, which had been signed in 1979, but only part way through the implementation of the treaty. In other words, the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai was only partially complete. The withdrawal was staged over a three-year period, which meant that the final withdrawal was going to take place during early 1982, and this was the beginning of 1981. Haig came out with about a year still to go before the Israeli withdrawal would be final.

The other aspect of the peace treaty that was incomplete was the autonomy talks, which were going on between the Egyptians, in effect speaking for the Jordanians and the Palestinians, and the Israelis, about implementing that part of Camp David which provided for an autonomy regime for a transitional period, for the Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza, as a step towards further negotiations for a final settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

I think I mentioned earlier that the first negotiator had been Robert Strauss, who had been the president's representative to help the Egyptians and the Israelis in the autonomy negotiations. He had been called back to help run President Carter's election campaign, and had been replaced by Ambassador Sol Linowitz. But obviously it was the end of the administration and his resignation was accepted. And therefore there was no autonomy negotiator, and there was no great rush on the part of the Reagan administration to appoint one. While they were committed to the Camp David Accords and Peace Treaty, their priorities were somewhat different. They sounded a little like what I would call the neo-John Foster Dulles approach to the Middle East.

And when Haig came out, his main focus was on trying to forge a "strategic consensus" among the states of the area with the United States, against threats that were perceived by this administration to come from the Soviet Union. I had the job of trying to convey to Al Haig that this was not the first thing on the minds of the Egyptians. They were more interested in finishing the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and getting something for the Palestinians, so they would not be the only country at peace with Israel. And he did modify the line a bit after a while. Instead of saying "Our policy is to forge a strategic consensus," he said, "Our policy is a twofold policy, to forge a strategic consensus and to continue to pursue the ultimate goal of a comprehensive peace according to the Camp David accords."

Q: This, I gather, was pretty much at your insistence.

ATHERTON: Well, I think some of my colleagues in the area also made the point. At the same time, this was not a time of great friendship between Egypt and the Soviet Union.

Sadat himself was concerned about the Soviets, after Afghanistan. This was after the invasion of Afghanistan, and some people had the apocalyptic view of a Soviet move down through Baluchistan and into the Persian Gulf and a threat to the oil supplies. Sadat to some extent shared this perception. Whether he really believed it as much as he said, I'll never know, but he certainly talked this way, and it made him very popular, obviously, with the Reagan administration, who felt they saw eye to eye. But they didn't, really, because Sadat wanted the economic benefits of peace and he didn't want to just focus on a strategic consensus, which implied trying to find common ground between Egypt and Israel as military allies of the United States. The implication of "strategic consensus" was what other Arab states could we bring into circle? I think anyone who knows the Middle East knows that as long as the rest of the Arab world, was in a state of belligerency with Israel, Egypt didn't want to be isolated with Israel and the United States. Sadat didn't care as much perhaps, but a lot of his people did. And therefore, however much they may have been suspicious of the Soviets, and Sadat was very suspicious - he had broken off many of the aspects of his relationship with the Soviets, although they still had an embassy there, and he had turned entirely to the United States and away from the Soviets - still he didn't want to be seen, and certainly his advisors in the Foreign Ministry and others in the government who were more sensitive to the Arab world views of Egypt than perhaps Sadat was, didn't want to be seen to be developing a military alliance with Israel against the Soviets and forgetting about the Palestinians and the peace process. So we had to find a way to reconcile these conflicting perceptions that Washington had and that the Middle East had.

Q: Who was advising the president on Middle East affairs in the White House?

ATHERTON: I think this was still the period when Richard Allen was the national security advisor. I forget who worked under him. I don't recall that they had anyone on the White House staff who was a Middle East expert.

Q: It sounds as though they didn't have anyone.

ATHERTON: The State Department had its Middle East experts who were advising the secretary, but he had other people that he listened to who did not necessarily have all that good a background on the Middle East. He was getting somewhat mixed signals. But he certainly was hearing a fairly consistent line from those of us in the area.

In any case, the problem was: What to we do about the peace talks? The administration finally did appoint a negotiator, not as public and prominent a figure as either Robert Strauss or Sol Linowitz. It appointed Richard Fairbanks, who had been a lawyer and a supporter of the Republican party, and had, at one time, under an earlier Republican administration, been assistant secretary of state for congressional relations, and had worked in various positions around the administration. Fairbanks suddenly turned up as the negotiator for the autonomy talks. His teams were much the same; he still had much the same people at the working level in Washington and from the embassies in Israel and Egypt.

But by that time, the steam had gone out of the autonomy talks. They hadn't made much progress. The Egyptian and Israeli delegations had been able to agree on certain areas of commonality, but the key issues in the autonomy talks were never resolved. They agreed on a lot of peripheral though less important issues, and it was useful groundwork. But the really key issues were such matters as who would have authority over the allocation of water rights once the Palestinians elected their own local self-government and the Israeli military government withdrew. The Israeli military would remain in the occupied territories, but they would get out of running the day-to-day life of the Palestinians.

But that led to questions such as: Who's going to control water rights? Would this be solely the elected, Palestinian self-governing authority? Would it be the responsibility of mixed commissions of Israelis and Palestinians? Or would the Israelis retain some of these rights? The question of who's going to vote in these elections, in particular, would the inhabitants of East Jerusalem be allowed to vote? The Israelis had always treated East Jerusalem as under Israeli law and quite separate from the rest of the occupied territories. Legally, from the American point of view, it was still part of the territory that had been occupied by the Israelis since the 1967 war. There were lots of issues, really tough ones, having to do with electoral procedures, eligibility for election, the authority of the self-governing body, how much authority would it have, how much would be just responsibilities detailed to by the Israeli military governor, who might move from the occupied territories across the line into Israel proper but would still have overall authority.

So there were all sorts of unresolved questions and no sign of being able to even approach a solution to them, and an increasing unwillingness on the part of the Egyptians to make these kinds of decisions for the Palestinians. They wanted to just get some general principles agreed and have the elections take place and get Palestinians elected who were going to deal directly with the Israelis with a Jordanian presence as well if possible. The Egyptians were uncomfortable trying to assume and make decisions for the Palestinians and the Jordanians. So the talks didn't really lead very far.

Meanwhile there was a growing disillusionment internally in Egypt, the perception that peace had not produced all that they had anticipated, that Sadat had oversold the peace settlement in some ways to his public by promising economic miracles, and a quick solution to the Palestinian problem, that the isolation from the Arabs would be only temporary.

Well, there were no economic miracles. The economy continued to have difficulties, it did not attract large foreign private investment and inflation began to get worse. A new rich class emerged, taking advantage of the free market in services and trade and commerce and banking in particular which Sadat had inaugurated in place of the command economy of the Nasser period. It did not extend to manufacturing; it involved little productive investment and was more service centered, which made some quick fortunes, and this led more to dissatisfaction on the part of the average Egyptian.

And there was no progress in implementing normalization provisions of the peace treaty. There were lots of things that were supposed to follow, such as the negotiation of cultural exchange agreements, professorial exchange agreements, trade and commerce. Anything that was not explicitly spelled out in the treaty itself was subject to negotiating supplementary technical agreements. Lots of negotiations took place. Israeli delegations flew to Cairo, and Egyptian delegations went to Israel, and they spent a lot of time working on these side agreements.

Certain things had happened. You began to be able to buy the Jerusalem Post at newsstands in Cairo, for example. And you could buy Egyptian papers in Israel, if anybody wanted to read them. And, of course, the border opened up. There was scheduled air service between Ben-Gurion Airport and Cairo Airport.

Q: I can't imagine any such exchange existing between, say, Damascus and Israel, and yet there was one being envisaged between Cairo and Israel. Is there a basic difference between the attitude of the Egyptians toward Israel than there is of the rest of the Arab world toward Israel?

ATHERTON: Well, my view has always been that the average Egyptian did not feel as personally passionately about the Palestinian cause and about Israel as did the average Syrian or Palestinian. There were, in Egypt, shadings of view, and still are. You had, particularly among the intellectuals, a strong sense of the pan-Arabism that Nasser had fostered. And they were the ones who were very upset at the isolation of Egypt in the Arab world and wanted to preserve Egypt's ties, and who therefore were resisting too much and too rapid a normalization of relations with Israel.

These were the people who, during the negotiation of the peace treaty, had wanted to link normalization of relations with Israel to progress on the other aspects of the peace settlement, with the Palestinians in particular. And they had been overruled by Sadat, who had said we will go ahead and make our peace and normalize relations, and, while we will be seen to be working on the Palestinian aspects of the problem, we won't link the two explicitly.

The negotiation of all these things were in the hands of, to a large extent, the Foreign Ministry. And in the Foreign Ministry there were many people who in their minds felt there should still be a linkage. Although there was no formal linkage, in practical terms psychologically there was a linkage between the state of Israel's relations with the other Arabs and the state of Egypt's relations with Israel. And there was no question that the absence of progress on the other aspects of the peace settlement dampened Egyptian enthusiasm about normalizing relations.

Very few Egyptians, other than government officials, visited Israel for example. There were exceptions, though. There were some Egyptians who really wanted to try to make this work and got out in front of general public opinion, or certainly out in front of the approach that had been taken by some in the foreign ministry and some of the security services, for example.

There was no question that people who wanted to visit Israel had this put in their files. They were under special scrutiny, looked at with some suspicion.

But there were professors at the university who felt that they had something to learn and tried to form relationships with their counterparts in the Israeli academic world. The Ministry of Agriculture believed strongly that Egypt had something to learn from Israel, from its agricultural technology, and established some technical exchange arrangement which survived a lot of difficult times.

So there were exceptions, but the general attitude was: Let's go slow on the normalization of relations. Those things which we are required to do by the treaty, such as end the boycott of Israel and Israeli goods and Israeli people, stop putting Egyptians on the boycott list who deal with Israel. Open the borders to travel by land or by air. Those were all in the treaty and those all went forward. But other things, which were to be negotiated in the side agreements, somehow got bogged down. And to a large extent bogged down, I think, because the Egyptians didn't want to go too fast. They were making the linkage in practical terms.

But there was, as I said, a general sort of disillusionment within Egypt that the peace treaty had not been all that was promised, and some of this focused on Sadat. One heard Egyptian criticism of Sadat, that the peace was not the comprehensive peace that he had promised, that his freeing up of the economy had benefited a small group of people who had gotten rich quick at the expense of everybody else.

He also said he was going to liberalize the political sector, and I think, intellectually, Sadat did feel that Egypt had to build institutions of democracy and get away from the one-man authoritarian rule of the Nasser period. He was temperamentally not very much convinced, however, that anybody knew as well as he did what was good for Egypt. And so he was kind of a father-of-the-family, an authoritarian father-of-the-family.

And so democracy didn't flourish in the sense that many had been led to expect. There was more expression of opposition, but Sadat occasionally would suspend the opposition newspaper, or there would be an occasional detention of some of his more outspoken critics. So it was maybe the beginning of a move towards establishing democratic institutions. A new constitution, a new upper house of the Parliament was established, a consultative council, the Shura Council, alongside the People's Assembly. So the groundwork was laid for a more institutionalized democratic government, but with Sadat in charge, it tended to be still a very personalized rule and very much a personal paternalism. I would call it paternalism verging on authoritarianism, with a little overlay perhaps of democracy. But institutions were beginning to develop.

Sadat began to turn more and more towards a crackdown on the opposition. He kept getting reports that there was more and more opposition, so his reaction was: "I'll show you who's boss around here."

Q: And who were the opposition?

ATHERTON: Well, they were mixed. Some came from the Islamic fundamentalists. He had given them a certain amount of freedom when he came into office. There was amnesty and he let out of jail a lot of the Moslem Brotherhood, who had been under lock and key during the Nasser period or underground, on the theory that they were the best defense against the Communists. He was more concerned about a threat that he perceived from the left, from the Communists. He saw communist conspiracies.

And, of course, it turned out that he had let the genie out of the bottle. The fundamentalists turned against him, because they wanted a regime that was run according to the precepts of the Koran, and he had, in fact, a secular regime. Mrs. Sadat was not the ideal of the Islamic wife, she was very public, and they had a rather elegant lifestyle as a family. Many of Sadat's friends were considered to be profiteering from the regime. They was clearly a lot of corruption, although Sadat personally I think was not involved, in that he never amassed a fortune, but he was tolerant of those who did. Their children married into some of the rich families that were tainted with corruption. There was an aura of corruption tarnishing the image of Sadat, the winner of the war, the peace-maker, plus disillusionment with the fact that the peace process had come to a stalemate, the economic miracle hadn't happened, they didn't have the democratic freedoms they expected.

The opposition was from the Islamic side, from the neo-Nasserists, those who regretted the end of the days of Nasser pan-Arabism, with Egypt the leader of the Arab world, and Arab socialism where you did not have the extremes of wealth that began to develop again under Sadat's regime, which reminded a lot of people of the pre-Nasser period, of the monarchy, of the privileged classes. And Sadat did, in fact, turn back some of the properties of some of the wealthy people who had prospered under the monarchy whose property had been sequestered during the Nasser period.

Q: Where did the military stand in this?

ATHERTON: Sadat had made sure that the military leaders were people who were loyal supporters. The chief of staff, who became the minister of defense and really got credit as the architect of the successful military campaign against Israel in 1973, General Gamasy, was eased out by Sadat and was retired upstairs, in a sense, but he was definitely replaced. Sadat did not permit powerful subordinates. He had a very good civilian prime minister, who had some good ideas about trying to cure Egypt's economic ills, Mustafa Khalil, a very loyal supporter of Sadat, but eventually Sadat replaced him. He did not permit anyone to develop any sort of power basis around him. So there were lots of people who were disaffected.

And then you had the old intellectuals, who had become disillusioned with Sadat very early on, when he proposed his treaty of peace with Israel, in effect unilaterally, without going along with the other Arabs. They weren't opposed to the concept of ending the war, but they felt it should be in an Arab context and not a separate Egyptian context. People like Hassanein Heikal, who had been head of al-Ahram and one of Nasser's confidantes, had an early falling out with Sadat. And Heikal was one of Sadat's leading critics.

And then there were opposition political parties. Sadat had permitted what had been a one-party state to be turned into a limited multi-party state. There was an authorized opposition, and it had a certain amount of credence and could speak against the government in parliament, and it included some people sympathetic to the Moslem Brothers who were not legally allowed to have political representation; it had people who were socialists, some neo-communists, some neo-Nasserists. A lot of the intellectuals of Egypt were writers and journalists, and many of them, under Sadat, were not allowed to publish. They had been allowed to join the al-Ahram Center for Strategic Studies, and it became a kind of think tank and a place where all of the disaffected intellectuals gathered and preached to each other about the ills of the regime, but they couldn't get into print. There was definitely a limit on freedom of speech, freedom of expression. Though there was some; it was not totally proscribed.

What Sadat did do was to do away with some of the extreme measures. He did away, in effect, with concentration camps, with most of the abuses infringing on civil rights. The judiciary became again to a larger extent an independent body of government. And people who felt they were abused by the regime had recourse to the courts. So he did away with the police-state atmosphere of the Nasser period. People were willing to talk in private, without going out in the garden, to express their views, and in most cases felt that they didn't have to fear the arbitrary arrests or the knock on the door in the middle of the night or detention without trial. But there were exceptions. Occasionally, particularly when it came to dealing with some of the extremists in the Islamic movement, the niceties of law were not always observed. There were reports, and I guess continue to be reports of the brutality and tortures of the police interrogation methods. Most Egyptians however, even those who were critical of Sadat, will admit that the worst abuses, the police-state atmosphere of the latter Nasser period had been done away with.

Q: Could you give me some idea about your relations with Sadat himself, what subjects you brought up with him, what were your problems with him, how he reacted to you?

ATHERTON: Well, I suppose I saw Sadat more than probably any other foreign ambassador, because we were the principal, full partners, as Sadat used to say, in the peace process and in developing our strategic cooperation. Remember that we also had annual joint military maneuvers. Our military worked very closely together. We had big programs. We had an AID program that eventually reached, on the economic side, close to a billion dollars a year, and a billion or more a year on the military side. So it was a very large program, and a lot of Americans involved in administering this program, some by direct hire and others by contract. Most of the day-to-day business was dealt with through the Prime Minister whom I would see very often, particularly when it was Mustafa Khalil, who was a very active and effective prime minister. On a regular basis I used to see the foreign minister and some of the other ministers as well, about some of the ongoing business, the bilateral business between the two countries. So I rarely had to see Sadat on bilateral matters.

There were some bilateral matters that had to be raised at the Sadat level, some of the policy issues having to do with our military cooperation with the Egyptians. And in that context, one of particular importance to our Navy was getting permission for nuclear-powered warships to transit the Suez Canal.

The Egyptians had a flat prohibition, because they were concerned about the safety of the canal. They were alarmed that there might be nuclear accidents and put the canal out of commission, and the canal was a major financial asset. The Navy had spent an inordinate amount of time sending delegations to Egypt and inviting Egyptians to come and visit our nuclear ships to show how safe they were, and how they were allowed into our harbors and why they should allow them into the canal. So I used to have to occasionally have to go to Sadat and make a major pitch on this issue.

Incidentally, Hermann Eilts was fighting this battle when I took over from him. And when I left and turned over to Nick Veliotes, he had to pick it up. Sadat always would say: "Oh, yes, in principle, I understand this. Go talk to my people about it." And then I would sit down and talk with the head of the Suez Canal Authority and to the various other parts of the bureaucracy who had some say in this, civil defense people and, heaven knows, there were all sorts of people in the Egyptian government who had some say about this issue, and this never got resolved. They never said no, but they just never said yes. That was a good example of the kind of issue.

I did make an approach a couple of times when we had high-level AID people there. I would always take them, or any other high-level officials, congressional delegations, AID officials, cabinet officers from Washington to call on Sadat; we had lots of congressional delegations. I always went to see Sadat with them. And they usually had something specific that they wanted to talk about - AID people perhaps said more than most, because of the size of our AID mission. Sometimes military people would come, and Sadat would always see them. We would have visits from the National War College, and he enjoyed seeing them and giving them his strategic lecture. So I would always take the War College people to see him.He was very generous with his time. But these were not usually meetings to conduct business. There were occasions sometimes, usually the visit of a senior person who would go to Sadat with an issue that could not be resolved at a lower level; so I would sometimes use these meetings to try to raise an issue that meetings with the various ministers had been unable to resolve.

Also there were occasions to try to get his attention on economic matters. We had a really serious ongoing problem getting Sadat to focus on such matters as population, the need to do something about the population explosion, family planning, the need to get him to think about economic reforms and try to get away from the enormous and growing subsidies, which was stifling the economy, artificially holding down the price level. Foreign investors had problems with the bureaucracy trying to get approval of a joint venture which could benefit Egypt. So I used to try to find occasions to go to Sadat and he'd always issue instruction to have them looked into, but they didn't always get immediate, and sometimes didn't get any results at all.

But for the most part, these dealings with Sadat were on matters having to do with the peace process, relations with Israel, with the status of the peace negotiations, that kind of thing. As I said, the day to day business was conducted with the respective ministries. And, of course, I didn't need to do all this personally. I had a large staff of very able people, AID directors, for instance, who conducted a lot of the AID business. When there was a particularly important policy issue pending, we would do it together. When there were AID projects to be inaugurated, it was always an occasion to get out and get my fingers on the pulse. So I did a lot of going around the country, officiating at the inauguration of various US financed projects: power stations, schools, all sorts of things. And that was a very good entre into the hinterlands. I had very good, first rate economic and political counselors, AID and USIA officers, all of whom knew their jobs. We had a very good country team. We all pulled together very well. When we had problems, they usually reflected positions in Washington, which is often the case.

But, as I was saying, this was a period when Sadat's image in the country had begun to lose its glow, and one got more and more intelligence reports of plots against the president's life. We had a good intelligence exchange between our intelligence people and the Egyptian intelligence people. The Egyptian intelligence and security people were in despair because Sadat really did not take kindly to be told that he had to be on his guard from the security point of view. He liked to appear in public. He did not like to be behind armor plate or armored cars or behind armored glass. He loved to ride in an open car down the street and wave to the people. And he just didn't really believe in his heart that his people were against him, that he was in danger, or if he did, he was very fatalistic about it. It was a sort of Islamic fatalism. If it happened it would be God's will. I'm the president of the people, I'm the father of these people. He used to personalize everything. "My canal." "My army." He really was a sort of father of his people, and while that made for a sort of authoritarianism, but it also made him feel that he didn't want to isolate himself. In practice, he was increasingly isolated in terms of people he would listen to. His circle of advisors was getting narrower and narrower. People who told him things he didn't like to hear somehow ended up being farther away from him.

And the military were loyal. The military in Egypt has never been politicized in the sense that it has tried to take over the government except at the beginning. It took over, obviously from the monarchy. But, on the other hand, it has always been a major factor. Everybody knows that if the Egyptian government followed policies that the military thought were detrimental to the basic security of the country, or to their own prestige, that they would probably find ways to try to prevent this. And, of course, it was no accident that all of the rulers of Egypt since Nasser have been military officers-Nasser, Sadat, and now Mubarak. Even many of the civilians, who became ministers or governors in the provinces, or the heads of public-sector companies, were retired military officers. And, of course, this wasn't just the military feathering their nest, they were also some of the most able people. They have had perhaps some of the best training. The military worked well as an organization. There were many of the institutions in Egypt that didn't work so well. But those that worked well worked quite well. The Suez Canal Authority, which was a civilian authority, though it had a lot of retired military people in it, was one of the best-run, efficient operations, that would be a credit to any country operating it, including the United States. They were very effective, efficient, good people. The military the same way. The military ran certain industries, defense industries. They were under the minister of military production, which was run by one of the ablest general officers I had met in any country. They had excellent people in the ministry. So that the military used to provide the resource people because of their education, their training, their ability to manage and to organize things, the ability to make decisions. They tended to be very prominent in the infrastructure of the government. And so there was this kind of symbiotic relationship between the military and the government, but it was not in the traditional sense of the power behind the throne. They were pervasive. And certainly Sadat and they were on very good terms, but he also did replace occasionally military whom he felt were getting too independent. I'm jumping ahead a little bit, but Mubarak in recent years fired the minister of defense and former chief of staff, a popular officer, because he thought he was getting too independent. There wasn't a gamble. You haven't heard much of him since. So, you know, the military does tend to stand up and salute when ordered to do something. But, on the other hand, the presidents had to be careful about what they ordered the military to do and not to do.

Remember, with the war with Israel over, the military was in search of a role, an identity for itself. The career of all of the people in the Egyptian military was spent preparing for the next war with Israel, and suddenly they were at peace with Israel. Meanwhile, though they still had to build against a contingency that the peace treaty might break down, it wasn't the same. One thing they did was to get more and more into civilian activities. They had their own construction programs, for example. They developed agricultural projects, producing a lot of the food for the military themselves, using military personnel and military resources. They laid telephone lines, they repaired roads, they built bridges. They did an awful lot of things that in most economies would be done by civilian agencies or the private sector.

Anyway, to get back to the main theme. Sadat was getting increasingly authoritarian and, some people would say, rather erratic, and over-reacting to some reports of criticism he heard, the gossip that they kept bringing to him. He was getting out of touch with the people he should have been listening to.

And then added to this was an outbreak of rather serious communal fighting between extremist Moslems and extremist Christian Copts. In one of the poorer sections of Cairo and in upper Egypt, in Assiut where there were large Coptic minorities, where there had always been some tensions between the two communities, but it got out of hand. In one of my more revealing meetings with Sadat, just before his last visit to the United States, which was in late summer of '81, he was coming over on one of his periodic visits to Washington, he said to me, "I should tell you Roy (he always called me Roy) that I'm going to have to be very firm when I return and crack down on some of these people that are trying to obstruct my program and make difficulties."

Sadat's attitude, I think in genuine frustration was: "I know what's best for the country. Why don't they agree with me? I want democracy. I want a democratic society. But democracy does not mean the right to obstruct what I want to do." And he was always looking for some way to reconcile his authoritarian instincts with his intellectual commitment, I think, to the need to develop a democratic state. He could never quite reconcile the two.

Q: He thought what was best.

ATHERTON: He was really doing what he thought best. But he did say, "When I come back from this visit, I'm going to have to crack down very hard." I don't think any of us knew how hard.

When he came back (from Washington), one day he simply rounded up all the people who had ever been critical of him-from extremists on the Moslem Brotherhood side to people like Heikal. Heikal was not a threat to him. He had them all rounded up and put in jail for awhile to give them a lesson.

He also at the same time moved against the Coptic pope, the head of the Coptic Church. He was a rather tough adversary, who took a very confrontational approach to relations with the government and the Moslem community. He felt very strongly about the need for the Copts to retain their historic position as the oldest community in Egypt. In any case, Sadat, in effect, exiled the pope, put the pope in a monastery in the desert and appointed a group of bishops to run the affairs of the church. So tensions were high in the opposition, even in the loyal opposition, even among the people who would never think of going outside the law but did feel that Egypt should respect the views of those who disagreed and permit greater freedom of expression.

Well, there was increasing tension but no sign of how it was going to be resolved, until it was suddenly resolved by an assassin's bullet at the October 6 parade, 1981, celebrating the October 1973 War, which Egypt had always celebrated as their victory. It was an occasion for a very large military parade. Each year all of the latest Egyptian military equipment, most of which was of American origin, passed by the reviewing stand in view of the public and dignitaries. There were flybys by airplanes, including acrobatic flights, all of which was viewed from the reviewing stand by visiting dignitaries from other countries, the diplomatic corps and military attachï¿½s. It was a big parade celebrating the crossing of the canal against the Israelis on October 6, 1973. There was some sense of foreboding in the atmosphere. There had been an authenticated aborted attempt to assassinate Sadat once before that. So one worried a bit. But because this was a military parade, it was controlled by the military and security was in the hands of the military. Our area was a secure area that people couldn't get into without credentials being checked. It was assumed that nothing could happen here.

I was there in the reviewing stand where the diplomatic corps sat. I was sitting with the British and Canadian ambassadors not too far from the Israeli ambassador plus the visiting delegations that happened to be in Cairo, including one, I think either Chinese or North Korean delegation that was further back in the reviewing stands. And in the center up front were Sadat and his cabinet and senior officers and other distinguished guests. I was behind them in the tiered reviewing stands. On the right were the diplomatic corps and the visiting delegations. On the left was the attachï¿½ corps and visiting military dignitaries.

We had two senior American generals in town at the time, who were guests of the military. One was the deputy commander in chief of the European command, General Smith. The other was General Kingston, who was the commander of the Rapid Deployment Task Force that became the Central Command. It was the command with responsibility for preparing against contingencies that might arise in the Persian Gulf. They were the ones under whom the joint military exercises took place every year. So General Kingston and General Smith were both there as invited guests of the Egyptian military; they were sitting down in the front section along with the vice president and all of the religious dignitaries; so our two generals were down in the area just a few rows behind Sadat. Their military aides were sitting with our defense attachï¿½s.

The parade went on and on and on, with occasional disruptions. A vehicle would break down occasionally and had to be hand maneuvered out of the way. There was one live demonstration of paratroopers who made a precision drop and came down in circles that were drawn on the ground in front of the reviewing stand. They came up and saluted the president.

There were flybys, and I did have one chilling moment, because in one of the very low flyovers, the planes came straight at the reviewing stand, then at the last minute pulled up. And I suddenly found myself thinking, "You know, what if somebody really wanted to wipe out the president, his whole government, and anybody else, if they had that mission and decided to do it, we would be perfect targets. . . " Well, anyway that went on, and we all watched them fly away.

Near the end of the parade, along came the heavy artillery with their crews sitting in the back of the trucks pulling the heavy guns. One of them stopped in front of the reviewing stand. The crew scrambled out. Well, our assumption, and it was certainly Sadat's assumption was that this was going to be another one of these salutes for the president, as the paratroopers had been. They were going to come up to the stand and salute the president.

The president stood up to take the salute. We all were watching. And at that moment, suddenly hand grenades were thrown and automatic weapons were being fired. Clearly this was an assassination attempt at Sadat.

I didn't witness anything else, because, along with all of my colleagues, I was down, hugging the ground as fast and as far as I could. But there was a lot of shooting, and you could hear the shots. I could hear occasional bullets whizzing by. It was just luck who got hit and who didn't. A number of people in the diplomatic reviewing stands did get hit.

They were after Sadat, certainly, but they were firing at random to keep down any potential counter-fire from the security forces that might have protected us. As it turned out nobody did, because Sadat's own security had let their guard down, thinking that this was something that the military was in charge of and therefore they didn't have to worry. My security detail was several rows behind me in the reviewing stands. The Israeli ambassador had his security in back of mine, I guess. I had an Egyptian guard at the time, provided by the Egyptian government.Anyway, it was total chaos. When the firing stopped we all stood up and looked down at the front. There was a jumble of chairs upside down. They had already carried Sadat out and gotten into a helicopter that was standing by, and we heard the helicopter leave.

Michael Weir, who was the British ambassador, and I were side by side. With all that training as a political officer I immediately began seeing who was there, comparing notes. . . Is that Mubarak? Is that the minister of defense? Who isn't there? Who's been hit? Where's Sadat?

Sadat was nowhere to be seen. But we did try to get some impression of what the damage had been. We only learned sometime later that there had been 8 people killed in addition to Sadat and some 30 people had been wounded-some diplomats, the Belgian ambassador, the Australian commercial officer, and one member of the Chinese or Korean delegation whom I remember seeing as I was leaving. He had been hit in his wrist, bone shattered-his hand sort of dangled. It was a pretty bloody scene. Well, the assassins ran out of bullets, and they had no escape plan. I guess they expected to be killed in the process. They were all captured, and eventually they were tried, and several of them were executed. It was ascertained that this was an Islamic fundamentalist cell led by an officer in the army that had infiltrated the military, got military uniforms and used forged papers and substituted them for the crew of this artillery prime mover. This was that it was not in the main stream of the Moslem Brotherhood but was a spinoff, a group dedicated to violent overthrow and to establish Islamic rule in the country. To them Sadat had become the personification of evil, because he had made peace with Israel, because of his lifestyle, because he was seen as anti-Islamic. He had done all the things that the Islamic fundamentalists disapproved of. So it was no surprise that there were extremists in the Islamic movement who were out to destabilize the regime, including by assassination and other acts of violence.

It wasn't the first time; there had been other attempts earlier in the Sadat period. There had been an attack on the military industrial training school in Cairo at one time.

The remarkable thing wasn't that the attempt took place, I suppose, as much as it was that this proved not to be a grass roots group; they didn't begin a ground swell of revolution of opposition to the regime. Even the disaffected didn't want this kind of violence for the most part. And so they didn't represent the mainstream of the Islamic movement. They didn't represent the mainstream of the Moslem Brotherhood, which had decided to operate within the law.

But the Islamic movement was not a new phenomenon. The Moslem Brotherhood and Moslem opposition to westernization or secularization of the regime dated back to the 1930s. They tried to destabilize the Nasser regime in the 1950s, and that was why Nasser had a number of their leaders executed and kept many others in jail. Sadat released them when he came to power, as a counterweight to the leftist opposition.I believe that the brother of the leader of this particular group had himself been arrested by the Sadat police and the timing of the assassination may have triggered by this, but certainly the causes went beyond that. In any case, there was utter confusion. It wasn't quite clear whether Sadat had been killed or whether he had been wounded. We saw the vice president with a small bandage, so obviously he was all right. The minister of defense had gotten a superficial wound, but he was all right too.

Probably the reasons not more of the leaders had been killed were twofold. First, the very first opening move was the throwing of a hand grenade. I was told later by the minister of defense it had bounced off his head. But the grenade didn't go off. And there was one man whose job it was to kill Sadat. We've seen some of the pictures of this. He was up, actually up, aiming the gun down, because Sadat by that time had fallen to the ground. Others were simply providing covering fire for the man whose job it was to kill Sadat. They were not targeting other individuals, but they weren't trying to avoid killing other people- and they did kill other people. But the target was clearly Sadat.

Anyway, the question was: How do we get out of here? By that time I was being urged by my security detail to get away. Somebody had organized the diplomatic cars, which had been parked out behind the reviewing stand, and gotten them into some kind of order. I went and found my car and driver, and we headed back to the embassy.

I had a radio in the car which not many of the other ambassadorial cars had, so I was able to get on the radio as soon as I got in the car and called the embassy and talked to the DCM, Henry Precht, who was at the Embassy. I knew my wife was going to be watching the parade on television at the embassy. She had turned down an invitation to sit in the ladies' reviewing stand with Mrs. Sadat, up behind where the president and all of us were. She was watching this at the embassy; so I said, "Please tell Betty I'm all right. Tell everybody I'm on my way back". I told Henry it looks here as though it was a single assassination attempt. We couldn't tell at the time whether there was a follow-up plan or whether there was going to be an attempt to take over the usual targets: military headquarters, television stations, and so forth. So he'd better get a team and get people scattered around to do as much reconnaissance as possible. Well, Henry had already started doing these things.

I learned later from Betty what went on at the embassy while they were watching the parade on television. Suddenly the screen went crazy, and it was clear that the cameras were pointing in the air and in all directions. Henry just said right away, "Something's happened." He got on the phone and opened a line to the operations center in Washington and said, "I don't know what's happening, but clearly something is happening that is very serious. . . keep the line open, and we will report to you as soon as we get some facts." So we were able to get to Washington pretty early and report that there had been an assassination attempt. I was all right. I didn't know yet whether the president was alive. There were others who saw some bodies down there, but they weren't the president's. The senior bishop of the Coptic Church was killed. Then we had to worry, are all the Americans accounted for? By the time I got back to the Embassy the two general officers had arrived. They had been down in the reviewing area but had escaped any of the bullets. They were worried about their aides, who had been sitting in the reviewing stand. Well, we had to find out what had happened to the military aides; we had to establish a task force; we had to get word out to the American community; set up an information center to answer the inevitable questions. Is this something to be worried about? Is it the beginning of a revolution? Is there going to be disorder and chaos?

Our initial reporting was that it looked like an isolated event, no indication that there would be a follow-up or trouble anywhere else. The Egyptian radio and TV were showing films at that point, and playing light music and no news at all was coming over. We assumed that meant that everyone in the government was getting themselves together to try to take stock of what had happened and let everybody know who was in charge. I had a phone call from Mrs. Reagan who wanted me to talk to Mrs. Sadat. I said I would convey a message to her but I wouldn't be able to see her that day. Mrs. Reagan wanted Mrs. Sadat to know that she was very concerned.

Then, the most bizarre phone call was one from the minister of defense, Field Marshal Abu Ghazalla, who had been the military attachï¿½ in Washington and was considered very much a friend of the Americans, one of the strong advocates of U.S. military cooperation. He phoned me and said, "I just want to let you know that everything is under control in the country, the government is meeting, and the president has been seriously wounded but it is not life threatening." I had no choice but to accept that until we had evidence to the contrary.

And at that point I had a telephone call from former President Carter. He wanted to know what had happened to his friend Sadat. And I said, "All I can tell you is that there has been a serious attempt on his life. He certainly had to have been seriously wounded by all of the fire, but I have just been told by the minister of defense that he wasn't killed." This is in Carter's book, that he had been reassured by my report.

There was a period of almost seven hours, between the time of the assassination attempt and the time the Egyptian government announced the death of the president, when we were still in doubt. We kept getting urgent requests from the American press corps to confirm that the president had been killed. And I said, "I can't. We are waiting for the Egyptian government to announce it. I can't announce it." I got a certain amount of criticism in fact, from the press corps, that we were behind the power curve on this.

The CBS correspondent, a woman correspondent, whose name I've forgotten, was the first to go on the air and announce that the president had been killed. And, of course, we were asked to confirm it. And my response was that it was not up to the American ambassador or the American government to announce the death of the president of Egypt. It was up to the Egyptian government. I later learned that she (the correspondent) was outside the military hospital in Maadi, where the helicopter had taken Sadat, and had taken Mrs. Sadat too. The correspondent had gotten hold of a doctor coming out of the hospital, one of the surgeons or an assistant. She had said "What about the president?" And he had said "He's dead". And so she went on the air and announced it. But it was not official.We told Washington not to confirm it, but that they should be prepared. And then the radio and the TV began to play and chant verses from the Koran. I tried to call the family; I tried to call the foreign minister, and I tried to call various other people in the government. I kept being told that they were all at a meeting. And, of course, they were. They were having a meeting at senior level of government to make sure that authority was maintained. The radio came on and announced that Sadat had been killed, that the government was intact, order would be maintained. Everyone should remain calm. So we had our confirmation - about seven hours after he had been killed. Mubarak announced that the constitutional procedure would be followed. Under the constitution that was then in force, the vice president was not an elected official. The president was elected by the parliament and then confirmed by a general referendum.

The president in turn appoints the vice president. He is not elected, and he does not automatically succeed to the presidency.The speaker of the People's Assembly becomes the president ad interim. So a very senior, amiable, professional politician, Sufi Abu Jalah, who was speaker of the Parliament, became president of Egypt through that interim period, after which parliament would elect a new president.

Well, I did get a phone call soon thereafter from if I remember correctly Kamal Hassan Ali, an old friend, who was one of those loyal, intelligent, able servants of the state. He was a career military officer. He had been head of general intelligence. He was a war hero. He had been an artillery officer in the '73 War, and he had a good war record. He had been named by Sadat to head the Egyptian delegation to the peace treaty negotiations in Washington after Camp David. He had been made foreign minister. At some point he had also been minister of defense. At this point he was foreign minister. He did finally get to me. He was the first senior Egyptian I was able to talk to, as I recall. He later became, for a period, deputy prime minister. Kamal Hassan Ali confirmed that everything was under control. There had been some uprisings in Upper Egypt where there were attacks on police stations by Islamic fundamentalists. It was not at all clear that they were coordinated or whether they were spontaneous attempts to take advantage of the situation. And there was some unrest in some parts of Cairo, but very local and very quickly contained.

And the government functioned as the constitution provided. The establishment rallied round and announced that all the members of the government, and the government party in Parliament, the Peoples' Assembly supported President Sadat's choice of Mubarak, and therefore he was the only candidate when the Parliament voted to elect a new president. Unlike when Nasser died, when there was a power struggle and it took several months for Sadat to emerge on top as the ruler of Egypt. Mubarak, upon whom Sadat had laid hands, was chosen without opposition. The whole mood in the country then, and even of those who had been basically opposed or were becoming increasingly disenchanted with Sadat, was that we don't want unrest in this country. We want an orderly transfer.

I think perhaps one of the best insights I had was from a very senior Egyptian, retired by then, but formerly foreign minister and senior diplomat - a good friend of ours. He came to call on me at the embassy a few days later and said: "I think we have to say that out of something bad (Sadat's assassination) something good can come."

Before I go on, I'd like to just add a footnote to what I said in the last segment about the Sadat assassination. I mentioned that two very senior American generals were there as guests, and the guests were sitting up behind Sadat, and both of them escaped somehow unscathed from the hail of bullets. What I forgot to mention was that each of them had a military aide. And the aides were sitting in the military part of the reviewing stand, with our embassy military attachï¿½ people and other officers from the Office of Military Cooperation. Both aides were hit. Neither one fatally, but they both had rather severe bone injuries, from bullets which were flying around at random. And in addition to all the other problems that we had after the dust had settled and I got back to the embassy and we began to try to organize the reporting to the department, and finding out what was going on, and information for the American community and all that, we also had to try to locate the two aides. We did not know where they had been taken. The Egyptian medics were very quick, and I give them full credit for being on the spot and taking all the wounded that they could find, and there were quite a few, there were thirty or more injured in various degrees of severity, Egyptian and foreign. It took quite awhile to finally locate them at the hospital where they had been taken. The concluding chapter was that they were given absolutely first-rate attention by Egyptian orthopedic surgeons. When they were finally medevaced back to US military facilities in Europe, the American medical people were full of praise for the surgical treatment they had had, which really probably made their recovery-not easy, because they had severe problems - but less complicated than it otherwise would have been.

Anyway, on to the funeral. President Reagan announced that he was going to send a very special, high-powered delegation to Sadat's funeral, in honor of our high respect for Sadat. The delegation consisted of three former presidents-Nixon, Ford, and Carter; a former secretary of state, Henry Kissinger; a large congressional contingent, the chairmen of both Senate and House Foreign Affairs, Foreign Relations Committees, minority members; a large press delegation. Anyway, it was a very big delegation. Oh, and also the chief of protocol, Leonore Annenberg, and Jeane Kirkpatrick were there, our representative to the United Nations. So it was a very top-heavy delegation.

There was a certain amount of jockeying for who was senior. Well, the person in charge, of course, was the secretary of state. The head-of-delegation was Al Haig as secretary of state, in charge of the former presidents and in charge of Henry Kissinger. And it made for some very interesting personal, temperamental sort of footnotes to the funeral.

Q: I think perhaps Haig enjoyed it.

ATHERTON: Well, he certainly didn't make any attempt to conceal the fact that he considered that he was in fact in charge. He is famous for saying "I'm in charge".

But the real problem was there were two airplane loads of people including the press and the staff assistants and the secretariat people, security and communications people. The Egyptians, in announcing that there would be a state funeral and that they would provide accommodations for delegations, said that they were taking over one hotel. I can't remember now which, but it was one of the larger hotels in Cairo, and that they were going to assign a suite and a couple of other rooms to every national delegation. And when we told them the size of our delegation, they blanched. What they finally did was take over two hotels. One hotel out near the airport, dedicated entirely to the American delegation. And another hotel for all the other delegations from all the other countries.

The funeral was well organized. The Egyptians really do these things rather well. They are good at protocol, they have good people. Most of the senior people in the presidency who had the job of pulling this together were themselves retired military officers, with the training, the discipline, and the sense of organization that were part of their professional career. So they did do quite a good job of getting it organized.

It was a very strange kind of a funeral. In fact, it was a strange kind of mourning period. There was no outpouring of popular grief after Sadat's assassination. The city was very strangely muted; the country was strange. There were some outbreaks of violence, some local incidents and instability, anti-government, to build on the Sadat assassination in some parts of Cairo and in some parts of Upper Egypt, none of which was difficult to contain, although there were some casualties in the process. But the general feeling was that perhaps best expressed by the very senior and certainly patriotic former Egyptian official that I saw not long after. I was trying to get some sense of why there was such a contrast with Nasser's death. When Nasser died, there were mobs in the streets and tremendous demonstrations of public grief throughout the whole Arab world, and certainly in Cairo. It was well documented on television that it was really out of control at the time of Nasser's death. There was none of that. Now one explanation was that the Egyptian authorities were concerned that Sadat had died in a totally different way than Nasser. Nasser had had a heart attack and had died and had left an obvious vacuum. Sadat was assassinated, and the government wasn't sure whether it was going to be the beginning of a chain reaction of events, and therefore there was more security and the people were intimidated. But I think the more likely explanation was that in fact Sadat's popular base had badly eroded by that time.

And, as I have said, the very senior former official and friend of mine, whom I had talked to - and I talked to a number of people trying to make some sense of what the public mood was - summed it up well. He said, "Well, perhaps out of something bad, something good will to come."

There was a feeling on the part of many people that Sadat, in those last months, overreacted to signs of opposition, expressions of opposition from disparate groups concerned about the economic situation about reports of growing corruption, or about the fact that the peace process had bogged down, had not brought the promised economic miracle, and Egypt was isolated. But, in any case, Sadat had begun to crack down and reverted to some more authoritarian methods, and some of the freedoms that had been given for public expressions of dissent were really being reversed.

So there was no great popular outpouring of grief at Sadat's death. You might almost say some people found it a relief. It relieved tensions. They didn't know quite where Sadat would go next, where the country would go next. They had a foreboding that there was internal tension building up, and there was conflict among different elements of the population. They were isolated in the Arab world. There was just a sense of public malaise in those last weeks of Sadat's regime. Not that the people who felt this way advocated a violent solution. Most of them were appalled. I think most Egyptians did not think that this was the Egyptian way to solve their problems. They are not a violent people as some other countries are. They genuinely wanted to see stability maintained. There was very little attempt to exploit the situation and destabilize the transition to a new government.

The transition went very smoothly. As I mentioned, it followed the constitutional provisions. The speaker of the People's Assembly became acting president under the constitution until the Parliament could vote and elect a new president. The president was elected by the People's Assembly and not by popular vote, although there was a referendum afterwards.

So the person that actually received the condolences from the various delegations to the funeral was, in the first instance, the speaker of the Parliament. Everybody of course knew that Sadat had appointed Mubarak as vice president, and all the indications were that nobody would contest the election of Mubarak as president, that he would be the next president. It was taken for granted that the constitutional procedures would be followed. But there had to be some delay before that vote could be taken, so Mubarak was not actually president at the time. He was still vice president at the time of the funeral though he clearly was prepared to be leader of the country. So the delegations called on the speaker of the Parliament first, and then they called on Mubarak.

In any case, the funeral went off without incident. It was very tight security. Remember, among the heads of government who came to the funeral was Menachem Begin, the prime minister of Israel, with an Israeli delegation. It was a typical Moslem funeral. Everybody marched, walked in the cortege behind the casket.

It took the same route, incidentally, exactly the same route as the military parade had taken, right past the stands where Sadat was assassinated, where the ladies, who were not taking part in the Moslem funeral, were sitting. It is just the men who march. The ladies, Mrs. Sadat and friends of the family and other ladies including Betty, my wife along with Mrs. Mubarak, who would be the new First Lady, were all sitting in the stands where the president had been sitting when he was assassinated.

The reason for this route was that the burial was to be in a mausoleum right next to the tomb of the unknown soldier, which was right across the street from the military reviewing stand. That's where Sadat is interred. It was a very simple ceremony. There was a receiving line, and there was a certain amount of chaos. Everyone was trying to pay condolences to Mrs. Sadat. Her family were all there.

There was one little footnote, which was rather interesting, because we had two senior ladies in our delegation: Jeane Kirkpatrick and Lee Annenberg, ambassador to the UN, with cabinet rank, and the chief of protocol. And the question was raised: Shouldn't they be marching in the procession with the rest of the members of the delegation? All the rest of them were men. And it fell to me, as part of the briefing, to deal with this. I felt a little bit strange briefing three former presidents, Henry Kissinger and all these other people, but it was my job as ambassador explain the customs of the occasion. And the question was raised: Should the ladies not be marching? And I had to say that I think that really we should follow Moslem customs, follow the customs of the country.

Q: How did you determine precedence among three presidents?

ATHERTON: Oh, they knew that themselves. Nixon was clearly the senior. No doubt about that. He knew the precedence.

The ladies accepted this, although there was a certain amount of discomfort about it. I remember Jeane Kirkpatrick saying "Well, if I see any other ladies in this parade, I'm going to be very unhappy." As it turned out, one of the senior members of the French delegation insisted that his wife walk with him in the funeral parade. That caused a little bit of unhappiness, but I still think we were right in following local custom in this.

There was a dinner that evening for all members of the American delegation and the American Embassy at the hotel where the American delegation was staying; an in-house dinner, with three presidents, each making remarks. It was interesting, because each took a very different tack. Nixon spoke first as the senior ex-president. And he spoke in terms of the man with the most experience who had been in the House, who had been in the Senate, who had been vice president, who had been president, how he had been through all of these things before. He took the high road as the sort of world statesman in his remarks. But he was the only one of them who paid a tribute to the embassy personnel and the men and women of the Foreign Service for their role in all of this.

Gerry Ford gave the most low-key of all of the presidential remarks, rather general, but recalling his own association with Sadat and his part in the peace process.

Probably the most personal, recalling his special relationship, were Jimmy Carter's remarks. His were very personal, about his relationship with Sadat, the relationship between the Carter and the Sadat families.

It was not a gay occasion, but it was a relaxed occasion, and the presidents all agreed to have their pictures taken, endless photo opportunities. They had their pictures taken with various members of the staff, all of them delighted to have pictures taken of themselves with the presidents.

And then it came time for the delegation to depart. Kissinger was going on somewhere else. He wasn't going back with the others.I think he was going on to some other part of the Arab world. So you had, on the plane the three presidents. I went aboard to see them off. It was interesting. Without any hesitation, Ford and Nixon immediately moved into what was the presidential compartment of Air Force I. They took over without question the section of the plane which had always been theirs. The Carters were sitting at a table down in the general seating area of the airplane. So the touches of protocol were quite apparent. They all had a sense of where they belonged.

Q: No one managed it.

ATHERTON: Well, I assume this was managed by the White House protocol people who had been sent along.

Q: Did they have separate menus?

ATHERTON: That I don't know, because I didn't go on the airplane with them. But it was a very strenuous period, in fact, to get through without serious incidents.

Q: And they were there how long?

ATHERTON: It seemed like months. I think it was really about three days, or maybe it was two nights. And, of course, this involved, in addition to calls on the vice president, there were calls on Mrs. Sadat. And that was a rather emotional experience, especially for Henry Kissinger. He got all choked up in trying to make his remarks, because she was there with the children, and he had gotten to know her and the kids pretty well during the shuttles. And it was a very personal experience, and he clearly was deeply touched. The Carters had the same experience. Mrs. Carter was the only spouse of the senior people in the delegation.

After the main parties had left, the secretary stayed behind for some more substantive consultations with Mubarak about the future. And also there were some military people. I remember the Army chief of staff, General Smith, I think. I can't remember for certain. Anyway, he stayed behind and there were consultations among the military. And the main thrust was concerned - I thought a rather exaggerated concern, of Haig and of the military people accompanying him - that this was going to begin a period of instability, and what could we do to help stabilize Mubarak's regime and ensure that the peace process continued as it had under Sadat.

It developed that they were very suspicious in fact that the Egyptians would not stick to their word, and that once the Israelis had withdrawn from the Sinai, they would then reassert their old belligerency toward Israel. I did my best to convince them otherwise - that Mubarak, as he said, was genuinely committed to carrying on Sadat's policies, which were peace with Israel, good relations with United States.

And it turned out that we were right, but there was an undercurrent of concern. One of the moments of testing - the assassination was October 1981 - would come in early 1982, which would be the final Israeli withdrawal from the last third of the Sinai Peninsula, three years after the peace treaty was signed. The treaty provided that the final third would be turned over to the Egyptians in the spring of 1982. And as the time grew near, some Israelis became more and more stressed at the thought of giving up this last bit of territories they had always seen as a buffer of security during all these years since the 1967 war. And the Egyptians were concerned that it might not all go off on schedule, too.

So what happened was that the administration decided it needed to appoint somebody to help mother this through and keep both sides calm. And the person chosen for that was Walt Stoessel, who was then deputy secretary of state. And so Walt Stoessel, with a very small delegation, came out and actually spent quite a bit of time shuttling back and forth between Israel and Egypt in those days, and dealing with minor crises that kept coming up.

Not all were so minor. One of the principal problems was who was going to fill the vacuum, who was going to perform the peace-keeping function, which the treaty said had to be performed, in the Sinai. There had to be a peace-keeping force which would ensure observance of the demilitarization and limited armament provisions, and settle disputes only in the various zones in the Sinai under the treaty. There was to have been a UN force, but the Soviets made clear that they would not tolerate this and they would veto any attempt of the UN to establish a United Nations force. They had opposed the peace treaty and were supporting the Arabs who had rejected the peace treaty.

So, in the end, we had to go to the fallback, which we had committed ourselves to do in the treaty negotiations, which was for the United States to take the responsibility of establishing an international peacekeeping force, outside of the framework of the UN, which took on the name Multinational Force and Observers. It had a dual function, the peacekeeping force and also observing compliance with the treaty. And that had not all fallen into place. That had to be put together on very short notice. That was one of the things Stoessel was working on, getting agreement with the Egyptians and the Israelis for the composition of this MFO, with an American civilian as Director General. A general from Norway was to be the commander, and the forces were multinational. The biggest single component was American, elements of the Ninety-Second Airborne. And they are still there today as part of this force, but there are also other nationalities: Latin Americans, some Europeans, Australian, Fijians. It was quite a combination of forces we were able to put together.

It did all, in effect, fall into place, despite the stress, concern and nervousness on the part of both sides. But the final moment arrived when Israel literally would leave all of Egyptian territory.

Another footnote is that Israel did not leave quite all Egyptian territory, it stayed in a little enclave called Taba at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba, which it claimed did not belong to Egypt, and that became one of the issues that had to be dealt with in the last days of the withdrawal. It was one of the principal things that Walt Stoessel had to negotiate.

He had some very able help from Mike Sterner, who was also sent out from the Department to help get this all together. But they had to negotiate an understanding that Taba would be dealt with under the provisions of the peace treaty which provide that if negotiations didn't work, then there would be conciliation and if necessary a resort to arbitration. And it took years, quite a few years after that, until finally it could go to arbitration. And the arbitration found that the Israelis' claim had no basis, they had not claim to the disputed territory, and it was finally turned back to the Egyptians.

Q: Is Taba directly adjacent to the town of Aqaba? Where is it?

ATHERTON: It's directly adjacent to Elat. It's on the Egyptian side of the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Israelis considered it kind of an extension of Elat. One of the problems was that during the occupation, the Israeli government had authorized a developer, I think it was an Israeli developer with international participation, to construct a very large tourist hotel on one of the best stretches of beach along this part of the Sinai coast. It was developed to be a resort. It was an American hotel chain, though not one of the big ones. I believe it was Sonesta Hotels. The beach really became an extension of Elat. Elat was overcrowded as a tourist facility. This was to be an attraction for tourists in Israel who could enjoy the amenities of a European-style vacation at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba.

It took, as I say, several years, but eventually it was resolved by the provisions of the peace treaty, and the Egyptian now have it. The Egyptians now have the hotel, with special arrangements for Israelis to be able to cross into that area, with fewer formalities than if they were going to other parts of Egypt. So that was a footnote.

But on the whole, the withdrawal and the putting into place of the final arrangements for peacekeeping and observation worked out as foreseen. And Mubarak turned his attention to what would be the future policies of his government. He was very interested, we had very close consultations on this with the Egyptians, to reinforce their declared intention that the government would not change course and would remain committed to Sadat's commitment to peace with Israel, the treaty, Camp David Accords, and a strong Israeli-US relationship.

But there were nuances of difference. Mubarak was much less strident in his rhetoric about the other Arabs. He began to signal that he was interested in trying to repair Egypt's relations with the Arab world, which Sadat had not paid much attention to, and in fact he had taken a sort of pride in antagonizing the Arabs when they objected to his making peace with Israel. So Mubarak said he was prepared to make up with the Arabs but not at the expense of peace with Israel. They would have to accept Egypt as it was. While he would like Egypt to rejoin the Arab world, it was up to the other Arabs to take the initiative. Egypt was ready. He toned down the rhetoric and tried to make it easier for other Arabs to do this.

There was also a tendency to be a little tougher in the tone of his relationship with the Israelis. Sadat tended to give the benefit of the doubt to the Israelis. And it became increasingly difficult in those days for the Israelis to continue negotiating, or to move towards the kind of normalization of relations that they had wanted. All of the arrangements for banking facilities, or trade or cultural exchange, tourist exchange, were slowed down; the atmosphere was not as hospitable. It had never been exactly warm, even under Sadat, because while Sadat did his best to prod his bureaucracy, there was lots of resistance to moving too fast towards building normal relations with Israel while Israel was still in a state of war with all the other Arabs. This was going back again to the linkage which existed between the state of Egyptian-Israeli relations and the state of Israeli relations with other Arabs. Even though this was not a legal linkage or a formal linkage, it was certainly there politically. And there were lots of people in the Egyptian establishment who wanted to keep the Israelis a bit at arm's length as a reminded that they had unfinished business and that things wouldn't really be normal until Palestinians were satisfied and the other Arabs were given an incentive to make peace as well.

An attempt was made to move the autonomy talks forward, that had conducted first by Bob Strauss and Sol Linowitz, and then under Reagan by Dick Fairbanks, who tried to move toward some understanding on self-government for the Palestinians in the occupied territories as a step towards engaging them and the Israelis in the peace process. And those talks went on, but they moved very slowly and they were making no real progress until the next major dramatic event that affected the relationship with Israel and really ended the autonomy talks. That was in June of '82 when the Israelis launched their military invasion of Lebanon.

And that came as a bit of a shock to those in Egypt. There were some who were trying to persuade their colleagues that they really had to do more to put flesh on the bones, if you will, of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty. There were some professors who talked about joint projects, an amendment to the US foreign assistance act which set aside a certain amount of aid to Egypt and Israel in a regional fund which would only be used for joint projects. It was to be an economic and financial incentive for Egypt and the Israelis to come together in economic cooperation. And some projects developed under this, in fact. So there was some movement.

I can remember the one thing that really dramatizes the negative impact of the outbreak of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon on Egyptian-Israeli relations was the fact that finally, after laborious negotiations, it had been agreed that there would be in downtown Cairo an Israeli trade promotion office. And it would be opened with some ceremony. The Israeli minister of industry was in Cairo, there had been a reception where Egyptians and Israelis were talking about trade, and they were going go find ways to cooperate in trade and trade promotion. And the Israeli invasion of Lebanon just finished it. It literally happened, I think, the day that the ribbon-cutting ceremony for this new office was to take place. That ceremony never took place and the office never opened. That was just symptomatic of the cold-water effect that the Israeli military action threw on the peace treaty.

In some ways, that became a turning point. Many people have argued that this relationship wasn't going anywhere anyway. I'm not so sure. I have a feeling that at least there were some people in Egypt who were committed to trying to make it work better, this relationship with Israel. They may have been a minority, but there were some. After that, they didn't speak up. They really couldn't speak up, particularly when the television began to show that Israel was not just going in to sanitize the border and get out as Israel had originally announced. When the Israelis advanced all the way to Beirut, the bombing of Beirut was in the papers but also on television, night after night after night, pictures of Israeli planes bombing the city of Beirut. And that really made it very difficult. I remember one senior Egyptian who was quite committed, he was probably the most committed of the Egyptians, and he was in the cabinet - he was trying to work out cooperation at the technical level, for their mutual benefit. He said to me when I asked him how this was affecting him, "Tell your Israeli friends they have gone too far." He felt, I think, genuinely disappointed, because he felt there was something in this cooperation whereby Egypt would benefit.

Mubarak did, to his credit, keep a small Israeli agricultural technical consultative team which had already been established to work with the Egyptians on some sort of agricultural research project in the delta. He kept them there through this whole period. They kept a very low profile and stayed out of Cairo. But that project went on right through this tense time. It was one of the few. I think there were some archeologists who were brought in as well.

But for the most part, the numbers of Israelis coming to Egypt and the number of Egyptians going to Israel [which was not very large in any case] virtually dried up. And there were just one or two senior Egyptians whose responsibility it was to keep the channels open with the Israelis. They were the points of contact. One of these was Mustafa Khalil who had been prime minister during the final stages of negotiation of the treaty. He was quite committed as a result of this treaty. And he managed to keep his channels open and receive an occasional Israeli visitor. The other was Boutros Ghali, who was minister of state for foreign affairs, who had also been the deputy head of the Egyptian delegation which negotiated the peace treaty. And they managed to keep their channels open. But mostly, their channels were to the Israeli Labor government, not to the Likud Party in power.

Q: Tell me, were the Egyptians particularly angry with the Israelis for driving out the PLO from Lebanon? Was that a factor, or was it just the point of going in and destroying this city of Beirut?

ATHERTON: No, I think it was-the Israeli objective was to drive the PLO out of Lebanon. If possible, to defeat it totally and destroy its bases and its infrastructure. The Egyptians were never emotionally committed as some of the other Arabs were to the Palestinian cause. But they were committed to the precept that Egypt was an Arab country, and Egypt could not stand by and pretend it didn't matter when other Arabs, even if they were Palestinians, were being clobbered by the Israelis. The Egyptians were not great supporters of the hard line, rejectionist PLO position. They thought the PLO should have joined the peace process and brought the Palestinians into the peace process. But still, they could not be seen to be siding with the Israelis when the Israelis were invading an Arab country and bombing Palestinians. So their cry was: Get this over with quickly and get out. The longer this goes on, the more difficult it is for us to hold the line in terms of our relationship.

Up to this point, despite pressures from the opposition and a big argument internally, Mubarak had not even withdrawn the Egyptian ambassador from Israel. Many people had argued he should sever relations, not just withdraw the ambassador. And there was great pressure to break or suspend diplomatic relations. There were even a few extreme voices in Egypt saying that Israel had violated the peace treaty, in effect, violated the treaty by going to war with another Arab country. That really would be a stretch of the treaty, of course.

But Mubarak held out against all of these factions until the massacre of Palestinian civilians in the refugee camps. Though it was carried out by militant Christian elements in Lebanon, clearly it was done in an area where the Israelis were in control. And the impression was that it could not have happened if the Israelis had not been permissive and let it happen. And that caused such an outcry that Mubarak then recalled his ambassador. And that's all he did. He didn't close the borders, airports. El Al continued to fly into Cairo Airport, and Egyptian airlines continued to fly into Ben-Gurion Airport. There wasn't much substance going on, but the formalities of the peace treaty continued to be observed

This was also the time when there was a change in the American secretary of state. George Shultz became the new secretary of state. He tried to deal with the crisis in the Middle East, including the war in Lebanon and the increasing reaction against the United States in public opinion in the area, including in the streets in Egypt. Many Arabs assumed that we closed our eyes to the Israeli attack; there were many who thought that Secretary Haig had given his tacit approval.

Shultz activated his good friend, senior diplomat and trouble shooter Philip Habib, to go out and try to negotiate a solution to the problem, which meant basically trying to prevent, as it turned out, the total annihilation of PLO. What he was trying to do was to negotiate a departure of the PLO from Lebanon and find places for it to go. This is when the PLO set up its headquarters in Tunis. It was really a way of demonstrating that the United States had some sympathy towards the Palestinians and that it was not entirely on the Israeli side. This ran quite counter, of course, to what the Israelis wanted and what Sharon and Begin had in mind.

There were two sorts of peace initiatives launched. One was the announcement of what became known as the Reagan Plan - basically a statement of the American position on getting Arab-Israeli negotiations going again. And it was also part of the effort to defuse the reaction against the United States and correct the image that we were totally behind Israel, by putting forth a peace proposal with something in it for the Palestinians and for the Arabs. It wasn't a bad plan, on paper, but it was launched in a situation where there was no context for it to take hold, there was no atmosphere of receptivity in the area, and there was no follow-on. And it never did take off. It was just out there for people to pick up when they wanted to.

There was also George Shultz's effort to negotiate an agreement between the Israelis and the Lebanese. It would not bring Lebanon into the full peace, but at least it would end the state of belligerency between Lebanon and Israel, and it would lead to an Israeli pull-out from Lebanon, as a part of the package.

Shultz came out to the area and with Phil Habib as his principal deputy, and others working on his team, tried to hammer out an agreement between the Lebanese and the Israelis that would defuse the situation and, if it worked, would take Lebanon out of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Now there was a separate negotiation going on in other channels directly between General Sharon and the Lebanese Maronite leadership, which was designed to really create a Christian Lebanese enclave that would become not just a non-belligerent but would become almost an ally to Israel.

Anyway, all of this was running against other currents in the area, certainly the Syrians were opposed.

Q: During this time there was this terrible civil war going on in Lebanon, right?

ATHERTON: There was all this time a civil war. This is all against a background of fighting between Moslems and Christians, and Christians and Palestinians, and between Palestinians and Moslems at another point. Syrians in large numbers had been there since 1976, as part of an Arab League effort to end the civil war, sometimes behind one side and sometimes behind another in the conflict. And, of course, you also had the pro-Israeli Christian forces in a zone along the southern Lebanese border adjoining Israel, which was really an extension of Israeli control over southern Lebanon through Christian forces on Lebanese territory, to provide a buffer against terrorist attacks into Israel across this border from Lebanon.

I think it's important to note that the declared intention of the Israelis, as they announced it, was to put an end to the threat of Palestinian terrorist attacks across the border into northern Israel. The problem with this rationale was that there hadn't been any terrorist attacks for some months. Phil Habib had been out on an earlier mission and had negotiated, in effect, a cease-fire that had stopped these attacks across the border. But there was in Israel a faction, headed by General Sharon, who really wanted to go in and try to clean the PLO out of Lebanon. But he couldn't just announce that, so they announced Operation Peace for Galilee, even though the evidence was that there had been no terrorist attacks in some months. It was almost a year since Phil Habib had negotiated the cease-fire.

The trigger, and this was one of the real ironies, for this attack, was the assassination attempt against the Israeli ambassador in London. And the Israeli government said: You see, this is a terrorist attack against Israelis, and the Palestinians will have to be punished.

So that was the proximate cause of the launching of the Israeli invasion, an attempt to assassinate the Israeli ambassador in London by a Palestinian. The only problem was that the Palestinian group that did this was a renegade group which had been long since kicked out of the PLO because they failed to observe PLO discipline. It was not a PLO group, it was an anti-PLO group of Palestinians. And yet it was used as an excuse to really try to topple the PLO in Lebanon.

Well, there was lots of opposition to such a Christian Lebanese-Israeli peace, including factions in Lebanon that were not happy with this. And George Shultz, who was pushing ahead, thought the elements of the peace were all worked out. I can recall at one point during this period he came out and had a chiefs of mission conference. He brought all the American chiefs of mission from the area, from the Middle East, to a conference in Cairo, to get their judgments of the situation to get their reading of the attitudes of the people in their countries towards peace and toward the United States in particular. And one of the most outspoken people at that conference was our then ambassador to Damascus, Bob Paganelli, who stated quite promptly to the Secretary in this meeting of chiefs of mission that his attempt to have a separate Lebanese-Israeli peace - even though it was not going to be called a total peace treaty, it was going to be in effect an end to the war - was doomed to failure because the Syrians were committed to not letting it happen, and the Syrians were a major actor in Lebanon. The secretary did not like hearing this. But it turned out that this Ambassador Paganelli was quite right. The Syrians did succeed in undermining the secretary's initiative, which was still-born. Also, there was the assassination of Bashir Gemayel, who was the Lebanese president-elect and Israel's ally. And the whole thing just fell apart. Meanwhile, the Reagan peace plan had not caught fire. The peace process both on the Arab-Israeli front and in Lebanon was making no headway.

There were strains at this time, I have to say, in the Egyptian-American relationship because of our inability to get the Israelis out of Lebanon, even though we had defused it somewhat by helping it organize an orderly departure of most of the PLO to places of asylum or refuge, including working to help the PLO establish its headquarters in Tunis, a long way from Palestine, where they are, by the way, still today. And the one country that wanted to see this solved but did not want to accept any Palestinians, even a token number, was Egypt. Egypt was happy enough to work for the Palestinian cause within reason, a cause that was not inconsistent with its commitment to the peace process, but it had no illusion about putting any large numbers of Palestinians on Egyptian territory, because most of them were opposed to the peace treaty with Israel, and they would end up becoming a destabilizing element in Egypt. So that Egypt did not become a host country for the Palestinians.

There was a strain in the US-Egyptian relationship which tended increasingly to focus on what became an objective of U.S. policy. To some extent the objective was supported and pushed very hard by the Israeli lobby in Washington and certain elements in Congress. It was the objective of Israel, and became our objective, to get the Egyptians to return their ambassador to Israel. And this became a major subject of discussion on the agenda during a Mubarak visit to Washington. He made what George Shultz interpreted as a commitment that if Israel agreed to an arrangement whereby it would withdraw from Lebanon, then this would be all it would take for the Egyptians to return their ambassador. Well, the agreement that Shultz had negotiated between the Israelis and the Lebanese Maronite leadership did in fact include Israeli withdrawal in stages from Lebanon. And so Shultz said we've met your condition and therefore you've got to return the ambassador.

The problem was, of course, that that agreement fell apart and the Israelis didn't pull out. But Shultz said the commitment was not that the Israelis would pull out, it was that the Israelis had agreed to pull out, and the fact that they hadn't pulled out was not their fault, and therefore Egypt should return its ambassador. This became a very personal thing between Shultz and Mubarak. The chemistry was not very good between the two of them, and this was part of the reason. Shultz felt he had been let down. He had reported to Congress that he had succeeded in getting an Egyptian commitment and he had reported in private to certain congressional leaders that he had succeeded in getting an Egyptian commitment to return its ambassador, which was what Congress wanted, because it was a symbol of continuity in the peace treaty. And then, of course, it didn't happen, and he felt that he had been embarrassed in the eyes of the Congress by Mubarak's not fulfilling what he thought was a commitment.

Q: The Egyptians never withdrew their embassy, did they?

ATHERTON: No, no, the embassy was there and the staff, it was just the ambassador. The ambassador became the symbol. Parenthetically, it underlined one of the lessons to be learned; the last time you should withdraw an ambassador is when relations are difficult, when you need the ambassador. And to withdraw an ambassador as a symbol of displeasure is easy to do, but getting the ambassador back again is sometimes very difficult, to find the right time when you really would like send the ambassador back, to explain politically why you're doing it. The reason you pulled the ambassador out has not been corrected. I have always argued that one must be very, very resistant to pressures to withdraw ambassadors in times of crisis, when you need them most. In any case, the ambassador didn't return.

And Shultz also felt that he had been let down by King Hussein, who he thought had agreed to try to get Arafat to accept the Reagan peace plan, which called for a joint PLO-Jordanian delegation, and this would become a basis for negotiations. Then Hussein couldn't deliver and so he felt he was betrayed by the Jordanians. And, in general, his view of the Arabs began to be that they were not very reliable and that on the other hand his experience with the Israelis was that they were strong and they kept their commitments. He developed particularly good relations with Moshe Arens, who was then the Israeli ambassador to Washington. And I think this did not help smooth out the rough places in the chemistry between Shultz and Mubarak. So there was a period of stress in our relationship.

The next major event of this period, I should have pointed out earlier, as part of the process of trying to ensure the security of the PLO withdrawal from Lebanon negotiated by Habib, was to send a Marine detachment to Beirut, and the French, put in a French detachment. It was a kind of international peacekeeping force. And, it was this Marine detachment that was targeted for a suicide bombing by terrorists, probably of the Islamic fundamentalist variety, probably responsive to Iranian leadership, which resulted in the-I'm sorry, the first was the bombing of the American Embassy. The initial bombing was a bombing of the American Embassy by a suicide bomb attack. This happened while Shultz was out in the area in the first part of 1983. We had a memorial service at the embassy in Cairo, which Secretary Shultz and Phil Habib both attended. It was held in memory of all the personnel of the Beirut Embassy who had been killed, including Bob Ames, who had been the national intelligence officer for the Middle East at CIA and had become a very close associate and friend of the Secretary. The Secretary felt deeply about this tragedy. The bombing of the Marine barracks was in October, 1983.

Let me put that aside and turn now to what was going on in the Egyptian-U.S. relationship, because increasingly we were preoccupied with economic issues. There was nothing going on in the peace process. The Israelis were still in Lebanon, and there was a strain in the relationship there because the peace process was stalled. So the primary focus of the US-Egyptian dialogue in those days was on a number of economic issues.

Egypt was doing pretty well economically. It had some windfalls from increases in the price of oil, since it had become an oil exporter; lots of Egyptians were working in the Gulf states, which were booming, sending home remittances of hard currency; Suez canal tolls were doing well; and tourism was growing rapidly. So Egypt was getting a lot of foreign exchange in this period which rather masked the fact that the economy fundamentally was full of weaknesses and structural distortions. The private economy was growing rapidly, but the dominant government sector was still very sluggish in this period. And the economists in Washington and in the World Bank and we at the embassy including the AID mission were all trying very hard to persuade the Egyptian establishment, the president and his principal economic advisors that since they had an economic cushion because of the windfalls on the foreign exchange front, this was the time to institute some structural reforms in the Egyptian economy and begin to make it more competitive - to reduce, for example, the enormous element of subsidy payments in the Egyptian budget, subsidizing the basic economy in order to keep the price level down. This was something inherited from the Nasser period but which had grown to the point where the subsidies were a major factor in the Egyptian state budget. We were trying to persuade them to permit prices to seek their own level in a free-market system, remove controls on industry, privatize some of the large government enterprises and make them more efficient. There was quite a dialogue going on between Washington and Cairo on these economic issues. And, to their credit, the Egyptians listened; they put together economic study groups, to review and study and make recommendations to the president. But there was enormous resistance in the Egyptian bureaucracy to moving away from what they were used to, which was a centralized state-controlled economy. For one thing, it was their livelihood and they were not persuaded that a free market was the best thing in the world; the free market in Egypt had been subject to some excesses with too much focus on imported luxury goods, consumerism, corruption, a new rich class established, increasing the gap between rich and poor. There were some fundamental flaws in the Egyptian economy-no doubt about it. And many Egyptians recognized this and we had many discussions through our AID mission directly, with visitors from and to Washington, my own talks with Mubarak and others. And I will at least give Mubarak credit for recognizing that they had some problems, and he certainly did not simply wave them aside as Sadat used to do. Sadat used to say: There's nothing the Egyptians can't handle. After all, we have all that land that is empty, and we have all that water in the Nile, and all we have to do is put them together and you can expand the area for our people and expand agriculture. This went against all of the judgments of economists, who felt that there wasn't all that much excess water. Also the economic costs of trying to irrigate, to bring under cultivation lots of new land were prohibitive. And you had an argument between those who said that the way to improve agricultural output in Egypt was to bring new land under cultivation, and those who wanted to intensify and get more out of the existing cultivated land.

Underlying all this, though, was the fundamental fact that Egypt's population was growing so fast that it was keeping the economy from getting ahead of the power curve. The population increase in those days in Egypt wasn't the highest in the world, but it was running at about 2.7 percent net increase per year.

Q: What was the population at that period?

ATHERTON: It was then, I'm talking about 1982 into early '83, certainly 43 million. When I went there in 1979 it was 39 million, and it just kept growing. Sadat, again, did not take this seriously. I think I mentioned earlier Sadat's attitude towards the population growth.

But Mubarak did. Mubarak did realize that this was a serious problem, and we brought over an American team under the Resources for the Future Program to demonstrate through their computerized monitoring the impact on the various factors in the Egyptian economy if this population growth should continue. The number of new schools that would be needed, housing, land that would be lost to cultivation because you would have to build new villages and expand the cities, the strain on the water supply, all the things that would become necessary. It was very difficult, of course, to quantify all this. Mubarak organized, in effect, a high level seminar to attend this presentation. I think I mentioned earlier that we had got Mrs. Sadat to get President Sadat to sit through one of these presentations, and Sadat had done it in the privacy of his home, with one minister, as I recall, present to hear it.Mubarak convened members of his cabinet, members of the Islamic clergy, academicians, economists, and had a big roundtable gathering, so that the presentation was made to a lot of the people who were going to be involved in trying do something about Egypt's economic crisis. And they heard the lecture, they asked questions and were answered. So Mubarak was trying to educate his people that they had to do something about population growth. And, unlike Sadat, he brought it up in some of his speeches. He emphasized that unless something is done about the growth in population the country would suffocate. So he took this on. It was not a popular political issue, but he took it on.And he also did commission various economic studies. The problem, of course, was that their recommendations were rather draconian, and they all had potential political fallout, because they would have meant having prices go up, they probably would have increased unemployment in the short run, caused some inflation and that could bring political unrest. Most Egyptian leaders, then and still today, remember that Sadat once tried this kind of draconian medicine on the Egyptian economy back in 1977 at the recommendation of the World Bank and the IMF. And there was rioting in the streets in January, 1977 which he had to finally call out the army to put down. It was a nightmare to Mubarak, who thought it might precipitate domestic riots, and he would have to ask the army to again intervene. So he was very cautious about accepting or implementing recommendations of the international economists.

But the dialogue went on, and they did adopt some measures. There was some attempt to let the price of energy increase, although it remained, and even today, remains well below world prices, to let the price of bread go up, not by increasing the cost of the standard loaf, but introducing a new, somewhat better loaf at twice the price. So there were some attempts by indirection to reform the economy, some movement towards letting farmers charge market prices rather than trying to control agricultural output and marketing and distribution of the product. But most economists' judgment has been that it was too little and too late. They aren't going to get ahead; the crisis is going to overtake them if they don't move more rapidly. That was the case then and it remains, I believe, today. But somehow they muddled along. There was a windfall here and there, such as happened in the Kuwait-Iraq war. Something always seems to come along. Egyptians historically take the attitude that Egypt is too important and too strategic to be permitted to collapse, and therefore some external force would come along and save them from their worst economic problems. So far, I have to admit, historically they have been right.Another important component of this dialogue in the economic field had to do with the popular image of the U.S. AID program. It was a very large program with a large number of Americans, counting contractors as well as direct-hire Americans, totaling several hundred mostly living in one suburb of Cairo. So you had this image of a large number of Americans, living very well, with a high standard of living, an American school in Maadi although enrollment was only about half American. There were lots of images of the American presence. And there were those who worried that this was politically counterproductive.

There was a fair amount of criticism of the AID program from the political opposition particularly among academicians; all this money was coming in and one didn't see dramatic results. There were no big projects like the Aswan dam, for example, which the Russians had built. There were infrastructure projects, a lot of which consisted of pipes under the ground. There were some big ones, there were a lot of power projects which were evident. And there were a lot studies; the AID system, the AID approach to administering an aid program, appears to the Egyptians to be unduly expensive and time-consuming; feasibility studies, endless negotiations before an agreement was finally reached on a particular project between the Egyptian ministry and concerned and the AID mission and Washington. And then competitive bidding on the contracts, which were always time-consuming. So it did seem to be a slow-moving program, and a large pipeline was built up. It couldn't spend the money as fast as Congress appropriated it, so you had literally a million dollars or more sitting in this pipeline. And then there were some projects that in retrospect were probably better not undertaken. University social studies department, working in collaboration with universities in the States on in-depth studies of various aspects of Egyptian society. Well, it was the kind of thing that Egyptians do pretty well by themselves, and there was some question about whether it was the best use of AID funds, on those long-range sociological studies. They may have had some interest to scholars, but they did not seem to produce anything productive in the eyes of a lot of Egyptians. So there was a lot of carping at the AID program.

I have to give credit, by the way, to AID for creating a program from nothing, into which much too much money was pumped too fast because in the early days the level of the aid was determined politically and not on the basis of what could be efficiently used. The AID director who really shaped the program and gets a great deal of the credit for creating a development program that produced results, in my opinion, was Donald Brown, who was one of the senior career AID administrators. He was very good in conceptualizing and putting together his Mission's programs. It was just probably mission impossible to do as much as Sadat and we had held out with such promise; expectations were too high. And then a lot of Egyptians didn't understand AID's ways, and they resisted AID's emphasis on free enterprise, which happened more during the Reagan period than the Carter period. But there was a lot of friction, almost inevitable when you have that many Americans coming and trying to bring the American way of doing things to the Egyptian economy which had its own way, and with lots of Americans interacting at various levels with their counterparts in the Egyptian ministries.

It began to look to some of the political critics that there was a secret American hand running the Egyptian government. At least that became the kind of image the opposition tried to portray.

Q: Did they bring this up to you. . . ?

ATHERTON: Well, I used to hear it. It was not from the government, you'd get it from the opposition. It would appear in the opposition press, in speeches in parliament, and it was heard in the streets. So it led to concern that maybe the AID program wasn't paying enough attention to its public relations. And we began to try to find ways to explain the program better, and also to look at those projects that might be trimmed, and look for projects that might be more dramatic, to get people's attention. There was a big argument. Do you want dramatic projects or do you want to invest in an infrastructure for which you won't get much credit now, but ten years down the road it will be filling a need.

For example, AID created in the end more electricity-generating capacity through its projects in Egypt, which were a combination of oil and gas projects, than had the Aswan Dam. But, for some reason, many Egyptians always compared the Aswan Dam favorably with the results of the American AID program. We weren't able to get this across.

Q: They could see it.

ATHERTON: They could see it. I guess that's it. They couldn't see many of the other things that were happening. There were some very good programs. There was a basic village services program, which tended to put the decision-making out into the villages, in the village councils, and get them engaged in local economic development projects. There were urban counterparts, urban neighborhood services programs.

I think that the final judgement of the USAID program in Egypt has yet to be written. Somebody is going to have to take a long look at the base where Egypt was when we started this program and where it was fifteen years later.

Now we weren't the only people putting money into Egypt. There was the World Bank, Europeans, lots of other people, but our AID program, I think did as much as all the others put together. Also we were much more involved in trying to design changes in and helping fine-tune the Egyptian economy than other donors except the World Bank. The others gave grants designed to help their nationals come in and sell their products and their services.

Anyway, there were problems. To some extent the AID programs had problems that needed fixing, but to some extent it was a perception problem.

Q: And we're talking about what years?

ATHERTON: I'm talking about the whole period I was there, which was 1979 until I left in 1983. But there was a change in the AID mission leadership after the change of administration. When the Reagan administration came in, in '81, less than halfway through my tour there, it decided to try to give our AID programs more of a private-sector image.

This began with the appointment as head of the AID Mission of a non-career person out of the US private sector, who also knew quite a bit about Egypt. His name was Michael Stone, a successful businessman from California. He was British originally, and had fought in World War II, flying aircraft off a British aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean. He had a long association with Egypt, and had been on the board of the American University in Cairo. Mike Stone was chosen, I'm told, to inject more of the private-sector philosophy into the Egyptian economy and into the way the AID program was structured, and also to try to improve its image. Mike Stone, by the way, was to become Secretary of the Army in this administration. He was, I felt, a first-rate choice for AID Director.

But he soon ran into problems, not with the Egyptians as much as with his headquarters back in Washington. Because he had been told that he was going out there to be in charge, and yet AID headquarters in Washington kept trying to second-guess him, look over his shoulder and micromanage his program. He wasn't used to working with this kind of bureaucracy. So he had his problems with AID headquarters.

But Mike Stone and I together did launch an effort to improve the image, public relations-wise, for the AID programs. We did much more briefing of the press, paying much more attention to their way the projects were presented publicly, in-depth interviews with some columnists, Egyptian columnists, giving them background information, using the USIA facilities to get the AID story out more than it had before, briefing members of the Egyptian People's Assembly, meeting with people from the Assembly's Foreign Relations Committee.

Q: Touring the various projects, I suppose?

ATHERTON: There was a lot of touring of projects, a lot more public imaging. I won't say that we turned things around, but I think we had some effect.

Well, that's a lot about the economic side, but I did want to make clear the economic side of the US-Egyptian relationship, because we were putting close to a billion dollars a year into an AID program, some of it for food, some for commodity purchases, but a lot of it for projects, and some of it was bound to create frictions.

There was another area that created frictions during this period, too. And that was on the military side. On the whole, the relationship between the Egyptian and American military was good. They were getting a lot of American equipment, there were American training missions in Egypt, to work with the Egyptians on the new equipment, helping them learn how to maintain it, integrate it into their forces, both air force and ground. There wasn't any naval program but there were air defense and ground equipment and Air Force equipment. There were American field teams to accompany each new weapons system, called TAFTs, Technical Assistance Field Teams, which were under my authority ultimately, but their chain of command was through a member of my country team, a general officer, who headed the Office of Military Cooperation or OMC.

Now, in addition to the cooperation, military-to-military, focusing on transferring equipment and know-how to the Egyptians there were annual US-Egyptian military exercises. The US units were under CENTCOM (Central Command) which had been established by President Carter after the fall of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, to have a force that could intervene to counter a threat to our friends in the Persian Gulf. That, by the way, is the command which today is in charge of all of the build-up of American forces in Saudi Arabia. All of these joint exercises, gaining familiarity with working with Egyptians in an Arab environment, contingency planning for staging equipment through Egypt to the Gulf, have played a major part in helping the rapid build-up in response to the Saudi and Kuwaiti request for protection against the Iraqis and in making this go smoothly. So these years of working with the Egyptian military paid off in August of 1990.

But there was another area which was not as friction-free. The American military very much wanted to formalize their access to Egyptian bases and Egyptian facilities. In fact, they wanted the nearest thing possible to having military base facilities in Egypt. And this went very much against the political currents in Egypt. Even Sadat, who was open to military cooperation, strategic cooperation, said that he would make facilities available but would permit no foreign bases on Egyptian territory. They still remembered how long it had taken to get rid of the British bases in the Suez Canal zone. They have no good memory of foreign bases on their territory.

Well, the problem was that for some of the things the military wanted to do in Egypt - pre-positioning of equipment, having small contingents of people on the ground - funding came under the appropriations by the Congress for military basing purposes. And the legislation required that we have formal agreements with the Egyptians that gave us certain rights, which the Egyptians resisted. They wanted a handshake and a word-of-mouth arrangement. And so we had endless go-arounds with delegations coming out. My successor once removed in Washington was assistant secretary Nick Veliotes, who was then assistant secretary in the Reagan administration, for the Near East and South Asia. Veliotes came out and tried to negotiate for facilities at Ras Banas, which is way south on the Red Sea and which Sadat had always said was a perfect place for the Americans and Egyptians to work from in our efort to build a capacity to move quickly to protect the Gulf in case of a threat. But our insistence on having a formal agreement ran directly counter to Egyptian insistence that this was an Egyptian base and that we would be their guest. We were welcome there, but they weren't going to give us any base rights, just access. So we never did resolve that. Sadat, who really started this, and then Mubarak picked it up, looked for American money to develop Ras Banas. It was an old Egyptian base, naval air and land; it was right on the water, on the Red Sea. And it had a lot of strategic facilities, a good harbor, good amenities. But the Egyptians didn't have the money to modernize it. They thought that if they were to develop it for the Americans we should put a lot of money into it and create a very modern base. The problem was that we would only put money into it if was an American base, or at least we had a written agreement. Congress insisted on this. Congressional delegations came out and looked at Ras Banas, talked about it. I kept trying to persuade congressmen and anyone who asked me, people who came out from Washington, that they weren't going to get Egyptian agreement that would be seen by, and held up by the opposition as permitting a foreign, an American military base on Egyptian territory. If we couldn't find ways to work within their political imperatives, then we might as well give the idea up and just go on with some form of annual military exercises, and the benefits those gave us. But we had to move quickly because of the Gulf situation.

There was another friction. The Egyptians had a very great concern about letting nuclear-powered vessels use the Suez Canal. They were concerned about nuclear accidents. And that didn't just mean vessels with nuclear weapons on them. It meant those with nuclear power plants. And increasingly our Navy is nuclear-powered. So we could never get an agreement with the Egyptians as a matter of routine to let nuclear-powered American warships use the Suez Canal. They said this applies to all countries, it's not just the United States. The trouble is, we have the most, and we wanted to make the most use of the canal to move naval ships, including aircraft carriers, from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. And we went around in circles. Delegations came out. Bob Murray, who was the under secretary of the Navy, came out. State Department and Defense Department teams spent weeks in Cairo talking to the Egyptians about why they should permit our ships transit, demonstrated to them it was perfectly safe, that they had nothing to be concerned about. We took Egyptians to the States, showing them nuclear ships in our harbors, giving them as much briefing as we could, orientation on their safety, showing them how nuclear power plants worked, precautions that would be taken to assure that there would be no accidents in the Canal. Sadat, who said in principle that he would like to see this worked out, said "I will talk to my people about it". The people principally concerned with this were the Suez Canal authority, who tended to be rather autonomous and strong-minded, and they weren't about to agree to anything that might endanger their Canal, they said. And also they argued that if we let American nuclear-powered ships through, under the Constantinople Convention, we can't give preferential treatment and, we'll have to let Russian nuclear-powered ships and any other nuclear-powered ships through the Canal. So this was another friction because these arduous negotiations went on and on without anything of substance being agreed by the Egyptians; nothing except general statements that in a real emergency we will waive the restrictions, if there is a real operational necessity to move very quickly. And, in fact, in the current Kuwait-Iraq crisis, I understand that they had done just that. A lot of American Navy vessels had moved into the area.

Q: But the choice is always theirs. . .

ATHERTON: But they have to offer it. And it's an exception to the rule; they haven't changed the rule.

Well, I think that's enough to give some sense of the flavor of what it was like trying to help manage and conduct from Cairo, Egyptian-American relations during this period of four and a half years I was there, from mid-1979 to the end of 1983, with all the events that happened during that period, part of it under Sadat, part of it under Mubarak, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the problems with our economic relationship, with the running down and grinding to a total halt eventually of any attempt to follow up the Camp David agreements on negotiations with the Palestinians, Egypt still being largely isolated. All the time I was in Cairo, there was no Arab diplomatic corps. There were a few Arab diplomats from countries that didn't break relations with Egypt, but for the most part there was no Arab diplomatic community. And the Russians, while we were there, were very much on the periphery, and the American presence was the big presence.

Q: Could I ask you a few questions now about your staffing arrangements and how you dealt with such an enormous staff. You must have had-How many section heads did you have? Did you have any problems with any of them in particular, or did they all work smoothly?

ATHERTON: Oh, we had problems, but we managed to work them out. I suppose the principal issues, the most difficult to deal with were between the AID mission and the embassy economic section. We had an economic counselor, and I was eventually able to get him the title of minister-counselor. The AID mission director had his own economic analysis unit, and very often they would be doing the same kind of reports independent of each other. I worked very hard to try to get coordination between the embassy economic section and the AID mission, and with some success over a period of time. But there was a built-in bureaucratic turf. I found that, although I had never had formal management training, I spent an awful lot of my time, not conducting foreign affairs, but managing a mission.

I think we were talking last time a little bit about the embassy in Cairo and the question of managing it, staffing it. In other words, the sort of managerial aspects, if you will, of being chief of mission in that kind of a post.

The first thing I guess I ought to say is that I have never really had much formal management training. In fact, few of us in the Foreign Service career ever did in those days, we learned on the job. I had managed a small consulate. As a desk officer I had always had my secretary.

I had taken one management seminar, which the Foreign Service Institute put on, during one of my Washington tours or on leave, I can't remember which, some years before, which stood me in good stead. I found that I remembered some of the things that came out of that. It was during the time when John Stutesman was running the FSI, or was running at least part of the FSI. I can't remember now precisely whether he was the director or whether he was running one of their programs. But he was very interested in management, and he had arranged a contract with an organization, whose management technique was called the Management Grid. This was a group based at the University of Texas, in my recollection, and they ran a very intensive seminar for middle-grade officers off-site at the Tidewater Inn in a town in eastern Maryland. Anyway, they took a group of us down there on a Sunday afternoon. It was sensitivity training, really, somewhat more structured than the usual sensitivity training.

Q: Incidentally, they had those seminars all over the world, as a matter of fact. I attended the one, from Beirut, in Athens.

ATHERTON: Was it also the Management Grid?

Q: Yes, Bob Stutesman came out with it.

ATHERTON: Well, I thought it was an excellent structure within which to think about how you deal with management decisions. I remember, for example, that one of the things they did was to show to the group the film Twelve Angry Men, with Henry Fonda and others and then used that as a basis for a discussion to bring out how different participants in the seminar had heard different things in that film, about how the decisions were made that ultimately led to turning a jury that was 11-1 for guilty to a 12-0 for acquittal. That was one of the training devices for this seminar. In any case, that was the only formal management training I had. It lasted a week and was very intensive. We started at breakfast and went through the day and had sessions after dinner in the evening. So we were all pretty well intellectually strung-out by the end of the week.

But some of it stuck when I was finally put in a position where I really was the manager, even more so than being assistant secretary, because the bureau had its own very senior executive director, and so much of managing in the department is managing policy issues, whereas managing people is part of a larger context. At the embassy, you are the context.

Q: Would you mind giving us a run-down of a sample day that you had: who you met with, how you saw your staff?

ATHERTON: When Betty and I first arrived, we made a point of going around to every unit of the embassy, visiting different components of the embassy in their offices. We went to the AID office to see the AID people, the military offices, the USIA, and the different sections of the embassy, getting to know not just the heads of the sections but the junior officers and the clerical staff and the communicators in the communications center, and secretaries and support staff and the Egyptian employees of the Embassy.

The embassy, by the way, had grown very rapidly during this period. I took over from Hermann Eilts, who had tried very hard to keep down the size of the AID mission, but it just continued to grow by sheer force of the number of people it takes to run an AID program according to our laws and regulations: auditors and people who had to do feasibility studies-sort of counterparts to all the Egyptians AID was working with. And we had a program that grew while I was there, the economic assistance program, to something like a billion dollars a year - eight hundred million roughly in economic assistance, and another two hundred million, in rough figures, in PL 480.

Q: You can't run it without a staff.

ATHERTON: You can't run it without an enormous staff. We had, at the peak, when I was there we had more than four hundred direct-hire Americans on the embassy payroll. That counted all sections, other agencies as well, but all, under the ambassador. There were also large numbers of AID contractors who were not part of the embassy but had certain facilities at the embassy, which swelled the American economic assistance team enormously. And later, as you got into the military supply program, it became a billion dollars a year too. Then there were also defense contractors, large numbers of people who took over a whole apartment building out in Heliopolis, for example, just the General Dynamics staff alone, that was running the F-16 program bringing in aircraft for the Egyptian Air Force.

It was a large staff, and so the first thing was to get to know people and get to meet with them. Then I had four country team meetings a week with heads of all of the major elements of the embassy. Usually fairly brisk. We didn't spend a lot of time just in reporting what everyone was doing. Kind of an action-oriented meeting. And I said at one point, "There are other ways to report in detail on this or that program. What we want in country team meetings is to raise those issues which are coming up for decision, or which have inter-agency implications that other parts of the mission ought to know about, so that we don't have a situation where we all are working in separate compartments." They were more information-sharing and discussion meetings than decision-making meetings.

Q: Now you had your other heads of section in the political and economic section of the embassy as well?

ATHERTON: Yes, I had the economic counselor, and we were later able to persuade the department to give him the rank of minister-counselor, because of the size of the job and of the responsibilities, including general policy liaison with the AID mission, keeping an eye on AID policy and the AID program on my behalf. He became minister counselor for economic affairs. And, of course, the DCM, who was minister counselor, and the political counselor. They were always part of the country team staff meetings, which always included the AID Director, the counselor for administration, the public affairs officer, the science attachï¿½, the counselor for commercial affairs who was a Department of Commerce officer assigned to perform commercial services, the agricultural attachï¿½, who was a senior officer, the consul general, head of the consular section, a defense attachï¿½, and the head of the Office of Military Cooperation. There was always a bit of a problem there, because he was a general officer, a Brigadier General, and the defense attachï¿½ was a colonel, and yet he felt that traditionally the defense attachï¿½ was supposed to be the top military man. So there was always a bit of tension there. I kept finding myself trying to negotiate between different branches of the military. And, of course, the station chief, representing CIA in Cairo, was declared. He was not declared publicly, but he was declared to the Egyptians, who knew he was our intelligence representative. And therefore it got to be pretty generally known what he was. Not what I would call very deep cover. He was the station chief in Cairo but was technically an officer in the political section.

It was a good team. They were good people. Most agencies felt that this was an important enough post for them that they assign some of their very best people, so that we had a quality staff altogether.

Q: You didn't have to deal with much of free-wheeling on the part of these heads of agencies?

ATHERTON: Not a lot, not a lot. I don't think there were any sort of devious and deliberate end runs that I was aware of.

One of the problems was, of course, with so many projects all over the country, they overflowed into the consular district of Alexandria. We had a consulate general in Alexandria. When I first got there, we also had a consulate at Port Said. That was closed early on in my tour. We had a consul general in Alexandria, and the whole northern part of the country was in the Alexandria consular district. There were AID projects there, and AID mission people would go up there to deal with their Egyptian counterparts and forget very often to tell the consul general they were coming to town and calling frequently on the governor. So that became one of the first things we had to do, to tighten that up and make sure that the AID mission people were aware that anybody traveling, and not just the AID mission, anybody from the embassy in Cairo traveling to Alexandria on business had to let the consul general know and give him, and later her - because we had a lady consul general at the end of our tour, Frances Cook - at least the option of accompanying them on some of these calls. It was very useful. I always found that going along with the AID mission director on certain of his field trips or for the inauguration of projects was an awfully good entrï¿½e into meeting people outside of the capital. So the AID program, in addition to being important on its merits, was a good diplomatic tool. It was a point of entree. Not just for me but for the other members of the staff including for the minister-counselor for economic affairs.

Q: I gather that you had the feeling that you knew pretty much what people were doing. . . you had good control. . .

ATHERTON: Yes, I don't feel that I was ever in the dark about any of the main developments. And I'd say the staff was basically conscientious for the most past about making sure that I was briefed. So I was able to keep pretty well in touch. But it was a big part of the job, the management side of it, keeping on top of a staff that large. Fortunately, because there were also obviously the bilateral relations aspects.There were certain people that only I could see. The president and vice president, and the foreign minister and some of the other ministers. The policy ministers-the Prime Minister. So my days would be a mixture of internal management, starting off with the staff meeting and sometimes further appointments during the day with particular people who had a particular problem or issue they wanted to discuss. But also diplomatic appointments with members of the Egyptian government.

And there was an endless representation side of it. Cairo had a very large diplomatic community. While we were there, there were almost no Arab diplomatic missions. Most Arab states had broken relations after Egypt made peace with Israel. So you had just a few small Arab missions, with a very low profile. There was a very large and a very high-quality African diplomatic corps. And it seemed every week there was at least one African national day. And I made a point, as I believe Hermann Eilts had before me, of at least putting in an appearance at all of the other countries' national day receptions. For them, it was terribly important whether or not certain people, and in particular the American ambassador, came to their parties. If you went to one and not another, then you put somebody's nose out of joint.

I think there was hardly an evening when we didn't have at least one event and sometimes more than one that we had to go to. There were ceremonial events when AID projects were inaugurated, which always require a certain amount of time, usually a speech of some kind, and there was a tea or reception or something like that. USIA had programs in the universities, and I was often asked to come to the presentation of books to the university. I was asked a couple of times to lecture to some of the professors and the graduate students at Cairo University, in their department of political science, about U.S.-Egyptian relations. I was even asked to lecture once at the Egyptian equivalent of our National War College about U.S.-Egyptian relations.

So there were endless demands such as this. But one has to try to cover all of these bases. Obviously, the bilateral relationship was critical, and that had to take priority, when I had to see a senior official on a particular urgent piece of business. And there was always lots of business because, during the earlier part of my tour, we were still trying to make the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations on Palestinian autonomy work. There were special negotiators representing the president who came out. There was always a lot to do to prepare for those visits and a lot to do between those visits. There were matters on which only the president, President Sadat particularly, but Mubarak when he became president, could make decisions. So many things which, in a less centralized government, might have been handled at the ministerial level or even at the sub-ministerial level, got kicked upstairs very quickly to the president, or to the prime minister. So I had to attend more meetings than would have been the case in, say, a European capital, with the very top people in the government.

Q: Could I ask something here? This is rather minor, but when you went to see, say, the prime minister or the president or one of the other ministers, whom did you take with you, and did you do your own reporting? How did you manage that?

ATHERTON: I very often would see the president alone, because he would be alone, and since they both spoke English, there was no need for an interpreter. I certainly couldn't handle it in Arabic, but both Sadat and Mubarak's English was quite adequate. I would very often do it alone. On the other hand, a lot of those meetings, particularly at the presidential level, were in connection with visits from Washington, taking a member of Congress, taking the administrator of AID when he came out, taking other senior executive branch officials for calls on the president. Then I would normally take the visitor, but usually with another officer, depending on what the subject matter was, economic officer or political officer who helped with the reporting on the meeting, taking notes and writing it up. On those occasions, the president would usually have somebody from his staff with him as well.

But some of the more sensitive issues were the subject of a private tete-a-tete, and I would have to go back and reconstruct and dictate a memorandum of the conversation while it was fresh in my mind. I took a few notes. I didn't try to put down more than a few key words to remind me what the subject was, so I could reconstruct it and write it up. I always worried a little bit, with Sadat in particular, because he never had anybody taking notes, and I always wondered how much of it ever got reported on down the line to his people. I frequently ended up having to tell his foreign minister what he had told me, to be quite honest.

Q: You didn't leave an aide memoire with him? That practice has sort of gone out of style, hasn't it?

ATHERTON: No, I didn't. Occasionally with the foreign minister, who was more used to that. I'd day I'll send you something after the meeting.

But there were never large gatherings. It was totally different, for example, from meetings that I used to go to when I was doing the shuttle, when I was doing the pre-Camp David negotiating job in Israel. Normally the meeting was with a roomful of people, and I would have several people with me as did the Israeli delegation. And they kept literal verbatim transcripts. But I was never sure there was any record of some of these meetings with the Egyptians, except for our own records.

There were lots of visitors, lots of congressmen. It was obligatory for members of congress, particularly in an election year, to say that they had seen President Sadat. It was good politics in the United States to have your picture taken with President Sadat, once he had made peace with Israel. And he was great at playing on this. He would put on a very good show, very often when there was a congressional delegation. Usually they were delegations. Very few of them came solo. We would have to go out of town; he would be at one of the villas he like to stay at - one at the barrages, which was up at the beginning of the Delta, north of Cairo, which had been the British engineer's residence when the first barrage to control the floods had been built, in the early days of the British period. He stayed there. He had a place in Aswan. He had a place in Alexandria. He had his own residence in Giza. And you never knew quite where you were going to be calling on Sadat. He would always put on a good show-a tour d'horizon for the visitors. The importance of Egypt's role in the strategic balance in the Middle East. How important it was that Egypt and the US work together. We had a lot of meetings that had to do with military matters, trying to formalize more the military relationship. He was always very adroit at saying that he would be happy to have a close relationship with us and cooperate with us and have our military come on joint exercises, but no alliances, no American bases on Egyptian territory. It was politically much too sensitive in light of Egypt's experience with foreign occupation. It's hard to say what a typical day was, except that they did all start with a brief country team meeting.

Q: Well, you've given us a good idea. I think it's clear.

ATHERTON: I should add one other thing. Once a week, usually the last day of the week, we would have a more open staff meeting, with not only the country team, the senior people but others from the staffs of the other agencies, and from the embassy staff.It was really kind of an open meeting. The people who wanted to come would come. They were like seminars. I started the custom of having these open meetings once a week, with a subject matter to be discussed, and asking a member of the staff to take the lead in a discussion of a new direction in AID policy, for example. Or, I remember for example our economic minister counselor trying to explain to the staff something about supply-side economics after the change of administration. Remember I went over there as Carter's ambassador, and then Reagan came in with new emphasis on the private sector and supply-side economics, and we had to try to educate our staff about the policies and the philosophy of the new administration. In these discussions, for example, one of the big issues was how important was the resurgence of Islam, the Islamic revival, which was readily apparent. How important was this politically to the people, and was it a threat to the stability of the government? And everyone would contribute; the political officer, the USIA officer, people who had contacts all over the community would take part in these discussions.

Usually I would ask one member of the staff to organize the discussion, make a presentation, and then draw others into the discussion. That way, every week we would find some subject of general interest to everybody. Sometimes they were in-house matters.

One of the things that consumed an enormous amount of time in the early part of our tour in Cairo was, believe it or not, the question of the work week. When I got there, the embassy was on a Saturday-Sunday weekend. And I found that there had been a long-simmering issue in the mission between those who wanted to keep the Saturday-Sunday weekend and those who felt we should go on to the Egyptian weekend, which would mean that in a predominantly Moslem country Friday was their Sunday; and then some of the Egyptian government offices were getting into the habit of a two day weekend, so they would take off Friday-Saturday. And the AID mission in particular wanted to change the weekend, because they had to work Sundays even though the Embassy was closed, because they did so much of their work with their counterparts in the ministries, the Economic Ministries and Technical Ministries, so that when our weekend was Saturday-Sunday, they could hardly see their children, because on Friday, when the Egyptians have their holiday, we're working; on Sunday, when we have a holiday, they're working, and so there was very little chance to see their kids.

Now we didn't have much guidance. The Cairo American College, which was the big international school, for American-style education, had an enrollment of close to 1200. But it was an American school, and it had the Saturday-Sunday weekend. The American University of Cairo compromised by having a Friday-Sunday weekend with class on Saturday, so it was a split weekend. So the question was: What should we do?

I felt personally, my inclination was that we ought to abide by the customs of the country and that the embassy ought to be on the Egyptian work week. But rather than just decree it, which I felt would cause a good deal of trouble, we had a series of what I guess the younger generation would have called rap sessions, with different sections of the embassy, with the Egyptian employees, the AID mission, USIA etc. We took it up in a couple of weekly staff meetings and let everybody say what they thought the week should be. I was determined not to have a vote. If you put this to a vote, it's going to have winners and losers. Yet some people felt very passionately about this, that Sunday was a day of rest, it is our traditional day, and we should not have to work on Sunday. Others felt, equally passionately: Why should we work on the day when all the Egyptian government is closed down and then close down on a day when the Egyptian government is working?

Q: Yes, when you are closed on Sunday, you're closing yourself off from the government.

ATHERTON: That's right, especially when there are three days-Friday, Saturday, Sunday-out of a week when the Embassy and the government are out of touch. So we had a lot of discussion about this. I finally announced I had a sense of what I think is the consensus of the embassy community, and I felt there would be understanding, even though all wouldn't be happy. I said that the consensus I feel I have found, and I really wouldn't want to have to put a percentage figure on it, is that we should go over to the Egyptian work week instead of closing on Saturdays and Sundays.

Well, there was a little backlash. The biggest backlash, incidentally, came from the Maadi Community Church, which was the ecumenical Protestant church which most of the American church-going Protestant community attended. But there were also some smaller missionary groups that felt very strongly about this. The Presbyterians who had had missions in Egypt for over a century, I can't remember how far back, felt very strongly about it. So I got some letters of protest from some of the ministers. With Betty's help-I must say, she has a very nice touch at this-we drafted understanding responses and tried to explain why we felt this was necessary, and offering to meet with them and explain why we have done this, and that we were certainly going to make allowance for those people who wanted to attend church services on Sundays.

Q: In Kuwait, they solved it by having the services in the evenings, Sunday evenings.

ATHERTON: I can't remember, maybe some of the churches in Cairo did that too. In any case, it took a long time to get this change made. But I felt it was better than just coming in and, being the new boy on the block, simply decreeing, which would have caused a lot of dissension. And really, as an issue it disappeared almost immediately. People adjusted very quickly once the decision had been made.

Q: What other sort of morale problems would you have to deal with, with families and with staff and all that?

ATHERTON: Well, this was a very large community which included a great many people - not so much in the embassy proper, in the State Department or USIA component, or the career AID people - but you had a lot of people among the AID contractors and the business community, who were having their first cross-cultural experience. And, obviously, the differences between American culture, between western culture and Arab Islamic culture are great. So many Americans found trouble adjusting to many things.

We had community tensions, particularly in the suburb of Maadi, where most of the Americans lived - a very large concentration of Americans with their children in Egyptian neighborhoods. And they would have parties, and there would be alcohol, and the children would drive their motorbikes up and down the streets, making a lot of noise when the prayers were said on Friday.

We had just the beginnings when we got there of drug and alcohol problems in the high school. They were not major, but you could get very easily on the local market hashish, a very potent form of marijuana. I don't recall very much in the way of heroin or some of the harder drugs, though there was some of that, too. But there were cases of high school kids particularly, buying hashish and smoking it, or going to the local tavern, where they were obviously under age by any standard and being able to buy alcohol.And the result was there were tensions within the community and between the community and the Egyptians.

Q: How did you deal with it?

ATHERTON: For this, I have to give Betty primary credit. One of the things that Betty decided she could most contribute was to organize a support system, which would include mental health counseling and family counseling, orientation for new people, summer job or activity programs for students when school wasn't in session, to keep them occupied with something constructive, evening community classes in handicrafts, Arabic language, and there were all sorts of things that you could create to help make this group of Americans bond a bit more together to feel more like a community.

Q: How would she do it? Would she get the parents. . .

ATHERTON: With the help of long time American residents, she identified a group of community leaders, including representatives of Amoco - the largest US company in Egypt - to work with her. She discovered very early on that there were many people, particularly parents of students in the American community, private as well as official, who felt the need of some kind of a support system they could turn to in times of crisis, for example.

When we were in Washington, she had become familiar with the efforts that were made very successfully in Afghanistan, when Ted Eliot was ambassador there, by the executive director of the State Department medical division in establishing a similar program in Afghanistan. Betty had seen this on one of our trips there and decided that this was a model, if you will, that we might try to emulate, obviously, being a much larger post, on a much larger scale.

The problem was to get some initial funding. She turned to the mental health section of the department's medical division, which has a mental health program, and asked if it could allocate some seed money to start what came to be called the Community Services Association, CSA, in Cairo, to help get a program going there that hopefully would eventually become self-financing.

Then the problem was finding somebody to actually run the program. Betty had heard of a couple who were doing this kind of thing in Malaysia, in Kuala Lumpur. They had been doing it for several years, and the word had gotten out and somehow come to her attention that they were looking for a change. All of their references were absolutely first-rate. This is a married couple, Joe Wallach and Gail Metcalf, and their young son, Joshua, who was then a baby.

So the seed money was used to pay their way to come from Kuala Lumpur to Cairo and meet, over a period of several days, with members of the community, particularly at the school but also in other situations, to look them over and for them to look Cairo over.

And the decision was: They are just what we need. They have good ideas, they have had experience in how to deal with cross-cultural stresses and problems, and counseling. So the decision was made that we would offer them the job.

The next problem was that the seed money, including a loan from the Cairo American College, had almost all disappeared, just to pay the round-trip ticket from Kuala Lumpur. So we went to work on several fronts. One was to get more money out of the State Department, more seed money. The other was to try to raise money within the community - especially the business community.

Q: And they could use the services.

ATHERTON: Oh, yes, this was not for just the embassy. It started out being just for the American community and it later became available to what was loosely called the expatriate English-speaking community. We started with a small group, including the heads of local US companies. The biggest single American company in Cairo was Amoco, which had a big concession for drilling and exploring for oil. They had been there for years. They'd been there since before the break in relations in '67. They had been there straight through. They were exceptions to the rule that all Americans had to leave the country in '67. So the trick was to get their head man engaged. He was skeptical. He said, "You know, we're a big company, we are self-contained. We have our own means to manage these things for our own people." And so we began to ask how many of their people had to be shipped home because they couldn't make the adjustment, mental, psychological, family adjustment problems. Well, it turned out, quite a few over the years. And we said, "You know, this kind of a system might save you money in the long run, because you get people out here and you can deal with these problems in situ, then you haven't invested all that money in training them and getting them and their families and their household effects out only to have them turn around and go home." And he was persuaded. Once we got Amoco committed, and he was able to get his company - I think in their case they agreed that their contribution would be in kind. They would make available an automobile to this couple, and eventually they also provided some funding. The embassy agreed that it had some housing that had been earmarked for temporary housing for people arriving until their permanent housing was available. The embassy made half of one apartment building available - one flat for the Wallach-Metcalf team to live in and another flat for offices.

I had a meeting of the business community in the embassy early on and turned it into a fund-raiser. I hadn't known that was part of an ambassador's responsibilities. But we did, in fact, manage to get a good financial base, so that we could bring the Wallach-Metcalf team back to Cairo. They had no rent overhead, they had an automobile, we paid them a salary, and they could begin to build a staff. Also, the Community Service Association charged for services. It would seem like nominal charges by stateside standards, but it produced income. They also organized an orientation program for students coming into the school at the beginning of each school year, for students and often for their parents as well. There was an item in the school budget to pay for this service.

We went there in 1979, and this got started almost immediately, in early '80. Ten years ago and still going strong. Wallach and Metcalf have moved on. They were invited to go to Taipei to do the same thing for the American community in Taiwan, and they are now there. There is a new director now running the program in Cairo. Their staff has grown, and the last I heard, the budget was $125,000 a year. And it's going strong. I think it has been a success in providing the structure and support system to deal with drug problems, teen mental health problems, counseling, community relations, and all these things. Lots of cooperation from within the embassy. I was very proud, for example, of both our Marine guards and our SY, our security people, who gave their free time meeting with some of the students. And also, in some cases, the security people dealt with the Egyptian police, putting out fires before they got out of control-between American teenagers and the local community.

Q: It could be explosive.

ATHERTON: Well, it became, I think, one of the success stories. I have to say of this one, that thanks to Betty Atherton; it was her vision and conception. She was elected president and remained president all the time we were there, and I think left behind a legacy which is still going strong in Cairo.

So that's basically what it was like being a manager of what was, if not the largest, one of the largest embassies and AID programs in the world for four and a half years.

Q: Could you tell me a bit about your staff. Were you able to pick your own staff, or did you pretty much have to take what you get?

ATHERTON: At the senior level, I was always consulted. Counselors, certainly the DCM. I was presented with recommendations. The DCM was always my choice. When I got there, there was a DCM, Freeman Matthews, and he stayed until the end of his tour, about a year into our tour. Then I was told that there were several possible replacements. I was given a list and said "This is the person I need." The second DCM was Bob Dillon. Bob did not complete his tour because he volunteered to go to fill the ambassadorial post in Beirut, which was empty. He was in the Beirut embassy when it was bombed. It was just luck that he didn't get killed himself.

When he left prematurely, one person who became available was Henry Precht. Henry should have been given a mission. Henry had been head of the Iran task force during the post-revolutionary and hostage period. My understanding was that President Reagan wanted to appoint him ambassador to, I think, Mauritania, but because he was identified with the overthrow of the shah, the loss of Iran-he was just carrying out policy and doing his job-the word was that he would have great difficulty passing muster with Senator Helms. And so he was offered the option of coming out as DCM in Cairo. I welcomed him. I had known him as a staff aide in Joe Sisco's day. He had come up very fast and was a very good officer. So I welcomed him. I told Henry that while he wasn't ambassador he had responsibilities considerably larger than many, many ambassadors. I was often traveling, and he had long periods as chargï¿½. So, I clearly was given a good choice of DCM. The Department never said this is the person you're going to take, no matter what, as DCM. It was my final choice.

And usually for the senior minister-counselor I had a lot to do with picking the right person for that job because it required not only a good economist, a trained economist, but also someone who had the person-to-person skills to be able to work with the economists, and particularly the director, of the AID mission who were all good economists themselves, and who tended to ignore the embassy economic staff instead of saying let's all try to work together. So I did put a lot of effort into working with the personnel system and trying to find just the right people to consider as economic minister counselor. And the same was generally true of the political counselor.

I was never given a choice of who would be the AID director or the public affairs officer, but I was consulted. Word always came out that the AID administrator intends to nominate so-and-so, here is his Bio. I never had any problems with the nominations for those jobs or for the PAO job or for the senior military jobs. They were always good people. I think that their personnel systems knew better than I did who were the best people for the jobs, for this post, in most cases, because they were clearly not going to send unqualified people; it was not a dumping ground. Cairo was a place where they tried to send their best people.

Q: And you had no problems with. . .

ATHERTON: No serious problems. When I got there, the AID mission director was already in place. A very strong-minded, senior, experienced, professional AID career officer named Don Brown. Don ran a tight ship, and he had his own ideas. He was really the author of this rapidly expanding development of a politically motivated AID program. And Don and I had a little bit of jaw-boning in the beginning to establish a relationship. I have great admiration for Don, and I think it worked out very well once our relationship was clear.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, could you give us some idea of the amount of travel you did around Egypt when you were ambassador there and how important you felt that this travel was?

ATHERTON: I attached a great deal of importance to it. I don't think you can get a sense of the country by sitting in the embassy in the capital or shuttling between the embassy and the Foreign Ministry and the presidential palace, so I traveled whenever I could, usually for a particular purpose. I tried to make my travel coincide, for example, with the opening of a major AID project, in Upper Egypt. I usually did this with other members of the staff, so we would be able to interact with the Egyptians where we were at different levels. With the governor, with the governor's staff, with the private business community, etc. I encouraged all of the members of the staff to travel as much as the travel budget permitted.

One of the purposes of this was, well, it was multi purposed. One, of course, was simply to show the American presence, for people to see that there was an American ambassador and an American embassy, and that there were Americans in the country, to help tell the American story. Not in a propagandistic way, but to try to explain the basic elements of American policy towards Egypt, towards regional issues, towards its economic development, the underlying purposes of the AID program, about which there were a great many misunderstandings. But also to try to keep our finger on the Egyptian pulse.

One of the things we would cover in these larger staff meetings once a week was: What are the big issues today that we ought to be keeping Washington informed about? What do the different segments of Egyptian society think of American policy? Was the special relationship which Sadat and later Mubarak had developed popular? Was it just on the surface with certain elements, was there hostility below the surface? How are we doing in this country, and what should we be on the lookout for? What can we do that will be more supportive of American policy? Or, if we find certain policies are counterproductive, then what should we recommend to Washington to fine tune or adjust our policies towards Egypt, towards Egyptian-Israeli relations, towards Egypt's relations with its neighbors?

So that, in a way, every member of the mission, at least every senior officer, and certainly the officers with responsibility for analyzing and reporting to Washington on the economy or the politics or the society, had an agenda. We all had certain things that all of us kept our ears and eyes open for, and they were fed into usually consolidated reports rather than having a lot of fragmented reports.

We began to try to have more joint reports that would go in from the PAO and from the political section. So that it had become a public diplomacy type of approach. There were good contacts there, particularly the cultural affairs officer with the universities. The universities were probably the engines, if you will, of political dissent when there was dissent and intellectual ferment. It was important to get a very good feel for the political trends in the country in the academic and intellectual community. Sometimes this gave us advance notice of trends that might spread more broadly to the society. It was also one way of trying to measure and to judge the influence of the Islamic fundamentalists on public opinion, and how much this was a factor the government would have to take into account.

So we had an agenda of issues to which everybody was expected to try to contribute - if not by writing reports, by giving their impressions to the people who were writing the reports in the embassy. So that, in effect, the political counselor had resources that went beyond just his political section.

Q: Well, I like the use of the word "agenda," so the whole staff knew what they were doing and what was required of them and what you wanted them to do.

ATHERTON: Well, I hope they did. I tried my best to see that we had good communications within the mission. In a mission that large, that's not always easy, to keep all the channels open. But it was certainly a priority as far as I was concerned, to try to do this.

Q: Now could you go on a little bit about your, say, relationship with the secretary of state, with the president, with the assistant secretaries back at State. You, having been assistant secretary for Near East and having worked with several presidents on the Arab-Israel issue and the others, knew all of these people. I would think that your relations would be somewhat different from most ambassadors. Could you tell me how that affected you, your method of operation, and whether it was an advantage? Was it useful?

ATHERTON: Well, when I went out, remember, it was 1979. I was appointed by President Carter, and I was recommended for the position by Secretary Vance. I had worked very closely with Vance during the whole preceding two years in the Middle East negotiations, both before Camp David, at Camp David, and afterward. And so I had a very close and comfortable relationship with the secretary. When I send him messages, they would get to the secretary. I didn't have to go through back channels or around devious ways. And I was perhaps, I won't say close to President Carter, but I worked with him again, at Camp David particularly, on the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. And so he knew who I was. I had traveled with him on a couple of trips before I went to Cairo. So that we had, again, I think a comfortable relationship.

Q: Just let me interject one thing. Both Sadat and Mubarak knew that you knew President Carter.

ATHERTON: That's right.

Q: So do you think that had a helpful influence?

ATHERTON: Oh, I think so. You see, I was not a stranger coming to Egypt. I had been coming in and out of Egypt since '73, with Kissinger and then later with Vance on various negotiating missions before the peace treaty. It was after the peace treaty I was assigned to Cairo. So I knew most of the principal players, the president down to the prime minister, the prime ministers in particular, admittedly mostly on the political side. I had to cultivate my relations with the economic side, the academic world, and the private world. But with the leaders of the country, and there were not all that many of them, I did have the advantage of having known them, so that, as far as they were concerned, I was part of an effort in the peace-making process, which was the most important thing on their minds in those days. So I did have an advantage. I was not an ambassador who felt I had to have a direct line straight to the White House.

Q: They didn't know that you didn't.

ATHERTON: No, they had to assume that anything that they gave me would get to the president. But my own channel was, as it should be, through the secretary of state. And, of course, through the president's personal representative on the negotiating side, Bob Strauss who was, of course, very close to the president, and Sol Linowitz, who was also close to the president. But they both worked closely with the secretary, too; they didn't try to bypass the secretary. So there was no need to worry about channels. And, of course, the assistant secretary, who was Hal Saunders when I first went out there, had been my deputy, and we had a very close relationship. We carried on a lot of informal correspondence. We had a secure telephone and we could discuss things that way, so that preliminary informal exchanges of views could take place without their getting into the formal message traffic, at least until it came to the making policy recommendations or policy decisions which obviously had to be recorded in formal messages. And then the instructions would be sent. There were a lot of preliminary exchanges. I was consulted, not just sent edicts that said "go tell the president this" without having a chance to comment on it.

Now after the elections - but to back up again a moment, Secretary Vance resigned before the end of the Carter administration over his difference with Carter on the hostage rescue operation in Tehran, which I described earlier as the operation was staged through Egypt. Egypt was instrumental in that whole process. But Secretary Vance didn't agree with this, he tendered his resignation and was replaced by Senator Muskie as secretary of state. That was a brief period, and I had not known Muskie personally.

But the relations with Egypt were such that there were, at least every year and sometimes more than once a year, working visits to Washington by the president or sometimes it would be the vice president of Egypt, during the Sadat period. And the ambassadors always went. So I had many occasions, more often than many ambassadors, to get back to Washington and see the president, see the secretary, see the people in the State Department and in the other departments, the department of defense because of the big defense programs, treasury, commerce. There were more occasions than usual for me to renew my several points of contact in Washington. And that continued even under Mubarak after the Sadat assassination, during the Mubarak period as well. Usually, I would guess it was twice a year, I would have a chance to get back on one of these important visits.

And Betty had her own schedule. Mrs. Sadat, during the Sadat period, came on a very major goodwill visit to the States sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution entitled "Egypt Today." Betty was asked to go along, and she flew with Mrs. Sadat on President Sadat's plane, which was made available for Mrs. Sadat. So we had that good relationship going on the spouse side as well as on the ambassadorial-presidential side.

I was also very close, particularly with the first prime minister during my tour, whom I had known during the latter part of the peace treaty negotiations, Mustafa Kahlil was a good strong prime minister, who, incidentally, graduated from Indiana University, a very strong prime minister, and I had a very good relationship with him. I could call up and go see him almost on a moment's notice. Usually we had private meetings. He was a very good channel to Sadat. Other prime ministers didn't have that same standing, but as long as he was prime minister, it was always a very good relationship. He was also one of the architects in making the peace treaty with Israel work, and I had a lot of business with him in that area as well. And, being an economist, he took an active interest in the economic policy of the country. He was a political and economic contact at the most senior level until Sadat decided that he disagreed with some of Mustafa Khalil's policies and, in effect, honorably retired him to be speaker of the Parliament.

Q: I haven't asked you anything about the diplomatic corps. Were any of the other ambassadors of any use to you?

ATHERTON: Yes, some were. There were some. One learns eventually who are the savvy and able ambassadors, who are well informed and who can help broaden one's circle of analysis and information. There were several who were excellent. The British ambassador most of the time was Michael Weir, who was an old hand in Arab service, and I relied heavily on exchanges of views and impressions with him. But there others. There were some good, first-rate French ambassadors. Another that was useful in that period was the Yugoslav ambassador, very well connected. I'm probably leaving some out who would be hurt if I did. There were certainly others. Then, of course, there were some who really weren't very much in touch, with whom you didn't spend a lot of time - just enough to be polite. But there were maybe a half a dozen of these ambassadors who were really well plugged in and well worth keeping touch with.

Q: Did they take up much of your time? They can in some places.

ATHERTON: Early on I got some indirect messages of unhappiness from some of my diplomatic corps colleagues that I wasn't paying enough attention to them, that I was spending too much of my time just dealing with the Egyptians. And I think it was probably true. We had so much business going on with the government of Egypt that it was really very time consuming. Between that and all of the American congressional visitors, and executive branch visitors, and high-level business delegations, all had to be personally attended to. All had to be briefed every time.

Q: That brings up something I wanted to ask you about. Can you tell us a bit about your relations with the American business community, just the local American community there. How did you deal with them?

ATHERTON: Obviously I couldn't deal with all the private community on a one-on-one basis. I did encourage the people on the staff to do so, particularly the economic staff, the USIA people and the AID people, and above all the commercial counselor who had an open door to the American business community. And if any of them had problems they felt they had to see the ambassador about, I would always try to do it.

One way of doing this was attending the local Rotary Club, the American and Egyptian business people were there, trying to see them in groups. Betty and I would have periodic social affairs, which were not large receptions or dinners. The residence wasn't all that big, there was only a certain amount of space, so we couldn't have hordes of people at one time. And we would try to always be sure that the guest list included at least some representatives of the business community. We also had of course the academic people from the American University of Cairo, which is a long-respected American institution in Cairo. It was a source of great help in the early days in meeting and getting to know the academic and intellectual community. Many of their professors also taught at the Egyptian universities.

Also, there were frequent visiting artists who came out under the auspices of the USIA, piano soloists or small jazz combinations, dance troupes such as the Martha Graham dance group. And we would use that as a focal point for invitational performances. Usually, if it was a small enough group, we would have one invitational performance at the residence, and we would invite people to come and hear the piano soloist, or the jazz band, or the dance group, or whatever. Then they would have a larger public performance at the university or at one of the public theaters, all of this organized by USIA. But we did try always to have at least one invitational performance, and that was a good occasion for giving members of the private community a chance to be in touch with the official community, not just for me to talk to them, but to bring them and members of the staff together.

We did not do a lot of entertaining, quite honestly, for the diplomatic community. We had an annual Fourth of July reception, and that was our principal event for the diplomatic corps once a year. But then we would have selected members to some other affairs. But it was a big community to keep in touch with, and there was no way that I could do it all on a one-to-one basis. I could try to set an example and encourage members of the staff. I think we had pretty good embassy-private community relations as far as I could judge.

Q: Could you tell me how you used your DCM. What was his function?

ATHERTON: I used him as my hands-on manager. I tried to work through him on both substantive and on management and administrative matters. I probably overworked him, because I did not want to get myself so bogged down in details of administrative, particularly personnel issues, that I was not free to devote myself to policy issues and bilateral relationship issues, the big issues in our very large program. So I used the DCM a lot as my alter ego.

Q: Did you encourage everyone to use him initially before coming to you, so that he knew everything that you knew?

ATHERTON: Oh, yes. The office setup when I got there was interesting. There was a front office suite in the old villa, which had been the embassy chancery for years. It's gone now. There is now a high-rise tower office building. All the time we were there we operated out of the old villa with lots of annexes. The front office suite was a kind of barrier, with a railing across the front of it. On the left as you came in was my office, and on the right was the DCM office. The DCM's secretary sat in a little office next to his, off by herself, which was the main entrance to his office. And there was a sense of division. And after thinking about it awhile, I said we've got to make this a single front office. So the first thing we did was to take that railing down so that people could come in and not be stopped by a barrier. Secondly, we brought his secretary out into the central area where my two secretaries were, so that the secretaries were there together. And then we made the door to his office which opened into the central area as his main entrance, so we created physically an arrangement that it made it clear the DCM and I were all part of the front office team, and not the ambassador here and the DCM there. And he and I would be in touch all day, within shouting distance of each other, across the front office. I tried very hard to have matters go through him although I didn't say nobody could see me directly. If they felt they had to see me, I would trust that they would have a good reason, and I would do it. I did not, incidentally, have a staff aide, as is usual in an embassy that size. I inherited a staff aide, who was a junior officer assigned to the Consulate in Port Said. But Port Said required only a couple days a week work, so he became an aide to ambassador Hermann Eilts. I inherited him. The reality was that I had a secretary who had been with me already by that time seven, eight years. She went out to Cairo to be my secretary, Helen Kamer. And Helen was secretary, staff aide, and everything else. She was very strong-minded and very efficient. I had had staff aides in Washington when she was my secretary, and there had always been a question of who was in charge here, Helen or the staff aides. And I didn't see any sense in duplicating this kind of a problem, so I just said I don't need an aide and Helen could function as everything. I did not have a staff aide all the time I was there; my successors all had. In retrospect, maybe it was not the most efficient way to run a front office, but it was certainly a more convenient way in this case.

But I did try to use the DCM as an alter ego and make sure he was informed of all I was doing, and certain things I really tried to leave for him. For example, we had a science officer who was a very senior officer not from the career service. He had entered as a specialist at a senior level with an academic background. He was very good as a scientist, but he had not had a lot of experience working in a team operation. But there was an important Egyptian scientific community, and there were things that we could get from his meetings which were of general interest and not just to the science world, or to the office of scientific affairs in Washington. And there was always a certain amount of friction because the AID mission had its own science and technology office dealing with AID programs that they were funding. And the science counselor felt that he should be in charge of all this, and the AID people felt that they should be in charge. That was a problem I figured had been around for a long time, so I asked the DCM to take that on. He had to negotiate between the science attachï¿½ and the AID science and technology officers.

There were certain security functions I asked the security people and the counselor for administration and the embassy security people to try to handle at the DCM level. The DCM oversaw the whole management, administrative side of the embassy on my behalf and brought to me only those issues that couldn't be resolved in that way. And that was a big job, because there was an enormous administrative staff. We handled all the housing for the embassy. People didn't get out on the market to look for their own housing.

The maintenance of the buildings - the embassy as well as private residences - the motorpool, all was done by people who were on the staff of the embassy. The Egyptian services were just not up to this. Many of those who were skilled mechanics, plumbers and electricians had all been siphoned off to the Persian Gulf, where they made a lot more money. So the quality of services in those days really was not great. And the only way to be really sure you got the work done right and on time, on the maintenance side was to have your own maintenance staff. At one point, we had thirteen general service officers, doing everything that in many embassies would have a staff of senior national employees in charge of. We weren't able to staff such positions. We had some very good foreign service nationals. But there were certain services we couldn't contract out on the open market. So we had to turn to direct hire. Many embassies would contract out the maintenance of the motor pool. We had mechanics assigned to the motor pool on the embassy payroll. It was a big thing, property maintenance, and automobile and equipment programs. So I had the DCM work closely with the admin. counselor on all of these things.

I meant to say earlier on, I think it's worth noting in passing that the hardest position I had to fill successfully was counselor for administration. It was a tough job; it was very demanding, somewhat a mission impossible. The counselor for administration when I got there was burned out. One of the first things that was apparent to me was that we had a very real problem of coordination on the administrative side. It was too big for anyone except an experienced, skilled senior administrative officer to manage.

Q: He would have to take care of the AID mission as well?

ATHERTON: We had a joint administrative section that was staffed by State and AID people, together. They did all the administrative work for the entire embassy, including the AID mission, and some of the smaller units which didn't have their administrative staffs. The office of military cooperation (OMC) had its own administrators. But the big jobs were AID and the other components of the embassy, State, USIA, and the other smaller units. We had a joint administrative section, and we needed a strong person to head it. The way it was set up, the admin. counselor was a State Department officer and his deputy was an AID officer.

We found ourselves without an admin counselor and there were problems that were beyond my understanding at the time, or the DCM's. So I asked the department, I said, "I need a management team." The department then had, and perhaps still has, a system of assigning a field team to go out to a post to do an analysis of their administrative and management problems, and then make a recommendation of the post's needs. It was an administrative inspection, but it's done especially on call at the discretion of the ambassador. And I requested this early on, because I could see that we were in deep trouble in the management and administrative side of this embassy.

And they sent out a good team under a skilled senior admin officer named Bob Blackburn, who had been, I think, admin counselor in Rome. He was detailed to come to us as acting admin counselor until the department found a new one, as well as to head up this team. And he did a crackerjack job. They came up with good recommendations, and then, of course, it was a problem of implementing. And so I asked if Bob Blackburn's TDY could be extended and stay on to start the implementation. The department approved. And he really kept us afloat until we finally, after going through at least one other admin counselor who couldn't manage the pressure, finally got a first rate admin officer. He came out, I think he had been admin officer in Bonn, a European background, and he was persuaded to take this on the assurance that after that he could almost have his choice of post. He did, in fact, go on to become head of the joint administrative section in Brussels, which was providing administrative services to all five of the US embassies in Brussels. But he was very good. First rate.

There was a brief period when we had a man who had been the deputy of the admin section, the AID man. But we had, if I remember correctly, counting the temporary, we had one, two, three, four, five admin counselors, six by the time I left, during that four and a half years. Now some were very short-term, they didn't work out, and the one who finally put things together was the one I mentioned, Earl Bellinger, and he did get his Brussels assignment. He was replaced by another excellent officer. But that was the real problem area at the embassy. In addition to everything else they had to oversee the building program. We had an FBO representative there. We were building a new chancery, a new residence, and three apartment buildings for staff housing, all at the same time, which is a big building program, in a country where building anything was a very complicated process. I won't go into this as a lot of it was also a disaster area. Well, that's another story.

Q: Well, let's see. That pretty well covers it. I would like to have you make a couple of comments, it's sort of customary to ask an ambassador himself, who's had a pretty fantastic career, what was the most outstanding, the most rewarding part of your career? Is that a fair question? We always ask it.

ATHERTON: I think there were different rewards at different times. I have to look back and say that there were highlights and there were periods that I don't have very strong memories about. Most of my assignments at the time I had them were rewarding. The first one was obviously a learning one. But to be in Bonn when the transition from military government and occupation to the Federal Republic was taking place, with the division of Germany being sealed, was a moment of history. To suddenly discover the Middle East, which I had known little about, in Damascus, the center of the birth of the Arab nationalist movement, to be there only four years after the end of the first Arab-Israeli War, when the future of the area was beginning to settle into patterns which are just now beginning to be broken - that was another moment in history.

I suppose, in a way, the highlight of my earlier years was being the principal officer in Aleppo, being assigned to open the post and being in charge was pretty challenging at a junior level. That had to be a high point. I won't say the Indian assignment was one I considered particularly rewarding. After that the whole experience of being in Washington, being a part of two secretaries', both Kissinger's and Vance's, inner circle Middle East negotiating team was unique. But I wasn't unique, because there were other people on the team, like Hal Saunders. Hal Saunders and I were together on this all this time. There were others who came in and out.

Q: Whereas they came in and, you were always there.

ATHERTON: These were all rewarding. I can't say there was any one that stands out over the others. Cairo, obviously, being ambassador there was, as I look back on it, a highlight of a career that built up to it over the years. It's interesting, because I didn't start out with the conscious decision to become a Middle East specialist. I thought I was going to be a European specialist. I had French and German, which I though I could use. But I didn't study Arabic, I went straight to the Middle East from Germany without any area training, except a couple of weeks in the FSI studying the history and culture of the area. I remember Ed Wright at FSI, who is a legend, or was in those days. I just became sort of a Middle East specialist by accident. But I did ask to stay in the area, when offered the opportunity to return to Germany in 1956, and I got involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and that became the focal point around which everything else centered. I did not have a deep academic background, and I never did become an Arabic language speaker.

I guess I would not say that today I would be a very good candidate for that ambassadorship. I would not recommend somebody going out to an Arab country without knowing Arabic.

Q: Even Cairo?

ATHERTON: Well, in Cairo it's maybe not quite as important, because in Cairo everybody there that you deal with, anyone at almost any level has had a fair amount of English. But still, not knowing the language means you don't have quite the same feel for the country. Even if you do your business in English, to be able to know the nuances of the languages is to know the nuances of the culture and thought processes of the people of that country. The language reveals the cultural distinctions, which are terribly important to understand. I guess I picked a lot of them up by osmosis, but it was not a conscious learning process as much as on the job training. I wish, in retrospect, that somebody had said to me, you've got to take a year out and learn Arabic.

Q: I'm not sure you could have learned it in a year.

ATHERTON: I know I couldn't have. I guess it is a two-year course. I was always being rushed on to the next assignment without time out for training. I had some short term training along the way but I didn't have the chance to learn Arabic. And, of course, I ended up my career doing something entirely different. I don't know whether you wanted to take a little time to give you the denouement.

Q: Why don't you do that. Just wind it up as you would like.

ATHERTON: We had been in Cairo since mid-1979 and we had been through turbulent times beginning with the Iran hostage problem, the downfall of the government and the revolution in Iran, the Shah receiving asylum and dying in Egypt. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had a ripple effect through the region. The building of what became known as the special relationship between the US and Egypt, begun under Sadat, continued after his assassination under Mubarak. I had to adjust to a new secretary of state after Reagan was elected, and the new secretary and president had a new style and new priorities. The AID program was suddenly to become more of a private sector program. Al Haig had a different world view and a different view of the Middle East than Cy Vance . He tended to be what I thought was a bit of a throw-back to the cold war of the Dulles period. He tended to view the Middle East more in terms of our cold war relationship with the Soviets and the need to forge a "strategic consensus" with all of our friends in the area, which included working toward a comprehensive peace but did not give this first priority. This was not a very salable item-to tell the other Arabs that what we really wanted was for them and the Israelis to get together and stand with us against the Soviet Union. To get a strategic consensus was an anachronism-either an anachronism or ahead of its time. It wasn't a policy that would go down very well in the Arab world at that stage. And then, of course, after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon George Shultz came in, so I had to adapt to another secretary. My personal relationships were much closer, I guess, with George Shultz than with Al Haig. In any event, by 1983, we had been in Cairo four years, and I was hoping to stay although that was already longer than the average tour. Most tours were only three years. Hermann Eilts had been there five and a half, and I thought it would be nice to match Hermann's tour. Sam Lewis had been in Israel longer than I was in Egypt, and it looked like he would stay on for a while. I liked Egypt, and I thought there was a lot to do there; it was still an interesting time, a lot of challenges. So I planned home leave in the summer of 1983. By the way, the second home leave of our career. I hadn't had home leave since 1956 until then, because we were in the US 1959-61 and again 1966-1979 - an unusually long Washington tour. We had every expectation of having home leave in 1983, in the summer so that we would be in the States for our younger son's wedding. But we expected to be going back to Cairo at least for another year or so.

While we were in Oregon at the farm of one son getting ready for the wedding of the other, I had a phone call from Dick Schneider, who was the senior deputy assistant secretary for NEA, saying, "Roy, have you been listening to the radio lately or seen the papers or watched television?"

And I said, "No, I'm at the farm getting ready for the wedding. and I'm sort of out of touch."

Well, he said, "Then let me tell you first before you hear it otherwise that the President has just announced that Nick Veliotes is going to replace you in Cairo."

I had heard nothing about this at that point at all, so I was annoyed. I guess I sounded annoyed, because the next day I got a phone call from George Shultz saying that he understood that there was some mixup and I hadn't been informed in advance. He wanted me to know that he had very important plans for me and that when I came back from home leave to Washington he wanted to see me and to talk about this.

Well, it turned out that what he had in mind was to be Director General of the Foreign Service. I wasn't told that at the time. And I wasn't really quite ready to leave Cairo. In fact, the suggestion was even made that since I was to be aboard for this new job by the end of the year maybe it really didn't make a lot of sense to go back to Cairo at all. I said, "That's totally unacceptable." I didn't say this to the secretary but the personnel system. "That's totally impossible. We've got to go back and say farewells to a lot of friends that we'd worked with over a period over four and one half years. Besides that, it would not look right; it would be misunderstood if I were suddenly never to return and make a proper departure. Besides, you know, we've got a house full of things to pack and just a lot of personal things that have to be done. So we have to go back, and we have to stay there long enough to have a decent departure. We couldn't just pull up our tents and leave in the night."

I found out, incidentally, that the reason this all came about was something of a comedy of errors. Phil Habib had stayed with us in Cairo on one of his trips seeking to negotiate a solution to the crisis caused by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 to destroy the Palestine Liberation Organization. During that visit Phil asked me: "Roy, what do you want to do after Cairo?"

And I said, "Well, I think that the Foreign Service has been awfully good to me and I owe it something. And one job I might be able to do and repay a bit of what I've had would be to take over the personnel system to be Director General for a tour. I thought it was important that all officers do their part on the management and personnel side of the State Department as well as on the foreign policy, substantive side. So I said someday I'd like to do that.

Well, apparently Phil mentioned this to the secretary, but it got translated into saying I was ready to come back to the US to be Director General, which was not exactly what I meant; it was just something that I thought would be down the road somewhere. On top of that, somehow the personnel system didn't, when it knew this change was coming up, pick up the phone and call me ahead of time and say be prepared because you're up for reassignment.

I think it would have been easier. One thing I did as Director General as a result of this lesson, was to make sure any ambassador who was being replaced was informed by my deputy or me before it happened.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, on the last tape you had discussed your final days in Cairo as ambassador to Egypt, and you were just about to talk about a few of the things that happened your final days there before going back to Washington to become Director General of the Foreign Service. Could you start on from there?

ATHERTON: Yes, I think as I said the last time, we had been on home leave and had been at the wedding of our youngest son in Oregon, and learned while we were there that we were being transferred. So we went back to close out, in effect, and have our final few months in Cairo. As I recall, we went back in early September or perhaps it was late August and left in October. So we really went back for just a couple of months.

One of the things I had wanted to do while I was in Egypt was to visit one of the Egyptian oases out in the western desert. We planned the final trip to be combined with the annual ceremonies marking the anniversary of the Battle of el-Alamein in World War II. This was an annual event, hosted in rotation by the British, by the Germans, and by the Italians, all of whom had memorials near el-Alamein. And each year, one of them would host the solemn ceremonies which involved honoring the war dead and laying wreaths. And then we would usually take a few days and stay at the government hotel near there and have a bit of a rest period as well.

We did the same thing this last year, the end of October, 1983, or thereabouts. In any case, it was during the last weeks of our tour. We spent a few days with some of our British and German and other European friends who had been up for the ceremony. And it was while we were there that we learned of the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut. It put a bit of a damper on the festivities.

We went on from there, before going back to Cairo, to do a quick visit to the Siwa Oasis, which is the westernmost desert oasis, very close actually to the Libyan border. We went west from el-Alamein to Marsa Matruh, which is the last major Egyptian town on the coast. That's where Rommel had his headquarters during his attempt to march across North Africa to Cairo during World War II. And there still is a small Rommel war memorial in Marsa Matruh, which we visited. And then we went down to the oasis. We did this the easy way. We flew to Siwa in the air attachï¿½ plane, rather than having to take the somewhat more arduous trip by car across the desert.

Siwa is an interesting settlement, where the Berbers of North Africa have lived for centuries, very close to the Libyan border, and has always been, perhaps still is to some extent, a security zone. You couldn't just go there. You have to get special permission from the Egyptian authorities, which we had. And we had a very interesting visit to the historical, archeological sites in Siwa, including the site where Alexander the Great made a pilgrimage at one time when he was trying to establish that he was the legitimate successor to the pharaohs of Egypt.

But also we did a certain amount of official business, a meeting with the senior Egyptian officials who administer that particular oasis jurisdiction, and learned a little bit about some of the problems that they had in dealing with the people who were still not totally convinced that they should be under Egyptian authority.

From that, we went back to Cairo and it was the usual last minute whirl of farewells and packing, saying goodbye to friends and having farewell ceremonies at the embassy, and a farewell lunch for some of the diplomatic corps, and farewell calls on government officials, and back to Washington.

We came back without any real break. Fortunately, we had found a place to live when we were home earlier in October, so we were able to move without a great deal of difficulty into our new permanent residence. And I reported for duty immediately as Director General of the Foreign Service, which I had been asked by the secretary to do and which I had earlier indicated I would be happy to do to try to pay back some of the very good career I'd had in the service by trying to do something for the service directly in terms of helping run the personnel system and deal with some of the evolving problems in the personnel system.

Q: Who were you replacing?

ATHERTON: I was replacing Joan Clark, who had been Director General, and I had a very good overlap with Joan. I was part of what Secretary Shultz called his new management team. He was assembling a group of people for senior positions in the management side of the State Department, who would look at how the department was managed.

George Shultz gave more attention to those kinds of questions that many other secretaries, given his own background as a manager, in industry and in the private sector as well as in the academic world. He was not the first secretary to be concerned about how the State Department functioned and puzzled about the management and personnel system. It didn't seem to him to fit what he had come to think of as the efficient way to manage personnel or to manage a large institution from his experience in the private sector. So he put together a team to review what might be done to make the department function better.

The senior member of the team was the under secretary for management, just appointed, Ron Spiers, who was brought back from his position as ambassador to Pakistan to take on that job. It also included the assistant secretary for administration, who was new in his job, Bob Lamb, who had come back from being counselor for administration in Bonn. It included Roger Feldman, who was the comptroller of the department. It included Bill Harrop, who had just come back to become inspector general of the department, at a time when that position was still a presidential appointee, nominated by the secretary, before it had been taken out of the control of the secretary and made part of the overall inspector general network of the executive branch. But in those days, it was in transition from the old inspector general role, which was very much the secretary's representative, inspecting posts abroad and the department in Washington. Under the old system, it was an in-house inspection. It was not designed primarily to uncover wrongdoing, thought that was part of its job, as it was to try to help people who were having problems make things work better. The philosophy has changed today, and today one of its primary missions is looking for examples of malfeasance and corruption.

Q: Sort of a police force.

ATHERTON: It's more of a police force now, and it's more autonomous than it was in the old days. Bill Harrop was the last inspector general under the old system. He was part of the team. Steve Low, who was director of the Foreign Service Institute, was also part of the team. And there were certainly others, but we were the inner circle, if you will, of the new management team that the secretary had put together. He had charged Ron Spiers with looking at the totality of the management of the department, its programs, its budget, its physical plant, and its personnel system, everything that comes under the rubric of management.

And, of course, it came at a time when we were in the third year, basically the beginning of the fourth year of the changes that were made in the personnel system by the Foreign Service Act of 1980. So it was a time of some transition and some change also. Since none of us as a team had ever worked very closely together, we thought it would be useful if we could start right off with a management retreat, where we would go off for a long weekend and try to work out what our agenda was going to be, what the problems were, to get to know each other better, and also to begin to decide on how, as a team, we were going to approach some of these issues the secretary wanted dealt with and make the department and the personnel system work better.

It was a very useful experience, in fact. Spouses went along, and we had minimal staff. We had just a few of the key staff people who had been in the system and therefore could help brief all of us on how various aspects of the system worked, from the management operations side to the personnel side - the assignment process, the training process, the promotion process, selection out, and recruitment, all the things that make a personnel system work, but also, more broadly, the budgetary resources needed and how they were determined, how to develop the relationship of the management structure to the functional and geographic bureaus of the State Department.

Henry Kissinger once said in some frustration at a staff meeting, I remember, when he found himself having a particularly difficult time with one of the more strong-minded assistant secretaries of one of the regional bureaus, that never since the Magna Carta had anyone had to deal with such a group of independent feudal lords he had to deal with in the assistant secretaries of the regional bureaus.

But, in any case, it was a very useful beginning. I would emphasize also that we included in the program representatives of the family liaison office, so there would be input about the problems that office faced in dealing with the role of families overseas, the problems of spouses seeking employment, the education of children, all the things that come under the general rubric of the family role in the Foreign Service.

So we came back from that all set to charge in and, as our mandate from the secretary said, make things work better.

Q: Where did you have this retreat?

ATHERTON: We had the retreat down at the Aspen Institute Center at the Wye Plantation, near Easton, Maryland, on the Eastern Shore. Very nice facility for this kind of thing. As I recall, we went down on a Friday afternoon and came back on a Sunday afternoon. We had two pretty full days, and we really worked almost around the clock.

And we did it right. We had contracted for the services of a professional management specialist to facilitate the conference, a professor, in fact, at the Kennedy school of government at Harvard. Some of us knew of his reputation for helping people analyze their management problems, helping them think through the kind of problems that you might deal with and work your way through towards possible solutions, someone who didn't come from within the circle and could stand back a bit and look at it from the outside. This was Professor Mark Moore, who had run some similar events in other organizations. In fact, I think Mark Moore became rather frustrated because we all had a pretty good idea of what we wanted to do and where we had to go, and he didn't get utilized as much as he had hoped to in leading us along. We tended to have a momentum of our own. But we did come out of that meeting with quite a long agenda.

I was particularly concerned with those parts of the agenda that dealt with the personnel administration of the department, particularly the phasing-in of the new Foreign Service Act and its implications for personnel management. Some of the problems that were on the agenda at that point were how do you deal with the phenomenon of what came to be called the senior glut. In the very senior ranks of the service there were more officers on active duty than there were senior positions for them to fill. You always need a few extras because people are in movement and in training and so forth, but, in fact, there was quite a large number of senior officers who were literally not assigned and who were on the payroll and were walking the corridors to look for jobs.

So one of the charges was to figure out how to reduce the senior glut in the system that basically should have selected out substandard performers earlier in their careers or promoted fewer officers into the senior ranks which gave them tenure and made it almost impossible to retire them involuntarily.

The new act, however, had a provision to do this. And we had to figure out how to make that part of the new Foreign Service Act work. This is the provision establishing a senior Foreign Service, which you had to apply to be promoted into called "opening your window," and then you had a certain number of years, administratively established as six years, to get from Class One in the new system, which was the top of the middle grade, across the so-called senior threshold into the senior Foreign Service. Once in the senior Foreign Service, there were limited numbers of years in each rank after which you would be retired if not promoted. The three ranks of the senior Foreign Service are counselor, minister counselor, and career minister.

Q: Entering the senior Foreign Service was voluntary?

ATHERTON: Yes, you did not have to compete. You could say I'm happy to have my career end as Class One, and I'm not going to compete to enter. It was known as opening your window for promotion to the senior Foreign Service. Once you did that, however, you had six years in which to get promoted in the senior Foreign Service. If you didn't make it, then you were involuntarily retired. That had not yet begun. When I became Director General it hadn't been so fierce. The act only became effective in 1981, so it was only in effect at that point for three years. So nobody had yet reached the point where they were caught in the squeeze of the six-year window. That came later; it came under my successor. It didn't really begin to hit until I had finished my career.

But we did have another aspect of this which was already in effect, had been started by my predecessor, namely a system for granting what was called under the new act limited career extensions, for officers in the senior ranks who ran out of their time in class and yet whose services were still needed. The selection boards, in addition to deciding who would be promoted and who wouldn't for the senior Foreign Service, also had to recommend those that they felt were entitled to be considered for limited career extension. It was a way of extending your time in the senior ranks.

Q: Also a way of sort of defeating your purposes.

ATHERTON: And it seemed to defeat the purpose of trying to thin out the senior ranks. The decision as to how many years one would be in which grade, what percentage of senior limited career extensions would be granted, were administrative decisions. They were in the law. They were decisions made, in effect, by the secretary upon recommendations by the under secretary for management after consultation with the management team.

But there were certain tradeoffs and there were certain tensions in this. Because, quite obviously, the more limited career extensions you granted, the fewer openings there were to promote people from Class One across the threshold into the senior grades. It was the fundamental concept of the Foreign Service Act that you had to have an orderly flow-through system from the time of entering into the service to the time of retirement. But you had to predict, as closely as you could, how many openings there would be at each level, so that you would know where to draw the line on promotions. When the selection board would come up with a rank order, you had all of the officers in a certain class, and you had to know how far down that list you went before you drew the line where those above line would be promoted. There were always people who were certified to be promotable by the boards who fell below the line, who didn't get promoted. So the more senior people you kept on by giving extensions, the more opportunities were denied to Class One officers to make it through the window into the senior Foreign Service.

And this, eventually, by the time the six years began to run out for some of the officers who opted immediately upon enactment of this law to choose this, to open their six-year window, began to squeeze some of these officers. The numbers of available promotions were simply not enough to take care of all those that the board said were clearly deserving of promotion. This happened after my time, but we could all see it coming.

Increasingly, officers in Class One, which was Class Three under the old system, many of whom had by that time twenty years of service, sometimes even more, were experienced and had many language and other skills that were needed in the service, began to be involuntarily retired.

It put a pressure on management, through AFSA (American Foreign Service Association), their bargaining representative, to reduce the number of limited career extensions for senior officers in order to make more room for officers to cross the threshold. This, in turn, led the senior officers to formulate their own senior officer association to argue for the need to retain senior officers beyond their limited number of years in class. So there was a real tradeoff here. It was very difficult to find where the balance of equity lay in this situation.

Q: Do you think this was really a good change, this inauguration of a senior service?

ATHERTON: I have very mixed feelings about it. The origins of this were the decision made in the Carter administration and with the considerable impetus from the Congress to have a reform of the Civil Service. There was a Civil Service Reform Act, passed in 1978, and there was considerable pressure I'm told at the time to deal with the Foreign Service personnel system in the same context.

The service argued, and the secretary argued that Foreign Service was different in its personnel needs and imperatives and had always had a separate statutory base ever since the Foreign Service Act of 1976, and even in some ways going back to the Rogers Act of 1924. They had a system different from the domestic service for a lot of very valid reasons, and therefore should not be lumped together with the Civil Service.

But, at the same time, there was a commitment made by the Carter administration that there would be introduced by the administration a proposed revision to the Foreign Service Act of 1976-a new Foreign Service Act parallel to the Civil Service Reform Act. It would conform as closely as possible to the Civil Service Reform Act which established a senior executive service within the Civil Service (one of the essential features of the Civil Service Reform Act), and therefore it was almost a foregone conclusion that you had to do something analogous in the Foreign Service.

Q: Did it serve any useful purpose in the long run?

ATHERTON: I really don't know. When I left, I felt that there were too many rigidities, built into the way the system was working, in terms of the ability of management to make the best use of personnel.

One of the problems was that it was designed to deal with the failure of the department personnel system, and the Foreign Service in particular, over a great many years, to discipline itself. This is a system in which the Foreign Service, in effect, is administered by people in the Foreign Service, under the overall authority of the Secretary. The director general and most of the personnel system is staffed by Foreign Service people.

The Secretary of State, for example, cannot decide, if he wants somebody promoted, and if the selection boards, consisting largely of Foreign Service people to rank order officers for promotion, draw the line above where that person is on the list.

This is one of things that George Shultz found very frustrating. Management can recommend an officer down the line for fast track advancement, but it cannot put that person on the fast track and promote him or her rapidly. You could only write glowing efficiency reports, which you hoped would get the person promoted. Shultz thought this was the best way to run a railroad, to be quite honest. But it was built into the Act, and there we were.

But the service had failed over the years, before the act of 1980, to retire, or not promote officers who clearly had leveled off, so more were in the senior ranks than there were jobs for. By giving them extensions and by having long times in class at the senior level, this tended to fill up the senior ranks and slow down the promotion of people from below. Or, if you promoted them from below, then you ended up with what I inherited when I became Director General - a glut of too many senior people.

So I think that to some extent this was a way of imposing discipline on the management of the service which it had not really imposed upon itself. Selection out for substandard performance, which was part of the Foreign Service ever since the '76 Act, has been virtually a dead letter, ever since the grievance system came and we developed what came to be a labor union to challenge management decisions.

For example, there was a whole cohort of Class One officers who were marked for involuntary retirement because they hadn't made it over the senior threshold in their six years, who brought a class action suit against the Secretary, saying that this particular provision of the law violates certain rights, commitments under which they entered the service. It was a breach of contract, in effect. We're speaking now in 1990, and the last I heard this class action suit was still going on, had not yet been decided. A number of officers, whose involuntary retirement would have taken place about 1987, are still on the payroll, because they are there as long as this class action suit is unresolved.

It's a good example, I think, of failure to use the system to keep the service lean, if you will. Selection out clearly ought to be used only when people clearly are substandard. But even the best of selections systems is going to let in a few people who either shouldn't have been let in, in the first place, or who, after they came in, something went wrong, went off the track and lost their edge, who couldn't adjust or compete. And that's basically what selection out was designed to do, to get rid of the substandard or less competitive officers that occasionally turned up.

It used to be that way for awhile. In the very early years, after '46, people were selected out. In fact, I think one officer who was selected out committed suicide, because of the desperation that he felt himself in when he was suddenly selected out in those days when you couldn't get a job. And that had a chilling effect, of course, on management's willingness to use this provision of the act. The result is that there are very few officers who are selected out. Selection out today is largely by the expiration of time in class.

I've learned, incidentally, subsequent to retiring, that AID, which operates under the same act as the Department of State, has used selection out over the years since the Act of '80 was passed. So it can be done.

Q: There used to be an age limit, too.

ATHERTON: The retirement age. Well, there still is, but it's now 65. And there are those who challenge whether even 65 isn't discrimination on the basis of age. There also used to be an age limit on entry into the service - I think 30 or 31 - which is no longer the case.

So there are lots of things that made it difficult to carry out the intent of the act, which was to reduce the number of people in the senior ranks, including pressure from the senior officers themselves. Since the people administering the act were themselves senior officers, there was a tendency, probably, despite the best will in the world to be objective, to be sympathetic to the concerns of the senior officers, who felt they ought not simply to be put out to pasture, if you will. This was not just because they reached 65, because most of them were not. Most were in their 50s or early 60s.

Q: With a well-paid past.

ATHERTON: Yes. The pension system, the retirement system is a very good one, one of the best in the country as far as I can see, unless you're a senior corporate executive and get a golden parachute.

Anyway, the result was that this was the beginning of a rather turbulent period. I didn't fully appreciate all that I was taking on when I agreed to become Director General. And I passed on even more difficult problems to George West when he became my successor, because I was only dealing with the early symptoms of the malaise and the stresses and the strains and the tensions that this act created within the service. They were there, but they became much more acute in the next era, because more and more people were feeling the bite of this senior threshold.

Q: You know, we always hear, whenever a new administration comes in, there is a blow to the morale of the Foreign Service. Almost without exception there is a morale problem in the Foreign Service. Do you have any thoughts on that, during your term as Director General? Was it a real problem?

ATHERTON: It was beginning to be a problem, and I think it got worse. In certain parts of the service it was very bad. To the Class One officers who saw themselves facing involuntary retirement it had a very chilling effect. And it was bad on the senior officers who saw their extensions denied. And there were some very senior and able people who were affected.

I remember at least one career officer who was serving as an ambassador in a small country and was not granted a career extension. I had my deputy telephone and tell him this. I always said the deputies bring the bad news; the bosses would bring the good news. But he just couldn't believe it. He couldn't believe that as an ambassador he wasn't going to be extended. As long as he was serving as an ambassador with a presidential appointment, he could continue to serve in that post. He didn't have to break his tour in the middle and go home. But what he knew was that when he finished that tour as ambassador, he had X number of days, I forget, sixty days, or whatever it was we gave people to retire.

Q: Unless the president personally wanted him to stay on.

ATHERTON: Unless he were reappointed to that or another presidential commission by the president, with the advice and consent of the Senate.

When this act was passed, it sort of went by a lot of the people in the service. They didn't really comprehend how fundamental some of the changes were that it was going to make.

Q: How would all this affect the younger officers, the newer officers?

ATHERTON: That's a good question, and I'm glad you asked that, because, in fact, I found, as I said, the state of morale varied in different parts of the service. I did not detect any diminution of enthusiasm among the new officers just coming into the service. The numbers taking the exam did not fall. The numbers being brought in was controlled by predictions of flow through, but it was more or less stabilized at a couple of hundred a year. And today the junior officers, once they are brought in, do not get tenure. They have to go through a period of being on trial, probation, before you get commissioned and you get permanent tenure, unlike in our day when you were tenured and got commissioned the minute you went into the service and took your oath. But the ones I met were an enthusiastic group, and they were able.

I found it very interesting, because one of the things I did, as soon as I could, was to visit overseas posts in as many regions as I could get to of the world, to meet with different categories of people in the service, with junior officers, with senior officers, with middle-grade officers, people in various cones, those with different specialties. I usually did this by piggy-backing, in effect, on conferences that had already been organized.

Joan Clark, who moved over from being assistant secretary for consular affairs, had a series, or continued a tradition, I think, which existed before of having periodic consular officer conferences in different places around the world, where all the consular officers in a certain region were brought to a conference to talk about common problems, interpretations of the immigration and nationality act, lots of the issues that consular officers needed, to be sure they were all following the same interpretations of the law and regulations.

And so I used to ask if I could go along and meet with these officers, and also with the people at the post where that conference was held, and usually used that as a jumping off point for visits to other posts in the immediate vicinity. I did it a couple of times in Europe, in Africa, and in Central America. I didn't get to as much of the world as I would have liked to have done, because I didn't remain that long as Director General.

And I'm glad to say, incidentally, that George West, my successor-he was in the job for five years almost-visited virtually every part of the world before he finished. Very useful in keeping your finger on the pulse of the service.

And one of the conclusions I drew from this is that morale is always worse in Washington than it is overseas. But at most of the overseas posts I had, with some very specialized exceptions and for very special reasons, I thought morale was pretty good. And it was particularly good among the junior officers, who were very enthusiastic and a good group of people.

The biggest problem I found with middle-grade officers was that they were beginning to hear what would happen to them when they became senior officers, this squeeze of the six-year window. And they were beginning to look at the long run and wonder whether this was the career for them or just something they would do for ten or fifteen or twenty years and then think about going on to something else.

I think part of the change in the service that I detected in the year I was Director General, which was not true for my career, was that fewer people now look at the service as a career lifetime commitment. There were those who still did, but more and more it was looked at as an interesting and challenging job, but still a job that you did for a certain period of time and looked at other options so that you wouldn't get locked into this as the only thing you would ever do with the rest of your life.

Q: Why was that?

ATHERTON: Well, partly I think it was that Foreign Service officers felt the road to the top was becoming more and more problematical. The concept of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 is that if you reach Class One, which was Class Three under the pre-1980 personnel system, you have had an honorable and satisfactory career, and that most people's expectations should be that they would reach Class One, over a period of 20 years or so, and retire, and would still be of an age where they could go on to a second career.

The attempt was to equate this to a military career, where I am told that retiring as a full colonel is considered the norm and the cap of a very successful career, and that if you go beyond that to general officer rank, you are being singled out exceptionally.

In the Foreign Service, the psychology has always been that if you didn't reach the top, you had not had a fully successful career. Yet since the service personnel structure is a pyramid, it stands to reason that a very small percentage are going to become ambassadors and career ministers and reach the most senior ranks.

Given the number who were not crossing the senior threshold under the 1980 Act, middle-grade officers began to look ahead at alternatives. Another was that they were getting to the point where their children were in high school or getting ready to go into high school, and they began increasingly to want to have longer periods in Washington and shorter periods overseas in order to have access to good educational facilities at home.

Perhaps even more important, though, in changing the attitudes of officers in the middle grade and above toward the career service was the increase in the number of spouses who had careers of their own, who were not satisfied in simply being the spouse of the officer and doing the things that traditionally in the old service wives did. Spouses in those days were almost always wives. There were very few male spouses married to women officers in the earlier days. That's changing, but then they were looked at basically to be adjuncts of their husbands and help his career, entertain well, raise their families, take part in activities that were good-works kind of activities in the country where they were, and be representational. There was the old two-for-the-price-of-one syndrome. Well, you know, this is another age now, and more and more spouses are unwilling to accept that role, or if they have their own careers, they want to pursue them. In some cases, they are careers they cannot pursue overseas. There are professionals who must be licensed in other countries. If you're a lawyer, you can't just go to another country and practice law.

In my case, Betty was a teacher, and that's a very portable profession. Wherever we went she could always find a position teaching in the local American community or international school, or tutoring sometimes.

But there are many professional spouses now who can't find satisfying positions abroad. And that creates pressures either to extend Washington tours and reduce the overseas tours, in a service where there is a firm commitment to availability for worldwide assignment and where you expect that you're going to spend at least two-thirds of your career overseas and not in the States.

An additional factor is the growing number of what came to be called tandem couples - Foreign Service officers married to each other - with dual careers. And therefore the problem arises: How do you manage a personnel system so that you can assign a husband and wife team, both officers, or sometimes an officer and a staff-level person, to the same post, so that the family does not have to split, particularly if they still have young children?

The result was that very often we tended to look for large posts where there were lots of opportunities to assign couples. And then they were usually also what were considered the more comfortable posts.

Maybe the best example that I ran across of this was in Brussels. Brussels was one of the first places I went to attend a consular conference and get to know the problems of the service as seen through the eyes of the people overseas. Well, in Brussels you had the embassy to Belgium, you had the NATO mission, and you had the embassy to the European Community. So there were three American ambassadors in one country, with their own missions and their own staffs. And therefore it was very easy to assign a husband to the embassy and his wife to NATO or vice versa. And they'd all be in the same city. You save on rent allowances, by the way, when you share housing.

So there was a perception that tandem couples were favored, because they got these cushy posts. As I said, I met with different categories of personnel, and I would also meet with the staff, or the communicators, or the secretaries. And many of them, who were very often single people, complained that the tandem couples were being favored and that they were being disadvantaged because they were single. Single officers felt the same way, that they ended up going to the small posts in developing countries often where you couldn't assign a married couple.

Q: That brings to mind the Carlton Coons, who were both chiefs of mission and separated, and not in plush posts at all.

ATHERTON: That's right. I think the perception is perhaps exaggerated, but nevertheless it exists.

Q: I have heard the suggestion that the Foreign Service has changed considerably from being a profession, a career and a profession, to a job. And some people have suggested that if that's true it's partly because the people in it, the officers and the clerks and so forth, are worried a lot about their hours, that they are worried more about the pay and more about the perks, they have been allowed to negotiate for posts and so forth, all of which tends to ruin the esprit de corps and reduce the sort of professionalism of the job. Would you say there's anything to that?

ATHERTON: I think there is some truth to that. I would describe it in terms perhaps of a decline in professional discipline. An attitude that certain things are a right, and that you ought to be able to choose not only your post but the cone that you're in and the positions that you're in, even in Washington. And also, because, particularly as you get near the top of the mid-level grades, with the squeeze of this six-year window staring you in the face, the tendency is to want jobs that are perceived at least as being the best, or the most promotable jobs, to get into the jobs where people have a better record of getting promoted. Everyone should have a voice in planning their careers, and in seeking assignments and training that will advance their careers, but this needs to be balanced by a respect for the needs of the Service.

Now it used to be that two of the most sought-after positions in the career service were political and economic counselors of embassy. Suddenly the idea got abroad that what you really had to do was to get a management job. You had to be a manager in the service, manage people, management was the way to the top. And therefore these good political, economic counselor jobs went begging while people held out to try to get a deputy chief of mission job, even at a little post, because that was management. It was a mind set that reflected the promotion lists; the people who did tend to get promoted tended to validate this perception.

But I think fundamentally the pendulum swung too far away from professional discipline and too much towards an over-concern for meeting the preferences of the individual member of the service about assignments, about training and so forth.

I've always felt that in the end management has to decide, and officers have to accept the decision of management, what is best for the service and not always what is best for the individual. There will be some things that will be better for the service and less good for the individual, and then over a career these tend to even out and you get rewards that compensate for what you thought perhaps were the less rewarding assignments along the way.

I know in my career, I don't remember, until I went to Cairo, ever digging in to get a particular post or job. I did ask if I could be considered for the opening in Cairo when I heard that Ambassador Eilts was leaving. But I figured I'd been around long enough and in Washington long enough, to have the right to request that. But the only other assignment I ever really pressed hard for was a training assignment.

Q: Well, you had all those April Fool preferences.

ATHERTON: Oh, you always put down your preferences. But it wasn't the same. You always put down your preferences, but you didn't immediately rebel if you didn't get it.

Q: You didn't negotiate.

ATHERTON: You didn't negotiate. At least I never negotiated for assignments, though I had a couple of bosses who had negotiated within the system to get me assigned to work for them.

Q: I never knew you could.

ATHERTON: Well, there were always some people who managed it all along. But, in fact, the perception of most officers was that in the end you went where the service decided you had to go. And did a good job. And also that you didn't have to be put into a straitjacket with a cone, that you could do a variety of jobs, whether it was consular work or economic or political. Everybody wanted to be a political officer. The political officers tended to be more broadly defined, I think, than later became the case.

That was another innovation that I inherited, that happened before I was Director General, that I hadn't focused on much. That was the cone system, where from the day you were appointed to the service you were assigned to a certain cone. And while many times junior officers were told that if you want to change cones later you can, it turned out to be really difficult to change cones. If you were in the administrative cone, it was very hard to get out of that. And there was a perception increasingly that women tended to be assigned more to certain cones than others, more women in the consular positions.

Q: How did this cone system come about?

ATHERTON: It came about when I wasn't looking, for one thing. It came about sometime when I was too busy worrying about the Middle East to really be paying any attention to the personnel system, and I was senior enough so it didn't affect me. But it came about as a management tool, basically, because, needless to say, we need a certain number of officers in these different specialties in the service, an attempt to project a profile of what the personnel structure should look like, how many people in what specialties. And in order to manage that, it was decided you really had to put people in cones, in proportion to the numbers you needed in that particular specialty at that particular grade level.

It's not a bad concept if it's administered flexibly. But the cones can become a straitjacket, which made it very hard for officers to always get assignments that they might have needed in certain phases of their career. You could get an out-of-cone assignment, but that was not always easy. People in a certain cone got preference for the assignments in that cone. And there was always a great desire to get in the political cone; that was always the most popular cone.

Q: As an assistant secretary, did you feel that you should have the primary say in assignment of personnel, or would you leave that up to the personnel people?

ATHERTON: Well, I always felt, when I was assistant secretary in NEA, that I should have a major say in assigning the senior people, the DCMs, the counselors. Obviously not the junior officers or even the middle-grade officers, except that if you happened to spot a particularly fast-comer in the middle grades who you thought would be just the right person for the number two political officer or the consul in some small country you would try to go and get that person assigned. So I did feel that the geographic bureaus should have a major say in assignments to overseas posts..

When I became Director General, I somewhat changed my perception and felt that really you couldn't run a personnel system in a decentralized way, with a whole lot of autonomous assistant secretaries running their part of the personnel system. It had to be integrated, and you had to have a central assignment system. You took into consideration the views and preferences in the bureaus by having them represented in the assignment panels.

One of the tensions of the job, during my tour as Director General, was between the central personnel system, and many cases were brought up to me to deal with, on the one hand, and the regional bureaus and the functional bureaus on the other, who wanted to pick their own key people and train them and groom them and follow them through and help get them promoted.

This also came up with respect to training. I felt very strongly that officers ought to go through certain periods of training, whether it was short-term, getting ready for a particular area of assignment, which was not always taken seriously enough, or the longer-term training assignments, such as the War College or the Senior Seminar for senior officers.

It's amazing how many assistant secretaries would request that a particular officer, who had been selected by the system for that kind of training, be excused because he or she was much more badly needed immediately in a particular position overseas. And the personnel system would come up with a half a dozen other people to fill that position who had the qualifications.

I had some rather knock-down fights with some of the assistant secretaries over whether an officer should be assigned to training, as I felt and as the personnel system had decided, or whether that person should be excused from training, such as to the Senior Seminar assignment, in order to go off and become political counselor in Bonn for example.

That was one of the assistant secretaries I had some problems with; he was running the European bureau. I wanted to take one of his favorite officers and put him into the Senior Seminar, not only because I thought it was good for the officer but because I thought the officer would bring certain strengths and qualities and balance that other members of the seminar would benefit from. And he threatened that if I wouldn't change that assignment he would take it to the Secretary. And I said, "Good, we'll see who the Secretary backs." Well, in fact, the Secretary sent word that he didn't want to get involved in this, and the assignment stood.

Secretary Shultz was very good normally about backing the Director General and the personnel system in the assignment process, if it ever got appealed to him. Most of it stopped short of that.

I had trouble with Larry Eagleburger when he was the under secretary for political affairs, because he always wanted to give particular help and reward for his staff aides. And it was true, they probably worked 60 hours or more a week and were able people, and he felt that they deserved a reward. And he would try to tell the personnel system I want so and so to go there, when there might be half a dozen other qualified officers who had bid on that post and who were as deserving if not more deserving. So occasionally there would be run-ins with the under secretary for political affairs about assigning one of his staff aides to a particular position when the system felt somebody else should get it.

Oh, there will always be some tensions.

Q: How about dealing with minorities?

ATHERTON: Very important. The act of 1980 says that the service shall be representative of the American people. And that has been always interpreted as meaning that there should be a cross section of ethnic minority, racial minority, women and men in numbers, more or less proportionate to their percentage in the US population. And there was in place an affirmative action program, that had been a priority particularly of Secretary Vance and Larry Eagleburger, when he was under secretary for management, to push very hard, aggressively a plan to encourage minorities to take the Foreign Service exam.

There were even certain advantages given to bring minorities in without having to compete at all levels with everybody else. There was a lateral entry system to bring minorities in above the entering level, by oral exam without a written exam. That was no longer the case when I became Director General. It hadn't worked very well, because some of the officers that had been brought in that way had to begin competing once they came in. And they had trouble competing in some cases.

The real problem was getting the most able minorities to apply for the Foreign Service, because they were in great demand. This was the age of affirmative action. And there was a great demand to show that you were carrying out affirmative action goals, that you were hiring minorities, trying to get a representative work force in your organization, not only within the government but in the private sector. Therefore, a member of a minority group, and I guess it was particularly true of the black minority, African-Americans, those who came with excellent academic and professional credentials, would probably have a lot of job offers. And one problem was that because of the time it took to pass the exam, to go through the oral exam process, to go on the register to wait for openings, to go through the security clearance, which took sometimes a year or more, some of the very ablest candidates for the service, and not just minorities but it was true also of majority representatives, were given other job offers and they took them. And we lost some of the real stars that we might have had. That's a problem that I think we're still wrestling with, and I believe it's time we finally draw it to a conclusion.

I was frustrated by it all the time. We had endless task forces studying these aspects of the personnel system.

Q: Did you actually go to recruit on campuses?

ATHERTON: We did not as much as we should have, in retrospect. And I think that is a change for the better. Today, there are active efforts to go to the historically black colleges, for example, and actively campaign to recruit people to take the Foreign Service exam.

We also had, among exam-takers, a system in those days called "near-pass". There is a cut-off score for passing the written exam, and anybody below that level was not invited to take the oral exam. But among minorities, there was a formula whereby they got extra points on their score, and therefore a minority candidate would be called in for the oral assessment with a score that a non-minority or a majority person would not be called in.

So there was an attempt to weight the system somewhat to compensate, if you will, for disadvantage, educational disadvantage, socially, not just in the current day, but historically. This was particularly true of the black candidates.

I will admit that I was never satisfied that we had really come to grips during my tour, how to get a better, a more representative service, particularly in terms of Afro-Americans.

Q: Was there any thought given to paying attention to Howard University and trying to get undergraduates in, and particularly if they had a foreign affairs interests?

ATHERTON: Well, there was thought given to it, and also we talked in the periodic meetings with the board of examiners of the Foreign Service, the people that helped advise the Director General on examinations, techniques, recruitment and all these other things that went into ensure that you did tap the best pools for the service. The idea that you ought to be targeting not just certain universities, Howard University is a very good example, but you should be targeting certain inner city high schools, you were trying to reach down into the high school level.

The ideas were there. I think in my period we didn't perhaps find ways to translate some of these concepts into practical programs as vigorously in that respect as we might. It wasn't that we were not sensitive to the problems. I certainly was, and I think my deputies in the personnel system were pretty much sympathetic to the need to do better, but we weren't too successful always in finding how we could carry out that good intention.

There's a lot of inertia and fixed mindsets in the way a personnel system works. It's very hard to turn that around, to change a pattern that has procedures that have been effect for years and years.

Q: Changes take money, too.

ATHERTON: . . . There were just lots of structural problems when I was there, that I was never able to figure out quite how to correct.

Another example, I mentioned earlier that we were required by law to project the flow-through of the system over a period of years, how many vacancies would there be, how many officers at certain class levels that you could promote into the senior ranks. And we made required reports to Congress every year, which would project these figures, which were worked out by the "number crunchers" in the bureau of personnel, based upon historical patterns, five-year averaging, and all sorts of other techniques.

But the fact of the matter was that, when I left the Department, we still did not have in a completely computerized, integrated personnel data base. We were still in the horse and buggy age in terms of the kind of computerized data base that we had. You cannot have a scientifically projected pattern of recruitment information and retirement across-the-board, in all ranks and all grades, in a system that doesn't have all of that information in a single data base. There was a lot of guesswork going on.

I'll have to admit it was all done in the name of a scientific personnel analysis and system, but I learned as I went along that there was still a lot of guesswork being done. And the right hand often didn't know what the left hand was doing. Training assignments were not always related to follow-on assignments, so that an officer in training felt that he or she was losing an opportunity to stay in the mainstream while somebody who wasn't in training was getting ahead. When a person was assigned to the Senior Seminar, we were not able to decide before they went in what their job would be when they came out. That is now beginning to happen; it's a great improvement. Lots of things are happening now that I would like to have been able to make happen when I was Director General.

Q: What do you think about the argument of generalists versus specialists?

ATHERTON: I just think it's a false dichotomy; I've never believed it. It depends what you mean by specialist. There are certain technical type jobs.

Q: Such as economists.

ATHERTON: Well, no. First of all, I think that every Foreign Service officer in the ranks who is at least competing to rise to the top of the system has to be to some extent a generalist. You have to have the ability to look at the overall picture and know something about all aspects of the system, and you have to have certain instincts for good management and maybe hone those through training, personnel as well as programming, and money. But on top of that, you have to have some expertise. You have to learn the culture of the country or the language of the country. If you're an economist, you have to know how you analyze an economy. So I would say a generalist must also be a specialist in the sense that you need certain special skills and expertise to represent the United States abroad and conduct the foreign relations of the United States.

Q: Well, it used to be that a Foreign Service officer, at least when I was in, would at one point be in the consular service. You would do the consular work, you'd do administrative work, you'd do economic work, you'd do commercial work, you'd do political work, you would do the whole thing,. . .

ATHERTON: And I think the more you can do that the better, and I consider us all generalists. Now, obviously, when you speak of specialists, to me a specialist means somebody who can run a highly complex, sophisticated communications system. You do have to have specialists to run the telecommunications systems. What we used to call the old corps.

Q: What I was going to say, they don't have to be one certain officer.

ATHERTON: You need people who can handle payrolls, who can handle the very specialized aspects of administration, property management. And today you have some general Foreign Service officers doing those jobs and you have some specialists, and they really have different personnel specialties. They have different codes, they have different opportunities to move ahead in the system. And yet they tend to be, to some extent, particularly in the middle grades or junior grades, used interchangeably. So we've never really decided in our own minds as an institution what we mean when we talk about generalists and specialists, and secondly, how you structure the service so that it will have the right mix, something that we have been unable to do.

Another frustration during this period for me was the kind of fragmentation of the personnel function. I felt that as Director General I was mainly responsible for managing the personnel system. And remember it's not just Director General of the Foreign Service, it's also the director of personnel for the State Department, so you're running both the Foreign Service and the Civil Service personnel systems. And you are at the assistant secretary level; you no longer sit at the right hand of the secretary the way early Directors General used to do under the act of 1946. When it was combined with the operational responsibility of running the personnel system, not just advising the Secretary it became much less a kind of a father figure for the foreign service and more the manager of the system. It used to be you had an assistant secretary for personnel, or a deputy assistant. Well, you are really the assistant secretary for all these things even though your title is Director General.

And yet there are aspects of a personnel function that were not under the control of the Director General-the Foreign Service Institute-training, and training is an integral part of personnel. The head of the medical division of the department had a direct line of authority to the under secretary and not under the Director General. The head of the family liaison office, which clearly is very much involved in the morale, family side of making the personnel system work, is a recognized position in the department today, reported directly to the under secretary for management. And they would also consult with the Director General, and I would invite them to meetings from time to time. But, for them, the important thing is that they sat in the weekly staff meetings of the under secretary, and that was where the power lay.I had good cooperation, and there were very good people in this job, it wasn't that. But I didn't write their efficiency reports, and that makes a big difference. And I had no real say in who was chosen for those positions. I'm happy to say, however, I understand that now (in 1990), the current under secretary for management has said that he wants to move all of those functions under the Director General, a move that I felt at the time would have been very useful.The other thing, the Foreign Service Act of 1980, of course, in effect, says that there are five branches of the Foreign Service: the State Department Foreign Service, the USIA Foreign Service, AID, the Foreign Commercial Service, and the Foreign Agricultural Service. Theoretically, the Director General is supposed to have a coordinating function for all these, and they are all supposedly under the overall policy supervision and guidance of the Secretary of State. But, of course, in fact they have their own budgets, and they operate as separate personnel systems, so they interpret the act very differently. AID has a quite different set of rules for the senior threshold and for limited career extensions and for selection out from the State Department. USIA has its own.

Another problem in my day was the role of the board of the Foreign Service. It was chaired in those days by the Director General, but it was chaired at other times by different people. Once it was by the deputy secretary until he decided it ought to be a career officer and therefore decided it should be Director General. It had representatives of all the other foreign affairs agencies plus other departments that had an interest in overseas and had their personnel assigned overseas. Treasury, for instance. And then a representative of the Office of Personnel Management.

And during my time, the Office of Personnel Management was under a man, in the Reagan period, who had very strong ideological views about how you ran a personnel system and how you'd get people who were political loyalists, and really did not accept philosophically that the Foreign Service was not under the Office of Personnel Management. So he kept trying to find ways to cut back on the authority of the Director General and to broaden the role of OPM, and increase its membership on the board of the Foreign Service. There was a fundamental disagreement with the concept that the Foreign Service, in effect, the Department of State, administered its own personnel system and it was not under the central personnel system, the OPM, which runs the personnel system for the whole Civil Service, for all the rest of the government. There was a bit of tension there. I don't think, in practice, many enemies were made during that period, but it did lead sometimes to rather strained meetings with the board of the Foreign Service.

And another problem that was not new and will always be with us to some extent was: How do you choose ambassadors? and How do you define the mix between career and non-career appointments? During the Reagan period, the numbers of non-career appointments tended to go up. Not as high as some people thought, but they did tend to rise from the traditional 30 percent of ambassadorial appointments being non-career to maybe 37 percent. But even more the problem than the ratio, to me, was the quality.

Some of the ambassadors I've admired most have been non-career people who have come in from other careers and other professions, people like Ellsworth Bunker, people like David Bruce, Averell Harriman or, more recently, people like Charlie Price in London. There were some excellent appointments, but there were also (and I won't name names) on the other side some who simply didn't have the qualifications for carrying out the duties of representing the United States abroad and running a foreign policy mission.

There was also division of responsibility between the Department of State and other executive branch agencies, where functions that had traditionally been Foreign Service and State Department functions, commercial functions, but increasingly aspects of international economic policy, trade negotiations. A lot of changes had been taking place. Some of these had taken place over the years, and I had been unaware of them because I had had blinders on in a way, looking at the Middle Eastern problems, and hadn't been watching what was happening to the personnel system. So a lot of things that happened involved this fragmentation, for example, of some of the traditional functions that were run out of the State Department, which I would like to see at some point reversed.

Q: What would be the ideal situation as far as you're concerned? What would really be best?

ATHERTON: Well, I've always believed that the secretary of state is the principal foreign policy advisor to the president, and that overall foreign policy responsibilities should be under him.

Q: That would include AID, USIA, Commerce, etc?

ATHERTON: I think strongly that what we call public diplomacy, the responsibility of USIA, should be part of the State Department. AID is another example. The head of it is not a cabinet-level officer, he's an Administrator. He does take, or is by law supposed to take policy guidance from the secretary of state. But he does have a separate budget, etc.

Probably the way to get a handle on this would be for the secretary of state to have overall responsibility for the budget item, the 150 account, in the US federal budget which funds the conduct of foreign affairs in all its aspects. And because the 150 budget account is fragmented, the responsibility itself is fragmented. Responsibility for appropriation of funding is also divided among different Committees in the House of Representatives.

Now I'm not so unrealistic as to think that you can turn back the clock and take away from the Treasury Department its Treasury attachï¿½s, and maybe you wouldn't want to, and reintegrate the Foreign Commercial Service and take it out of the Commerce Department and put in the State Department. But, as a long-term objective, even those things should not be ruled out. It just seems to me that we've got to get back to a more integrated foreign policy structure. While the Secretary of State clearly cannot monopolize all aspects of foreign policy, he should be seen as the President's principal advisor, and his voice should carry greater weight. And one way to do this, when you have different personnel, reporting to different departments, and different secretaries, different cabinet officers, is at least to have interdepartmental arrangements which are chaired by the representatives of the Department of State.

This happened to some extent, I guess it was in the Carter period or the Nixon period, when you had a structure of interdepartmental groups to deal with problems of foreign policy that cut across departmental lines. But they were chaired by the appropriate assistant secretary or his representative from the State Department, who had his guidance from the Secretary of State, and if there was a real problem in those meetings and the State Department representative's efforts failed after trying to find a way of working out a consensus, then it would go up to his secretary who talked to the other secretary. That's where the relative clout of the Secretary of State is important. If it's known that he in the end will have the President's ear and win approval if it is taken to the President the two of them are going to take their differences to the President.

So I don't know anyway they put all of this back in the bottle again, it's been out too long, but it seems to me that there ought to be a consciousness of the need to stop the trend towards greater fragmentation and look for ways if not to reconsolidate, at least have better cooperation.

Q: If you do that, if you bring more of the organization under one umbrella, in an embassy for example, would that have the effect of reducing drastically the personnel?

ATHERTON: First of all, I think it does work reasonably well at the embassy level, because you do have the presidential directive that says without ambiguity that the chief of mission is the president's representative, and all representatives of the executive branch in that country, with the exception of separate military commands, will be under the authority of the ambassador. The country team concept is how this is carried out. The real problem is not in the field, mostly. Once in a while you will get a problem in the field that has to be adjudicated back in Washington. Mostly it's in Washington itself, with the fragmentation.

Q: Sitting in separate buildings.

ATHERTON: Sitting in separate buildings, separate staffs, and nobody to provide overall coordination. On foreign policy, the NSC, national security advisors to the President and its staff are supposed to act as the filter through which different views are allowed to be heard and the views heard by the President if necessary. In practice it doesn't always work that way.

How Washington works is hard to define. I mean, it really depends so much on the management style and interests and authority of the President, and of the people he chooses as his cabinet officers, his national security advisor, and in particular the person he chooses to be his Secretary of State.

I was lucky, in the period that I was Director General, in having a secretary who took an interest in management and personnel, Secretary Shultz. And so he had periodic meetings with the management team to talk about management problems, because he knew about them and we had his ear. That is not always true with other secretaries who didn't have the same interests that Shultz had in these issues.

Well, I've run through my impressionistic remembrances of that period - really it was only a year and a few months that I was Director General, I came back to Washington with the idea that it was going to be another Washington tour, and that probably at the end of it I would retire. But I had only been in the job for about a year, when I was approached unexpectedly and asked if I would be interested in a position as director of the Harkness Fellowships at the Commonwealth Fund, which of course meant retiring and going into a second career.

I have to admit that at that point I had enough frustrations trying to be Director General. It was not the kind of job where you wake up every morning and can't wait to get to the office, because there were too many heartbreaks, you had to tell too many people the bad news that they were not getting their career extension or were being selected out, or get into another fight about an assignment, the struggle over who's going to get this body. It had its rewards, and one of the great rewards was working with some very good people in the personnel system, learning a lot of things about it that I should have learned much earlier in my career, which I regret. I believe today that any officer with an idea of rising to senior ranks in the service ought to have to do a tour in the personnel system, to learn about it from the bottom up.

Q: You had that.

ATHERTON: No, I had never had that.

Q: Oh, I thought you had had an assignment in personnel.

ATHERTON: I had never had an assignment in personnel. The nearest I came was being the assistant secretary and having to deal with the personnel decisions in my bureau, and I served on the selection boards in the department. I think training ought to be a built-in part of getting up the career ladder. Training ought to be career-enhancing and not be seen as career impeding. There are lots of things that ought to be changed.

In a way, I had a second chance, because after retiring and becoming director of the Harkness Fellowships, which is an international exchange program, I was asked if I would serve on a commission on the Foreign Service personnel system, which was created by an amendment in the Senate to the State Department Authorization Act, to take a hard look at the personnel system and recommend ways to increase the stability of the personnel system. It was a broad mandate.

And I was pleased to spend almost a year as a member of this commission. It was chaired by John Thomas, a former assistant secretary for administration. It included myself. It included Graeme Bannerman, who had been in the department and earlier on in the Foreign Service, and then later had become a member of the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and ended up being chief of staff of the committee when Senator Lugar was the chairman. So he knew a lot about the system, including a congressional perception of the Foreign Service. And we had a very excellent personnel specialist in the Civil Service system, Pat Schittulli, who was chief of personnel for the Air Force and director for personnel, Ersa Poston, who was on the Civil Service Commission and chairman of the New York Civil Service Commission for several years, and had a lot of experience working as a consultant since she retired, including for AID. She sat on the AID selection boards and had a lot of wisdom in the personnel field.

We put together a report, which started under the previous administration but finished up under the Bush administration and went to Secretary Baker and to the under secretary for management and to the new Director General. We have had occasional briefings from the Director General about what had happened to our recommendations, and a number of them are in fact in the process of being translated into changes in the system.

There was a parallel internal study report done by Ambassador Jerry Bremer, before he retired. We had the Bremer report and the Thomas report coming out together. They were arrived at quite independently. The Bremer report had a narrower focus; he simply looked at the role of generalists. We looked at the whole service, generalists, specialists, everything from recruitment to training to promotion to retirement, what you needed to make the cone system work better, what you needed to make recruitment work better, to get a better representation of minorities. We looked at the whole gamut and also looked at the Bremer report. What was amazing was not the differences between the two but in how many ways they came to the same conclusions. They tended to reinforce each other in some respects.

The recommendations from those reports are now the agenda of the personnel system in the department. So I feel that some of the things that were most frustrating in my time are in fact beginning to be dealt with. It doesn't mean that all the problems of the service are solved. A lot of them are not solvable. A lot of them have to do with changes in our society. And the societal changes are reflected in the kind of people that are going to come into the service, how long they want to stay, how you reconcile family needs with the needs of the service, the career of an officer with the career of his spouse, her spouse.

Q: You haven't mentioned your relationship with Congress at all.

ATHERTON: Well, I think the State Department over the years, and the Foreign Service as an important part of it, have not been as sensitive to or adept at managing their congressional relations as many other departments of the government.

Perhaps this came across most clearly when the Thomas commission that I was on went up to meet with members of the staffs of the committees on the Hill who had been, in effect, the drafters of the amendment that created the commission, to get some idea of what was the legislative intent behind it. And we got an earful on how the Foreign Service and the department are seen through the eyes of people on the Hill. And I'm sure in many ways they reflected the perception of the congressmen themselves.

The one quotation that really opened my eyes wide was from one of the staffers, who was very sympathetic to the service. He said, "The problem with the Foreign Service is that the whole is less than the sum of the parts."

Q: Well, after listening to all of these tapes of your career, I wonder if there's any job, in the State Department or abroad, that you might like to have had. What do you think about that?

ATHERTON: Well, there was a time when I thought I would like to finish up my career perhaps where I started, as ambassador to Germany. But the opportunity didn't come, and I don't feel that I am unfulfilled as a result of that. I think that I had a very rewarding career, and I can't imagine a more interesting one. And I also feel that there are great people in the service. I don't want to leave it on the note that I cited, quoting a member of Congress that the whole is less than the sum of the parts. The service has management problems but I don't think they are beyond repair. I feel I had a very rewarding career. I wouldn't go back and change anything. And I would not lose hope in the Foreign Service as an institution, because I think the world's going to need it and the country's going to it, and somehow or other it is going to get its act together. It's going through a politically difficult period in this era in the implementation of the act of '80. But I don't despair. I think it has a future as well as a past.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, thank you so much. No one has had a more interesting, more productive career than you have. Thank you very much.

ATHERTON: Well, thank you, and thank you for your patience.

End of interview