

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

**JON GUNDERSEN**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*

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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Jon, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?*

GUNDERSEN: I was born in 1945, in Brooklyn, New York, only because my father, who was in the Norwegian Navy, was in New York at the time.

*Q: Okay, let's start, on your father's side, what do you know about the Gundersens and all?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I know a lot, because I still keep in touch with my Norwegian relatives and my family still visits Norway often. My father, Jon Gundersen, was born in 1915, in Revesand, a small fishing village on the southeast coast of Norway. His father, my grandfather, also named John Gundersen, was a sailor, who traveled the seven seas, as they said at the time. My father had a normal life for the kids in that generation in Revesand. Many of the men were away at sea for months at a time. The women had to be strong-willed since they had to raise the kids, keep order in the home and community on limited budgets. Remember Norway was still a very poor country. In fact, the per capita income in Norway was well below, say, Italy or Greece at the time. But my father was part of a big extended family with many aunts and cousins around at all times. In other words, my father always said he had a happy childhood. Although they were far from rich, they believed they had all the necessities of life. His sisters and cousins, most of whom have now passed away, I think felt the same. My father first left for sea at 15 as a merchant seaman – as did many of his contemporaries.

During the war, when Norway was occupied, the Norwegian merchant fleet worked with the Allies. My father was commissioned as an officer in the Norwegian Navy. And his ship, the *Vardos*, was sunk by a German sub near Tobago. He was rescued and evacuated to New York where he met my mother. And that's why I'm here speaking to you as an American.

*Q: So, what did your father do after the war?*

GUNDERSEN: We went back to Norway after the war, in '46. My father resumed his career in the Norwegian Navy as a lieutenant commander. My mother followed him, as did most spouses in that era. It was a tough time, especially for my mother. My father was at sea a lot and I think my mother missed America. She had two small kids by that time, both in diapers. We didn't have indoor plumbing; we lived in a log cabin in Skoyenasen, outside of Oslo. She struggled with the language and the long winters. In other words, it was not easy at that time, so they came back to the United States in 1950.

So I grew up in the United States, at first in Brooklyn, and then on Long Island.

*Q: Okay, let's talk about, on your mother's side, what's her background?*

GUNDERSEN: She is of Polish background. Both her parents, my Grandparents, Franczusek and Sophia Cichazewski, were born in Poland and came to the States before World War One. Later they changed the family name to Chester; many immigrants at the time wanted to become more American, so they anglicized the family name. My mother was born in 1914, the oldest of seven kids, in Brooklyn, where they lived in Sunset Park, a Polish neighborhood at the time. My grandfather was a carpenter and was functionally illiterate in English. They raised seven kids on a carpenter's salary, even during the Depression. All their 20 grandkids called our Grandparents Nanny and Dzadji. All seven of the kids, my aunts and uncles, did well largely due to my Grandmother, who ran the house and took care of the money. My mother, Holly Teresa, was an excellent student. She loved to read, paint and visit museums, three very esoteric pastimes for a working class Polish girl. My mother met my father at a restaurant at the St. George's Hotel in Brooklyn in 1943.

*Q: Did she graduate from high school?*

GUNDERSEN: She did and then she went to night school at Cooper Union, while working in a canning factory.

*Q: Oh, yes, Cooper Union has a great reputation.*

*Well, then, do you recall Norway as a small kid?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, you think you do. I have flashes of memories, such as playing with a German worker, a former German soldier, who stayed in Norway and worked somewhat as an indentured servant after the war. Of course, I've been back in Norway many times. I speak the language and our family now has a cottage – a hytte - in Revesand, Norway where my father grew up, so I have many cousins and second cousins there.

*Q: You basically grew up in, what, Brooklyn, was it?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, in West Hempstead. We lived in Brooklyn for a year, then moved to Long Island.

*Q: So, as a kid, you had brothers, sisters?*

GUNDERSEN: I have a brother, Frank, who's a year younger, born in '46, so he was born in Norway. He became a successful businessman and his family lives in Cold Spring Harbor on Long Island.

*Q: West Hempstead, what was that like?*



GUNDERSEN: It's really what you would say is a working, middle class area. Most of my friends' parents were first, second generation immigrants who wanted a better life for their kids. Many moved to West Hempstead from ethnic neighborhoods in Brooklyn and elsewhere in New York.

We had a reunion a while ago and six or seven of us talked about our parents and every one of my closest high school friends had parents who had celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Now how often today could you have six or seven people the same age whose parents were still together after 50 years with no divorces?

We weren't well off, but none of us considered ourselves poor or deprived, perhaps because we didn't know any really rich people. Maybe it was that 50s mentality of the post-War generation. My parents bought our house for ten thousand dollars in '51. It was a small home, one bathroom, and most of the families in the neighborhood had three or four kids.

In other words, we had a stable, nice life. I'm going to my fiftieth high school reunion in June. I'm really looking forward to seeing old friends, so we can share memories and lie to each other how well we all look.

*Q: In your family life and all, how important was religion and what religion was it?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, you might call it a mixed marriage; my mother grew up in a Catholic family, my father in a Lutheran family, but we were not regular church goers. My mother was a little bit of a black sheep. She was not as religious as her brothers and sisters. She was a bit of the rebel, even hanging out in Greenwich Village.

She wasn't anti-religion; she just wasn't a practicing Catholic. When we returned to Norway after the War, I guess you could say we were nominal Lutherans. Most Norwegians, by the way, still consider themselves Lutheran, but only attend church on Easter and Christmas and for baptisms, marriages and funerals. In other words, to be hatched, matched and dispatched.

So religion wasn't a core part of my childhood, although the culture in which I grew up - on giving and forgiving, on how to treat people- was grounded in religion.

*Q: How about politics?*

GUNDERSEN: My mother comes from a Polish family, who tended to be culturally conservative. Most, but not all, are conservative Republicans.

My mother was, I would say, more open minded is not the right word, but she wasn't wedded to any sort of politics, although my parents probably voted Republican almost all the time.

My father said the only Democrat he would have supported, although he wasn't a citizen, was Roosevelt, because he won the war to liberate Europe. But he said he was an Eisenhower Republican, because he was against isolationism and believed America should work with allies, especially in Europe, to stop fascism and communism.

*Q: Let's talk about elementary school. Did you take much to school?*

GUNDERSEN: I was a smart enough kid, but I wasn't a super student or super motivated. I enjoyed sports. So I always did well, but not top of class or anything like that.

*Q: Were you a reader?*

GUNDERSEN: I read. My mother was a voracious reader. She read all the time. And my father, with English was a second language (or actually third language, because all Norwegian kids growing up between the wars learned German as the second language). My father still had a strong accent. My father worked on barges, mostly carrying industrial material on the Great Lakes and Erie Canal, as did many Norwegian immigrants in the New York area. While he didn't have much formal education, he had an agile mind and he and my mother were as smart as any Harvard graduate. My father, for example, could do the New York *Times* crossword puzzles faster than anyone I know. My mother was mostly a stay-at-home mom, as were most of the mothers of that generation where we lived. She had her hands full with my father away most of the time. And she was somewhat a mentor to many of my cousins. She was also a member of Mensa, you know the organization for Brainiacs. What ever happened to me, I'll never know.

*Q: In reading, you recall any early books that particularly impressed you or were fun to read?*

GUNDERSEN: My mother used to read to us when we were kids. She liked books by James Fennimore Cooper and Jack London, for example. When I got older I enjoyed reading about politics and history and sports, of course. My father was a great admirer of Churchill, so I read Churchill's Series of Books about World War II at a relatively young age.

*Q: How'd you find high school?*

GUNDERSEN: I had a good set of friends. I was a little younger than most of my class, I skipped a grade when I was in elementary school, so I was 16 when I was a senior.

It was only in my junior, senior year that I started to go out with groups of friends. I was also playing sports. I didn't grow to my full height 'til I was actually out of high school. And I didn't date or anything like that until well into my senior year. But most kids in those years were not as advanced as they are today. In any case, I had a very happy carefree time in high school with a good of friends I still keep in touch with.

*Q: What sports?*

GUNDERSEN: I enjoyed track and field the most. I ran, high jumped and broad jumped (now called long jump). My nickname in high school was “High Jump,” because I was the best jumper at the school, a fairly good jumper in basketball. I could dunk the basketball, if I might brag a bit – not your normal 1950s white boy.

*Q: Well, then, did you have a favorite subject in high school?*

GUNDERSEN: I think what we called the class “citizenship” – the class combined history, politics, philosophy. I remember one teacher, Mr. Goudis, he challenged us and I enjoyed arguing with him.

*Q: What high school did you go to?*

GUNDERSEN: West Hempstead High School.

*Q: How was it?*

GUNDERSEN: A relatively new school, because much of the housing was built in the immediate post- World War Two. They had farms there before the war and then they built many small Levitt type houses.

So there wasn't much class distinction; we all more or less came from the same background and same income level, even though there was a real nice ethnic mix, Italian, Jewish, Polish, etc.

I remember many of my friends had grandparents living in the house who always seemed to have an accent. I assumed when you became fifty years old you suddenly got an accent; that was just something that happened when you became old. Perhaps we all view our formative years through rose-colored glasses – we remember the good times. Anyway, that's my high school memories.

*Q: I take it there wasn't much in the way of an African-American population?*

GUNDERSEN: No, there was a couple in the school.

*Q: Jewish?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, perhaps 20/ 25 per cent. I seem to remember that many of the Jewish grandparents emigrated from the old country and worked as merchants in New York before moving to West Hempstead for the kids. Some of my best friends, as the cliché goes, are still my old High School friends, many of whom happened to be Jewish. I was a member of a High school fraternity, Delta Lambda Pi, with kids from different religions. Most of us also had part time and/or summer jobs. I worked as a paper boy, at a

Butcher shop and at Carvel, the local frozen custard shop, where a lot of my friends would meet.

*Q: By the time you were in high school, how big an attraction for the kids, yourself included, was downtown New York?*

GUNDERSEN: We lived in our own little world and we didn't have cars, couldn't drink, legally anyway, so we stayed pretty much in our home town. I remember by the senior year, in the summers particularly, we'd go into Greenwich Village, just walk around. Remember this was time that Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were playing in small clubs in the Village.

But we weren't a sort of cultural elite that went to Broadway shows. Some of the girls may have, but we didn't.

*Q: Then, were you pointed towards university or not?*

GUNDERSEN: I think so. Yes, I think, most of my friends assumed they were going to college; that was sort of a natural thing. There was an emphasis on education for most of us.

And I was interested in international affairs, because my parents had lived overseas and came from immigrant families.

The other possibility was Kings Point, which was the Merchant Marine Academy. My father had worked in the Merchant Marine, I had two uncles who were in the Merchant Marine in World War Two and had gone to Kings Point. Another factor was it was free.

I might have gone there, but my father said, "You're really interested in international affairs," so I went to GW, George Washington, and they were willing to put up a decent amount of money for my college education. My father said I should follow my passion (although I very much doubt he used that trendy term). When you think about it that was quite a sacrifice for a family without a lot of money. Of course, a college education was still within the reach of most normal families in those days.

*Q: Had you been following international affairs as a kid, on radio, TV?*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, we had only one TV and everyone watched the same program, so you did follow the news, we watched it with our parents and we went back to Norway once in a while, when we could afford it.

So I followed world events to a degree and especially by my senior year I was particularly interested in politics. I followed the presidential nomination conventions. I remember the '56 conventions, the nominating conventions, and the Kennedy-Nixon race in '60.

*Q: Well then, you went to George Washington. You were there from when to when?*

GUNDERSEN: '62 to '66.

*Q: What was George Washington like at that time?*

GUNDERSEN: You didn't have a great deal of what we now call diversity at most American colleges at the time. GW was somewhat different; there were a decent amount of international students and minorities, since the college was in the heart of DC. By a lot, I mean perhaps five or ten per cent.

GW was also a place where you had people whose parents were in the military or worked for international organizations. So it had an excellent international affairs and political science program, because all the resources of the capital was at your door step. And so you'd get lectures by senators and government officials. We'd go down to the Hill once in a while for some of our classes. So that was a strong suit.

And I joined a fraternity, Delta Tau Delta, which was known as a jock house, so, as you can imagine, we had an active athletic and social life. I still keep in touch with a number of my college fraternity brothers.

*Q: Did you find yourself concentrating on international affairs?*

GUNDERSEN: I did. I think fairly early on I knew I was interested in something to do with international affairs, so that became my major.

*Q: You were right next to the State Department. Were they able to recruit lecturers from the State Department and all?*

GUNDERSEN: They did, but I wasn't focused on the State Department. To us, that was just a big building, where we walked past to the fields to play sports. We played right where the Vietnam Memorial is now, that's where the playing fields were. They still had the old World War Two barracks there at the time.

*Q: I remember those. Was the Soviet Union sort of a major focus of students' you were around interest, or not?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, the Soviet Union was always there. We assumed that's the way it was going to be through our lifetimes. I don't think you could say that most of my contemporaries were ideologically anti-Soviet. They just innately believed that the Russian were our adversaries and that Communism was not a good thing.

There was a small group of students, who were the forerunners of the SDS *i.e.*, the campus radicals of the second half of the Sixties, but you didn't have any real organized protests. This was right before the bulge of protests in '68. So we still lived in a pre-'68 Eisenhower era sort of world.

*Q: How about other parts of the world: China, the Middle East?*

GUNDERSEN: They had departments for all the regional studies, but because I was not focused on a foreign service career *per se* and wasn't sure what sort of career path to follow, perhaps teaching or international business. So all sorts of courses were available at GW, but I don't think I or most of my contemporaries were really focused on any particular country.

*Q: Well, had your parents been going to Norway?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, at first we couldn't afford it. The first time we went over after we left Norway was in 1959. To take the whole family cost a good amount of money. Therefore, we spent most of the summer there.

And that was really nice. That reinvigorated my interest and ties to Norway and I felt that my Norwegian roots become very much a part of my life. My brother never redeveloped those ties to Norway even though he was born in Norway.

*Q: Before you started college, had the election of 1960, that was Nixon and Kennedy, had that engaged you? It engaged so many of the youth.*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, I was 15 at the time and I remember my inclination was to support Kennedy. I think it was the idea of the New Frontier and all that, although my parents said, "Well, you've got to look at Nixon a little more."

I remember we had a mock ballot in our citizenship class and it was like 60-40 Kennedy at the time, but I think if you asked the parents it would have flipped to 60-40 Nixon.

*Q: I assume that the Cuban Missile Crisis of '62 was sort of a major focal point in your early years?*

GUNDERSEN: I was at GW at the time - October '62. I was a freshman and I remember coming back and sitting in the basement of Adams Hall (where the IMF is now located). There was only one TV in a common room in the basement. All the students sat around listening intently..

While most students were not political, this was such a galvanizing moment, because you didn't know what was going to happen, was this going to be our last week on this planet?

*Q: Well, then, as you got closer to graduation, did your focus change, as far as what you wanted to do?*

GUNDERSEN: I graduated in '66, at the early stages of the Vietnam War, we sent major forces in '65. So there was always a sense that you would probably be drafted, or wind up going into the military.

I assumed I would be drafted as well, so I talked to a recruiter and decided to not just be drafted but do something of interest, so I went into the Army Security Agency, which dealt with intelligence collection.

When I graduated from college in '66 I went to the University of Oslo International School, as a graduation gift from my parents. I studied there for a few months and then when I came back I went into the army, in October.

*Q: How did you find the University of Oslo?*

GUNDERSEN: It was a great year, because I had just graduated from college, I was young and a bachelor. Let's just say I enjoyed the company of Norwegian girls

*Q: How was your Norwegian?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I had basically forgotten the Norwegian; I spoke it as a child. When I came to the States we didn't speak it at all. My mother was home with the family and my father was away.

But I did begin to pick it up again, because I worked in college summers on Norwegian ships, first one in '65, I worked on a Norwegian tanker, Gotta Larsen, sailing under the Liberian flag. I worked as a deckhand.

So I picked up the language again; it wasn't particularly diplomatic Norwegian, however.

*Q: Well, did the sea call you at all?*

GUNDERSEN: I think my father had talked to an old colleague from the war, Viggo Kristoffersen, who worked for a Norwegian shipping firm. They talked about how it would be a good thing for a young man to go to sea for a college summer. I did that and it was pretty tough, I remember the wages were 45 cents an hour, chipping paint and scraping tanks and standing watch.

But in retrospect I think it was a great experience. I signed on a ship in San Pedro, California, went through the Panama Canal and loaded grain in New Orleans and brought the ship to Rotterdam. It was a good experience for a 19 year old.

And then the summer of '66, when I graduated, to get over to Europe I worked my way over on a ship, the Havtroll.

*Q: So, what about the Vietnam War?*

GUNDERSEN: I went into the army in October '66. After basic training at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, I was being trained in the Vietnamese language at Ft. Bliss in Texas. While I was

there I decided I wanted to be an officer, so after language training I went to Officers Candidate School at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma as an artillery officer.

And so I got my commission in '67 and then I went to John F. Kennedy Special Warfare School in Ft. Bragg. We were trained to work with Special Forces on counter-insurgency and pacification of the countryside. The training was tough – 4 ½ mile run every day in full battle gear, etc. But I enjoyed the comradeship and physical part – except getting up at O dark thirty every morning. From there I was sent to Viet Nam.

*Q: So you were in Vietnam from when to when?*

GUNDERSEN: I was there from '68 to '69.

*Q: Where did you serve?*

GUNDERSEN: Most of the time I was in a small town, Di An, about thirty kilometers north of Saigon.

*Q: Infantry, or*

GUNDERSEN: I worked with the MACV, which was the military command in Saigon and I worked with the mobile advisory team program, first I taught the Vietnamese language and then worked with a mobile advisory teams in the provinces. We lived with the Ruff-Puffs – or Regional and Popular Forces. The Ruff-Puffs were lightly equipped local forces such as Montagnards. These units were looked down upon by the regular elite Vietnamese Officer Corps, which were usually drawn from the upper class and, in my view, too often corrupt and unwilling to engage the VC.

*Q: How did you find your work there?*

GUNDERSEN: I'm not very introspective. I just did it. I didn't think about it particularly. I wasn't fearful, I didn't make political judgments. I enjoyed the experience and the comradeship with my buddies; we took care of each other.

Because I spoke Vietnamese I enjoyed working with the Vietnamese. I enjoyed very much the *Montagnards* who were a very trusting people.

But I did see the corruption, so in the course of my time, both in Vietnamese language training and in Vietnam, I gradually turned against the war.

*Q: You were up in the highlands, was it?*

GUNDERSEN: Part of the time, in Dalat.

*Q: Was there much fighting going on then?*



GUNDERSEN: There was. I was lucky, I experienced a bit, but I avoided the worst of it.

Actually, I arrived in Vietnam after the Tet Offensive in '68. There was actually less fighting than there had been in late '67, early '68.

*Q: What was the attitude of the Vietnamese authorities towards the Montagnards?*

GUNDERSEN: There's a certain quiet racism there. They viewed the mountain people as uncultured. And there was a clear ethnic distinction; the Montagnards, for example, didn't get promoted in the military and weren't even allowed in certain units.

And even though the *Montagnards* were strongly anti-Communist, they weren't a part of the Catholic elite, many of whom had come from the north when Vietnam split in the Fifties.

*Q: Were we trained for the right war?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, actually Stu, now I'm working with some of the same counter-insurgency issues in Iraq and Afghanistan. To put it perhaps too simply, in both wars (Vietnam and Iraq and Afghanistan), initially we fought a conventional war in a conventional way. We brought in American troops and we did most of the fighting in conventional battles. We, including allies such as the Koreans and Australians, basically fought the war for the Vietnamese – not a way to defend your own country. You have to remember that at the time most of the senior American officers had fought in World War Two and that's what they knew.

It wasn't until well into the war, when we lost the initiative, that we changed to a more counterinsurgency doctrine. We tend to forget now that the counterinsurgency and CORDS program were somewhat successful in reversing VC gains, but it may well have been too little and too late and it may not have been possible to win anyway.

But you could say from '69 to '72 much of the countryside had been pacified and you could make a case that the war was, if not being won, was not being lost. But the Vietnamese government was somewhat corrupt and non-representative. You could make the case that they couldn't have won whatever our doctrine had been or no matter how we trained them.

By the way, the Ruff-puffs, the units I worked with, didn't get the best equipment, they weren't trusted sometimes by the Vietnamese Army; we had to help them get equipment sometimes. We advised on everything from small arms marksmanship to force protection to sanitation.

*Q: Well, you left there when?*

GUNDERSEN: I left in November '69.

*Q: Okay, how did you feel, whither Vietnam at that point?*

GUNDERSEN: I didn't know, honestly. I had a vague sense it was not going to go well, but I didn't foresee it would be a North Vietnamese takeover, I foresaw some sort of muddled solution, perhaps a neutralist government which included some elements of the Viet Cong. But I didn't have a well thought out political prognosis.

*Q: Did the Vietnam War and your experience there leave you with any sort of latent feelings about how one fights wars, what you get into, what you don't?*

GUNDERSEN: It did. I'm still somewhat involved in the issue. I have the sense that wars should only be fought if its supported by the local population, if we are supporting a relatively legitimate government and if we have other partners. Unilateral actions, no matter how well meaning, will not succeed.

*Q: So here you are, 1969. What are you going?*

GUNDERSEN: Before the end of my one-year tour, strangely enough, I actually asked to extend in Vietnam. Why? I guess because it was fascinating experience and I liked the adventure, but also because if I extended I kept the extra combat pay, which was \$55 dollars a month (big bucks for me then). And also because I could get out of the army commitment a few months early.

But at the time my mother got into a very bad accident which was life threatening, so they sent me back to the States because they didn't know if she would survive. And once I got there, she gradually improved and the Army decided, "Okay, you're here, the war is winding down, we'll allow you to stay for the remainder of your obligated service in the States."

So my last seven or eight months in the military, I worked first as a bereavement officer at Ft. Dix, New Jersey; in other words I had the responsibility to be the first to tell families that their son had died in Vietnam.

*Q: What a joyous job!*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, it was a tough job, but they chose officers who had served in Vietnam to do this unenviable task.

*Q: You get any strange reactions sometimes to this news?*

GUNDERSEN: Each reaction was both the same and different. I sympathized and admired the families so much, because I'd never felt any hatred towards me as the bearer of the awful news, just sorrow. One of my jobs was to organize the funeral, make sure the family was supported, had all the military honors for the deceased; just to be there for the families.

I remember one time I had to go into Harlem to deliver the message to a family. I walked up in a uniform to deliver the horrible news. The family knows full well why you're there. But on this occasion, they had friends over and were drinking. You could cut a tension with a knife. The father just said, "This must be tough for you." It let everyone know that I wasn't a villain or anything, I was doing my job. I thought that was very thoughtful and honorable way to handle the situation.

Then my last six or seven months I worked as the special services officer at Ft. Hamilton in New York. That was a great job. And I asked for that. I did the bereavement duty and this came up and I said I'd like to do this.

I took care of all the army recreation programs in the New York area and distributed free tickets for returning veterans, so I got tickets to Yankee games and Broadway shows. I was single in New York at the time. Not a bad gig after spending a year in the Vietnam jungle.

*Q: By the way, while you were in Vietnam, did you have any contact with the embassy?*

GUNDERSEN: No, not really. I knew an officer in the CORDS program who lived in this old French mansion and we always said, pardon my French, "these freaking State Department people," but then I became one.

*Q: While you were there, I was in Saigon as consul general.*

GUNDERSEN: So you were one of those guys. Must have been an interesting tour for you. But Saigon and the Embassy was just another world to us.

*Q: We looked at the military and said, "Thank God!" I had spent four years as an enlisted man during the Korean War, I was in the air force. I really didn't get shot at, particularly, in Korea, a little.*

GUNDERSEN: But the State Department was just this institution there and they did their thing, but we didn't think that they lived a very tough life.

*Q: Of course, some did, some didn't.*

*So, you're discharged in 19*

GUNDERSEN: '70.

*Q: What happens?*

GUNDERSEN: I wanted to travel a little, so I after I was discharged I went to Norway, worked as a deckhand on a freighter to get to Europe. Then I worked as a bartender/bouncer at Peppe's Pizza Pub in Oslo. After a couple of months, I wanted to see more of the world, so I hitchhiked through Europe on my own, all the way down to

Egypt, living in either hostels or sometimes just sleeping outside. I did that for four months or so. Met a lot of other hitch-hikers from throughout world – what one might call counter-culture types.

*Q: How did you find the Norwegian attitude towards the world? They did have a border with the Soviet Union. Were they you might say engaged in the Cold War or not?*

GUNDERSEN: Because Norway is a small country that borders on Russia and relies on the United States and NATO for security, most Norwegians are pro-US and pro-NATO. They have a large emigrant population in the United States, they rely on sea routes and trade and they knew that they can't defend themselves unilaterally from World War, so they rely on institutions like NATO for security. I'd say the vast majority of Norwegians sort of accept that reality.

But they were also very curious about the United States and critical at the time about our struggles over civil rights. Of course, they were living in lily white homogeneous country and it was very easy to criticize others in different circumstances.

Perhaps because I was thought of as a Norwegian, I did not see any real anti-Americanism. Norwegians, however, were very curious about the United States and they had sort of an ambivalent feeling. Yes, the US is a big country that's a little violent and has racial discrimination, but, especially as they began to accept minorities into their country, Norwegians began appreciate the struggles of a big multiracial country like the United States.

*Q: In traveling through Europe, as a young, free person, was it fun?*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, it was a lot of fun, because there were a lot of other hitchhikers.

*Q: There was a big era of that.*

GUNDERSEN: And it was just not only Americans, there were Australians and Canadians and Scandinavians, so every place you'd go, every hostel where you'd pay a dollar or so and sleep 6 or 8 to a room.. It was a great time. At that age, you're 24 or 26 and everyone is open to everything and exploring the world. This was in era of free love era and all that.

*Q: Yeah, a lot of hashish and all.*

GUNDERSEN: You know the old joke, if you remember the 60s, you didn't live the 60's. At the same time, I think there is some exaggeration regarding drug use, especially if you watched Hollywood films of the era, like Easy Rider. I don't remember that much drug use in my travels, in any case.

*Q: I went from Saigon to Athens as consul general and those that did get involved in the hashish, that got involved in the trade, they'd go to Turkey and get some stuff and then they'd be picked up by the Greek police and we'd go see them in jail.*

GUNDERSEN: You probably saw the height of that trade. Thinking of Greece, one of my best times was first in Crete, then we took a boat from Brindisi to Corfu and stayed there for a while; really enjoyed Corfu and then went down to Crete. I was with this Canadian girl for a while and it was just a very nice time.

*Q: Was something telling you that, "Gee, I've got to get to work" or something like that?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes. I sowed some oats. I knew I was coming back and I came back in I guess December 69 and started looking for work.

*Q: What were you looking for?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I wasn't sure. I was thinking of doing something international, so I went to a couple of job interviews. I didn't want to go into the corporate world. I went to a couple of corporate interviews. I didn't even own a suit, so I didn't know how to prepare for an interview, how to dress up, or that it would be a good idea to know something about the company you're interviewing with.

And then a buddy of mine, a Vietnam vet, said there's this new program that you might be interested in called the sky marshal program, which was providing counter-terrorism security on planes. So I took the test and was accepted to that program. I trained for the job at Quantico, Virginia in firearms, close combat and other counter-terrorism techniques.

*Q: How long did you do that?*

GUNDERSEN: Did that for about two years.

*Q: Tell me what a sky marshal does, in that particular time.*

GUNDERSEN: Well, we flew to the risk areas, where they had some intelligence there might be hijackings. The program was started after a rash of major hijackings to Cuba and then the PLO blew up airliners in the Jordanian desert.

So we flew undercover. I flew mostly TWA and Pan Am internationally. I flew a lot of flights to Israel and to the Caribbean, I've flown Pan Am's around the world route. We went on flights undercover, always carrying a concealed weapon – a snub-nosed Smith and Wesson.

*Q: Was there much screening for weapons at the time?*

GUNDERSEN: No, they just had these primitive magnetometers. But we had the authority to walk the airports to look for suspicious characters. This was well before elaborate airport security and procedures. We had a good amount of free lance authority. We also did some anti-drug busts working with the DEA. We were trained to fire and fight as part of our training. We'd fly for one a week or so then have off for 4 or 5 days. I lived with a Sky Marshall buddy in a light house on the water in Freeport, Long Island, near Jones Beach. The Light House was owned by a local Mafia type, Vinnie Salvato, so we had a good time in our off-hours.

*Q: Just curiosity, but you don't want to fire a weapon in a place, do you?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, you don't want to, but you can. There's somewhat of a misconception that if you hit the fuselage in a plane everything will blow up. Well, that's probably not going to happen.

And we were trained, we had mockups of 707s and we had pop-up targets and we'd turn around and fire. So luckily I didn't have to actually confront any hijackers, but I got to fly around the world and get paid for it. Not a bad job, I'd say. I also took some graduate courses.

*Q: What were you studying?*

GUNDERSEN: I was studying history at the time.

*Q: Did you have any feel for the diplomatic business, foreign service, at all, during this time?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I was interested in it. I took the test with another sky marshal. As you know, the State Department entrance process is very long, so I continued to fly to places like Istanbul, Tehran, Delhi. I saw a lot of world and did a lot of reading to stay awake and alert..

*Q: Where'd you take the test?*

GUNDERSEN: I took the test in Long Island, Hofstra University.

*Q: How'd you find the test?*

GUNDERSEN: I thought it was pretty difficult. I did a little study, like one or two evenings. I had no idea how I did. I had no idea of how the test was measured. But obviously I passed it and went through the interview process.

*Q: How about the oral exams? You recall any questions on it?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I do. It was a panel who sort of sat behind a long table. You sat in a little chair like you're in a Star Chamber. But I think I did okay, perhaps because I was

not like somebody's going to graduate foreign service school at Georgetown and that was the only thing he or she wants to do. I did it, not as a lark, but I was a little more casual.

And they asked me about Vietnam, they asked me political questions and I said, "I have my political views," I remember them asking me about Bao Dai and political factions and I said, "I was a simple soldier, here was my view as a soldier, this is how I saw it."

So I think that they were probably guys who had served in the embassy in Saigon and so I think that was the right approach.

I remember one question they asked me about dating if you're overseas, I didn't know what they were driving at and I said, "I feel like I'm on *The Dating Game*," which was a big popular TV show of the day.

I was thinking I was a little too casual about that, but they laughed at that. I think it went well after that because I just thought of the interview more as a conversation,

*Q: Had you done any prepping for the Foreign Service per se, or thought about it much before*

GUNDERSEN: Well, not that much. I actually took the test in my senior year in college, because GW encouraged students to take the test. I didn't pass it at that time, so I took it again four years later.

One of the things I did when I was a sky marshal was read a lot. You sit on a plane, you got to stay awake. And I read more than I ever had in college, or since. I would take an author like Hemingway or Camus or Hesse, who were popular at the time and then just would read all their novels.

And I read some history and would read *Time* and *Newsweek*, so probably that helped me on the Foreign Service exam.

In the meantime, working as a Sky Marshall, I got to know TWA people, so I was hired by TWA. I worked as what they called DCS or Director of Customer Service. I flew on 747s throughout the world. I was in charge of the flight crews and customer service for the passengers. Flying was a lot more luxurious at the time. That was the first rung on the management ladder. It was a decent job.

I had taken the written and oral Foreign Service exam when I was a Sky Marshal. Then I took the TWA job. After four or five months, I had almost forgotten about the State Department. Then I received a non-descript letter stating: "Welcome to the Foreign Service." I almost threw it away as junk mail.

So I had to decide whether to stay in this management track with TWA or switch to the Foreign Service. I decided to go into the Foreign Service, but it wasn't a slam dunk decision.

*Q: You came in when?*

GUNDERSEN: the fall of '73.

*Q: The junior officer class you were in, how was it constituted?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, it was autumn of '73 and they were beginning to take more females in. We had probably seven or eight females out of a class of thirty.

The Foreign Service at the time still reflected the old Foreign Service – you know, male, pale and Yale. I remember talking with my classmates and realizing that I was in the minority because I had gone to public high school.

Myself and another guy were the only Vietnam vets, so we were a little rougher than some of the ones who had come from the right private schools.

I remember going on a retreat in West Virginia. We played touch football game and we weren't allowed to block or anything. I said, "How can you play a football game like that?"

*Q: Did you have a feel for what specialty you wanted in the Foreign Service?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I came in the consular cone. That was only because they told me when I came in, "Check this one" and I didn't know the difference. But I felt that I was more interested in political reporting and I eventually became a political officer.

*Q: Did you have any particular area you wanted to go to?*

GUNDERSEN: I wanted to go back to Norway, or the Soviet Union. But when I went through the junior officer course, you're given a list of all the openings and vice consul in Norway was on the list, so I put in for that and I got the assignment. So that was just serendipitous.

But it turned out it was not available until the following summer, with a nine month break for language and other training. But I didn't have to take the language. So to fill the gap my first assignment was as a liaison officer with a Soviet Exchange Group. The Soviet Exhibit was part of the bilateral exchange agreement with the Soviet Union. The Russians brought over groups and we went over to the Soviet Union with similar groups – on art, music, sports, etc.. So I was assigned a Liaison Officer following the Exhibit as it toured through the United States.

*Q: What tour was this?*

GUNDERSEN: They called it the Soviet Youth exhibit. Their "youth" wasn't that youthful. Most were in their late thirties, who had kids and a wife at home, were party



members and were vetted against the possibility of defecting. However, they were experts in their field such as Soviet art and architecture and paintings and music. By the way, members of the group always used the word “Soviet” never “Russian.”

And so they toured the United States. We went to Washington, Pittsburgh, Houston, Kansas City, Denver and San Francisco. So I followed them. That was a great job.

*Q: What was your impression of this Soviet effort to display a positive face to the United States?*

GUNDERSEN: I got along with most everyone on the tour, but they were obviously carefully selected for their loyalty to the party. But I gradually realized that it was difficult to have real open discussion, especially on politics; the type of freewheeling even provocative discussions I’ve always enjoyed. You also become aware of who are the KGB goons – I mean minders - because you’re there every day, you know those things. Eventually we did begin to talk about things like family, humor, sports and, yes, even sex – things and feelings that all people share.

And even though I got to like the people I dealt with, the tour made me more cynical about the system.

*Q: Were you sort of briefed by your handlers in the State Department on this, on what you should do and shouldn’t do?*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, I had a short briefing by the Soviet desk, Jack Matlock was the head of the desk then, he became ambassador later, what I should be reporting on, about their contacts, what political groups they would meet. Outside of that brief I was pretty much on my own. The Department at the time, unlike today, expected officers to handle pretty much any situation without much training. This approach had both advantages and disadvantages, needless to say.

So I had two jobs: one was to assist the Soviets, get everything from reserving hotel space to working with local officials, setting up meetings with journalists, mayors, even protecting them, that is providing security from anti-communist groups such as the JDL, the Jewish Defense League, and various East European groups who protested at the sites of the Exhibits. Of course, we never limited the rights of these groups to protest, but worked with the local police to make sure the protest didn’t turn violent. The Russians, of course, found it hard to believe that I, as a government representative, couldn’t just tell these groups to f--- off. So I was to help the Soviets, but my second job was to report back to Washington on their activities and their impressions.

*Q: How did you find the reaction of Americans? Were there demonstrations, was there much of a crowd? How did this thing work?*

GUNDERSEN: It was interesting, because, as I mentioned, there were ethnic anti-Russian groups, in Pittsburgh we had Poles and Hungarians, very anti-Russian and then

you had the JDL protesting. Remember this, because this was immediately after the Yom Kippur War and the Soviets were restricting Jewish emigration.

Then you had Marxist groups that were pro-Soviet. And I had to sometimes help the Soviet officials understand each of these groups' agenda and how they operated in a free society – not an easy task. We got intelligence, for example, from the FBI that the JDL was going to be a certain place and avoid these places. So I was charged with working with all sides.

In addition, the labor unions at that time were anti-Soviet, because of George Meany, AFL-CIO President, and some of them wouldn't work on setting up their exhibit. So it was a real mixed bag.

My basic approach was this was America – an open society - and that the members of the Soviet Exhibit should get out to meet average Americans. I tried to get them out, take them out to a local bar or local rock concerts. I think they really enjoyed that. Although their KGB minders – and some of my State superiors - did not.

*Q: When this exhibit closed, was that about time to go to Norway?*

GUNDERSEN: Right. It closed in San Francisco in June or so and then I went to Norway in late July, August.

*Q: Did anybody defect from the exhibit?*

GUNDERSEN: Nobody defected,. They were very thoroughly vetted and most of them were the sons or daughters of the Communist elite or had a husband or wife back in the Soviet Union.

But there were one or two who began to ask questions and one was sent home because I think they worried he was going to defect.

*Q: Did you come away with, say, a sensitivity towards the Soviet issue that maybe you wouldn't have had if hadn't had this experience?*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, the tour piqued my interest in the Soviet Union and thought I would like to serve there at some point. It didn't make me more sympathetic to the system, however. The more I experienced first hand and the more I read, the more I realized the regime is not a good thing and that there was a Cold War for a reason. I wasn't a Cold Warrior, but I believed that this was a bad regime that we needed to fight it, diplomatically.

But I did really enjoy the Russian people, the ones I met. They were allowed to drink and they knew how to drink and although I'm not a drinker, but I have a tolerance, so I could match them drinking vodka, which elevated me in their eyes.

One incident, I thought was interesting, occurred outside of Houston. The Russians had been out drinking and they were pulled over by a cop in some small Texas town and put in jail. This is the anti-communist, deeply religious rural deep south of 1974. They had never seen a real godless Russian before.

The Russians were deathly afraid, perhaps justifiably that they were going to be sent back and they're going to be sent to the Gulag for embarrassing the regime.

I was in Houston at the time and the Russian group called me up (they were afraid to call their minders or the Soviet Embassy). I drove down to this town and talked to the local sheriff about sports, girls, etc, and then joked about his Russian prisoners, "Well, they're just Russian good ol' boys on a bender, they're really stupid, but this could create a real incident, you don't want to get involved with that. " So I got 'em out of jail with nothing further happening; the sheriff just let them out.

And after that, the Russians were my best friends, I couldn't do anything wrong.

*Q: Well, then, you came back to the State Department and eventually Norway?*

GUNDERSEN: I went to the embassy in Oslo. I went there as vice consul.

*Q: You were there for how long?*

GUNDERSEN: Two years, a little over two years.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

GUNDERSEN: First it was Tom Byrne, who was a labor leader and good friend of Hubert Humphrey. Then William Anders came, who was a Ford appointee and a former astronaut.

I served one year as vice consul, one year rotating between the economic and political section.

*Q: Let's talk about the consular side. By that time, was there much immigration?*

GUNDERSEN: No, we had some immigration, but that wasn't a major part of our workload. The one issue that came up relatively frequently was membership in the Communist Party.

After the war, northern Norway was occupied for a while by the Russians, by Cold War standards a relatively benign occupation. So a lot of local people joined the Party because that was the way you get a job.

So now they're in their sixties; they've saved a little money and want to visit relatives in the States. When they came for an interview and I was supposed to ask them if they had

ever been members of the Communist or Fascist Party. Being honest folk, they would answer directly: “Oh, ja, sure, I was a member of the party there for six months. Oh, ja, we all did it.”

Then you have to send their visa application back to Washington for review and get a waiver and all that stuff. And probably doing things illegally, I just said, “I don’t want to know about your Party affiliations, I just want to know that you’re not an active Communist or fascist now and that you’re not intending to emigrate to the United States.” I sort of prepped them on what not to say, these old fishermen.

*Q: Was there a feeling that there might be a Soviet invasion, or not?*

GUNDERSEN: I don’t think by that time there was in the general population a feeling there’d be an invasion. However, there was a sense that “We need to keep our defense up.” They always talked about April of 1940, when the Germans sailed right up the Oslo fjord and they couldn’t do anything about it alone.

The Norwegians fought a reasonable resistance, in comparison with Denmark and other victims of the Nazis, but they realized that they couldn’t provide for their own defense, so the majority of Norwegians strongly support Norway’s membership in NATO. You also have to remember that a small country like Norway now realizes that they can only protect their sovereignty through multi-lateral institutions like NATO. Large countries like the US, Russia and China sometime believe the opposite – that is, multilateral institutions limit their ability to protect their sovereignty.

Regarding the Soviet Union, they didn’t think invasion was imminent, although some of the military people worried, but I don’t think it was a major issue for the general populace.

*Q: Well, were Soviet submarines playing games in the fjords?*

GUNDERSEN: They were, it was known by the military, but they didn’t publicize it.

*Q: What was it, “Whiskey on the rocks?”*

GUNDERSEN: That was in Sweden, and that was a little later in the early Eighties.

*Q: A Soviet submarine, which we called the Whiskey class, got stuck on the rocks in the Stockholm archipelago.*

GUNDERSEN: That’s right, when the tide came out and there’s this Russian sub just sitting there. It’s pretty hard to deny that. I don’t think that captain had a very nice homecoming in Moscow when that happened.

*Q: What about Sweden? One hears these jokes sort of second hand about one Norwegian chasing twenty Swedes, or vice versa, there are a lot of these Swedish-Norwegian jokes. How was it, in your time, as far as relations?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, as you know, I Chair Nordic area studies here at the Foreign Service Institute, so I still have to follow Scandinavian affairs. The ditty I heard as a child was “ten thousand Swedes went through the weeds, chased by one Norwegian.” So I just got one side of the story.

A lot of the Swedish-American rivalry and jokes came from Swedish and Norwegian immigrants, who settled in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest. They settled in their own communities, so those differences were sort of frozen in time from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Q: This is one of the things that, it permeates American politics, that when immigrants come over, they have sort of their set ways and the things they hang onto. The Armenian issue with Turkey gets played out in Glendale, California, it gets virulent.*

GUNDERSEN: That’s right. The attitude when you came over gets frozen and it goes on from generation to generation. The Norwegian and Swedish rivalry has largely disappeared, although a friendly rivalry remains witness the Sven and Ole jokes.

Back in Scandinavia there was some animosity - although nothing compared with conflicts among some other European ethnic groups - because of Norway’s junior status from 1814 to full independence in 1905 and especially because of Swedish neutrality in World War II. For example, the Swedes benefited from trade with Hitler during the War. Again, that animosity has largely disappeared.

*Q: What about Germans? When you were there, how were Germans viewed?*

GUNDERSEN: Some in the older generation view the Germans skeptically, because the Germans had invaded, had occupied the country with hundreds of thousands of troops.

So there was some anti-German feeling, but it wasn’t as strong as it would be in Poland or places like that. And my father grew up, as that generation did, learning German as a first foreign language, so there wasn’t an anti-ethnic German, but anti-Nazi feeling. And, of course, my father, who fought the Nazis, readily welcomed my wife Eike, who is German, into the family.

*Q: If I recall correctly, there was a lot of resentment, during World War One Norway had been quite helpful to a lot of Germans who suffered, taking them in and then all of a sudden they had this aggression against them.*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, for example, Fridtjof Nansen, who was a Norwegian politician and philanthropist, organized relief efforts for Germans and other refugees and won the Nobel Peace Prize.

*Q: And there was a Nansen passport {a document he designed which was the first internationally recognized refugee travel document.*

GUNDERSEN: Right, exactly, so Nansen was a hero to many. Norway took in a lot of German Boy Scouts, too, because they had nice outdoor camps. It turned out some of those Boy Scouts, this was in the Thirties, were actually members of the *Hitler Jugend*, and were told to spy on the Norwegians; how deep are the harbors and where do the boats come, for example? And during and immediately after the war that led to understandable anti-German feeling.

*Q: Well, how did you find life in Oslo?*

GUNDERSEN: Oh, it was great. I had relatives there, I socialized a lot. Of course I really got into cross country skiing. And so it was a good time.

*Q: How about when you were doing political-economic work? What were the politics of Norway at the time?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, the Labor Party had been the dominant party in Norway since the Thirties, but it was a moderate Labor Party, pro-NATO. But there was a strong sentiment in the left and among some of the youth to get out of NATO. One of my jobs was to report on that, that attitude of the left. In my work, I got to know many of the youth leaders, who would later become major forces in Norwegian politics. And I worked economic issues. Their aid program, they had a big aid program, those are some of the reports I remember doing.

Because I spoke Norwegian, I got to know the FSNs well and worked intra-Embassy issues between the American and Norwegian staff.

*Q: What sort of prompted the labor movement to be anti-American?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, the labor movement did not have monolithic ideas. The older labor movement supported the Labor Party and the Labor Party controlled the government, which was a solid NATO member. So I don't think you could say that the labor movement was anti-American.

And a lot of them had been in either the government in exile in London or in Washington during the war. One of reasons I think that Norwegian politics is not quite as vituperative as here is that they all worked together in a coalition government in World War Two.

*Q: During this period, Sweden was sort of socialist left and rather doctrinaire in its portrayal of the United States.*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, I think it was different in Sweden at the time. Olaf Palme, who was prime minister, had, in fact, demonstrated, while serving as prime minister, in front of the American Embassy against the Vietnam War.

He was not personally anti-American and he also was not pro-Soviet, because he also protested the invasion of Czechoslovakia in front of the Soviet Embassy. He had also studied in and had fond memories of the States. But I think you could say that he thought of himself and Swedes as morally superior to both superpowers.

*Q: Well, the Swedes have a lot of at least not very nice television coverage of the United States. Were the Norwegians doing the same thing, dwelling on our racial problems, our poverty problems, all this?*

GUNDERSEN: I don't think as much as in Sweden, but there was an element of anti-Americanism. It may also be because people who went into journalism tended to be more on the political left. One of USIA's responsibilities at the embassy was to try and counteract that by getting an American perspective on TV and in the press in order to present a more balanced view of the America. I worked with USIA on that front.

In the final analysis, because so many Norwegians have relatives and had been to the States, that prejudice was balanced by the knowledge that this country's not as bad as it had sometimes portrayed.

*Q: Did you feel the hand of the Norwegian immigrant community in Minnesota and Wisconsin and all in your work?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, you would see them there as tourists, but they tended to be more conservative than their ancestors. Many of the first and second generations, like Walter Mondale, for example, became members of the Democratic Farmer Labor Party in Minnesota. They were from the working class and worked as farmers, miners and loggers. But by the next generation many became Republicans.

*Q: Yeah, well, actually, when one thinks about it, Norway and Sweden were really not very nice places back a century ago or so and people were getting out from a very class ridden areas.*

GUNDERSEN: Sweden was relatively prosperous compared with Norway, because they had better farmland and more resources and they stayed out of wars. But Norway was one of the poorest countries in Europe.

After the war, Norway's per capita income was comparable to Bulgaria. When my father grew up it really hardscrabble and the emigration rates, especially at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was the highest, except for Ireland, in Europe.

If you weren't the oldest son, you didn't inherit the farm or much of anything,, so the rest of the family often left.

*Q: You were there two years?*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah.

*Q: And what then?*

GUNDERSEN: Then I went back to the Department and worked in the Operations Center, 'cause I figured that was where the action was.

*Q: Did you gather a bride up while you were in Norway, or not?*

GUNDERSEN: No, I didn't. I married later in life.

*Q: Norway's known for these attractive young ladies.*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I somehow either escaped or they didn't want me. I came back single. I married a German girl, Eike Raudzus years after and we're still happily married.

I wanted to work in the nub of the State Department. The DCM in Norway was Jerry Bremer. He recommended that I work in the State Department's Operation Center – the hub of 7<sup>th</sup> floor activities.

*Q: I've interviewed Jerry.*

GUNDERSEN: I still keep in touch with him. Actually, I taught him how to cross country ski. He was very driven. He was a young DCM and he said, "I want to learn to ski," so I went out with him. He worked long hours, but we'd go out and practice after work. Our goal, which we accomplished, was to ski the famous 50 K race - the Holmenkollen Cross Country race - together.

So he recommended I work in the Department's Secretariat, which includes the Operations Center and put in a good word. I worked as a watch officer.

*Q: The Operations Center is very much staffed by people recommended by people who've been involved in similar work previously and Jerry Bremer was always a prime player in the State Department staff apparatus.*

GUNDERSEN: He had been one of Kissinger's aides.

*Q: All right, you did this, what, for a year?*

GUNDERSEN: A little over a year, yeah.

*Q: What were you doing?*



GUNDERSEN: I was a watch officer, which means you take all the incoming calls, you make sure that the cables that are going out are cleared correctly, you distribute cables when they come in at night. So we got to learn the Department – what the regional and functional bureaus did and didn't do. If there was a crisis or an earthquake or a coup we would call and alert the appropriate Department officials. Of course, this was in the days before the internet and social media, so we were the communication hub of Department activities.

So we'd do that for a couple weeks, then we'd work as the editor of the Secretary's morning brief. We'd look at the incoming cables and determine which one's to summarize for the Secretary, writing a one or two line synopsis of each. We also wrote longer, more reports based on all source reporting, including intelligence reports.

*Q: How'd you find the work?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I found it instructive. I learned more about the State Department; got to feel the whole elephant. We worked long hours - two days on each shift, around the clock, so every six days we'd work two midnight shifts. But I didn't mind that. It was a good place to be and learn the Department.

At the time I bought a town house in Southwest, DC, near the Arena Stage, which was very much a transitional neighborhood. I rented rooms to and hung out with the actors and actresses (they all liked to be called the generic term "actor."), so I really lived two totally different life styles. I guess I bring this up to encourage my fellow State colleagues to get out of their comfort zone in official Washington. They'd enjoy it.

*Q: While you were doing this, were there any memorable developments?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, we had a contest among the officer who could write the quirkiest titles for the Secretary's morning summary. I remember when former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir died during my shift I was charged with writing a short note. I remembered that she was born in the States – in Milwaukee and they had a funeral procession, so I entitled my piece: "The Bier That Made Milwaukee Famous." We got a note back from the Secretary: "No jokes!" But I understand from his aide that he actually laughed at that.

*Q: Well, then, after a little more than a year, where'd you go?*

GUNDERSEN: I went from there to Stanford to study Soviet affairs.

*Q: You were at Stanford for, what, about a year?*

GUNDERSEN: A year, yeah.

*Q: How'd you find Stanford?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I flew to San Francisco and made a left – just kidding. It's a top-notch school year, obviously. The program, which no longer exists, unfortunately, was very competitive. You could choose any school in the States to study and write – all expenses paid. Having been an undergrad, living two or three guys in a room and just getting by, now I was paid full salary and *per diem*, so it was really a fool's paradise.

I studied Soviet affairs and arms control, because the Soviet desk had recruited me to do that, with an onward assignment to Moscow.

I must admit I chose Stanford less for its academics, which were great, than the fact it's a great place to live with great weather. I visited both Harvard and Columbia, it was sleeting in late March when I took the trip. Then I visited Stanford; it was 70 degrees and coeds running around the campus in shorts, so I came up with an academic rationale to justify going there.

*Q: Absolutely. One doesn't take these things for pleasure, but*

GUNDERSEN: It's good to combine the two. But it was a great year. I did a lot of reading in Russian history and literature and arms control. I also taught a course in US foreign policy and wrote a paper on Soviet nationalities. At the time, no one foresaw the break up of the Soviet Union into various ethnically based nations. So my paper caused some consternation in the State Department.

*Q: Stanford, on Soviet things, has a great collection. One thinks of it as being, particularly at that time, quite a conservative place, nor not? How did you find it?*

GUNDERSEN: The Hoover Institute, which was on but separate from Stanford, was conservative. Even though it has that image of just being a collection of conservative émigrés, but it had a mixed group, it has some who would be considered liberal, but its strength was a conservative/orthodox ideology. Solzhenitsyn, for example, had his archives there. I wouldn't say conservative in terms of U.S. domestic politics, but it was definitely anti-communist.

*Q: That's probably a better definition, yeah.*

GUNDERSEN: But the Stanford campus was not conservative. One of my professors, Barton Bernstein, one of the best-known revisionist historians, put much of the blame for the Cold War on the United States. We had some heated, but friendly, discussions in the class. So it was a mixed group of professors. But all top notch people.

*Q: What was your impression, you were having this chance to look at the Soviet Union in, what was it,*

GUNDERSEN: '78.

*Q: Okay, we're talking about eleven years before it fell apart. But did you have any inkling, was anybody talking of that?*

GUNDERSEN: I'd like to say, yes, I was the only one who knew it was going to happen. But, no.

*Q: I've talked to people who, up until October of '89, it was really a surprise.*

GUNDERSEN: Everyone assumed this was going to be like this for our lifetime and that it was a question of tinkering at the margins. Remember the 1970's was a time of that the Soviet Union was seen by many as the ascendant power. On the other hand, the U.S. was seen as a declining even decadent power. We had just gone through defeat in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, plus inflation and oil embargos. Iran had just taken American hostages in our embassy in Teheran during my tenure at Stanford.

So the U.S. was seen as a demoralized, declining power. Using Cuban proxies, Moscow had successfully intervened militarily in Angola and Ethiopia. Even though the Russians weren't loved there, a lot of Third World leaders said, "Well, I'm going to hitch myself onto to this rising power, the Soviet Union. It gives me a convenient governing rationale, calling myself a Marxist, to represent the proletariat." So it was a nice intellectual rationale.

So at the time there was a sense that, at best, we were just containing the Soviet Union's advance.

But the more I studied it, I came to the realization that it was not a system that offered any sort of long term solutions and that the more people knew about it, it wasn't going to work out.

So I lost a little bit of my fear of the Soviets as the wave of the future.

*Q: So many people would come back from the Soviet Union and say, "It really doesn't work." But we were overawed by the military might and all this.*

GUNDERSEN: They did use a major portion of their resources to become a great power, which was, ironically, one of the reasons that the society didn't work, because they didn't take care of consumer and other needs.

I began to see other holes in the facade. I wrote papers on nationality issues, for example. Now, we say, "Oh, of course, Moscow could never keep the Ukraine and Estonia satisfied," but at the time that was not the conventional wisdom at all. The Communist doctrine was that they were making a Soviet Man and eventually nationality issues would disappear. And remember even many so-called western intellectuals like Sartre and Lillian Hellman were still apologists for the Soviet Union.

But the more I studied, witnessed and talked to average Russians, the more I realized that that was not the case. And that was one of the things I got out of my time at Stanford and it reinforced when I got to Moscow.

*Q: Well, then, after Stanford, what did you do?*

GUNDERSEN: Then I took Russian language training and then to Moscow. And so the intention was that my specialty was going to be arms control and nationalities.

*Q: How did you find the language?*

GUNDERSEN: I enjoyed it. I had a disadvantage, because I started the language before I went to Stanford, for three months. Then I went to Stanford without language training. Then I came back to relearn my Russian. So I didn't really get the full advantage of the solid 9 months of uninterrupted Russians my colleagues had received.

I'm much better orally. In terms of the grammar, my Russian wasn't as good as I'd like. In any case it's a fascinating and rich language.

*Q: You said you were studying the various ethnic groups in the Soviet Union at that time. What was your impression of the viability of this sort of multi-ethnic empire?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I guess the assumption by almost everyone was that the Soviet Union was going to remain recognizably the same state through our lifetime. But my evolving thinking was that these nationality and ethnic issues were deeper than commonly thought and that they were not going to disappear and that you're not going to create a Soviet Man and that Moscow was going to have difficulties accommodating these nationalities.

*Q: When did you go to the Soviet Union?*

GUNDERSEN: That would have been the summer of 1979.

*Q: Okay, today is the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, 2012, with Jon Gundersen and we'll pick this up in 1979, in the Soviet Union. What were you doing in the Soviet Union then?*

GUNDERSEN: I think the last thing we discussed was that I was assigned by the Soviet desk to Embassy Moscow. As part of that forward assignment I was sent to Stanford to study Soviet affairs, arms control.

So I spent '78-'79 at Stanford, got a master's in what was then known as Soviet studies, went to Moscow, where I was first assigned as PPO, or Press and Publications Officer, which was somewhat of a cover.

My main job was traveling around the Soviet Union, buying books and publications in the local language. The travel was funded by the CIA, because they read the literature. I

was briefed by a guy named Murray Feshbach, who was very famous Sovietologist, because he was the first to focus on the demographic problems in the Soviet Union, alcoholism and abortions and declining birth rates. He used the literature that we collected in the regions, which were unavailable in Moscow, to discuss the possible political consequences of social and demographic problems.

One regional almanac I collected was something called *Narodnoe Khozyaistva*, which is sort of the “Peoples Almanac.” Each nationality had their own and the statistics that came out of those, hospitalization and birthrates, for example, gave us a picture of the future of the Soviet Union, which was much more grim than the Soviet Union we knew in 1979.

*Q: It still is today.*

GUNDERSEN: Well, yes, that’s when it began to dawn on some us that the Soviet Union had a real long-term problem on its hands. That it was not the ascendant power I had to referred to in on earlier discussion.. And that Marxism was a false god that offered nothing to the proletariat or common man.

*Q: Well, could you talk a bit about that job?*

GUNDERSEN: A lot of Soviet hands who later did quite well had the PPO job relatively junior officers. As I mentioned the main part of the job was traveling around the Soviet Union to the various republics, to collect literature but also report on nationality issues and do reports from those travels.

So I traveled to the Baltics, the Caucasus, to Central Asia, everywhere from Tallinn to Alma Ata to Tbilisi to Irkutsk. You really got a sense that you not get just reporting out of Moscow.

So I literally bought thousands of books. I had to travel with somebody, because those were the Embassy rules, correctly so, because oftentimes the KGB, who always tailed us would try to compromise you.

They tried to do that by sometimes having an attractive young girl “happen” to sit next to me on the plane (every other seat coincidentally had been taken). When we’d arrive, the girl would say, “Oh, we have a room reserved for you” and they had a special room for us at the hotel that was clearly bugged. Needless to say, I didn’t take the bait. Even though I a man I’m not that stupid.

Another time my travel companion was an attractive female American officer, married, and the clerk said, “Oh, we have only one room for you,” I think this was in Baku, “just for the two of you, “ setting us up for a blackmail situation. Obviously we didn’t do anything, but we thought it was pretty humorous.

So I didn’t just collect books.

*Q: I've talked to some people who've done this. Some of the bookstore managers loved you, because as far as they were concerned, their business was settling books, these were not particularly bestsellers.*

GUNDERSEN: Exactly. We'd had a list of books and topics we got from Washington (actually the CIA) and we'd buy a number of copies of the book: these were often biographies about leaders like Brezhnev and local leaders, Books on Communist and Marxist doctrine or local almanacs. So, yes, the book store managers were happy to see us buy books no one else wanted to read..

Only certain Western books, like by Hemingway or Jack London or Faulkner, when available, would sell out immediately. Certain of these books were not censored because they were deemed anti-Capitalist. So we didn't buy those, we bought the ones that they had to display, Brezhnev's works, etc..

*Q: I was in Yugoslavia for five years. There was a big bookstore there and I was told by one of our local employees, "Go look." There, in the cultural section, was George Orwell's Animal Farm, which was selling quite well.*

GUNDERSEN: I did find "Animal Farm" in one book store, I think in Uzbekistan. Probably the local apparatchik was a little dense and figured this had to be a book about animal husband. In Moscow, the ideological minders rightly understood it was a parody on Soviet socialism. Probably Yugoslavia censors were more tolerant or less ideological at the time. So we went in and bought the books, lugged them back. Usually we went to *Dom Knigi*, which was the main bookstore, it means "House of Books," in each of the cities. So that was my first year job.

*Q: What was your impression of the Soviet Union at that time? You went around beyond the capital. How did it strike you?*

GUNDERSEN: Most anyone who went to the Soviet Union was struck by the fact that it was essentially a Third World country with a superpower image. They obviously had a very strong military, but most everything else didn't work. That impression was reinforced by going to and traveling around the provinces.

I think the second thing that struck me was that nationality, ethnicity issue was something that was real and despite what the Soviet Union said about the creation of the New Soviet Man and allegiance first to the state, that was not the fact.

I remember in Baku, in a bar, seeing a fight between an Armenian and an Azeri. You could hear that the dispute was clearly just ethnic, vituperative.

The Embassy didn't really report on nationalities, because from the Moscow perspective, the official line was it's not a real problem. The Embassy was reporting on more pressing issues like Afghanistan, arms control, Jewish emigration, and human rights and dissidents. But even the best-known dissidents, by the way, were very Russo-centric. And

so the reporting that came out of Moscow, both by the embassy and by journalists, was about the same issues,, but very little about nationalities. Everyone was talking to the same officials an even dissidents like Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov, who were all ethnic Russians. In other words, regarding ethnic issues, they heard the same story: a communist Soviet Union or a greater democratic Russia would not breakup and dissolve into ethnic based units.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

GUNDERSEN: '79 to '81.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

GUNDERSEN: First was Malcolm Toon. He was an old Soviet hand, a career guy, and then we had a Chargé, Jack Matlock, who became ambassador later. Matlock was followed by Tom Watson, who was the CEO of IBM.

Toon was solid. Like most diplomats who served in Moscow for an extended period of time, Toon had no illusions about the Soviet Union. Moscow's one of those places, the longer you're there, the more skeptical you become.

In many countries, they accuse Foreign Service Officers of becoming overly protective of their host governments. In other words, they are infected by "clientitis" and of carrying their country's water in Washington. They don't accuse Foreign Service people who go to Moscow of that.

Toon was tough and knowledgeable., Matlock had majored in Russian and knew the country inside out. Watson was put there in the later part of the Carter years. It was a short period characterized by a window of optimism about U.S.-Soviet relations. Both sides wanted to sign a SALT II Treaty and to increase trade. Watson wanted to increase business contacts as well.

But when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan before Christmas '79 we considered what to do and how do we react. Watson didn't want to react too strongly, because he felt that it would hurt American business.

Most of us at a more junior level said, "This is such a transgression of basic international law and that the world, including the Muslim world, expected us to react strongly, and that we needed to do so. So there was tension in the embassy at the time.

*Q: As you got there, what were the people who were reporting talking about Brezhnev and company? He was getting pretty old by this time.*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, part of our job was to try to decipher what was from happening. It was hard to do, because we didn't know much about the inner workings of the Kremlin. but we were constantly trying to read the tea leaves..

I remember we had a visit of Daniel Boorstin, who was the Librarian of Congress. I was his control officer. I traveled with him and he met with the Minister of Culture, Madame Furtseva, who was female, the only one in the Soviet leadership. During the meeting, we found out in his conversation that she had not been invited to a Politburo meeting, where one of the subjects was Afghanistan. This was a month before the invasion. We speculated on why she had not and thought that perhaps subject matter was too sensitive. Unfortunately, we did not speculate that they were planning an invasion.

And that's the type of information we didn't normally get. So those are the type of things you try to find out.

And, yes, Brezhnev, he lived another three years or so, was not as in command as he had been. We were constantly trying to figure out who was up and who was down. You always looked within the Politburo, who got more space in *Pravda*, who was on Brezhnev's right on the saluting plenum atop Lenin's Tomb at the May Day or October Revolution parades, these type of things. You have to understand that this was the height of the Cold War and that this was the focus of American foreign policy, so we had a sense that our cables were actually read at the highest level in Washington.

*Q: At the time of the invasion of Afghanistan, was there any consensus about why the hell they did it? It may have been a different type of communist government that was overthrown by Soviet troops, but it was a communist government and here the Soviets invaded.*

GUNDERSEN: Well, there was much discussion. Interpretations ranged from the most dire, that the Russians were looking to expand their influence and Empire all the way through Iran and Pakistan to get warm water ports, to, "Well, it was just reactive, the communist president in power was not popular, so they wanted to get their communist guy in there." And this episode should not disrupt our bilateral relations.

Even in retrospect, it's hard to know exactly why they did it. I think we now realize that the Kremlin didn't think it would be as costly as it turned out to be, both politically or economically or certainly in terms of the survival of the system. Of course, Brezhnev and the Politburo expected a certain amount of Western condemnation, but that storm would soon pass and they would quickly suppress the rebellion as they had in Budapest and Prague. They had most recently also been able to intervene through Cuban proxies in Africa without real Western counter-actions. Sure, there would be some Western protests, but these would soon disappear.

They thought they could control the populace, the *mujahideen*, etc and they obviously could not. But, at the time, given their experience, they thought they could put in their own puppet and withdraw quickly. Obviously, they had not read Afghan history.

*Q: On these trips you made to various places, were you able to get into any meaningful discussions with the people you'd meet?*



GUNDERSEN: Not as much as I would have liked, because we always had a KGB tail. The local KGB was told that two Americans would be in their bailiwick and to follow them. Some regional KGB types were more sophisticated than others.

I remember, I think it was in Baku, that they followed us like Keystone Kops, ten feet behind, and when we turned around they would look up and point their cameras up and we would jump on buses and jump off, just to lose our tails just to piss them off.

Most of the people we met had never seen a Westerner and they were a little suspicious. But we did get into conversations, especially if you're in a place where they have a drink or two. That was always interesting reporting.

*Q: When we put on all sorts of sanctions on the Soviets after the '79 invasion of Afghanistan. Were there counterdemonstrations in Moscow?*

GUNDERSEN: Not really. I can think of one or two, but we always used to joke the word would go out that at 1400 there will be a spontaneous demonstration at the American Embassy.

It was all controlled. I don't think they wanted to have real mass demonstrations. And I never felt any sense of danger, or anything like that.

The Soviets wanted to play down Afghanistan and if they played up the Western reaction to it, it brought attention to Afghanistan. 'After all, they were sending Russian and other kids there to die and they knew it. When they had burials of war dead they never publicized it, they never brought all of the casualties to one hospital or one region. They were very careful not to shed any light on the casualties of war.

*Q: I'm told that there was some visiting of graveyards and all that? Did you get involved in that?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, not so much related to Afghanistan, because those casualties did not begin to pile up until '82-'83-'84. I did visit graveyards just out of historical interest, because they give a sense of who had power by where they were buried.

We visited Pasternak's grave, for example, to see who was visiting. It's right outside of Moscow.

We went to a funeral of Visotsky, a mildly anti-regime pop singer. It was not publicized but we heard about it through the dissident grapevine. There were tens of thousands in attendance who spontaneously showed up crying and weeping. And that showed he was listened to. And that's the sort of reporting we'd do that was a little outside the normal reporting.

I should mention I also ran the Russian language program at the Embassy. The Russian teachers were assigned to us by the so-called Soviet Protocol Department (UPDK), who were a branch of the KGB. I got to know a lot of the Russian teachers, even though they reported to the KGB, as fellow human beings.

I remember attending the funeral of the husband of one of the teachers. It was a very Russian event and there was a lot of drinking and crying and laughing.

So I actually got to go to a lot of Russian homes, much more than the rest of the officers. I also knew some dissidents, artists. I showed old American films at my apartment. We received some first rate American films that the Soviets allowed us to show. They couldn't stop us from showing them; often times the Russian teachers attended.

I remember we watched *The Deer Hunter*, which was a very good movie about Vietnam. It was set in a Western Pennsylvania steel mill town populated by ethnic Russians. My Russian guests loved seeing the old babushkas yelling at the young kids about to be sent to Vietnam. So they really found that powerful, because it was just at a time when their own adventure in Afghanistan was unfolding and their sons were being sent there.

I remember we showed *Kramer Versus Kramer*, which the Soviets had no problem with, because it showed American divorce and some of the bad aspects of American society.

But all the Russians who saw it were most interested in the kitchens of the middle class. I would show a movie, then we'd talk about it afterwards.

*Q: Were you there during the hostage crisis in Iran?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, not when the Teheran embassy was overrun in 1978, but I was there as the situation unfolded.

*Q: How was that playing at the time, or was there much interest in it?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, there was interest, but the Soviets were very careful. They actually reported the story fairly straight, because they had an interest in protecting their own diplomats. So they just reported that the UN and others were trying to get the hostages out. It was actually unusual to hear such unbiased reporting.

*Q: Did the KGB give you a problem there, in Moscow?*

GUNDERSEN: They had a KGB guy assigned to me. He would periodically call me to get together. And the funny thing is the KGB had probably the most sophisticated, best training in English and American culture as this guy had. I joked with him about it, that he had learned his English by reading Raymond Chandler novels or by seeing old movies, *film noir* and Humphrey Bogart.

So he'd always call and say, "Hey, Jon, how ya doin'?" Hey, pal, it's a swell day, ain't it, buddy?" He'd use this sort of slang from that time.

I was a single guy, I was fairly adventurous, I thought of it as a game. We'd try to avoid a tail and when I would hear the phone click, I'd yell at them in Russian, "How the hell can you live your life listening to somebody else?"

Whenever they wanted to show us that they didn't like that they'd pull the plug on our refrigerator or slash our tires, things like that. But nothing more serious.

*Q: Did you have to do with other embassies there?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes. My second year one of my responsibilities was to handle the upcoming Olympics in Moscow in '80. So initially the job was to be the control officer for Congressional and other delegations.

But when we decided to boycott the Olympics as a punishment for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, my job changed drastically. We now worked with NATO and other countries to try to get other countries to support the boycott. So we met at least every other week to find out what each country was doing and report back to Washington with recommendations.

*Q: The Olympics occurred while you were there?*

GUNDERSEN: Right.

*Q: I'm told that embassy officers were told to keep away from the Olympics.*

GUNDERSEN: Yes. That was U.S. policy. But I loved sports, especially the Olympics and as the control officer I would have gotten to go all these events. Obviously, if you're boycotting an American representative can't show up. So, yeah, I was disappointed, but I understood the policy. Although I must admit I had mixed feelings about the boycott.

But I did have a lot of contacts with other embassies. For one thing, you couldn't fraternize with Soviets, so your potential social circle was limited, but there were journalists and others who were there, so you did have a social life. My girl friend at the time, for example, was a young Dutch diplomat. She's now the Dutch ambassador in Washington here.

*Q: Did you feel that you wanted to become a real Soviet hand, or not?*

GUNDERSEN: I think so, yeah, I found it fascinating. You're happy to leave, just because it's so restrictive, but I always felt I would come back at some point and I always followed Soviet affairs, even when I was not working in the area.

*Q: You left there in '81?*

GUNDERSEN: '81, yes.

*Q: Where'd you go?*

GUNDERSEN: I went to the Office of UN Political Affairs. I dealt with all UN political-military issues and that included Soviet affairs. So I was here in Washington from '81 and '83 and did a lot of traveling to the U.N. in New York in that time.

*Q: Were you located in the Pol-Mil Bureau?*

GUNDERSEN: The Bureau of International Organizations Affairs.

*Q: What were the basic issues that you dealt with?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I was responsible for arms control and political-military issues at the U.N. I remember I was the coordinating officer for the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace proposal. You get sort of a variety of jobs. Another job was as a speech writer for Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick and her Deputy, Ken Adelman. I became pretty good at knowing the party line and putting it on paper. I worked the 2<sup>nd</sup> Special Session on Disarmament, which Reagan addressed. It didn't have much difficulty with putting forward American positions, even when I didn't totally agree, because the UN at the time was so politicized and dominated by radical left wing states such as Cuba and Libya. Remember North Korea got more support than South Korea as the legitimate representative of the Korean people. Also half the resolutions revolved things like Zionism as racism.

Basically, in the Reagan Administration, my job was to say no, because the administration didn't want the UN dealing with these larger security issues. They were done in bilateral or NATO channels. So we were to make sure that any UN resolution didn't compromise NATO decisions or negotiations with the Soviet Union.

*Q: Did you get involved in any of the peacekeeping efforts?*

GUNDERSEN: Not so much. That was a different office.

The issue I had prime responsibility for in the U.S. government, it was not a major issue, but others had great interest in it, was a proposal to demilitarize the Indian Ocean called the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace Resolution.

We didn't want to just say no, because the Soviets were using it as propaganda to get rid of our base in Diego Garcia and naval access rights elsewhere in the region.

Our strategy was to refashion the proposal in such a way that would not compromise our security. So what we did was to write a declaration much like that for the CSCE, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, an outgrowth of the Helsinki

Accords, that you first must respect human rights, national sovereignty, adherence to international treaties, confidence building measures, before you could have any real disarmament. Our proposal containing these principles were a not so subtle attempt to link the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, where they transgressed all these principles, to the Indian Ocean negotiations. And so we wrote a proposal along these lines, which the Soviets could not agree to. This neutralized the issue.

*Q: And the Indians and Pakistanis could very well find that approach attractive.*

GUNDERSEN: That's right. I thought it was a clever way or defusing the issue.

*Q: Actually, the Indian Ocean had become quite a prowling ground for the Soviets and for us, too.*

GUNDERSEN: Right. This was a time when the Soviets had bases in Ethiopia and Yemen. We were quietly working with Somalia and Kenya to establish bases or at least naval access in the region. We were also building a military base in the British dependent territory of Diego Garcia. The Indians worried about the Pakistanis. The Soviets were in Afghanistan.

We were also saying if we discussed these Naval issues, we could not ignore the Indian Ocean "hinterlands", which included Afghanistan. So we said, if we're going to have demilitarization, it has to encompass those states as well. Now we knew it wasn't going to happen, but it was a way to defuse the issue. UN diplomacy was often a case of protecting US security interest, hitting the Russians, but, at the same time, not alienating developing nations. It was Kabuki theater by all concerned.

*Q: What was your impression of the UN, personnel there and all?*

GUNDERSEN: I didn't have an especially positive impression. The UN does a lot of good work, on refugees and peacekeeping and health. But politically it was a time when the U.S. was very unpopular.

They were constantly discussing resolutions equating Zionism and racism and it was easy to attack Israel in the UN. So it was a little frustrating. The U.S. was also constantly under attacked.

I remember some of these Third World diplomats talking about the oppressed people and the international proletariat. I knew a lot of these guys, they've never got their hands dirty in their lives. They went to school at Oxford, came from their national elite, they were driving big cars and lecturing us on the proletariat. So I wasn't particularly impressed. I did enjoy arguing them, however..

*Q: Yeah, it's easy to lecture.*

*This is during the Reagan Administration. There were certain solid reasons why no administration would want to see certain issues like disarmament get involved with the UN, 'cause it wouldn't go anywhere. The Soviets and Americans and others had to talk to each other.*

*But did you have feel that the Reagan Administration per se not really giving a goddamn about the UN?*

GUNDERSEN: There was a lot of that feeling, sure. Most of the career people realized we have to deal with the UN, we're members of it, it does some good work. We had to think about our core interests, but not ignore the UN.

Many of the political appointees really disdained the UN. So there was a little tension there.

I came from an assignment in Moscow. As I mentioned, you tend to be more hard line after you've lived in the Soviet Union. And even though I didn't agree with all Reagan policies, you do react to some of the hypocrisy of the UN. They spent more time talking about oppression in Puerto Rica than about genocide in Cambodia. Where is the balance there?

*Q: You were there for two years?*

GUNDERSEN: Right. I was stationed in Washington, but I would go up for the UN General Assembly in the fall and then one or two sessions in the spring, so I was at the UN maybe four or five months a year.

*Q: How did you find the meetings you attended at the UN?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace meetings would never start on time. It was supposed to start at ten, but started at 11:30. So you had all these interpreters there waiting, getting paid a lot of money.

Each meeting was a little different. I understand some of the other committees were better organized. Committee chairmanships were based on a sort of regional quota system.

So I found the UN not very effective and to some to degree a waste of money, even though I think the UN is a very necessary institution.

*Q: Well, then, again, moving on, where'd you go after that?*

GUNDERSEN: In 1983, because I had worked on the US delegation with a guy named Ken Adelman, who was the second or third ranking ambassador at our delegation to the UN. I worked on some stuff with him and wrote some speeches. He a was a fun guy to work with. When he was nominated to be director of ACDA (the Arms Control Agency),

he asked me to prep him for his confirmation hearing. ACDA Director was almost a Cabinet level position at the time.

So one other guy and I became his aides while he was going through the Senate confirmation process, I guess in late '83. Adelman was a very controversial choice, because he was a hard liner. Remember, the Democrats controlled the Senate and Reagan's SDI the "Star Wars" missile defense program was being attacked by the Democrats.

So it was a very contentious hearing, partly because Adelman was an off the cuff guy and made joking statements about subjects like nuclear war, statements better said at a bar than a Senate Hearing. So I was there as a briefer, hand holder and filter

And then when he was confirmed, I accompanied Adelman to a lot of meetings with high level people. I was asked by one Ambassador, Jim Goodby, to be a member of the delegation to the Conference on Disarmament in Europe. He was slated to lead the US team to those negotiations. I was asked to be the head State representative on that delegation to the Stockholm CSCE Conference.

*Q: Back to Adelman, was part of your job to keep him from shooting his mouth off about things that would get him barred from the job?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I wouldn't say that exactly. I would say, I know him and could joke with him, he's a tennis partner, so I was able to speak to him frankly and to keep him from saying something controversial that would get him in trouble.

And the first hearing, he talked about nuclear war and when it would and wouldn't occur. You just don't do that. You have a standard line that our policy is to deter, that nuclear weapons would never be used, blah, blah, blah.

*Q: Where did his support come from?*

GUNDERSEN: Mostly from hard line Republicans, but he also had some defense minded Democratic support because he was not a right wing social conservative. He was very involved with the original neo-con movement, which was originally composed of former democrats (and socialists), often Jewish, who were strongly anti-Communist.

We think of it now as a Republican base movement. As a mentioned, the neo-cons then were Democrats who felt that Democrats were too soft internationally, but they were liberal in terms of domestic policy.

*Q: Basically these were Jewish liberals who took a hard line on the Soviet Union.*

GUNDERSEN: Correct. Irving Kristol, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Podhoretz, many had been Marxists, the older ones, in the Thirties. So he was part of that movement and Senator Patrick Moynihan was also part of that movement.

What got him through the hearings is that Moynihan brought along the Jackson Democrats. So they got about ten of those Democrats to vote for his confirmation.

*Q: What was your impression of Adelman?*

GUNDERSEN: Personally, great guy, enjoyed joking around. Little bit of a loose cannon. He'd been a writer, so he said things just off the top of his head.

*Q: How long were you with him?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, about three or four months in the lead up to the confirmation hearing. Then I got the job with Goodby on the CSCE delegation.

*Q: What were the issues you were dealing with mainly?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, it was the security side of the Helsinki Process. You remember the baskets: political-security, economic, human rights. And part of security side, a conference was mandated to convene in Stockholm which would lead to agreement among all States in Europe and the US and Canada. One of the catchwords of the Helsinki Process was you could not have a treaty which was legally binding, you could only have a politically binding agreement.

Our position was that the appropriate place to talk about conventional and nuclear disarmament was either MBFR in Vienna or the nuclear talks in Geneva. So we didn't want that to be discussed in Stockholm..

So I worked closely with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Office of the Secretary of Defense and even the Congress to come up with proposals for confidence building measures.

We felt that what could reasonably be agreed by all States was more transparency, more information sharing, invitations to military maneuvers, concrete confidence building measures, instead of either arms control or the Soviets wanted a non-use of force treaty, like the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. We thought of the later as unenforceable and leading to a false sense of security. The Soviets hoped to use the Conference to influence Western European public opinion against NATO and INF missiles, intermediate range missiles, based in your territory. Obviously, the Russians needn't worry about Russian public opinion, since they controlled their press.

So their game was to propose attractive sounding proposal, like a Non-Use of Force Declaration; ours was to agree to concrete measures. Not as sexy, at least at the outset.

*Q: Well, then, how did the conference go?*



GUNDERSEN: Well, the first year and a half, half of the time we were in Washington and half of the time in Stockholm. The first year and a half it didn't go anywhere, we just talked past each other. That was during the period when the Soviet Union was still ruled by Brezhnev and Brezhnev era holdovers.

In two years, we had Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and finally Gorbachev, so we had four different Russian leaders in two years. But when Gorbachev came in, there was a decided shift. And I think the Kremlin made a decision they wanted to have an agreement, that they were willing to largely accept the NATO proposal Confidence-Building proposals with inspections and transparency of military maneuvers and that they would deemphasize their insistence on a non-use of force treaty, because they knew it was a non-starter.

The compromise basically was, and I was involved in the writing of the final document, that the preamble would say that the conference had decided on a series of confidence building measures, constraints and information sharing. If those measures were observed, then it makes the use of force less likely. So the Soviets could say, "We have a non-use of force agreement;" we could say, "Non-Use of Force depended on adherence to concrete measures."

And we had an agreement which was probably the first major arms control agreement of the Gorbachev era and it was indicative that the Soviet regime had changed with respect to being willing to negotiate realistically.

So, in the final analysis, it was very successful Conference. Shultz and Gromyko came to the signing. It was not the magic bullet, but one of the more important agreements of the era. I must admit, signing such a breakthrough agreement after two years of hard work, was something you don't often experience as a diplomat. Perhaps it's somewhat like the euphoria an athlete feels after winning a championship. Anyway, it may be fleeting, but it was definitely a high.

*Q: It must have been quite a change, those of you who had been sitting around in these non-ending, non-working conferences, to have something come out of it?*

GUNDERSEN: We were surprised, honestly, because the signs were not so positive in the beginning. For example, after each session, we had a big party and invited all the delegates to a place I rented in the old town, because I knew a lot of the younger delegates; the Soviets and their allies never attended despite being invited.

And then we had our party in the spring of '86 at a place we rented on the Swedish archipelago in Saltsjobaden. The Russian delegation grandly announced, "We're coming," to us it meant that now it's different. And it was. We got to talk with them more openly and candidly. They clearly had been given different marching orders.

*Q: How was Gorbachev seen, early on?*

GUNDERSEN: There was initial skepticism, because every time there's a new Soviet leader, some members of the press would say, "Oh, this guy's different, Andropov drank Scotch, etc.

*Q: He played jazz.*

GUNDERSEN: So there'd always initial skepticism about Gorbachev. It took a while for us to realize that Gorbachev was, in fact, different. And it was only after a series of concrete steps, instead of just rhetoric, that we realized that it was a different ball game.

I was not a Gorby convert, however. My view was that Gorbachev was not a Jeffersonian democrat, he was a believer in the Soviet system, but he felt that you could reform the system, *glasnost* and *perestroika*, without destroying communism.

Of course, the fatal flaw, from the Soviet perspective, is if you had real reform and democracy, you couldn't maintain the democratic centralism of the communist party. The nationalities would go their own way and the people would not freely choose communism. So, in my view, you couldn't have a reformed communism governed like the Soviet Union.

But Gorbachev's reforms were positive in the sense that they didn't intervene when the Eastern Europeans started going their own way. So it was a very positive historical event.

*Q: How did you feel about being involved in these negotiations? Did you feel sort of cut off from the geographic bureaus and all that?*

GUNDERSEN: I guess I probably should have, but, you know, once you get involved in something these negotiations it becomes your main focus. You want to be successful, so you don't worry too much about bureaucratic politics. Anyway, we had to deal with all the bureaus, because the delegation had to have agreed, cleared instructions. We'd have interagency meetings two or three times a year. We'd go back to Washington, cleared positions at State, meet with EUR/RPM, the Pol-Mil Bureau, International Organizations Bureau. After that we'd have to clear with OSD and JCS – the Pentagon – and finally with the NSC and White House.

We also had a congressional representative from the Helsinki Commission on our delegation, which is a positive thing, because they'd get congressional buy in before each session of the Conference.

Then we'd have to go to NATO to get a common NATO position. So we were constantly getting buy in from all interested stakeholders, including, by the way, neutral states like Sweden and Switzerland.

That's one of the things that, sadly, you don't have anymore. We had a Democrat and a Republican representative sitting on the delegation, except the most secret meetings. So

they reported back to their bosses, so you didn't have problems with Senate ratification and things like. In other words, you didn't have the rank partisanship so prevalent today.

*Q: They signed*

GUNDERSEN: The agreement. Yes, all reps were present at the signing in Stockholm in the early fall of 1986.

*Q: And then what did you do?*

GUNDERSEN: I chosen to be the NATO representative to write the political part, so I was very much involved in the political objectives. So I had to stay a little longer in Stockholm. It was a memorable experience and I really got to know NATO.

From there, because the head of delegation was from ACDA, the arms control agency, I was asked to be the Division Chief for International Security Policy at ACDA, which is a senior position. I was an FS-01 at the time. So it was a nice opportunity.

*Q: What did this involve?*

GUNDERSEN: It dealt with the multilateral arms control and other negotiations, such as the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva, which dealt with chemical and biological weapon, non-proliferation, MBFR, Mutual Balanced Force Reductions, talks in Vienna and all the multilateral arms controls treaties except the bilateral treaties with the Soviet Union.

*Q: Speaking of chemical warfare and all this, Nixon had abolished chemical weapons. So what does that do to us? The Soviets had a big program.*

GUNDERSEN: Right, so it's one of those rare areas where we were the most vocal proponent of an arms control agreement. Actually, the Reagan Administration and particularly George H.W. Bush was an active proponent of banning chemical weapons as well as biological weapons.

So we worked on the Soviets, trying to get them to buy into it. They claimed they did not have biological weapons. They claimed they did not have usable chemical weapons. However, we had solid intelligence that they did. So we very much pushed them to sign a ban on such weapons. Later in the 80's they did sign these agreements in Geneva.

So I was working on those issues in Washington, but I would represent the US on the delegations, mostly to Geneva but also to Vienna. So my bailiwick was a catch-all for every arms control negotiation other than bilateral arms control issues.

*Q: How did that work?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, it was a lot of talking past each other, at least initially, because the Soviets weren't prepared to sign onto biological and chemical weapons limitations. We weren't prepared to sign onto most of the declaratory Treaties the Soviets pushed.

And then the Swedes were very much involved, as well as the Indians. Everyone had their own agenda. So we didn't get much done, but we tried to understand each others' positions. Eventually agreements did come out of that, towards the beginning of the first Bush Administration.

*Q: Were you really sensing that things really were changing in the Soviet Union by this time?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, I came to that view reluctantly, seeing a certain amount of naïveté by some in the West about the Soviet Union, but clearly they were changing, but I still felt that it would only go so far.

One of the things, maybe coming from my PPO travel experiences during my Moscow assignment, was that Gorbachev did not understand the nationalities issue. He still thought, like the previous generation of Soviet leaders, that he could keep the Soviet Union intact and there was not really a nationality issue.

For example, one of the last things Gorbachev as First Secretary of the Party, was to send in troops into Lithuania, when they pushed for independence. And there were casualties. So I think he didn't get it, and many others didn't get it.

But clearly he was a reformer in a limited sense. He's very much venerated in places like Germany. I don't hold him in the same regard. I view him more like de Klerk in South Africa. The world changed and the limited reforms he was willing to countenance simply weren't adequate to address the new situation.

And I think Gorbachev did the same thing – he set in play historical forces he could not control. In other words, by his unwillingness to use Soviet troops to quell unrest in Eastern Europe, he created the conditions that resulted in freedom in Eastern Europe and the breakup of the Soviet Union, which he certainly didn't anticipate.

*Q: You were with ACDA until when?*

GUNDERSEN: From late '86 to early '89.

*Q: I take it you were not one of those who "saw the end of the Soviet Union?"*

GUNDERSEN: No, I did not. I wish I could say I was that insightful.

*Q: I'm still looking for that person.*

GUNDERSEN: There are some people who say they did. Brzezinski says he saw the end of the Soviet Union, to some degree. There are some others, but, you know how it is, we lived in that world and we assumed that would it was going to be that way for our lifetimes.

*Q: When we look at the way things are, we tend to straight line project, this is the way it's going to be. Obviously, China's going to go through some real convolutions in time, but it's hard to forecast when, or exactly how things will play out there.*

GUNDERSEN: We just extrapolate from the last five and six years.

*Q: Did you get married during this time?*

GUNDERSEN: I didn't get married until 1991, when I was in my mid-forties.

*Q: Were you living in Washington?*

GUNDERSEN: When I got married?

*Q: After you finished with ACDA, where did you go?*

GUNDERSEN: Then I went to the National War College. So I had a year at the War College, which most people enjoy, because you have time to think, - a luxury in the State Department.

*Q: How did you find the War College, what were your impressions?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, because I had worked political-military issues and knew military people, I wasn't surprised by much. I gained great respect for the officers who were there. I had time to do a lot of reading and get in shape. When you're working at a desk you don't have as much time for that. So I did enjoy the time..

After the War College I took a not very traditional assignment. It was a senior flag-rank position (I was still an FS-01). I was stationed in Frankfurt as head of what they called a FEST team – I can't go into the specifics of the job, but I was head of an interagency team, including the most sensitive military and intelligence counter-terrorism assets. I was responsible for Europe and Middle East. My cover title was Regional Security Officer for Frankfurt.

*Q: Ooh! What was the situation when you took the job? You took it when?*

GUNDERSEN: In '89, right out of the War College?

*Q: What was the situation you saw, regarding your future job?*

GUNDERSEN: You know how these assignments are somewhat fixed in advance. When I heard about the job, I can't talk about the details, it sounded fascinating. It involved in counter-terrorism and black programs.

*Q: I realize we have to avoid discussing classified material. Can we talk about the mega picture? What was behind this?*

GUNDERSEN: I would like to say I saw al Qaeda coming up, but I did not. There was hostage taking going on at the time. There were radical movements and there were remnants of radical movements in Europe, the Red Army *Faction*, the Red Brigades, the Baader-Meinhof Gang.

So, working with local governments, I dealt with those issues. By the way, most of the governments we worked with did not want it known they were working closely with the Americans. So we kept it clandestine – successfully, I think. For example, we knew that there was growing militancy in Algeria and other places. So we did certain exercises and were involved in certain programs. I was the chief of an interagency team that flew around.

But I can't say I saw this growing Islamic militancy or anything like that.

*Q: Did you see the intelligence and police forces of Europe being both aware and capable of dealing with the situation? They had gone through the Red Brigades, the Japanese Red Army and all this. Was this by this time a pretty well honed apparatus?*

GUNDERSEN: I think it was. {By this time they did have better control of the situation, unlike ten years prior. They had better intelligence and cooperation across national lines.

I worked with the Interior Ministries, because there were only a few people who know about our operation in each country.

So we had close connections and were largely successful. I think that's one of the reasons they disbanded this unit eventually, because it was very costly and had accomplished it's main missions. In other words, it was suspended and everyone seemed to be pleased.

But the best thing I took away from the assignment was my wife, Eike, who is German. I met her in Frankfurt. The Consul General in Frankfurt, which is a very big post, as you know, and one of the biggest in the world, because it's a regional center, was the only person at Post, who was briefed about our activity, so I would debrief him on a regular basis. My wife worked as a Foreign Service National at the Consulate. So I met my wife there and that's the biggest thing I took away from the assignment.

*Q: My first post was Frankfurt, back in '55. It wasn't as much a regional center, but it was a major post.*

GUNDERSEN: Germany must have been different in '55 – still recovering from the war. I should mention that I was actually assigned as the first Consul General to Kiev, Ukraine out of the War College. We were opening up a consulate there. We'd been trying to do this for awhile

*Q: In the works for*

GUNDERSEN: For 15 years and I knew the guys who'd been previously assigned but never got there, because something bad would always happen in US-Soviet relations and canceling the opening of the Consulate in Kiev and a Soviet Consulate in New York was a convenient measure both sides could take to show their displeasure..

So I was assigned that job. In the meantime, they were protracted negotiations. So I was given the job in Frankfurt in the interim.

Just as I was given the job in Frankfurt and paneled, they needed me to go to the Ukraine, because they thought they finally had agreement finalized to open the post. So I was assigned and panel to Kiev.

So I had two jobs and the two parts of the Department responsible for these two areas fought over me, but S/CT *i.e.*, the State Department office responsible for counter-terrorism policy, who reported directly to the Secretary, said, "Well, we need him more," so I went to Frankfurt. As I said., without this bureaucratic tug of war, I would not have met my wife – so, for once, good things can come out of the bureaucracy.

And when they finally came to agreement about with Soviets about opening the consulate in Kiev, I was pulled from the Frankfurt assignment to go directly to Kiev.

*Q: This was when?*

GUNDERSEN: This was in late 1990.

*Q: Just before the Soviet Union*

GUNDERSEN: That's right.

*Q: Was the ending of the Soviet Union sort of in the wind, did you see it at that time?*

GUNDERSEN: I did begin to see it when I went to the Ukraine, in late '90. Initially there were just two of us, so I had a staff of one. By at the end of my tour there I had a staff of eighty.

So myself and the other officer, who was a fluent Ukrainian speaker, lived in an old Soviet-style apartment on the third floor. Ukraine was still very much a Soviet Republic in the eyes of Embassy Moscow. And we began to report facts on the ground.

We gradually got a sense that the Ukraine was going to go independent. We'd talk to Party leaders, dissidents, labor leaders, members of the Rada, which is their parliament. They were beginning to sense that the center could not hold. Then CODELs began to come in.

They had a vote on sovereignty in March 1991, which was voted for fairly overwhelmingly. This wasn't independence, it was a sovereign Ukraine in the Soviet Union, but because the vote was so overwhelming, you had a sense that they aren't going to stop there.

We started reporting about that, that there was a real movement for independence. Embassy Moscow didn't agree. The conventional wisdom in the Bush I administration was that we could work with Gorbachev; we were beginning to sign arms control agreements and Gorby was a known entity. The thinking in Washington was, "Let's deal with the devil we know, we're getting these agreements, let's not deal with this nationality, independence issue."

Because we didn't have classified communications capabilities in Kiev, my colleague, John Stepanchuk, and I had to travel virtually every weekend to Moscow to write secure cables. We'd work a full week in Kiev take the overnight train Friday or Saturday to Moscow, because it was a lot safer than flying Aeroflot. We'd get in, open the classified section of the Embassy and we'd write out our cables and send them to Washington.

Sometimes Embassy Moscow would put "We do not agree with this" in a comment on our cables. So there was a little tension there.

We weren't saying, "They will become independent," Foreign Service people don't make such categorical statements, but "There is a good chance that they will be pushing for more and more independence and they we have to deal with this reality and have to think about what our policy should be: would we recognize Ukraine's claim as an independent statehood? what are the criteria for recognition? how do we coordinate with our NATO allies?, etc."

So it was an interesting time to be there. On top of that, Eike became pregnant (I don't know how that happened). We were living in this Soviet style apartment, she had to shop for scarce goods at the local markets, I was working long hours. It was a tough time, especially for Eike, but she was a trooper and our best reporting officer on local conditions. I could go on about the sacrifices, usually unpaid, that Foreign Service spouses do for their families, but I think you understand.

*Q: I do. What were the Ukrainians saying? Was there a Ukrainian government at the time that could easily split off and become an independent government, or was there sort of a creature of Moscow?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, they had a leader named Kravchuk. He used to be the ideological secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, but he was a crafty character and saw the



way things were going. So he became more and more independent; he quickly changed to a black nationalist hat, and discarded his red communist hat.

Meanwhile, the Rada had elections and elected some *Rukh* people, that's a democratic pro-independence party. So there was real, pretty open discussion on independence. And we were reporting that even the Communists were moving in that direction.

*Q: As a consulate general, you were seeing, you might say, that the independence movement was farther along than Moscow did. Was there any resolution to this, or did they tell you "Don't report that"?*

GUNDERSEN: Thankfully, they never did. They let us report what we wanted. Once in a while they added a little note saying that they didn't agree with our reporting. But there was never any repression of what we were reporting and, in fact, there was much discussion in Washington about the different approaches. I heard *post facto* that our cables were causing quite a stir in Washington.

Many of our cables were sent directly to the White House and shared in NATO. So there was a lot of ambivalence about whether Ukraine. I got what they called O-I's, official-informal notes outside of channels from fairly high ranking people, who'd say, "Right on!" and "We agree with you."

*Q: Of course, to my mind, being a non-expert, but just looking at this, if the Ukraine goes, Russia's no longer a threat. It's like in the Middle East, if Egypt's not going to fight, there isn't going to be a war. This is not just a minor development. This meant sort of our entire geo-strategic assumptions would have to change. Or were we looking at it that way?*

GUNDERSEN: I think reflects exactly some of the discussion. In fact I have a letter from Paul Wolfowitz, who was at the time the Assistant Secretary of Defense for international security policy. He was reading our cables and using them against some at State who would say, "Well, we have to work with the Soviets and Gorbachev. Let's not push it too much." The Pentagon's thinking, in the Office of the Secretary of Defense was driven by military not political objectives. If Ukraine becomes independent, the thinking was, Soviet forces would have to retreat thousand miles from NATO and it would no longer be a strategic threat.

And so they looked at it from a military perspective; they were less involved with arms control or other considerations. There were some in S/P, State's Policy Planning Council, who agreed. However, most at State and the NSC wanted to stick with the existing policy toward the Soviet Union. So we understand there were some real tough "wither Ukraine" discussions in Washington.

It came to a head when President Bush came to Ukraine..

*Q: This is his "Chicken Kiev" speech?*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, the “Chicken Kiev” speech.

*Q: Could you explain what that was?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, Bush visited the Soviet Union in early August 1991, it was still the Soviet Union, to work with Gorbachev, because they had come to the recognition, from their perspective, that they liked Gorbachev’s reform policies. We were signing arms control agreements. Bush was someone who placed great stock in personal relationships and he was comfortable dealing with Gorbachev.

But we also knew that they had to deal with the nationality issue. So Bush scheduled a trip to Kiev after Moscow.. He was greeted by a million people in Kiev because he was seen as pro-democracy, the route was lined with people, it was a very joyous occasion.

And he gave a speech to the Rada. He talked about democracy and self-determination and human rights and Ukrainian history. Not a bad speech generally. However, two things he said became famous: he warned against “suicidal nationalism” and said that “Democracy does not mean independence.” So he was, in effect, telling the Ukrainians, “You can push for democracy, but not for independence.”

I only saw the speech a couple of hours beforehand. I told the speechwriters: “This is going to go down really bad, because of these two lines.” And those were the things that were picked up by the press. I think it was Washington columnist Robert Novak who called this speech the “Chicken Kiev” speech. The Ukrainian-American community here reacted very strongly and negatively to the speech as well. All the good things in the speech were soon forgotten.

*Q: Were you sort of relegated to the rear of the president’s entourage?*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, I was there, but it was still the Soviet Union and Ambassador Matlock accompanied the President to Kiev, so clearly I was subordinate to him. I had to fight to get into meetings, because they knew what we were writing from Kiev. But I did get into the meetings, most of them.

One of the results of the meetings was the Soviets were becoming increasingly suspicious of the Ukrainians and where they were going. So they sent down Yanayev, one of the leaders of the subsequent coup to remove Gorbachev from power, to spy on what Bush and Kravchuk were talking about.

Kravchuk and Bush wanted to have a one on one meeting, so they told me to “Talk to Yanayev, so we can have a private discussion.” I have a picture of a very worried looking Yanayev sitting there with Bush and Kravchuk. Then Bush and Kravchuk disappeared. I think that was one of the key events that caused the coup makers to act. I think Yanayev reported back to his buddies in the Kremlin, but not Gorbachev, that: “Ukraine’s going to

go independent, we need to do something about it.” The coup occurred a month and a half later.

*Q: The next time, I'd like to talk to you about how we saw the coming of independence, the Black Sea Fleet*

*Today the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, 2012, with Jon Gundersen and Jon, where did we leave this off?*

GUNDERSEN: As I remember, I had been assigned to the Ukraine and consul general.

*Q: Let's talk about the Ukraine, now.*

GUNDERSEN: At the time, if you remember, this was the George H.W. Bush Administration. Gorbachev was beginning to open up, with *perestroika* and *glasnost* and we were beginning to sign deals we had worked on towards the end of the Cold War, including arms control agreements and confidence building measures.

And we very much wanted to have Consulates in the Baltics and Ukraine, to have eyes and ears on the ground so to speak. But we also didn't really push for independence for those countries, because the Bush Administration was becoming comfortable with working Gorbachev. It was much easier to sign these agreements with a single nation state. Diplomats are more comfortable with the devil they we know rather than the devil they don't.

So my charge as Consul General was basically to report on what was happening, to work with the government of Ukraine, which was still a communist government, and to encourage openness and democracy, but not independence.

But when I got there, it became increasingly apparent, as I mentioned during our last session, that it would be difficult for the Soviet Union to remain a unified state, because Ukraine and the other constituent republics, particularly the Baltics, didn't want to be part of the Soviet Union.

So the fatal flaw, in our view, was that you couldn't have democracy and openness without independence. And, as I said earlier, we began to report that, very carefully, because it was not the received, conventional wisdom in the State Department or in Washington or in NATO.

*Q: You look at the Soviet Union as a unity, it can't help but be a menace. But with the Ukraine separate, it's sort of like a toothless dragon.*

GUNDERSEN: And that in fact is what eventually occurred. The break up of the Soviet Union was something that now seems to be so logical, but it wasn't so apparent at the time. We were so used to the Cold War. The Soviet Union was so well established as our strategic rival that there were very few, if any, who prophesized that the Soviet Union would fall apart.

In the U.S. government, the first to really support the possibility of Ukrainian independence was the Defense Department, ‘because they saw that in military terms. So they, in internal deliberations within the U.S. government, were the ones who were agreeing with our cables from Ukraine.

*Q: At the time, you had the Soviet Black Sea Fleet.*

GUNDERSEN: Ukraine had the Soviet Union’s only “warm weather ports.” Russia subsequently negotiated a long-term lease for the traditional Soviet naval bases on Ukrainian territory, but it was not part of Russian sovereign territory, it was part of Ukraine.

*Q: And the other issue was of course the settlement of Russian-speaking people in significant parts of Ukraine.*

GUNDERSEN: Right. Eastern Ukraine was mostly Russian speaking, Western Ukraine was Ukrainian speaking and a mixture in the middle. But it was not as divided as were the Serbs and Croats, because there’s a lot of intermarriage in Ukraine, especially in the Eastern Ukraine. So the ethnic issue was not as visceral as other places.

*Q: From your perspective, were you able to sort of get out, you and your colleague in Kiev and sort of sample and get a feel about what would happen, was this for real, this desire of Ukraine to be independent?*

GUNDERSEN: I think we were given an unusual and almost unexpected degree of access, because this was a time when the Soviet Union was changing, Gorbachev was encouraging this more open attitude. Although obviously they didn’t want to go all the way. Gorbachev believed you could have a reformed, more open, kinder society and keep the Soviet Union together.

And initially, it was two of us, myself and a guy named John Stepanchuk, who was a fluent Ukrainian and Russian speaker. We traveled all over. We talked to Party people and *Rukh* dissidents.

They had elections for the parliament. We for the first time, we organized international visitors program grants for Ukrainians to visit the U.S. – and they readily accepted. We brought together a mixed group, including Communist Party members, democrats, labor representatives, to visit the United States. And that took a lot of delicate negotiations with the Ukrainians and with Washington. They visited Washington, New York and Ukrainian communities throughout the mid-West

Not only did they see an open, democratic diverse society, but they worked together, they sat together, they traveled together. So they realized that could work together as home as well. And many of them served in subsequent governments back home. The \$60,000 we used on the program was, I believe, money well spent.

*Q: How about the Party, the Communist Party in Ukraine? Where was it coming out?*

GUNDERSEN: The Party had always been very loyal to Moscow, very hard line, because they knew that many Ukrainians, especially Ukrainians in the west, were anti-Party, anti-Russian, so they needed to prove their loyalty to Moscow. Vladimir Shcherbytsky, the Ukrainian Party leader until 1989, was one of the most loyal followers of Brezhnev and a member of the Soviet Party Politburo.

Kravchuk was the Party chief when I arrived in Kiev and he had been the Party ideologue who took care of ideological purity previously. But he was a very wily politician and he began to realize that the world was changing. I met with him at least seven or eight times during my time there, sometimes one on one.

In fact, after Ukraine voted for sovereignty in the spring of 1991, but it was clear where they were going. We started getting visitors like Brzezinski, Kissinger, Nixon and all sorts of CODELs (Congressional delegations).

Nixon, for example, came on his own. This was a unique opportunity for a Foreign Service Officer to sit down with a former president and escort him around for two days. Despite his obvious flaws, Nixon, even at 80, was a very sharp, *realpolitik* guy. We met with Kravchuk. After we came out of that meeting Nixon said, "This guy is smart and he will be the type to will break with the Soviet Union if he thinks it's necessary for his survival." Kravchuk was a cynic, sort of like Nixon, who recognized they were kindred spirits. As much as anyone, Nixon probably foresaw what was going to happen regarding the breakup of the Soviet Union

And then we saw some of the dissidents, Nixon wanted to see everyone. We visited them in their dusty old house with little heating. They were mostly intellectuals with little idea about governing. In front of Nixon, they argued about what sort of Ukraine would emerge, whether it would be along the lines of a Jeffersonian democracy, they were quoting Rousseau and Montesquieu.

And Nixon asked, "How do you run the government? Who's in charge? Where are your alliances?" And Nixon sort of turned to me and he said, "God damn expletive intellectuals!"

*Q: Well, I have to agree with him. You can imagine, you get together, playing around with ideas, at a certain point you have to come up with a system.*

GUNDERSEN: How do you collect the garbage? It was funny, you're sitting next to a former president and he turns to you and says something like that. And this was after he had met with Kravchuk, they sort of, I wouldn't say bonded; let's say they understood one another.

*Q: Well, you had a poisoning of a president, apparently, by the KGB and now you have a former vice president being abused in jail, a lady. Were you seeing these individuals and realizing, sort of trying to evaluate the divisiveness within this society?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I'd like to say we saw all this coming

*Q: One never does.*

GUNDERSEN: But what we saw and reported is that Ukraine, after the failed coup in Moscow.

*Q: While Gorbachev was vacationing in the Crimea.*

GUNDERSEN: The head of the KGB, think his name was Kryuchkov, Akhromeyev, former military Chief of Staff, and Yanayev, Gorbachev's Vice President, who had just been to Kiev, decide to act while Gorbachev was vacationing.

When that the coup happened in August '91, Ukrainians basically were set on independence, so. Kravchuk immediately denounced the coup.

Unfortunately I was in Washington on consultations when this occurred. So I rushed back to Ukraine. You want to be there where the action is. My first thought when the coup occurred, was, the hard line Communists are going to return to Brezhnev era policies and it would be difficult for us to influence the course of events.

At the same time, *Rukh*, the democratic movement we had been helping, basically took over the government in Kiev. I got a call from the head of RUHK telling me, "We know you're looking for a building to house your consulate. Would you like a building? And they offered us the Kiev Communist Party headquarters, which is the current U.S. Embassy there. So that's how we got that building.

But of course our bureaucrats back in Washington said, "Oh, we need to look at the security to make sure the building had adequate setback and was it a stand alone building. And beside s and it was too big for the then consulate staff."

We replied, "If Ukraine goes independent, we will need all this space." Now, the building's much too small. But it took a year of negotiating and we ended up paying much more money for the building than we initially would have had to, because at that golden moment we were basically given the building, because we had been on their side during the tough times. So that's how we got the present embassy.

*Q: Well, was there any concern on your part that trends in Ukraine about what might happen?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, there were concerns that there was not a democratic or ethical tradition about how one governs. There wasn't the idea that governments should be held

accountable. As an optimist and believer in the better nature of human beings, I must admit I did not foresee the current extent of the current corruption..

We did report a little about the corruption in the society, about the weakness in the democratic forces, about Kravchuk and the local KGB being interested in holding power and getting the fruits of selling state assets. But we didn't say, "Well, this is going to doom the Ukraine." We thought that Ukrainian independence was a positive thing, which I think in the larger sense it certainly was, but we didn't prophesize Ukraine would have all these problems.

We actually reported something along these lines: "Ukraine has the potential to be a stabilizing force, because it's a rich country, it's got cultural resources, it's got a lot of smart people, and it has a strategic location

*Q: It's got that wonderful soil.*

GUNDERSEN: It's got black soil like our soil in Iowa. It used to be the breadbasket of Europe. Before World War One, that was the largest exporter of wheat in Europe.

So we thought they would muddle through and they did muddle through, but obviously they've never developed into the type of reasonable, not perfect, democracy, but a reasonable, stable country, as we had hoped.

And we saw progress right after independence. Businessmen came to open hotels and to invest. But we began to hear that most of the officials were all on the take; you had to pay money to get things done, that a Ukrainian mafia was developing. So we sensed that there were real problems in the society.

*Q: How were relations with the embassy in Moscow?*

GUNDERSEN: At first, we functioned as a satellite of Embassy Moscow. We had a small office. At first four of us and our Ukrainian secretary and driver worked out of one dumpy office on the West Bank of the Dnipro River. I should also mention that Eike was pregnant and living in our Soviet apartment at the time. She had to fly to Germany for the birth of our son, Jan Taras – he was partially named after Taras Shevchenko, the Ukrainian poet and nationalist from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Russian paper "Izvestia" actually sarcastically reported that the American Consul General had the audacity to chose such a name. Eike returned to Ukraine after Jan's birth and, in effect, lived on the local economy.

Regarding policy, we did have, as I mentioned, differences as to where Ukraine was going to go, but Embassy Moscow never stopped from reporting what we were seeing.

*Q: Well, were you getting inquiries from Washington, various places, saying "What do you all think?"*

GUNDERSEN: We were, because we were on the ground and there was great interest. As somebody once said to me, “You’re lucky, because there’re very few cables that are actually read by the White House.” So our cables were being read by the White House and we often got requests like, “Could we share this with NATO allies?,” for example.

*Q: I would think, Kyrgyzstan comes or goes, but who the hell cares? Particularly Ukraine, of all the Soviet republics, the Baltics were a bit different breed of cat, in a way they weren’t critical and weren’t going to stay in the Soviet Union anyway.*

GUNDERSEN: And I think most of the Russians, except for some of the real hardliners, accepted that the Baltics were going to go because they had once been independent states and were not Slavs. We, of course, during the Cold War, never formally recognized Soviet sovereignty over the Baltic republics.

*Q: In a way, it was a problem, but it was a problem that really didn’t cause us any headaches, but in Ukraine was a question mark and it had the potential to change the entire world equation, practically.*

GUNDERSEN: Here’s this big country of 52 million in the heart of Europe, which, when it became independent, became the third largest nuclear power in the world, because of all the nuclear weapons on Ukrainian soil. And they were sister Slavs, “little Russians” that would say.

So when Kiev declared its independence, we at the consulate wanted to recognize Ukraine right away. Embassy Moscow wanted to check with the Soviets first. They delayed recognition to allow for meaningless things like getting our defense attaché in Moscow accredited to Ukraine. We felt these little things were both unnecessary and small ball at this was a historic moment.

So when Ukraine voted for independence on December 1, 1991, in overwhelming numbers, the Canadians and Scandinavians recognized them right away, but NATO as an alliance was reluctant to do that as was Washington..

So we had our differences with Embassy Moscow.

*Q: Must have put a burden on you.*

GUNDERSEN: Well, it was. There are few times in the life of a diplomat where you feel that what you are saying will have a real impact on U.S. policy. We felt we had the best vantage point to report the real situation. We were respectful of the Embassy, of course (the Ambassador, after all, wrote my efficiency report). But we knew what we said was having an impact in Washington. It wasn’t that Moscow and others openly disagreed with our reporting, but it was always, “Yeah, but” and we felt that we might be losing the moment.



The State Department eventually came around to accepting the reality of independence. Secretary Baker came to Ukraine, he visited Ukraine and the other newly independent states in January '92. He turned the policy around 180 degrees and basically declared: "Yes, Ukraine's going independent, obviously the Baltic Republics are and probably these other constituent Soviet republics are and we have to be ahead of the curve." Right after his trip we recognized Ukrainian independence immediately and we said all the right things. The Ukrainians were very happy about it and so it was a sea change and we started getting aid programs, the Ukrainian-American community and we had been pushing for.

The Nunn-Lugar Amendment was passed, which would give a lot of money for taking care of the scientists who worked on nuclear weapons. Nunn and Lugar visited as did Bradley, Cranston, Strom Thurmond, etc. By the way, Thurmond at 90, still had an eye out for attractive women. I was very much involved, sometimes as a policy maker, sometimes as a messenger delivering messages directly to Kravchuk such as: "We will be able to do all these things if you abide by international covenants and agree to get rid of the nukes on your territory."

*Q: You basically wanted them to go to Russia, where we would deal with them?*

GUNDERSEN: Or be destroyed. Remember at the time we were negotiating bilateral treaties with Moscow which would allow us to control nukes more closely in Russia. However, there were forces in Ukraine, on both the right and left, who were saying, "Let's keep the nukes, that's how we will get respect as a new State, by having these nukes." Of course, the Russians were also pushing to get the nukes out of Ukraine.

There were also a lot of countervailing forces. There was a strong anti-nuke movement because of the reaction to the Chernobyl reactor explosion. At the same time, as I mentioned, some politicians believed that the nukes could give Ukraine legitimacy and perhaps great power status or, at least, that they could be used as a bargaining chip with the Russians. So we worked out what was eventually called the Lisbon Protocol in early '92. The Ukrainians agreed to get rid of all their nuclear weapons. In exchange they would get certain aid and would have a pathway to membership in international institutions. Those negotiations were very delicate and touch and go. I remember midnight calls to Kravchuk's villa delivering a curt message from the Secretary of State: "You've got to agree to this by this date or else." And he signed. Of course, Moscow was also pressuring him as well.

*Q: What about the fleet? Did it have nukes, too?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, that wasn't so much our concern. The Black Sea Fleet was not a threat to our interests at the time. The fleet did not have the same strategic capabilities as ours did and, in any case, we felt we could control the choke point through the Turkish straits.

But it was a point of contention about who controlled the Crimea. Crimea had been Russian territory, but had been given to Ukraine as a gift by Khrushchev in the Fifties. Of course, Moscow could never imagine that control of Crimea would have an issue, because the Ukrainian Communists were very loyal. It was just sort of an offhanded gesture.

We had no real problem about the Russians maintaining a fleet there, as long as it didn't jeopardize our 6<sup>th</sup> fleet and Ukrainian sovereignty. That negotiation went on for a few years after I left and they eventually agreed to a long-term lease of Sevastopol.

*Q: Were there forces in the Ukraine that were of concern to you that wanted to preserve the Soviet Union?*

GUNDERSEN: There were forces. There were still members of the Communist Party who would have liked to have kept the Soviet Union. But they were in a minority and we felt that they would not be able to win any parliamentary election,

The former Communists under Kravchuk and Kuchma, the next Prime Minister, liked being independent. They weren't democrats, but they didn't want to be under Moscow. So we didn't think that was a real possibility, to restore the Soviet Union..

*Q: Was the disbandment of essentially the Warsaw Pact and troops coming back to the homeland, was that anything you had to deal with in Ukraine?*

GUNDERSEN: To a degree, yes, because demobilizing a lot of troops is costly. So we did have some agreements where we would give them certain aid to demobilize their forces. They had to change their conscription, training and operations and maintenance policies. But that was not a major bilateral issue. The Pentagon did work closely with The new inexperienced Ukrainian Defense Ministry.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

GUNDERSEN: I was there from January '91 to early '93.

*Q: Was the economic collapse apparent while you were there?*

GUNDERSEN: It wasn't initially apparent, because we felt Ukraine had enough resources that it would do relatively well. That was a time when Europe was uniting and prosperous. They were looking to integrate what we called Eastern Europe and eventually Ukraine into sort of the Western economic framework and institutions. There was a sense that Ukraine would eventually be integrated into the World Trade Organization and some sort of agreement with the EU.

So economic issues we were addressing at the time were more how do you change a state dominated, top down economy to a more open, market economy.

One example that clearly indicated it would be difficult occurred during Assistant Secretary Tom Niles' visit to Ukraine. Niles was a smart guy, Russian speaker. We had a meeting with the prime minister, whose name was Fokin, a Kravchuk appointee and former Communist. He was going along with independence and he fancied himself as an economist. The meeting with just Niles, myself and Fokin.

Niles asked him, "How do you shift to a market economy and determine prices in the interim?" and Fokin said, "We believe in the market and when we fully adopt a market economy, the market will determine prices, but we haven't figured out what price to set yet." I don't think he understood markets. So that was indicative that it was going to be a difficult transition.

*Q: The Ukrainian politicians, one of whom was apparently poisoned while in office and another jailed for corruption, were they prominent politically while you were there?*

GUNDERSEN: I now remember I had met Yushchenko, but I didn't focus on him at the time. Yushchenko was a young, very dashing, figure. He later married a Ukrainian-American who visited the Ukraine periodically and would meet with us. She was working for an NGO. So we knew him, but didn't foresee he would become so prominent a decade later.

Yulia Tymoshenko was a young, attractive dissident, very charismatic. But we also didn't foresee what she would become.

But we aware that the dissidents were not united. Ukraine didn't have a figure like a Havel or a Mandela who might have led the country to more stability. You had a lot of petty infighting even among the democrats, as well as the Communists.

Yushchenko and Tymoshenko should have, after the Orange Revolution, been working together and that was the golden moment that they missed.

*Q: Was there a military component to this whole thing, military commanders people had to look to and defer to or consider?*

GUNDERSEN: Of course, all the military had been trained in the Soviet Union by Moscow using their military approach, which is a top down approach. We never felt that there was a Napoleonic coup possibility, where the military would take control, because they always had operated at the behest of the Party, so they weren't like in Egypt or Turkey an independent force.

*Q: One thinks of these huge factories and oil field and collective farms A very rich place, but was much coming out of this? How did we evaluate this situation?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, we felt that it was potentially rich country, but you have to understand, the whole collectivization and the destruction of the kulak class occurred

largely in Ukraine. Millions of people died in the famines in the Thirties and what also died was the sense of having an independent agricultural class.

So I think that affected Ukraine, because it was collectivized and you didn't have a recent history of independent agriculture. That made it more difficult than even we expected to transition to a more market economy.

*Q: Was there any movement while you were there of oligarchs to come in and gobble up the former state assets?*

GUNDERSEN: When I left, that was just beginning to occur. If you remember, in Russia that occurred in the mid-Nineties and I left in early '93. So we didn't know exactly where Ukraine was headed, but we knew that it would not be an easy transition.

Basically, the old Party guys and the KGB, they just changed their hats from red to black and so they became "nationalists," but they wanted the spoils.

There was a hotel, big hotel, the nicest one in town and that was controlled by the KGB. Then Westerners wanted to buy it, but basically the KGB said, "No, we're going to continue to control it." They allowed Westerners to put their money in, but they still controlled the hotel.

*Q: When you left there, how did you see things falling out?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I probably have to admit I was more optimistic than I should have been. We had fought the good fight, we knew the people involved. We thought it was and I think it remains very much in the U.S. national interest to have an independent Ukraine.

So we felt that it would become a relatively stable, relatively democratic country which would be increasingly integrated into Europe. It has maintained its independence. It hasn't been a total disaster.

So in a larger sense, I think the record has been mixed, but obviously it's disappointing that Ukraine hasn't developed into a more democratic society and that corruption is endemic.

*Q: Did Moldova cause any concern, or was this sort of over the horizon and out of mind?*

GUNDERSEN: It's one of those many issues that you're aware of, because there was an ethnic Ukrainian as well as a Russian element in Moldova and there's a question whether Moldova would become independent, whether it would be still sort of a semi-satellite of Moscow, because they had the Russian bases there.

Ukraine was interested and basically supportive of Moldovan independence but they were a little suspicious of Moldovans because of their treatment of the ethnic Ukrainian minority. Part of Moldova used to be part of Ukraine. However, Kiev did not want to

open border issues, because they benefited from the post-War changes in borders with Poland and Crimea, for example.

So they played a careful game and we encouraged the evacuation of the Russian troops, while being supportive of an independent Moldova. But the Ukrainians were a little suspicious of where this process would go.

We just more or less monitored it. Our main interest was to get the Russians further back from the boundaries of the former Warsaw Pact.

*Q: Apparently, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, our military intelligence services saw this as a great time to get hold of pieces of equipment, so they could analyze them. Did you get involved in that sort of thing?*

GUNDERSEN: Not so much. Obviously, we were involved with intelligence. One of the first groups coming into town was some of our intel friends. They set up their own place, which was much nicer than the embassy, and they had nice dinners there.

We were involved, for example, in securing with the nuclear scientists, so they weren't tempted to sell the knowledge to the Iranians or Libyans. We also worked on securing nuclear related equipment.

With respect to military equipment, remember, the MBFR and CFE agreements required bringing Soviet tanks, artillery and armored personnel carriers away from Central Europe and Ukraine, which the Russians eventually did. Honestly speaking it was economically infeasible to maintain military units of the size they had. So they made decisions, not always supported by the military, that they didn't want to spend so much money on arms and soldiers. That was fine with us; we encouraged it.

*Q: What about our NATO allies? Were they establishing consulates and all? It must have been a little bit like Istanbul after World War One or something like that, an awful lot of countries getting in there, dealing with a new political situation and all that.*

GUNDERSEN: Well, when I got there, there was already, basically the French, the Germans, and Canadians and a few East European trade missions.

The Canadians, because they had a very large Ukrainian community - I think there were almost a million Canadian-Ukrainians and in a country of thirty million, that's a big portion. So they had a consulate.

We met every week with our NATO colleagues in the lead up to independence and recognition. The Canadians were probably the biggest advocates, because of their domestic politics. The others were thinking more or less like we were initially, being a little bit cautious about recognizing Ukraine, But everyone eventually followed the emerging NATO consensus about recognition. By the time I left most major Western countries had established embassies in Ukraine.

*Q: What about the Ukrainian-Americans? Were they much of a factor?*

GUNDERSEN: When I first was appointed Consul General, I did the tour of some of the Ukrainian-American communities in the States. I had a steep learning curve, because even though I had served in the Soviet Union and knew Russia well, I wasn't a Ukraine expert. So I did a lot of reading and talking. The Ukrainian-American community was pushing a reluctant Administration for independence and eventual recognition. So I had to tread a careful line working closely with the community while toeing the party line as a government official. I remember once referring to "the Ukraine" rather than "Ukraine" in front of a Ukrainian group – a big mistake I soon found out.

*Q: Yeah, I've always had problems with that, I still talk about the Ukraine, but that's not the right term.*

GUNDERSEN: It's "Ukraine" and it's because of somewhat arcane grammatical and political reasons. Ukraine comes from the Slavic word for "border". In Ukrainian or Russian, using the word as a common noun in that sense requires that you use a definite article to modify the word. And that means a subset of a larger unit.

So when you say "the Ukraine" it could be seen as meaning a subset of a larger unit, i.e., Russia. Ukraine, on the other hand, could refer to an independent unit. It's more of an issue in English. So I learned very quickly you say "Ukraine" with the Ukrainian-American community.

The Ukrainian-American community, some of them came over after the Russian Revolution in 1917, others came over as Displaced Persons after World War Two. Most were and are strongly anti-communist. Some had even been pro-German, because they hated Stalin so much they welcomed the Germans. So they're a real mixed group and I had to handle the community delicately.

So I got to know them fairly well and I still am friends with some of the community. In the final analysis, they were a political force in the recognition question. They had political clout on the Hill. Whenever I returned to Washington for consultations I would meet with their representatives.

*Q: Way back, when I first came into the Foreign Service, I was very much aware of Ukrainian nationalism, because there are a couple of statues right in the heart of Washington honoring some to me obscure Ukrainian poet or something.*

GUNDERSEN: Taras Shevchenko. You can't say he's an obscure poet!

*Q: Okay.*

GUNDERSEN: Just kidding. There's a big statue right by like 24<sup>th</sup> Street of Taras Shevchenko. I did read some of Shevchenko's writing, including his poetry. He was not

only a poet but a nationalist, who wrote in Ukrainian, not in Russian as was the norm under the Czars. So he's considered by many as the father of independent Ukraine.

Our first son, who was conceived in Ukraine, is named Jan Taras, his middle name after Taras Schevchenko. We chose the name before independence. The newspaper *Izvestia*, the largest paper in the Soviet Union at the time, reported that "The American consul general has named his son after the Ukrainian nationalist hero." A not so subtle criticism by a large paper still touting the Soviet party line. That was the only time I have ever been mentioned in *Izvestia* and it was right there on the front page.

*Q: Did our policymakers, both in Washington and at our embassy in the then Soviet Union divide into camps over Ukrainian independence?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, there were camps. Those who wanted to go slow on recognition and those who wanted to go faster. It was largely DOD that pushed for quicker recognition. And there were some in the State Department who wanted that, especially in Policy Planning.

But the Soviet desk was more cautious, because they were dealing directly with our embassy in Moscow. I know that at the NSC they had the same discussions. The Soviet director at the NSC was a guy named Ed Hewitt. Nick Burns, who later became Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, was a young officer at the NSC. I met with both of them whenever I was in Washington. The Desk and the NSC didn't want any obstacles to good relations with Gorbachev (we were negotiating a number of delicate bilateral arms control agreements at the time). As I said earlier, we disagreed on a number of issues, including the George H.W. Bush speech in Kiev.

But everyone eventually came around after the failure of the August coup in Moscow. By the end of 1991 it was clear to all that we needed to recognize Ukrainian independence.

*Q: It's interesting how, but this is typical of how Washington operates, it likes straight-line projection. There was a Soviet Union, there will always be a Soviet Union, this is part of what we're going to be dealing with.*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, you're more comfortable with the devil you know. But I must say that once Secretary of State Baker decided to recognize Ukraine and the other newly independent States, there was a real sea change in Washington. We started aid programs, we became an advocate in NATO and for the integration of Ukraine into Western institutions and all sorts of programs.

*Q: How about Poland? Was a factor?*

GUNDERSEN: My mother is Polish. I mentioned that at one of my first meetings with a Ukrainian-American group before leaving for Ukraine. Some of in the audience whispered to me afterwards that, "Poland has been a colonial power, just like the Russians."

*Q: Well, Poland had a big hunk of Ukraine.*

GUNDERSEN: They did. The Ukrainian city of L'viv or L'vov was part of Poland in the interwar period. But I think that the real enemy they felt was Russia and that Poland had played a transitory role in Ukrainian history. In fact Poland has become a real supporter of Ukrainian independence and they have very good relations now.

*Q: How about Belarus?*

GUNDERSEN: People sort of laugh, "Well, they're not really a country, they're little Russians."

*Q: When you left, where'd you go?*

GUNDERSEN: From there I came back to Washington and was soon appointed as Chargé d'Affaires in Iceland, because there was no ambassador. So I came back to the States for a month or two and then was sent to Iceland.

*Q: I would have thought that you would have been sort of disappointed that you didn't get more deeply involved in this new situation in the former Soviet Union.*

GUNDERSEN: That's true. The State Department wanted to nominate me as the first ambassador to an independent Ukraine. Tom Niles proposed that to the White House, but the NSC had their own candidate.

*Q: Who went there?*

GUNDERSEN: Roman Popadiuk, who was a Ukrainian-American, and was the deputy press spokesman. Bush's National Security Advisor Scowcroft and pushed for him and, of course, the White House nominee trumped the State candidate.

*Q: Today is the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, 2012, the anniversary of D-Day, with Jon Gundersen. Let's pick up on where we were on Ukraine.*

GUNDERSEN: In 1992, I was still in Ukraine as Chargé, after that country's independence. Ukraine at the time was an unknown actor on the world stage, it was this new country of fifty million sitting between Russia and the rest of Europe, with the third largest nuclear force in the world, after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

And the U.S. didn't quite know how to work with Ukraine, since we were accustomed to working with a reforming Soviet Union, but when the Soviet Union collapsed we recognized Ukrainian independence quickly.

Secretary of State Baker realized that we needed to work with them closely. Firstly, because Ukraine had a massive stockpile of nuclear weapons left from the Soviet days



Therefore, my most important mission towards the end of my tenure in Ukraine was as a the conduit for negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons from Ukrainian soil.

I was receiving almost daily instructions to go see the President Kravchuk, to say, “Here is what we would like you to do, either destroy your nuclear weapons or return the nuclear weapons to Russian custody under strict supervision, and to work with us to make sure that your nuclear scientists are integrated into society and don’t sell their secrets to rouge nations such as Iran and Libya.

So I had a number of meetings at the instructions of the Secretary of State, basically giving the U.S. position. We were in a solid position, since we had money and influence at the time. We had a lot of prestige for, in effect, winning the Cold War and the First Gulf War.

There were forces in Ukraine who wanted to keep the nukes, as both a bargaining chip and to enhance their status as a power, but with enough pressure from the United States and others, the Ukrainian leadership agreed to eliminate their nuclear weapons, largely by returning the weapons to Russia.

*Q: What were the inducements we and other countries were able to bring on Ukraine to make it*

GUNDERSEN: We had an assortment of inducements.

*Q: Which were?*

GUNDERSEN: One, Ukraine wanted to be seen as a legitimate nation state in Europe. Remember this was a heady period. The U.S.S.R was no more, Europe was integrating, the EC had money to help the former States of East Europe and the former Republics of the Soviet Union. These new States wanted and needed aid from Western countries. And Russia, of course, didn’t want the Ukraine to have nuclear weapons.

There was pressure all around for Ukraine to eliminate the nuclear weapons. However, various actors in Ukraine said, “Well, nukes will give us status as a power and we can’t trust Russians, so let’s keep the nukes.” So there was some immediacy and sensitivity about getting Kiev to accept eliminating their nuclear weapons. These were tough negotiations, especially between Russia and Ukraine with the U.S. as the intermediary. I spent not a few late nights at President Kravchuk’s summer residence. Eventually all parties signed what was called the Lisbon Protocol, because it was signed in Lisbon. In it Russia more or less guaranteed Ukrainian borders, recognized their sovereignty. Ukraine would eliminate their nuclear weapons, gradually, and the EC and U.S would undertake to integrate Ukraine into European institutions, the World Bank, the WTO and other institutions. I received a State Department Award for my contributions. So that was a very exciting time.

*Q: Was there a significant Ukrainian defense establishment?*

GUNDERSEN: Not Ukrainian, at the time it was still largely a Soviet-style establishment.

*Q: I'm just wondering, emerging from the Soviet entity, was there a significant Ukrainian one?*

GUNDERSEN: There were a number of high-ranking officers who were Ukrainian; some of them more nationalistic than others, some of them more sympathetic towards Russia or the old Soviet Union.

There was a struggle within the emerging defense community of Ukraine about what to do, how to build their own forces, because everything they had done previously, their operations, maintenance, training had been as part of an integrated Soviet force. They had never organized or equipped themselves to defend Ukraine specifically and they were reliant on a conscript army raised by the Soviet Union.

So they really started from scratch. We had a ground-breaking visit from our Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney. I had to call the Ukrainian defense minister, his name was Moroz. I called him directly and said that our defense secretary was coming and we needed an agenda.

He said, "Fine, let's plan it," so we sat in his office setting up meetings. I said we needed to get hotels for the Secretary's party. And he said, "Oh, yeah, good. My sister-in-law runs the concession stand at Intourist. So let me give her a call."

So while I'm on the phone with Washington, the Ukrainian Defense Minister is calling his sister-in-law to set up hotel arrangements and catering and things like that. That's how things operated at that time.

Ukraine was also very eager to get American assistance.. So it was an easy time to deal with the Ukrainian government. Kravchuk, the president, was happy any and all high level American visitors, including CODELs. I think we had six or seven in the first couple months after independence, including Nunn, Lugar, Bradley, Thurman, Cranston, Pell (Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee), etc..

*Q: How about the European powers? I think particularly some place like France would be really delighted to see the Soviet Union no longer hovering over the Carpathian Mountains.*

GUNDERSEN: They had sort of cognitive dissonance. There were two thoughts: one was, yes, they wanted Soviet forces as far away from the Fulda Gap and Western Europe as possible. But they also were comfortable dealing with the former Soviet Union, or with Gorbachev, devil you know is better than the devil you don't know. Europe was – and is – even more reluctant to deal with a change in an existing State system than we were.

So they were not that quick to recognize Ukrainian independence. The ones who were quickest were Canada, because of the large Ukrainian population there; Poland, because they distrusted the Russians and were happy to see this development; and small countries, who readily supported a newly formed State. Iceland, for example, was one of the first countries to recognize Ukraine, because they were proud of their own sovereignty.

And there was struggle within NATO about recognizing Ukraine. As I described earlier, there was a difference of opinion within the U.S. government about recognizing Ukraine immediately.

When the bureaucracy finally came around, we then argued forcefully within NATO for quicker recognition, for assistance, for all these other things. There was pretty much consensus by '92 to recognize and work with Ukraine.

*Q: Did the Black Sea Fleet come within your purview? It wasn't our business, but at the same time, it was a very awkward situation.*

GUNDERSEN: It wasn't, as you say, directly within the U.S. sort of purview, but we encouraged Ukraine to work with Russia to resolve contentious military issues: who controlled the Crimea, who controlled Sebastopol and the fleet itself.

So we had people come over, for example, Admiral Crowe, who was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time. Eventually, after my tenure, it was worked out that the Russians would have a long term lease, but Ukraine would maintain sovereignty over Crimea. But the Russians, in effect, controlled those bases, with a long-term lease.

*Q: Did grain enter into our calculations at the time?*

GUNDERSEN: Not really. We were interested, because Ukraine had been the breadbasket of the Soviet Union. It was an important factor in that sense. But they didn't export to the United States and we export a lot of grain to Russia ourselves.

Our interest was to help them change from collective production of grain to one that allowed farmers more autonomy, so we had the Secretary of Agriculture come out. We were there in an advisory role.

*Q: Young Ukrainian girls became quite a commodity in the West early on in this period, they were being enticed by Italian or Hungarian pimps, sold a bill of goods. Trafficking of women, that issue, although it had been going on for thousands of years, this was all of a sudden pretty obvious problem.*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, that developed over the course of the following decade, so it wasn't a major issue while I was there. But, you're right, unfortunately, Ukrainian girls became a valuable commodity in the West. They were attractive, they had not had the freedom to leave the old Soviet Union before and there was a built up demand for foreign

travel. Most of these girls were not well off and they could make a lot of money in the West and they were exploited by unscrupulous traffickers.

I could add an interesting and unrelated anecdote. When we got a marine security guard detachment at our new embassy, in '91, I guess, the marines had a non-fraternization policy dating from the old Soviet days, they couldn't meet socially with any locals. That was lifted for all embassy personnel, including the defense attachés and all other Department of Defense personnel, but it wasn't lifted for the marines.

Now, from the embassy's perspective, that was the worst of all worlds, because you have these young, twenty year old kids in the prime of life and they can't see these girls and saw what everyone else was doing.

And, in my mind, that was just a perfect set up for a honey trap.

*Q: The classic KGB trap, which has happened again and again.*

GUNDERSEN: And there was the case in Moscow in the Eighties involving the sexual compromise of a Marine Guard, Lonetree was his name as I remember.

And we made the case by cable with the Marine Headquarters, which was in Germany, that they had to lift this non-fraternization policy. So we had the Marine Corps Ball coming up, the biggest and wildest Marine Party of the year at all American Embassies around the world. Eventually, after much prodding, the non-fraternization policy was lifted less than two weeks before the Marine Corps Ball.

At the ball there were more young, attractive Ukrainian girls than you could ever imagine. Each marine had six or seven beautiful young Ukrainian girls.

Now, how they got to know them in two weeks, I don't know and I didn't ask. But it was a good party.

*Q: Here you were, Foreign Service-wise, you were sitting on some prime real estate and there must have been all sorts of people, both on the political appointee side and on the Foreign Service side, who wanted to be the ambassador there. Did you feel that?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes. I think I mentioned at another session that the assistant secretary of state for European affairs, Tom Niles, came out after independence and told me State would nominate me to be ambassador. He'd fight for it, but don't count on it, because he knew the reality of Washington politics.

So he did nominate me but there were a lot of people interested. They mentioned names like Brzezinski and Howard Baker. The person who eventually was appointed was a Ukrainian-American, Popadiuk, who had worked in the White House as the deputy press spokesman. I worked as his DCM for a few months and that's when I came back to the States, in early '93, I guess.

*Q: How did the Ukrainians respond to somebody of Ukrainian background? Did they try to exploit this? Did you get any feel for that?*

GUNDERSEN: It's a tough situation.

*Q: Were we working in conjunction with the Western European embassies, or was everybody sort of doing their own thing?*

GUNDERSEN: I had weekly meetings with the ones who were there: the French, the Germans, the Brits and the Canadians. Those were the only Western countries with embassies at the time. The British were the last to open one.

So we had weekly meetings. At first, the big issue was would the Ukrainians vote for independence.

So we had a fairly consistent and coordinated view of Ukrainian politics. Our Embassy had a lot of good contacts, because we had Ukrainians speakers on our staff and the Europeans did not. So we were able to share a lot of good intelligence.

*Q: Ukrainian politics has developed some nasty characteristics which persists even today. It almost seems like the office politics of the Roman Empire, or something like that.*

GUNDERSEN: What we knew was that Ukraine was a very immature country without civil society counterweights to government institutions and that it would be very difficult for it to develop along Western line, and it would take a long time.

I must say we were probably a little overly optimistic about its future, because this was a time of euphoria, the Wall had fallen, East Europe was independent of Soviet influence, and the Soviet Union had fallen apart.

We knew a lot of the Ukrainian democratic activists who were more Western oriented. We didn't know the old Communist apparatchiks as well. We knew there would be problems, but I don't think we foresaw all the problems that have since occurred.

*Q: Were you flooded with NGOs? In '94, I spent three weeks in Bishkek, in Kyrgyzstan and I was tripping over all these NGOS, all of whom had a little, I won't say piece of the pie, but interest in the pie and were trying to make sure that they were accomplishing something: religious, social, what have you.*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, the NGOs first on the scene were largely Ukrainian-American groups and charities and religious organizations that were there to help Ukraine.

We also had a lot of those groups coming through as well as Jewish groups. But there were distinct differences among the religious groups. There's a Ukrainian Orthodox Church, there's a Uniate Church *i.e.*, one that uses the traditional Orthodox liturgy, but is

part of the Roman Catholic church. There were reformed, orthodox, Hassidic, Lubavitcher and other Jewish groups as well. They all were interested in helping their Ukrainian brothers and sisters, who had been suppressed in Soviet times.

The Embassy worked with all these groups, many of whom could be quite demanding, because they were, let's say, on a mission from God.

*Q: Was there anybody left? I think of Babi Yar. Was there any Jewish*

GUNDERSEN: There was. Kiev still had a couple hundred thousand Jewish residents. Odessa was a big Jewish center. A lot of them who left in '73 and '79 were from the Ukraine.

We worked with them on a number of issues. For example, I helped a Jewish group open up the home of Sholem Aleichem, the author of the original story on which *Fiddler on the Roof* is based, in Kiev. The *shtetl* that was discussed in the original Aleichem stories was in Ukraine, it was a fictitious locality in the Pale of Settlement.

So the initial NGOs that came in were ones like that. Human rights groups then came towards the end of my tenure and they really increased in numbers later on.

*Q: How did the fallout, literally, from Chernobyl play out while you were there?*

GUNDERSEN: Well the first fallout was after I got married, before I went to Ukraine. The fallout from Chernobyl was even a bigger issue in Germany than here, because there was a lot of anti-nuclear sentiments and some of the radioactive cloud passed over Germany. When my wife, Eike, became pregnant with our son, she had to decide whether she would join me permanently in Ukraine.

The German doctors told her not to. The U.S. doctors back in Washington said, "There's no problem, we've done tests and everything, it wouldn't affect the pregnancy." So Eike moved to Ukraine, stayed with me for a year and a half, but she went back to Germany to have the child.

My contacts in the Ukrainian president's office said, "Why don't you have the child in Ukraine, because it would be such a symbol of U.S.-Ukrainian friendship and would be a great thing for us."

And I basically said, "I'll do a lot for my country, but I'm going to sacrifice my first born."

They showed me the hospital where the Communist Party elite went. It looked ok and they would have given us preferential treatment, but the supplies were old U.S. and German medicines. So our son, Jan Taras, was born in Flensburg, Germany, the local hospital near my wife's hometown. So that's one Chernobyl-related incident that occurred there.

Another one was a visit from Under Secretary of State Selin to Chernobyl. It was the first major American visit to Chernobyl. I accompanied him. We had to wear protective gear throughout the visit.

It was an eerie thing, because you see this town, it's totally a ghost town, like *On the Beach* after the bomb had gone off. We went with the head of the Ukrainian Nuclear Society.

He lived there when the accident happened. We went to his apartment, and he hadn't been there since then. And it was exactly as he had left it, including his child's toys and he just broke down when we went in. It was an interesting and touching experience.

*Q: Were we, the United States, doing anything to clean it up or help or not?*

GUNDERSEN: We had a lot of both private and public money going there and we worked a lot with the Europeans. So there was a real active effort. There was also an effort to take some of the kids from Chernobyl and send them to camps in the West, just to get away. And, of course, they evacuated the immediate area.

*Q: Were we doing much to try to encourage more efficient farming and all?*

GUNDERSEN: The Secretary of Agriculture did come out and talk with the Ukrainian leaders about it, but it was tough, because the Ukrainians had eliminated the population most amenable to agricultural reforms during the collectivization drive in the Thirties. And the ones who eventually took control of the farms were those who had personally benefited from collectivization. So we tried to help out to decollectivize some farms.

*Q: What about fishing? Was that much of a business?*

GUNDERSEN: Not really. One thing, speaking of fishing and Chernobyl's impact, in terms of contamination, Kiev wasn't affected so much, because it's south of Chernobyl and the radioactive cloud drifted to the west. So there was more contamination from fallout in Poland, in Sweden and Belarus than there was in Eastern Ukraine.

However, we were told not to eat the fish, because the Dnipro River flowed from Chernobyl towards Kiev and the south.. So the fallout from Chernobyl didn't affect agriculture, but fishing and things like mushrooms.

But otherwise, commercial fishing, I don't think we had much of an interest in that.

*Q: You think of Odessa being a big, major seaport for the whole Soviet Union. Did that continue?*

GUNDERSEN: Odessa, it's a thriving old maritime city and it's also a place with a big Jewish population, as well as a Greek and other minority populations.

*Q: Used to be a Greek city.*

GUNDERSEN: Right, so it was a real polyglot city, interesting, some beautiful architecture. So it maintained its status as a seaport and I assume it still does.

*Q: Did we look upon it as being sort of more the bellwether than Kiev?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, Kiev was important, because it was where Russian and Ukrainian ethnicities mixed and there were a lot of mixed marriages. Of course, it was the capital and largest city.

So it was really the key place to work as a diplomat. Odessa was more of a commercial than a diplomatic or political center.

*Q: Well, then, you left there when?*

GUNDERSEN: I left early '93 and I came back and I had a couple of job possibilities, but Tom Niles, who was the assistant secretary, asked me, after home leave, to go to Iceland as Chargé, because the ambassador, a political appointee, had left to help the Bush Sr. campaign.

So I went to Iceland as Chargé, I was there for six months and Eike and our young son Jan came out for part of that time.

*Q: What was the situation in Iceland when you were there?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, our main priority was our military base at Keflavik just outside of Reykjavik. Iceland is a member of NATO, but it does not have its own indigenous armed forces. So we have a bilateral treaty to provide security for Iceland.

The Keflavik base was important, particularly in the Cold War, because we had F-15s there. We also had navy patrol planes – P-2s - that looked for Soviet subs. The base was also was an important way station to the rest of Europe and the Middle East.

So our interest was to maintain good relations and keep that base. It's located where the international airport is, we shared that facility and we actually paid for a lot of the costs of maintaining the airport.

So during the Cold War we were the main drivers in keeping the base active and available. The Icelanders had mixed feelings about keeping it open, because they're proudly independent. But as the Cold War ended, we started to think, "This is a very costly place," so we wanted to downsize the base. The tables had turned. Now, the Icelanders didn't want us to downsize, because they realized that the base provided employment and infrastructure as well as security.



In fact, the Foreign Minister, Hannibalsson, the Icelandic official I spoke to most often, had been a radical who demonstrated at the embassy as a youth to get the base out. Now he was pleading with us to keep it open and keep it at full strength, because it supported the local economy and there was a since that it tied the U.S. to guaranteeing Icelandic independence.

So that was one the main things I did there. We have since closed the base, well after my tenure.

And the other issue was whaling, because Iceland is a whaling nation and, of course, we have a big movement within the United States to ban whaling. So one of my first days there I had to deliver a demarche requesting the Icelanders join the International Whaling Commission, stop whaling and, of course, that didn't make the U.S. very popular.

*Q: Do we have anything in Iceland now?*

GUNDERSEN: In terms of bases? No, we don't. We closed that down four or five years ago. We have good relations with Iceland, they're members of NATO.

The biggest, most sensitive and sensational issue while I was there was an attempted kidnapping by two Americans who had children with an Icelandic girl who had lived in the United States. She married one, had a baby, divorced, married another American, had a baby. They were both Special Forces guys.

She was an alcoholic, so a U.S. judge awarded the children to the American fathers. Then she absconded with the two children to Iceland. And then these two Special Ops guys got together and worked out a plot to kidnap their two kids in Iceland.

They set up a phony company that was supposed to be handling the logistics for filming a Sylvester Stallone picture and their front man hired the Icelandic mother to work for the dummy film company. It was a very elaborate plot. In the meantime, while she was at work, they kidnapped the two kids with the intention of flying back to the States. They even had false papers for the kids..

And they got to the airport with the kids. Unbeknownst to them, the girl's father worked at the airport and saw them leaving on a flight, called the police, who stopped the kids and Special Ops guys just as they were boarding the plane. What were the chances?

So I was summoned by the Foreign Minister, who protested this breach of Icelandic sovereignty.. Of course, this was the headline in the Icelandic media. The story had it all: Hollywood, Sylvester Stallone, kidnapping, Special Forces, sex, a young, innocent Icelandic girl.

So I spent a lot of time on this, including visiting these guys in jail.

*Q: How'd it come out?*

GUNDERSEN: One guy was arrested, the other guy got away. The one in custody was charged, but was given a short sentence, ten years, with time off for good behavior. He got out well after I left, but he eventually did get out.

But the foreign ministry didn't want to make a big deal of it, because it was a little awkward, she was not a good mother, but there's nothing more sensitive in terms of nationality and sovereignty than a kidnapping, child custody case. The default position of most countries in this type of case is: "Our country is right, our people are right and the other ones are bad."

I was allowed to visit her and I was allowed to see the children, to make sure everything was okay, so that's how we worked it out quietly.

*Q: We still had troops there. I assume the regulations were pretty much intended to keep the troops on the base, weren't they?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, although not like Afghanistan or Cuba. They went out, they had relations with the locals, girlfriends. It's a fairly isolated place where they were located, but they had just built in the Eighties, before the end of the Cold War, a major facility, brand new high school, new dormitories and new housing. So the USG basically built this beautiful facility that wasn't needed after the end of the Cold War. They had a nice commissary there and a nice gym, which the Embassy could use.

*Q: You were there, what, about six months?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes.

*Q: This is one of the plum jobs, isn't it?*

GUNDERSEN: I don't think it's as plum as Geneva or Paris.

*Q: No, but they're little plums.*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, as you know, most European Posts go to political appointees, friends of the President and big party contributors. Eventually somebody did come out as ambassador. In fact, unusually it was a career Foreign Service Officer..

*Q: Did you get involved in NATO business while you were there, or not?*

GUNDERSEN: We had NATO meetings, once a month or so the NATO ambassadors there. The most important relationship was the U.S. bilateral relationship with Iceland, because Iceland does not have a standing army; the US provided for Icelandic defense.

Russia had a big embassy, a lot of spies. I talked to the Russian Embassy once in a while, but this was after the Cold War, so things were in flux and even Russian embassies were

in flux, the old hard liners were being replaced and so you had mixed signals coming from the Russians.

*Q: How about the Canadians? I would have thought they'd be interested?*

GUNDERSEN: Not really. I don't even know if they had an embassy there.

*Q: You get many high level visits while you were there?*

GUNDERSEN: Basically the visits you have are like four hour stopovers, so they could say they visited Iceland, a NATO member. We had a couple CODELs. We had a number of under secretaries and flag rank officers.

*Q: Politically, what was going on there?*

GUNDERSEN: The prime minister was a conservative, David Oddsson, but all the governments there are coalitions. By the way, all Icelanders go by their first names, because the last names change with each generation. David was very friendly to the U.S. I would often meet with him at the prime minister's official residence. It was of modest size and not protected by security.

*Q: A relatively small cottage.*

GUNDERSEN: In fact, that's where Gorbachev and Reagan met in 1986, at the famous summit and maybe you'd have a guard walking around the open fence. You could see the people from the PMs' office and people would look in the window at the prime minister doing his work. It was probably tightened up since then, but it was a very open society at the time.

The President, who was the head of state, but didn't have real power, was a woman. She was very popular, one of the first female heads of state. She would have a big party once a year. I remember having to rent white tie dress for the big occasion, a Dinner-Dance and the Department refused to reimburse the expense. I attended, as head of the U.S. mission. The Admiral, who was the commanding officer at Keflavik, would always be invited as well. A lot of dancing and drinking which loosened up the typically reserved Icelanders..

*Q: Well, then, you left there when?*

GUNDERSEN: I left there in the summer of '93. One of the main reasons was to return to the States for the birth of our second son, Kai Nikolas, in September.

*Q: And what?*

GUNDERSEN: And came back and worked in EUR, the European Bureau, as the deputy for policy.

*Q: What does that mean?*

GUNDERSEN: The job basically entailed everything that was not covered by one of the country directors or the NATO office in EUR. So we did things such as speeches for the assistant secretary, talking points, mission program plans for the bureau and other things that didn't fit into any of the country directorates. We also did long term strategic thinking.

Probably the most strategic issue I worked on was whether NATO; the question of whether NATO would expand to encompass Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. We were in the forefront of arguing for NATO expansion, a not very popular position at the time.

There was a lot of opposition to NATO expansion after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russians opposed NATO expansion, particularly to include Poland and the Baltic States, and the Germans and the French were reluctant about expansion as well.

But we worked with Senator Lugar and eventually Dick Holbrooke became a proponent. Our office wrote a lot of the position papers on NATO expansion. We always listed pros and cons, but our bottom line was in support of NATO expansion.

I also coordinated the move of Radio Free Europe from Munich to Prague. So it's those types of things that either were emerging policies or small things that didn't fit into one of the country directorates.

*Q: Looking at it, even though one could argue about what's the point of retaining NATO, it does keep the Europeans from developing independent defense organizations which could tend to evolve into rival organizations opposing our own future strategic objectives.*

*It really does have a calming effect on the international scene.*

GUNDERSEN: Correct. One of the main points we made about NATO expansion to Eastern Europe was that since the East Europeans were so anxious to be seen as Western countries and so afraid of their eastern neighbor, this constituted pressure on them to abide by certain rules: if you want to become a member of NATO, you have to respect the rights of minorities in your country, you have to respect freedom of the press and basic human rights.

And at the time we didn't know how Eastern Europe would develop, whether it would revert to communism or some form of right wing dictatorships. So NATO membership became a real tool to encourage them to adopt normal Western standards of conduct. And, in fact, I think that's what happened.

*Q: It seems to have worked.*

*Was there any thought, while you working on this, of maybe bringing Russia into NATO?*

GUNDERSEN: There was discussion of it, but it was a bridge too far. At that point, we focused on the Baltic States, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Then we said, if that worked, NATO might expand further. Ron Asmus, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European affairs 1997-2001, was the one who said, "Let's establish a mechanism to test their *bona fides*." That was called the Partnership for Peace, where aspiring nations would train with NATO, and if they could meet a set of criteria, they would be eligible for membership, a process that we established.

*Q: Was there concern that as the Soviet Union collapsed and we were pouring money into setting up new embassies in the newly independent, former Soviet republics, that we were sort of starving other activities of the European Bureau of resources?*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, that was a big mistake we made at the end of the Cold War. We should have and could have ask the Congress for a supplemental appropriation to establish these embassies.. The Pentagon is much better at asking Congress for supplementals in addition to the normal budget process.

This was a mistake Secretary of State Baker made right before the 1992 presidential election. To show he was really going to keep the budget deficit in check in line with the Republican platform, Baker said we could add Embassies within the existing EUR budget and that, of course, decimated the rest of our European embassies.

*Q: Oh, I think so. We were overjoyed at the end of the Cold War and it wouldn't have been that big a deal.*

GUNDERSEN: And we still feel the effect, because then we would have established a baseline much higher for future State budgets.

*Q: Well, after you left there, where did you go?*

GUNDERSEN: I was sent to Estonia as chargé, because Bob Frasure, who had been Ambassador in Estonia, was sent by Holbrooke to Bosnia to get a sense of the fighting and determine whether the US should play a larger role. Sadly, he died in a traffic accident while inspecting a dangerous area in the Balkans,

*Q: In Sarajevo, yeah.*

GUNDERSEN: Yes. So I was sent there to become Chargé in his absence. And so was a good friend of mine, Keith Smith, who had been the Director for Policy. He and I, for a year and a half, basically went back and forth as Chargé in Estonia.

*Q: Okay, you were there, kind of off and on, when?*

GUNDERSEN: 1995, I was there for two four-month periods.

*Q: What was the situation in Estonia?*

GUNDERSEN: Estonia was at the time very interested in establishing its independence, getting away from Russia and becoming a NATO and EU member.

Our most immediate objective was to get the remaining Russian troops out of Estonia. So I worked closely with both the Estonians and the Russians to get the troops out without anyone losing face. There was a lot of historic tensions between the ethnic Estonians and Russians in Estonia.

*Q: Were they in any particular place?*

GUNDERSEN: Most Russians either lived near the Russian border or in Tallinn, the Capitol. The Soviets also had two military bases during the Cold War, which were still in place. The Russians were prepared to withdraw, but they wanted to extract certain concessions from the Estonians.

Estonia, like the other Baltic states, were independent in the inter-war period and were forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union because of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Because they were so anti-Russians, some Estonians in fact, helped the Germans in World War Two.

And they saw demographic change, from a country that was over eighty per cent Estonian before the war, to a country that was less than sixty per cent Estonians by the 1980s, because a lot of Estonians emigrated after the war to Scandinavia and the West, some were sent to the Gulag, and many were killed by Stalin before or during the war,. And their places were taken by Russians, especially in factory towns.

So, you can understand, that's a very volatile situation and there was a lot of understandable anti-Russian feeling in Estonia.. Therefore, Estonians very much wanted to be seen as part of the West, in order to guarantee against the Russians returning.

But at the same time, the US had an interest in making sure that ethnic Russian residents were integrated into Estonian society. Some of our aid program, in fact, included language instruction and money to teach Estonian to the ethnic Russians.

So we worked on compromises to allow the Russians to save face as they withdrew their forces and on programs to not unnecessarily alienate the remaining ethnic Russian population.

Estonia had a tough time in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union; they endured economic shock therapy, they had high unemployment. But that eventually

paid off, because instead of propping up uneconomic Soviet-era industries, they let them fail.

*Q: I assume there was a considerable Estonian-American population and I assume they were hand in glove with what was going on?*

GUNDERSEN: They were very involved. In fact, the present prime minister is an Estonian American. He was ambassador here. I worked with him.

The head of the Estonian armed forces was a retired Estonian-American colonel, who was a little bit of a wild card, because he was so anti-Russian that I had to persuade him to tone down his more vitriolic anti-Russian statements..

*Q: Yeah, well, this, of course, is always a problem. Somebody who, say, lived in the United States could vent freely about issues, but when you come back to a country where it is a politically volatile issue, you've got to watch what you say.*

GUNDERSEN: Einseln, that was his name, was appointed defense minister of Estonia because they didn't have a real supply of Estonians who had attained senior rank in the Soviet armed forces and they wanted to choose an officer untainted by the Soviet experience. Unfortunately, when Einseln came to Estonia he lost his U.S. military pension, because he was working for a foreign power.

So we had to work to get a special congressional dispensation which would allow him to keep his pension, because he was making like \$8,000 a year as the defense minister of Estonia and he couldn't live on that.

*Q: Did you find you that you sort of had a fairly prominent role in Estonia?*

GUNDERSEN: Because I was representing the United States, they were very interested in my views. The president, Leonard Meri, in fact, invited me to his sauna to talk business in the nude. Nothing to hide, I guess.

We also had a visit by Vice President Gore when I was there, which was a big deal. He was the highest-ranking American ever to visit Estonia. I was worried, because of my Ukraine experience. As I mentioned previously, President Bush I delivered his famous "chicken Kiev" speech while I was Consul General in Ukraine. So I made sure I was able to pre-clear Gore's speech in Estonia to make sure that Gore said all the right things. And he did.

I remember when he visited the embassy and talked to the staff in the library, we displayed copies of his book, *Earth in the Balance*. That was the first thing he saw when he entered the Embassy. He got a kick out of that. Gore was also nice enough to mention I was his mentor and coach when he was a student at St. Albans. I was coaching football and track at St. Albans for extra cash while I was studying at George Washington U. I doubt he really remembered me. Good staff work I suppose.

*Q: How did you find the Russian-Estonian relationship?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, it was contentious. The government at the time was made up of ethnic Estonian parties, even though and the parties that represented the Russian minority, which represented about 1/3 of the electorate, weren't involved in government.

So although we strongly supported Estonian independence and we understood why they were so anti-Russian, we worked with them closely to pursue policies that didn't exclude the ethnic Russians population.

Initially they wanted to prevent anybody who had come to Estonia after World War II, mostly ethnic Russians, from obtaining Estonian citizenship.

So we worked with them on the citizenship law to allow more ethnic Russians to become citizens, as long as they learned Estonian and met other criteria. Eventually most Russians did so.

*Q: Was there an Estonian-American being groomed to become our ambassador there?*

GUNDERSEN: Eventually, the person who went out there was Larry Taylor, who headed the Foreign Service Institute. Again, I was told I was on the short list.

A footnote to this, in my strange career, shortly thereafter, I was offered an appointment as Ambassador to Tajikistan. That was an unaccompanied post. Because I had small children and had been married for just a few years, I just said no to it. So that was another close brush with an ambassadorial career.

*Q: How did Estonia at that time compare with the other Baltic States, Latvia and Lithuania?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, they coordinated their policies because they had a common enemy – Russia – and they had a mutual interest in collective security, which they eventually gained through NATO membership. We also worked with the Balts to establish military cooperation. Eventually they had their own Baltic brigade, which served in the Balkans and even in Afghanistan.

But they were also proudly independent. They have three different languages and each Baltic State has a different history. But they worked together out of necessity. In fact, it was sort of comical, when they met. They didn't have a common language, so they decided that English would be their common language.

Now, they all spoke Russian fluently, because they grew up in the Soviet Union, but they'd rather use rather very primitive, Tarzan-type English with each other rather than Russian.



I was at one meeting where they had a very preliminary discussion on defense cooperation and they would turn to me and a Frenchman who also spoke Russian and said, “What is this in Russian? You can tell the others how you say this in Russian.”

In other words, it was okay for Westerners to speak Russian, but they wouldn’t use it officially with one another.

*Q: Did the legations from the Baltic countries which had been maintained here in Washington, they’d been here since, what, the Thirties or so, were they at all players?*

GUNDERSEN: By the time the Balts became independent in the early 1990s, most of the diplomats who represented their countries before the Soviet takeover in 1939 had died. But the ethnic communities in the U.S. were always supportive and kept the hope of an independent nation alive. And the Baltic States had a lot of support when they eventually became independent because they represented small countries trying to maintain their independence and willing to contribute in NATO.

They’ve become responsible members of the international community. So I think it fair to say that U.S. policy contributed greatly to their independence and political and economic success.

*Q: Did you find yourself quizzed or challenged on American foreign policy much, while you were in Estonia?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I think they were more interested than challenged by American foreign policy. Most of the government ministers were younger than me, they were mostly in their thirties. The foreign minister was 29. They were very savvy technologically, and very pro-American.

So the criticisms weren’t that we shouldn’t be involved in this country or that we were too aggressive, it was, “Why can’t you be tougher on the Russians?”

Having been largely shut off from the West since the war, they loved American and Western culture and movies.

*Q: Could you do anything in that regard, through USIA?*

GUNDERSEN: We had a strong USIA presence. We had an IVP program, which brought a lot of people to the U.S. We helped American businesses. So, I must say, it was not a difficult assignment.

*Q: Singing was quite an element within the*

GUNDERSEN: “The Singing Revolution,” sure. Well, I’m not a singer, *per se*. The only time I remember singing publicly, was during an interview on Estonian radio. I don’t

remember where I picked this up, but there was a joke that Bob Dylan has sung about Estonia in a song.

I mentioned that and the interviewer challenged me to sing it, so I did. Instead of the Dylan song which contains the verse “They’ll stone you when you’re getting, etc”, I sang: “Estonia when you’re getting in your car, Estonia when you’re alone,,,everyone’s got to be stoned.” In other words, when Dylan mumbles they’ll stone you... it sounds like he’s singing “Estonia.” So they thought that was funny. Well, you had to be there.

*Q: Where’d you go after that?*

GUNDERSEN: From Estonia, my wife was keen on my getting a normal assignment. Eike stayed with me for a few months in Estonia with our two small kids. In fact, she worked for an Estonian paper for awhile. But for most of my assignments in both Iceland and Estonia, she was alone with the kids in Washington. So I came back to the Department and had a short assignment in the Political-Military Bureau, in charge of Balkan issues. That was during the lead up to the Dayton Accords., which, in effect, stopped the bloody Wars in the Balkans..

*Q: How’d you find that?*

GUNDERSEN: What I found was, because Holbrooke was such a force of nature that he basically took over the issue and operated independently. And I found a willingness by all the Balkan parties to accept American leadership, because they were exhausted, and for the Europeans to go along, because, let’s face it, they were unable to stop the war without American active leadership. I worked on the political-military confidence building measures in the Balkans, such issues as over flight rights that allowed us to transport material and exchange of information between ethnic forces, etc.

*Q: Were you working out of Washington?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, but I did travel to the Balkans and to Germany where we negotiated with our European partners.

*Q: How’d you find the Balkan people that you had to deal with, the Bosnians, how’d you find them?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I found there’s a lot of history and everyone had a grudge. At every meeting, the first thing you would hear is why the Serbs have mistreated us or why the Croats have done this and how we defended Western civilization against the Turks. Everyone had a grudge.

And the first thing that we always said to all parties was: We understand that, we sympathize, but now we have to look forward and we’re not going to change history. Now we want to address what to do to stop the bloodshed. In other words, you can’t allow them to begin with a thirty-minute diatribe against the other side.

So that was my experience in the PM Bureau. From there, I had a choice, I was offered, as I mentioned earlier, an ambassadorship to Tajikistan or a position as political advisor (POLAD) to Special Operations Command (SOCOM) in Florida. For Eike, it was an easy choice.

*Q: How long did you do that?*

GUNDERSEN: I did that for two years. In some ways, it was a logical assignment. I had been in the army had worked in special ops and had earlier been the head of a black ops unit for counter-terrorism in Europe. So I knew the community and culture. It was a great job.

*Q: What can you talk about the job?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, of course, not everything. I can say that POLADS were there to advise the four star general, the head of the command, about domestic and international sensitivities, international law and getting clearances to do certain things, including covert activities. In other words, to inject State Department input into the planning process.

I did a lot of traveling with the four star, General Shelton, who later became the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff. For example, when we traveled to Indonesia to train Indonesian special forces, we had human rights concerns regarding Indonesian use of this training to suppress natives in East Timor and Aceh. So I tried to make sure human rights concerns were addressed. I did the same in the Middle East, in Africa and in Latin and Central America. We visited and advised in all these areas.

While it was largely a political job, when there were black ops planned, I was there to make sure that there weren't unintended consequences and to consider those possible consequences.

*Q: I always think about when we intervened in Panama in December, 1989, we seemed to have tripped over ourselves, in not protecting the embassy, getting the papal nuncio mad as hell. It was sort of done on the fly. We should have known much more what we were up to.*

GUNDERSEN: And that's why every major military command now has a political advisor. In 1989, not all commands had a POLAD and, when they did, they didn't have much of a voice.

The Special Operations Command often would get direct orders from the Pentagon or the White House from a small circle of people, which did not include the State Department. That's why the POLAD position on the ground was so important.

One of the things that happened on my shift, it's now in the public domain, was when the Shining Light guerilla movement took over an embassy in Peru

*Q: The Japanese Embassy.*

GUNDERSEN: The Japanese Embassy, with Americans and other non-Japanese guests present. Our Special Ops forces worked secretly with Peruvian special forces. So when we were there on the ground training these forces, nobody knew about it. We worked with them on the actual hostage rescue operation and they took all the credit, without any overt U.S. fingerprint. So that's the type of thing I worked on.

*Q: These things actually pop up, didn't they? The special ops opportunities or challenges mature over a long time?*

GUNDERSEN: And sometimes they come up suddenly. You can't know when a hostage situation is going to come. The Special Operations Command has a relationship with a lot of countries.

I traveled to every continent with the commander. We spent a lot of time in the Middle East. A lot of it was training, not only on counter-terrorism, but everything from counter-narcotics to just making sure other countries' militaries have the requisite capabilities. Clearly, there always are local and international consequences to any action.

Sri Lanka was another example. We were supporting the government, which was combating the Tamil Tigers, a very bloody insurrection.

The government wanted our training, but they wanted to handle the captive Tigers without, shall we say, legal niceties and without outside interference. It's ironic now, after Abu Ghraib, that we were lecturing them on "things you don't do."

*Q: How long did you do that?*

GUNDERSEN: I did that for two years. That was my wife's favorite assignment. We had our third son, Finn Markus. We lived in Florida. I biked to work. It was a nice place to live. We still have many friends in the area and we visit periodically.

And when we'd travel, unlike in the State Department, where you'd leave Saturday and come back next Sunday (no weekends off), we'd usually leave on a Monday morning and come back Friday. For SOCOM weekends were sacred, unless we were in a war zone. Of course, then you were on duty 24/7.

From there, I was offered a job either as a Deputy Assistant Secretary in PM, handling special operations and low intensity conflicts, or DCM in Norway. Obviously, a DAS job is more prestigious, but because of my background and family circumstances, I took the job in Norway.

*Q: How long did you do that?*

GUNDERSEN: I did that a little over three years.

*Q: Until when?*

GUNDERSEN: To 2001. And, of course, my father left Norway as a merchant seaman with little money. To return as a senior American diplomat was a really nice thing. I only regret that my father did not live to see his son return to the Old Country. I'd like to think he would have been proud. And I was Chargé for over two years in Norway.

*Q: Why? I would have thought Norway would have been a hot spot for political appointees.*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, it almost always is. I initially was assigned as the DCM to a guy named David Hermelin, who was a political appointee. He was a major fund raiser for Bill Clinton, but was a very nice guy. He contracted brain cancer and he was sent back to the States. The Clinton Administration, rather than appoint a political Ambassador – and many people wanted it – was nice enough to leave me in charge while David was in treatment back in the States.

Sadly, he eventually died and, for a short period, before Bush was elected they appointed another political Ambassador, Robin Chandler Duke. But for most of the three year period I was in charge.

*Q: Well, what was the situation in Norway, from your perspective?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, there were two governments, one socialist and one conservative, in my time, although in Norway those terms do not mean the same as they do here. The socialist Labor Party was pro-NATO, and the conservatives favored more social democratic policies than conservatives here.

We had very good relations. The Norwegians very much wanted to work with us on NATO expansion, integrating Eastern Europe into Western institutions. And we liked working with the Norwegians, because they had developed a considerable reputation as mediators and facilitator for international peace efforts we supported.

They did the Oslo peace accords in the Middle East. They were active in ending the civil war in Sudan and Sri Lanka and Colombia. So part of my job was working with the Norwegians to help them out, give them support and intelligence for their peace mediation efforts.

For example, on the anniversary of the Rabin assassination, the Norwegians planned a memorial and invited the Palestinian Yasser Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to commemorate the Oslo Peace Process.

So the Norwegian government invited Arafat and Barak to come to Norway. That was towards the end of the Clinton Administration and we – the Embassy – suggested to the White House that this would be a good time for Clinton to come to Norway to help resurrect the Oslo Peace Process..

We eventually persuaded Clinton to come to Norway as part the continuation of the Oslo Peace Process and it became a major event. This was in November '99. Ahtisaari, then head of the EU, came, and Putin, who had just become prime minister of Russia, followed.

This became a major international event. I was Chargé at the time, but David Hermelin also came back for the occasion, because he was a personal friend of Clinton. So that was a big deal. It was good to have him back even though he was clearly very sick.

You know how it is to take care of a presidential party. Because Clinton decided to attend at the last second, we had only eight or nine days to organize the visit.

That event restarted the Oslo Peace Process. Over the next six months the parties got very close to an accord on Middle East peace: 98 or 99 per cent of the West Bank was to be part of a Palestinian state, Jerusalem would be split.

I was largely a spectator, but still on the sidelines on these historic discussions that unfortunately didn't come to fruition.

*Q: What role was the Norwegian government playing?*

GUNDERSEN: Their role was to get all the parties together. All the parties found Oslo to be a hospitable and convenient venue. The Norwegians were trusted by both the Arabs and the Israelis. So they were basically the facilitators; they weren't part of the actual negotiations.

*Q: How'd you find the embassy there?*

GUNDERSEN: It's sort of ironic that in places where it's easiest to live often times morale is not as high as places that are tough, like Moscow or the Third World, where the Embassy staff has to bond out necessity. Morale wasn't low in Oslo, but Embassy personnel largely went their own way outside of work hours.

And that's understandable, because it was a Western country, everyone has their own individual interests and they had Norwegian friends.

Like everywhere in Europe, the Department was also reducing staff, so we lost a few positions while I was there.

*Q: What was happening up around the Kola Peninsula?*

GUNDERSEN: A lot of this is classified, but we have a lot of close cooperation with the Norwegians on intelligence and in the north of the country. Norway is one of the few countries that is really an intelligence provider and not just a passive recipient of information from us.

So that's something we worked on very closely with the Norwegians. I visited certain sites up north. Remember the Russians are still firing rockets and conducting missile tests in the vicinity.

One of the problems for the Russians, after the Soviet Union collapsed, was that there was no rationale to have hundreds of thousands of people living in Murmansk. It's a cold, forbidding place that has no economic value but as a naval base and other military facilities. Many of these facilities were moved or shut down after the Cold War.

So we began to realize that the new problem we had to confront was not Russian strength but its weakness. For example, you had Russians coming over the border to Norway because of the better living standard and they brought with them prostitution, drugs, etc.

*Q: What did you do after that?*

GUNDERSEN: I came back here. That's when 9/11 occurred and I worked with the Counter-Terrorism Bureau. And then I came out to FSI.

*Q: Today is the 12<sup>th</sup> of June, 2012, with Jon Gundersen. Remind me where we were.*

GUNDERSEN: We were discussing my time in Norway. I mentioned when President Clinton visited to restart the Oslo Peace Process. We only had about eight days' notice that Clinton would come.

*Q: Which is almost just as well, isn't it?*

GUNDERSEN: Exactly. If we had three months, we would have worked full time for three months.

*Q: And nothing would have been better or worse.*

GUNDERSEN: That's right. So we worked hard under a time deadline to set up meetings and it worked out well.

*Q: How did you find the advance teams? If you have a president come, it's equivalent to an earthquake, really.*

GUNDERSEN: We called it the Invasion of Attila the Hun. Like every Foreign Service Officer, I've done it a number of times, but not as Chargé or chief of mission.

The Norwegians were very forthcoming, because a sitting American president had never visited Norway. It was the only NATO country not to have received a visit from a sitting American President. US Presidents have visited Norway before or after their tenures. For example, both Clinton and Carter visited Norway after their Presidential term. In fact, I was able to spend a good amount of time with both without having to worry about their entourage and handlers.

*Q: It must be more apparent to the Norwegians.*

GUNDERSEN: Yes. Norway was often taken for granted. Norway's, a good ally, never a problem. It's not a major actor, so it wasn't always a top priority. You know how it goes in White House thinking - the squeaky wheel gets attention.

So the fact the President was coming there was a very big deal. The real reason, of course, was to reinvigorate the Oslo Peace Process, but Oslo was very happy and set up meetings with the Prime Minister and King in addition to the meetings with Middle East leaders.

We booked every room in the biggest hotel in Norway for the advance team, plus press, plus hangers on, almost a thousand people. So the Norwegians just kicked people out and booked the entire hotel.

Of course our guys were very security minded and Norwegians were not used to that. But it worked fine and the advance team was more sensitive to local concerns than they often tended to be.

*Q: What was the problem with the Oslo Peace Accords?*

GUNDERSEN: Towards the end of the Clinton Administration, you had a relatively moderate Israeli government, with Barak in power, and Arafat began making noises that he was willing to compromise.

So Clinton thought this could be a crowning foreign policy achievement for his administration. It took a while to get Clinton to agree to come (the Embassy used the argument that he should seize the opportunity to make a lasting contribution to Middle East peace, to get Clinton to commit to coming to Oslo. That, and not the opportunity to exchange pleasantries with the King, was the real carrot that got the president to come to Norway.

That occurred in November '99. The discussions were fruitful – all players seemed to get along on a personal level. They later continued discussions in Taba, in Egypt. The parties came within a whisker of reaching agreement: 97 per cent of the West Bank returned to the Palestinians, Jerusalem would be split, there'd be some Israeli settlements remaining on the West Bank, in exchange for land that would be given to Palestinians, and recognition of both states.



We now forget how close they came to an agreement. Whether it could have been implemented was another story. Clinton blames Arafat for blinking and backing out at the last moment. I should mention, Clinton returned to Norway after the Bush election as a private citizen. Eike and I and some Norwegian friends had dinner with him and he opened up on his frustration about being unable to close the deal. We stayed up late, in fact, closing up a local bar. Clinton genuinely likes talking to people, at any level at any time. The next day, *Aftenposten*, the largest Norwegian paper, had a picture of us in a local restaurant with Eike giving Clinton that Nancy Reagan adoring look. I tease her that I never get that look.

I wasn't part of the actual negotiations *per se*. We set up the meetings. David Hermelin, who was being treated for brain cancer in the States, came back for a few days. He had a boat, a nice yacht he had bought in Norway. We had some of the talks on the yacht, which was very private.

I wanted to mention, another of the initiatives I worked was to get the Norwegian Navy to buy American equipment for frigates for the Norwegian Navy. There was a European consortium that bid on it as well. That was the largest military purchase in Norwegian history.

We told Washington that the only way for an American firm to be able to get this contract was to work with a Spanish firm, Bazan. Because the Norwegians had bought American F-16s, and other American equipment, the EU was pressuring them to buy the equipment from a joint German-French firm, so some Norwegian politicians felt they needed to give this contract to Europeans.

So we quietly worked with the Spanish, an EU member, on a joint bid. The Spanish firm Bazan would build the hulls and we'd supply everything else. The deal was basically put together by the Embassy. And it was successful one billion dollar deal, which subsequently employed thousands of US shipyard workers. People don't realize Embassies do a lot of commercial facilitation that benefit American companies and workers.

So in the summer of 2001, I was offered an assignment as the State representative of the Helsinki Commission on the Hill, the organization that monitors implementation of the Helsinki Accords..

I came back in late August and September 11<sup>th</sup> occurred ten days after I started my job on the Hill. Because I had some counter-terrorism experience, they immediately pulled me back to the Department to work 9/11 issues.

*Q: Were you in the Capitol on 9/11?*

GUNDERSEN: I was working in what they call the Ford House Office Building, where the Helsinki Commission has their offices, about two blocks from the Capitol Building. All government employees were told to evacuate. At that time there was a sense that

either Capitol or the White House would be next. You know how it was, nobody knew what was happening. As I drove home to McLean I could see flames rising from the Pentagon. Scary times.

*Q: Well then, this new job, how long did you do it and what did it consist of?*

GUNDERSEN: This wasn't a defined job. I did whatever was needed. One of my jobs was working with the UN to get a resolution based on the UN Article 51 right of self-defense, to allow the United States to take "all necessary means" to respond to 9/11.

And it was not easy. You know how it is get the UN to pass any resolution which would give legitimacy for U.S. action.

*Q: This was directed not at a country, it was an organization. What were we after?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, at first we didn't know. It took a few days for us to confirm that it was al Qaeda that had attacked us. Then it took a while to formulate a strategy and to implement policies. Basically we worked on what were our goals and what we should do to attain those goals.

The goal obviously was to punish al Qaeda, for the Taliban to shut them down and turn over bin Laden, since he was harbored in Afghanistan. It was not our stated intention to attack Afghanistan; the initial policy was to get the Taliban government to turn over the al Qaeda leadership.

And so we gave Kabul an ultimatum. When they didn't do it then we went forward. We had operatives in the north of Afghanistan already, working with the Northern Alliance. In fact, we were secretly pleased that the Taliban rejected our overture, because if they had played it out diplomatically they might have got the Russians and Chinese to block any action and do it in dribs and drabs. Remember, because of precedence, the Russians and Chinese were always chary about allowing any infringement on sovereignty. But the Taliban leadership rejected that US ultimatum.

I also worked to get NATO to declare that this was an attack on a NATO member under Articles Five of the North Atlantic Charter and, therefore, was an act of war and thus NATO would support any action against the Taliban.

*Q: Did you find, in your circle, resistance to the idea that this would fall under NATO?*

GUNDERSEN: I think there was some initial resistance, but because the 9/11 attacks were so horrific, nobody expected the U.S. to do nothing. There were those who wanted to work the issue diplomatically, using sanctions and the normal array of non-military actions.

But there was enough strong backing, particularly by the French and the British, that 9/11 was clearly a premeditated attack on the United States, a NATO member, that the use of military force was an appropriate means to react.

So while there was some quiet resistance, when it became clear that the U.S. had to react, NATO unanimously supported the US reaction.

*Q: Were the new members of NATO almost more eager to get involved?*

GUNDERSEN: I think so. These newly independent nations appreciated that the U.S. had supported their independence even during the Cold War. Their only, not concern, but their only caveat was that any U.S. response to 9/11 should not diminish our support for keeping Russia out of Eastern Europe and the Baltics. But, regarding Afghanistan, these nations wanted to be seen as good allies, so they were strong supporters.

One of the issues we had was that when NATO did invoke Article Five, “an attack on one is an attack on all.” We wanted the NATO blessing, but we did not want NATO militarily involved in Afghanistan. We wanted to do it alone, because we already had boots on the ground, we had intelligence and we were prepared to do it and we didn’t want to be tied down trying to negotiate a NATO consensus on each military action we took.

In retrospect, since NATO didn’t have any skin in the game and didn’t have boots on the ground or aid programs, we didn’t feel we needed a major engagement by European nations. We thought we could do it largely alone with the newly emplaced Afghan leadership under Karzai. When NATO forces began to become more involved with PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) and aid programs, the Taliban were already making a comeback.

If NATO had been more involved initially, when the Americans were largely welcomed, the Taliban al Qaeda was on the run, and before we became involved in Iraq, who knows what would have happened in Afghanistan?

*Q: Was the president’s staff concerned that NATO might get too involved?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes and I think that’s why they just wanted to get NATO’s blessing and support regarding sanctions, without NATO becoming too involved. Once you operate as part of a multilateral coalition, you get a lot of strings attached.

And the same in the UN. Before Putin became really strong, Russia was less assertive, so Russia largely acquiesced to our policy. *Russia* also had their own Muslim terrorist problem in Chechnya and elsewhere, so they supported counter-terrorism measures, although with some trepidation. So, at the time, Russia thought fighting the Taliban and Muslim extremism might complement their own counter-terrorism strategy.

The Iranians were also initially supportive, being Shiites and al Qaeda being Sunni, who had in fact assassinated an Iranian diplomat in Afghanistan. Therefore, Teheran was happy to see us overturn the Taliban.

*Q: How did this play out in Washington?*

GUNDERSEN: I wasn't directly involved in our discussions with Iran, but we did share intelligence, we did get their approval for over flights. Khatami, who was then president, was considered moderate by their standards. So there was a time when we actually cooperated. A lot of Iranian experts believed we missed a golden opportunity to work with a more accommodating Iranian leadership at the time.

That incipient cooperation was stopped in its tracks by Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech, which, in my view, was a major mistake on so many levels.

*Q: Can you explain what that speech was?*

GUNDERSEN: Bush asserted there was an "axis of evil": North Korea, Iran and Iraq. It provided an intellectual basis for the invasion of the "evil" regime in Iraq. But the linkage made no sense.

First of all, it was not an "axis," Iraq and Iran had just fought a terrible war. "Axis" implies a group of nations that cooperate. North Korea had nothing to do with Iraq and Iran.

And "evil" is relative. Obviously North Korea has a terrible regime, as was that of Saddam. But at the time Iran was a more open regime than it is today and actually was making noises about working with the West.

So it might have had the nice rhetorical ring that speech writers love, but the speech had really negative consequences.

*Q: How long did you do this?*

GUNDERSEN: I did that for about five months, until we got a UN resolution and full NATO support.

After that I was sort of in limbo. The Helsinki Commission had become less important in that time. So when the Director of Political Training at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) retired, I was asked if I was interested in the job.

*Q: How stood political training when you took over? This was in 2001?*

GUNDERSEN: It would have been December 2001 or January 2002.

Political training for FSOs had been cut in the 90s. We were still training a lot of people, but you didn't have the resources and staff.

My job included teaching the basic tradecraft courses. All State political officers need to take a two week tradecraft course: how to write a cable, how to work overseas, how to work with other sections of an Embassy and with foreign counterparts, etc. We also offered courses on human rights, intelligence, political-military affairs, global issues. We taught perhaps 25 courses each year to some 1,000 foreign service officers and personnel from other agencies. I was in charge of organizing and teaching all these courses.

I found it interesting and useful, and very good for my career after the Foreign Service, because I needed to work in an academic environment, to teach, to organize, to attract speakers, etc. The job led to others after I retired.

*Q: What was your impression, during your time, before this course was available, when you went out as a political officer, did you have any preparation or where you just sort of, there you are and you're on your own, or what?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, you know the Foreign Service. They expect you to do on the job training. It's not like the military, where you are constantly trained and exercised, where you overlap with your predecessor and successor, where you get mid level training and then you go on to war college. Your career follows a certain pattern and you're trained for everything. The military has the clout in Congress to get the necessary resources.

In the Foreign Service, they expect you to be smart and savvy enough to learn on the job. One of the things that the Foreign Service does well, or at least it used to, is to teach you how to write. An FSO is expected to do analytical reporting; usually your bosses have done the same thing and are good editors.

*Q: How much time did you have to take a Foreign Service Officer and turn him into a political officer?*

GUNDERSEN: As I mentioned, the tradecraft course was two weeks. It's basically how to write, how to brief ambassadors, how to do demarches, what's expected of a political officer.

This course generally is not given in the beginning of your career. It's usually given after four or five years. I think we did a decent job, but we didn't have the time and resources, as you would in the military, to really do the best job. That's just the nature of the beast.

*Q: Was there a movement within the upper reaches of the State Department to do more about this?*

GUNDERSEN: There was. Secretary of State Powell, at the time, coming from a military background, appreciated that education and training should be an integral part of a career, both in the military and in diplomacy.

Previously in the State Department, time spent in training, languages, exercises, etc. outside of normal assignments, was not considered career enhancing, whereas in the military, if you don't do the requisite education and training, you don't get promoted.

Powell increased the number of Foreign Service slots, increased training. So FSI became a more important element in State thinking in that period, 2002-03.

*Q: How long did you do this?*

GUNDERSEN: I did this for two years. At that point, I had reached 35 years of government service, including my time in the military and as a sky marshal. So I had maxed out my pension. So I thought of leaving at that time and getting a pension.

Towards the end of my FSI assignment, the invasion of Iraq had occurred. So, along with many senior officers, I was asked to work Iraq issues, even though, like a number of my compatriots, I had spoken out against the invasion.

One of the things I should mention is that prior to the invasion, because I had worked counter-terrorism in a previous life and most recently after 9/11, I realized we didn't have a single counter-terrorism course in all of the State Department. So I set up the first counter-terrorism course after 9/11 in 2002.

Therefore, I helped design a one-week course for everybody working counter-terrorism issues. This really forces you to think about what should you know and what sort of skills sets you need to work the issue.

*Q: What do you teach, outside of, terrorism is a bad thing?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, first of all, I actually called an old friend, Jerry Bremer, who later headed our efforts in Iraq under the rubric of the Coalition Provincial Authority.

*Q: He was running a course in this for corporate employees.*

GUNDERSEN: Exactly. I knew him because he was my DCM when I was a junior officer. I actually knew him fairly well, because we jogged and cross country skied together. Later he headed the State Office for Counter-Terrorism (S/CT).

So I called him and some academic experts (who now are talking heads on TV) and we set up a one week course. We first taught a little bit of history of terrorism, we talked about intelligence, terrorist financing, etc.

We discussed how each part of an embassy might be involved, exchanging information with intelligence services, methodologies and sources of terrorism. We also did a gaming exercise working with special ops people I knew.

And the reason I mentioned Bremer was that I asked him to be my opening speaker and open each subsequent course. But just before my second course was to begin he calls me and said, "I'm sorry, I can't do this. I can't tell you what I'm going to do. Just watch the news."

That night Bush announces Bremer is going to be head of our operations in Iraq. He was sent to Iraq the very day he had been scheduled to open our course.

*Q: So, what'd you do?*

GUNDERSEN: I got some of my CIA buddies to help out, including Cofer Black and Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, who had lead counter-terrorism offices in the CIA. I knew Rolf from previous jobs and we were friends. He's a Norwegian-American and we share a lot of experiences.

*Q: Everybody was kind of learning on this counter-terrorism thing. Were you able to get sort of feedback from people within the Department who got involved, sort of take the temperature of whatever you did?*

GUNDERSEN: Yeah, they said, "Sure, that's a good idea and more power to you," but it wasn't really in line with previous State thinking; it's something State didn't do at the time, so they didn't throw great resources at me or anything.

*Q: So it was pretty much on you?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, luckily I knew people, who really helped out. I got a little money to get people in to speak. So I spent half my time getting FSI to increase my budget from a couple of hundred to three thousand dollars to do this.

*Q: How'd you find, during this time, the administration of FSI? Did you find it responsive, under fire, demanding? It's an academic institution and it's got some of the problems all academic institutions have.*

GUNDERSEN: Well, like everything, it's somewhat of a mixed bag. I must say I found the leadership of FSI too bureaucratic; they were more interested in protecting positions than doing anything innovative.

I had to fight for the counter-terrorism course, for example. I wanted to start a program to train foreign diplomats. The military invites military personnel from other countries to come over and attend their training courses and we get so much value out of this. But, the FSI administration said: "No, we can't do this, we don't have the resources."

You had all these new diplomats representing states from the former Soviet Union, eager for training. Here was a chance to influence a new generation on democratic methods, values, etc. But, no, that wasn't in the plan and was too much extra work.

So it was a struggle; most of the people at FSI are careerists. So it wasn't a happy circumstance.

After leaving FSI after the invasion of Iraq I was appointed a senior advisor in NEA, the Near East Bureau, and for the last five months of my Foreign Service career. My major mission was to get the Hill to approve an appropriation for Iraqi reconstruction, which amounted to \$18.7 billion. I was charged with securing the funding from Congress and organizing how the money should be spent.

One of the important yet frustrating parts of the job involved determining which firms would get contracts to build roads, factories, pipelines, etc. – in other words, the needed infrastructure to get the country back on its feet. Unfortunately, the young ideologues appointed by the Bush administration to oversee the project were more interested in ideological purity than in getting things. They asserted that only companies from countries that supported the war in Iraq could bid on the contracts.

But the professionals in my office didn't accept this logic. We were saying that "Well, right now, we have to look forward. We need as many allies as we can to rebuild the Iraq. It's not about retribution, just because they didn't support our policy."

We wanted the French and Germans involved, for example. But the ideologues, these young guys coming in, said, "No, no, we can't do this, because they didn't support the invasion."

And then we got into the definition of what's an American company. For example, Chrysler wanted to bid on things. Well, they were owned by Daimler-Benz, a German firm, so they couldn't bid on anything.

*Q: How long did you do that?*

GUNDERSEN: I did it until I retired, about five or six months, to the summer of 2004.

*Q: Where were you getting your support and where were you getting your opposition?*

GUNDERSEN: You mean, in the Iraq job. Well, we got support quietly at State. The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported it as well. Military men are not thinking of domestic politics, because they have boots on the ground – young men and women –and, understandably, they want more allies engaged to share the burden and sacrifice. (unlike some young political operatives who have never served in harms' way).

As you know, we did have some solid allies at least at the beginning of the Iraq War. Of course, the Brits, Poles, Aussies and others had troops on the ground, but the Spanish dropped out, after an election, and other countries dropped out as well.

The main opposition to involving other allies in reconstruction came from the Vice President's office.



I also wanted to mention another program I was involved with at the time. When I returned from Norway, I enlisted in a program started by Secretary Powell to mentor in inner city school kids. I still volunteer.

So I did that once a week. We went to an inner city school in Northeast Washington and we mentored those kids at Minor Elementary School on reading and writing and just basic things like that. And the program has had a positive impact on their lives. Reading and writing scores have improved at least one grade level, for example. It's a very good program.

*Q: I imagine you found this quite satisfying, didn't you, very rewarding?*

GUNDERSEN: It's not like you go in there and the light goes on. It's tough two steps forward, one step back work. Usually the kids come from broken homes and often don't show up to school.

Too often, they don't have positive male role models. The ones they see are pimps and drug dealers. And when they come home, there's nobody there. Perhaps they have a grandmother, maybe, so all they do is watch TV or they're out in the streets.

So we teach kids basic social skills: looking a person in the eye, shaking their hand, and giving them a sense that they can succeed. So that is very rewarding.

*Q: You get an impression of the DC schools?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, DC schools, they're dealing with a tough situation. Some of the best students go to charter schools. But I think there has been improvement and achievement test scores are going up.

In DC, at least, No Child Left Behind has actually worked relatively well. It's been criticized and should be more flexible, but I think that the students and teachers need structure and defined goals.

Sometimes, inner city kids are not challenged enough - what is called the soft prejudice of low expectations.

*Q: Then, after you left the Foreign Service, what'd you do?*

GUNDERSEN: I wanted to do something different and I didn't want to retire totally, plus I had three kids who were still in school and would be going to college, so I couldn't afford to retire. So I worked for six months with good friends who had a construction company, BOWA builders.

I worked as an associate for BOWA, learning the construction trade and trying to bring in some business, from my contacts in the international community. For six months I trained

on the different trades, from electricity to plumbing to contracting to construction estimates.

It was fun, but I realized this was not my real skill set. In fact, I have no technical skills – just ask my wife. So I looked elsewhere and the State office that did declassification was looking for retired senior officers. That sounded like an interesting job, so I applied.

I got the job of declassifying information for Freedom of Information Act requests and the Foreign Relations of the United States Historical series. I still work with a group of retired senior Foreign Service officers doing declassification. In fact, we still have World War II vets in the office. Like an appointment to the Supreme Court once you're in, they can't fire you.

*Q: Are you working on anything else?*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, because, as you know, we can only earn a certain amount of money from a federal job if you receive a federal pension. I had time and energy to do other things. I've done a few different jobs. I've also been involved with coaching my boys in a number of sports. I should add that Eike worked full time in international education for much of the last 10 years. So we've both been quite busy with work and family these last years. Now that two of our boys are in college, we hope to take some more time off.

For example, I was hired by the U.S. Institute of Peace to do a study on education and training for complex operations, or how the U.S. government, the private sector and academia trains and educates people to work in zones of conflict like Somalia and Afghanistan. Also how civilians work with the military in these zones, and how they work with NGOs.

This study for the USIP was published, it's called *Sharing the Space*. And then, as a follow on to that job, I was asked to work for the Center on Complex Operations, doing lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I've been doing that for the last two and a half years. In fact, I've co-edited a book on Civil-Military teams past, present and future – lessons learned and not learned from these teams. It's called "Unity of Mission" and will soon be published.

*Q: Well, looking at these things, these books, did you come to any particular conclusions?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, if I had an easy answer, I'd make a fortune. Unfortunately, I don't think there is a simple answer. The book I'm editing consists of a series of essays on the experience of the United States and other countries in coordinating civilian and military teams in theaters from Vietnam to Afghanistan to Iraq to Somalia.

I asked each of the authors to address the question, what we did wrong, what we did right, what are the lessons learned. The Book contains a history section, the present

situation in Iraq and Afghanistan and a future oriented section. I've also asked NGOs and international organizations and the private sector to contribute. So it's not just military focused. I'm writing an introduction and executive summary to tie the sections together.

*Q: Well, looking at it, I realize it's difficult, but is there anything that strikes you in particular, as to what works and what doesn't work?*

GUNDERSEN: Well, the first lesson is to understand the local situation: the needs and outlook of the local population and not to impose your own value system. In any case, in most developing countries we're not going to be able to impose a Jeffersonian democracy. In other words, find out what they need, what they want and determine if we have the ability and perseverance, consistent with our values, to make a positive difference.

We also need buy in from the local and international community. We need to establish early on a common vision – it shouldn't be overly or artificially ambitious – perhaps just to resume old trade patterns or to reestablish ethnic dialogue or to stop ethnic cleansing. You can't do this unilaterally and you can't do this by force alone (although force, especially to provide security so that diplomacy and development can work can play an important role).

So those are some of the basic elements. Then our Book discusses how to prepare these team; how you train them, what their command and control relationships should be, what their roles and missions should be, how to work with allies and NGOs. Understanding NGOs is very important, because some NGOs don't want to work with anyone wearing a uniform.

*Q: I think one of the things you and I have seen over our careers has been the growth of the NGOs. It's not necessarily all good, it's not all bad, but it's just a different kind of organization and a different approach and how do you use these to further policy objectives, we're diplomats, it's part of our tradecraft.*

GUNDERSEN: Yes, tradecraft: going back to my time teaching it at the Foreign Service Institute, I realized that we, as government employees, needed to learn how to leverage all sectors of our nation, including the private and civil sector, if we were to succeed in our public mission. At FSI, for example, I invited NGOs to speak. We actually had a debate between NGOs who work with the U.S. government and those who felt that they don't want to be compromised by working with the U.S. government, because they needed their own humanitarian space.

One of the things I helped with at USIP was writing a guide for cooperation between civilian NGOs and the U.S. military: what we can and can't do; when and where to meet (not at a military base, but at a neutral site), when to evacuate NGOs because they're under threat or need security to deliver goods, how do you do that, what are the rules of engagement?

*Q: Did you find, working with the military, were they slow to come around to realizing NGOs are here to stay?*

GUNDERSEN: Now the US military often is more attuned to working with NGOs than the State Department is. They realize that the NGOs are going to be in the same zones of conflict – sharing the space if you will. NGOs can play a complementary role in stabilizing and rebuilding these societies.

One of the other things I do now is to work war games with the military. I just came back from doing one in Quantico with the Marines. They now not only invite the State Department, AID and NGOs to their games, they invite them to design the games, so it is not only beneficial to the war fighter.

The primary mission of any military is to fight and win the war, but in a gray world of failed and failing states and terrorism and insurgencies, the military understands its mission must reflect that reality, so they want NGOs, State and others to be part of framing the gaming exercise, so that the mission is not only winning the war but creating a more stable and enduring peace. (sorry about the sermon!).

*Q: There's so many NGOs. If you're in the government, looking upon eventually using them and all, there has to be a problem of sorting out what ones really would be effective and which ones would be just quite frankly a drag on your resources and not produce much.*

GUNDERSEN: Well, that's why we have to be careful about the term "using the NGOs," because they'll think, "We don't want to be used." When you work in that environment, what you have to do is get the NGOs agree to a common mission – even if it's a modest mission statement.

And that mission may be to stabilize a country, to improve governance, to minimize corruption. And everyone can play a part: our police forces can train the local police to be a little less corrupt and more professional; our military can train local security forces, including to respect human rights; NGOs can educate on everything from sanitation to basic hygiene. In other words, you need a whole government, a whole society approach to be effective.

I also give a course at the Joint Special Operations Command in Tampa, Florida on how to work with the ambassador and country team, how to work in the interagency environment and how to work with the international community. I give this course to the Special Operations Command, the SEALs in San Diego, the Special Forces in North Carolina and now we're taking this course overseas to work with indigenous forces. I do this course four or five times a year.

*Q: Well, it sounds like you've got your hands full.*

GUNDERSEN: Well, I've got to put my boys through college. My final thought would be to remind everyone that a career like mine would not have been possible without a loving and supportive wife and family

*Q: Well, Jon, I think this is probably a good place to stop.*

GUNDERSEN: Well, this is a great thing you're doing here and I hope you're getting all due rewards.

*End of interview*