Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR MICHAEL W. COTTER

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Q: Well, can we start with, basically, telling me when and where you were born, and then something about your family?

COTTER: I was born in Madison, Wisconsin on August 1, 1943. I grew up in Milwaukee. My father is a lawyer. My mother, as was common in her generation, raised us. I have two brothers, one of whom works for the American Medical Association in Chicago, as an economist. The other is an assistant district attorney with Milwaukee County.

Q: Yes, let's talk about this, and can you give me a feel for the family? Did you read? What were the interests in the family?

COTTER: Yes, I read a lot. I read a lot more now than my brothers. I don't know whether this is a function of being a couple years pre-boomer versus being a boomer, but I was brought up reading with my grandparents at a very young age. I always read a lot, and still read a lot. I went to parochial schools, Catholic grade school and Jesuit high school in Milwaukee. I played some sports, but my main activity in high school was drama and student government.

Q: Well, one hears those Catholic schools, fifty or so years before, could be very strict, and the nuns a very difficult group to deal with. How did you find this?

COTTER: It was very strict. Although I ceased being a practicing Catholic many years ago, I still give significant money to the high school, because I think the best education I had, in my entire education, through law school, was at that high school. As is common in Jesuit schools, it had a demerit system. Every five demerits earned you a "jug", a jug being 45 minutes in a study hall, after class. Now if you were involved in a sport or anything else that required practice right after class, your alternative to jug was five swats. Five swats meant that you got up in front of the jug, emptied your back pockets, put your hands on your knees, and took five hits with the golf club. Actually, in those days, the parents certainly knew this was part of the rules. I don't even know many kids who objected to it. So, yes it was a strict school. I liked a separate education in high school. While not having girls in school was a frustration, I suppose, it was also less of a distraction. In those days, you had sections in each class. I was in the honors program, and took four years of Latin and two years of Homeric Greek. Greek was a lot tougher. The first year we didn't have a really good teacher, and as a result I never learned to read ancient Greek that well. By the time we took it the second year, we had a much more sensible teacher who simply had us read ancient Greek plays in English, and then write papers on them. This was probably as useful as memorizing ancient Greek. The Jesuits, as is well known by their detractors as well as their supporters, do a great job of educating. I was in drama for three years. We did Twelve Angry Men one year, and There Were No Angels, or My Three Angels, the play has been called different things. In my senior year we did No Time for Sergeants, in which I had the lead.

Q: The Andy Griffith role.

COTTER: I played the Andy Griffith role, that's right. It was a lot of fun. The only problem with being in drama, I discovered in high school, was that, particularly in that kind of situation, it's mostly preparation. You do three performances, and the whole thing is over, unlike with professionals. I read in the paper today where Cats is going into its 17th year. Even with football or basketball seasons in high school, you have a certain number of games in which to "perform." But in drama you work, and work, and work, and then have three days of glory, and it's over. I was also in student government and was president of the student council in my senior year. I participated in what was called the Badger Boys State. It's a program run by the American Legion in every state to give student leaders some experience in the democratic process.

One other thing I guess I would comment on is, I was a Boy Scout and an Eagle Scout. Later on, although I don't have children of my own, I did serve as Scout Master. I discovered what I think a lot of fathers find, and that is, too many other people tend to see Scouts and other organizations as a way to get rid of their kids for a while. The greatest frustration as a Scout leader is getting other parents to go along on camp outs and participate in other activities. I finally asked myself why was I doing this. I didn't have kids of my own, but yet I was doing this, and I couldn't get fathers to come out. The interesting thing about being a Boy Scout in the 1950s was that all of our leaders were World War II vets. My father served in the Pacific in the Eleventh Airborne Division and actually was scheduled to be on the first element of the invasion of Japan had it taken place, and was on the second plane that landed in Japan after the armistice was signed. Anyhow, he and the other fathers were all World War II vets. So our scouting experience was very focused on the military. We learned to march in step. We learned all of the Army marching songs. We learned signals. We learned about a compass. It was much different from scouting now, I gather, where, of course, it has changed with the times. The leaders today don't have the same military background that all of our leaders did. I found scouting to be a lot of fun, and very interesting. We took some fascinating trips. The other day, I was going through an old box, and came upon a patch, I guess it was from when I was already an Explorer. We built what we called Klondike sleds, which were sort of like dog sleds. The exercise was then to go out and do a simulated airline rescue. A plane had crashed, and then we were to go out with the sled, and find survivors, and haul them back. Well, we went out to camp on this particular weekend. It was one of the coldest weekends ever, about 20 below. So, we were camping in various kinds of tents, incidentally this would have been in 1957 or 1958, probably. We got up the next morning. If you hadn't had your boots in your sleeping bag with you, your boots were frozen. So, the first thing you had to do was thaw your boots out. All of the food was frozen solid. I remember my dad and our patrol leaders said, "Enough of this business." We went into town and had breakfast. Then we trekked off using compasses, following compass instructions more than five miles to find the downed airmen. It was a fascinating experience. We were doing this at ages 12 and 13, and we were really quite sophisticated, I think.

Q: Growing up in your town, in Madison, or were you in Milwaukee?

COTTER: Milwaukee. We moved to Milwaukee when I was five or six.

Q: I am trying to capture the spirit of the times. Was it pretty much a Catholic childhood, in those days? Things have gotten so mixed now, but my impression is, as a kid myself, the Catholic kids were over here, here the Protestant kids, and the Jewish kids were over here, that there was more division.

COTTER: Milwaukee was and still is an interesting town, although I suspect it has changed a lot. I have been away for many years. But, in those days, it was divided. Milwaukee was a very industrial town. The south side of the city was the working class part of town, mostly tended to be thought of as Eastern European, Polish and Slavic. The central northern part of the city was, to some extent, African-American, although in the 1950s, there were not that many blacks in Milwaukee. The population increased during the 1960s. The northeastern suburbs along Lake Michigan, where we lived, were largely professional people. The western suburbs were largely commercial and industrial. Bankers would live northwest, and the lawyers and doctors would live in the northeast. The one thing that meant was that in our suburb there was a mixture that included a significant Jewish population. The public high school in that suburb still today closes for the major Jewish holidays. In the block I lived on, you had quite a mixture, mostly Protestant, some Catholics, and a local rabbi lived across the street. So I grew up with Jewish kids in the community. I was going to a Catholic high school, obviously. Milwaukee is interesting because the predominant Protestant sect is Lutheranism.

Q: German.

COTTER: Exactly. German-Catholic, German-Lutheran, some Irish, and a lot of Eastern Europeans, most of whom were Catholics. In those days, of course, the old religious wars of Europe still continued on. My mother came from a Lutheran family, my father from a Catholic family. When they married in the Catholic church, they couldn't have a church wedding. They had to be married in the sacristy because, in those days, the Catholic church would not do a mixed marriage in the church proper. My mother converted to Catholicism 10 or 15 years later and never told her family. When she visited her parents, she didn't go to Mass because she was concerned about the effect this would have on her parents. When my Lutheran cousins were confirmed, I remember going to the confirmation and feeling very guilty about doing so, because I was probably committing a mortal sin going to a Lutheran service. Although, later on, I discovered that Lutheranism and Catholicism are extraordinarily close. The difference is basically Martin Luther.

Q: The same hierarchy.

COTTER: Exactly. In addition to the Catholic parochial schools in Milwaukee, of which there are a number, you have a whole system of Lutheran parochial schools- Lutheran grade schools, two Lutheran high schools. I don't know how many other cities actually have a Protestant group that goes in for that kind of thing, not counting the Christian schools that developed in the South, after desegregation. We went to school in a very Catholic atmosphere. We had daily Mass at the high school. But I grew up in a somewhat more cosmopolitan neighborhood, although, in terms of knowing any other races, we never saw blacks. There were none in my high school. We were talking about this the other day. I think when I was a senior in high school, there was one black student. Now, of course, the school has a scholarship program and works very hard to attract minorities, but in those days there was not much thought given to that kind of thing.

Q: Were there any teachers, either in elementary or high school, who were particularly inspirational or controversial?

COTTER: We had one course, I guess you would call it civics; it was called "The Problems of Communism", taught by Father Cletus Healy. Cletus Healy was from the John Birch school of anti-Communism.

Q: Extreme right?

COTTER: This was extreme right wing. I remember, we not only had all the books and pamphlets and what not, but one time even had a visit by the man who wrote, I Was A Spy For The FBI. This was a guy who had been a Communist...

Q: I Was A Communist With The FBI.

COTTER: Yeah. I can't think of his name. Actually, I suppose, although it was a little heavy handed, certainly what you got in that class had an impact on you.

Q: As the papers now show that are coming out, the Communist Party really was a tool of the Kremlin. Not many people doubted it, except those people who belonged and tried to defend it.

COTTER: Apart from that, I can't think of any teachers, at either level, who were particularly inspirational.

Q: What kind of books were you reading?

COTTER: Science fiction. Oh, heavens, in high school what kinds of books did I read? Well, I did then, and do now, read lots of science fiction. I started on that reading the old Edgar Rice Burroughs "John Carter of Mars" series. I was looking through and giving away books the other day to the book sale at the State Department. Let me see, what was I reading in high school, beyond that? That is going to be a hard question to answer. I read when I was younger. There is a whole series of youth adventure books. I can't remember the name and all. There must have been a 12 or 15 volume series in the youth adventure books. I don't remember reading Andy Hardy. My guess is that, apart from reading for pleasure, with the amount of homework we did I'm not sure I read a lot of mind-expanding books.

Q: How about movies? Were movies important?

COTTER: No. I remember when I was small going to Saturday cartoons, and the Saturday serials, but movies have never been of particular interest.

Q: When you were coming out of high school, were you, or the Fathers, or anybody, pointing you toward anything?

COTTER: No. We talked about politics. Because I was in student government, there was an assumption that I would go into politics. Politics in those days, of course, had a different connotation than it does now. Then, it was considered an honorable profession. We had exchange students. Why my parents got into having exchange students, I'm not certain. My guess is they felt it was important for us to meet people from other countries. Generally, you hosted another student when you were in your senior year. My parents decided that the senior year ought to be ours, so when I was a junior, we had an exchange student. He was a boy from Italy, GianCarlo Pallatella. He was a very interesting guy, who cut quite a wide swath through the girls at the time and earned himself quite a reputation. Subsequently, after I left - one of my brothers is four years younger, and the other is six years younger - we had an exchange student from France and an exchange student from Argentina. Then, we took over a student from another family at some point after I was already in college. He was a Brazilian student who had gone to live with another family, and there was an incompatibility, so he came and lived with us. That has turned into a very close relationship between the two families. He is from Sao Paulo. His parents later sent his younger brother up to live with my parents and spend a year in the States studying English. When he came, all three of us were out of high school. My middle brother, who was in kinship with the older son, actually did a double major in college, in Portuguese and economics. At one point after college, he tried to emigrate to Brazil, but because he didn't have a job he couldn't get a residence permit. Therefore, because he didn't have a residence, he couldn't get a job. He spent six or eight months there with the wife before finally giving up and coming back to the States. He still goes back to Brazil at least annually. My parents have been down to visit this family, probably 10 times, and they have been up 10 or 15 times. We have a very close relationship with that family through the program.

Q: For college, where did you go?

COTTER: I went to Georgetown. I applied, actually, only to two places, because I knew I could get into Marquette or The University of Wisconsin. I applied to Yale, and I applied to Georgetown. I didn't get into Yale, but did get into Georgetown.

After my senior year of high school, for my graduation present I went to Italy to spend the summer with GianCarlo Pallatella and family, which was very interesting. I took a little bit of Italian at adult night classes at Marquette University for several months before I went. This was in 1961. I had taken trips in the United States, but that was it. I got my passport, and I got on a jet, which at that point was still quite novel. I flew on the early Boeing 707 to Rome, where GianCarlo and his uncle met me. His uncle lived in Naples, so we took the train down to Naples and then went on to Taranto, where the Pallatella's lived. I spent the summer with them. GianCarlo, although a nice guy, was lackadaisical. He had completed his first year of college, but at the end of the school year he wasn't ready to take his exams. The system they had was that he could take exams in the fall as well. This infuriated his father. So GianCarlo was sentenced to being tutored all summer, so he would be prepared to take the exams. As a result, he wasn't able to travel with me. I spent a month and a half doing what kids in that time and place did in the summer, which was primarily going to the beach during the day and sitting around and drinking in the evening. It was interesting because you went around as a group. In southern Italy, in those days, there was no such thing as dating, certainly. The group was interesting because their ages ranged from 16 to 25. This was a group of people who had known each other, whose families knew each other. We would get up in the morning, go to the beach, come back home, have lunch, and then have a siesta. Then, in the evening, hang out at various places where the kids hung out.

We had planned on, after spending a couple months there, GianCarlo and I traveling together around Italy. That never worked out, because of his tutoring. So there I was, at age 18. I discovered that on my plane ticket, rather than flying straight back, I could go from Rome to Vienna to Berlin to Paris and then fly back to the U.S., for the same price. So, I changed my tickets. I went up to Rome and spent about a week there. Traveling in Europe, I learned that going anywhere alone is not so much fun. I took all the various day tours and night tours and walked my feet off. I found Vienna to be a great place, because of the beer gardens. I thought it was great that at 18 I could go in and order a liter of beer. This was August 1961, when the Berlin Wall went up. The next stop on my trip was supposed to be Berlin. I had to decide what to do. Happily, in those days, you didn't really telephone. All I could do was write, so I didn't have the opportunity to get any counsel from my parents as to whether I should do this or not. I went on to Berlin. Actually, the Wall was still going up. When I was there "Checkpoint Charlie" was very active. I took the various tours in Berlin, and after one of the evening tours, went up to "Checkpoint Charlie" and got through the barricade with my American passport. I went up and chatted with the guys manning the tanks there who weren't any older than I was. Finally, I went on to Paris. Paris is definitely not a town to travel around alone in. I didn't have much money, and by the time I got to the airport to leave Paris, I had spent all my money and had forgotten about airport departure fees. I had to borrow money from the people in line behind me, in order to make the departure fees. That was a great experience.

I had chosen the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown for, among other reasons, the fact that it had no science or math requirement. Science and math were not my favorite subjects in high school. There were very few colleges that didn't have some kind of requirement, and the Foreign Service school didn't. Sometime over the course of that summer, I guess, I decided that the Foreign Service was what I wanted to do.

Q: What was the draft situation then?

COTTER: The draft situation was intense, although it became an issue for me only because, after college, I went to law school. I kept my student deferment.

Q: The draft wasn't a problem if you were going onto college?

COTTER: Right. You had student deferments, as long as you were actually in school.

Q: You were active back in high school, in 1960, in school politics and all that. Did the Kennedy inspiration hit you? Was that around at that time? Kennedy captured a lot of people's imaginations, and also, with "...What can you do for your country?"

COTTER: Not in high school. I graduated in 1961 and Kennedy got elected in 1960, so I would have graduated in the spring of the year he came into office. My family was Republican, so I have never been a fan of the Kennedys. But the spirit of it, certainly during college, I think, was clearly one of the reasons why I decided to join the Foreign Service. In that era public service was an important thing. I think most of us thought seriously about not what we could do for ourselves, but what we could do for our country, and serving - not necessarily Vietnam - but serving in some way, working for the government, was an attractive thing. It was also always attractive to me. My parents were members of the Depression generation, and although my father is a lawyer and has been quite successful, consumption is a thing that worries them. In fact, at various times growing up, we did certain things, and my mother would say, "Well, we were never able to do that at your age." But, the other advantage of government service, in addition to contributing, was the security that it offered, the security of a job and the security of a pensiowhich, I must say, by the time one got toward the end of one's career they were not quite the same as they were when one entered. Nonetheless, it had great benefits. The only time I ever had qualms about my choice of profession was a few years later when I was struggling through as a mid-career officer at the same time that my law school classmates were becoming partners in firms, and they were making multiples of what I was making, or was ever likely to make. I remember thinking a couple times about that, but the trade-off was going back to Milwaukee or some other town and becoming a suburbanite. I mean, I never had any great desire to join a country club and live the suburban lifestyle.

Q: The other thing is, we wouldn't be doing what we are doing right now, because frankly, I don't think a career of that nature would be of great interest. I find this with the Foreign Service: No matter how you put it, I think the career is both interesting and, I think, significant.

COTTER: But, it was clear to me that once I traveled to Europe that summer, there was a lot of the world left to see, and I definitely wanted to see it.

Q: What was the School of Foreign Service like at Georgetown in 1961? Was Father Walsh running it then?

COTTER: No, Father Walsh was gone. There were several prominent figures in those days. One was Father Frank Fadner, who didn't actually run the Foreign Service school, he ran the language school. He was a very flamboyant Jesuit. Another was Dr. Carroll Quigley, who was a very influential history professor and taught freshman history. Quigley wrote a very influential world history text. I still have it and have looked at it various times over the years. He had a nice way of making you think about periods of history. It was interesting, because you really started to see, in those days, 1961 to 1965, the ideological lines forming. Parts of Georgetown were very conservative and very traditional, but you had a number of people, Father McSorley for instance, who was very active early on in the civil rights movement. We had the anti-war movement and a number of things. I must say that I came from a much more conservative upbringing than that. You also had a guy who used to hang around the campus with signs that said the Chinese Communists were listening to us and had radio receivers on us, and we should beware. This period, 1961 to 1965, was still before the real change, both in the anti-war movement and the rise of radicalism. SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) really was a little bit later. In Georgetown, only the Foreign Service school and the language school admitted women (besides the nursing school of course). There was a quota, twenty percent, I think, which caused much unhappiness, because the women tended to be brighter than the men, since competition for them was much tougher. So, we had some women in the Foreign Service school and in the language institute, but the rest of Georgetown was all male.

The Foreign Service school was very rigid. It truly was a trade school. In four years, I had 12 elective credits. This is based on a fifteen credit course load per semester, 12 elective credits in four years. With that said, what they gave you was certainly a very broad preparation, not only for the Foreign Service, but for life. As I looked back on it, I'm not sure that I, at age 18, 19, 20, was any better or much prepared at all to determine what kinds of things I ought to take in order to prepare myself for adult life. We ended up with almost a double or triple major. We had four years of philosophy, four years of economics, four years of history, four years of various kinds of political science, two or four years of language. Actually, if you were Catholic, you had two years of philosophy and two years of theology. If you were non-Catholic, you had four years of philosophy. I did my junior year abroad in Spain. Georgetown was even more rigid on that. The junior year abroad program wasn't sponsored by the Foreign Service school, but was rather the language institute. Their course requirements weren't the same as ours. So all the credits I got in Georgetown's own junior abroad program didn't meet my requirements in the Foreign Service school. As a result, I had to go to summer school when I came back from my junior year abroad in order to meet my requirements.

I don't know how it is today, but I lived in a dorm during my freshman year, and Georgetown in those days was very strict. We had to be back in the dorm at 8:00 in the evening. From 10:30 to 11:00, we had half an hour where we could go out and get something to eat. At 11:00, we had to be back in our dorm, and it was lights out at 12:00. Graduate dorm monitors enforced the rules. That was for freshmen. It eased up a little bit after freshman year, but not that much. Anyhow, I moved off-campus after freshman year. I moved over to an apartment in Arlington along with a couple classmates. The dorm experience is much different from living off-campus, which is almost like being a "day tripper." There was an international law course in my senior year. It actually used the same text book that I used in law school. It was a very good preparation for law school because it was taught in the Socratic way that law school is. By the time I got to law school, I had at least experienced the Socratic method of teaching in law school. Going to Georgetown also had another great advantage: you had access to the Library of Congress, which made it great for doing research.

Being in Washington was fun, although I discovered for the first time that Washington is a lot nicer town if you have enough money to do the things that Washington offers. Because my father was a successful lawyer, he was able to pay my tuition and room and board, and also bought me a used car my sophomore year. But, I was expected to work during summers for spending money. I could ask for money, although the way I had been raised, I didn't like to ask for money. There were quite a few wealthy kids at Georgetown. There was a big clique of wealthy Latin Americans who played polo. A number of them had polo ponies, I remember. Georgetown was also interesting to me because it really was the first time I had been out of the Midwest, and things were a lot different. Where I grew up you wore what are now called chinos.

Q: Cotton, light tan pants?

COTTER: Yes. We wore desert boots, but we wore white socks. Everybody in Milwaukee wore white socks.

Q: Of course you wore white socks.

COTTER: Nobody wore white socks out East. It was interesting because Georgetown was full of Easterners. It was full of Catholic kids from the East who hadn't gotten into Ivy League schools, whether because they weren't bright enough to get into Ivy League schools, or in many cases it was due to quotas. Not so much quotas against Catholics; it's just that if you were from New York, Harvard and Yale had lots of New Yorkers who wanted to go there. Actually, if you were from Utah or Wisconsin, in those days you had a better chance of getting into Harvard than you did if you happened to be from New York. There was a great effort to make Georgetown be Ivy League.

This was the first time I was ever exposed to Easterners, particularly New Yorkers. One of the interesting things to me was that when you would go back home, people would say, "Jews are loud and pushy." In my parents' day, you had lots of Jewish kids from New York who went to the University of Wisconsin because it was a very liberal school and had a good academic reputation. A lot of Jews in those days couldn't get into the Ivy League schools. Of course, when you got out to a place like Georgetown, what you discovered was that it wasn't so much that Jews were loud and pushy, but that New Yorkers were, whether they were Italian, Irish, or Jewish. It is just an entirely different way of being. In Milwaukee, of course, you didn't have much experience with those other New Yorkers. What people would do in that time was characterize the people they knew like that. But Georgetown was a great exposure that I would never have had if I stayed back in Milwaukee. The first year, I went home for Thanksgiving with a classmate who came from Providence, Rhode Island. An Italian kid as I recall. I actually went to an after-hours bar with him. We went to this greasy spoon restaurant, and in the back by the restrooms was a door. You knock on the door, and inside was an after-hours joint. I had never imagined anything like this. You could read books about this, but the thought that places like this actually existed, and there were towns where you knew who was in the Mafia, was a revelation to me. I remember this kid had friends who wanted to become doo-wop singers. They were a group of kids who sang on street corners doing four-part harmony rock and roll. I certainly would have never seen any of this if I had stayed back in Wisconsin.

My junior year in Spain was very interesting. For years, Georgetown had this program at the University of Madrid. The year I was supposed to go, NYU (New York University) cut a deal with the University of Madrid, giving them an exclusive junior year program. Other schools could participate but only through NYU. Georgetown wasn't about to do that, so they had to scramble around to find a place. We ended up going to the University of Barcelona. As a result, because things were up in the air for a long time, we had a very small group - only 12 of us. Although we had our classes all together as a group, they were all in Spanish. A lot of the junior year abroad programs aren't all done in the local language. They study the local language, but classes are in English. Although I'm sure our professors spoke more slowly, and we covered a lot less material than we might have otherwise, it was all done in Spanish. So were our exams. As a result, I learned Spanish very well. I would never have learned that well at FSI (Foreign Service Institute). I lived with a family, a Catalan family. Now, of course, this was Franco days, and Catalan was not permitted to be used, and was not used publicly. I still have a Catalan-English phrase book. This family spoke Catalan in the home and on the weekends, when they would get together with family. But, otherwise, they spoke only Spanish. I took advantage of that.

When we went to Europe - this was in 1963, because I was abroad when I first heard the Beatles and when Kennedy was assassinated - we took a boat across the Atlantic to Calais. Then, as a group, we went to Paris for a few days before heading on down to Spain. Three of our group, me included, decided to hitchhike. So, we hitchhiked from Paris down to the Spanish border and then took a train. Everybody had told us that there were not enough cars in Spain in those days to have much chance of getting a ride. Again, this was in 1963, and you didn't find that many Americans traveling around Europe, especially not hitchhikers. We had no trouble hitchhiking on that trip. We usually ended up getting a ride to a town, and then we had to walk through it, to the other side, and get a ride out. We did a lot of traveling around Spain. We traveled over to Ceuta and Tangier, across the straits of Gibraltar. In those days, Gibraltar was closed.

Q: On the Spanish side.

COTTER: Yes. You could go to Gibraltar, but you couldn't go from Gibraltar across to the Spanish possessions in North Africa. Then, we traveled quite a bit through Europe. You could do amazing things. I remember traveling through Spain and Portugal by train. There were things called "kilometrico" train passes for which you bought a book of so many thousand kilometers. Three of us took a trip around Spain, using the "kilometrico" which had our pictures on it. It had coupons in 100 kilometer segments, so to go from Barcelona to Valencia, you would show up at the train station and turn over the required segments. This was quite cheap. We also tended to stay in very cheap hotels. I remember generally spending fifty cents a night or so, per person. When we got to Lisbon, I remember being shocked that we had to pay a dollar a night to stay in a hotel. In fact, it had bed bugs. The only time in my life where I experienced bed bugs. There were two of us to a room, and somebody came knocking on our door, saying "Don't get in your bed." We said, "Why not?" He said, "You have bugs in it." We threw back the covers, and there were these little black bugs. After sitting up until 2:00 in the morning, I thought, enough of this, and went to bed. The other guy in my room slept all night in a chair. Indeed, the next morning I was covered with welts because of bed bugs. We did Holy Week in Valencia and Sevilla, which is something I would like to do again.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Franco government, or not? Or was it all so new to you that you didn't.

COTTER: Yes, it was all so new. Local people didn't talk much about that. The history books you got, of course, were history books written by Franco's people. Generally, by that time it was portrayed as having fought against Communism, not so much having been aligned with the Nazis, and having saved Spain for Christianity and Catholicism against the "communist hordes" of the Republic. I don't recall it being particularly repressive. But, I think a lot of that had passed. I'm not certain how repressive the Franco government was, per se, unless you knew you didn't like it. Barcelona was a port-of-call for the U.S. Sixth Fleet. Ship visits were very popular with us because there were things you couldn't get in Spain, such as decent toilet paper. European toilet paper in the 1960s was of the crepe paper variety. When there was a ship in, the girls in our group would head down to the port and try to hit up the sailors for dinner, and for things like toilet paper, ketchup, peanut butter, and things that you couldn't get in Spain. They were mostly successful at it, because most of the sailors were usually surprised to see American girls. Barcelona is a nice town. I really do need to go back. Although we have been to Spain, to Madrid, and to other areas, I have not been back there.

Q: Barcelona, particularly after the Olympics, has a subway. It's pretty nice.

COTTER: Of course, Catalan is used now. The only time we heard or saw Catalan in those days was when we took a trip up to Andorra. There were regular weekend bus tours, which were very popular with Spaniards because Andorra was duty free. So, Spaniards would go there and buy pots, pans, and other things not available in Spain in those days. Andorra is another place I haven't been back to that I would like to visit again. We have taken a couple trips in France, staying a week or two. The next time we do this, I think we are going to go and stay near Carcassonne, in the eastern Pyrenees.

Q: Before you went to Spain, what were you getting from Georgetown, from your history teachers and all, about Spain, because of Franco and all that? Did that intrude?

COTTER: No. By the end of my sophomore year, where would we have gotten in world history? I don't think we had gotten up to the 20th century.

Q: While you were at Georgetown, you had been in student government in high school - did you get involved in Georgetown politics, campus politics?

COTTER: No, I didn't get involved in campus politics. In my freshman year, I suppose I could have. Sophomore year, once I moved off-campus, it was much more difficult to get involved in student politics. I also didn't continue with drama, which is interesting. The reason is because they did musicals. One of the things I am not, is musical. I have absolutely no ear at all. I like music, but I can't reproduce it. I went and tried out for one of the musicals, but I couldn't sing worth a hoot, so I didn't get the part. I never did continue with drama.

Q: Was Bill Clinton there at the time you were there? I can't remember.

COTTER: He graduated a couple years after me. I think he was a sophomore when I was a senior. I would have loved, over the past several years, to say I was a friend of Bill's. He was in student politics, I think, from the beginning. But again, junior year abroad took me away for a year. By the time I came back during my senior year and had done summer school, I was only marginally there. After Georgetown, I went to law school.

Q: Where?

COTTER: The University of Michigan. I had decided by my senior year that I wanted to go into the Foreign Service. I was at the Foreign Service school, and many people gravitated toward the Service. I had sort of wandered serendipitously into some of these things, in that I took international relations rather than the international commercial focus Georgetown also offered. Many of us took the Foreign Service exam.

Q: I would have thought there would have been Foreign Service graduates of Georgetown, who had come over in the evening to sit around and pass on Foreign Service stories.

COTTER: If there were, I didn't do it. That would have been too serious. I was not that serious a student beyond the classroom.

Q: I found that probably the preparation that a great number of our fellow officers had done, particularly in high school, was majoring in sports and girls.

COTTER: I think that is probably my case. I was not a terribly serious student. I am blessed with being bright enough that I didn't have to be. Although it had an impact. I applied to Michigan Law School and Wisconsin Law School. I originally didn't get into Michigan. One of my father's partners, who was a graduate of Michigan, wrote an appeal on my behalf, and I got in. I ended up graduating cum laude. Anyhow, I went to law school thinking that I still wanted to join the Foreign Service, but if the Foreign Service didn't work out, I had something to fall back on.

Q: You were talking about how you got into Michigan Law...

COTTER: I thought that if the Foreign Service didn't work out, I could practice law. In my senior year of college, when we were talking about, thinking about the Foreign Service, I can't remember the exact issue, but there were some flaps that had become public about frustrations in the State Department. I recall somebody complaining about having been assigned to checking the electrical outlets in the State Department building. There was a significant amount of unhappiness. So I thought that I might find that I didn't really like working for the State Department. I ended going to the University of Michigan Law School, which is a great law school, one of the four or five - along with Harvard, Yale, University of Chicago, and the University of Virginia - top law schools in the country. It has also changed enormously. In those days, what you were taught and what you focused on were fairly standard courses. Now, of course, they have branched off into a great variety of advocacy activities that didn't exist then. I was there from 1965 to 1968, which was the time of the SDS.

Q: Could you explain what SDS was?

COTTER: Student Democratic Society, is that what it was?

Q: Students for a Democratic Society.

COTTER: Which was the radical anti-war movement. It actually originated at the University of Michigan. Blissfully, those of us at law school, who were all career oriented, missed out on the whole thing or weren't interested in it. Most of us were interested in keeping our student deferments for the maximum time possible. I must say, I sympathize a lot with Bill Clinton, because I never met anybody in university or law school who actually wanted to go to Vietnam. Everybody I knew did everything they could to avoid it. I don't think most of us would have left the country, but I think we did everything we could, legally. That included, if you had an uncle or a father who knew somebody on the draft board and could get an exemption, you certainly did it. If you had an uncle or father who was connected to the Army Reserve, and you could get into the Reserve and do six months active duty and then get off, you did it. This is one of the criticisms of the war, of course. We were all certainly upper middleclass, and it was easier for us to avoid the draft than it was for poor children. I must say, in all honesty, at that point I didn't much care about that. I was perfectly happy to take my exemption. I should go back and say I took the Foreign Service exam in my senior year of college, like many in my class. In those days, if I remember correctly, it was a two day exam. There were also elective sections, corresponding to the various "cones" in the Service. Although the concept of coning didn't make sense before you came in, you had to choose which elective sections of the exam to take, depending on what your interests were. As I recall, I took the economic and the political elective part. The third part was general knowledge, and the fourth part was a morning of essays. I went off to law school after taking the exam. Then I was informed in the fall of my freshman year at law school that I had passed the written exam, and was invited to come take the oral exam, which I did in Chicago. In those days the oral exam was a two hour interview by three officers. I took it in Chicago at the Federal Building. You answered questions for two hours.

Q: Do you recall some of the things you were asked?

COTTER: There were questions about Spain and what I thought was going to happen after the death of Franco, or after Franco passed from the scene. This would have been 1966. The one question I remember best was the one area in which I was weakest. Science and Math weren't strong points, but the one real shortcoming of Georgetown's Foreign Service school was that there were absolutely no fine arts courses. You had no art classes at all. Nor was my high school strong in fine arts. One question put to me was, "You are in France, and you are sitting around with a group of French intellectuals, who tell you that America is an intellectual wasteland, and you don't have any musical composers who are well known. What would you say to that?" I was caught flat-footed, mumbled something about George Gershwin and danced around it. At the end of the exam, they told me I had passed, but they noted I was very weak on cultural matters and might want to spend some effort to improve. I don't remember any other specific questions. They must have asked me something about Italy, since I had been there. The examiners had your biography, and then you did two statements, as I recall - an autobiographical essay, and then you wrote an essay on why you wanted to join the Foreign Service. So they knew quite a bit about you. I thought it was an interesting exam. I had been prepared a little bit for that kind of thing because the oral exam Georgetown required for graduation. So the Foreign Service exam, was not the first time I had been through that kind of traumatic ordeal, which makes a big difference. I was lucky, too, in that I was in law school, and while I wanted to join the Foreign Service, it wouldn't be the end of the world if I didn't. Again, one of the important things to me when dealing with exams is not having too much at stake. The more you have at stake, the more nervous you get. So, I did pass the oral. Then they had to do the security check and several other steps. In the spring of freshman year in law school, I got a letter saying there was an entering Foreign Service class that summer that I was invited to join. I had no idea how any of this worked. I had no idea how the State Department worked at all, or how the Foreign Service worked, except I was invited to join this class. Well, I didn't want to do that, so I wrote back and said, "Look, I am finishing my first year of law school, and I really would like to go ahead and get my degree."

Q: How many years was that, law school?

COTTER: Three. I had two more years. I asked whether there was any way I could postpone coming in until I was finished with law school. I got back a letter saying that there was, and they would defer my entry. I just had to keep them posted on my grades. What I found out later was that they brought me in as a Foreign Service Reserve officer. I wasn't sworn in, I never showed up. But, if you look back on my personnel records, my date of entry is 4/66, something like that, although I didn't actually come on duty until 1968. So, in the biographic register, I was an FSR-8 for two and one-half years. At that point I knew I was in the Foreign Service, which again made law school a lot easier. Law school then, and I'm sure it is not any better now, is a real pressure cooker because one's ability to get an interview with a law firm is almost solely based on one's grade point average. At Michigan, where law firms from around the country came to interview students, they would usually have a cut-off. That cut-off might be a 3.0 or it might be a 3.25 grade point average. If your grade point average was below that, you didn't even get the interview. The other problem with law school is that one third of your total average is determined freshman year. So what you end up with is very much defined by your freshman year. At Michigan, in those days, all the freshman courses but one were full year courses, with no exams except the final exam. Final exams, again, in law school in those days, were two to four hour affairs with anywhere from two to four case study questions. The pressure and tension by the time spring of freshman year rolled around was palpable.

There were two things that I discovered in law school. One was that the study discipline I developed in high school got me all the way through law school. That's one of the reasons I still give that high school money, because it does an excellent job preparing students for later academic pursuits. One of the key things about law school is that you can't leave studying until the end of a term.

The second thing I learned was that there was very little international law exposure beyond a basic course or two. When I graduated, for instance, and looked around to interview, the only law firm in the country that had an international law practice was a firm called Baker & McKenzie, out of Chicago, which is still around and is still one of the largest law firms. But it was the only international law firm of any stature around. Companies also didn't hire for international staffs. I remember interviewing with Chrysler for their legal staff, and saying that I was interested in international law. The answer was that they didn't hire international lawyers, they hired people for their legal staff, and an opportunity might arise for one to do international law, or it might not. Nowadays, of course, things have changed radically, in the sense that every international corporation has an international law staff, as do most of the major law firms. Michigan now has a whole series of courses and programs on international law and actually recently started a journal of international law. In those days, you had a course in international law that you could take. There were a number of students from other countries there for a master's in comparative law, as well as a number of visiting foreign professors. I managed to do two different seminars in this field. One was with a visiting Mexican professor, Cesar Sepulveda, for which I wrote a paper on the Mexican oil expropriations, which had taken place in the 1930s.

Then, my senior year, there was a visiting professor from Chile. A group of us worked with him on a project to compare what was then the new United States Uniform Commercial Code to Chile's civil law commercial code. Also, during the summer between my second and third years, I traveled to Central America under the auspices of the Inter-American Judicial Council. It is one of the organizations that comes under the OAS, the Organization of American States. The Central American common market had come into existence just a few years before, only to disappear with the soccer war between Honduras and El Salvador a few years later. But in the mid-1960s, there was great hope for economic integration in Central America. Four of us from Michigan participated as observers in a conference in San Jose, Costa Rica, on Central American integration for lawyers. The theory behind this was that the treaty of Central American economic integration had been done, essentially, by economists. The idea was that if they didn't get lawyers on board for it, it was never going to go anywhere. So, they had young lawyers from each of the Central American countries and observers from Panama and our Michigan group to look at economic integration in Central America. It was a nice program that also allowed me to keep my Spanish up. That year, Michigan started a new journal called The Journal of Law Reform. I served on the first editorial board.

I worked during the summer. Summer jobs are interesting. One summer I delivered pies for a local pie company in Rinkwankee. It was a great job. I drove a delivery truck and delivered pies to restaurants and little packaged pies to stores. The best summer job I had was with the Chicago Northwestern Railroad. I was a fireman, working mostly switch engines. That was great. I actually got to drive switch engines and switch off cars. One summer I worked construction part of the summer and worked for a janitorial service, cleaning banks in the evening. I emptied wastebaskets and polished floors in the banks.

That brings us back to the student deferment issue because I had managed to keep a student deferment as long as I was in law school. When I graduated, I was 25. Now, draft eligibility lasted to age 26. If you could make it on student deferments until you were 26, they wouldn't draft you. But, almost all of us, if we completed school in the standard time, graduated from law school at age 25, which made us prime candidates for the draft. This was 1968, the height of our involvement in Vietnam. Two things happened to me. One thing was that in my senior year of law school, I developed a herniated disk in my back from which I suffered very much through that spring. The second thing that I did early on was to contact the State Department and ask if it offered job-related deferments. The answer was, "No, you have to sort that out with your draft board." Well, I suppose there were some draft boards in the country that might have understood about the Foreign Service, but the draft board in Milwaukee was not one of them. In any event, right after I got out of law school I went into the hospital for back surgery. While I was in the hospital, I got my notice to report for my draft physical exam about a week and a half after I got out of the hospital. So there I was, barely able to walk. The physical was very interesting. The first thing I did was try to explain that I had just gotten out of the hospital from a back operation. I realized that I should tell the doctor that, not the guy sitting at the first desk, but the doctor and the actual physical was the last step. I remember one of the first things was you talked with a sergeant. He asked me how many years of education I had. So, I counted the years to myself, eight years of grade school, four years of high school, four years of college, and three years of law school, and I told him that I had 19 years of education. He said, "Come on." So, I had to go through this so he would believe me. He looked at all the records, then we took intelligence tests. This went on for a couple of hours. Finally, we got to the doctor. You are in a room with about 25 others. They come around, look at your eyes, look at your ears. I remember we all had to drop our pants. I can't remember what the devil they were checking for, at that point.

Q: Probably checking for hernias. They always look up your rectum.

COTTER: They may have, I don't remember. Anyhow, at that point, the doctor sees this six inch long incision. The doctor said, "This is a waiver." My only regret was that they hadn't discovered this several hours earlier and saved me a lot of time. So, I got a 1-Y deferment. 4-F is a permanent disability; 1-Y was for temporary disability. If you showed up at a physical with a broken arm or broken leg, you would get a 1-Y, which was good until your physical problem was cured, and then you were subject to being drafted. In point of fact, at least at that point, they certainly never came back to me and said, "Your back is healed enough." So my guess is that most people who got 1-Y were saved. In any event, it saved me for the time being. I took two bar exams during that summer, the bar exam in the District of Columbia, which was a very sui generis affair, unlike any others. Nowadays bar exams are standardized, there is a nationwide test, and then you have a few specific questions for each state. I didn't pass the DC bar, but I did pass the Wisconsin bar. I remain a member of the Wisconsin bar even now. I entered the Foreign Service in the class of September 1968. This was a class that was largely USIS [U.S. Information Service] officers, rather than State officers. Again, by the time I entered, I had not learned any more about what the State Department was like. When I showed up I may have had a law degree, but I was one of the most naive recruits the State Department ever had. Nowadays, when you join the Foreign Service, you come in on a TDY (temporary duty) status. In those days, you got nothing. You came to Washington, and you joined the Foreign Service. How you lived was your problem. I remember coming with a cashier's check from my bank in Milwaukee in the amount of $400 or perhaps $1,000 and depositing it in the American Security Bank only to be told that I couldn't draw on it for 10 days until the check cleared. I had nothing until then. In those days, you could get an emergency loan at the Foreign Service Lounge. I got a $50 loan to see me through until I was able to access my checking account. The other thing that was tough was the fact that you don't draw your first paycheck for a month. I remember that being a very dicey time for many of us. You can see in this the remnants of the way it was when most people who joined the Foreign Service had independent means. The thought that some people were going to come in who didn't have the money to support themselves really had not been taken into account by then.

Q: I came in in 1955. As soon as we took the oath and we were officially on board, we all trouped down to the Credit Union and took out an emergency loan, and I was married.

COTTER: Which would have been even tougher. There simply wasn't any mechanism there to support you at all. I remember the other difficulty this system caused was that in those days most posts were still unfurnished, particularly in Latin America, where a number of my classmates went. So you ended up with people coming out of basic training, and then language training and going to a post where they had to bring all their furniture and appliances and had no money at all to do it with. It made it really awfully difficult for a good number of the young people. I can't remember now, but I should dig out the documents and see how big my class was. It was not that large a class. As I say, there were mostly USIS officers. There were two other lawyers in it, one of whom had come in on the same kind of deferred entering that I had come in on. I never did find out how that worked. A few years later that kind of program had ended. At least, I have not heard of people who were able to pass the exams and then defer their entry. There isn't anything that stands out about the A-100 class. The head of it was a guy named John Day. The main thing I remember about A-100 was when the assignments came out, because, lo and behold, I was assigned to CORDS (Civilian Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Program) in Vietnam. What is interesting was I was the only member of my class to be assigned there.

Q: That's very interesting, because I would have thought that is when you would have been "all scooped up."

COTTER: In the class before me, every unmarried male official was assigned to CORDS. I don't know whether my class was different simply because the previous class had been so large it had taken up all the training space. But in any event, I was the only person assigned to CORDS. The nice thing about that was I won the worst post pool. We all had put in five dollars in the pool. The finalists were me and a guy who was going to Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Everybody agreed that I had won the pool. I remember complaining to John Day about my assignment. He said he had recommended me for it because he thought it was a great opportunity. I didn't know whether I should thank him for the consideration, as I would just as soon not have been recommended for this high honor.

My first reaction to the assignment was, "Gee whiz. I can't go to Vietnam, because I am physically unable. I have a bad back." I remember telling this to personnel. They sent me to a doctor, who examined me and found no reason not to send me to Vietnam. I had no compunctions then or later about the war. I think, basically, we won the war on the ground, but we lost it back here. If anything, my compunctions were about the physical danger one went through. But, certainly, I didn't have any problem supporting American policy there. I entered the Foreign Service in September 1968. FSI didn't have a Vietnamese language class starting until January 1969, so, for the interim, I was assigned to INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research), to the Korea desk. I spent a couple of months reading Foreign Broadcast Information Service material on North Korea looking for common words and phrases. If I had to do that for more than a couple months, I probably would have jumped out a window, but it was interesting for a while. Then, in January 1969, I started Vietnamese language training. In those days, FSI was in Rosslyn, but Vietnamese training was in an entirely separate building. It was in the River Towers complex, now called River House, I believe.

Q: Yeah, you were down in the garage.

COTTER: Yes, they had converted part of the parking garage into classrooms. Later on, having experienced the classrooms in SA-3 (State Annex 3), which were bad enough, I realized how bad the classes in the parking garage were. You were either boiling or freezing, and they were tiny rooms. There were six of us to a class.

Q: Sometimes we had to be evacuated because the exhaust fumes got to a certain level, so they had to get everybody out.

COTTER: That's right. The only thing left in Rosslyn from those days, I think, is Tom Sarris' restaurant. There used to be a little shopping center where the USA Today buildings are now that had a small grocery store in it run by Koreans, a pharmacy, and a dry cleaners. Actually, it is interesting about Rosslyn, because when I first went to Georgetown in 1961, that area was different and so was Rosslyn. M Street had a bunch of biker bars, and there used to be regular fights between the Georgetown students and the locals. Rosslyn was nothing but a number of low-rise buildings, pawn shops and such. There was also a bowling alley. I had a friend who was in the next room in my freshman year at Georgetown who was a very good bowler. He actually flunked out of Georgetown after freshman year because he spent all of his time bowling. He gave me one of his bowling bowls that I still own. It was in storage, unfortunately, while I was in Turkmenistan because there actually was a bowling alley there. Rosslyn really has changed since I did Vietnamese training there.

I like FSI language training very much. I have met people who don't like it. I think FSI does a great job, but you have to buy into its program. I have been through this now for a couple different languages: Turkish, little bit of Russian, and French. If you let FSI do to you what it wants to do to you, you will come out of it able to speak the language. You certainly won't be able to speak fluently, but you will definitely have the basis upon which you can build. But you have to be patient. This means starting out with several weeks of just phonetics. You sit there repeating phrases for several hours in classes, which to a lot of people gets very old, very quickly. The FSI people know what they are doing. Even in those days they did, although the courses have gotten a lot better over the years. In the end, if you have a basic language facility, you can speak the language. I remember being very frustrated with Vietnamese because it is a tonal language. I think I mentioned that music is not my thing, and I have always been pretty tone deaf. I remember being very frustrated; for months in class I couldn't hear a tone to save my soul. All of a sudden, about five months into it, lo and behold, I could not only hear, but I could reproduce those tones. Then you say to yourself that you don't know what was so difficult about it. It's the same thing with some of the pronunciations. Americans don't seem to be able to pronounce "nguyen." You just have to learn how to do it. It all can be learned and memorized. I suppose, if you are a young child, you could learn it a lot easier. Anyway, I did ten months of Vietnamese language. Interspersed with that we did lots of things because, of course, this was not only a language school, but it was the Vietnam Training Center. I remember we went off for a week to Front Royal, VA for deep immersion, where we actually played an exercise of dealing with the Viet Cong. They separated us into different groups. One group of villagers, one group of Americans in Vietnam, doing what we were going to do, and a third group of Viet Cong, and we actually simulated working in villages, using the tools we would have in CORDS while the Viet Cong tried to thwart us. They had even organized ambushes. I remember we had little cards for all sorts of things. If you took so many casualties, then that day's mission wasn't accomplished. You had to decide what forces you would have along with you. When there was an ambush, they would compare your forces versus the other ambushing forces. It was very interesting game play, I thought. At the end, those playing the villagers would talk about what decision they had made and why. I thought it was a very successful effort at this kind of gaming. I also remember that was the only time I ever played a full game of Risk, which is a world board game that goes on for days. It is a series of set plays where each player starts out with a part of the world and a certain number of forces. Then, you plan to move those forces or have alliances or not, and sort of have a play every half-hour. The reason this was the only time I ever played it was because I had never been in a place to have two or three days in the evenings to dedicate to it. We also went to Fort Bragg for several days of weapons familiarization, as well as having the opportunity to shoot at AID's (Agency for International Development's) public safety school in the Car Barn at the D.C. end of Key Bridge.

Q: This was, of course, almost a year, by the time you finished, after Tet. What was your attitude and what was the group's attitude you were with? How did you see things going out in Vietnam at that time?

COTTER: Well, of course, we would get lots of information during the various parts of the program. Clearly, what was given to us by the government was not what one read in The Washington Post. It was more realistic, more correct in some ways, although almost certainly biased. That was a very traumatic period. When did Johnson resign?

Q: It had to be 1968. In the spring of 1968.

COTTER: So, he resigned, I guess... Oh, it had to have been before the elections. Nixon had been elected by the time I came in. There were many anti-war marches. I remember going with a couple classmates to the big anti-war march down on the Mall, and around the White House, with candles, all night. I remember a number of us came to class wearing black armbands to protest against the war. We were told in no uncertain terms that black armbands were not accepted parts of clothing at the Vietnam Training Center. It is hard for me to separate what I thought about all of this before I went, as opposed to what I thought about it after being there. My guess is, I was probably against the war by that time, although I certainly wasn't against the war later on, after I actually had been there. Otherwise, I don't think I would have participated in the march. It is always possible that I participated in the march because everybody else did it, and it was the thing to do. Even though a number of us wore black armbands, there was not a great rebellion in the ranks against the war. I think we probably did it out of boredom, more than anything. The other thing I recall about language training, and about going to Vietnam, was the great mix of people in the training. There were some military officers and a number of junior AID officers, in addition to the junior State Department officers. There was also a smattering of second and third-tour officers. I remember two colleagues, who shall go nameless, who found themselves in the Vietnamese language training and flunked out intentionally. Their view was that if they had to go to Vietnam, they were going to go and get it over with. They sure didn't want to add a year of language study to the whole process. Plus, and they were absolutely correct in this, if they took Vietnamese, they were going to be assigned out in the boonies somewhere. If they were going to have to go to Vietnam, they wanted to work with the embassy. Indeed, they happily flunked out of Vietnamese, went to Vietnam early, and worked in CORDS headquarters in Saigon, which was not a bad thing. From my perspective, even looking back on it, I liked what I did. I liked the opportunity to learn Vietnamese, and in hindsight, I have only served once in a country where I didn't speak the language. That was my last tour, in Turkmenistan, because I didn't have enough Russian to really function. I can't see living in a country where I don't speak the language, plus language is a great window into culture and personal relationships. Even if you don't take area studies, you can't speak a language without understanding the culture, to some extent, of what it is you are speaking. I remember in Vietnamese, for instance, there is a word for "I" but Vietnamese people usually wouldn't use it because their existence is in relationship to those around them. If you are speaking to your brother, you refer to yourself in the third person as younger or older brother. The same with a sister; you are younger sister or older sister. To adults, it is: mother, father, aunt, and uncle. Foreigners use "I" but I think the Vietnamese very seldom use "I." The whole set of relationships is much less complicated than Japanese, but it gives you an idea. Vietnamese is actually a great introduction to Asian languages, because it is written in Western characters, so you don't have the problem you have with Chinese or Japanese. Reading it isn't that difficult, yet you also have the tones. Another interesting thing to me about studying Vietnamese was the great influence of Chinese culture in different vocabulary words. This is particularly true in the literary Vietnamese, and in newspapers, where you find different vocabulary with a lot more Chinese words. So I liked FSI, even from that first experience. I thought the whole Vietnam Training Center operation, for its time and place, was quite successful. I remember getting lots of lectures on the whole issue of counter-terrorism or counter-guerilla warfare, which we were struggling very much with. I remember having different reps come in who had been veterans of the Malaysian conflict.

They came in and talked about how one deals successfully with guerilla wars. I thought FSI gave us as good a preparation as you can get for something that was a very strange experience. We also, in addition to the week up at Front Royal, went down to Fort Bragg for a week for weapons training, which was very useful. When I was in grade school, I took a shooting course. The other day I came upon my NRA (National Rifle Association) certificate, having passed rifle training in an NRA sponsored course. There was a rifle range in the basement of the local high school where we had classes on a weekend. The rifles were M1 Garands that had been rebored for .22s. So you had a big, old M-1, but rifled for .22 calibers. Of course, the instructors were all World War II veterans. So we really went through the whole drill of range etiquette, which to me over the years has been a very useful thing. In Vietnam I acquired a Walther P-38, with Nazi stampings on it, that came out of Cambodia from the large Viet Cong weapon stockpiles there. A lot of this stuff filtered back to guys in MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam), who then analyzed it. Of course, some of the things ended up on the market. I remember buying this Walther P-38 with the Nazi stampings. I now also have an old Winchester Model 893 that I bought in Chile. I have never owned many guns, but I enjoy shooting. Over the years, I have gone out shooting with the Marines at most posts. Knowing shooting range etiquette is very important. But, we went to Fort Bragg and fired a variety of weapons and did some orienteering work with compasses, and while there also did some role playing. By the time I headed off, at the end of 1969, I was pretty well prepared for Vietnam.

Q: End of 1969?

COTTER: End of 1969, yes. I arrived in Vietnam Christmas Eve, 1969.

Q: You arrived in Vietnam. Tell me how you were received, where you went, and what it was like.

COTTER: Okay. Actually, I was going to mention before I got to that, the trip there was interesting, for a number of reasons. I mentioned I arrived there on Christmas Eve. One of the things that happened on the way there, something that has stayed with me, is that while I was traveling to Vietnam, one of my close friends, and the only one, I must say, of my close friends who was killed in Vietnam, was a rear seat in a Navy fighter. Anyhow, they sent most of us who were going to be in CORDS, to Taiwan. On route to Taiwan, I stopped in Japan. I took a train from Tokyo to Hiroshima and spent a day seeing the town. I had reservations for a night train back to Tokyo. I had a long wait in the Hiroshima station. I was sitting in the train station, reading a book. All of a sudden, I felt this hand on my shoulder and someone talking to me in Japanese. He obviously had been drinking. I studiously ignored him and read my book, everybody else in the room studiously ignoring the whole thing. The next thing I knew, I smelled something burning. The guy next to me brushed my head. It turned out that this young kid, who was obviously inebriated, had put a cigarette to my hair, and the person next to me put it out. I continued sitting there reading my book, trying to ignore what was going on. The next thing I know, a couple of policemen approached. They discovered I couldn't speak any Japanese, so they went away and returned with an English-speaking colleague. They expressed their regret about this incident, and so forth. I gave them my passport, which, of course, was a diplomatic passport. There was much discussion, after which I was taken off to a VIP room and put there until the train left. About a year later, I was down in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam when I got a cable from the embassy in Saigon passing along a query from Embassy Tokyo as to whether I was the Michael Cotter who on such and such date was in Hiroshima Airport and had been attacked by someone. It turns out that the individual's father had gone to Embassy Tokyo with money for compensation. I had Saigon send a cable back, saying, "Yes, I indeed was that Michael Cotter, and I appreciated the thoughtfulness, and would they accept the money and give it to a charity on my behalf?" I thought it was an interesting anecdote. I can imagine how perturbed that Japanese father was when this incident occurred, and how it upset the Japanese police when they discovered that it was an American diplomat.

Anyhow, we went to Taiwan and looked at cooperatives down by Tai Chung, a very interesting trip. It was an exposure to how imaginatively the Taiwanese, even then, were raising a whole variety of products, and an interesting visit to Taiwan itself.

So, I got to Saigon on Christmas Eve. I had requested to be assigned to the Mekong Delta. I had felt that having invested 10 months in Vietnamese language training, I didn't really want to go somewhere where there were lots of American troops, and whatever development work we were doing in central Vietnam was going to be clearly secondary to the war effort. I don't recall now whether it was in Saigon or when I got down to Can Tho, which was the principal town in the Fourth Region and the Delta, that I discovered I was assigned to Kien Hoa Province. We had a week's orientation in Saigon. I arrived in Can Tho on New Year's Eve, 1969. There is something that passes for a BOQ (Bachelor Officers' Quarters) there. I don't know what it was before, some kind of a hotel. Right next to it was a cesspool. Every evening there was a movie on the roof of the BOQ. My first night in Can Tho, I was sitting on the roof of the BOQ, watching of all things Night of The Living Dead, watching tracers, and hearing the 105mm howitzers in the distance. You feel very alone in a situation like that. It is your first tour, and none of the colleagues I had studied Vietnamese with ended up in the Delta. I don't think this was like showing up for a first tour in the normal embassy, where you sort of walk into an extended family, but to end up in Con Tho, South Vietnam in the middle of a war. Anyhow, I went onto Ben Tre in Kien Hoa Province. Now, Kien Hoa is a province that is between two of the major outlets of the Mekong River. The river has three major outlets to the South China Sea. Kien Hoa is between the two northernmost. It is bordered on the north by Dinh Thuong Province, the capital of which is the major city in the northern Delta. Kien Hoa has been called birthplace of the Viet Cong, and Madam Binh, who was the Viet Cong foreign minister in those days and later an official in the northern government, came from Kien Hoa province. The capital Ban Tre had been made famous in the Tet Offensive of 1968, when it was described as the town we had to destroy in order to save. I was assigned to be the civic affairs advisor on one of the district advisory teams. District advisory teams in the CORDS and the MACV program consisted usually of just military personnel, because there really weren't enough civilians for all of those districts. Where we could, we had civilian officers from the State Department or AID in some cases. The Ben Tre district team was located in a compound. South Vietnam is divided into provinces which are further subdivided into districts and into villages. Normally, the district advisory team would sit in the principal village of the district, but in the case of Ben Tre, since that was the province capital, the district headquarters were set in a compound about three kilometers outside the capital. It was simply a bermed compound about 50 meters square with a number of buildings. Our quarters were sort of built into the side of the berm.

Q: Berm being a ?

COTTER: A dirt wall, with a ditch like a moat outside of it, where you dug the dirt. I think the thing was probably 10 feet high. That was surrounded by open rice fields. Beyond that about 1 km away were dense coconut groves. Kien Hoa did, and probably still does, grow a lot of coconuts. I also had some great seafood while I was there, particularly shrimp. The other interesting thing about that district was that there was a famous individual, at least famous at that time, popularly called the Coconut Monk. This fellow was a Buddhist monk who lived on a boat in the branch of the Mekong between Kien Hoa and Dinh Thuong. His boat was tied up to an island, where he had a temple and a village. He was quite well known because there were a lot of young men whom he accepted as adherents; young men who were trying to get away from both the Viet Cong and the government's draft. Every once in a while, the government would make an effort to do a conscription raid on the island. It always produced an enormous protest. But, by the time I arrived, they pretty much left the Coconut Monk alone. He was nominally under government control, but in fact, he pretty much ran his own village.

Q: Was he the man who leaned against the big jar? He never slept lying down, or something like that?

COTTER: I wouldn't know that. I went over a couple times and called on him. He was an eccentric fellow, but quite successful in what he did.

Q: I don't remember. I met him once.

COTTER: You got to Kien Hoa, by the way, by taking Highway 4 down from Saigon to My Tho; then you had to take a ferryboat. There was no bridge that went into Kien Hoa itself, and, indeed, to get to a number of the districts you had to take ferryboats because there weren't bridges. If there had been bridges across some of the large canals, they had been destroyed over the course of time. The interesting thing about Vietnam was how much - and I've seen this since in the Foreign Service, not so much in our service as in other services - comment there is about the tail-to-tooth ratio, i.e. the size of the support system that we have overseas compared to other embassies. The fact is the size of that support mechanism allows us to work a significant part of the working day. In places like Zaire, with some of the other smaller embassies, the diplomats often had to fend for themselves, spending 50% of their time simply getting things done and staying alive, and thus only able to work about half the time. Well, in Vietnam, in the boonies this was true in spades. We spent an enormous amount of time simply managing housekeeping things. For example, radio watch. We monitored the radio 24 hours a day. One or two nights a week - there were seven of us on the team, so probably one night a week - you had radio watch all night. Then there was a daily trip up to the province capital to get mail and supplies. That would take one or two people and generally consume half a day. There were a number of other regular housekeeping chores as well.

Essentially, my responsibilities were to distribute AID commodities. We distributed corrugated roofing, soy-enhanced dry milk, and managed a number of other AID projects. One of the interesting projects, the results of which I would like to go back to Vietnam to see, was an effort to completely change the pig population. Pork is a very important food in Vietnam. The Vietnamese pigs were these potbellied, black pigs that had a lot more fat than meat. AID introduced a Western, much meatier pig. Over the time I was in Vietnam, you actually saw a significant change in the quality of the pig stock. It would be interesting to be back 25 years later to see what kind of pigs are there now.

The other main responsibility I had was doing the HES, the infamous Hamlet Evaluation Survey, which got a lot of bad publicity in the U.S. press, which suggested that it was a way to encapsulate the war in statistics that really bore no relation to reality. We did a monthly HES. We had a questionnaire for each village in our district. Then there was a much more detailed, quarterly HES. The questions were, for example, who controls the area, whether the government had control at all times, daytime or never. You filled in the appropriate box. Actually, like most of these statistical things, it was quite good if used properly. It wasn't very good when all that got published were the statistics that said, "Eighty percent was under government control," without any explanation. Filling out the HES could be difficult, because it always put you in conflict with the Vietnamese district chief. Obviously, his reputation and promotion possibilities weren't enhanced by the fact that some of his villages were under Viet Cong control. The worse he showed up on the HES, the unhappier he was. This always produced a certain amount of conflict. In the first district I was in, Ben Tre, we could visit about half of the villages in 1970. The other half of the villages we couldn't get to; they were Viet Cong-controlled all the time. I recall one group of villages that we visited once a week. The villages themselves were quite secure, but the road to them was very dangerous. It was a dirt road on which the Viet Cong regularly placed mines at night. Several times a week the motorcycle-pulled little rickshaws that were used for transportation would arrive at the compound with dead bodies in them. The district senior advisor made it a practice for a team of us to go down there once a week. There was a South Vietnamese Popular Forces unit, like a local militia, located about half-way down the road, whose job it was, in theory, to keep the road clear. However, they much preferred staying in their compound at night to going out and patrolling to keep the VC from laying mines. So, we traveled down the road once a week on the theory that if the American advisors went down the road regularly, the Popular Forces had more incentive to check the road. We would drive down this in a jeep with a layer of sandbags on the floorboards and under the seats covered by a layer of flak vests. We would ride on top of this. My successor, who was an Army captain, was killed on that road when that jeep hit a mine. He was thrown out of it, and landed on his neck. There was a certain amount of danger involved. I spent about five months in that district, and then I went down to...

Q: Well, in the first place, just to get this, you were in Vietnam in 1969...

COTTER: Let's say, from the beginning of 1970 until the summer of 1971.

Q: How did you find you were received, working with the military?

COTTER: Quite well. The military, at both the district and the province level, were happy to have someone do things like the HES and the other civilian things we did, plus I was the only Vietnamese speaker on the team. I was received quite well. The province senior advisor, Buck Kotzebue, was a retired Army colonel, who was working for AID as the province senior advisor. He and his team were quite good. I had mentioned that I wanted to go to the Delta because there weren't any American troops there. The U.S. Ninth Division had been located at Tan An, a town between My Tho and Saigon. When I arrived at the beginning of 1970, the Ninth Division had, in essence, pulled out. The base at Tan An still had a few people disposing of things. It worked quite well for us because we could send up foraging teams from the district to pick up all sorts of things. But, the military were quite accepting. I enjoyed that relationship. You had to learn how the military did things: radio protocols, how to bring in helicopters, and many other things. If you weren't able to do that, my guess is that you would have had a much harder time. We clearly were living in a military situation, and we operated by military rules more than State Department rules. The military guys out there sort of admired someone who would go out to the villages and do various things, because most of them were much more reluctant to mix. For instance, we would eat bologna six different ways when there was great food to eat out locally, simply because these guys weren't prepared to eat out. I remember in Vietnamese training, they went through a long explanation of the fish that lived in the fish pond, and how you could eat them. One of the other innovations we had brought to Vietnam was building latrines over fish ponds, which was much more sanitary than what people had done in most of these areas before. Well, of course, we also introduced fish into the fish ponds. The fish would eat what dropped into the pond. There was a big discussion at FSI about whether you could eat these fish. We were assured that indeed the fish would assimilate whatever they took in and were perfectly healthy to eat. In my case, that was very useful, because when you would go out to villages, particularly in the morning, they would serve you a breakfast, which tended to be a bowl of rice with a fish on top and some of this horrific rice liquor that the Vietnamese drank.

Q: Nuoc mam?

COTTER: No, not nuoc mam, which was a fish sauce. This was a rice alcohol that smelled sort of like fuel oil, baside, I think, is what it was called. We would try to go out to villages on a regular basis, either to deliver things or simply to talk to the village officials. I found the Vietnamese very open and accepting. Again, they hadn't had much experience with American troops. Whatever bad experiences people may have had when you get a large number of foreign operations in the area, the Delta Vietnamese didn't have. This was my first exposure to how cultures see each other. As usual, children were the most instructive in this regard. We used to say the Vietnamese would call us "long noses," but what got most of the kids was how hairy we were. You would go around in villages, and kids would come up and touch your arm because they couldn't believe the hair. Vietnamese have very little body hair, so kids would come up and just be fascinated by the hair an American had on his body.

After five months in Ben Tre District, I was transferred down to Ba Tri District, which was a district right down on the South China Sea, at the very mouth of the Mekong. Ba Tri was a pacified district where our team could visit all of the villages. We were a three-man team. I was the district senior advisor, and I had a medic - an Army sergeant - and an intel lieutenant. The three of us managed things there. In my first district our seven-man team included a couple of weapons specialists, who, on occasion, would go out on patrols. They were primarily there to train and work with the local Vietnamese forces. In Ba Tri there wasn't much need for that. We did a lot more development work. There were a couple notable things about Ba Tri. While on the land there wasn't much war going on, we did have very extensive mangroves. Where the land there ended, there was over one kilometer of mangrove and then the South China Sea. The sea was shallow for at least a mile out, mostly because of sediment deposited by the Mekong. On the edge of the mangrove swamp was a SEAL [U.S. Navy Sea, Air, Land, special forces] base. The Viet Cong used one mangrove both for cover and transportation routes. The SEALs would generally go out on night patrols to interdict that travel. One gained a lot of admiration for them because it was certainly a high-risk proposition. The most military kind of thing we ended up doing in the Ba Tri district team was very often calling in and supporting medevac (medical evacuation) helicopters because the SEALs would often end up in firefights on their night patrols. At 3:00 a.m., we were having helicopters coming in to deploy out of our district compound in order to go down and get SEALs out of trouble. The SEAL base had two advantages for us. One was that there was a group of pinochle players there, and the other was that once a month or so they had a Navy supply ship come down to resupply them, so we could usually count on them for things like lettuce, frozen steaks, and so on. One of the problems with living in the Delta was that we were at the very end of the U.S. supply line. I remember when I arrived we had, in that compound, no generator. The town power, to the extent it existed, would go out about 9:00 P.M. Actually, we had a generator, but it didn't work. We sent it back to Saigon for repair, and we were told it was an old model the Army no longer issued. We weren't a big enough team to qualify for the size of generator they were then issuing, so it was a Catch-22. Nonetheless, we received our monthly supply of two or three fifty-gallon drums of gasoline to supply the generator. Well, one day the district chief came to me and said, "Look, I have a deal for you here. My brother runs the ice plant in town, which happens to have a gasoline compressor. How about if I provide you with a diesel generator and a soldier to run it, and you turn over the gasoline to me?" I did that quite happily. So we finally had a generator. However, it was so small that we could either watch a movie or have the lights on, but not both at the same time.

After 10 months in the Delta (the tour in Vietnam is 18 months generally), I was transferred to Saigon, to work as staff aide to Deputy Ambassador Sam Berger. He and Ambassador Bunker generally chose staff aides from among the CORDS officers. I was fortunate to be chosen. The move to Saigon was a radical change. I had been, in theory, in the Foreign Service, but in fact seconded, more or less, to the military. I was supposedly seconded to AID, but when you lived out in that part of the world, you were not very AID-like or certainly not very Foreign Service-like. So the move to Saigon to was my first real experience of working in an embassy. By this time, I had been in the Foreign Service for about two years. Ellsworth Bunker was the ambassador. Samuel Berger was called deputy ambassador. Berger had been an ambassador in his own right, to Korea, as well as deputy assistant secretary for East Asia. There are myriad stories, as you know.

Q: Well, why don't you tell me. I would like to hear what you heard about Sam Berger.

COTTER: No, not about Sam. I was talking about Saigon, in general.

Q: Well, tell me, because this is for the record, not for us.

COTTER: Well, working in the Berger/Bunker front office was an interesting experience. Sam was a fairly gruff person. Both he and Bunker were very focused on the substance of what they were doing. Bunker was a gentleman of the old school, who may not have remembered your name but was unfailingly polite to you. Sam was not that polite. I was young and innocent, and when I left Sam was too busy to do a performance evaluation on me. It wasn't until my next post, when I was mentioning this to my boss, who said, "You've got to have a performance evaluation." I contacted PER (Bureau of Personnel), who confirmed that I should have an evaluation. So, I had to send a cable back to Berger and ask him to do a performance evaluation for me, which he did somewhat haphazardly after the fact. Unfortunately, again, this is what Saigon was like. The embassy was so big and so busy, there wasn't a lot of cohesiveness, even among the junior officers, as to how the system functioned. It was a strange atmosphere. Sam Berger did have two lovely daughters, one of whom was Sherry. The officer who was Bill Colby's staff aide, Tony Allitto, and I, along with Sherry Berger, took one of the "honeymoon specials" to Nepal. Bunker was married to Carol Laise, who was ambassador to Nepal. Bunker, in true imperial style, had an executive-equipped DC-7 at his disposal. Once a month or so, either Carol would fly to Saigon or he would fly to Nepal. He would usually take staff along. On one of those trips, I met Skip Gnehm, who at the time was a vice consul in Kathmandu.

Bill Colby, who headed the CORDS program at that time, was really outstanding. He would have, about once a month, a dinner for some of the civilian advisors out in the field. As I recall, there were generally 10 to 12 invited. He would have us over to his house for dinner where very free-ranging discussions took place. It was a nice opportunity for most of us to come up to Saigon, have a nice dinner, and engage in some conversation. I think it was very useful for Colby because he would get the kind of insight into what was going on in the field that few senior people in Saigon ever got. Once you got a group like this together, you probably got more sensible information about what was going on than you did any other way. It's worth noting that we did, from the field, very little reporting. We got occasional visits from people from the embassy, but not that often. Frankly, down in the out-of-the-way parts of the Delta, we got much less in the way of visits than did advisors in other parts of the country, that, for whatever reason, were always considered more important. I was in Saigon during the incursion when we finally went into Cambodia.

Q: That was in May or June of 1970.

COTTER: Was it 1971?

Q: 1970.

COTTER: That was before I would have gotten to Saigon. I got to Saigon after. It was May of 1970?

Q: Around then, because I was in Saigon; I went in July 1970.

COTTER: I still believe that the Cambodia incursion was a military necessity and the right thing to do. I know we were much criticized for it, but those of us who were there were aware that Cambodia had long since ceased to be neutral. The large caches of weapons and other material that were taken certainly justified that incursion.

Q: I've been interviewing Winston Lord, and we have been talking about the great indignation back in Washington about this invasion of Cambodia. For those of us who were there, what is the big deal? Where is the moral indignation? It wasn't as though we were going into a neutral country.

COTTER: All we were doing was beginning to level the playing field. I must say that I had come out of the Delta with quite a bit of respect for what our government was trying to do. I like the fact that I went to a place where there were no American troops. To this day, I think the Mekong Delta is the heart of what South Vietnam was. One of the problems, of course, was that South Vietnam was never run by southern Vietnamese. It was always run by central Vietnamese. A lot has been written about how Vietnam works; that it is shaped like a dumbbell - a big north, and a big south, and a narrow belt in the middle; and how for centuries, the central area, which couldn't support itself, has managed to rule breadbaskets in the north and the south. I think Ho Chi Minh was from the center and Diem was from the center. Southerners were always, even by the Saigon government, looked down upon as country cousins and not taken very seriously. But, people who lived there were good farmers and the heart of the nation. I think they were much more comfortable living under the Saigon government, and what it would have been, than they were under the Communists.

Anyway, at this time, I was staff aide, which was essentially pushing papers and making sure clearances were done. You get some interesting anecdotes out of this time. We actually had for a while four ambassadors in Vietnam. Bill Colby also had the rank of ambassador. And while I was in Saigon, there appeared on the scene as head of the Third Region (around Saigon) Ambassador Richard Funkhouser, who had been ambassador in an African post. Funkhouser at first also used the title. I remember one day the Marines called, and said the German ambassador was arriving in a helicopter on the roof. I didn't understand what the Marine was talking about, as the German ambassador didn't have a helicopter and wouldn't have been allowed to park it on our roof in any event. Then I recalled we had gotten a call from his office saying that Ambassador Funkhouser would be arriving, and indeed, Ambassador Funkhouser, who had a helicopter as the head of CORDS in the Third Region, arrived on the roof. Finally, at one point, Berger had to call him in and tell him that while he might have been ambassador at one point, he was creating too much confusion by using the title in Vietnam, he wasn't entitled to use the title in Vietnam, and we already had a confusing number of ambassadors. So Richard Funkhouser reverted to just plain Mr.

Q: While you were in the Delta, what was your impression of the problem with the central government, of corruption, how things were being translated to that center, down?

COTTER: Corruption was endemic. I served most of my career in Third World countries, most of which underpay civil servants and public security officials, with the result that all of those officials tend to live on what I call "user taxes." If you want a service provided, you pay for it. When you are paying civil servants or police officials five dollars a month, it is sort of to be expected that this happens. That kind of corruption was endemic. I know that more senior officers were accused of selling goods and other things. At a district level, you really didn't see this. Your Vietnamese counterpart was usually a major, living generally with his family. In a military situation, I don't doubt at all that all of those people made more money in various ways than their salaries. But they certainly didn't live ostentatiously. When you got down that far, you didn't see much impact from the central government. We did not have, in Kien Hoa, regular ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) troops. The only troops we had were regional forces and Popular Forces, most of whom were commanded by local people, and most of whom, as a result, had affinity with the local people. How much collaboration went on with the Viet Cong is, of course, a different question. There was always suspicion that a number of the Popular Force and regional force people were playing both sides of the street, and particularly in a place like Kien Hoa, where parts of the province for which regional forces nominally had responsibility were not accessible to those forces or anyone from the government. Because those units undoubtedly had patrolling requirements, I'm sure that a good number of them had things worked out that said, "We won't bother you, if you don't bother us." The other option was they were probably going to get killed.

Q: In Kien Hoa, for example, where you say about half the villages were unreachable, was there somebody sitting back in the Fourth Corps or something, saying, "We have to get to those places?" I mean, mounting military operations, or was it just let go?

COTTER: It was just sort of let go. They were low level efforts. Again, we and the Vietnamese put quite a bit of effort into the regional forces, and we put a lot of effort in the CORDS program, into providing commodities and other benefits to villages, to try and convince them to come over to the government. The impact of the Tet Offensive was only beginning to be seen. When I was there, it had a devastating effect on the Viet Cong. Actually, I am getting ahead of myself a little bit. I went back to the Delta in 1973, after the cease fire, and I was one of the first tranche of language officers who went back to monitor the cease fire. That was after two Tet Offensives, one of them the one of 1968, and the other of 1972, which had really devastated the Viet Cong. When I got back to Kien Hoa in 1973, there were North Vietnamese troops there. The province that had provided the Viet Cong with troops as recently as 1970 was forced by 1973 to bring in northern troops in order to sustain a North Vietnamese/Viet Cong effort. By that time, I could visit almost all of the villages in the province. Some of them were difficult to get to because the roads were not very passable, but you could visit them all. In essence, by 1973, we had won the war in Kien Hoa. If they had to depend on North Vietnamese troops there, the Viet Cong had lost the war, because the North Vietnamese were practically as foreign in accent and behavior as Americans were to the South Vietnamese. I think this was true in good parts of the Delta, simply because by their miscalculations in both 1968 and 1972, the Viet Cong exposed significant numbers of their critical political and military cadre who were killed.

Q: The villages that were under Viet Cong rule, how were the people living there?

COTTER: Not very well, by all reports, but it is difficult to tell because you didn't get in. When we got in later on, by 1973 what you found were villages in very bad shape because they were subject to some patrolling during the day and attack from helicopters. Every night the 105 mm artillery that belonged to the district would fire. In theory, they had ranged in on trails used by the Viet Cong. They would fire randomly on those trails. Some people said the regional forces really didn't bother with that. They simply had "X" number of rounds, and would fire them off into the coconut groves. But people who lived in those areas certainly didn't live as well as people who lived in areas controlled by the government. Again, in the Delta, you didn't have the kinds of things that you had up north, the strategic villages and what not, where we gathered people and put them into villages. That kind of thing never occurred. Most of these folks were rice farmers. The coconut groves were not well maintained because they were dangerous, either from booby traps or from the presence of Viet Cong. People didn't live very well in the Viet Cong areas simply because the Viet Cong didn't have the resources to improve their lives.

Q: When you were back in Saigon, back in the big city, were you getting anything from the junior officer mafia? There, more than anywhere else or any other time in the history of the Foreign Service, we had people who, like yourself, were coming in and had been out in the districts and really had been seeing things from the ground, rather than the perspective of the capital. What were you talking about among yourselves, about how things were going, wither Vietnam, that sort of thing? Was there much of that?

COTTER: I'm sure there was a lot of discussion. I know that there was significant unhappiness because the kind of reporting that went up, if it was at all negative, from a reporting officer in the field, wasn't particularly appreciated. In other words, there was a goal that we were attempting to reach, and reports that didn't support that goal were not appreciated. I remember at one point I came in for some criticism because I had sent up a report that was positive on the Viet Cong situation in Dinh Tuong. It brought down on me the wrath of the CIA station chief. His name was Tom Polgar. They said that I was being negative. They actually sent someone down to the district to talk to me. This was a guy named Frank Snepp, who later wrote quite a controversial, probably quite accurate, book on Vietnam that was suppressed by the CIA because he wasn't supposed to write it.

Q: A Decent Interval, I think it is called.

COTTER: Frank did a lot more traveling around than a lot of other people. My guess is he probably had responsibility for the Delta, as opposed to other regions. It is hard for me to say. There was certainly unhappiness with the accuracy of some of the reporting or the fact that embassy reporting in Saigon didn't necessarily reflect what was going on in the countryside. But, again, so little of any of that was focused on the Delta to begin with. My experience in the Delta would have been much more instructive had I served somewhere in central Vietnam and could have gauged it much more. As I say, the Delta was simply not ever considered integral to what we were doing. Also, I think as a staff aide, and not working in the political section, you weren't quite part of that junior officer mafia as much as you would have been if you were actually working in the section.

Q: Did you get any feel for relations with the CIA, for example, in the Embassy?

COTTER: No. In the field you worked some together. I must say, I don't recall any experience with the Phoenix program in my district. We had CIA people in the province but not the district. The Intel people were lieutenants in the Army. I think relations with the CIA were okay, except that the CIA was, again like everyone else, interested in not necessarily what was going on, but what we had determined we wanted to go on. My feeling is that our effort in Vietnam would have been very successful. We lost the war not in Vietnam, but back here in the States. By the time I got back in 1973, this was very obvious. That was two years before we left, but we had already started cutting back significantly on the assistance we were giving the Vietnamese. One of the hardest things I ever had to do in the Foreign Service was one of the things we ended up doing back there during my second stint - in essence telling the Vietnamese who were accusing us of abandoning them, "No we aren't. I am here as actual, physical proof that we aren't abandoning you." Of course, we were abandoning them. For instance, in 1971 the Vietnamese fired off 105 millimeter rounds every evening. That didn't happen in 1973. Well, maybe, you say, because the place was pacified, but I think the reason was because there was no longer a steady supply of shells. The Vietnamese had to account much better for expendable items than we did. They weren't going to use up shells that weren't going to be replaced. When the war ended, it wasn't a bunch of rag tag cousins in black pajamas that came down the pike, it was the North Vietnamese Army driving Soviet tanks. In fact, the Russians supplied that force. At that time, we had stopped supplying the South Vietnamese, essentially. We lost the war because people in the United States were not willing to see it through. The government hadn't articulated the reasons for it, or whatever, or the press had misplayed it. Now, again, we are now at a time in history when it is easy to sit with hindsight, after Vietnam and the Cold War, and look back on the inevitability of various things. I'm not certain whether the war itself created as much suffering for the Vietnamese people as what happened to the South after they were taken over by the North. In many ways, not only reeducation of individuals, but simply the reorientation of what, frankly, is a very free economy-oriented people. The Vietnamese, at least the South Vietnamese could not have taken very well to whatever form of collectivization was forced on them. How that turns out, I'm not certain. I think we had good and laudable goals. If we had had the ability to articulate it back here and carry it through, it would have been worthwhile. We would have saved Cambodia unimaginable suffering. We would have saved the Laotians significant suffering, and we certainly would have saved the South Vietnamese significant suffering, which was due, to a significant part, to us having lost interest in that adventure.

Q: I take it the media didn't cross your path at all?

COTTER: Very little. Who is the woman who wrote the famous book?

Q: Fitzgerald.

COTTER: Yes, Frances Fitzgerald, she came down once, but very few other media got down that far. You had some media who would visit the Coconut Monk, but you would never see them at a district because we lived beyond the Coconut Monk. They would come down from Saigon, on a day trip. Other than that, you found very few journalists who actually came that far down, which was too bad because they generally got treated very well when they came, simply because we would be starved for any company. District teams were usually happy to put journalists up, but we didn't get very many journalists. You had very few in Kien Hoa and very few from Saigon, in general, because it was hard to get to, and because it had a reputation of being a dangerous place.

Q: You left Saigon in 1971. How did you feel about where things were going, at that point?

COTTER: My feeling was that things were going positively, that we finally had gotten engaged in Cambodia, and had begun seriously to try to disrupt the Ho Chi Minh trail. The war was not going badly in the south. You saw less from there than you would have back in the States, with the impact of the press, I think. In those days, you didn't have CNN. We didn't very often get the New York Times. We essentially got Stars and Stripes and Armed Forces Radio, which were your accesses to the world. But, from what one could see in Saigon and where I had been in the Delta, the war was going quite well. Of course, Johnson had resigned over the war and Nixon had come in. I guess it was fairly obvious by the time Nixon came in, or at least soon thereafter, that one of his goals was to find a way out. One had hoped for a way out with honor, but I'm not sure we achieved that.

Anyhow, I left there in the summer of 1971. I spoke Spanish when I entered the Foreign Service, and what I wanted to do was go to Brazil. Those were the days before open assignments, and you contacted your career officer and were told where you were going to go. I got sent to Bolivia, which I suppose the system felt was in Latin America, began with a "B" and it was close enough to Brazil for government work. So, I was assigned to La Paz. Again, being a junior officer and not being wise to the ways of the world, I didn't take my full home leave, of course, because the embassy said that I had to be there yesterday. I was fat, dumb, and ignorant, and showed up fairly quickly. I was very impressed because I had gotten a message from the ambassador, Ernie Siracusa, inviting me to stay at his house. I thought, "This is what Foreign Service is like." I was very flattered and impressed. I discovered later on that he was going on leave and wanted somebody to housesit the residence while he was gone, but nonetheless, I showed up in La Paz. It is the highest post in the Foreign Service. The airport is at about 13,000 feet and the capital is about 12,000 feet. When I arrived there, the ambassador was on leave, and the political counselor was on leave. We had a political section of four people: counselor, labor officer, one mid-level and one junior officer. In fact, there were two junior officers. I and the other junior officer both arrived the same summer. I'm not sure the second officer had arrived yet, so it was me and the labor officer, and the DCM. I had been there just a week or so when a coup broke out. Bolivia is known for coups. Historically, there has been a coup on the average of every 18 months. There had been a left of center government in for about two years, which had also come in via coup, headed by a General Juan Jose Torres. Remember, this was 1971. Allende was in Chile. One really has to take these things in context. It frustrates me so much when you now see revisionist history, after the Cold War is over, which simply discounts how all of us felt in the early 1970s about the course of the fight against Godless Communism and for domination of the world. In fact, that conflict was in serious doubt in the late 1960s and early 1970s. We were clearly engaged in ideological, and in some places, a shooting battle. There were clearly sides on these things. In Chile, Allende was the wrong side and Pinochet was the right side, with whatever casualties came later as a result. In Bolivia, Juan Jose Torres was on the wrong side. He kicked out the Peace Corps, among other things. He pushed a campaign of accusing the Peace Corps of genocide against the Indians by preaching sterilization of Indian women. There was a very well done agitprop film made in those days in Bolivia that purported to show Peace Corps volunteers advising Indian women to be sterilized. Anyhow, Hugo Banzer, who is now, once again, President of Bolivia, was at that time an army colonel who had gone into exile in Argentina. He began a revolution in the eastern part of Bolivia. We sat up in La Paz in the embassy, getting radio reports, primarily from missionaries, as it progressed towards La Paz. Then, it broke in La Paz, with some quite serious fighting. I had been in the embassy for a couple of days, and I had finally gone home to get some decent rest and to shower. The ambassador's residence there sits on a square, with the ministry of defense across the street. In the middle of the afternoon, all of a sudden, I was awakened from a nap by shooting. I looked outside to see tracers going back and forth across the square, in front of the residence. People were firing from and at the ministry of defense. I was the only one there; the resident guards and staff had long since left, so I was sitting there, in the ambassador's residence, all by myself, hearing more firing closer than I had heard in 18 months in Vietnam. I got on the radio to the embassy to get rescued. People said that they had enough other things to worry about. Finally, at about 9:00 that night a group of armed men attacked the Marine house. That was a four-story house, and the Marines were up on the roof, dropping tear gas grenades down the stairwell. The attackers were on the first and second floors shooting up.

Q: Who were they?

COTTER: This is interesting. That is a good question. It turned out, in the aftermath, that as far as we could tell, these were probably not "leftists," but a group of young men who were unhappy because the Marines either allegedly or actually were stealing their girlfriends. They had decided to take advantage of a certain amount of unrest and come in and get even. A lot of the shooting in La Paz, it turned out - and this happened later in other countries - was the result of hit lists which both the rightists and leftists had. They had developed these hit lists over time of people who they saw as opposed to them. Both sides, when the revolution broke out, had armed groups that pulled out the hit list and, in some cases, went from house to house, pulling people out and shooting them. There were armed groups of both the right and the left cruising the town. Finally, the embassy sent out a Chevy Suburban with the defense attachï¿½ and CIA station chief, armed with a couple of shot guns, to come and relieve the Marine house. They picked me up at the same time and got me out of the residence. There were no casualties in the embassy. I think the embassy building took one round. The embassy was on the upper floors of a building, above a bank, on a narrow city street. It would have been very vulnerable to a car bomb, but not so vulnerable to physical attack.

The Banzer forces won and he took over and imposed a military government. There was some of the same kind of thing that took place in Chile and Argentina later on, although to a much lesser extent. You had, in those days, in Bolivia what they called the "Ley de Fuga"- the law of flight. You have someone who had been interrogated when they didn't want to take them out of the countryside. They would say, "You can run away." They would let them get 50 yards away and then shoot them down. One of the very well known leftist labor leaders in Bolivia in those days escaped to Chile in a coffin. To my knowledge, we weren't involved in the bombs or the coup. My guess is that we certainly sent signals to the extent they had asked that we would not at all oppose the change. Something that I found later on in Latin America, by which time our policy had pretty much changed in later years not only in Latin America but in other places, you would have people approach us and say, "We are thinking of doing a coup, what does the United States think about that?" By the middle to late 1970s, I think, at least in places I served, we pretty much decided we didn't like coups very much. In all cases that I know of, we told people we weren't in favor of them. But, certainly in the early 1970s, when somebody like Banzer came down the pike, I am certain he got a very positive go ahead.

The difficulty, and again these are areas where our policies have always had problems, one of the things, of course, that Torres had done was expropriate American property. As a result, we had cut Bolivia from a whole series of programs. There were pieces of legislation at the time that prohibited aid to countries that expropriated our property.

Q: The Hickenlooper Amendment.

COTTER: Hickenlooper. That is correct. When Banzer took over, of course, he comes to us and says, "I am a good guy. I am your friend. These guys have ruined the country, and I need your help to get started again." The answer was, "We would love to help you, but we can't until you pay off the expropriation." The answer was, "We don't have any money." The answer we gave him to that was, "Yes, we are sorry, we know you don't, but you have to do something about it." As a result, by the time we got this sorted out, we had lost a significant amount of goodwill with the government that wanted to befriend us.

Bolivia is an absolutely fascinating place. It is the strangest place that I ever served, in terms of culture and everything else. When I was there, and I don't think it has changed very much, less than 50% of the population spoke Spanish, in spite of the fact that the Spaniards had conquered the area 400 years earlier. The Indians up in the mountains have still not accepted the premises of Western Culture. Something that is very common in all of the Andes. They live in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, very high, few trees, where very few things grow. Quinoa is the grain grown at that altitude and potatoes were very staple. It was the most difficult living conditions I had ever seen. I have been in lots of poor countries, and not the least of which Vietnam was certainly one; Zaire, later on, was extraordinarily poor. But in Zaire, if you had a plot of land and stuck a stick in the ground, it would grow. You could grow all sorts of things. You had lots of diseases, but you weren't in much danger of freezing or starving to death.

We did a number of things, things to which the law of unintended consequences applied. When I was there, AID had just finished building a road on the eastern slopes of the Andes: a project which had been widely criticized in Congress because it was a road to nowhere. Now in those days, in the 1960s, AID was deeply involved in infrastructure building, in major infrastructure projects. There was a significant backlash against this because the projects had cost a lot of money. Congress and others couldn't see any benefit from it and thought we would be better off giving money to more tangible things than investing in these projects. One of the examples that was used was the road to nowhere. Well, the road to nowhere was built on purpose. It was built to open areas to agriculture, to get Indians off the Altiplano, where it was difficult to live, and convince them to move to areas where their quality of life would improve. Indeed, a lot of them moved. Their quality of life improved. There was only one problem. What they chose to grow was coca. Now, when I was there, Indians chewed coca leaves. You could then, and you still can - although it is not advised that you do it - drink coca tea. We would drink coca tea regularly because it had a stomach settling effect, and the altitude in Bolivia had all sorts of effects of people, one of which was, you couldn't eat late in the evening or you wouldn't sleep. If you ate anything heavy, you would have an upset stomach. Coca tea was great for settling upset stomachs. Nowadays, in the days of random drug testing, you are not advised to drink coca tea because indeed it will show up in urine. In those days, cocaine was not a problem. As the Indians moved down into these areas on the eastern slopes of the Andes, they found coca the easiest thing to grow. That lead to an explosion of coca production, which fed the cocaine problem. You really have a law of unintended consequences because it had the good result of getting people off the Altiplano, but it contributed to a greater social problem.

Q: Were drugs a problem? Was it considered a problem at that time?

COTTER: No. It wasn't an issue at all, because cocaine, I suppose, was known, but it wasn't an obvious problem. We had nobody assigned to the embassy for counter-narcotics. At that time, DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) hadn't yet come into being. You had a great conflict between the Justice Department's Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD) and the US Customs people who fought a major bureaucratic battle within the U.S. Government over who was going to control the counter-drug war. It was finally resolved - I'm not sure if it was the Carter Administration - when the DEA was created. But we had nobody assigned in La Paz at that time. It was not perceived as a problem. That changed by the time I was in Ecuador in the late 1970s, when we did indeed have a BNDD officer assigned to the embassy.

Q: What were our concerns in Bolivia at the time, when you arrived as a young officer in the political section?

COTTER: Well, the major concern was keeping Communists out of governments in Latin America and preventing the Cuban-supported spread of Communism. I arrived in Bolivia a year, I think it was, after Che Guevara was killed in Bolivia by Bolivian soldiers trained and assisted by U.S. Special Forces. Again, the threat of Communist revolutions was very real, all over the region. Cuba was very aggressively supporting these kinds of groups. Our major concern was helping to shore up anti-Communist regimes. We weren't particularly interested in looking beyond that. The issue of creating development as the best way to prevent Communism was there, but only beginning to be articulated. Kennedy had begun the large AID program.

Q: Alliance for Progress.

COTTER: Yes. We began to put money into social development and to build up AID missions, but from a political section perspective, the primary issue was supporting a friendly, anti-Communist government.

Q: My understanding about Bolivia is that a coup occurred every 18 months, and you had miners running around with sticks of dynamite stuck in their belts. What would be the concern about Bolivia doing whatever it wanted to do, from the American point of view? It is pretty isolated.

COTTER: Yes, but of course, both in Vietnam and elsewhere, you had the domino theory, if you want to call it that. As I said, Chile was under Allende. The Tupamaros were wreaking havoc in Uruguay. They never took power there, but they certainly were creating great difficulties. As you will recall, we had two AID police advisors assassinated in those days. Argentina, as I recall, probably, since that was before the military coup, was probably under a very left of center government. I think there was a real specter of a domino progression. Bolivia, in and of itself, was probably not significant. Tin was the major thing they produced.

The question you raise is a good one, that comes up in spades to me, later on, in an area that I wasn't working, but Central America. What, by the mid-1980s, was the importance of Central America, when it was obvious that the communist revolution wasn't going to succeed? In the early 1970s, I don't think we had the same qualms. I think it was fairly clear what we were doing. Among other things, I had the pol-mil (political-military) portfolio. That was largely because I had just come out of Vietnam, and my colleagues said, "Great, you have been in Vietnam, and you understand how the military works, so you have the political-military portfolio and the military assistance portfolio in the embassy." We provided quite a bit of assistance to the Bolivians. The Bolivians, in those days, were still flying P-51 Mustangs. I remember during the height of the coup, the university was the tallest building in town, it was a 21 story-building that you could see from the embassy, and about the fourth day of the coup, I remember seeing a Mustang fly over. All of a sudden, I saw smoke come out of the university. A group of radical students had barricaded themselves in the university and were being attacked. The Mustangs, at that point, were very quickly reaching obsolescence. We then got them some F-86s. Again, this was 1973, and you are talking about giving Korean vintage military equipment over 20 years old.

Q: The Mustangs, the P-51s, were World War II?

COTTER: That's right, and they were trading up. We had a lot of controversy over the years about this. It was interesting because, during the early 1970s, what we would do in our military assistance programs was give ex-Korean War vintage stuff to these countries. By the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, we were passing along Vietnam War equipment. We really came into a crunch on our military assistance program by the late 1980s when there was none of that left. The only thing we could give or sell to countries was new production at enormously higher costs than the things we had been able to give them before, which essentially had been war surplus.

We had lots of strange anomalies, some of which still exist in our military assistance policy. One of the things is that countries are required when they accept military assistance from us to maintain it and keep it in the inventory, because we may at any time come out and inspect to see if the stuff is still there. Well, there was never an "end date" written to that. In a place like Bolivia or in Ecuador, where I was a couple years later, you would find reams of computer printout paper of stuff we had given these governments, going back to 1952 in some cases. The stuff was still on the books. In theory, they were still responsible for it. What they were supposed to do if something were destroyed or decommissioned was to come to us and say, "We are going to decommission this." We would make the decision whether we wanted it back or wanted them to scrap it. Of course, the fact is, nobody ever did this. One of the things our military advisory group people did was like handing off a bomb with the fuse lit. You signed on for all of this, and hoped the GAO (Government Accounting Office) never came down during your two years and discovered that nobody knew where this stuff was. When you finished your two year tour, you would sign it off to somebody else, because there was simply no way that you could manage it. Every once in a while, a GAO would come and look at an embassy and discover that people had no idea what was happening to all this military equipment, and find that it had wandered off somewhere. In most cases, it simply decommissioned to scrap, because it was already old by the time we gave it to them.

Bolivia was a little bit difficult to work on external political affairs because they never really had true Civil Service protection. As a result, staffs in most of the ministries changed every time a government changed. As a result, looking for anyone to deal with was virtually impossible. This was my first experience with what I found to be one of the most frustrating things in my career - the exercise we go through every year, preparing for the UN General Assembly. Our colleagues in New York come up with long shopping lists of things we absolutely have to have every country's support for, and demands for immediate demarches to get it. In most countries, this is certainly true in Bolivia, once the General Assembly started, anybody in the country who had anything to do with the UN was up in New York, including the foreign minister, who was up for a good part of it. We would get these frantic cables. The answer, more often than not, was, "Go talk to the guys in New York, because that's where the people are who know anything about this." For most of these countries, the foreign minister and probably the director of their international organizations office, and perhaps one other guy in the foreign ministry, knew the portfolio, all of whom were up in New York.

Bolivia was very hard to travel in. There were practically no paved roads. In many cases, we had to ford rivers at very high altitude, carrying our own gasoline, carrying our own provisions. But there are some fascinating places. The town of Potosi was the major silver production area in the days of the Spanish Empire. The river by Buenos Aires is called Rio de La Plata, the river of silver, because that is where most of the silver was exported. There is one mountain in which they are still mining. There is no silver left. I think they are mining other things. But, Potosi in the 16th century was the largest city in the Western Hemisphere. It happily avoided the fate of lots of other cities, because it simply is now a tenth of the size that it was then. As a result, things were never torn down to build a new building. The colonial city is still virtually intact. It was 20 years ago, and I think it probably still is today. Potosi is at 14,000 feet, which makes it not an easy place to go to. Bolivia, at least, had something approaching a social revolution. Ecuador, which I later served in, had not had one. Juan Jose Torres was clearly an Indian. He had Indian features. In Peru, to this day, or in Ecuador, or in Colombia, someone with clearly Indian features simply could not run for president of the country. But, in Bolivia, they could. The revolution came in 1952. The Bolivians had kicked out Patino, who owned the tin mines, and expropriated most of the tin mines. But, even though there had been a social revolution, it had never really gotten up to and affected most of the Indians. I remember there, and in Ecuador later on, they would say that an Indian who decided to join the dominant society put on shoes, and putting on shoes for an Indian was a right-of-passage; someone who had come out of the village and was ready to adopt Western ways and learn Spanish, and dress Western. The Bolivians, in those days and I think still, maintain really well, however, out in the villages and small towns, traditional folk patterns. I think the only other place I have been in the world where that is the case is Bali, where villagers, to a large extent, have their religious and folk festivals for themselves, even though there are an increasing number of tourists who come to watch them. It is not done primarily for the benefit of the tourists. It is primarily done for the people themselves. The Bolivians have some absolutely fascinating folk dances and folk rituals, apart from miners and sticks of dynamite that used to happen. On one occasion, before I had arrived there, the labor attachï¿½ and another officer had gone down to visit a mine, and they found themselves seated on kegs of dynamite and held hostage for several days. Again, the miners' complaint had nothing to do with us, but it was the one way they could get the attention of the government. Because having an American diplomat blown up was not something the government wanted, and so, that way, they could get the minister of labor, or the minister of social welfare, to at least come down and listen to their complaint. I know, as we traveled to the mines, we hoped we wouldn't get set out on a keg of dynamite. Our embassy in Bolivia had some great people; it always has over the years. Again, it's typical of some of our really difficult posts, because the only people who end up there are people who want to be there, or people like me who, as a junior officer, didn't know any better. Because it is so high, there are any number of health reasons that can exempt you from service in Bolivia. As a result, you get people who want to be there and who enjoy being there. We had a very good group of people. Siracusa was the ambassador, at the time I was there. Dick Barnaby was the DCM, who was a very hard man with a red pencil on editing. He taught me good editing or writing lessons that I have never forgotten in the Foreign Service, such as, avoid using the passive voice. You learned the hard way, in those days, when you worked for somebody like Dick Barnaby. Perry Shankle was political counselor. Roger Gamble was the labor attachï¿½, who later on was ambassador to Suriname. John Maisto was one of the officers who had left when I arrived, who is now ambassador to Venezuela.

I left Bolivia in January of 1973 to go back to Vietnam. As I mentioned, I had gone back to Vietnam after the cease fire. This was done in great secrecy and with very short notice. I remember I was called into the ambassador's office just around New Year 1973. He had received a Top Secret cable. This was the first Top Secret cable I had ever seen and said, "There is going to be a cease fire in Vietnam. This was negotiated in Paris. There is going to be a Control Commission, and we are going to send back 100 language officers to serve as vice consuls and to monitor the cease fire. The following officer is in your post, and he is going." They called me in about this. I said, "Fine, I am perfectly up to going." It was very difficult because you couldn't tell anybody. The assumption was that you would go out for six months and then go back to post. But at the time they were doing this, I only had six months left in my tour in Bolivia. So, I said, "Well, fine, let's do this, but there is no sense in my coming back here. Why don't you expedite the assignment of my successor, in trying to get him out here, and then we will just cut my tour?" Well, this caused great consternation, because the mechanism wasn't set up to do this, to actually curtail my tour. It wasn't curtailed. They did get my successor out about three months early. I had to dispose of my car and pack up my personal effects. When I left Vietnam and went to Bolivia, I had a foot locker and two suitcases, I think, for all of my worldly goods. Half of the worldly goods were the stereo set that I, like everybody else, certainly used. You did two things when you were in Vietnam: you got a stereo set, and got a fancy 35 millimeter camera, and a watch probably, from AAFES (Army and Air Forces Exchange). I still have the Omega watch that I bought in 1971. Anyhow, we sorted this all out, and I packed up and went back to Vietnam.

Q: I have a question about Bolivia. Were you, particularly in the political section, getting information about Allende in Chile? What sort of terms were you hearing about Allende?

COTTER: Not positive terms. I mean, Allende was running Chile into the ground. I visited Chile during the Allende period and was struck by the fact that there were no goods to be had. You would go by shops after seeing things in the window, and one could go in and ask about them. The only thing the shop had were those things in the window, which they couldn't get rid of or they would have no reason to stay open. It was a terribly depressing place to be. What you don't know about these things is, how much of this is reality and how much of it was perception. Clearly, wealthy Chileans were bailing out as fast as they could. I know colleagues who served in Chile at that time were buying colonial furniture for practically nothing. The U.S. Government, in those days, because of Congressman Rooney was very limited as to what kind of real estate we could acquire, but we bought some houses in those days from people who were trying to bail out.

Allende's agenda was clearly to carry out a socialist revolution at that time. Indeed, the more radical followers of Allende were not the Communists, but the Socialists. The Socialist Party in Chile was more radical in those days than was the Communist party. It was the young Socialists who were pressing Allende to carry out even more radical change. I know when the Pinochet coup took place, the pretext they used was that there had been an inflow of arms from Cuba, as well as Cubans, and that the more radical elements under Allende were preparing a coup to carry out the revolution. We tracked this very much and were interested in it. Bolivia had had its coup. The sense was that the Chilean military and the Chilean Right looked at the Banzer coup and our reaction to it, and they took a signal from it as to what our reaction would be to a coup in Chile. I think the record has become clarified over the years. I don't think we were involved in the Pinochet coup, but I think it is fairly clear that we certainly made it clear that we would be perfectly happy to see that change of government take place. I think in Chile the same thing happened that had happened in Bolivia, where both the left and the right, particularly the right, had a hit list of people. I think in Chile, as in Argentina, they went considerably further than they had gone in Bolivia, in terms of picking up family members of people they couldn't find. I see today where Pinochet is. I must say that as I look back on this in hindsight, and with what the Pinochet government accomplished in reforms in Chile, that it is probably fairly cold to say so, but the cost of human lives that it took to bring about those reforms in Chile was probably cheap at twice the price. I know that it is politically incorrect to suggest this, but the fact of the matter is that, if some 3,000 Chileans died, there are a heck of a lot fewer than Salvadorans and Hondurans who died, or than have died in most other conflicts, and an order of magnitude less than the number who died in Argentina, where the estimates are ten to twenty thousand babies being sold, and everything else, which didn't happen in Chile. In fact, when you look at Chile today, and I served in Chile in the early 1990s, it was at that point the only truly reformed liberal economy in Latin America. It was reformed in ways that the Argentines are still struggling with, somewhat unsuccessfully. The Brazilians really haven't come to grips with reform yet. Chile was reformed in a way that opened the economy up to foreign and other influences. One of the things that was true in Latin America in those days, and is still true in many areas, is that these aren't really market economies. Most of them are oligopolies. You have a number of families who run things, and they run things very happily for themselves. So the market is divided up, prices are controlled, and things are divided amongst these groups with very little true competition. Most of them don't want outsiders in. Most of them are not really open to true competition. The Pinochet revolution changed that significantly. It broke the power of what had been extraordinarily strong labor unions. These are labor unions that are somewhat reforming in Argentina. The Argentine experiment under Menem in the 1990s is a very critical one because it is a question of whether you can reform, create a liberal economy, under a democracy because there is a clear pain to this. If you have a statist or statist-type economy where lots of people work for the government, and you are going to change that and increase the private sector and reduce the role of government, people are going to be put out of jobs. If it works right, they will find new jobs and revitalize the economy. But the fact of the matter is that you are throwing people out of work. In very few places are people going to vote to have themselves thrown out of work. So, there is a question whether you can do this democratically. Menem, indeed, I think, has gone a long way toward succeeding in it.

Q: I want to move back. How did you find Siracusa operated, both with the embassy and with the government?

COTTER: Siracusa was very effective. We had a very good group of Spanish speakers at that embassy. Actually, most of the embassies I've been in in Latin America have good Spanish speakers. Siracusa was quite effective. Siracusa did have his quirks. He had gone on home leave and bought a motorcycle. He spent six weeks of his home leave traveling around the States on a motorcycle. He grew his hair, which for those days was quite long. It was down to his collar and quite scraggly. When he came back to Bolivia, he brought his motorcycle back. He convinced a couple of us to buy motorcycles. I bought a Honda. We would go out and ride through the countryside on motorcycles. It is really the only way to do it. The follow car would come along, and we would have a picnic basket. If your bike broke down, the driver and guard would get out and fix it for you. Every once in a while, the embassy would get reports about a band of hippies terrorizing the countryside. (Siracusa also had a beard at that time.) Of course, it turned out it wasn't a band of hippies, it was the American ambassador and his colleagues who were terrorizing the countryside on their motorcycles. But he had a good relationship with the government, and he was a good officer to work for, he and Dick Barnaby both. As I said, Dick was a very tough editor, which from my perspective turned out to be very good. He taught me Foreign Service writing skills that I wouldn't have learned under an easier editor. Those are good lessons I learned. One lesson I learned that I never made the mistake of doing again was that we spent a lot of our time trying to beat FBIS. They hated to be scooped by FBIS. FBIS is the Foreign Broadcast Information Service which publishes things based on radio and newspapers around the world. Siracusa and Barnaby did not like having Washington hear about something through FBIS before they heard about it from us. That put a great premium on us picking up on news.

In terms of traditional political work, of course, there wasn't much, because there were no political parties. Bolivia was under military government during the time I was there. The political party individuals were around, and you could have contacts with them as individuals, but not as political parties. There was not much opportunity for changing things. We ended up with lots of controversies. Human rights, which at that point was not as well developed in American policy as later, certainly arose. The Maryknoll Catholic Order has long been a very socially active Catholic order, and indeed, when you found a conflict in most of Latin America between the left and the right, you would find Maryknolls involved. I think the nuns in El Salvador who were killed were Maryknoll nuns. The Maryknolls had a very active way of maintaining contact with their people because their people were engaged in social work that very often got them in trouble. I remember one case where we received a call one day from Senator Kennedy's office about a Maryknoll priest who had been arrested. This was the first we had heard about it. Indeed, we explored, and we discovered that this nun had been arrested. Actually it was a nun, not a priest. She was found with a printing press in her basement that was printing anti-government propaganda. After much work and much pressure from Kennedy's office, we got her out of the country, but what was interesting was that she and people like her had shortwave radios. They called in at a regular time every day. If they didn't call in, the assumption was that something had happened to them. So, the first thing that the people back in the States would do was obviously not go to the State Department about this. They would go to Senator Kennedy's office. So you would hear these things first from one of these avenues when someone was arrested. There was some involvement, not a lot, but of Maryknolls.

Another group that was surprisingly active in some of this were Mennonites. There was quite a large Mennonite community in Bolivia, as there is in Brazil. It had begun, of course, from Mennonites wanting to live as a community, and under less government control. The United States Government made it much harder for self-schooling and self-contained communities, so communities of Mennonites moved down to the interior of Bolivia and interior of Brazil, where they could maintain a community life without much impact from the outside government. A number of Mennonites got active and involved in social change areas that brought them into conflict with the government.

Anyhow, I went back to Vietnam in January 1973. There was a consul in Can Tho, who was Frank Wisner. We were assigned as vice consuls. Although there were fewer of us than there had been earlier, I was originally living in Kien Hoa, back in the province I had been in before. I was responsible for Kien Hoa and Gocong provinces under the general supervision of another vice consul, one of two officers who were in My Tho. We reported on the cease-fire. This was interesting. That was the... What was the name of the commission? I can't remember, but it was composed of Poles, Hungarians...

Q: I think it was called the ICC.

COTTER: ICC, yes. I think there was an "S." International Commission of Control and Supervision, something like that. It was comprised of Indonesians, Canadians, who were, in theory, the pro-government people of the commission, and Poles and Hungarians who were the pro-Viet Cong element. The government, the Viet Cong, and the North Vietnamese were all supposed to participate in this commission. In fact, in the six months I was there, you only met a couple Viet Cong, as they were not trustful enough of the system to actually participate in it. The North Vietnamese maintained that they had nobody down in the Delta, so there wasn't any point in their participating. These commissioners from the other countries moved into military installations and held lots of meetings and wandered around aimlessly. I must say, they were not able to do much. The cease-fire may have been negotiated in Paris, but as with most of these things, the devil is in the details, and actually implementing any kind of a disengagement on the ground was much more difficult, particularly when there really hadn't been any engagement. This kind of thing works much better if you have set piece armies and you can identify a front line. But it was very hard to do it in the Delta, where there were no front lines. The Viet Cong were skeptical enough that they really weren't going to expose themselves again. The North Vietnamese, as I said, were not really willing to admit they were engaged in this.

I remember the great difference between the Poles and the Hungarians. We were all briefed on this, of course, as to who were actual military and who were military intelligence types. The Hungarians were quite a sophisticated group, most of whom were language officers and most of whom were assumed to be military intelligence. The Poles, on the other hand, tended to be regular Polish Army officers with an interpreter attached, who was usually identified as the political officer. There was another difference. The Poles arrived in Polish Army uniforms, which were wool. The Hungarians had very nice, dress cotton uniforms, that they wore. The poor Poles just suffered unimaginably in the Delta.

Some things wouldn't change. While we were there, at one point the Polish national day came up, so I put my suit on. It was probably the only time in the six months I was there that I wore a suit. I went to the hotel in My Tho where the Poles celebrated their national day at midday, of course, because you couldn't do this at night. We had warm vodka. It was 100 degrees, with 120% humidity. You sat there in this non-air conditioned hotel, wearing a suit with the Poles in their wool uniforms, drinking warm vodka. You would no sooner drink it, than it would explode out of all of your pores.

It was an interesting time period. As I said, I think the most difficult part of it was that part of our role was to be there and to assure the Vietnamese we were committed to them forever and a day, when by 1973, of course, the writing was on the wall. It was quite clear we weren't going to be there. Anyhow, for three months I was back in Kien Hoa. Then, the two officers who had been in My Tho left after three months. One of those officers was Desaix Anderson, who may have just retired. He was later the Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs. I can't remember who the other officer was. At that point, I moved up to My Tho and had responsibility for the three provinces: Dinh Tuong, GoCong, and Kien Hoa. I was there for about six months total, during which we were given one leave, one vacation. I had, somewhat foolishly, agreed that if they got my successor out to La Paz early, I would take my leave and go back to Bolivia and introduce him to my contacts. So, I had a ten day vacation. It was about 36,000 miles that I flew back to Bolivia for a week. I turned around and flew back to Vietnam. It was an incredible flight, across the Pacific to California, and then down to Miami.

Q: You were there, looking to see that the North and the South Vietnamese stayed in their proper places, is that it?

COTTER: Well, that the cease-fire would be implemented, that fighting would end, and to observe how the ICCS was doing its function. Now, it may have been that this was somewhat more successful. The first six months, of course, were chaotic. Again, down in the Delta where I was, there wasn't organized fighting. It was guerrilla war. There really wasn't much of that, even when I was there earlier. There were no set battles, and every day you would have casualties primarily from night patrols, and people would run into mines. There would be an occasional fire fight, but not much conflict. As I said, in Kien Hoa in particular, the 1972 Tet Offensive had really emasculated the Viet Cong. By the time we got back in 1973, there were not very many Viet Cong. The same was true in Dinh Tuong, which was the province that My Tho was the capital of. The six months I was there, almost all of it was spent jockeying around the various people, trying to arrange meetings, that the government and the Viet Cong would both come to, and endless negotiation with the ICCS, and under what terms such a meeting would be and where people would sit, and where it would be. Nine times out of ten, the meeting would be held and no one would show up. Some of them would come from the Viet Cong headquarters, but there wouldn't be any local officials there. Enormous amounts of time by the ICCS were spent again on simply their own housekeeping, getting food, getting mail, getting organized, sorting out where they were. I don't know, because I lost track of it when I left, whether this ever succeeded. My sense is that it never really did, that it sort of floundered around, but the North Vietnamese or the South Vietnamese didn't have any intention of making it work. As a result, it very quickly degenerated. The Indonesians, as I recall, pulled out even before I left. I can't think who replaced them. They didn't stay in it for more than six months. As I say, it was never really successful. You had some meetings where you actually had a Viet Cong officer, usually from somewhere else, who participated. You would go visit a village to determine who actually controlled that village. But, by and large, it was a somewhat fruitless exercise.

After that, I was assigned back to Washington. I sort of had the anomaly in my career, of - except for Vietnam to Bolivia - of never having two overseas assignments consecutively. I would have an assignment overseas and then back to Washington, and almost always back to desk jobs.

Q: While you were dealing with this truce commission, again, when you were talking to your fellow officers, what was the feeling about this, at that time, this whole cease fire business?

COTTER: The feeling was that we were bailing out, and that the commission was essentially there to provide cover for us to leave. I certainly didn't anticipate, in 1973, what ended up happening in 1975, that the whole thing would collapse like a house of cards. As I say, one was fairly confident about the Delta, that the war had been won in most parts of the Delta, that the Viet Cong presence was minimal and the North Vietnamese presence was increasing, and in the long run, in a guerrilla type conflict North Vietnamese regular army presence was not going to win. The government had its act together considerably. We had done an awful lot to improve the life of people. It was really in 1973, rather than earlier, when I noticed the impact we had on raising pigs, for instance. The first ten months I was out there we were working on this. When I went back in 1973, you saw practically none of the swayback, fat, traditional Vietnamese hogs. Some industry had come down to that area, shrimp fishing and other things, with the decline of the war, which had declined considerably down there, simply because the government had consolidated its hold on most areas. When the government fell, I guess, like a lot of people who served in the Delta, the perception by this time, and I was far away from it, was that once central Vietnam fell, the government pretty much gave up the ghost. They never had any interest in the Delta. There was never any effort by the government to leave Saigon and move down to Can Tho. Once the game was up, they all fled and left the Delta pretty much to fend for itself. Ted McNamara, who was then consul general, escaped on his famous trip down the Mekong River, I think, after the Embassy in Saigon fell.

Q: Terry McNamara.

COTTER: Terry McNamara, not Ted. He had tried to get, as I recall, assistance and was unable to. They finally commandeered a river boat and put everybody on a river boat. As I recall, it was a few days after Saigon fell.

Q: A few days after, yeah, something like that.

COTTER: There was never any effort by the South Vietnamese Government to regroup. I think there would have been some potential. There is not much potential for doing that if you have North Vietnamese troops with tanks coming down the pike and you have no military assistance to counter it. But I felt very badly about Vietnam because, as I say, I think it was a winnable war. I remember feeling that when it did fall in 1975, and I was back in Washington, having terribly conflicting feelings about that. Friends of mine and colleagues of mine were going back and taking in refugee families, something that I really wasn't prepared to do, which again, conflicted me, because I sort of had the feeling that I should have. A couple of colleagues actually went back against flat orders not to, returned to the country, went on their own hook and helped people...

Q: Lionel Rosenblatt

COTTER: I can't think of who it was who went back with Lionel. As someone who believed in what we were doing when I went out there, who saw nothing in the time I was in Vietnam to lead me to believe that what we were doing was not the right thing, I was very conflicted when it ended, and for a long time, years afterward really. Then, when you saw what happened in Cambodia, it sort of led one to think that, again, we had made a mistake in not sticking with what we were doing.

Q: When you came back, you came back to Washington. You were there from 1973 until?

COTTER: Until 1975. Then I went up to Stanford for a year, at the university for training in Latin American studies.

Q: When you came back in 1973, what was your job?

COTTER: I was the desk officer for Honduras and El Salvador. There was one desk officer for both of those countries, in those pre-Soccer War days.

Q: Before we start talking about South America, you had a long, hard look at Vietnam. When you came back, what was the attitude toward Vietnam that you were getting back in the States?

COTTER: That it had been a disaster. Most of us who were there didn't talk about it much. I don't recall, even with colleagues with whom I had served, that we ever really sat down and said that we felt the thing has all gone awry. Other people would sort of look strangely at you, "Oh, you have been in Vietnam." Everybody, as far as I could tell, was happy it was over, happy to be out, wanted to forget about it, thought it was a disaster. Of course, that wasn't the main topic of discussion when I got back in 1973. The main topic of discussion was "Deja vu, all over again." It was the disgrace and pending impeachment and resignation of Richard Nixon, and the disintegration of the U.S. Government. It was clear when you got back to the States how strong the feeling was against the war in Vietnam. But you also would see, I think, from my experience, how wrong the media was about it. They were not reporting accurately what was going on, that their reporting from the field was as flawed as they claimed the U.S. Government's reporting was, that it was not particularly in depth. But, that is what most people had to go on. I think most people overestimated the level of corruption and lack of commitment of the South Vietnamese to avoid being Communists. South Vietnamese officials that I knew in Saigon, in the Delta, those who were from the Delta, or from the South, had an identity as South Vietnamese, which is not the same as an identity as North Vietnamese. The people who felt even more strongly about this, of course, were the refugees who had come down from the north to escape Communism, and who felt very strongly about it. The fact that some of them were venal - I think the Vietnamese are fairly mercenary people, in general - the fact that that was a flawed regime as there are many other flawed regimes, I think, is incontrovertible. But I don't think, even in hindsight, that how it would have been if we had stayed in was worse than what ensued. I don't think you can maintain that.

The other thing that is misunderstood here is that we successfully Vietnamized the war. A lot of the criticism of it was of American involvement, that it was an American war, and not a Vietnamese war. Indeed, it began that way. But one of the things Nixon had done successfully was Vietnamize the war. It was the Ninth Division leaving the Delta, U.S. units leaving. As we left, and the South Vietnamese had to take responsibility for more of their own defense, I think they were willing to do so. The Vietnamese, like most people, were probably thinking that if the Americans were willing to come here and die to save us, more power to them. I think at the beginning of the 1970s, when it was clear that they were going to have to be more responsible for their own defense, I think the Vietnamese Government picked it up. It was at that point, not only did we take out American troops, but we also removed the physical and financial help that they needed to fight on an even basis against an enemy who had financial and equipment resources from Russia. That is the thing that is really too bad, because we saw correctly that U.S. troops were not going to win the war. We then changed. A lot of the time, when U.S. troops were there, in spite of all the money we were putting in, the Vietnamese really had second quality equipment. When I was down in the Delta, for instance, as late as 1970 the regional forces and Popular Forces largely were equipped with M1 and M2 carbines, World War II 30 caliber M1 and M2 carbines, not with M16s. By 1971, 1972, we were getting M16s out to those troops, but as late as 1970, most of those troops, who were responsible for a lot of what was being done, were fighting with equipment much inferior to what even Viet Cong guerillas had, who had AK-47s. If we had been able to withdraw our troops but maintain the level of physical support, I think it is very possible that the South Vietnamese Government would have managed to defend themselves, and develop into something much more credible. I think that is one of the great flaws that is not perceived in the United States. The perception was that it was an American war and South Vietnamese never played a role in it. When we ended it being an American war, they fell. Well, to me, there was an American war stage, and there was Nixon's Vietnamization effort, which I think would have been successful if we had continued it. The fact is we did not continue it.

Q: Well, moving through Central America now, which 10 years later was to be the center of American interest, 1973 - 1975, Honduras and El Salvador.

COTTER: We had put them together because in 1969, they fought a war called The Soccer War. At that time, we combined the two of them in a single desk. I actually did that from 1973 to 1974, and then I moved to the Bolivia desk when the incumbent Bolivia desk officer left. I had not had much experience in Central America. One year on the desk, you don't develop very much. One of the interesting things was, in those days, the Alliance for Progress was AID, and it and the State Department were integrated in the Latin American bureau. You had an office director and a deputy. One would be State and one would be AID. So, if the office director was State, the deputy director was an AID officer. The desk officers sat together, the State and an AID desk officer, a system that worked quite well, actually. We looked at the consolidation of USIA (United States Information Agency), with much to and fro about how this was going to work. I remember just three months ago talking to people in the IG (Office of the Inspector General) who were jetting out for an inspection and discussing how this was going to work, mentioning to them that we had had this before. It was understood we were not going to do that with USIA, but it worked quite well with AID in those days. We worked in a very good situation. So, at that point, when I was on the Honduras and El Salvador desk, the director there in Central America was an AID officer and the deputy director was a State officer named Larry Pezzullo, who later on was ambassador to Nicaragua before he was fired by the Reagan Administration. As you might expect, in a country where there was one desk officer for two countries, you spent most of your time catching up. I had two new ambassadors go out. So I spent an enormous amount of time on the desk preparing them to go out, getting them through hearings and things. Henry Cattle went to El Salvador while I was there, who later on was ambassador to London and then director of USIA. He turned out to be quite good. When he came in, he was a very green political appointee, from Texas. I think in the end, he got his teeth into it and turned out to be as effective as a director of USIA could be, but that is not saying very much. So, I did that for a year and then moved to the Bolivia desk, which was in Andean Affairs. Obviously, I had a lot more knowledge about Bolivia and Bolivian politics and people in Bolivia. There, we tracked largely tin prices. In both of those years, it was interesting coming back to the State Department. Even in those days, working in the State Department was not easy. Both years, I ended up with my back going out. It was only years later that it dawned on me that this was not slipped discs but stress related back problems. Of course, 1974 was the last year of... When did Nixon resign?

Q: He left in 1974.

COTTER: The government practically came to a crashing halt. The White House did nothing. We had ambassadors, as I recall, who went home in umbrage because a year would pass and they weren't able to present their credentials, since you couldn't get the White House to focus on anything other than Watergate. I am sure it is happening today, but perhaps to a lesser extent. What is going on today is not quite as serious as Watergate was. There was a book that had been published, not that much before, called Seven Days in May, which was about a military coup in the United States. You had people talking about this kind of thing and editorializing about it as we slid into chaos, in what was still a very dangerous world with the Cold War. As we slid into chaos, we waited to see whether the military would indeed take a step that would be the only thing that would save the republic. There were some scary things that went around in the last year of Nixon. I remember the great relief when he resigned and flew off. It was almost like the air deflating out of the balloon. People could actually start going back to doing their work because the crisis was over. It was a very tense time. The one positive thing that I recall from those two years was that I got married. This was a woman I had known for a number of years. We started dating when I got back and we got married in 1974.

Q: What was her background?

COTTER: She actually is from Wisconsin as well, although we never knew each other back there. We met here, through mutual acquaintances, who had gone, as she did, to Marquette University. She originally came out to Washington after graduation from college in 1967 and went to work for NSA (National Security agency) as an intern. She spent a little less than a year with NSA before she decided that was not her cup of tea. She left and got a teaching certificate. When I met her, she was living in Adams Morgan and teaching DC (District of Columbia) public schools. Then she went to work for a non-profit organization that did HUD (Department of Sousing and Urban Development) contracts. That is what she was doing when we got married. She later became a Foreign Service Officer. She took the Foreign Service exam then. It must have been 1975 when she took the exam. She passed the written exam, but most of the questions in the oral were why she wanted to join the Foreign Service, and was it to travel with her husband. Questions that subsequently, as a result of a women's suit and other things, were stricken. But in those days that was the attitude. This was before what I call the "amnesty," when women who had working spouses, and who had been forced to resign when they got married, were allowed to come back. We have a couple of very good friends who came back in under that. I think that was about the same time, 1974, the system first allowed or corrected that inequity that had occurred sometime before. So, we were married. I applied for university training in Latin American studies in the summer of 1975 when my tour as Bolivian desk officer was up, and went out to Stanford. I think this has gone down, but in those days, one of the other things the Department of Defense did, was there was Defense funding for area studies and quite a few schools. For Latin American studies, we actually had a choice of about four schools. Wisconsin had a good program, Texas had a good program, UCLA had a good program, Stanford had a good program. There may have been some on the east coast too, but I was interested in getting out of the east coast and going somewhere else. I finally went to Stanford, primarily because its masters program was a one year masters, and I could get a masters degree in the one year that I was allotted for the program. I think this is one of the great things we have done. It was really good for me because, again, I needed, just like a lot of people, decompression after the whole Nixon thing. This was a very intense time. It was a good time for me, after having worked for two years in the Department, to take a year and go away and think about it. There is no better place to go than California, where you are completely out of time. One of the great culture shocks and changes in my entire Foreign Service career was going out to Palo Alto, California. In those days, you couldn't get The New York Times on the west coast very easily.

Q: Let's pick this up with your time at Stanford. There was a flaw in the taping. Let's go over again about the dependency theory and how you were received at Stanford, and where this came from and all. Also, had the Catholic Church come up with this, something theology? I can't think of what it was.

COTTER: Liberation theology.

Q: Liberation theology. So, let's talk about both those trips, as you were seeing it from the academic world, because this is important, as part of the milieu in which we were operating in Latin America.

COTTER: Well, the question before I went to Stanford was whether Stanford would want to have me in Latin American area studies, want to have a Foreign Service Officer. The reason is because it was one of the centers for the study of dependency theory, which sort of grew out of liberation theology. Professor Richard Fagen ran, not the whole Latin American studies program, but was one of the major professors there, and was also one of the major proponents of dependency theory. We have always had a Foreign Service Fellow out at the Hoover Institution, at Stanford. It turned out that that year it was Curt Kamman, who later I worked for in Chile. I called him and asked him whether he thought there would be any problem with a Foreign Service Officer doing Latin American studies. He expressed surprise and said, "Well, I doubt it, very much, but I will check." He checked and there were no problems. That is symptomatic of how the Department looked at these things or how the Department felt the rest of the world would look at them. Of course, part of the answer to that is when you get out to California, you are in an entirely different world. Things that loom large inside the beltway, loom much smaller when you get as far out as California, where frankly, in those days, you had a hard time finding out about much of anything at all that existed in the outside world. The San Francisco Chronicle, not being one of the great newspapers of the western world, and of course, The Los Angeles Times not being culturally acceptable at a northern California university.

Q: I recently read it when I was visiting my son. It is sort of The Washington Post light. It's not a world class paper.

COTTER: It's not a world class paper.

Q: It is watered down.

COTTER: Anyhow, the Stanford program had a variety of courses, but the basic part of it was a core curriculum. The core curriculum focused a lot on dependency theory and I wrote a paper on it, along with another student, a Latin American woman. The dependency theory basically is neo-Marxism and says that nothing that ever happens to Latin America was their fault. It was pretty much the fault of the United States, one way or the other. The pernicious thing about such an idea is, of course, you are not responsible for anything. Not being responsible for your own actions, tends, in my view, to engender irresponsibility on the part of the actor, who after all doesn't have to worry about the consequences. It was quite popular in the 1970s. The other problem with dependency theory, which one quickly found out at a place like Stanford, is that the proponents are almost all North Americans. There were a few Latin Americans, thinkers and writers, a number of them religious people. But most of the people who took the theory and developed it in any way were North Americans. Something interesting that I found in other area studies is that we do a lot of area studies, but it is we who do them. When you go to other countries, USIA was very active in pushing American studies programs at various universities, and they get some interest, partly I think because professors at those universities end up getting grants to come to the United States and study up so they can go back and teach about it. Frankly, most parts of the world don't spend as much time studying what one might call esoteric things as we do. As a result, you end up with American professors teaching dependency theory in Latin America, or teaching Latin American politics or African politics or Asian politics, as opposed to professors from those cultures, themselves, studying themselves in the same degree that we did.

In any event, I found open arms at Stanford and participated very much as one of the students. The thing I found most interesting about going back to school after about seven years, and what the Foreign Service had done to me, was the impact on how I looked at things and how I read things. In government, at least in the State Department, you are faced with, on a daily basis, reams of material that you have to read. One of the skills you acquire very quickly is being able to separate the wheat from the chaff. That is one of the reasons why in telegrams people put so much emphasis on summaries, because as we all know, many readers, particularly back in the Department at more senior levels, don't read anything or they will only read those telegrams in which the summary catches their eye. As a result, critical reading becomes very much reading something quickly to determine whether it has any utility or value and then discarding those that don't and reading those that do. Well, of course, in an academic setting, it is much different. I would find myself being assigned a book to read and do an oral presentation on it. Particularly when you have things like the dependency theory, you read about the first 30 pages and say, "Well, this is absolute silliness." My normal reaction would be to put the book aside and find another book. Well, of course, you couldn't do that. I was supposed to read that book all the way through and read it critically. I found that that took a little getting used to. The other thing, frankly, is you realize, as you are a little older, how well students have it. I sort of went with the idea that since the State Department was paying my salary, I would work an eight hour day, more or less. What I quickly discovered was it is very hard to work an eight hour day, even with a fairly heavy graduate school load. One of the problems I had was very often you partnered on papers with other students. The problem was always giving your partner the same sense of urgency that you had. I found this at the end of the year when we had to turn in our "core paper." I discovered that my partner was planning, in any event, on coming back for the summer and probably for the next year, and was in no hurry to get this done. I was in a great hurry to finish it and go on to my next assignment, which was Quito, Ecuador. A number of years later, things changed on us, but when I went to university training, it was informal but they tried to assign you to your ongoing assignment. Later on, this became quite a controversial issue because for a while people found that they were assigned to things like the Senior Seminar or the War College or university training, and at the end of the year, had no assignment.

Q: I came out in 1974 or 1975 from the Senior Seminar.

COTTER: Then, for a couple years, the system guaranteed people assignments. One of the things that did was to screw up posts' planning because you found people going into these programs, lopping off some of the very good assignments and posts being very frustrated because they were forced to accept people they didn't want to accept. In any event, when I went into the university training, after that I was assigned to Chile, but over the course of the year the assignment was changed to Quito. I think I mentioned earlier, how difficult it was when I entered in the late 1960s, because there was no financial assistance provided to new officers who came in, particularly people who then were assigned to what, in many cases, were unfurnished posts. Even in 1976, when we went to Quito, we had to bring not only all of our furniture, but all of our appliances. By 1977, when people went to Quito the Department had started providing at least appliances. I think they decided that it costs less to send a washer and a dryer and have it stay through several people than it did to pay the transportation for all of these things. Nonetheless, we bought furniture and headed off to Quito, Ecuador.

Q: I have a question, before we leave Stanford. What about liberation theology? You say, dependency theory sort of spun off that, but was liberation theology a viable theory that was going through the corridors of Stanford University?

COTTER: No, not liberation theology, per se. It may be, if you were in a Catholic university, you would hear some more of that, but of course theology wasn't something that Stanford much focused on. Dependency theory really began... I wouldn't really remember the names to save my soul, but there were a number of priests... Liberation theology began in Brazil. There were some priests and a bishop that, as I recall, in Sao Paulo was very radical. I don't recall particularly the details of liberation theology, other than that it would have focused as well on the repression of peoples dependent in non-central countries under the yoke of those in the more developed countries, who exploited that for their own ends. By the time dependency theory got very well articulated, which takes a number of years in academic circles, it was pretty much discredited. So you may find a couple of lone Marxists wandering around. You would probably find a number of graduate students who believe in it, but not many professors. I don't know where Richard Fagen is. He is probably still at Stanford, although he may have retired by now. Frankly, outside of Latin American area studies, nobody worried much about him. Even in Latin American area studies, there were people on the staff and elsewhere who didn't much buy into it. I had an interesting professor, John Johnson, who had written a book, and I did some work on, regarding military governments. So, I went off to Quito in the summer of 1976.

Q: You were in Quito from 1976 to when?

COTTER: 1979. Dick Bloomfield was the ambassador when I was there, and Ed Corr, when I arrived, was the political counselor, and then moved up to be deputy chief of mission. Gerry Sutton was the political counselor. There were three of us in the political section. We would switch portfolios, but I generally had political-military issues (by this time, I was identified as a political-military officer) and external political affairs. Ecuador was under military government. The military must have taken over earlier, in 1976. It was a military junta, composed of three officers. They had taken power to prevent the election of a fellow named Assad Bucaram. One of the interesting things about Latin America is the inordinate, percentage-wise, presence in political life in many of the countries of immigrants from the Levant. The Latin Americans tend to call them all "Turcos," "Turks." They are mostly Syrians and Palestinians, and interestingly enough mostly Christians, people who had left with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, very often in the 1920s. Families like the Bucarams, obviously, were from this group. Carlos Menem, President of Argentina, is also from this group. It was a very active political group, and a very high profile political group, given its small percentage of the population. Anyhow, Bucaram was seen as a dangerous populist. Having tried a number of constitutional ways to keep him from being elected president, including questioning whether he was actually born in Ecuador, the military ended up overthrowing the system. So again, we have a very active political life. You saw a lot, still at that time, of military governments being able to play the anti-Communist card with us in order to maintain a particular flow of assistance. That changed a little bit when Jimmy Carter came in. Of course, that was about the same time I arrived. The main issue I remember dealing with was an interesting one. We are not supposed to talk about classified things on this, but I guess this is now 20 years, so we will call this unclassified. But the Carter administration came up with an idea that I thought was an absolute disaster and one of the few pieces I have ever written was a piece for the Open Forum Magazine on it.

Q: This was essentially our in-house dissent magazine.

COTTER: If it still exists.

Q: I'm not sure.

COTTER: I haven't seen a copy of it in years. But, it was an in-house magazine in which one could write articles, including classified articles, dissenting or commenting on policy. The Carter Administration came in and established a policy of not selling sophisticated military equipment in areas where this kind of equipment hadn't been introduced. This caused a real problem coming when it did, the period 1977 to 1980, because so much of the military equipment that we had given Latin Americans was obsolete and simply not supportable. I think I mentioned that when I was in Bolivia, the Bolivians were still flying P51 Mustangs. The Bolivians got from Canada F80 Starfighters, one of the very early jets.

Q: First generation, early Korean War.

COTTER: Later on, they got some F86s, which is what the Ecuadorians had, which again, was Korean War. Well, by 1977 you couldn't get parts for the F86; you couldn't repair the engine; you couldn't do a whole bunch of things. The Ecuadorians, along with a lot of other countries, were in the market for more aircraft, particularly fighters. It applies to tanks, although to a lesser extent in that part of the world, because tanks are not of much use in those countries. The bridges won't take more modern tanks. So, a lot of this is focused on aircraft. Actually, Northrop had developed the F5.

Q: So called "Freedom Fighter," which is really designed for non-American countries.

COTTER: Not originally. The F5 was built by them in competition with the F16 and lost the competition with the U.S. Air Force, which decided to buy the F16. At that point, Northrop reconfigured the F5 and turned it into what was a somewhat less capable aircraft. Well, they would not say that it was somewhat less capable. They would say it was as capable, but the fact is, a cheaper and somewhat less capable aircraft was for sale to the Third World. Again, facing the same issue, the question was asked, "Well, what do we have in our inventory that we can sell or give to these countries?" Anyhow, this came up because the Ecuadorians were looking at a number of aircraft. We at first said we weren't going to sell them first-line aircraft. Then, the Israelis came to them and wanted to sell them the Kfir. Now, the Kfir is an Israeli-designed aircraft, quite high performance, that had GE (General Electric) U.S. engines. The fact that it had U.S. engines gave us the veto power over its export to third countries. Lo and behold, the Carter Administration wouldn't allow the Israelis to sell the Kfir. So then the question came back again about the F5. At that point, the administration said, "Well, if we turned around and sold the F5, it would look like we had stopped the Israelis from selling the Kfir solely for cross commercial purposes." That wasn't our reason. Our reason was a high moral purpose of preventing the introduction of this kind of equipment in Latin America, so therefore we would not sell the F5, and we would not sell anything to the Ecuadorians. The upshot of this, of course, is that the Ecuadorians went out and bought French jets. I don't remember what French jets they bought, but they bought French jets. This had two effects. Number one, it opened a Latin American market which had been ours. If we had done this intelligently, we could have kept Ecuador on a stage of military modernization at minimal cost. It opened it up to any comer. The next impact of that was the Peruvians buying new MIGs, which drove us up a wall but was a predictable result of our unwillingness to sell military equipment. The other immediate impact on Ecuador, of course, was bribes because the French had been known in the past to sweeten their deals with commissions. It was fairly commonly believed, and I think correctly so, that in order to sell them Mirages, the French provided significant monetary benefits to people in the Ecuadorian Air Force. So, we have three events. We lost control ourselves of the arms market in Latin America, for better or for worse, but it could have been done better. We opened the door for introduction of much higher technology than we had any intention of selling. We opened the door for corruption of people who I don't believe would have engaged in it otherwise. It is a policy which I think has had impacts all down the line, although we are still screwing around on this. In the last few years, we have been discussing whether we would sell high-tech jets to the Argentines or the Chileans. The fact of the matter is, if those countries want to spend the money on those kinds of things, they certainly will find other countries willing to sell them.

Toward the end of the time in Ecuador, the military promised to return power to civilians within three years. Indeed, they stuck to that timetable. It didn't turn out quite as they had hoped. They managed to keep Assad Bucaram out. But what Bucaram did was put up for the elections his nephew, Jaime Roldos, or it may be a son-in-law. Anyhow, he ultimately won the elections. They made good on their commitment and turned the government over to Roldos. Long after I left, he turned out to be an excellent president who, unfortunately, was killed in a helicopter accident a number of years later. It was unfortunate for Ecuador. Ecuador was interesting at that time because oil had been discovered earlier, but the Ecuadorians who had expropriated lots of these kinds of energy things, years earlier, finally allowed Texaco to come in and begin to exploit some of their oil reserves. You see the impact of this still today. The oil was in the Amazon basin, and you read about a lot of the problems that Ecuador has with environmental degradation. It also caused some technological difficulties, pumping oil from the relatively low Amazon basin up across the Andes and down the other side to the sea coast. This had some interesting impacts. The one refinery was down on the seacoast. Quito is at 9,600 feet. I, by this time, had graduated downward from La Paz, at 12,000 feet. The ride down to the coast was fairly harrowing. It was a two-lane asphalted road that crossed the pass at probably 11,000, 12,000 feet, and then it dropped down to the coast. In doing this, you would pass through several microclimates. The wind would come from the west. So, you had a cloud layer that would form every day at a certain level. That would produce subtropical plants and things. When you were driving down to the coast, well, usually the bigger problem was driving back from the coast, because you would come up behind laden oil tankers, laden gas trucks. They would be lucky to do 10 miles an hour up to the top. It is a highway that runs around the mountains, and when you get into the clouds, it is absolutely blind driving. There are not very many Latin Americans who are going to let that deter them from going around the trucks. I can't remember that we ever took a trip up that highway without coming upon horrific car accidents where people tried to pass trucks or simply got caught in the cloud cover. I don't think Ecuador has ever widened that road beyond that.

Ecuador is a very interesting place to travel. It has some of the best and worst of what you find in Latin America. I probably mentioned that when I was in Bolivia, Bolivia had had in 1952 at least a semi-social revolution, allowing the indigenous people a certain amount of votes, who wanted it. There were not that many, and there are still not that many who want to participate in the political system. At least one president of Bolivia has had very noticeable Indian features. Well, that revolution had not occurred, and I don't think it has occurred today, in Ecuador. The people who lived up by Quito in the high plains of Ecuador were extraordinarily conservative. Society in that country was composed of people who could trace their ancestry back to a village in Spain where they came from. Germans who came in the mid-18th century were still called Germans. Palestinians who came in the 1920s were still called "Turcos." You weren't a real person unless you could trace your ancestry back to Spain. They ran large farms and the Indians who lived on them were essentially serfs, who worked on the farm, who bought from the farm, who were in hoc to the company store, so to speak. It was a very difficult place. But there also you had this distinction between the highlands and the lowlands. In the lowlands, the same happens a lot in Peru, you have much more mixing of races. Some of these folks would emigrate to the highlands, but in Guayaquil, you find a much greater mix of people including blacks, as there had been some experiments the Spaniards had had with African slavery, which often hadn't worked. But, the descendants of the failed efforts still lived there. You had slave ships bound for other areas that at various places had either crashed along the coast or were taken over by the slaves. So, you had a mix of black population along the coast and then mixtures of Indians and Europeans. Ecuador is much like Bolivia in that you had true Indians living in the mountains. By putting on shoes and moving down, they could make the decision to join a modern society, which some did and some didn't. There are some very beautiful, old colonial towns in southern Ecuador, Cuenca being one that is a very nice town. It was difficult to get to. The Pan American Highway, at that point, was not paved. There was a paved road that came down from Colombia to Quito, and then went down to the coast. You could take a paved road down to Chile, but the Pan American Highway itself went down the high plains of the Andes and was not a paved road. It was subject to lots of landslides. The other interesting thing about Ecuador, that we got called upon to do several times, was deal with plane crashes. There was one just before we arrived and one while we were there. These were commercial jetliners, small ones, flying to cities further south that had crashed. They would crash on the eastern slope of the Andes, which was very heavily forested. They were never found. There were 60 people aboard. At one point, while we were there, the authorities came to us and asked us to send down a plane from Panama to search for one of these planes. Unfortunately, they had waited a week or two after the crash, by which time, there wasn't enough heat left for the thermal sensors on the C130 to do much good. But it was generally believed that what would happen with these crashes would be that it would be difficult to see from the air, so the only way you would know about it would be if someone came in and reported it. It was generally supposed that local people went in and looted whatever was there and then were obviously in no position to go and report the crash. As far as I know, those planes have never been found. There were several Ecuadorian commercial airlines that flew down from Quito to Guayaquil, that had sort of cornered the market on old Caravelles. A Caravelle is a two-engine French early jet. I guess it was from the very early 1960s. The Ecuadorians flew these on their domestic routes and had bought from Alitalia a whole bunch of them to cannibalize. When you went down to Guayaquil, you would see parked beside the airport a whole row of these things which simply sat there. They cannibalized them to keep a couple flying. There were two airlines that flew that, and then there was one airline that flew Electras, which were a four-engine turboprop, similar to a C130, but a commercial one. I don't even remember who made it, Lockheed, I think.

Q: It was Lockheed.

COTTER: That was the plane of choice to fly out of Quito because the Caravelles couldn't fly on one engine at that altitude, particularly on take off or landing. So if one of the Caravelles lost an engine on either take off or landing, you were done, whereas the Electra, even though it was a slower turboprop with four engines, could fly on two. So, if you had a choice, you tended to fly the airline with the Electra.

Quito airport was great. Quito is a relatively small town, it probably still is. In those days, it was 300,000 to 400,000, now it is probably 500,000. It is a long city set in the plains up in the mountains. A lot of the suburbs are on the hills or on the side of it, and the airport was on the edge of the city. I think it still is. If we were expecting visitors, we could, literally from our living room, see the plane come by on its landing approach. Then we could leave the house and drive to the airport to meet the visitors. It was a very interesting place. We had a good mission. It was a very good place to be.

Q: You say the ambassador was Dick Bloomfield? What was his background and how did he operate?

COTTER: He was a career Foreign Service Officer. His next assignment was ambassador to Portugal. Dick was a Latin American hand. He ran a tight but fair ship. He was acceptable to people. He made an effort to improve the staff in most activities. Ed Corr was his DCM, who later on was ambassador to El Salvador and possibly somewhere else. He got himself caught up in the Reagan revolution and lost his job. That must have been later on in the Reagan revolution, because he must have been ambassador to El Salvador. Ed was in Quito from 1976 to 1978. Then he came back to Washington to work on the drug program, under Mathea Falco, I think is the name. Later on, he was Ambassador to El Salvador, under the Reagan Administration. Ed was good. Nevertheless, Ed had arrived as political counselor and then moved up to be DCM. That did not affect me as much as it affected my boss.

Q: How was it dealing with the Ecuadorian bureaucracy, the political class, and military?

COTTER: The political class kept a low profile because you had a military government when I was there. They weren't allowed to organize openly, although it was easy enough to keep contact with them. This was not a military government that threw most of these people in jail. It was not a military government that prevented most of them from planning for the return for civilian government. So, we maintained contact with the major political forces. There was a lot of change that is still going on - but I think this military government in Ecuador sort of pressed a lot of it - between the old political organizations and, as the 1970s came to an end, ferment and change in these kinds of things in Latin America. You had the Christian Democrats and the Social Christians, the Social Christians being on the right. In theory, you had Socialists on the left; the Communists were banned. But, Jaime Roldos and Assad Bucaram's party was not banned. It was a Populist Party.

The bureaucracy was not very well organized. You had a civil service, but it did not have full protections. When you had, for instance, a military government come in, you had a lot of people leave. The depth and the expertise of the foreign ministry was quite limited. The military had largely been trained in one way or another by us and were quite accessible. Again, in those days, it was before the drug war and there was no particular threat at all in Ecuador. It was a fairly low level relationship. You had a military group in the embassy that was grossly overstaffed. I found, throughout my career, in some cases it is difficult for political sections to play a role in this. On one hand, the military tend to resent civilians sticking their nose in. Largely, that is a function of convincing them that you know what you are talking about. The other advantage we have always had in these situations is being able to play the mediator between the defense attachï¿½ and the military assistance group. The Pentagon has never figured out, largely because this is really peripheral to what the Pentagon does, how to manage these kinds of things. They resisted, for years and years, unifying their overseas activities because those activities are not unified back in the Pentagon. The Pentagon has an incredible variety of fiefdoms, all of which defend their turf with great effort. You would find one group commanded by a colonel and an attachï¿½ office headed by a colonel. A good part of the time both those gentlemen argued who is the senior military advisor to the ambassador, with some incredible internal warfare and with some complaining and bitching on their part. If the political officer is astute enough to take advantage of it, it gives him or her a great advantage in serving as a sounding board and advising both. This worked in places where the embassy managed to give political sections a role in these kinds of things, as opposed to having the military group commander report directly to the ambassador. There was a lot of this internal fighting in Ecuador. It is also a function, I think, in a lot of these countries, of neither colonel having enough to do. In most of these organizations, from a military perspective, you wouldn't have a colonel running that small an operation. You do it in embassies because you need the rank there. I will talk in some later posts about this. It turns out over a number of years to be a matter of some interest and some difficulty for us to deal with. In every post I have been at, at different levels, we have had to work out problems of our military colleagues.

Q: Also, too, I have heard other people talking, who have served in a Latin American country, saying that the staffing of these military groups, at the colonel level, often use people on the way to retirement, not people out of the up and coming wagon of the military.

COTTER: This is true. It is an interesting anomaly. Again, it goes to how peripheral all of this really is to the Pentagon. I remember in Vietnam being out in the district, under CORDS, which worked with MACV. MACV, the military assistance mission in Vietnam, was the advisory portion of our presence, as opposed to USARV, which was the U.S. Army Vietnam. I remember people coming out of Saigon, or for all I know out of Washington, and they would come and talk with our military officers in our advisory group in the province saying, "You guys are central to what we are doing. You and MACV are as important to us as USARV is. Don't think you are second-class citizens. What you are doing is central to the military mission." Well, I heard the same thing over the next 30 years in every post I have been at. People would come up to the guys in the military group and say, "You are central to what we are doing. You are really important," as the system in every stage, not just now, was weeding them out. The fact of the matter is, in the Army, if something is not armor or infantry or military police, or anything else, it is a sideline. It is interesting, and the Pentagon wants to keep its oar in, but they have never succeeded in developing a career track, up to flag officer, for foreign area specialists. The Army does some things very well. They have a foreign area specialist program on which they lavish tons of money that trains young officers, something we should be looking into. For instance, it sends officers at the captain or navy lieutenant level off for a two year program of area specialization, one year of which is university, and the second year of which is simply traveling the region. Literally, the guy has a travel budget, and if he can hook himself up with a military institution in a country in a region, fine. In some cases, these officers go to a command and general staff school in another country, and they spend a year traveling. Would that be interesting if we had something like that in the Foreign Service for area specialization! We don't even do language study in the region. Nonetheless, in spite of having things like this for captains and majors, and having something of a career up to colonel, the military has never managed to get a flag officer or a serious number of flag officer positions for military assistance people. As a result, it doesn't attract officers with great ambition. Frankly, the attachï¿½ business suffers from very much the same thing. Only the Army has a true attachï¿½ corps of people with military intelligence background who are trained and who have multiple tours. The Air Force and the Navy have never done that. The Air Force, in particular, has a lot of disgruntled people. Very often, what you would find with Air Force attachï¿½s or colonels were guys who had been fighter pilots and were being told, in no uncertain terms, that they weren't fighter pilots anymore. They would spend two years in their posts, most of the time trying to figure out how they could return to a pilot's seat - spending more time worrying about that kind of thing and bemoaning what was being done to them than they did engaging in whatever it is attachï¿½s are supposed to do. You are right that it doesn't attract, necessarily, the best officers, although you would find good officers who, as an excursion tour, were serving as either an attachï¿½ or military assistance person. There are very good officers who should have had longer careers in the military but didn't, simply because the career track wasn't there for them.

Q: During this 1976 to 1979 period, how were things on the Peruvian border? Anybody who serves in Ecuador I'm sure knows that we are a guarantor from 1942 or something, along with Brazil and others of the Peruvian/Ecuadorian border. This keeps getting thrown in our face from time to time.

COTTER: Yeah. I'm glad you mentioned that because the border itself was quiet. Ecuador never did accept the peace agreement that had been done at the end of the Second World War. This stemmed from a war that occurred in the 1940s, in which Ecuador lost a third of its territory to Peru. A peace was forged by us and others, and the Ecuadorians have always resented this. The war was in 1942, and the Ecuadorians always felt that their interests were sacrificed to the greater world war effort, and the United States wasn't interested in having a war in South America that perhaps would be exploited by the Nazis.

Q: I had an interview with someone who was a desk officer. He got called by Sumner Welles, who said, "I don't know what the war is about, but stop it. You are screwing up things, so just stop the war."

COTTER: We did. The result was something that the Ecuadorians never accepted. While there was peace on the border, the Ecuadorians didn't accept it. Part of our concern and part of their interest in buying more modern arms was in being able to regain their lost territories. It's funny because you would see the same kind of thing at the airport in Bolivia when you arrive in La Paz. There is a sign that says, "Antofagasta was, is, and will be Bolivian." Antofagasta is a city in northern Chile. Of course, Chile won The War of the Pacific at the end of the 1800s against Peru and Bolivia and actually occupied Lima.

Well, the Bolivians, who lost their sea coast in that war, never accepted that fact despite a couple of treaties, and for a good part of the period since then they have not had relations with Chile. When I was in Chile from 1992 to 1995, there was no Bolivian embassy there. They didn't have diplomatic relations. The Ecuador/Peru thing was very much the same. There wasn't a town that the Ecuadorians could focus on. The idea was that the Amazon was, is and will be Ecuadorian. This is one of the reasons the Ecuadorians were interested in upgrading their arms. What is fascinating about this is there was a period there, in the very late 1970s early 1980s, where the arms race had progressed. Ecuador had gotten its French Mysteres, I think it was. Peru had acquired MIGs, and Argentina and Chile were almost at the point of war in 1979 and 1980 over the Beagle Channel. The Beagle Channel goes along the Straits of Magellan. One of the complaints that the Chilean military, Pinochet, and the Chilean Army have against us was that our embargo on arms to that military government began seriously at the end of the 1970s. From the Chilean perspective, in their time of national need, when they were faced with the prospect of war, the United States was not there for them. In any event, one could see the potential for a continental war occurring, as everybody took advantage of something else. In other words, you could see Chile and Argentina fighting over the Beagle Channel. It was predictable had that occurred, the Peruvians and Bolivians would have taken advantage of the Chileans being engaged in the south to try to regain their lost territories from the war. It is 90% certain that would have happened. A Peruvian would have had to be a traitor to his country not to take advantage of that. Indeed, one of the Chilean military's problems has always been fighting a two-front defensive war. How do you fight in the south, in those areas that were not defined with Argentina, and at the same time, in a country that is 3,000 miles long, fight in the north to protect the territories you won in The War of the Pacific? Well, if Peru had become engaged in a fight with Chile over that area, it is again 95% certain that the Ecuadorians would have taken advantage of this to regain their lost territories in the Amazon. So the threat of fighting between Chile and Argentina in 1979 and 1980 had implications that went far beyond Chile and Argentina itself. I really believe that it carried the seeds of a continent wide conflict. Happily the Argentine/Chilean conflict was settled. That was the reason they called the Pope in, and the Pope negotiated a satisfactory settlement. But, it was extraordinarily dicey there for some time. You had military forces, which had some upgraded equipment. The air forces, in particular, had new toys which they would have liked nothing better than to try out. As it turned out, going back to your initial question, the conflict between Peru and Ecuador was not an active one at that point. I don't think it became active really until 12 years later.

Q: Did human rights play any part, particularly in Ecuador? This was the Carter period. Was it a problem?

COTTER: Well, you had a military government, of course, which by definition violated human rights. Frankly, there was a lot of talk about human rights, but the policy was not articulated to the extent it is today. What has always surprised me in my career is that the Reagan Administration did more to institutionalize our human rights policy. I think the Democrats were very afraid that when Reagan came in, they would abandon that. The Reagan Administration didn't abandon it. It did institutionalize it. It was not institutionalized in Carter years. It was a matter of importance, but in fact it wasn't very clear what we were doing with this, except that we had an interest in it. We objected to the absence of political rights, of having military government and no democratic government. We pressed very hard on the Ecuadorian military to commit to a timetable to return to civilian government, which as I said, they did. I'm trying to remember whether we started doing human rights reports that early. I think we probably did.

Q: The Congress mandated it. I am pretty sure they were doing it about that time.

COTTER: The interesting thing with this has always been, of course, our definition of human rights as it applies to that report. Other countries have noted, for instance, that the U.S. doesn't consider the right to work or the right to salary or the right to medical benefits as a human right. We focus more on the political rights and not on economic rights. Anyhow, I transferred out of Ecuador in 1979. I was looking at that point career wise, professionally, at the prospect of becoming an Andean expert. I ought to say about dependency theory, one of the interesting things I did, having come out of Stanford, was that Dick Bloomfield was very interested in professional improvement. There was a big push in the Department at that point on continuing professional education and finding ways of doing this at post. They were pressing, among other things, posts to take the Great Issues series. Having come out of Stanford, I ended up being tabbed to run this for Quito. So, we generally would do brown bag lunches at the ambassador's residence once a month. I would prepare materials and get them out to people in advance. I decided to do a session on dependency theory, an idea that at least people in the embassy ought to have some idea of what it was. Of course, you can imagine the reaction because no one was very enthusiastic about this. It was difficult for me because I wasn't a particular proponent of it, although I found myself in the situation where I ended up having to defend the pieces I wasn't very comfortable with, simply because everyone else was against it. I had lots of materials. I would copy materials and circulate them to people ahead of time, and then we would have a luncheon discussion. It was a very useful thing. It is something we got away from very quickly, and something that only works if the ambassador really spends a lot of time on it. It is good because it helps people get out of their little molds and think broader thoughts. Something, also, however, that is a little bit less necessary now, when globally you have much more access to information than you did in those days. Some people aren't quite as isolated intellectually at some of these posts as we were in the late 1970s. In any event, I was looking at becoming an Andean expert. I could see my career progressing downward, altitudinally, from La Paz to Quito, and then you go into Bogota, at 8,400, and then you would get an excursion at 7,600. But I had gotten to the point in Latin America where at some point I was going to strangle someone. While as an intellectual thing dependency theory didn't go very far in the 1970s, the basic idea underlying it was very popular. That was that nothing they do affects themselves. Americans control everything, and everything is our fault. After the umpteenth discussion with an Ecuadorian, supposedly an intellectual, telling me that everything that happened in this country was our fault and they had never done anything themselves to deserve this, I was going to stand someone up and throttle him. It is incredible how destructive that kind of a thing is because you simply don't have to have any responsibility for your actions.

Q: I found slightly earlier, in 1970-1974, when I was in Greece, that the Greeks made the United States responsible for whatever had happened. Not just the United States, but the CIA.

COTTER: I remember, it was later I guess, an Argentine, who had been one of our exchange students back in Wisconsin. We got into a discussion after the Argentine junta had left. A new government had come in, and there had been this banking crisis. This was the crash in the 1980s when the American banks lost an incredible amount of money because they had loaned too much to the Third World countries. This guy was an engineer, and his view was that this was our fault because we forced money on the military junta. It really wasn't the Argentines' fault because the junta wasn't an Argentine government. It was the junta. It we hadn't forced all this money on the junta, all these problems would not have occurred. I said, "Carlos, get a grip. It was your government. You may not like it, but it was your government, and they took the money. I can feel sorry for banks that may have gone bust, but I can't accept that it is my responsibility or my government's responsibility that you guys over-borrowed." We decided that for our mental health we didn't want to continue the trend descending posts by altitude, and we had to get out. For a long time I had been interested, as all of us are at one time or another, in serving in Europe. Well, of course, Europe is a very difficult bureau to get into if you are not in it already. It always has been and always will be, although it is less so as the definition of Europe expands to include places that some of the European bureau (EUR) people weren't so interested in going to. Nonetheless, I was interested in going to Europe. Coming from ARA (Bureau for American Republic Affairs), you can forget it. I had no contacts, and I had been overseas for most of the previous three years. I ended up talking to my career counselor and came up with two possibilities. The only way I could get into Europe was to take a hard language. If you had Spanish and wanted to go to Spain, you can forget it. If you wanted to study French or German, forget about it, but you could take a hard language. So, there were two possibilities open for me: one was taking Serbo-Croatian and serving in Zagreb, and the other was taking Turkish, and serving in Ankara. Very much about our careers is luck because you just don't have that much control over things. You are faced with decisions, but that, frankly, was for me a very lucky decision. I had wanted to go to Zagreb, but I got a call one day saying that they were paneling the Ankara job and wondered whether I wanted it. I said, "Well, where does the Zagreb job stand?" They said, "Well, we are not paneling that yet." "Well, when are you going to panel it?" "Well sometime." "Well, what are my chances on that?" "Well, we can't say." I decided to take the Ankara job and go to Turkey, and go on to Turkish training, which is a 10 month language program. I got back to Washington and discovered that Turkey was in the thralls of incredible terrorism and had no money for heating oil. Not only did you have terrorists around town shooting up restaurants, but people in the previous winter had had no heat, and in some cases literally had to break the ice in their commode to go to the bathroom, which answers the question why the system was willing to have someone from ARA go to Ankara. Anyhow, my wife and I both took the full Turkish language course, something the Department also moved away from when money was tight. We treat our spouses so badly in general and provide so little to them. Obviously, we don't compensate them because they are not real people, even though they are expected to endure a significant amount of work. But, also, when we don't provide language training to such people, we don't provide them with the tools they need to function adequately in various countries. I think we are back to doing more language training. It is really important, and it really made a difference. We were also in the same class which was interesting. They tend not to like spouses in the same class. Joanne and I managed to do quite well. So, we had 10 months of language training.

Q: This would be from 1979 to 1980?

COTTER: That's right, from summer 1979 through summer 1980. I like FSI very much. I like their language training. I had been through it, of course, taking Vietnamese, in somewhat odd circumstances, but nonetheless a full language course. It's interesting. You have lots of conflicts in these courses. I think there were 12 of us taking Turkish. We had three classes. One of the early conflicts you get into within all these language classes is between people who like grammar and people who don't. There are some people who, when you start talking about noun cases, are really turned off and would rather absorb the language by osmosis. Other people like to know the grammar, and almost inevitably, it ends up in a conflict. Finally, the linguist has to resolve this. But we had a very good group who took Turkish, most of whom we are still in close touch with. I can't think of any events, in particular, that occurred that year, other than we spent a lot of time studying.

Q: Where did you go, to Ankara?

COTTER: Summer of 1980, I went to Ankara.

Q: You were there from 1980 to 1982?

COTTER: Yes. I was in the political military section, called Mutual Security Affairs. We arrived in August, and three weeks after we arrived there was a military coup in Turkey, which overthrew the government that had been there, and put an end to serious terrorism. I have now served in Vietnam, which obviously was a military government; I have served in Bolivia, which had a military coup six weeks after I got there; I served in Ecuador, which had a military coup three months before I got there; and I was now serving in Turkey, where a military government took over three weeks after I got there. I suppose the KGB's file on me probably ties me somehow together with military takeovers in various places. I guess one's personal experience colors very much how one looks at these things. My view of military governments is that, in some cases, they are necessary, where there is simply a breakdown of civilian institution. The difficulty in most cases is that they simply compound the problems that occurred in the civilian government. I was talking to somebody about this the other day. In a lot of countries where these things occur, the problem is that you don't have institutions that are strong enough, or good enough, to run the country. So you have a civilian government which simply doesn't perform. In almost all the cases where I have served with military governments, those governments were welcomed by the vast majority of the people, simply because of the chaos and non-performance of civilian government. People accepted that it was time for change. The problem, in a place like Ecuador, was that nothing changed under the military government. You had a lot of potential there for reforming, but the reforms don't occur. The military doesn't do anything to develop civilian institutions, and inevitably, they become corrupted by the same powers around the country that have corrupted whatever civilian people were there before them. They take money, and they take benefits from civilians. After a while, they leave power simply because they no longer enjoy popular support. Once again, a group of civilians takes over with the prospect of not much changing because nothing has been done to change the underlying conditions in the country. This was certainly the case in Ecuador, and it was, to a large extent, the case in Bolivia, where not much change was carried out. The Turkish military, to their credit, was much more disciplined and had done this before.

Q: And returned it.

COTTER: They returned it to civilians, trying to change the system every time. They did change the system significantly between 1980 and 1983, when they left, although again, they were not able to resolve some of the underlying conflicts within the Turkish body politic. Today, we find that Turkey hasn't had a government for six weeks, and it is some of the same old people who are in charge. The guy the military kicked out of office in 1980 was Suleyman Demirel, who is now the president of the country, and the prime minister before him, Bulent Ecevit, is now in the parliament and is trying to form a government. Nonetheless, when we arrived in Turkey, in Ankara people wouldn't go out at night because of two big dangers. One was banner bombs. There would be a banner strung across a main street with an inflammatory political slogan, and when the police came to take the banner down, it exploded. The other danger was drive-by shootings. It could be at a restaurant or a shop. Patrons would be in a restaurant at night, and along would come a carload of people with submachine guns and grenades.

Q: What were they trying to do?

COTTER: You would discover that the owner of the restaurant was a rightist or a leftist and was being targeted by people on the other side of the political spectrum. The precise goals were never clearly defined. I mean, right and left had been clearly defined, tending toward socialist on one end, and tending toward conservatives on the other side. This reflected much of the same societal conflict that was affecting a lot of countries during the 1960s and 1970s. One of the interesting things about studying Turkish at that time was the degree to which this conflict pervaded even the language. We ended up having to learn two vocabulary words for lots of things because language had become politicized. You had Turkish vocabulary that came from Ottoman Turkish and that had lots of Arabic and Persian words. Then, you had what the Turks called "Oz Turkey" time Turkish, which was an effort to go back to the roots of the Turkish language and get rid of the rest. Well, if you were a rightist, you used "Oz Turkey," if you were a leftist, you used the more modern, or older Ottoman, Turkish that was popular in the cities. So, we ended up having to learn two words for many things. That has mostly gone away by now. Turkey has gone beyond that. If you talk to the Turks today, they use only one word for things. They will all know both words, but it is no longer politicized. Anyhow, the tension was incredibly high in 1980. It was not only that these attacks would happen in parts of town where foreigners were, but even in poorer neighborhoods. If you were a leftist, and lived in an area where there were mostly rightists, your life would be in danger. So, people would move into another neighborhood. At that point, you would have entire neighborhoods that were all leftists and all rightists. Then you would have carloads late at night from one neighborhood going to the other and shooting up the neighborhood. Oh, the other thing in Turkey was a significant element of this from the far left, aimed at America. In the late 1970s, there had been a number of terrorist incidents directed at us: attacks on bus stops, military buses. I don't remember whether there were any attacks on embassy people, per se. I think most of them had been targeted at our military presence, rather than at the embassy.

The military government came to power around September 1980 and stayed in power until 1983. I was assigned to what was called Mutual Security Affairs, the embassy's name for the political-military section. In Ankara, we had then, and we still do today as we do in many of the NATO countries, in addition to a political section, have a political-military section that deals with lots of the issues stemming from NATO. Examples of these issues are status of forces issues and NATO political issues. In Turkey, what made the job particularly interesting at that time was that in the wake of the Turkish action on Cyprus in 1974 we had cut off military assistance to the Turks and had cut off most of our cooperation. This created difficulties for our military, which had a number of facilities in Turkey. We had a large air base down near Adana, in southern Turkey, called Incirlik. Americans also manned a number of NATO communication and weapons facilities in the country. Our cutting off military assistance caused the Turks to put all of that in the deep freeze. While we still manned those facilities, we weren't allowed to do anything to them or at them. Well, this went on for about four years. Finally, the costs to our defense posture and NATO's defense policy became quite clear. In 1979, we began negotiations with the Turks, and in early 1980 we completed them on terms for renewing military assistance. This was particularly difficult in the United States because of the influence of two very strong ethnic lobbying groups: the Armenians and the Greeks. This was my first experience in the Foreign Service dealing with ethnic lobbying in the United States, primarily the Greek lobby, and to a lesser extent the Armenian lobby. Renewing military assistance with the "barbarian" Turks was fought very strongly by the Greek lobby in the U.S. Congress. But, it was finally done. In early 1980, we signed the first Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) with the Turks, which was a really seminal document. It ended up being the model for agreements we have done with a number of other countries around the world since. It changed very basic relationships. What essentially had been our bases became Turkish facilities. We were required to cooperate with the Turks and share information with them. Among other things, we had intelligence collection facilities, two of them, in addition to the air base at Incirlik. I say this was a seminal document because it was really the first time that we had accepted, as we have subsequently in other places, that we are in these countries as guests, and that the places we are based we will share, and will be under at least notional command of local commanders. I arrived in the summer of 1980, just about the time we began to implement the DECA. It was absolutely new territory, where we had never been before. The Turks would send in a commander to one of these bases, with three guys on his staff, and very vague orders about what his role on the base was to be, who then had to take over from an American commander who had always commanded the base and who has now been told, "You have to work with this guy whose base this is." Of course, you got a lot of personalities involved. There are some people who want to play hard ball and others who didn't. We, in our section, and the foreign ministry, essentially had to sort all of this out. It also opened the possibility, for the first time in six or seven years, of our doing maintenance and upgrades at some of these bases. Nothing had been done at any of these places since 1975. At Incirlik, for instance, NCOs (Non-Commissioned Officers) were living in trailers that were from World War II. They were in Libya for the Africa campaign for World War II and had stayed at Wheelus Air Force Base until we closed Wheelus in 1967 or 1972 and then had been moved to Incirlik. They were still being used 35 years later. You can't imagine what these places looked like.

We did all sorts of interesting things. One of the things we did at Incirlik, for instance, was allow Turkish firms to bid on constructing new base housing. The Air Force in Germany, which managed contracting, was getting ready to hand off contracts to one of its German firms. The Turks said, "Wait a minute, under the DECA you have to open this for bidding by Turkish firms." The Air Force didn't have any Turkish firms on its contractor list, but the Turks insisted they add some. Well, in fact, by that time there were Turkish construction firms working around the world that were very good. In the end, it was a Turkish firm that won that contract and did it a lot cheaper than it would have cost to bring in Germans. Again, the U.S. Air Force had to adjust its mind set. They had simply never done this kind of a thing in Turkey. Putting in new equipment out at the radar site in Diyarbakir, which had 60 tons of old copper piping, also had to be offered to the Turks. We worked out a regular set of inspections with the Turkish foreign ministry and someone from Embassy, the counselor or I, would go around and inspect all of the bases. There were lots of status of forces issues. It was a fascinating two years. It was really very good.

Q: I would like to go back. The coup came when?

COTTER: Three weeks after I arrived.

Q: You are the new boy on the block, and all. Looking at the embassy, was everybody waiting for this particular event to happen? If so, or if not, how was the coup received when it did occur?

COTTER: Well, it was received quite well by most people, simply because we had lived in such concern over our personal safety, as did most Turks. You could almost hear a sigh of relief, I think, from most people. Over night, restaurants opened up and people were out on the street who hadn't been out on the street. The military in Turkey had an extraordinarily high reputation, which I must say, in this case, they lived up to, in terms of the probity with which they ran the government and met their commitments to turn it back to civilians. The fact that people were no longer subjected to being gunned down in a restaurant or being gunned down in their neighborhood was received with a great sigh of relief. Of course, by 1980 we couldn't accept the coup because of the human rights implications, and we leaned very heavily on the military government for a commitment to return to civilian rule as soon as possible. They said that they were only there temporarily and had taken similar action before and returned power to civilians. We insisted on receiving from them a time commitment.

We did not have much notice on the coup. Actually, the day of the coup, out on the edge of Ankara, near where our small military compound was, one of our military attachï¿½s had noticed a line of tanks and asked his contacts what they were for. He was told they were for an exercise. Indeed, the exercise was the coup. So we had no forewarning of it. There had been a lot of speculation that something was going to have to happen, but the timing of it came as a surprise.

Turkey was interesting to me for a number of reasons, after Latin America. One, the place was an order of magnitude in terms of sophistication beyond places like Ecuador and Bolivia. They have an incredibly professional and efficient, well-trained civil service and the foreign ministry people in Turkey were really outstanding. In Latin America we had very large military assistance groups that were all over the country and worked very closely with all of the military and had very clear access to all of the military. In Turkey, it was considerably different. We had a large military assistance team, but they were not out with Turkish units. When we did things socially and professionally, it was with a limited number of Turkish officers. Our access to Turkish officers outside of that circle was really quite limited. The Turks have always maintained a certain distance in terms of a fullness of sharing with us. There were, in those days, those officers on the Turkish General Staff and elsewhere who were clearly designated to work with foreigners. If you met an officer outside the circle and invited that officer to a social event, generally the officer was unable to go. Certainly a lot of that occurred during the embargo period, from 1975 to 1979. There was a lot of speculation, and I don't know whether it is true or not, but as we began our assistance programs again, there was a lot of concern expressed about the generation of military leaders in Turkey who reached field grade during that period and didn't have access to U.S. training and U.S. schools. A lot was made of the fact that when I was there, most of the senior Turkish General Staff people had served in Korea. The Turks had a very big contingent in the Korean War, so the Turkish General Staff in those days felt very close to us. I don't know whether by now the group in the general staff who were at their formative point in their military careers when we cut Turkey off from military assistance are in positions of authority.

The embassy, generally, welcomed the coup. The other thing the coup did was to restore fiscal discipline. Part of the problem with the civilian governments was their financial irresponsibility. Turkey has very cold winters, and in 1978 and 1979 the country did not have the money to buy heating oil. At that point, it depended largely on coal and on oil for heating. That changed with the military government. So, there was, in the two winters we were there, sufficient heat, although by that time the embassy had put generators in most of our quarters. Embassy staff had lived scattered around town. In the difficult years, as leases came up, the Embassy tended to put us together in apartment buildings. So we were in a building that was occupied primarily by Americans, which allowed us to make sure that the heating plant had fuel oil, and we had a power generator. We lived in a six-story apartment building that was all U.S. embassy people. I remember the rules were that if there was a big power outage, we could only use the emergency generator to keep our refrigerator and freezer going. We weren't supposed to have any lights because they thought from a security point of view it would look strange if the whole neighborhood was black, except for the one building. Terrorists or whoever would be able to identify that as the American building. When I recounted this to Turkish friends, they would say, "There is something wrong with you, you must be nuts. You mean, you have a generator, you have the ability to have lights, and you don't have them because you are worried about it. Anybody who wants to know a building occupied by Americans, it is easy enough to find out." But, nonetheless, we maintained that charade the whole time I was there.

Q: Speaking on the military side, was the Soviet Union the threat? Is this what you all were looking at?

COTTER: Yes. Turkey, of course, is a member of NATO. It was and is the easternmost member of NATO. It faced the "soft southern flank" of the Soviet Union. The Iranian revolution had occurred in 1979. Let me go back a minute. I commented earlier that as I was studying Turkish nothing notable happened. But one of the difficult things, if I can digress, about language study is that early on the teachers try and force students to communicate in the language. So while you are in the first several months, they will do dialogues and try to get discussions going, which, under the best of circumstances, is very difficult because you simply don't have the vocabulary to express yourself. I forget when in 1979 the takeover of the embassy in Tehran was. September maybe?

Q: I think it was November 1979.

COTTER: Okay. So, we would have been in Turkish training three months when it occurred. What the language teachers do is to try and find topics of current interest to talk about. And our Turkish teachers kept wanting to talk about the embassy takeover. For most of us, what compounded the fact that we didn't have the vocabulary to talk about it, was the fact that it was very difficult even in English for most of us to articulate our feelings about this. I still remember the people I knew and how absolutely devastating that year was. It was such a traumatic thing to have so many of our colleagues taken hostage and have no idea, for months, what was going to happen to them. Talking about this in Turkish was absolutely impossible. Finally, we said to the teachers, "We don't want to talk about this. Let's talk about other subjects," because we had such strong feelings pent up and didn't have the vocabulary to express them.

Anyhow, Iran also borders Turkey and clearly we weren't friendly with them. We wanted to get our hostages out, but that was not a major concern of the Turks. Then there are the Kurds, who live in southern Turkey, western Iran, and northern Iraq. Traditionally, two of the three cooperated to push the Kurdish problem into the other country.

This was 1980, 1982, and we were in the depths of the Cold War. Greece has always been an ancillary concern of the Turks. That relationship may be more central now than it was then or at earlier times. It happens in many bilateral disputes that the dispute is much more important to one side than the other. Certainly this was the case with the Ecuador-Peru border dispute, where it obsessed the Ecuadorians much more than the Peruvians. Peru was involved in lots of other things (including the land they had lost to Chile in the 1880s), and only worried about the border with Ecuador when the Ecuadorians made something happen. But, the Ecuadorians were absolutely obsessed by it. I found very much the same in the relationship with the Turks and the Greeks; the Greeks are absolutely obsessed by Turkey. I think even during the height of the Cold War, probably they considered Turkey their major enemy.

Q: I was in Athens from 1970 to 1974. The Soviets were all over the horizon, but the Turks...

COTTER: For the Turks, the Greek issue is a sideshow. The enemy of the Turks for hundreds of years had been the Russians. The Russians have several complaints about the Turks. First, the Russians' great historical enemy are the hordes from the east, the Mongols, and ethnic Slavs still talk about the horrors 600 years ago when the Mongols came through. Second, the Russian Orthodox Church had always looked to Constantinople for its spiritual guidance. Third, the Turks controlled access to the Mediterranean Sea. So, the Turks and Russians have been traditional enemies for years. The Cold War for the Turks was simply a continuation of a long dispute, which they believed would continue after the Cold War was over. Again, one of the things you realize working on Turkish and Greek affairs, as well as in other parts of the world, is how superficial our view of things often is. We have a very short history ourselves, and we tend to be forward-looking and to believe that history has little impact on what people do. So for us, everything is a current problem which should be solvable using common sense. If people don't like each other in Bosnia, we say, "Let's sit down and talk about this because we can work something out." Well, maybe you can't work anything out. We tell the Greeks and Turks, "You are both members of NATO. Let's sit down guys and work this thing out because you are causing lots of problems." We tell this to a Greek, and he says, "These bastards took Constantinople 600 years ago, and we are going to get Constantinople back." We say, "Wait a minute, that was 600 years ago. You are not going to get Constantinople back." But we can't tell them that. It is the same with the Turks, regarding the Russians. They say, "Okay, it is now Soviet government, but hey, Soviet government or imperial government or democratic government, we have to deal with the Russians. This has gone on for a long time, and it will go on for a long time in the future, and we have to sort our relationship out in a much longer term sense than you Americans are interested in working on." The same thing occurs all over the Middle East. Again, there are blood and other feuds that go back 1,000 years, and somehow we think we can come in and say, "Let us sit down and work this out as reasonable men." I have been away from Turkey, and I don't know how much has happened in recent years. From my contact with Turks when I was in Turkmenistan, and from visiting Turkey, the potential problems with Greece remain a sideline and really are not central to Turkish thinking. It is a handy issue and where you see it exploited on both sides, is when a politician is in difficulties. One way to alleviate that difficulty is to play the Turkish card on one hand or to play the Greek card on the other hand and distract people's attention from the political failures. Having tracked, to some extent, efforts to settle this dispute over the years, it is like lots of other disputes. The party that is losing tends to want to sit down and talk while the party that is "on top" has no interest in doing so. Then the table turns and so does the relative willingness to negotiate a solution.

Q: You were saying, a year later...

COTTER: A year later, the tables have turned and the other side is strong, and the first side is now the weak one. To solve something like the differences between Turkey and Greece, even without the complications of Cyprus, you would need to get a strong, confident government in Turkey in a positive economic climate; and a strong, confident government in Greece in a positive economic climate. Such governments would probably be able to take that step. The chances of having that happen at the same time, basically, are not very good. It makes it much worse that the Cyprus issue is in there, because then you have two client states, either of which may or may not have a desire to have some progress made on this. In theory, we can say to the Turks about the Turkish government in northern Cyprus, "You guys control them, tell them what to do." It is not that easy. All the time, we are having people tell us the same thing: "Tell the Turks what you want done, and they will do it." Well, we found out that doesn't always work.

Q: I want to take you back to the 1980 to 1982 period. On Cyprus, and Greece in general, did this raise its head, what you were doing, in the political-military area?

COTTER: Only in a limited way. The one area that it did was with the NATO commands that the Turks had put on hold after the Cyprus action. There is a southeastern command that is a naval command, I believe, headquartered in Greece. Then, there is a NATO southeastern land command that is based in Izmir, Turkey. We encountered difficulties with those commands. The Greeks opposed reinvigorating the land command, but NATO went ahead. But with the sea command in Greece there has always been difficulties. Difficulties would also emerge in air space use over the Aegean and control of that. In theory, Aegean air space is managed from Greece, not from Turkey. The Greeks would tend not to accept it when the Turks would announce that they were going to have air exercises over the Aegean and designate an area that commercial aircraft shouldn't go through. If the Turks would be able to get us or other NATO allies to participate in these air exercises, then the Greeks would get upset.

When I left Turkey in 1982, I returned to the State Department as a Turkish desk officer. At that point, significant differences had begun to emerge over the Aegean islands and the question of territorial water extension. This was about the same time the international Law of the Sea was being finalized. The Greeks wanted to apply Law of the Sea standards to territorial waters of the islands they possess just off the Turkish coast. If the Greeks were able to claim a 12 mile territorial sea, there were enough of these islands that it could, in theory, block Turkey from access to the Aegean. So the Turks, even in the early 1980s, had said that any attempt by Greece to apply those kinds of territorial seas to the Aegean islands would be a casus belli. That conflict still goes on. We would have loved to have spent at least another year in Turkey. But, at that time, Turkey was a 20% post I guess it was.

Q: Twenty percent post means?

COTTER: At that time Turkey was a 20% hardship differential post. Therefore, it was a two-year assignment. Because language was one year long, and because we assign people to language generally nine months before that, what happens in a place like Turkey is that your job appears on the bid list the same time that you arrive. They are going to recruit someone that fall who would start language the next August, who would come out the year following and replace you. As a result, literally within two months of having arrived, you had to make a decision whether or not to extend for a third year. Of course, we arrived in Turkey in a climate of terrorism, and two months later we had no idea whether we were going to like it and were not prepared to extend our tour. That opportunity passes and someone is assigned to follow you, then the opportunity to extend goes away. This is a real problem in every hard language, hardship country in the world, although the situation is better now than then. Now, my understanding is that you can extend up to the time the Department actually assigns someone. Oftentimes, because they have a hard time filling some of these positions, that process may extend into the spring. In Turkmenistan, we ran into the same thing. In any event, as a result, we did only two years in Turkey. But, I came back to be the Turkish desk officer.

Q: This was 1982?

COTTER: 1982, which worked out very well. It worked out well for the post, because somebody was coming back with good knowledge of Turkey. Again, in the State Department it is interesting that if you look around at desk officers, I would guess that at any one time, we are lucky if a third of them have ever served in the country they are the desk officer for. If you are looking at posts where people became a desk officer for that country, immediately after assignment to the country, I bet it is not a quarter of the time when that happens. Well, there are in fact countries in the world where this kind of continuity in the country experience makes a difference. I would suggest in the case of Ecuador or Bolivia or most of Central America, it doesn't make much of a difference. In a case like Turkey, I think that it makes a real difference. There is very little understanding in Washington of the issues involving the countries of southern Europe. Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus have always been sort of the stepchildren of the European Bureau. They don't look like us, they don't talk like us. They are not real countries. The bureau has never figured out how to deal with them. EUR has an even greater problem now. It has had a whole bunch of other countries dumped on it that don't look like us or talk like us either. When I came to the Turkish desk in 1982, southern Europe was really seen as peripheral issues. EUR management and the Department focused on Germany, France, and the significant NATO issues, and not on Greece, Turkey, or Cyprus. This lack of attention has advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages to that is that it pushes some decision making down at a lower level than it would otherwise come, which is nice if you are on a desk. But, it also imposes a great burden on desk officers to be able knowledgeably to brief their superiors on what the hell is going on in the country because there is no hope that their superiors are going to have any idea of what is going on. So, it made a lot of sense for me to take over the desk. Actually, the Department has generally filled those desks well. I am not certain with officers directly coming back, but certainly, as I track these things, the percentage of people in the Southern Europe directorate who have country experiences is really quite high. The current director, Mort Dworkin, served in both Turkey and Greece, I think. The deputy director, when I was there, had served in both countries. We have done pretty well by those countries, which is necessary.

What is certainly true about Turkey, and I believe Greece as well, is that the Turks have never thrown away a piece of paper. They have such professional capabilities in their foreign ministry, that if we don't maintain some kind of continuity in ours, we really are at a great disadvantage. I remember one case where we actually had a reverse status of forces case. This involved a Turkish officer who had been assigned to Newport News and had injured an American in a car accident. Of course, under status of forces agreements, the Turkish officer was not liable. The American spent the next 15 years trying to get some compensation. It was understood that he had no right to compensation, but our tradition is to do an ex gratia payment. This person had been after such a payment from the Turks for years. While I was in Ankara, we received a cable from the Department saying that so and so had contacted them about this case and what was going to be done about it. One of the other things I should mention is, in 1979 not only did hostages get taken in Iran, but our embassy in Pakistan was burned down. It must have had to do with the Middle East situation?

Q: I think it was almost a spontaneous thing, but it had to do with the Iranian takeover and the general excitement within the Islamic region.

COTTER: One of the impacts of that was that orders came around to all posts to reduce paper records and to send them back into storage. I think they were sent first to Frankfurt. So, when I got to Ankara, we were carrying something like six months of files. Thus we had no historical memory at post. Not only don't you have any there, but the records are not readily accessible because we still don't have any effective way of accessing those records. If when the embassy retired them, it actually marked what was in each box, and the box was numbered, and then the embassy kept a list of what was in that box, in theory you could find it. But, of course, as we both know, no one ever marks what is in the boxes. No one ever marks the boxes, so you don't have any idea. Well, up came this case. I got this letter and went over to the foreign ministry, and said, "I don't know anything about this, but I have this request, asking for ex gratia payment." The Turkish official rolled his eyes, and said, "I know about this case, give me a minute." He came back with two of these European style binders, full of papers. The Turks had all the papers on it. It turned out that, indeed, at several points, the Turks were in agreement to make an ex gratia payment, but every time the recommendation went to the Turkish treasury, the treasury said, "We don't have any money. This is not a legal obligation, so we are not going to pay it." But, I was so impressed by the fact that they had such a complete file and were willing to share it with us. We literally had to get copies from the Turks of our notes to them and their notes to us on this to recreate our files on this case. The guy ultimately got paid, in about 1985 or 1986. He received a $100,000 payment. So, we don't have very good collective memory on these sorts of things. We really depend a lot on the knowledge of officers who have served in the region and have some experience.

Q: Well, you were the desk officer back in the Department from 1982 to 1984. What were the issues?

COTTER: Well, the major issue was the Armenian situation and Greece, to a lesser extent. But there were a number of issues about the Armenian situation. I don't know if this was the first time, but the Armenians were pushing to have the expulsion and murder of Armenians in eastern Turkey in 1915 and 1917 declared a genocide. There was also a very active Armenian terrorist organization called ASALA, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, based in either Lebanon or Syria, engaged around the world in assassinations of Turkish diplomats. In fact, they assassinated the Turkish consul in Los Angeles in 1977 or 1978.

Q: Consul General, yes.

COTTER: It may have been while I was in Turkey, but it was before I was on the desk.

Q: I think it was in the early to mid-1970s.

COTTER: It was toward the end, because it was still very fresh. Anyhow, there was a lot of activity on our side, in trying to track down the ties of ASALA and others in the Armenian-American community. Of course, this is one area where we were sensitive because it placed Turkish diplomats really on the forefront of being targets of terrorists around the world. But dealing with the question of how to deal with the events of 1915 was difficult because the Turks made it very clear that any declaration by the U.S. Government that this was genocide would seriously harm the relations. That probably was the most difficult issue over the two years, and one that came up continually. Again, because nobody in the U.S. Government is familiar with or cares about the issues, we were forever briefing congressmen and staffers. Every congressmen has at least one Armenian in his district who is writing a letter to him urging action. If you are lucky, you get a call from the congressman's office and a staffer saying, "Can you give me some background on this?" If you are not lucky, the congressman writes a letter to the Secretary, and then the desk officer has to deal with a congressional letter. It was usually much better to be able to brief a staffer orally and say, "Look, here are the implications, and here is the situation. We aren't going to do anything about this." That issue took up a lot of time.

Military assistance issues and military relations issues, even on the desk, took up a certain amount of time. We had two desk officers, I should note, for Turkey. I did the political portfolio, and the other officer did the economic portfolio. There was a lot of economic work because in 1983, as promised, the military government turned power back to civilians, to a great reformist, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal, who really opened up Turkey to greater competition. When I was there, Turkey was a very autarchic place. The republic had developed along a very self-contained, import substitution model, corporatist not in the pejorative political sense, but in the way that Germany, Italy, Spain, and other countries were organized at the same period in the 1920s and 1930s. It really wasn't until the 1980s that Turgut Ozal opened the Turkish economy to competition.

On the political side, there was a lot of work on military assistance issues. At that time, the Turks had been negotiating for sometime to buy new fighter aircraft. There was intense competition amongst, on the American side, the F-16, the F-18, and F-5 Freedom Fighter, which by that time was called the F-20. While I was in Ankara, this competition had begun. When I was back in Washington, I was managing that competition from a policy side of the State Department and ensuring openness and assuring that we stayed neutral. I also ensured we maintained an even playing field amongst the competing American companies. So that took up a significant amount of time. Working on and defending our assistance programs to Turkey took up a significant amount of time because the Greek lobby, rather than the Armenian lobby, fought hard against our military assistance to Turkey. Although it wasn't written in regulation or in law, pressure from the lobby caused Congress to impose a seven-to-ten ratio, where for every $10.00 of military assistance to Turkey, Greece was assured of $7.00. It was a terrible policy. At various times, we had more money available for Greece in military assistance than Greece had any capability of absorbing. But, of course, no government was going to turn it down. This was something that the Turks worked very hard to keep from being written into law. The Greek lobby kept wanting to write it into law, but succeeding administrations kept it out. The Turkish view was that our military assistance of countries ought to based upon need, not upon some kind of an artificial ratio. The Greeks would laugh at that and say, "I guess that is true, but..."

Q: At this time, was Andreas Papandreou the prime minister in Greece?

COTTER: He may have come in just about then.

Q: Because he was making provocatively anti-American, get out of NATO, get out of the European Union, get the bases out statements, none of which he acted on, but I was wondering whether this was thrown into the mix at the time?

COTTER: Well, not so much on the bilateral relationship with Turkey. The Turks would throw this up at us and say, "The problem is because the Greek-American lobby is so strong and so supportive of things Greek." In general, no matter what outrageous statements the government in Greece makes, it doesn't make any difference when it comes down to an issue of Turkey versus Greece. It may make an issue in NATO councils, of what we think about the Greeks, and how close should we work with them, but when it comes down to things like U.S. assistance for or cooperation with Turkey, it doesn't make much difference. That policy, or our relationship with Turkey, isn't driven by, but it certainly has to take into account, the strength of the Greek lobby. This was my first real exposure to the ethnic lobbies in the U.S. One interesting thing was that at that time, Edward Derwinski, former congressman from Chicago, became counselor of the Department, and made a big point of stating that he saw himself as the desk officer for Americans. The State Department had desks for every country in the world, according to Derwinski, but there was nobody in the State Department who was worried about American interests. Of course, in this context American interests mean whatever a given hyphen-American group wants. Derwinski, who came out of Chicago, where there were many Greeks and a very large Armenian community, was the person in the Department to whom these communities would go looking for assistance. We concluded that Derwinski was a very nice fellow, but not one of the brightest stars that ever descended upon the Department. Then, as today, the counselor was a seventh floor undersecretary-equivalent, for whom desk officers had to go through all the hoops. Once the counselor said, "I have a question about this," everything had to be dropped, so we could answer his question no matter how silly it might be.

This was an interesting time on the desk. There was also tension between the State Department and the Department of Defense (DoD) over control of our Turkish policy. I think the Pentagon had been unhappy with the arms embargo from the get-go. They saw this as State Department or Administration pandering to a domestic constituency and losing sight of the greater defense needs. So the Pentagon had chaffed under this for some time. Indeed, DoD has a close relationship with the Turks. It carried on a whole series of activities with the Turks that State, more or less, kept an eye on. Well, when Reagan came in Richard Burt was assistant secretary in the political-military bureau. Well, Burt had enemies on the Hill. He had been a reporter who took over what I used to call the "Les Gelb Memorial Chair" because Gelb, also a New York Times reporter, had also been Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs. In came Reagan, and they replaced Gelb with their reporter, Burt. In 1982, Burt moved from the political military bureau to the European bureau, but he had a problem getting confirmed by the Senate. It took six or nine months for him to get confirmed. In the meantime, of course, the EUR bureau was somewhat leaderless. Burt was there but not confirmed. In the Pentagon, meanwhile, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs or Policy was "The Prince of Darkness."

Q: Richard Perle

COTTER: Richard Perle. He was a very astute, very tough bureaucratic player, who took advantage of this hiatus to hijack Turkish policy. It was fairly easy, because Burt wasn't very interested in Turkish policy. This was down in southern Europe where he wasn't very interested. Burt's deputy for southern Europe was Richard Haass, who is a foreign policy advisor to George W. Bush. Haass was not a deputy assistant secretary (DAS). I think it probably was because EUR had already filled its allotted DAS positions, and Burt couldn't get permission to create a new DAS for Haass. Haass was called the deputy for policy and had DAS authority. Haass' area of responsibility was southern Europe, which is interesting because it meant that Greece, Turkey and Cyprus issues were not under one of the deputy assistant secretaries, it was under someone who was not a deputy assistant secretary. On the other hand, the advantage of it was that Haass had Burt's full confidence, where some of the career DASs didn't. So at least when you dealt on something with Richard Haass, and Haass said, "Yes, or no," you could be fairly confident that it reflected Burt's view. Haass is a very bright guy and very good. He was actually very good to work for, but bureaucratically, he was a little strange. In any event, as you might expect from two high-power personalities, Burt and Perle didn't get along, so there was internal bureaucratic back-biting all the time. I remember at one point, we had (and still have, actually) a high-level defense group, that carries on talks with the Turks once a year. One year it met here, and then the next year, it met in Turkey. We always create these mechanisms and I've come to hate them because they start with great fanfare and the deputy secretary shows up for the first meeting and that is the last time. Then, responsibility flows down to the desk. Meanwhile, the other country is sending a prime minister to the sessions, and they don't understand why they were getting an assistant secretary of state. Well, the same thing happened here, of course. At one point, it had no doubt been the Secretary of State or conceivably the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, but while I was there, it had drifted down to assistant secretary level. This is the kind of thing Richard Perle was going to take the ball and run with. Burt wasn't yet confirmed. So, the first year I was on the desk, I got called to the front office and they said, "None of us can go, and you are going to represent the State Department. Your job is to keep Richard Perle on the reservation." There I was, a mid-level desk officer, and I said, "Yes sir, of course, I will keep Richard Perle on the reservation."

I should go back, while we have a break. I had talked earlier about dealing between defense attachï¿½s and military assistant group commanders and the difficulties this caused, and the advantages it sometimes gave embassies. Well, in Turkey, in addition to dealing with the Turks on the NATO issues, in the mutual security affairs section, one of the main things we had to do was deal with our own military establishment. Frankly, this was usually more difficult than dealing with the Turkish military establishment. In most countries, you have a defense attachï¿½, who is a colonel, and a military group commander, who is a colonel. In Turkey, we had a military group commander who was a U.S. Army major general, and a major general who ran the logistics command for our various bases, all of which came under the logistics control of the Air Force. Then there was a two-star American major general wearing a NATO hat in Izmir, plus a colonel defense attachï¿½. Well, of course, in Turkey, the defense attachï¿½ was completely out of it because he was a colonel and everybody else was a major general. But, the amount of time spent in fighting and deciding who indeed was in charge between the military group commander and the Air Force logistics commander was brutal. The guy from NATO was not so bad because he had a NATO hat, but, of course, he was a major general, expecting to be treated like a major general whenever he came to Ankara. The lack of coordination and coherence between the military group commander who came under the European Command (EUCOM) and the Air Force guy, who came under U.S. Air Forces, Europe (USAFE), both of whom, in theory, came under our overall commander in Europe, but who, in fact, were different services and didn't talk with each other, was just incredible.

It must have been then, for the first time, there emerged, in my recollection and my experience, the whole issue of "stovepipe organizations," which later on became a very important issue when we got into security and determining who was responsible for security. This is an issue which just in the last couple years...

Q: Let's keep to the time.

COTTER: Okay, I'll stay to the time. You'll remind me to come back to that, right?

Q: Only if it pertains to when you were dealing with it.

COTTER: Well, part of the Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) was defining the cooperation that we would provide and the activities that we were going to carry on there. So, you have the European Command which is in charge of various things. But, it is not, as it turns out, in charge of everything. In many of our bases, we had activities being carried out by military organizations which were independent of EUCOM. Their housekeeping was being taken care of by EUCOM, but their policy direction came from someone in the U.S. This caused real problems because you would go to get a policy decision at EUCOM and they would say, "I'm sorry, we don't manage this." Then, we would have to come back to some strange organization in the Pentagon that knows nothing about Turkey except they know they have some people out there. Where this was an issue was in sharing of intelligence information, and where we collected information. There were two places basically. One was on the Black Sea coast and was a listening post. That worked out pretty well because our people who did that actually had been working with their Turkish counterparts in other areas, and it was fairly seamless, having Turkish operators next to our folks and sharing information. The other one was out at Diyarbakir. It was a radar collection site. It had an enormous radar that monitored Soviet missile launches. So, the DECA got signed which required us to provide the Turks with the data from that site. Well, it took months to figure out who ran this. It turned out, of course, it had nothing to do with EUCOM or anyone else in Europe. It was an Air Force organization back here. We said, "Okay, you have to provide the data." They said, "In a pig's eye, we will provide this to the Turks." We said, "Well, if you don't, the site won't operate." That issue ended up going all the way up to the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense to get someone to explain to that command that they had to provide the data. Then, they would say, "The data is useless. It has to be integrated." And that created problems of other third country information that couldn't be shared. In the meantime, the Turks are saying, "We are going to shut this thing down if we don't start getting data." It took about six months to get the command's attention. Finally, it agreed to develop data that made some sense and could be provided to the Turks. It took about a year to work this out. We had a number of similar issues at other stovepipe organizations.

Q: Stovepipe means what?

COTTER: Stovepipe meant that it had a direct command line back to a command in the U.S., from whence its policy came. The Pentagon divides the world up into its regional commands. You have SOUTHCOM, Southern Command, for Latin America; CENTCOM, Central Command, for the Middle East and part of South Asia; EUCOM, European Command, for Europe and Africa; and PACOM, the Pacific Command, for East Asia and part of South Asia. Those are the regional CINCS - commanders in chief. They, in theory, are quite independent. They come directly under the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and have operational responsibility for those parts of the world. But, like everything else in the Pentagon, there are other commands and organizations which simply aren't subordinate, although they assign people to the region. For instance, the Military Transport Command is a separate command, which services the regional commands, but doesn't work for them. Defense intelligence agencies don't work for them. The same for a number of other organizations, which have activities overseas, and when they are housed overseas, they come under the housekeeping control of the CINCs, but they don't come under their command. They are considered to be "stovepiped," back to their headquarters in Washington. It causes enormous difficulties.

But our main problem in the embassy was managing major generals, who didn't have enough work to keep a major general busy. I don't know what in the military a major general usually commands, whether it is a corps or a division, but in the military group in Turkey, a major general commands 75 people. Well, obviously, you don't get to be a major general without being an A-type personality.

Q: A-type personality meaning active, not passive?

COTTER: That's right. There are brigadier generals in the military that I have met who are stretching the Peter Principle, but when people get to major general, they tend to be quite good.

Q: I have to say that according to the Peter Principle, you rise to your level of incompetence.

COTTER: Something, of course, in the Foreign Service that we don't know anything about. But, anyhow, you end up with senior officers who have a lot of energy and not enough work to occupy them. It caused a lot of difficulties. Anyhow, we've digressed from when I was in the Department working on the Turkish desk and doing a lot of work on political-military issues. I worked a lot with the political-military Bureau. It was at that time, I think, either in Turkey or when I came back, I added to my specialization as a political officer. We have a sub-specialty for political-military officers, which I added formally to my expertise.

Q: In fact, at one of these joint meetings between the Turks and the Americans, you said you were supposed to keep Richard Perle under control. He was essentially not interested in the Greek/Turkish thing, but in Turkey, or was he involved in the Greek/Turkish side of things?

COTTER: Well, yes, it inevitably came up in these kinds of things. To say Richard Perle was sort of hijacking policy is not fair because policy in this case tended to be made a lot higher. Whoever was going out to these meetings would go out with a mandate, one of which was to tell the Turks, "Look, if you don't settle Cyprus, we have a lot of difficulties." They were also to explain to the Turks why the American domestic political situation made it difficult for us to do all the things they wanted us to do. Certainly, Perle would go out and carry that message. Perle was quite effective at that. If you looked at it from anything other than a narrow European bureau of the State Department perspective, having Richard Perle in charge of the delegation was not bad because he is very articulate. The Turks knew him and liked him and thought him a friend of Turkey. He could tell them difficult things that would be harder for a Rick Burt to come and tell them. Actually, those delegations went pretty well.

I should say something else. I spent 10 months studying Turkish, and then while in Turkey used Turkish only twice professionally in two years. The foreign ministry people with whom we worked and the Turkish military people with whom we worked all spoke English. One time I used it was when I ended up having to do a demarche on the Law of the Sea. I found the officer in the foreign ministry's Law of the Sea office, who didn't speak English. He was a French speaker. In those days, unfortunately, I didn't speak French, which I later corrected. I had to struggle through that demarche in Turkish. The other time I used Turkish was very interesting and very useful. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs at the time, an Air Force general as I recall, was in Ankara at one point to meet with the head of the military junta. The Chairman had come out with a number of things, the Greece/Turkey relationship being one, return to civilian government another. I sat in on this meeting for the embassy. The interpretation was provided by the Turks. I was the embassy note taker. The interesting thing was that the interpreter wasn't interpreting everything, in either direction, but particularly some of the points that General Jones was making were not being translated to the Turks. Sitting there with my knowledge of Turkish, I could track that. I could see how the conversation developed, and things that came out and things that didn't come out. I did what I thought was a very good report afterward, reporting on this and reporting where the conversation had gone and the areas where it would have covered if the interpretation had been correct. I never regretted taking Turkish. It is a great language, and we have gone back to Turkey a lot.

Q: When you were the desk officer, 1982 to 1984, obviously, as you have mentioned, Cyprus came up again and again. What was the general feeling that you were getting on Cyprus? For somebody who was, by this time, pretty well out of the business, I have to state my prejudice today. It looks to me like Cyprus oneness is essentially settled. The Greeks aren't going to get back what they took. When you look at the origins of what happened in Cyprus, they don't really deserve to get it back. But we keep making these noises about trying to redo it, mainly because of the Greek lobby. As you look at this, essentially for the first time, and the people on the desk, in dealing with it, was this just noise we were making about doing something about Cyprus, or did we feel that maybe something could be done to reintegrate these two communities, at that time?

COTTER: I think Cyprus is a case not atypical in our foreign policy management, where you can't say that we have 25 years of experience with the crisis. Rather, we have two years of experience, 12 times over. I think how we deal with the issue, and dealt with it in 1982 to 1984, are probably the same because every time a new cast of characters comes in, we deal with it anew.

Q: When you talk about a new cast of characters, you mean on the American side?

COTTER: On the American side. We change administrations, and a whole new group come in. We are unfettered optimists. The new people look at the issue and say, "Look, there are very key issues at stake here. We have a very critical part of the NATO alliance. We have two countries to which we are very close. They have this bone of contention between them. They obviously have to get rid of the bone of contention. Every problem has its solution." People who have been dealing with this for 10 or 15 years may say, "Well, it may not be that easy." Well, we don't have that luxury. We have every four years, probably, and sometimes more often, when new people come into an administration, a new group of people who come in, they know nothing about this. Six weeks or two months later, up comes an issue on their desk. They say, "But, I don't understand, why am I dealing with this? There has to be a way around it." The Clinton administration deals with this problem by naming special negotiators for everything. Actually, the first special Cyprus negotiator was named when I was on the desk, Chris Chapman. He had been DCM in Paris. They were looking around for an embassy for him and parked him in this position. Later on, it was Reg Bartholomew. Nobody has ever stayed in that job for more than two years. When they leave, someone new comes in and looks at it again.

The thing about the Cyprus issue is that it comes and it goes. When it comes to a head, we tend to look at it and say, "But this is an annoyance we don't need. It complicates our relationship with these two countries, and we would like it to go away. So, we will go and talk to the two countries." As I said before, you may find a conjunction in time when both of those countries are really interested in a solution and would really welcome our input, and if we at that point had people in Washington who were knowledgeable about it and wanted to do something, we might be able to find a solution. But, the chances of having the four players on the ground all together on it, and us having an administration which, at that point in time, was willing to focus on it, is practically nil.

Q: The four players being the two parties, the Greeks and the Turks on Cyprus?

COTTER: Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots and then Turkey and Greece. Each of those client groups is very good at playing off its own patron. One looks at a patron-client relationship and says, "Well, the patron tells the client what to do." But, in fact, in most places in the world, that is not true. The patron certainly has advantages, but the client has great advantages as well. The patron can't dictate that easily. One interesting issue when I was still in Turkey, and which has been a recurring issue, is the question of whether or not Americans should go to northern Cyprus. Now, the Turks have offered great, very cheap fares to go from Turkey to Cyprus for vacation. Of course, there are a number of resorts in northern Cyprus that the Turks have kept open. This finally came to a head while I was still at Ankara. We discovered that airmen assigned to Incirlik were going to northern Cyprus for vacations. Incirlik is down at Adana, which is in southeastern Turkey. There were two ways to get to northern Cyprus: you could fly to northern Cyprus, or you could take a ferry from Mersin, a coastal town. I don't know what the prices were, but let's say, for $200 for a week, an airman could go to Cyprus. Well, the issue came up, "Do we allow this?" We went back and forth on it. Some felt when these guys were on their own time, the U.S. government really couldn't dictate to them what they could do and what they couldn't do. So, we finally decided that as a matter of policy, we didn't want people going on vacation over to Cyprus, but as a practical matter, we weren't in a position to, or going to try to, prevent them from doing so.

Another interesting thing that came to a head while I was there was another issue that looked simple until we looked into it and it turned out to be very complicated. Every so often we would get intelligence that the radical groups in Turkey were going to target American military again. So, at one point while I was still in Ankara, the ambassador, having gotten one of these, called everybody in and said, "Well, I am making a decision that all military personnel will wear civilian clothes." The military assistance group commander said, "You can't do that." The ambassador said, "Yes I can." The commander then said, "The problem is that we issue uniforms to enlisted people. If we tell our enlisted personnel that they may not wear uniforms, we have to give them a clothing allowance. They are entitled to a clothing allowance to go out and buy suitable civilian clothing. I don't have the money to do that. I can't do that. I have to go back to the Pentagon and get authorization to do that. That authorization is going to take time. You can't do this." Well, the ambassador, of course, in the end made it stick, and they finally found a way to do it, but it was an interesting example of some of the complicated bureaucratic issues. You have young soldiers who don't own coats and ties, perhaps, who are being told they have to wear them. Having to come to terms with what that means to the military, in terms of cost.

Q: Well, maybe this is a good place to stop. I would like to put at the end that you left the Turkish desk in 1984?

COTTER: Yes, in 1984. My wife, Joanne, entered the Foreign Service in late 1983. I think I mentioned earlier she had taken the examination at an earlier time, and one of the questions was, "Do you want to join because your husband is in it?" Well, she took it again at a later time when they couldn't ask those kinds of questions, and certainly on her own very good merit, passed the exam. She came in as a USIA [U.S. Information Agency] officer. The way things often work in the State Department is that officers serving overseas often come back to Washington for four years - for two, two-year tours - and then you go overseas again. That is what most people do unless they stay in Washington for six or eight years. I had been looking at doing two years on the Turkish desk, and then perhaps doing two years in the regional political military affairs office in EUR, or on another desk in EUR, and then go off to another European post. Well, Joanne, bless her soul, entered the Foreign Service, and happily she did this at a time when we were both mature and had been overseas and knew what we were getting into. We had a long discussion about it, as you really have to. Being a couple in the Foreign Service is not easy. It has very clear implications for careers. Now, if they are both junior officers in the same entering class, that is not very apparent. It becomes apparent as soon as one gets promoted, or soon it becomes clear that one is better than the other and then the other person has a very difficult personal decision to make. But, in our case, I was, by this time, an FSO-2, senior 2, looking for promotion to 1. Joanne was entering as a junior officer. We had talked about this a lot. We don't have children and the relationship between us is very important to both of us. One of the things that we decided early on was that we would not accept posts in separate places. We didn't want to live apart. I have known other couples who have done that, some successfully, but very often not. It is very hard for the marriage to survive. That decision had implications for my career because it meant that we would go to a place where we could both get assignments, not necessarily a place that otherwise I might have chosen to go. The other thing about tandems (as the State Department calls professional couples) is there are two places where they tend to go on assignment. One is to very large embassies, which have enough jobs for both people, and the other is to places where no one wants to go. Although non-tandem people in the Foreign Service tend to think that tandem couples get preference for cushy, large posts, in our experience and that of other tandems we know, many more tandem couples end up in places where no one wants to go. Joanne was coming in as a junior officer and so she had a limited list of USIA junior officer training positions in places where she could go. Then, we had to look for a job for me. There were really only two places that would work. One was Lagos, Nigeria, and the other was Kinshasa, Zaire. The job possibility for me in Lagos was an excursion tour as the USIA information officer. Another experiment that was tried between USIA and State back at this time was to have some cross-fertilization between the two agencies. So, they came to an agreement that each agency would put up a number of comparable positions to be taken by officers in the other agency. This information officer position in Lagos was one. I bid on that. It turned out that that job disappeared before it ever got started because USIA looked at it and complained that the jobs State put up for the exchange were not comparable jobs...that the State Department was dumping the dregs on them. In fact, the whole experiment disappeared. The other option was Kinshasa. That was a "gimme" [give me] for me, because the position I would be going out to was an 02 political officer position on which I was the only 02 officer bidding. Many hardship posts, in the 1980s in particular, filled positions through what we called "stretch assignments," where people bid on jobs above their grade. I think it is still the case, but it certainly was then. As the only 02 bidder on the 02 job, I was fairly sure of getting Kinshasa. Indeed, that is what happened. Joanne was assigned as the assistant cultural affairs officer, and I was assigned to the political section. She went out in May 1984 after six months of French. I, for the last three months I was on the Turkish desk, took early morning French at FSI from 7:30 until 9:00. Then, when I got out of the desk job around Memorial Day in 1984, I went into full time French until September, when I arrived at post. So, Joanne was at post about three months before I was.

Q: So, we are in Kinshasa, which was then still Zaire. This was 1984 to 1988. Wow, that is a long time. What were you up to?

COTTER: I was one of two mid-level officers in the political section. There was a four-person political section at that point that had a counselor, two 02 officers and a junior officer. Interestingly enough, when I arrived at the beginning of September 1984, the promotion list came out, and I was promoted to 01. This caused a certain problem for my boss, who had two mid-level officers there. He had worked with the other guy for over a year, who was very concerned about losing his perks to someone new who came in. We ended up cutting a deal where I wouldn't be deputy chief of the section on paper, but that I would supervise the junior officer, which turned out to be a fair deal in the end. Anyhow, I arrived on the same airplane as the new ambassador, Brandon Grove, who is best known as the "father" of the new FSI complex. Grove turned out to be a very good ambassador. For those who know him, he looks to be right out of central casting. If you could get a line-up of people and choose the one who looked the part of ambassador, it would be Brandon Grove.

Q: Always impeccably dressed, very tall.

COTTER: Yes, tall and very well dressed. He was not an easy person to get to know, but a very effective ambassador.

Q: Let me ask a question here. Here you have a corrupt dictatorship and you have a four-man political section. I would think that the political life would be almost nil. Can you talk about that?

COTTER: Yes, there was limited political life, although what one should have been doing in Zaire was trying to find out what was going on in the interior. Unfortunately, it was practically impossible to travel in the interior, since there were no roads anymore. You could fly, but your ability to really travel around was quite limited.

Q: You say there are no roads anymore; had there been roads, and they deteriorated?

COTTER: Yes, there had been roads under the Belgians. There had been all sorts of things under the Belgians that no longer existed 20 years after independence. Much is blamed on the Mobutu government, though the fact is, as we see today, the Congo or Zaire should never have existed. It, like so many other African countries, was a creation of European geopolitical interests. Even by the mid-1980s, it was recognized that the country was an anomaly. There was a question that nobody asked because it wasn't politically correct to ask it. That was whether Africa's borders, at least in the case of Zaire, had any long-term viability? Mobutu, to his credit, which very few people give him today, managed to turn that place into a country, more or less. By the time I was there, at least, I think most people identified themselves as citizens of Zaire and recognized what that meant. He did this through a number of means, but the primary one was cooptation of every kind of political opposition he could find. You didn't murder political opponents; you bought them off. Mobutu bought people off repeatedly. There was a revolving door, where people would come into government jobs, presumably make some money, and then at some point, he would find them guilty of corruption, which, of course, was true of everybody in the government. Then he would fire them. They would head off, perhaps into exile, or into internal exile or simply lose their job. Five years later, you would find them back again. Interestingly enough, the only person he wasn't able to buy off a second time was Etiermie Tshisekedi, who was the main opposition figure during the time I was there, and is still a main opposition figure. He was recently sent into internal exile again by the current government in the Congo, as had been done to him when I was there. But every other figure in Zaire had been bought off several times. One of the things about Mobutu that gets misunderstood, I think, is that our estimates of his wealth are very exaggerated. I think in the four years I was there, media estimates of his wealth went from $3 billion to $5 billion to $11 billion. If you ever tried to look into these estimates, it would be a newspaper quoting some other newspaper or quoting some Zairian opposition group. The fact is nobody really knew. But, again, like other places I have been, the problem was that the distinction between the president and the treasury was a very fine line. When you read that Mobutu has $3 billion, I think it is accurate that Mobutu, in one way or another, had appropriated or used some of those monies. But whether it was his personally, or whether it belonged to the government, I think is a moot point. People would talk about his palace in Paris. I remember Brandon Grove went there on his farewell call. It was a very nice house on Avenue Foch. It could have been very nice, but it was not kept up very well inside, and it had ratty old furniture. It was exactly what you would expect Mobutu to have in Europe. We are not talking about a palace. I have never heard, and I'm sure this wouldn't be the case, that when Mobutu died, his family claimed that house, or the house in Switzerland, or any of the others, because I don't think Mobutu ever saw these as being personal possessions of his. He was Zaire, and these things were perks that went with the office of the president. When he came to the States, he would charter a Concord aircraft. We would talk to the government people about this and tell them that it really looked bad. Here was Zaire, a poor country, and the president flies on a chartered Concord with, of course, an Air Zaire DC-10 following with the rest of the entourage. Then, they came back overloaded with all the stuff they bought. Zairian officials' answer to this was interesting and it showed the gulf of thinking between us. Our view was that this looked bad. Their view was that he was the president of the country, and they were not going to have him going to the U.S. looking like a poor relative. He was going to go looking like a head of state. They didn't see anything wrong with this. Again, these are things that cost money. People would say that this was paid for out of Mobutu's money. But, of course, it was not out of Mobutu's money but the government's money. The other thing is that a lot of the wealth that went through his hands ended up as part of the cooptation process. In Zaire, you have an incredible network of family and clan relationships, and people in a position of power and people in the capital had very clear responsibilities to take care of and provide for a whole series of clients both related to them and not related to them. This costs money, and it costs money for the president. It costs money for everyone on the way down. I would not go so far as to say that corruption in Zaire is a trickle-down economic process, but in fact all of the people in government had responsibilities that went far beyond whatever nominal salary they received. You would find colleagues who would have eight or ten kids in their home, of whom two or three were theirs. All the rest were nephews and nieces from the interior, wherever the family came from, who had come to Kinshasa for their education. This head of family was responsible for care, feeding, paying books, and all the other education expenses because nobody out in the village at home could afford that. There was no minister who made enough money to do this kind of thing. A lot of the corruption that went on worked its way out in this sort of way. Mobutu has always been pilloried for this system. Yet we never heard the same criticism of Houphouet-Boigny (former president of the Ivory Coast), in spite of the fact that he built the largest cathedral outside of Rome, and turned his whole village into a new capital and a great city. But, we heard a lot of criticism about Mobutu, who did almost the same thing. I think this was probably because Mobutu was more our client, and Houphouet was a French client. I ran into the same dichotomy when I was in Central Asia, and another example is that we never heard criticism of the King of Morocco. My guess is the distinction between the state monies in Morocco and the king's private purse doesn't exist. If you went to a Moroccan and said, "The king has billions of dollars." They would say, "Whatever the king wants, the king has." There would be certain controls on it. To call Zaire, under Mobutu, a kleptocracy is accurate, but it isn't any more accurate there than it was in most African countries with a natural resource that could be used in this way. But, as I said, Mobutu did manage to turn Zaire into a country, coalescing disparate ethnic groups, co-opting them in one way or another, and turning it into Zaire. We wondered in the 1980s what was going to happen when Mobutu left. One of the problems with a very personalized system like his or any other authoritarian government is that it makes the identification, training, and preparation of a successor virtually impossible. Once the "big man" nominates a successor, in many ways he becomes a lame duck. There are no "big men" in Africa, or anywhere else in the world, who are willing to let that happen. It is probably exacerbated by the way Mobutu left. But I think we are seeing today what a lot of us would have predicted in the 1980s, or even earlier, and that is that without some kind of a strong government, the viability of Zaire or Congo as a country is really in question. I would venture to guess that 10 years from now it won't be a country. The other thing about this that was clear to us in the 1980s was that Zaire, because of its size and because of its geographic location, was critical to this kind of geopolitical stability in all of Africa. It really is a key. It has borders with, I think, 11 or 12 countries.

Q: I come up with 10 countries, but I may have missed some.

COTTER: It is composed of various tribes and ethnic groups, who tend to be more related with people across the border than with Kinshasa itself, or with the center part of the country. Once that system breaks down, it leads to or causes or exacerbates the geopolitical, ethnic tensions that exist in the other countries. This is exactly what we are seeing. The civil war in Angola is part of this. Certainly what is happening in the Great Lake states in Rwanda, Burundi, and the issue between Tutsis and Hutus, if not caused by the breakdown of Zaire, is certainly something where the breakdown of order in Zaire allows it to develop as it is. The situation in Sudan is affected by Congo because the southern Sudanese who are Christians have long gotten assistance from there. The issue in the Congo, across the Zaire river, where there is still chaos, in Brazzaville...

Q: Chaotic as hell right now.

COTTER: That's right. So, the breakdown in Zaire is coincident with or causing a breakdown all through Africa. This was fairly obvious to us. Observers now tend to put things in a Cold War context, particularly during the 1980s. They tend to say "Our policy toward country X was driven by the Cold War." My experience during the Cold War was that it was sometimes true, although almost always our policies in countries were more sophisticated than that. They took into account, and were based on, regional interest. What did often happen is that those interests were couched in Cold War terms in the bureaucratic fight for resources because resources were often dependent on being able to justify them in terms of Cold War.

Q: So, we are really talking about dealing with Congress, in a way.

COTTER: That's right, and even within the Administration.

Q: And also dealing with an Administration too.

COTTER: That's right, but you were always competing for limited funds. People who study our policies during the Cold War era have to do so very carefully because if you look at the media or policy papers and see things couched in Cold War terms, keep in mind that there may very well be and probably are other political interests at work, but in the competition for resources, the Cold War tended to be very important. Now, for instance, we see a number of other buzz words, democracy, etc. We are pressing democracy around the world, whether it exists or not. Clearly, when embassies or the State Department develops its request for assistance monies for countries, they are always going to couch it in terms of aiding that country toward democracy or toward economic stability. Well, in those days, we did it in terms of the Cold War. But, a lot of our policy was based upon the fact that a strong, unified Zaire was critical to the geopolitical stability of Africa.

Q: Was there any question at the time, in the political section, with others at the embassy, looking at this and saying, "Look, this thing isn't going to hold together, do we really have to do this, and what will top this?"

COTTER: People worried about it, but there weren't any signs of Mobutu going anywhere. Again, it really wasn't very clear what would come. Certainly, Washington, and even more so businessmen, would ask us, "Well, what happens after Mobutu?" My answer was an answer that was similar to one that I've used in other countries where I've served. I think in hindsight it was probably wrong in the case of Zaire, but my analysis was that the senior people in the Zairian Government had more to lose from falling out amongst themselves than they did from staying unified and figuring out how they could keep the same system that Mobutu had going. The problem with that analysis is that since anybody with any talent was forced to keep his or her light under a bushel, it is very hard to identify who would emerge in such a situation as a leader. There were some other fairly senior Zaire leaders who had quite a bit of credibility and who could have emerged. Unfortunately, Mobutu didn't die suddenly. These scenarios always work better when the head of state dies suddenly and the other people in power are faced with the situation of what do they do now, as opposed to a lingering illness, such as Mobutu had, with declining support from outside patrons. In that case, the whole situation deteriorates slowly, and the next thing you know is there is a rebellion in the far eastern part of the country headed by somebody that nobody in the West knows at all. Anyway, the embassy worried about this, but, again, our ability to do anything about it was greatly overestimated by people. People thought, that somehow we could tell Mobutu to leave and he would leave. We and the French told him to leave, and he told us to get lost. We could look at and try and groom people who might be potential successors, but that was sort of a risky business in Zaire. If somebody got too identified with the United States, he was likely to be out of a job.

Q: You were setting somebody up.

COTTER: Happily in that system, they would come back again, so you would fall back on government people whom we had been working with 15 years before, who had ended up off somewhere and who were now back.

Q: I think it was Sekou Toure who had people literally rotting in jail.

COTTER: Mobutu didn't do that. I'm sure there were some people who rotted in jail but not the senior people. If they fell out with him, the worst thing that they used to do, generally, was send people to internal exile - "rusticated," it was called. That is sending them back to a village. This is pretty tough if you are a French educated person who is used to living the good life. There were some people in jail. Tshisekedi ended up in jail I remember back in 1987, I think, or early spring of 1988. The chargï¿½ d'affaires and I went and visited Tshisekedi. Etienne is what his first name is now. Etienne, then he was Tshisekedi wa Mulumba because, of course, everyone had taken a Zairian name. That is another interesting point. Mobutu, in one of his Zairian organization things in the early 1970s, had done a couple of terrible things, one of which was to kick out a lot of the small traders, lots of Greeks, Indians, and some Lebanese, who kept the country together. They would go through the country selling bicycle inner tubes, pins and needles, and stuff like this. Mobutu expropriated them and handed their business over to Zairians, who, in general, had no sense of how this was done and really didn't have any interest in slogging through the hinterland. Their idea was that they would make a lot of money and live in Kinshasa. What often happened in these businesses is that the new owners would milk them dry. They would build a house and buy a Mercedes, move to Kinshasa, and the business would deteriorate. Even by the mid -1980s, when I was there, a lot of the villages way upcountry simply didn't get commodities that they used to get. Going back, the Belgians had developed the Congo quite well. They had developed it, by all reports, with fairly brutal techniques, but there was a road system; there was a river system; there were towns. By the 1980s, when you were there, Kinshasa had deteriorated. There were parks and monuments that were simply falling into ruin. When you went into the interior towns, you would see brick buildings, brick homes, shops, which were simply abandoned. Roads didn't function because they were never repaired. The Belgians had a very firm system of requiring each village to maintain its section of road. They would enforce that, I suppose, by taking out and whipping village leaders who didn't do it. But, the upshot is that the roads got fixed, not that any of the village leaders necessarily saw a connection between their fixing that part of the road and the broader economic life of the country. The boats on the Congo, the Zaire River, the major traffic artery, had deteriorated. The Zairian government hadn't bought a new boat since 1970. There was simply no money put into these things. One of the big impacts of corruption is that money went into cooptation and various things that could have gone into infrastructure development, and didn't at all. When I arrived in 1984, one of the things of great interest to us, just emerging interest, was AIDS.

Q: What is this?

COTTER: Auto immune deficiency syndrome, HIV. I'm not sure, before I went in 1984, that I had ever heard of AIDS. It is possible I had. But Zaire, of course, is one of the cradles of the disease. There are a lot of reports about how it got spread. It turns out that during the Second World War, apparently there were Haitians who served in their armed forces or our armed forces, but in any event were working after the Second World War in Africa, in Zaire, and other places. Some people say that Haitians contracted HIV there and brought it back to Haiti. Then it worked its way north. In any event, research was being done on it by the time I arrived in 1984. The CDC, the Center for Disease Control, in Atlanta had a center in Zaire doing very good research on AIDS. That office was headed by Jonathan Mann, who a couple years later left CDC and was the first head of the World Health Organization's AIDS program. He was very active in AIDS up until earlier this year when he died in a plane crash. Anyhow, Brandon Grove, to his great credit, in the fall of 1984 organized the first of several town meetings in the embassy to talk about this. Of course, people had lots of questions about how AIDS would impact them. People who had children had the question of what they should do about their nannies. They were wondering whether they could leave their children with a nanny, or was their child going to catch AIDS. The CDC people, from their research, already were able to say quite confidently, "As long as the child didn't have an open sore, and the nanny didn't have an open sore, they were probably fairly safe, that the disease was transmitted by an exchange of bodily fluids. One of the other questions at that point that was very high in people's minds was whether it was transmittable by mosquitoes, because nobody knew in those days whether that was possible. But the CDC people were already concluding that it wasn't possible because they were tracking family groups in Zaire who lived in areas that were very mosquito-ridden. This was a major concern as well with the Peace Corps because, of course, we had lots of Peace Corps volunteers in Zaire, and interacting with locals was high on their priority list. During the time I was there, we had no Peace Corps volunteers (and I have not heard of any since) who contracted AIDS in Zaire.

Q: AIDS was significant because sex was one of the major ways that it was transmitted. With the Peace Corps, these are young people out in the hinterlands, not just anywhere, and lifestyle being what it is, I would have thought the embassy would have to have, at least if nothing else, a rather prolific condom distribution. Was this done?

COTTER: I don't remember whether we did. Condoms were available in the embassy health unit for embassy people. I assume they were available for Peace Corps volunteers. I don't think in those days, as I recall, that people were terribly confident whether or not condoms protected you. I think what they were recommending to Peace Corps volunteers, which I assume most of them did, was abstinence. Your comment about it being sexually transmitted is very true, and of course, in Africa then, and I think still today, AIDS is largely a heterosexual disease. People in the States worry about it very much being a disease of homosexuals and drug users, but that is not the case in Africa, where it was a heterosexual disease. In a number of countries, the social mores contributed greatly to the problem. Men who had reached a certain economic status would have mistresses, perhaps serial mistresses. The [nickname] for AIDS in French is "slim." They would call it "slims." One of the groups that CDC was studying that, of course, was heavily infected were prostitutes. Whereas in the States people who have AIDS die of sarcoma or pneumonia, in a place like Zaire most people died with AIDS from diarrhea or dysentery. Their immune system would not work, and they would have diarrhea and die. Well, one of the other impacts this kind of thing had was that people lost weight. At the time I was there, Zairian men preferred to have slim European style mistresses, as opposed to heavier, traditional African women. As a result, what you had was men being attracted to and taking as mistresses women who met their standards of beauty, probably because they were infected with AIDS. By the time I left Zaire in 1988, the disease was already devastating the country. You would have on almost a daily basis reports appearing in the newspaper of somebody having died of a "long and difficult" disease. You knew what that was. In the recent statistics that I have, it hasn't gotten any worse. I don't know why this is. Even when I was there, there was much talk about the Zambian Army being 30 to 40% infected. There was lots of concern about Uganda, where a civil war was raging involving lots of very young soldiers. This kind of thing would move the disease through a population very quickly. One of the characteristics in Zaire was that it was almost exclusively an urban disease, largely in Kinshasa, and to some extent down in Lubumbashi. But, again, because mores were different out in rural areas, you didn't have the freer sexual conduct that contributed to the problem.

Q: Also, too, you were saying that roads had collapsed, because I understand in other parts of Africa a major sector was truckers. Well, if you don't have roads, the truckers aren't going through.

COTTER: Actually, that is not only in Africa, that is also the case in the former Soviet Union as well. Yes, that is true. Again, it differs a lot from country to country. In a place as big and as difficult as Zaire, it stayed largely an urban phenomenon.

Going back to the political section, I would like to mention one person in that section. We had one of the extraordinary local employees, Foreign Service National (FSN) employees, Papa Botumbe. I don't even know Papa's first name. I'm sure I have seen it written, but he was known as Papa Botumbe. When he finally retired from the U.S. Government a few years after I was there, he had worked for the government for 50 years. He had started out working with USIA in the 1940s. He had then been elected a senator at one point. Then, later he lost his senate position and had gone back to work for us. He had been the political section's FSN for years when I arrived. He was critical to us because unless we were able to staff the embassy completely with Africans, not African-Americans, but Africans, it was difficult to really understand the country. I mean, a foreigner can learn a lot about the culture, but to meet contacts or contacts who would want to meet with you, particularly in a controlled environment like Zaire was, is very difficult. So, we depended a lot on Papa Botumbe, who was widely well known as the way to get your story to the American Embassy. I'm sure he was watched by the Zairian Government, but he managed to do this quite successfully. His office was in a trailer that had been converted into an office out in the back lot of the embassy, not in the building itself. Visitors could come and visit. He was critical to us in keeping us in touch with various dissidents. I think he did a very honest job of transmitting their views to us. It is the only place I have been where in a political section we had a daily staff meeting in the morning with Papa Botumbe. He would go over what he had picked up during the evening, go over the newspapers. He was really a great asset to us. He is still alive and still there. He did finally retire. Toward the end of my term, it was clear he was reaching the mandatory retirement age, and we were trying to convince him to take on an assistant who could be groomed to replace him. With somebody like Papa, that is very difficult because there is nobody who is going to replace him. That had not been resolved by the time I left.

We did have Cold War interests in Zaire. One of them was an air base, Kamina, located in the south of Katanga. It seemed to be fairly common knowledge that we were supporting Jonas Savimbi in those days, and a lot of the support was being run by our intelligence community through Kamina Air Base. It was actually an interesting air base because it had been built to NATO standards. It was the only air base south of either Dakar or... What's the name of the air field by Monrovia, by Liberia? Roberts Field, something like that.

Q: I think it is Roberts Field.

COTTER: Roberts Field may have also been a NATO standard air base, but Kamina Air Base certainly was. Kamina had been built by the Belgians in the 1950s to NATO standards and could actually take any of our large aircraft. Going back to my comments about how we justified things in Cold War terms, we used to talk about support for Kamina because it was the only air base that could support an evacuation from or an intervention in South Africa, if and when South Africa disintegrated. Therefore, the argument went, we needed to provide assistance to the Zairian military and to the Zairian Government in order to retain our access to Kamina. Well, Kamina was also used to support the war in Angola.

Q: I would have thought that given the state of the Zairian Government and all, that to maintain an air base you would almost have to do it yourself.

COTTER: Yes, well actually, all we really worried about were the runways. We talked at various times about getting enough assistance to rebuild them. For instance, there was no lighting on the runway because long since the wires and lights had all been stolen. There was nothing in any of the buildings. In Zaire, things disappeared. You would go to the university, and there wasn't a working toilet in the place. Most toilets that were there didn't function. A lot of them had simply been stolen. Kamina was like that. We did get some money to improve the base. The way we did that is something we have used with success in other places. The U.S. Air Force has a rapid reaction engineering force. The one from the European Command was called the Red Horse Squadron. I think each of the regional commands has a similar unit. But, what we did was to bring the Red Horse Squadron down to Kamina on a deployment exercise. It was good for them. It allowed them to deploy to a place they hadn't been. They came down for a couple weeks, lived in tents. They are a construction engineering battalion. They redo the runways and the taxi-ways, and off they fly. It really is very much a win-win situation. An added benefit is that it doesn't come out of foreign assistance funds, it comes out of their exercise fund. Kamina was the one Cold War thing that was fairly critical.

One other comment about these issues is how the Cold War often got translated in the way we would do policy documents. An example is a word that is, still today, much misused. That is the word "strategic." We would justify our programs in terms of the country's strategic importance. We would talk about Kamina Air Base and Zaire being "strategic." Even in those days, it really bothered me. It isn't anything but a platform pointing to the heart of the bottom end of Africa. Frankly, South Africa may have some strategic interest to us, but I find it difficult to perceive what it is. Much less Zaire, for that matter, if you looked at "strategic" purely in Cold War terms, which is what in theory you were talking about. Yet, we used the word because if you could get the Washington community to accept a strategic argument, our likelihood of getting resources was much greater. This still goes on today in Central Asia. Our people talk about the strategic importance of Central Asia, and, unfortunately, some of the Central Asians would listen to us and take it seriously. In the same way, we would talk about the strategic importance of Kamina Air Base and of Zaire. The political counselor when I arrived was Jack McDonald, who left in the spring of 1986, thus opening the political counselor position. At that point, Joanne and I would have been nearing the end of our two year tour. I bid on the political consular job. In the absence of a plethora of senior bidders, as an O-1 I got the job. It entailed, on my part, a commitment to a further two year extension. So we were there for four years. What began as a training tour for my wife, going for her first overseas post, and me going to a position that, by the time I arrived, was below my grade and not very stimulating, turned out actually to be much better for me than for her because I ended up with a stint as political counselor in one of the large embassies in Africa, while she worked as assistant cultural affairs officer for four years. That is the reason we were there that long. From 1986 until the summer of 1988, I was political counselor.

Q: What would you as a political officer do? You had your local Papa Botumbe giving you ideas of what was happening and all. Then, you say, you kind of all fan out and do something, but how did you work in this environment?

COTTER: Well, there are the traditional functions of a political section, which are to cover internal political activities, which includes a whole multitude of sins: human rights, social affairs, refugees. There are external affairs, which tend to be either our bilateral relationship or Zaire's relations with other countries. There are the political-military issues: military assistance, military relations issues. There are labor issues. Zaire did have labor unions. They weren't truly independent, but nonetheless, AFL-CIO and Belgian trade unions had a lot of interest in them. Of course, in the Cold War at that point, labor was still perceived as being a major battle ground between the international Communist-controlled unions and the Western international federations. In Zaire, we worked on a lot of those subjects. Human rights was a major interest. The status of dissidents was a major interest. We spent a lot of time maintaining a data base of dissidents. When I said Mobutu didn't jail people, I didn't mean he didn't jail anybody. I'm talking about the senior people. We maintained a card file of dissidents who were either in jail or in exile or thought to be dead. We had a very good relationship with the Belgian embassy on this because the Belgians still had much more information and access to information as one might expect in Zaire, than we did. But, we had a very useful interchange on that and on other internal matters with the Belgians. So, we spent a lot of time tracking dissidents, tracking real and imagined human rights problems. Refugees were not a major problem in Zaire, although there were refugees from fighting in Angola and refugees from Sudan, both groups of which we tracked.

On the external side, it was really difficult to do much very useful. We could track, in general, what we knew of Zaire's relations with other countries, but in a place like Zaire, all decisions were made by Mobutu. So, even at the level of the foreign minister, if you could get to see him, you weren't going to get a decision. If you really needed to get a decision made or something done, the ambassador had to go see Mobutu. Since things didn't function very well in the capital, telephones didn't work, for instance. These were the days before cell phones, so you didn't have a cell phone. Most Zairian officials had several jobs. Again, corruption works a lot better if you happen to be someone in a position where you can benefit from it. For example, the policeman on the street, the customs agent, anybody in an office where someone has to come in and ask for a government service. But, in the foreign ministry, except perhaps for people who issue passports, and that probably wasn't the foreign ministry (it was probably the interior ministry), they weren't in those kinds of positions. So, people who weren't in a position where they could make extra money on the job tended to have several jobs. They would never be in their offices. There is simply no control over this in a place like Zaire. People nominally are on the payroll, but aren't there. So, you would find if you were going to make a demarche in the foreign ministry, you couldn't telephone ahead. Generally, what we would do would be to collect a number of issues that we had to do with three or four or five different people and go over to the ministry and walk the halls and see who was around. Literally, you would have to walk from office to office and find that most people weren't there, but if you were lucky, you would catch one or two. You would do your demarche, or get your answer, and go back to the embassy. Kinshasa is not that big a city. But an officer could spend a whole morning doing this, possibly getting one demarche out of it. We also spent a lot of time completing the plethora of U.S. Government required reports. I think our own internal reporting requirements take up an enormous amount of our time. By the time I became political counselor, we lost the fourth position in the section, and had it replaced by a rotational junior officer. A junior officer would be assigned in Zaire for a two year tour. One year was spent in the economic section and one year spent in the political section. This is an excellent job for a junior officer, and we had some really great officers come through. But from a manager's perspective, what it meant was training every year because every year you got a new officer into that position. That officer only experienced what functions he or she had one time, and then you had a new officer. So, if they were assigned to prepare the annual human rights report, you had to teach them how to do it, but after one report, they moved on and you had to train another. So I spent quite a bit of time training and working with junior officers, which is good, but it takes a significant amount of time. We had quite a bit of work tracking some of the military issues, particularly the military assistance program. Zaire also got lots of visitors, congressional visitors who were often critical of the government and other people who came through to hold Mobutu's hand occasionally. Ambassador Vernon Walters, who at that point was ambassador to the United Nations, got sent out on a regular basis by Ronald Reagan to hold the hands of people like the King of Morocco and Mobutu. Supporting those kinds of visits took up quite a bit of time as well.

Q: There is always the problem of reporting back to Washington, you know, the phones don't work, corruption is everywhere. The more you do that, the more people in Washington tend to disregard your country, or else stuff leaks. So, you are not getting anything done because of these reports. Did you find that you had to sort of sit on your reporting skills to overstress the corruption problems, and all that?

COTTER: I think the problem was actually the opposite because what press there was about Zaire tended to emphasize either corruption or how horrible the human rights situation was. A lot of the reporting, to the extent we did it (and we had to be very careful doing it), was trying to put things into perspective, which nobody really wanted to hear. We had to be very careful in doing that, not to be seen as an apologist for the regime. So there is a very thin line, where you try in a place like Zaire to keep some balance in what is known in official Washington at least, if not the world, about the country, without them saying "Here is Embassy Kinshasa once again defending Mobutu." It can be done, but is very difficult. It requires gaining a reputation for honesty in your reporting, for being willing to criticize the government on occasions when it is deserved, and it is only after, really, you have built up that credibility that you can report objectively on some of the other things. The fact of the matter is the press reporting on Zaire and most other countries is not very objective. I don't think we worried a lot about reporting enough on human rights issues or on corruption, as we did trying to put them into perspective.

Q: Did we have a consulate in Lubumbashi?

COTTER: Yes we did.

Q: Was that it or was there one in Kisangani?

COTTER: No, that was the only one. There had been one up in Kisangani, but that had been closed quite a few years earlier. Lubumbashi was the only other post we had.

Q: At one time, that was Shaba. It was a whole different world. It had Belgian interest, copper interest was very strong. We have gone through a great deal of turmoil trying to keep that area within the Zaire framework. How was it when you were there?

COTTER: One of the things the Zairian government had done, which actually caused them lots of difficulties later on, was to build a dam on the lower Zaire River, between Kinshasa and Matadi, called the Inga Dam, which was an enormous hydroelectric project. It had been done well before I got there. They ran power lines from there all the way down to Shaba to power the copper industry. The geopolitical interest on Mobutu's part in doing this was to tie Shaba to the center for its electricity. But it was an enormously costly project. I think, at that time, it was the longest direct current electrical transmission line in the world. It used direct current not alternating current, which required boosting stations at various points along them. I think Westinghouse built it. That project had cost several billion dollars. These were U.S. Export-Import Bank and other loans that when I was there in the '80s were still hanging over Zaire and causing lots of problems in repayments. But the Inga project did tie Shaba more closely to the center. This has always been a major concern of the government in Kinshasa going way back to the Katanga (the earlier name for the Shaba region) rebellion early on.

But geographically, Shaba is different. Shaba and Lubumbashi are on the southern African steppes, as opposed to the central African savannah and forest area that Kinshasa was on the western edge of. Shaba is much closer to Zambia. People who were assigned in Lubumbashi usually had their household effects shipped in through Lusaka. I know a number of the people in Lubumbashi who bought their cars in South Africa and drove them up, something we couldn't do in Kinshasa. So, it was a different world and it was always a problem for the government in keeping Shaba functioning and loyal. Again, the copper industry, even by the time I was there, was having a very difficult time. Happily for the Zairians, their copper mines were low-cost surface mines. This was strip mining, largely. The costs were quite low, but already the infrastructure was deteriorating in a significant way. The mines had all been mostly expropriated, but they still had investments from and strained relationships with Belgian entities. The Zairians, while they had taken things over, continued all the time I was there to have this strange love/hate relationship with Belgium, where they professed to dislike the former colonial master but still had all sorts of relationships with it, including the fact that many Zairians carried Belgian passports. Most of them sent their kids to Belgium to study. They had all sorts of business relationships with Belgian firms, which you thought were long since out of the country but, in fact, weren't. They were still busy running from behind the scenes a number of major operations, including a lot of the copper mines.

One of the other very interesting things to me about Zaire, which is my only experience in Africa really, in that kind of a former colonial atmosphere, was how interesting the lifestyle was. I mention this because we were talking about Belgians. One could in the 1980s maintain quite a decent lifestyle in Zaire with local help. A lot of the Belgians who remained still had a very colonial mentality. Most of the senior Belgians, the professionals, left and what remained was a very interesting ex-colonial group. You had lots of Belgians who were lower-level technical people or professionals, a lot of whom wouldn't have had anywhere near the same job in Belgium that they had in Zaire and who lived very well, with a slew of servants. A lot of them were very much Belgian rednecks who had incredible attitudes. We very much disliked them, and socialized very little with them. You would go to a dinner at one of these Belgian homes, and the whole dinner conversation was how lazy the Zairians were, and how they didn't work, and how dumb they were. All the time, you are being served dinner by Zairians. I kept thinking, "Why is it that I'm not getting ground glass or splintered bamboo in my food?" To me, this idea of talking about servants like they aren't there, was very strange. The whole conversation would be about how bad things were in Zaire. Another interesting holdover you found from colonial days was this mentality was not only in the Belgians, the Zairians still shared it. In the colonial days Africans were not allowed in those neighborhoods unless they had a special pass that indicated that they worked for a European or they had business there. By 1984, 1988, this was very much still the same. If you gave your household help anything - clothing, an appliance, or a gift - they would insist that you give them a piece of paper with the embassy stamp, saying that you had given it to them. Otherwise, they were probably going to get stopped by a policeman and have it taken from them. Indeed, when we first got there, the servant we had in the house came to us and said he wanted a letter so that he could come and go to our house and neighborhood freely. We said, "This is silly, why do you need this?" He said, "The police will stop me." We responded, "This isn't colonial days, you are a Zairian, this is Zaire, you can go anywhere you want." Of course, he gave us this look that you usually do to fools and children that says, "Okay, I understand all of that, but I still need the piece of paper with the stamp." In fact, the police and others would hassle Africans who had no business in European neighborhoods. This was in the mid-1980s, 25 years after independence.

Q: Was there a security problem?

COTTER: Not a bad one. I have been very lucky in assignments because I have been to places that have been difficult places to live, but I have been fortunate enough to serve in them during fairly good periods. If you talk to people who served in Zaire, they have a range of experiences because there were times when the situation was very difficult there, and there are times when it was not bad. All of the time I was there Zaire had IMF (International Monetary Fund) programs. That meant that hard currency was available, which meant that goods were available to buy in stores. It also meant that there was work and people were being paid. There was a security problem but it wasn't a critical one. Almost all of the thefts from homes, once you looked into them, were inside jobs. It was someone related to a maid. There were no cases when I was there of people breaking in with weapons. In Nairobi, at that time, people had safe havens in their homes. The bedrooms would have steel doors which you would bolt when you went to bed. People would break into the home armed and kill anyone that they could find. That was not the case in Zaire. While you certainly had the potential for a break-in if you lived in a house, it wasn't that great. Most people had guards. I think the embassy hired all those guards, although I don't recall. The first two years we were there we lived in an apartment building that was all occupied by AID and embassy people at which we had an embassy guard 24 hours. At our political counselor's residence, we had embassy guards 24 hours. They were not terribly effective and were unarmed. But, on the other hand, the worst I think we ever had was a couple pieces of lawn furniture stolen. Security in town was not a real problem, although when we first arrived, there were roadblocks at night in the city, unarmed troops checking documents. It was never really clear why. In many cases, people thought they were holding up drivers for money. Your diplomatic plates would get you through. What you would do when you approached one was turn your lights down, turn the interior lights of the car on, so they could see that there were Europeans in the car, and slow down. I am not aware of any embassy cars being stopped during the time.

That ended about a year after we arrived. There were other dangers. Automobile accidents were one. We were warned when we arrived that if we hit a pedestrian, we should leave the scene of the accident and drive immediately to the embassy. Hitting pedestrians was very easy. There were lots of them, many of whom had come in from the countryside and were not at all familiar with cars. They would be walking along the side of the street and, all of a sudden, decide to cross the street. The danger was that if you would hit a pedestrian and stopped, you would be mobbed by people who might drag you out of your car and beat you to death. Again, I wasn't aware of any cases where that happened, but on the other hand, we were warned not to let it happen. It also goes against all of our training as drivers. We learn to stop after an accident, not drive off. This was a matter of some concern. There were lots of accidents like this while we were there.

The embassy employed a local guard force. We had regular guards who we hired, who were managed, in those days, by the commissary association. But we also had on full time duty a platoon of Zairian police who were fed, uniformed, and equipped by us. This was very cushy duty for a Zairian policeman because he got a good meal at the embassy, got a food supplement, and got a decent uniform. We always had a group of this force on call. If you had a problem up at your house or anywhere else, rather than calling simply the local police number and hoping you get a police response, you would call an embassy security officer. They would send out a vehicle with a squad of our own policemen. This was a necessity because you couldn't get that kind of security from the local forces. We used primarily, for our communication, a radio net. Again, since the phones didn't work, they didn't work very well for Americans either. So almost all of our communication was done over the radio net, which meant that if you were going over to somebody's house for dinner, or you wanted to talk to someone over the weekend, you had long conversations on the radio. The big problem with that, of course, is that you also had people who spent their time listening to the radio. None of your business is your own if you choose to use the radio in that way. We all used radios for communication because there simply wasn't any other reliable way of house-to-house communication. People lived in a couple of areas in Kinshasa. One was Gombe, along the river where the ambassador's residence is, which is where our first apartment building, was located also, along with a number of other apartments and single-family homes. There was the Binza area, which was up on a hill, out on the edge of town, which had a number of homes and also a compound that had belonged to Gulf Oil. At one point, years earlier, Gulf had left and the embassy had inherited that compound, which had single-family, U.S. style homes in a walled compound. Most of the families with children preferred to live there because the kids could come home from school and play in that rather large compound, quite securely. You were going to ask me about...

Q: Our mission in Zaire had a reputation of being a CIA post. I was in Athens during the time of the colonels, 1970 to 1974, which had that reputation, and somewhat deserved, because of the undue influence the CIA had, both within the Greek Government and really on the ambassador. Could you talk about the CIA as a political officer in our embassy during this 1984 to 1988 period?

COTTER: Now that I am retired, I don't have to worry so much about keeping good relations with them. This history in Zaire goes back a long time, of course, because the CIA was popularly believed to have been present at the creation, and in fact was. New Zaire hands soon meet Larry Devlin, who is sort of mythical in the system. He was the station chief in 1964 or 1965, when Mobutu came to power. He has some great war stories to tell about those days. Indeed, he and the Agency certainly were present at that time. Larry has since retired, and last I heard he was working for Maurice Tempelsman who, in addition to dating Jackie Kennedy at one point in her life, was very active in business in Africa.

Q: Diamonds.

COTTER: Larry, later on, worked for Tempelsman, and was still around Zaire when I was there, and had been back numerous times. Anyhow, the Agency's relationship goes back a long time. Of course, it was largely the Agency that conducted the war in Angola. As I said before, I headed a four-person political section, although on paper I had a 14-person political section. I couldn't have picked some of my staff members out of a lineup. I would go to parties with other diplomats, and they would say, "You are the political counselor and John Doe works for you." I would have to say, "Oh, yes, he is a valued employee," not having any idea who John Doe was. This could be quite difficult, but you had to deal with the realities because the fact was that the Agency had access on things that we didn't have. As far as I know, Brandon Grove and Bill Harrop, his successor, managed it quite well because it had the potential for being a problem for the ambassador as well.

Q: I might mention for the record that both Brandon Grove and Bill Harrop have been interviewed by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program..

COTTER: It was undoubtedly somewhat difficult for them managing that relationship since the station chief had his own access to the security people, if not to Mobutu, and I think, actually, probably, to Mobutu as well, because he was courted very much by the Agency. One of the difficulties that this poses, not only in a country like Zaire, but in lots of countries, particularly where the Agency has a policy role, is that they always say that they are not a policy organization. Of course they are a policy organization. It has annoyed me over the years to have them say that they do not make policy or that they simply carry out what others decide, which is simply not true. In countries like Zaire, where things like human rights are an important US policy, generally they are not very high on the Agency's agenda. So, while the Embassy is pressing the U.S. Government view that human rights are important, the station chief over here is saying, "Don't worry about these things."

That problem is actually broader than that. It is unfair to blame the Agency. My experience over the years in countries where human rights are perceived as a problem has been that they are largely perceived as an issue in the State Department, not in the U.S. Government generally. Human rights are not perceived as a problem by senior U.S. Government officials, other than some State Department officials. The result is that we send very mixed signals. When Vernon Walters came to Zaire, or Bill Casey (Director of the Central Intelligence Agency) came to Zaire, you can bet that pressing Mobutu on human rights was nowhere on their list of talking points. The Secretary of Commerce went to Zaire. You can be sure that it wasn't on his talking points either. Frankly, what was even worse was that even if you had a very senior State Department official visiting, human rights weren't on his agenda either, because he would be out there to talk about a specific thing. The embassy would always include human rights as one of the issues in briefing papers, but they always ended up amongst those issues that somehow never quite get covered in the discussions.

It is the same when senior officials from those countries go to Washington. Human rights would always be included on the President's talking points. I think Mobutu went to Washington only once, maybe twice, while I was there. When, months later, we would get the NODIS (no distribution) report of the meeting with the President, nothing about human rights was mentioned. When we asked, the answer was, "Well, it never came up." As a result, two things happen: (1) these countries begin to perceive human rights as a State Department policy, not a U.S. Government policy. Even worse, they perceive it as an embassy agenda because the embassies are always making demarches about it, but when other visitors would come, nothing. When they would go to the United States, nothing. Not surprisingly, they would conclude after a while that the problem really wasn't with the U.S. Government, it was with a couple zealots in the embassy who were pressing human rights. In my entire career, I have never seen us manage to take that issue as seriously as those who are engaged in human rights would like to see it taken. Over my last 10 years, I simply gave up pushing it. I simply wouldn't do it unless there was some indication that we were serious about it and balanced about it. I wasn't going to put myself in a position of pressing a policy that no one else in the U.S. Government is willing or able to give high priority. This is a real problem in Zaire because you would have the station there at the same time that we were going in to demarche the government on human rights saying, "Don't worry about this, this is just some crazies. You know how the guys in the State Department are."

Q: Another thing, just at the working level, did you find information coming from the station officers to help you with your reporting?

COTTER: No. Again, this is another problem with stations. In most countries where we have a cooperative intelligence relationship, the last thing they want to do is spoil that relationship. So, while they will be busy working on Soviet targets and third country targets, they aren't willing to, for instance, penetrate the local security service to find out the situation of dissidents, they are not willing to do that. Indeed, you got very little out of the station that would help you reporting on those things that were of interest to us. The answer simply was that that wasn't their mandate and they weren't very interested in doing that. It was tough. One anecdote I will tell. My wife never likes it to be told, although I don't know why. We have had a lot of discussions about it. But it is an indication of how Zairian security people work. At one point, when we had been there for about a year, Mobutu had released a number of dissidents. They had been either under house arrest or actually in prison, and were "rehabilitated." We made contact with them. I was the one designated in the embassy to do this. We would have them over for drinks in the evening at the house. I would religiously write up a memorandum of the meeting. Well, one day Joanne got called into the ambassador's office. Then, I got called in. What she had gotten called in for was that the ambassador had been to see Mobutu and Mobutu had said, "You have an officer who is doing stuff she shouldn't do. I want her out of the country in 48 hours, Joanne Cotter." The Ambassador couldn't believe that Joanne Cotter had been doing something she shouldn't do, but he said he would go back and look into it. He came back and asked us what was going on. What we concluded had happened was that, as I mentioned, Joanne had arrived at post three or so months before I did. As a tandem couple, when she arrived first, we were in USIS housing and the apartment was in her name. It is very clear that these dissidents were followed by security services, who learned which apartment in that building they were going to, probably from the guards. Then, obviously, they had someone in the American Embassy who was willing to tell them who was the person in that apartment. They reported all that to Mobutu, who said, "She has 48 hours to leave." When Brandon called Joanne in, he said, "Do you want Michael involved in this?" She said, "Yes, I would like him in it right now." I said, "It's not Joanne; it's me. I have been having these meetings. These guys have all been released, and I have submitted MEMCONS on all of my meetings." He said, "Send me the MEMCONS." So, I went back and got the MEMCONS (Memorandum of Conversation) and sent them up. To Brandon's credit, he went back to Mobutu and said, "This is incorrect, the person you are talking about is not engaged in this. Nobody in my embassy is engaged in contact with these people surreptitiously. It's all above board as they are free men." He actually stood up to Mobutu on it and went away. It was interesting because, clearly, they were tracking those people. They found out where they were. Where they made the mistake was, they looked at whoever in the embassy records was the resident of that apartment and mistook who it was. Let's see, what other things occurred?

Q: Missionaries?

COTTER: Missionaries, yes. Some Americans. There were lots of different missionaries, Swedes, Belgians, and all sorts of people. Actually, missionaries were very important when you traveled in the interior because that is where you would end up staying, since if you got very far in the interior, there weren't places to stay. People always preferred to stay with Catholic missionaries because you could get a drink. A lot of the Protestant missionaries were dry. The last thing you wanted when you got to the end of the road was not being able to have one of those great Zairian beers. People much preferred staying with Catholic missionaries. Some of the missionaries are very interesting because many of them were in Zaire for the second generation. Parents had been missionaries. The children grew up there, went back to school, and came back as missionaries. By the same token, this is often a problem for us when we are trying to evacuate American citizens from a country, because, generally, these people don't want to go. Their view is that they are well integrated at local communities, and the people there like them, and they are not in danger. History has shown that when situations reach a point where we have to evacuate, a lot of those relationships don't go on for very long. But, you had quite a few missionaries.

Q: You obviously weren't using them as agents, but in talking about local conditions, did they seem to understand the local dynamics or were they concentrating mainly on religion?

COTTER: Generally, they concentrated on religion. I think the Belgians probably had better luck. My guess is that a lot of the Belgian embassy sources in the interior were missionaries. A lot of the American missionaries, when you would try and press them on it, would say, "Well, we don't deal with these issues." It was very hard to get useful information. You could get sometimes things on local dynamics about how local government officials interacted with people. But, you know, one of the things about Zaire is that when you got very far into the interior, frankly, the central government's writ didn't run very far. Down in the diamond mining areas it did and in the copper areas it did, but in the vast bulk of the country, there simply wasn't any government presence, or if there was, it was people doing other things because the government wasn't paying their salaries. The writ of Kinshasa did not run very far into the interior.

One of the interesting things in Zaire is that there is a very interesting religion there, a Christian sect called Kimbanguism. It is a locally developed religion. I think the founder of it was named Kimbangu. He may actually have still been alive when we were there. It was a Christian sect that preached a very strict morality. Their headquarters was in a town 75 kilometers or so east of Kinshasa. It was quite an influential sect, as attested to by the fact that that is how far the asphalt road ran. Kimbanguists were very much sought after either for staffing the embassy or staffing homes because they had a very strict code of honesty and monogamy. They were very good people to work with. But, it was one of the very important African Christian, locally developed Christian sects.

Zaire was a fascinating place. One of the things that being there four years allowed me to do was get to know things and people much better. Two year tours, of course, as we all know, just don't work. I know lots of reasons why we have them. There are places where it is very difficult to work and live, and if we require people to be there three or four years, we won't have anybody go. But, there is an old truism in the Service: you spend your first six months settling into a post; you spend the last six months anticipating your next post. So, in essence, on a two year tour you have one year to work. In a place with as many cultures as Zaire has and as complicated clan and family and tribal relationships as Zaire has, you really just can't get a handle on it in two years. By the end of four years, I was able to distinguish where somebody was from by his name. I knew a lot of the tribal and clan relationships, primarily from Papa Botumbe, who was a great fountain of knowledge on this. This was done by simply picking his brain over time. You could become quite an expert on this. It is much more interesting, I suppose, to a political scientist, historian or anthropologist, than to practitioners, because nobody in Washington cared about that level of detail. But it was very useful, and it certainly allowed you to do some good reporting. We did some very good reporting on tribal names of clan affiliations and relationships. I was there for two ambassadors and three DCMs. John Farragut was the DCM when I arrived and was there for one year. Then, for my middle two years, Dan Simpson was the DCM. Dan was later ambassador in the Central African Republic and then to Zaire until last summer.

Q: Is he still in the Service?

COTTER: Yes, Dan is now the vice president of the National Defense University, I think. He was replaced as DCM by Mark Baas, who later became ambassador to Ethiopia.

So, Brandon Grove was ambassador my first three years there. He was to be replaced by Bill Harrop in 1987. Well, Bill ran into confirmation problems. I can't remember specifically the reason. I think it may have had to do with Bill having been one of the first presidents of AFSA (American Foreign Service Association), and Senator Jesse Helms or somebody was down on AFSA and labor unions at that point. So, Bill's arrival was delayed. Mark Baas arrived that summer. For the fall of 1987, it was Mark Baas as chargï¿½ and me as acting DCM, and I was essentially the historical memory in the post because, again, we had had significant turnover that summer of 1987. Bill Harrop arrived finally in about January 1988 when I only had six or so months left in my tour. One of the nice things when I left Zaire was that I was actually chargï¿½ for the first time in my career. There was a time, for a couple days at the very end of the tour, when Harrop was on leave, and Baas had gone on official travel out of the country. Baas was supposed to be back before Harrop left but got caught up in travel difficulties, which is always the case in Africa, and he didn't get back in time. Harrop had to leave, so I was chargï¿½ for about three days. I sent out the first telegram over my name. All in all it was a very good tour. We were there, as I say, at a good time in that country's somewhat sad history.

Q: Being there four years, and maybe it didn't pertain when you were there, but I have often wondered about the fact that we have made a great effort to go after minorities for recruitment into the Foreign Service. Were there African-Americans who were assigned to Zaire in responsible positions? Was this a plus or a minus? How did this work, if there were, in dealing with the Zairians?

COTTER: I think it was a neutral. Of course, you really need to talk to African-American officers about their experience. But my perception of this, and some of this is from observation and some of this from talking to African-American officers, is that the Zairians weren't confused. They knew they were Americans. There was no mistaking on their part that somehow these were brothers who had come home. It is also true that most African-Americans are of mixed blood. You find some African-Americans who are very dark, but most Zairians, except for those who have European blood, and indeed in the Zairian upper classes quite a few of them do because very many of them are married to Belgian women or married to Belgian men, as the case may be. You had a lot of mixing of races in the upper classes, but in lower classes, in the rural areas, Africans are very dark and very distinctive. None of the Zairians were confused by this. As for the African-Americans, I suppose it depends a lot on the individual, whether they felt they were going back to their roots or not. I didn't get a sense that the four or five black officers who were there when I was there had that kind of a reaction. The one interesting thing, and I don't know whether I should use a name or not, but one junior officer who came through was a very attractive black woman. She was very clearly not pure African. She is an officer who is still active in the Service. She is a very good officer, and did a lot of the human rights portfolios. A lot of her interface was with the ministry of justice. We finally had a minister of justice who was pretty good, and we were able to do some programs with him. She would be sitting, waiting to see the minister. Other people would come in and assume that she was his mistress, not being able to understand why an attractive young woman would be there, and they were always very surprised to discover that that wasn't the case. On the other hand, she also commented that her looks gave her access to government officials that she wouldn't have gotten otherwise. I suspect it meant some quick brush offs on her part to keep them from pursuing a relationship beyond that. So, I think, in her case, both her sex and her race, probably after an initial barrier, because people assumed she was something she wasn't, probably assisted her. But, otherwise, I don't think it would help much. The first time I went to Europe in the 1960s, you could pick out Americans. We dressed differently, we walked differently. That hasn't changed, frankly. There is no way, without spending years there, that an African-American could "pass" very successfully. You could possibly pass for a European-educated African of mixed race, but would unlikely pass for much more than that.

Q: You mentioned that with the new minister of justice, you were able to work out some programs. What sort of things would these be?

COTTER: Some training programs, both sending him and other people off on USIA programs in the U.S., grants, and also doing some training with the police and with the courts. To a large extent, real human rights problems in a place like Zaire are not high-profile political dissidents, but the problems an average, everyday citizen has in getting justice out of the system. Again, when the US focuses on human rights, we end up being taken in by high-profile political dissidents who are probably no better than the people they are trying to replace. But we like them because they are dissidents, when the real human rights problem is simply non-functioning government institutions and non-functioning legal systems. This was very true in Zaire. I remember we had programs of trying to build up court data bases. You would ask what prisoners there were, and the fact of the matter is, the Zairians weren't very sure what prisoners they had, because they relied on whatever paper records they had, to the extent they bothered to keep them. It was very possible in Zaire for someone to disappear in the prison system and be forgotten, simply because nobody cared, nobody had records. If a family member went to a court or went to a policeman, unless they could pay the significant amount of money it took, they couldn't get the person out. Apart from the corruption, which was a problem, a lot of this was not ill-intentioned. It was simply that people were not prepared, weren't educated, and didn't have the equipment with which to work. So we were at that point trying to help them build up a data base of their prison population. Another problem was people who would disappear in the system, after being charged for a crime, and never come to trial. Again, it is a function of paperwork not moving. I don't think we were very successful at changing that. But, we certainly found their system responsive to our help and willing to accept it.

One of the problems is that we never follow through on these things. You would get an opening with an official saying, "Well, yes, we would like help doing this." An expert would come in and look at it and say, "You have to be kidding me, to build a data base and provide this for the Zairian court system is going to cost $20 million." "Well, we have $400,000." So, you buy a couple of computers and send someone out for some training and do a couple of things, but you are putting a band-aid on a gaping wound because these things always cost more than we think they are going to cost. We never have the resources to put against it to make a real difference. You could say, on the other side, there is some reason to think that we probably wouldn't make a real difference if we followed through. You would put in the $20 million and half the computers would disappear a year later and half the people would disappear, and there would be a new group of people in, and they wouldn't know how to use them. We shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking we are going to make much of a change in any of these countries. The problem is we fool ourselves into thinking we are going to have an impact, and then we don't have the resources or the will.

Q: Probably, there is not the will on the other side, or the ability of the other side to do these things. You are really trying to change culture and all.

COTTER: I think that is right and what you find, at best, is people saying, "If the Americans can pull this off, more power to them. Am I going to invest my time in it? Not really, because I have been around Americans a long time and I know they are probably going to forget about this, or when this guy leaves and the new guy comes in it will be a different thing, or I'm not going to be here a year from now, so I won't worry about it." I think a lot of this on other people's part is a matter of managing us and we are pretty good at allowing ourselves to be managed in that way.

Q: Before leaving Zaire, could you talk about your relations and impressions of the direction that was coming, both in the Reagan Administration, and the NSC at the top, and also from the AF Bureau regarding Zaire?

COTTER: Well, it was a very important relationship. The war in Angola was a very serious war. At that point, there were two wars going on in that part of Africa. There was Mozambique and Angola. They were both, but particularly Angola because Cuban soldiers were fighting there, perceived as very important to the Cold War. This was a focal point of our battle against Communism for the minds and hearts of the African people. So Zaire took on a very high profile and got significant attention. As I say, Mobutu had at least one, and maybe two, official visits to the States, both of which caused great angst amongst human rights communities, but the Regan Administration, I think, was focused much more on the "strategic importance" of it. By the same token, the Administration was not particularly willing to press Mobutu for change. But, on the other hand, I didn't think then, and don't think now, that we get very far by doing that. We had regular visits from senior officials. Bill Casey came through while I was there, as I said.

Q: He was the head of CIA.

COTTER: Yes, at that time. Vernon Walters made a number of visits. I think, probably, the highest State Department visitor we had was Chet (Chester) Crocker, who was the assistant secretary, at that point, for African affairs. But we had a number of military visitors, the commander in chief of the European Command and a number of other senior military visitors. So, Zaire took on quite a high profile.

Let me mention one other interesting thing in Zaire that worked very well for us. That was summer interns. The intern program that State has and embassies have is a very good program. We were able to take a lot of advantage of it in Zaire because there are a lot of graduate students who speak French. When I got to Turkmenistan, it was much harder to do because there aren't that many people who speak Russian, but it worked very well in Zaire. We had some absolutely outstanding interns. The nice thing about interns was that it was easy to find projects for them because you could send them out to the interior - places that no sensible career officer was going to go to on a bet. We sent one intern off with an AID person up to far northeastern Zaire, near the Sudanese border. These trips would take a couple weeks to set up. You would fly to the nearest airport, usually on a small airplane. You would have to have arranged vehicles in advance, usually borrowing them from missionaries, and then drive. The trip I mentioned went up through part of the northeastern part of the immense Congolese rain forest. I remember that intern coming back all excited because he had gotten to ask about cannibalism amongst the pygmies. He drafted up a report on it, and I had to say, "We are not going to send this report in because, basically, you are talking to other people and asking them about cannibalism, and they are giving you the answer they think you want to hear. I'm not going to have a cable going back from this embassy about cannibalism in Zaire based on that kind of information. If we are going to do this kind of report, it would need a lot more investigation, otherwise, we are simply catering to people's worst beliefs about it." I know that intern wasn't very happy about that.

We sent one other intern off with Papa Botumbe to his home village, which was in a province north of Kinshasa, called Bandundu. I suspect, as the crow flies, 200 miles. Again, this was a trip that took two weeks because there were several rivers they had to cross. They were crossed only by ferries, but you could never be sure when the ferries were coming, so you went in your Land Cruiser with your food and water, and then maybe spent two days sitting at the ferry crossing, waiting for the ferry to come. On all of these trips to the interior, when they would come back, the Land Cruiser would be full. I remember the intern who came back on that trip: they had a live crocodile tied up, live chickens, and a Land Cruiser jam-packed full of food. The driver and the FSN who went along took advantage of this trip into the interior to load up on things that weren't readily available or only at inflated prices in Kinshasa. They would bring these things back in the vehicle.

The other trip that I didn't get to take, that is great if you can manage it decently, is the river trip up the Zaire River. About five, six years ago, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) did a great series on this in one of their travel things, because these river boats were a microcosm floating world of their own, and it was mostly trading then. There was the central boat and several barges tied to it, some of which were for cargo and others of which had dormitory style housing on them. The boats would leave Kinshasa and go up as far as Kisangani, which is as far as the river is navigable. Rapids beyond that make it unnavigable. The problem with taking the trip up from Kinshasa is you never knew how long it was going to take. It depended on what the current was like and how much trading there was to do and whether you got stuck in a sandbar or not. Hardly anybody ever did that because you could never say that you would be back in two or three weeks. The only sensible way to do it was to fly up to Kisangani and take the boat down river. Well, the only problem with that is, you would fly up to Kisangani and you could never be sure when it was going to leave. But it would leave eventually and you would get back. The other problem was you did have to take your water. I think most people who did the trip didn't take their food. There were a couple cabins on these ships that were the "first class" cabins, which meant you had air conditioning, which might or might not work. You had a little bit different food than the other people. From the people who have done it, it is just an absolutely amazing trip. It's one of those things so often you find in the Foreign Service, and I have learned this lesson over and over, and that is when you arrive at a post, the things that are interesting to do, you have to do them right away. Otherwise, all of a sudden you discover you are in your last three months of your tour, and you haven't done this and you haven't done that. By that time, it is too late. In the last six months of our tour, when I wanted to take this trip, there was cholera up country, and there was at least one case of the river boat having gotten down to the major town north of Kinshasa and not being allowed to come ashore because there was concern there was cholera on board. So, they left that boat sitting out in the middle of the river and didn't let it go anywhere until they were certain it was clean. I wasn't going to subject myself to that kind of thing, so we never did take the river trip, which is unfortunate, but I highly recommend the BBC's show.

Q: I think I have seen it. Great River Dreams, I think it is called. Well, Mike, this is probably a good place to stop. Don't you think?

COTTER: Yes.

Q: In 1988, you went where?

COTTER: I came back to the Department and worked in the M/MP, the office of management policy in the under secretariat for management.

Q: You did that from 1988 to when?

COTTER: Until 1990. Then, I moved on to PM (Bureau of Political-Military Affairs).

Q: We'll pick it up then.

COTTER: Okay.

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Q: Today is the 25th of January 1999, only 11 months until Christmas. So, Mike, you came back to the management bureau. Could you tell what you were doing?

COTTER: The way this is going, we might be done by Christmas. I came back to the management bureau. I had wanted to do something different, having been a political officer my whole career. I was looking at doing other things, and was even then a believer that political officers, per se, were not very well suited to anything approaching management. I know, as a matter of fact, apropos this, Zaire was the first time I wrote a Foreign Service evaluation. So, I had been in the Service almost 20 years before I wrote an evaluation. Nowadays, as people move up faster, it may be unusual, but in those days, it wasn't unusual for political officers not to supervise other officers until well into their second decade in the Service.

Q: Yes, I have been a consular officer, and I have been writing them on and on and on, ad nauseam, in my really rather early days.

COTTER: Even in Kinshasa, the maximum I wrote was three performance evaluations in a given year. I felt the need to gain some management skills. The office of management policy (M/MP) is an interesting shop. There is not a lot to talk about, it really was out of the mainstream. In fact, I got promoted to OC just when I came back. The job I was in was an 01 job, and I know friends who said, "Gee, you ought to seek a curtailment out of that assignment and get an OC job." I chose not to do that. I worked primarily on projects involving communications upgrades around the world. There isn't that much to say about it.

Q: Okay, but then you shifted over within management, didn't you?

COTTER: Well, no. Then, I moved to the political military bureau (PM).

Q: You moved there when?

COTTER: April 1990.

Q: You were doing that from when to when?

COTTER: From April 1990, until the summer of 1992, when I went off to Santiago.

Q: Could you tell me where the political-military bureau sort of fit at that time, at the beginning of 1990, within the State Department?

COTTER: It is one of the main functional bureaus as opposed to the geographic bureaus. It comes under the direction of the under secretary for T. It was called under secretary for security affairs, I think, which is actually an interesting under secretariat because, at that time, it really only had one bureau under it. In theory, most of the under secretaries have a slew of bureaus. But, the under secretary for security affairs only had the political-military bureau. I am thinking that Reg (Reginald) Bartholomew was under secretary when I arrived. Richard Clarke was the assistant secretary of PM.

Q: He is a former senator?

COTTER: No, this is Dick Clarke, who is a Senior Executive Service officer. Dick is a guy who has been around the State Department for a long time. I have known Dick for years. He is one of the cadre of very competent senior civil servants who have come up through the national security affairs circuit. There are a lot of interesting stories about Dick because he is someone who is roundly disliked in the Foreign Service. He is perceived as being anti-Foreign Service. This is very interesting because during my time in PM, for the first time, I really got exposed to the terrible culture conflict between the professional Foreign Service and the professional Civil Service, something the State Department handles terribly badly. I think this is largely because of biases within the Foreign Service toward Civil Service colleagues. The fact of the matter is that over the last 20 years a cadre of very sharp senior foreign policy thinkers has come up in the ranks through the national security apparatus, largely. A lot of them served in the Pentagon, some in and out of the White House and the NSC, some in the CIA, and a certain number in the State Department. State has always been a difficult place for these kinds of people because they could never aspire in State to rise to senior positions within the Department, all of which were reserved for Foreign Service officers. This is something which over the years has created a lot of resentment amongst senior civil servants, certainly since President Carter passed the Foreign Service Act of 1980 and the Foreign Service bought into the concept of the Senior Executive Service, which implied, no longer Civil Service guarantees for senior officers, but rather a series of three to five year contracts, with individuals being vetted and only staying on if they performed adequately. Of course, the thing never worked out worth a hill of beans. Nothing ever changed. In any event, when they created the Senior Foreign Service, a number of people were given the option, because of their job, of choosing either that or the Senior Executive Service. We gained a couple Foreign Service officers that way, primary amongst them Reg Bartholomew, although there are a number of others who later on were seen as being Foreign Service officers. But, actually, once upon a time they were civil servants, who had the sense to take advantage of that change. Dick Clarke didn't. Dick had worked primarily in political-military affairs in various positions. He has now just been named the White House coordinator of counter-terrorism. To give you an idea of Dick's bureaucratic astuteness, I worked for him at the end of the Reagan and Bush Administration when he was director of political-military affairs. When Clinton came in, he moved over to the National Security Council as senior director for counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism. So this was a very successful move, at a senior level, from a Republican administration to a Democratic administration. In any event, I came into PM in April 1990. I think Dick Clarke had taken over in the fall of 1989 as assistant secretary of PM. Dick has a penchant to sort of shoot from the hip. He was already busy reorganizing the political-military bureau. He was reorganizing it the whole two years I was there. Dick's way of doing this is to declare the reorganization and then let the personnel system catch up with him. The result of that was that no job description matched what people actually did anywhere in the bureau, making Dick unpopular not only with the Foreign Service, but with the personnel people as well.

The political-military bureau does a number of things. It develops and implements arms control and strategic arms negotiations. It runs our registry of arms exports and controls arms exports. It has always run the military assistance program, which, of course, comes under the State Department's foreign assistance item, not a Pentagon budget item. I had bid on and been assigned to be the director of the office of security assistance (PM/SAS). In January, I got a phone call from Mort Dworkin, who was then director of that office, saying that I had to be alert to the fact and be prepared to defend my turf because Dick was reorganizing again. As far as Mort knew, SAS was going to be combined with another office, and he thought I wasn't slated to be director of the new office. So, I went down to see William Rope, who was the principal deputy assistant secretary for Dick. The Senior Foreign Service officer in the bureau, Bill had lots of East Asia experience. After hemming and hawing and putting me off for a while, Bill finally fessed up to the fact that this was the case. The two offices were going to be combined and the new director would be a GS-15 civil servant, named Dick Sokolsky, who is one of Dick Clarke's protï¿½gï¿½s. What they wanted me to do was to be principal deputy in that office. So there I was an OC, expecting to be an office director, and all of a sudden, I learned I was going to be a deputy office director to a GS-15. So, I bobbed and weaved a while and decided whether I should take this. By this time, it was getting to be March, and job availability was fairly limited. So, I finally said, "What the heck, I'll do it and see how it turns out." At that point, the combined office changed to the office of defense relations and security assistance (DRSA). That state of affairs lasted for about three months when Dick reorganized again and moved another Foreign Service officer out and Dick Sokolsky in as director of the office of strategic arms negotiations. Happily, I then became director of the office of defense relations and security assistance.

DRSA is a fascinating office. As I think I have recounted in the past, I have worked on political-military affairs of one kind or another in most of my assignments. I was quite familiar with the program. DRSA essentially has pol-mil desk officers who covered most countries of the world. We worked as a global resource for the geographic bureaus on their security assistance functions. We also had an element in the office that managed the security assistance program globally, working on Congressional presentation documents, defending the program in Congress, doing a certain amount of the accounting on it, coordinating with the Pentagon and the Defense Security Assistance Agency, which is the implementer of a lot of these programs.

Q: When you say "security assistance," you better define what this meant at that time.

COTTER: Well, there are two elements of it. One is military assistance itself. There were several types of this. One was grant assistance, where we simply provided military equipment, on a non-reimbursable grant basis to countries. That actually, to a large extent, was phasing out, even by the time I was in DRSA. Then, we have the program of Foreign Military Sales, called "FMS," which were low cost loans. We would sell military equipment to countries on a concessional basis. The third element of the program was economic assistance given for political purposes. Generally, in most countries it was simply money given over for budget support. It wasn't development assistance. The primary recipient of this, of course, as with military assistance in general, was Israel. But, Turkey, Greece, Thailand, and a number of other countries were receiving this kind of assistance as well. Those are the main areas, but there are other parts of the program that we operated, for instance, EDA (Excess Defense Articles). This is military equipment that the armed services have declared excess to their needs that we then make available, sometimes on a cost-free basis, sometimes on a reduced-cost basis, to other countries. We also have something of a role in monitoring commercial exports of military equipment. The licensing of that was largely done in other offices, but because our office coordinated with American embassies abroad, it also had something of a role in that. DRSA was a large office. There was a staff of about 25, which is much larger than an office in a geographic bureau, but not atypical for the functional bureaus, which tend to have larger offices. We were divided into three separate functions. I had three deputies. Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, and I had arrived in April 1990. As you can imagine, that took up most of the energies of the political-military bureau for the next couple of years. It was a fascinating time to be there, because in addition to the normal work, we had a major role in the Washington part of the war. Amongst the 25 staff members in DRSA, I had five military officers: a major, three lieutenant colonels, and a full colonel. They were on detail from the Pentagon and worked on various jobs on security assistance. This is part of the State-Defense Exchange Program, in which State sends political advisors to commands and people teach at the war colleges. The Pentagon has always taken it more seriously than State does. Well, not always because for a long time, it was not career enhancing for military officers. But in 1986 or '88 Congress passed the Goldwater-Nickles reforms that strengthened the powers of the Joint Chiefs. There has always been a conflict in the Pentagon between the services and the Joint Command. The Goldwater-Nickles Act strengthened the Joint Command and made joint staff assignment a requisite, a ticket to be punched, for officers to be promoted to senior level. The officers had to have joint assignments. By making that a ticket that had to be punched, it meant that aggressive officers looked for joint assignments. All of the details to State were considered joint staff assignments and qualified for this, so we had some very good military officers. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, the first thing that happened, of course, was that a task force was set up. In the nature of things and partly because Dick Clarke was very quick off the blocks - he was much quicker than his colleagues in the Near East Bureau (NEA) - PM headed that task force for the entire duration of the war. I remember being over there that first evening when we were trying to bring some order out of chaos.

Q: You say "over there?"

COTTER: Over in the task force office, on the seventh floor of the State Department. We were trying to bring order out of chaos, with quite a bit of success. So, essentially, for the next eight months, whatever it was, until the war was over, my office seconded people 24 hours a day to task force duty. This meant a rotational series of assignments, which generally, at any given time took about half of my staff. A number of my deputies served as coordinators of the task force.

One of the problems that appeared early on in the lead up to the war was communication with the Pentagon. The Pentagon had several task forces itself. There was one in the Pentagon itself - the Office of The Secretary of Defense (OSD) had a task force, as did the Joint Staff. But since we were talking here about preparation for combat in a combat situation, the task force in the Pentagon that had real authority was the Joint Chiefs. The OSD task force was largely advisory, giving policy guidance and what not. Well, the liaison between the OSD and the State Department task forces was very good. These were people we worked with on a regular basis. The liaison with the Joint Staff task force presented some real difficulty. It was down in one of the "tanks," the very carefully controlled, secure areas of the Pentagon, where civilians couldn't go. You could go over there with your State Department badge and say, "I am from the State Department, I am from political-military affairs." And they would answer, "That is very nice, but you are not welcome." So, Dick Clarke early on came up with the very sensible idea of assigning some of the military officers assigned at the State Department to go to the JCS task force. I think there were about 10 military officers, all told, in PM. Then most of the geographic bureaus had one or two military officers assigned, usually to the office of regional affairs, doing political military work in the bureau. So, there must have been 15 or so of these officers. All of those officers were put under control of PM and put on a rotational assignment over to the JCS task force during the war. This was invaluable for a couple of things. It was invaluable for Dick, personally, and it was invaluable for the State Department. It meant we had someone in the key Pentagon center whom we knew, whom we could call, and he would talk with us, and who understood how the State Department operates, who understood what State's role in all of this would be. These officers provided a really critical element of communication between the two agencies.

An example of why this is important and where it comes up, is for instance, when we were deploying units in the build-up to the war. You have all sorts of foreign policy questions that come up. For instance, troops from Korea participated. How do they get there? Well, some of them took ships, which had to make refueling stops. Some of them flew, which meant stops for the aircraft. All of these were state aircraft carrying military personnel. We had to work out where they would land, under what conditions, and from where they could stage. None of this is within the Pentagon's purview. It is all in the State Department and our embassies overseas. This was difficult in Asia. Finally, as I recall, Singapore agreed to be a major staging point.

Q: Even India, I think, allowed us, if I recall, some planes to land there.

COTTER: I wouldn't be surprised, but I don't recall. Well, of course, there was also the issue of whether a country that cooperated in this effort wanted it to be public or not. If it wasn't going to be public, how could we manage that, given the notorious difficulty the United States has of managing confidentiality. Another example was the issue of paying for the war. As you might recall, I think we probably made money on it because we passed along the cost to everybody. So those countries that couldn't participate, such as Japan, because of their own restrictions, were asked to ante up. Even Korea was asked to ante up. Those negotiations were undertaken by State. Indeed, there was a separate office in the State Department set up specifically for negotiating payments for the war. Another area where we had difficulty were overflight and landing rights for aircraft coming from the United States that had crossed over Europe. Negotiating with the Spaniards and with others, early on. Now, later on, when France and other countries joined the coalition, it was somewhat easier. But it was not easy to negotiate all of the overflight and landing clearances. For instance, to get fighters to the Gulf, you had to base tankers at various points along the way to refuel all those fighters in air. Well, these would be based in places that normally didn't have U.S. military aircraft based there. Again, this is the kind of thing the State Department generally had to work on. These are the sorts of issues on which the Pentagon gets notoriously fidgety and is not very patient because they want it to happen yesterday at the latest. Of course, those things don't happen quite that quickly. So, anyhow, the liaison in the Pentagon turned out to be of a great advantage to us.

The other advantage for Dick Clarke, of course, was that he had his people in the Pentagon, keeping Dick informed of things. When it came to the Secretary's meetings, Dick knew what was going on before anybody else. Another way Dick did this is, we had a State Department political advisor, POLAD, assigned to each of the major regional military commands. Of course, the Gulf War was under the Central Command, which is nominally headquartered in Tampa, Florida, but it had moved to advanced quarters in Saudi Arabia to prepare for the war. Well, I don't remember the name of who was our POLAD.

Q: I think it was Gordon Brown.

COTTER: I think you are right.

Q: I have interviewed him.

COTTER: Okay. Gordon, was up to his neck in alligators and going down. So, Dick came up with the very sensible idea of sending an assistant. That was quickly approved, but the State Department said, "We don't have anybody extra to assign, Dick, but if you want to send one of your people, go ahead." Dick looked at this and said, "This is a God given opportunity, I am not going to squander it." At first, he sent out people for a month, on a rotational basis. But, close to the time the war was starting, he sent out Douglas Kinney, who was one of my deputies in DRSA.

[Is now looking at a mug]. Oh, and here is Doug Kinney's coffee mug. "Douglas Kinney, Foreign Service Officer, United States of America, Political Advisor, Commanding General, Combined Task Force Operations." Anyhow, Doug went off to this. Again, this was very useful to the Department and very useful to Dick because as a result we knew more of what was going on than anybody else did. Dick would get a phone call first thing in the morning, about 7:00 A.M. Washington time, from Doug Kinney, filling him in on what had gone on over the last 24 hours. By the time the Department's senior staff meeting occurred at 8:30 or 9, there was Dick Clarke with up-to-date information. This was useful for Dick, but obviously, useful as well for the Department, to be that well informed and not dependent solely on the Pentagon for information. The upshot of this for my office in DRSA was that we, in addition to manning the various task forces, still had to manage the rest of the global security assistance program, which we did with between a half and a third staff. Task forces really affect normal staffing. Either people serve on the daytime shift, which means they are not at work, or they may have the nighttime shift, but then you lose them for the next day because you are not going to have them work on the task force for eight hours and then come and work for eight hours. If you say, "Okay, a third of the people are on task force duty at any given time," that in essence means two-thirds of your people, on any given day, are not available. So, we had to scramble quite a bit to manage the rest of the program.

Q: Did your particular office deal with Israeli and Egyptian affairs, Israel being the engine that drives this whole thing, or was that off to one side? It always seems to be that no matter what you had, Israel is different, and what they want, they get, in any way they want it.

COTTER: You know, it is like so many high-profile issues in large countries: policy isn't made at working levels. It is made at much higher levels. With Israel, it is particularly complicated, because a lot of the policy is made in Congress, not in the Administration at all. For instance, the direct financial assistance I talked about before, which is called Economic Support Fund (ESF), was budgetary support assistance. In Israel's case, I think, at this point, during the war, ESF was probably near $2 billion a year. Now, this kind of assistance for most countries is essentially a cash transfer, and the Treasury Department likes to hold off as long as possible before making the transfer. So, they wait until all legislation is passed, and then they will only hand it out in tranches. You spend a lot of time arguing with the Treasury to release money because the country wants its money. With Israel that is not a problem because the law appropriating that money specifies that there will be no delay in issuing the money to Israel. Literally, you would have that law passed, and within 24 hours the Israelis were in, wondering where their check was. We are talking about several billion dollars cost to the U.S. Treasury. But, again, that was written into the law. There is nobody in Congress who was going to leave this up to the vagaries of Treasury and Treasury's desire to save money. We had, and I assume we still do have a very close relationship with Israel. Our military mission in Israel and their military mission here and most of the equipment it acquires is bought on a multi-year procurement basis. This is something that Israel could do, but most countries weren't allowed to, and it really has caused some very difficult problems for us and our military assistance. You talk about buying things like tanks or aircraft, but there is no way you are going to make a one year purchase on that. Of course, we only appropriate money one year at a time, and Congress gets very fidgety when the Administration appears to be committing future year funds. So, the documents when we do these sales always say, "You, Turkey, contract to buy F-16s. Here is the total package costs. You are going to pay so much. The company will do such and such in offsets, and this year, the U.S. Government has X amount in foreign military assistance that you can use. Future amounts may or may not be available, depending on funds. You, Turkey, have the obligation to pay the full contract price if the funds aren't forthcoming from the U.S. Government." Countries don't like to do this, but they don't have a choice because you can't buy a 400 million dollar purchase of aircraft when your annual allocation of U.S. assistance is one million, ten million, or one hundred million dollars. Those figures, by the way, are way off. I think Turkey's purchase of F-16s was $2.5-3 billion, and at that point they were getting $175 million or so in military assistance, which had to cover all of the military services. In any event, being able to procure or being able to allocate funds only one year at a time really makes it very difficult to have multi-year programs. We, nonetheless, sort of had them with a wink and a nod. It would be okay until a congressman who didn't care for this kind of thing, David Obey, a congressman from Wisconsin, being one of them, every once in a while would get a burr under his saddle and cause us lots of grief over it. With Israel, of course, this was never so much of a problem. Most of Israel's procurements from us were very large, and they were all funded only by our military assistance. I don't remember anyone ever raising a question about them.

Q: Essentially, we pay for all of this stuff that Israel gets, is that right? I'm not talking about transfers, but does the money come from within Israel?

COTTER: No, it comes from us. Israel's total aid from us, both economic and direct military, in the early 1990s was about $5 billion a year, and Egypt was getting about $3 billion. This is something that always gets glossed over when people look at our foreign assistance budget, both for AID money as well as military assistance. They say, "Well, there is a $17 billion foreign assistance budget, we are throwing good money after bad." The fact is that $8 billion of that, off the top, goes to Israel and Egypt.

Another great problem during the time I was in the political-military bureau, and since, is that Congress, which has its own ideas about these things, had long since discovered that it couldn't trust administrations to do what it wanted unless it wrote it into law. So, the nefarious practice of earmarking grew. Earmarking is the means by which Congress directs where money will go. So, the appropriation will stimulate that there is $X billion in foreign assistance, of which no less than $5 billion will go to Israel, no less than $3 billion will go to Egypt, X amount will go to Turkey. This is what makes the military assistance part of the foreign assistance budget a multi-volume document. They earmarked in those days, because of the relations between Turkey and Greece, what Congress liked to call the seven to ten ratio, whereas for every $10.00 assistance Turkey got, Greece would get $7.00. If you gave Turkey $100 million, you had to give Greece $70 million. Those were all earmarks. Lebanon would have its earmark, Philippines would have its earmark. Everybody who had a handle in the Congress would get their earmark. Well, that means when Congress says, "Okay, fine, from $10 billion we are going down to $8 billion, the tendency was never to cut the earmarks since they were protected by someone on the Hill. So, what you would find was, of a $10 billion program, probably $6-7 billion of it was tied up to specific earmarks. So, when Congress reduced the total to $8 billion, instead of $3 billion for the rest of the world, you had $1 billion for the rest of the world. As a result, when we started cutting military assistance budgets under the Bush Administration or at the end of Reagan, those cuts fell really hard on the majority of countries that were not fortunate enough to have an earmark. I think, finally, Israel's and Egypt's have been cut somewhat, but the Israelis and the Egyptians made very clear that they weren't expecting any cut in their program. These are some very difficult issues that still bother us.

Q: Well, we will move to other parts of this whole Gulf War. Were we doing anything, through your office, or through the bureau... I don't want to sound too bitter, but our great ally was our great concern in the Middle East. The main thing was to keep the Israelis from doing anything. Were we sweetening the pie, or anything like that, from your perspective, in order to keep the Israelis from mucking up things?

COTTER: Well, we provided Patriot missiles, and we essentially said that we would protect them from SCUD missile attacks from Iraq. But, keeping them out of the war was very important because in order to have Arab countries in our coalition, there was no way to include Israel. Of course, the Israelis were very concerned, since Iraq is very close and it's very anti-Israel. I am sure there were lots of discussions between us and commitments on our part to keep the Israelis out of the war. I am certain we did a lot of intelligence sharing with them. It's my experience that intelligence sharing with the Israelis is generally a one-way street, not two.

Q: I know. As I say, there does seem to be a pattern.

COTTER: One of the other interesting areas with Israel that Dick Clarke got himself in a whole bunch of trouble on, not deservedly, is the issue of Israeli reselling or reengineering U.S. military equipment, and selling it to places we didn't want it to go. Every once in a while, we get into a problem with a country which has either received something from us and transferred it, or more often, taken what they got and added their embellishments and resold it. The contracts when we give or sell military assistance are very long. One of the things they contain is a provision that the recipient can't resell it or give it away without our permission. Sometimes this gets difficult. For instance, when the Israelis wanted to sell the Kfir fighter to Ecuador that I mentioned earlier. Well, Israel designed the Kfir, but it has GE engines. Since it has General Electric engines, that gives us a yea or nay as to whether the aircraft could be reexported. That is what enabled us, back in those days, to deny Israel the right to export the Kfir. But, over time, there have been a number of accusations that the Israelis had reengineered some of our radar systems and had exported them to countries that we wouldn't sell military equipment to, with South Africa and Chile, which, at that time was under Pinochet, as prime examples. Dick Clarke, at one point, had gotten pilloried by the Hill for supposedly trying to cover up for Israel, which I don't think he did. I think Dick's concern was that - and this is always a problem in these cases - the accusations of this generally came from sensitive intelligence sources. The intelligence agencies would generally not let the intelligence be used for fear of revealing sources and methods. So, we had a situation where we couldn't accuse the Israelis, or to use another example, accuse Pakistan of developing and nuclear weapons. The Pakistanis would say that they weren't doing it, and if we thought they were, we should prove it. Then, there would be a major battle within whatever administration it was over how much of what we knew was going to be released. Generally, NSA (National Security Agency) and CIA were successful in not allowing that kind of information, the facts, to be released. Well, Dick's view on this, with which I agree, is that we have to make a decision in these cases. If we are going to go public with an accusation, or if we are going to take policy action on the basis of such information, we have to be willing to make that public. If we are not, even though we know something is going on, we need to grin and bear it, or we need to work in other ways to try and stop it. Anyhow, he got into trouble. I don't remember what the specific case was. I know it was in the newspapers at the time he got reprimanded for it. That was during the Gulf War.

Q: Did your office play a role in getting stuff to Saudi Arabia, and the political consequences of putting up half a million men in a fundamentalist Muslim country, and all that?

COTTER: No, not really. I think most of that was done by the people in the Near East bureau. PM wouldn't have had a direct role. Where we worked more in our office was with the embassies on the various transit and the contributing countries, as opposed to the actual basing countries. I am sure we worked to some extent on the status of forces agreement that was done with Saudi Arabia. The other thing that came up at the end of the Gulf War, that actually caused another reorganization just after I left PM, was the emergence of peacekeeping as an issue. DRSA was divided into a security assistance office and an "operational" office, which coordinated peacekeeping efforts. It was the office in the Department that is responsible for the peacekeeping funding and peacekeeping operations. While I was there, DRSA did that kind of thing, although there was not that much happening in the way of peacekeeping. As a result, however, of our work on peacekeeping, in addition to the military assistance budget, we also worked closely with the international organizations bureau on our contribution to the UN for peacekeeping activities.

PM is a fascinating bureau. My position was very interesting because we worked with a lot of resources. We spent a lot of time putting together the massive Congressional presentation for the military assistance budget, which has country sections for each country, justifying our proposed program in each. We then edited that down into executive summaries, which the Secretary and under secretary would present. We also prepared negotiation documents for OMB (Office of Management and Budget) because OMB always fights the levels we ask for. Then, we provided lots of follow-up briefings on the Hill for staff members of Congress and the Senate as they argue against, generally, parts of our proposal. But, it is a fascinating place to be.

Q: Did you get involved at all with Syria?

COTTER: Not at all. Again, that was NEA. The Near East bureau, like most of the geographic bureaus, tolerates an intrusion of the functional bureaus only to the extent it can't prevent it. When it comes down to the crown jewels, they are not going to let outsiders in. I said that Dick Clarke was not popular in the Foreign Service. One of the reasons for that is that he was generally perceived as not liking Foreign Service Officers. My sense of Dick is that, not unlike other colleagues in the Department, he doesn't suffer fools gladly, and he has a fairly broad definition of what constitutes a fool. I think he has run into a number of Foreign Service Officers that he doesn't care for. Frankly, I had no difficulty working for him. I found that if you knew what you were doing, and if you didn't take any BS [bullshit] from him, if you didn't take any of his guff and you knew what you were doing, you were okay. However, his reputation made it very hard for us to recruit people. By the time I left the bureau, I think, there was only one Foreign Service office director in the bureau. Foreign Service people would gripe about this and complain that Dick was turning it into a Civil Service bureau, and indeed, there was a whole grouping of Civil Service people he nurtured and helped, very similar, in my view, to the way we in the Foreign Service network and have client relationships. Dick did this in Civil Service, getting young people from the point where they were presidential management interns, PMIs, which is the entry level program for fast-track civil servants, and then nurturing them through a series of jobs on up. Dick did that very successfully and was very much liked by the professional Civil Service cadre in the Department, precisely because he was one of the few people, at a senior level, who they perceived as taking their interest into account. Now, this whole issue is still percolating in the Department. About two years ago, our ambassador in one of the Gulf countries got severely reprimanded because he sent a very incautious telegram that made it very clear that he thought the Foreign Service Officers were first class citizens and the civil servants in the Department were second class citizens. This is something that we have never come to grips with. All of the recent management reviews have tried to deal with the issue and have not come to grips with it. But, it did cause us some serious recruiting problems in PM in terms of filling the Foreign Service jobs we had. I think, frankly, the people in my office, generally, got quite good onward assignments from PM and went on to places they wanted to go.

Q: Obviously, in your bureau everything was pushed toward the Gulf War, with Congress cutting down on funds that would be generally available. Can you talk a bit about the countries and programs that were either frozen off or almost starved? I would think this would be an awful lot of countries which had been getting maybe modest amounts of military support.

COTTER: Well, a number of countries came under real pressure. The Greek and Turkish programs were two. Turkey was the next largest program after Israel and Egypt. I think when I was in Turkey in the early 1980s or when I was on the Turkish desk in the mid-1980s it must have been about $1.5 billion, probably about $1 billion foreign military assistance and $500 million Economic Support Fund. By the time the Gulf War started, I guess this was down to $700 million and falling. We had done away with ESF and just had military assistance. The problem was, of course, that the Turks were critical to us for the Gulf War, and you had to juxtapose these reductions in military assistance. I guess part of the answer to that is we could say the Turks were critical to us and the Gulf War, but in fact, the Gulf War and how it worked out was fairly critical to the Turks. So, it was in the Turk's own national interest to play a role in this, otherwise they would have ended up with an independent Kurdistan in the northern part of Iraq, which is something they didn't want. They have managed to prevent that, and I would guess that from a Turkish point of view, that probably justifies their participation in the war effort. The other advantage of cutting Turkey was you automatically cut Greece, since Greece's levels were tied to Turkey's, at least as far the Congress was concerned. I must say, as a matter of policy, no administration has ever accepted the seven to ten ratio. We rejected it as a matter of policy, yet we applied it year after year. So, you could cut Turkey and cut Greece, and those, of course, were the third and fourth largest programs. Some of the others disappeared on their own around this time. The Philippines had always also been a very large program, and then we had the Mt. Pinatubo volcano eruption. We closed bases and reduced almost all of our military assistance to the Philippines. One area that our office did a lot of work on with the East Asian bureau was what to do with equipment at the bases in the Philippines and the bases themselves. There were some very difficult issues involved in this. In theory, on those bases we had the right to bring back anything we wanted, but when the Pentagon started looking at transportation costs of used equipment, they generally decided that it wasn't worth taking. Then, the equipment would become excess. There is a whole series of other legal restrictions on what you can do with excess property. First, it must be offered to the US states, then to counties and cities in the United States, and only then could it be made available to foreign countries. Where this gets dicey is particularly with construction equipment - bulldozers, road graders, and things like that - which, in the past, cities, counties, and states, have had their eye on. At the end of the Gulf War, we had to dispose of lots of excess equipment stockpiled in the Gulf and Europe as well as disposing of equipment from the Philippine bases. A list of excess equipment would circulate, and then a state or county might say that they wanted all of this stuff. We would then have to go through a long process of explaining how the transportation cost of bringing it back from the Philippines was going to be X. If the county really wanted it, it would have to pay the transportation costs. Usually, it turned out they could go out and buy new equipment for less. We were generally able to get around this, but of course only with lots of grief, usually not from the state, county, or city itself, but from the congressman or the senator who wanted to know why their county was not allowed to get, at no cost, these Army bulldozers.

Thailand's programs also got cut then. I think we decided it had graduated from needing grant assistance. Grant military assistance during this period was pretty much phased out in general, and most of the programs went to concessional FMS loans. There were a number of countries that didn't want loans, or didn't feel themselves in a position to take on loans. We have never been very tough in this area, in evaluating ourselves whether a country was a good risk for these kinds of loans. A lot of countries didn't like it, and a lot of embassies worked extraordinarily hard at trying to justify programs.

Q: I was going to say, you must have been deluged with them. Because of the importance of country X, which is the junction of all our policies, you have to supply helicopters, or something like that.

COTTER: Yes. All of these would come, and we would prepare the draft budget. This begins with submissions from each embassy. I shouldn't say embassy, rather each country team. Of course, it is generally something that is worked out very carefully between the embassy and the military assistance group. In many countries preparing the foreign assistance request is one of the things that gives the embassy, usually the political-military officer, a lot of influence with the mil group. While the military knows country X's military needs and what the Pentagon may want to give it, the request has to be couched, not in Pentagon language, but in State Department language since these requests don't come in through Pentagon channels but rather from the ambassador, through State Department channels. PM puts together the requests in a raw state, which generally totals three times what we can expect from Congress. The under secretary then usually allocates to each regional bureau what he or she thinks is likely to be appropriated. That forces the regional bureaus to make their own allocations. So, for instance, if the Latin America bureau wants more for Uruguay, it will have to take it from one of the other country programs in the bureau. Of course, the geographic bureaus that have significant allocations like that process, while those that don't say that it ought to be a global fund, so they are not forced to argue within a geographic bureau, but can argue for funds against all of the other country programs. Deciding the final request is a long, drawn out process, that involves many appeals to and meetings with the under secretary when assistant secretaries come up to argue their position. The fact of the matter is, during the early 1990s, there simply wasn't any money. We would sit down with people and crunch the numbers and say, "If you can get some of Israel's money, more power to you, and we will be happy to give it to you." The other thing that regional bureau desk officers would get good at it, that we in PM objected to as a matter of policy, was to work behind the scenes with friends on the Hill to get an earmark. Of course, we don't lobby like this, do we? We, in the State Department, in the Administration, don't like earmarking because it restricts the President's ability to carry out his foreign and defense policies. Nonetheless, if you are a desk officer for a country whose program is at risk and you have any kind of a relationship with Hill staff, the answer was, at that point, to seek an earmark. It simply made the situation more difficult for those countries which had no clout with the Hill, and generally, as a result, had small programs. By the time I was going to Chile in 1992, we had phased out most small country programs. I remember a couple cases in Latin America where we were down to $500 million dollars. At that point, our embassy in the country would say: "We don't want it. It is more work to us to administer a program of $500 million than it is worth."

The other program that I should have mentioned that PM also administers in the Department is IMET, the International Military Education and Training Program. That is a separate budget. It is also a State Department-run budget. It has been cut quite a bit over the years, but survives pretty much intact. So, even in most countries where we have traditionally provided military assistance, even though they may no longer be getting Foreign Military Sales or any kind of grant military assistance, we still do training of military people. IMET encompasses lots of different kinds of training, everything from technical training for aircraft mechanics or tank mechanics, to officer training of various kinds, including things such as the military School of the Americas. That school is something human rights groups like to criticize because they claim it is a school for torture. SOUTHCOM, the Southern Command that does Latin America, in the past had a great advantage in doing this kind of training because it was headquartered in Panama. Most of the training programs that they run, the School of the Americas, were in Panama, a Spanish speaking environment. We generally have had no problem in finding Spanish speakers within our own military to serve as instructors. It gets much more difficult with other languages and for other regional commands that don't have a convenient midway point to do the training. When you do this kind of training, most of the cost is in transportation and lodging at the training site and the States. Even if the students are put up at in a BOQ on base, there are still international transportation and other costs, whereas if you are doing the training in Panama, you cut the transportation costs and other program costs in half. If you are talking about Africa, we have to fly people all the way back to the States, and we limit training to students who speak English because we don't have enough people to teach in French. So, a certain amount of the money goes to providing English language training. I have found very few countries in the world where anybody in the military who learns English stays in the military if they can get out of it. They can generally make more money in the private sector. This is a problem as well in Asia, although I think a lot of the Asian armed forces have a relatively large number of people who speak English and it hasn't been quite the same problem. When I got out to Turkmenistan, in the former Soviet Union, this was a big problem. We had very few Russian speakers to teach classes.

I think a lot of the IMET training is quite good. Whether or not an individual, or his military culture, allows him to function as what we would define as a professional officer is another question. In fact, people come to these schools, sometimes for a command and general staff college, which could be a year, and see how a professional military under civilian control functions. I think that kind of professional training and exposure to the United States is useful. I don't fool myself that people go back and say, "Gee, I am now going to change my armed forces." Indeed, you find, even in very friendly countries to us, that when people return from this kind of long-term training program, they often are considered untrustworthy and sometimes shunted off to the side. One of the requirements we have when we send people to IMET training is that the host country must sign a document that requires people who come up for training in a certain discipline to return to a job which takes advantage of that experience. That is easy enough for a technician. If it is a lieutenant colonel who has been indoctrinated with terrible, democratic ideas, we may find the lieutenant colonel assigned to a regiment out in the boonies somewhere after his return, rather than where we would like to see him: in their general staff trying to bring about institutional changes. But, he probably has to go back and spend some time in the jungle before he is cleansed, from their perspective.

Q: Were we making any noises within your bureau about - or maybe we were already doing it - doing something about the former Soviet Union, particularly the old Soviet Army?

COTTER: This just got started. By the time I left PM in 1992, we were wrestling with it. You mentioned before about how Israel is sort of sui generis. Well, there were a couple of other areas the political-military bureau had a very difficult time getting a handle on. One was nuclear arms negotiations in Europe. The European bureau has always had a very strong political-military office of its own called RPM, regional political-military affairs. Particularly when it comes to dealing with negotiations over tactical nuclear weapons, but also the full range of dealings with NATO, PM never really succeeded in taking them away from the European bureau. That was always something that was of considerable frustration. I know that Dick Clarke, at one point, was espousing that the only way functional bureaus could recruit good officers was if they somehow had control over ongoing assignments. The international organizations bureau (IO) does. There are IO offices in Geneva, a position in Nairobi, positions in Vienna and others, that the IO bureau controls. Dick Clarke came up with the very sensible idea that political-military affairs is a recognized sub-cone, and he requires a certain level of professionalism and experience on the part of the officers that go out to pol-mil positions in embassies. Therefore, he argued, the PM bureau ought to have a say in who gets assigned to them. Well, the geographic bureaus never liked functional bureaus mucking around in their assignments. PM failed miserably in this effort, but the idea was that if we can get some control like this, then you could attract officers to the bureau by saying, "You want to go to the Rome political-military affairs office, or you want to go to U.S. NATO, we have some say in those assignments." We never much succeeded in getting that away from EUR.

Q: I was asking about doing something about military...

COTTER: Soviet affairs. This is similar to NATO and Israel. It has now changed somewhat, but Soviet affairs were run, for decades, differently from everyone else. EUR/SOV had its own rules and its own way of doing things, and it didn't deal with the rest of the bureaucracy.

Q: EUR/SOV?

COTTER: Yes, short for the Soviet desk in the European bureau (EUR/SOV). When the Soviet Union broke up and Russia started changing, this habit of doing things changed very slowly. How we started building relations with ex-Soviet armed forces was through training. We didn't do anything more detailed in the way of military cooperation than that until well after I left PM. Dealing with EUR/SOV was difficult. We would hear by happenstance that EUR/SOV had worked out their whole training proposal. PM would tell them they couldn't do that because they didn't control the money for it, PM did. It would take memos to the under secretary for political affairs to get EUR/SOV to understand and accept the fact that they were now dealing with a military assistance budget that was global. While there may or may not have been monies in the budget for their countries, it was not their money to deal with as they saw fit. We had a terrible time. With the Eastern European countries it was a little bit easier because Poland and Czechoslovakia were much further ahead in qualifying for this kind of assistance. The Eastern European affairs office in EUR much more quickly learned to deal with military assistance, but the Soviet affairs office took an awfully long time to come to grips with it, and it hadn't by 1992, when I left PM. They were still trying to manage these kinds of policies themselves without any reference to the rest of the world. They, along with the EUR regional political-military affairs office and the Near East bureau when it came to Israel, were areas where PM, as a functional bureau, really had very little clout.

Q: Well, you moved in 1992 to Chile.

COTTER: To Santiago, Chile as a deputy chief of mission (DCM).

Q: How did that come about?

COTTER: Well, actually, I give great credit on this to Curt Kamman, who was the ambassador. I was up for reassignment and DCM jobs, of course, appear on the bid list. I bid on Israel, Chile, and Turkey. DCM Turkey was the job I really wanted. When I met with the new ambassador there, whose name now escapes me, soon after he was confirmed, I learned he had already made his decision. He didn't even bother to look at who had bid on the position. Curt Kamman, to his great credit, looked at those who bid on DCM Chile and interviewed people. I had never met Curt before I interviewed with him for the job, and he offered it to me. I must say that in that case, the bidding and interviewing process, from my perspective, worked. I was hired by an ambassador whom I did not know before I took the job. A week after that I was offered DCM Tel Aviv, by Bill Harrop. He, of course, had been my last ambassador in Zaire. I agonized for a while about this and decided that Chile was the place I wanted to go. I had done enough work on and about Israel in PM to realize that the embassy in Tel Aviv, frankly, works largely as a visitor center. Our policy regarding Israel isn't made at that embassy. It does have an extraordinary number of visitors. I knew that Tel Aviv had bad morale problems and a bad physical situation. I decided that I didn't want to do that. It turns out, of course, that Bill Harrop was there for only about a year when he got himself on the wrong side of the Clinton Administration and was removed. Curt Kamman had gone out to Santiago at the beginning of 1992, and then I followed him out around July 1992.

Q: You were there from 1992 until when?

COTTER: January 1995.

Q: What was the situation in Chile, when you arrived?

COTTER: Chile is a great place. I arrived in Chile at a very exciting time. The referendum that brought about the end of the Pinochet government had taken place in 1989. In 1991, the first elected civilian government came into office, under President Patricio Aylwin. So that government had been in office a little less than a year when I arrived. This was a time when Chilean democracy was still sort of feeling its way. It was also a time when there was very great anticipation that Chile would be the next country to join NAFTA (North American Free Trade Association). NAFTA had been negotiated by the Bush Administration, and Bush had also promised President Aylwin, during Bush's 1991 Latin America trip, that Chile would be the next country invited to join NAFTA. The way these things go, during the presidential campaign Clinton and the Democrats campaigned against NAFTA. Low and behold, everybody was surprised when Clinton won the election. It took Clinton about a year to realize NAFTA was a positive thing, and in the meantime, proponents of the treaty in the Senate and elsewhere almost defeated it. Passage of NAFTA came within a whisker of being defeated. NAFTA has come down, through history, as a great victory during the Clinton Administration. It is cited as where Clinton really proved his spurs in foreign affairs. Well, there wouldn't have been such a problem passing NAFTA if Clinton had been in favor from the beginning, instead of screwing around for a year. But then, he had some real problems within the Democratic Party.

Q: Mainly the unions didn't like it.

COTTER: The unions didn't like it, that's right. NAFTA was finally passed in 1992. As I noted, George Bush, when he had visited Latin America in early 1991, had promised the Chileans that they would be next. The Clinton Administration reiterated that commitment. Today, in 1998, we still haven't made good on that commitment. Chile still doesn't have a free trade agreement with the United States. That was a very active issue when I was there. The other issue on which we still saw repercussions was the grape controversy.

Q: I just wrote down "grapes." I had a long interview with Tony Gillespie. Could you explain what the "grapes thing" was?

COTTER: Yes. I forget the dates, 1987, maybe, or possibly as late as 1989.

Q: It doesn't matter.

COTTER: Chile, of course, exports a lot of fruit to the United States. If you are eating grapes in the United States in the winter, you are probably eating Chilean grapes. If you eat peaches or pears, or most other fruit in the winter, it is probably Chilean fruit. As a shipment of Chilean grapes was arriving in Philadelphia, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, which is responsible for inspecting these things, received an anonymous call that the shipment contained contaminated or poisoned grapes. Inspectors opened a couple of crates and found what was alleged to be grapes laced with cyanide. They then seized the entire shipload and dumped it and put an embargo on all Chilean grapes. With the delay in shipping time, this being the height of the grape season, Chileans had, undoubtedly, a hundred million boxes of grapes either on the high seas or ready to be shipped. They were told they couldn't ship them. The embargo got lifted 10 days later, during which time, the Chileans claimed that they had suffered significant losses. Figures for those losses are sort of like those for Mobutu's wealth. Every time you turn around, the figure goes up geometrically. But, nonetheless, they had clearly lost money. The Chileans have always maintained that there were never poisoned grapes - that the whole thing was done to embarrass them, the Pinochet administration, that it was a put-up job. They would say, "How is it you can have a whole shipload of grapes, and you open one or two crates and find the cyanide laced grapes." Before dumping it, the inspectors looked at the rest of the shipment and found no other poisoned grapes. Gaining recognition that the U.S. had made a mistake and getting economic compensation for their losses occupied significant effort on the part of the Chileans all during the time I was there. Actually, the case finally got resolved in, I think, 1996. The Chilean growers, like their counterparts in the United States, are very powerful. When we would talk to the foreign ministry about the issue, its interest in grapes was minimal, but there was a significant lobby in Chile that was demanding that their national honor be assuaged. We worked very hard on this issue, and we can talk about some of the interesting aspects of how we tried to deal with this.

Bush's ploy, when the Chileans raised the issue with him, was to say, "Look, take it to court, everybody else does."

So, we told the Chileans that they really needed to pursue their remedies in the U.S. court system. After much hemming and hawing, they finally hired some lawyers and filed suit in federal court. As I recall, it was under the Federal Tort Claims Act. They claimed that they had suffered significant economic damage because of activity by either the United States Government or its agent. When the case went to court, the first thing the Justice Department did was to claim sovereign immunity. So then, the Chileans complained to the embassy that we had told them to go to court. Our answer was "Yes, but we didn't say that when you went to court we would deny ourselves all legal defenses to such a suit. Anyhow, happily the court threw out the sovereign immunity defense. But, ultimately, as I recall, the Chileans did not win in court. We tried a number of ways to solve the problem. Don Planty, who is now ambassador to Guatemala, was then director of the Latin American bureau's office of southern cone affairs, which included Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. Don tried to work out with the foreign ministry a way to somehow come up with a solution that looked like we were paying something, but weren't. The foreign ministry, at that point, had said, "Look, we will take care of the compensations internally, but we have to have something to take to the growers, a package of things that would look like concessions on your part." So, Don went around U.S. agencies to try to hunt up things that we could perhaps do without, but that could be sold by the Chilean government as concessions on our part. This ultimately came a cropper for two reasons. First, the foreign ministry and Chile couldn't sell it to their people. Second, and this underscores one of the difficulties the State Department has in carrying out foreign policy, was our inability to organize the package. U.S. Government agencies notoriously carry out their own foreign policy. State, if it's lucky, is aware of what they're doing, but half the time simply doesn't know. In this case Don Planty convened an interagency working group to talk about this. He said, "Look, we need to put a package together, so why don't you guys all go home and think about things you might have been thinking of doing with Chile that we could package together in this." There were a number of things, it turns out, in agriculture that USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) was not only interested in doing but eager to do. In the end, USDA went ahead and announced these things on their own while we were trying to put together this package. They never made such announcements through our embassy in Santiago. They would call in the Chilean Embassy in Washington, or they would simply have a press conference. I remember one day in Santiago reading about a series of steps USDA was taking, things we hoped would be in this package that had just been given away by USDA to no broader use at all. Poor Don Planty, in spite of consulting and instructing people, was never able to get everybody's act together.

USDA has a lot of programs in Chile. I should say that one of the offshoots of the great fiasco was that Chile ended up being one of two countries in the world where plant inspections take place outside the US. I'm sure there are more by now where we actually inspect fruit and vegetable exports, in the country itself. There was a full time team of APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) USDA plant inspectors assigned to Chile. They pre-inspected grapes, stone fruit, kiwis, and anything else destined for the U.S. right in Chile. The theory behind this was a very good one, I think. It was better to find problems before the fruit got shipped than it was once it was ashore in the United States. Generally, we are not talking about looking for cyanide poison but rather for insects, primarily. For Chile to be able to export fruit to the United States depends upon Chile keeping those fruits and vegetables free of a number of pests, such as the Mediterranean fruit fly. Chile has a great benefit there because of its geographic isolation. It is surrounded on the east by the Andes Mountains, on the north by the Atacama Desert, which is the driest desert in the world, and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. They really have a unique ecosystem, which is easy to isolate from outside influences. The Chileans have been fruit fly free for a number of years.Anyway, APHIS did a lot of this inspecting. The interesting thing about it is that the costs, all except for APHIS inspectors' salaries, were paid for by the Chilean growers. In other words, those who had great interest in having the inspection done before they went to the expense of shipping the fruit paid a surcharge that paid for all of the costs of running that office. Basically, it was staffed on a full-time basis by two people year round, and then we would bring in additional inspectors during Chile's main growing season. Happily, that is winter up here, when a lot of these inspectors otherwise were in a lax time. It really worked out very well. The only cost to U.S. taxpayers was the salary of the two inspectors who worked fulltime in Chile. Their housing was paid and their travel expenses were all paid by the Chileans. It really was an excellent example of using the user tax to do something very well. APHIS had inspection stations both at the seaport and at the airport. In addition to the fruits I mentioned, the Chileans have a booming business exporting asparagus, strawberries, raspberries - things that don't travel very well that are shipped by air rather than by sea.

Chile is a fascinating place. Very often people talk about the Clinton Administration, and to some extent the Bush Administration before it, establishing democracy in all of Latin America. In fact, Chile has had a very long and very vibrant democracy. I think most Chileans saw the Pinochet era as a clear aberration from what had existed before. Chile is a very conservative, very correct society. I would guess that the level of government corruption there is lower than it is in our country. Civil servants are paid living wages. They take pride in their work. Trying to bribe a police officer is the fastest way to land in jail. They have a long and very good history of democratic political life, going back more than 100 years.

Q: What were you getting, while you were there, about reflections on the Allende period?

COTTER: That their views on Pinochet depended upon where people came from in the Chilean political spectrum. Unfortunately, that spectrum has been very broad, and traditionally it has been about a third on the left and a third on the right and a third in the center. This means that it is very hard to get anybody elected with a majority. Most of the period during the 1950s and 1960s, the right had unified behind the Christian Democratic Party and managed to win all the elections. Allende, a Socialist, was elected with perhaps 25% of the vote because the right split. In hindsight, that split was a disaster on its part because it meant that there was no unified candidate from the center right. As a result, Allende, with 25% of the vote, won. So, his administration was tainted from the beginning because he certainly couldn't claim to govern with the mandate of the people. Nonetheless, he proceeded to take his mandate seriously and began to carry out a radical restructuring of Chilean society. Interestingly enough, I think, it turns out that the more radical people in his administration were not the Communists but the Socialists, particularly amongst the young people. The right in Chile believed that the Socialists were in the process of turning the country into a socialist country on the model of Cuba. Certainly Allende had very good relationships with Cuba. I think there is no question about the fact that the commitment was there to create a socialist republic of Chile. Too often people in the US look at that period from the perspective of today, with the Cold War over. But you need to understand the 1970s from the perspective of the 1970s. What Allende was trying to carry out was not something that the US wanted to see. Had it been successful in a country like Chile, it would have had real impact all over Latin America. In any event, the Chilean military took over in 1973. There is still a lot of dispute about how many people actually died during that period. Chile had a Truth and Reconciliation Commission after the civilian government came in, which identified a total of about 3,000 who were either known dead or missing. Now we read in the newspapers about what people claimed went on during the Pinochet era.

The Pinochet era had two sides to it. That is one of the things that often makes it difficult for us to understand these issues. While on the one hand, it was very clear that people were tortured and killed and disappeared without benefit of any judicial process, the Chilean right has always maintained that it was involved in a civil war and that war time rules, as opposed to peace time rules, should govern. They claimed to have found caches of weapons from Cuba. They said Allende's security forces were not the normal police forces but rather armed Socialist Party militants. But the other side of the Pinochet government was the radical restructuring of the Chilean economy along liberal lines. It is famous for "The Chicago Boys." Pinochet looked to the University of Chicago for a model of how to carry out economic restructuring. He got Milton Freedman in spades. To me, there has always been a question about how to succeed with this kind of market restructuring. The Argentines are still wrestling with this question. Chile was, as are almost all countries in Latin America, very state sector oriented. The private sector was always there, but it always enjoyed a set of cushy relationships in a very protected economy. Happily for carrying out reform, under Allende Chile had fallen apart. There were no goods to be bought; there was rampant unemployment; nothing functioned; the government had no money. So, when Pinochet came in, he had a lot of flexibility in putting things back together in the Chicago school sense - a market-oriented, private sector-focused economic model. In other words, he didn't have to fire hundreds of thousands of government employees. Most of those government employees had no jobs under Allende, as the country simply ceased to function. Pinochet simply didn't hire them back. His government restructured the economy with a much smaller public sector, a much more open private sector, open to foreign investment, open to true competition. They actually carried out a number of reforms that we in the US are still wrestling with. Chile was the first country to privatize its social security program. There is a safety net for the poorest people, but other than that, every worker contributes 10% of his or her salary, which is matched by his employer. The employee then has a choice of several investment plans to put that money into. There are seven or eight companies, including some American firms, that manage these funds. This is exactly the kind of thing we are now talking about possibly doing. Chile reformed its national health service in the same way. They have a very basic, and not terribly good, safety net, but beyond that, it has privatized health insurance plans that workers could sign up for, which include a contribution from the employer. Chile is rightly seen as the one country in Latin America that carried out the market-based reforms that we have been preaching for a long time. So what has always made it difficult for us to evaluate the Pinochet era was on the one side the perceived human rights situation, and on the other side the fact that his administration successfully implemented the economic model that we were preaching around the world.

The Chileans are very highly educated as a society, and so Chile was a much easier place to carry out these reforms than in a Bolivia or a Peru. There are very few Indians in Chile. The Chileans dealt with their Indian problem the way we did. They killed most of them and put the rest on reservations in the south. Their Indians, as a matter of fact, are now reemerging as are our American Indians, in terms of reevaluating the agreements they had with past governments and in demanding their rights. For instance, American Indians travel to Chile on their Indian nation passports, which are recognized by the indigenous peoples in Chile, who also carry their own nations' passports. Anyhow, Chile is the kind of place where reform is possible. Once you start with a fully non-functioning economy, and you apply principles in an egalitarian, non-corrupted way, you can carry out reform. For instance, I have never heard any accusations that either Pinochet or any of the other people in his government were ever corrupted by the system and co-opted by economic powers. That happened in the military government in Ecuador, where I served. It certainly happened in military governments in Bolivia, Colombia, and Brazil. It didn't happen to Pinochet. By 1989, Pinochet agreed to hold a referendum on whether or not to return the government to civilians. He thought he was going to win. He thought there was no chance he would lose, but in fact, he did. It was very close, 55 to 45, something like that. Again, to his credit, he said, "Fine, we have lost, we will turn it over to the civilians."

Q: According to Tony Gillespie, the problem was that the air force commander in chief came up, who was a member of the junta, and told the press before he walked into the junta meeting, "Well, it looks like we lost." That was not exactly what the junta had really been planning to do, but once he said that, they couldn't disclaim something.

COTTER: Yes, I have heard and seen that story, too. Anyhow, the transition to civilian government in Chile was much different than, for example, in Haiti where you kick out Papa Doc or you kick out the military government. There is talk about creating a democracy, but there isn't any basis for it. The same problem exists in most of Central America. There isn't much of a basis for democracy there, either. But, in Chile, there was. They didn't have to create civil institutions. They didn't have to create real political parties. The parties existed, and a lot of the same old people emerged. By the time I got there, in 1992, there were still a lot of aspects of the transition that had to be dealt with, but in terms of the political life of the country, it was as though the Pinochet era had never occurred, except that the parameters of the political debate had changed. There was a Communist Party, but it was very marginalized. The Socialist Party was very much along the mainstream of the British Labor Party or the Spanish Socialist Party, both of which had bought clearly in to social democracy and market-based reform.

Q: At one point, there had been quite a flowering in the, you might say, Marxists, Trotskyites, the whole group of extreme left wingers who not only were in Chile but came down there. By the time the Pinochet regime was over, had they been either eliminated or had left, or was there any residue there?

COTTER: Yes, there was the residue. Most had gone into exile, although during the Pinochet regime there were a number of terrorist incidents carried out by radical elements. There were a couple groups, the NLM, National Liberation Movement, for example. There were a couple that were even more radical than that. In 1986 or 1987, they carried out an almost successful assassination attempt against Pinochet. They assaulted his car with rocket fired rifle grenades and small arms. Pinochet always traveled in a three-car motorcade and had security cars. Then, there were three identical armored Mercedes Benzes. One never knew which of the three he was in. Indeed, when they attacked his motorcade, as I recall, they got the wrong car. Yes, there was still a network of these people. It had changed by the 1990s. A number of them had left Chile and gone to Central America during the civil wars there. A number, most of whom had since moved to Cuba, were still living in Cuba. The Chileans have tried to get a number of those people extradited to stand trial, but they have had only some success. But terrorism still existed when I arrived. There had just been a serious terrorist incident directed at us in 1991. It was a horrible kind of thing when you think about it. We had a softball league. One day, at one of the softball games, there was a booby-trapped bat that exploded just outside the dugout. It killed a Canadian and blinded our RSO in one eye. The story, as it came down to me, was that there had been a disputed play just a couple minutes before, which had emptied the dugout. This bat was lined-up crosswise in front of the dugout. When it exploded - of course it was a metal bat - it sent shrapnel all over. While I was there, after the return of civilian government, there were occasional incidents directed at American companies. They almost always involved a rocket grenade fired at a building, the Coca-Cola building or the IBM building. I think, by now, those radical groups have pretty much been eliminated. The Chilean security services have arrested most of them. Once there was a return to civilian government, the Cubans pretty much cut off their support, and without funding and a place to go, it was very difficult for them.

A lot of interesting things happened in Chile when civilians returned to power. A lot of people had left in voluntary exile when Pinochet came in. Many had come to the States. We were very active, particularly the U.S. Democratic Party, in assisting Chileans to get placed here. So there was a number of people who went to school here, got their degrees here, and taught or were working here. When these people went back to Chile, they had a major impact. First off, most of President Aylwin's cabinet was educated in the United States. They had more Ph.D.s from American universities than we had in our cabinet. You can argue whether that is positive or negative, but there are a lot of Ph.D.s from American universities in the Chilean Government. There were excellent relations with the Democratic Party, which worked out very well when Clinton won in 1992 because the Democrats had longstanding relationships with many of the senior Chilean officials.

So, we started off with a very good feeling on the part of the Chilean Government toward the United States because a lot of these people felt that indeed we had saved them and had provided them the opportunity to improve themselves. Again, I think one of the very interesting things about Chile that demonstrates what kind of place it is is that when it was possible to go back, most of these people did so, often leaving excellent jobs to do so. I don't think there are a lot of Central Americans, now that the civil wars are over in Central America, who are hastening to go back. I for a long time, as a matter of fact, maintained that the war in El Salvador and the splash over in Honduras was really a plot by both the left and the right because nobody in Central America wants to live there. They all want to live in the United States. One way you do this is to have a war, and then everybody on the right can come to us and say, "We have a lot of money." So, we let them in. Then everybody on the left can come because they can all claim political persecution. If you carry this on long enough, there won't be anybody left at home. But, anyhow, the Chileans went back in droves to take up their lives. The people for whom it was more difficult, and for an observer were more interesting to track, were the many Chileans who had gone to live in East Germany and in Russia. Of course, Chile's return to democracy occurred just about the time the former Soviet Union was imploding. The Chilean government organized and paid for repatriation flights and tried to find jobs for these people. But they weren't coming back with Ph.D.s from American universities, speaking English. They were coming back speaking German or speaking Russian. In many cases, their return was quite bad. They had fled from Chile, where the socialist revolution had failed in 1973, and gone to countries where it was succeeding, only to find, 15 years later, that it had failed in those countries as well.

Particularly those Chileans who had been in East Germany came back very disillusioned with what they had seen. They had a very difficult adjustment to make. There are still several hundred, I think, who haven't returned.

When I got there in 1992, Chile was already booming. One of the rules we have in the Foreign Service is that we can't invest in stocks in a country in which we serve. That is unfortunate for all the people who have served in Chile from 1989 to 1992 who could have made a killing in the Chilean stock market. Even by the time I arrived in 1992 the really fast money had already been made. Anyhow, Chile is a very robust place, in which the economy is growing and is very well managed. It certainly is a country which qualifies, by all measures, to be a partner in NAFTA. One of the real problems for the Chileans in that regard is that everyone recognizes that they should be in NAFTA. But, for what it considers very good reasons, the Administration has held off from doing so. There have been several proposals in Congress to approve an expansion of NAFTA just for Chile. But, the Clinton administration has always said, "We can't do that. We are trying to maintain rules." The whole idea is that there will be an American free trade area for all of the countries when they achieve certain criteria to be able to join, and therefore we are not going to approve a bill just for Chile. This really frustrated the heck out of the Chileans, who had worked very hard with friendly people in Congress. They had gotten so frustrated that they had gotten congressmen to introduce a bill only to have the Administration say, "No." How the Chileans think about it now, I'm not so certain. They had worked very hard, even then when they wanted to get into NAFTA, on diversifying both what they exported and to where they exported. Up to Allende's day, and I think even during part of the Pinochet era, their main product and almost sole export was copper. They had two really. They exported copper and fishmeal. But they, like Peru, discovered that fishmeal is a very untrustworthy export because of El Nino and some other ocean currents. They would have abundant anchovies for four years and no anchovies for three years. But copper was Chile's main export. I suppose it accounted for some 80% of their hard currency. By the time I was there, copper was down to 40% of their export earnings and falling. The Chileans had done lots of things. Fruit is the example that people know. Wine is the second one. Chilean wine is now plentiful here. Even when I got to Chile in 1992, its wine was common in the US, well not that common, but available. But now Chilean wine is a first choice for lots of people, and they have done amazing things in improving the quality of their wines.

Another way they have developed things... it's a very interesting little story. Back in Allende's day, ITT, the International Telephone and Telegraph Company, was expropriated by the Chilean Government. Then it was roundly criticized for having been involved in the Pinochet takeover, having financed it. This was when there were claims that the CIA had financed the coup, as well. I think I mentioned before, the U.S. doesn't like expropriations without compensation. So when the Pinochet government came in, if it was to hope to have any kind of economic relationship with the United States, it had to deal with these Allende expropriations. The upshot of the ITT one was a settlement which involved a not insignificant amount of money, 10 or 20 million dollars, that was paid by the Chilean Government. What they worked out was an entity called the Chile Foundation. The Chilean Government paid its compensation into the foundation, and ITT put in some money as well.

The Chile Foundation's purpose is to try and find ways to diversify Chile's economy and exports. So, the foundation goes around looking for products that Chile can produce and export. One of the things they came upon early on were fish, specifically salmon. Again, now when you shop in the stores in Washington, you see fresh Atlantic salmon everywhere. Very often it is clearly marked as imported from Chile because although the breed is Atlantic salmon, they are not coming from the Atlantic, they are coming from the Pacific. They are farm raised in Chile. There are wild salmon down in the fjords of far southern Chile, but not enough to catch in a commercial way because the Andes are so close to the sea that the rivers aren't long enough to allow a big breeding population. Chilean commercial salmon are all farm raised. Chile has a number of fresh water lakes in the south where they raise fingerlings. Of course, salmon migrate to spawn in fresh water, and the young born in fresh water migrate back to the sea. So, they fertilize eggs and hatch the eggs in fresh water tanks. When they reach the age when normally salmon would migrate to the sea, they put them in tank trucks with oxygenated water and drive them out to the coast, where they have enormous underwater pens. If you fly over the area, it looks like a series of sunken ships, which are the salmon pens. This is a very big business. The Chileans are, I think, the third largest salmon exporters in the world, after the United States and Norway. That is an industry that was developed by the Chile Foundation using these research monies. The foundation has also done this with a number of other kinds of fish. When I left, they were looking very hard at farming turbot, which is a great delicacy in Europe, primarily. It is a large flat fish, sort of like flounder.

One of the other products which the Chile Foundation did a lot of work developing, and the Chileans are now doing a lot of exporting, is lumber. Chile's climate is very interesting. The country is 3,000 miles long, and at its widest, 150 miles. In many places, it is about 30 miles wide, but because of the length, it encompasses an incredible variety of climates. The northern third of the country, as far down as Santiago, is really desert. The Santiago area has been irrigated for 400 years with snow from the Andes. The middle third is comparable to Oregon in the United States, temperate, great for growing fruits and vegetables and for grains and what not. The southern third of the country is glaciers and fiords and ocean. Chile has long growing seasons because they can stagger them the length of the country. But it also turns out that down in the southern region, between the good farming area and the fiords, is an area of forests. There are types of pines, because of the humidity, that will grow to maturity in 11 years. In comparison, pines need 20 years to mature in the southeastern United States. So, they have done an awful lot in forest farming. Now the wood from these pines is not high quality and is largely used for wood chips, although they are now doing quite a bit of pine furniture and you actually find some assemble-your-own pine furniture from Chile in the U.S. But it has mostly been exported in the form of wood chips to Japan. In recent years Chile has expanded into industries that process these chips into pressed board, plywood and the like.

Development of the forest industry has not been without controversy because in order to plant pines in some of these areas, they have cleared slow growing, very rare, hard growth forests. Again, there are a lot of the same debates in Chile over this as you find in areas of the United States; how much of your virgin, first-growth, native forest ought you to preserve, and where do the economic interests versus the ecological interests come down? In any event, they ship a lot of forest products. When I was there, about one-third of their total exports went to Europe, about one-third to the Americas, and one-third to Asia. The Chileans felt that they had insulated themselves pretty well unless there was a global recession, and that, with luck, at least one or two of their markets would be solid at any one time. Unfortunately, I think what we have seen with the recent downturn in the Asian economies, and the impact that has on global markets, is that the Chilean economy is so small it is inevitably affected by these global problems.

Q: Let's stick more to the time you were there.

COTTER: During the time I was there, Chile was in great shape. Its economy was growing at 8% a year.

Q: What about relations with Argentina during the time you were there? Did you get involved with that at all?

COTTER: They had quite good relations with Argentina and were working very hard when I was there on solving the last couple of border worries. I think I mentioned that when I was in Ecuador, they had almost gone to war over the Beagle Channel, which had finally been given over to the Pope to arbitrate. The Pope had come up with a solution that actually favored Chile, and the Argentines accepted it. By the time I was there, there were three little pockets of disputed border up in the mountains that both countries were trying very hard to solve. But both countries were having to deal with irredentist groups at home. Every time they came close to a solution, someone in one country or the other would say, "We won't give up an inch of territory to those no good people on the other side of the mountains. This is territory we fought and died for." What you are talking about in almost all of the cases are glaciers high up in the Andes, areas that are uninhabitable by anyone and don't mean anything. Of course, that doesn't make much difference to irredentists. Chile began cooperating with Argentina in a number of ways at that time that they had not before. The two sold electricity back and forth, and when I was getting ready to leave, Chile was finalizing negotiations for natural gas purchases from Argentina. This was something very important for Chile because it is an energy importer and has lots of air pollution problems. Their problems are the same as those Los Angeles has always suffered from. They have mountains to the east and prevailing winds, in the winter particularly, from the west. So there are a lot of inversions. Thus, natural gas for taxis, trucks, and buses would be very important. The thought of being dependent upon Argentina for something as important as energy resources had always been anathema in Chile, but they were overcoming it. The liberalization of the economies in the area had really wrought enormous changes, because what you found was Chilean companies providing electricity in Buenos Aires after Argentina privatized. You found Argentine companies owning things in Chile, but you also found Chilean companies, very often in partnership with others, such as Americans, active in Argentina. A number of American power companies have invested in the power sector in Latin America, which is one of the first sectors to be privatized. Often there is a consortium with an American company, a Chilean company, and a Spanish company buying power distribution and power production in Argentina, and vice versa. So, the economic ties between the two really drove improving political ties.

The military services, while I was there, even began talks. The Chilean military had never had regular talks with the Argentines before. What happened was that the services varied on this, depending upon their individual tactical concerns. The air forces worked quite closely together. The armies talked mostly because you can't fight a ground war in southern Argentina and Chile. The Chilean Army is much more concerned about the desert plains bordering Peru and Bolivia. The services that didn't get along very well were the navies, which of course were the services that had confronted each other historically, and the navy conversations didn't go anywhere near as far as those between the air forces. I remember when I was there, the Chileans and the Argentines were wrestling with modernizing their air forces. Recall the problem I mentioned when I was in Ecuador. Fifteen years later and it is the same thing. The Chilean Air Force at this time had F-5s, original F-5, and some Mirages, old French aircraft. They wanted to upgrade to more modern fighters. This was an interesting debate because they didn't have a lot of money. There was now a civilian government in Chile, and when Pinochet turned power over to the civilians, the military reserved a couple of areas, such as providing that Pinochet would be commander of the army until a mandatory retirement age. He just retired last year at age 87, something like that. They also mandated that the armed services would get a set percentage of hard currency earnings from copper exports. But even those earnings don't get you to the point where you can spend $100 million on F-16s. Washington was very worried about whether we should let the Chileans buy modern US aircraft. I said, "You know, to me, they are going to have to get this past their own parliament. If they can, more power to them. But, I don't think, for a minute, they are going to get this past their own parliament. Why should we be the bad guys when we can let someone else be the bad guys?" At one point, I even suggested to the Chileans that what they ought to do is get together with the Brazilians and the Argentines because the Argentines were also talking about upgrading their air forces. I suggested that if they got together to buy a wing (18-24) of F-16s jointly, they would form three squadrons run by all three countries. I noted that if they came in with that kind of proposal, the U.S. Government would never be able to tell them they couldn't do it. Unfortunately, that idea was still too radical.

Anyway, Chile had pretty good relations with Argentina. One area where they stayed at arm's length from Argentina was MERCOSUR, the southern South American common market, which included Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. The Brazilians, particularly, have never liked the idea of NAFTA or what we promoted at the Miami Summit of the Americas in 1993 - a Western Hemisphere free trade zone - because they saw that this would be dominated by the U.S. economy. Whereas, Brazil is so large it could dominate South America's economy. So, you know who dominates in MERCOSUR. Paraguay and Uruguay don't have any power at all. Even Argentina is so much smaller than Brazil that its influence is limited. In any event, as we were wooing Chile to joint NAFTA, Brazil and Argentina were trying to convince it to join MERCOSUR. Chile kept them at arm's length all the time I was there. Since then, as it has become clear they aren't going to join NAFTA in the near future, they have moved closer to MERCOSUR. They are not full members, but they are associates. But, not being in MERCOSUR was one area where their economic policies and Argentina's didn't mesh. One of the problems that the region still has to deal with is reliable east to west transportation routes. The Andes cause a real problem, but there are also the historical enmities between countries, so there has never been very good transportation between Argentina and Chile. In what must be a 2,000 mile border, there was one major crossing, which was from Santiago to Mendoza. It consists of a two-lane highway which crosses the Andes at something like 13,000 feet. It is out of commission most of the winter because of snow and avalanches. It has dawned on both the Chileans and the Argentines that their access to markets in the other ocean would be a lot better if there were reliable transcontinental land transportation routes. The interesting thing about this is that as we were preparing the final papers to hand over the Panama Canal to Panama, and talking to Americans about this, no one was very interested. The Panama Canal has little economic importance to the U.S. at this point. The big tankers can't go through it. Basically, it is only barely competitive with rail or truck across the U.S. But, to Chile and Argentina it is really important because Chile's access to eastern United States markets is by ships that go up the Pacific and through the Panama Canal. Similarly, Argentina's access to western American markets is up through the canal. The alternative is going around Cape Horn. These countries have a great interest in the Panama Canal being run in a decent way, or alternatively, the creation of reasonable rail or highway connections that will allow them to move goods across.

Q: Looking at it from our embassy's perspective there, what were the issues we were dealing with?

COTTER: NAFTA, grapes. To some extent, the aftermath of the Pinochet era, although more on a watching brief. The Chileans were the first country to have a truth and reconciliation process. The civilians recognized when they came in that revenge wasn't possible and decided that the important thing was to get the facts about what had happened out and let bygones be bygones. They had a commission that worked for about a year or 18 months. It finally published, I think I mentioned earlier, a volume listing the people they determined had died, and those who were missing that they hadn't been able to determine what had happened to them. Actually, Chileans later provided advice to the South Africans when they were trying to deal with the same thing. We followed that process quite closely. We also did an extraordinary amount of trade promotion in Chile. American companies were coming into Latin America in quite a big way in the early 1990s. Chile was an easy entry to the Latin American market because it was easy to set up a company and firms could hire very qualified local people. Chile gave American firms a good base for marketing their goods in the rest of Latin America. The embassy hosted many trade missions from U.S. states - Wisconsin, Mississippi, Massachusetts, and others. We spent more time at trade promotion probably than most anything. The other thing as DCM that I spent a lot of time on was moving into a new embassy. In Santiago, the State Department built one of the last Inman buildings. Inman buildings are those named for Admiral Bobby Inman, who after the bombing of the embassy in Beirut, headed a commission to decide how we could prevent this kind of thing from happening again. They came up with recommendations that cost a lot of money because of building design and location requirements. Unfortunately, Congress appropriated monies to build these new, safer embassies for only a few years, and then everybody forgot Embassy Beirut had ever been bombed. At that point, Congress stopped providing those sums of money, and the State Department stopped spending for them. So, the whole thing died. Now there have been the bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and the process is repeating itself.

Q: These embassies were blown up last year.

COTTER: Had there been Inman buildings in those places, they would not have been damaged so badly. My guess is we will do the same thing now: throw a bunch of money at the problem for a year or two and then forget about it. In any event, Embassy Santiago was a great example of how we could screw these things up. The process of designing and building an embassy takes an enormous amount of time. I think the Santiago building design was finalized in something like 1985 or 1986. Construction, which had been delayed for a number of reasons, began only in 1991. The building was finally completed, and we moved in on July 4, 1994, which was 18 months late. Part of the delay was the Foreign Building Office's (FBO's) fault, and part of it stemmed from problems dealing with the Chileans and having to try and use local providers who couldn't provide things that we needed. For many years, Embassy Santiago had been in an office building downtown, on the fifth through the tenth floors. This caused a lot of concern, particularly after the 1993 and 94 bombings in Buenos Aires. No, not two years in a row. I think there was a year in between the bombings. One was the Israeli Embassy and one was a Jewish community organization. These bombings were very much like the Oklahoma City bombing. A truck vehicle laden with explosives pulled up in front of the building and was set off. It was precisely for this reason we are now trying to get embassies that are set back from roads and away from streets. In Santiago our embassy was on a main street, a block from the presidential palace and across the street from Citibank. If someone had really decided to bomb it, they could have gotten the American Embassy and nasty Citibank with one big bomb. There is absolutely no way to close that street off. These buildings are old enough that if a bomb had gone off it would have caused a lot of damage. Perhaps less than in other places, because Santiago is very much an earthquake zone, so buildings tend to be built stronger. I must say that a major concern of mine, particularly after the first bombing in Buenos Aires, was how susceptible we were, as an embassy, to having the exact same thing happen.

The new embassy was built in town, but in a new area that was opening up to businesses. It was really quite an imaginative design, and very much a secure Inman building. It was the butt of many jokes as it was being built because it has an incredible amount of reinforcing bars in the concrete. The Chilean newspapers took to calling it "The American Bunker," claiming that it was being built to withstand nuclear blasts. As I understand it from the builders, it was built that way because of the earthquake threat. But all in all, it was quite a nice building. It had the advantage of reducing what used to be a very difficult forty minute commute down to about a ten minute commute because the commercial center of the city was moving out toward the residential areas where most of us lived. Getting that building finished and approved, getting us all moved into it, and dealing with all of the issues surrounding a new building, took up a large amount of management time for me as DCM. I said the building was designed in 1985 or 1986 for our staffing at that time. Subsequently, as USG downsizing became popular, the number of Americans assigned went down. By 1994 when we moved in, we had too much space in the controlled-access American spaces, but we didn't have enough space for local national employees (FSNs). So, we were already dealing, when we just moved in, with cramped FSN quarters and having to figure out ways around that.

The move also underlined how sensible it was for the USG finally to move to ICASS (the International Combined Administrative Support System), which is the new way in which the foreign affairs agencies share out administrative costs, to replace the old FASS, Foreign Affairs Support System. Under the old system, State was responsible for all the overseas physical plant, and other agencies had no financial responsibility for it. Under the new system, while FBO still built the building, agencies in effect paid rent, as part of the share of upkeep of the building. One of the effects of the system is that when the rent bills come in, agencies take a different look at their staffing needs. This never happened in the past. There were never any costs to DOD, USIA, AID, CIA, or anyone else from growing because they asked for space and they got space. This was the case in Santiago where many agencies, for other reasons, had downsized but still had enormous amounts of space in the new building. When we went to them and said, "Well, how about giving up some of that space?" The answer was, "We can't do that, and this is secure space." Well, my guess is that if they are talking about this now in Santiago under the new system, those agencies would take a different view of it. They are now paying for square footage that they are not using. When we finally got the building built, it was a wonderful building that does us proudly as an embassy. But I must say, the management time spent on working on this was very great.

Another problem was caused by the 18-month delay in completing the building. Once construction began, the State Department's willingness to put maintenance money into the old embassy went down to nothing. So there we were here in an old building that needed upgrades but was getting none. As the heating system failed and as the water pipes failed, the answer was "Don't worry, you are moving into a new embassy." Well, as the delay grew from six months, to a year, to 18 months, we literally had our fingers in the dyke in several places in the old building to keep the place running until we could move into the new building.

Q: What do you want to add here? We have talked about Chile's relations, economics, and moving into the new embassy, and other things.

COTTER: That may be all. Perhaps, I will talk a little about Chile itself and traveling. I should talk about Antarctica and our base in the Chilean part of Antarctica, and Chile's policy on Antarctica, versus our policy on Antarctica, how we deal with that issue.

Q: Okay. Did the Letelier case come up at all, or was it pretty well solved?

COTTER: It was pretty well solved.

Q: One other thing I would like to ask. That is, how did we deal with Pinochet at the time?

COTTER: I have a vignette about that.

Q: We will stop at this point.

COTTER: Okay.

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Q: Today is the 4th of February 1999. We had some trouble with the other machine. Mike, could we reprise what we were talking about? We were talking about Antarctica.

COTTER: Chile and Argentina extend down close to Antarctica. If you look at a map, there is a peninsula that sticks up from Antarctica and comes close to those countries. They are separated from it by the Drake Channel, which is the main passage through Cape Horn. Chile and Argentina are among a number of countries that have territorial claims in Antarctica. The U.S. doesn't. We have always maintained that the white continent ought to be saved as an international zone for scientific exploration. A number of other countries, primarily but not solely, those that are contiguous to Antarctica take a different view and assert territorial sovereignty claims. Under the Antarctic Treaty all countries agreed to place those claims in abeyance. In any event, that peninsula is very popular for scientific stations. One main reason is that in the summer the snow all melts and it is solid ground, which makes it easier to build and support bases. That is good for countries whose technology doesn't really go as far as supporting bases on ice. On that peninsula, you find, in one very small area, a large number of bases, including Chinese, Russian, Polish, British, German, and Argentine of course. All those bases are fairly near one another. Unlike the situation at our McMurdo Base where we land aircraft on skids, the Chilean base has a true asphalt airfield. This airfield is only open during the summer and is very limited. It is just a runway with no parking areas and no instrument landing capabilities. Aircraft fly in and have to pick up or leave passengers and cargo and take off right away.

The U.S. has a scientific station a little bit further down the west side of that peninsula, called Palmer Station. The base is essentially open for scientific work about four or five months a year. The National Science Foundation runs it. We fly in scientists at the beginning of the southern summer, in November, and then fly them back out again in March. The flying is done by the New York Air National Guard, out of Schenectady, which has a lot of experience flying in snowy conditions. It flies C-130s, which are the largest aircraft that can get into that base. They come down in November as one of their training missions and have aircraft there for two weeks or so. Scientists fly commercially as far as Punta Arenas, the southernmost town on the mainland of Chile, and then continue to the Chilean base on the C-130. We also operate two scientific research vessels out of Palmer Station and southern Chile. Those vessels are actually on station all year, I think, and during the winter work the edge of the icecap. So, you fly down to the Chilean base, and then take one of the research vessels for an overnight run down to Palmer Station. I had an opportunity to take this trip. Timing is chancy. You may be in Punta Arenas a couple days because if the weather isn't good enough and anticipated to be good enough at the Chilean base for the plane to make the two-hour flight down and make it back, they won't go. The scientific research vessels are quite nice. The older one was leased from a Norwegian firm and has a Norwegian crew. People would complain about the food, which tended toward boiled potatoes and cod. The other vessel was a new vessel built in Louisiana, which operated under contract from the National Science Foundation. It is quite a fine vessel, which even had a Cajun cook. The base at Palmer Station is quite small. It only has several buildings with dorm type sleeping quarters and then common rooms. The scientists study primarily animal and plant life. The krill is a very popular subject of study, as are the various animals that feed off it. Seals, penguins, and lots of birds feed off krill or each other.

Chile actually has a number of remarkable areas. The southern third are fjords and glaciers off the permanent Andes snow cap. Chile has a couple spectacular national parks in the area. There are also some very good white water rafting rivers, which cause us a little bit of a consular problem. Every year, several people die on the most popular one, the Futaleufu. During my tenure we had a couple of cases where consuls had to go and repatriate bodies. Chile also has what the locals claim to be the southernmost town and the southernmost inhabited area on the globe. Puerto Williams is on the south shore of the Beagle Channel. On the north side of that channel, a little further east, is the Argentine town of Ushuaia, which claims to be the southernmost city in the world. Puerto Williams is quite a bit smaller. What it is best known for is its little post office. When you visit Puerto Williams, the only stop of interest is the post office where tourists can get postcards stamped as coming from the southernmost town in the world. Around the side of an island a little east of Puerto Williams is Puerto Toro. It is essentially a Chilean naval base, but it has a school and church. It bills itself as the southernmost inhabited area in the world.

Q: Well, did we get involved at all in the problems over the Beagle Channel or Chilean sovereignty, Argentinean sovereignty and Antarctica, while you were there, or was it solved on an international level?

COTTER: That was settled on an international level. I think I mentioned earlier that they got the Pope to mediate and settle the Beagle Channel dispute in 1980 or 1981. There were, as I think I mentioned, still a couple of outstanding territorial disputes. I think they are all solved now, but there were three remaining, all of them up in the Andes in very inhospitable areas. The Chilean and Argentine border, at that point in the south, was quite well defined.

Q: When you are talking about the Andean border and all, were there any problems of Indians up there? One thinks of Peru and the Shining Path and all that, as an Indian movement. Was there anything of that nature in Chile?

COTTER: The Chileans and the Argentines dealt with their Indians pretty much the way the Europeans and the North Americans did, which was to kill as many as possible, either by disease or violence. The others were pushed back into reservations. The reservations were fairly high up in the mountains. There is quite an active effort by the indigenous people of Chile to regain lost rights and to get back some of the ancestral lands they once had. There is quite an active indigenous handicraft movement as well. I think I mentioned that there is even a passport that indigenous tribes travel on. North American Indians would travel to Chile not on a U.S. passport, but on an Indian nation passport, which was recognized by Chilean authorities. I don't know whether Chilean Indians could get into the United States on a similar document. My guess is we probably do recognize them, if for no other reason than our treaty obligations with the Indian tribes in the United States. The indigenous Chilean groups are very small and have lost a lot of their language. I think one of their challenges is retaining their tribal identities and language and culture.

You asked me about Pinochet while we were there, and I should talk a minute about that. When I arrived in 1992, the issue of Pinochet and the role of the military was on everybody's mind, if not on everyone's lips. It was very clear that deals had been cut and that the return to civilian government was not without compromises on the part of the civilians. Part of that was accepting changes to the constitution that had been put in under the military government. Those changes did a number of things. For instance, they gave Pinochet and the other commanders of the military services who had been members of the junta quite a long period of time when they could remain on duty. I'm not sure whether it was written in terms of for a period of 15 years or up to a certain age, but I know Pinochet certainly remained commander of the Chilean Army up until, I think, 1998. It is important to emphasize that he was commander of the army, not of the armed forces. The Chilean services don't always see eye to eye. I think you mentioned earlier the referendum that kicked the Pinochet government out was successful in part because the air force commander announced that they had lost before others, who might have wanted to, had an opportunity to stuff ballot boxes. But, nonetheless, Pinochet was still army commander, which was an influential position. He is also entitled to be senator for life. The constitution also allows for a number of other appointed senators, who had had fairly long terms, and all of whom, of course, had been appointed by Pinochet. These were compromises that actually made it very difficult to amend the constitution because they created a block of permanent senators who could prevent amendments they didn't like. The other compromise, of course, was accepting the amnesty laws that had been passed by the military. Anyhow, Pinochet stayed as army commander and was very visible. Our relationship with the Chilean Army was, as I think I mentioned, not very good. We cut the Chilean military off from assistance and sales at about the time in the late 1970s that the Beagle Channel dispute heated up. By the time I was in Santiago, the Chilean Army was still not dealing with us. They wouldn't buy American equipment, although the other services would.

The Organization of Commanders of Armies in the Americas, something like CONCAA, meets every year. The tradition has been that they would meet one year in the United States, the next in another country. General Sullivan was the chief of staff of the U.S. Army in 1992 or 93 and during one of these meetings somehow hit it off with Pinochet. Pinochet was quite a Napoleon buff. I recall seeing at the military academy a small collection of Napoleonic books and artifacts that Pinochet had put together. Sullivan, I seem to recall, was also a Napoleon buff. In any event, they hit it off. By 1993 or 1994, the conference was held in Brazil. At most of these conferences, a lot of business was done away from the formal sessions, in bilateral meetings. In most of the bilaterals, our chief of staff holds court and his colleagues come to him. Well, he tried to set up a meeting with Pinochet, who wouldn't come to the American Embassy for the meeting. Sullivan finally went to the Chilean Embassy. That cemented their relationship even more, the result of which was that General Sullivan made a visit to Chile. This must have been spring 1994. In any event, I was chargï¿½ d'affaires at the time. I hosted a lunch for Sullivan and, as usual, we invited Pinochet. Normally, he regretted all our invitations. Well, in this case, we got word that Pinochet would like to attend the lunch. So, he was invited. The security people came around to the house the day before. My staff, to their great credit, allowed his people to check the ground floor but wouldn't let them up into our private quarters. Pinochet came and had a good time at the lunch. He is very charming but difficult to understand because he garbles his words a lot.

Q: He has rather a soft, high voice, doesn't he?

COTTER: Yes, and a very quiet voice. But, one of his aides commented that this was the first time in 20 years that Pinochet had set foot in an American facility. Usually, until Sullivan's visit, when we had senior visitors, military or otherwise, Pinochet would always be out of Santiago on an inspection tour. He was never available. We would always request a call on him for a senior U.S. Army visitor. If we had a navy visitor, we obviously wouldn't call on Pinochet, and same with the air force. But, if we had an army visitor, we would request a call on Pinochet. We would always get back the response that he regretted it very much, but he was inspecting troops up country.

Q: Was there a concern on our part of contact with Pinochet, or had the decision sort of been made that the Chileans had made their compromise, and we are going to play it straight?

COTTER: That is pretty much what we had decided upon. Our view was that this was Chile's business, and Pinochet was an official in the Chilean Government. We worked with the Chilean Government, and therefore in areas where Pinochet had authority we would deal with Pinochet. Again, since he is commander of the army, that was a fairly narrowly circumscribed area. It is not as though you run in and have dealings with him on a regular basis. It was only when we had a military visitor. The issue came up a number of times of his possibly traveling to the U.S., for instance, to participate in the CONCAA conferences. His people would ask us and the answer always was that we couldn't guarantee immunity to him. Diplomatic immunity would not protect him from private suits filed against him, and our recommendation was that he not go to the States. He never did.

Q: As we speak, he went on a hospital visit in London, and is now under house arrest because of private suits against him from France and Spain.

COTTER: That's right. It would be interesting to know who was at fault here, whether the British gave him assurances of immunity, which then weren't kept, or whether the Chileans simply never asked the Brits, or whether they asked the Brits, and the Brits said they couldn't guarantee it, but Pinochet went anyhow. Because we had a monthly get-together of deputy chiefs of mission in Santiago, I'm sure I must have, at some point, raised the fact that requests for Pinochet to travel to the U.S. had come up, and what our position was. But I don't remember anyone else commenting as to whether their government would recognize his sovereign immunity or not. I think our position on this is still the same, i.e. as much as we regret what Pinochet has done, it is for the Chileans to deal with. This is an episode that is very conflicting for me, as I mentioned. His regime made great progress in transforming Chile economically but not without significant costs and human rights violations.

Q: I can't remember, did we discuss the fast-track NAFTA thing?

COTTER: I think we did.

Q: Well then, 1995?

COTTER: January 1995. Actually, I knew I would be leaving as early as late summer 1994. My normal tour would have ended the summer of 1995, but in July 1994 I received a call from personnel asking me if I would be willing to have my name sent to the White House to be ambassador to Turkmenistan. I don't know how many people you have had here who talked about how onerous the ambassadorial confirmation process has gotten. Nevertheless, I am a good example of this. I was first asked about this in July 1994, and I finally made it to my post in November 1995.

It is interesting how this came about. A Foreign Service career is a mixture of lots of things. One thing that is an essential element is luck. I assume all FSOs are good, but being in the right place at the right time, or the wrong place at the wrong time, determines an awful lot of what happens to someone's career. I think I mentioned that I was fortunate in that Curt Kamman chose his DCM honestly. I had never met him before, and I got the job based on my interview. Well, it must have been in the summer of 1993, and I was looking over an upcoming bid list. At that point, we had opened our embassies in countries of the former Soviet Union in 1992, which meant that ambassadors would change in 1995, after the normal three-year tour. I wrote a letter to the director of senior officer personnel in which I said, "Look, I don't know how ambassadors are chosen and if one can put one's name in the hat, but I know these countries are coming open, and I would like to do so." I noted that several of them speak Turkic languages, and that I thought instead of sending ambassadors who have served in Moscow, it would make good sense to take advantage of their Turkish backgrounds. I speak Turkish and my spouse is also an officer who speaks Turkish, and so I pointed out to the system, "You would get two for the price of one. I would like to have my hat thrown in the ring." Last year (1997) was the first year, in my memory, that the Department actually sent around a list of embassies coming open and invited senior officers, if they felt they were qualified, to apply for them. In the past, of course, that was never done. The "D Committee," chaired by the deputy secretary, decides on ambassadors in one of these old Foreign Service processes. In any event, I never got an answer to this letter, not even the courtesy of a pro forma reply. But in 1994, I did get a call saying that my name had come up in the D Committee, and they were proposing to send it forward to the White House. I told them I would call them back, that I needed to talk to my wife. I went home and dug up the atlas, because frankly, while I knew in general where Turkmenistan was, I didn't know exactly. The main thing we had to consider was the impact it would have on Joanne's career. Anyhow, of course I accepted. They then sent it over to the White House. Until Bill Clinton came into office, when the President signed off on an ambassadorial nomination, he would call the individual and formally offer the job. Well, Clinton doesn't do that. He checks off on the name, and it comes back to the State Department for action. I forget exactly when mine came back approved.

I began talking to personnel about the timing in the fall of 1994. We were looking at the summer of 1995. Their thought was to have me come back and study the Turkmen language, building off my Turkish. So, we moved our plans up, and I left Chile in January 1995, thinking I would take language and area studies until the summer and be confirmed at the end of the summer. My predecessor, Joe Hulings, was going to leave around Labor Day. Doing this planning is very awkward, because until the White House has sent your name to the Senate, you are not supposed to say anything about it. There are always horror stories about how people prematurely announce publicly that they had been named ambassador somewhere only to find the White House dumping them.

Q: Particularly Johnson took this very much to heart. This could be the kiss of death.

COTTER: I discovered, of course, that leaving post six months early is impossible without telling people anything. They think you have been fired. I also figured that it was fairly safe for me to tell the Turkish Ambassador in Chile because my doing so probably was not going to get back very quickly to the White House. In any event, talking to the Turkish Ambassador was very useful because he managed to get me many maps and other publications that the Turks were publishing on Turkmenistan.

The first thing we discovered was that FSI, bless its soul, had not found anybody to teach Turkmen. In a way that is not surprising because while there are lots of people from lots of countries in the U.S., there are not a lot of Turkmen because not very many of them have ever had the opportunity to travel. Failing to find a Turkmen teacher, FSI was then going to send us to one of the private language schools in Washington that claimed to have found a Turkmen teacher. When we showed up there for class, it turned out that the teacher was the wife of the number two man in the Turkmen Embassy in Washington. She had just arrived from Turkmenistan and spoke no English. The linguist with whom we were working spoke Russian, but not Turkmen. He would talk with her about our lesson plan in Russian. He, of course, knew nothing about Turkish or Turkmen grammar and was no help on that side of it. Not surprisingly, this quickly got screwed up. We discovered that we could never be certain of what we were learning. Turkmen is very close to Turkish, and we would ask whether something we were learning was like in Turkish. She would say it was, but we were never sure whether (a) she understood; (b) whether it really was; or (c) she was just being nice. She was also pregnant, and after a couple weeks, it was obvious she became uncomfortable teaching us and would rather be home, but she felt some pressure to do it. This was complicated because when we started there, we were still unable to say what position I was going to be because my name had not come out of the White House, so they had not sought an agrï¿½ment. Here was the wife of the number two guy in the Turkmen Embassy, teaching this clearly middle-aged person Turkmen. "Well, what are you going to do there?" she would ask. "I am going to be assigned to Ashkhabad," I would respond, without answering the question of "as what?" although I don't think it took them very long to figure out why I was going out there. After a little over a month of this, we told the Department this wasn't working out.

We then wondered whether we should brush up on our Turkish, which was more than a decade old, or study Russian. So, we sent a cable off to Ashgabat to ask people's views. My predecessor, Joe Hulings, is a Russian speaker. He had served a number of tours in Moscow. His deputy chief of mission was Doug Archard. Doug Archard is a South Asia/Turkish specialist. Doug actually replaced me when I left Turkey in 1982. He not only knew Turkish, but before he went to Ashgabat as DCM, he had studied Turkmen in the one place in the country where you can do so. That is the University of Indiana, which has a Central Asian language institute. So, we sent out a query, and we got back two separate answers. Hulings thought we ought to brush up on Turkish because it would allow us at least to use some courtesy words in Turkmen. Archard said that he thought we ought to take Russian, because nobody used Turkmen. So we had diametrically opposed answers from the two language officers at the post. In the end, we decided to take Russian, which we studied for about five months.

The White House approved me at the beginning of 1995. The State Department got agrï¿½ment from the Turkmen in March. Our congressional relations people showed an unusual amount of incompetence in managing the confirmation process. Well, I shouldn't say that. The problem is that the State Department's congressional relations office exists to liaise between the Secretary of State and the Hill. Those matters that deal more generally with the function of the State Department take decidedly lower priority. Naming of ambassadors is, I dare say, not much more important to the Secretary of State than it is to the senators. If it was, Secretaries of State would put more emphasis on it. Anyway, the idea was that confirmation would happen in the early summer. They would send us up to the Hill to have a hearing with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate would confirm us. Well, I had dealt with Congress when I was in the political-military bureau working on the military assistance budget. The fact is the Senate takes a July 4 recess, which runs several weeks, and then usually between the first and second week in August the Congress adjourns until after Labor Day. So, you really have two short windows in the summer to get things done. When congressional relations talks about doing this for summer, of course, they don't energize themselves to send names over until May. So then you are talking about a window in June, and about two and one-half weeks in July. After that you can forget it. Along came the Fourth of July recess and nothing had happened. The names were not sent over until the middle of June because the Department decided it didn't want to send names over piecemeal but rather in a group. One person was late in submitting paperwork, so the rest of us sat around until that was done. At that point, the Administration was in a battle with Sen. Jesse Helms over foreign affairs reorganization. Helms wanted USIA and AID folded into State. Clinton's first Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, had actually come up with the reorganization idea, but then Brian Atwood, who headed AID, intervened. Atwood, being a FOB, went to Clinton and got the idea quashed.

Q: FOB meaning "Friend of Bill"?

COTTER: That's right. Anyway, Atwood went to Clinton and got the White House to block reorganization. So, the situation was that the Secretary of State had come up with this idea, which had been picked up already on the Hill by Helms, who wanted it to happen only to have the White House then force Christopher to say that he didn't want it. If Christopher had had any spine, he would have said, "Look, either Atwood goes, or I go." But he obviously felt that he had more important fish to fry. In any event, the administration reneged on reorganization. Helms insisted that it go forward. As is his wont, he simply sat on nominations to force the Administration's hand. In July, at least a group of us did have a hearing. It was a very interesting hearing. There were six of us, including the designee to be ambassador to Bosnia, which was obviously going to take up most of the interest of the committee. Only two senators came to the hearing. Senator Lugar was there and Senator Sarbanes came in for a while and then left. Senator Lugar had intelligent questions for each of us and actually made this a useful process. So, I had my hearing in July, with no prospect of being confirmed by the summer. This leaves you in a very awkward situation because you simply don't know how long you are going to be in limbo. For Joanne and me, it had a number of implications. We had returned in January and were living in a furnished executive apartment in Virginia, but we are both residents of Washington, DC. Well, if you live in Virginia for more than six months, you have to file a Virginia tax return. Once we passed the six-month period, it meant that I was going to have to file for that year in both Virginia and DC.

We couldn't make any plans. I remember one of my colleagues in this situation took a job as a coordinator of the Bosnia Task Force, which was fine, except as inevitably happened, suddenly her nomination went forward, and the task force was left without a leader. I know one nominee who got caught up in a similar situation a year later who said the heck with this and took a vacation. We returned to Russian language training, but it's hard to plan and concentrate when you don't know how long you'll be there. FSI wanted to know how long we would be there, so they could do some planning, and we didn't know. Finally, the Senate confirmed a group of us at the very end of September. These nominations are all done by number. I got in the habit of watching C-SPAN 2, the Senate C-SPAN channel, late in the evening. Generally, what happens is that these kinds of nominations get approved just before a recess, or late on a Thursday evening, when the Senate is doing general business, where they take a lot of preagreed actions, "without objection." One evening they read a list of these actions, and one of them was my number. At that point, I knew I was confirmed. The one nice thing about the length of this process was that it gave us time for preparation. My successor, for instance, had somewhat less time, in that he was in Washington in a job and already spoke Russian. They put him through rather quickly. People do many things in preparation for ambassadorial assignments. The Meridian House runs a seminar with academics for nominees. I was at FSI, of course, able to participate in the excellent area studies program that FSI offers and read what there was to read on Turkmenistan, which is very little. Not much at all has been published on that country. In any event, I was sworn in by the acting chief of protocol, on about the 20th of October 1995. Turkmen National Day was the 27th and 28th, and I didn't want to arrive just before that, so I arrived at the beginning of November.

Q: You were there from when to when?

COTTER: I was there from the beginning of November 1995 until the end of August 1998, more or less, the standard three-year ambassadorial stint.

Q: Before you went out, what did you see as, in order of priority, what you were going to do about relations with Turkmenistan?

COTTER: There were two missions that I had when I went out, one internal and one external. I must say that it was left very much to me to define my priorities. Again, these countries are new countries, and the management of that part of the State Department which was responsible for them is very much focused on Russia and staffed by Russian hands. Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbot took a personal interest in this area, and he is very much a Russian hand. Jim Collins was the special advisor to the Secretary for the Newly Independent States, there not being yet a formal bureau for them. He had been DCM in Moscow before he took that job. His successor, Steve Sestanovich, is an academic, also a Russia expert. Frankly, the amount of time that anyone in Washington placed on defining what our policies ought to be in a place like Turkmenistan, at least anyone in the State Department, was quite small. So, an ambassador has a certain amount of flexibility. I served, as is clear from this discussion, in a number of countries which have real or imagined human rights difficulties. I have found over my career that it very seldom does us much good to focus on human rights as the sole issue or to make it the sine qua non for a relationship. Turkmenistan has a very autocratic government, and it is possibly the least reformed of the former Soviet countries. Although we can talk about this later, I do question whether that is really true, and I question what pace of change we can or should expect in that country. There certainly is a divergence between our intellectual appreciation of their situation and our policy expectations of them. But, in any event, the U.S. had made human rights a major issue in the bilateral relationship.

When my predecessor, for instance, left the post, he did not have a farewell call with the president because of bad feelings on this point. Yet, what is stated as our main policy goal in having a presence in these countries is primarily to strengthen and ensure their political independence and their economic development. This insistence that they have Western standards of human rights and political development was never first on the list of priorities I had in my mind. So, my sense was that I needed to go put our relationship on a more positive basis, without necessarily dropping human rights issues entirely from sight. I will talk a lot about that as we go on because, again, I have served in enough places that you get to the point where you can have an appreciation for relative human rights abuses. It sort of depends on what you are talking about. Turkmenistan has not had civil war since it has been independent. We have tracked, for instance, at various times, as many as about a dozen political prisoners. Well, frankly, my experience is that a dozen political prisoners is not a big thing. On the other hand, the fact that the country is being run along Stalinist lines is absolutely true. I guess the only question is: Where does that change come in our priorities versus a place that really abuses its citizens? In any event, I was not going to go to Ashgabat and make human rights the main focus of what we were doing. I have also become convinced over the years that we can get a lot farther selling honey than we can vinegar, and that there are ways, generally, of putting our views that don't appear as much a slap in the face. So, my one mission was to go out and put that relationship on a more positive basis. My internal priority came about a lot because of the nature of these embassies and where we had gotten by 1995.

The embassies in most of the former Soviet Union (FSU), in particular in the Central Asian countries, faced problems because it was very difficult for us to find quarters for embassies and for housing. In most of the countries and cities in the FSU, there simply were no such facilities available. Tashkent had a foreign presence even in Soviet days and was quite a large city. But you get to cities like Ashgabat and Dushanbe and Bishkek where there was very little. So, we had a very hard time getting set up. The governments would offer us buildings, but that had drawbacks. They aren't very cheap to begin with, and then it costs a lot to get them into acceptable shape. Furthermore, we can never be certain what is inside the walls besides cement. Dushanbe is probably in worse shape than Ashgabat. Dushanbe is in Tajikistan. Bishkek is in Kyrgyzstan, and Tashkent is in Uzbekistan. But Ashgabat had been hit by a massive earthquake in 1948 that leveled the city. Only three buildings survived. It is in a very active earthquake zone where the subcontinent is pushing up into the Asian land mass. So, the buildings the Turkmen showed us were simply not satisfactory from an earthquake perspective. Housing was also very difficult. In my whole tour, it was very difficult to find any houses that even approached Western standards. So, the Department decided to build an embassy and housing in Ashgabat. I assume that the fact that my predecessor had been minister counselor for administrative affairs in Moscow and knew the ways of these things also had something to do with that decision. Certainly, Joe Hulings deserves lots of credit for that. The embassy building is a modular building that was built by a New Jersey firm. As I understand it, if you go to the older, small strip malls around the country, you often find a bank building standing alone in the parking lot. This is the company that builds those bank buildings. They got the contract to build our embassy. They put it together in New Jersey, and then broke it down, packaged it up, and put it on a ship for Adana, Turkey, near where we have the Incirlik Air Base. The State Department chartered a couple of these giant Antonov Russian transport planes and flew the building into Turkmenistan where it was unloaded and reassembled. Of course, since we are speaking of the chancery building itself, at all these stages it had to be physically escorted by security people. The advantage of this method was that the actual construction of the embassy once it was on site only took about four months. That was a significant savings in terms of construction, security people, etc. The embassy is right in the middle of town in a very nice location. We had also gotten from the government eight hectares, a little bit more than sixteen acres, for a residential compound out on the edge of town, where the Turkmen want to develop embassies and ministries. We were the first to build, and we built an ambassador's residence and townhouses for staff. These were also modular. The design and materials came from Finland, and the houses were put up by an American contractor. For the first three years of its existence - the embassy opened in early 1992, we had a chargï¿½ for a couple months, then Joe Hulings had gone out in the summer of 1992 and then stayed until summer 1995 - we were in an old Soviet-style hotel, the Jubilena, which had been the nicest hotel in Ashgabat. I was in the hotel after we moved to post and can testify to its bleakness. I cannot imagine what working in it was like. We didn't even have our own area. We had a Romanian diplomat living among us, and the Iranians were a floor down. Security was virtually impossible. Our staff had one hotel room to live in, and another hotel room for an office. The communicator had a suite because, of course, he had the communications gear to protect. In any event, under these circumstances you can barely function. We are present in lots of places in the world but without a fully functioning embassy.

We moved into the new chancery on the Fourth of July 1995. I arrived, of course, that November. It was made clear to me that one of my goals was to turn Ashgabat from "Fort Apache" into a real embassy. I went out there with that internal mission. That was not an easy task because most of the people in a post like Ashgabat are doing their current job for the first time in their careers. You get a lot of stretch assignments where people of a lower rank bid on a job of higher rank. The post is so small that we are only one deep at most positions. When I arrived, the second group of people assigned to Ashgabat had been there a year and a half living in these hotel conditions. When I arrived there were, for instance, no files. Files were very hard to keep in a hotel where you had no space and no ability to secure things. So, when I looked around for the normal files you would find in an embassy, there were none. There was no one who knew State Department paper procedures, what a formal diplomatic note looks like versus an aide memoir, a first person note versus a third person note. There used to be, you will remember, a style to these things.

Q: Yes, there was a style manual.

COTTER: Well, there had been one in Ashgabat, but we couldn't find it. If an embassy asks the Department for a style manual, the answer is that it hasn't been updated for several years. But, when I looked around at the staff, there was no one who knew what a first person diplomatic note was. Nobody knew what kind of paper it should be on. These were all relatively junior officers. At most embassies, does a first or a second tour officer get to draft a first person note? No. They were kind of hazy about what kind of paper notes went on. Now, you can carry this point a little too far, but there are standards, and there ought to be standards for the way these things are done. The Turkmen didn't care. They knew no more about these standards than we did. But, nonetheless, we need to do things correctly.

The other difficulty was that the FSNs had only worked for the U.S. Government for three years. So we didn't have these FSNs who had memorized the Foreign Affairs Manual and knew how everything was done. We had very good people. But they were people whom we had hired largely because of their English ability. So they had to be trained to do their jobs, often by people who really didn't know much more about the functions than they did. So the FSNs weren't much help in all of this.

The housing compound opened in theory in the spring of 1995. The Hulings were planning on leaving at the end of September, so they sort of camped out in the ambassador's residence. I recall that when we asked them what equipment was in the kitchen, so we would know what things to bring, they didn't know because they hadn't unpacked the boxes. So the Hulings did not have any regular staff and had never set up an ORE account (Official Residence Expenses). It is the account kept by ambassadors and deputy chiefs of mission who occupy an official residence. You pay 5% of your salary into the account, and then all expenses beyond that the U.S. Government pays. Well, there are many procedures and ways you can set up an ORE account. But in Ashgabat no one had ever heard of it. I literally had to go to the administrative staff and explain about ORE, and show people where in the FAM it was written up, and then use the system we had used in Santiago. I had to tell them, "This is how we are going to do it." The challenges of making the place work right, frankly, were at least as hard as the bilateral relationship with the Turkmen. That bilateral relationship worked very well because the Turkmen were very proud of the fact that we were there and wanted very much to have us there.

These are countries on the far, far end. Turkmenistan was the southernmost country in the former Soviet Union. It is bordered on the west by the Caspian Sea borders it on the west, on the south by Iran, on the southeast by Afghanistan, on the northeast and north by Uzbekistan, and a little bit right on the Caspian Sea, in the north, by Kazakhstan. This is the end of beyond. That wasn't the case 1000 years ago when the Silk Road was functioning, but after the Mongols came through and destroyed everything that was worth being, Tamerlane came through 150 years later and finished the job. It has been a very rural, backward area. The Turkmen, until the Russians came, were largely nomadic herders - the country being primarily desert. It is about 90% desert. There is a fertile river along the east, the Amu Darya, which was called the Oxus by the Romans. In the far south, there are a couple other rivers, the Margay being the main one. Along the mountains that form the border with Iran, there are springs. Some communities have formed there, including Ashgabat, which is right on the border with Iran. But the rest of the country is desert.

It was the last area conquered by the Russians when the Imperial Russians took over that part of the world, in what was then known as the "Great Game" as they jockeyed with the British Empire for control of the region. They expanded southward until they reached the Persian Empire. Then, they built a railroad from the Caspian Sea across what is now Turkmenistan, up through Bokhara, over to Tashkent, and connected it with the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The Imperial Russians fought a major battle in which 15 or 17,000 Turkmen died in 1880. That was the last battle that consolidated what became the Russian Empire.

The Soviets took over after the revolution. This part of the Russian Empire did not take easily to Communism. A lot has been written about it. There were elements of White Russians with British support fighting there for a number of years. There were also early Bolsheviks and Communists who actually believed in the idea of a multinational Soviet empire and saw in it a role for the Muslims. The Russians took one look at that and quashed it. The Soviet hand was hard on Turkmenistan because they were collectivized, as were the Kazakhs, a process in which many people died because collectivizing nomadic peoples is not easy.

These countries were the textbook colonial examples. The Soviet empire was indeed an empire. The periphery served the center. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were cotton producers and had a cotton mono-culture, using waters from the Amu Darya, one result of which was the drying up of the Aral Sea. But, very little of note went on in Turkmenistan under the Soviets. Tashkent and Uzbekistan were the center of the region where the Soviets had a lot of their regional government apparatus. A lot of Uzbeks gravitated to Moscow and reached high levels in the Soviet Union. There were very few Turkmen who did the same. Since it was on the border with Iran, which for most if not all of the Soviet period was considered by the Soviets to be a hostile border, Turkmenistan essentially was a military zone. That meant that very few foreigners got to visit and very few Turkmen got to travel outside it. The result of all of this is that by the time they become independent, there was very little preparation or experience that would enable them to form and run a national government. There was a terrible lack of prepared personnel to staff the many ministries that didn't exist when Turkmenistan was a part of the USSR. Turkmenistan was like most of the countries in Central Asia in many, but not all, ways. In most of the countries in the former Soviet Union when they were given independence, whoever was First Secretary of the Communist Party ended up as president. In Turkmenistan, they changed the name of the Communist Party to the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, but it is the same cast of characters, without the ideology. So they run the country in a very authoritarian manner. From their perspective, however, immediately after independence the Turkmen observed difficulties all around them: serious riots in the most populated area of Uzbekistan, in a place called the Fergana Valley; a war broke out between Azerbaijan and Armenia, just across the Caspian Sea; and civil war erupted in Tajikistan. The prime goal for the Turkmen, as was the case with the Uzbeks and others, has been stability and maintaining national integrity, the kind of goal that lends itself to an authoritarian government.

The problem with democratizing very rapidly in these countries is that there is no basis on which to democratize. Compared with them it was easy for Chile to transition from a military to a civilian government because there was a long tradition of democratic government to fall back on. If you look at Haiti, as much as we keep talking about creating democracy there, I think we are discovering that creating democracy is very difficult. It may be the best form of government, but it requires a certain level of political sophistication, a certain shared acceptance of societal structures before people are willing to repose trust in it. In a place like Turkmenistan, where the only basis on which you could have political parties was a tribal or regional basis, you run a real risk of creating precisely what the government and I think we don't want to happen because parties based on tribal affiliation is what leads almost inevitably to great conflict and civil war. Among academics and others, there is a consensus that in these countries real political change and democratic development is a generational issue. We are probably talking 20, 25 years at the minimum, until a generation of youths have been raised who have had greater educational opportunities and some ability to understand the outside world, and the countries have some time to assimilate the kinds of ideas that will allow democracy and a liberal economy to take root. But, the U.S., as always, is in a hurry. It was fairly clear that even before I went out to Turkmenistan, already people were becoming annoyed with Russia because it was not yet a full fledged, functioning Western style democracy. We get caught always on our short-term policy goals. The Administration wanted to put up lots of money to help the Russian transition. The first question from Congress was "Yes, but we have to limit that. We are not going to have these countries become dependent on aid like countries in Africa, so we will have to limit it." What do you limit it to in any reasonable term? We weren't able to determine that. We got frustrated early on with the Russians and others. I am not suggesting that throwing money at the problem is necessarily the solution. I think what you have to do is throw money and policy and look seriously at saying, "We are going to try to have a consistent policy over the next 25 years to bring about change." We are unable, because of the nature of our system, to carry out policies over a period as long as a quarter of a century.

Q: What about the Russian nationals who were there? I was in Kyrgyzstan in 1994, and there it was apparent that the Russians were leaving, but they were the people who ran the small businesses and all the Kyrgyz were apparatchiks in the government. This is something that had been given, but this was a place that had received more than it gave, as far as the Soviet Union was concerned. It had its difficulties.

COTTER: The Kyrgyz don't have the natural resources that Turkmenistan does. Well, the same thing happened in Turkmenistan. I don't know what the proportion of Russians was in Kyrgyzstan. In Turkmenistan, it was fairly small. I think about 10 to 12% of the population. It wasn't the kind of place most Russians wanted to live. Most Russians worked on the railroad or in various industries. Again, natural gas was the main one, apart from cotton, but you didn't need Russians to run cotton farms. Turkmen collectives ran them. The Russians were the professionals in the arts community, the medical people and what not. Indeed, many of them left after independence. By the time I arrived in 1995, the Russian population was down to about 7% of the population. Now, the country's total population was about four million, so you are talking about several hundred thousand people. By 1995, most of the ethnic Russians who could emigrate easily had done so. By that, I mean after the first rush of immigrants from Central Asia, the Russian government itself put limitations itself on who could return. They didn't want people coming back without jobs or places to live. So they put serious restrictions on immigration into Russia. Most of the professionals had already left, and the Russians who were still in Turkmenistan were going to have a much more difficult time emigrating. There was never a great exodus on this, other than people simply moving. There were no pogroms against Russians by the Turkmen. In fact, it took the Turkmen a while to realize the impact from the loss of so much technical expertise. I think they are just coming to grips with it now, when it is too late. There has been a whole series of issues they have dealt with in the same way. For instance, making Turkmen an official language but then recognizing the fact that that wasn't going to work in the short run, and not really enforcing it. In theory, Russians have equal rights, but I think if you talk with most Russians, they believe, correctly, that if there is a Turkmen even remotely qualified for a promotion, the Turkmen is going to get the promotion over the Russian. Clearly, the government feels very strongly about improving the possibilities for Turkmen and about having senior government people be Turkmen.

You know, things change really fast in this area, as you might expect. We are always a little behind the power curve. When I was there, the U.S. co-sponsored with the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) a series of studies and conferences on displaced populations anticipating a movement of peoples like after WWII. But in 1996, this really wasn't a problem. The only place it was a problem was in Tajikistan, where because of the civil war people were displaced internally. But this concern with the movement of Russians and other ethnic groups, and the anticipation of further inter-ethnic conflict in the area, simply hasn't come to pass. There were many movements of people, but they have all been absorbed. There are all sorts of ethnic groups in this region. It is amazing what you find. Volga-Germans, who are Germans who had lived in western Russia for centuries and were exported by Stalin. There are Meskhetian Turks. There are Koreans, and so on. Central Asia was a dumping ground for many ethnic groups Stalin felt were a threat.

The Volga-Germans had been enticed to Russia by Peter the Great or Catherine the Great because they brought talents and skills and what not. Then, at some point, early in WW II, Stalin felt they were a threat and moved them from the Volga region to various places. So, there are communities in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and all over the place. Of course, they are still Germans. So, now with the new unified Germany, they are seeking repatriation, and the German government is trying to help them. Unfortunately, they don't speak a word of German. So, there are groups like that, some with success, and others with less success, getting back to their homeland. The Meskhetian Turks had lived in Georgia and were expelled from there with the blessing of the ethnic Georgians, either under the Imperial Russian government, or under the Soviet one. I think it was probably under the Soviet government. They are trying to get back home to Georgia, which of course doesn't want them any more than it did 50 years ago. But, the status of Russians and the problems from Russia leaving are very much with Turkmenistan and will be for a long time.

The other thing that turned out to be a major policy interest of ours was energy in the Caspian. The Turkmen have what they claim are the fourth largest reserves of natural gas in the world. They have some oil too. There is more oil across the Caspian, in Azerbaijan, and there is oil up in Kazakhstan, and there may be some in Turkmenistan, although much less exploration has been done. But, there are major gas deposits that the Soviets exploited. They did not exploit them very well, however. Indeed, after about 1970, the Soviets put little money into Turkmen gas fields because then they were opening the big gas fields in Siberia and focusing their investment resources on those gas fields, not the Turkmen fields. But the Turkmen were producing gas that they were shipping, along with other gas from the Soviet Union, to Europe at the time of independence. It took the Russians until sometime in 1993 to realize that they were paying good hard currency for this. The gas was exported and the Turkmen would get back hard currency through the percentage of gas that they had. So, suddenly they told the Turkmen that their gas from now on would go to Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia - none of whom had the money to pay for it. Meanwhile, Russia would send its own gas to Europe.

It really took the Turkmen until the end of 1994, almost halfway through 1995, to realize what had happened to them. Before that, they were earning lots of money, relatively. Given the very low expectations of the people in the small population, the government had lots of money and was able to build up several billion dollars of reserves. This is one reason that they felt little pressure to reform. I think their view was that they liked the way Kuwait runs, thank you very much. They would be perfectly happy to reform along the lines of Kuwait or Abu Dhabi. Since the Turkmen didn't have their hand out, like other FSU countries, we had limited leverage to make them reform economically. When Armenia, Georgia, or the Ukraine were bankrupt, we and the IMF could come in and say that we could take care of their bankruptcy if they would accept a lot of our conditions. Well, the Turkmen weren't in that situation.

They also wasted a certain amount of that money on a number of fairly odd construction projects, some of which have been unfairly criticized. There is a whole row of boutique hotels out on the edge of town near our housing compound. They actually began as ministry guest houses. It has been the Soviet tradition that wherever you had a ministry, you had a guesthouse. The Turkmen had enough money to build ostentatious little guest houses. Of course, they are too small to make a profit economically. The government has since tried two or three times to consolidate them and do different things with them. Actually, a lot of them have permanent residents because there is so little Western-quality housing that a number of foreigners have taken over the presidential suites in these places and turned them into apartments. The French ambassador lives in one, and the British ambassador lived in one for a while. The oil company representatives live in them also. Our defense attachï¿½ lived in one for a while.

Anyway, midway through 1995, suddenly the Turkmen found themselves holding a lot of debt. Ukraine owed them a billion and a half dollars, although they've since reduced the principal. We have had a lot of foreign companies interested in helping the Turkmen exploit their energy resources. I would say that most of that interest is in oil, not gas. Gas is a much different animal. With oil, you drill it out of the ground, load it on the tanker, and sell it to someone. Gas doesn't work that way. You really need to have a market before you will get the investment to drill it out of the ground and transport it. That usually means long-term contracts. So, we had many fewer companies in Turkmenistan than we did in the other countries. The Turkmen also believed that they could drill for and market gas themselves, and they were quite reluctant to share this cash cow with foreign companies. The first American company of any significance arrived just before I did, and that was UNOCAL. They had an ambitious project to build a gas pipeline from the gas fields in southeastern Turkmenistan down to Pakistan and possibly in to India. They also wanted to build an oil pipeline that would connect to the old Soviet pipeline up in southern Uzbekistan, and could carry oil from Kazakhstan down to the Indian Ocean, avoiding Iran, and the Straits of Hormuz. Well, the Afghan war has delayed that project, something I think UNOCAL seriously underestimated when they got into this. The company has since drawn back a lot. The other main U.S. company that got established, but considerably later, was Mobil. They were really only beginning to work on oil in western Turkmenistan about the time I left. Nonetheless, there were lots of people coming and going and lots of interest in this. The Turkmen government has had the attitude that it was sitting on the mother lode and all it had to do was wait for the dollars to start rolling in. Again, like everything else, the Turkmen have had a very steep learning curve here. It has taken them a long time to gain a better appreciation for how world energy markets work and for what their potential is. It has certainly become a central part of our policy in all of this region to promote access to the energy resources. The fact that Turkmenistan had money early on lead them to be a good market for our exports. Their national airline flies Boeing jets on all of its international routes, except the route up to Moscow. I think, at this point, they have three 757s and about six 737s. Both JI Case and John Deere had made significant sales of agriculture equipment. Again, this part of the world is a great market for those firms. Soviet agricultural equipment is cheap, but it isn't very good.

Q: Let's talk a bit about picking cotton because one has heard about how the Soviet system, particularly toward the end, got so focused on production quotas that were destroying the Aral Sea and also great parks in Turkmenistan, with cotton because they were putting so much fertilizer on. They were essentially destroying the land, or maybe this was elsewhere.

COTTER: Yes, it is Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It involves a number of things. One problem is fertilizers and pesticides, a lot of pesticides which not only affect the land but then go into runoff and affect the cows that are downriver. The Amu Darya River rises in the Tien Shan Mountains down in Afghanistan on the border with Tajikistan and flows downstream between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It forms a border between those two countries, to the Aral Sea. The Aral Sea has shrunk so much that what used to be its delta in northern Turkmenistan is no longer. The ground water in those areas is very salty because of all the salt that has leached out of the desert soil as they irrigate it. What happens is that in the spring they will open and flood the fields, to flush them. But they have to flush several times to flush the salt out. Of course, you are flushing the salt back into the river, and it flows on down the river. The next guy uses it to flush all the salt out. By the time you get to the end, you have very saline water. They say that people in Dashhowuz in northern Turkmenistan, when they go to other places and drink a cup of coffee, have to put salt in it because they are so used to salt in the water. They have lots of liver, kidney and other diseases because of it. So, yes, it is doing great damage to the land.

The problem for these countries is that Uzbekistan is, I think, the third largest cotton producer in the world. That is a hard currency earner for both them and the Turkmen. It is the major hard currency earner the Uzbeks have. Right now, it is the only one the Turkmen have since they cannot get their gas out. The advantage of cotton is you can load it onto a railroad car, and you can load it on a truck, as opposed to oil and gas, which has to go through pipelines. As of today, all of the pipelines are controlled by the Russians. Western critics occasionally say "Well, the Turkmen and Uzbeks have to do away with the cotton mono-culture and grow something else." The question is, "Okay, that is fine, but what is going to earn hard currency in the meantime?" Neither country is cutting back on cotton production. Indeed, they are probably expanding it. There is some hope of improved technology, requiring less water, fewer pesticides. But, again, all of those involve capital investments, and no one has the money for them. There are advanced types of seed, but the Turkmen don't have the money to buy them. They are using 40 year old seed. A lot of the Soviet irrigation systems are old and just not very efficient, but the cost of these things gets astronomical. ITT Fluid Technologies, which is a part of the ITT conglomerate that sells irrigation equipment, has won one contract there and is looking at others for replacing Soviet pumps. There are some others. There is probably $20 billion worth of irrigation infrastructure that could be installed in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, but neither of those countries has $20 billion. As a result, the Aral Sea will continue to dry up. There are endless numbers of conferences on the Aral Sea issue. People, largely from the West, sit around and wring their hands and say what a terrible thing its disappearance is. In fact, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan do need to do something about it. Then, the question comes up, "How about some money?" The answer from Western critics is, "We don't have any money." In other words, there is plenty of money for conferences, but there is no money for the changes themselves. I don't know what you would be talking about, in terms of money. I suppose you would be talking, conservatively, about $500 billion to clean up the area and stop the diversion of water from the rivers. In Turkmenistan, for instance, one thing the Soviets did, one of their "great" engineering feats, was to build the Karakum Canal, which goes from where the Amu Darya enters Turkmenistan from northern Afghanistan and runs for 1,400 kilometers across the southern part of the country, ending up near the Caspian Sea. They started it in the 1950s, and as of independence day, they were still working on it. That canal has opened up all sorts of new areas. But, the dirt canal is not lined and not covered, and as a result you find large areas in southern Turkmenistan alongside the canal that are now swamp. In this desert country, you find these swamps where nothing can be grown, because you got seepage out of the canal. Well, I hate to think what it would cost to line and cover a 1,400 kilometer canal. So those are some problems that they face dealing with it.

Q: Are they still operating under, essentially, the "collective system?"

COTTER: No, they are trying to get away from it. They abolished the collective farms a couple years ago and created "peasant associations." The distinction is, I imagine, without a difference. The circumstances have changed, perhaps, in that the peasants are now in theory the owners of their association and its land. But the procedures to make that effective are not in place. The last year I was there the Turkmen began to work on agriculture reform, something none of the former Soviet countries has gotten very far with. They divided all these peasant associations up, in a haphazard fashion. In theory, each farmer gets a plot of land. In addition to cotton, they have had a lot of emphasis on growing wheat to become self-sufficient. The Turkmen are making a lot of the very same mistakes with their wheat and farm imports that the Latin American countries made in the 1950s, the Asian countries made in the 1950s and 1960s, and the African countries made in the 1960s and 1970s. They decided that it would cost a lot of money to import flour, so they decided to produce it themselves. They realized they should go and produce things where they have a comparative advantage over another country. But that doesn't help when they have a bread shortage and bread riots. It's because they haven't done their planning and ordered wheat. So now they are pushing wheat. They grow a lot of dry land winter wheat, which they harvest in early spring.

What was your question again?

Q: I was wondering about collective farms.

COTTER: Collective farms, yes. So, they divided them up and we spent my last year there trying to figure out exactly how they had done this. You would go out and talk with farmers who didn't understand it either because they still had to produce specific things to meet state quotas. Most peasant associations have quotas for cotton and for wheat. While farmers may be getting plots of land, that doesn't necessarily mean that they can grow what they want. Nonetheless, the Turkmen government has asked for our help with this process, and we were trying to help them with a cadastral program that would help define boundaries of land. Another aspect of the problem and one reason why I don't think they have gotten very far with rural land reform in the Soviet Union is that the rural peasants weren't farmers. Poland had a history of family farms and went back into it very easily. Even in places like the Ukraine you could probably do that. The Turkmen weren't farmers, but they were herders. So there is no sense there that a given plot of land, for example, was the owner's grandfather's land before the Soviets took it. They are not farmers. They are farm workers, and the distinction is important. When you go into these farms, each farm will have a little museum. It has pictures of the sons who died in the Great Patriotic War, World War II, and a number of other things including a sort of worker of the month photo. The winners are mechanics, drivers, farm workers, or supervisors. They all have functions. To suddenly say: "Well, that is no longer the case. You no longer have a supervisor. You now have 10 hectares, get out there and farm it." Of course, none of these people have ever done the full range of farming. They each had their little part in an industrial enterprise. The other problem is that all of the inputs and all of the outputs were always dealt with collectively. Tractors, for example - who runs the machinery? Well, the machinery was run and owned by the collective. Well, okay, now you have created a bunch of farms. What happens? They all have capital in the combined machinery. How are they going to run it? Where are they going to get their seeds? The seeds have always come down through the system. They have no idea how to buy their own seeds or which seeds to buy (except for the farmer who was the purchasing agent in the old days). What the Turkmen did was turn collective farm managers into cooperative managers. I am very afraid about how that is going to work. It just isn't going to be very easy for these farmers to adjust to this situation. We have been helping some but much less than we really could, in terms of running training programs for them.

Q: Of course, here in the United States, we are moving to large industrial...

COTTER: They are moving in the other direction.

Q: We are moving in the other direction and essentially doing what collectives do, in their own peculiar way. That is, have large industrial complexes, and the individual farm is shrinking all the time.

COTTER: Well, the Turkmen don't want this. What we have also accomplished is the percentage of the American people engaged in farming is now probably one and one-half percent, down from 20% in the 1930s. About 55% of Turkmenistan's population is rural, and the government doesn't want 55% of the population descending on the cities. They want a system that would actually keep people down on the farm. Well, you know as well as I do that that is a non-starter. Over time, it isn't going to work. But, this is one reason they would like to downsize to provide more work opportunity in rural areas, because otherwise if you simply modernize a collective farm, you are going to have an incredibly high level of rural unemployment. When they buy JI Case Harvesters, they will buy beautiful harvesting machinery, but that means the workers who work and pick cotton are no longer needed. You can say that that is great for them because it is excruciating work, but what do they do as an alternative, and how does the country absorb that labor?

Q: I would think that, being the ambassador in a place that is going through all these changes, in a way you would be presiding over a whole series of experts coming out from our country, and then others from other countries, all with great ideas, but almost being a waste of everybody's time. This is sort of technocrats coming out and saying what to do and all that, instead of somebody who knows the system and is willing to work with it.

COTTER: Actually, that is true, writ large for the former Soviet Union. Lots of money has been made. As you know, if you count the amount of our aid money that actually stays in the country, it is very small. It almost all goes to American consultants of one kind or another. Russia, of course, is full of this. Russia, was, up until the recent problems, full of 20-something Westerners, who were there giving them advice. Who takes advice from people fresh with their MBA, who have never worked? Well, you do it if it is not costing anything, or you don't have a choice. They have no understanding of what your culture is or how things work. It has been a real problem. It has created, in a number of these countries, the impression of change, where there really wasn't any. When a crisis comes, they revert, and then we say, "Well, how can this be? We thought you were well on your way to reform." Well, it was a house of cards. You also had a lot of people playing at political science experiments. Nobody has dealt before with how to turn Communist countries into market economies and democracies. In most of the other countries where we have worked on transitions, the countries have a basic culture or legal understanding of what we are trying to sell them. Even in the African countries, which call themselves socialist, people who ran them were all educated in France or England. If you talk to them about a contract, they know what you are talking about. If you talk with them about private property, they know what you are talking about. They may be trying to do away with it, but they know what you are talking about. In the former Soviet Union, on the other hand, they don't know what you are talking about. The concept of a contract didn't exist in the former Soviet Union. There is no such thing as commercial law. There is, in Turkmenistan, a court of economic crimes because private economic transactions were crimes in the USSR. In the absence of anything better, that court wrestles with the beginnings of trying to sort out commercial differences. Private property didn't exist. The concept of it didn't exist. Well, how do you create it? Again, in Poland, or in some of the other former eastern bloc countries where it existed before, you could go back to old land records, but in Central Asian countries, you couldn't. So, it really is very difficult dealing with people who don't have a conception of what you are talking about. We have been working with the Russians, putting in lots of money, on drafting a civil code. The Russians passed it less than a year ago, but the Turkmen just passed it. So they now have civil codes, but who are the judges, who are the bureaucrats that have any conception of what it means? They don't. Who are the law professors and where are the universities who understand the underpinnings of this new code? None of them do. So, you can't just enact a code like that. Even if you are dealing with people who want to do the best job they can, they simply don't have the intellectual underpinnings. In a perverse way, Turkmenistan benefited because it didn't reform. It has gotten, percentage wise, much less money than any other country in the former Soviet Union, so there are many fewer advisors wandering around.

We do these things in a self-fulfilling way. We can tell the Turkmen that they can get more money if they reform, and they can't get more money if they don't reform, but if there is no money to get some advice to them on how to reform, how are they going to carry out the reform? I argued against this mind set. While I was there, our total assistance, including USIA and AID, was between $3 and $5 million a year. Kazakhstan was getting about $36 million, Kyrgyzstan a little over $30 million, Uzbekistan $20+ million. Armenia, of course, gets $100 million plus a year because of the Armenian lobby in the U.S. Georgia gets a significant amount also. There are a lot of ways in which, if we had used this money sensibly, we could have made some real progress with them. We are beginning to. We have the advantage because you can bring in people who have now made mistakes in other parts of the Soviet Union for five years. Over the years since independence, we have weeded out some of the real incompetents providing advice across the FSU. Some of the good people who are around at least understand what they are dealing with.

Q: Well, as ambassador, did you find yourself a bit of a gatekeeper, trying to keep out fuzzy headed people out of grad school? Did you bring in what you would call hardheaded, knowledgeable people?

COTTER: No, my problem was getting anybody because we had so little money. I was trying to talk Washington out of more money. It could be that my predecessor would have had this problem, had he wanted money, but he was very much of the view that if the Turkmen don't reform, they don't deserve to get it.

Q: Well, in many ways, as you were really saying, you really don't come out that much ahead with a lot of money.

COTTER: No, that's true. We can come out further ahead now because, as I say, we've gotten rid of the real charlatans, except in the very big programs. There are still programs that are carried out strangely, and with AID you are dealing with fairly large institutional organizations. There is a lot of weight, and a lot of overhead. My problem was that until the Turkmen realized that they were only earning debts for their gas, building up IOUs in the Ukraine which didn't have any money, they were not very open to the idea of reform. But, that was the point when we could have gotten some more advisors in. It is a long process. We have advisors there for a year before they really win the confidence of the people they are working with. So, it's a slow process. We were lucky enough that there wasn't money there, so we had to be much more careful of how we applied it. Indeed, if there is a lot of money and the inevitable emphasis on spending it all, you run into these kinds of problems. I would think that my colleague in Armenia had some real problems with that. I would think the mission in Russia had some real problems. I would guess the Russians probably have taken us for a significant amount of money. But, again, there was a big rush to get in. We had a great opening, and we were going to try to do everything in a hurry. I think, in hindsight, a lot of money was wasted but not in Turkmenistan, where we simply didn't have that money.

My big problem was somehow trying to squeeze more money out of the system. For instance, we had no USIS operation at all. Right after independence, USIS along with everyone else, expanded like crazy and opened up full public affairs operations in most of the new embassies, which didn't need them at all. Well, Tajikistan had a civil war, and Turkmenistan wasn't reforming about the time USIS sort of ran out of money and interest, and so we never got one. When I was going out to post, I argued on this, not only because my wife is a USIS officer, although they made clear from the beginning that she wouldn't be able to work there as a USIS officer because of nepotism rules and concerns. We even said, "Look, you are not going to put a permanent position there, but how about a designated position for two years and we can supervise her from outside?" At least that way she would be able to set the FSNs up with a program that functions. They wouldn't do that either. But when we got to post, we saw how much this was like what USIA's function was when it began in the 1950s and 1960s - telling America's story, teaching English, making things accessible to people who have never had them before. Well, USIA doesn't do that anymore. They got out of that business. They didn't do English training anymore. They felt they had gone beyond that. That is fine for the parts of the world that don't need it, but here they have opened up a whole part of the world that literally in these areas was just like the 1950s in other parts of the world. We had no flexibility to say that we would go back and do some of the tried and true things that we did successfully in other places. So, we had practically no USIS. All of our assistance (as for other FSU states) monies were not USIA program monies. They were out of the Freedom Support Act, which is a separate line item of assistance money to the former Soviet Union. I argued on this until I was blue in the face and was unable to get USIA to do this.

Q: How did you find the bureaucracy of Turkmenistan, from the President on down, dealing with things?

COTTER: The president was easy enough to deal with. I don't know that he listened very much.

Q: Who was the president?

COTTER: Saparmurat Niyazov, who took on the second surname of Turkmenbashy, for which he has been laughed at. Turkmenbashy means head of the Turkmen. He styled himself, I think, after Ataturk, whose name means father of the Turks. Niyazov has quite a colorful personality, which most people liken to Stalin, although, again, I think it is much more based on what Ataturk was trying to do. Niyazov was always accommodating when I would talk with him, but he certainly had his own way of doing things. The foreign minister was the only senior government official who spoke any English. He was a former KGB diplomat, and he spent a good part of his career in India. It's very hard to deal with the Turkmen bureaucracy. First, it was very hard for us to get unfettered access to them. I fought this the whole time I was there. We would find that for our staff member to go call on someone at the ministry, we would have to send a diplomatic note. Well, we refused to do that. We would go in and talk with the foreign ministry, and say, "Look, we shouldn't have to do this." They would say, "You are absolutely right. You don't have to do it." It turns out that, to some extent, the problem was bureaucrats protecting themselves. They were not about to talk to an American unless they had a piece of paper saying that they were authorized to talk to him or her. Again, this was a vestige of the old Soviet mentality, which many Turkmen still have. Well, they knew the Cold War had ended and we were friends, but not so much friends that we were going to actually get in their office. We found this all time when trying to get hold of documents, because they are secret. They tell us that we can't have some documents. We tell them, "We have an agreement, and we need these documents." Their response is "They are secret; you can't get a hold of them."

To see senior ministers, I would generally have to send diplomatic notes, but for ambassadors to be required to do that, is not that uncommon around the world. We generally refused to do so for the rest of the staff. This caused great frustration when a staffer really needed to see somebody and the only way to do so was to do a diplomatic note. Every once in a while, we would do a diplomatic note when there wasn't any other way to accomplish what we needed to accomplish, but, generally, we wouldn't. If the Turkmen had their way, we would deal with them only through the foreign ministry. Again, this is not something unique in that country. That is the way the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry would have liked to have us work. To some extent it is the way the Turkish Government still works today. Although you have access to other ministries, the foreign ministry would much prefer if diplomats worked through them. So, access to the government was hard. It depended a lot on officers developing relationships. There, of course, one of the things that works against us is two year tours. It takes longer than a year to develop the kind of trusting relationship with the Turkmen that will give you access that you need. We depended quite a bit on FSNs for this as well. They could have a little easier access. The problem with the FSNs is they wouldn't know what question to ask unless we coached them on it. We would tell them to find out a certain thing, and they would come back and say, "Well, I asked, but they didn't answer." We would tell them that this was not satisfactory. The FSNs' view on this is if they ask a question and are told, "no," they don't push it, they leave. Even though they knew they were working for the U.S. and knew, in theory, that things had changed, the internal spirit that they have worked with for 40 years tells them how to react in these situations. Access could be fairly difficult.

Q: I would have thought that you would have had a watching brief, since your country borders both Iran and Afghanistan. We are talking about two things that sometimes are joined together, the terrorism, but also the Islamic fundamentalism. You must have spent a lot of time kind of watching this, didn't you?

COTTER: Yes, we watched these things to some extent. There was a lot of interest early on, and even by the time I arrived, about the potential impact of fundamentalist Islam in Central Asia, and a lot of concern about the Iranians. It turns out that a lot of this comes from our own ignorance of how things work because in fact, in most parts of the region, the Iranians are not the source of Islamic fundamentalism. The Central Asians are Sunni, not Shiite Muslims. Plus, they don't have any language commonality with the Iranians.

Q: They really are not very religious anyway.

COTTER: No. In some areas, they are. This is a different subset of the problem. In the populous urban areas of Uzbekistan, and in Tajikistan, people are quite religious. There always was, in Central Asia, a dichotomy. There were the nomadic peoples and the sedentary peoples. The sedentary peoples were always more religious and more organized than were the nomads. The Turkmen are cultural Muslims but certainly not religious. I bet there are not 100 people in that country who know all of the Muslim rituals of Islam. For instance, you never hear the call to prayer. A lot of that the Soviets beat out of them, but much of it wasn't there even before the Soviets arrived. But there are other areas, such as the Fergana Valley, where Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan come together, where indeed there is a problem with religious fundamentalists. But where it comes from is Saudi Arabia. The source is what is called in the former Soviet Union the "Wahhabis." They are who are in Chechnya and are funded by Saudi money. Wahhabism is a very conservative, very strict strain of Islam that grew out of Saudi Arabia, not from Iran. It is also a movement that wouldn't have much sympathy in Iran. My feeling on this has been that Iran's goals in this part of the world predate religion. The Iranians, I think, are like other former imperial people in the world. They consider themselves Persians. Maybe whoever runs the place now claims to speak for God, but I think when you scratch an ayatollah, you get a Persian. For them, Central Asia is part of their historic sphere of influence. These areas belonged to them once upon a time, and they still see the region as their natural sphere of influence. There is no doubt that Iran has goals in the area, but they are not primarily goals that have to do with the propaganda of Shiite Islam; they are goals that have to do with regaining Persia's historical influence in the area. So, we watched the Iranians, but they weren't having much success. The Afghan War we also watched, to some extent.

This part of the world highlights one of the very interesting problems for the U.S., internally, and that is how we organize ourselves to watch and monitor a region. Central Asia is at the cusp of three different bureaucratic spheres of influence in the State Department. Responsibility for the countries of the former Soviet Union is under the special advisor to the Secretary for the New Independent States (SINIS). I understand that under the planned reorganization of the Department, SINIS is going to finally be a bureau. It is going to be called EEE, Eastern Europe and Eurasia. I gather that it is called Eastern Europe because the Ukrainians and the Moldovans want to be considered Europeans. Iran, of course, comes under the Near East bureau (NEA). Afghanistan comes under the South Asia bureau (SA), along with Pakistan and India. So there are three bureaus, all of which are responsible for developing our policy in the region. Clearly, the SINIS people focus mainly on Russia. For them, Central Asia is really on the periphery. Again, it is on the periphery for NEA. It is a little bit less on the periphery for South Asia, but even South Asia is uncomfortable with it. As a result, there ends up being something of a policy vacuum because no one really takes charge of overall policy.

Our policy on Afghanistan has been hampered by the fact that we are not comfortable sitting down with the Iranians and talking about it. The fact is that if you can't talk with the Iranians about Afghanistan, you are not going to solve the problem. So, most of our Afghan brief is mostly out of Pakistan, as it had been during the war. There is access to Afghanistan from Turkmenistan, but I don't know of anybody who even visited the northern coalition cities, some of which you can drive to from Ashgabat. While I was there, the assistant secretary for South Asian affairs came through Ashgabat twice on a briefing mission. She came to talk with the president about it, but that was about all. The Turkmen had been willing to host a peace conference of the Afghans, but the Afghans haven't gotten far enough along to be able to do that. So, we watched these things, but not as our primary point of interest. The other limit on our ability to track these things in depth, of course, is the problem of limited staffing. Basically, we were not going to accomplish much of anything. When the former Soviet Union countries first opened up, we had the ambassador and what later became a deputy chief of mission. There was a big controversy in the Department and it eventually designated most of the embassies as special embassy program (SEP) posts. Originally, SEP posts did not have a DCM. That created confusion, particularly with other agencies, about who ought to be in charge when the ambassador was gone. The Department, after mulling this over for several years, finally created SEP DCMs, which is a DCM without any of the perks that a DCM normally gets. They don't get dedicated housing; they don't get the silver and china, and all the rest of that. So our staffing consisted of an ambassador, a DCM, one political-economic officer - I'll go through the State people first - one communicator, one secretary, a vice consul, an administrative officer, and a general services officer. Then, we had a contract facility maintenance person and a one-person defense attachï¿½ office, which most of the time was staffed by people on TDY from the Marshall Center in Germany. We also had a regional affairs officer and a communicator. That was the total staffing. Now, we also had PIT positions.

Q: Part- time?

COTTER: PIT stands for "Part-time, intermittent, temporary." The positions are usually held by spouses or eligible family members. So, we had one spouse who supervised commercial and USIA activities. Ultimately, the defense attachï¿½ office hired a spouse to work there. We had an administrative assistant position that we finally changed to a contract position because we didn't have a spouse to fill it. And we had a contract person who managed AID programs. So, that is a very small embassy. Even when you share the reporting responsibilities, for instance, the consular work took maybe 30% of the vice consul's time. So, we finally had that position redesignated to political/consular, and the consular officer was responsible for the law enforcement portfolio. He also did a lot of the regional reporting, traveling around the country. So, even when you divided things up among the DCM, political/economic, and political/consular officers, you don't have very deep coverage of anything.

Q: You had your two year tour limitation.

COTTER: That means incredible changes. I arrived in November 1995, and in summer of 1996, everybody but me left. With two year tours, the first set of American staff was there from 1992 to 1994, and then a second group from 1994 to 1996, and then a third from 1996 to 1998. There are not many tour extensions in a place like Ashgabat for a number of reasons. The main one is that the "stans" don't have a very good reputation. Ashgabat's reputation isn't so bad, actually. We haven't had trouble filling the positions. The real problem is one I mentioned when I was talking about being in Turkey, and that is the fact that most of the positions are Russian language designated. That is a 10 month training course. So, the Department assigns the job one year and a half ahead of when the person is going to take the position, so they can take language. Well, that means you come out of language training and arrive at post in August. Your job is on the bid list for the next summer to allow the next person to start language training then. This means you have to decide between September and November, barely 3 months after arriving, whether you are going to extend. Frankly, Ashgabat isn't the kind of place where many people are going to make that leap of faith. So, in the summer of 1996, at one point in the middle of the summer, the embassy staff consisted of me and a summer intern. Literally, we were all that was there, plus a communicator. When I left at the end of August 1998, we had another complete turnover. The only person who was a holdover was the second communicator. Everybody else was on two year tours. What happens, of course, is that the ambassador is on a three year tour. So every six years, the ambassadorial tour coincides with everyone else's two year tour. I started warning people about this a year ahead of time, before the bid cycle, making the point that either the Department needed to make sure that replacements arrived at the very start of the summer, or it needed to do one of two things with me: either pull me out six months early or leave me there for six months longer. Either way it needed to do something on this. Well, of course, the Department simply can't deal with a problem like this, so they ignored it. I shouldn't say that. It is not being fair. Most of the 1998 replacements did arrive in time to overlap with the person they were replacing. I stayed until the end of August, and everyone was on board by then, except for the new regional affairs officer and the new administrative officer. I had six weeks of overlap with the new DCM and about a month overlap with the new political-economic officer and two and one-half months overlap with the general services officer. But, when I walked out that door, there was no institutional memory at that post beyond six weeks. Happily, by the time I left, we did have files. We had worked very hard on creating a coherent set of files and a historical file of diplomatic notes and a whole bunch of things. But, still, it will take that new group at least six months to really know what they are doing. Then, after a year there, they will all be busy bidding on new posts. It is very hard.

Another problem in small posts is the enormous number of reports and taskers that need to be done. One goal of the SEP program was to cut back on reports and taskers sent to small posts. It hasn't succeeded worth a hill of beans. Before taskers are laid on SEP embassies, they are supposed to be cleared off by a special office in the under secretariat for management. That doesn't work. Sometimes, we would just ignore uncleared taskers, and say, "This isn't cleared." Sometimes, if we cared about it, we would go back with a message and say, "How can I act on this, because it isn't cleared?" But then when people do go to clear action messages, that office always clears them. I don't know if they ever say, "Why do you need this information from this SEP post?" The number of reports and things that SEP posts have to do really isn't that much smaller than normal embassies. We spent an awful amount of time simply keeping up with the paperwork.

As I said before, most of my time, I think, was spent on training. Again, having people in the position they are in for the first time and not having any layers really of supervisors sort of means that as ambassador, I was sort of supervising everyone to the extent that I could. The DCM who is there now has had a lot of experience. The previous one was a very bright, very ambitious officer, who came to the job as an 02 in an 01 job because she wanted to begin to punch her management ticket. But, her previous post had been as one of several officers in the internal political section in Moscow. She had a couple earlier tours as well, but she had never written an EER. She had never managed anything. I gave her a lot of responsibility for managing the embassy because that is what she wanted to learn, and that is what I felt was important for her as a DCM. So, she did less substantive reporting than might otherwise have been the case because she was focusing on management. I did quite a bit of the reporting, although I didn't take on an actual portfolio. My successor and I talked about this a lot. He has to figure out how he wants to do this, whether he wants the DCM to really be more of a substantive officer and he will be the manager, or vice versa. One area we had a really difficult time in was the back-up consular staffing. The Department, to its discredit, continues to send brand-new vice consuls to places like Ashgabat. That is, a new officer straight out of basic training and the basic consular course coming to a post with no experienced consular officer to supervise him or her. There is a regional consular officer in Frankfurt who travels around the region and helps, but that's all. We were blessed in having, while I was in Ashgabat, great junior officers who were up to this. But I know when the new group came out in 1996 and the subject came up, there was nobody in the embassy who had ever done an MRV.

Q: An MRV is a?

COTTER: A machine-readable visa. The political/economic officer had been a consular officer two tours earlier, before they had machine-readable visas. He had no idea how to do one. Well, the new vice consul, fresh out of basic training, had to teach this guy how to do a machine-readable visa so he could fill in when the vice consul wasn't there. Those kinds of problems drive a manager up a wall. The administrative officers have an enormous range of responsibilities, some of which involve legal requirements and have real implications if they are not done correctly. But what is expected when one becomes an administrative officer is that he or she has done most of the administrative specialties and has some experience. Again, the administrative officer who was in Ashgabat the whole time I was there was a 0-4. Again, she was a very bright officer, very interested in getting better, but who didn't bring a whole lot of experience with the full breadth of her responsibilities. So, I found that I was spending a lot of time talking with people and helping them through problems, sorting out and trying to make sure that things were being done the way they were supposed to be done. We did the annual certification letter, which is a letter that every ambassador does in October, in which he or she certifies that there are no major shortcomings, no major legal or other gaps at post. When we did the first of those, it was the first time my DCM or administrative officer had ever seen one. I had to tell them, "Look, I'm going to sign this, but I am going to assume that the two of you have indeed verified that we don't have any of these material shortcomings - that your inventories, your financial papers, and that everything else is in order." The Department will send out a questionnaire embassies can use to check for shortcomings, which we asked for. In the normal embassy, the ambassador would never know to ask for that, especially if you get an ambassador who has never been a DCM, whose only previous jobs have been in the political section or in the Department because the political section never deals with this letter. He or she would not even be aware of it. Yet, in a place like Turkmenistan, the ambassador is probably the only one who understands that these things need to be done. It was a very interesting experience.

Q: Were there any negotiations, plans concerning a pipeline through Turkmenistan for oil? You have reservoirs of oil in Central Asia, and you have the problem of Afghanistan, which is also Iran, then you have the Caucuses which are fragmented and unruly. Did this come up at all?

COTTER: Yes, it came up everyday, all day. Can we maybe save this for the next tape?

Q: Sure.

COTTER: This will take some time, I think, to go over this accurately.

Q: All right. Well, why don't we stop at this point, and we will pick it up next time. You have talked generally about Turkmenistan, including administration of the embassy, the problems of Turkmenistan, and all. But now we want to come to something that concerned you, and everyone in that area. That is oil politics. We will talk about that. Is there anything else we should cover?

COTTER: We haven't talked at all about what other embassies are there. That is sort of interesting.

Q: All right.

COTTER: We ought to talk a little bit about what life was like in this kind of a country, in terms of what is there and what is not, traveling around the country. I think there are a number of other things.

Q: Social life.

COTTER: Social life.

Q: Good. Okay.

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Today is the 5th of February 1999. Mike, we are going to talk about oil and oil lines because the main thing about Central Asia has been figuring out how to get the oil out of there. You want to talk about your view, what was happening during your time?

COTTER: Right. Well, a couple bits of history here. One is that the Caspian areas had oil for a long time in a number of areas, particularly southwestern Azerbaijan. The Russians first used oil from there in the late 1800s. The oil bubbled up to the surface, in 1870, before people really were clear what to do with it. Azeri fields were a major source of oil for the Russian Empire and for the Soviet Union for a long time. During the Second World War, the Baku oil fields were a major target of the Germans. Indeed, there is today, in Turkmenistan on the Caspian Sea, an oil refinery which was provided to Russia under Lend Lease from the United States. It was originally in a town in Russia, and then, when that town came under threat, the Russians moved the refinery down to the Caspian Sea. The Turkmen are very proud of the fact that this is Land Lease and still running (although they are now replacing it). So, oil has been in the area for a long time. The Soviets, of course, didn't go about exploring very effectively or very efficiently, and their technology to draw out oil was very limited. They also did a very dirty job of it. When you go to western Turkmenistan to the oil fields there, there are incredible hulks of machinery lying around and hundreds of these donkey engines...

Q: I think they are these up and down things.

COTTER: Up and down things pumping oil, some of which work, and some of which don't. In any event, in the 1970s and later on, the Soviets put most of their effort into exploiting Siberian oil and gas fields, and they really stopped investing in the Caspian area. A lot of the oil in the Caspian is quite deep, but the Soviets didn't have the technology to exploit it. In any event, when those countries became independent, two things happened... by those countries, we really are talking about Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. Now, Azerbaijan is where most of the oil was exploited in the Caspian basin, not much in Turkmenistan.

Q: Baku.

COTTER: Baku is the capital of Azerbaijan, and it sits right on the Caspian. I'm not certain how much of the deposits in Kazakhstan were well known, but certainly soon after independence day, the Kazakhs encouraged foreign companies to come and take a look at them. Turkmenistan, as I said yesterday, has primarily gas, and not so much oil. It doesn't have so much experience in exploiting oil. I can talk a little bit later how the Turkmen were a little slow getting off the mark. The major international oil companies, as usual on the outlook for new reserves, were very interested, I think, right after independence. I have seen it written and said that U.S. Government policy in this area is motivated by and formed by the oil companies. I think that is not quite accurate. I think what you have is a conjunction of interests. Our interests in the area are fairly clear. Essentially, it is to help to do what we can to ensure the political independence of the countries of the former Soviet Union. The reason for that, obviously, is to prevent or help avoid a re-creation of a Soviet or a Russian Empire that ends up becoming another challenge to us. Obviously, hand-in-hand with political independence goes economic viability. This is a real problem in some of the countries, especially those which must import energy and are energy dependent and which have not found productive activities to replace those that they engaged in during the Soviet Union. Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Belarus are all examples of this. So it seems fairly clear, perhaps shortsighted, although I don't think so, that for those countries that do have an economic resource that can be exploited upon which their economic independence can be based and solidified, it is only reasonable that they would pursue that. When you come to Azerbaijan, I think the oil is the only major resource of any kind they have. Kazakhstan has a number of alternatives, but very clearly oil will be a major part of their economic development. Turkmenistan has cotton, but I don't think anybody would suggest that a cotton mono-culture is any better than exploiting a natural resource like gas. So, for those countries that have oil or gas, it automatically becomes the prime candidate for forging economic strength that will underlie their political independence. The fact that this coincides with oil companies' interest is obvious, but I think it is a mistake to suggest that oil companies drive our policy. I think U.S. policy would be the same if it were another natural resource. It is true, however, that oil companies coming into the region then have a significant influence in what the United States does and how it does it. I think in Kazakhstan, which I can't speak to directly, but certainly the oil companies there have been very influential and have good access to the embassy. The embassy assists them in any way possible, as we would any other company. The same is true in Azerbaijan, where there is a large number of American oil companies. It is true to a lesser extent in Turkmenistan, although only UNOCAL and Mobil have been working there. We work very closely with those companies.

In Soviet days, and still to this day, all pipelines in the Soviet Union, and the markets for energy resources in the Soviet countries, went essentially from the southern area north and west. Turkmen gas went north and west. The oil pipelines that existed went through southern Russia, to Novorossiysk, on the Black Sea, from whence they were exported. Those pipelines, in most cases, are old and suffer from the general Soviet lack of maintenance and technology. In any event, they were only developed to export the quantity of oil that the Soviet Union was planning on exporting. Once there are independent countries, each of which wants to maximize what it is doing, all of a sudden the need for export capacity goes up exponentially. We had to negotiate agreements with governments that aren't very familiar with this, which took up a lot of time in all of these countries. All of them felt that they were sitting on great riches, that it was a seller's market, and that they could extract terms from the oil companies that would make them wealthy forever. Well, the oil companies didn't look at it that way. At the present time, this is incremental oil. The oil companies and western governments tend to look at Caspian oil as a strategic reserve for, perhaps, sometime in the 21st century. This was obviously not something that the countries in the Caspian liked, since they are not interested in exploiting a resource in the 21st century. They want to exploit it today. Nonetheless, there were as you might expect the normal conflicts in negotiating agreements. We have seen replicated already in Turkmenistan in one case and I think we will see in some of the other countries, what has happened in other parts of the world. That is, the first company in an area, particularly with natural resource exploitation, comes in and says, "Well, nobody has been here before. This is a new market, a very risky market. We need a return that reflects the risk we are taking." Then, they negotiate an agreement that gives them a significant return. Their investment proves out. They get along with the government, and the second and third companies come in. Well, the risk level has dropped. They are willing to settle for less return. Well, the government signs on with better terms for those companies and then looks at the first contract and thinks it was taken advantage of. Then comes an effort to renegotiate, or simply, flat out break the contract. I have seen this happen in Ecuador. It happened in Mexico a long time ago, and it has happened in other countries. It happened in Turkmenistan in the case of an Argentine company, Bridas, which had the gas and some oil exploration and production agreements with the Turkmen government. The Turkmen reneged on these and have been in arbitration and court over them for some time. So, the first stage, which took some time, was negotiating agreements and for these countries to determine how they were going to go allowing foreign companies in. There is also a lot of jockeying because some of these projects were quite large, and so involve consortia, rather than single companies.

I should say that there is one other difficulty here that the companies are now wrestling with and that is going to cause a great problem. That is a shortage of oil rigs for offshore work in the Caspian. Parts of the Caspian are very deep, and the Soviets didn't do any deep water drilling, or did very little. They had only a couple of deep water rigs. These were in Azerbaijan, and I think at this point only one is useable. They had some shallow water rigs, most of which, again, aren't useable. So, the companies that come in have been forced to figure out how they are going to carry out drilling. Rehabilitating one of these rigs can cost a couple hundred million dollars. Bringing a new rig in is almost impossible because you have to break it up into pieces, and bring it from the Black Sea, up the Don River, to the Volga-Don Canal, and down the Volga River. That may not be feasible. You could build one in the area except the technology and the construction expertise used to build that kind of thing doesn't exist there. So, companies have had a very hard time meeting their drilling timetables. This is important to them because most of the contracts with the government require the consortium to drill a certain number of test wells within a specified period of time. I think it is fairly clear that a number of the consortia in Azerbaijan are not going to meet their deadlines, and they are going to have to renegotiate, simply because they don't have rigs that they can use.

Q: I want to concentrate, because this is your oil history on Turkmenistan.

COTTER: Okay. Well, then you get a somewhat different picture. Let me move more quickly through this. Anyhow, the third thing is getting the oil out. On that, there has been a lot of discussion. There is the oil pipeline that goes to Novorossiysk, which comes up from Azerbaijan. The companies in Kazakhstan have been negotiating with the Russians to build a pipeline, which would go north of the Caspian Sea and connect with the pipeline to Novorossiysk. The U.S. has been working very hard on negotiating pipelines from Baku, across the Caucasus to the Black Sea, or then down through Turkey to the Mediterranean. You can get Stan Escudero in here at some point to talk about all that. Turkmenistan was a little different, again, because it is focused on gas. But it shares with the other countries the difficulty that they think it is a seller's market, or have thought that it is a seller's market, and that they were in charge. When UNOCAL came in, they first got into trouble because the Argentines had originally had the concession from the Turkmen to build a pipeline down to Pakistan. UNOCAL came in and negotiated with them and UNOCAL and Bridas have been involved in a lawsuit ever since. The Turkmen felt they could dictate price and how the project proceeded. Well, the fact of the matter is that what is going to dictate it is how much it costs to build a pipeline, and then what the market in Pakistan is. It turned out that the Afghan civil war is preventing any pipeline from being built for now, but even if a pipeline was built, it's not clear that a sufficient market exists in Pakistan to use the gas. A lot of the projections that were done by UNOCAL originally were betting on the cone. They were looking at Pakistani projections of what their need for energy will be, what their growth would be, over a period of time. It has been assumed that most of this gas would be used to generate electricity. I think, as with most countries, Pakistan's projections were wildly optimistic. It has also been thought that the only way the project would really make sense would be to extend the pipeline on to India, which makes a lot of economic sense, but probably faces some political difficulty. UNOCAL put together a consortium with a couple of Japanese companies, or an Indonesia company controlled by Japanese, and a Saudi company, to carry out the pipeline. That consortium still exists, although as I left Turkmenistan, it was practically moribund.

This is really difficult for the companies because there is a whole series of negotiations that have to take place. They can talk with the Turkmen, on one hand, about exploiting gas. Really, the way their contract with the Turkmen read, it simply required Turkmenistan to deliver to the border X amount of gas and to prove that it had the reserves to do that. The assumption was that the Turkmen would pump that gas themselves and get it to the border. The fact of the matter is that we believe that any banks that finance the project would want to have an international operator in from the beginning, but UNOCAL simply felt that they would sort that out if and when the time came. Well, they also had to negotiate with the Pakistanis, and they had to negotiate with the Afghans. Negotiating with the Afghans was very difficult because they had to decide who to negotiate with. This caused enormous difficulties as it wasn't clear who was in charge. The government in Kabul during most of this time was what is called the Northern Alliance. It insisted as the "government" of Afghanistan that it would be involved in the project, Even though they didn't control the route. Since late 1996 the Taliban has controlled the entire route, but it has been very difficult for UNOCAL to find someone in the Taliban who can speak to this issue definitively, because it is not a very organized entity. There have always been concerns about Taliban ability to control the pipeline. Then, UNOCAL had to negotiate with the Pakistanis. The Pakistanis have had their own difficulties. One of the other elements that entered into this was Saudi interests. In the battle between Bridas and UNOCAL as to who was going to build the line, at one point Bridas had claimed to have the support of Prince Turki. I think his full name is Turki bin Faisal, who is the head of Saudi secret service. He is a very influential person. UNOCAL, on its side, had another Saudi company, headed by an influential businessman. There was much toing and froing as to which of either of these consortia the Saudis actually supported. At one point, we sent Embassy Riyadh in to ask the Saudi Government what the heck was going on. We discovered, as one might expect, that the government took no interest in it at all. But it is often difficult to separate influential Saudis' individual interests from their government positions. That finally got sorted out, but not without many anxious moments.

Another issue came into this equation. That was the position of Iran. There were a number of people who were saying that the Iranians would never allow this pipeline to go through. They wanted to sell their own gas to Pakistan. Iranian gas primarily comes from the oil fields, down on the gulf. But the question is whether Iran wanted that competition. This gets into another digression, which is the geopolitical importance of Central Asia. Maybe I will come back to that, because it is something worth talking about on its own.

Q: We want to make sure we are focusing on you, rather than a general lecture on this. Your experiences, because...

COTTER: I know what you are after. My experience was fairly limited because we didn't have, other than UNOCAL's interest, very active foreign oil companies that depended upon the embassy for anything. The U.S. Government's position has always been that we are not a party to the pipeline, it was the company's. This is difficult for the Turkmen to understand and difficult for others. In late 1995, when UNOCAL signed its agreement with the Turkmen, it was signed in the United States. The U.S. Government came out and said that we supported the UNOCAL project. This created, in all other governments' minds, the impression that the U.S. Government was involved in this. Of course, our real position was more sophisticated. That is that we want these countries to exploit their energy resources, and we think it is great if American companies are participating because we think American companies are the best companies in the world, but we don't take the position of any one company. UNOCAL preferred to hedge on that. The Turkmen preferred to say that they had the United States Government as a partner, as did the Pakistanis and others. This came to a head at several points. It came to a head the first time a document was signed on this pipeline agreement. It was signed by the president of Pakistan, the president of Turkmenistan, and someone representing Afghanistan. They came to us and said, "We want someone from the United States Government to sign this." My answer was, "We don't have a horse in this race. UNOCAL is your partner, not the U.S. Government. We think this is a great project, and we are 150% behind you." The Turkmen have never really understood this very clearly. It is also a factor to some extent in how they divide up foreign influence to ensure that everybody has an interest. President Niyazov, for a while when I was there, indicated that UNOCAL had eastern Turkmenistan and Mobil had western Turkmenistan. Neither Mobil nor UNOCAL liked that idea, but in Niyazov's mind, he wanted American oil companies there, and it was cleaner to divide these things up because that way you don't have "unruly" competition. Why did Niyazov want to have American oil companies there? I think, certainly in the early couple of years, when the Turkmen and these other countries were very concerned about a return of the Russians, they had a feeling that not only was there energy to exploit, but the companies and companies' investments could be held hostage to continued U.S. Government involvement. In other words, if you have a German company or an Argentine company, and the Russians start to play hard ball, the U.S. Government isn't going to take any interest in it. On the other hand, if you have American oil companies in there and there is a problem, the U.S. Government will undoubtedly come in and defend your interest. This never gets articulated, certainly never in a meeting with me, but it was always there, implied.

Q: There is a certain rationale to it.

COTTER: Sure, and I think they are right. Historically, I think that is exactly the truth. Generally, my position on this was when companies came to town, be they oil or other companies, to sit in on their meetings with the president if they wanted me to. If they didn't want me to, that was fine too. There were a number of companies, oil and others, that we would basically hear were in town when we read in the newspaper that they had met with the president. Exxon is famous for this. Exxon finally won some contracts for exploration, and I don't think they ever darkened the door of the embassy. UNOCAL, on the other hand, worked very closely with us. I think I sat in on almost all of UNOCAL's meetings with the president. Mobil, similarly, when they had senior people in town, I would sit in on the meetings with them. Once you got past an introductory meeting or when the chairman came, basically, as you might guess, the oil companies are perfectly capable of carrying out their own negotiations. They usually only meet us when they have a problem. They didn't have any problems during the time I was there. The other pipeline issue that I did get involved in was a pipeline west. Turkey wanted Turkmen gas very badly. Turkey, right now, is dependent on gas from Russia, and they import some liquefied natural gas, which is very expensive, from North Africa. Turkey had been talking for some time with Iran and Turkmenistan. There have been a number of possibilities here. The main one was a pipeline from Turkmenistan into and through Iran, and on into Turkey.

Al Haig, Sr. was involved, back in 1993, as a private businessman, in promoting such a project. The Turkmen, in their innocence, figured that dealing with Al Haig, since he was a prominent senior American, obviously meant that the U.S. Government supported whatever project he was pushing. It was to their great shock that they discovered that the U.S. Government strongly opposed the pipeline going through Iran. Before I arrived in Ashgabat, this was a major issue. We would go in and beat the Turkmen over the head on a regular basis about how bad the Iranians were, and how they really shouldn't have anything to do with the Iranians. Well, they have a 1,000 mile border with Iran, and it is fairly clear that they are going to deal with Iran. I soft pedaled that point the entire time I was there. We talked about it and it was obvious that they understood our position and I understood their position. So, I stopped beating them over the head about their relationship with Iran. The only issue remaining then was whether or not the U.S. Government would support a gas pipeline that went through Iran to Turkey. Once again, the Turkmen think they are the center of the universe, but the fact of the matter is the real client on this is Turkey, and our interest in helping ensure Turkey's energy independence. The question of where this pipeline would go was a major issue during my whole tenure there. We came up with, in 1997, the idea of a trans-Caucasus gas pipeline that would parallel the oil pipelines we were talking about. We have been working ever since in trying to put that together. That is a real problem because it involves a pipeline from Turkmenistan, under the Caspian Sea, which in itself isn't difficult except that the status of the Caspian Sea is up in the air. The Russians still claim to have an interest in all of the Caspian Sea, and the Russians are clearly not going to be happy to see this gas pipeline succeed because this is truly a zero sum game. Every cubic meter of gas that Turkmenistan sells to Turkey or the West is a cubic meter of Russian gas that either doesn't get sold or for which the contracts have to be renegotiated. The project also involves building a pipeline through Azerbaijan and Georgia and/or Armenia. All of those countries have their difficulties. I think President Niyazov has always been skeptical as to whether that pipeline would ever work because he felt the Russians and/or the Iranians, by disrupting the situation in one or another of the Caspian countries, would disrupt that pipeline. Nonetheless, we talked it up very heavily. The U.S. Government has never really had its act together on this. We, I think, have found, when I was there, confusion between the State Department, Commerce Department, and Ex-Im Bank over who was actually formulating and who was running the policy. I must say that when you sat in Ashgabat, you were often at the end of the information line. The State Department, with whom we would have most of our contact, purported to have control of policy, but frankly during most of my time there it simply didn't. It didn't have the expertise or the people. Commerce Department was quite aggressive in pushing its policy prescription. Ex-Im Bank played an ancillary role as the ultimate financier and was engaged with a number of the people that the Turkmen had engaged to help them on this. Ultimately, though, we did manage to get Niyazov to agree to support a trans-Caspian pipeline. He visited Washington in April 1998 for an official visit, at which we pinned him down on this.

I found, as difficult as dealing with Niyazov and the Turkmen on this was, that somehow dealing with and getting Washington to understand what things were like in the field was tougher. I kept getting instructions to find out what was going on in the field, and what would convince Niyazov to support a pipeline. My answer was always the same: "Build it and they will come. Niyazov isn't going to build the pipeline. Most of it doesn't go through his country, and he doesn't have any money. He will ship gas through whatever pipeline people build. If we or someone else can build a pipeline, or at least come up with a project that has financing and is ready to go to build a pipeline under the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus, Niyazov will be happy to sell gas through it. If we can't do that, he isn't going to support it. He isn't going to support it when there is nothing there." Washington had a very hard time understanding this. They wanted a flat commitment that he wouldn't build a pipeline through Iran. At the same time that we were pressing our route, Shell Oil was busy negotiating with the Iranians to build a pipeline to Turkey, and understandably, Niyazov was unwilling to commit himself to one project or the other. I think, as of today, the issue is still in abeyance. I think Niyazov would use whatever pipeline goes through. The last I heard, the Iranian project was off. Frankly, even the trans-Caspian pipelines are a little in abeyance because with oil at $10.00 or $11.00 a barrel, it is not clear whether anybody is going to go to the expense of exploring and drilling for Caspian oil.

Q: Mike, going back to how we felt, how did you feel about the politics of saying, no, no, no, for Iran, since in the long term Iran is not going to go away. Its government will probably be different. Every once in a while, we have a bad guy at one point, certainly with China. Today, it is still Cuba. What did you feel at the time? Was this no touching Iran driven by domestic politics, congressional politics, or was this a rational policy? How did you feel about that?

COTTER: It is driven by domestic and congressional politics and by our Middle East policy, in general. One of the interesting things about the opening up of Central Asia to us is that it brings a whole new perspective on Iran to bear. Iran looks much different when you are sitting in Ashgabat with Turkmen, than it does if you are sitting in Washington. Indeed, all of our ambassadors in Central Asia, myself included, were advising Washington that we had two inconsistent sets of policies here. We had a policy that looked at Iran in terms of the Middle East, which was driven largely by Iran's continued support of Hezbollah, their refusal to accept the existence of Israel, and their support in one way or another of terrorism.

Then, there is a whole other range of issues revolving around access to Central Asia, getting Central Asia's energy resources out, and resolving the Afghanistan conflict, all of which required in a rational way cooperation with Iran. Certainly the American oil companies have been beside themselves about our policy and its impact on their ability to do business in the region. It is one clear area where it is obvious that our policy and the American oil companies' policies have not seen eye to eye. But, our policy is driven largely by congressional views and U.S. domestic views, mishandled by the Administration. The fact of the matter is that supporting an opening with Iran wins no votes, while bashing Iran is a sure vote winner. There isn't anything in it for many congressmen to come out in support of changing policy to Iran. For the Administration to do it, it would have had to have been soon after an election, when it really didn't have to face another election for some time and could take these kinds of risks. But the Clinton Administration has never been very good at that.

The whole problem is complicated. We had good conversations in Ashgabat about this because the Turkmen had quite an amicable relationship with the Iranians. They exchanged presidential visits twice a year; they had a joint commission with the foreign minister that they participated in; they had an energy dialogue. They had a number of cooperative things going on. We usually got pretty good reports from the Turkmen of their meetings. They would have loved to serve as an intermediary between the United States and Iran, should the United States want to engage the Iranians more in opening up. Ashgabat would be a good place for that because you don't have to worry about a lot of press hanging around. You can certainly have private meetings. So, the Turkmen were very interested in playing an intermediary role.

There are two sides to the Iran issue. One is the United States policy and our hang-ups, but the other one is the Iranians' own problem. For a long time, it has been clear that no Iranian is going to win any votes by being nice to the United States. The election of President Khatami really opened up some new possibilities, since he is considerably more liberal, considerably more open to opening up dialogue with us and changing. But also he very clearly is someone in limited control of his own political situation. I used to have very good discussions with the Turkmen foreign minister about this. We sought his counsel as to how to proceed. His advice, informal during that period, was that we had to proceed very carefully. Overtures by the United States to Iran that were seen by the conservatives as going too far would simply serve to encourage them to cut Khatami back further. So, whatever was done was going to have to be very carefully orchestrated. The Turkmen were, obviously, very hopeful that the situation would improve. We had a number of congressional visitors, almost all of whom would see President Niyazov and bash Iran. Niyazov was very effective in these discussions in explaining his situation vis-a-vis Iran and his disagreement with that policy. I must say, I'm not sure I saw any great change, but there did begin to be some openings in the Congress looking at the broader perspective. Senator Brownback, who is certainly no friend of Iran, is promoting a Silk Road policy of trying to put more assistance in for the Central Asian countries. His exposure to that over time will change his views because you can't deal with that part of the world and not change your view on what Iran is and what role it needs to play. On Afghanistan we had to deal with Iran. There are some who believe that Russia, for its own purposes, doesn't want Afghanistan at peace because conflict there enables them to justify keeping troops in Tajikistan. There are some who feel that Iran doesn't want Afghanistan at peace because if it is, then the Pakistanis have a much, much more direct access to the markets in Central Asia and that Iran doesn't want. Frankly, I think the Afghan conflict is disagreeable enough that probably everybody would like to see it resolved sooner rather than later. The only question is the terms. We really are outside players in this. We would like to be a central player on Afghanistan, but the fact of the matter is we are not willing to put in resources or bodies or anything else to solve it.

Q: Are there any Russian troops in Turkmenistan? I know they were in Kyrgyzstan.

COTTER: No. They have approximately 500 Russian border guards there on contract, serving the Turkmen border guards. Unlike Kyrgyzstan, the border guards are Turkmen, with a number of Russians, mostly in communications and transportation. They also have probably a couple of hundred other military advisors, who again serve on a contract basis. But those numbers are dropping. My guess is the number of advisors is about several hundred. The Russians actually closed the bases they had in Turkmenistan and the Turkmen encouraged them to be closed back in 1993. So, you certainly get a different view of Iran when you sit in Ashgabat 35 kilometers from the border. As I said before, Iran's goals in the region are Persian goals, not Muslim goals. I think the opening up of Central Asia probably will help over time in changing our view of Iran simply because we will be forced to engage Iran on different issues than we have in the past.

Q: Did you get a feel for any changing attitudes in Iran? As we are talking now, it is the 20th anniversary of the arrival of Ayatollah Khomeini back into Iran, the 20th anniversary of the revolution. Things aren't going terribly well. The young people want to get on with things. The Iranians are smart people. This clerical government doesn't sit terribly well.

COTTER: I think my insight to this is what any intelligent observer who follows international press gets. That is, the fact that Khatami won 77% of the vote indicates that people are dissatisfied. Our access to and exposure to Iranians, of course, was very limited. The Iranian ambassador in Ashgabat was a businessman from Meshed, whose family had a lot of business interests. Obviously, he and I never sat down and talked about this. Since I have a beard and he has a beard, President Niyazov used to delight in posing the two of us together. At state dinners and other events, the ambassadors would all troop up and have our picture taken together with Niyazov. He would say, "Oh, my two brothers," and would get me on one side and the Iranian on the other. It was never very clear who was more uncomfortable. The Iranian seemed to be a very nice guy. He spoke English very well. I would have enjoyed getting to know him.

Q: This diplomatic game of not recognizing people and not talking has always struck me as being completely undiplomatic. In other words, you talk to people no matter what. We end up by playing it. It is like withdrawing your ambassador if the situation gets tense. We used to feel that it was a good idea to have an ambassador, the highest person you can have in a country.

COTTER: I guess that is true, but on the other hand, people would read a lot into it. If the Iranian ambassador and I were deeply engaged in social discussion, much would be made of it. Basically, what happened is we sort of avoided each other. Every once in a while, I would be in a situation where I had to shake his hand and he would have to shake mine. But usually we would simply circulate in other parts of a reception. Given that, if we had started talking, it would have created enough of an impression that ultimately somebody would report back to Washington that I had been cozy with the Iranian, and I would hear about it. Also, there really wasn't anything to talk about, other than to exchange pleasantries. We are not going to get engaged in policy issues. I have no guidance. Indeed, our instructions are fairly clear. We communicate with the Iranians through specific channels in Switzerland. We, as individual diplomats, are not encouraged to free lance on this. We didn't see very many Iranian businessmen in Ashgabat. The Iranians wanted to get into business but were constrained by the fact that their internal controls are fairly strict. And they don't speak the language. Their way of doing business is not as effective as either the Turks or the Pakistanis. There was one Iranian store in town. I used to go in and shop, as you could find canned goods there. The Iranians make really great pickled garlic. I remember one time we were doing our cost of living survey. We would go around to different grocery stores and write down the prices. Our spouses, who were doing the survey, went into the Iranian store and had a notebook to write things down. Someone from the store came up and asked what they were doing. The spouses responded that they were from the American embassy and they were doing a survey, and they were kicked out of the store. The Iranians wanted to have the Turkmen be more open in giving them visas. The Turkmen were very reluctant to do so because I think they were concerned about exactly who was going to be traveling. It is also difficult to travel into Iran from Turkmenistan. There is a road that goes south from Ashgabat through a pass in the mountains and crosses the border about 30 kilometers away. Meshed is 250 kilometers from Ashgabat. A number of my diplomatic colleagues drove to Meshed and generally found that even though they had gotten a visa, after much waiting, they could be delayed at the border for a good period of time because, of course, the border in Iran isn't controlled by foreign ministry immigration people, but revolutionary guards. There was a UN mediator in Tajikistan, a Uruguayan, Perez-Ballon was his name. At one point, when the Turkmen were hosting peace talks on Tajikistan, Perez-Ballon was in town and decided since he was there he would take a trip down to Meshed. They had arranged all of this with the Iranians because there was an Iranian delegation involved in Tajik talks as well. He got to the border and waited five hours. Finally, he was turned around because whatever documents he had gotten from the foreign ministry had not been communicated to the border. He was then present in a meeting- (end of tape)

Q: You were saying the Iranian foreign minister...

COTTER: Yes, called the next day and offered to send his plane to fly Perez-Ballon to Tehran, apologizing for this misunderstanding at the border. Well, by that time, he was leaving and wasn't going. The episode just highlights that the revolutionary guards are very careful about whom they let in.

Q: Also, they are powers within powers within the government.

COTTER: That's right, many of whom are controlled by conservatives. When my British colleague and his wife went to Meshed, they wanted to see a famous Shiite tomb. I don't remember who it is now, but one of the major Shia religious figures. I'm sure one of the imams, but I'm not sure which one. It is not Ali because Ali is buried in Mazar-e Sharif in Afghanistan. But, they weren't allowed to visit it. They tried to do so and first were turned back, then when they explained who they were, and they were asked if they were Muslims. When they said, "No," they were told they couldn't go inside. So there were a lot of constraints, dealing with the Iranians. The Iranians were not dealing terribly effectively in Turkmenistan.

Q: Looking at this, when you left in 1998, what was your impression of whither Turkmenistan? From what I gather, you have some natural resources. You have cotton, and types of governments come and go, but basically, these are not a technologically... In fact, the whole damn area, there are mainly people who have been nomadic for centuries. The rule that was there was Russian, which really didn't impart an awful lot. The technology, behind the West and all that. Why, do you figure? Do you think Turkmenistan is going to stay viable or become part of something?

COTTER: A lot of that is beyond the control of the Turkmen. One of the key issues in the area is with Russia, which is a critical issue. If Russia decides that it really is Western focused, that it really is European, and that its future lies with development with the West, I think the countries in Central Asia have, for the midterm, pretty good prospects. If the Russians decide once again that the West is their enemy, that they are being betrayed and cheated by the West, and that their only hope is to form another union, and if they can manage to organize themselves sufficiently to do so, I would think that the future of the Central Asian countries is much in doubt. Clearly, if Russia were able to exercise greater political and military control over that part of the world, beyond rhetoric, there is not much we would do about it. So, the constraint is Russia's own disorganization and impotence at the present time. If the Russians were able to and decided to reassert their authority over those countries, I don't think there is much question but what they could do so.

Similarly, if you look beyond the midterm, it is very hard to tell what will happen in that part of the world. You have an Iran which has historical interest in this area. You have the Pakistanis, or let's say, the Pashtun peoples from Afghanistan and Pakistan, who feel they have a historical interest in this region. At one point, Balkh, a town in northwestern Turkmenistan, ran a significant empire in Central Asia. The Pakistanis certainly feel they have an interest. The Turks feel that they have cultural and other affinities. Now they are not as near, but one could see, at some point in the future, a new "Great Game" being played out between Russia, a resurgent Persia, and a Muslim Pakistan looking for strategic depth against India, all of which could bring a lot of pressure on these small countries. Now, it may also be that they serve as a convenient buffer between these various groups, and therefore the Russians and the Iranians and the Pakistanis or Indians and the Chinese, when you get out to Kyrgyzstan, decide that having a series of small buffer states is preferable to confronting each other directly. If that is the case, the future of those countries is probably pretty well assured.

For the short-run, I think, Turkmenistan is in pretty good shape. I think all of the Central Asian countries are in relatively good shape from that perspective, with Kyrgyzstan perhaps being the most at risk. Tajikistan is also somewhat at risk. The potential for unity amongst the Central Asians is not there. The animosities between the various ethnic groups in Central Asia are sufficient that they would not unify. The Uzbeks talk about this occasionally. The Uzbeks dominated Central Asia during most of the period before the Russians arrived. You had the Emirate of Bokhara and the Khanate of Khiva, both of which were essentially run by Uzbeks. The Kyrgyz and the Turkmen and the Tajiks, for instance, have no desire to serve under the Uzbeks. We have been pushing various ideas of cooperation and unity very hard in the various countries. AID has been very active in pushing cooperative projects, most of which the Uzbeks like and their neighbors don't care for at all. The Uzbeks have taken as their national hero Tamerlane, the empire builder. Well, the Turkmen look on Tamerlane as the one who destroyed the city of Merv for the second and definitive time. They see the Uzbeks taking Tamerlane as their national hero as an indication of the Uzbek mindset and latent aggressive tendencies. Turkmen national heroes are poets. There is obviously a difference there as to how they and the Uzbeks perceive themselves, even though the Turkmen have been a very warlike group. So, the potential for any kind of unification amongst the Central Asians I don't think is very great. I think the effort we have been spending on trying to promote that isn't going to go very far.

So, I think Turkmenistan will do okay. It has a very small population, which is still largely rural. The population has very low expectations, either in terms of material wealth or of quality of government, so it isn't going to take a very competent government to satisfy them. Obviously, they will be more demanding as time passes, but hopefully the government will be more competent at delivering services. One of the things I was happy to see in Turkmenistan is that the level of corruption has been considerably less than in some of the other countries. That may be partly a fact of there not being as much money floating around, actually or potentially, as in other countries. It may also be because the Turkmen, even at the leadership level, are not so greedy. There is no mafia as there is in Ukraine and Russia. While every minister who can get his hand in the till does, it is not for extraordinary amounts. Certainly not the corruption at a level one sees in Kazakhstan or Azerbaijan where there is corruption, partly because there is lots of oil money floating around, which has reached very significant levels. If the Turkmen can control that, they will be much better off. Turkmen officials don't live terribly ostentatiously. They all drive Mercedes Benzes but they are government Mercedes Benzes. I don't think most of them have a personal car. They wouldn't need one. They have use of the government car. Ministers are only now starting to build better houses. I don't know that any of them, including the president, has Swiss bank accounts. I'm not sure he would know what to do with a Swiss bank account if he had one. So, basically, I think it will survive as a fairly small, rural country. One of the questions is, if and when it begins to receive significant amounts of oil and gas dollars, what it will do with them. AID, to its credit, has run a number of seminars, which they would like to increase, to compare countries with natural resource wealth - those that have succeeded and those that haven't, and why. A number of Norwegian ex-ministers have come in and talked about how Norway has managed its energy money. People usually put Norway up on one side and Nigeria on the other side, as to which way you can go. I would talk to Niyazov about this, and he is quite receptive to the idea of making sure that they do well with their wealth when they get it. But planning is not his strong suit. I sort of have my doubts as to how successful they will be.

Q: Mike, you retired in 1998. What are you up to now?

COTTER: I'll be working part time for the State Department's Inspector General, leading inspection teams. It is the primary thing I am doing. I have been out of the United States except for short periods for years. I sort of missed the decade of the 1990s. Although the Department was not handing out many second embassies to people, at one point I was approached about whether I would be interested in another Central Asian embassy. My answer was "No, three years in Central Asia was an interesting growth experience, six years that isolated from anything simply would be too much." Life is too short and there is too much to do to spend six years of your life in that part of the world. I have lived most of my life in various parts of the Third World, and I don't really have any desire to live in the Third or Second World anymore, nor do I have any great desire to leave the Department after 30 plus years and immediately jump into another 10, 11-hour a day job. Working part time for the inspector will keep me engaged. Beyond that, I may look at some other business opportunities, and I will probably do volunteer work. We will be in the Washington area for two and a half more years until my wife can retire, at which point, we will move away, and hopefully do a lot of traveling.

Q: Good. All right, I thank you.

COTTER: Okay.

End of interview