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MARSHALL ADAIR

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is April 28, 2022. We're beginning our interview with Marshall Adair, focusing on his service with the American Foreign Service Association. Marshall, when did you enter the Foreign Service?

ADAIR: In May of 1972.

Q: At that time, as a newly arrived officer, were you aware of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA).

ADAIR: I was not aware of AFSA until I attended the A-100 orientation course for new employees. The class numbered about 20 new hires. The directors of A-100 gave each of us an assignment to interview a designated official in the State Department. I was given two people: the head of AFSA and the head of AFGE (American Federation of Government Employees).

AFSA and AFGE were engaged in a campaign that was leading up to an election in which the people in the Foreign Service would choose whether they were going to be represented by AFSA (an exclusively Foreign Service organization) or by AFGE (a branch of AFL/CIO). Bill Harrop was AFSA President, and I can't remember who I spoke with in AFGE. I wrote a one-page summary of the arguments that they presented to win the right to represent Foreign Service Officers

After those conversations I had a preference for AFSA. Bill Harrop made clear that AFSA would have two roles: to represent the Foreign Service as a union; and to serve as a professional association monitoring and promoting the rules and principles of a disciplined diplomatic service. Having grown up in the Foreign Service, I understood that there was something different there. Although AFSA then was not conducting outreach as it would later, this initial experience made me aware of the organization and its mission. But then how did I become involved in AFSA? What motivated me to do it? That started in my first Foreign Service post: Paris.

Paris is a beautiful place in which to live and work, of course. But the embassy there is huge, and very busy, and that can have some drawbacks. During that time, I met a man named Bob Pfeiffer, who you may have heard about in your research on AFSA. I really

enjoyed getting to know Bob and his Japanese wife. He regaled me with stories of the Foreign Service, and specially about dealing with the bureaucracy of the Foreign Service. The latter was particularly interesting to me as I encountered a problem with that bureaucracy after only a few months. In Paris, junior Foreign Service officers were not included on the Embassy's Diplomatic List. The reason was there were so many representatives from other agencies that the French government had asked the embassy to keep the numbers down (or so I was told). The embassy decided to cut the junior officers out on the grounds that they didn't have as much need to deal directly with French government offices.

Now, I was more fortunate than most. I went there as a junior officer in the only rotational position in the embassy; and I just happened to luck into some of the best jobs available in the embassy. One of them was filling in for a senior person who had to leave for medical reasons. I did have to make demarches to the Foreign Ministry, and they did challenge my credentials. The embassy's administrative section simply couldn't, or wouldn't deal with it.

I also was impressed by the Labor Attaché at the Embassy. John Conlon was really smart, very welcoming and he had phenomenal contacts in Paris and throughout France. That gave me a different perspective on "labor" issues. Years later, when I returned to the Department, Bob Pfeiffer was running for the position of the president of AFSA and so I put my name in for State Representative on his slate. I didn't campaign actively, and he didn't win, but for some reason I received the most votes of anyone on the ticket. After that I did nothing directly with AFSA until many years later Dan Geisler came and asked if I'd run for president.

Q: But in between 1979 when you ran for the board, and then ran to be president, were you ever an AFSA rep at a post?

ADAI: Hang on one second. You said that was '79?

Q: Well, that's what Harry Kopp said in the book: "Adair had run for the AFSA governing board once before in 1979 as a candidate for State Representative on a narrowly defeated slate that opposed drafting a new Foreign Service Act." That's what Harry Kopp says in, The Voice of the Foreign Service.

ADAI: Okay. I was wrong about just getting back.

Q: What was it about the Foreign Service Act that inspired you or pushed you to join a slate against it?

ADAI: I thought it was a bad idea for them to go to Congress for a new act. There was too much downside to it. I thought there was a danger that they risked changing the character of the Foreign Service and politicizing it too much.

Q: When you left Washington for a new overseas assignment it was the late 70s/early 80s. Were you an AFSA rep at your foreign post?

ADAIR: I was the AFSA rep at the American Consulate in Hong Kong. I remember at one point a congressional delegation came through led by Tip O'Neill. I asked to see him. I can't remember if I actually saw him or if I just saw his senior aide. But I had the strong impression then that these congressmen, and their staff, didn't care about the professional diplomatic service at all. For some of them it is just an annoyance. They would rather have those positions to hand out as political favors. It's unlikely they will make the time to see you unless you're somebody who can offer them money or votes. This impression was reinforced repeatedly when I was in other positions with AFSA.

Q: Okay. Let's turn to the period of time, when you're considering running for president of AFSA. This is when Dan Geisler approaches you, Dan is in Washington, but he has to leave to take a management position where he cannot be both head of AFSA and take on the management responsibilities. What were your thoughts at that time about running for president of AFSA?

ADAIR: I didn't really want to run. I had no idea how to do it, and was not enthusiastic about engaging in a campaign, trying to promote myself and so on. Dan said, "Don't worry, we can help you with that." He did, there was no opposition and I won easily.

Q: When you become president it is an interesting moment in State Department and foreign service history. Many things had come to a head in 1999, as you're getting ready to become president. During the Clinton administration, you had the peace dividend and the rise of Jesse Helms as the head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. There seemed to be a general agreement in both the legislature and executive that a rationalization of foreign affairs agencies was needed. This included a desire to reduce budgets and personnel. You must have been aware of that, as you were entering the presidency of AFSA. Did that affect your thinking? Or in what way was AFSA viewing that moment?

ADAIR: That's interesting. You're describing it in a little bit different terms than I was seeing at that time. Maybe my memory and picture of it is not clear. The way I would describe it is that the Clinton administration came in wanting to address seriously critical issues like the budget deficit. They did it more seriously and more effectively than perhaps any administration prior to that. But there was a consequence for the State Department because it is one of the smallest in both personnel and budget, and perhaps with the least obvious contribution to the districts of members of Congress. Budget cuts are harder for the Foreign Service to absorb, as there is much less fat in the State Department than in many of the other departments.

The second thing was that the Clinton administration, like all administrations, was very politically oriented. I thought it was more politically oriented to the local level than others had been, and it was reaching out to multiple elements of the Democratic coalition which were on the rise and increasingly visible. Foreign policy was probably not as important to those groups as some other aspects of government. Nevertheless, the administration was drawing ambassadorial candidates from those groups. It was kowtowing to them on certain policy issues of interest to ethnic interest groups (Greek, Armenian, Hungarian, etc). I thought that was counterproductive, and not in the national interest. The Clinton administration was also committed to the Affirmative Action world,

and that impacted personnel and professional issues. In my view, it often competed directly with the need for professionalization and competence in the diplomatic service.

Q: As you're entering the presidency of AFSA, are there any particular activities or events that are illustrative of what you're talking about right now?

ADAIR: When I was in AFSA, one of the most difficult issues that we had to deal with was the desire of the Personnel office, later renamed Human Resources, to give priority to Affirmative Action above all other considerations.

For example, the Latin American Bureau, supported by the Secretary's Office and Human Resources, wanted to assign a civil service person, a woman, from the Latin American Bureau to the position of DCM in Lima, Peru. DCM positions are quintessential Foreign Service positions, both because they require previous service with embassies overseas, and because they are essential training positions for Foreign Service officers to move upward into ambassadorial positions. The decision was presented to me by one of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries in the Director General's office. She was excited that they were going to give an outstanding civil service employee, who was a woman, the chance to serve as DCM; and she thought that I would be pleased, too. I told her I thought it was a terrible decision and AFSA would oppose it.

This issue turned into a really nasty fight. We won the legal battle because some years before a similar action had been taken, and the Department had agreed never to do it again - in writing. It was turned into a gender issue within the Department, and a number of female Foreign Service officers resigned from AFSA over it. However, neither gender nor the specific qualifications of the individual had anything to do with AFSA's position. AFSA argued, and won, on the grounds that maintaining the designation of certain positions overseas as Foreign Service positions was essential to maintaining an effective, apolitical professional diplomatic service.

Of course, at the end, Secretary Madeleine Albright declared that the appointment was a national security issue, which was absolute rubbish. She used her prerogative as Secretary of State to overrule the law.

Q: You're right, in The Voice of the Foreign Service, Harry Kopp does devote quite a good deal of attention to this particular episode in the history of AFSA. But other things also, were going on when you were president? You came into the presidency right after the bombings in of the U.S. embassies in Africa in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi? How did that affect AFSA? How did AFSA represent the foreign affairs agencies under its remit?

ADAIR: Actually, when I came in and started looking at how we should establish our priorities, that stood out to me as being the one that was crying out for attention. Not only had the bombing happened, but Admiral Crowe had been asked to do a study on the security of embassies. He had done it, and made a number of recommendations. One of them was that the government should spend, right away, about \$1.4 billion on improving the security of the embassy facilities around the world. That was supposed to be a start.

Q: According to Harry Kopp's research for The Voice of the Foreign Service, The State Department offered only 400 million. Crowes said 1.4 billion per year for 10 years was necessary to improve embassy security throughout the world. That's how it began.

ADAI: I don't remember those figures, but I believe the State Department request started out even lower, and only increased in the face of substantial objections. AFSA was among those objecting. OMB [Office of Management and Budget] was a big part of the problem, and State might have been taking its cue from OMB. Eventually OMB agreed to a higher figure, but nothing near what Crowe had recommended. But as time went on, my concern grew that the State Department, the administrative management side of State, and then the Secretary's Office, were not giving this sufficient priority in their communications with OMB. There was no indication that they were even proposing the increase. Now, obviously, there are all kinds of calculations that go into this. I never would want the job of M (Under Secretary of State for Management) or A (Assistant Secretary of State for Administration). But this was a life-or-death issue for our personnel, and an issue as to whether we were going to be able, in the face of this new kind of threat, to conduct effective diplomacy over time.

Of course, there were also people who warned that we would just build fortresses and retreat into them making diplomacy impossible. They were right to be concerned. In many respects we have done that. But part of our concern was that if you're going to do it, you have to do it right. That costs money and you have to make that a priority concern in the budgets proposed to OMB. We thought that a big part of the problem was within the State Department. We tried to talk with them, but they saw us as the enemy. Even trying to get basic budget statistics from them was virtually impossible. I don't know if you've talked with John Naland yet?

Q: No, he comes a little later in the history of AFSA.

ADAI: John may have something to say about this, because he was AFSA vice president at the time and made a lot of the contacts.

Q: Let me take one more minute with you on this topic of building secure embassies. There are many bureaucratic actors involved in the process of constructing embassies. There are offices in the State Department, which don't always agree. There is congress, same thing. And there are blue ribbon commissions, major studies conducted by outside contractors, and sometimes the General Accounting Office plays a role. All of these are difficult to penetrate. I briefly worked on the question of which embassies should get updated public diplomacy offices. There were so many bureaucratic black boxes that I had to ask my Deputy Assistant Secretary to take over the negotiations with the Office of Overseas Buildings.

ADAI: That is an important point. It has always been difficult for embassies to deal with the complex mix of people and agencies in Washington. For the most part, it is best for overseas personnel and ambassadors to leave those dealings to the Department of State in Washington; but the embassies have to make sure that Washington understands as well as possible the situation on the ground - even if doing so might annoy those in Washington. After leaving AFSA, I went to the inspector general's office, and I

inspected a bunch of posts in Africa and in Europe. One of the things that we were looking at was the security issue. The embassy in Zagreb, Croatia had gone through the whole process of selecting a site and was close to completing construction of the new embassy. When I saw the site I thought it was inconvenient because it was outside the city, rather far from the Croatian government offices. The other thing, however, was that it was right next to the airport, and if anyone planned to fly an airplane into it, there was no way you would get any advance notice. We checked, and there was no record of the embassy even raising those questions.

Now the other thing that was happening at this time, was the increasing power and influence of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security [DS]. Congress was giving DS lots of money, personnel, and independence. They were acting as though they were an independent agency, and nobody was willing to rein them in. That was certainly true during the last part of the Clinton administration.

In that environment, one of the things that we were concerned with was a relatively minor issue on which we couldn't make any progress: maintaining access for retired foreign service officers to the State Department. We had met with M [Under Secretary of State for Management] and A [Assistant Secretary of State for Administration], and the head of DS [Bureau of Diplomatic Security]. Every one of them gave us the brush off. When the Bush administration came in, and Colin Powell was named to be Secretary of State, he was given a temporary office down on the first floor of the State Department while he waited for the others to vacate. I thought he might be less dismissive of this issue because he was a military officer and retired military employees retain pretty good access to military facilities, including the Pentagon. I called on him in his temporary office, and he listened - really listened. About two weeks later, he overruled DS. DS complied, albeit reluctantly and still more restrictively than we considered necessary.

Q: Just out of curiosity, as president of AFSA, you also represent officers in DS. Did they ever shed any light on what their priorities were or their new method? I don't mean sources and methods in terms of counterintelligence. But what was their basic approach to security?

ADAI: That's a really good question and I have to answer, no. We did make an effort. We started inviting all the new DS people to come to lunch at AFSA so that we could tell them about what AFSA would do for them. We even did not object to their push for special pay and privileges that nobody else in the State Department had. In the end they did not need AFSA's help because they had their own "law enforcement" relationship with and support from Congress.

Q: Right. Fascinating. You testified at one point about the security violations and how the number of violations or the seriousness of the violation could affect an officer's career. Did AFSA take any actions in that area?

ADAI: I don't remember. When did I testify?

Q: It was in your first year.

ADAI: Before Congress?

Q: Yes, it was somewhere between '99 and 2000. You were among people who testified about, in particular, ambassadorial appointees, who were getting advice and consent from the Senate, and who had a lot of security violations and the Senate was starting to take note.

ADAIR: Okay. I believe I would have taken the position that this is serious and everybody has to comply. People should not be given special dispensation from security violations, ambassadors least of all because they can have an army of people cleaning up after them. We also had an issue of political appointees who were not operating by the rules. One in Israel used an unclassified computer to report from his car and he didn't get censored. Career people would be crucified.

Q: I had mentioned that, again, only because in the discussion about DS and so on, it goes from the larger security questions all the way down to how much security, you know, here's an important distinction, a security infraction and a security violation. Infractions in the end, go off of your record after a few years, like points go off of your license, but a security violation is a more serious matter, someone may have made a determination that there was some harm done, you leave negotiating instructions in the men's room at the negotiating site. That can be a real violation and a real problem.

ADAIR: In all of those discussions, we did try to make the point that there is a gradation of these things. The problem with a lot of the security enforcement people was they saw no gradation; and that resulted in their, often successful, efforts to upend or paralyze the conduct of diplomacy overseas. Sadly, it wasn't just them. It was our political system, in which anybody will try to jump on issues like this if they think it might give them extra leverage. The powers that be within the State Department or within the White House were either unwilling or unable to insist on rationality.

Q: All right. Let's move on to another aspect of access representation, which is, over time in the department, a number of communities of interests began to develop. Certainly, there were African Americans, there were women, GLIFAA [Gays and Lesbians In Foreign Affairs Agencies], and more. AFSA represented them all but at times they took it upon themselves to represent themselves or their interests directly to the Director General or to management. To what extent did that play out while you were president? What did that mean for you?

ADAIR: Well, it was growing, then; and I think it has become much worse since then. AFSA is supposed to represent all members of the foreign service. If an individual member or group was in trouble, we would therefore try to help them with whatever means we had. If an individual group came and asked for help securing equal rights, we would try to do that. However, if they were asking for special consideration, we had to be more careful. That in itself could create inequalities. That's a problem for any organization that is trying to take care of the interests of its members both individually, and as a whole. Additionally in AFSA's role as a professional association, the "needs of the service" and the demands of diplomacy may require that the desires of individuals and interest groups be subordinated, and that is rarely "politically correct."

Q: Similarly, during your time, did you have to deal with any issues related to the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act]? Or accommodations for people with disabilities?

ADAI: I don't remember. There were issues like that all the time with access, but John Naland might remember better.

Q: Before we move on to any more policy issues, I wonder if there were any particular cases where AFSA had to represent an individual or group that were particularly salient for you while you were president?

ADAI: I'm not sure. I can't think of anything specifically, though there were probably some cases with political ambassadors as well.

Q: That's fine. Sometimes AFSA takes positive action to accomplish something but sometimes AFSA also takes action to prevent bad things from happening. Do you recall any of those because often those do not get into the history books because of AFSA's early action.

ADAI: The assignment of a civil service employee to the Foreign Service position of DCM in Lima fits into that category. The original action to prevent that kind of violation had happened about 15 years earlier. AFSA had secured a formal, binding agreement that the State Department would not do that again. It didn't help. It didn't matter what the Department had agreed to when it came down to something that the political people wanted to do.

What else? One of my concerns was that the Department was not taking workforce planning seriously. It wasn't doing it because, A) it only had a short term focus; and B) there seemed to be an assumption that they were never going to get the resources anyway, so why bother? One of the things that we argued was that there were too few Foreign Service Officers. The Foreign Service actually had positions that were going unfilled. The Department was not taking into consideration things like training, transfers, leave, etc. We needed to have more Foreign Service Officers than specific foreign service positions, so that we could allow people to take vacations, to take leave without pay, to get training, and to address unexpected developments. At one point when I was president, I think the official statistics said that there was a shortage of 200 officers. We tried to make the case that, in fact, it wasn't a shortage of 200, there was a shortage of more like 700 because of all these other demands that were being made on the personnel system that weren't being factored into the calculations. The Department didn't do it, and part of the reason just might be that the Department didn't have enough money to pay people to take a look at these things.

Q: This does raise the larger issue, when Colin Powell becomes Secretary of State in 2001, He begins to ask for more resources, more personnel for the State Department. At the same time, it appears that State Department personnel management is beginning to erase differences between the Foreign Service and the Civil Service. As you were looking at the beginning of Colin Powell's tenure, what was AFSA thinking about his personnel management?

ADAI: When Secretary Powell took over I thought that there was an opportunity for the Foreign Service to address many of these problems. As a military officer, he would naturally appreciate the need for professional discipline, training and experience. Ironically, towards the middle and end of his tenure, it turned out to be just the opposite. He apparently thought that the distinction between the foreign service and civil service personnel was silly and overdone and so he didn't help.

I may have contributed to that by failing to go directly to him on certain issues. There was a case where AFSA had proposed and obtained approval of a "Foreign Service Star" award for those who lost their lives in diplomatic service overseas.. We had lobbied different groups including Congress, and we managed to get it through.

The State Department without consulting us changed the name of it. It was no longer to be the Foreign Service Star, it was to be the Thomas Jefferson Star and it was going to be available to all State Department people, not just the foreign service. At the same time, they were also getting rid of the "Foreign Service Lounge." In other words they appeared to be deleting all reference to the Foreign Service.

John Naland and I went to see Pat Kennedy, who was Assistant Secretary for Administration. I reminded him that the award was AFSA's proposal, and that it was specifically intended for Foreign Service personnel in recognition of sacrifice in the service of diplomacy. Eliminating the name "Foreign Service Lounge" was wrong not only because it had historical significance, but because it looked like department leadership was deliberately denigrating the Foreign Service. He brushed us off on both issues. I then sent a letter to all Foreign Service personnel reporting the meeting and criticizing the State Department leadership for their decision.

Now, that was a big mistake. I assumed that Pat Kennedy, Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Management, was speaking for the Secretary of State and he probably wasn't. Even if he was, I never should have made that assumption. I could have gone to see Colin Powell. We had met, we knew each other, and he had invited me to come and see him anytime. I should have started going to see him regularly. On this issue we managed to get some compromises like the "Thomas Jefferson Star for Foreign Service," and a plaque commemorating the Foreign Service Lounge. But only grudgingly.

Q: Well, even when you have access to top officials, you don't have access to what they are saying to each other.

ADAI: That's true. But, when he acted for us in that first time, it was really impressive.

Q: All right. Now, you mentioned you felt that some mistakes were made. What do you look back on during your tenure as particularly successful?

ADAI: I think that the fight for maintaining the positions was still worthwhile. It did reiterate the principle of maintaining specific positions for professional diplomatic service, and may have strengthened it. I don't know what's happened since then but I hope that the Department was reminded to think twice before they violate agreed upon principles and rules for short term political goals. I think that AFSA, led by our congressional liaison person Ken Nakamura, did a good job of staying in touch with

Congress. We had a reasonably good reputation up there on the Hill [Capitol Hill]. Many congressional offices realized that AFSA could provide them a helpful perspective.

I also tried to go around the country and talk to the retiree groups thinking that I could encourage them to become more active in communities. I thought that if we were more active in communities we could get more support from Congress. That may have helped some.

I did look for things that we could do that would have a lasting effect, but they were elusive. I wanted to rename the park in front of the AFSA building and redesign it as a monument to the diplomatic service; but that required more energy and resources than I was able to muster.

Like everybody else we tried to argue that the ratio between political ambassadors and professional ambassadors was out of whack; and like everyone else we didn't get very far. When I was AFSA president it was 30% political and 70% professional, I don't know what it is now. Do you know?

Q: It's certainly higher than 30%? I believe it's something closer to 40%. That's where it tends to hover these days. You have mentioned briefly other interactions with members of AFSA management. What do you recall about any other particular collaborations you had?

ADAI: First of all, Bill Harrop and Tom Boyatt were really helpful. Dan Geisler took me to lunch with the two of them, when I was just starting. They were very helpful in terms of advice and things like that. I had people on the board that were helpful. I had former ambassadors that were working with AFSA, and they gave me both good and bad advice.

When Susan Johnson was AFSA president she started a really good practice of meeting regularly with past AFSA presidents. Her immediate successors did not continue it, but Susan kept it up more informally.

Q: One last thing then. The bombings on September 11, 2001 took place toward the very end of your tenure. Was there anything that engaged you then?

ADAI: I had already left AFSA by that time.

Q: Well to close, are there any parting thoughts you have about AFSA?

ADAI: I still think that it is essential to have an organization like AFSA; and that it should be not just a union but a professional association. It is a difficult combination, but both are needed.

AFSA is a small organization trying to deal with big issues. It has had all kinds of ups and downs, as do most organizations. It would be nice for it to have more resources; but the likelihood is that its financial resources will always be limited.

On the whole, I think AFSA over the years has been very lucky with its staff. We have had both talented and committed people both from within the Foreign Service and from without. I hope that we can manage to continue that.

I think it needs outside support, like the group of former presidents that I mentioned. Some AFSA presidents may feel uncomfortable with their predecessors looking over their shoulder, but there are plenty of ways to exploit positive potential and limit negative interference. And, of course, there is an endless variety of other political, economic, and social NGOs in Washington that imaginative AFSA presidents might be able to mine for ideas, inspiration and support.

Q: With that, then I would like to thank you on behalf of ADST and the AFSA grant that we have to interview former AFSA presidents, and we'll close the interview here.

End of interview