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

MICHAEL ARIETTI

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial Interview Date: August 23, 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Shiraz, Iran: Consular/Economic Officer 1975-1976
- Iran-Iraq relations
- Shah's projects
- Shias
- Cultural presentations
- Environment
- Reporting on Shah's projects

State Department: Political, Military Bureau, Arms Control 1976-1979
- Multilateral Ballistic Force Reduction
- Office organization
- Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA)
- Paul Warnke
- Indian Ocean naval activities
- US presence in Diego Garcia and Bahrain
- Negotiating with Russians
- Russians in Aden
- India

State Department: Near East Bureau; Arabian Peninsula 1979-1981
- Yemen president, Ali Abdullah Saleh
- Military aircraft to Saudi Arabia
  - Congressional interest
- South Yemen
- Governments
- Saudi-Yemen relations
- Iran hostage crisis
  - Mission to Rome
  - Refugee visas cases
  - Baha'i
- US Assistance Programs

Canberra, Australia: Political Officer 1981-1985
- Marriage
- Environment
- Ambassador Robert Nesen
- Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser
- Viet Nam
- Anti-nuclear weapons
  - Safety issue
  - US naval vessels
- Bill Hayden
- US military installations
- Foreign-born communities
- East Timor

VIP visitors
Wife's activities

Stockholm, Sweden: Political Officer 1986-1989
Ambassador Gregory Newell
Prime Minister Olaf Palme
Anti-Vietnam activist
Assassination
Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson
Soviet sub Whiskey
Relations
Capitalists
Government
Swedish foreign policy
Nicaragua
Industry
Ortega
Local media
NATO
Kola Peninsula
Reykjavik Summit

State Department: Human Rights Bureau: Director, Office of Bilateral Affairs 1989-1992
Human Rights Council
Assistant Secretary Dick Shifter
Soviet Union emigration
President Carter and Human Rights
North Korea
Israel
Palestinians
Congressional interest in Human Rights
Arab and African countries
Reporting on Human Rights
Dangers of duplication
Macedonia

Lusaka, Zambia: Deputy Chief of Mission 1992-1995
Government
President Kaunda
President Frederick Chiluba
Relations
Ambassador Gordon Streep
Ambassador Roland Kuchel
USAID Program
Peace Corps

Working environment
Conservation International

State Department: Director, West African Affairs, Africa Bureau 2002-2005
Thirteen Countries
Liberian Civil War
Peace Agreement
Charles Taylor
Ambassador Blaney
UN Peacekeeping Mission
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
Regional developments
Libyans
Qadhafi
Bureau personnel
Islamic Fundamentalism

United States Ambassador to Rwanda 2005-2008
Environment
President Kagame
US policy
Eastern Congo refugees
HIV Aids
Hutu-Tutsi rivalry
Economic development
Government
Religions
Language
Foreign communities
Relations with neighbors
Uganda relations
Gorillas
Methane gas
Role of women

Retirement 2008

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is 23 August 2011 with Michael Arietti. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by Michael or Mike?

ARIETTI: Michael.

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

ARIETTI: I was born in 1947 in Los Angeles.

Q: OK, let's start on your father's side. What do you know about the family?

ARIETTI: My father's family were Italian by origin. Both of my grandparents on his side were born in Italy.

Q: Do you know where?

ARIETTI: Yes they were born in northern Italy in a small town called Cossato which is near Turin. They emigrated to the United States in the early 1900's. I am not certain exactly when. But other members of the family had preceded them. They settled in Connecticut. That is where my father grew up. That is where I eventually grew up as well.

Q: Let's go back to Italy. Do you know where your family, what was their occupation?

ARIETTI: I really don't know much about them, the family. I think they were farmers. Cossato was a small town near a place called Biella. Biella is an industrial area that made cloth and clothing. But I am not really sure.

Q: OK, when they get to the States in the early 20th century what were they up to?

ARIETTI: Well actually both of my grandparents worked in at the Bigelow-Sanford carpet mill in Enfield, Connecticut, the town where I grew up. It was well-known at the time for making carpets. They both worked there for all of their working lives.

Q: How about on your mother's side?

ARIETTI: My mother's father was born in Germany. He also emigrated to the United States. He emigrated to a place in Wisconsin called Kenosha. He married my mother's mother there. As far as I know she was born in Wisconsin, but she had been an orphan, and so she was adopted, raised by another family and took their name. I don't know much at all about how they met, but they married and settled in Kenosha which is where my mother was born, and she grew up there all of her early life. He worked for Snap On Tool Co. and did that for most of his life. I think my grandmother was basically a housewife as far as I knew.

Q: Did your mother, how far up in school did she go?

ARIETTI: High school, both of my parents only graduated high school.

Q: That is still the pattern the generation I am talking to like yourself, the great majority of our parents were not high school graduates but often were extremely well read, but it just wasn't, but starting with today's foreign service officers, I think their parents were mostly one college degree, but maybe several.

ARIETTI: No, I think you are right, and in fact I was the first member of my family to go to college as far as I know.

Q: All right, you grew up in a small town…

ARIETTI: In Connecticut. I was born in Los Angeles. That is because my father had been in the Marines during the war. When he was discharged, he stayed in Los Angeles. My mother's brother had moved from Wisconsin to Los Angeles and was living there. My mother went down to stay with him for awhile. My mother and father met in California, married there and I was born in Los Angeles. I was born in Inglewood, which is now not a very nice place, but at that time was a place of small homes. When I was less than a year old my parents went back to Enfield, Connecticut and stayed there. That is where I grew up.

Q: OK, let's talk about Enfield when you first were aware of Enfield what was it like?

ARIETTI: Enfield was a small town when I was really young, I guess it had about 20,000 people. It grew later on to about 40,000 people. It was a bedroom community I would say. It was a small town on the Connecticut River. It was a mill town, but other industries grew up in that area between Springfield, Massachusetts and Hartford, Connecticut, Enfield is between the two of them. A lot of people lived in Enfield and worked somewhere else. They would drive ten or fifteen minutes. Enfield was a town mostly populated by families who were originally immigrants. My high school class was probably 30% Irish American, 30% Italian American, 30% Polish American and the other 10% were probably some 10% traditional Yankee American, but also we had a few Armenians. What we did not have, and this was maybe typical of the East Coast back then. We had very few black families, and we had very few Jewish families. It was a mixture, but it was a select mixture of immigrant families.

Q: I would assume that your family, well no, with your mother maybe not, but was your family Catholic?

ARIETTI: Yes.

Q: I would assume that the town was Catholic with Italian, Irish, Polish.

ARIETTI: Very much so.

Q: Was it divided into Irish churches, Polish churches and Italian churches?

ARIETTI: Absolutely. Yes indeed. Many families had members who spoke English but never extremely well. So my grandmother used to go to the Italian mass. There were Masses in Italian at certain churches, and there were Polish priests at other churches. It didn't really apply to the Irish, but they had their communities as well. It was a division of convenience. I don't remember there being any hostility between these groups. There was a huge amount of intermarriage. Lots and lots of Italian, Polish, and Irish families all mixed up. Somebody's name was Kennedy, you didn't know if their mother was actually a Costallano or whether it was a Koslowski. There were a lot of mixtures. It wasn't a wealthy community. People lived in modest types of homes. We didn't have any really big luxury mansions. It was a working class town.

Q: How important was the church in your life in the early days?

ARIETTI: Oh it was integral I suppose. I went to a Catholic primary school. My brother and I both went to Catholic primary school. They didn't have a Catholic high school. Most people went to the public high school. I was an altar boy when I was 10 or 11. You can't generalize, but I think in my family was like many other families where the parents insisted that children go to Catholic school, be brought up Catholic and go to mass. But the parents themselves did not necessarily go themselves. It was sort of do as I say, not as I do. So I think there was a beginning of an evolution away from people like my grandmother who probably went to church every day of her life to others who were Catholic and felt themselves as Catholic but were not as intense in their religious observance.

Q: Politically where did your family fall?

ARIETTI: We never talked about politics a lot in my family. I suppose my family were Democrats. It was a working class town. Most people were Democrats. Most of the local government officials were Democrats. I don't actually know if my parents were registered members of a political party, but they probably voted Democrat more often than not.

Q: As a kid were you much of a reader? I am talking about early on.

ARIETTI: Yes,, I was. I was not a great sports person. I was more academically oriented.

Q: Can you recall any of the early books that you read?

ARIETTI: At what age? Are you referring to high school?

Q: No, earlier.

ARIETTI: Oh gosh. I tell you the thing that I probably had in common with a lot of people who eventually became Foreign Service officers was an interest in things that were slightly different, out of my immediate environs. I remember for example, having a book that was about American Indian children in different tribes. There was a kid who

grew up as a Navajo and somebody else who grew up as an Eskimo and someone who grew up as a Seminole. It described what their everyday life was like. I read that many times. That is an example. I also always liked science fiction, and I tended to like things that had an historical base. Now when I was quite young that wasn't the case. I probably read comic books.

Q: Of course. That was also the era of very good pulp magazines too, like astounding tales.

ARIETTI: Mad Magazine. Yes, I used to read those as well.

Q: What about getting out in the street? This was not a period of organized sports.

ARIETTI: No, high schools had football teams and basketball teams.

Q: I was thinking earlier on where so many kids in sort of that era were sort of after school turned loose in the street just to go out and play with the rest of the kids.

ARIETTI: Absolutely. When I was quite young the first house I can remember was opposite a park. We could go across the street and go into the park and play there as long as we wanted. I can remember my mother used to go out on the porch and yell for us. "It is time to come home, dinner." We could hear her, and we would go back. My father had three brothers. One of his brothers and his family lived very close to us. So we would go from one house to the other. My childhood was quite nice actually. We didn't have a lot of problems. We weren't wealthy, but we weren't financially struggling either. It was a time when children could go outside and not really worry about it. Parents didn't fear terrible things happening to their kids.

Q: What about school? Let's take elementary school. How did you come to deal with school?

ARIETTI: Well I used to walk to school. I went to St. Josephs, which was a Catholic primary school that was near me. It was run by nuns, the Sisters of Mercy. They were very strict. These were the nuns that rapped your hands with a ruler if you got out of line, and certainly made you stand up in the corner. If you didn't pay attention or talked in class or passed notes or any of those terrible things kids tended to do. They were quite good. I think I had a fine elementary education. I think there was a standard curriculum that all schools had to teach. This was in the 50's. I did OK in elementary school.

Q: OK, so in high school you went to what high school?

ARIETTI: I went to Enfield High School. It was the school of the town. The town of Enfield at that time had one high school. So all of the elementary schools fed into that. When I first went there it was in an old building which was quite crowded. We only went to school in the mornings. We had split terms because there were too many kids for the capacity of the school. They were in the process of building a new high school. I think it

was in my sophomore year that I went to the new high school, which for that time was state of the art. Everybody was very pleased with it. It was very nice. I think I continued to walk to school then too. I must have taken a bus in some circumstance, but most of my elementary and high school I walked to school. Just something I used to harp on when talking to my daughter.

Q: Yes I remember telling her if the snow was three feet high, maybe I put shoes on.

ARIETTI: You got it. It was very much like that. I can remember it being very cold in the winters and hot in the summers, and we just went along. I was a good student in elementary school. I think I was number one in my graduating class in eighth grade.

Q: What about high school? What courses did you do well at or were there any you didn't do well at?

ARIETTI: You know it is funny. I know that eventually you are going to ask me when did you want to go into the State Department or when did you think you would like to join the Foreign Service. I am perhaps a rare commodity. I learned about the State Department and the Foreign Service when I was in high school. I can remember writing a letter to the State Department, probably when I was a Sophomore in high school, asking what kind of background is needed to be a successful candidate to join the State Department. At that time I took liberal arts classes. I did great in history, geography. I studied foreign languages plus all the usual subjects, such as English, Math. Math was not my strength. At that time you did the usual algebra, geometry, trig. I did the basics. I did OK, but I never really did warm to it. My interest then and my best subjects were always history and economics.

Q: Often at that age maps can be quite intriguing.

ARIETTI: Absolutely. I was always fascinated with maps as well. As I say, geography was a big thing. I had an atlas. I used to flip through the atlas for pleasure. I memorized all the capitals of all the states and the different countries. I would know what language was spoken in a particular foreign country and read everything that was relevant. I had a teacher in high school who taught a course that included international affairs, geography and economics together. He was very supportive and encouraged me to think that a career in this field was possible for me. Most members of my family were workers. They worked in the mills or they worked in the factories. They hadn't gone to college, so what I was aspiring to was quite different. My parents didn't have that background themselves. When I was interested in these things, it was a little bit of a mystery to them as to what was so fascinating about looking at maps all the time. But my teacher understood. He encouraged me.

Q: I remember I am older than you, so I grew up in the 30's. As a kid, this is before WWII I had my ideal spot where I really wanted to go. I looked on a map and it was Wake Island. I thought wouldn't this be great. Of course it was quickly taken over by the Japanese. I actually landed on Wake Island on my way to the Korean War. I thought Oh

my God because there is nothing there, but it looked great on the map. Were you in any extra curricular activities?

ARIETTI: Sure I was. They tended to be school related things. I was on the yearbook committee. I was in different clubs. I was never a great sports man. I didn't play football. Everybody had to play some sport in gym class, but we didn't have a lot of other extra curricular activities at that time. When I was quite young I started to work especially in summers.

Q: What did you do?

ARIETTI: Interesting. At that time, in Connecticut at least, you could not get a job in a store until you were 16. But they had special rules for agriculture. You could start working in agriculture if you were 14. One of the local industries, along the Connecticut River Valley, is growing shade tobacco under tents.

Q: It is used for cigars as a wrapping.

ARIETTI: It is a wrapping for cigars. They had a lot of tobacco farms in this area where I grew up. When kids were 14 and they wanted to work during the summer, you went and worked on a tobacco farm, which is pretty miserable work, I must say. Tobacco plants are grown in rows, and you have to go between the rows on your hands and knees and weed and clean them out under these tents which exacerbate the heat. It is quite hot in the northeast in the summer. When the plants are at a certain age you snap the leaves off. Again you are crawling along, down on your hands and knees, however you wanted to do it. You are pulling a basket, and you snap off these leaves usually two at a time and then you put them together and put them in the basket and then pull the basket along. Maybe somebody else pulls the baskets; I can't remember. You could either be a picker or a puller. In any event it was hard dirty work. People can be allergic to the tobacco plant liquid which drips when you pull the leaves. I was and had to wear gloves. I did it for at least two summers, ages 14 and 15. Once the tobacco leaves have been picked they have to be put in these sheds to dry. There is a machine that inserts a thread through the stems of the tobacco leaves to hang on a lath. A barn full of hanging tobacco leaves was worth half a million dollars or something like that. Then they let it dry and then take them down and use them in cigars.

Q: While you were in high school, were you following world events and all?

ARIETTI: Yes. I am sure I was. I can't quite remember all the details now. The first president I can remember was Eisenhower. I used to take an interest in domestic elections. After Eisenhower it was the contest between Kennedy and Nixon if I have my history right. Kennedy was president. Of course he was then assassinated when I was in high school. That was a big event not only to the country but also to me personally and to my friends. We were all great fans of Kennedy, and just devastated when he was killed. I think even at that age I was interested in what was happening around the world. I would

read the newspapers. I used to read magazines. I used to read a bit of history on my own, histories of different countries, but as always interested in the world at large.

Q: Did the cold war intrude on your thinking?

ARIETTI: You know I guess it did. The Cuban Missile Crisis happened while I was in elementary school. I can remember having drills and having to hide under your desk. People were interested in building fallout shelters and the like. There was great tension then that affected people's lives to one degree or another. People feared the whole world was going to blow up. So yes, I guess in that sense these international events did affect us, but in that broad sense, not in any particular sense.

Q: Well did you feel that you were destined for college or university?

ARIETTI: Yes, I think so. I mean again it was the era more and more when people were going to college. It became possible; it was a time when the number of people who were going to college was growing exponentially. In my school they encouraged you to think about going to college. So. Yes. I always expected to go to college and my grades were good enough that people anticipated that I would.

Q: You graduated form high school when?

ARIETTI: 1965.

Q: You mentioned a teacher encouraging you in high school. Do you remember his name?

ARIETTI: Frank Gross.

Q: The reason that I ask is that in these oral histories teachers don't often get credit. Since we are going to put this on the internet, let's get Mr. Gross' name out there.

ARIETTI: Sure.

Q: What were you looking at for college?

ARIETTI: Well by then I knew I wanted to study international relations. Even then I aspired to go into the State Department. So I was only looking at schools that had international relations classes. I applied to Syracuse, to the University of Connecticut, to Johns Hopkins, and I may have applied to one of the Ivy League schools like Yale or Princeton. I just don't remember. I was accepted at U Conn, Syracuse and Johns Hopkins. My parents were never wealthy. My father had a small business and my mother was for some years a policewoman. They could help pay for college, but it was always hoped that I would get some sort of scholarship. In the end I visited these schools and I decided on Johns Hopkins, both because it offered me a partial scholarship and because they offered an AB-MA program in international relations. One studied for three years at the

Baltimore campus of Johns Hopkins and then two years at SAIS in Washington. At the end of five years you would graduate with a both a BA and an MA. I was very keen on that program. Initially, I did not get accepted into it. I think there were ten or twelve students in that program every year. I did not get accepted into the MA-BA program but I did get accepted into Johns Hopkins. When I went for my interview they said, "Well you know, we sometimes add a person in the second year. Why don't you come to Hopkins and we will see how you do and it is possible that you could enter the program." So I worked my tail off that first year. I had basically a 4.0 my first year at Hopkins, and I was then able to transfer into the MA-BA program. One great advantage to that was I got a much bigger scholarship than I had the first year. So I think they paid most of my tuition plus I got a stipend for room and board.

Q: What was Johns Hopkins like when you entered?

ARIETTI: Well it was fairly small. It was a traditional school. It wasn't a new one. It had been around for a long time. It was all men. It is now co-ed but it wasn't then. Small. I think we had perhaps 300 in my entering class. Nice campus in Baltimore. Baltimore at that time was a tough town, but we were in the nicer part of the city. Kind of preppy I would say in the sense that a lot of kids that I met there came from a much more wealthier backgrounds than I was.

Q: Did you feel out of place or how did this work?

ARIETTI: Yes, it was very different. Mixing in with a whole group of people who were quite different from me in some ways. Everybody had to live in the dorm the first year. I had a roommate who was form a very wealthy Boston family. We didn't get along especially well. I think that is also not atypical of experiences people have in college. But we didn't dislike each other; we just didn't have a lot in common. We didn't stay friends after that. But I found my way. I found my own little niche of people. When I got into the AB-MA program I was really with a group of like minded people. We all had the same interests. I have friends to this day who were from that group.

Q: You were in essentially a southern town. Did the civil rights movement intrude during the time you were at Johns Hopkins?

ARIETTI: Yes. You are right. It was quite interesting. I was the only one in my immediate circle of friends who went south to university. Baltimore was very much a southern city then. This was between '65 and '69 or '68. Of course that was also the time, let me get my history right. What was the trigger that caused all the rioting in Watts and all of those towns. Was it Robert Kennedy's assassination?

Q: Well it was after that but I mean you were there when…

ARIETTI: I was there when Baltimore burned. The downtown, and Washington burned too.

Q: Martin Luther King…

ARIETTI: Martin Luther King's assassination. Of course it was. Martin Luther King's assassination. So that was in what, '67. '66? Something like that. Yes Baltimore was a segregated city to a certain extent. There were very few blacks in Hopkins. We lived in the part of the city that was almost fully white. It was like Washington was then in that the majority of the population were African American. It wasn't a legal segregation but it was a social segregation. The whole civil rights movement became a major issue back then. As was the anti-Vietnam war movement. Those were big issues then.

Q: Were there any developments on campus? Let's take civil rights first?

ARIETTI: You know I can't remember. There must have been. I think all of us were fairly liberal in our thinking at that stage. I am sure there must have been pro civil rights activities. I can remember the march on Selma and Lester Maddox in Georgia. The civil rights movement was part of every day awareness. Big changes were taking place. I wasn't personally involved so much in it.

Q: Another big movement of course was anti-Vietnam. How was this played out on the campus from your perspective?

ARIETTI: It was a very big issue. There were organizations and clubs and rallies of one kind or another against the Vietnam War. A lot of students got involved in the political side of things. That is when Gene McCarthy was running against Johnson. People I knew, myself included, became quite active. I went to New Hampshire to campaign for Gene McCarthy at that time. We had a group from the university who got on a bus and went up to knock on doors in the primary season in New Hampshire. The election was in '68 so it was probably January and February before the New Hampshire primary in '68

Q: How did the convention of '69, this is when students and others were protesting the police action in Chicago.

ARIETTI: Again I didn't go there but we watched it with great interest. We were appalled at the violence that took place against the students and the demonstrators. I think people then had a sense of hope. I mean people felt that they as individuals could come together to affect the system. When Johnson announced that he wasn't going to run for president again that was seen as a vindication of everybody's efforts to vocalize the feelings, the anti war sentiment. So the convention on Chicago was another example of that.

Q: While you were at Hopkins during the summers, were you working there?

ARIETTI: Yes. I went back to Connecticut every summer, and I had a whole variety of jobs, local jobs there. All manual. Nowadays everybody wants to go get internships and do that. That wasn't an option back then. You needed to make money so you could have some spending money for the next school year. We had a lot of small businesses in the

area that I grew up in. I remember one year I worked in a plant that made envelopes. I worked in construction one year.

Q: Back at Hopkins during the first three years when you were on the Baltimore campus, were you concentrating on any particular area.

ARIETTI: I was in this MA-BA program. You were directed into courses that were relative to international relations, so I took international relations as a subject area. I took history courses. I took macro and micro economics courses. You had to do foreign language, so I kept on with my French, which was a real struggle. Foreign languages have never been easy for me although I do like them. But at that time I think French was my first foreign language and I struggled with that. I did geography. It was an interesting thing. I also took philosophy and classes that were for the first time available to me. Philosophy was something you didn't take in high school. Psychology, yes I took psychology classes. At Hopkins there was a core curriculum you had to take. Everybody had to take so many English, science, social studies classes and then focus on history and international relations.

Q: What was social life like then?

ARIETTI: Well it was fun. I enjoyed college. I was in the dorm for the first year and the next year I lived off campus in a house with a bunch of guys. I think there were four or five in this house. Social life revolved around the university. We had parties frequently or went to parties, drank plenty of beer. They had fraternities at Hopkins. You were either in a fraternity or not, and I wasn't. So you made your own fun. As I said it was an all male school. They didn't I suppose they had mixers and stuff like that, but mainly somehow people just met others through friends. We dated girls from Goucher College.

Q: I was going to say Goucher was sort of the feeder college.

ARIETTI: It was. Goucher was there but there were other girls schools as well.
So yeah we had a good time. College was fun.

Q: Well then you had two years at SAIS in Washington.

ARIETTI: Actually I had three years at Hopkins. Hopkins also had a branch in Bologna Italy. As part of the MA-AB program Hopkins, all of us went to Italy during the summer after Junior year to study foreign languages. It was interesting. We were living in Italy because that is where SAIS had its facility, but we only spent a month or six weeks in Bologna and then we divided up to go to the country of the language we were studying. So my language was French and I had a French tutor in Italy who taught us. We did French every day. Then I went to France for a month. We went to the University of Dijon. We were supposed to take classes there, which I did not particularly like. So I think I spent a week or ten days there, and then I went off to Paris just on my own and wandered around there and just tried to absorb French culture that way. So that was that summer. Then the fourth year I did go…

Q: What summer was that?

ARIETTI: That was ’68 I guess.

Q: Was that the summer of revolt in France?

ARIETTI: Let me think, ’66, ’67. ’68. Yes it was. I think it was 1968 was the big year of turmoil in Europe. But it wasn’t just the summer but other times. I don’t especially remember being caught up in that. I was there and it was a lot of student activity, but it wasn’t anything I got involved in.

Q: Were you expected to start with your doing Bologna, concentrating in any area or field of study?

ARIETTI: No, I don’t think so. I think we had a course, in addition to language we had a seminar on European politics. That was obvious to do that while we were there, but no, we didn’t have specialties. When we came back for what would have been my senior year, I started at SAIS. Again we moved. We had a group house in DuPont Circle. I went to SAIS for a year. Now this was ’68-’69. the fall of ’68 going into ’69. I had a number of issues back then. To be honest I didn’t really like SAIS. I felt everything was too academic. Not academic, that is a silly thing to say. Obviously it was academic. It was too theoretical. The classes I was doing were theoretical, and I was interested in practical stuff. I was losing the link between the stuff I was studying and what I really wanted to do. How do you actually influence events? How do you apply the material, the information I was learning? It just didn’t work for me. I think some individuals have their off years. When I was a senior, my fourth year of university I just couldn’t see going on for another year and completing the MA program, so I didn’t. I actually finished. I graduated and got my BA degree and I joined the Peace Corps. I left university and applied for and was accepted into the Peace Corps.

Q: This was what year.

ARIETTI: It was the summer of ’69, so I then went into the Peace Corps in the fall of that year.

Q: Well the draft was still on.

ARIETTI: Absolutely.

Q: How did the draft affect you?

ARIETTI: I was in the middle. My number was somewhere in the middle so it wasn’t guaranteed that I would be drafted and it wasn’t safe that I wouldn’t be drafted. I was somewhere in the middle. It may well be that was part of my intellectual thinking at the

time. I don't remember the primary reason, but if you were in the Peace Corps you were given an exemption or a delay for the draft.

Q: How did you feel about the Vietnam War?

ARIETTI: I think what I felt at the time was that it was unnecessary. There was so much going on. There were so many young people dying. There was so much death and destruction. As someone who knew something about international relations, I didn't necessarily buy the domino theory that people cited, e.g. if Vietnam falls, then other neighboring countries would fall. I had serious reservations about the logic of this. People oversimplified, saying Russia, China, Vietnam, were the same because they were part of this Communist bloc. That was very simplistic. They weren't talking about the differences between the countries. So no I didn't think it was worth the blood and money and deaths that were being caused.

Q: The Peace Corps in those days, did you have a point where just would go into the Peace Corps or would you say I would like to do Africa or Latin America or what?

ARIETTI: Yes you could. I was interested in South Asia and Southeast Asia. By then at Hopkins my area of interest was South Asia and Southeast Asia as opposed to Latin America or Africa in particular. So I wanted to go somewhere in that part of the world. I assumed I would be an English teacher because what else could I do. I didn't have any technical training to do a lot of things. So at the time when you applied to the Peace Corps you could express a preference as to where you would like to go and what you would like to do. Then they would make you an offer, and you could choose to accept it or not. Well lo and behold they offered me the option of going to India to participate in a poultry project, raising chickens and selling eggs and chicken meat. I knew absolutely nothing about chickens other than you could eat them and they laid eggs. They said that is not a problem .We will teach you. So I agreed to do that. My family was not particularly happy about my doing that. They were unhappy that I was giving up this opportunity to stay in college and get my Masters and they were unhappy that I was going off to Lord knows where in India on the other side of the world.. But I was sent to San Bernardino, California for training. We went off to a rural area and lived in almost a barracks for farm laborers. We had maybe six to eight weeks of training where we had some area studies, learned something about India, started to learn the Hindi language, Hindustani, and also learn something about chickens. And had all sorts of practical hands on training about how to raise chickens to the point where they start laying eggs and you either sell the eggs or the bird itself. How to raise baby chicks, make sure they didn't die in their early days. That included keeping the temperature right in the area where they were, how to feed them, how to mix chicken mash, how to inoculate them, what the diseases were that affected chickens. A particularly bizarre thing is that chickens when they are in a confined area can become aggressive. Their beaks are very sharp and they peck each other. If one of them has a small wound the other chickens almost become cannibalistic and they just keep pecking at the bloody area and before you know it the bird is dead. So to prevent that, one can take a very sharp tool and slice off some of the top beak of the chicken. They call it debeaking. You don't cut both beaks, but one, and

that just prevents the bird from pecking. So you do this when the bird is quite young. Presumably it doesn't hurt them very much. You cauterize the wound and do it very quickly. You might do 500 chickens a night. You do it at night because that is when the birds are calm. I was a chicken debeaker for the better part of two years.

Q: My God!

ARIETTI: Great training for the Foreign Service!

Q: OK, well then off to India.

ARIETTI: Off to India. I was posted to Rajasthan. I don't know how much you know about India but Rajasthan is one of the most fascinating parts of India. It is in the northwestern part. The big city there is Jaipur. It was the area that had the princely states so they had the maharajah of Jaipur, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Udaipur. I was sent to the town of Ajmer. That was an area where the Peace Corps had poultry projects for some time. We were an expansion group. I shared a house with another Peace Corps volunteer. We both did the same thing. We were integrated into a local rural extension project of the State of Rajasthan. We worked with our Indian counterparts. We were like a rural extension agent. We would go out to small farmers and poor people who had never raised chickens before, but the government was encouraging them to do that as a way of making money. They wouldn't know anything about it. Somebody told me it is something like teachers do. As long as you are ahead of the next day's lesson you are OK. Well that is the way we were with these farmers. They knew a lot more about farming, but they didn't know anything about chickens. So we could go out and say look here are your 500 baby chicks. Here is what you need to do to rear them to avoid mass deaths. You can't them to get too cold. You can't let them get too hot. You have to feed them this particular mix, and at age six weeks they need to be inoculated etc. We would visit their farms on bicycles. We would go around to all of these communities in the immediate area of Ajmer and assist them in whatever way we could. I did that for two years.

Q: How did you find you were received?

ARIETTI: People were always surprised. What in the world is this foreign white person doing here running around, speaking atrocious Hindustani. My Hindustani was good enough that I could get by. We could basically communicate. They were appreciative. Especially budding farmers. We could help them make a difference. It was a really positive experience.

Q: Did you find any particular problems with the chicken project? I mean was this received. In the first place were you breaking some rice bowls of some old style chicken farmers of like the new guys coming in?

ARIETTI: No. I think this was helping raise chickens on a commercial basis. I mean people had chickens but they had four or five. They just scratched around in the dirt. They didn't really feed them. They managed on their own, and if they laid an egg

somebody would go find it and then they would eat it. But this was raising chickens in enclosed areas with relatively modern methods and imported chickens. The Government of India and the State of Rajasthan were helping to import hybrid chickens into these communities where they had never existed before. People knew these birds needed a different kind of care and attention than traditional farmers had used. There was a mix of people we helped. Some people had been assisted by the Peace Corps for a couple of years. One or two had become quite wealthy rearing chickens and selling eggs. The main purpose of the project was to promote egg production and egg consumption. India is a very mixed country but a lot of people were vegetarian. That was part of our selling technique as well. We would explain to people that these were vegetarian eggs. A hen will lay eggs when it is her time regardless of whether there is a rooster anywhere around. We didn't have roosters. We just reared hens. So the eggs they laid had not been fertilized, therefore there was no "life" in them. So if you ate an egg you weren't killing an animal. We argued that it was just like milk. It was a byproduct. So we would encourage people to consume eggs even if they were vegetarian, because it was another source of protein. India was so big and so mixed there were plenty of people who were happy to consume eggs even if there were others who didn't.

Q: What was your impression of Indian society at that level?

ARIETTI: India was a defining point I think in my life. I had never been overseas other than that trip to Europe before. I had certainly never been in a developing country before. I was in India from '69 to '71. India was incredibly poor. I think I became aware of the depth of poverty in ways that I never would have anticipated growing up in the United States. So it was a big eye opener for me in terms of what the rest of the world did and how the rest of the world had to live. I liked Indian culture. I loved Indian history and Indian temples and music and the mixture of populations in Indian. In Ajmer, the people were mostly Hindu but there was also a Muslim community. You also had Jains and Parsees, you had Christians. It was very mixed. It was a hard experience. India was a struggle. It was hot, and it was dirty, even though we lived in a fairly comfortable government house which was cinder block. It had water, although the taps never ran except for an hour a day so we had a big cistern where the water would collect. You took showers by pouring cups of water over you head. Very basic toilets. It was a very simple Peace Corps type life. But I found India fascinating; I still do. I spent as much time as I could getting out of the immediate town I was in to see the rest of India. I was fortunate that over those two years I traveled in India a lot. We used to travel on the train without a reservation We used to call it third class jungle. You just forced yourself onto this train full of humanity and sometimes you got a seat. Most often you didn't; you sat in the corridor. You went wherever you could go. We went to Bombay. We went all down the southern India into Kerala and Madras. I am using the old terms, Bangalore. I went to Calcutta. I went up to Kashmir. I went to Darjeeling. I went to Agra in the central part of India, to Delhi of course. So I saw a good part of India on these trips. I used to do my research in advance and I would know I wanted to see certain temples, and I would go off. So a lot of this travel was Indian culture and Indian history. Understanding Indian history by going to forts, palaces and the like. Again you saw a lot of India's struggle. The worst of India were people who had disabilities. They just didn't have a life. You

became conscious of it; you became irritated by it. You set up a defense mechanism. The bottom line of all of this is when I came back from India I had discovered that I really liked this and I wanted to deal with developing countries, and I wanted to deal with part of the world that wasn't necessarily similar to my own. So I wasn't interested in Europe any more. I wanted to do other parts of the world.

Q: How did you find the Peace Corps administration in India?

ARIETTI: It was pretty good. There was a growing Peace Corps presence there. It was one of the largest, this is before Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister. Indira Gandhi kicked the Peace Corps out at a certain point after I left. We were growing exponentially then It was pretty good. When we arrived in Rajasthan we had a training session, did more language training, did more poultry training, then we were divided up into our different groups.

Q: Did you find the local administration the head man or mayor of a farming village give you a rough time or not.

ARIETTI: They wouldn't give us a rough time. I mean it was interesting because the guy who was in charge of the local poultry project was somewhat intimidated or threatened by us I think, because we were temporary. We had some resources that he didn't have. He was a college graduate in poultry. We found that we were willing to get our hands dirtier than some of the Indian people. In India at that time caste was still important. The government officials wanted to associate more with people who were on their way up, you know, or relatively prosperous businessmen. While they would work with the local poor farmers; it wasn't their preference. If he wanted to go somewhere he had a car; we were on bicycles. So there was a little bit of tension with that, but we had other staff with whom we got along quite well. We made friends. You can make friends in India. There was a lot of curiosity. Who were you?

Q: Did you run into any evidence of ethnic or religious tensions?

ARIETTI: Oh sure. The Hindu/Muslim divisions were there. The partition had taken place decades earlier. There were still refugee people there. One of the local successful families were Hindu Sindhis from Sindh in what was then Pakistan, who had been forced out because they were Hindu. Ajmer also had a Muslim shrine that was very famous. People came on visits every year and there was a big event for the Muslim community. But there wasn't any violence, Hindu-Muslim violence. while we were there. We got to know Muslim families. It was my first exposure with anything having to do with Islam. People there were not the crazies, the dogmatic radical Islamists that we worry about today. These were just religious people who happened to be Muslim. They had a Sufi tradition there. There was a lot of music, singing. They had saints and people would go on pilgrimages to their shrines. It was a more relaxed kind of Islam than you read about these days. That was an important part of our understanding of their culture.

Q: Well then you spent two years. By that time the draft was over wasn't it.

ARIETTI: Yes, it was.

Q: So then what?

ARIETTI: I went home. I had taken the Foreign Service test while I was in the Peace Corps. I took it at Delhi. I applied for it, and went to the U.S. embassy in New Delhi and sat in a room with others and took the written test there. That was probably in the early part of 1971. Then when I left India I traveled. I took three months off and I traveled all through Southeast Asia on my own. I went to Burma when it was very unusual to go to Burma. I took a paddle steamer up the Irrawaddy River and went to Mandalay. I went to Thailand, to Singapore, the Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan.

Q: Did you stop by our embassies or consulates?

ARIETTI: Not usually, no. I had been to the one in Delhi for the test, but no, I was just traveling. I was a backpacker just traveling through to see local culture and history. I didn't have any reason to go to those embassies.

Q: How about the drug culture? Was that while you were in the Peace Corps or there, was that a problem?

ARIETTI: Well it was a time when people smoked marijuana to one degree or another. It was there. It was in the atmosphere, it was part of life, but it wasn't a big deal. People didn't get involved in it in a long term way. So when I came back after this three month trip to the U.S. I then took the Foreign Service oral test.

Q: In Washington?

ARIETTI: I think it was Washington.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions?

ARIETTI: Oh yeah.

Q: What were they?

ARIETTI: The first question they threw at me was what about the chicken war, which had nothing to do with my chickens. It was a European trade issue. They asked about my experiences in India. The oral was kind of tough. They asked about American culture. If you wanted to talk about American writers, whom would you talk about and why. So it was fairly intensive I would say. But I think I became aware that what they really wanted was to see how well you presented yourself. It was not necessary for you to know the precise answer to every question they put to you but how you dealt with it. I think there were three or four on that panel. One of them I happened to know because we came into contact in later life was George Moose. He eventually was one of my ambassadors later

on in my career. He was on the panel. I passed the oral test, and then what happened, I don't know how it works now, but then they put you on a roster. They basically told you that you are in the top third of the top quarter or the top whatever. Depending on your ranking State would immediately offer you a position or put you on the waiting list. That is where I ended up, on the waiting list. They could not promise me a spot. They only took so many people at any particular time of year. It was difficult because it was a good prospect I was going to be offered a position but they couldn't tell me when. So what do you do? I had to keep body and soul together, so I found a different job. I had done a summer working for the U.S. immigration service at a local airport, one of those people who would stamp your passport when you would come in. I got as job working for the immigration service.

Q: How long were you doing that?

ARIETTI: Just about a year.

Q: How did you find that?

ARIETTI: It was like any civil service job, not especially interesting. In fact I was given a job in Vermont. So I actually moved to Vermont, and I worked in an office. I wasn't doing passport work.

Q: You weren't at the derby line?

ARIETTI: No, no I was in Burlington at the offices there.

Q: I see. My wife comes from up there, and you go to Derby Line and the border runs right through the library I think.

ARIETTI: Well I wasn't opposed to getting one of these positions but you needed to spend some time doing this clerical stuff, and I did not like that especially. I really was a clerk for the immigration service handling paper. I only did that for about six months, and lo and behold along came this letter from the State Department saying would you like to join our class at such and such a date. It was a little awkward because I had just started this new job and I had to give my notice right away. But when I told the guy who was my immediate boss that I was going to make twice as much money working for the State Department as I was for the INS, Maybe not twice as much but a significant amount more, he couldn't fault me on that one.

Q: So you came into the foreign service when?

ARIETTI: In January of 1973.

Q: What was your initial entry class like, the A-100 course?

ARIETTI: What was my A-100 class like. Gosh I think we had about 40. I am going to say 40 but it could have been fewer, something like that numbers of entries, people who came in. Very mixed, the usual mix of people from around the country. Interesting. Some of those people I will be friends with the rest of my life. A-100 back then was six weeks, eight weeks? It was an eye opener. I had been thinking of joining State for a very long time. But I didn't really know a lot about government. So you had people come in to discuss the structure of the State Department, the other international agencies. We also went out and visited these different sites. We had people come in and talk about practical administrative matters. It wasn't bad. At the time it wasn't bad other than anytime you just sit in a room can get tedious after awhile, but it was OK.

Q: How about mix of people: female, ethnic.
ARIETTI: It was mostly white male but not exclusively by any means. I think we might have had I am going to say a quarter, maybe it was more who were female. Minorities, I don't think we had any, African Americans. We might have had Hispanics or Asians. I don't remember any particular person who was an African American back then. It was mixed in the sense that it wasn't East Coast. It wasn't East Coast and it wasn't preppy. It was very mixed in terms of where people came from . We had people from Texas and Oklahoma, California, Oregon, the south, Alabama. It was a mixture of the United States and I think even back then they were very consciously trying to bring in this mixture.

Q: When I came in, in '55 they were talking about a massive infusion of Main Street.

ARIETTI: Main Street. Not Wall Street but Main Street.

Q: Was there any talk about, I mean we were still involved in Vietnam at that time. How did Vietnam play?

ARIETTI: Well we were as you say we were involved, but the fighting had ended. Let's see, this was '73. this is where my dates get fuzzy. When were the Paris peace talks?

Q: Well I think the peace talks had already taken place, and they had these supposedly everything was set. The country was still divided and all, but it was just a bomb ticking ready to go off.

ARIETTI: You know I don't really remember it being a major aspect of out discussions at the time. We were all bright, bushy-tailed and looking at what our next individual lives were going to be like. People were terribly focused on what their first assignment was going to be, and where were we going to go.

Q: What were you asking for and what did you get?

ARIETTI: I wanted to go to South Asia. I spoke Hindi, passing Hindi. When I took the foreign service language test they scoffed at my Hindi. It was not FSI Hindi, it was Hindustani local. I could get by in ordinary conversations in the market. What is the price of a dozen eggs, you know, how is your sister doing. In ordinary conversation I was OK,

but when they said, I remember the instructor saying, "Look, try to ask me what I thought about the prime minister and the parliament," I didn't even know the vocabulary of that thing. So I got a 1+ in Hindi. Maybe I got a 2+ in speaking and a 1+ in reading because my reading wasn't very good. So that is where I wanted to go. They ended up telling me there were no jobs there and in fact I was the only person out of my class who did not have an assignment.

Q: That must have been pretty discouraging.

ARIETTI: Yes, it was discouraging with everybody going off to one place or another. Even if they were staying in Washington they knew what they were going to do. This guy said to me, "We can't really place you exactly where we think you should go right now, so we are going to give you a temporary job. So I went off and the first thing I did was in an office that dealt with Russian affairs and at the time they had limits on where Russian diplomats could travel. Even they were restricted. Somebody had to administer this. Somebody had to read their requests for travel from Washington to New York and say yea or nay. We used to keep track of how many permits had been given out to our folks in Moscow and we would give them the same number of permits in Washington. I did that for a couple of months. It was never going to be a permanent thing. It was all just temporary until finally a job opened up in INR dealing, not with India, but Pakistan and Afghanistan. So they pushed me into that for my first job. So I stayed in Washington for my first couple of years.

Q: All right, INR. What were our relations with Pakistan and Afghanistan?

ARIETTI: Afghanistan if I recall the Russians…

Q: No, they came in '79. The Russians were there, heavily there but they didn't invade until '79.

ARIETTI: Well the problems were the traditional ones between Afghanistan and Pakistan. I think we had acceptable relations with both countries, and under Nixon of course he had favored Pakistan. With the end of the war with Pakistan, Bangladesh became independent and all that. So we had relatively good relations with Pakistan. We had acceptable relations with Afghanistan. One of the things I watched was the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and their cross border rivalries and tensions and the Pashtuns across the border and all the same stuff that you read about today is part of the background of what is going on was very much true then. The borders were very porous.

Q: Well what were you doing?

ARIETTI: I was an analyst. I would write short papers. INR published thought pieces if you will on A, B or C. I can't remember if I did Pakistan more than I did Afghanistan, but I was watching both countries. You know this was an exposure to how the State Department really worked. I didn't know what they did. I had to read INR documents going on. We got intelligence. We would get reports and try to make sense of it. I was in

an office where quite a few people had a lot of experience over decades in dealing with these issues. So they took me under their wing and tried to show me what to do. Basically I learned the first part of what it was like to be a Foreign Service officer.

Q: How did you find INR? Was it interesting.

ARIETTI: Yes, it was interesting to me because of the topic matter. I have never been a great person for writing. You would think that would be strange. I can write OK, but I don't take great pleasure in writing for myself. The task of writing a piece on A, B, or C due next week was sort of like the same thing I was doing in college, producing a term paper or a short paper on this. But what I learned from that was how to write, how to be more concise and terse in writing than I have ever been able to do in the past.. How to catch people's attention in your writing. And I also at the same time I was relatively shy in terms of public speaking. I remember at that era taking one of those toastmaster classes, how do you do better as a public speaker. It was intimidating to somebody who hadn't had that experience.

Q: OH yeah.

ARIETTI: It wasn't very long before I went out to my first overseas tour. I think I was in Washington including language training for less than two years from January of '73 when I came into the State Department to when I went to my first overseas post. So I used that to absorb a bit of the State Department life and culture. In hindsight that was a very smart thing. It wasn't intentional but it worked out very well because when I went overseas as a first officer I knew something about how the Department worked that a lot of new officers didn't.

Q: Absolutely. I mean to learn how things are done. Had you developed a significant other at this point or not?

ARIETTI: No. I was dating but…

Q: Sort of footloose and fancy free.

ARIETTI: Absolutely. That was a nice time to be in Washington.

Q: Well this is probably a good place to stop. We will pick this up the next time in when did you leave INR?

ARIETTI: I am going to have to go back and look at the timeline.

Q: We are talking about '73.

ARIETTI: '74 I think I went in '74.

Q: OK, well we will pick it up then.

Q: Today is 30 August 2011 with Michael Arietti. So now you might put us where we are and where we are going.

ARIETTI: Well if I recall where we left off I had to finish the A-100 class having joined the Department in January of 1973. Initially they didn't have an overseas job for me so I spent a very short term, like a two month period working in EUR tracking Russian diplomats and giving them their permits to travel around the country. Then I was moved into INR working on Pakistan and Afghanistan. Again both of these were always intended to be short term because the goal was to find a normal assignment as most of my colleagues had already been assigned overseas. So I remember working in INR which was OK. I got a call from personnel one day and they said, "We have been looking for a job for you. How would you like to go to Khorramshahr?" I had to confess I didn't know where Khorramshahr was. I had never heard of Khorramshahr. With some chagrin I said where is that? He said, "It is a consulate in Iran." I said, "Oh." As I said before I always had an interest in South Asian issues. So Iran wasn't that far afield. It seemed interesting. I looked into it. It was a tiny, little post of three Americans. And Khorramshahr is a port on the Persian Gulf, right down near Basra in Iraq and Kuwait, sort of the head of the gulf. Anyway I said, "Yes." They first sent me to FSI for Farsi language training which I did for I think it was five months, and some other types of training. Then in the summer of 1974 I think it was, I was sent to Khorramshahr.

Q: Question back to INR. Looking at it at the time did it seem to be through either foreign service or civil service much expertise in the areas you were dealing with?

ARIETTI: I was very impressed. There was a man whose name now escapes me, Dan somebody. Maybe we will recall this. Who had been in charge of the Pakistan, Afghanistan, probably Iran desk or country directorate in INR for some years. He was a civil service, not foreign service and really knew his stuff. He had been studying this for years. He managed the influx of who ever happened to be assigned to his office who didn't necessarily have a lot of expertise, myself included. But he guided us all in the right direction. He was a very good first boss if you will.

Q: How did you find Farsi learning it?

ARIETTI: Well I had already learned Hindi when I was in the Peace Corps, so I had this base. There is a relationship between Hindi and Farsi, mostly in shared vocabulary words, not in the grammar or anything of that sort. But there was a lot of overlap in the words. I think the big differences were script. Farsi is written somewhat like Arabic in that cursive script and Hindi was in something called Devanagari which is totally different. So learning to read Farsi was more difficult perhaps than learning to speak it. I never did do very well in reading Farsi, but it was a challenge. It was really a foreign language with not a lot in common with English. But I think having Hindi was a help.

Q: OK, as you went out, would this be in '73?

ARIETTI: ’74.

Q: How stood before we get to Khorramshahr specifically, how stood relations between Iran and the United States?

ARIETTI: Oh they were excellent back then. I mean the Shah was in power back in that era. The U.S. had a great relationship with him. There were a lot of sales of both military equipment and also commercial equipment. The Shah had a lot of money from oil and he was developing the country and building these big infrastructure projects. There were a lot of American businesses which had a big presence in Iran.

Q: All right let’s talk about Khorramshahr. As you were there and before what did you find out about Khorramshahr?

ARIETTI: Well the first thing is I have to tell you is that when I first looked into the post report on Khorramshahr the first sentence starts out something like this – “Khorramshahr is a hot, dusty khaki colored city on the Persian Gulf” , and that is exactly what it was. When I got off the plane for Khorramshahr, we actually landed in Abadan which was very close to Khorramshahr. Abadan was the big oil producing center, about 10-15 miles from Khorramshahr. I got off the plane and there was this blast of hot air at me. I thought it was the wake of some jet’s heat exhaust, but it wasn’t. It was just the wind, the normal climate. It was well over 100 and hot and humid and really miserable. Another vignette I remember, we used to do outdoor activities a lot because it was so hot. I can remember leaning against the consulate building one evening and having to pull back because the brick was so hot after having the sun on it all day, even though it was evening. It wasn’t comfortable to do that. You know Khorramshahr turned out for me to be a great assignment. I really liked it for all kinds of reasons which I will tell you. Number one it was an extremely small post. There were three Americans, and I had an extremely good first boss there who is still a friend of mine.

Q: Who was that?

ARIETTI: A guy named Michael Hornblow. He was the consul, and I was the vice consul, and we had an administrative officer. That was it the three of us, and we probably had five or six Iranian employees. That was it. We all lived right next to each other. The consulate had been next to the old British consulate. The British consulate had closed; we had acquired it and converted it into housing. So I had this enormous house as s single person. It probably had seven bedrooms. That was my first exposure to a different thing about life in the State Department. Most of use are not familiar with having servants and all of a sudden you have a cook and a cleaner and a gardener. For your entire prior life you have done this stuff yourself. It is kind of strange for a young diplomat to all of a sudden have to deal with this kind of support that you never have had before. And doing it in Persian because none of them spoke any English so I had to do all of my conversations and instructions in Farsi. You got dumped into the water and you had to swim, no two ways about it. Khorramshahr was a port and it had been a big port during WWII when the allies were sending food and weapons to the Russians. So we had

established a presence there back in the 40's or the 30's and this was the remnants of it. Because Iran was growing in terms of American importance there was a great desire to maintain a presence in the provinces. Khorramshahr was small; it was a port. There was very little to do in Khorramshahr. There weren't any cultural activities, but Abadan was close by. This part of Iran has a very large Arab influence. So even though everybody spoke Persian, at least 50% of the population were Arab in origin.

Q: Was it Balochistan? What was the outlying province? What areas did you cover?

ARIETTI: Well from Khorramshahr we would cover the entire third of Iran from West to East. So if you just took a line across Iran we covered Shiraz, another big city, and it went all the way over to the Pakistani border. So yes that included Balochistan and there was a town called Zahedan, and we had Bandar-Abbas and Bushehr, ports that were in the southern third of Iran.

Q: So what was your main work?

ARIETTI: Well I was a jack of all trades. I was the vice consul so I did consular work. I did visa interviews, issued new passports etc. But I was also the economic officer and the political officer and I traveled a lot, as much as I could. That was what was exciting about it. You woke up in the morning and you didn't know what was going to face you. We only had consular hours in the morning so I only had a couple of hours of consular work. There wasn't a need for more than that, although that was a beginning when, because of the new found oil wealth in Iran, a lot of young Iranians were going as students to the United States. So we had a lot of visa cases. But I traveled. I did economic reporting. I didn't really do oil so much because that was covered out of Tehran. The main embassy had a lot of people focused on the oil industry. But I covered some of the other local industries. They grew dates and exported dates to the United States. I did the annual date report. There were factories that made licorice. There were American businesses, for example Boeing and Pratt and Whitney and others selling a lot of aircraft to the Iranians. So I had interaction with American businessmen who were there, who were stationed in Iran.

Q: Well were you watching at one point I was on the other side of the Gulf in Dhahran. We were terribly concerned, the British more than we, about Iranian influence in those days the Trucial states, Bahrain and Qatar and migration out. Were we looking to see if the Shah had desires on these places?

ARIETTI: I don't recall that was such a big problem. I think at that time we were friendly with most of the countries in the Gulf. They had historical rivalries, the Iranians and the Saudis. The Iranian /Arab division was very much alive. There was a conflict at the time as to what to call the Gulf. Was it the Persian Gulf or the Arabian Gulf? You know you could get into trouble by using the wrong term depending on which country you were in. So we were sympathetic to all and used our good offices if you will, to try to prevent any of this rivalry of growing and getting out of hand. No I don't think we were especially concerned about that. We had such good ties with the Shah. We didn't have much

interaction with the intelligence community. The Embassy, did but we didn't. But we certainly had good ties with the local police for security grounds. It was a good time to be an American in Iran. You were welcome. There wasn't any terrorism or anything of that sort. We were concerned about the problems there, but the problems were student unrest and the potential for left wing insurrection. It is interesting, given what eventually happened with the religious right coming into power. From my experience we all sort of missed that. We were so focused on the communist threat and the left wing threat that we didn't pay enough attention to that.

Q: Well also there was concern you might say here in the Untied States about Iranian students. Every time the Shah came to the United States, which he did fairly frequently, all the Iranian students would get out there and demonstrate.

ARIETTI: Absolutely and again that was sort of the left wing influence. It was also a period when we were just beginning to focus on human rights issues. There were plenty of problems in Iran. There was an organization called Savak. There are always these stories of Savak abusing people in its prisons and people disappearing etc. We walked a little bit of a line to try to interact with the Iranian government while trying to keep sympathy with those people who were suffering from excesses due to the security services.

Q: Was the Shah's white revolution going on while you were there?

ARIETTI: White Revolution?

Q: I mean this is supposedly bringing more democracy to the villages and all that?

ARIETTI: I can't recall exactly. The concern was that it was a superficial democracy and that the Shah would allow democratic processes as long as he kept full control over it. He wasn't about to allow anybody to rise up and potentially be a threat to him. When I look back on all of this, one of the things I think I learned after the fact, was the importance of the prior history of US involvement in Iran. The Department really didn't do a great job then of teaching this history. The U.S. and the CIA helped overthrow Mosaddegh in the 50's. He was a left wing prime minister at the time. There was a huge history there. Even though it was touched on in my training, I don't think anybody actually sat me down and said, "Look you have to be really conscious because there is an innate anti Americanism among a large percentage of the population that goes back to the Mossadegh era because of what we did." In fact I think none of us really appreciated the strength of that even while we were in Iran.

Q: Was Mossadeq a name that was bandied around while you were there?

ARIETTI: People were very careful of what they said. That was true because the Savak was omnipresent and always listening. So no if they did it was just in a passing historical thing. No you didn't get a lot of, people who would talk to me as an American diplomat about Mosaddegh or express any anti American feelings. So superficially we were

welcome. It was easy to make contacts. We dealt in the higher echelons of society. Even though I would travel around and I had more interaction with people you tended to be guided. Your local employees would help you. We had a local political officer, and if you were going off to visit some far flung province you relied on him to set up your appointments. Even though you might ask to do this and the other, you weren't going to go out there and talk to the real rabble rousers. Certainly not in my position.

Q: Was the Tudeh party out of bounds?

ARIETTI: Yes that was out of bounds. I can't remember what big party was supporting the Shah. That is basically who we talked to. What I did, and it was a useful thing to do, but it probably didn't prepare me for what eventually happened, was to make an effort to try to contact local mullahs and the religious establishment there. And they were vetted a little bit if you will by the government authorities. But I did make an effort whenever I visited a place to not only call on the local governor or mayor whatever it was, but I also tried to see one of the religious people.

Q: Was the, seeing the way it became, at the time you were there, did religion sort of dominate everything or was this just a factor.

ARIETTI: You know it is an interesting question because, yes, religion was very important then. What was different then was there was a lot of skepticism about the mullahs and the priestly class. And there were jokes about them. Anybody who knows the Iran of that era has heard stories about Mullah Nasreddin. They are like Irish jokes or Polish jokes. Mullah Nasreddin would find himself in a silly situation and not be able to get out of it, whereas any sensible person would. So there was a sense that there wasn't total respect for the Ayatollahs. They had Ayatollahs, but mixed in with that was this certain willingness to mock the religious establishment which apparently doesn't exist after the revolution. All that sense of skepticism seems to have been lost. Did people in that era anticipate the Ayatollahs and Khomeini and all of that, certainly no. I didn't from my little perch down there in the south, and I didn't get the impression from interaction with the folks in the embassy that they were so worried about that either. Again the focus was on the left wing.

Q: Well when you think about it, I mean basically in the Iranian revolution there was a fight between the left wing which is and the moderates sort of the western intellectuals you might call them, and the conservative religious group. The conservative religious group won. It was just waiting to happen. There was a lot of turmoil.

ARIETTI: There was a lot of turmoil, you are right. Later on during the revolution there were phases of that, and there were times when there were moderates who were in power and eventually they got kicked out. Now I didn't stay in Khorramshahr probably more than a year. I think my total time in Iran was two years, but the embassy decided they needed to reconfigure our presence in Iran. We had consulates in Tabriz, Khorramshahr, and another town initially when I first arrived. But there was so much American business going in to the towns of Esfahan and Shiraz that they decided that it was better for

example, to have our consulate move away from Khorramshahr and establish itself in Shiraz. They also opened a consulate in Esfahan at the same time. So in 1975 we closed Khorramshahr and I went, at the time my boss was leaving, I became the consul in Shiraz. I had a new officer that came in to join me. I think there were just two of us initially, maybe three in Shiraz. So at a fairly junior age in terms of experience, I became the consul in Shiraz and help set up a new post, got the property etc, and worked there for a year.

Q: OK, let's talk about Shiraz. How did it fit in?

ARIETTI: Shiraz is an Iranian paradise. It has a wonderful climate. It has a lot of history. It is a very pretty city. A lot of Gulf Arabs used to come to Shiraz for vacation; it was such a nice place. I had been there before. It was in our consular district, and I had been there as a visitor. But no it was a much more pleasant place to live than Khorramshahr for sure. It was much bigger, more cosmopolitan, had a university, had a lot of American presence at the time. So it was a step up I would say from the relatively quiet life in Khorramshahr.

Q: Were you picking up any sort of local differences between the Arabic speaking along the Pakistani borders as you say. It is a tribal country.

ARIETTI: Yes. Iran is multilingual and multi ethnic. The big majority were Persian Farsi speaking people, about 80% or 75%, something like that. The Arab minority was concentrated around Khorramshahr and Abadan and the Gulf region. There were a lot of links between those Arabs and their counterparts in Iraq. At that time that I was in Khorramshahr relations between Iran and Iraq were terrible. So we were not allowed to go into Iraq. But I could see Basra across the river. The Shat al Arab was the river border and we could see Iraq. When I went to Shiraz, I was much more in the Persian heartland and that was not so much an issue. The other big group in Iran was the Kurds. We had part of Kurdistan in our district. So I did have some exposure to them, but most of them were further north and covered out of out consulate in Tabriz.

Q: How did you find the local authorities?

ARIETTI: Generally cooperative. I was a fairly young officer and didn't have a lot of experience. I didn't have a lot of things to compare it to, other than my experience in India. Iran was so much wealthier in the circumstances of everyone's daily life. They were so much better off than India. The Shah talked a good talk. He talked about encouraging irrigation and improving agriculture and getting more money into schools and women's rights. It was a lot of progressive discussion and action. I don't say there was nothing going on. But the authorities were all absolutely in step with the program so when you talk to somebody they always used all the honorifics when referring to the Shah. It wasn't just the Shah. It was Shah en Shah blah, blah, blah. It went on and on. It was quite a culture of deep respect. Iranians are Shia. Even the Arab people were Shia there. The only Sunnis I came into contact with were along the Baluchi border the far east of that consular district, and the odd one here and there. The Shia, are fascinating too.

They would have these big ceremonies and they have their Ayatollahs. There is a certain mysticism in the Shi's side of the faith. I was able to get along quite well with the religious establishment. They were somewhat outward looking and not as fundamentalist as they seem to be now.

Q: What about social life there?

ARIETTI: You know social life is all in making your own way as you went along. Like anywhere, you interacted with some of the other diplomats. There were a few other consulates, more so in Shiraz than in Khorramshahr. I tried to invite Iranians to social events, and occasionally we would get invited back as well. Having the power of the visa made you a very popular person, and anyone who has ever done consular work knows how careful you have to be. You can acquire friends and then the next thing you know they are looking for a favor. Iranians tended to be very family focused. If there was a distant cousin who had been refused a visa, I could almost guarantee that sooner or later my new found friend was going to bring up that case and ask that I review it one more time.

Q: How about dating. You were single at the time.

ARIETTI: I was single at the time and not really. There was little chance. We didn't date Iranian women. That was not culturally accepted at least in the parts of Iran where I was.

Q: I was wondering because women going to universities, they weren't prohibited or anything like that.

ARIETTI: No they weren't but they didn't date in the western sense. If there was a function they might come and you might interact with women, young, old whatever at that instance. So whenever we could we would organize a cultural event. We used to show American films. If we had a musical group visit, we would organize a concert. When I went to the university for example, I believe even back then if I would be invited to give a small talk to a small group, men and women were both present. But it was still a fairly conservative society.

Q: How about the hand of the embassy at the time?

ARIETTI: The hand of the embassy was -- excuse me for my difficulty in remembering names, the former CIA director…

Q: Colby wasn't it?

ARIETTI: No, Helms Richard Helms. He was the ambassador for a good part of the time I was there. He ran a tight ship. He was very close to the Shah. We coordinated our reporting with Tehran. I wouldn't say they controlled us. I don't recall a circumstance where they said no, don't send this cable. But they tended to look at it, and sometimes they would offer suggestions or maybe you wanted to rephrase it this way and that way.

This was interacting with the political section. My recollection is there was some tension up in the political section in Tehran in the sense that people wanted to report more critically about the Shah and the leadership was less willing to allow that.

Q: Within the foreign service this period prior to the Shah's overthrow, the reporting the ambassador and the senior officers tended to sit on our reporting. I mean they could report anything they want as long as it is favorable to the Shah.

ARIETTI: I think this is consistent with that.

Q: This was considered to be a grievous fault.

ARIETTI: I don't disagree with you. I don't frankly recall specific instances that I could cite and say this is what happened. My general impression was yes, you were expected to report positively on what was happening in the country.

Q: One picks up that in an atmosphere I think. I mean not specific orders.

ARIETTI: That's right. That is true.

Q: The Soviets, were they a presence?

ARIETTI: Yeah, I am sure they were there. I can't remember if we had, there was certainly an embassy. I don't think there was a consulate in Shiraz so I didn't have much interaction with them.

Q: How about either Pakistan or India?

ARIETTI: Same thing. I think there was a Pakistani consulate in Zahedan, and when I went there which I only went to maybe once possibly twice in the two years I was there, we would have said Hi to them. But it wasn't a big presence. The Gulf Arabs were more present I would say. They had more interaction with the Iranians.

Q: I am just trying to think at that time were the Gulf Arabs had the British pulled out by that time?

ARIETTI: I think so; most of the countries were independent. The UAE was I think in existence then. Qatar and Kuwait were all. There would have been a Kuwaiti embassy in Khorramshahr for sure and probably a Saudi one. I mean a consulate.

Q: What about was Iraq seen as a real threat?

ARIETTI: Yeah, relations with Iraq were very bad. There wasn't any active fighting. I think the big Iraq war happened later.

Q: It did. It started in '80 or something like that.

ARIETTI: Yes, but there had been tensions, and there was a lot of concern that the Iraqis were going to try to infiltrate and encourage dissatisfaction amongst the Arab population in Iran. So yeah, the Iraqis were not looked at as friends.

Q: OK, you were there and you left around '76 or so.

ARIETTI: Yeah that is right, I left in '76 and I went back to Washington. That was sort of the nature of my career. I have always had an overseas post and then come back to Washington. I have never had two back to back overseas posts. Again my career was full of new situations. I thought I have never done this before but why not. I can't quite remember how it came about, but at that time you put in your wish list of where you wanted to work, and I wanted to go back to Washington. I was assigned to the PM bureau. Political Military bureau in an office that dealt with arms control issues. At that time there were several offices within the bureau. One dealt with strategic nuclear questions. The one I was in dealt with, among other things, theater nuclear weapons. You may remember there was a thing called the MBFR discussions, multilateral ballistic force reduction. So the idea was for NATO to negotiate with the Russians to reduce the level of missiles, short range and intermediate range missiles in Europe. Those talks had been going on and I got added into the mix of that. I knew nothing about arms control or these kinds of issues and again had to do a quick learning period. It was interesting because that was my first real interaction with the military and the Pentagon and the Joint chiefs and the CIA and the inter agency process. The inter agency process was very much alive and well when it came to arms control questions. And ACDA -ACDA was alive at that time. I can't tell you the number of inter agency meetings I participated in and got involved in.

Q: One of the things I have picked up from these interviews is the State Department member of various inter departmental discussions and all, negotiations has a certain problem. And that is they are often up against civil servants who have been there for 20 years doing that. And when someone like yourself appears this is a two year assignment. Did you find this was a problem or because of where you stood, you could quickly come up to speed on your own, I mean State's priorities.

ARIETTI: I think the answer was, what I hope in my case and others, that you had a lot of respect for these other services because they really did know their stuff, and they knew the history. You could draw from them a lot of information. We weren't rivals so much as we were colleagues I would say. That was my experience in that era. Especially that was true in ACDA. ACDA was mostly staffed by civil servants. It had a lot of good people who really knew their stuff, and it was silly to try to compete with it. That didn't make any sense.

Q: I did an interview with a woman who was in ACDA for 20 years her description of the work there was quite different from the normal foreign service one because obviously this was a family. Everybody knew each other and they knew the issues, but it was much in a way tighter group than the foreign service where there were all kinds of strangers thrown

into the problems of such and such and all sort of tried to figure out where to go and how to do it. It is just a different atmosphere.

ARIETTI: Absolutely. It was totally different. They were a smaller entity. They had a lot of collaboration internally amongst themselves There was a certain rivalry between ACDA and the State Department. If it was a question of who was going to lead the delegation, it was almost always ACDA. My recollection is fuzzy back then in terms of specific examples, but there was definitely a sense that although the State Department was much bigger, ACDA was the princess if you will, who had been anointed to be the lead on these things. Sometimes that became a little difficult. There was a certain rivalry there as well. They had some really good people in ACDA. The one I enjoyed most was a guy named Paul Warnke who had been around forever in and out of government and was a well respected individual. As I said I started off in MBFR, this was in the Carter administration. Jimmy Carter, I have great respect for him. He did a lot of good initiatives. One of the things he was interested in doing was expanding the arms control dialog with the Russians or the Soviets back then, including on naval arms control. Most people don't recall this but we actually did naval arms control negotiations with the Russians regarding the Indian Ocean. There had been a build up of military activity from their side and our side. People came along and said do we really need to do this? Can't we negotiate some sort of limits on the level of presence we have in the Indian Ocean. There were a lot of people complaining, the Indians, the Pakistanis the South Africans were all sort of wondering about this and didn't like the idea of a lot of super power presence on the Indian Ocean. So we took the lead and initiated a set of discussions with the Russians on Indian Ocean naval activities. These ultimately never went anywhere, but I became assigned to that particular part of my office, and directly got involved in these. I traveled to Europe where we negotiated with the Russians. This was a big ego trip for a foreign service officer in his early 20's.

Q: What was your impression of Warnke?

ARIETTI: I liked him a lot. He was smart, clever, sincere person. He really believed that the world was a better place if you had good arms control agreements. What was true then is probably true now and probably will be true in the future is that within whatever administration you have leading the U.S. government; different parts of the government have different interests. The Pentagon's interest is not the same as the State Department or the same as ACDA's or the same as the CIA. There was a lot of tension within the inter agency process. The Pentagon and the navy in particular were dragged kicking and screaming into even the idea of having potential limitation on the U.S. navy presence in the Indian Ocean. They hated it. Yet they had to be an integrated part of our negotiating team. Fortunately there were a couple people whom I got along with, and we could talk reasonably to each other. But whenever it went up the chain and they had to get an authorization from whatever admiral was watching this, it was almost inevitably going to cause a problem.

Q: Was the issue of Diego Garcia front and foremost?

ARIETTI: Yeah, it was. Because we were expanding our military presence there and therefore the British needed to be included in this. We never put on the table the idea of limiting our actual presence. The British were not directly involved in this. This was a bilateral U.S. Soviet discussion. But the British were concerned on how it might impact their presence there. The other country that was surprisingly involved in this was Australia. Now Australia has a big coastline around the Indian Ocean. Every time you started talking about naval limitations, all sorts of ideas went out there. Would there be a limit on the number of port visits for example which might take place. Would there be limits on how many ships could be in the Indian Ocean at any given time. The Australians were allies. They didn't like the idea of us negotiating with the Russians on an agreement that could potentially have an impact on their security and they weren't even involved in that. So we had a lot of bilateral discussions with the Australians just to keep them informed about what was going on and to quell their concerns.

Q: Would you say the negotiations didn't go anywhere, but was there essentially a buildup during that time looking to the future and things were rather static?

ARIETTI: No, there was a buildup going on because we were developing our presence on Bahrain and Diego Garcia. The Russians had established a naval base in Aden and I think they had one in Somalia. That was of concern because the Russians there had access to the Gulf of Suez. They didn't like the fact that we had all these military ships in the Gulf. Yeah there was a build up. There had been an ongoing naval buildup which actually led to these talks getting started. Ultimately the talks failed because we could not agree on a basis for limitation. All sorts of ideas were discussed.. Would it be the total number of days that you had in the Indian Ocean, or the number of port calls, or the size of the ships. All of these ideas were floated. Ultimately either we or the Russians couldn't agree, so we never reached an agreement.

Q: What about the Indians?

ARIETTI: The Indians liked the idea of our, the foreign presence being limited. They thought this was great. But they were always pushing us for even more extreme limitations than either we or the Russians were willing to consider.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the Indians were sort of supporting whatever the Soviet stance was?

ARIETTI: A lot of the stance wasn't known. These were confidential negotiations and we tried to keep them confidential. There were leaks, stories out there, but the premise was that nothing was agreed until we reached a total understanding. So I don't remember that being a big issue.

Q: Was the CIA a player in the negotiations?

ARIETTI: The CIA is always a player in the sense they provide raw information and assessment, so you had CIA, DIA, Pentagon. Some issues, for example, were how many

total ships are there and what was the nature of the Soviet presence in Aden. In the negotiations, each side would not only have to talk about its presence. And that was one of the things we did. We had a data exchange. How many ship days did we have in the Indian Ocean, and how many ship days did the Russians have in the Indian Ocean? So you went to the CIA to verify if these statistics were correct.

Q: How did you feel, you were a junior officer and had a pretty good time in Iran and all that. How did you feel sort of career enhancement in getting involved in all of that?

ARIETTI: Again I had a zigzag career. My whole career has been a zigzag, due partially to my own interest and partially just circumstance. I was actually pretty happy to be back in Washington. As you said there wasn't much of a social life in my previous overseas posts, so I was enjoying life as a young person in the Washington area at that time. From a career point of view, I got a better understanding of how Washington worked. And being involved in this inter agency process. Frankly I thought I had more responsibility than I would have expected at that time.

Q: Of course the thing is responsibility what you get and what the perception is. Somebody on a selection board might say arms control, they are just talking and don't realize or appreciate the responsibility.

ARIETTI: It didn't seem to affect me. I was on a fairly normal career path in terms of promotions and the like. I wasn't a shooting star but I certainly wasn't being handicapped.

Q: So where did you go after?

ARIETTI: Well at that time I stayed in Washington and I am trying to recall how it came about. I had this background in political military matters and I had this experience in NEA because Iran was part of NEA. At that time I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do in terms of specialization. South Asia was still part of NEA at that time. So I was interested in working in NEA, and I think I looked for overseas jobs and couldn't find any, so I took a job in what was called NEA/ARP. ARP is the Arabian Peninsula. I got a job where I was the desk officer for Yemen. We had two or three officers who shared Saudi Arabia. I did the Pol Mil part of Saudi Arabia. So I stayed in Washington and moved over to NEA.

Q: You did that from when to when?

ARIETTI: I did that from '79 to '81.

Q: All right well this is an interesting time in NEA. This is the time of the back to your old stamping grounds, the Iranian Revolution and our embassy being held hostage and Afghanistan being invaded. Well let's take Yemen. At that time was there, you say Yemen. At that time was it one or two…

ARIETTI: It was two at that time. We had diplomatic relations with North Yemen, and we did not have an embassy in South Yemen. South Yemen had a communist government at the time and we hadn't had relations with them for a long time. North Yemen, do you know who the president was then? Ali Abdullah Saleh, who is still the president in 2011.

Q: There has been tremendous public pressure to get him, but he is still there.

ARIETTI: He is still there. He is still the president, and he was the president and had been for some time when I became the Yemen desk officer. Now even though I had some exposure to NEA I had never worked in any of these Arab countries. So I didn't know anything about Yemen or Saudi Arabia, so again quick learning. If I have one thing I guess I would point to in my whole career I was a fairly quick learner.

Q: I guess we all are.

ARIETTI: Absolutely because you do float from A to B to C and do not necessarily have a lot of background on the next job. I did that and it was very interesting. The other thing that was going on, because of the Iranian revolution and all that, was that we were increasing our arms sales to the Saudis, including aircraft. I think they were F-15s. I think we were proposing to sell a large number of F-15's. Was it F-14's or F-15's I can't remember. But advanced military fighters to the Saudis. This caused all sorts of questions to be raised in the United States, mainly because of the fear of the Israelis and the pro Israeli lobby in the United States that these weapons might be a threat to Israel. So there was a lot of explaining that was going on. There were Congressional hearings on this. I got very much involved in staffing this proposal if you will. The policy decision had already been made to go ahead with this new more sophisticated arms sale to the Saudis.

Q: Were we trying to make sure that, let's call it the F-15, could shoot down the Israeli plane in other words with the avionics and all of that.

ARIETTI: There were various safeguards that were built in, and we weren't selling them some offensive capabilities. There was a particular kind of missile that went on this plane and we were not going to sell them that missile because that missile was seen as a potential to the American planes that the Israelis had. That was one of the safeguards that was used to justify the sale. So yes all of these factors were taken into account.

Q: As these sales negotiations were going on I would imagine that you would have Northrop, Boeing, our big aviation companies would be teaming up with the Saudis to get the sale.

ARIETTI: Absolutely. And the Congressional districts where these things were being produced, they were all in favor of the sale. So there was a certain amount of domestic American politics involved as to who was on what side of this issue.

Q: How did that play out with regards to your work?

ARIETTI: In the end the sales were approved. I think that Congress either had to vote against it or pass something that permitted it and that did happen. Again, for me this was a learning experience. I was dealing a lot with the Hill. For the first time having to prepare talking points for principals who were going up to the Hill to defend this and doing background papers and all of the stuff that gets involved with trying to explain policy issues to the Hill. That was quite an eye opener for me at the time.

Q: Did you get any feel for how the Saudis operated in the States?

ARIETTI: Oh, they had so much money. I remember once being invited to a Saudi National Day, They hired the Corcoran Art Gallery, and they had the entire place. They had this spread that was spectacular. You just couldn't imagine the quality of the foodstuffs they had there. They invited anybody and everybody and a lot of VIPs showed up at those events.

Q: Did you find, this is probably your first time in dealing with, or did you deal with congressional staff or Congress itself?

ARIETTI: Yes as I said, they were having congressional hearings on those things. I did have some dealings with congressional staff but not as much as I had later on in my career. Above me there was the office director, the deputy office director and the senior Saudi person. I was the junior Saudi person, so there were plenty of other people who tended to get called on before me who would interact more directly with Congress. I tended to do more preparatory work.

Q: Well what were these planes for?

ARIETTI: They were to protect the oil fields, and by then as you said, the Iranian Revolution had taken place. It was a combination of fear of this new Iranian regime and the omnipresent Russian Soviet threat. I mean that is what everybody was worried about. The Soviets are going to do this, that, or the other thing. The Iraqis, the Iraqis were relatively close to the Russians at that time.

Q: So that was as often said a dangerous neighborhood.

ARIETTI: Yeah that is right.

Q: Did the UAE or Qatar or Kuwait, did they figure at all in what you were up to?

ARIETTI: Not really. We had other officers in that office who were responsible for those countries. Mainly it was oil. They were buying weapons as well but not on the scale that the Saudis were. I visited that time both Saudi Arabia and Yemen which were pretty strange countries at that time. I mean Yemen was almost medieval when you went to Sanaa. I also went to Jeddah and Riyadh and Dhahran as well to visit our consulates there.

Q: Ok, let's talk about Yemen. We didn't have, Aden was part of….

ARIETTI: It was a different country, South Yemen.

Q: And that was beyond the pale for us.

ARIETTI: Well they were very anti American. They were hard line Marxist, and were very much in the pockets of the Soviets who had military bases there. They had a conflict with North Yemen. North Yemen was and still is very tribal, religious, ultra conservative. Aden had been influenced by the British, but North Yemen wasn't. So they were enemies. North and South Yemen had fought several wars. So from our point of view a key question was how do we help buck up this relatively fragile regime in the north and not allow the South Yemenis to take over. We were pretty close to the North Yemenis.

Q: Well what were your impressions of the government?

ARIETTI: It is interesting. It is like a lot of these relatively underdeveloped countries. You have a very small elite at the top who tend to be very well educated and who run things. So the foreign minister, the finance minister, those people were really very sophisticated capable people. So when you interacted with them it was fine. So when I went to the embassy and they had meetings for me you were relatively impressed by these people. The country as a whole was medieval. It had I can't remember, a 20% literacy rate. Most people were subsistence farmers. Very conservative. All the women were in purdah wearing veils.

Q: I guess in Sanaa they shut the gate at night.

ARIETTI: Well I am not sure about that, but it was a very conservative society. There was no night life of any kind.

Q: Was there much contact between Saudi Arabia and Yemen?

ARIETTI: They have had an historically difficult relationship. The Saudis somewhat look down on the Yemenis, and the Yemenis resented the big brother approach the Saudis took. And yet the Saudis provided lots of funding for the Yemeni government. But they also meddled internally. They used to make direct payments to the tribal chiefs so there were some tribes who were in the pockets of the Saudis and some that weren't. The Yemeni government was always frustrated by that. And they had an undefined border. It hadn't been demarcated, so there tended to be border issues. It was a tense relationship between the Saudis and the Yemenis, and we tended to get caught in the middle because we were trying to be friends with both.

Q: It sounds a little bit like we are dealing today with Pakistan and Afghanistan in the tribal areas along the border. Which of course the Brits got their nose bloodied again and again there.

ARIETTI: There are parallels. Yes I would agree with that. There wasn't any active fighting going on when I was involved. There was a lot of smuggling going on. They were not the greatest of friends, the Yemenis and the Saudis.

Q: Oman wasn't in your, Muscat Oman.

ARIETTI: No. That was a different officer's responsibility, but it was a relatively small office. Whenever you are in an office like that, you just pick up stuff. When you go to the staff meetings, people are talking about what was going on etc. I think the sultan was Qaboos at that time.

Q: When you were in NEA did the hostage situation just dominate everything?

ARIETTI: Sure. It dominated the whole country for a long time. When were the hostages taken, do you remember the year?

Q: I think it was November of '79.

ARIETTI: So I was just starting in my job in ARP. Yes they were. In fact I think they had all sorts of special task forces and groups and if I recall I think I was pulled into those things occasionally. I will tell you something that doesn't reflect very well on the subject. I had this Persian speaking background and when I was in NEA there was a huge problem with large numbers of Iranians after the revolution who were trying to get out of Iran and trying to get to the United States. A lot of them were refused because they were obviously immigrants. They were trying to come in on regular visas. I had been a consul in Iran. I was asked to go to Rome because there were a huge number of Persian speaking cases caught up there. Most of them were Jewish. There was a huge push on the U.S. government from Jewish American entities to look sympathetically on these Iranian Jewish individuals because they couldn't go back to Iran. They were subject to persecution then. Yet our embassy and consular section in Rome were just following the general guidelines as to how to make decisions as to how somebody met our visa criteria. Anyway I was asked to go there to lend a hand and in effect to review a lot of these cases using my Persian language skills to see whether I couldn't help out. It was made clear to me before I went I should be as sympathetic as I could possibly be without breaking the law. You know if it bent a little bit or whether we gave people the benefit of the doubt that was OK. So I did that and I went out for a month or so and worked in the consulate in Rome and reviewed, let's say they had 200 cases. I can't remember exactly, but I sort of re-interviewed everybody. I didn't have the authority to totally make a new decision. Well I guess I did because every visa officer can make his own decision, That is the law, but I wouldn't do it without explaining myself. Usually I was able to come up with more information or more details or people came in a second or third time and brought in more documents or somehow the story changed so they met our criteria. So I did that and gave a lot of those people visas who then came to the United States. Basically if these had been Shia Muslims in the same boat, we wouldn't have made that special effort. It was definitely a bow to the Jewish American and Israeli communities.

Q: At that time I remember getting involved in Iranian students in the United States weren't helping the cause of those trying to get out because they were causing a lot of trouble on the side of you might say the forces of darkness at the time. So I remember I was consul general in Naples in '79-'81. I got a call from the visa office saying would I like to open up my office to all these Iranian students. I said, "Hell No," showing my sympathy for the cause. Also part of the thing was at the time there really had not been real persecution of Jews Per se. there had been some Jewish leaders, but other leaders of others but this was conflated into all Jews were being persecuted. But the Iranians the mullahs took the position that Jewish Iranians were children of the book. But where they really came down was Bahá'ís. These were anathema, but we weren't overly helpful to the Bahá'í.

ARIETTI: No you are right. The Bahá'ís were persecuted more seriously initially. They were the ones the fundamentalists focused on. Eventually Christians, Jews anybody who wasn't a Shia Muslim, but at that time it was worse for the Bahá'í.

Q: Well Just for somebody listening to this and wanting to know the politics of visas, I came into the foreign service in 1955. My first job was dealing with refugees in Frankfurt, Germany. But I found the whole refugee program was some of the refugees who were getting visas were Italians in Italy and Dutch in the Netherlands. This is not a place where you think of refugees, but they were so you had Congressmen Seller from New York and a lady from Holland, Michigan, and they turned the Dutch and Italians into escapees, refugees. If their house was bombed and they had to move across the street.

ARIETTI: No but that is true. As any foreign service officer knows, congressional interest in visa cases and immigration cases is more often a big headache because they are more often focused on getting the result they want. You can tell them Congress made this law and these are the rules you passed. That doesn't get you very far. That was a side track. We were back in Iran and it started with Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Q: Well was there anything we can do with Yemen?

ARIETTI: No, not really. We just tended to be supportive, it had so far to go. It had so much poverty. Again AID, we haven't really talked about AID, but AID tended to be integral to these countries I was in. The Shah was so wealthy I am not really exactly sure what AID was doing there. They were certainly present in India when I was in the Peace Corps and in Iran and in Yemen they had a big program. So we tended to focus on development issues more. At that time when Carter became president in '77, he did turn things around with his new focus on human rights. I am sure other people you have interviewed have commented on that. That was really quite a game changer in many cases where before the tendency had been to see human rights issues as under the purview of the nation state and internal. Now all of a sudden the way a government treated its people was going to affect its relations with the United States. This was a big change and I will have more to say about that later. It was something we had to start

taking into account. The Saudis have a very non democratic government. We began getting questions about why are you in bed with the Saudis when they have such bad levels of democracy and human rights.

Q: Which continues to today.

ARIETTI: Yes, but it was new then. It was a change.

Q: Well then after this were you still trying to get into the Near East. I would have thought that with the expulsion of our people and the imprisonment of our people in Iran this would have sort of flooded the bureau NEA. Here was a place that absorbed quite a few people who couldn't go to Iran.

ARIETTI: They couldn't go to Iran. So I didn't have any future. My Farsi is of no use anywhere but Iran and maybe Afghanistan. Because I had this Peace Corps experience in India, I was always interested in the subcontinent and South Asia. I believe at the time I looked around to see could I get a new job, could I get another job overseas in South Asia. It did not work. For whatever reason, usually it is a matter of timing. Partially timing, whether there is a vacancy at the place you want to go at the right level that fits or do you need to have language training or not. Anyway it didn't work. I wasn't going to be able to go to any country in South Asia. I couldn't go back to Iran. At that time I had a big career decision to make. I was in NEA. Most of NEA consists of Arabic speaking countries. Should I learn Arabic? I was offered that. I sat back and I looked at myself and looked at the people I had met who were career Arabists I decided that I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to be a career Arabist and I did not want to float around between Cairo, and Damascus and Sanaa and Rabat. I said no, and I looked around for a totally different type of job. Remember back when I mentioned I had dealt with the Australians when I was doing the Indian Ocean in PM? So I had contacts with the Australians and with the folks in EAP who were responsible for Australia. There was a job in Canberra that was coming up. I put my hat in for that and I lobbied as best I could, and I was selected and was assigned to Canberra. So I abandoned NEA and all of the middle east and went off to a much more pleasant place.

Q: How did you lobby/

ARIETTI: The country director was ultimately going to have a big say in who would be selected for this job. So I put in my bid. I went to him and I talked to one of the deputy assistant secretaries who had a hand in the decision. I called on my friends and anybody who knew anybody in the Bureau. I reminded them of how nice I had been and how well I had worked with the Australians when I was doing the Indian Ocean talks and how cooperative I was etc. It was a great job and people wanted to go to Canberra, Australia, It was like going to Paris or London. It really isn't but it was really a very pleasant type of assignment to get. I was either just lucky or just fortunate or persistent but I was selected to be a political officer in Canberra.

Q: OK, well we are going to end here and we are going to pick this up when you are off to Canberra in 1981. Before we get to that, Reagan came in in 1981 and Haig. Of course that was a very early day. How did that strike you.

ARIETTI: Well I was in the U.S. during that time. We had the hostage situation then, and we were in the final days of that. The election took place and the hostages weren't going to be released before the election, and then Carter lost and Reagan won. I think at the beginning there was an understanding that the U.S. was going to have a more self centered foreign policy under Reagan. Carter had a more globalist approach. We were beginning to see the changes and a decrease in the focus on human rights. That idea wasn't gong to be as prominent a feature under Reagan as it was under Carter.

Q: OK, so we will pick this up in 1981 when you were off to Canberra.

ARIETTI: OK, great. Thanks.

Q: Today is 2 September 2011 with Michael Arietti, and we are off to Australia, Canberra. When did you go, and let's talk about it.

ARIETTI: I was in Australia for four years, 1981-1985. I think I had a three year tour and extended for one year. Just prior to that, in 1980, I got married to the woman who is still my wife. That was 31 years ago. That was the first time we had gone overseas together as a couple.

Q: Do you want to talk just a bit about the background of your wife.

ARIETTI: My wife is British by birth, and was still a British citizen when I met her. She was working at the British embassy in Washington, but not in a permanent long term career status. She had been hired let's say locally and was working at that time in the science office. Had come to the United States for what she thought was going to be a couple of years. Then we met and married in 1980 and off we went.

Q: OK, Canberra. What job did you have?

ARIETTI: I was a political officer. I think we had a three person political section, and I was the number two.

Q: What sort of either briefing or corridor word or what did you know about Australian politics and what you are getting into?

ARIETTI: Well you know Australia is a wonderful place to serve. It is a wonderful place to live. It is extremely pro American friendly, modern. You had all the conveniences. There were no physical challenges to living in Australia other than the plane travel which took a very long time to get to Australia. On the other hand there were not a lot of huge issues that got a lot of people's attention. So it was considered to be a relatively quiet post. I knew that when I went. But that was fine for me at the time. The other thing is

Canberra, the capital, is always looked down on by other Australians who prefer to live in Sydney or Melbourne. So they see it as a little backwater place. We didn't have that vision. We loved living in Canberra. It has so many opportunities for outdoor activities and hiking, sight seeing. The weather is great. So there were a lot of plusses if you were a foreign diplomat living in Canberra.

Q: Canberra itself is like Brasilia isn't it a ____?

ARIETTI: Exactly. A new town halfway between Melbourne and Sydney, part of the Capital Territory so it is like DC in that sense. Quite modern but relatively small. I can't remember the population back then, but it was relatively small.

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?

ARIETTI: It was a gentleman named Nesen, Robert Nesen, who was a political ambassador. That was the first time I had dealt directly I guess with a political ambassador. He was from California, had been a major campaign contributor, so I think that is why he was selected for the job.

Q: What was the political situation in Australia at the time?

ARIETTI: The prime minister was Malcolm Frasier. He had been prime minister for a very long time. He came from the conservative party. It wasn't called a conservative party, but that is what it was. He had a lot in common with our government. I am trying to think back in the early 80's that was Reagan. So they were of a like mind. We didn't have a lot of problems with the Australians. Now my job was dealing with some of the political military issues, and that was interesting. That is kind of what made my day, because the Australian populace was quite anti nuclear at the time. This was also Vietnam War times.

Q: The Vietnam War would have been over.

ARIETTI: That's right, I am sorry. It was over but the history of our cooperation in Vietnam that had been controversial in Australia.

Q: Well they had troops there.

ARIETTI: They had troops there. Frasier was criticized by his opponents who said he was just too subservient to the Americans and followed blindly and didn't stand up for Australian interests. But the operational issue for us was this anti nuclear movement which translated into the Australians being very pro nuclear arms control. And a certain segment of the population was against any nuclear weapons or even nuclear powered ships coming into Australia. Because they were an ally through the ANZUS treaty, we had a lot of navy ships that visited Australia. Every time they visited Australia there was a controversy. Were they nuclear powered number one, and number two did they carry nuclear weapons. The U.S. policy was never to confirm or deny whether or not there

were nuclear weapons on board. So we always would stand by that, and that always led to protests of one form or another by a segment of the population. That was one of the things that kept me busy, managing this anti nuclear sentiment.

Q: Well let's talk about this. You talk about managing. What did you do?

ARIETTI: We tried number one, to deal with the nuclear safety issue. We put out lots of information about the fact that if a particular ship was nuclear powered there was no risk of any pollution or contamination from the visit. So we dealt with that. We also tried to explain the role of nuclear weapons as deterrents, and compared the willingness of other countries to happily accept U.S. naval vessels to this resistance on the part of some in Australia. Now the government never had a problem, so they were allies in this trying to get work together to try and explain the issue to the Australian populace. So that is what we did. I went and talked to schools and colleges. We did press interviews. But there were some people you weren't going to convince regardless.

Q: Well you have the example of New Zealand.

ARIETTI: Which was even more extreme and more anti nuclear. They then elected a government that took that position and wouldn't allow U.S. ships to visit. So New Zealand, the folks in the embassy in Wellington had a worse time than we did in Canberra. It all was linked and there was a lot of feeding from one country to another.

Q: I understand, in sort of that theme, that the Australians looked at the contamination coming from left wing labor types form England, the London School of economics grads and all came over and infected New Zealand. They wanted to keep that infection from getting too serious in Australia. Did you run across that feeling?

ARIETTI: Oh sure. The social democrats if you will had a lot of commonalities and a lot of meetings around the world etc. The head of the opposition at that time was an Australian politician named Bill Hayden. He was considered to the left even for his party. That was interesting too. Try to meet with, interact with him and his staff to find a way we could deal with these issues without it blowing up in everybody's faces.

Q: Did you find you could get anywhere with him?

ARIETTI: For them, the Labour Party, they were always looking for issues to bash Malcolm Frasier with. So sometimes they would do it for domestic political purposes even if they believed, for example, that there wasn't any security threat or safety threat from these ships. So we managed the situation, kept it from blowing up in everybody's faces.

Q: How about our various military installations out in the middle of the desert and all?

ARIETTI: Well they were another part of this complex. We did and still do have some very sensitive military installations in Australia which nobody talked about. So all of the

information on the installations tended to come out when some journalist or other alleged this, that, or the other. The worst allegation was that things were happening that the Australian government wasn't aware of, and that wasn't true. We had an extremely tight sharing of information with the Australians, and to the best of my knowledge that was never a problem. Anything the Australians wanted to know, they knew. There were Australian personnel working together with Americans in these various installations. It wasn't an issue for the Australians, but it was an issue for the Australian populace. That was tricky because this was when you couldn't' say anything about it. Your hands were tied. Even if you knew the answer and could have easily batted aside an allegation you couldn't do that. That was the reality whenever you are dealing with these nuclear or intelligence matters as a diplomat. You are stuck with American policy in the sense that it limits what you can do or say.

Q: What was your and say maybe the embassy impression of the influence of so many ethnic groups in Australia. We have these but most of the ones in Australia I gather are really rather new. So they are bringing all sorts of baggage with them.

ARIETTI: Australia had a rather checkered history and for a long time they had something called the white Australian policy, which limited immigrations from any of the neighboring countries, China or Indonesia etc. But you had a lot of Europeans who emigrated to Australia. So you had a really big Greek community for example, and you had Yugoslav community and Polish community. There were a lot of ethnic groups in Australia. It was quite interesting. They used to say the second largest Greek city in the world was Melbourne after Athens. So there were a lot of ethnic restaurants and admixture, and the population was adjusting to the reality that they live in the Asian region. Australia at that time was looking more and more for its proper place in the world. Whereas its historical links were all with the United States, Europe and Britain, practically, from a trade point of view, from a neighborhood point of view, they really needed to develop relations with Indonesia, and the Indo Chinese and the Chinese in particular, Filipinos. So that was all in transit when I was there.

Q: What about Indonesia? I mean it is very close. Had they gotten into East Timor?

ARIETTI: East Timor was a big bilateral issue. Timor had not been given independence then, but it was always a controversial issue because there were a lot of NGO's and other groups who were highlighting purported human rights abuses by the Indonesians against the population in East Timor. There were East Timor refugees who were living in Australia. So they tended to be outspoken, and that irritated the Indonesians etc. So this went on for years. It was going on while I was there but it went on for a long time after that.

Q: Did you have much contact with foreign diplomats?

ARIETTI: We did. Australia had a fairly large diplomatic community. One of the things I have found throughout my career is that the British, the Swedes, the Dutch tend to be easy friends to make, easy people to work with when you are in the area. But there were

also a lot of other countries, especially Asians, the Filipinos, the Thai, the Indians who are important to get to know. As I mentioned before I had been previously working on this Indian Ocean naval arms control project. People knew that, so the others, like the Indians, even though I wasn't actively working on that any more, wanted to talk about the background and the history of that.

Q: What sort of role were the Indians playing? They seem pretty far away to Australia but at the same time their Seas encroach on each other.

ARIETTI: I think India was still finding its way back then. It wasn't as active a player or as strong a player as it is on the international scene today. And of course there was the non aligned movement, which tended to be say a pox on all your houses when it was looking at the East and the West. To be honest it was a fairly comfortable and easy post in Australia. It didn't have huge issues. It didn't have a lot of visitors although we did have first President Bush come. He was Vice President then. He came on a visit and also found time to plant some trees at the Embassy. We had the Secretary of Defense came. But we weren't overwhelmed with visitors either. There is ANZAC day every year, and there was always a desire to have a prominent American participate in that. It was basically an Australian ceremony. But as an ally the Americans always sent somebody But the Australians tended to judge, or at least the media judged the strength of the relationship by the level of whomever the United States sent. It was sometimes funny. One year when I was there, our representative was Fess Parker. Now do you remember Fess Parker. Fess Parker was Davy Crockett on the old TV series. Well he was a friend of Ronald Reagan from their acting life. He was asked by Reagan to come out and represent the United States at this event. I think from President Reagan's point of view, he was sending an important friend. Somebody who he liked and the closeness of the relationship was a sign of respect to the Australians. But the Australians didn't necessarily see it that way. So we had a lot of this, "Who is Fess Parker and why are they sending some retired television star to here?" etc. Again the press, the Australian press was very outspoken and independent and they could make all kinds of trouble. Sometimes they did so just to sell newspapers. Heaven forbid that could happen anywhere else! But those were some of the relatively minor problems we had.

Q: How did you and your wife fit into Australian society?

ARIETTI: Oh we loved it. We had a great time there. We made a lot of Australian friends. A lot of them we still have. We got into a non diplomatic group of people who were just ordinary Australians. We had that through neighbors etc. My wife worked while she was there. At one point she worked for the Australian deafness council. She has always done that. She has always been able to find a job working overseas, unconnected to the embassy. She has never worked in the embassy ever, over all the years that I have been in the foreign service. She also did some university work while she was there, so she attended Australian National University. So it was very good for us. We had a good tour.

Q: Well then you left when?

ARIETTI: I left in ’85. You asked me earlier about careers and how you seek jobs etc, I was advised and had the feeling that the next logical thing for me would be to be the head of a section, a political section in an embassy. So the jobs I sought at that point were head of the political section wherever I could find it. Well what happened to be available and what I was assigned to was head of the political section in Stockholm, Sweden. We first went back to Washington and did some Swedish language training. I did about six months of that. Then we arrived in Stockholm in the summer of 1986.

Q: You were in Stockholm from when to when?

ARIETTI: From ’86 to ’89. We were there for three years.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

ARIETTI: The ambassador was another political ambassador Gregory Newell. He was there most of the time I was there.

Q: How was he?

ARIETTI: Well you know I don’t think it is appropriate to speak negatively about any ambassador I worked for. Ambassador Newell was very young. He was probably my age. He was in his late 30’s I think when he went there. He had a very attractive young wife and four or five small children. He was a Mormon and that was a very important aspect of his life and obviously his faith. There weren’t a lot of Mormons in Sweden, so he kind of had to explain himself, but there were enough that he joined a local Mormon Church there. He, like Ambassador Nesen in Australia, didn’t have any diplomatic background. I think in both cases they both wanted to do the best job they could but they didn’t have the skill set that automatically came with it. They didn’t have the background. If you are in an embassy and you have a political ambassador of that type, and there are plenty of others who are of a different type, you really have to spend a lot of time preparing them for their meetings or their interviews etc. So there was a lot of basic stuff, basic knowledge you end up needing to remind these ambassadors about in order for them to do their job. So it is a little bit harder I think if you are dealing with a non career ambassador. Of course if you had somebody like Mike Mansfield or plenty of others who were extremely prominent, or George Bush when he was Ambassador to China, those are totally different scenarios, different situations. But in my case when you had people who didn’t have any experience in the diplomatic world, it took a lot of effort. You had to be careful that they were alert to a lot of the pitfalls and errors that they could stumble on.

Q: Of course there is the other side. You couldn’t sound patronizing or anything like that.

ARIETTI: Not at all. I would say the one thing I found in general about political ambassadors is they are looking for loyalty, and they tend to be suspicious of the foreign service because they kind of assume the foreign service would have preferred to have one of their own as ambassador. So they come in and assume they are dealing with someone who is a little irritated or resistant to them having been selected or nominated and chosen

as ambassador. So you have to deal with that. You are right. You have to be a little bit cautious as to how you approach them.

Q: Well what was the political situation in Sweden when you got there?

ARIETTI: When I was studying Swedish, Olaf Palme was assassinated.

Q: He was the ex-prime minister.

ARIETTI: No, he was then the prime minister. He was the prime minister at that time. He had been a very virulent anti Vietnam War activist. He had been, I think he was prime minister on two different occasions. He had really irritated the American government at that time, so there was a lot of bad blood and history, baggage that was there. But he was getting along better in this second term, but then he was assassinated. This was a huge shock to the Swedish people and the Swedish body politic because that kind of violence just didn't happen in Sweden. The police had a very difficult time finding out who had done it. Was it a conspiracy or a lone gunman or just what happened?

Q: I can't recall what, I mean there were a lot of questions. What was the upshot?

ARIETTI: Well they arrested somebody eventually and he was a guy who had some mental issues in his history. They never found a conspiracy. They thought in the end it was just this one guy, but then they had a very difficult time convicting him. I am trying to remember. I think he was in the end convicted. But there was a lot of criticism of the police for not having been able enough. It was years later that this all came out. For a long time there was no resolution of the case. So Palme had died, and his successor was Ingvar Carlsson, who then became the prime minister, also a Social Democrat. So when I arrived, I think the assassination took place in March, and I arrived in August, t was still very fresh in people's minds.

Q: How else stood relations? I mean social democrats and Ronald Reagan doesn't sound like an ideal…

ARIETTI: No but it wasn't terrible. It wasn't as bad as it had been. The Vietnam war was over, and there were big changes happening in the Soviet Union. Sweden was a neutral country, but it was a Western country. They weren't part of NATO. The Norwegians and the Danes were. The Swedes and the Finns weren't. They had a very difficult time. There was a Soviet submarine of the Whiskey class they called it. It foundered on some rocks on the Swedish shore.. So this was the Whiskey on the rocks incident. The Soviets said oh it was a navigation accident. They weren't there spying. But the Swedes firmly believed they were. They had been in on their shoreline.

Q: There was a lot of cat and mouse both in Norway and Sweden.

ARIETTI: Right, absolutely.

Q: Submarines sneaking in.

ARIETTI: Sneaking in and trying to intercept communications or maybe dropping somebody off, involved in the general spy trade. So this had been a big issue between the Swedes and the Soviets. The other thing that was happening was that Gorbachev was coming into his own as the new leader in the Soviet Union. A lot of things were changing in the Soviet Union and people didn't know where this was going to lead. Sweden has a very strong diplomatic service. They were watching very carefully what was happening in their neighborhood, which is to say the Soviet Union. We, of course, were fascinated by what was going on there and were watching closely. We didn't have a lot of American-Swedish issues to deal with. So one of the things the Embassy political section did was to watch the neighborhood. So we would talk to the Swedes about what was going on in the Soviet Union. How are other countries reacting to that? What was going on in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which were still part of the Soviet Union?

Q: And which had extremely close ties with the Swedes going way back.

ARIETTI: Exactly, way, way back. There is a lot of history there. During the period of the 20's when these Baltic countries were independent they used to call it the Baltic Riviera. A lot of Swedes went there for holidays. Then when they were absorbed into the Soviet Union there were a lot of people who left and fled and resettled in Sweden. So there are a lot of ties, a lot of history, and a lot of anti Soviet sentiment that came from that era. My job did have some new aspects to it. I think we had two or three people in the political section, probably three. Part of the newness was being a supervisor, and having to write efficiency reports and all of those sorts of things, but also having to give direction to people, Of course you don't set overall guidance on your own, you set it with the embassy, the ambassador, and needed to deal with what interested Washington. I had to advise what the section would be writing about. Washington wasn't really interested in the ins and outs of Swedish domestic politics. These were like a lot of other western European politics. Parties came and went into different coalitions and a few things changed but it wasn't a huge consequence for the United States as to what happened.

Q: did you run across American former GI's who had gone to Sweden?

ARIETTI: Oh I think there were some, but again that was the consular section that tended to deal with those issues. It wasn't a big issue, it was long enough after the war that a lot of that had been sorted out.

Q: Well I was wondering the Swedes ___for the Vietnam War but generally the Swedes looking at the United States particularly on the socialist side were airing documentaries would go to New York and immediately head for the slums. That sort of visceral anti capitalism, anti Americanism and all.

ARIETTI: That is true to a certain extent, but you know the Swedes, the Swedish labor party had this philosophy about milking the cow. I mean in order to milk the cow to get the milk to feed the people, the cow had to be healthy. So even though there were a lot of

high taxes and things, there was a lot of support for capitalism in Sweden. There were big Volvo, Vigan airplanes, Saab corporations in Sweden. The Social democrats had been in power for such a long time they had their modus vivendi with these big capitalists. Although the capitalists would have preferred that the opposition conservatives come to power they got along with the social democrats. So again in any of these countries and in any of these political parties you have factions within them. There were more moderate social democrats and the far left social democrats. You had to understand these differences. The biggest mistake was to get too involved with their internal factions.

Q: What about Swedish influence in Africa. I am thinking about Van Zant and other places where the Swedes put a lot of support again in this London School of Economics kind of attitude which practically destroyed Tanzania and the area and all of that.

ARIETTI: Well that was, yes I don't disagree with you but it wasn't such a big deal for me back then. What was big on the radar was Nicaragua and Ortega who was there. This was of course, the Iran Contra, that era. The Swedes tended to have a lot of public support for Ortega. That was the one issue where I probably had the most difficulty. We would just talk past each other. To the Swedes this Ortega was a revolutionary hero who was addressing the needs of the masses and trying to bring about important social change. From our point of view he was a communist who was just going to create all sorts of problems not only for American business but spread his revolution elsewhere. We just talked past each other when it came to Ortega.

Q: How did the ambassador, I mean was he effective or could anybody have been effective?

ARIETTI: I don't know. Not on that issue. I think on that issue there was no hope. I think the ambassadors, both in Australia and in Sweden where I had political ambassadors, tended to focus on issues of commonality. They tended not to be in the lead on issues of controversy, other than maybe if they were making a speech that we would write. They could then just state the clear American policy regarding A, B, and C. But they tended to be out there dealing with receptive audiences, going to call on governors, the public face of the embassy if you will, and trying to do that in a positive way, and let the rest of the embassy deal with some of these messier issues.

Q: Actually in both countries you didn't have the situation where ambassadors can be effective in a difficult circumstance where you have human rights. You just didn't have human rights problems.

ARIETTI: No, that's right. Those were areas of cooperation.

Q: What about the media from the political point of view.

ARIETTI: Not bad in Sweden I would say. There were a variety of different newspapers. We were lucky then because this Whiskey on the Rocks incident had so soured their attitude towards the Soviets that we kind of got the benefit of that in the sense that they

tended to be a little kinder to us. They didn't want to have everybody irritated at the same time.

Q: How about on the other hand what were you getting form the Swedish Soviet watchers about this guy Gorbachev because this is high Gorbachev.

ARIETTI: Well I mean everybody was fascinated by what he was doing and the potential changes that he was bringing, the openness, perestroika was his phrase of the time. So there was the beginning of these dramatic changes in the old Soviet life style. Yeah we all watched it with great interest. I can't recall a particular time when either we knew a lot more than they did or they knew a lot more than we did. Obviously we had a bigger presence in Moscow. We used to get all the Moscow cables. I read just about everything I could that came out of Moscow that was shared with other US embassies in Europe. Because that is what people wanted to talk about. We didn't have any really huge trade issues or other problems with the Swedes. To be informed, to speak with some degree of knowledge with what was going on in a neighboring country was quite important. We would sometimes send questions or comments and ask Embassy Moscow to try to clarify stuff. They were always very cooperative when it came to that.

Q: How stood things with the Swedes and NATO? Was this sort of an understood I won't say alliance but cooperation or was there considerable distance?

ARIETTI: Well there was certainly a major political distance. The Swedes were not part of NATO. They prided themselves on their neutrality, which they had for many many decades. I don't think they ever felt threatened by NATO in any sense. They really didn't cooperate, or maybe they did. We had ship visits and the normal kinds of things, but there wasn't any secret integration of the Swedes into the NATO planning etc. One of our Embassy goals was to try to expand the understanding of the Swedes of what NATO was all about. And of course their neighbor, Norway, was a member of NATO. And at that time in the fairly recent past there had been some incidents on Norway's far northern border with the Soviet Union.

Q: The Kola peninsula.

ARIETTI: Up in that general area. There was a town called Kirkenes where there had been some minor incidents along the border. We had some money, through USIS I think, it was. So I took a group of Swedish parliamentarians to visit NATO facilities including going up to the far north of Norway. We went first to Oslo. It is funny. Even though the Norwegians and the Swedes would talk to each other all the time, when it came to military stuff this NATO/ non NATO membership made a difference. So we took the Swedish parliamentarians to visit the Norwegians in Oslo to discuss NATO. They had never done that before. These were people who had never talked about some of these issues on a bilateral basis. Then we took the Swedish parliamentarians, I think there were five of them, all the way to the northern part of Norway and went right to the Russian border, showed them this is where the fence is, showed them that is where the Russians are. This was quite an eye opener to the Swedes who didn't have a common border with

the Soviets. We also took these parliamentarians to London and to NATO headquarters in Brussels where they had briefings. So I was their escort officer at the time, and I really enjoyed it. It was a good trip.

Q: You left there when?

ARIETTI: I left there in '89.

Q: When in '89?
ARIETTI: Summer of '89.

Q: I assume that you were thoroughly convinced that the Soviet Union was going to break up at that time like most of us in the diplomatic business. (For the transcriber: we are talking facetiously.)

ARIETTI: No, nobody knew what was happening and it was exciting because there was so much potential for change.

Q: Was there a change in attitude as it came clear that Ronald Reagan was much more of a peacenik than many other people in the United States. I mean he really wanted to get rid of this nuclear stuff.

ARIETTI: In that summit in Reykjavik.

Q: Yeah. Was that appreciated or really understood?

ARIETTI: I don't know. I can't, I don't think it was really understood anywhere.

Q: Oh I don't either and the people there didn't really understand, I mean this is somebody's deep convictions and nothing happened in American politics.

ARIETTI: Absolutely, and there is a traditional school of thought in the U.S. and the security establishment about the role of deterrence in nuclear weapons even today. I mean how many years is it since there was the change in Russia. We still have large numbers of nuclear weapons. It gets reduced and they keep signing new arms control agreements, but there is still a huge amount of destructive power there and for what. If it were up to me I would have larger cuts faster.

Q: OK, '89, whither?

ARIETTI: Back to Washington once again. This was actually quite interesting. To be honest I can't quite remember the causes of all these different job assignments, other than there was a logic in terms of going up the ladder at State. A logical next step was to become an Office Director in the Department. There weren't many at that level. I think I was an FS-1 at the time and there weren't that many choices. But one that was available and which I was selected for was to be the head of what was called the bilateral affairs

office in the human rights bureau, what was called HA back then. All these names have now changed. It was a fairly new bureau that had been set up by Jimmy Carter. It took a long time for everybody in the State department to accept it sort of as an equal relation. But I went into this job. The bilateral affairs office focused on human rights issues in individual countries, between for example the United States and the government of China. A different office dealt with international human rights organizations, the Human Rights Council and a lot of other issues which were dealt with on a multilateral basis at the UN. So we dealt with individual countries, and also by that time the human rights report series had started. So my office was involved as well.

Q: It must have been fascinating. Let's talk about it. In the first place what was the pecking order in your, whom did you report to?

ARIETTI: I reported to Dick Schifter. He was the assistant secretary. We had a PDAS, the principal deputy assistant secretary who was Jim Bishop.

Q: How did you find, I mean Schifter was put in there because he was a human rights activist. How did you find working with him?

ARIETTI: I loved it. I have the highest respect for Dick Schifter.

Q: I have had an interview with him.

ARIETTI: I think he was great. He was one of the smartest people I ever met. He was a lawyer by profession. He was very committed. He was interested in human rights around the world. He was a pragmatist, and he looked for ways to actually make a difference as opposed to just making speeches and pounding on desks. One of the things he did was develop a dialog with the then changing Soviet Union. This was at the time the Soviet Union was changing but they still had very tight laws on emigration. To leave the Soviet Union you had to get all kinds of permits. They refused a lot of them. Then these people who wanted to go and had maybe family members in the west couldn't leave. They were often called the refuseniks. So Schifter initiated bilateral dialog with the Russians. The Russians at that time had changed to the point that they were willing to talk about individual cases. So we met with them on a regular basis. We would come with a list of 50 individual names of people and we had all the details. Schifter would go in and say, "Look what is the matter with this. Why won't you let this individual leave?" And he would badger them a bit. He gave them information and little by little he made a difference. The individuals whose cases we raised were often allowed to leave the Soviet Union. So there was a lot of very practical import that he was able to bring. When he talked to the Russians or Soviets they would say well this is against our law. He argued that the Soviet law is inconsistent with international law. He would say that just because you pass a law doesn't mean that we should accept that as a simple answer explaining why things are. So he was very smart, and he developed personal relationships with some of these Soviets he needed to deal with. I think he had their respect as well and made a difference.

Q: Well I would think that having served as consul general in South Korea, and I would think that doing these bilateral things there are all sorts of countries where if you are an ambassador you just prefer not to have to talk about human rights. I mean you have got base agreements and trade problems and all. This is a tricky thing, and you are basically meddling in the country's political life and all. You must have found yourself up against all sorts of reasons coming out of embassies why they couldn't' over push human rights.

ARIETTI: It sounds like you were there. That is exactly right. As I said earlier when Jimmy Carter started this bureau of human rights it was a big change. It took a long time for the State Department to accept that promoting human rights was just as important as promoting base rights or some of these long term security or economic or trade issues. So it varied a lot, and we had lots of issues. My office was responsible for the world. It wasn't a big issue for the Europeans, although there was an issue we will come back to. When it came to the Africans or the Asians or the Latin Americans, yes. The individual geographic bureaus and individual embassies looked askance somewhat when we pushed that. I know, and you do Stu, nothing in Washington happens with just one bureau pushing something. It all gets coordinated, so there was a huge amount of time spent talking to different bureaus about how do we phrase this or what is the message. What is the best way to achieve success? I do accept that there are huge differences. We didn't have an embassy in North Korea which has a horrific human rights situation and there was nothing we could do about it other than pound on tables in international fora. So there wasn't anything to be done. When it came to South Korea, which had a relatively good human rights situation, but there might still be some problems. That is where you got into this tricky area of what are you going to do about it. I would say that Schifter was pretty good at recognizing that there were times when it didn't help to be too vocal about it. It was better to do things through quiet diplomacy. This is where you would have differences of view on what is the best way to achieve your goal.

Q: OK, let's talk about human rights reports. I assume the easiest one, and these were mandated by Congress weren't they. The easiest one was always Israel.

ARIETTI: Ha, Ha, Ha.

Q: Do you want to talk about that and why we are laughing.

ARIETTI: Yeah, well Israel is, the U.S. relationship with Israel is extremely important and also extremely political. The United States has always been probably the strongest defender of Israel, and Israeli policies. But when it came to issues with the Palestinians, there was another school of thought that said the Israelis were too harsh in dealing with the Palestinians, and the Palestinians had legitimate grievances. While nobody defended some of the tactics they used and the violence they used against the Israelis, when it came to should the Israelis be knocking down houses or should they be cutting down orchards, some people said this is a type of human rights violation. So writing the human rights report on Israel and the occupied territories was always the most difficult one because of the different perspectives of the different people who had a hand in running this. Richard Schifter is Jewish. He had a history of being a very pro Israeli activist. This was well-

known. At the same time he was not a rabid apologist for Israelis. Inside Israel there were all sorts of different political factions, and some were more extreme, more hard line than others. You could pick your Israeli. You found Israelis who were criticizing their own government for some of these actions. But he walked a fine line. He was fair, I think he was honest. Others may not accept that characterization, but I thought he did the best he could on those circumstances. He certainly didn't ignore issues that came to his attention regarding human rights in Israel and Palestine.

Q: Did you run across serious you might say entity problems with the Israeli human rights reports of AIPAC and congressional influence and all of that?

ARIETTI: Well, all of this was new. Mostly they liked it in Congress. I think they liked the idea of these human rights reports, and they were new. I can't remember when they started, but they hadn't been going for all that long.

Q: Congress had mandated it.

ARIETTI: Congress had mandated it, but Carter initiated it. They loved the highly critical reports on the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries or the Central American countries etc. There were lots of countries that we were always happy to bash publicly because they had really bad human rights reports. But when it came to countries like the Saudis or a lot of the middle eastern countries where we had very important trade ties and oil. That is when you got into this grey area of what was the most effective way to support these countries. The same with African countries. there was a lot of human right abuses in Africa. This got publicized, so the Africa bureau had to deal with the consequences of that.

Q: How did you find sort of the corridors of power of the State Department? I have had accounts of the first human rights head was Pat Darien who sort of annoyed the hell out of an awful lot of people but probably became effective because she annoyed the hell out of people and didn't play the game. By the time you were there how stood things? I mean did people shudder and turn their papers upside down so you couldn't read them when you came into their offices?

ARIETTI: No, I think it had become established enough that people even if they didn't want to they knew they had to somehow deal with these human rights questions. If you were in a geographic bureau you had to deal with it. So there wasn't a lot of sense in butting heads immediately. I think people tried to be cooperative. The human rights reports go through multiple variants. They start off in the embassies and then they come back to Washington and there are questions asked etc. They vary a lot in the quality to be honest. They have gotten much better over the years but sometimes you don't have a lot of information. You had officers out in these embassies who frankly didn't have a lot of contacts. They didn't know a lot about these issues and they were out there sometimes for the first time getting information. The problem often is with these human rights reports you get one group, one NGO who says this happened or these people were abused in a police station or these were unjustified killings or whatever the particular incident may

be. It is very hard to verify that. It is very hard to check it out. If you say that, and you put it in a human rights report it has consequences. All of a sudden, what I found about the human rights reports is they get repeated. They get quoted by others. The Americans believe X. So we had to be rather careful whether you said it was alleged that such and such happened or did it happen. That is where you tended to get in a lot of debates within the department between the different bureaus. But let me tell you quickly this little story. You said earlier Israel was a problem Where would you think you wouldn't have any big issues? One of the countries was Greece. What happened, the Greek report was short. They didn't have a lot of human rights problems. It was like doing the one on Switzerland. Well what happened is that one first tour foreign service officer in Athens was writing the report and in it he made a passing reference. I think it was a sentence, maybe two, to the Macedonia, which was an area in northern Greece.

Q: Well there are two Macedonias.

ARIETTI: Yes, there is the country Macedonia which at that time was still Yugoslavia, and there is an area in Greece. They had a Slavic minority whose mother tongue was some Slavic not Greek. They had a small group there who were criticizing the Greek government for not allowing them, I thin it was a language issue. These one or two sentences got put into the report about the Greek government resisting attempts by this Slavic minority to be able to express itself. For whatever reason I think that it bypassed the chain of command if you will, in Embassy Athens. It was such a routine thing that nobody paid attention to it. It got into our report and was published, and as soon as they Greek government read it they blew up. They went ballistic about this, called in the ambassador, "What in the world are you doing. There is no Slavic minority. How dare you interfere in our internal affairs. We wouldn't expect this from a friend," Blah, Blah, Blah. So this went on for years. Once you said it you couldn't take it back. It was published out there in print. And then how do you deal with it the next year. You couldn't ignore it the next year because then people would start to complain. This was a little bit of a tempest in a tea cup but it was an example of how an incident in a human rights report can cause a lot of unexpected consequences.

Q: I am very sympathetic because I served five years in Yugoslavia and four years in Greece, knowing it from both sides that Macedonian thing is still going on.

ARIETTI: It is still going on; they still refuse to…

Q: It is just a name, Macedonia; talk about tempest. But anyway, I would think that being in this job would have made you a little bit of a pariah with the geographic bureaus or not.

ARIETTI: No, not really. How do you deal with people. They knew I had a job. My job was, I was in the human rights bureau. My job was to be an activist inside the department, and I knew that often their primary goal was to maintain a reasonable bilateral relationship with a country. I had been there. I had been overseas. I wasn't stupid and wasn't that young, so I think I succeeded in being able to deal with the bureaus in an

acceptable way as professionals. Nobody ever to the best of my knowledge went behind my back and said that Arietti, he is somebody we can't deal with.

Q: Well what you are saying is that the real art of diplomacy is how you operate within your own government.

ARIETTI: That is a good part of it, a big part of it indeed.

Q: So what happened. What was the next job?

ARIETTI: Well again you are going up the pecking order. Where do I want to be after I had been an office director? I wanted to be a DCM. Well if you are a FS-1, which I guess I was back then, and you want to be a DCM, where are you going to be a DCM? Africa is the only place that has embassies where that was possible. So I put my hat in to be DCM in a couple of countries and I was selected to be DCM in Lusaka, Zambia. So that was my next assignment. I went to the Zambia in 1992 and was there form '92 to '95.

Q: All right, Zambia. Do you want to talk a bit about the history of Zambia and where it was when you were there.

ARIETTI: Zambia had been Northern Rhodesia. It had been a British colony and had been independent for some time, maybe 20 years, and for most of its independence had been headed by a guy named Kenneth Kaunda, who was the president and who basically ran a one party state. Lots of problems with that. Zambians had suffered a lot from what was going on in Zimbabwe and Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. They were very anti apartheid, pro Zimbabwe independence. Allowed military movements to have bases in Zambia. As a consequence they had a lot of economic difficulties. A lot of their trade should have been to the south, and that wasn't permitted.

Q: They are land locked.

ARIETTI: They are landlocked country. Kaunda had a very left wing socialist approach to economics. The state should run everything. The country was in very bad shape economically. He had imposed a one party rule. There had been an uprising against this if you will. Kaunda finally allowed for multi party election in which he was defeated. I think that it was in '91. The new guy, Frederick Chiluba, was elected as president. He had been in office for six, seven eight months when I arrived. That is what made Zambia so interesting, because a lot of things were changing in Zambia. Chiluba was at that time seen as a golden boy if you will, in the sense that he was a democrat. He had come to power through free elections. He was interested in changing the economic principles of the country, promoting investment, liberalizing etc. So it was an exciting time to be in a country that was very poor but seemed to have some hope of change.

Q: How had our human rights reports been about Zambia?

ARIETTI: I think quite fair. I mean Kaunda was not a good friend of the United States. Again to be honest if you have a difficult relationship with a country the folks in the geographic bureau tend to not be so concerned about what you say about the country. So we had a pretty hard hitting human rights reports on Kaunda.

Q: Well was Kaunda running like what we had up in Senegal people disappearing into jails and never being seen again and all. How stood things?

ARIETTI: It wasn't as bad as in other countries. The had some problems in Zambia in terms of that kind of stuff, but mostly he just refused to allow these people to have any voice. There wasn't an active opposition. There hadn't been for years, so he just squashed things down and didn't permit people. You know the press was controlled. There weren't a lot of outlets for people.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

ARIETTI: When I first arrived it was a career ambassador Gordon Streep. He was there for a year and a half, and then the second half was Roland Kuchel, also a career ambassador.

Q: So what were the issues in Zambia?

ARIETTI: It is interesting because for us the real issue was how to support change. We had hardly any trade with Zambia. We had some issues in terms of the regional context. But here was a country that was in the early stages of promoting a lot of change that the United States had been proposing for a long time. Installing a democratic government, liberalizing the economy, and finding ways to address the poverty of the country. So we had a big and growing AID program there. We worked a lot with the fledgling democratic parties so we had a democracy governance program there. That was welcomed by the government. The issue was for the first time for me being in a developing country where the United States could play a positive role in helping that country overcome some of its historic either political or economic problems. So that was basically where we pushed on and spent a lot of time. So it was a cooperative program and we didn't have a lot of big obstacles to overcome in dealing with Zambia then.

Q: How about Peace Corps and Aids?

ARIETTI: We had Peace Corps. Aids was a growing problem there. It was one that it was still in the early stages of being able to talk about. There was a hesitation on the part of many African countries to talk about Aids and how it was spread. It was a secret really a sword striking at Zambia because the numbers were going up exponentially. When we started getting the right kind of research done so that we could understand the problem it was phenomenal. Eventually Zambia had one of the highest infection rates in the world. Not as high as South Africa but high.

Q: Well this had to be of concern not just what do we do about it, but living there wasn't it?

ARIETTI: It was. You had all of your staff checked. We began to have a lot of deaths in the foreign national community from aids. In fact it became a problem because there were so many funerals that when a fellow worker died everybody wanted to get of to go to the funeral. It became sort of a management issue, the embassy would have to close down for the day and everybody would go off to the funerals. If you only had one, but then they started coming every couple of months we would have one of our people die. There were a lot of problems that came from that.

Q: Well what about say medically what were you, because you were charged with managing the whole place, what did you tell the Americans? How did you deal with this?

ARIETTI: You know, MED, the state department medical program, had guidelines that were applicable to all countries. Before you hired somebody you were supposed to test them to see if they were HIV positive or not. You didn't have to not hire them. People at that time it was still new enough, people understood how it was passed on, mostly through sexual relations. So that was a big no-no. Just don't have sexual relations with locals who could potentially be infected and certainly not unsafe relations. But if you have household staff, we knew that infections was spread through bodily fluids. It was more of the odd unexpected things. Somebody had a cut and what if that person was helping your child and your child also had a cut. This is really hard to do this transmission, but it was a matter of concern. And really this was new, the HIV aids pandemic -- we were beginning to understand it. So people were aware of it and conscious of it. It was more likely you were going to get malaria than you were going to get HIV aids. So you kind of keep things in perspective.

Q: How did you work with say the Zambian government and say the opposition? Was it easy to work with them?

ARIETTI: It was at the time. Chiluba over the years that he was president changed. I think it was the lure of power, but he came into power as a democrat overthrowing Kaunda and said all the right things and was interested in a multi party system etc. but over the years he became less tolerant of opposition. There were issues with newspapers for example, whether they were able to publish anything they wanted. It got much worse after I left Zambia and eventually Chiluba was voted out of office, charged with corruption and all kinds of things. But when I was there it was still the early days and he wasn't so bad. He was somebody who we talked to, but mainly I would say the way we approached it was we would bring in these democracy training programs and they would be available to every party including Chiluba's party. So we would try to bring people together. You talked about how to run a campaign; how do you get your message out; how do you encourage people to vote; the kinds of basic stuff we are all familiar with in the west. The kinds of things the League of Women Voters would do. We had the Democrats and the Republicans both coming out to Zambia to work on that.

Q: How did the Peace Corps fit in?

ARIETTI: The Peace Corps, I am trying to remember now when they came. They were fine. I had been a Peace Corps volunteer myself, so obviously I was very sympathetic and supportive of them. I think they were mostly involved in English language training and some agriculture extension work.

Q: Was there any spill over from the problems in Angola?

ARIETTI: Yes, in the sense that Angola's civil war had been going on for years. There was a refugee population in Zambia of Angolans. One of the things we did was report on refugees, so I went out and visited these refugee camps a couple of times. They were in the western part of Zambia. SADC had been created. That was the South African development community. This was a cooperative thing in Southern Africa. One of the problems in African countries in that era was that they were usually loathe to criticize each other. So if you had problems in another country like Angola where we didn't think the government was very good, the Zambians would never do that. So the Africans didn't want to criticize each other, so it was difficult getting anyone to talk about Angolan human rights problems. I am trying to remember. At that time Zimbabwe was doing extremely well. We used to go down to Zimbabwe on holiday because it was so nice. The economy was so much better than the economy in Lusaka. People went on holiday, you would go on a shopping trip to Harare because you could get a lot more there than you could in Lusaka. Botswana had a democratic government. The South Africans, they were in the process of change. That was the era where you had these Bantustans that had been created. So there hadn't been the full change in South Africa. There was a lot of criticism of the South Africans, but we weren't as vocal about it as the Europeans and some of the others. I would say that a lot of stuff at the embassy we dealt with involved regional issues. And of course the Congo was a big mess and that was the northern border to Zambia. They shared the copper mines there. The copper streams were in both countries. So we focused on that as well.

Q: Mozambique?

ARIETTI: Mozambique, the war was going on. I am trying to remember whether the peace agreement had been reached. I don't think so. I think they were still fighting in Mozambique.

Q: So you had sort of two wars on either side of Zambia.

ARIETTI: Right, but Mozambique didn't have a common border, and Angola was kind of a long ways away. Both Zambia and Angola are big countries. The Africans tended to be opposed to violent overthrow of existing neighboring governments. They didn't want to get involved in these internal disputes in other countries.

Q: What about South Africa? This is before the ANC took over. It was I mean were we playing any role from Zambia at all?

ARIETTI: Not really. I mean the US had a very active diplomatic role, but it was direct. It was dealing between Washington and others and the South Africans. The Southern African countries were also so viscerally against the white government in South Africa that they didn't really play a very active role. They were supporting the ANC and they were supporting the total change in government so it wasn't very sensible to use them as conduits.

Q: Well what was your impression of you dealt in different places, of the civil service, the diplomatic service and various, talking about the government of Zambia.

ARIETTI: It was still in its development, even though they had been independent for some time, they still had a lot of weaknesses in the government structure. They were very poor. It was a very poor country. They did not have a lot of money. So civil service salaries were miniscule. Teacher's salaries were miniscule. You tended I always found as I said earlier, in these countries you had at the top you had some very smart highly educated people, and below that it was almost nobody. So you tended if you really wanted anything done you tended to have to go to the minister him or herself or the permanent secretary was a senior civil servant there. Going below that they were not going to make any kind of decision. It was limited. Their capacity was quite limited.

Q: Did the hand of the State Department weigh heavily there or were you out of sight, out of mine?

ARIETTI: A little bit out of sight, out of mind. I mean Chiluba was seen as a positive change. The AF Bureau paid attention, but we weren't in the center of anybody's radar with any huge issues that were going to affect the United States. We had a lot of flexibility.

Q: Which was fun.

ARIETTI: It was fun, very nice indeed.

Q: So when did you leave?

ARIETTI: I left Lusaka in 1995.

Q: By the way, had the Soviet Union which is still or just becoming Russia, had they had a mission there, and was that sort of disintegrating or what?

ARIETTI: I am trying to remember. I think, do you remember the date when the Soviet Union ceased to exist?

Q: I think '92.

ARIETTI: I was going to say the same. I kind of remember having a conversation with the Russian diplomats who were as mystified as we were about what was going on back home etc. All of a sudden they were a bit more talkative than they tended to be in the past, and worried. I would say Soviet diplomats at the time were quite worried about what was going to happen to their country and to themselves. As the Soviet Union started to split, people who were, had a Ukrainian background, were they going to find a role for themselves in the Ukraine or were they going to stay in Russia. What was going to happen?

Q: Speaking of sort of splits, how about Zambia, how tribal was it?

ARIETTI: It was tribal but unlike in some other African countries where you had two or three big tribes and they tended to be very prominent and could make a difference, in Zambia you had lots of little tribes. I think they had some thing like 80 tribes in Zambia. So while tribes were big in the sense they were still part of the social fabric of the country, you couldn't rise to power because you were a member of tribe X. You needed to be attractive to a lot more people. So tribal politics weren't as big an issue as they were in other countries like Zimbabwe.

Q: Well in '95 where did you go?

ARIETTI: In '95 I went back to Washington again . I became an office director in the IO bureau. Each time I moved I was in another bureau. Only in Africa have I had two tours. So I went to the International Organizations bureau. I became the director for the office of peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. This was not a new office; it had been one that existed for a long time, not a log time but for years. The United Nations was becoming more and more involved in peace keeping operations, and they were growing by leaps and bounds. You had one in Angola, you had the traditional ones, but you had them in other countries as well. So it was a growing industry shall we say, while I was there.

Q: You were how long there?

ARIETTI: I was head of that office for two years.

Q: Who was the deputy secretary for International Organizations.

ARIETTI: I don't remember. I think what happened is there was a gap. Princeton Lyman eventually came in as the assistant secretary for IO, but I think while I was there we had an acting assistant secretary. This is where my memory is fuzzy as to the names of the people who were there.

Q: Obviously there wasn't a strong personality who sort of left their mark on the organization. Where were your principal operations?

ARIETTI: Well there were lots of them. I mentioned we had one in Angola. That was the biggest one at the time. There was one in El Salvador There were the traditional ones in India and Kashmir, the Golan Heights. But we also had them in the Sinai. They kept growing. I am trying to remember where they were. Angola was the biggest of them, and Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was falling apart. While I was there we introduced troops into Bosnia and the whole Yugoslavia operation was a big part of that.

Q: How did you find that were you more operational or did you get into the sort of the politics of our… Why don't we start with Yugoslavia. How stood that?

ARIETTI: Well we had two operations in Yugoslavia. We had one in what was called Eastern Slavonia which was part of Croatia, and we had the bigger one in Bosnia Herzegovina. They were going quite well. I think the basic peace keeping operations tended to work quite well. The issue for the United States and this is important I think, goes into our own political debate as to where America's interests lie and how we ought to promote our interests and whether or not that ought to include an international process. So those people who didn't like the UN anyway and wanted to see the United States act independently were always finding fault with these peace keeping operations which tended to be slow, expensive and difficult because the UN didn't have a standing army. So when they decided to create a new peace keeping operation, it took at least six months. UN headquarters had to go out and negotiate with different countries to provide the troops and get the financing etc, and get all your equipment there. It just took a long time. Once they got there you had lots of different countries participating. It wasn't like you had a single lead. So there were a lot of people domestically in the United States who preferred to have the United States take the lead with these coalitions of the like minded as we did in Iraq etc. You had a problem there. Another problem that underlay everything was financial. The United States, prior to the Clinton Administration, had been very unwilling to fully pay its dues to the United Nations for a variety of reasons. So we were in debt millions of dollars to the UN, and this undercut the peacekeeping operations. Every time you went to the UN and, under Clinton we voted for these new peace keeping operations, the first question we got was when are you going to pay your back debt? So the politics of the financing of the peace keeping operations was a big deal when I was involved in this. But specifically the operations in Yugoslavia that had a lot of European input were going pretty well. Of course it was difficult. Yugoslavia had imploded and you had these new countries becoming independent and a lot of displaced people. It was very messy, but basically the UN was doing a pretty good job. You also had the Europeans there, and they had their own presence in a way. The biggest one at the time was still Angola, but Angola was beginning to come down. Another problem country was the Western Sahara where a UN peacekeeping operation had been there for a long time, but which was going nowhere and there was no real significant move on the political level to solve the underlying problems which were between the Moroccan government and the rebels. Algeria was a key player there.

Q: What was your role; what were you doing?

ARIETTI: Well, as the office director, I had a couple of jobs. One was to ensure that to the best of our knowledge we were fully informed about what each operation was doing.. And to identify strengths and weaknesses in it. So we had officers who worked for me who would focus on a particular operation and might travel out to see it and read all of the reports, because there is a lot of information that comes out on these entities. If we saw problems we'd lobby the UN or lobby the Peacekeeping office up in New York to change these things or pay attention to them. The other thing I did was with Congress which took a very deep interest in these operations. Every month the State Department was on the hook to go up and provide a briefing to Congressional staffers. Occasionally you would get a congressman but mostly staffers about these UN operations. There again the Democrats and Republicans tended to have different perspectives, and they had lots of sharp questions. I would go, I was the point person and I would have other people with me. We called this Around the World. Every month I would go up and I would brief the House staff and I would brief the Senate staff about UN peacekeeping operations. I would make the presentation and I would explain what was going on, what the U. S. was doing, what we owed or didn't owe, what had changed, what were the big issues, and then I would answer questions. In a way it was the first time I was on the hook to be forced to answer questions from outside the State Department from people who weren't necessarily very sympathetic to what I was doing. So that was also a growth opportunity for me.

Q: You say the big one, did we have troops in Angola ourselves?

ARIETTI: No, we hardly had any troops in there. We tended, occasionally we had a handful of people who weren't fighting troops, they were observers. We could have American military as observers, but they really were just a handful in most of these operations. Now in Yugoslavia we had a greater presence. We also had the role in Eastern Slavonia, there was quite a character, a foreign service officer named Jacques Klein. He was in charge of that operation.

Q: I have tried to get Jacques to be interviewed. He is a slippery character. He is busy doing a lot of things.

ARIETTI: He is an operator. He is a fount of wisdom if you cold get Jacques to be interviewed.

Q: I'll have to try again.

ARIETTI: He was there. He was an American who was running this show, and again there was a lot of interest in this show on the Hill in Eastern Slavonia. It was working pretty well, and he was the point man. So when he would come back and he would have to brief the Hill, in most of the other operations it was a national of another country who was in charge, but this one was ours.

Q: I ran across part of this during your time there, I was retired but I went to Bosnia twice for elections.

ARIETTI: Election observer.

Q: Very interesting. It seemed that people were getting shot at.

ARIETTI: Absolutely, no these were dangerous operations. They were peace keeping so the premise was there was a peace to keep. There had been a political of some kind, but it was shaky and you did have peace keepers get killed in these operations.

Q: The Sinai thing had been taken away from the UN hadn't it.

ARIETTI: Yes, we had sort of an oversight of that. That was a bilateral understanding with the Israelis, the Egyptians and the United States, but we ran that show. There were American people there. But the Golan Heights was a UN operation.

Q: did you have any issues with the department of Defense on these things?

ARIETTI: Again there was a lot of collaboration on this. For the most part we didn't have U.S. troops involved in these peace keeping operations. But we used to relay on their expertise to be a sounding board on how the UN was doing. Was this the right way to go about it etc.

Q: How about Somalia?

ARIETTI: Somalia. When was the Black Hawk down?

Q: I think that was just when Clinton came in. As I recall Clinton got…

ARIETTI: It was Bush though . Bush had put them in and Clinton took them out.
Q: Bush put them in and sort of said here, and handed it over to Clinton.

ARIETTI: I would say the big problem there was that it was seen as a total failure. The folks who question the capability of the UN to do this kind of work would cite that, even though it was essentially an American operation, as an example where it just couldn't work and it was a waste of money to put resources in. These operations tended to be very expensive. I think in Angola the UN was spending a million dollars a day on the peace keeping operation.

Q: Did you feel this money was well spent or was this a way for the countries to sort of milk the UN for money?

ARIETTI: You know it is a complicated thing. There are many problems if you have a peace keeping operation. The first thing you have to do is have to have a mandate. The Security Council sets the mandate. Sometimes these mandates were unrealistic or poor. But that was a political decision made by the UN. Then the next question was if you were going to set up a military force, where were these troops going to come from . So you

went out and a lot of countries didn't want to provide troops. A lot of countries did want to provide troops because they got heavy funding. There were a number of countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Jordan, and sometimes Egypt who had a good number of troops around at any given time because they found it satisfying, they were getting hard currency for the days they were in the field. The same with the Ethiopians, they had a lot of troops in the field. Senegal. And it had to be a mix. It couldn't only be Western troops or African troops. It had to be a mix of troops that were going in.

Q: Were you involved in the recruiting?

ARIETTI: No, that was a UN operation. Sometimes the State Department might say we understand the UN is looking for troops. We think it would be great if you would provide some support. But we didn't tend to go. We let the UN take the lead on that.

Q: Well then whither after that.
ARIETTI: Well I was in the IO bureau, and that is about as good a place as you can be if you wanted to go out as the DCM at our mission to the UN offices in Geneva, Switzerland. I was selected by the IO bureau to go out and be the DCM in Geneva. I went there in 1997 and I was there until 2000.

Q: Well first should we stop here do you think?

ARIETTI: Yeah, maybe we should.

Q: OK, why don't we stop here and we will pick this up in 1997 and you re off to Geneva as the DCM and we will talk about the whole operation there.

ARIETTI: Great.

Q: Today is 6 September 2011 With Michael Arietti. We are off to Geneva in 1997 where you are going to be, there are all sorts of things in Geneva. You are DCM to what?

ARIETTI: Well there are three separate permanent missions in Geneva the U.S. maintains. I was DCM in the biggest of them, which is the mission to the UN and other international organizations. It is really UN agencies in Geneva. Separate from that there is a US mission to the World Trade Organization and there is a U.S. mission to the Conference on Disarmament, which works on arms control treaties.

Q: DCM it must be quite a busy job because so many delegations can come in.

ARIETTI: We used to joke that the mission was like a cruise liner. We just kept on sailing and people would come in and out. We would go to a particular port and you get a delegation to go to the World Health Organization and they would stay awhile and then we would go to a different port and get somebody who was going to the ILO, the International Labor Organization, or you would have someone coming to deal with refugee matters or human rights issues or international telecommunications organization.

(Sorry I should turn this off. I never get any phone calls. That is unusual.) So it was quite a busy operation.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

ARIETTI: George Moose.

Q: Well now George is an old foreign service hand.

ARIETTI: Absolutely. It was the first time we had a career ambassador there in quite awhile.

Q: Actually at one point I very tangentially supervised George in that he was in Da Nang when Terry McNamara was there as vice counsel. I supervised Terry from Saigon. This was back in the 60's. But anyway I mean were you mainly a housekeeping organization..

ARIETTI: It is unique. Most people get confused they think the UN is based in New York. That is where the political part of it is with the security council and general assembly. But the UN entities in Geneva are very large. We basically were the US representative to these organizations and entities. The big delegations came in when there was an annual conference or a special negotiation on A, B, and C. The mission was divided into political and economic sides. We had individual officers who were responsible for let's say telecommunications and would watch over those aspects during the course of the years. The thing that was different was that we also had representatives from other agencies. For example, we had somebody from HHS who was the representative for health. We had somebody else actually a foreign service officer who had a lot of experience in labor issues. He headed the ILO part of the Embassy. So it was a mixed somewhat unique organizational structure.

Q: You were there from when to when?

ARIETTI: I was in Geneva from 1997 to 2000.

Q: What outside of you might say, we will talk later about some of the housekeeping things, but what organizations or issues particularly involved you and George?

ARIETTI: Well I would say the most controversial stuff tended to be human rights, and sometimes refugee matters. But the human rights issues were always controversial. We were always pushing for condemnation of Cuba or other countries we had historically had big problems with in regard to the human rights issues. Then you had others who were of a different view, the Arab countries. Human rights in general were always controversial. I would say that was the most explosive of the various issues that we dealt with.

Q: Well we are going through right now a period of the last few months called the Arab Spring. The government of Mubarak in Egypt has been overthrown. Qadhafi is going

down the tubes and Syria has got terrible problems. Some of these we were trying to make banks with as Qadhafi, and we had along term relationship with Egypt. What about were we sort of playing defensive, there is of course Israel.

ARIETTI: You know it is, I have dealt with human rights issues for a very long time in the course of my career. I think it is silly to pretend that we don't come down harder on those countries where we have very bad relations. We would be the first to speak up against Burma or Cuba or Sudan or China at a certain period. When you had better relations with a country you tiptoed a little more gingerly. Now that is not to say you ignored the human rights issues, but you didn't come down like a ton of bricks. Partially as I have said earlier, tactically you can achieve something by dialog with those countries and you don't need to be as visceral in public. But sometimes we certainly pulled our punches when it came to Israel for example or Saudi Arabia is another good example or some of the Central American countries where we had relatively good relations or even African countries. So it is a challenge to the U.S. as to how to best promote human rights around the world.

Q: I would think you would have problems with these delegations which are often ad hoc delegations which were put together to go to whatever the issue was, but particularly the more political ones like human rights, in that you would have people on these delegations who weren't trained diplomats who would sort of get off the reservation.

ARIETTI: Well each of these delegations had a leader. That person, each delegation was different, but usually it was a senior person, somebody who had been selected because of their connections to the administration at the time. Our people tended to be integrated into those delegations. We did, because we were based there, we did a lot of the support for those delegations, especially our admin section. That was really, we had a big admin section, and that was part of the reason for that. There would be delegation meetings and people would discuss and put forth their points of views before you go into a big conference a multinational conference. Sure there were always changes, differences within the delegation because as you said they tended to represent different agencies. In some cases the State Department had a very prominent role like in human rights or refugee matters, which were our bread and butter. Other more technical agencies like telecommunications or the world meteorological organization or the universal postal union. The mission did not play that prominent a role and the State Department didn't play that prominent a role. So it kind of depended on what the topic was as to how deeply we got involved and how much of a voice we had in deciding policy issues.

Q: How about I would think during the time you were there that Bosnia and Kosovo in the former Yugoslavia would have loomed up rather largely with refugees and human rights, that sort of thing.

ARIETTI: That is true. No that is all true. So refugees, what was her name, the Japanese woman who was head of refugee matters? Mrs. Ogata. Mrs. Ogata was the head of what was called the commission for refugees at the time. She was a very smart woman, very dedicated. We tended to be on the same page when it came to refugee matters. That

wasn't really very controversial. At a lot of these organizations the issue was money as it tends to be. They all had big budgets and how much the U.S. was going to contribute or if there was a special appeal would we do it, so we had pledging conferences there. We had lots of things. In addition to these, let's call them regular meetings of these international organizations, Geneva was a centrally located place, and people would come to Geneva for particular meetings and conferences. For example I can remember one time there was a special meeting on the Middle East. I can't quite remember the topic. They wanted to have a meeting of the five permanent members of the security council at the foreign minister level. They had a terrible time scheduling it. But everybody was more or less passing through Geneva at a particular time. We set up a meeting. Secretary Albright participated in it, and that meeting started at 12:30 in the morning and went until 4:00 in the morning because that was the only time those foreign ministers were passing through Geneva at more or less the same schedule. So as ridiculous at it seems that is what happened. So we had everybody, translators , interpreters, people making coffee, the whole paraphernalia of a big international meeting like that for about four hours in the morning. That was a more extreme example. Another example was when Secretary Albright met Yasser Arafat in the mission building at one time, just the two of them. We had meetings dealing with Syria I remember. We had a lot of visitors. It really was a cruise ship when it came to that.

Q: How as sort of Living in this very busy place but with all these other international groups and their permanent staff and all of that in Geneva? Was it a difficult place?

ARIETTI: No, it was a great place. Geneva is a very easy place to live. Obviously it is a modern sophisticated city in the middle of Europe. From a personal point of view it was great. Another story people told and it was true is you can have breakfast in France, lunch in Italy, and dinner in Switzerland, and people did. You could technically do all of that. It was close to the ski slopes. There was Lake Geneva, beautiful tourism around there. I lived in a somewhat rural area not far from Geneva. I used to come through some fields driving back into the city, and on a clear day, which wasn't all that often, I came around the corner of this field, smack in front of me was Mont Blanc just sort of rising up out of the nothing. Spectacular. From a personal point of view and from a family life point of view it was very nice. The one thing I would say it was strange and I was a DCM, and this is the second time I was a DCM, so I had this experience in Zambia before. But what I found most surprising and the thing that was most difficult for me was I had so many personnel management issues. I think part of the reason was the medical office in the department saw Geneva and most places in Europe as like being in the United States. So anybody who had any psychological issues like say with alcoholism or manic depression or anything that was under control but needed management and sort of psychological support, they said Oh we were going to send them to Geneva. That was fine and they will get well. It didn't work like that. The system of providing psychological support in Europe is not the same as in the United States. I had more problems, health problems with people than any other place I had ever been. It was surprising.

Q: I know way back I was in personnel for consular personnel, and we had a tendency to if we had a person with alcohol or mental problems well make them a consular officer I

London. Pretty soon London is full of people with problems. I mean it didn't make it very pleasant for London. We had to be a little careful on that.

ARIETTI: No, the department as you know has regional psychiatrists. There are only five in the world maybe, and there was one in London. This poor psychiatrist, she was like on a shuttle between London and Geneva, but that is sort of an aspect of my job there. For me it was actually quite a challenge because I had never had any need to become engaged in these kinds of issues, and I didn't have a lot of experience. Once again the department doesn't teach you this kind of stuff, you just have to learn as you go along. And DCMs as you know have the primary responsibility for internal management of the mission in dealing with these kinds of personnel matters. It was a kind of learning curve again.

Q: How did you find the Swiss officials?

ARIETTI: Well you know we didn't deal with the Swiss government really except when it came to security matters. A lot of Americans always got mixed up. Oh you are in Geneva, you work with the Swiss government. Well our embassy in Switzerland is in the Swiss capital, Bern. So we almost hardly had any interaction with Swiss government officials other than when they were colleagues in terms of their participation in international meetings and conferences. But the local folks in Geneva, the police and so on we had a lot of interaction and it was fine. They were very supportive.

Q: What was your impression of the United Nations civil servant?

ARIETTI: I think it is true that the UN in general is overstaffed. They have too many people, and they have very comfortable salaries. Now that isn't to say there aren't many talented people who work within the UN system. But I think there is a lot of room for reform. They have like country quotas. To pick an example out of the air If Brazil is sort of short in terms of people represented at the UN, you give preference to a Brazilian over a Canadian if you are looking to fill a particular slot. Nobody would ever say that in such clear terms but that is kind of the way things work. Another thing we did at that time there was a lot of focus on improving efficiency. The Congress has always been highly critical of the UN and its budget and complains that it is bloated. So one of our jobs was to participate in all the administrative meetings of all these organizations to promote what they called strategic budgeting. We had a person who basically did that as most of her job. I used to get involved in that as well. Nobody else wanted to do it. Well I kind of thought it was interesting. In every job I have had, I looked for something that I could learn something new. I didn't know about strategic budgeting, so I got a little bit smarter on that. We would go in and lobby for reforms and tightening of budgets etc. and with some success.

Q: What about the Russians. They had just newly become Russians. Were they sort of pulling in their horns and not throwing their weight around as much as they used to?
ARIETTI: That was certainly the case. I think everybody would agree to that. I think with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the separation of that former country into all these new republics, they were feeling their way. The Russians were now a much smaller

country. To a certain extent they were less powerful. They were having lots of economic problems. They were quieter. They weren't as aggressive in their presentations. Whereas in the past you were always assumed you were at loggerheads with the Soviet, with the new Russians there were areas of cooperation and collaboration that didn't exist previously.

Q: What about spying from your point of view? One always thinks of the game of spy versus spy played in the beautiful fields and slopes of Switzerland. What was happening when you were there?

ARIETTI: Like James Bond or something. We didn't, it wasn't a big part of anything I don't think. It was not a core aspect of the job.

Q: How about communications. Things had really changed over the years with E-mail and all that. How did you find this going by this time in Geneva?

ARIETTI: I mean communications were quite easy actually, especially if you were in western Europe you could pick up the phone and talk to people relatively easily. We had lots of detailed instructions. Whenever there is a big international conference, the department or some other agency department back in the U.S. is in charge. The State department or others tends to send out an instruction cable at the beginning of these meetings that lays out the U.S. position on the issues A, B, C, D, and E. that tended to be negotiated back in Washington You took your marching orders from that. Now things changed obviously as you went along in the discussion. Usually it was the delegation head who had the responsibility for figuring out how to react, or talking back to or sorting out with Washington what our new position would be under changed circumstances. But especially on voting, that was always the trick. You often had very short deadlines. An issue would be put to bed, there was a resolution that was finally agreed to on working at night and it would be put to a vote the next morning. You had to get instructions from Washington. Do we vote yes; do we vote no; do we abstain? Sometimes the delegation felt it had authority to decide, but sometimes it didn't. A lot of those instructions came in at the very last minute. Sometimes we would get them by phone. Somebody would be talking to Washington on the phone, but we always insisted we follow it up in writing by cable. Nobody wanted to get burned, if you will, by saying that person didn't understand what I said. We insisted on getting the instructions in writing. That helped everybody. I mean Washington was supporting that as well. But, sometimes you had to go just on the basis of a phone call.

Q: Were any events particularly affect you? The Euro was coming into effect about that time wasn't it?

ARIETTI: The European Union was not so much maybe the Euro was, but the European Union was becoming more of a politically coordinated entity shall we say. For an American diplomat dealing with the Europeans it was changing. You couldn't' go talk to the British or the French or the Italians and say this is Italy's position, this is France's position. Although they all had their national positions, it always had to be coordinated

within the EU. Then you would get an EU position. That took a long time. We used to feel sorry for our European colleagues because they spent vast amounts of their time in these internal coordination meetings which they always complained about. Everybody complained about them, but that is what they had to do in order to come up with an agreement. Sometimes it was good in the sense if you had a united European position, but sometimes they would cut the difference. If the British wanted to be very strongly in support of whatever the American position was or have the same position, it would get watered down as they went through the coordination process and came up with something less than ideal.

Q: Well then is there anything else we should cover?

ARIETTI: No, I'd say Geneva was a fascinating experience. The breadth of the issues we had to deal with was quite remarkable. You know sometimes it was a surprise when something turned out to be so important. For example one of the things I knew nothing about was telecommunications. There we were representative to the International Telecommunications Union. I guess it was Commerce that was the main U.S. actor and department that was responsible for this. They used to have meetings about bandwidth. I didn't know what bandwidth was, and I certainly didn't understand the importance. I learned sort of after the fact. The other thing is not only would you have government officials, but you would have private sector officials participating in these meetings. It all had to do with, bandwidth, had to do with cell phones. The world was moving into the cell phone age. Which country was going to be using which bandwidth and whether or not they were going to be compatible. If you had an American cell phone could it work I Europe? Could it work in Japan? They were negotiating all this with huge financial consequences that came out of these meetings. Fortunately I would say they really had the right people leading the delegations. This was a time when you shouldn't rely on non experts form the State Department in dealing with these important trade issues. I guess the only other thing I would say as you mentioned earlier there were these three missions in Geneva. In the past there had been a certain rivalry amongst them. Who has prominence? All three had been headed by ambassadors. But we had one common administrative section which was responsible for all of them. I think the thing that was changing was our delegation to the World Trade Organization. A lot of these big international trade treaties were under discussion at the time. The WTO and the U.S. mission to the WTO were expanding rapidly. So there was a certain sense of I wouldn't say it was a rivalry but one of my jobs was to avoid problems. My counterpart DCM in that mission to the WTO and I would have lunch on a regular basis just to sort out some of these problems and make sure they didn't create unnecessary complications.

Q: Well you left there in 2000.

ARIETTI: I left there in 2000 and this is somewhat interesting. From a career point of view I got promoted when I was in Geneva to MC, minister counselor. As you know there isn't much above that. I guess there are 400 or 500 people at any one time who might be eligible for promotion to the next grade up from minister counselor, and they pick three or four. I knew at that time I wasn't going to advance any higher than my

grade level in the State Department. I had never had a tour outside the department. For many years people argued that it was counter productive. If you went outside the department you kind of got lost and it would affect your promotion prospects. Well knowing that I wasn't going to get promoted and wanting to do something different I discovered the department had a program where they would loan foreign service officers to different entities, sometimes state government, sometimes the private sector, and sometimes it is NGO's. I said this would be something interesting to do . I was assigned as a loan officer on detail to the World Wildlife Fund. That is what I did next. I came back to Washington and worked at the World Wildlife Fund originally for one year, but circumstances were such that I was able to stay for two years. So I worked for WWF for two years.

Q: OK, let's talk about what was this.

ARIETTI: Well again it was interesting to me because I had always dealt with NGO's. So that wasn't a big change, but I hadn't been part of an NGO before. When I went in they were happy to have me because I was a relatively senior experienced individual, and my salary was paid for by the State Department. They really didn't have any big expenses other than to provide me with a desk and that kind of support. But in a way they didn't quite know what to do with me, because I didn't have technical expertise. What I ended up doing, and it worked out very well, was to take advantage of my experience working with UN agencies or big international entities. The way that worked was the World Wildlife Fund had many projects, but one of its particular goals was forest conservation and promoting the sustainable use of forest products from around the world. They had established a partnership with the World Bank. The World Bank also had that as one of its goals as well. The Bank and the World Wildlife Fund were two different organizations that just could not speak to each other. The WWF came at it from a we have got to do whatever we can to preserve the world's forests for all sorts of reasons, and the Bank came at it from yes we want to promote conservation but a lot of countries are relying on the use of these forests for growth and economic development. It wasn't so much that they were at loggerheads in terms of their goals, but they were at loggerheads in terms of how they talked to each other and how they made decisions. So I became the liaison between the World Wildlife fund and the Bank on these conservation issues. That was something where I could use my diplomatic skills.

Q: What about World Wildlife Fund, I would think that it might be divided into furry creatures, flying creatures and swimming creatures. In other worlds people who felt very strongly and of course you have forestry and all that. These would fee
l very strongly on their particular thing. It would be difficult to get them to feel strongly on the other entities.

ARIETTI: Yeah they were like an organization. They were subdivided into these different parts. You had the people who dealt with preservation of pandas and preservation of Siberian tigers and preservation of exotic bird life. You had a lot of entities, and a lot of money came in that way. The Panda is the symbol of the World Wildlife Fund. They get a lot of money from individual contributions. They are out there

selling themselves as an effective entity to help preserve these animals. Yeah but there was another whole section on the conservation of forests. Again they were sophisticated. They didn't way oh no, cutting down all trees is wrong. They just said if you are going to have a forestry business, it ought to be done in a sustainable way. I think the most controversial side of that was whether or not it made sense to cut tropical trees, for example in the Congo or Gabon or any of the central African area where a lot of these trees like mahogany and others took a long time to grow. Some people took the view that none of them should be cut and others think you can have a forestry business as long as you do it in a particular way. They tended to have internal disputes about that. Again the thing about the WWF and some of the other organizations is they are scientifically based. They are in favor of preservation of wildlife and the environment but they were also tended to go into it on the basis of science. Another thing that I personally wasn't involved in but was very controversial at the time was global warming. That was when the Kyoto Treaty was being negotiated. The U.S. was talking the position that it was not going to join in these commitments that came with the Kyoto Treaty. So it was controversial.

Q: How did you find the State Department related to the organization.

ARIETTI: Well I think one of the things anybody in this day and age who is in the State Department would agree on is that the prominence of NGOs is vastly greater than it was say when I started my career. So the role of NGOs and the need to consult with them and their ability to influence policy, all of that had risen dramatically in the decades I was in the State Department. The World Wildlife Fund was sort of a niche group. They were only interested in a particular set of issues. But they were respected. They would go and lobby. They would have their positions. Sometimes they would support, sometimes they would participate in international conferences. They had a way of getting their voice heard.

Q: Did you find yourself, was Congress an important player in this?

ARIETTI: Congress is always an important player if for no other reason that it agrees on budgets for whatever effort you are going to make. Yes and the World Wildlife Fund would go and try to sell its position to congressional staffers and whatever. From a personal point of view one of the things that was different was that whereas for almost every day of my professional life I had worn a coat and tie to the office. When I worked at the WWF all of a sudden I didn't have to wear a coat and tie unless I was going out to a particular meeting. If I was going to the Bank I tended to dress but it was quite a change to be more in a relaxed mode than otherwise. WWF was so much smaller than the State Department. That was the other big thing.

Q: Where is its headquarters?

ARIETTI: It is in northwest Washington. It worked out that you got to meet a lot more people and interact with them.

Q: I would think that in the staffing and all of that you would run into some very intense people.

ARIETTI: Yes I did. The other thing I came to realize is you tend to think that NGOs have a common position but they don't. Even on something like forestry conservation there was another organization, I think it was called Conservation International. They had rather different views on forestry issues than WWF did. So you get two NGOs throwing brickbats at each other even though generally they were on the same wavelength.

Q: Did the nature conservancy fit into this?

ARIETTI: Yes, that was also another entity. They tried to coordinate amongst themselves, but they were very private individual entities. They didn't feel, the need. to always agree. They could take their own positions. I didn't have a lot of interaction from the nature conservancy but I met some people from that. I did this, as I say I went there for a year. I was having a good time. I looked at the options that were available to me back at the department. There wasn't any other job that was extremely appealing at that particular time after the first year, so I applied to be allowed to stay a second year which was rather unusual. Again the department was paying my salary and they weren't getting any immediate services from me, but they agreed to do that so I stayed a second year.

Q: Then what happened?

ARIETTI: Then I went back into the Africa Bureau, and my next job I went to in 2002 was as the director of West African Affairs in the Africa Bureau of the State Department.

Q: Ok, West African Affairs is what?

ARIETTI: West African affairs includes all the countries in West Africa starting with Mauritania in the north, Senegal, all of the Sahel countries, Mali, Niger, Burkina etc. and then all of the countries along the coast, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Benin, Togo, Nigeria. I am sure I missed a couple. But I think we had 13 countries. Of those 13 countries, 11 had huge problems.

Q: I was going to say when you named them it seems to be there is something to being on the western side of the African peninsula that causes you to have very nasty civil wars.

ARIETTI: Absolutely. It was remarkable how many wars the West Africa office had. We would go to meetings inside the Africa Bureau where we had a representative from South Africa, East Africa, West Africa and Central Africa. I would tend to be the one who had the most to say usually because there was some crisis in my patch of Africa. It wasn't considered an easy job. A lot of people didn't' like it, didn't want to be responsible for those countries, but I actually had a great time. In fact I would say, I will get to this in a minute, except maybe for Rwanda, in terms of the job satisfaction I had in my whole career, this was the best, West Africa. That is mainly because we were able to actually have an impact in ending the Liberian Civil War.

Q: I was going to say you had Liberia and Sierra Leone didn't you.

ARIETTI: Yeah, we did.

Q: That was all Charles Taylor and all. Talk about your time there and what was happening and what we were doing.

ARIETTI: Well it was a very good time for me in that the U.S. decided it was going to play a more active role in trying to bring the Liberian conflict to an end. When I came in that summer of 2002, a colleague John Blaney was going out as ambassador to Liberia. Walter Kansteiner was the assistant secretary at that time. The US had sort of thrown up its hands in disgust at Liberia. In previous years, we had a very active policy in Liberia where there was civil conflict for years and years. We had tried to do a lot. I think we had evacuated embassy Monrovia three times because the civil conflict wasn't under control. It was considered almost a hopeless situation. But with Blaney going out, and Kansteiner being interested and myself a new boy on the block if you will there was a new opportunity. I didn't have all this other baggage other people had because I never had any real exposure to it. We looked at it as a real opportunity to see what we could do. We initiated kind of a review. We led a review of what the U.S. role could be in ending the Liberia conflict. That led eventually to a peace agreement and the departure of Charles Taylor.

Q: OK, let's talk about, what did you think you could do. In the first place what was the situation.?

ARIETTI: The situation was that Taylor had come to power through the civil war although there had been an election that he had nominally won. The fighting had continued on in Liberia in spite of everyone's efforts. In Sierra Leone you had a similar civil war and you had a horrible history of atrocities and mass killings and rapes. Both countries Sierra Leone and Liberia were being destroyed by this internal civil conflict. Now Taylor had been in power for a long time. There was another group, called the LURD, who were opposed to him and were having some success on the battlefield and threatening the Taylor regime. At the same time there were highly destructive mass evacuations and lots of deaths and destruction. Then you had another opposition military group, the MDL, that was coming along. The Taylor regime for the first time saw itself at risk and therefore they tended to be a little more receptive than they ever had been in the past in talking about how to end this conflict. Now the U.S. had a policy in the past of not having any contact with these rebel groups. In general we dealt with governments and not with rebels. These guys weren't great democrats. What happened I think is when Ambassador Blaney went out he had a bit more latitude to engage in promoting a dialog with these different groups, and we did the same thing in Washington. So we became gradually more and more involved with established contacts with these parties. As the situation on the ground changed, and the LURD and the movement for democracy in Liberia, I think it was called the MDL became more of a military threat to Taylor, there was more scope for starting peace talks. That is eventually what happened. We and the

western African countries through their organization called ECOWAS and the UN and the Europeans and others put together peace talks that actually took place in Accra, Ghana, starting in 2003. So that was a year after I got to the Liberia, West Africa job.

Q: Did you have any evacuation of embassies while you were there?

ARIETTI: No, not in Liberia although we did have a U.S. naval ship off the coast at one time that was prepared to evacuate Monrovia should the ambassador ask for it. This was another kind of thing where the State Department had some accusations leveled at it in the past that it hadn't acted quickly enough when people were at risk in certain embassies. So in my point of view the department over reacted now in consequence of that. They were very quick to consider evacuations even if the situation on the ground wasn't quite that clear cut. So without the State Department actually asking for it, the Defense Department sent the ship off the coast of Liberia that was prepared to help out in an evacuation. But in the end Ambassador Blaney said, no, he didn't want to evacuate thank you very much. That caused some raised eyebrows back in Washington,.

Q: What about some of the others, did Nigeria play much of a role?

ARIETTI: Oh yea, well the Nigerians were the 100 pound gorilla in West Africa, by far the biggest country and the most wealthy. They were very influential in ECOWAS. I have a lot of respect for ECOWAS as an organization and as a regional entity. They had been involved in Liberia in previous years. We tried to coordinate our policy with ECOWAS. So the Nigerians had a big role there. They had money and would pay for some of these regional military expenses. At the same time Nigeria had its own internal problems and had a number of flawed elections while I was there. We had a love hate relationship with the Nigerians. We cooperated with them on Regional issues, but we tended to be critical of their internal politics.
Q: We are talking about Anglophone countries. What about the Francophone countries?

ARIETTI: Well they were countries we interacted with a lot.. I would say Mali and Senegal in particular were very important voices when it came to regional matters. We had a lot of dealings with them, Niger a little less so. Mauritania is a different case. Where does it belong. It could be part of North Africa or it could be part of West Africa.. When I was there it was part of West Africa. I think for the moment it has been shifted and is part of the North African section in the State Department. They had an attempted coup while we were there. Almost every country had some big problem during the three years that I was involved in this. But the biggest were Liberia and Sierra Leone. As I said once these negotiations got started I went out to participate in them in Accra, Ghana, as did other American representatives. And there was a lot of pressure being put on Charles Taylor. At the end of August 2003, Taylor agreed to resign his position and he went into exile in Nigeria. Nigerians took responsibility for him. The peace agreement was signed in September and that led to a transitional government and the UN sent in a peace keeping element to help in Liberia.

Q: Did what happened with Taylor while you were there?

ARIETTI: Well he was not somebody who was prepared to leave. There was a lot of pressure put on him to actually resign. President Bush had basically said at one point Liberia, Taylor has to go. That was the first time the U.S. had been as explicit as that. That really laid down the red line that people kept turning back to. He did not want to go, and I think the Nigerians in the end convinced him that he could go into exile in Nigeria without being prosecuted. There was another complication. You may remember there was a special tribunal for Sierra Leone. Taylor had been accused of supporting the rebels in the atrocities in Sierra Leone and he was indicted by this special tribunal while he was president. He was terribly afraid of being sent off to the Hague as some sort of prisoner. So when he went to Nigeria, the Nigerians made it clear they were not going to turn him over. That made another whole series of issues.

Q: During this time was Qadhafi a force?

ARIETTI: Qadhafi. The Libyans in West Africa had a lot of money. So they tended to make donations to governments. So I would say yes he wasn't so much of a big force as he was buying support. He tended to fund different projects and give foreign aid to different West African countries. That made them less willing to criticize Libya s they should have been.

Q: As we are speaking in this particular hour there are reports there is a convoy which may contain Qadhafi going out of Libya into Niger towards Burkina Faso which has offered to take him. I can't think of a worse come down.

ARIETTI: A refugee in exile in Burkina Faso, yeah. I don't know whether there is truth in there or not. It reminds me of a particular aspect of this Liberia problem that is worth mentioning. On the day that the peace talks began in Accra, Ghana where Taylor had gone and was hosted by the president of Ghana. I think there was like a summit meeting to launch these peace talks which a lot of people put a lot of time and effort to get going and a lot of us saw as the main hope for an end to the conflict. The leadership for the special tribunal for Sierra Leone which had been investigating Taylor's role in the civil war in Sierra Leone issued its indictment of Taylor there and basically called on the government of Ghana to arrest Taylor as he was sitting there as a participant in these peace talks. It was a huge issue in the sense that some people wondered what in the world is this tribunal doing. They are going to blow up the peace talks. They are so focused single mindedly on bringing Taylor to justice they don't care what the consequences will be for the rest of the country and the region. Others are of the view that it is about time that somebody finally focused on Liberia and Taylor's role and the fact that you are a sitting president shouldn't be a protection if you really commit these international atrocities. That is a fundamental issue to the role these new international judicial systems in going after ringleaders or perpetrators of human rights abuses. But I would say at the time the majority opinion was -- what in the world is the court doing? This is really a stupid decision to make at that time to indict Taylor on day one of the peace talks. Of course there wasn't any chance at all that the Ghanaians were going to arrest Taylor. In fact they didn't and he went, and they were criticized for not doing so.

Q: Well it does seem as we are looking right now we are in a period where Qadhafi has basically lost his base in Libya, and you have…

ARIETTI: And is about to be indicted for his own role in the killings and human rights abuses in Libya.

Q: And you look at Syria with Assad. Anybody, I mean the killings are atrocious. In sort of the good old days if a dictator if you sort of say well we will put you up in a three star hotel in Saudi Arabia or someplace like that .but now there really isn't much of a place for him to go.

ARIETTI: That's right.

Q: Which means they will hang on and the consequences be damned.

ARIETTI: This is a dilemma and I think you are right. One of the questions that different people have really different views on is whether you could and should go after these sitting officials while they are in power, because the negative part might be that would make them reluctant to give up power because they fear going to the court. On the other hand if you don't' try to take action against them then they seem to have immunity from prosecution, and so people have another point of view that you really should go after them. It is a big issue and a difficult one to know what the correct answer is.

Q: Were you feeling much direction you had monumental problems in this area from the head of the African bureau or the Secretary of State or other ambassadors?

ARIETTI: Yes, I would say there was a lot of direct involvement. I recall that Kansteiner didn't stay too long after I joined AF. He moved on to a different position and then Connie Newman became assistant secretary, and then Jendayi Frasier. That was the sequence but the dates escape me. Most of the time it was Kansteiner or Connie Newman who was director of the Africa Bureau while I was there. In general I think we had great support. We had a position. We were all aiming to achieve the same end which was to bring an end to the conflict, some sort of peace agreement, and we had support. The issue tended to be when it came to Congress. There were those of the view that Taylor should be brought to trial, and they very much supported this tribunal. So we got a lot of criticism, especially after Taylor was in Nigeria, for not pressing the Nigerians to turn him over to the special tribunal. We walked a very fine line because the Nigerians were incensed. They felt they had really gone out of their way. They didn't need Taylor. They didn't want Taylor but they felt the only way they could bring an end to the civil conflict was to accept him in effect as an exile in their country. They didn't appreciate being criticized by a lot of people in Congress for having done so. So it was tricky.

Q: How did that play out?

ARIETTI: Well what happened in the end, this happened after I had left that job and was doing something else, but if I remember, Taylor stayed in Nigeria for a number of years, but one of the conditions was that he wasn't supposed to play any role in Liberian politics. He was supposed to have a quiet life and not get into any mischief. He was supposed to keep the Nigerians informed about his whereabouts. This is still very murky. As I say I wasn't very well informed about it. It seems he was attempting to leave Nigeria without the permission of the Nigerian government. He was captured at a border crossing and taken into custody, and then he was in fact turned over to the special tribunal by the Nigerians on the grounds that he had violated the understanding that they had made with him. So now the trial is still going on. I don't think they have reached a verdict.

Q: Well then Rwanda and all that was in somebody else's area.

ARIETTI: Yes, I had nothing to do with Rwanda while I was in West Africa. My hands were more than full with the issues I was currently dealing with.

Q: What about how did you view Islamic fundamentalism at that time in your part of Africa?

ARIETTI: You know it wasn't as big an issue as it was in other parts of the world, but it was something we watched carefully, and we were conscious of the danger that it could pose. There were the Salafis who were in Algeria. They were trying to make inroads in the Sahel countries, Mali, Niger, Mauritania. We initiated a program to assist those countries to build up their military capacities and in terms of intelligence to combat these terrorist groups that were trying to expand their reach into these countries. It came in funny ways. One of the wealthiest mercantile groups in most of West Africa are the Lebanese. They had been there for generations. They tend to run the small shops in the same way the Chinese did in Indo China. The Lebanese we watched were sending money back to Hezbollah in Lebanon. That was a question of interest to the United States. How were the tentacles of these terrorist groups reaching out around the world and what was it the U.S. could do to find out about them and combat them. So it was there. It wasn't as big a problem as it was in the other parts of the world.

Q: Well in 2004…

ARIETTI: 2005 The next and final position with the State Department started in 2005 when I was nominated to be ambassador to Rwanda. I served in Rwanda form 2005 to 2008.

Q: OK, Rwanda had gone through this, it wasn't long ago, this horrible situation of killings there. How stood things when you went out to Rwanda?

ARIETTI: You are right. That is the issue. Most people never heard of Rwanda and if they have ever heard about it, they only know about the genocide. I went out in 2005. And the Genocide had happened 13 years earlier. It was still an ever present aspect of life in Rwanda, but it wasn't like it had been immediately after the genocide. A lot had

changed for the better when I arrived. For example there wasn't really any violence in the country at all and it was a very safe place to be. You could walk around the streets of Kigali and you could travel in the country with probably less risk than you could in probably a lot of other African countries. So that was a big change. You had a president, President Kagame, who had made some fundamental reforms in Rwanda that were highly regarded and highly appreciated. So Rwanda by the time I got there was considered in some respect to be a model for improvement, for reform, for economic development, for dealing with how to recover and how to pull yourself up out of the abyss after the genocide.

Q: How were you received there?

ARIETTI: I was received very well I would say. President Bush had met with President Kagame a couple of times in the past, and they had a good relationship. So the general overall approach to policy in Rwanda was a positive one. A lot of what we did was dealing with economic reform, development, promoting democracy, supporting Rwanda and also dealing with the regional conflicts. One of the aftermaths of this civil conflict and genocide was this huge outflux of refugees from Rwanda into the Eastern Congo. Most of whom had been returned in previous years. But there was still a remnant of Hutu extremists who were living in Eastern Congo who were anti Kigali and who would like to have created havoc in Rwanda if only they could. But they couldn't because the Rwandan military was quite strong. But they did create a lot of trouble in the Eastern Congo. The relationship between the government of the Congo and the government of Rwanda was very bad. They didn't have diplomatic relations One of the things that happened while I was there was this effort to overcome this regional history and improve relations between the two countries.

Q: Did you sense in the Congo, Zaire, it is a vast country, particularly on the eastern side. It seems to be almost without real government.

ARIETTI: That was a fundamental problem. The authority of the folks in Kinshasa was limited when it came to the eastern Congo. There isn't a road that goes from Kinshasa to the east. You either have to fly or they used to take a boat on the Congo River. But I don't think that is reliable anymore. So the geography, the expanse is enormous, and it is a different group of people there, different tribal groups, different language groups. It is quite different. The Congo itself was a mess. There had been Mobutu and after that there had been the Kabilas. So there were a lot of internal problems in the Congo that were the responsibility of Kinshasa, but those of us in Kigali and Uganda and Burundi who were part of the regional group had to deal with how these problems interacted. So that was one aspect of it. Basically in Rwanda we were focused in promoting democracy, and improving governance, and improving economic development and dealing with the HIV aids problem which was quite large in Rwanda. We had a really large economic assistance program for this country of that size.

Q: How does one promote democracy?

ARIETTI: Well people write books about that don't they. President Kagame is a controversial figure in many ways. The interesting thing about Rwanda when it came to people who were observers of Rwanda, Americans or elsewhere, is you either loved Kagame or you hated him. There weren't very many people In the middle. The ones that loved him felt that he had dome a remarkable job of bringing the country out of the abyss after the genocide. He was a fair person. He wasn't persecuting, he wasn't a tribalist. In Rwanda the history is the Tutsi and the Hutu are the two big groups. He wasn't trying to suppress the Hutu majority, but his goal was to protect the Tutsi minority so that the genocide could never come back. He was tough; he was strict. The Rwandan security apparatus didn't allow anyone who was going to create any trouble to get very far. He had a lot of issues with freedom of the press. So our approach was basically to build up civil society. How do you promote democracy and establish democratic institutions? You improve the capacity of the police so they are professional. You improve the judicial system so that it is fair and people have faith in the honesty of the judiciary. You promote civil society organizations, which previously didn't exist in Rwanda. So that you had groups of farmers or lawyers or educators or civil NGOs of one kind or another. You promoted decentralization. You set in place the checks and balances that could over time allow for a country to have a functioning democratic system. You strengthened parliament so that you had different entities as part of the governmental structure that could work on their own.

Q: How about economic development?

ARIETTI: Economic development, Rwanda was then and still is an extremely poor country, but it had a lot of resources that hadn't been properly tapped. We had a big program on promoting the production of and exporting of coffee. Coffee and tea were traditional Rwandan exports. Coffee tended to be of a pretty low quality. We had a lot of people, AID was working on this, working to improve the quality of the coffee so they could sell coffee to these specialized niche markets and make a lot more profit than the had otherwise.

Q: HIV aids. I mean my understanding is Rwanda and Burundi have a horrible population problem. Two small countries of too many people. Ten of course you have got aids which is part of the reproductive problem.

ARIETTI: Well the U.S. government had focused, starting under President Clinton and under President Bush, on this big anti HIV aids program We put a huge amount of money into it. Rwanda was one of the early countries to participate in this. Because the Rwandans were quite efficient and their government was honest, things got done in Rwanda more quickly than happened in other countries. So you are right, they were over populated. That was sort of the next phase. The initial goal was to control the pandemic and to reduce the increase in the incidence of aids. So there was a lot of education done. There was a lot of provision of medication and medicines to prevent the expansion of aids. There was a lot of training of women to prevent them from becoming infected. A lot of educational programs went on when it came to dealing with HIV aids. The population control came later. Again the Rwandan government, fort which I have a lot of respect,

understood that was an issue. They initiated a program of family planning that hadn't really existed in the past. In fact the population growth rate in Rwanda has come down dramatically as have the deaths from HIV aids. Most people don't know this but more people die from malaria than from aids in Rwanda So we also had a program to control malaria. We provided bed nets to the population, also did spraying to control the mosquito population all of which were quite successful. Again I think my three years in Rwanda were at a time when we had the resources, we had the interest levels, we had a lot of capacity to make a difference in Rwanda, and we did. I think there was a lot of improvement in the overall situation.

Q: On population did you run across the birth control issue?

ARIETTI: It wasn't so much of a big issue in terms of religion. Rwanda is a Christian country but quite mixed. There is a percentage that are Catholic, a percentage that are Protestant, Evangelicals of different kinds. More I would say the problem was a social one. Having a big family was considered good. Of course as in other developing countries when the death rate of children and babies was as high as it traditionally had been, if you had ten children, if you were lucky you might have three of them who would live into adulthood. They were the ones that people relied on to support them in their old age. So as the overall economy improved and the quality of life improved and the death rate of children went down. The logical consequence of that was that families began to accept that maybe they shouldn't have as many children. So there was a gradual evolution in popular attitudes. Women became empowered to control their own fertility rates. Education for women is probably one of the most effective ways to stop rapid population growth.

Q: How was social life there?

ARIETTI: Rwanda is a small country. It didn't have a lot of foreign missions there. The Rwandans aren't the easiest people to get to know. People, this is a real stretch I would say, but I have heard people say that Rwandans are the Swiss of Africa in the sense that they are mountain people. They have traditionally looked to themselves. They are inward looking rather than outward looking. They are not the easiest people to get to know. For all of their terrible history of fighting and genocide there is only one language in Rwanda. It is Kinyarwanda which was impossible for me to learn. They had been a Belgian colony so their second foreign language was traditionally French, although English was coming up a lot. I got along very well with the key people I dealt with in the government. We used to do a lot of the traditional diplomatic entertaining, but I would say it is hard to make friends in Rwanda.

Q: How did you find your staff?

ARIETTI: Very good. We had an excellent staff I think. It was growing by leaps and bounds. It was a fairly big staff for a country of that size. We also built a new embassy while I was there. The first building I served in when I first arrived was a true dump. It was as bad a place as I have ever been. To get into the building you had to walk through

the motor pool. It was pretty sad. A very old building, not well kept. Fortunately as the State Department was building all these new embassies all over the world, primarily for security reasons, we were on the list to do that. They started construction and completed construction while I was there. The last six months of my tour we moved into the new embassy building. It was night and day. It was really quite a handsome building with lots of space.

Q: IN that part of the world who were the merchants? Were they Rwandans, or were they Indians or were they Lebanese? How did this work?

ARIETTI: They didn't have many Lebanese in East Africa. There wasn't really a comparable sub set. There were some Indians, yes, but there were also some Greeks and some Belgians and others who had been there, but a lot of them were actually Rwandans. A lot of small shops were run by Rwandans.

Q: How were relations with Burundi?

ARIETTI: They had been complex in the past and there had been a lot of cross border issues. When I was there Burundi was bringing to an end its own civil conflict. That was a separate issue, but they got along very well with the Rwandans. They had a good relationship. The trouble was more with Uganda and of course traditionally with the Congo. That was the big problem.

Q: What was the situation with Uganda?

ARIETTI: It was kind of a big brother-little brother kind of relationship. When Kagame had been in exile during the period before the genocide a lot of the Tutsis had been expelled from Rwanda. A lot of them lived in Uganda and Kagame was actually part of the Uganda military establishment. He had fought on behalf of the then President Museveni in Uganda. Then as circumstances changed and he came back to Rwanda and took over the country, I think the Ugandans still tended to see Rwanda as a little country in their neighborhood and expected the Rwandans to listen to Ugandan advice. The Rwandans on the other hand said look we are big boys; we can stand on our own two feet. So there really wasn't a huge amount of reason for any tensions. It was mainly an historical problem. In fact the situation improved while I was there. It got better, and after I left, Rwanda joined the East African community, as did Burundi. So now their economies are becoming more and more integrated.

Q: Gorillas, how stood that?

ARIETTI: Gorillas are the main tourist attraction in Rwanda. The Rwandans have an excellent program to preserve and support the gorillas. We had lots of tourists who came in. In fact Rwanda had sort of been discovered. It was on the tourist map of people who had already been and done their safaris in Kenya and Tanzania but were interested in other things would come and go hiking to see the gorillas. So we had I think there were 10,000 to 20,000 people a year who came in to Rwanda as tourists to see the Gorillas.

Q: Bringing in substantial money.

ARIETTI: Absolutely. It was a big growth industry. Our AID program was very diverse. That was one of the things we did. We provided help in training to people in how to manage this tourism trade.

Q: All right you left there when?

ARIETTI: I left in 2008. I left in the summer of 2008, and I retired in October of 2008.

Q: How did you see the future of Rwanda?

ARIETTI: I was then and still am a great optimist. I think Rwanda will continue to do well. It has put in place a number of really remarkable reforms that allow them to take the most advantage of their limited resources. An example is on the border between Rwanda and the Congo where there is a lake called Lake Kivu. That is a volcanic area. Because of that there is a lot of methane gas that has been dissolved in the waters of Lake Kivu. With modern technology you can extract that gas and burn it and create electricity. An American company had come in and was investing in that technology. It is now coming into fruition. Before long Rwanda can become an energy exporter, as opposed to an energy importer. So many positive things were being implemented. The subsistence agriculture was becoming more modern. The investment climate for foreign investment had improved dramatically. So there was a lot of change taking place in Rwanda that I think will continue to be the case. The long term issue for Rwanda is the relationship between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority. Now Kagame and the government, their position is we shouldn't focus on that anymore. We are all Rwandans and everybody should be treated equally. We should ignore this past and just sort of create a new future where we are all just Rwandans and these ethnic issues are reduced. A lot of people agree with that but I think there is a certain segment of the population which will never be happy unless the Hutu representatives are seen as being in control of the government and the population and Kagame is not about to let that happen. So anybody who pops their head up and seems to be a Hutu chauvinist or argues that we need a political party that supports the needs or the aspirations of the Hutu majority is going to get stomped on. That is going to create tensions and problems on whether or not people would agree that Rwanda is truly a democratic society.

Q: Well what have you been doing since you left?

ARIETTI: Well I have been enjoying retirement to be honest. I have not been working. My personal circumstances have been such that I have been living in the UK where my wife is from for the last two years. I am not allowed to work while I am in the UK. I have been dealing with some family issues, but I guess I have also become involved in some charitable organizations. I am on the board of directors of an NGO that is involved in supporting improvements in the role of women in Rwanda. I am also a very active

member of the Rotary club. I was here in the U.S. and I am in the UK. That keeps me busy.

Q: You mentioned the role of women. How powerful are women in Rwanda?

ARIETTI: Well traditionally not at all. Traditionally it was a very male dominated society. Women did a lot of manual labor and had all the children, but they didn't have a big voice. That has changed dramatically. In fact Rwanda has the highest percentage of women elected to parliament of any country in the world. It has the highest percentage of women in government. So the role of the educated woman is much stronger in Rwanda than it was in the past. But the majority of women were relatively poor and uneducated. That is changing. There are as many girls in school as there are boys at the moment which is a big change. And women are gradually playing a more appropriate role in the life of society. But that is a cultural thing and it is going to take another generation or two change fully. It is in the process of changing. One of the ways you can do that, the charity the NGO that I am involved with supports women's cooperatives. They make baskets; they make cloth. The goal is to enable them to create a business infrastructure so they can export these goods on their own without relying on somebody else. But at the moment what we are doing is helping to train women. They tend to know how to do the sewing and the basket weaving, but they do not know how to run a business. How to run a business in modern society and how to then establish the links so they can export directly. Right now we are the go between We link these exporters with American businesses here and facilitate the sale of the goods and the passage of the goods and the money all goes back to the Rwandans where it is invested in further technical training. So that is what the NGO does that I am involved with.

Q: OK, well Michael I think you very much.

ARIETTI: It has been a great pleasure.

Q: Do you have any questions?

ARIETTI: No, I hope this will be of interest to someone someday.

Q: Well thank you.

End of interview