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

AMBASSADOR EDMUND JAMES HULL

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Do you go by Edmund, by Ed, or what?

HULL: Actually, I go by Edmund and that's for a very practical reason. For many years I was introduced to people as edul and I found that no one had a chance to grasp the names when it came that briefly. So I adopted Edmund to give people a pause, Edmund ... Hull.

Q: When and where were you born?

HULL: I was born February 12, 1949 in Keokuk, Iowa which is a town on the Mississippi River. My parents were actually living in Carthage, Illinois, but Carthage had no hospital. When my mother was ready to deliver they had to cross the Mississippi and so technically, I'm an Iowan.

Q: You were born on Lincoln's birthday.

HULL: I was born on Lincoln's birthday and grew up primarily in Springfield, Illinois which was Lincoln's home town, which meant that I never went to school on my birthday. For the first fifteen years of my life I had a chocolate cake in the shape of a log cabin every birthday.

Q: Let's talk a bit about your parents? Let's take your father's side. Where did Mr. Hull come from and that side of the family?

HULL: My father, Thomas F. Hull was born in Burnside, Illinois which is a very small town in West Central Illinois. He had an all-American, Tom Sawyer-type life in Burnside. He was a very gifted athlete and eventually was recruited for a high school team in Quincy and then to the University of Illinois and lettered in baseball at the University of Illinois.

Q: Where did the family come from?

HULL: The Hulls, we can trace back to about 1500. They came from England, the paternal line. The first Hull that was recorded in the early sixteenth century was a miller and had a mill that was taxed by the English crown. That's how they entered in the history books because of the taxation of that mill. One of the prominent ancestors Reverend Joseph Hull was born in the seventeenth century, went to Oxford, became a minister, a protestant minister, and actually led a group of Pilgrims to the United States. They left from Weymouth, county Dorset and landed on March 6, 1635 in Boston, Massachusetts. There's a lot of history for the succeeding fifteen generations.

Q: Say your grandparents. Where did they appear on your father's side? Were they in Illinois?

HULL: The early generations were in New England, and as best I can tell whenever a new territory was opened up for settlement some of the Hulls moved into that new territory. For example, from the Massachusetts Bay Colony there was a movement down to New Jersey when it was becoming a state. Several generations of Hulls lived in New Jersey. There was a judge, there was a sheriff and eventually, a generation moved to the Cumberland area of what was then Virginia and is now West Virginia. One generation was on the frontier there in Cumberland. I imagine the land there was rather poor and so when the further west opened ul believe it was Jacob Hull in the early nineteenth century moved out to West Central Illinois and there's actually a town in West Central Illinois called Hull. He established the family there in Illinois. My great-grandfather William Henry Hull moved to Pilot Grove, Illinois and he's buried there. Pilot Grove with the coming of the railroad shifted a few miles and became Burnside, Illinois. Burnside, Illinois is where my great-grandfather Edgar and my grandfather Fred P. Hull grew up.

Q: What was your grandfather, your grandparents on your father's side. What was his business?

HULL: Fred P. Hull ran the general store in Burnside, and he was also postmaster of Burnside. He also wrote a column in the local newspaper about news in Burnside and ended up writing a history of the county. He was a local figure, very well known, very opinionated and very articulate.

Q: How about your father; what type of business did your father get involved in?

HULL: After my father graduated from the University of Illinois he was in the army, this was during World War II. He was in Kansas, at Fort Leavenworth and technically he was in the U.S. Army Cavalry. He was a trainer, he was training people for World War II. After he left the U.S. Army he became an insurance agent for the Equitable Life Assurance Society because his brother-in-law had followed that profession and helped him get started.

Q: On your mother's side?

HULL: My mother was Lorene Ellen Fruin, and the Fruins emigrated from Ireland, from Tipperary, to America in the nineteenth century, I believe, as part of the immigration spurred by the potato famine. They came and settled in northern Illinois around Gilman. On one side it was Fruins, and on one side it was Brady's. The Brady's were entrepreneurial, and one of the ancestors actually went west and settled for a time in Denver, built one of the first houses ever built in Denver, Colorado, made a respectable amount of money mining gold, came back and took that gold and purchased farm land in northern Illinois. They set up the Fruins as farmers in northern Illinois. My grandfather was not only a farmer, but also one of the original agents of State Farm Insurance Society. That was Frank Fruin.

Q: What was your mother's education?

HULL: My mother also graduated from the University of Illinois and her father, Frank, was very much dedicated to education and made sure that all of his children received college educations.

Q: What field was your mother studying, do you know?

HULL: I think she was having a lot of fun. The academic portion of her studies was rather generalized.

Q: How did your mother and father meet?

HULL: They were both at the University of Illinois. My father was a varsity athlete and my mother was in a sorority and a very social gal, very, very good looking, both of them. I think one of their friends made the match for them.

Q: They settled where?

HULL: Initially, my mother followed my father out to Kansas. They weren't married at the time, but they got married very shortly thereafter. I think their entire wedding cost about $22.00. My mother kept the receipt for the wedding breakfast which was the main celebration. I think it was about six or seven dollars, so it was wartime and people made the adjustments and life went on. They spent a period of time, a couple of years, at Fort Leavenworth, and then when my father left the military they came back to Illinois, to West Central Illinois where he had grown up and established themselves there.

Q: You grew up where?

HULL: I grew up primarily in Springfield, Illinois. We moved there when I was about nine years old. I stayed there until I graduated from high school and went to the East Coast to university.

Q: This was the mid fifties, I guess? What was Springfield like then for a boy?

HULL: It was saturated with Lincoln lore. You kind of lived and breathed and just imbibed that history of the United States. We made the obligatory and sometimes not obligatory trips to the Lincoln shrines: his house in Springfield, the courthouse, his tomb. His presence of course, was also very prevalent in the schools. That I think was a dominant feature of growing up in Springfield. I think the other significant thing for me was it was an all-American town. We had very little supervision growing up. I have ten siblings and so my parents were limited in what they could do in that department. My mother assigned each of us a guardian angel and we pretty much went our own ways and lived very freely. My father with his eleven children strongly encouraged us all to work and gain an income, so all of the boys started out in paper routes from about the fifth grade when you are about ten years old. We had those paper routes, morning paper routes, that entailed getting up about 5:30 and doing our runs before school. We kept those until high school and that's how we paid for our extras and that's how we paid tuition to high school, in fact. I think that was a very good experience for me, increased my sense of independence and gave me a very keen appreciation of the value of money.

Q: You were one of ten?

HULL: I was one of twelve, but the last daughter, Christine died as an infant.

Q: Where did you rank in this?

HULL: I was the fourth from the top.

Q: Your family, where did they fall politically ?

HULL: My grandfather, Fred P. Hull, was fairly active politically and very much a Democrat. My parents grew up during the Great Depression, and they were most impressed by FDR and I think felt his approach to government had a certain amount of compassion that they greatly admired. They had seen the effects of it firsthand as they were growing up. So they were lifelong Democrats. My mother was strongly opinionated and more active than my father. We had that sense of New Deal politics from our early childhood.

Q: Religion, where did your family on that?

HULL: Staunch Catholics, hence the twelve children. My mother said that when they were counseled by the priest upon marriage, the priest said the Lord will take care of the birth control. And my mother went along with that until she had her twelfth child, and then she decided that maybe the Lord didn't give her enough attention, and she decided to take care of it herself.

Q: How Catholic was your family growing up?

HULL: It was very Catholic. We went to Catholic schools The experience with the nuns and the brothers and the priests was our educational experience through high school. Not daily mass but certainly more than once a week. We were all encouraged to see if we had vocations and in fact both my older brother and I went to the seminary out of high school but neither of us stayed.

Q: You went to Catholic school. I assume at that time the elementary school was run by nuns, was it?

HULL: Yes, Ursuline nuns.

Q: How did you find it? One hears the good side and the bad side, but everybody has a strong feeling.

HULL: We certainly got a first-rate education. There was no question about discipline in the classroom, there was no question about challenging studies, and they were on the whole very good teachers. They also were very strong disciplinarians and with the education and the religion came a very powerful sense of sin, of guilt, which I think were more problematic to someone growing up.

I still recall when I was in the sixth grade we were going out to recess, and I had to use the restroom as we were going out. I came out and I was smiling for some reason. One of the nuns was suspicious immediately and took me aside and asked me what had happened. I said nothing and she insisted, "Tell me what has happened." I said, "Nothing." She said, "Tell me. So I complied and said: "Something has happened." She said, "What was that?" "Nothing," I said, reverting to the truth. So we lived under close supervision. On balance, I think there was much to be gained from the experience.

Q: Were there boys and girls in the class or was it separated?

HULL: In elementary school it was coeducational; in high school it was separate.

Q: Any subject particularly interest you and others not?

HULL: I was good at everything. I was kind of the academic star in the family and got a lot of positive reinforcement from my parents who followed these things closely, a lot of positive reinforcement from the nuns. I was the one who won the holy card when it was put up as a prize and that positive reinforcement, I think, just encouraged me to work harder and harder at studies, and I could do it across the board.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

HULL: Yes, a lot of reading, especially things like the Hardy Boys and Tom Swift and the Black Stallion and literature for young boys.

Q: How about sports?

HULL: My older brother was the athlete of the family. It was pretty hard to measure up to him. Whereas he would play on all the organized teams, my sports career was limited to more informal, pickup sports.

Q: At home in those days I imagine your parents had quite a job organizing the family. Around the table was there much discussion about what was happening in the world and that sort of thing?

HULL: The important thing around the table was getting your fair share of the food. I'm not saying that we ever went wanting, but you were pretty focused on the meal. In addition, to that my Dad every once in a while would decide that there was a manners lesson that was needed, and we would be subjected to an intense explanation of proper form for eating soup. We really didn't get into current events or politics or things of that ilk.

Q: What was the name of the high school you went to?

HULL: It was Griffin High School in Springfield, Illinois.

Q: This was run by whom?

HULL: This was run by the Viatorians, a teaching order, and we had very, very, very fine teachers, some of whom had PhDs and were teaching in high school. All, with few exceptions, quite qualified to teach their subjects.

Q: Where did the Viatorians fall within the various teachings? I never heard of them.

HULL: It's a small order that really concentrates on teaching.

Q: This was a male order, is that right?

HULL: Yes.

Q: Wasn't it the same discipline that you got from the nuns or was it different?

HULL: It was consistent with the earlier discipline and again we had no problems in the classroom or generally in the school. They ran a very taut ship.

Q: In high school, what sort of things did you get involved in?

HULL: I got involved big time in student government, was sophomore class president, on the student council and then I became the president of the inter-city student council which was a council of student councils in Springfield, and I held that position for two years which gave me a little bit of recognition. We had a computer club, one of the first computer clubs, I think ever formed. We had a big Allis Chalmers factory that had computers, and my physics and math teachers arranged for us to use the computer at Allis Chalmers. I've often thought there was a path not traveled had I gone into computers. I was very keen on math and physics. I had very, very good teachers in those fields. I was very good at Latin and won some competitions in that area. I was very strong generally in math and science, a little less strong in the area of English and social sciences where I gravitated eventually.

Q: During this time did you find yourself involved, as an observer obviously, in the election of President Kennedy? Was this a big thing?

HULL: My first political memory, I think was Kennedy's concession speech to Estes Kefauver, who ran with Adlai Stevenson's in 1956, and the grace with which that was made. It was a coincidence that I happened to be watching television at my grandparents' house. It was black and white, I remember, and this young man came on and very graciously conceded and then of course, four years later came back quite dynamically and ran a successful campaign for President. I think somewhat naively at the time we saw Kennedy with a burst of vigor, freshness against the grayness of the Eisenhower era. We followed what he had to say in his inaugural about "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." I think we were invigorated by his approach and the reception that he received around the world. Camelot was a long way away on the Potomac, but we were aware of it and I think we fell under its mystery. Like most people of my age, I vividly recall what I was doing when he was assassinated, going into the school and being told by a brother that the president had been shot and followed all the ensuing events on television.

Q: Was there a strong identification with him as a Catholic?

HULL: Yes. I think we were proud that a Catholic could be elected President, and he was putting behind the community that particular bugaboo.

Q: Did you find during this period from both sides, from the Protestant side and from the Catholic side a divide? I remember when I was a kid if you went out with a Catholic girl you might marry her and then the kids had to be brought up as Catholics. This was "a bad thing." I'm sure it was true on the other side. Did you run across that?

HULL: Yes, it was just remarkable the extent to which our world was homogenous. Protestants were seen as quite a different breed, not to mention Jews or...

Q: They weren't even considered.

HULL: Even farther beyond. I remember my older brother actually dated a Protestant girl from Springfield High School. We were scandalized that he would go outside his faith even in dating. Yes, it was a special little environment.

Q: What about dating and all that? Was this much of a thing when you were in high school?

HULL: I wasn't socially adept. But the nuns had a lot of girls at the girls' academies, Sacred Heart and Ursuline, who needed dates and my sisters were attending Sacred Heart, so I was drafted into being a partner for a number of the girls at the proms. I was slow in this area.

Q: You say that you and your brother both went to at different times to seminary? Did you feel that you were called for a while or was this an exploratory thing?

HULL: I think our parents in many, many ways conveyed a sense that this was the highest calling, and of course, it was reinforced by the nuns and the priests so for a smart Catholic boy at that time it was kind of a natural channel. My brother went to Maryknoll and stayed four years and I went to a Paulist Seminary in Baltimore and after about six months realized it wasn't for me and then left after the first year. That seminary, Saint Peter's, was a junior college and had 26 students in it. I think at the time we were the smallest accredited institution of higher education in the country. It went out of existence the following year, and I shifted my attention to Princeton.

Q: What made you feel that you didn't have a calling?

HULL: Well, I think there were a couple of factors, three factors. One was once you actually got into the theology, and you were kind of being taken behind the curtain you understood that you weren't meant to take literally the articles of faith or the Bible stories. That was somewhat of a shock to an admittedly naive person like myself, that these were allegorical, and we really didn't mean what we said about these things. Secondly, I came into contact with a lot of older priests who didn't seem very well adjusted and seemed in ways bitter and their lives hadn't really turned out that well. Some of them were prone to alcoholism or other socially strange behavior, so seeing it up close and being able to project where this was taking me gave me a great deal of pause. The third thing was I discovered I missed female company. I wasn't willing to give that up in the way the Church required it.

Q: This brings us up until about when?

HULL: This was 1967 to 1968.

Q: While you were there, did the outside world intrude on you?

HULL: Well, at Saint Peter's we were in Baltimore and this was when Martin Luther King was assassinated. We could look up and see Baltimore burning. Yes, the outside world was very pressing. And, of course, it was the Vietnam era and as young men, we were subject to the draft and so therefore that was also a very pressing matter.

Q: Did you find yourself interested in foreign affairs? We had the Cold War going on and other things like that. Was that something that you looked at much or not?

HULL: Not yet.

Q: And diplomacy?

HULL: Was the farthest thing from my mind.

Q: So what happened? You finished up your year at Saint Peter's and then what?

HULL: Saint Peter's was closing and I was moving on in any case. I had to choose another college. When I was in Springfield I had worked for the Illinois State Journal, the daily newspaper, for maybe two or three summers. I guess I started my senior year. I had met there Nick Penniman who was it that time the business manager and who would later become publisher of a number of papers including the Saint Louis Post Dispatch. Nick Penniman kind of took me under his wing on the job at the newspaper. He had gone to Princeton, and we had talked about his experience at Princeton. That and the fact that Bill Bradley was doing his heroics on the basketball court made Princeton seem like a very interesting prospect to me. So I visited it, loved the campus. It had everything that Saint Peter's did not have in terms of intellectual fire power and a beautiful college setting. I made an application to transfer, and I didn't realize at the time that transferring to a place like Princeton was extremely difficult because of course, very few of their students fail and so they don't have very many slots after the freshman class has been taken in. I was blessedly naive in all of this and went ahead and applied for transfer, got an interview and it may have been that they had an unfilled category for former seminarians. I'm not quite sure what was the reason, but they agreed to take me so I entered Princeton as a sophomore.

Q: So you were at Princeton from when to when?

HULL: 1968 to 1971.

Q: How did you find Princeton?

HULL: Princeton was overwhelming. You came into contact with brilliant minds and your fellow students were extremely smart. There was an immediate adjustment from your having been the big fish in a small pond to being a small fish in an intellectually very big pond indeed. That took some adjustment, and I didn't really know what I wanted to study. I initially made the mistake of trying to do too much and overloaded myself and thankfully was able to shed some courses and get my feet on the ground. Because I was not really tightly focused, the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs appealed to me as a major because I could study history, economics, politics and sociology, and I didn't have to choose. So that's what I selected as my major when I went into my junior year.

Q: What about the eating club system? How did that fit in because I am not sure how that works?

HULL: Yes. You bicker I think in your freshman year. My generation at Princeton was the SDS generation, and it was coming in the wake of free speech movement in Berkeley, and the takeover of the administrative buildings at Columbia. We were at this stage politically spun up and almost anything traditional including the eating clubs was rejected simply because it was traditional. I never even thought about going that route, it was just too staid, too clubby and so I joined the newly formed Woodrow Wilson College, and I took that avenue. Ironically, this was what Woodrow Wilson as president of Princeton wanted. He wanted to do away with the eating clubs and organize social life in the form of colleges much along the lines of Oxford or Cambridge. Many, many years after he failed in that attempt, Princeton has come back to his idea and Wilson College is one of the first colleges set up to that end.

Q: Was there a social divide between the eating club group and the non-eating club group?

HULL: Probably, but I was not aware of it, and the mood at the time was so radical and politicized, I believe the people on the eating club side of that divide were somewhat on the defensive and really adopted a fairly low profile.

Q: How did this radicalism that was going on in the campus at that time affect the teaching?

HULL: In some ways not greatly. For example, my favorite courses were philosophy. There was a particular professor there, Walter Kaufman, who was a scholar of Nietzsche and existentialism who gave a number of courses which still are touchstones of my life. Other prominent teachers like Marian Levy in sociology were quite conservative. There was a lot of brilliant work and teaching going on including by Manfred Halpern, a politics professor with whom I worked as a research assistant. But by the same token events occurred, particularly Nixon's decision to invade Cambodia in the spring of 1970, which caused academia to come to a complete halt. We, with the support of the faculty, stopped classes altogether, stopped work on papers, didn't take exams. There was a strike and it was not just the students, the faculty was as engaged as the students. We went off to such places as Washington for marches, and we spent that spring doing politics. I remember one of the initiatives at Princeton, which spread nationwide, was an effort to elect a new Congress, because it was felt that only Congress could curb the Executive and its expansion of the war in Vietnam.

That summer I went to France. I was studying French and had a chance to go work in France, and I did so. I came back my senior year to the rude awakening that all of the work from our junior year was going to be made up before we started on our senior obligations which were heavy anyway. So the senior year became a crushing burden of finishing the junior year and moving on and doing the senior thesis that was associated with being a senior at Princeton.

Q: It sounds like the faculty at Princeton held the line pretty well, as far as, all right we're opposed to the war but at the same time there is an education to be gotten.

HULL: Yes. We were told the credibility of Princeton and the credibility of the anti-war movement both required that all academic work be done.

Q: When you went to France, how long were you there?

HULL: I spent the summer in France.

Q: Were there still reverberations from the spring of 1968? What were you picking up?

HULL: Yes, although I was outside of Paris in Brittany, but certainly we were aware of Daniel Cohn-Bendit and the highly politicized European scene. It didn't impinge on me personally. That was also the summer of the moon landing and American prestige was high. We were admired for that although we were criticized for Vietnam.

Q: Did going to France whet any appetite for foreign climes?

HULL: That was the beginning. I'm sure that learning French in a practical way, living in a different culture, traveling and seeing the sights was what whetted my appetite for first the Peace Corps and then the Foreign Service.

Q: How about at the Woodrow Wilson School? Was one pointed toward public service?

HULL: Absolutely. Woodrow Wilson, as president of Princeton, had encouraged the motto of the school: "Princeton in the nation's service." The Woodrow Wilson School became the embodiment of that value, and to this day has a charter for preparing people for public service, the core of which is government service.

Q: Were you at that time inquiring and looking into any particular area of government?

HULL: We were very anti-government. In my circle, we couldn't imagine working for the U.S. government. In terms of substantive matters, actually I was looking at Africa. Not for any very good reason. and in fact at one stage I played with the idea of going to Africa, taking my junior year going abroad to an African university, and I went and talked to a very, very eminent professor at the Woodrow Wilson School from Africa, proposed this and only to have him look at me disbelievingly, saying, "Why would you leave one of the foremost educational institutions in the world and spend a year at a much less formidable educational institution". That common sense prevailed and so I gave up that idea. I was looking at Africa I think probably because civil rights were big and we were looking for bridges.

Q: Civil rights, during the time from high school did civil rights run across your radar much or not?

HULL: I think the civil rights part of it really came home when Doctor King was killed and when the cities in the U.S. exploded and again watching Baltimore burn was very vivid.

Q: Did you get involved in any of the civil rights or anti-Viet Nam marches at all?

HULL: I was involved in some of the anti-Viet Nam stuff. The march on Washington, for example. We were all down here and got tear gassed in some kind of big demonstration. But I didn't do it seriously, I never joined the Students for a Democratic Society, for example.

Q: It was a pretty radical group, wasn't it?

HULL: Well, of course, it started out being Jeffersonian with the Port Huron statement, and then gradually moved to a much more militant style.

Q: At Princeton, at the Wilson School, what ended up as your concentration?

HULL: Oddly enough, I did my senior thesis in sociology looking at young people in Tunisia. I had an adviser who had gotten data from Tunisia, and we were looking at what motivated peoplwhat the achievement motivations were among those young people.

Q: This was during the period Bourguiba, I suppose?

HULL: Very much so.

Q: Did you come to any conclusion on this?

HULL: Not really. The conclusion was I managed to finish the paper, which was pretty dicey. I kind of collapsed as I crossed the finish line.

Q: Were girls or women at Princeton at this stage or not?

HULL: When I entered Princeton we had about twenty "critters" which were critical language girls, and the first women who were admitted I think. During my senior year, the first regular female students were admitted to Princeton.

Q: And now the majority are women?

HULL: Well, we have a woman President and the Dean of the Wilson School is a woman. I think women are slightly less than half the students at Princeton. They certainly are there in force.

Q: When you were graduated in 1971, was the draft still on?

HULL: The draft was still on so you had questions about where you fell in the lottery, and for many of my colleagues there were existential questions. Were they going to go to Canada? Were they going to go to jail? In the end, my choice was the Peace Corps. I managed to do my service in the Peace Corps.

Q: What attracted you to the Peace Corps?

HULL: The summer in France had been a very positive experience. I liked mastering a foreign situation and foreign language. I was ready for more of that. I thought the Peace Corps was a good way of getting into a French-speaking environment.

Q: What happened?

HULL: I was accepted and I was sent to Tunisia. Oddly enough, when I was senior at Princeton I had a roommate who was studying Arabic, and I thought that was the oddest choice of any language I could imagine. And then I found myself in the Peace Corps in Tunisia and, after brushing up my French, I started studying Arabic. That was the second step that really determined my career, I think, gaining a capability in Arabic via the Peace Corps.

Q: What were you doing in Tunisia?

HULL: I was at a lycï¿½e in Mahdia teaching English.

Q: What's the town or city?

HULL: Mahdia is a city of historical importance. It is located on the coast about midway down the coast of Tunisia, between Sousse and Sfax. Mahdia was the capital of the Fatimides. The Fatimides were a Shia sect that came to power in Tunisia and then moved east and conquered a good deal of the Islamic world and actually founded the city of Cairo and established a Shia Caliphate in Cairo that endured for, I believe, centuries. So they started in Mahdia and moved to Cairo as did I in stages of my Foreign Service career.

Q: What was the political situation there? I assume you were in Tunisia from 1971 to 1973?

HULL: Right. And what they told us as we entered the Peace Corps was the one thing we could count on was that there would be a change of leadership during our time in Tunisia because President Bourguiba was very old. It didn't happen, of course, and then when I went back to Tunisia as the political counselor in 198that would've been fourteen years latethat change of power still had yet to occur and actually did occur.

Q: What was the Peace Corps training like?

HULL: It was excellent training. They took us to Colorado, they took us to Colchester, England and then they took us to Mahdia. They taught us French, they taught us Arabic, they taught us about Tunisian culture and Islamic culture and the fasts and the feasts and the tenets of Islam. It was a very good introduction to North Africa.

Q: You were doing what?

HULL: I was teaching English in the high school.

Q: How did you find the high school system?

HULL: It was French. It was just transplanted from France. It was called a lycï¿½e and it acted like a lycï¿½e. We graded on a twenty point scale, most of the teachers were Tunisian, but there were French "co-operants" (volunteers) there and the Peace Corps volunteers there. We made $160.00 a month and we lived very well on $160.00 a month. Our problem was that we were entering a strange educational culture, an educational culture not quite Truffaut's "Five Hundred Blows" but pretty strict and pretty compulsory. The big mistake that American teachers made was they became too close to their students, and therefore forfeited respect, and they graded too liberally giving 16s and 17s out of 20, sometimes even 20 out of 20, when every French teacher knew that you graded around 10,11 or 12 so that you always had the option of failing a student. That's the way you kept them in line.

Q: Did you fall into that trap?

HULL: I kept the distance from the students and the respect, but I was a more liberal grader than my French counterparts. Besides the numerical grades, we were meant to record "appreciations" (comments) and there I kind of ran afoul because of my inadequate French. Most of the "appreciations" were things like "tres bon" (very good) or "peut mieux faire" (can do better), and I got bored with writing these on my students' report cards so I started cribbing from my fellow teachers. There was one that particularly appealed to me which was "il essaie, mais ces moyens sont limites" (he's trying, but he has limited capabilities). I wrote that for one of my students that I really liked and admired for his efforts. Then I got an unexpected visit from his father wanting to know why I was dismissing his son as dull and unable. I had to explain it was not his son, but my French that was inadequate.

Q: How was the role of Bourguiba at the time you were there?

HULL: This was still I think a good time for Bourguiba. He was progressive in a number of areas, and Tunisia was developing. I think Tunisia was a relatively good place to live in North Africa. Certainly for women, perhaps the best place in the Islamic world to be living.

Q: It had two difficult neighbors, Algeria and Libya. Had Qadhafi taken over by this time or not?

HULL: Qadhafi took over in the early seventies, but he was still in his enlightened phase. He wasn't yet identified as the menace that he became later. But when I returned to Tunisia in 1987 both Libya and Algeria were very, very problematic vis-ï¿½-vis Tunisia. But in the 70s, at least as far as I was aware, there wasn't a lot of regional tension.

Q: Algeria, this was after the Evian Accords and all that, wasn't it?

HULL: Right. Algeria was progressing. I hitchhiked through Algeria to Morocco and came back by train. I hitchhiked in Libya. I slept in the ruins of Subratha; it was before the anti-Americanism and the violence. It was still relatively normal in both countries.

Q: Did you have any feel that Algeria, in particular after this civil war, or whatever you want to call it, Algerians got out, both Algeria and Tunisia got out from under French rule. The Tunisians had kept their French ties, and it didn't seem to disrupt the country the way Algeria sort of went down hill certainly economically. Did you see that difference?

HULL: At the time I wasn't aware of it. It depended upon how the French related to the country. France incorporated Algeria as a province of France. They wanted Algeria to be as French as Paris. In Tunisia they never had that ambition, and therefore the rule in Tunisia was always lighter. Also the Tunisians were able to gain their independence primarily through political moves. So the two situations were very different.

Q: How did you find the students?

HULL: The students were challenging. They did challenge, and they would take the measure of the teachers and if they could get them on the run, they would do it. Not all of the students, but there would be classes, especially what they called the technical classes. These were the more vocational-minded students who probably questioned the relevance of learning English to their futures given the fact that they were Arabic speakers and had already learned French. It was a big challenge, and it took a certain amount of courage to go in, especially to a technical class and maintain control and get them to learn something. So I generally, especially with the technical classes, went in with a very heavy hand in the first couple of weeks coming down pretty hard and then after establishing who was boss could afford to relax a little bit. I actually had some good results with those students after gaining their respect.

Q: Were the classes mixed?

HULL: Yes, they were mixed.

Q: Was this a special school?

HULL: No, it was a standard Tunisian lycï¿½e, but Bourguiba had no problems with mixing the sexes.

Q: Did Islam present a problem or a factor?

HULL: Islam in Tunisia is a very natural phenomenon. The Tunisians are very comfortable with Islam, and they practice it, but not fanatically. We were able to participate in the feasts and we were able to go to such places Kairouan, which is an historic Islamic city, and visit the Grand Mosque there. We would be there on Islamic feasts, and no one raised an eyebrow and it caused no tension. There was an openness that I think is much rarer today.

Q: Did you find yourself up against the Israeli factor of America there?

HULL: I knew very, very little about the Middle East at this point. I remember one evening in Mahdia with some teaching colleagues running into an extremely articulate Arab who spoke English very, very well and who was politically extremely sophisticated and then to learn that this was a Palestinian. I think this was the first glimmer I had that there was an issue out there, and a people out there who had a very special view of the Middle East. Little did I know at the time that I would eventually marry a Palestinian from Jerusalem.

Q: Did the embassy cross your path at all?

HULL: We tried to stay far from the embassy. I was still recovering from my university days. I didn't want to be associated with the embassy, and I didn't think I needed the embassy for very much. But we did give into cheese burgers at the snack bar when we were up in Tunis, and at one time I had to go to the health unit to try to get condoms which I failed to do. In fact, I was kicked out of the health unit for even asking for that service which meant I had to go to the local pharmacy. Since I didn't know the word for contraceptive in French, I had to explain in imperfect French and with gestures what I wanted. Then I was kicked out of the pharmacy as well. So my initial contact with the embassy wasn't very productive.

Q: I have to ask, were you able to get this vital piece of equipment?

HULL: I think I finally consulted a Larousse and got the right French word, which is "preservative", and that did the trick.

Q: When you were teaching there, did you run across the French establishment?

HULL: Very much so. The "cooperants" were of course a phenomenon unto themselves. They were teaching not only in Tunisia but all over the former French empire.

Q: They were a little like a French Peace Corps weren't they? They were part of the military system. Weren't they young people?

HULL: They weren't necessarily young. They were teaching professionals. It was more like USAID. They got a salary from France, and then they got a salary from Tunisia. Together that made their work quite remunerative. The French in Mahdia, included a lot of sailors especially people from Brittany, and several of them brought their boats down to Mahdia, which had a beautiful fishing port. They actually started a sailing club there, and I joined and learned to sail in French which caused some problems when I got back on the Chesapeake. It was a wonderful pastime and gave me a lot of contact with the French "cooperants" whom I liked.

Q: There wasn't any tension between the American Peace Corps and the French "cooperants"?

HULL: No. In fact they taught me sailing, and I taught them English.

Q: I take it than that you weren't aware of some of the winds that were blowing through the Middle East which got worse and worse and worse.

HULL: Only vaguely. I was aware of the 1967 war, but that was back when I was working as a journalist in Springfield. No, in Tunisia we were somewhat removed from the real crises.

Q: You left in the summer of 1973 so you missed the October War?

HULL: I was planning to do a third year in Morocco, and I was studying in Morocco, but I had taken the Foreign Service exam at our embassy in Tunis, and I had passed. I came back to Washington and took the oral, and then was notified that I was accepted. So I was in transition between the Peace Corps and the Foreign Service, but actually in Morocco in October, and I remember the October War from that context.

Q: About the October War, how was this received in Morocco?

HULL: I think the initial Egyptian victories in crossing the canal caused a great elation, and so it was overall a very positive feeling at the time. I remember tracking what the Israelis were doing in response, and Sharon's move across the canal and the encirclement of the Third Army. I remember being thoughtful enough to hope that somehow the situation could be frozen so the gains made could provide a basis for future negotiations. In fact, that's what happened with Kissinger and the shuttles.

Q: What caused you to apply to the Foreign Service? Not only were you anti-government they wouldn't even give you a condom.

HULL: Well, I think I was really developing options for after the Peace Corps. I had a third year in Morocco lined up but what after that? I had two main options: the first was doing what I was doing but in a diplomatic way. I decided to see if that was a real option. And the second one was journalism. I actually interviewed with the Associated Press in New York and might well have gone into foreign journalism except for the fact they wanted me to do two or three years of apprenticeship on a local American newspaper and I thought I'd done that already in Springfield and could get where I wanted to be overseas faster through the Foreign Service than through the Associated Press.

Q: You took the Foreign Service exam in what, in 1973?

HULL: Either early '73 or '72.

Q: And then you came back and took the oral exam?

HULL: Yes.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions?

HULL: I do. What I recall about the oral exam was, I had done a lot of reading in the Peace Corps, including Edmund Wilson on communism, and I recall being able to answer several of the questions based on my Peace Corps reading rather than anything I had learned at Princeton. I also recall a question on Kissinger in Chile which I didn't know a lot about but I answered, I guess, acceptably. Probably I was lucky that I didn't know more than I knew because then maybe my answer would not have been so acceptable.

Q: This was the overthrow of the Allende regime?

HULL: Yes. There is something I tell my students at Princeton who are going into the exam process, particularly the oral. To me there was a great benefit knowing I had an interview with the Associated Press afterwards in New York City, because I could go into the oral examination with it being one option of at least two. Therefore I didn't really feel it was a make-or-break encounter and was able to be fairly relaxed.

Q: So when did you come in?

HULL: I told the Peace Corps that I had this offer from the Foreign Service. They didn't want me to start in Morocco and then pull out midyear so I came back late in 1973, and I had to find some way of bridging the period until I got my clearances and could be inducted. It turned out that was about five months because I didn't get in until May of 1974. So I went up to Chicago and drove a taxicab and lived with my brother, and then I came out to Washington and taught English on Dupont Circle and made ends meet that way.

Q: What organization?

HULL: It was a private language school on Dupont Circle with Hispanics, Persians, Araba United Nations of students.

Q: How was driving a taxicab in Chicago?

HULL: It was an experience. Chicago has a grid pattern so it's a very logical place to drive. With a good map and some clever reasoning you could actually find your way around. But there were certain anomalies; Lake Shore Drive, for example, had only a few places in and out. I still recall picking up a customer who wanted to go to the McCormick Center and driving down Lakeshore Drive missing the left exit and whizzing by the center, which he remarked, having to turn around and come back northward and there are no exits at McCormick Center northward, so I had to whiz by it a second time and only on the third go were we able to get to the exit and get the man delivered. He was not too happy with this as you can imagine. My excuse was that I was a novice cab driver, I don't think he found convincing. I have a lot of stories here.

Q: I'd just like to get a feel for some of these.

HULL: One of my most memorable rides was a Playboy bunny whom I picked up outside the Playboy Club. She had just been suspended for fraternizing with a client As I was taking her home she was explaining to me her troubles, and I was very sympathetic, as you can imagine. When we got to her destination she went to pay me and she apologized for not having enough to give the tip. But she did have an ice cream cone which she offered instead of the tip. The phantasy sufficed, and I declined the ice cream. There are lots of stories about Chicago.

Q: Chicago, where there are lots of sort of no go places? I'm particularly thinking of the black areas verses the white areas.

HULL: South side was very dicey. I didn't have any run-ins myself, but there were risky places to be.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service in 1974?

HULL: I think May of 1974.

Q: What was your basic officer course like?

HULL: It seemed to me helpful and, of course, this was a period of discovery, sorting out what this is all about and who are these other people. We had great people in that class, Mike Metrinko, Don Camp, Molly Williamson, and Chuck Redmond. We were getting paid. I had been living on a shoestring and all of a sudden I was getting paid, so I could live relatively high in Washington. I do remember that after the A-100 course we got our assignments. I set a record. My initial assignment was for five yeartwo years of Arabic language training and then three years as political officer in Jerusalem. I think that reflected the desperation of the Foreign Service for Arabic speakers at the time. After the Kissinger shuttles, we had opened up embassies throughout the Gulf and reopened embassies in places like Cairo and so there was this huge demand for Arabic speakers. I spoke decent Arabic coming out of the Peace Corps and was slotted into that Arabic program and then slated for Jerusalem.

The other interesting thing was that I had time to kill before the Arabic program started that September so I took a consular course and about a week into the consular course the Turks invaded northern Cyprus.

A: July 14, 1974.

HULL: Yes. They needed volunteers to go work on the task force so I and a number of others volunteered. We went over and worked the graveyard shift and got our first real exposure to crisis management. I have vivid memories at that time; we were evacuating people from Nicosia through the British sovereign bases to Beirut and taking them into Lebanon which was a relatively stable place and then out of Lebanon to the U.S. In light of the Lebanese Civil War soon to follow, I now find this activity ironic. So I had that experience in the summer of 1974, and then really kicked into the Arabic training at FSI Arlington.

Q: Had you mentally prepared yourself to do this? Were you ready to relax and go wherever you were sent?

HULL: I had very much wanted to pursue the Arabic study and to serve in the Arabic-speaking world. So this was right up my alley. I took to it like a duck to water.

Q: You'd been off in the Maghreb, quite removed really from the cockpit of the Middle East. Were you reading your way in or were you getting yourself informed about what was going on?

HULL: Yes. I was getting smarter and actually the Arabic training was a part of that process. My initial class in Arlington had two other students in it. Our teacher was an Egyptian woman. When I opened my mouth and spoke my Tunisian Arabic she was appalled. It was the most offensive Arabic she had ever heard in her life. One of my classmates had grown up in Cairo and spoke the Egyptian dialect. For the first time in my life, I confronted real prejudice. I had to gradually shed my Tunisian accent and adopt a more Egyptian variant. After that experience, we went over to Lebanon to the language school at the embassy in Beirut and there most of the teachers were Palestinians. And so along with the language you imbibed history and politics from the teachers. I got smarter fast.

Q: Were you in contact with the Middle Eastern NEA desks?

HULL: Not really, not until we got to the embassy in Beirut.

Q: Who was the ambassador then?

HULL: Godley. Mac Godley. Godley was a very colorful person. He had been, I believe, in Laos and had been very much involved in the counter-insurgency operation.

Q: He was called the bombing officer or something.

HULL: Yes. And I still remember my introduction. When we got to Beirut, it was just on the eve of the civil war and when we walked around West Beirut, young men with Kalashnikovs were positioned on the street corners. It was an armed camp even around the embassy, which was a rather sobering sight. The embassy itself had an APC parked in front of it because it had been attacked. We were given our introduction by Ambassador Godley who proceeded to explain why Lebanon despite its many troubles would never sink into civil strife because there were cross-cutting connections among the economic elites that would prevent that. Of course, it was an ill-fated prediction because even though we were only there six months we were there to see that civil strife ignited. But I was young, I was eligible, and I was invited by the ambassador to a luncheon because there was a young single guest, a female, who needed companionship. I spoke a little bit of French and a little bit of Arabic and was a good choice for that. I remember going to the luncheon, which was hosted by a prominent Lebanese Christian family. After the luncheon the young lady and I were taken out by the young Lebanese to do two things: one, to take target practice with an AK-47 on a mountainside and two, they brought out a stallion and mated him with a mare. This was the recreation, the entertainment for the afternoon luncheon.

The reason I mention this is because the prominent Christian family was the only real contact I had with a political family in Lebanon. After I had been in Beirut for a while, I was asked about that connection. The way that happened was I had bought a car, a red Fiat 128, and I think it was the first or second weekend that I owned the car and was driving around Beirut. I was going down from my apartment in the Manara (lighthouse) District to a movie theater and noticed first that the theater was closed and then the streets were empty. I concluded something was amiss, so I started heading back to my apartment, but missed the turn on Hamrah Street, which was the main street of West Beirut. I went up one street further and found myself confronting a Palestinian roadblock. My car had diplomatic plates. I was stopped, the car was searched. Unfortunately, the weekend before we had gone to Deir al Qamar (the Monastery of the Moon) one of the tourist attractions in Lebanon, and one of my colleagues had left a camera under the back seat of the car. So when the car was searched at the roadblock, the camera was discovered, and it was associated with the diplomatic license plate. I was immediately taken by the armed militants into the Palestinian camp, which I believe was Tel Az Za'atar (Hill of Thyme). I glimpsed a poster on a wall which showed an arrow bent through Jordan and into Palestine so I believe my captors where from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine whose ideology called for liberating Palestine via the overthrow of Jordan's Hashemite monarchy. I was interrogated, hooded, for quite awhile as they tried to figure out whether or not I was spying. It was a very vivid experience, the interrogation. I remember being guarded, I could just barely see through the hood, and I can remember being guarded by someone who looked like he was about twelve years old with a finger on the trigger of the Kalashnikov pointed right at me. There was rocketing going on that you could hear from the detention area. I remember in the middle of the night being woken up, taken in my car, my head forced down in the back seat. The individual who was guarding me in the back's heart was beating violently. I could only think the one reason why that would be happening, and that was he was ordered to do away with me and was a little bit nervous about doing the job. I really thought that was the end. But in fact, what happened was they took me to a second camp, repeated all the interrogation, and I was lucky because I knew nothing about embassy operations other than the language school. I had no secrets to hide. The only thing I had to hide was this weekend association with this prominent Christian family. My technique in answering the questions was to tell the absolute truth about everything but one fact and to lie about that fact consistently. By strictly limiting the amount of lying that I was doing, it made it easier to keep track because, of course, in interrogation that's the technique to try to catch you contradicting yourself. After many, many, many hours and a few relatively minor knocks on the head, one of my interrogators came in, un-hooded me, displayed my personal effects including the camera. I had been telling them take the film and develop it because then they would see the only thing that's on the film is a tourist site, nothing in the security way. And they returned all the personal effects, including the camera. I had assumed that they had checked out the film in some way. They asked me whether I had been mistreated. I said no. And then they told me they were going to release me and they actually took me out to a main street, Sharia' al Mazra' (the Street of the Farm) and gave me precise instructions to get to the Corniche that ran along Beirut's coastline and to the American Embassy. They didn't want me to turn off into another camp and end up in more trouble. I followed the instructions very, very carefully, drove back to the embassy and then reported my captivity. This was before, just before, all the American hostages were taken and held in Beirut for years and years and years. I think my timing on being a hostage was fortunate indeed.

Q: What was the embassy's reaction?

HULL: Surprise. They hadn't missed me. Of course, I was debriefed extensively. I think it was upon debriefing that I concluded that I had been held by the PLFP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) given the poster I had seen on the wall. That was my most vivid experience in Beirut.

Q: What happened to the language class? All of a sudden you're moving into this situation. Did they keep it going?

HULL: Well, it was touch and go for weeks and months. Finally, they decided they had to move the school. And the proposal was to move it to Tunisia. I had pretty much finished the course by then, but I still had about six months before I had to report for duty in Jerusalem in January, 1975 so I proposed to them that they let me take off on my own to the University of Jordan and enroll myself at the University of Jordan. They agreed. I packed up all my belongings into my red Fiat and took out when there was a pause in the fighting, over the mountains and into Damascus and from there, of course, it was easy getting down to Amman, Jordan. I'm not sure that the regional security officer these days would allow a junior officer to do something like that but back then it was possible.

Q: By the time you left there, was the embassy still talking like it's not going to turn into civil war? Were they downplaying what was happening or were they taking it pretty seriously?

HULL: No, that all changed after the "Ain Rumanah" incident.

Q: What was that?

HULL: Ain Rumanah (the spring of Rumanah) was a neighborhood of Beirut. There was a busload of Palestinians going through it. Christian militias massacred them. To my mind anyway, that marked the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War. It was downhill pretty quickly thereafter. As I said, you went one block above Hamrah, the main street in Beirut, and you ran into Palestinian guerrillas controlling the whole show. No, I think by that time the embassy knew it was serious.

Q: You had Palestinian teachers mainly. In the first place this whole thing was basically a spillover from Black September of 1970, wasn't it? The Palestinian militants had been kicked out of Jordan and ended up in Beirut, weren't they? Was that the genesis?

HULL: That was a significant factor. The armed Palestinian presence and moreover the Palestinian operations from southern Lebanon into Israel and the Israeli retaliations for those operations which were pushing more and more poor Shia from the south of Lebanon up into the capital and creating the southern suburbs which became the bases of Hezbollah. But that was only one factor. The Lebanese political system had been frozen for decades, along confessional lines. There were families, the Jumblatts, the Gemayels, etc. which had basically turned Lebanon into private fiefdoms and controlled a lot of the government wealth that was channeled into private pockets. There was a big gap and a growing gap between the way the well-to-do lived in Lebanon on a European level of prosperity and the poor, particularly the poor Shia, who had been forced into the southern suburbs of Beirut. And that economic tension was just extraordinary. The mismatch between how politics were run in Lebanon and the demographic facts caused very great tensions. So when it came, it was more sectariaChristians, Musliand the Palestinians initially tried to stay out of it, but then got sucked into it eventually. So it was a very complicated picture, but definitely not as rosy as Ambassador Godley had painted it.

Q: You went for what, six months or so to the University of Amman?

HULL: Yes. Six months.

Q: In 1973 or 1974 or so?

HULL: This was 1974 to 1975. Tom Pickering was the ambassador at the time, a remarkable man. I remember my interview with him when I was leaving Jordan and remember: one that he wanted to see me because I wasn't a very prominent person, but two, that within the space of about twenty minutes had he had absorbed from me almost the entirety of my intensive experience at the University. He had put it into his data bank and had it ready. It was an interesting experience in many ways because, of course, the campus was very politicized with lots of Palestinian teachers and lots of Palestinian students. Having an American diplomat there, as you can imagine, presented certain opportunities for provocations, but by and large I enjoyed the experience.

Q: I realize you're looking at one perspective, but how did you see the situation in Jordan at that time?

HULL: Of course, this was in the aftermath of Black September, which occurred in 1970. It was Jordan returning to normalcy, I think. Having come from Beirut where the Civil War was just breaking out, by comparison Jordan seemed calm and relatively effectively governed.

Q: Among the students you say there were a significant number of Palestinians. How did they view the king?

HULL: I don't know if I remember anything that was specifically said. I think, maybe this was imagining more than anything else, there was lingering resentment but at the same time respect because he had confronted a very challenging situation and he had mastered it. So no love lost, I think, but perhaps some grudging respect.

Q: I would think given that you have the Palestinian population and you had the Jordanian population of more of nomadic stock, I would have thought the Palestinians would almost overwhelm the university by their presence. Palestinians are like Jews. They go for education.

HULL: Right. I think that's true. Very many of the professors were Palestinians. The course I took on Palestinian issue was done by a Palestinian professor. My Arabic teacher at the university was a Palestinian from a prominent Jerusalem family. Yes, they were the dominant intellectual force.

Q: Was anybody looking at what was happening in at the time?

HULL: People were looking at what they would call Palestine and of course you had the phenomenon there where Israelis watched Jordanian TV and Jordanians watched Israeli TV depending upon the programs being offered. It wasn't the other side of the moon. There was a knowledge and not quite familiarity, but certainly a pretty good knowledge of what the other side was like.

Q: Did you have any problems?

HULL: I didn't have any political incidents that were unmanageable, a couple of perhaps embarrassments. I remember there was huge class on the Palestinian problem, maybe 150 students. One day we came in and the Israelis had just attacked Palestinians in southern Lebanon, and the professor invited me to come up and justify the Israeli conduct and I really didn't think that was my responsibility: as a student to be justifying anything much less as a non-Israeli to be justifying what Israel was doing, so I declined that invitation. Other professors would invite me. I remember I took a diplomatic course, and the professors would invite me to talk a little bit about how an issue would be handled as a practical matter.

Ironically, my most difficult course was my Arabic course. It was classical Arabic and I'd only studied colloquial and modern standard Arabic. This was very challenging material. It included "Kalila wa Dimna" a kind of Aesop's Fables in Arabic, and I found the vocabulary very strange, nothing to do with diplomacy or economics or politics. It had to do with jackals and foxes and chickens and things like this. I took the final exam in that course and the professor called me in. She had kind of a depressed look on her face and she said, "Well, I think one thing is sure, and that is you have no future in the Arabic world given what you have done on this exam." And she was right, I had no future in terms of classical Arabic literature at all in the Middle East, but I did find applications for my colloquial and Modern Standard Arabic.

Q: We're talking about 1975?

HULL: The end of 1974. I think I moved in January of 1975.

Q: So you went to Jerusalem?

HULL: I packed everything I had from my apartment including my plants, drove down to the Allenby Bridge and had everything including the plants carried across into the West Bank and then up to Jerusalem.

Q: You were consul general in Jerusalem from when to when?

HULL: I was the sole political officer in the consulate from 1975 through 1979. Mike Newlin was consul general, and Don Kruse was his deputy.

Q: The perspective of Jerusalem is basically the West Bank?

HULL: Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and West Jerusalem is very, very Israeli. East Jerusalem was under the Hashemites before 1967 and was primarily Arab Palestinian. So what you had in Jerusalem was really a schizophrenic situation where on a daily basis you would be dealing with Israelis and Palestinians who had radically different views of the world.

Q: Had King Hussein renounced his rule over the West Bank at this point? Or was that later on?

HULL: At Rabat in 1974 at the Arab Summit, the Arab leaders agreed that the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) was the sole, legitimate spokesman for the Palestinian people. King Hussein had to accept that decision. So formally the torch had passed, but informally, I think, the King maintained residual ambitions, not in a sense of wanting to impose himself but wanting to be available if others asked him to play a role. And certainly with regards to the Haram Sharif, the Islamic holy places, the Hashemite had had a long, profound association there and continued to pay the salaries of the Haram officials. I think he had a lingering ambition, but one which was rarely articulated. The Israelis for their part, also very much wanted to keep King Hussein and the Hashemites in the picture because one of their preferred option was some kind of a role for Jordan in the West Bank in a final solution.

Q: What was the balance that you all had to deal with? The Israelis were occupying significant parts of the West Bank.

HULL: They were occupying the entire West Bank.

Q: At the same time we did not recognize the legitimacy of this or how was this dealt with?

HULL: We considered it an occupied territory. We didn't recognize Israel's claims to it nor did we recognize, for example, the expansion of the Jerusalem city limit or the annexation of the Golan. We thought all of the territories should be subject to a negotiation in an agreed settlement. The consulate in Jerusalem was unique in the world. It was the only consulate that was independent of any embassies. The consulate reported directly back to the State Department, not through Embassy Tel Aviv. The Consul General had a very delicate position in this regard. Our mandate was to be the liaison and to report vis-ï¿½-vis, the Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, not GazGaza was under the embassand secondly, to be the liaison and report on the municipal Israeli government, Mayor Teddy Kollek at the time. That was what we were meant to do. In doing it, of course, we were very much interacting with Embassy TelAviv and their responsibilities. It caused a certain amount of friction, a certain amount of tension and was a challenge.

Q: Who was the Consul General then?

HULL: Mike Newlin.

Q: How would you describe the relationship? The ambassador was Sam Lewis, wasn't it?

HULL: The ambassador was Sam Lewis.

Q: You were a little on the sidelines watching these two, but how did they deal with each other?

HULL: Of course, Sam Lewis was a force of nature, he was ambassador for a very, very long time, had an excellent reputation in Washington, an extrovert, very confident. Mike Newlin was quiet, but also extremely competent and very good at getting things done in a low-key way. And Mike Newlin, I think, successfully defended the independence of the consulate and did very delicate reporting with a great deal of integrity. You could admire both of them.

Q: The Israelis are not noted for shyness. And I would imagine there would be constant attempts to, I don't want to say compromise, that's the wrong term but to do something which would give the Israelis more control than they might have if we didn't do something? Did you find yourself maneuvered or pushed or concerned about something like that?

I got back to Jerusalem and reported up my chain of command to my bosses about the incident which was a very good thing to do because quickly Ambassador Lewis was notified by the Israeli government that I had been engaged in inappropriate activity. Lewis called my boss to find out what it was all about, and fortunately Mike Newlin was able to brief Ambassador Lewis that this was in the line of duty, reporting on a subject of great interest to Washington. So Ambassador Lewis to his credit pushed back and, I believe, defended my activity. That didn't stop the Israelis. The issue was leaked, it was on the radio and the following days an editorial appeared in Haaretz, one of the leading newspapers entitled "Shalom, Mr. Hull", which was "Goodbye, Mr. Hull." Haaretz was hoping that I would be given my walking papers, but in fact the Consulate, the Embassy, the Department stood in back of me, and I continued my reporting and finished out my tour quite normally.

Q: At some point you mentioned the settlements. Were you able to talk to the settlers? I assume they were within your area of responsibility?

HULL: With the settlers themselves. Yes, although we didn't take a confrontational, we tried to avoid a confrontational approach, whereby we would be challenging personally what they were doing with their lives, but inevitably you would be running into thesePeople, and they wouldn't be shy at all about telling their story and why they believed they have a claim on one spot or another and what they intended to do.

Q: Were you finding that the settlers at this particular time were for the most part, people who were pushed by religious conviction or was this a pretty good deal? Low rent or what have you?

HULL: There were several factors. There were Labor settlements along the Jordan valley and there it was a security objective that the Labor government had promoted. But then you had a very strong religious element and the settlements, for example, in (???) on the way to Hebron, there you had true believers who were really fulfilling what they considered to be a Biblical imperative. Also though there's no doubt the Israelis provided considerable material advantages to people who were willing to go and settle. You could get a much nicer villa in a settlement than you could ever afford in Israel proper, and you had a number of financial incentives if you were willing to live in the occupied territories.

Q: Was there a significant number of the Israeli settlers who were American citizens?

HULL: Yes. Sometimes the most fanatic were Americans.

Q: How about dealing with them? Did they go to you?

Q: The Mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, was quite a famous figure. How did you deal with him? How would you characterize him?

HULL: He was imaginative, he was active, he, I believe, really wanted to unite the city and not just physically, but also on a human level. I think he had a measure of sympathy for the Arab population that was unusual. He was a showman of the first degree, and I really think his public diplomacy was extraordinary in stamping Israel's "trademark" over most things in Jerusalem. Not all together an easy thing to do when you think of the television shot of Jerusalem with the Haram Sharif's Kubbah As Sakhra (the Noble Sanctuary's Dome of the Rock) in the background. Ironically, the classic visual of Jerusalem testifies to an Islamic character. But Teddy Kollek was quite able and quite effective. He had working with him Meron Benveniste, who knew the Palestinians very well, and who had written on the Palestinians and the Crusaders. It was a relatively enlightened municipal government.

Q: You could not talk with the PLO at this point, could you?

HULL: No, but we found this restriction easy to finesse. Technically any member of the PLO in the occupied territories was a member of an illegal organization and therefore should be in jail. We concluded that anyone who was not in jail was prima facie not a member of the PLO and therefore fair game for us, and we did talk with anyone.

Q: Would you talk a little bit about being a political officer? How did you go about your business?

HULL: I came on board in January, and I believe it was February or March when they had the first municipal elections since the occupation had begun in 1967. These elections were of great interest because there would be a relatively free vote and the true sympathies of the West Bank electorate would be gauged for the first time since Israel had occupied the territories and so the priority was covering that election. I know my bosses had some trepidation because they had a new political officer, green and unproven, and the elections would be his first challenge. It was a very interesting election. Often it was decided by "tazkiat" (consensus). In fact in all municipalities it was decided by consensus. In Bethlehem, the old familieparticularly the Freij'held sway. In most of the municipalities, however, the consensus process came up with a nationalist slate of young, intelligent, active Palestinians who were not formally associated with the PLO, but who made clear their affinity to the PLO and considered the PLO as the spokesman of the Palestinian people. So we dealt with people like Fuad Qasimi, Karim Khalaf, Bassam Shaka'a, Mohamed Milhereally a new generation of Palestinian leaders, who were impressive for what they wanted to do in their cities and for their ability to articulate the Palestinian position.

Q: At this particular time, was there a concern that the Israeli security services were trying to undermine, discredit any potential Palestinian leader that was coming down the path?

HULL: No. The Israelis, I think, welcomed a homegrown Palestinian leadership and their hope was that this leadership would somehow develop and supplant the leadership that was then outside of Palestine in Lebanon. The Israelis gave these Palestinians leeway.

Q: How big a figure was Arafat at this point?

HULL: Arafat was the embodiment of the Palestinian national cause. He was really without a rival, and Palestinians in the West Bank supported him sincerely.

Q: This would be more of a consular matter, but were there concerns about Israeli security forces beating up or being nasty to Palestinians?

HULL: Oh, sure. This was the Carter period. There was a big emphasis on human rights, and the human rights report coming in from the Consulate General in Jerusalem was one of the most problematic reports to hit the desk in the Department, which is still the case today.

Q: OK, you're putting together this report which consists mainly of toting up incidences of who was doing what to whom and that sort of thing?

HULL: To a large extent.

Q: And I'm sure obviously Tel Aviv didn't like this?

HULL: They had to do their own report, and yes, I am sure they found a lot of what we were reporting created problems for them.

Q: You were a junior officer yourself. There's always the thing in any embassy or consulate where junior officers seek out sensation and are looking for extreme cases and all. The most senior officers tend to modify them. I mean this is the dynamic that goes on all the time. Did you find this going on?

HULL: No. There was a very interesting case which was not actually related to the human rights report. We had assigned to the consulate a woman who had been an INR (Intelligence and Research) analyst and wanted to do political reporting, but she was doing consular work. She was giving immigrant visas, I think. In the course of her visa interviews she had a significant number of Palestinians who had been prisoners of the Israelis. In the course of interviewing, she developed a significant number of accounts of mistreatment of prisoners, and being a trained INR analyst she, of course, was able in a sophisticated way to compare the accounts and come up with certain patterns, accounts from independent sources of significant mistreatment or torture of the Palestinian detainees. She collected all of this and she wrote it up in a very, very coherent fashion and she submitted it to Mike Newlin and Don Kruse, and it was sent in. The cable citJerusalme 150became famous. It exploded in Washington because it included a great deal of detail, very significant analysis, put very dispassionately, but which painted a very troubling picture of prisoner abuse and torture by the Israelis. As I said, the consulate management, Newlin and Kruse, as far as I know, didn't hesitate at all. They sent it right back in, and it had a tremendous impact when it hit Washington and was eventually leaked into the media. Of course, that didn't have to go through the embassy because we were an independent consulate. If it had had to go through the embassy management, I'm not quite sure what would have happened.

Q: The normal response to this, particularly looking at the Israeli pattern, is to try to discredit the messenger which is being done in spades in the United States today. What happened in this case?

HULL: The reporting officer was subject to a lot of attention and a lot of rumors were put out and her relationships were examined extremely closely.

Q: We're talking about male-female type relationships?

HULL: Right.

Q: If you've got a woman making a report you can always say, you know, some guy got to her or something.

HULL: There were suggestions along those lines but the fact that the material had come from so many different sources, who had just been there for a visa interview, really made it difficult to discredit the reporting. It was rather ad hominin or ad feminine.

Q: What happened? What happened to her?

HULL: She was eventually transferred back to Washington, I think not as any kind of a disciplinary measure. I don't recall if it was on schedule or premature, but she had a rather unusual personality, she was very introverted, I would say not your typical diplomat, more an analyst, and she went back to Washington and I'm not sure what happened to her career after that.

Q: Did you get out? Did you travel extensively through the West Bank?

HULL: We traveled freely throughout the West Bank. There were very few restrictions. Occasionally, when there was a security incident, there would be a curfew imposed and then we would have to talk our way through the curfew or else have to wait until it was lifted. We traveled very freely.

Q: How heavy at that particular time did you find the handling of the Israelis on the West Bank?

HULL: It was fairly heavy. Certainly they were watching the security situation very carefully, and they were also expropriating considerable amounts of lands for settlements. They had a choke hold on the economy so it was a rather heavy-handed occupation.

Q: You spoke of expropriating lands, I have heard stories either losing records or cooking up records or something. In other words, land deeds going back to Ottoman times weren't recognized. Was there a lot of, you might say legal hanky panky going on?

HULL: There were many categories of land. The Israelis almost automatically of course, claimed and disposed of any state land, land that had been controlled by the Jordanian government. There was also land where Palestinians had legal deeds to it which on occasion was expropriated. The vast majority of the land had been Palestinian hands for generations, but there was no legal title. The British had begun to register some of this land, I don't think they had gotten very far. So there was a great deal of traditional land ownership and that gave the Israelis a certain area in which to act in the fashion they wanted to act.

Q: Did you find checkpoints and as an ex-enlisted man myself, I know the guy who ends up on the checkpoint, particularly at night, is not the best soldier. And particularly you have a citizen military and I was wondering if there were problems with the troops who were doing the guarding?

HULL: It could get very sticky but, of course, our cars were labeled CC (consular corps) so we were advertising our status and our mission. But depending on the circumstance or the individual on duty, it could be a bigger or lesser problem. A good tactic was to take one of the Israelis who was driving for the consulate. I remember David Pinto in particular. He was an Israeli, he'd served in the military, he knew the mentality, he knew Hebrew, and he could talk his way through almost any checkpoint. That was often your strongest ally.

Q: Were you able to go to villages and talk to the various leaders there?

HULL: Yes, because I had Arabic it was quite easy for me. Our responsibility was to get out and report back to Washington on what was going on.

Q: You were there during the Camp David process? When Carter came in what was the feeling at first about Carter?

HULL: Well, early in his administration, Carter made a statement in favor of a Palestinian homeland which echoed in some ways the Balfour Declaration of 1917. That had a very positive echo in the West Bank. There was a feeling that this was a new administration that was serious about dealing with the problem. And then we watched the painful negotiations taking place to try to reconvene the Geneva Conference which were running afoul of such questions as Palestinian representation and how the Geneva Conference would be structured.

Soon after I arrived in Jerusalem, a sea change occurred. I mentioned the Palestinian elections, but you had Israeli elections and Begin was became prime minister. This brought Likud to power for the first time and of course, Likud's attitude toward the occupied territories, especially the West Bank, was radically different from the Labor position. That side of the equation became much more difficult to work. We could follow from Jerusalem the efforts being made by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and people like Assistant Secretary Hal Saunders and Special Mideast Envoy Roy Atherton to get the Geneva Conference reconvened. There was interest in the new mayors, whether they would step up and agree to represent the Palestinians which they refused to do, referring back to the Rabat Summit decision that the PLO was the sole legitimate spokesman of the Palestinian people. The process ground on until President Sadat in Egypt alarmed the Americans by concluding that President Carter needed help and would not get there on his own, and announced that he was willing to go anywhere including Jerusalem in the cause of peace. We listened to this with disbelief; we couldn't imagine that Sadat really meant what he said.

Q: Sadat at that time was still considered somewhat of a lightweight, wasn't he?

HULL: Well, I think after the 1973 War, people were no longer under-estimating this fellow. Anyway, we had Sadat's offer and, of course, this had not come in a vacuum. Israeli Foreign Minister Dyan had been meeting with Sadat's National Security Advisor Tuhami in Morocco. These were secret contacts between the Israelis and the Egyptians about which we knew nothing at the time. With alacrity, Menachem Begin issued the invitation to President Sadat to come to Jerusalem. They were communicating through the consulate because the Egyptians had no embassy in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv and the Israelis had no embassy in Cairo so we were playing a mediatory role.

I still recall one evening I was called in because we had received a cable from our embassy in Cairo which contained President Sadat's acceptance of Begin's invitation to visit Jerusalem. Since I was the junior officer I was the logical person to be the postman and the message was given to me. Menachem Begin was speaking that evening at a large assembly hall in Jerusalem, and I was tasked to take the message to that convention hall and to wait for Prime Minister Begin to finish his speech and then to deliver to him President Sadat's acceptance of his invitation. I thought that was a pretty cool thing for a young officer.

We tracked the Sadat visit very carefully when he came to Jerusalem and, like others, watched on TV as he descended the steps of the airplane and shook hands with Begin and embraced former Prime Minister Golda Meir, listened to his speech in the Knesset, which struck us as very orthodox in terms of Arab politics. Perhaps the most important thing we were meant to do was to get Palestinian reaction to the whole thing. The reaction within the West Bank and East Jerusalem was relatively favorable. Sadat had said the right things, he was still esteemed for what he had accomplished in the 1973 War. It was really only after the PLO weighed in from Beirut excoriating Sadat that public opinion in the West Bank shifted against the visit and against Sadat.

Q: At the beginning of this process from the Consulate General's point of view was the PLO in Beirut considered an intransigent group? Not only did you have instructions we couldn't work with them, but did you feel that their policy or mind set was such that they were probably were undealable with?

HULL: I don't think we necessarily thought that. I think given our parochial perspective we thought that there were good minds, good people in the West Bank and East Jerusalem whose views should count. After all these were the people living under the occupation itself, they were still inside, they couldn't get around to conferences or attend U.N. sessions and some of the other prerogatives of the PLO leadership. I think we, at least I, felt their views deserved to be heard and appreciated.

Q: What were you relations with the embassy in Tel Aviv? Did you go down there? Was there a lot of consultation or not from your part?

HULL: At the top there were regular consultations between Mike Newlin and Sam Lewis, and I think they worked very hard at maintaining that relationship. I personally did not do as much as I should have to cultivate relations with the embassy. I think that I, as a young man, was jealous of the independence of the consulate and resented any possible infringements by the embassy. And I think the relationships grew quite testy over time as we would be reporting things that made life uncomfortable for the embassy. So it was a strained relationship at my level.

Q: Part of it I think, would be just the normal thing. Here you are the political officer in Jerusalem and you go to Tel Aviv you are a very small fish in a much bigger pond, aren't you?

HULL: It wasn't so much personal prestige or status. It was that we were living in a schizophrenic world. There was very little common ground between the way the Palestinians saw things and the way Israelis saw things. I think, naturally, we took on some of the perceptions of the people we were dealing with primarily. That meant that naturally there would be a divide between the way the embassy would view events and the way the consulate would view events. I think I needed and others needed to make more effort to bridge that divide.

Q: How were relations with the embassy in Amman?

HULL: Cordial.

Q: How was King Hussein regarded on the West Bank?

HULL: With suspicion. The Hashemites after 1948 had moved in and annexed the West Bank and their rule over the West Bank had been heavy-handed in many ways. They'd been resented. Of course, the West Bankers, most of them, were Jordanian citizens and they had to be careful about how they conducted themselves, but there was no love lost between West Bank Palestinians and the King.

Q: So the Camp David process startewe are talking about after Sadat's dramatic trip to Jerusalem. How did things work out?

HULL: Well, initially, the United States took a step back from the process, because Sadat had acted to a large extent unilaterally and this of course, had derailed our preferred course which was to Geneva. I think Washington decided we needed to step back and see what the Israelis and the Egyptians could accomplish on their own. Not much was the answer. When the summit occurred between Begin and Sadat at Ismailia, it became very apparent that the two sides left to themselves would get nowhere, and therefore Carter and his team re-engaged and finally got the parties to Camp David. I think from my perspective it seemed like very impressive diplomacy at Camp David. The Sinai was settled relatively easily although the settlements were a significant issue. The real blood was spilled over what happened to the West Bank and Gaza, because that's what Begin did not want to give on and where Sadat needed something to maintain his position in the Arab world. Of course, what we did was we took Begin's suggestion of autonomy for the residents of the West Bank and Gaza, and we tried to push that as far as possible towards an interim arrangement of self-government which would then be followed by negotiations of the final status.

When I first read the Camp David Accords, I thought from a Palestinian point of view, it was thin gruel. After all the Egyptians had gotten virtually all of Sinai back, recovered the oil fields, the settlements would be uprooted. The Palestinians got what might look like a bowl of porridge, but the Department made a concerted effort to sell the Camp David Accords. Hal Saunders came out to Jerusalem, and we arranged a series of meetings between Hal and some of the best of the mayors, including Fahd Qawasmi and Mohammed Milhem. Hal made the rounds, or perhaps they came to Jerusalem, I'm not clear, and he made a very good pitch as Hal was always able to do. And again, as with Sadat's speech, the initial reaction from the Palestinians was interest. They didn't rule it out, but predictably in fairly short order the PLO came online from Beirut denouncing the agreements, denouncing the self-government proposal, and then we found our interlocutors scurrying behind the PLO's position, and we could never get self-government off the ground.

Q: What about visiting groups? Israel could almost convene the Congress there at one time or another. How much did they peel off over your place?

HULL: We saw a significant number of Congressmen who would want to hear both sides of the story, and we would arrange meetings for them. We benefited from that traffic.

Q: Every time there was a primary in the state of New York, every presidential candidate, practically, has to say they are going to move the embassy to Jerusalem, and it never happens but it is sort of the ritual. How much did you think of this as an issue?

HULL: It was constant. There was constant pressure from the Congress to do something. We would, of course, hope that the Department would hold the line, as they did largely.

Q: Did you find yourself being pushed in a corner by Congress people who, you know, at least at that time the Arab group was nothing compared to Jewish groups and particularly Jewish political contributions were extremely important to a significant number of Congress people, so were you sort of considered the anti-Semitic Arab lovers or something? Was this a problem with Congress?

HULL: I think Congress, the engaged members, were aware of what the consulate was doing and were uncomfortable with what the consulate was doing so there was a constant tension in that regard. We did get some sympathetic visitors. We were aware of Representative Paul Finley, who was sympathetic to the Palestinian perspective. We were visited by Senator Paul Simon from Illinois, who was very interested in hearing both sides of the story. There were exceptions, but generally we found Congressional attention more critical of us than otherwise.

Q: How well did you feel you were backed by the State Department?

HULL: I think we were backed very well. I think the NEA Bureau and the leadership of Hal Saunders, Roy Atherton by then I think had moved on and was the special envoy, and even in the White House Bill Quandt was the senior director. I think they were very serious, professional and fair-minded people. I never really doubted the Department's position.

Q: What about other countries? Did they have representation on the West Bank?

HULL: Yes. There are a significant number of European countries which have consulates similar to ours: the British, the French, the Spanish, the Turks have a consulate there and the Greeks have a consulate there, so we had our own little consular corps.

Q: Did they play much of a role from your perspective?

HULL: They were active, they were interested. It was a very high profile issue. The British, of course, had the legacy of the Mandate and a special position therefore. Most of the consulates were active and interested.

Q: In the area that you had responsibility for, were there many holy sites?

HULL: Oh, yes. The Haram Sharif or, as it is known to Jews, the Temple Mount is in East Jerusalem. There were sites in Hebron, notably the Mosque of Abraham where the prophet is buried as is Sarah and other patriarchs. There's Rachel's Tomb, which is on the outskirts of Bethlehem. There was Joseph's purported tomb up in Nablus. The West Bank had many sites of religious significance.

Q: Did these concern you all?

HULL: Oh, yes. They were flashpoints. In Hebron you'd have regular incidents at the Patriarchs' Tomb and the other sites as well.

Q: When you were there, were there any of these Israeli or Jewish fanatics trying to do things at the wrong place?

HULL: Yes. It happened not infrequently in Hebron, and also in the Haram Sharif area. There were significant challenges.

Q: Did that get you involved?

HULL: Well, if there was violence and casualties, it would be reportable. We would try to keep track and try to figure out how the incident occurred, who was responsible, and yes, that was part of our mandate.

Q: Did you have sort of well-meaning Christians coming to see Bethlehem and the holy spots and being in the wrong place at the wrong time?

HULL: A significant percentage of the Palestinians were Christians. Bethlehem is a Christian Palestinian town. The mayor was a Christian. And Ramallah was primarily a Christian town. First of all, you had Christians among the Palestinians. You had Americans, also pilgrims coming in, and we would be responsible for their safety and well-being. We would have to warn them if there were dangerous situations, but the situation was not as dangerous as is the case now when terrorism is widespread, there were real no "no-go" zones. At that stage you could still travel virtually anywhere in the West Bank in relative safety.

Q: I would imagine you would get the usual speecheas a former consular officethe people who believed they were Jesus coming back to his hometown and that sort of thing?

HULL: We did have those cases. Since I wasn't doing consular work, I really didn't interact very much with that element but it was certainly there.

Q: By the time you left in 1979 how stood things compared to where you were in 1975?

HULL: From our perspective, they had worsened. The settlement activity had expanded in a major way, and the political process had come to pretty much of a dead end after Camp David. The hope that had come with the election of the mayors in 1975 and the new blood, with the intense Carter negotiating efforts early in his administration, all of those promises had not really produced change. We left feeling that times would be tougher.

Q: Did a significant other develop during this period of time?

HULL: A very significant other developed. My wife, Amal, is a Palestinian. She was the director of the Islamic Museum in the Haram Sharif. She had been an International Visitor (IV) grantee, and therefore was on the consulate's list of contacts, and we had met at one of my welcome parties. I had with great relish recounted to her my experience in the Peace Corps living in Mahdia, the capital of the Fatimite Dynasty, an account which she found rather quaint. Over time our relationship became serious, and we married in 1978. It so happened that Vice President Mondale decided to visit Jerusalem on that day. My boss, Michael Newman, was always a great gentleman and gave me the day off.

Q: Did this cause any problems, having a Palestinian wife?

HULL: I think it raised many eyebrows. The Department handled it very well indeed. Michael Newlin had married a Czech national during the Cold War when Czechoslovakia was communist. He had had a similar personal experience, and that made him sympathetic to my experience. But the Israelis found it puzzling. When we went on our honeymoon, we arrived at the Ben Gurion Airport with one suitcase. They looked at my American diplomatic passport, and they looked at her Israeli-issued laissez passer identifying her as Palestinian, and they wanted to know to whom the suitcase belonged because if it was a diplomat's suitcase it would get cursory treatment, but if it was a Palestinian suitcase it would get very thorough treatment indeed. We told them that it was shared which produced a quandary. It was pretty clear that we made an impression. When we arrived back a week later and went through the processing, our passports were requested for processing and the official took one look and said, "Oh, yes, we've heard of this case." It was somewhat unusual and took some delicate handling.

Q: Since essentially you were reporting things that the Israelis rather not be reported, was the fact that you were married to a Palestinian used against you in the newspapers or anything like that? Did you ever feel any pressure of this nature?

HULL: No, this was 1978. No, actually, I think the pressure predated it and postdated it. Perhaps unusually, I don't think it was ever cited as a factor.

Q: In 1978 where did you go? Having spent five years or so there?

HULL: Yes, this is 1979 now after about four years in Jerusalem. I was recruited to become the staff assistant in the Near East Bureau, me and another young man out of Islamabad named Mark Grossman. (Mark had a brilliant career that included Ambassador to Ankara, Director General and finally Undersecretary for Political Affairs.) I think that I was spotted by the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary who had come to visit us in Jerusalem and whose escort I was. Since NEA then included South Asia, it was a good idea to have in the NEA front office someone with Middle East experience and then someone with South Asia experience. Marc Grossman and I took over from Ron Newman, later our ambassador in Bahrain and Afghanistan, and Jim Collins, who ended up as our ambassador in Moscow. We launched in 1979, I think it was probably September, right before the events of Tehran in November.

Q: Your job was what?

HULL: I was the staff aid in the Near East and South Asian Bureau working for Assistant Secretary Hal Saunders.

Q: How did you find Hal Saunders as a person to work for and how he operated?

HULL: Saunders was an impressive leader, and he, of course, was one of the major architects of the Camp David process. Henry Kissinger and then Cy Vance and Jimmy Carter had all come to rely upon him for his skills in analysis and diplomacy. To that immense competence he married a very rare quality of humanity, a very deep concern for the people with whose problems he was dealing, but also concern for his staff and the Bureau. So in many ways, it was a golden age in the NEA Bureau under his leadership. He made a real effort to create a team in that bureau. I recall, for example, when the peace process team would be prepared to launch on a trip to the Middle East, perhaps related to implementation of Camp David Accords, Hal would gather in his spacious Assistant Secretary's office a number of people from the bureau who were working on related matters, the relevant Deputy Assistant Secretaries, the country directors for Israel and relevant Arab countries, and other specialists in the negotiating process. He would sit with this group and brainstorm exactly what the Secretary of State or the President wanted to accomplish in this visit. He would talk through a scope paper, which Mike Sterner, the Deputy Assistant Secretary would then draft, and the relevant supporting meeting papers and issue papers. They would crystallize through that brainstorming process, a very purposeful plan for that trip that would ensue. This inclusive style, I didn't appreciate at the time, was rather rare in the Department of State, and more often people charged with an important issue would adopt an exclusive style. For example, the recent peace process teams really tried to minimize the number of people involved with two effects: one, they were denied the broader expertise that Hal was able to tap, and two, they alienated talented people in the bureau who could make contributions, wanted to make contributions, but were never asked or given the opportunity to make contributions. This inclusive team style of Hal Sunders not only resulted in better morale, but also resulted in a better product. Great strides in Middle East peace were made by the U.S. during that period, during the Kissinger and the Vance/Carter periods. I think one reason for those strides was Hal Saunders' leadership in the process.

Q: When it comes to the crisis in Iran, in a way, the Near Eastern Bureau's major thing has always been Israel and the Palestine question, and you have lumped in the Persians and the Indian types. All of a sudden this became hot. Did you see a dislocation of the thought process or how the bureau reacted to something that had essentially been on the periphery coming center stage? And really center stage too.

HULL: Right. It was as if we were hit by successive force-five hurricanes. It was a bureau that was preoccupied with the Middle East peace process. Of course, we had accomplished tremendous success at Camp David, and then as you say, the Iran revolution hit and that brought Iran to the forefront. Quickly thereafter, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan so the whole South Asia question came in a very dramatic fashion. And there was instability throughout the region, the attack on the mosque in Mecca, the burning of our embassy in Islamabad, problems in Libya. So the bureau was really buffeted by these diplomatic hurricanes. Its leadership and everyone in the bureau scrambled to react. With Iran, I think I previously mentioned that as a result of the Iranian revolution the senior management at the Department shook up the NEA Bureau and brought in Peter Constable, who had been Deputy Chief of Mission in Islamabad, as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary to reinforce the management. The person who really managed Iranian policy was Henry Precht, who was Director for Iranian Affairs. In those days Henry's influence and his activism were equally large. He took an issue which was relatively neglected and because of the dynamism of his personality really dominated the issue. I recall as a staff aid we could generally fend off most country directors who opportuned to our bosses. We didn't have any success at all fending off Henry. If he wanted something, he would find a way to get it.

Q: Did you sort of learn to give way to an elemental force?

HULL: In a way to survive and also because I think we recognized that Henry was doing important work, and he had a right to plead in a special way. He was dealing with bosses for whom the subject wasn't as natural, say, as Israel or the Arabs countries. But if Henry wanted something to happen while the Secretary or the Assistant Secretary was in New York at the United Nations, he would find a way to do it. I remember learning much from Henry. I later work for him when he was Deputy Chief of Mission in Cairo. One thing I learned from Henry was that charm is a potent diplomatic tool, and Henry would charnot staff aides, of course, who weren't sufficiently importanbut certainly the secretaries of the principals. He would find open doors around the building because the secretaries liked him.

Q: This shows where real power lies. This is true in any corporation. You have the secretaries, now I think they're call office managers

HULL: Right, the office managers who hold the keys to the kingdom.

Q: I understand prior to the final collapse of the Shah that Henry was so powerful and unswerving proponent of saying you have a real problem here, that the National Security Adviser, Brzezinski, wouldn't allow him to come to meetings because he would not give way.

HULL: Well, I don't have direct experience with that. I'll leave that for others who do.

Q: I think Henry has mentioned this.

HULL: I do know that part of the debate in Washington was what we should do with our embassy and the degree to which the embassy should be staffed up. And I think Henry, in a proactive way, wanted a robust relationship, wanted the embassy staffed robustly, and then of course, when the hostage crisis came, those people were in harm's way. It added, I think, to a sense of having got those people into this situation we had a responsibility to get them out of the situation.

There was, of course, a very intense debate about whether the Shah should be allowed into the U.S. after he Iran. As I recall it, Henry and the Bureau were quite against that. They foresaw ramifications for our mission in Tehran, and of course, we lost that argument and others prevailed upon the President to allow the Shah in. When that happened there was a collective holding of our breath, and I remember there was a demonstration planned to protest his entry, and we tracked it on a real time basis. It was diverted from the embassy and actually passed with relatively little violence. There was a feeling of relief when that occurred, but it was short-lived because within a few days the students had occupied the embassy, and we had a situation where colleagues that we knew were being held hostage, and of course, the whole hostage crisis, 444 days, then unrolled.

Q: When the students first took over the embassy was it the expectation that this would be like the one on Valentine's Day before you know, a day's thing or something.

HULL: Yes. Bruce Laingen was in the Foreign Ministry at the time, he had contact with the government, there had been a precedent in which the government had asserted its control, and so the initial expectation was that the situation would be corrected. But as time passed it became clear that it was a whole new ballgame.

Q: I realize you weren't in the sort of analytical side of things, but what were you picking up from people and Khomeini and his revolutionary government?

HULL: One of the perks of being a staff aide is you had access to the vault. The vault in NEA was this skiff, a secure area where classified documents were maintained. We had cabinet after cabinet after cabinet of classified documents and one folder was NODIS and dealt with the efforts that had been made by General Hauser, Deputy Commander in Chief of the European Command, to shore up the Shah prior to his departure. I remember reading through some of those reports and being struck by the disintegration of the Shah's regime and the security services, and like a castle of sand just melting away when the waves of Khomeinism struck. Although we weren't privy to all the information, we could indirectly get a sense of the issues. It was very sobering.

Q: What was the analysis early on of this really rather bizarre invasion of Afghanistan? It was sort of a communist country invading another communist country.

HULL: There had been a fear for some time that the Soviets would find a way to extend their power to the Persian Gulf and the oil there. When they moved into Afghanistan, this was seen as a move in that direction and therefore a move not just involving a client state but also a move with implications for U.S. strategic interests.

Q: Were we getting increasingly concerned about the strong fundamentalism? It had always been kind of lurking around. All of a sudden you had this popping up in Afghan, in Mecca and Islamabad.

HULL: We were greatly concerned about the threats to our personnel and with the instability. We had a huge investment in the Saudi royal family, in part, for economic reasons. At the time I think, our concern was not that a fundamentalist group would grow and be able to threaten directly the United States but rather that these extremists would threaten governments which were friends and partners of the United States. That was the problem we had already seen with the Shah ousted and so it was not a stretch of the imagination to see other "friends" of the U.S. under similar pressure.

Q: You were there for how long in the staff aide job?

HULL: I was there for a year. It was the most intense year of my life. Once our colleagues had been taken hostage there were no more weekends or much of holidays. The bureau became a 24/7/365 operation, and we gained breathing time only by trading off and doing every other Sunday as opposed to every Sunday. People like Hal and Peter Constable and Henry Precht virtually had no time off during that period.

Q: In a way though, what was the result of this devotion to duty? What was the end result?

HULL: I would argue a diplomatic success and a political failure was the end result because at the end of the day after more than a year of negotiations, Warren Christopher and Hal Saunders through the Algerians did negotiate a deal which resulted in the safe return of the American hostages. And it really was far from a giveaway in terms of other U.S. interests but rather created a process that was enduring and adopted by the Reagan administration to regulate our relations with Iran through that troubling period. But the unrelenting attention on the hostages and the way the White House allowed it to become the central foreign policy issue, I think, led to Carter's defeat and Reagan's election.

Q: How did the aborted attempt to rescue the hostages and the subsequent resignation of Cyrus Vance impact on what you all were doing?

HULL: We knew nothing of it before it occurred. It was obviously close hold. We read about it with a sense of horror, not only because of the loss of life involved among the U.S. military people, but most of us believed that had they got to Tehran it was highly unlikely they could have pulled this off without tremendous loss of life. For us again being personally involved, knowing the people who were hostages, we were against an approach that risked greatly that loss of life. Cy Vance, of course, opposed it very, very strongly to the extent that he resigned in its wake. We had great respect for Secretary Vance, and I still recall the line that formed outside his office when he said goodbye to the Department. I have never seen a longer line in the State Department. Everybody wanted to shake his hand and thank him for what he had done.

Q: By 1980 you moved on?

HULL: Yes. In the summer of 1980 while the hostage crisis was still prevailing I was relieved, and I chose to take the Algerian Desk which was bit unusual because normally staff aides would go to desks closer to the heart of the peace process (Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon). I thought the Algerians were particularly important at that time, given their role in mediating the release of the hostages, and I wanted to do what I could to improve U.S.- Algerian relations, in part with that in mind.

Q: When you moved there in the summer of 1980, was it that apparent that the Algerians were playing that much of a role in the hostage negotiations?

HULL: We had used a number of mediators. There was a lot of cloak-and-dagger surrounding some of them. They were not professional diplomats, and we were just driven to use these channels because we couldn't do anything directly with the Iranians, and we found no official party to work through. All of those attempts had failed. So when the Algerians because of their revolutionary credentials did manage to connect in Tehran with people who seemed to have influence and power there was great satisfaction because Warren Christopher and Hal Saunders finally had some channel in which to work the problem, where they could work in a professional, purposeful and effective way. So the Algerians were valued very highly by the Department. They turned out to be formidable diplomats and to play a very important role in resolving the issue. As I recall this was becoming evident in the summer of 1980.

Q: Talk a little bit about what was happening in Algeria at the time, the situation there and the diplomatic process.

HULL: The major issue for the Algerians was the war in the Western Sahara where the Polisario, a group supported by Algeria, was battling Morocco which had a few years before marched into the Western Sahara to annex the territory to Morocco. That was the issue most important to the Algerians. Beyond that there were important issues of liquefied natural gas (LNG). The Algerians were supplying us with LNG to a significant extent, and we had invested a good deal of money in that.

Q: What sort of government did they have?

HULL: The Algerians had a government that really flowed out of their revolutionary experience and the National Liberation Front (the FLN) had evolved into a dominant party, in a one-party state. President Bendjedid was in power, a relatively benign leader, one of the very few Arab heads of state who had ever given up power, but it was a state where you had a very strong single party, a very strong military which again had revolutionary roots. You had a minority Berber population, which was talented and somewhat restive, but you still had a society where there was a good deal of cohesion and national purpose.

Q: Did we see at that time any of the fundamentalist force which sometime later set upon a rather vicious war?

HULL: Yes. Not at the time. I think we, of course, had seen it in places like Saudi Arabia, but it was not apparent at least to me in Algeria until a bit later. However, I do remember one striking thing. In the course of my responsibilities I traveled to Algiers and at that time we could move around the country relatively freely. I remember on Fridays seeing vast numbers of Algerians overflowing the mosques and occupying adjacent streets as prayer places. It was very striking to me the numbers of Algerians praying. The elite was still French-educated and extremely sophisticated and French speaking, but the masses were obviously were taking a different direction.

Q: Wasn't there the migration to France that caused a lot of problems in France today?

HULL: Yes, it was going on very much at that time.

Q: Let's talk about Algerian diplomacy. Who were the diplomats and how did they develop their various skills?

HULL: Well, of the ambassador here was Redha Malek, who was a consummate Algerian diplomat. He did not speak English and so meetings would take place in French with Alec Toumayan interpreting. Alec was one in a long series of State Department interpreters, like Stephanie Van Reigersberg and later Gamal Helal, who were really more than interpreters. They were cultural bridges, and their contributions to our diplomacy have never received adequate credit, in my view. Malek himself wouldn't take a lot of notes, but at an important point in the conversation he would pull an envelope out and he'd scratch a few notes to himself. We soon learned he was quite a reliable interlocutor and got things straight, and that Algiers would be well-informed and eventually Tehran would be well-informed. He became a very, very important channel for us. At the time we had Rick Haynes as our ambassador in Algiers, a non-career ambassador, but a very good one and we had Chris Ross as the deputy chief of mission who knew North Africa and particularly Algeria extremely well. He had excellent French and excellent Arabic. We had an extremely strong team in Algiers, and the Algerians had a very strong team in Washington, not just Malek, but his deputy Slim Debagha. Their Foreign Ministry threw itself into the process: the Foreign Minister, and his assistant ministers, some of whom died tragically in a plane crash a few years afterwards. They fielded a thoroughly professional team without which I doubt that the hostage crisis could have been resolved successfully.

Q: One of the things you pointed out that is sometimes forgotten is that diplomats are judging other diplomats. And you're saying you found he was an excellent interlocutor because he was accurate. One of the problems sometimes being if you try to talk to another party and you have an intermediary in between, they are usually putting their own spin on it. In a way you were searching for somebody who was going to give you the real stuff?

HULL: We wanted a professional. We had had experience with talented amateurs who had connections in Tehran who seemed to be able to influence the Iranians and then had never delivered. That had been a very great investment with a great deal of time and effort through those channels including White House time and effort. We needed something that was more reliable, more professional.

Q: How did, from your position there, when you were staff aide, how did you view the White House? You know Carter, Brzezinski and all, were they helpful or sort of tending to run off in different directions or what?

HULL: The President was extremely helpful and dedicated to resolving the hostage question. Of course, Saunders had worked with him previously on Camp David so there was a great deal of familiarity and respect. The whole team from Carter through Vance and then Muskie after Vance left, Warren Christopher, Hal Saunders, Henry Precht and, in fact Jody Powell and Ham Jordan, played important roles, rather unusually given it was a foreign issue. There was this tension with Brzezinski and the NSC (National Security Council) staff. Gary Sick was the responsible person. State did not see eye to eye with NSC on many of the issues. There was this friction, but it did not impede working with the President, I think, because these people knew each other so well from the Camp David experience.

Q: How about particularly working on the Algerian desk, how did you find the role of the French with Algiers and with the Iranian crisis?

HULL: The French, I think, like most of our friends and allies tried to be helpful, but didn't have much influence. We tried every normal channel and some very unusual channels to find influence in the Tehran, and no one really had it.

Q: One of the interesting things I think is Algeria, although once you go back to Senator Kennedy, Senator Jack Kennedy, getting up and making his famous talk that sent the French up the wall about how Algeria should be freed and all that. We've never really been able to warm up to Algeria. Even today, I mean, do you see any reason for that? Maybe I'm wrong.

HULL: We did have a warming period at this time. After the Algerians delivered on the hostage issue, I and others who had worked with them, felt we needed to do more in that relationship. One of the first things that we did was to allow Chris Ross and me to go to Tindouf and meet with the Polisario. This had been off limits, and Saunders and the others decided to go forward with it in light of what the Algerians were doing for us. It also made a certain amount of sense since we had learned in the Middle East that it is generally a better idea to talk to all the parties in a dispute then to be one-sided. We made that trip, Chris and I, and it was a great encouragement to the Algerians and to the Polisario themselves although on that trip we made a special effort to interact with the Moroccan prisoners of war.

Q: Some are still there, aren't they?

HULL: Some are still there. We had been briefed that we would be exposed to the Moroccan POWs (prisoners of war) and we hit on a plan so that meeting would not be an exploitative exposure. We brought with us writing equipment, pens, pencils, paper. The Moroccan POWs had been arrayed in the sun obviously for some time before we were brought to the scene to examine the seized equipment and the prisoners of war. What Chris and I did was, instead of just reviewing them, we approached them, and we explained in Arabic that we brought paper and pencils with us and, if they wanted to send messages back to their families, we would be happy to take those messages. Initially, there was disbelief. They didn't know how to react, but then gradually they understood the opportunity, and they broke out of their ranks into these small groups, and there would be one in each group who could write. They would scribble off their messages to their families. The Polisario didn't know how to react. Finally after fifteen to thirty minutes, they decided this was not the kind of encounter that they had planned. We collected all of the messages, and I brought them back to Washington. Initially, the Moroccan government had been appalled even by the idea of the visit and said they had no interest in our communications, but then in a fairly short time they decided that, no, they did want to facilitate the messages getting to the families so we handed them over to the Moroccans. I think for many families it was the first communications they had with the prisoners.

In the grander scheme of things, my purpose was to improve U.S.-Algerian relations. The visit to Tindouf was one thing we could do. Another thing we could do was that the Algerians were very interested in getting C-130 aircraft. I was working with Deputy Assistant Secretaries Morris Draper and Peter Constable on a deal whereby the Algerians could obtain not C-130s, the military version, but the civilian version of the airplane. Of course, these are transport airplanes, not lethal in themselves. We were working this issue, but the election occurred and, of course, the release of the American hostages didn't happen until Reagan was sworn in. But then we found a new regime in the White House and Al Haig as Secretary of State, and there was such animosity towards the Carter Administration and such an aversion to dealing with the Iranian issue or anyone associated with the Iranian issue, including the Algerians, that we had this glacial chill which stopped our efforts almost dead in their tracks. At the lower levels, Peter Constable and myself, we continued to push because we thought the Algerians had earned this positive action on our part.

Finally, the new administration sent General Vernon Walters out to the area to assess the situation. Walters had had long, long good relations with King Hassan in Morocco, and on this trip he met President Chadli Bendjedid in Algiers. Walters was a consummate diplomat, a gifted linguist, and one of the most original envoys I have ever met. He would fly commercial airplanes with no regard to his personal security or perks of the job. He would just go and get the job done. So Vernon Walters was designated to go out and have a look at the situation. I remember the battles over the talking points because there was a very strong Moroccan lobby in the Department that didn't want to give an inch, and therefore drafting the talking points for the visit was a rather agonizing experience. General Walters said at one point he didn't care who drafted the talking points; what he cared about was who delivered the talking points, and Vernon Walters would decide how those talking points were delivered. I learned something from that. So General Walters made his trip and he came back. General Walters saw that we had an opportunity with Algeria, and he liked Bendjedid. He told me that Bendjedid reminded him of his father, and he wanted to do something to improve the relationship. So Vernon Walters put his shoulder behind the L-100 airplane deal.

Q: The L-100 being the?

HULL: The civilian equivalent to the C-130. So Vernon Walters came back and dipped his oar in the water and lo and behold, the action memo, which had been languishing for months, came back from Secretary Haig with an approved sign on it. I got word of it quickly. (Staff aide generally establish their own communication network that somehow race ahead of the official notice) So, I got word of this and ran up to Peter Constable and told him that we had finally gotten a decision. I had press guidance so that we could announce it that day, lest any of the Moroccan lobby in the Department try to reverse it. Peter initially was skeptical and wanted to make sure before he signed off on a public statement, and I produced for him the actual document with Al Haig's OK. Peter agreed, and we did announce it. We made the deal, and we felt that the Algerians had got not only a symbolic, but also a more tangible expression of thanks for their good work. Generally, I think at least as long as any of us who had been engaged in the hostage crisis were around, the Algerian embassy received a very warm welcome in the State Department.

Q: You mentioned something which over the course of twenty years that I've been doing interviews comes back again and again and that is how King Hassan sort of captured particularly our ambassadors. If he felt somebody like Dick Parker was a little too objective he'd get him PNG'd (persona non grata). Particularly political appointees just lapped it up, for example, the ambassador would say, "Our King" in his telegrams. Would you talk a little bit about being the Algerian desk officer against this mighty Moroccan machine in the Department?

HULL: You're right. Of course, the Dick Parker story is the classic one. Personally, I had not only the general situation, but when the Reagan Administration came in, Carl Coon was made head of North African affairs. Carl was a professional diplomat and competent, but he was very-one sided on this question. He was very pro-Moroccan. I think Carl came in with a determination not to allow what the Algerians had done in the Iranian crisis to threaten the U.S.-Moroccan relationship. I got my wings clipped pretty short by Carl, and I maneuvered within that constraint for the rest of my term as Algerian desk officer.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about the Polisario. One, what was the general feeling about the cause? Was there a right and a wrong or was it just one of these Middle Eastern things and who the Polisarios were as we saw them?

HULL: At that time I think people were divided on the issue. There was a group that felt the Moroccans had been high-handed in their Green March to seize control of the Western Sahara and that legally we were constrained by that illegal occupation in what we could do with Morocco. There was the other camp that was willing to turn a blind eye to the international legal questions involved and to put greater value on the historic U.S.- Moroccan relationship. As I said, anything dealing with the Western Sahara was very hotly contested within the Department and very problematic. Chris Ross and I had spent about three days with the Polisario in Tindouf. They struck one as extremely competent warriors, and we traveled with them in the desert, and I think into the Western Sahara, truth be told, in their jeeps and vehicles which they could not only drive with remarkable skill but could maintain with remarkable skill.

Q: Were they Berbers mainly?

HULL: They are Arabs from the Western Sahara. They had their own dialect of Arabic, their camps around Tindouf were extremely well-disciplined and orderly, they had projects for the women, and they were living in an extremely austere environment. They struck one as a revolutionary, disciplined, competent movement.

Q: I've always been troubled by the prisoner issue because there are people who have been in prison or POWs for 30 years or so. We sent missions out, I know Inderfurth went out with a group later on and was able to get some released. We've made efforts, but what's their point of view of keeping these people?

HULL: I think the Polisario feel they have very few levers vis-ï¿½-vis the Moroccans, and I think the prisoners are viewed as a lever to influence Moroccan policy.

Q: Was there a winner or a loser in this thing? At the time you are talking about was basically a stabilized border? Had the berm been built?

HULL: No. There was a more dynamic situation. It was still, I think, undecided how it was going to turn out. The Moroccans were taking some painful losses, but the Moroccan rulers were still pouring investment into El Aaiun, the capital in the Moroccan-controlled area, which I also visited on the trip. I think the turning point came with the construction of the berm and the enclosure of "the Sahara utile" (the useful Sahara). That structure increased Polisario casualties in a way that the Polisario, because of their very limited numbers and limited resources, could not easily absorb.

Q: Were the Polisarios a distinct group or was this something to which the Algerians were feeding troops into?

HULL: We saw no indication of Algerian troops in the camps. Chris Ross probably knew Algeria as well as anybody non-Algerian, and Chris never had that impression.

Q: But what about looking at the other side? I take it there was no particular problem with Tunisia?

HULL: Nothing that was, to my knowledge, pressing. Later on, of course, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria would be very much of a concern to the Tunisians, but that was later in the nineties.

Q: What about the real trouble-maker in the area, Muammar Qadhafi in Libya?

HULL: I would leave the Libya discussion for later when I was actually assigned to Tunisia.

Q: Was our embassy able, you say Chris Ross and I take it the others were able to get out, was there a hinterland and the cities and Algiers and all that? Were these two distinct areas?

HULL: I traveled with Chris a bit in Algeria. You did have different areas. The cities, Oran or Algiers itself, were in some ways very similar to European cities whereas the hinterlands were very Algerian. Then you had the Berber regions which were distinctive in themselves. Yes, you could distinguish.

Q: Again this is with very superficial knowledge, but it seems that Algeria and much of that area had been sort of the breadbasket of the Roman empire at one point. The French had seemed to do a pretty good job with agriculture. What was the situation? Were Algerians as Algerians able to move into, to continue the agricultural side of things?

HULL: Culturally, the Algerians were trying to Arabize. There had been great efforts to introduce in Arabic into the education system. They had brought in a lot of Egyptian teachers, for example. The dominant issue, I think, was economic and the Algerian government was following a socialist model and was failing miserably in developing the country economically. The oil and, even more important, the gas deposits were perhaps a hindrance in this regard because they provided a lifeline economically that forestalled the kinds of reforms that were needed. The housing was shabby and there was a great dearth of it. We had the earthquake that occurred to which we responded with alacrity. One of the impressions that you got in looking at the earthquake damage was how flimsy the housing constructed by the government actually was and how bitter the people felt that their basic needs were not being met by their government.

Q: Everybody says the Egyptians are a lot of fun to work with, no matter what government they have. But to the Algerians, fun does not seem to be an operative word. I don't know. Do you have any feel on this?

HULL: I think there is a revolutionary angst and then socialist seriousness that did dampen spirits a bit, although people like Redha Malek and his impressive wife (an activist in Algeria's revolution) were very gracious and very hospitable. But overall, no, you certainly didn't have the "joie de vivre" that you find in a place like Egypt. On the other hand, I must say political humor in Algeria to some extent echoed the humor in Egypt. You had very acerbic political cartoons and caricatures. So the Algerians were not devoid of a sense of humor.

Q: You left the desk when?

HULL: I left the desk in 1982, the summer of 1982.

Q: 1982, whither?

HULL: I went to Cairo, Egypt. It was very soon after the assassination of Anwar Sadat. Our embassy was growing by leaps and bounds because of the Camp David process and the peace treaty with Israel. The Egyptians were being shunned by the Arab world. It was a place where there was tremendous diplomatic action. It was also an embassy that was headed by Roy Atherton who was a legend in NEA. Henry Precht was the Deputy Chief of Mission, and he too was legendary. He had ended up in Cairo as a consolation prize when the Congress had refused to confirm him as ambassador to Mauritania.

Q: What was his problem?

HULL: Henry was held responsible for the loss of Iran. As happens in Washington, an individual will be singled out and, although immensely competent, will be in this way punished by the legislative branch. NEA certainly felt Henry had done yeoman's work and felt that he had earned an embassy and not being able to give him his own embassy, they did the next best thing which was to make him number two at one of the most important embassies in the world.

Q: Mauritania is not exactly a prize.

HULL: No, but I think for most diplomats an ambassadorship is the brass ring.

Q: What was the situation, this was in early Mubarak when you got there and what was the political-economic situation in relation to the United States?

HULL: My job in Cairo was political-military officer. I had no military background, I had been Peace Corps. But I remember that Skip Gnehm (later Ambassador to Australia and Jordan and Director General of the Foreign Service), whom I knew since his days in Damascus, had always felt that to be a good diplomat you really needed to understand the U.S. military, and you had understand military matters. I was very happy to have this job in Cairo which was then initiating the largest military assistance program that we had anywhere in the world. I arrived with a beard. I had had a summer vacation and started a beard. I met General Ed Tixier who was a U.S. Air Force major general, a very interesting character in his own right and immensely competent, about six foot four, very much a general in bearing, in intelligence, and in demeanor. Shortly after I'd arrived my boss who was Political Counselor Tom Carolyn came to me and said, "Edmund, there's one problem. General Tixier is not comfortable with your beard." So I told Tom the beard would be gone by tomorrow morning. That was the right thing to do, and I was soon adopted by the U.S. military in Cairo as one of their own and was invited to all General Tixier's staff meetings and had total access to him and very good relations across the board with the army, air force, and navy people. It also gave me a chance to get to know Minister of Defense Abu Ghazala, Chief of Staff Orabi and many Egyptian military personalities. And in those days even more than now, the political leadership in Egypt was rooted in the military. Nasser, of course, had been a colonel and the revolution of 1952 had been to a military undertaking. The Egyptian military in 1982 retained a dominant influence in Egyptian politics. So it was a very good vantage point from which to look at things more broadly in the relationship.

Q: What did you find, this must have been an emerging educational experience of a Foreign Service Officer having not come out of the military or had your time in the military. Were you able to take what amounted to a quick course in military matters as far as getting out and learning? What kind of the plane was that, what do they do, and how does this work that sort of thing?

HULL: Well, the assignment was like a graduate program in military affairs with its faculty General Tixier and then his successor Air Force Brigadier General Stan Musser and then on down the line through the colonels. The U.S. military is one of our par excellence institutions for teaching leadership and inducing leadership so I learned a great deal about that. And then I learned a great deal about weapons and F-4s and F-16s and M-1 tanks and I-Hawk missiles. It was ironic, at the time we had one of the best defense attaches in the business, Colonel Dick Underwood, running that operation. But the Office of Military Cooperation, the security assistance office, was really the office that had the insights and experience with the Egyptian military because they were working with these Egyptians day in and day out. The Egyptians had billions of dollars to spend, they wanted the latest and greatest. The technology vastly exceeded their ability to operate it or maintain it. We were constantly struggling to bring the logistic support and the operating skills of the Egyptians on a par with the kind of technology that was pouring into Egypt. A lot of the security assistance advisers got extremely frustrated with this mismatch. Some called the mission: "Kicking sand." We were constantly counseling patience and forbearance and trying to help the Americans in this strange environment function effectively.

One of the things I did early on was to read Mohamed Hassanein Heikal's book, Sphinx and Commissar, which was an insider's account of what went wrong in the Egyptian-Soviet military relationship. You remember the Soviets were kicked out of Egypt in 1973, prior to the war. They had been there for about five years or more. One of my intents was to learn from the Soviet experience and not have us repeat the mistakes the Soviets made. At the time there were dire predictions, including by people as knowledgeable as Herman Eilts, a legendary former ambassador, who did not think that the United States could sustain this kind of intensive military relationship with the Egyptians. Yet, we have sustained that relationship, and we are still there with a great presence. I think we did have success in that regard in shaping that relationship so that both sides found it tolerable.

Q: What did you see as some of the problems the Soviets had?

HULL: The Soviets would take bases in Egypt and turn them into Soviet bases, and the Egyptians would not be allowed in. There was no greater affront to an Egyptian than to be told you can't go somewhere in your own country. We never did that. We had only one location, Wadi Qena, which Sadat offered for contingencies related to the Iran hostage issue and which we kept secret, but even there the Egyptians had access. I think that was the most important step that we took.

Secondly, the Soviets kept the Egyptians at arm's length. They really could not interact whereas Americans for all of our faults and all of our shortcomings, we are not pretentious people. The U.S. military are salt of the earth and can relate in very personal ways to whomever they have to relate.

I think the third thing we did well was professional education and training in the U.S. The Egyptians who had gone to schools in the Soviet Union had almost uniformly very negative experiences. They were discriminated against. The Egyptians who went to U.S. military schools almost uniformly had positive experiences. They were welcomed. They were dealt with as equals, and they came back from those experiences favorably impressed.

There were at least three issues which challenged the relationship. They were nuclear warship transits of the Suez Canal, the proposed base at Ras Banas and host nation support for Gulf contingencies. The first issue, nuclear transit of the Suez Canal, was very, very important to us.

Q: Could you explain what that was?

HULL: We needed to be able to move nuclear aircraft carriers from the Mediterranean into the Gulf. For Gulf contingencies, we would at times need more than one carrier. To move that carrier around Africa or from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf took too much time. We wanted from the Egyptians an agreement that we could do this. We invested a great deal of diplomatic capital in this effort. I remember Assistant Secretary Nick Veliotes came out to Egypt and spent days working with, I believe it was, Presidential Advisor Osama al Baz on the Egyptian side trying to hammer out an agreement. We failed. I still remember I was the reporter for the meetings, and I had voluminous accounts of the discussion on this issue. What it came down to was the Egyptians would not formalize an agreement, and yet the Egyptians would give us a political promise that when we needed to do this we would be able to do this.

Q: It was sort of a don't ask, don't tell type situation.

HULL: Or, "knock and it shall be open to you." Our wisdom in that regard was to go with the political promise and not insist on the formal agreement. Of course, the formal agreement could have been revoked. There would have been some kind of provision for cancellation so it itself was not a guarantee. In the event, the political promise has always served us in good stead. We have moved carriers through the Suez Canal as needed. That was the first issue; the second issue was Ras Banas. Sadat had offered the U.S. administration a base at the extreme southeast corner of Egypt. In the wake of the Soviet move in Afghanistan, we had formed the Central Command because we had defined oil supplies in the Gulf as a vital U.S. interest. The Central Command was developing extensive contingency plans to deal with the possibility of a Soviet move further south into the Persian Gulf. They needed and wanted bases that would get them to the Gulf, and Sadat had offered this base.

Q: This is on the Red Sea?

HULL: This is on the Red Sea. So we began a negotiation to re-construct Ras Banas, and it involved the U.S. Corps of Engineers, and again we got immersed in an agonizing discussion. It boiled down to: Who was going to do the work? We wanted the U.S. Corps of Engineers to do the work and the Egyptians demanded that the Egyptian equivalent do the work. Washington would not give on this. I'm not sure if it was Washington politics about getting work for the Corps of Engineers.

Q: The Corps of Engineers being an extremely politically powerful group in Congress.

HULL: Yes. Or whether it was a question of standards. We didn't think the Egyptians could meet our standards. But the irony of course, was we were using Egyptian air bases in the interim and Cairo West right outside of Cairo most notably. For some reason, Egyptian standards seemed to work well in those instances, but we could not accept it if we were going to develop a base, pretty much from scratch at Ras Banas. So that failed and what we found ourselves doing instead was using existing Cairo military bases, particularly Cairo West, which we then improved instead of Ras Banas. That may have been a blessing in disguise. If we had sunk hundreds of millions of dollars into Ras Banas we might have taken "ownership" of it and then really created a serious bone of contention with the Egyptians.

The third issue was host nation support. Washington sent out teams to discuss the kind of host nation support we would want from Egypt were we deploying U.S. military forces to confront a Soviet move to the Persian Gulf. The U.S. military in their war planning developed worst case scenarios and maximum wish lists. The team coming out from Washington had a wish list that was absolutely mind boggling. Control of Cairo's International Airport, virtually diverting petroleum products for U.S. needs, an array of measures so that the Egyptians, I think, were just stunned. We received a polite hearing from the Egyptians, and then we received an Egyptian no which was not direct but rather no answer until after a very, very long time we finally understood that we were being turned down. So CENTCOM obviously had to work around this in forming our contingency plans.

Q: Did you that CENTCOM at that time was pretty responsive and knowledgeable about the Middle East things, and it was more the Pentagon, you know the people of the top, who make these plans thinking every country will give in. Did you see a discrepancy between the two or not?

HULL: Not so much. I didn't see it anyway. I think CENTCOM was still on its learning curve at this state. It didn't have the area experience it has now. The host-nation-support negotiations were actually handled by the Joint Chiefs of Staff representative Air Force Major General "Click" Smith, and he was really shooting for the moon.

Q: Yes, I find that talking to people so often one of the major bones of contention is base agreements. Lawyers from the Pentagon will ask for everything. In a way, it's always a non-starter.

HULL: I certainly agree that that is the tendency. I thought with Ras Banas the embassy was negotiating the agreement, and we were doing voluminous reports back to Washington and getting detailed instructions, very time consuming and it was also very nitty gritty and detail-oriented. In retrospect, I think a much more productive approach would have been for us to strike the best deal we could and then give it to Washington as a take-it or leave-it proposition. I think Henry, who was directing the negotiations, wanted cover from Washington. He didn't want to do anything that would leave the embassy open to the charge that we had somehow sold out U.S. interests.

Q: You were dealing with the military there? Were you conscience of all the time that you were being monitored by the Israeli military to make sure that you weren't making the Egyptians too good?

HULL: Well, the Israeli presence was very limited in Cairo. They had an embassy, but they were circumscribed. But the monitoring I think took place in Washington with any kind of arms proposal. Having a peace treaty did make a huge difference. We were pouring billions of dollars of equipment in and the Israelis were not contesting this as they were contesting say, AWACS for Saudi Arabia or F-15s for Saudi Arabia. The peace treaty made a huge difference. My sense was, no, the Israelis were not seriously opposing.

Q: What were you gaining from your American military colleagues about the Egyptian military. I read some time ago an account, I think it was a military attachï¿½, who had served in the Middle Eastern countries and pointed out that the training is a different mind set. You teach a lieutenant how to operate an artillery piece or something he will generally in the Middle East keep that knowledge to himself and dole it out, whereas we make sure the sergeants and corporals can take over. In the Middle East, knowledge is power and you don't diffuse it. Were there any aspects of this that you noticed?

HULL: Yes, not only knowledge being power, but spare parts being power or access to the base being power. There was just this general reticence to engage in teamwork and reticence to use up resources. There was a hoarding mentality, an accountability mentality and whether or not the military could perform was a secondary concern. Egypt, like most Middle Eastern countries, suffers greatly from not having an NCO (non-commissioned officer) corps so you have the officers at the top who often will not get their hands dirty and then recruits at the bottom who are there for a few years but then move on. So it was very hard to develop a trained, enduring cadre of technicians. Our people were extremely frustrated with a system so different than the U.S. system. It was a very great challenge to our people to engage with it effectively. More than once our trainers would go out and "kick sand" in frustration.

Q: I know I interviewed Admiral Crowe who at one time was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and when he was with the his equivalent in the Soviet military the Russian was saying, you know, your great strength is in your non-commissioned officers corps which is true. I have served in the military, and I know. The sergeants are the people you are relying on.

HULL: Right, quite true. We could never convince the Egyptians to take a serious effort to develop that corps.

Q: It's cultural.

HULL: It's cultural.

Q: It's cultural and some of these things may just not go. It may make it more effective on this side but it may louse you up in your struggle to survive in the society.

HULL: It may relate to their class system. When you don't have much of a middle class then it is more natural perhaps to have the aristocratic officers and the plebian enlisted.

Q: How did you find Egypt as a country in which to work?

HULL: We loved Egypt. We extended in Egypt. After three years as political military officer, I took over as the deputy political counselor at the embassy.

Q: You were there until?

HULL: Until 1986. There were security concerns, of course. This was a very active period of terrorism so we lived with that, but we enjoyed Egypt as a cornucopia of culture. We enjoyed all of that, we learned to ride horses, we enjoyed the Red Sea, we enjoyed trips out to the oases, we thoroughly enjoyed the country. It was a factor in my decision to come back as Deputy Chief of Mission in the nineties.

Q: Going back to when you arrived, Sadat was assassinated by a bunch of, you might tell who assassinated Sadat and the repercussions that must have been going on for some time, and also judgments of Mubarak. Would you like to talk about that?

HULL: Of course, when Sadat was assassinated, I remember I was up on the Hill and got the news which shocked Congress.

Q: The Hill being Congress?

HULL: Yes. I heard first-hand accounts of the assassination when I got out to Cairo. Of course, our ambassador, Roy Atherton, had been standing very close to Sadat, and he was very much involved in absorbing the psychological blow and working with Mubarak, who took over. Mubarak, of course, now looms large, but at the time Mubarak was considered a joke as a Vice President. His nickname among Egyptians was La Vache Qui Rit after the French processed cheese because the cow depicted vaguely resembled Mubarak.

Q: Sadat had been too.

HULL: As Sadat had been under Nasser. Osama Baz, who, I think, is probably the most intelligent man in Egypt, once explained to me the phenomenon that occurs when the successor takes over. He very quickly takes on the Pharaonic aura and deference begins and then grows until he becomes this almost Pharaonic figure in the political establishment, a little bit like the American politician who succeeds in being elected as President.

At the time Mubarak had some very strong partners. Defense Minister Abu Ghazala was a formidable individual. He spoke English, he was very gregarious, he was very dynamic, he was reshaping the Egyptian military using the U.S. connection to do so and getting the Egyptian military into a lot of areas including civil construction. The Egyptians were confronting this Islamic challenge, which peaked with the assassination of Sadat. Heikal described the phenomenon in his book Autumn of Fury. In the last days of the Sadat regime, one of Sadat's mistakes was to try to repress all opposition, extreme and otherwise. He had rolled up not only Islamic critics, but moderate critics including Heikal himself. Heikal had spent a good time bit of time in an Egyptian jail with the Islamics, and therefore in his typical journalistic fashion turned this experience into a fascinating book about this challenge. We watched the Egyptian government try to cope with this, and they did so by a combination of very tough security measures which the Egyptians are good at and a certain loosening up by Mubarak from the excesses of the Sadat era. The Egyptian people themselves have a lot at stake in extremism not triumphing because the Egyptian economy relies to a significant extent on tourism. Also the American connection was important, Not only the military but also the economic aid that we were pouring in was very important to the Egyptian economy.

One of the trickiest moments of that period was in 1985 when the Egyptian police force revolted. That was prompted by a measure to increase deductions from their pay that ended up being a pay cut, and the Egyptian police rioted. It was a very tense time. The riots extended to Maadi, which is the suburb in Cairo where most Americans were living and where the American school was located, and therefore embassy people calling home could hear gunshots in the background and knew that firefights were taking place around the school where their kids were. The Egyptians clamped down with a curfew, and we expected chaos and were surprised to find that the Egyptian public responded with great discipline, uncharacteristic discipline, and the curfew was very effective. The military under Abu Ghazala was called out to put down the police rebellion. I had previously recommended my parents come out for a visit so they were visiting us during this time and could watch the events on the street from our balcony overlooking the Nile. I always thought that my father had a dim view of my political judgment in the wake of that welcome.

Q: We were having this tremendous buildup of the military. What was it for?

HULL: It was so the Egyptians could show their people and the other Arabs that their peace treaty with Israel paid off and did not neuter them in terms of their military capabilities or their influence in the Middle East.

Q: I would think that the Egyptians would have a lot of T-72s and whatever MiGs there were. What did they do with them? You know, pretty soon you start running out of parts.

HULL: Yes. Many in the Egyptian military loved their Soviet equipment. They were familiar with it. It was simple to operate. , It was simple to maintain. It was in many ways the ideal equipment for the Egyptian military, and they were attached to these items. They did make an effort to keep them running. It was so common throughout the world that you could get parts for most of it. We couldn't help them very much doing it although we helped a bit. We had some expertise in Soviet equipment, but there was this lure of the latest and greatest, the highest tech so the prestige went to the fighters, to the pilots who flew the F-16s, not the MiGs.

Q: I remember talking to somebody who was doing the same kind of the work that you were doing at one point and taking an Egyptian who wasn't too familiar into warehouse to show him the inventory you needed to maintain F-16s. It's mind-boggling and to have a little part ready in a hurry; inventory control is one of the unheralded military disciplines. It is absolutely essential.

HULL: Absolutely. The Egyptians were still doing it with file cards in warehouses and finding a part or getting a part released was a major undertaking.

Q: Were you working on this?

HULL: Oh, yes. We've made great efforts at IT (information technology) and logistics. Our people, the American military, of course were true believers in this regard and understand it's the sinews of power. The Egyptians were tough sells.

Q: You were there from 1982 to 1986 period. It was a time when intelligence technology particularly computer work in inventories and information was just beginning to really hit the world. Some countries really take to it, obviously the Indians do and the Chinese. How did you find the Egyptians?

HULL: It was slow, uphill. They liked the control. They liked to have those parts on the shelves, they liked to have the cards. They liked to be able to demonstrate to their bosses that they had used up nothing, so it was counter-cultural to them.

Q: One doesn't think of inventory control as being a key part of military effectiveness but it is.

HULL: Absolutely.

Q: Our equipment is more complicated whereas a lot of the Soviet equipment I think, you could sort of cast in sand.

HULL: But the Soviet stuff was a perfect match for the Egyptians.

Q: I'm told when the Soviets first came in they were asked what the war plans were. Well, you do this and you do that and then you wait. So what are you waiting for? You wait for winter.

HULL: Winters are very mild in Egypt. I asked who was the enemy. We all asked that same question. The real enemy was Israel. No one knew whether the peace treaty was going to actually work out but the Egyptians couldn't say the enemy was Israel so we had this elaborate phantom, and then we had a convenient enemy, Libya. Libya was in our bad books, and the Libyans had provoked the Egyptians. So we got elaborate scenarios, threat assessments, involving Libya. The White House, under Reagan and with Admiral Poindexter as his Advisor for National Security Affairs, had its own scores to settle with Libya. The La Belle Disco attack occurred, we bombed Libya.

A move arose in the White House to settle the Libyan account once and for all, and the way they wanted to do that was to have the Egyptians invade and replace Qadhafi. Admiral Poindexter and members of his staff flew out in a highly secret mission to Egypt, met with Mubarak, and proposed this. By this time Nick Veliotes was ambassador and Nick as Assistant Secretary had had great battles with Al Haig and had just barely survived until Al Haig's replacement. But Nick Veliotes was a tough-minded ambassador who knew Washington. After Poindexter left, we met and the meeting included me and Henry and the intelligence liaison people. We looked at the proposal and thought it was a loser. We knew not only what the political sentiments were in Egypt, which were not that hostile to Libya, but we also knew the capabilities of the Egyptian military and that this could easily turn into a debacle.

This whole military establishment was pointed eastward not westward so you would have had to redeploy significant forces and then you would have had to sustain these forces as they moved.

Q: It was really more a supply problem. I mean, I would imagine that the Libyans would be kind of a joke as far as fighting you know, a regular battle but it would be mainly being able to bring up new troops. Wasn't that the problem?

HULL: Well, at one level it was that and then at the political level it would have been the problem of one Arab government ousting another Arab government which we found out in when Saddam invaded Kuwait is not viewed very favorably by the Arab world.

Anyway, we made this assessment and as part of this assessment, I took out a Michelin map of northeast Africa, and I showed Ambassador Veliotes the practical problems entailed in this proposal. The ambassador loved my presentation and said, "You're going back to Washington, and you're going to make this presentation in Washington. " Here was Nick Veliotes and these were the days of course of "Irangate" when the NSC was playing fast and loose.

Q: Well, Ollie North and all this sort of thing. It was a very peculiar time.

HULL: It was a very peculiar time, and I think one of the things in Ambassador Veliotes' mind was I'm dealing directly here with the National Security Council, I've got the adviser out here talking to President Mubarak. How much does Washington, the State Department know about this? And how do I get my embassy protected and how do we make sure the voices of reason in Washington have what they need as these issues are discussed back there? So he hit upon the solution of sending me back to Washington. And I went back to Washington, I didn't want to go because I meant to go on vacation at the time but I was dutiful and I went back and I arrived in NEA, and I met with Arnie Raphael who was then principal deputy assistant secretary and I made my presentation to Arnie Raphael. Arnie was the consummate bureaucratic politician, and he had an ambassador in Cairo that needed this story told, he had a White House that didn't want the State Department particularly involved in the issue and he had a very, very junior person here.

Q: What rank were you at that time?

HULL: I was, I think, an Foreign Service 03 officer.

Q: That would be about a major.

HULL: Very junior. So Arnie sent me off to a little make-work job preparing a written brief and then ultimately arranged for me to meet with the under secretary for political affairs, who would have been one of the State Department's interfaces with the White House.

Q: Who was that?

HULL: Michael Armacost.

So I ended up at the end of the week meeting with the undersecretary, making the presentation in the small time he had available and then feeling that I had done my duty and headed back to the Middle East.

In the event, Mubarak and Abu Ghazala also had a rather dim view of this enterprise, and we waited and we waited and we waited for a response.

Q: That's the Egyptian no.

Hall: Right. The CIA to its credit also recognized the flaws in this approach. Langley was responsible for recruiting the fifth column. Libyans who would support the invasion. Our local professionals, who knew the Libyan opposition, had great doubts about their wherewithal so Langley also probably leaned against this one. And so Poindexter's grand initiative to replace Qaddafi didn't washed, and I have always believed that President Reagan and the American people were spared an embarrassing failure.

Q: Did you get any view from the undersecretary where he was coming out?

HULL: No. I think Armacost was in a listening mode and not inclined to reveal his thoughts to me.

Q: Well, a fascinating insight into how things worked, particularly at that time where you had this, you know, you might say the major branches of government were in considerable suspicion of the NSC. What about our military? I mean, our attaches, the ones who knew about the capabilities. Were they?

HULL: They were very dubious. And we got no bite from CENTCOM., although in this case it probably would have been EUCOM as the supported command Libya was in their Area of Responsibility. But we got no push from the U.S. military, and this little war never happened.

Q: Were the Libyans doing anything nasty at the time or not?

HULL: They were always

Q: Vis-ï¿½-vis the Egyptians?

HULL: They were always rhetorically nasty, of course. They were in the lead of the Arabs trying to isolate Egypt from the Arabs post Camp David, and hence Qaddafi was posturing as the new Nasser which Egyptians found laughable. There were some pinpricks, but nothing that amounted to a casus belli.

Q: Was the Sudan a problem?

HULL: Sudan was not. The Egyptians were very interested in Sudan because of the Nile River. They felt kind of a big brother toward Sudan. They wanted the correct thing to happen in Khartoum in ways that would be compatible with Egyptian interests.

Q: I guess there were no relations with Syria at the time?

HULL: Most of the Arab world was boycotting Egypt.

Q: Did that make much difference?

HULL: It did. The Egyptians felt rejected, but the reaction was to reinforce their own feeling of superiority vis-ï¿½-vis the other Arabs.

Q: In a way, in talking to the Egyptians, did they really feel Arab?

HULL: Well, ironically they felt super Arab. Nasser, of course, had invented Arab nationalism and that was an Egyptian product. But they were Arabs, and they were more than Arabs. They also had this long pharaonic tradition of which they were very proud. Boutros Boutros-Ghali used to have his theories of concentric circles where Egypt would be playing a leading role not only vis-ï¿½-vis the Arab world but also the African world and then the Islamic world and then the non-aligned world and the thing in common here was Egyptian leadership in all of these.

Q: Boutros Boutros-Ghali was the foreign minister at the time, wasn't he?

HULL: He was the minister of state for foreign affairs which was the number two.

Q: From the military point of view during the time you were there how did the American military view Mubarak?

HULL: The American military loved Defense Minister Abu Ghazala, and they respected Mubarak. I think Mubarak came across to all visitors, not only the U.S. military but U.S. Congressman as well, as direct, candid and a friend of the United States.

Q: How about the Saudi connection? I mean, obviously the Saudis were on the Arab side but was there any other spillover? Saudi Arabia has always had a considerable number of Egyptian teachers and administrators and people at the professional level.

HULL: Right. And that was more or less maintained, and the Saudis kept coming to Egypt, to Cairo during the holidays and during the summer for relief from the austereness of the peninsula. So at a popular level there was much less of the shunning.

Q: By that time Beirut was out of the question.

HULL: Beirut was a mess.

Q: So if you are going to Europe in the Middle East, it's Arab.

HULL: Cairo was the Mecca for entertainment.

Q: Were there any significant developments with Israel or was this a "cold peace", as it's been called?

HULL: It was stable. There were things going on. There were the disengagements and withdrawals from the Sinai. The MFO (Multinational Force and Observers), the peacekeeping operation, the non-UN peacekeeping operation. in the Sinai was doing its job and doing it well. You had the Taba first negotiations and then arbitration to resolve the issue of who would have Taba, which eventually was restored to Egypt.

Q: This is a small area, what is it in the Gulf of Aqaba?

HULL: Yes, it's near Eilat on the Red Sea, the sliver of the Sinai that Sharon and others had hoped to maintain after the peace agreement, but that was working out in Egypt's favor. During the Reagan Administration, there was not a great deal of effort to build Middle East peace so it was a bit of a period of stagnation in terms of the peace process, except for implementing the Egyptian-Israeli peace accords.

Q: Then in 1986 you are off?

HULL: In 1986 I'm off, and I take a year at Oxford studying with Sir Michael Howard who was one of the foremost strategic thinkers of the age.

Q: How did you work this sabbatical or whatever you want to call it?

HULL: I think sabbatical is fair enough.

My wife had been curator of the Islamic Museum in Jerusalem when we got married and had given up that position and to some extent her career. True, she had been able to get a master's degree at the American University in Cairo in Islamic art history during our stay there, but she wanted to do further work in Oxford, and I felt we should do everything possible to make that happen. I also felt after seven years in the Foreign Service with intensive time in Jerusalem, very intensive time back in Washington during the hostage crisis and four pretty tough and demanding years in Cairo when we not only worked hard but there was a good deal of risk involved, we deserved some time off. The department had a national security studies program that sent people for a year to places like Harvard or the University of Maryland. I had, however, talked to visitors and had heard a great deal about Michael Howard, who was one of Thatcher's most important advisers and who was really on the Kissinger level in terms of his stature and his works. And so I had taken it into my mind to try to get to Oxford and to work with him. I applied for the national security studies, but I said send me to Oxford, and I demonstrated how the State Department would actually save money because tuition at Oxford was a pittance compared with tuition at Harvard. It was unorthodox, and it was not covered by Department regulations, but I made my case to Arnie Raphael, the principal deputy assistant secretary in the Near East bureau (NEA), and Arnie made it happen. To the extent that the Department could not cover something, NEA covered it so the mother bureau did very well by me. Arnie Raphael did very well by me. So we went to Oxford. We moved into a small row house near Port Meadows. I was attached to St. Anthony's College which had a lot of Near East types, and I began a fascinating nine months of basically reading about U.S. strategic thought and particularly U.S. military engagements and then meeting with Sir Michael Howard for about an hour and a half every two weeks to just talk about what I had read and what I had written. I'm sure it was interesting why Howard took me on because it was very unusual for an Oxford don to pick up someone of my background but I had heard that Howard developed a personal relationship with Ron Spiers when Ron Spiers was Deputy Chief of Mission in London. Ron Spiers was then in charge of management at the State Department so I had prevailed on him to write a letter to Howard to pick me up as a student, and Ambassador Spiers did that, and I think that carried the day with Sir Michael.

I also think he had a respect for practitioners which is unusual in academia and that he found it a little bit interesting to have somebody who was a practicing diplomat to talk to every once in a while in addition to the more academic students that he would be dealing with. So I read his works: The European Way of War, The Causes of War, tThe Franco-Prussian War and enjoyed it immensely. Then I read a lot about World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam and really felt for the first time I had a grounding in how the U.S. conducted its wars. It was a very intellectually profitable period.

Q: How did you fit within the Oxford academic system and students and the other dons and all and their approach? I mean, this is true if you go to Harvard or Wisconsin or something. One talks an awfully lot about theory and all and the other one says okay, fine. What do I do? Which is the practitioner's way. Did you find that, were they realistic did you feel in what you were getting?HULL: Well, Howard certainly had an appreciation for the practitioners' dilemmas. I never felt a significant gap there. It was hard to make connections across the board however. Oxford is a very bookish place. The interesting intellectual debate going on actually had nothing to do with the Middle East. It was directed at the Soviet Union. St. Anthony's had a series of lectures on events in the Soviet Union, and this was the period of early Gorbachev, and there were two camps in Oxford. There was a camp of eastern European ï¿½migrï¿½'s who took an extremely dubious attitude toward Gorbachev and the prospects for reform in Russia in the Soviet Union, and then there was another group, I think, it was headed by Archie McLeish, a Scott, who were Western scholars of the Soviet Union. They took a different attitude which was that something is happening here, Gorbachev is for real. They went back and forth in weekly presentations on various aspects of the problem. They were very stimulating because there was very sharp questioning between the dons and with the graduate students, which was totally absent from the undergraduate lectures. No undergraduate opened his mouth for fear that either the professor or his peers would consider him ignorant on any matter whatsoever.

Q: Well, also I don't know if it prevails in the university but the British system is replete with tales of being able to put somebody down. You know, rather than saying, "Well, that's an interesting question" and go on.

HULL: Very true. I once asked Howard why he didn't take questions after his lectures, and he said he had tried to do so but all of the accents were Yankee, and so he had stopped the practice. In any case, St. Anthony's series of graduate seminars on the Soviet Union reached a dramatic climax when one day the leader of the Eastern European camp, Hungarian I believe, got up after a presentation and announced that he had just obtained reliable data on the state of the Soviet Union's economy, and he now concluded that Gorbachev had no choice because of these economic factors. Reforms would have to take place, and it would be a new day in Eastern Europe. The conversion of the most eminent of the hard-line skeptics to the position of the perceivers of reform was a dramatic intellectual moment.

Q: It really is because when you think about the mind set of these people often, you know, facts don't pertain. It's almost devotion.

HULL: Well, these people were very serious scholars, and I believe they were intellectually honest, although skeptical.

Q: Sir Howard, how did he view American military policy over time and where it was going at the time we are talking about?

HULL: I think that first he was very close to Thatcher and although he was not in any way a simple minded conservative, he was to some extent a disciple of Bernard Brodie. He had a realists', very much a realists' view of the Cold War, and the Soviet nuclear capability and therefore he was not at all European in the sense of active opposition to the deployment of theater nuclear missiles.

Q: It was a time of, it was still the SS - 20 business, wasn't it going on?

HULL: Yes, I believe so, although I wasn't focused on that. He was generally strongly supportive of NATO, the UK's connection with the United States and the need for a tough Western position vis-ï¿½-vis the Soviet Union, Soviet bloc and the Cold War. At the same time, he felt that the Star Wars project was misconceived, and he compared Reagan himself to Hindenburg, a likeable, elder statesmen of great reputation, but no great competence. I think that was revealing as to his attitude toward the Reagan administration's approach certainly on such issues as Star Wars.

He also made a wise comment on the U.S. relationship with Europe. He suggested that the U.S. should not consider itself the CEO of the "West, Inc." but rather should see itself as the senior partner in a law firm and should use its influence, but not try to dictate policy to the Europeans, which inevitably they would reject.

Q: How did he view our involvement in Vietnam?

HULL: He didn't harp in criticism, but he viewed it as misguided and ineffectual and although he, and I think if you read his writings of the time, he lays out the mistakes in the U.S. approach, but he wasn't strident. He wasn't one to reduce the U.S. to that issue or let that issue overshadow the contribution the United States had made in World War I and World War II in the post-World War II world of Europe. He took a much more balanced position.

Q: How did your wife find it?

HULL: I think she found it very challenging. She found the English academics a little bit off-putting in that they were engaged with the subject academically and intellectually, but without cultural affinity or understanding. So it was a rather difficult period in that regard.

Q: In '87 whither?

HULL: Bob Pelletreau had been named ambassador to Tunisia, and I was recruited to be his political counselor at the embassy in Tunis.

Q: Let's talk about the Achille Lauro. Would you explain what the Achille Lauro was and the situation and then about what you saw.

HULL: The Achille Lauro was an Italian cruise boat that was cruising in the Mediterranean in the early fall of 1985 and it was taken over by four terrorists from the Palestinian Liberation Front. Among the passengers on this boat were scores of American citizens so when the news of the hijacking took place, of course, all the embassies in that area of the Mediterranean were put on alert. We followed events very closely. Embassy Cairo where I was then serving as deputy political counselor became particularly involved when the terrorists finally decided to bring the boat into Egyptian waters which meant that the Egyptian authorities would have control of the boat, the terrorists and the hostages.

Q: And then how did this play out?

HULL: Well, Nick Veliotes was ambassador in Cairo at the time. Nick had been Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs in Washington and had been more or less rewarded for that very, very difficult job by being named ambassador in Cairo. At that stage, Cairo was the largest embassy in the world so it was quite a prestigious position. Nick Veliotes was of Greek ancestry, an exuberant diplomat, and very, very shrewd. He knew Washington, and he knew the Middle East. He was very outspoken in his approach, and therefore he made a very striking contrast to Roy Atherton who had been the previous ambassador. I felt it was very hard not to like him because with Nick Veliotes you saw the man in full. I enjoyed working under him as I had enjoyed working with Roy Atherton.

We were in touch with Washington pretty much on a 24-hour basis because of the crisis, and we were talking with the operations center and particularly with P (the office of the undersecretary for political affairs), specifically with Chris Ross who was then executive assistant for Undersecretary Mike Armacost.

As the boat headed toward Egyptian waters, we got an instruction from P, and they were to be very candid with the Egyptians: what we expected of them and that included not only going to the assistance of the hostages, but arresting the terrorists and bringing them to justice either in Egypt or handing them over to the United States. I remember getting this instruction from Chris Ross in the wee hours of the morning going over to the residence and passing on the instructions to Ambassador Veliotes, who promptly called the Minister of Defense Abu Ghazala, the second most powerful man in Egypt at the time. Ambassador Veliotes conveyed our position with very strong language, laying down an unmistakable marker.

We were then of course, tasked to go to the aid of the hostages.

Q: What was the situation vis-ï¿½-vis the boat? I mean the ship. Was the ship coming in to Alexandria?

HULL: The ship was coming into Port Said.

Q: We knew it was coming in.

HULL: We knew it was coming in to Port Said. So Ambassador Veliotes asked me to accompany him to Port Said. I had a few minutes to pull my thoughts together which included such practical things as getting a list of the names of the hostages as we knew them and then we drove up to Port Said. We had a very good honorary consul there, Hassan Fathy, an Egyptian whom I had worked with before. He did a very good job of linking us up with the governor and then the security authorities, who quickly arranged to transport us to the boat. So we actually met the boat at sea in Egyptian waters before it was able to come into Port Said. I remember it was during the night and the seas were relatively high making the transfer from the small boat to the big passenger liner somewhat difficult. Finally we got onboard, and we found a traumatized crew and passengers.

Q: Were the Egyptian military, were somebody on board? You weren't just boarding it with the hijackers?

HULL: The hijackers had already been removed from the boat so we were going on and we had Egyptian authorities on board, but the crew was basically back in charge of the vessel at this time.

The first thing we did was to verify the well-being of the American citizens onboard. It was early morning and the passengers were asleep in their cabins. I had my list of American passengers, so I systematically went around knocking on cabin doors and checking off any Americans from that list. I found all but one passenger. Meanwhile, Ambassador Veliotes had engaged with the crew, who didn't have a lot of English but who were by gesturing and pantomime explaining to us that something had happened. That something was that Leon Klinghoffer, an old and infirmed American had been killed by the terrorists. He was in a wheelchair at the time and his body had been dumped over the side. The crew took me to the location., and you could still see on the side of the vessel bloodstains from where Mr. Klinghoffer's body had struck the side in going overboard. His wife was there. She and the other passengers confirmed the account of the crew, and we knew that we had a very difficult situation because not only did we have the problem of taking care of the hostages, but now the Egyptians were really on the spot because the hijacker who had been taken into custody were now clearly guilty of murdering an American.

On the way back to Port Said, my primary mission was to try to take care of the hostages as best I could and that meant trying to give them assurances that now they had U.S. government representatives there to help them, that their needs would be taken care of, that Klinghoffer's murder would be pursued. Of course, they were highly emotional and also recovering from the period in which they were held helpless in mortal terror. One thing that I decided would be good to do to fill the time would be to have all of them sit down with pen and paper and to write out an account of their experiences. That would give something written for the Egyptian investigators. It would also give the passengers something to do as we were steaming toward Port Said.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Veliotes was in touch with the captain, and as we came into Port Said, the Ambassador spoke over the ship-to-shore phone with Egyptian officials. I believe it was with Defense Minister Abu Ghazala. In no uncertain language, he reminded him that Egypt was responsible for bringing these terrorists to justice and used expletives in so doing. Ambassador Veliotes had no idea that this call was being monitored by the media, but it was. It was on an unclassified system and so his salty language was carried in the media and caused great consternation in Egypt and probably elsewhere in the Arab world. But Ambassador Veliotes had given fair warning and was now accurately predicting the action that would happen in Washington with confirmation of an American citizen's death.

When we finally got in Port Said, Ambassador Veliotes made his way back to Cairo to manage the crisis which now was in full swing in Egyptian-U.S. relations. I was asked to stay with the hostages, and at this stage we were joined by the regional psychologist from the embassy. We were bussed to a military airbase outside of Cairo and boarded a C-130 to be flown to Germany for medical examinations. I accompanied the hostages.

In midair, we had news that American military aircraft had intercepted the Egyptian airplane that was taking the terrorists from Egypt to Tunisia, which at the time was the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization. President Reagan had made the decision that we would so intervene and force the Egyptian airplane down at the U.S. Naval Air Station in Sigonella, Sicily. This interception caused even greater consternation back in Cairo.

We were diverted from Germany to Sigonella to give some of the hostages the opportunity to identify the terrorists and that process took place at the military. While this process was being done, many of us were outside in a waiting area. We were joined there by the team from the Special Operations Command (Socom) which had been shadowing the Achille Lauro at sea. So, we had an interesting situation in which the hostages, the terrorists, the U.S. special operations personnel and U.S. diplomats were co located and to some extent, could discuss the incident. At that time, I learned that special ops team had been prepared to storm the vessel. The hostages on hearing of this plan to storm the vessel expressed relief that it had not occurred. The hostages had been separated into different groups. The hijackers were with those dispersed groups, had automatic weapons and had radio contact. At least some of the hostages believed that if the storming had occurred, the hijackers would have opened up with automatic weapons, and there would have been many casualties.

The next move came from the Italians. Balancing their diplomatic interests as they saw them and knowing that this was a highly sensitive subject in the Arab world, the Italians decided to move the hijackers to Rome out of American custody. General Steiner who was commanding the special operations forces insisted on accompanying the hijackers. When the Italians refused, he ordered his small jet to take off from the base without clearance and he flew over, just over, the heads of the Italian authorities and directed his airplane to Rome. His concern was well founded because eventually the Italians did release Abu Abbas, who was not among the hijackers of the Achille Lauro but who had come to Italy to meet with his men who had been hijackers and who was responsible with commanding the operation. So this caused a great stress to U.S.-Italian relations as well.

After I had handed the American citizens over to doctors and psychologists at Sigonella, I was pleased to return to Cairo and did so to find that a diplomatic firestorm was taking place. The Egyptians were outraged, especially by the interception of the Egypt Air flight. The Egyptians believed that they had done a service to the U.S. by arranging for the hijacking to end without further loss of life.

Q: Had they known at the time that Klinghoffer had been killed?

HULL: It was not clear that they knew at the time. We, the American Embassy, did not know at the time. There were media reports that a hostage had been killed but those were unconfirmed reports. In his conversations with the Defense Minister, Ambassador Veliotes clearly laid down a marker that we wanted the terrorists held responsible and specifically mentioned that if any Americans had been killed or harmed that would be a very serious affair. Then from the boat, of course, we confirmed to the Egyptians that Klinghoffer had been killed and therefore in taking their action of transporting or trying to transport the hijacker to Tunis the Egyptian government was acting with knowledge an American had died.

Q: Just to get the chronology link, Veliotes had informed the Egyptian authorities Klinghoffer had been killed before the Egyptians had allowed the Egypt airplane to take off.

HULL: I'm not sure that it was before they allowed the Egypt airplane to take off, but in any case the terrorists were still in Egyptian custody while in flight. So they had the possibility of either keeping them in Cairo or turning the plane around.

So, there was a diplomatic firestorm in Cairo, and the Egyptians needed a scapegoat. They could not or would not make President Reagan or Secretary Shultz the scapegoat and so Ambassador Veliotes became the scapegoat. Ambassador Veliotes was particularly castigated for the language he had used when the Achille Lauro was approaching Port Said. It had been salty language. Ambassador Veliotes took this scapegoating with great professionalism, even stoicism. I never heard him complain, I never heard him fault Washington but at the end of the day it was the ambassador who was forced to leave Cairo prematurely and pay the price of the diplomatic crisis.

Q: Something like this with the embassy and all this is not one of these things where you could say, "Well, you know, it's one of those little tiffs" or something. It must've affected you all, to be mad as hell at the Egyptians for doing that.

HULL: I think there was a very strong feeling on the part of Americans in Cairo, certainly those of us involved directly with the hostages. But we had in Ambassador Veliotes an example of how we were to conduct ourselves and that was to be professionals and to carry on with our mission.

Q: How did you judge the reaction in Egypt? Did they see the enormity of what the hijackers had done? Or did it fall into Arab support of Arabs?

HULL: Well, of course, you have to remember that at this time there were lots of acts of terrorism going on in the Middle East and this was not the only one. It was the only hijacking of a vessel at sea. The Arabs viewed these incidents against the background of the Palestinian issue and attempts by the Palestinians to draw world attention to their cause and therefore there was a great sympathy in Egypt and throughout the Middle East.

One footnote I would like to add here. I didn't really understand how closely Washington was following the whole business until later when I received a letter from Secretary of State Shultz. This was in early December. Secretary Shultz had read reports of the operation and of our efforts on behalf of the hostages and had taken the time and trouble to send a letter to me. It's one I'm very proud of.

"December 4, 1985

Dear Mr. Hull,

I was pleased to read the accounts written by (embassy doctors) concerning the activities of the embassy team that responded to the victims of the Achille Lauro hijacking. Both of the doctors commented on the excellence of your performance in alleviating the distress of the hostages and expediting their departure from the ship. Quotations from these reports best portray your efforts:

"He expertly reinforced the image the ambassador presented by being open, communicative, stable and caring. He was superb as he worked quietly and diligently in taking care of everything from the mundane to the diplomatic."

Your performance meets the highest goals and traditions of the Foreign Service. I commend you for your work in this tragic situation.

Sincerely yours,

George P. Schultz"

I think this was indicative of Secretary Shultz and the attention and care that he took with the Foreign Service in appreciating our efforts and in going out of his way to recognize those efforts.

Q: I have to say that I have been doing these interviews for 20 years now and all secretaries of state are involved. I mean going back to the '30s and George Schulz seems to stand out as being the one who is respected as being both you might say administrative skills in dealing with the Foreign Service and his diplomatic skills and carrying on a foreign-policy under difficult circumstances. It was not the easiest group to deal with in the administration or the situation abroad.

HULL: Yes, I would agree. I think one of his lasting legacies is the strengthening of the Foreign Service and the creation of the National Foreign Affairs Training Center.

Q: Where we are now. Named after him and rightly so. It wouldn't have happened if he hadn't been Secretary of State.

Let's move on to 1987. You're off now to Tunisia.

HULL: Right. Tunisia at this stage was a very interesting posting for three reasons. One, President Bourguiba, the founding father of the Tunisian Republic, is in his late 80s and faltering and therefore his succession is in the offing. Secondly, the Arab League had moved from Cairo to Tunisia as a result of President Sadat's peace agreement with Israel and therefore Arab politics were very active in Tunis. Number three, the PLO had also moved its headquarters to Tunis after it had been forced out of Lebanon by the Israeli invasion in 1982. So what had been a diplomatic backwater at many times, at this particular moment was a focus of a great deal of American diplomacy.

Q: Your job was what?

HULL: I was political counselor.

Q: Let's talk about the ambassador. Who was it and what was his background? How did he sort of use the embassy?

HULL: Ambassador Robert Pelletreau was one of our most outstanding diplomats. He had previously been ambassador in the Gulf. He had previously been a deputy assistant secretary in State and in Defense. He was an extremely thoughtful man, a New Englander who chose his words carefully and spoke precisely. He was a man of great integrity and honesty. He was trusted by Washington, and he was a delight to work with because he was also very personable, treated his staff with respect and gave them scope to develop their talents and use their talents. I could not have asked for a better boss.

Q: As you hit the ground there what was preoccupying you?

HULL: Tunisia was in a very strange situation. Bourguiba was still functioning as president and yet he was doing so erratically. I had a chance to see this firsthand because when Ambassador Pelletreau presented his credentials he took with him a small group from the embassy which included myself and so we had a chance to meet President Bourguiba and to see his state. Now I had been in Tunisia from 1971 to 1973 in the Peace Corps so I had known Bourguiba of the early '70's when he was one of the leading statesmen in the Arab world. He was very farsighted and his vision for Tunisia was still producing benefits. The man I saw in 1987 was a shadow of his former self. He could barely carry on a conversation. He was very shaky on his feet and it soon became clear that his mental faculties were fading fast because he would dismiss a cabinet one week, make new appointments and then the following week he forgot who he had appointed to the various ministries. So it was clearly just a matter of time but it was not clear at all how the succession would occur and what damage might occur to Tunisia if President Bourguiba continued to exercise his powers in senility. The minister of interior was a young man named Ben Ali and he was respected. He was a very efficient interior minister. It was therefore of interest to us when he suddenly became promoted to prime minister and began to organize a new government. As I said, these shifts were occurring weekly in some instances. I'm sure that Ben Ali knew that the tenure of prime minister was tenuous.

I got a phone call one evening from Ambassador Pelletreau who asked me to come over to the residence. When I got there Ambassador Pelletreau said he wanted to talk to me about a meeting he had had. He had been called in to see Prime Minister Ben Ali, and Ben Ali had spoken to him about President Bourguiba's condition and also in general terms about the stability of the country.

Ambassador Pelletreau was trying to decide what to make of this conversation. It was clear that he and Ben Ali had agreed that President Bourguiba was no longer functioning adequately. A few days after that we were both given the news that President Bourguiba had been declared incapable of governing and pursuant to the clause of the Constitution he had been moved out and Ben Ali had assumed the presidency. In this, Ben Ali had the support of Hedi Baccouche, a leading politician of the ruling party, as opposed to Ben Ali, who was more of a career official. The Tunisian Army fairly quickly fell in line with Ben Ali. We looked at the technicalities of it. We, of course, knew the conditions Ben Ali had come through. We knew that Ben Ali had the strong support of the security services and the political party. So our judgment to Washington was that the succession was not in effect a coup. It had been done according to the Constitutional requirements, and Ben Ali was in power and likely to stay in power. Our recommendation was that the U.S. government should recognize the new government as legitimate.

We had been told, I had been told in training, and Ambassador Pelletreau knew from experience that in these situations what was most important to Washington is clear-eyed analysis of the situation and then a very clear recommendation on what U.S. policy should be. I believe we provided that focus to Washington, and Washington followed our advice.

Q: Was there a strong opposition hovering over the horizon at that time? Were we looking at say, a radical Islamic thing or something going on of that nature?

HULL: Political Islam was a significant concern. In Algeria, the storm clouds were gathering. It would take another year for that to explode, but we knew political Islamists in Tunisia had a very strong party and were a factor in North African politics.

We were also concerned frankly with Libya because at that stage Qaddafi was still very rambunctious, doing irresponsible things. Only a few years earlier, he had actually intervened in Tunisia militarily, and we wanted to head off any adventurism on the part of Libya.

Q: What was the intervention like?

HULL: It was an intervention in the south across the border that divides Tunisia from Libya and a small military altercation between the two.

Q: Anything happen?

HULL: Yes. In those days of course, Libya was a bete noire for Washington. We very strongly supported Tunisia. We increased our military assistance to Tunisia, and we wanted to lay down a clear marker that Tunisia had very strong friends if the Libyans wanted to repeat their adventure. Also the offshore oil fields that the Libyans and Tunisians contested were subsequently determined to be Tunisian by the World Court. So we kept an eye on that situation as well.

Q: In this we had helped check Libya so what, did you at that time see a real contest of power inside Tunisia?

HULL: Our judgment was that Ben Ali would hold power because he had the support of the military, the security services and the party. The question was what kind of power it would be and initially Ben Ali and Baccouche adopted a very liberal position, including a declaration that, I think, Thomas Jefferson would have been proud of. There was a hope that under Ben Ali, Tunisia would see a flourishing of democracy. In Bourguiba's old age, he had become more tyrannical and had lashed out at all opposition groups so Ben Ali arrived with the promise of a lighter hand. Unfortunately, as time passed those early promises were not respected, and Ben Ali's strong security bent became dominant and so since '87 we have seen a progressive hardening of the rule in Tunisia and the golden opportunity for an Arab democracy was missed.

Q: Where stood you know, some of the groups, I'm thinking of students, the general population. How did they stand?

HULL: I think the general population understood that President Bourguiba's time had passed. There was a joke at the time, I recall. An old man would go down each day to the newsstand and look at the front page. He would never buy a paper, just look at the front page and then he would go home. After he did this on several occasions, the agent at the newsstand said, "Well, why don't you buy a paper?" And the old man said, "Well, you see I'm only interested in the obituaries." And the news agent said, "Well, that's all the more reason to buy the paper because the obituaries are on inside pages." And the old man said, "Not the obituary that I need to see."

Ironically, relieved of the presidency, President Bourguiba returned to his hometown of Monastir and lived many more years. He proved to have a very robust constitution and was treated with respect throughout his very long life.

Q: After this constitutional move, how stood the situation in Tunisia?

HULL: The situation was fairly stable and under the economy minister, who was a former World Bank official, the Tunisians had initiated a series of economic reforms in 1986. Those reforms grew out of an economic crisis that proved, in retrospect, an opportunity and the minister of economy helped the government take full advantage of it. The reforms that he enacted put the Tunisian economy on a successful track which it has maintained since 1986.

Q: Well, in a way they were blessed by not having overwhelming oil. This is often a curse.

HULL: Exactly. On either side of them in Algeria and in Libya, oil or gas-rich economies that did not develop in a healthy way. So you're right.

Q: The PLO has relocated to Tunisia. We all remember Black September in 1970 in Jordan. I mean the PLO was certainly a nasty tenant in Lebanon. Had they learned their lesson? How did they stand?

HULL: This was a different situation. The PLO in Tunisia was not the PLO with armed military might. After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the PLO forces had been dispersed around the Arab world. Some had gone to Sudan, some had gone to Yemen. What had come to Tunisia was the PLO leadership, the politicians. Abu Ammar (Yasser Arafat), Abu Jihad (Khalil al-Wazir), Abu Iyad (Salah Khalaf) those were the ones that were in Tunisia. At that stage, there was a strict prohibition against U.S. contacts with the PLO except the very limited, carefully controlled security contract which had occurred mostly in Beirut. So we were in a situation of being in the same space, but not talking to each other. Often we would be at events where we might turn to our neighbor, ask a few polite questions and learned that it was a PLO official at which stage you had to pretty much terminate the conversation and not be perceived as engaging. The PLO presence did attract attention and sometimes violent attention. The Israelis on one occasion conducted an air strike on PLO headquarters which was just outside Tunis killing many Tunisians which, of course, then strained the U.S.-Tunisian relation. On another occasion, Israeli commandos landed on the beaches and then proceeded to use the house of Abu Jihad and assassinated him. Abu Jihad was perhaps the most popular leader in the Palestinian national movement, more popular than Arafat, The Israelis targeted him almost certainly because they were confronted in the Occupied Territories with the Intifada (the uprising). Although the Intifada was really homegrown, the PLO had to respond to it and Abu Jihad had responsibility for the occupied territories, and therefore the Israelis were sending a message in assassinated him. In a way, it was a futile gesture. It had no practical impact on the Intifada, which was an indigenous phenomenon. However, it did deny the PLO one of their best leaders.

Q: When you're using the term "Occupied Territories", could you explain if that had a specific meaning.

HULL: We're talking about the West Bank of Jordan and Gaza Strip which were occupied by Israel in 196i.e. the former being the consular district of Jerusalem where I had worked from 1975-79. So, there was a great deal of tension on and off, and we were following things as closely as we could but at arm's length. In 1986 in the fall, Arafat convened the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in Algiers next door, and I was asked to go over from Tunis to help Algiers in reporting on the meeting. At that time, we had Chris Ross in Algiers I believe, as charge. Chris was one of the most outstanding Arabists of his generation, and a very canny diplomat. I enjoyed working with Chris.

We covered the council meeting. Of course, we did not go directly but we had developed in Tunis very good relations with American media and when they came into interview Arafat, they stopped by the embassy and got our take and we are would get their take. Therefore, we had some pretty good accounts and assessments of the chairman and the PLO. Then those same correspondents covering the PNC would help us out in understanding what was going on.

It turned out that this was an historic meeting. In the meeting, Yasser Arafat declared the foundation of the Palestinian state but in so doing recognized Israel as a state and this was a significant departure from the Palestinian covenant. It was not enough, however, for Washington to initiate a dialogue. We had our conditions that Assistant Secretary Dick Murphy had endlessly repeated around the Middle East which included recognizing Israel but also renouncing violence and terrorism and accepting Resolution 242. There followed a couple of months of diplomatic back and forth indirectly between the PLO and Washington, including a very memorable visit to New York by Arafat for the General Assembly in which he addressed the assembly with a handgun strapped to his waist. Finally, Arafat made a statement , I believe it was in Geneva at a UN special session on Palestine which had been transferred from New York to Geneva because of visa issues. There Arafat had conceded to the U.S. formula. The Reagan administration acknowledged the change in PLO policy and announced there would be an official dialogue and that that dialogue would take place with the one and only channel that would be the U.S. Embassy in Tunis led by Ambassador Pelletreau. So we found ourselves designated as the official channel for the PLO and this reflected, I think, Washington's esteem and trust in Ambassador Pelletreau as someone who could manage such a sensitive contact well.

So we had then a series of high-profile, formalized meetings between the U.S. Government represented by the U.S. Embassy and the PLO. And in addition to those formal meetings, we had the ability to talk with other members of the PLO informally. Washington was very careful in giving us much leeway in that regard. The formal meetings unfortunately, became very much set pieces. This was 1988, and it was in the last days of the administration, the Reagan administration. We had followed through on our commitment to dialogue with the PLO, but there was no interest in Washington to put substance into that dialogue. Subsequently, when the Bush Administration succeeded the Reagan Administration the status continued. So we in Tunis were frustrated. We were trying to make something of this, and yet we found ourselves being hogtied by Washington. We would get questions from the PLO. To answer them, we would take the substance from our longstanding positions and try to repackage it in a way that met the PLO's expectations. Washington would not even look at the repackaging of the material. It was as if we were dealing with a script. Nor did it matter if the PLO changed its positions. I remember on one occasion that our interlocutors for the first time accepted the idea of an "interim arrangement" for the occupied territories. This was an element in the Camp David Accords which the PLO had always rejected. I knew because I had been political counselor in Jerusalem at the time and charged with convincing the Palestinians that this step was a necessary one. We highlighted the development for Washington, but got no significant recognition of it much less reciprocal flexibility on the U.S. side. So the formal meetings led nowhere.

Our informal meetings were a bit more productive. We saw Hakim Balaoui, the PLO ambassador to Tunis, regularly and then Ambassador Pelletreau got permission to enlarge the effort so we were able to either meet with Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), who eventually succeeded Arafat as President of the Palestinian Authority, and even Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), who was especially controversial because of his leadership of the Black September Organization. I joined the meetings with Abu Mazen. I remember the first one was over at Balaoui's residence, which was just a block from mine, and he had an enormous spread of Palestinian food, almost everything you could imagine. But he made the mistake of asking me whether there was anything not included and in excess of honesty noted there was no "aqoub.".

Q: Which is what?

HULL: "Aqoub" is a kind of thistle that grows in Palestine and is unknown elsewhere in the Middle East. Humble, yet appreciated by connoisseurs. Since I spent four years in Jerusalem and I was married to a Palestinian, I was intimately familiar with the Palestinian cookbook. About 10 days after this, someone showed up at my gate with two packages up "aqoub.". The Palestinian ambassador had somehow found a way to fulfill my desire. I thought it indicative of how much the Palestinians wanted the dialogue to be productive. After that dinner, we had occasion to meet repeatedly with Abu Mazen, and we were very much impressed by his demeanor, by his language, and by the substance of his what he said. He was a man of who originated in the town of Safed, which had become part of Israel. He was knowledgeable about events in Palestine, knowledgeable about Israeli politics, and very much a proponent of a peaceful solution. I think our initial readings of him has been borne out in all of his activities up to the present day.

Ambassador Pelletreau also stuck his neck out and got Washington's permission to meet with Abu Iyad as I noted above. As the head of Black September, he had quite a bit of blood on his hands. Nevertheless, after Abu Jihad had been assassinated, Abu Iyad ranked second in the PLO, and Ambassador Pelletreau engaged with him. In fact, Abu Iyad atoned somewhat for his past by being helpful to the U.S. in Beirut in protecting Americans in very tenuous situations during the Lebanese civil war.

Q: I've talked to Bob Dillon and others who talked about the PLO.. (was contact with Abu Iyad primarily for security?)

HULL: Our concern was not so much security although there were concerns that we involved might become targets for assassinations. Intelligence reports indicated that those involved in the U.S.-PLO dialogue was being targeted by extremist Palestinians who rejected this approach. However, our primary concern was to broaden the support within the PLO for a peaceful approach so that people who were talking to us would not be isolated and weakened politically. Ambassador Pelletreau realized that if Abu Iyad was also involved in the dialogue in some way his involvement would reduce the pressure on people like Abu Mazen.

When the contact with Abu Iyad leaked, there was a firestorm of criticism. Ambassador Pelletreau went back to Washington and was called in to see Secretary Baker who had only recently taken over as secretary of state and who generally took a dim view of professional diplomats who complicated his political situation. According to Ambassador Pelletreau, he was asked to explain who did so and noted that the meeting had been approved by Washington in advance. Margaret Tutwiler, one of the few people who could talk frankly with Jim Baker, supported Ambassador Pelletreau's on this point and, in effect, said, "Mr. Secretary, you did approve this meeting." I think Ambassador Pelletreau was always grateful to Margaret Tutwiler for speaking up.

And so Ambassador Pelletreau came back to Tunis and unlike Ambassador Veliotes from Cairo did not serve as a scapegoat, but rather continued on with the dialogue, his career continued with many more significant responsibilities-e.g. ambassador in Cairo, where I was his DCM, and eventually assistant secretary of state for the Near East. Unfortunately, Washington never got around to putting substance into the dialogue and therefore encounters became more and more ritualistic. Finally, a splinter group of the PLO engaged in a operation in Israel, and we called upon the PLO to condemn that operation "or else." They did not condemn it in so many words, and the dialogue was suspended.

Q: What was our evaluation of Yasser Arafat at that point?

HULL: We saw Arafat repeatedly and on occasion with a visiting congressman. Arafat was a mix. His personal habits were somewhat eccentric. He would not meet until the late hours of the night or the wee hours of the morning. You would never know exactly where and when you would meet. He had several locations in Tunis. You'd get a call announcing a meeting in a very short time at a different place. He was almost invariably gracious and would make an effort to extend hospitality. I remember he insisted on preparing my cup of tea, handing out honey for sweetener, He would speak at some length. His Arabic was quite good. His English was fractured, however, and at times I thought he did himself a disservice by trying to convey very complicated positions in elementary English. It would have been better to use good interpreters for this material. He was a bundle of energy, and he would be having meetings throughout Tunis and then fly off and do circuits of the Arab world or go to Europe. He was in perpetual motion. He was viewed affectionately within the PLO. He was not feared. He was not like Saddam Hussein, for example. His colleagues would disagree with him in meetings and so it was not a dictatorial arrangement. He eventually took a wife who was the daughter of one of my close contacts in my Jerusalem days. It was rather ironic that the chairman who was called "al khitiar" (the old man), in his declining years picked a young Christian girl as his wife.

Q: Did you get any of the feeling that later became so apparent that Arafat was someone you couldn't make a deal with? You know, when presidents tried to bring off things. When you got him up to the brink of really making a decision that might have even brought peace there, he couldn't make it.

HULL: This is the conventional wisdom. I do not think it is valid. I think Yasser Arafat could make a deal, and this gets us into a very complicated subject that is what happened with Oslo and the failure at Clinton's Camp David Summit. But in a nutshell, my impression is on the Oslo Accords neither side performed as it had promised. The United States did not hold them accountable. Arafat's political position was weakened by nonperformance on the part of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. Then he was ignored initially by Prime Minister Barak, who preferred an agreement with Syrian President Assad. Only after we allowed the Syrian track to become a dead end, did President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak belatedly turn to Arafat to address the Palestinian part of the equation. They persuaded him to come to Camp David on the understanding. that there would be no forcing of a deal. Arafat actually had said he was not prepared to make a deal, not politically prepared, I believe, given the fact that any concessions on Jerusalem and refugees would be extremely controversial among Palestinians. I think that history, when it's finally written and understood, will show a much more complex picture than Arafat not stepping up to the plate at a critical moment.

Q: We are talking about the period just before the end of the Clinton administration in 2000. Back to when you were there, did you feel sort of the hand of both the Israelis and the Israeli lobby breathing down your neck the whole time you were there? I mean, was this sort of just in the air?

HULL: Well, of course the Israelis had carried out both the airstrike against the PLO headquarters and the assassination of Abu Jihad in Tunis so they made their power felt directly. I didn't personally feel direct pressure from the Israeli lobby until I was working for the National Security Council in Washington. But the hamstringing of the U.S.-PLO dialogue reflected, I believe, a political calculus in Washington that gave great weight to the lobby.

Q: I'm talking about when you were reporting did you say, okay. If we're making a cable concerning these things we know that it will probably be on the desk of a proponent of Israel in Congress before probably the secretary knows. I mean was that part of the ambience or not?

HULL: We didn't believe that would be the case. We did our reporting in very restricted channels, "nodis", "exdis" and to my knowledge there was never a leak.

Q: What about internal politics? In the first place, you were in Tunisia from when to when?

HULL: From 1987 to 1990.

Q: What was going on internally?

HULL: Economic development coupled with gradual political suppression. After a brief period of political liberalization with the passing of Bourguiba, President Ben Ali began to curtail the opposition and particularly the Islamic opposition in the form of the "An Nahda" (Renaissance) party. In 1988, the civil war in Algeria arose because the Algerian military intervened after the first days of the election in which the Islamic Front had taken a lead. Therefore, you had this violent clash going on next door in Algeria and the reaction in Tunisia was a tightening of security and a retrenchment of liberalization.

Q: Did that sort of move rather quietly into Ben Ali camp or not?

HULL: It moved fairly quickly into the Ben Ali camp, and I think Ben Ali engineered the crack down, which was natural to a former minister of interior. My impression was that Hedi Baccouche, being a politician, was sincere in the early declarations of political liberalization. His passing from the government and consolidation of power in Ben Ali's hands moved Tunisia away from the goal democratization.

Q: In Algeria you had these religious fundamentalists. Were they trying to stir things up in Tunisia? You think certainly of Tunisia at that time as being rather free from religious orthodoxy.

HULL: Yes. Tunisia was probably the most moderate Arab country and Bourguiba had instituted reforms concerning women, for example. The Algerian Islamists were not fishing in troubled waters in Tunisia to any great extent. They had their hands full with the Algerian military. In Tunisia, you had an indigenous Islamic party, "An Nahda", which in Arabic means Renaissance. It was led by Rachid Ghannouchi, who was in exile. It was on paper a very moderate Islamic party, and we knew of no activities that belied that position.

Q: Did Qaddafi have a following in Tunisia?

HULL: Not a significant following. He was behaving quite erratically. He had run down the Libyan economy, and he had intervened militarily in Tunisia. He was not a popular person.

Q: How about the French? Did the French have any significant ties there?

HULL: Yes. French language and culture at least in the capital was so strong that it was a challenge to get Tunisians to speak to you in Arabic. Both Ambassador Pelletreau and I spoke Arabic, French and English, and we would be delighted when we would find some politicians, and I found some in the opposition, who were more comfortable in Arabic than in French. The mainstream politicians would divert to French very quickly.

Q: I was told that Dick Parker who met blank one time chastised his cabinet you know, the American ambassador speaks better Arabic than you do.

HULL: And with good reason.

Q: Did the French have any particular interests, you know, other than cultural interests and much influence there or not?

HULL: They had lots of influence. They had a grand embassy on Avenue Bourguiba. They were there in force. They had assistance programs. Also, the Tunisians often got medical treatment in Paris so they had very considerable influence. That seemed to be an end in itseli.e. maintaining this special relationship between France and Tunisia that really didn't serve any particular French interest to any great extent. Nevertheless, it was important to both sides.

Q: How about the major naval base? Was that?

HULL: At this point Bizerte was not a significant strategic factor.

Q: Was there any overlay or involvement in Tunisia during World War II?

HULL: Yes, of course, one of the decisive battles of World War II, the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

Q: We got our tail whipped. Our first battle in Europe, I mean in the East. It was called the Atlantic desert.

HULL: But eventually we did succeed. We used North Africa as a staging ground for our campaign in Italy. There is in Carthage, one of the northern suburbs of Tunisia, a beautiful American military cemetery. It's been maintained impeccably and annually on Veterans Day we would have a ceremony there. I think nowhere in the world have America's fallen been better remembered than in that cemetery.

Q: Did you ever get to the Kasserine Pass?

HULL: I did indeed. I walked it.

Q: Were the Egyptians at all influential at that time?

HULL: Egypt was represented by Ali Maher, a very intelligent fellow and this reflected Tunisia's importance as the site of the Arab League. The Arab League was an Egyptian invention, and there was great umbrage in Egypt when it was moved from Cairo to Tunis after Sadat made peace with Israel. The Egyptians never really accepted that move. It was always their intent to get it back to Cairo, which eventually they did. Meanwhile, they were well represented at the Arab League.

Q: I would think they would have been sort of natural ties between Tunisia and Morocco. Did Morocco play any role or not?

HULL: At the time there was a regional organization. I think it was called the AMU, the Arab Maghreb Union, which comprised Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. It was an attempt by the North Africans to come up with their own club. Other clubs were forming in the Middle East, and they wanted theirs. There were some meetings, but not a lot of significance or interaction. As we pursued peace in the Middle East, both Rabat and Tunis were stops for the secretary of state as he would try to build support for peace. Of course, King Hassan of Morocco was always helpful in that regard. He headed the Jerusalem committee of the Arab League, and he had a great deal of prestige and influence.

Q: Was there any Jewish community left in Tunisia?

Not to speak of. There were historic synagogues in the island of Djerba, but the community had left for Europe or Israel.

Q: From Tunis you come back to the State Department as director for Northern Gulf Affairi.e. Iraq and Iran. Within a week of your arrival, Saddam Hussein in August invades Kuwait and you're the new boy on the block and you have probably located Kuwait on the map by this time. But anyway, what was your initial impression and that of the people around you? Were we going to do something, did we have to do something or did you have any feel on how this mess is going to sort itself out?

HULL: It became evident early on that we were going to deploy forces to block further Iraqi advances through Saudi Arabia. What we were going to do vis-ï¿½-vis Iraq..

Q: The war is over. How long did you stay in that Iran-Iraq position?

HULL: I transferred to the National Security Council in May of 1991.

Q: So this is basically at the end of the war, isn't it?

HULL: That's right. The war ends, there are openings in the National Security Council and Richard Haass who is the senior director for the Near East and South Asia is recruiting people to fill those openings.

Q: When you left the State Department how stood things say with Iran? I mean, I mean in a way this could have been kind of an opening for Iran. We gave their mortal enemy a body blow. Were we getting anything, any opportunities with those openings?

HULL: We have to back up a little bit. When the Reagan administration came in and replaced the Carter administration there was a almost a knee-jerk rejection of what the Carter administration people like Warren Christopher and Al Saunders had negotiated with the Iranians and it took a great deal of effort to convince the new administration to accept that basis which stabilized the bilateral relationship. For eight years you had an arm's-length relationship. With Bush 41, Bush the father, there was a recognition because of Iraq that we had to manage Iran and we didn't want our activities vis-ï¿½-vis Iraq misinterpreted by Iran. We didn't want to end up in a two-front war in the Gulf. And so that was the real thrust of what diplomacy during the first Gulf Wai.e. to make sure the Iranians knew what we were doing and what our objectives were against Saddam and his regime and that we did not intend nor did we want to fight with Iran. It did not go further than that. The wounds from the hostage crisis were still relatively fresh. The Iranian regime was not really making overtures towards us. There was still a lot of hostility on their part. We had our hands full otherwise and therefore, we didn't have a larger ambition to use the first Gulf War as an opportunity for rapport with Iran.

Q: Did we get any, sort of at your level ,was there anybody looking at what's in this for Iran that leaves the power structure continuing because you know, with some nice words something could probably have happened.

HULL: Well, I'm not sure that's true because much of that depended upon Tehran.

Q: I'm talking about on their side.HULL: On their side we did not sense any new page being turned. They were still dealing with the Khomeini revolution, and they still had a vocation for exporting their revolution elsewhere in the region so that, at least at my level, I did not detect any great opening vis-ï¿½-vis Iran. I also was in a good position to know what anyone else in the administration might be doing since I controlled the Swiss channel. As our protecting power in Tehran, the Swiss were the only channel we used for communications with Tehran. All those messages, including the forewarning of the launch of Desert Storm, came from my directorate.

Q: Nobody was coming to you and saying, Ed, keep an eye out if you see anything happening because we're all looking for some sort of change or not?

HULL: No, but you have to realize the administration really had its hands full. We were working flat out to conduct this war against Iraq which was a very broad and just keeping Iran on the sidelines was about as much as we could handle at that stage.

Q: Okay. Then how did this going to the National Security Council. In the first place, what was your before you went there, what was your view of the National Security Council?

HULL: For the State Department, the NSC was always extremely important. Of course, the president in our system maintains the last say on foreign policy and the State Department was keen on having its people in key positions there so even though the position that I was holding in running Gulf affairs was an important job with a lot of responsibility, the Department and NEA in particular decided that if I was selected to work at the National Security Council, they would find some way of way of replacing me in Northern Gulf affairs. It was that important to have someone from State in that office.

Q: Was the National Security Council seen when you were in NEA as being on the same team? Was there a rivalry or anything like that?

HULL: During the Gulf War, there was extraordinary cooperation among all U.S. agencies, including between the State Department and the NSC. These were the days of Brent Scowcroft and Bob Gates on the NSC, and Jim Baker and Bob Kimmitt in State. They were thorough professionals and worked together extraordinarily smoothly. We had no feuding, egos were under control and the overall objective of defeating Saddam brought the whole interagency together. I think it was, for many people, kind of a golden age of interagency coordination.

Q: Do you know how you got picked to go there?

HULL: A number of candidates were interviewed by Richard Haass and among them they included people like Tom Miller and Molly Williamson, Bruce Riedel and myself and from that group, Richard picked Bruce Riedel coming out of the CIA and myself out of State.

Q: You served with the National Security Council from when to when?

HULL: for two years.

Q: This would be 1991 to '93?

HULL: That's correct.

Q: What was your portfolio?

HULL: I reverted back to the Arab-Israeli problem and the Palestinians, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and North Africa and my colleague Bruce Riedel inherited the Gulf, the Arab Peninsula and South Asia.

Q: What was your impression when you arrived at the National Security Council of how it operated?

HULL: Scowcroft ran an extraordinarily lean and efficient organization. There was a minimum of layering. We could e-mail General Scowcroft or Bob Gates directly. Things like meetings were arranged very quickly. For example, when (Israeli Prime Minister) Rabin, who was then in the opposition came to town, it took a quick e-mail to Scowcroft's secretary, a meeting was scheduled and then you'd follow up with another longer e-mail as a briefing memo in which you always started with what the general sought to achieve in that meeting. And that was the staff work. The meeting took place, and important contact was maintained, the general got insight into the situation out in the Middle East and in many ways it was the opposite of the State Department where a great amount of time and effort was wasted on paperwork and clearances. A great deal of energy was wasted to make it through all the hoops on the field and, as a result, the final product was often bland and unimaginative.

Q: What did you do in sort of a normal day or week?

HULL: One of the results of James Baker's extremely effective diplomacy during the Gulf War was a pledge by the United States to deal with the Palestinian question after the war concluded. Baker and Bush took that pledge quite seriously and so in the aftermath of the war one of the enterprises that took a lot of time was to push for resumption of negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis and the other Arabs as well. You have to recall that in our coalition to defeat Saddam Hussein we included not only longtime friends like the Egyptians and the Saudis, but also people like the Syrians and we did see here a golden opportunity to reshape the field in negotiations of the Arab- Israeli question. Jim Baker undertook a concerted shuttle in the region backed by President Bush to see if he could bring the Arabs and Israelis together.

Q: Okay, but you're sitting at a desk.

HULL: My job in this regard was to be the White House representative on the Baker shuttles and therefore this meant quite a bit of traveling in the region for extended periods of time and then reporting back to Richard Haass in the National Security Council and making sure that Haass and General Scowcroft had a good picture of how the effort was developing. There was a great deal of skepticism on the part of General Scowcroft of the effort because he saw the tactical game, but he didn't see the strategic game. He didn't see what the trade-offs were that actually would end up in the deal. In this, he had a valid point. But, the effort itself was very important in terms of how the United States was seen in the Middle East. So, a good deal of my time was spent on the road with the Baker team.

The other part of my time was spent really holding up my end of presidential diplomacy. For example, the White House visits by President Mubarak of Egypt, by King Hassan of Morocco. In those visits of course, the head of state coming from the Middle East saw the key meeting as the one with the president. The NSC, at least our NSC, took possession of those meetings in that we had our own ideas about what we could accomplish. We did have inputs from the State Department and other agencies around town, but in the final analysis we drafted the key briefing memos, and we tried to shape the meetings to accomplish the desired results.

Q: Let's took up take a look at some of the leaders. You had King Hussein in Jordan, Shamir was the minister in Israel, Mubarak in Egypt, Hassan in Morocco. These were the major players weren't they?

Hull: Right.

Q: Could you take them one by one and sort of, what was, you might say the group think or whatever it was from the NSC perspective about their contribution and abilities?

HULL: Let me start with Mubarak of Egypt. We had a lot of dealings with Mubarak both in his visits to Washington and in Secretary Baker's visits to Cairo. Solic is the word that comes to mind. He was not only physically stocky, but also in terms of his thinking and his manner he had a great deal of experience, he had Egypt's political weight and he brought to any subject very considered judgments that usually wore very well. Therefore, U.S. statesmen hoping to accomplish something in the Middle East were generally well advised to consult with him and to listen carefully to his point of view. Mubarak was very ably assisted by people like Osama al Baz, his brilliant national security adviser, whose career spanned also the presidency of Anwar Sadat. So the Egyptians were a very strong player.

Jim Baker established a particularly good rapport with President Mubarak. Baker was a brilliant negotiator. He had clearly in mind what he wanted to accomplish, but he had a human touch and was appreciated by Arabs for his willingness to take the time and make the effort to establish personal relations. I remember in particular on a visit to Cairo Mubarak would lay out a lavish spread always insist that we eat with him, which of course was traditional Arab hospitality. Baker was very adventuresome in terms of culinary experiments, and he would try everything, and he would ask questions and Mubarak would delight in explaining what the various dishes amounted to. Little things like that helped Baker establish a comfortable relationship.

King Hussein of Jordan, of course, had been our long time friend, but Hussein had backed Saddam Hussein in the war and had really torn his relationships in Washington. It was more in sorrow than in anger that President Bush, Jim Baker and others had to deal with King Hussein as an adversary, at least initially. After the war, King Hussein obviously realized a mistake had been made and undertook a very long and ultimately successful effort to reestablish those close ties in Washington. On the shuttles Baker was positively disposed to laying out for King Hussein a path of redemption and that path of redemption really was a positive role in the Arab-Israeli peace process which King Hussein did play with significant results. In turn, Baker tried to be helpful to King Hussein. I remember one of our early shuttles in Amman we had an appeal from the King to help reopen relations with Saudi Arabia and trade with Saudi Arabia. Baker intervened with the Saudi royal family and ultimately got a relaxation on border controls vis-ï¿½-vis Amman. Baker was always quite keen on hearing what an interlocutor needed or wanted and then if it was reasonable, Baker would make a sustained effort to deliver something, knowing that effort would build a relationship and pave the way for his interlocutor to do something on his behalf later on. I was fortunate in the shuttle as the White House representative. I was almost always in the meetings with the heads of state or government. I think this willingness of Bush (41) and Baker not to hold grudges, to give people who had crossed them an opportunity to redeem themselves really was a hallmark of their diplomacy and in the end proved a very wise course of action.

Q: Well, Hussein, of course was in a very difficult situation. The problem was that he had a population that did not like Kuwait at all and you know, in the long run it was a hell of a lot better to have Hussein on the throne than having kicked out, but I don't know.

HULL: Right. His position was a very difficult one and his decision was understandable. It turned out badly for him.

Q: We also want to talk about Assad and the Saudis too.

HULL: Assad was unique. He was sphinx-like. I think he grew to respect Baker greatly. Part of Assad's style was to engage in extremely long meetings, marathon sessions in which he would rehearse in agonizing detail the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict and attempt to wear down his interlocutors and create the context in which in any discussion in the future would take place. Baker was quite able to run those diplomatic marathons, he was ably advised by Ed Djerejian, previously ambassador in Damascus and then Assistant Secretary of State. He understood that we did have an opening vis-ï¿½-vis Syria, they had been on the right side of the Gulf War. They had sent troops to Saudi Arabia and shifting them on the Arab-Israeli question would create significant new opportunities. The attempt to maneuver around Syria, for example Phil Habib's negotiations between Lebanon and Israel, had failed because on that front anyway you could not make progress without Damascus going along.

Shamir was another very, very tough nut and being from the Likud not really feeling any political or strategic need to move. Shamir took a dim view of the whole enterprise, and I believe feared that Israel would pay a price for America's postwar diplomacy in redeeming its pledge to the Arabs. So from Shamir, Baker got very little movement and those meetings were extremely difficult.

As for the Palestinians, by this time we had broken off our dialogue with the PLO, so the Palestinian interlocutor had to come from the Occupied Territories. We had tried that previously during the Camp David process and had come up empty-handed. Baker, however, was determined. The PLO had also backed Saddam Hussein and therefore was in a weakened position. The Arabs from the West Bank and Gaza were clearly interested in a dialogue with the United States and with doing something to relieve the burden of occupation. King Hussein in Jordan was doing his utmost to broker an arrangement whereby local Palestinians could step forward and play the role, be delegated to represent the Palestinians in the Baker peace process. Among the Palestinians from the West Bank, Faisal Husseini from Jerusalem was first and foremost. He was a very moderate fellow, very sensible. He came from a historic Palestinian family that had played a leadership role in the Palestinian national movement. He was not corrupt, and he was viewed as someone with great integrity by other Palestinians. He had some very difficult decisions to make in the peace process as well.

And then there was a question of getting more generalized support from the Arabs, from the Saudis who could relieve the problems of Jordan and from North Africans, like King Hassan of Morocco, getting them to back the general peace process and eventually be willing to commit to participation in the multilateral negotiations. Baker's diplomaclike Kissinger's before hiwas very wide ranging.

Q: What were you doing?

HULL: We were a group of people Baker dubbed the "peace processors". They included Dennis Ross, Bill Burns, Dan Kurtzer, Aaron Miller, and myself. We provided Baker with the substantive details he needed to have effective meetings. We would have a session with the secretary about the upcoming meeting and what we hope to accomplish wherever we were, be it Tel Aviv or Cairo or Amman. This might end at seven or eight o'clock or it might be on the plane as we were leaving one capital to go to another and then the peace processors late in the night and sometimes in the wee hours of the morning would put the flesh on the bones that Baker had outlined. Baker would wake up the next morning, and he would have very inclusive talking points tailored to either Shamir, Hussein, Mubarak, or Assad so he could go into a meeting very well prepared. We also kept very close track of what the parties wanted and what we could deliver to the parties. Baker kept score. He would try to take into his accounts whatever the head of government or head of state had stated as his desire. He would see which of those desires he could actually make happen, he would keep track of it and in the next session he would remind Shamir or Hussein or Mubarak just exactly what he had done for them in the interval. He built up steadily and immeasurably a great deal of political capital with the various parties. We also, of course, did matrixes of what the parties wanted from each other and what the trade-offs would be and those were what we used to put together the letters of assurances and really, the deal that amounted to the Madrid Summit.

Q: Was there a feeling while you were doing this that there was possibly a final solution to the Arab-Israeli problem?

HULL: I don't think that we saw the final solution and its outlines at this stage. What we saw as possible was creating a dynamic.

So we were focused primarily on creating a diplomatic framework for getting the Israelis and the Arabs seated at negotiating tables, and getting a positive dynamic in the Middle East. We envisioned a two-track process. One track would be direct Israeli negotiations with the Palestinians, with the Syrians and with the Lebanese. Secondly, we envisioned a much broader multilateral negotiating process whereby we would bring in Arabs from throughout the Arab world to sit down with the Israelis and talk about issues of general interest. For example, arms control or refugees or economic development, and by so doing create a positive atmosphere in which the elements of a final solution could emerge.

Q: Was there sort of feeling that, I mean, one looks at this and one feels that maybe some maneuvering but basically the settlements would have to go and the Palestinians weren't going to be able to go home. Was that your feeling?

HULL: Well, we didn't get to the point of addressing the refugee question except in the later multilateral talks, post-Madrid. And there were very strong debates. The Palestinians insisted on the principle of the right of return. We were trying to come up with interim steps, more practical ways to improve conditions and not yet trying to define what the final solution would be.

Q: This shuttle diplomacy ended up with the Madrid conference? Is that how it worked or not?

HULL: There were two points in Baker's shuttle. He launched these things of course with no assurance that it would get anywhere. You had an Israeli government that really was not interested in a peace process. You had great skepticism among people like Brent Scowcroft who couldn't see the deal, the kind of final deal that you're asking about. But Baker persevered and used all his diplomatic skills. The first break through really came in a letter that he eventually received via Ed Djerejian, our ambassador in Damascus. Baker recounts this in his autobiography that deals with this diplomacy. Baker on one of his visits to Damascus really lays down for Assad the basis on which he can get the Israelis to the table and he asks Assad to agree. Assad comes back with requests for assurances. We provided a letter assurances to Damascus as well as to the other direct parties. But Baker had as a principle not providing secret assurances. In other words, anything that we would provide to one party we would share with all the parties so that they would see where our position was. That meant a lot of very careful crafting of language so that we could be responsive to some Damascus requirements. For example, some participation of the UN in the process but without crossing the Israeli red line on an active UN role. Based on that painstaking drafting and assurance effort, Ed Djerejian eventually phoned Jim Baker and told him we had a written response from Assad that he agreed to go to the negotiating table. Baker was so skeptical at the time that in announcing it in Washington he said, "My ambassador in Damascus believes" and it turned out that Ed Djerejian had read it correctly, and we did have Syria coming to the table.

The next critical point was Palestinian representation. The Israelis were adamant that that could not be the PLO, and it would mean the PLO making an historic concession in allowing people from the territories to represent the Palestinians. We were out to Jerusalem, we required of the Palestinians I think, something like 13 names that we would then convey to Shamir, and Shamir would agree that they were acceptable being legitimate people from the Occupied Territories. The whole enterprise was even more painful in that the Israelis were refusing to have anyone from Jerusalem to be in the Palestinian delegation which meant that Faisal Husseini, our leading interlocutor, could not himself be at Madrid and this meant a great personal sacrifice on his part.

Parenthetically, Husseini would tell a joke that I found apt. "Negotiating with the Americans was like someone who goes to tailor to have a suit made, and the tailor insists on making the suit with whatever cloth was available. Therefore, one sleeve would be shorter than another sleeve, one elbow slightly lower and the pants would be a little bit too short. And then the individual with that suit made in America would try to wear it the best he could. Critics, including the Americans, would then comment on how awkward he appeared."The climactic meeting with the Palestinians was at the East Jerusalem building of the American Consulate on Nablus Road. We generally met in West Jerusalem, but Baker decided he would go over to the other side to show that he was trying to reach out to Palestinians. We were there meeting, the Palestinians came forward. They had only about six names, about half the names that they required. Baker was extraordinarily frustrated. He slammed his book shut, walked out of the room. He used his tried-and-true threat "to leave a dead cat" at the Palestinian door, which the Arabs never quite understood but it sounded like something you didn't want to happen and left behind a very shaken Palestinian delegation.

We went back to the King David Hotel. The Russian foreign minister was in town, and this had been planned as the announcement of the Middle East Peace Conference, the Russians and the Americans announcing it jointly. But Baker was so discouraged that he consulted with Dennis Ross and decided that we weren't there yet and he could not make that announcement. When Dennis came out and told that to the peace processors there was a revolt in the ranks. People like myself, Dan Kurtzer, Bill Burns, Aaron Miller thought that we had come too close to give up. There had been previous history in the peace process when the Americans had not seized the day and events had unraveled. The group of us felt that we were at one of those moments again where the stars were aligned, but if we did not act they could not stay aligned. Dennis to his credit, allowed the group to come and make its argument directly to Baker. And we made this argument that the Palestinians were on board in principle, had not yet come up with their full list of names but the six that they had come up with were acceptable, that we needed to act to announce the conference and that the Palestinians would eventually would come through with an acceptable delegation. Jim Baker was persuaded and changed his position, made the decision, went downstairs and with his Russian counterpart announced the invitation to Madrid.

We took off from Ben Gurion Airport, headed toward Madrid to take a look at the arrangements. None of us knew whether or not the Palestinians would come through, but eventually we got word that indeed, they had filled out their delegation in an acceptable way and had even asked that having finally done so they be characterized by the United States as the first delegation to accept the invitation! In all of this, King Hussein had played a very positive and useful role in reassuring Shamir that the names that would eventually come would be acceptable to Israel. On that flight to Madrid, I remember talking with Margaret Tutwiler, Jim Baker's very close assistant and the one who handled press relations for Baker, and asking Margaret how Madrid had been selected as the site because Baker played those cards extremely close to his chest and even many of us in the party had not known. In fact, what Baker had done was to ask of all possible participants a list of three acceptable venues. The Hague was initially the front runner, but was subsequently excluded by one of the parties, and Madrid was a compromise second choice. We landed in Madrid. We got full support from the Spanish. Baker immediately had a team come to the capital to begin the preparations because the conference was only a matter of weeks away. People like Patrick Kennedy and DCMs from throughout the Middle East came to liaise with the Israeli and Arab delegations and to put together the Madrid Conference.

Q: At that point what was the feeling? You were saying that the constellations looked like they were coming together.

HULL: Well, in many ways Madrid, when it occurred was an historic occasion. You have the Israelis and Arabs sitting down publicly for the first time. It was a very contentious meeting. There was a lot of back-and-forth on arrangements.

As I mentioned before, Madrid was supposed to spawn two sets of negotiations: the bilateral set of negotiations involving the Palestinians-Jordanians and separately, the Syrians, and then a multilateral set of negotiations involving a much broader representation from the Arab world. The Syrians were adamantly opposed to the latter which they thought premature until the bilateral negotiations had yielded fruit. So the Syrians decided to absent themselves from the multilateral talks. Nevertheless, they go forward, and they set off a long period of diplomacy in the Middle East where Israelis and Arabs were talking about a broad range of issues in constructive way that in retrospect looks like a golden period of Middle East diplomacy.

Q: How well do you think you were served by, I mean you at your level by various sources of information, from our embassies, to the Department, to the intelligence agencies?

HULL: I think we had a good feel for the other leaders and their situations in part because the our embassies were staffed by some of our best and brightest, but also in part because Baker by this time had such an intimate knowledge of the other leaders that he could read them very well indeed. There were obstacles and the two greatest were, on the part of the Israelis, ongoing settlement construction and, on the part of the Arabs, the terrorist attacks. Each of these would create significant political problems for the other side in terms of staying with the negotiations. So we all did our best to discourage both terrorism and settlement construction.

Q: Was there very much success in that?

HULL: Well, the most dramatic action taken against settlement construction was President Bush's decision to link loan guarantees to settlement activity. I was back in the NSC at this stage in Washington as the decision was being made. It was the president's own decision. He felt very strongly that settlements were an obstacle to peace; he felt that he had gotten from Shamir a commitment not to extend settlements; he felt that the United States needed to do something significant to signal the Israelis than this was unacceptable to us. I'm sure that Secretary Baker welcomed this resolute stand, but he did not have to convince the president to do it. It was the president's own mind in this regard. We on the staff did detailed papers creating the language linkage. On the day that it was announced the president did so in a very dramatic fashion. He said he was one man standing against a multitude of lobbyists, referring to the Israeli lobby and its clout on the Hill. He was excoriated by many of Israel's supporters for taking this step. I remember my boss, Richard Haass was scheduled to talk to a delegation of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) that day. Richard begged off because of other responsibilities and so it fell to me to address the AIPAC meeting. I walked into the room in the Old Executive Office Building and immediately you could feel the tension and hostility. Some of the participants could barely contain themselves. As soon as I was introduced, one fellow jumped to his feet and began to attack the president on his decision on loan guarantee. I gave him time to speak, then I told the group that I welcomed the chance to meet with them, and I wanted to talk to them about the loan guarantee decision but before I did that I wanted to talk to them about where we were in the peace process because I just returned from one of Baker shuttles.

So I spent the first 20 minutes of the meeting really talking to them about what we were trying to do in the Middle East and our efforts with Syria and the Palestinians. This was all about a settlement that would guarantee Israel's future. Being able to give a first-hand account of the enormous effort that Baker and the president were making changed the framework of the discussion. Loan guarantees became an element of contention between us, but an element of contention within the context of a much larger agreement on what the United States was trying to do to promote peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors. That and the fact that some of my questions were really personally abusive, I think gained me the sympathy of the gathering and the session went off rather well. But the president's actions were held against him by the Israeli lobby and some in the Bush 43 administration continue to felt that it was a political mistake although diplomatically the correct thing to do. According to Margaret Tutwiler at a subsequent NEA chiefs of mission meeting, it was one of the considerations that Bush 43 maintained in his mind throughout his dealings with the Middle East. At that stage, Margaret was ambassador in Rabat, but very much plugged into the White House.

Q: Did the idea of using the loan guarantee as a weapon, did that originate in the NSC or where did that originate?

HULL: The idea of holding the Israelis accountable for their settlement activity originated, as I said, with the president himself. The loan guarantee was a convenient vehicle because the Israelis had come to us asking for that. Therefore, it was on the table and subject to an appropriate linkage.

Q: Could you explain just a bit about the loan guarantee. What was this?

HULL: The Israelis were engaged in economic reform. They needed to access capital from international markets. If the United States would co-sign those loans, guarantee their repayment in other words, then the Israelis could get significantly lower interest rates for that money borrowed and, therefore, it was another form of assistance to Israel.

Q: The election of '92 was cranking up. Was that reflected in our dealings with the Middle East at that point? That all of a sudden interest began? You had a huge move away from real diplomacy into political diplomacy or not?

HULL: Yes. It had an impact, and I think the most dramatic impact was that as the president approached election day, and his campaign was not doing well, he brought Jim Baker over from the State Department to take charge of the campaign belatedly which meant that our engine for progress in the Middle East peace was decoupled from the train. The president's staff, I remember Brent Scowcroft felt that the president would be reelected. They thought that Clinton's lack of a military career weighed against him. I remember on hearing that thinking that in my generation that was not necessarily the case. Many people had chosen a path other than Vietnam. In the end, from my perspective, it seemed like the perception of a double dip in the recession was what doomed the president's reelection.

Q: Did you feel the situation in the Middle East toward the end was dissipating? And I mean as far as the opportunity or did you feel that things were still on course?

HULL: We felt that we had considerable momentum in the peace process. Remember that the both the bilateral talks were ongoing and the multilateral talks were ongoing at this stage, and we had a lot of participation from both the Israeli and the Arab sides. We also had the prospect of Rabin taking over from Shamir and as I said, we had kept in touch with Rabin even in opposition. We knew that he was, unlike Shamir, serious about making a deal. It was clear to us, that Rabin wanted to sequence negotiations and, if possible do a deal with Syria and then turn to the Palestinians. With the prospect of a Labor government coming in in Jerusalem, actually the negotiating prospects were improved. But Bush lost and the transition between Bush 41 and Clinton presented some real challenges.

Q: Let's talk about the challenges. Were you there during the transition time or did you get cleared out?

HULL: No. We were asked to stay on. Richard Haass was replaced by Martin Indyk and I think as a testament to the accomplishments of the Bush Middle East team, there was lots of continuity in the peace process. You had Dennis Ross continuing at State, as well as Dan Kurtzer and Bill Burns and Aaron Miller. I continued at the NSC. Ed Djerejian had become assistant secretary of state under Baker. He continued as assistant secretary of state for the transition, but there were some tricky issues with the Clinton administration coming in. The most difficult was the question of Jerusalem. When Clinton was a candidate, he had made some campaign pledges which included moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. When he was elected and took over, the Clinton people were inclined to make good on that pledge. Those of us who were involved in negotiations saw that move as something that would totally derail the process. There were meetings in which I remember Ed Djerejian and others meeting with Clinton's people.g. Sandy Berger, Tony Lakand arguing vehemently that this was a step that would derail the process. One of our significant accomplishments was convincing the new people to put that on the back burner and not to implement it.

The new administration, as is the case with most administrations, took a lot of time gearing up. The initial forays in the Middle East peace were very cautious ones, and I do think we lost opportunities in that period, especially vis-ï¿½-vis the Palestinians as we held to a very rigid position on the PLO and the Palestinians from the inside the territories had very little room to negotiate apart from the PLO. What was actually happening was that the American side was holding to this rigid, no contact policy. Meanwhile, the Israelis under Rabin were actually engaged with the PLO in Oslo and generating the Oslo Accords which we only had a vague awareness of and really no direct role in bringing about.

I would mention, however, another very significant thing that happened in this period and that is the first bombing of World Trade Center by Ramzi Yousef. This was within months of President Clinton taking over and it was a great shock to the new administration to be hit in New York by people from the Middle East. I recall that it coincided with a visit by President Mubarak. Traditionally, early in each new president's administration, there are visits by the Israeli prime minister, the Egyptian president and other significant Middle East leaders and therefore, we were having the Mubarak visit. Mubarak told the press on his way to Washington that he had warned the administration about the attack on the World Trade Center. President Clinton was livid and wanted to know whether it was true and why this person whom he had never met before was embarrassing his administration by this claim.

Well, of course, it wasn't literally true. The Egyptians had never given any specifics on such an attack. At most, Mubarak had mentioned generally the forces of radicalism and risks pursuant thereof. So we had to explain to President Clinton what it amounted to and then somehow keep the visit from being a diplomatic disaster. I remember our Oval Office briefing of President Clinton. Ambassador Robert Pelletreau was there who was the ambassador in Cairo. The president turned to the State Department and asked essentially, "Where is this guy coming from?" And Bob Pelletreau gave a brilliant thumbnail sketch of Mubarak and his personality, his mindset, his political situation and managed to smooth over the hard feelings. After Pelletreau spoke, Vice President Gore supported his presentation and said, in effect, "Mubarak is a good guy, and we can work with him." I think Clinton although he was quick to anger was also quick to get over his anger and never lost sight of the strategic value of setting off on the right foot with key leaders. So he put behind his irritation and the visit turned out to be a very successful one and the relationship stood the Clinton administration in good stead for the eight years.

I emphasize the World Trade Center attack because it did, at a very early stage in the Clinton administration, represent its "blooding", in the English sense, on the issue of terrorism and counterterrorism. We would see later with Al Qaeda that the Clinton administration was disposed to take terrorism as a serious issue from the early days.

Q: Could you explain why this move of Jerusalem of our embassy which has always been, when the New York primaries come around pledges are made by candidates because of the Jewish vote of New York City more or less, and oh yes, we'll do something about that. It never happens. Why does it continue to be such a critical issue?

HULL: The Israeli governments are always intent on creating "faits accomplis", whether politically or materialle.g. with settlements in the Occupied Territories. They want to establish a political fact that Jerusalem is nonnegotiable, an inalienable part of the state of Israel. They want to take it off the negotiating table whereas the Arabs want to keep it on the negotiating table. A move of our embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem would represent U.S. acquiescence in the Israeli "fait accompli.".

Q: How long did you stay with the Clinton Administration?

HULL: I stayed with the Clinton National Security Council for a period of about four months. I had gotten an offer from Bob Pelletreau, for whom I had worked in Tunis, to come to Cairo as his deputy chief of mission. For me, that meant being number two and in effect being the day-to-day manager of the largest U.S. embassy in the world. It was a great opportunity. It also got me out of the Washington political battles and back over to the Middle East. So I was delighted to accept that offer and left the National Security Council and had a very able replacement in David Satterfield.

Q: Did you get any feel, it was still early on but Warren Christopher was our new secretary of state. Did you get any feel for his engagement? He had a great deal to do with getting our hostages out of Iran but other than that did you get any feel for him?

HULL: I had known Warren Christopher indirectly because I was staff aide to Hal Saunders during those negotiations and they were an impressive diplomatic accomplishment, a very complex agreement which protected U.S. interests and helped get our colleagues back. So I had a great deal of respect for Warren Christopher. I thought he was a very effective diplomat. His style was entirely different from Jim Baker's. Whereas Jim Baker was outgoing, personable and willing to try anything including what was served at dinner, Warren Christopher was quite reserved. If he could skip a meal, he would do so and really had a personality that in some ways did not sit well with Middle Eastern diplomacy. My vantage point at this time was Cairo, and there were dramatic differences for example, in the way that Mubarak had viewed Baker and the way he viewed Christopher. That's not to say that Christopher was not committed, hard-working and in a way effective because he made up in his intellect and his attention to detail what he lacked in terms of personal rapport. I remember with Christopher you were in hot water if you gave voice to the standard diplomatic complaints about lawyers. There's often among diplomats a frustration with nitpicking and legality but if in Christopher's presence one would say something like, "Well, that's just a legal detail," Christopher would bring him up short and remind him that he Warren Christopher had made his fortune as a lawyer paying attention to just those kinds of details. So we guarded our tongues in this regard when we were with Secretary Christopher.

Q: You were in Egypt from when to when?

HULL: This was '93 to '96.

Q: What would you say that was the situation in Egypt, not American related but situations in Egypt in '93 when you got there?

Hall: The situation was very tenuous. There was a wave of terrorism ongoing from the Islamic Jihad and the "Gamaat Islamiya", (the Islamic Grouping). Tourists were being targeted and Egyptian officials, including the prime minister were being targeted. In the New York Times, I recall, Chris Hedges was writing stories that ran on the front page comparing Egypt at that time with Iran in the last days of the Shah. In effect, he was predicting an Islamic revolution in Egypt.

We had a big embassy, the biggest in the world. We had a lot of exposure. We were greatly challenged to safeguard everyone. In that, we had full cooperation from the Egyptian security services and intelligence services. Still, I recall being tasked by the Department to have meetings at which we would lay out tripwires for drawdown of the embassy so much was the concern that we were in a pre-revolutionary stage.

Q: When you got there, what was the feeling?

HULL: The embassy differed from the readings from people such as Chris Hedges. We saw a very serious problem. We saw a threat to the regime. We didn't disagree about that. But we also saw the regime having great strengths; Mubarak's leadership itself, the long-standing deference that Egyptian leaders had received since the days of the Pharaoh, the personal and family interests in stability. We didn't see a regime in its last days. With the Shah, you had wavering leadership. The Shah himself was ill, uncertain, unable to make decisions. In Iran, you had fractures in the security services, the military disintegrating and refusing to carry out their duties. You had the population alienated, the middle class in Tehran turning against the regime. You didn't see those same elements in Egypt, and I recall one particular riot that occurred. It was a civil disturbance, in this case. It was directed by Islamic extremists against nightclubs on Pyramid Street. In this instance, the owners of the establishments and their friends came out and defended their property. Also, the Islamic extremists overplayed their hand.

For example, an assassination attempt resulted in the death of a 12-year-old Egyptian girl who was obviously an innocent bystander. The government did a good job of highlighting that fact, and the popular reaction against the terrorist groups was very strong. They started to lose more and more mass support in their campaign. I was personally convinced the tide had turned one day when there was an assassination attempt against an Egyptian general as he heading up to the citadel. It failed and the people who made the attempt then tried to flee into Cairo's "city of the dead," the cemeteries which are populated and provide housing for a good part of the Cairo population. As they tried to flee, they were captured not by the security forces but by Egyptian citizens and handed over to the security forces. It seemed to me at that stage when the government had the active support and involvement of the Egyptian population, they had won the battle against the terrorists. That proved to be the case and by the end of my time there, by '96, the situation was much stabilized.

Q: You're in charge of running this embassy. How did you find it?

HULL: Cairo was magnificent as an embassy. It had wonderful traditions, the best and the brightest of the Foreign Service had served there. Herman Eilts in the days of Henry Kissinger and then Roy Atherton after he had been assistant secretary, Nick Veliotes also after he had been assistant secretary, Frank Wisner who was a legend among the Egyptians and then Bob Pelletreau who was one of the best and brightest. It had attracted at the country-team level and in the lower ranks too, the best the Foreign Service had or the best AID had or the best that the CIA had and so I was in a very privileged position of directing a team of people who knew what they were doing and who needed very little motivation or guidance to do outstanding jobs. My real challenge was to coordinate these various activities so that they would be more than the sum of their parts, and that we would accomplish the mission objectives.

Q: How did you find for example the huge AID operation? How did you find it? One can't help but you know, if you've got legions of accountants sometimes I wonder you know, whether if some of the AID operation wasn't, our aid was more paying for Americans to be there than they accomplished. What was your feeling on that?

HULL: Well, you're right. The AID operation I had known in the early '80s when I was there in the political section and then again in the mid-'90s as deputy chief of mission. There had traditionally been, what shall I say, guerrilla warfare between State and AID. The AID bureaucrats, who were extremely canny, had fought very hard to retain their independence and to concentrate their efforts on sustainable development with as little political intervention as possible. Under Pelletreau the AID director was Hank Bassford. Uncharacteristically, Ambassador Pelletreau and Hank Bassford had a very good relationship and there was a lot of professional respect on both sides. I think Bassford was wise enough to trim his sails to meet political requirements, and Bob Pelletreau was wise enough not to challenge AID's professional judgment and so it operated fairly smoothly during my tenure as DCM.

There were, however, challenges. I will give you an example. After the Oslo Accords, the implementing agreements were negotiated to a very significant extent in Cairo because Mubarak was an acceptable host for both the Israelis and the Palestinians. There would be quick, short-term requirements to help get this Palestinian authority up and operating. For example, Arafat needed vehicles for his security forces if he was going to take effective control of security in the West Bank and Gaza ,and we were talking about a need over a matter of months, if not weeks. And, of course, AID's idea of a timeline was a year or two. So we undertook the challenge of somehow coming up with an AID program that could get vehicles on the ground in the Palestinian territories in a matter of weeks and we actually managed to do it by extraordinary effort. I thought this was a shining hour for AID, and I'm sure it was appreciated by people like Warren Christopher. One day when I was addressing an AID retreat, and I referred to this agreement as one of their great successes over the past year. Afterwards, good friends from AID came up to me and informed me that I was referring to what many in AID had seen as one of their great defeats! So I had a reality check on the different cultures at play. Of course, we've seen that cultural battle being fought out in the years since then with AID losing more and more ground to the extent that now it's a shadow of its former self and the secretary of state has, with the support of Congress, achieved more and more control over AID's functioning.

Q: How did you view dealing with turning or keeping Egypt as a functioning or sort of a quasi democracy but as a functioning unit? One thinks of the population getting bigger and bigger and it looks like a disaster.

HULL: Egypt always looks like a disaster, but that should not be cause for complacency. We determined early on that we needed an extraordinary effort for reform, and we got White House support for it in the form of a Gore-Mubarak initiative. Vice President Gore decided he was going to concentrate on a select number of important countries. Egypt was included, Russia was included and commissions were set up that paired the head of government or head of state with the vice president. Vice President Gore came to Cairo regularly over this period and worked very purposefully, very directly on the question of economic reform. I think that, although progress is in Egypt is rarely dramatic, he did lay the foundation for Egyptian economic reform that has slowly transpired since that period. I think it a credit to him that he sustained that effort.

Q: Does there seem to be any real future for Egypt? You know, huge population settled around sort of one city, not much out there in the hinterlands. What's going to sustain it?

HULL: One of the most important things we did early on in our AID program was to concentrate on agricultural reform. I'm talking here not only about the '90s, but in the '80s as well. We had for that reform Agricultural Minister Yusuf Wali, who was an extremely competent and extremely powerful minister. He was not only minister of agriculture, he was also secretary general of the ruling party and by undertaking agricultural reform that got the Egyptian "fellahin" reasonable prices for their products and by helping introduce agricultural technology (hothouses, irrigation, new crops), USAID, succeeded in establishing a solid economic basis for the Egyptian farmer. That's what has historically carried Egypt through hard times.

You still have the problem of 12 or 15 million people living in Cairo and a lesser number, 5 million in Alexandria. There, the AID effort has made appreciable progress in things like infrastructure. In 1982 when I went Cairo for of first-time, we would have regular power brownouts, we would have regular interruptions of the water supply, and we would have regular flooding of the streets with sewage. The situation was draconian. It would take half an hour to make a phone call. The level from which we started was so low, the quality of life of the urban Egyptian was so low that in a way we had nowhere to go but up. AID infrastructure projects addressed one after another these vital sectors so that a modern telephone system was installed, the water system was made functional, the sewage system was made functional. The Egyptian urban dweller could see in his daily life measurable improvements. The kind of improvements we haven't been able to do say in Baghdad since the recent war we were able to accomplish in Cairo. That and the Egyptians' traditional patience and low expectations I think have allowed us to get through the past decades. I think in terms of economic reform, the Egyptians have "religion," and we will see continued to see economic reform, much slower than we expect, much lower than we would counsel on an Egyptian timetable, but nevertheless, in the right direction. I think political reform is a different question.

Q: Did you see the impact of computer technology, communications technology? Was that hitting Egypt at all?

HULL: Yes. The Egyptians certainly took to cell phones in a big way and that was fortunately left in the private sector and parceled out among several companies, including Egyptian companies that now function throughout the Middle East. They took to that very quickly and similarly with computers. The Egyptians are not techno-phobic.

Q: What about the universities and the intellectual and student class? How did we view them at the time?

HULL: You had essentially two kinds of universities. You had the American University in Cairo which was an elite establishment to which the Egyptian ruling class would try to send its children and which we supported to a significant extent. And then you had public Egyptian universitiethe University of Cairo, 'Ain Shamwhich were mega universities with 50,000 plus students, classes routinely of hundreds, and very ill equipped. We would have dealings with them, but it was very hard to get your hands around those establishments. Those universities would often serve as the hotbeds of protest, but there was a clearly understood rule that as long as the protests stayed on the campus, the security forces would not intervene. If the students went off the campus and tried to bring their protest to the rest of the city, then the security forces would very quickly and very firmly crack down. You also had, of course, Al Azhar Universitone of the oldest religious universities in the world dating from the 10th century. We maintained contact with Al Azhar, and it was producing some of the most significant personalities in the Middle East because their graduates would go on throughout the Arab world to very significant positions in Islam.

Q: Was there an Egyptian Islam at the time? I mean, you had other Islams.

Hall: Well, Al Azhar was the oldest institute of higher education in the Islamic world, the most prestigious and its thinking was very highly revered, and it was to a significant extent shaping the next generation of Islamic thinkers. In addition, the Muslim Brotherhood was functioning just beneath the surface and sprouting like-minded groups in places like Palestine, where Hamas traces its origin back to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. And similarly throughout the Arab world, Islamic fundamentalist groups were deriving their charters. their thinking, their programs from the Egyptian source.

Q: Did your political officers seem to be able to get out? I mean, was it an easy place to work?

HULL: They were out, they had very good Arabic, they had great access. I think our political section, people like Alan Misenheimer, did very fine work.

Q: Was there any major incident or anything that happened that you can think of at that time?

HULL: I'd like to talk a little bit about reinventing government as it applies to the embassy because we did take the that hallmark of the Clinton administration seriously, and we did put it into effect in Embassy Cairo in a rather successful way.

Q: We're talking about in Cairo and you're managing this huge operation and we have the Clinton Administration coming along with, what is it called? Reinventing government, or something?

HULL: That's right.

Q: How does it play out on your side?

HULL: Well, we discussed earlier the problems in Embassy Cairo and the ambassador really gaining meaningful control over the programs. You had a $1.3 billion in security assistance, you had about $900 million in economic assistance coming in every year, huge AID establishments, huge military establishments and to have effective policy oversight of these resources was a daunting challenge and particularly with the AID side. There had traditionally been antagonism between the AID mission and the State component of Embassy Cairo as AID preferred to function autonomously. The reinventing government thrust of the Clinton administration, which was particularly championed by Vice President Gore, provided us an opportunity to reinvent the embassy, and we did it in a sustained, purposeful way. Our main vehicle was to create "cluster groups" which were interagency which would focus on an element of importance in our bilateral relationship. For example, the economic assistance element or the security assistance element, and then we would bring into that group anyone in the embassy who had something to say or something to do on the issue. So the economic assistance group had the front office, it had AID people; it had people from our economic section and other parts of the embassy, the agricultural representative, for example. By doing that, we were able to get the ambassador's oversight and policy guidance injected into the planning process rather effectively, and we were able to create interagency working groups that had real meaning in Embassy Cairo, especially given the magnitude of the resources that were flowing in. We also took advantage of this exercise to bring into dynamic roles the junior officers and younger people in the embassy because we needed people on these groups to do drafting and to get out of the embassy and into the field to see what is going on. So I think for a lot of the younger officers, it gave them an opportunity to see resources and how they were being applied, to have something to say about those questions and it was a very salutary experience across-the-board.

Q: Was there any feeling having much time gone by but our huge AID program to Egypt was from the outside it looked like frankly, a payoff, a bribe as it kept the Egyptians from mucking around in Israel. And then we're paying Israel. It sounds like were paying two powers that should be able to keep from going at each other and here we are sitting back in the United States paying both of them to be peaceful.HULL: Historically, of course, the aid levels for both Egypt and Israel came out of the Camp David Summit that also led to the peace treaty between the two countries. Both the Israelis and the Egyptians were very successful at taking a one-time deal and to turn it into an entitlement. To do this, they needed more than to bamboozle the Executive Branch. They needed to get Congress to buy into this, and both Tel Aviv and Cairo spent a lot of time, a lot of trouble working with the congressional angle. President Mubarak was always available for CODELs and they succeeded in turning those programs into entitlements which I think in retrospect was really not a very good deal for U.S. interests because over time, we didn't have nearly as much leverage as we should have had with that amount of resources going in, and the Egyptians didn't do nearly as many reform as they should have done with that amount of resources.

Q: What was the view from Cairo on Israel, our embassy in Israel, what the Israelis were doing during this time?

HULL: Well, during this period it was a rather creative period in the peace process because we had the Oslo process having produced principles for an agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. So throughout this period of time, we had quite a few shuttle visits by Secretary of State Christopher and his peace team, and they were working with the Israelis and the Palestinians to flesh out the principles of agreement from Oslo. The Egyptians were playing a useful role in that whole process. So we have something to show in a tangible way for the involvement of ourselves and the Egyptians. The tragedy was that the agreements reached did not get implemented, and the United States did not adopt an aggressive role in holding the parties accountable for what they had agreed to in that process and so when Netanyahu's Likud government succeeded the Labor governments, the Israelis effectively reneged on many of their requirements. For his part, Yasser Arafat dragged his heels and reneged on his requirements. There was no hard-nosed umpire to call the fouls and to keep the parties honest.

Q: How would you say relations were between the two parties, the American Embassy Cairo and the American Embassy Tel Aviv?

HULL: I would say they were respectful, and we had an overarching common interest which was the peace process. We had people who had served in both embassies so there was not the sense of rivalry that characterized, for example, relations between Embassy Tel Aviv and Consulate General Jerusalem when I was there in the late 1970s.

Q: How did our Consulate General in Alexandria fit in?

HULL: Well, we had a dynamic consul general in Alexandria. We had Frances Cook up there for much of the time, and she was a natural phenomenon, unending energy, extremely outgoing, kind of a perfect person to have at an important outpost like that. I think the Egyptians in Alexandria felt very flattered by her efforts and her attentions.

Q: Was Alexandria a different animal than Cairo?

HULL: Alexandria is quite different than Cairo. It is more Mediterranean, its history, its geographic position, more cosmopolitan. Cairo, founded by the conquering Arab armies, always looked more towards the east while Alexandria always looks more north and into the Mediterranean world.

Q: How were relations when you were there with Saudi Arabia?

HULL: I would say they were correct. I think the Egyptians and Saudis appreciated that they were leading forces in the moderate Arab camp. There was tangible support from Saudis to Egypt. We tried to encourage in the security relationshimore exchanges and participation for example by Saudi in exercises like Bright Star, but we found the Saudis rather timid about their military capabilities and nervous about showing up at any situation where they could possibly get embarrassed. I think Mubarak played Arab politics very well. At that stage, the Arab League had returned to Egypt so he had that instrument and Esmat Abdul Majid, a former Egyptian foreign minister, as the secretary-general of the Arab League, and so Mubarak was adept in managing his relationship with the Arab world as a whole.

Q: Was Qaddafi a factor at all at this point or not?

HULL: Qaddafi was not a factor. He was in his box more or less. Qaddafi was much more a factor during the '80s when I was there, and Qaddafi was still rambunctious. If you recall that was the era of the La Belle Disco bombing in Berlin.

Q: Our retaliatory bombing?

HULL: Our retaliatory bombing and more. I don't know if we covered it or not. We also had a secret mission from the NSC, Admiral Poindexter. Well, maybe I'll say a few words about that. In the aftermath of the La Belle Disco bombing and our attack on Tripoli, the NSC decided a more radical solution was needed. Admiral Poindexter, the advisor to the president for national security, jetted out to Cairo to propose to President Mubarak that the Egyptians invade Libya and depose Qaddafi. At the time, Nick Veliotes was the ambassador, and we had a very strong station as well as a strong embassy. This proposal was heard by Mubarak and then Defense Minister Abu Ghazala, and their response was noncommittal which was taken as a yes by the National Security Council which wanted to go full steam ahead. The staff levels in the embassy were very dubious. Part of the plan involved major movements of the Egyptian military into the Libyan desert, and as Pol-Mil officer and with my colleagues in the office of military cooperation we had a very good sense of what the Egyptians were capable of, and we felt strongly that that magnitude of a move was not within the Egyptian capabilities. Not to mention the fact that the preponderance of Egyptians military forces were arrayed toward Israel which is what they, the Egyptians, considered to be their real threat. We doubted that the military invasion was a practical plan, and our colleagues in the station doubted that the proposed work with Libyan dissidents was practical because they knew these characters. They knew they lacked reliability, they lacked support inside Libya and they would be weak reeds for our strategy.

We briefed this to the ambassador, Ambassador Veliotes, who, I'm sure, had his own misgivings about the whole enterprise. One result of this was that I got sent back to Washington to brief the military facts of life to the State Department, and I remember heading back with a map in my briefcase showing the situation in the western desert of Egypt. I arrived on NEA's doorstep, and NEA did not really know what to do with me. Arnie Raphael, who was principal deputy assistant secretary at the time, had me cool my heels on the Egyptian Desk for a couple of days and then finally he set up an appointment for me with the undersecretary for political affairs. I went along with Arnie Raphael and went up and went through my briefing of the practical problems involved in this proposed NSC scheme. I got sent back to the Middle East and the project somehow got strangled in the cradle because we did not get in bed with the Libyan dissidents and the Egyptians did not get bogged down in the Libyan Desert.

Q: Well, then you are back to DCM in Cairo? Qaddafi was not considered a major problem?

HULL: No, Qaddafi was growing older and calmer, and Qaddafi had his own Islamic fundamentalist threat as, of course, did Egypt in spades. So you are in a situation where the times had changed, and the threats to the regimes had changed.

Q: How about the Sudan?

HULL: Sudan was an area in which the Egyptians were always interested because of the Nile. They were very nervous about any activity upriver in Sudan or even in East Africa. They had hoped to increase the flow of water to the Nile by sponsoring the Jonglei Canal, which would have conserved Nile waters, but that was going nowhere because of the war in the south. There was a "Khartoum Spring," so to speak, during this period when Al Mahdi returned to Khartoum, and you had a brief period of Sudanese democracy. You had elections, party activity and some Sudanese experts were very optimistic that Sudanese democracy would take hold and flourish. In the end, that didn't happen, and the military eventually stepped back into power which I don't think bothered the Egyptians very much. They were primarily concerned that the Islamic leader Hassan al Turabi and his ilk not gain or not sustain ascendancy in Khartoum. If it meant that the military was in charge, well, that was something the Egyptians were very comfortable with.

Q: At the time you were there Egyptian elections continued to be somewhat problematic.

HULL: Formalistic.

Q: Was there a feeling that if they really had open elections the fundamentalists might win?

HULL: No. We in the embassy believed that if there were open elections, Mubarak would win very comfortably. The Egyptian people had seen a great deal of progress under Mubarak; their quality of life had improved, for some much more than others but even across the board. The Egyptian peoples were trained and had a long tradition of deference to the Pharaoh or whoever had a similar position so ironically, the Egyptians could well have afforded at that stage freer elections.

Q: Was there a growing gap between those who had influence and those who didn't have?

HULL: Yes, clearly there was. The "Infitah" or economic opening up as they call it had benefited some disproportionately and you had the phenomena not only of the latest Mercedes driving through the slums of Cairo, but you had huge, extravagant weddings being given by the leading families when many Egyptians were living on beans and bread. So yes, the disparity in the incomes was becoming not only apparent, but painful.

Q: Was this something you could do anything about or?

HULL: Well, certainly our agricultural policy and our assistance to the farmers and the liberalization of agricultural markets benefited the rural population very considerably, and a lot of it, as we discussed previously, a lot of the stability of Egypt rested on that success. Our efforts to improve the infrastructure of Cairo, the sewage, the water, that also had broad, very broad benefits. We did not have particular programs to redistribute wealth or redistribute land or any of those measures. Those weren't really in keeping with the American political or economic thinking.

Q: Any major visits? I'm sure you had a lot of Congress people.

HULL: Well, we had Vice President Gore often because of the Mubarak-Gore Commission and that was good because Al Gore was a serious man who followed the issues and by getting repeated visits and follow-up, we were able to sustain attention on key issues effectively. We also got President Clinton for one visit. It was a lightning affair. He was scheduled to go out to the Middle East, to Israel and elsewhere and shoehorned in a stop in Egypt. I still recall he got in at something like 4 a.m. in the morning. The Meeting with Mubarak was about nine, which was as early as you can conceivably have with an Arab leader, and he was on his way by early afternoon. His one, very considerable disappointment was that he could never get to the pyramids. His lodgings, and Mubarak insisted putting him up in a palace, his lodgings were on the east side of town and the meetings were on the east side of town. The pyramids are way outside Cairo on the western side of town and the transit across Cairo was just too daunting given the schedule we had. So as compensation after President Clinton's plane took off, Air Force One circled the pyramids and gave him a view from the air at least.

Q: You wanted to talk about the signing ceremony?

HULL: I wanted to mention the efforts of Secretary of State Christopher and his peace process team throughout this period which brought results in the form of agreements to implement the Oslo principles. These were difficult negotiations and extended negotiations and not concluded until there were all-night discussions involving the Americans, the Egyptians, the Palestinians and the Israelis and even when you had an agreement ready for signature you're never quite sure of it. On the day that the agreement was meant to be signed, we all showed up at the venue as did the world's media only to have the representative of the various governments including Secretary Christopher on the stage and then stopped dead in their tracks because Chairman Arafat refused to sign the final document. Even his own negotiating team had a hard time understanding what Chairman Arafat's objections were. They presumably had something to do with a map in the annex, but it was a very painful and a very long wait by the principles in front of the world media while efforts were made and finally successful and Chairman Arafat signed with a proviso. This was the last time to my knowledge that Mubarak offered to make Cairo a venue for a signing ceremony involving Chairman Arafat.

Q: You left there when?

HULL: I left there in 1996.

Q: Where did you go?

HULL: I came back to Washington and did the Senior Seminar for a year.

Q: How did you find the Senior Seminar?

HULL: The Senior Seminar was a great luxury. It was, I think, nearing the end of its run. It was somewhat anachronistic, frankly. You had I think, good representatives from the State Department because it was such an enjoyable posting. The other agencies though were using it as a reward for perhaps people who had served long and willingly, not necessarily up and coming people as it was originally intended.

Q: Where did you go then? This would be 1997?

HULL: This would be '96 to '97. Well, my career hit a speed bump. Having been DCM and charge for about nine months at the Department's largest embassy and having been recognized by such things as the Baker-Wilkins Award for Management of an Overseas Mission, which generally goes to one DCM every year, I had expected in the next cycle to be promoted and to launch my career search and my job search on that basis. But in the Foreign Service not everything happens as expected, and the promotion list came out, and my name was not on it. This would have been from OC to MC. I, therefore, found myself in an awkward situation and scrambling for jobs in Washington which were not easy for me to find. I remember going to Skip Gnehm, who was director general of the Foreign Service, and explaining to him my plight. Skip throughout my career had been a source of very good advice and what he told me was to find work that needed to be done and not to worry too much about the rank of the job. Everything would sort itself out. So acting on that advice, there was a job in the International Organizations Bureau in peacekeeping, and Molly Williamson, the principal deputy assistant secretary, asked me if I would take a look at the job. It was rated beneath the job that I had done previously as DCM in Cairo, but peacekeeping work was significant and so following Skip's advice I took the job.

Q: You did this job from when to when?

HULL: I took it from 1997 to 1999.

Q: Let's talk about the job. Where did it fit and what was it?

HULL: I was director for peacekeeping and for humanitarian operations in the International Organizations Bureau, and I reported to Molly Williamson, the principal deputy assistant secretary, who was the deputy of Princeton Lyman at that stage. It involved significant resources because the UN was conducting some 15 to 20 peacekeeping operations, and the U.S. was paying the lions' share of the cost of those operations. That's where the rub was because we had a Republican Congress, and both on the House and Senate side there was extreme hostility toward the United Nations, particularly by Senator Helms who was then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The opponents had initiated a watchdog operation on UN peacekeeping that required a State Department representative, me, to go up to the Hill each month and to defend in front of the authorizing and appropriating committee staff all ongoing and proposed UN peacekeeping operations. The staff members were pit bulls when it came to the UN peacekeeping. The monthly "Around the World" briefings were agonizing occasions.

Q: How did you prepare for this and where were the, you might say, the soft spots, the problem spots?

HULL: Well, the points to criticize in the UN operations were legion and you could not paper over them. The only approach that stood a chance of success was candor and honesty and granting the criticisms that the legislative branch had and doing our best in New York and in the field to correct as much as we could. But what the well-intentioned staff wanted was the State Department to take the issue seriously and to use the leverage that we had to correct it as much as possible. They were not naï¿½ve. They did not expect to reinvent the United Nations overnight, but they wanted their criticisms to be taken seriously and so that's what we did.

We worked extremely hard and put a lot of pressure on the department of peacekeeping operations (DPKO) in New York to try to improve UN performance. And we succeeded. I'll give you an example. There was an operation in eastern Slavonia, as part an effort to stabilize the Balkans in the former Yugoslavia. That peacekeeping operation was run by an American, Jacque Klein, a former military and a former Foreign Service officer. Jacque was a brilliant manager, a great leader and did an extraordinarily effective job in eastern Slavonia. The time came to bring that operation, we thought, to a close. It was not a negative reflection on the work that was being done. In fact, it was an indication of the success of the work that was being done. The UN bureaucrats, whose paycheck depended upon continuing operations, fought a hard, guerrilla operation to keep it going and to keep putting resources in. We played hardball and the operation's plug was pulled. The OSCE moved in as a successor. As a result of those kinds of efforts, we got enough credibility up on the Hill that we had a decent working relationship, but Helms' staff, particularly Helms' staff was always on the lookout for any evidence of softness in the State Department position.

Q: Could you make nice to the staff or were the lines so drawn they were always going to be opposed to it?

HULL: Well, you could not charm the staff. The staff was "uncharmable". You could not flimflam the staff. The staff, some of them like Jim Kulikowski, had been following these operations in detail for years and years. You could not snow these people. You could only be honest and candid, never promising more than you could deliver, but making visible efforts to protect U.S. interests. Then you gained their respect.

Q: Were they coming from the idea that peacekeeping wasn't worth it or was it that the United States shouldn't do anything?

HULL: UN peacekeeping operations had historically turned into institutions in themselves, entitlements. There were a lot of special interests being served in the UN bureaucracy and in the field there were people involved in the procurement process. A lot of money was flowing into these areas because you had a UN peacekeeping operation so all these vested interests meant that the operation became an end to itself and not a means to an end which was the return to a normal situation.

Q: I was interviewing Ron Neitzke. When he was consul general and then chargï¿½ in Croatia in the mid-'90s he was saying that UN establishments in Bosnia, it is quite clear that they didn't want U.S. troop intervention because this would break their rice bowl. I mean they had all sorts of things, I mean, it was more than just what would be effective. They were in a way protecting their job.

HULL: That was true in many, many of these situations. There were vested interests.

Q: What was the feeling of your office?

HULL: We felt like we were in the middle. We had "mission impossible", an adamant, ideologically, aggressive staff on the Hill and then we had in New York one of the world's most impenetrable bureaucracies. We were the shock absorber between those two forces and we got crunched repeatedly. It was, without a doubt, the most difficult job I've ever had in the State Department.

Q: Did you get much support anywhere?

HULL: I think people appreciated us playing the role of shock absorbers. Our superiors were happy they didn't have to go up and bear the brunt of the Hill's questioning every month, but beyond that there weren't a lot of rewards.

Q: How about some of the personalities? Who was our ambassador to the UN during this period?

HULL: Peter Burleigh was acting. We had a number of ambassadors. When we started out it was Bill Richardson, now governor of New Mexico, who was a political animal and who was effective in his own way. I was fortunate enough to travel with him to the former Yugoslavia and watch him in action. Then Peter Burleigh had a long tenure as charge and performed magnificently and should have gone to bigger and better things, but fell afoul of the confirmation process and then finally Dick Holbrooke toward the end came in, and he had his own style.

Q: Did you get much support from the mission up in New York?

HULL: The mission had different priorities than we did. The mission was trying to keep the international community happy and on our side and not to make too many waves in the UN bureaucracy. They were of course, insulated from Hill pressure that we were feeling on a daily basis so we were often at odds, not working at cross purposes ,but certainly subjected to radically different pressures.

Q: While you are there was the East Timor business going on?

HULL: Yes, the East Timor business arose at the end of my tenure and was an attempt, presented as an opportunity to come up with a reasonable peacekeeping operation.

Q: By the time he got there, how did you view what had happened in the Balkans?

HULL: Of course, I came at the Balkans having served on the National Security Council under Brent Scowcroft and having seen Bush 41 people, Scowcroft and Larry Eagleburger, not wanting to touch that with a 10-foot pole and then seeing Madeleine Albright successfully inject U.S. power into the equation and really move it to a successful course. So I had seen a great deal change in U.S. policy.

Q: You were running the blank when you left?

HULL: One area where I think we did make progress was in the area of civilian policing, CIVPOL, because it was clear in the former Yugoslavia that in a post-conflict situation, stability and progress depended an enormous amount on building, deploying and then maintaining policing capability, which was quite different than a military capability. The UN, and the international community as a whole, really lacked resources, the ability to do this. So Princeton Lyman gave me as one of my objectives when I started the job doing what we could to beef up CIVPOL. We worked on that with the UN Secretariat, with colleagues in DPKO, and were able to pull together a conference in New York that was extremely well attended in which for the first time the subject was discussed over two days in a serious way and where we began to realize that although the U.S. lacked resources in this area, other countries, Argentina, Italy and India for example, had units, usually gendarmes or carabinieri, that could be put in situations and serve as the bridge between military and police establishments as we knew them. That work was also done in collaboration with the National Defense University, Bob Oakley, Mike Djeijic and others, and I think we really did get a much better understanding of the problems and solutions although I must say, when you look at what happened in Iraq after our invasion, a lot of lessons learned back in the late '90s had to be relearned again by the people who entered Iraq and Baghdad.

Q: You left in '98?

HULL: I left in 1999. My colleague from IO Mike Sheehan, who had done peacekeeping at the National Security Council, but was not doing it at IO had moved over to become the secretary's counterterrorism adviser, and Mike recruited me to be his deputy in S/CT. For me, it was another question of doing a job that needed to be done. Ironically, it turned out to be my ticket to an embassy and in the period from '99 to '01 an area of increasing and eventually, overriding importance to the State Department and the U.S. government.

Q: What did this job consist of?

HULL: Congress had decided, I believe in the '70s, that the State Department needed to give more attention to terrorism. As structured, with regional and functional bureaus, that wasn't going to happen so Congress at its best legislated measures to address those problems and what they did was to legislate the creation of an office, SCT, that would report directly to the secretary of state and be concerned solely with counter terrorism. That office has had a number of very strong leaders; people like Jerry Bremer, Peter Burleigh, and Phil Wilcox. It had gone into a bit of a decline in the '90s, and there had been efforts to fold it into another bureau, INL. Those efforts reflected a misjudgment that the terrorism wave had crested and that we didn't need to pay quite as much attention to this as we had in the past. Mike Sheehan was an acolyte of Dick Clarke. He had worked with Dick at the National Security Council, and Dick had used his considerable bureaucratic skills to get Mike appointed to head SCT so he would have a compatible figure in that place in State. Dick and Mike recognized, as would people like Dale Watson in the FBI, and Cofer Black in the CIA, that terrorism had far from crested. In fact, there was as a tsunami on the way in the form of Al Qaeda. The opening salvos in that war had really occurred in Somalia, in Yemen in the early '90s and then vary dramatically in 1998 with the successful Al Qaeda attack against our embassy in Dar es Salaam in Nairobi. Both Dick and Mike saw that there was a lot more to come. In S/CT from '99 to '01, we were people with a mission and that was to do what we could to disrupt Al Qaeda, to warn the rest of the government and the country of the threat that was gathering in Afghanistan.

Q: You say you reported directly to the secretary of state, but this often sounds a lot fancier than it really is. Let's talk a little bit about that.

HULL: It's a good point. It was meaningful in that the fact that we were established in legislation meant that we couldn't be reformed, we couldn't be subordinated by reform from within the State Department as had been attempted in the '90s. It didn't mean though that Mike Sheehan got to meet with Madeleine Albright. Although Mike had worked with Madeleine in New York, and she had been comfortable with his choice, Madeleine didn't turn to Mike for her security briefings. Madeleine Albright saw the counterterrorism issue as primarily an issue of diplomatic security, how we protect our embassies, how we protect our people. She turned to Dave Carpenter, who was the assistant secretary for diplomatic security, which in my judgment was a very serious error because whenever terrorism is dealt with passively, whenever the primary concern is defensive (How do we protect ourselves?) rather than offensive (How do we go after Al Qaeda?) then we're setting ourselves up for failure because we'll always be there too little and too late in a defensive posture. As a result of Albright's blind spot, Mike dealt with Tom Pickering, under secretary for political affairs, because Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott also was not someone who was comfortable with the terrorism portfolio. Therefore, in the division of labor on the seventh floor, it fell to Tom Pickering. In Tom Pickering, we had a brilliant and engaged principal, someone who very rarely would say "no" when you needed him to get into the fight and do some of the diplomatic lifting so in that regard, we were fortunate, but as you say, he was less than what Congress had intended.

Q: How did you operate?

HULL: We were bureaucratic guerillas. We were constantly butting heads with other bureaus, particularly the regional bureaus, who also tended to downplay terrorism and didn't want our demands harming bilateral relationships. So we were constantly pushing NEA the Near East Bureau, and constantly pushing SA, the South Asian Bureau, to do more on terrorism issues. For example, whenever President Clinton would phone President Musharraf in Pakistan, we were always insisting that we deal with the terrorism issui.e. to get Pakistan to use its influence to get the Taliban to split from Al Qaeda and either to hand Bin Laden over to us or to expel him to a third country like Saudi Arabia or in some way disrupt the very effective operation that Al Qaeda had going on in Afghanistan. While we would push to treat this as the priority issue, our SA colleagues would have a number of other issues on everything from restoring democracy in Pakistan to nuclear issues that affected India, the position of women in Afghanistan. It was very hard to get a coherent, hard-hitting signal coming out of the U.S. government out of the White House on the issue of Al Qaeda and Bin Laden. If you look at the 9/11 Commission Report, you see that diplomacy in the pre-9/11 period was constantly evolving, and it was very hard to get effective pressure on these players. We did what was then appropriate to do. We basically designated bin Laden, designated Al Qaeda as a terrorist organization, and Bin Laden personally. We put shackles on the Taliban in terms of their economic relations. We eventually got a resolution passed in the UN Security Council that imposed a unilateral arms embargo against the Taliban. We really exhausted our diplomatic arsenal, but in the end it all proved too little in terms of applying effective pressure on Bin Laden.

Q: You got there after the attacks on our embassies in East Africa. We had launched I believe by that time missile attacks. What was the feeling about these missile attacks in Sudan and in Afghanistan? Was it felt that this sort of thing didn't work or was there, what was the thought?

HULL: Well, those had occurred before I was on board, but the lingering feeling, I think, was twofold. Vis-ï¿½-vis Afghanistan the feeling was we did not sufficiently harm Al Qaeda to be taken seriously. We hadn't gotten any of the principals, the attacks had not been sustained. They had taken our punch, and it really hadn't slowed them down. The attack on Khartoum on the chemical factory was extremely controversial. The evidence that we had that it was involved in chemical weapons production was not convincing. It was not something you could lay on the table and get reasonable people to subscribe to. There was a feeling vis-ï¿½-vis Khartoum that we had done it on the basis of very thin intelligence.

Q: Did this lead you when you came on board to have reservations about the intelligence, particularly the CIA, maybe military intelligence?

HULL: It was extraordinarily frustrating because George Tenet also "had religion" about Al Qaeda, and the CIA and his Counterterrorism Center (CTC) was working flat out. Because of the '98 bombings, the CIA and other intelligence generating bodies were putting more intelligence out into daily distribution because no one wanted to be responsible for having had a vital piece of intelligence and not having distributed it so everyone was erring on the side of distribution. Initially we had secure videos of teleconferences everyday of the workweek, and then they scaled back to three days a week. They were chaired by the National Security Council, Dick Clarke's office. They involved State, FBI, CIA, JCS, DOD, Justice and others as necessary. We would go over in exhausting detail all of the intelligence that indicated something might be afoot. We would be in touch with our embassies and reporting on the reaction of the embassies and the measures being taken by the embassies or our military forces. It was constant high tension, hands-on management of a situation which we could only see through a glass darkly. At times, this high-level attention would spike even higher because George Tenet would have called Tom Pickering or seen him on the Hill and handed over one or two juicy intelligence tidbits that indicated something was going to happen and then the seventh floor would react, and we would be just spun up trying to deal with what could be perceived as cries of wolf coming out of the director of center intelligence.

We would also get terribly spun up whenever we had a significant anniversary or something like that, like the Fourth of July, because there was a natural tendency to expect the worst to happen on those anniversaries or occasions. Embassies would be closed down, and we would go into 24/7 mode. The Foreign Emergency Support Team (FEST) at times would deploy to Europe. The whole interagency process run by Dick Clarke and the counter terrorism security group, the CSG, would just keep things in motion at an incredible level of intensity.

Q: What was your impression of the role of Dick Clarke?

HULL: I came into the job not having had direct dealings with Dick, but with very grave reservations about his style and his judgment. Having served in regional bureaus, I had a feeling that he was a loose cannon and very disruptive of relationships. When I worked in the job at S/CT, that opinion changed dramatically. I grew to see Dick as a brilliant bureaucrat, and someone who broke china but didn't do it haphazardly. He had a purpose and a message, and it was his overriding mission in this case to protect America from terrorism. That really was the engine motivating his extremely, how shall we say it, direct and sometimes undiplomatic manner.

Q: While you were there, were you sort of the fly in the ointment or something of that nature?

HULL: Right. We were the ghost at the dinner. Bureaus, like NEA, would try to manage us. Perhaps our best relationship oddly enough, was with SA, the South Asia Bureau, which reflected Mike Sheehan's good relations with Rick Inderfurth. They had worked together with Madeleine Albright previously. SA, I think, made a legitimate effort to work with us in dealing with the Al Qaeda phenomenon. Certainly, we didn't see eye to eye on everything and didn't have the same priorities, but we had a good relation working relationship with them and we got quite a bit accomplished. Both Inderfurth and his deputy, Al Easton, meant well and were acting responsibly.

Q: Was it kind of in the back of your mind the negotiation between the United States and maybe others to do something about the Taliban and the Al Qaeda connection in Afghanistan? It seemed like a doable place where nobody liked what was going on there and even indirectly or directly we could probably hit them pretty hard without upsetting the apple cart or was that a thought?

HULL: It is very hard to deal with that issue because we all now view it knowing what happened on September 11, 2001. At the time, the military force that could be applied did not appear to be a solution. The cruise missile attack had not accomplished very much. A full scale invasion was not in the cards. We didn't have the support from the neighboring countries that we needed to do it. The U.S. military had other priorities. Intermediate steps could have been taken and, at the staff level OSD and JCS, there was some creative thinking, especially by Brian Sheridan, assistant secretary of defense for Special Operations and Low-intensity Conflict (SOLIC), but it never made it outside of the Pentagon. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not really see this as a military issue, but more as a law enforcement issue even after the attack on the USS Cole which was an attack on a U.S. military vessel.

The "silver bullet" that did appear was the Predator drone, and we were flying it over Afghanistan and identifying on one occasion what we thought was Bin Laden. There were accelerated efforts to arm it so that it could be used not only to identify targets, but then destroy targets in Afghanistan and elsewhere. That was the crest of the U.S. effort in the period leading up to 9/11.

Q: What was our view of the PLO, the Hezbollah, and the role of Syria and Iran?

HULL: We differentiated the threats fairly clearly. We would identify, and we would label terrorist organizations. We had a process, again mandated by Congress, to do that, and we would do it on a yearly basis, designate different groups as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). Although we had scores to settle with Hezbollah, the Marine Corps barracks bombing in Beirut and others, at this time Hezbollah was not targeting Americans. Therefore, we did not favor going after Hezbollah in an aggressive, military or covert way and prompt that organization to target Americans when it was not doing so. We differed in our approach from that of the Bush administration post 9/11 which conflated threats and dealt with terrorism generically rather than specifically.

Q: How about Iran?

HULL: Iran again had a lot to answer for. Personally, I had been involved in the Iran hostage crisis in the late '70s. Also, Iran had provided a lot of support to those responsible for the bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. We knew from the investigation that followed that Iran played a very significant role. Subsequent to that, we were not aware of anything in particular that Iran was doing vis-ï¿½-vis U.S. targets although clearly they were backing Hezbollah.

Q: Were we at all concerned the Pakistani support of the mujaheddin or whatever you want to call them in Kashmir? They were getting into India too.

HULL: Yes. You had a situation where the Pakistanis were riding the tiger. They had facilitated things for their own mujaheddin groups. During my time Lashkar-e-Taiba had really come to the fore as the most significant threat, and there was a very close relationship between these groups, which were focused on Kashmir, and Al Qaeda which was focused on either Afghanistan or on U.S. interests. The Pakistanis were really playing with fire. Pakistani military intelligence was really in many ways the patron of the mujaheddin in Afghanistan, certainly the patron of the Taliban and indirectly the patron of Al Qaeda, so we had lots of problems with what the Pakistanis were doing.

Q: I don't know if it fell within your purview or not but were you looking at the Saudi support for the fundamentalist schools with Madrassas all over and what they were preaching?

HULL: We were concerned about the Saudi role in that regard certainly the whole diffusion of the Wahhabi school of Islam was a concern, but also the financing that was coming out of Saudi Arabia, much of it from private Saudis, filling the coffers of Al Qaeda's treasury and enabling Al Qaeda to operate worldwide.

Q: Were you able to do anything with the Saudi government?

HULL: We had a concerted effort with the U.S. Treasury Department in the lead. Interagency teams went to Saudi and Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf repeatedly to work on this issue. It was very hard to get traction in the pre-9/11 period. They had much more success post-9/11. In post-9/11, we saw the effects of those efforts.

Q: Were we at all concerned about what was going on in Indonesia and maybe elsewhere?

HULL: We identified Asia as a growth area for Al Qaeda and its associated organizations. The Philippines, Indonesia and our intelligence indicated that there were more problems to come in this part of the world and from this part of the world.

Q: Well, we can see this but was a pretty good intelligence coming in or where we just sort of reading the papers?

HULL: Well, we weren't just reading the papers. The CIA was collecting intelligence in a very concerted way. We were getting not only human intelligence but signals intelligence. The FBI was following up and getting a picture of Al Qaeda based on their investigation of the East Africa bombings and other terrorist actions. We identified the threat, we knew Al Qaeda was growing as a menace, we knew who was in charge of Al Qaeda, Bin Laden, Zawahiri and others. We had a good strategic understanding of what the threat to the U.S. was, including the threat to the homeland of the U.S. What we didn't have was practical intelligence about when and where and who would strike next. The closest we came was during the millennium period when a number of plots in Jordan and elsewhere were disrupted, and we got through that period without a successful terrorist attack. But, as was the case with Pearl Harbor, the signals that were out there were just too many, too confused, too imprecise for anyone to have put the picture together that would have depicted an Al Qaeda attack on September 11 against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Al Qaeda achieved tactical surprise in that regard and given the history of intelligence, I'm not surprised that we were surprised.

Q: Did you have the feeling, and again this is all ex post facto, while you were doing this the feeling that maybe the intelligence community wasn't sharing as much as they should have? I'm thinking about lookouts, as a former consular officer or passports. He's a bad guy and this sort of thing? Did you get any feel for that?

HULL: Well, at the time I did not have it. In retrospective, the 9/11 Commission Report has clearly indicated that there were disconnects and had the travels of a number of the 9/11 terrorists been more effectively followed and handoffs made between CIA and the FBI, there was a significant chance that they could have been detained and the plot could have been disrupted. That's all out there in the 9/11 report, and it's done a brilliant job of honestly portraying what was done and what wasn't done. For most of us dealing with this day in and day out, we were overwhelmed with information. We had hundreds of potential plots going on. In the State Department in particular, we were primarily concerned with our assets, our embassies, our personnel. We weren't looking at the homeland as much as we were looking abroad.

But I remember when Colin Powell took over, was designated secretary of state in December of 2000, one of the first briefings he asked for was a briefing on terrorism. I got the call from the transition team because I was acting director for S/CT at the time. Mike Sheehan had left to go to the UN. We decided the most effective thing we could do for Secretary Powell was to gather the CSG and so we did that. We had Dick Clarke, we had Dale Watson, we had Cofer Black, Brian Sheridan and, I believe, John Sattler and myself. Secretary-designate Powell spent about two hours with us, and we laid out in unmistakable clarity the threat we saw coming out of Afghanistan.

Cofer Black was probably most dramatic, which is not surprising given Cofer's personality. Cofer said, "Mr. Secretary, we will be hit by Al Qaeda. They will succeed in hitting us. I can't tell you when and I can't tell you where but that I can tell you that for certain."

Colin Powell looked at him and he said, "Well, how do you know that? What's your algorithm? How can you be so certain?" And Cofer said, "This is what I know from my years in the CIA, working on terrorism. This is as certain as I can be." And he was absolutely right. I think Powell did not at all dismiss this. He took it extremely seriously. We know he told Deputy Secretary Rich Armitage that one of the first things he should have was a similar briefing on terrorism and that Armitage should follow this issue personally and closely. At the start of the Bush administration then, we had access to the secretary of state and to the deputy secretary of state which we had never had in the previous administration. Condi Rice got a somewhat similar briefing.

Q: She was at the National Security Council.

HULL: Yes. Dick Clarke pulled together the CSG for her, not as lengthy, not as pointed. Don Rumsfeld never got a briefing like this and on 9/11, he had not yet replaced Brian Sheridan, the official responsible for terrorism in the Department of Defense. The attorney general never got a similar briefing. The people who were the most surprised about 9/11 were those heads of agencies which is not availed themselves of the experts and had to a significant extent ignored the problem in their first nine months in office. I believe Rumsfeld's recourse to military force subsequently in Iraq and elsewhere was his compensation for underestimating the threat initially.

Q: Tell me, what did this sort of do to you and me and others? Here you are carrying on foreign relations, which is essentially dealing with the peaceful solution of problems. You have a bunch of really nasty people out there trying to kill you but most people are ignoring us. This must have been quite a burden just personally to bear.

HULL: I think this experience was when I really personally transcended the State Department and felt closer to the counterterrorism interagency group than I did to State, and my priorities were more their priorities than they were State priorities.

We felt like prophets who were not given a hearing or were not taken as seriously as we should have been, particularly, I think, with Secretary Albright. I recall she was undertaking a trip to Central Asia. Central Asia was important. It was Al Qaeda's backyard and an important front on the war on terror. Initially, she did not even propose to take Mike Sheehan along with her. I was sitting in one of the preparatory meetings, and Mike was not the kind of person who would force himself on the secretary. I didn't have those personal compunctions, and I said if the secretary doesn't take her counterterrorism adviser to Central Asia, no one will understand in Central Asia. They gave Mike in a seat on the airplane, but they downgraded the briefing materials on terrorism. They were much more concerned about women's rights and issues like that. When the Secretary arrived in Central Asia, all the heads of state wanted to talk about was terrorism. Mike moved from the back of the plane up to the front of the plane, but it took foreigners demanding Secretary Albright to talk about this issue seriously for the secretary to put it high on her agenda.

Within State, it was frustrating. Tom Pickering was, in my mind, an exception on the seventh floor. Tom Pickering was seized with terrorism. He was very much affected by the bombings in East Africa in 1998. His door was always open to us. One of the more significant of our diplomatic initiatives was to get UN Security Council resolution 1333 passed which imposed a unilateral arms embargo on the Taliban. It would not have happened without Pickering. Pickering was personally engaged in the U.S.-Russian counterterrorism group that was very effective in concerting our efforts with Russia in this area. Pickering personally convinced the Russians to go along with us in imposing this arms embargo, and then did the heavy lifting in terms of lobbying the Security Council. I think that was the most significant diplomatic counterterrorism achievement of 2000, and it owed very much to Tom Pickering's personal efforts.

But once Powell, Armitage and Marc Grossman came on board, then really the doors were open to us, and I could go to Rich Armitage on short notice with anything on terrorism and so within the State system we felt very well connected indeed. Incidentally, the new team understandably jettisoned almost all the former administration's ad hoc diplomatic mechanisms, but they made an exception for the U.S.-Russian CT group because they say it paid real dividende.g. UNSCR 1333.

Q: I take it from what you said that you were all waiting for the shoe to drop and that Al Qaeda was going to do something which you probably could have stopped.

HULL: Right. We were hoping that wasn't true, but we were expecting that it was.

Q: Well, this was one reason why as soon as the towers, the International Trade Center and the Pentagon the immediate reaction from people in the know said, "That's Al Qaeda." It wasn't, "Who could have done this?" or something.

HULL: It was very quickly understood. The FBI, and this is recounted in both Dick Clarke's book and in the report of the 9/11 Commission, the FBI very quickly determined that some of the people on the planes had Al Qaeda associations and therefore there was really no question of the authorship of the act.

Q: Well then, you left there in 2001?

HULL: I left in July. One of the things when we briefed Secretary Powell in December of 2000, one piece of advice that I had offered was that he should, as a priority, select his man or woman for S/CT and get that individual confirmed and up to speed. It was not a position he wanted vacant on his team. Secretary Powell did that, and we got Air Force Brigadier General Frank Taylor, who relieved me in June or July. By this time, I had been nominated as ambassador to Yemen and was preparing for my confirmation hearings.

Q: How did we view Africa? Africa as a whole was this just a convenient place or was there a seething problem in Africa?

HULL: What we saw was that Al Qaeda had a global reach. They could hit us wherever we were vulnerable and therefore we didn't have the luxury of just hardening embassies in Islamabad, for example, or hardening Embassy Riyadh. We were in a worldwide struggle, and wherever we had vulnerability, our opponent could identify it and could reach it. I think that was the lesson of East Africa in 1998.

Q: Latin America?

HULL: Latin America similarly we had regular reports of Al Qaeda being able to function in Latin America. It never really reached a critical mass there but they were present.

Q: Did we see Al Qaeda as being very much not only a creature of the Islamic world or were we seeing it branch beyond that?

HULL: Well, I think Al Qaeda was sui generis. It was a terrorist organization that had gone global and that had brought together in very effective ways global financing, global communications, global logistics and that had made them a much more potent adversary than the terrorist groups we had encountered prior to Al Qaeda.

Q: What were getting out of Europe because this is a time when the European Muslim community was really developing and we see it today where most of the activity in the Western world seems to be right in Western Europe.

HULL: Yes. Pre-9/11 that was not so obvious. I was responsible for most contacts with the Europeans which took place in the context of annual G-8 meetings on terrorism. In the wake of the '98 embassy bombings, we hosted a G-8 summit meeting, I think in Colorado, and counterterrorism was at the top of the agenda. The G-8 formed a counterterrorism working group. It fell to me to chair the U.S. delegation to that group so we had meetings in Germany, in Rome, in Tokyo and elsewhere. At the time, we had very effective relations with the Brits. So much of our intelligence overlapped that it was easy to see eye to eye. The Germans were supportive, the Italians relatively supportive, the Japanese were passive, the French were obstructionist.

Q: So often I've heard that in intelligence they're pretty good.

HULL: The French are good in intelligence. They did have their own very significant terrorism problem, but Paris wanted all diplomacy to be run through the Security Council so that France would have a veto. So any effort outside the UN Security Council, any G-8 effort for example, France obstructed and we missed opportunities because of that obstruction. We also had trouble with the EU. In Brussels, we had at least annual counterterrorism meetings with them. We took them seriously, the EU bureaucrats took them pro forma, and I remember we were at times intentionally undiplomatic to make a point that we were serious. I remember going to Brussels with the U.S. delegation and starting off the morning with an array of EU bureaucrats on the other side of the table, maybe 15 or 20 people. Instead of going through the agenda in a pro forma way, we insisted on absolutely detailed discussions particularly when it came to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Al Qaeda. We took the meeting into the early afternoon almost without a break at which stage our EU interlocutor said, "We seem to be missing our lunch hour" and our response to that was we're quite happy to skip lunch because we have so much material to get through, we might not have time for lunch today, at which stage the EU delegation melted away and was reduced to about two or three unfortunate souls who could not get out of the room.

But the Europeans were not seized with the issue They did not take it seriously. They were happy to talk about it as long as was comfortable and convenient. They weren't ready to do anything about it.

Q: Where are we now?

Hall: We're in the transition period after I've left S/CT and getting ready for Yemen. This is the summer of 2001 which is a very tense time in global counterterrorism. There are continuing high levels of signals indicating that Al Qaeda intends to do something. The interagency is meeting repeatedly trying to identify what is going to happen. I've handed over the reins of S/CT to Brigadier General Frank Taylor who was a U.S. Air Force general selected by Colin Powell to take over the counterterrorism responsibilities. I'm in the process of preparing myself for my next posting in Sana'a, Yemen. That posting is clearly connected with my previous responsibilities in counterterrorism in Washington since Yemen was one of the nodes of Al Qaeda's international network. In fact, it was the location of their first terrorist attack against the United States back in the early '90s when they targeted American military people in Aden who were on their way to Somalia. Then much more dramatically in the year 2000, they successfully attacked the USS Cole, an attack which led to the deaths of 17 Americans sailors. I think Secretary Powell and President Bush agreed with the priority of the Clinton administration that the next envoy to Yemen should have a strong counterterrorism background, and I got that assignment.

Q: You were in Yemen from when to when?

HULL: Well, I should say a word about taking leave of Washington. Since I was primarily preoccupied with counterterrorism, I realized that it would be important to make the rounds in Washington; at Langley, with the FBI, the National Security Council and DOD because counterterrorism can only be addressed as interagency issue. And it so happened I was having my meetings in DOD on September 11, and I was scheduled to meet Admiral Tim Keating who had been assigned as commander of the Fifth Fleet which was based in the Gulf with headquarters in Bahrain and since the Cole attack had involved a unit heading to their destination and since there was an ongoing question of U.S. naval vessels refueling in Aden, we set the meeting for that day.

I recall arriving at the Pentagon early in the morning and in the midst of going through the security checks overhearing from a TV monitor that an aircraft had flown into the World Trade Center in New York. My immediate thought was this was an errant private aircraft, probably an accident, but something that would have to be looked at very carefully given the World Trade Center's past status as a target of Al Qaeda. Just as I cleared the security procedures in DOD at the Pentagon, word of a second aircraft was being broadcast so I entered the meeting with Admiral Keating with the thought in mind that Al Qaeda had definitely undertaken a new operation in the U.S. We went ahead with the meeting nevertheless and discussed the situation in Yemen, our future cooperation and about 30 minutes into the meeting, we felt the impact of the Boeing 737 hitting the Pentagon. It actually hit a section of the building which was right around the corner from our meeting room where Admiral Keating would have been if not for meeting me. So very shortly thereafter the corridors and the offices began to fill with smoke from the fire, and the admiral's staff came and advised us that the Pentagon was being evacuated because of the attack. We quickly shook hands and agreed to meet in the Middle East, and then we were being ushered out to the center of the Pentagon, the open courtyard,. I remember as we were looking over our shoulders because we knew that there had been two airplanes involved in the World Trade Center attack and we wondered whether there was another airplane headed for the Pentagon. Perhaps the people in charge of the security had similar concerns because we were immediately told to leave the center area and to evacuate through the building to the south parking lot. When we got there, we could look back and see the smoke rising from the Pentagon where the impact had occurred and the scene was one of great confusion, great concern because people had coworkers or in some cases, family that were unaccounted for. Communications was hard. The cell phone network was completely overwhelmed and inoperable. Private traffic was diverted away from the site. The Metro trains had been stopped, the station was no longer functioning and it took some time before we were eventually directed toward Metro buses with the intention of taking us to the nearest underground stop. That proved to be impossible. There was no way that we could get even close to Washington and as the buses kept being diverted further and further west into Virginia, we got word by transistor radio on the bus that the World Trade Centers had collapsed and then for me anyway the full magnitude of the day's events hit home.Eventually, we were so far west in Virginia that I asked the bus driver to just let me off on Route 7, phoned my wife who in was in Falls Church packing for departure for Yemen and she came back and picked me up and we spent the rest of the day like many Americans following events on television.

Q: Was there any doubt in your mind about Al Qaeda?

HULL: No, I was virtually certain that this was an Al Qaeda operation because number one, the target, the World Trade Center since Ramzi Yousef's attack early in the Clinton administration had figured prominently in Al Qaeda's target list and then the modus operandi, the multiple attacks either simultaneously or in quick succession brought to mind the attacks in East Africa. Of course, the summer had been a period of increased alert and we knew from intelligence that Al Qaeda was planning a large operation so the responsibility was evident and then of it was confirmed very quickly when the FBI identified several of the passengers on board the aircraft as being members of Al Qaeda.

Q: Was there any thought in your mind or people you talked to right after that there was an Iraqi connection to this?

HULL: It would not have occurred to me that Al Qaeda was working with Iraq. We had never focused on such a connection. I am aware in reading subsequent accounts, Dick Clarke's book and the report of the 9/11 commission that some in the White House and particularly the leadership of the Pentagon perceived such a connection and wanted to demonstrate such a connection, but to those in the counterterrorism world, that seemed to be barking up the wrong tree.

Q: Did this have any effect on your assignment to Yemen?

HULL: The most immediate effect was to raise a lot of questions about my swearing in which was due to take place on September 17. I had personal issues because I have a large family, 10 siblings, and my parents who had intended to come to Washington for that event. So very quickly they had to decide whether or not they were going to proceed to Washington, clearly a target of Al Qaeda terrorism, or wave off. Their travel was greatly impeded by the grounding of all civilian aircraft at least for the first few days after September 11. But in the event 10 of the 11 did make it to Washington one way or the other. My parents made it here, my wife's family made it and on September 17 the swearing in proceeded with Secretary of State Colin Powell presiding. I've considered it remarkable that the secretary of state with all of the burden that he was shouldering at the time nevertheless thought it was especially important to personally send off his ambassadors and for me anyway, the swearing in ceremony was a very memorable event.

Q: You're going off to Yemen. How would you describe Yemen's political economic situation before you went out and sort of the situation that you were going to?

HULL: Of course, the primary U.S. interest in Yemen was the interest of counterterrorism, and Yemen had been identified by Al Qaeda as an important node in their international network. Al Qaeda used Yemen not only as a base to launch attacks in Yemen, e.g. the USS Cole attack, but also as a location to support attacks elsewhere in the world, notably the East African attack. The linkages also included linkages to the 9/11 attacks. In fact, one of the pieces of evidence which linked Al Qaeda to 9/11 attacks was obtained in Yemen by a very astute FBI agent who in questioning of people detained in Yemen related to the Cole attack helped establish Al Qaeda's responsibility for 9/11.

Yemen had been ruled by President Saleh for 25 years. Saleh had come to power as a young colonel. No one had given him much chance of lasting. There had been a number of coup d'ï¿½tat before his takeover and most expected those to continue, but Saleh proved them wrong and proved to be a very wily politician who had established control over a very difficult political situation. The difficulty derives in part from a relatively weak central government and very strong tribes especially in the north of the country. Saleh had, in addition, pulled off the remarkable feat of uniting northern Yemen with southern Yemen and that had happened in the early '90s in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union when the Marxists in Aden found themselves without a patron, with very few political options and had agreed to unity with the North. That unity had been challenged in the mid-90s when the south attempted to secede, but Saleh successfully defeated that secession and kept the country unified.

Q: How did he do that?

Hall: That's part of the story. He relied in that on tribal support from the north and also support from the mujaheddin, the Islamic fundamentalist fighters who had fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets, Therefore, there were very important and very significant links between the government in Sana'a and this radical group. That was what was giving the FBI and the Naval Criminal Investigation Service (NCIS) a great deal of concern in investigating the Cole attack because the question was to what extent were government officials complicit in the Al Qaeda attack against the USS Cole.

Economically the Hunt Oil Company of Texas had a discovered modest amount of oil in the Ma'rib area of Yemen. That's the northeast part of Yemen, and they had constructed an oil pipeline across Yemen to a point on the Red Sea above Hodeida. That was Yemen's economic lifeline. Some 90% of Yemen's hard currency was derived from the sale of that oil. Otherwise, Yemen was the odd man out in the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries had a great deal of money and very little population therefore very high per capita income. Yemen was the opposite. It had very little national income and a very large population and therefore it was a country that was among the poorest and least developed in the world.

Q: When you went out there, how stood relations with the United States? Yemen is not supportive in the first Gulf War. It probably is in opposition.

HULL: Indeed. In the '90s, Yemen had a seat on the Security Council and was one of the few countries that voted against the UN Security Council resolution authorizing Operation Desert Storm. As a direct consequence of that, Jim Baker had largely terminated our military and our economic assistance programs in Yemen. Relations had gone into a deep freeze. Of course, with the attack on the Cole and with the suspicion in the CIA, FBI and NCIS about possible official complicity, relations were difficult, to say the least. There was much speculation in the American media and in some circles in Washington that Yemen should be a future target in the "War on Terror." After we had dealt with Afghanistan, Yemen was a prime candidate for future U.S. military operations.

Q: What was your perception? Were you going out as a hatchet man or a smoother over or what were you going to be doing? What was your agenda?

HULL: I had been to Yemen the previous year in my capacity as acting director for counterterrorism, and I had on that occasion met President Saleh, Prime Minister Iryani, the foreign minister, the interior minister, and some of the military. I had also talked with Ambassador Bodine, at that time our ambassador there. I had also been in touch with the FBI and NCIS ever since the Cole attack itself. So I had a very good sense of how the investigation had occurred and the substantive results of the investigation. It was a mixed picture. The FBI had gone into Yemen and at that time the investigation was being led by John O'Neill, a legendary figure in counterterrorism. The FBI had gone into Aden with the expectation that they could operate as they had in East Africa, in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam where they had been given a blank check by the governments and really, pretty much a free hand. It was a very different situation in Yemen. Of course, Arab and Islamic countries had a great sensitivity to American presence, to American dictates and in this case of course, the government had connections they were very sensitive. So they frankly had things to hide. The investigation really preceded by fits and starts. Our ambassador, Barbara Bodine tried very, very hard to press it, but John O'Neill wanted an even more confrontational approach. That sparked a conflict of two very strong personalities, and Ambassador Bodine eventually denied John O'Neill country clearance to pursue the investigation, and the FBI had to send an alternate lead for the investigation. That had surfaced in The Washington Post. Secretary Powell was not happy with State Department and the FBI squabbling surfacing in the media, and one of my objectives on arriving in Yemen was to get a team effort and a more productive investigation.

The investigation had moved from Aden to Sana'a. While in Aden the FBI felt itself as much a target as investigators and the level of paranoia was very high indeed. They brought that attitude with them to Sana'a. They would not sleep in hotels. They slept on the compound in a makeshift dormitory. They would go outside the embassy compound only for investigation purposes and for as little time as possible. There was a great deal of friction between the diplomatic security elements who insisted on providing protection and the FBI which wanted very much to protect itself by a much more overt show of force. One of my early undertakings was to sit down with all involved and to hammer out arrangements so the investigation could be pursued. In that regard I had a couple of advantages. I had very good friends in the FBI from the interagency process, the counterterrorism security group process, so I really came to Sana'a with a good reputation. We were able to come to an understanding, and they knew clearly that pursuing the investigation and getting results from the investigation was one of the highest priorities that I had as ambassador.

We were greatly assisted by the post-9/11 atmosphere because there was a great deal of sympathy for the United States government. We received many expressions of sympathy and condolences from ordinary Yemenis as well as official Yemenis and so in that propitious environment we were able to press the investigation and to get Yemeni cooperation in a number of ways, including handing over of significant amounts of documents and other evidence that was even allowed to be removed to Washington for processing by the FBI laboratories. So we're in a situation where the investigation was showing very gratifying results and moods brightened and cooperation within the embassy and between the embassy and the Yemeni security organs was prospering.

Q: I talked with Mike Metrinko who was there before you got there. The thing was scary because you had the State Department security people, you had the FBI and he had I think the Navy investigators. All these people had different views of the situation. They were running around, driving on the sidewalks and they were sort of hostile to each other and making a hell of a lot of enemies among just ordinary people. It was a bureaucratic mess, and they were armed.

HULL: Mike was talking about this situation in Aden. He had deployed to Aden and, as I said, paranoia was added to legitimate threat. Yes, the situation was teetering on the brink of being out of control, and there was a real mix of people overreacting. Great damage being done. There was a lot of talent and high motivation, but the trick was to bring it together in a team effort. Some of the FBI investigators were among the best informed on Al Qaeda in the world. I'm thinking of a number of Arab-Americans, who spoke fluent Arabic and had an encyclopedic knowledge of Al Qaeda, at least as far as their cases were concerned. The Naval Criminal Investigative Service also had thoroughly professional people. Our station had some talented people, including Arab-Americans. It was the ambassador's job to take all this talent and put it together in a team so that people would feel comfortable with each other and that we would show more results. That was our approach.

Q: How did the investigation come out?

HULL: The investigation eventually lead to trials in Yemen and convictions of the key Al Qaeda participants. In this regard, there's much to be said because in between there were jail breaks and recaptures, and we'll get to some of that, but the bottom line was the Yemenis eventually, with a great deal of help from the FBI and NCIS were able to convict and sentence the perpetrators.

Q: During this was the Al Qaeda operation also moving? Did they have something in Africa too?

HULL: Al Qaeda's main effort was directed against the embassy. They had links to Eastern Africa but the most active plotting was to attack the embassy or failing that, other American targets. We knew this from intelligence that we were gathering through various means, intelligence that proved quite reliable, if piecemeal. Initially, in 2001 and 2002 it was really a question of whether with the cooperation of the Yemeni s, we would get Al Qaeda or whether Al Qaeda would get us.

Q: How cooperative was the Yemeni government?

HULL: The Yemeni government in the aftermath of 9/11 said the right things. Saleh had sent a private message to President Bush pledging support. Soon after I arrived in a national holiday speech, Saleh had reiterated publicly that support. But the whole question was whether or not they could convert that rhetorical support into practical cooperation and show results. So we really needed to do so, and we also needed to resolve this issue of whether in the "War on Terror" Yemen was going to be a target of the United States or whether it was going to be a partner of the United States. There was a great deal of speculation in the Western media that it was going to be the former, which caused the Yemenis great nervousness.

I was asked about this early on at a town hall meeting held for American citizens in Yemen, What you must know is there are about 30,000 American citizens in Yemen, vast numbers of them and the vast majority of those are Yemeni-Americans who came to the United States, many who were recruited by Henry Ford to man the assembly lines in Detroit and then had returned to Yemeni with modest savings and lived there comfortably. So we had a lot of constituents in that sense. At an early meeting in my residence, I had a standing-room only crowd, primarily Yemeni-Americans. The regional security officer at the time, Chance Rowe, was made extremely nervous because most of them were wearing their "jambiyas", their ceremonial daggers, and he didn't know how wise it was to send his ambassador into that kind of a meeting. But they were all very happy to be invited, they were very curious about the new ambassador and one of their first questions was whether Yemen was a target in the war on terror. I went out on a limb and expressed my opinion that Yemen was a "partner" and not a "target" and that we would get much better results through that partnership than otherwise. This was reported, as I knew it would be, in the international media, and I never heard any kind of rebuke from Washington, so at least at that stage I was going to get enough slack to explore a counterterrorism partnership with the Yemeni government.

Q: In Afghanistan the Taliban was giving refuge to Al Qaeda, to the training camps and all that. Was there anything, what was he doing?

HULL: That's an excellent point because in Yemen there were no fixed training camps and U.S. military action would have been against very amorphous targets. Not to say that there weren't identifiable targets, but it would've been a very difficult and costly undertaking and when it was looked at, I think, that was seen to be the case. We had from Saleh, both a private and the public pledges of support so as ambassador my priority was to convert that into practical action. When I made my initial call on the president to present my credentials I was given an early opportunity to raise specific issues. Now normally presentation of credentials are protocol affairs and no business takes place, but I had decided we didn't have time for protocol and in scheduling the event President Saleh also indicated to me that he would not be adverse to talking business. Not only did I get the presentation opportunity very shortly after having arrived, but he also re-jiggered the order of ambassadors to leave me the last ambassador and therefore, to leave time after the ceremony for a substantive discussion. In that discussion, I handed President Saleh a memorandum in which we detailed for him two individuals who were playing leading roles in Al Qaeda in Yemen. One was Abu Ali, who was really the godfather of Al Qaeda in Yemen, and the second was Abu Assem, who was a Saudi and who was the primary financier for Al Qaeda operations in Yemen. I asked the president for assistance in either capturing or killing these specific individuals. We agreed that we would establish a special channel to pursue this objective, and we were therefore launched as quickly as possible.

Q: How did that play out?

HULL: Well, a number of things happened. On the intelligence front, of course, there was this defense vs. offense game going on. We knew Al Qaeda wanted to attack the embassy or American targets and therefore we had to initially strengthen our defenses. When I arrived, the embassy was shut down. The same authorized departure that made it impossible for my wife to accompany me to Yemen had caused most of the embassy operations to close and people were at home. This over a long period debilitated our operations and so an initial objective was to get the embassy more secure and get people back to work. The regional security officer, Chance Rowe, had ideas and took me on a tour, showed me upgrades that have been made by my predecessor and explained to me additional things he wanted to do including closing off a grilled part of the front wall and replacing it with a masonry structure to block views into the compound, mounting barbed wire on the walls to prevent scaling them and a number of other measures which I immediately gave the go-ahead to. My predecessor had been reluctant because of concern that the embassy would become a fortress. I gave priority to the security of the compound, but also because in Yemen because of centuries of instability, individual homes, buildings were fortress-like. The Yemenis took for granted that you would secure your place of residence against attack by others so I didn't think we stood out in the Yemeni culture. In any case, we fortified the embassy, and we also began very intense intelligence gathering to try to figure out what Al Qaeda planned and counter that.

We got the embassy back to work, but the authorized departure had sent home the majority of people. We had no public diplomacy, we had no economic section. I think at the time we had one political officer. We were really limping along.

Q: How about consular? With so many Yemeni-Americans there, this would be overwhelming for the consular officer.

HULL: We had a consular section, three officers as well as locally hired people, and we got them functioning again because you're right. We had a very large consular operation and an important one to a lot of Yemenis and to the Americans who were still in Yemen.

Q: Were you able to rely on or was there concern about the Yemeni security forces?

HULL: We had an interesting security situation. We had our local guard force, of course. We had the Marine guard unit, and they were augmented by U.S. military deployed TDY. The intelligence people and the FBI also had security capabilities. Outside the compound, we had a guard force from the Central Security Forces of the Ministry of Interior and we had also agents from the Political Security Organization which was Yemen's equivalent of the CIA. They were there not only to protect us, but also to keep track of embassy operations. So we really relied upon the Central Security Forces under the Ministry of Interior. In this regard, we were quite fortunate because Minister of Interior Rashid al-Alimi proved to be a remarkably competent partner. The force itself was under the command of, the president's nephew, and he too proved to be an unusually conscientious and effective commander. So for our own security we had two very good partners.

Q: In spite of the situation there, the local tribesmen continue to kidnap people. I mean there's an awful lot of ransom and all that. Were these things going on?

HULL: We were very concerned about kidnapping. When I was in charge of counterterrorism at the State Department, on a number of occasions we had incidents of kidnapping of foreigners in Yemen so I was very aware of the problem. Usually these were not strictly speaking terrorist incidents. Oftentimes, local tribesmen would have a grudge against the government. Perhaps there would be family members detained, perhaps it would be lack of government response to needs for services or roads or health. The tribes would take a foreigner hostage, treat him or her well, but only release them when the government made some concession. Of course, this was insidious because it led to an attitude that this was harmless kidnapping and it was also kidnapping that occurred with impunity because the tribesmen were rarely punished. The outside world couldn't distinguish between tribal kidnapping and terrorist kidnapping so Yemen's reputation was suffering and on occasion in the mid-90s, the kidnapping had tipped into actual terrorists incidents. On one notable occasion, foreigners were taken captive by terrorists who were demanding release of colleagues and other political demands. In that incident, the Yemeni forces had actually undertaken military action and two of the foreigners died. The situation was unstable and detrimental to Yemen's reputation.

Early on I undertook a concerted effort to stigmatize any kidnapping as terrorist and spent quite a bit of time in my early days making the rounds of tribal sheiks in Sana'a, meeting with them and arguing with them to speak out against this practice of kidnapping with several sheiks actually doing that. Gradually, the onus began to develop on anyone who kidnapped foreigners.

Q: North Yemen tribal and southern Yemen more developed: is that a good way of visualizing it?

HULL: There's a lot of truth in that. The south was quite different. They had a different history, they had the British rule direct and indirect, and they had the Marxist regime. Southerners were generally more sophisticated, better educated than people in the north. The tribal structures in the south had been attenuated whereas tribes were still robust in the north. So there was still in many ways two Yemens. But Saleh had very cannily recruited a team of individuals from the south into his government. The Prime Minister and the foreign minister for example. At the time, Saleh had rather effectively papered over the differences. He spent a great deal of time in the south, in Aden particularly during the winter to send a number of signals; one, that he was president of all of Yemen and two, he delighted in occupying the residence of the former British High Commissioner to remind everyone that Yemen had succeeded in throwing off the yoke of colonial rule. It was not a perfect situation but it was functioning, and Saleh was attending to it.

Q: How were relations between the two neighbors, Oman and Saudi Arabia?

HULL: The relations with both were improving. Historically, they had been very tense, and Yemen have fought with both Oman and Saudi Arabia. The Sultan of Oman had come to power in part by successfully resolving the Dhofar rebellion and that's the part of Omar that borders Yemen. The Omanis were quite adept at winning over the Yemenis subsequently by their diplomacy and the modest aid program helping build, for example, roads. By my day, relations with the Omanis were quite good.

With Saudi Arabia of course, there was a great deal of tension up to the mid-'90s when the Saudis were backing the secessionists in South Yemen in their civil war against the North. But with the coming to power of Abdullah, as Crown Prince and then eventually King a different tack was taken by the Saudis, and they implemented a very astute diplomacy to make the Yemenis the good neighbor. That had culminated in 2000 with the Treaty of Jeddah which had finally established the border between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. When I arrived in Yemen in 2001, a German company was in the process of actually demarcating that border that had been agreed. In this instance Robert Frost's observation held true: good fences make good neighbors. The Saudis were very active, very influential and in their own way, very generous with the Yemenis, and the relationship was a good one. That's not to say that there weren't very serious issues. The Saudis perceived Yemen as a source of weapons, explosives, terrorists and drugs. The Yemenis perceived the Saudis as a source of financing for Al Qaeda in Yemen. As you recall, the chief financier in Yemen was Abu Assem al Mekki, a Saudi who was drawing upon very deep Saudi pockets for Al Qaeda operations. So both sides had issues.

Q: Bin Laden or someone in his family was very much involved in the honey trade that was centered in Yemen. Was that anything at all?

HULL: Not much. Yemen does produce the best honey in the world, especially in the Hadramaut, which is bin Laden's ancestral homeland. The counterterrorism community in Washington took a long look at the honey trade to see whether it was a vehicle for terrorist financing. I remember I decided one day that I had to get smarter about honey because there was talk in Washington of doing something about this perceived problem. I went to a honey shop in Sana'a and got a lecture from the owner who warned me that there was a great deal of deceit that took place in the honey business and the main culprits were unscrupulous dealers who would take inferior honey from the United States and mix it with the superior honey from Yemen and sell it as pure Yemeni honey. I was advised to be on the lookout for such crimes and given a number of practical tests for the honey to make sure that it was unadulterated. In the end as far as I could tell, counterfeit honey had as much or more claim to being a problem as honey financing of terrorism.

Q: What about Iran and its influence? Was it a factor?

HULL: It was but I think we should leave that for the end of the discussion because it comes to the fore in 2004.

Q: Were you able to get a public diplomacy operation going?

HULL: First, we had to get some cooperation going because public diplomacy is rarely effective in the abstract. You really need the right policy and the right programs and then you can convey them through public diplomacy.

Al Qaeda was enjoying quasi sanctuaries in Ma'rib, Jowf and Shabwa. We needed to be able to get into those areas to function there and to gain the support of the tribes. President Saleh provided me an opening for this in my initial months in Sana'a when he called me late one night, as was his habit to call you around 11:00 or midnight when he had something on his mind. He made a plea with me to undertake economic assistance, development efforts in these deprived areas. This was exactly what I was looking for, a presidential invitation for us to do something in these difficult, remote areas. I did research on the tribes, including using Paul Dresch's work, and it seemed to me that the problem was we had a vicious circle in places like Ma'rib. You had bad governance which led to an alienated population, which led to continuing violence, which led to discouraging any kind of investment, which meant unemployment, which meant more violence and fed into the government ignoring the area and back to bad governance. What it seemed to me was we needed to replace that vicious circle with a virtuous circle; improving the governance of the area, attracting developmental investment, foreign investment, creating jobs, improving services, strengthening governance and then around and around.

I came up with PowerPoint presentation. We did it in Arabic because generally we functioned with most of the Yemeni ministries in Arabic. It was about an eight- or nine- slide presentation. I needed some way to get it reality checked with the president, and I chose for that his political adviser, Abdul Karim Al-Iriani, who is perhaps the most brilliant man in Yemen, a former prime minister and a former foreign minister. He came from a long line of intellectuals and judges and was himself extremely well educated. He had a Ph.D. from Yale, and was one of the few individuals who could deal with President Saleh without personal fear. So I took my approach to Abdul Karim, explained that this was my thinking generated by the president's request and asked him to take a look at it and see if it was suitable.

Now about this time another significant event occurred and that was I got a call from Ryan Crocker in the NEA front office saying that there was a possibility of President Saleh being invited to Washington. This was something that I pushed for before leaving for Sana'a at the NSC with Zal Khalilzad, who was then senior director for the Middle East and South Asia. It had turned out that there was an opening in late November, and Saleh was being considered for that opening. The problem was that it was during the month of Ramadan and in taking the dates to President Saleh, I knew it would be extremely difficult for him to travel during the month of fasting, but nevertheless, I raised them. As expected, Saleh noted the problems it would cause for him, said he would be delighted to go but asked if we could back it up to December. When I checked with Washington, not surprisingly, December was not a viable time period. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas there were short work weeks and a packed schedule so it was really Ramadan or nothing. I so presented it to the president, and he accepted the Ramadan timing.

In conjunction with the visit then, Al Iriani had proposed that we also take a look at some kind of memorandum of understanding on the issue of counterterrorism whereby each side would lay out what it could do for the other in the various areas of military cooperation, intelligence cooperation, and economic development, etc. It was not meant to be a legally binding agreement or a detailed enumeration, but rather to put down broad principles that could serve as a basis. I agreed to take a crack at drafting such an agreement and after doing so sent it back to Washington for its opinion and also made a copy available to Al Iriani for him to take a look at.

The following Friday I was on my way to the Yemeni Equestrian Club because I often went horseback riding on Friday and got a phone call while in the car that President Saleh wanted to see me urgently. I turned around, went back to the embassy, changed from my from my riding gear, went to the president's office and found an absolutely irate President Saleh who proceeded to take me to task for the plan and for the "treaty" that I had proposed. It took me a little bit of time before I realized what had happened. The documents that I given Al Iriani for his private reaction had been sent on to the presidency and then the presidency had sent them onto the Cabinet and they had caused a political firestorm. I had never seen the president quite this irate before and I honestly thought that my days in Sana'a were numbered and that I would be deemed persona non grata in short order. President Saleh ranted for a considerable amount of time. When he finally calmed down, I very quietly went through the origin of both documents that the president had been generated by his request to me, that the proposed memorandum of understanding had been Al Iriani's idea. If either or both were objectionable, we could toss them in the wastebasket. I had no need for them, but I was trying to meet a Yemeni request in both regards. That gave Saleh pause and put it in a different light. He still said nothing good about Plan Ma'rib, but he did say he wanted to think more about the memo of understanding. Clearly, the problem with Plan Ma'rib was the starting point for the vicious circle was that it was "bad governance"- a point that could be argued easily by the fact that the governor of the province had been exiled from Sana'a for keeping private prisons and his corruption, and he was well-known for being a drunk. In any case, that was put aside and instead after some consideration by the president, a green light was given to pursuing the memorandum of understanding.

Q: Well, then did he make the trip?

HULL: He made the trip. It was late November 2001 so two months after 9/11. I had preceded him back to Washington and had hoped to find Washington focused on Plan Ma'rib and the proposed memorandum of understanding. Indeed, there were interagency meetings to discuss the memorandum of understanding, but I soon realized that neither of these proposals stood any chance of serious consideration. There was still a very strong camp in Washington that considered Yemen a target rather than a partner in the war on terror and who were interested in browbeating Yemenis or taking forceful measures. So the NSC representative from the counterterrorism office in the interagency meeting on the memorandum of understanding, John Craig, the former ambassador in Muscat, effectively "deep-sixed" any talk of a positive engagement. I was left in the delicate position of the president coming with no serious Washington engagement on the memorandum. Saleh quite unintentionally provided me my exit strategy from this embarrassment because on his arrival in Washington he called me over to the hotel where he was staying and said that he had changed his mind on the memorandum and that he was not prepared to sign it, but the foreign minister could sign it. In response to which I said that was not the original understanding, that we should put the memorandum of understanding aside and focus the visit on the meetings and more general understandings. So quite quickly of course, the whole issue of signing anything went away.

Saleh went around Washington and met with all of the significant people in the new administration: DCI Tenet, FBI Director Mueller, Secretary Powell, Secretary Rumsfeld, Vice President Cheney and ultimately with President Bush. The meetings were hit and miss. Saleh at times was good, but at other times really insisted on talking about issues to which Yemen was marginal. For example, with Secretary Powell he used the majority of the meeting talking about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and we risked having the visit confirm in Washington's mind the image of Saleh as an unreliable partner in the obsession which was Washington's at that time quite naturally the war on terror. As we approached the Oval Office meeting, I met with my colleagues in the Yemeni government, Ambassador al-Hajri and Foreign Minister Qirbi and very candidly assessed that unless we focused President Saleh on terrorism in the Oval Office and made sure that he and President Bush had a meeting of minds, the visit would not be productive.

I was also given the opportunity to pre-brief President Bush in the Oval Office. We had about 15 minutes before the meeting. Secretary Powell was there, Condoleezza Rice, and Bruce Riedel, the National Security Council director. President Bush, when we walked into the Oval Office, got up from his desk, came toward us and said, "Who is this guy and what do I want from him?" Secretary Powell turned to his ambassador, and I had a chance to in about 45 seconds to lay out what was involved in Yemen and what was involved with President Saleh and encourage the president to be very direct, very clear about what we wanted to mention specifically Al Qaeda's leadership Abu Ali and Abu Assem, and to reach a partnership with President Saleh that together we would eliminate Al Qaeda's basic operation in Yemen. That was an objective the president, understood easily and could identify with. Bruce Riedel very helpfully chimed in that President Bush would be well advised to pre-empt any discussion because in President Saleh's past meeting with President Clinton, Saleh had begun and half an hour had really been wasted with Saleh giving a long, meandering lecture to President Clinton about Middle East politics. So armed with that President Bush did seize the initiative and as soon as President Saleh was seated, laid out his interest in the war on terror, that he wanted a partnership with Yemen but that we needed to go after Al Qaeda and that Al Qaeda had faces and we needed to go after the individuals.

President Saleh responded vigorously, also very directly, said we are in pursuit of these individuals, we will have them soon, "we will butcher them" which was language that the Oval Office was not adverse to hearing at that stage in the war on terror. So in the short space of some 35 or 40 minutes the two presidents had reached a meeting of minds, and we left the Oval Office. As ambassador, I thought I had a very good basis for pursuing my front on the war on terror.

Q: If you've got something you want done and you're mad at somebody there's a tendency to look around for small countries, Jordan is one, Yemen another but also the Africa countries who don't go along with us and it's like showing that they're the problem. They really want to be tough and they gang up on countries which have their own problems and all and the policy types who want to prove that they're tough or something. It's a phenomenon, it's a disturbing one but I guess it's a bureaucratic, natural one. Did you find this and were you concerned about this in Yemen?

HULL: It was very much the case, particularly in DOD and some people in the NSC. There was almost a preference that Yemenis would be obstinate and give us an excuse to take forceful action. Langley, however, was much more sophisticated and all along preferred cooperation as did the FBI so as ambassador it was really my job to manage these forces and to get enough of a result coming out of a cooperative track so that those back in Washington who wanted forceful action didn't have reason to pursue that.

Q: Did you pick up, I mean you were had been in the midst of the counterterrorism business a preoccupation. You saw Al Qaeda as a problem and all of a sudden the focus is moving toward Iraq. Were you sensing that at the time? Was it of concern to you?

HULL: At the time it still wasn't moving toward Iraq as the president had decided that Afghanistan was the initial front on the war on terror.

Q: That sort of forever had been made an issue. That made sense.

HULL: Right. And I think he was well advised in that regard so we were still dealing with the lead up to Operation Enduring Freedom and then Operation Enduring Freedom itself.

Q: Enduring Freedom being going into Afghanistan?

HULL: Right. The problem for Yemen was that there was a period between Afghanistan and Iraq when there were no other active military fronts and that's when some in Washington had a distinct preference for doing something forceful somewhere else and that somewhere else could've been Yemen.

Q: It's a shame when you think about particularly when you get people all heated upon over a subject.

HULL: Very true.

Q: What is known as a very dangerous country.

HULL: Very true. And we came very close at times in Yemen to moving toward an Afghanistan - like approach.

Q: Did you have a sense, whatever you were doing, monitoring from your connections back in Washington and all that you have a monster that could be unleashed?

HULL: Yes. We knew that there was a school that wanted Yemen as a target, and we were aware of ongoing planning in the Central Command. We also knew though that Central Commander Tommy Franks did not want a Yemen front and therefore, we were not without allies nor did George Tenet want to go out after Al Qaeda in Yemen militarily. So it was a question of really showing enough results through a partnership that would keep the hawks from gaining ascendancy and what really helped us in this regard was an operation in the next month of December.

You'll recall that President Saleh told President Bush that he was pursuing and surrounding our two primary targets, Abu Ali and Abu Assem. In mid-December Saleh called over and asked to see the chief of station. My response was that if anyone was going to see the president, it would be the ambassador, and I felt very strongly about this because I have seen in other places in the Middle East where the chief of station had established a relationship directly with the head of state and where the ambassador and the State Department were excluded and I was not going to have that happen in Yemen. So I said there could be a meeting but it would be with the ambassador. So he relented, we had a meeting in the ministry of defense, unusually because they normally had it in the presidential palace. Saleh told us that there was an operation being mounted to act against our two identified targets. Abu Ali was in a good location just outside Marib. Abu Asim was identified in Jowf to the north. He invited us to follow the operations, and we wished him good luck and we proceeded to a very intense couple of days as the Yemenis undertook this.

Unfortunately, the Yemeni had very little surgical counterterrorism capability so these operations turned into very clumsy, very noisy military operations involving armored vehicles, mass movements of troops. It wasn't very surprising that when they showed up at Abu Ali's compound on December 18 he was long gone. They got permission from the tribes to check it and verified that he was no longer there and that incident ended disappointingly, but not disastrously. The operation in Jowf, however, was not so fortunate. There the Yemeni military surrounded the compound and while they were negotiating with the tribesmen to check it for Abu Assem, a Yemeni Air Force jet overflew the compound and broke the sound barrier, which the tribesmen took to be the beginning of an assault and therefore they opened up on the Yemeni military and killed 18. Of course, the target was long gone so the operation had great casualties and was for naught.

We were depressed when we got this news back in the embassy and felt very bad indeed for the Yemenis who had suffered losses and for the opportunities that had been missed because this meant that in the future these targets would be very hard to find. It was somewhat of a surprise to me then to learn that the reaction in Washington was one of encouragement. We had notified Washington that this was in train. They were following it very closely as well and the fact that the Yemenis had spilled their own blood in pursuit of these terrorist targets was a stronger argument for a potential partnership than any words that we could have had and very interestingly, the reaction in Washington for the first time was that we had serious prospects for working with government of Yemen against Al Qaeda.

Q: Did this open up a relationship for training the Yemenis?

HULL: Well, things moved slowly. Washington was just beginning to wake up to the possibilities that we had been presenting them for some months. The first reaction of Washington was to dispatch Bill Burns, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, to have a meeting with President Saleh. Bill was one of the finest diplomats of his generation, an extraordinarily competent fellow, someone who had the full trust of Secretary Powell, Deputy Secretary Armitage and the respect of the National Security Council so we were absolutely delighted that he was coming out. He came out the following January, and we set up a meeting with President Saleh. Because it was winter, Saleh was in Aden, and Bill arrived in Sana'a with the intent of getting briefed and then proceeding to Aden for a meeting with the President. During the briefing for Bill, our defense attachï¿½ very expertly laid out in a map briefing the operation on December 18, what happened and why Yemeni forces were unable effectively to undertake this counterterrorism operation because they only had capability of moving large forces very slowly. What was needed was for us to engage with the Yemenis in training counterterrorism forces that could operate agilely and effectively.

Bill, of course, needed very little convincing. He had a good picture so we were ready to proceed down to Aden for the meeting with president. Bill was on a tight schedule. He had to meet with President Saleh and then he had meetings in Riyadh with the Saudi princes that evening so he made a plea that his return from Aden be in time to catch the commercial flight to Riyadh to keep those meetings with the Saudis. To get down to Aden we were offered the presidential helicopter, and we rode in it. Later we realized we were taking our lives in our hands in doing so when a U.S. Air Force team evaluated the Yemeni helicopter fleet and found it, including the presidential helicopter, to be unsafe in the extreme. We didn't know this at the time so we climbed aboard. We arrived in Aden, met with President Saleh.

President Saleh again was at the top of his game, reiterated what he had said in the Oval Office, said that the December 18 setback did not deter him. He was as determined as ever to eliminate Al Qaeda and whatever the U.S. decided he was going to pursue that objective. Bill had from President Saleh exactly what he needed to take back to Washington. Unfortunately, Bill had now lost his opportunity to catch the commercial flight to Riyadh from Sana'a and so we made a plea to the presidential staff to somehow hold the airplane until Bill could get back. In the event they didn't do that, but Saleh instead commandeered a Yemeni Air 737, brought it to Aden, put Bill and his one staffer aboard along with an entire lamb that had been prepared for their in-flight meal, and Bill was sent off in style from Aden to be in time for his meeting with the Saudi princes.

Q: During the time you were there what happened with Al Qaeda?

HULL: The Al Qaeda issue in the first installment played out over the next year and it was on our part an attempt to gain actionable intelligence. Where were the people we needed to get? And to also create a capability either on the part of the Yemeni or aided by us to get them and at the same time to keep track of what the Al Qaeda was trying to do against us so that we were weren't blown up before we had our chance. Both sides of this were quite intense and involved a great deal of first-rate intelligence work. After Bill's visit, Washington made the policy decisions to engage with the Yemenis in a serious fashion and that involved both a military track and an intelligence track. We started to get a bit of economic assistance that we could use in the remote tribal areas. We began to build the embassy back up, including the public diplomacy capability. The central part of this was a training effort of the Yemeni Special Forces which was their designated counterterrorism unit and this was commanded by Ahmed Saleh, President Saleh's son. They had been trained by the Jordanians so we weren't starting from scratch, and we had U.S. military trainers, both Marines and Army Special Forces coming into Sana'a and working with the Yemeni special operations forces.

That turned out to be an extremely frustrating undertaking. The Yemenis were still extraordinarily suspicious of us and when our people came in and the equipment came in they insisted on vigorous inspections including of highly sensitive equipment and they were very high tensions between the American trainers and the Yemeni trainees because they suspected each had ulterior motives. The situation became more even more complicated when the Yemenis started to impede diplomatic pouches. We defined virtually anything as such, anything we wanted to slap a sticker on saying "diplomatic pouch," including very large pallets of equipment, electronic or otherwise. The Yemenis defined diplomatic pouches as the being orange bags in which things were put in. So we had an extremely frustrating situation where the Yemeni would allow in weapons intended for their forces, but equipment that we needed for our purposes would be obstructed. We also had a problem in that the Yemeni Special Forces as it became clearer and clearer that in effect, we were training a praetorian guard for the president rather than an active counterterrorism unit.

Fortunately, we had at the same time been working with the Central Security Forces under Colonel Yahia al Saleh, the president's nephew, and Minister of Interior Alimi. There we found a totally different picture. We found a great deal of trust, we found commitment on the Yemeni side and we found a willingness to engage in the terrorist fight. So although our efforts with the Special Forces didn't pan out, our efforts with the Central Security Forces had very good results. We were developing other options at the time over these months because Washington was pressing to show results. The Afghan situation had gone well over a matter of months. We were still in the planning stage for Iraq. Washington wanted some other victory to show on the war on terror, and Yemen was a candidate for that. And that's when we entered into discussions with President Saleh about deploying the armed Predator as another option in going against the Al Qaeda target, which lead, in November 2002 to a successful strike against Abu Ali who was in a car heading back to Marib, and he was eliminated.

Q: Was there at all an option of Al Qaeda just to haul out?

HULL: Al Qaeda had invested a great deal in Yemen and was not about to give up that investment. They had in August of 2002, a plot well advanced to attack the U.S. Embassy with rockets, and we were fortunate in that the rocket they were preparing for the attack misfired killing one of the Al Qaeda operatives and severely injuring a second one. It was that mistake by Al Qaeda in August that short-circuited their plan. Then working with the Yemenis at the crime scene we made the connection to Al Qaeda and regained the initiative so that the following November we were able to eliminate the head of Al Qaeda by the strike in Marib.

Q: You left there when in 2004?

HULL: In July.

Q: By that time did you feel Al Qaeda was not much of a presence?

HULL: After Al Qaeda lost its leadership, there began a long continuing campaign to take out other key Al Qaeda operatives. Of course, while we were doing this in Yemen, it was being done more generally in the Gulf, e.g. in the UAE. Bin Laden lost his key operative for the peninsular region so between what we were doing outside of Yemen and what we were doing inside of Yemen, Al Qaeda was being steadily degraded. But they were not totally defanged. One of their decisions in the aftermath of the successful operation against Abu Ali was to mount an assassination attempt against the American ambassador, me. They had a cell of very experienced operatives dedicated to that mission for the better part of 2002.

Q: What was life like for you under these circumstances?

HULL: We had a great deal of security. Our most important tactic was to be unpredictable, to have no set pattern, to alter our routes, our times. I remember I had a Monday evening bridge game. The Regional Security Officer came to me and complained that it was entirely too predictable and so on occasion I would spend Monday afternoon at the defense attachï¿½'s apartment so I could make my bridge game without making the transit predictably on Monday evening.

The plot against me involved an attack against my motorcade and the plan was to stake out two intersections to the right and to the left of the embassy because when we came out of the embassy we had to either turn right or left and about a block down the road in either direction there were intersections which the attackers planned to stage at and then either using a rocket or a vehicle bomb to attack my vehicle.

Q: Did they get close?

HULL: They got to the stage of the surveillance and planning. Before they were able to execute the attack the Central Security Forces, the minister of interior, got information as to the location of the key plotter who was then set to flight. They were never able to execute the attack.

Q: I take it your family wasn't there?

HULL: My wife was there.

Q: How did that work out?

Hall: Amal was from the region, a Palestinian from Jerusalem. She was quite used to dicey situations. She maintained good security practices and enjoyed her time in Yemen very much.

Q: What about the rest of the staff? The intent is aimed at the ambassador, but you have other people going out all over the place who don't have the same protection.

HULL: It was an issue. We had a very street smart embassy in that we got a lot of training from Diplomatic Security and other security forces. The one thing about a tour in Yemen was that you became very practiced at personal security whether it was checking your vehicle or avoiding crowds. But remember after the hit on Abu Ali in 2001, pardon me, 2002 and then the subsequent degrading of the Al Qaeda network, we steadily gained the initiative, and we steadily gained more and more security for our personnel. So we were able to expand our operations safely and there were no official Americans harmed during this entire period in Yemen.

We did have a serious plot by the Iraqi intelligence at the onset of the Iraq war and what happened with that was that we were aware and forewarned from Washington that the Iraqi intelligence service generally would respond to our invasion of Iraq by trying to harm us elsewhere in the Middle East. We didn't know that they intended to do it specifically in Yemen until my colleague, the Italian ambassador, asked to see me one afternoon. He came over, said there was a friend of their embassy who knew an individual who claimed knowledge of a plot. We convinced the key individual to come into the embassy. We debriefed him. His knowledge of the Iraqi intelligence service was quite accurate. He had specifics for us: who was involved, where they were located, what kind of bombs they had. We passed that information to the Yemeni Political Security Organization, and at 2 a.m. in the morning they raided the house, arrested the individuals and located three sophisticated explosive devices. They were not going to be aimed at the embassy. It was too hard a target. But at the public affairs officer and the defense attachï¿½. So we had cause to be concerned, especially with the Iraq war onset.

Q: How did the lead up to the Iraq war and then the Iraq war play in Yemen?

HULL: There were very strong feelings against U.S. action, and in the lead up there were a number of peaceful demonstrations. The government was using the peaceful demonstrations to allow people to let off steam. After the invasion of Iraq, a demonstration was planned with the intent of similarly letting off steam but it was quickly taken over by Yemeni Ba'ath Party members loyal to Saddam who directed the demonstration to the vicinity of the embassy. We had within a block of the embassy at the Sheridan Circle a large, a very large crowd of people, and their intent was to approach the embassy and we did not know whether or not the Yemeni security forces would hold. The embassy went to high alert. We had the internal security plan going into effect. I remember walking around the embassy, and there were Marines deployed there for training purposes who were loading their automatic weapons. I thought we were coming very, very close to blood being shed, possibly by Americans in defense of the embassy. The crowd turned violent, there were shots fired from the crowd at the Yemeni security forces. The Yemeni security forces returned fire, and I believe three demonstrators were killed, including a young boy. The security forces never abandoned their positions, and eventually the crowd, having been met with this resolute defense, dispersed and the embassy was not attacked. We did not have to use force ourselves to defend the embassy. The government then realized that it was too dangerous to allow demonstrations to take place, certainly in the vicinity of foreign embassies. They were banned. The Iraqi Ba'ath members who organized them were detained, and we got assurances from Saleh that all necessary measures would be taken to protect the embassy and Americans in Yemen and indeed during that period, during the war no Americans were harmed.

Q: I realize you were far from the scene but we're talking about the period of Internet and e-mail and everything else. How did you feel about the lead up to the Iraqi War because you had been very much involved in terrorism aspect? I mean the rationale for going to war. How did you feel about that?

HULL: I knew that one rationale that we relied upoi.e. the Iraqi connection to Al Qaeda- had no foundation to it. The question of weapons of mass destruction was a serious issue, it seemed to me. We had people deployed to Sana'a by the State Department, health people, to give us vaccinations against smallpox for fear that the Iraqis had that capability. But it was hard sitting so far away in Sana'a to really appreciate what was going on in the inner councils in Washington and on an issue about which we had very little to say. We did realize early on that we were going to war with Iraq if only because the magnitude of the deployments we were making could not be sustained for very long and that we would have to use those troops once they were in the region.

Q: Did the Yemenis make any protests or were you called upon to get their support? Or what happened?

HULL: We were instructed to explain our rationales and to seek support. Saleh warned us against going into Iraq. He was very consistent in this, but having paid such a huge price for supporting Iraq in 1990 Saleh did not in this instance go public in opposing our attack on Iraq but he did privately, very consistently, and in retrospect very cogently outlined the risks of that action.

I might say just a word about two other subjects in terms of the broad counterterrorism strategy that we were pursuing in Yemen. One was the economic development part and the second was the public diplomacy part.

As I mentioned earlier, our economic development effort was keyed on the remote tribal areas where Al Qaeda had gained footholds, and as we proceeded on the security side we also got enough resources to initiate programs there. Ironically, the resources were not the traditional ones, the economic support funds or others identified with foreign assistance, but rather from the Department of Agriculture and the 401b program which involved providing excess American agricultural commodities which were sold in Yemen and then these funds were used. But we did have a rather substantial pot of money, tens of millions of dollars. We found that by going out into the regions, it was rather easy to identify cost-effective projects that had very demonstrable impact on the quality of life of the tribesman. For example, in Medghil which was a village about two thirds of the way from Sana'a to Marib for $250,000 we were able to build a health clinic and then also arrange for training of health personnel and equipment and medication that in the year after we finished it was treating daily an average of 50 persons each day. The news of this facility spread throughout the region and people would come from great distances. Relying really upon our Foreign Service nationals, Yemenis working in the embassy, we were able to replicate that throughout Marib and Jowf and make a significant impact on health services. We also undertook a very ambitious project of equipping a large regional hospital in Marib itself for some $7 million and created the first sophisticated hospital in those remote tribal areas.

We did work in agriculture as well and even some work in the cultural domain. For each of these projects, we had our distinctive brand, a Cammariyyah (moon-shaped) window which incorporated the flag of Yemen and the flag of the United States so that our efforts became very broadly known throughout that region, and we were credited as being the first foreign government to go into those regions in an effective way and provide tangible benefits to the tribesmen in those regions. I, myself, made maybe half a dozen trips to Marib and got into the farthest reaches of Jowf where I don't think any American ambassador or really any foreign diplomat had previously gone.

On the public diplomacy side we found most effective to let the Yemenis take the lead, and the Yemenis were very good at their own public diplomacy. The critical element of this was to convince the Yemeni public that Al Qaeda was a threat not only to the United States, but was a threat to Yemen itself. Al Qaeda really made this easier in some of their targeting. For example, when they attacked the French oil tanker which was carrying Yemeni crude in 2001, and it became clear that Al Qaeda attacks were threatening Yemen's economic jugular and were having practical, damaging effect on Yemenis, not only in general but specifically on the fishermen in the area. The Yemeni government had some very sharp people working on their public diplomacy. They told us they had seen what had happened in the Washington area, the role of Washington residents in the apprehension of the Beltway sniper, and that they were purposely intending to conduct their public diplomacy to elicit the same kind of practical cooperation from the Yemeni citizens and indeed, in a number of cases, that kind of practical cooperation did lead to counterterrorism successes for the Yemenis.

Q: Were the Chinese doing anything because they had built that road way back, and we were pretty nervous about that at one time back in the Cold War era.

HULL: The Chinese were very ably represented in Sana'a by a diplomat who had formally been the main interpreter, Arab interpreter, in Beijing, but the Chinese were preoccupied with commercial interests. There was no greater promoter of exports in the diplomatic corps than the Chinese ambassador whose reason d'etre was to sell things Chinese in Yemen.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover, do you think?

HULL: We were very actively pursuing the issue of democracy and human rights which was another major effort of the administration. There was an election, parliamentary elections scheduled for Yemen for 2003, coincidental with the invasion of Iraq by the Americans. Saleh considered postponing those elections but in the end went ahead with them. They were extremely well organized, the National Democratic Institute, the UNDP, and IFIS played very important roles with the Yemenis in organizing those elections. We were providing financial assistance to that effort. We were working with all the parties in Yemen, the ruling party, the Socialist party and the Islamic party. As the elections approached, the Europeans became alarmed by the general instability in the area and pulled out. The National Democratic Institute stayed the course and actually brought an observer delegation of some 20 experts to watch the election. The embassy, the American embassy, fielded an observer delegation of an equal number, some 20 from across the embassy organized by a political officer who had formerly worked for the National Democratic Institute, and the elections were a significant success and a step forward for Yemen. Largely as a result of them, Freedom House that year moved Yemen from the category of "not free" to "partly free."

The Yemenis subsequently sponsored a large conference in Sana'a co-sponsored by the Europeans to which they invited both official and nonofficial representatives from across the Arab world and it was a remarkable conference that produced a Declaration of Sana'a putting these representatives formally on record in promoting democracy in the Middle East. I had not taken it very seriously. I thought the words had little significance without practical implementation. Washington, at least the NSC, saw it in a different light. On a subsequent visit to Washington with Foreign Minister Qirbi, we met with the National Security Council leadership, with Steve Hadley, who was then deputy national security adviser, and Elliott Abrams. For the first time in my tenure as ambassador, the first subject raised by the NSC was not terrorism, but rather it was democracy. They were aware of Yemen's elections, they were aware of the Declaration of Sana'a and were very interested in using that declaration to further promotion of democracy in the Middle East. Therefore, it was not a total surprise when I received a phone call several months later from the National Security Council wanting to invite President Saleh to the Sea Island Summit of the G-8 which President Bush was hosting and which would have as its theme promoting democracy. So, my tenure in Sana'a was really book ended by two visits by President Saleh to the United States. The initial one in November, 2000 in the wake of 9/11 and the last one, I believe it was in June, 2004 for him to meet with administration officials in Washington and then attend the G-8 Summit in Sea Island, Georgia. For Saleh that meeting, those meetings in Washington were really somewhat of a victory lap because by that time Al Qaeda's operations in Yemen had been virtually shut down. Our counterterrorism cooperation was broadly speaking well established, and there was virtually no one left in Washington who any longer debated the question of whether Yemen should be a target or a partner. The partnership was really established on firm ground.

Q: On the democracy side, how strict was it with women?

HULL: Women in Yemen were extremely impressive. They were some of the most dynamic, most competent interlocutors and partners that we had. If you recall during my confirmation hearing, Senator Wellstone urged me to attend to the situation of Yemeni women, and I had done that. Therefore, we had a good many projects with Yemeni women in training them, in the formation of NGOs and political activities. I had also had the honor of working with the first Yemeni ministers who were women, two women who were ministers of human rights. We had an extremely fruitful cooperation with them. So we very much respected the role of women in Yemen, we did our best to promote it.

Q: Were they secluded or not?

HULL: In the cities, most went veiled and mostly Gulf-style veils, which had been imported by Yemenis coming back from working in the Gulf. They were the dominant garb now, not the traditional Yemeni veil. The women found ways of nevertheless, being active, and I remember during the parliamentary election some of the most active campaigners were women and more so for the Islamic party than for the ruling party. They would go throughout the Medina, they would go into other women's homes, they would have their discussions, they would do their campaigning and largely as a result of this, the Islamic Party did very well with the women's vote during the parliamentary election.

Q: You mentioned Iran. What sort of role did Iran play?

HULL: Initially, Iran was not active, but towards the end of my tenure, during the last month there was a rebellion in the north in the town of Sa'dah by a group that had links to Iran. These were the Huthi party. Al Houthi was a tribal leader who wanted to bring back the monarchy in Yemen. He was opposed to the whole Republican experiment, and he gathered around himself in Sa'dah a group of followers. He had traveled to Tehran, and he had gotten moral and probably material support from the Iranians who saw in this group, a fellow Shia' whom they could support. Ironically, of course, the dominant political actors in Yemen were also Shia' (Zaidi) so it was not really a question of Sunni versus Shiite, but Iran was looking to fish in troubled waters and find a party it could support.

Q: You left in June of 2004. And then what?

HULL: July, 2004.

The choice in front of me was between going to Princeton where I had been offered a job by the University, not by the Department of State, but by the University as the first diplomat in residence at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs or going as a political adviser to either General Abizaid, the central commander, or General Casey, who was in charge of our forces in Iraq. I had decided that the opportunity at Princeton was too good to pass up, and that I felt quite good about what we had accomplished in Yemen. I didn't know what could be accomplished in Iraq and it seemed to me the time to close the volume on the Foreign Service and to open up a new chapter in academia. That's what I decided to do.

Q: One last question. You, and we're speaking now our involvement in Iraq continues and is highly debated and public opinion is turning very much against it, so it appears. How did the Iraq involvement play at an academic institution like Princeton?

HULL: I had attended Princeton as an undergraduate in the late '60s and early '70s and then the Vietnam War was a firestorm on campus to the extent that in the spring of 1970 Princeton University and most universities in the U.S. went on strike and suspended academic activity. It was quite a contrast for me personally to be teaching undergraduates at Princeton in 2005 through 2007 and realize the Iraq War was not really their concern. Virtually none of them was being drafted. There was an interest, but it was an academic interest, and it was not a focus of attention.

Q: Okay, I think that's probably a good place to stop. Thank you very much.

HULL: Thank you.

End of interview