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

AMBASSADOR JUDITH CEFKIN

Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
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INTERVIEW

Q: So, today is February 4, and we're beginning our first interview with Ambassador Judith Cefkin.

And Judith, we always begin with where and when were you born?

CEFKIN: I was born in New York City, at New York City Hospital in the Bronx on February 10, 1953.

Q: Okay. Is that where you grew up as well, or did your parents move?

CEFKIN: No. We moved. I lived in New York City until I was two. Then we moved to Westbury on Long Island, while my father was finishing up a PhD at Columbia. When I was four, we moved to Fort Collins, Colorado, which is where I grew up.

Q: Okay. And are you an only child or where do you fall in birth order?

CEFKIN: It's a little bit complicated, since my father had three marriages. I'm the oldest of four in my nuclear family. I have two sisters and a brother who are younger. I also have a half-brother and a half-sister, who are older. And I have—well, I had three stepbrothers from my dad's third marriage, though one stepbrother unfortunately is deceased.

Q: Wow. I can't help but ask, do you ever have Thanksgivings with everybody there?

CEFKIN: Yes, at least with the biological siblings and half-siblings, we do sometimes.

Q: A lot of people have done ancestry research, have you looked back, well, at least at your particular nuclear family?

CEFKIN: A bit. I am fortunate that my father actually recorded a fair bit of his family history. Also my husband's been doing research on both of our families. In retirement, I look forward to delving into more family history research.

Q: Uh-huh. Do you—are there any highlights you want to share for the moment?

CEFKIN: Sure. I can tell you that my grandparents all immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe in the late 1800s, early 1900s, and they were all from what was then part of the Russian Empire. My paternal grandparents were from what's now Belarus. My maternal grandfather was from what is now Lithuania, and my maternal grandmother was from Bialystok, which is now part of Poland. They immigrated to the United States for a variety of reasons. One was to escape the pogroms against Jewish communities. I'm sure that search for greater freedom and better economic opportunities was also part of their motivation. In my paternal grandmother's case, she was politically active with groups promoting reform which ran counter to the Czar's policies, so her family was eager for her to leave Russia to avoid possible arrest. So, those are my family origins.

My father was born in Rochester, N.Y. and my mother in New York City. They both largely grew up in New York City, although my father's family moved around a bit, so he lived in different places.

Q: So, all right, but you get to Colorado and what sort of work is your father doing and is your mother working?

CEFKIN: My father was a professor of political science. After he finished his PhD he was offered a tenure-track position at Colorado State University (CSU), which is in Fort Collins, Colorado. It's on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains, about sixty miles north of Denver up towards the Wyoming border. It was a great place to grow up. It was a beautiful environment, also a very safe and nurturing community. So I have very good memories of growing up there. My father's work in academia, with a focus on politics and government, was very formative in terms of my upbringing. In particular, my father did a lot of work in the international relations sphere – in fact he authored a textbook on current world problems – and he had a specialty in African politics. So, I developed an early fascination with those issues. It's also worth mentioning that my father was a World War II veteran. He was an army infantry soldier who fought in Europe (France and Germany). He talked a fair bit about his war experiences, so that was also formative in my upbringing.

Q: Wow. And your mother?

CEFKIN: My mother had a college degree in chemistry. She worked with the Signal Corps during World War II, and after the war she had a job editing a chemistry encyclopedia. Once she was married and had children though, she stayed home to raise the kids, which was common in the 1950s and 60s. Later, after I had graduated from college, my parents divorced. Out of economic necessity, my mother had to go back to work. She initially started working with the city government in an administrative/clerical role, but eventually she was hired by the U.S. Wildlife Service, as an editor of their publications and research papers.

Q: Wow. Now, you began talking about your hometown; was the university the main economic driver or what were the other things going on in the town at the time?

CEFKIN: That's a very good question. Yes, I would say that the university probably was the main economic driver. When we first moved there, Ft. Collins was a small town – with a population of around 14,000. It was an agricultural area. In fact, CSU is a public land grant school which was originally established in 1870, as the Colorado Agricultural College. It had a very prominent agronomy department. It is also distinguished for its veterinary school. Now Ft. Collins is booming, with a population of over 160,000. And it's a very livable city. It has a vibrant arts scene and is known for its microbreweries. It also has a thriving, historic downtown with lots of good restaurants, and of course there are mountain recreation opportunities at its doorstep, so it's a fun place to visit.

Q: So, it wasn't really—so it wasn't a livestock area like a rodeo area?

CEFKIN: Well, it was. In fact, there's still a very large stock show in Denver every January. When I was growing up, county fairs and state fairs, which always included rodeos, were popular. And then, fifty miles to the north, in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and they have an annual "Frontier Days," which features rodeos and other forms of traditional Western entertainment. Before I became a Foreign Service officer, I worked as a TV news producer in Denver (and later in Houston). One summer, the Denver station where I worked assigned me to be the field producer for our coverage of Cheyenne Frontier Days. So, I spent a whole week there. It was a lot of fun.

Q: So, as a child, you're living in a relatively rural environment. Did you just kind of walk out the door and make your own fun or how was that? What was that aspect of your upbringing?

CEFKIN: (Laughs) Yeah, it was very safe, so it was easy to run around the neighborhood. We were outside a lot riding bikes and playing in our backyards. We made up a lot of games. Of course, there were movies to go to. There was a city park that had a swimming pool where I first learned to swim. And later on, an affordable private club opened – that my family and most of my friends' families joined - that had a big swimming pool and tennis courts. So our summers were largely spent there. I was a Girl Scout, which got me involved in hiking and camping. In winter we took ski lessons. And in high school some friends and I, along with my brother and youngest sister, joined an international folk-dancing group at the university. So that became a hobby.

Q: Now, so you went to both elementary school and high school there?

CEFKIN: I did with one exception, which was that when I was going into the 7th grade my father had a sabbatical year and we went to Africa for a year. He taught at what was then the University of Rhodesia & Nyasaland, so we lived in what was Salisbury, Rhodesia, now Harare, Zimbabwe.

Q: Wow. All right, we'll come back to that in a moment. But what was your elementary school like? Was it large, small? Was it diverse? How would you describe it?

CEFKIN: It wasn't super large, but it wasn't tiny either. And actually, they kept redistricting our neighborhood, so I went back and forth to a couple of different elementary schools. But it was a nurturing environment, so I have very good memories of my schooling. In terms of diversity, Fort Collins had a fairly large Hispanic population, but not a lot of other minority groups when I was going up. I was part of a religious minority. Growing up, Ft. Collins was overwhelmingly Christian (mostly Protestant). Our family was one of only a handful of Jewish families living there. In fact, in my high school I was one of one and a half Jews. The half-Jew, was the son of a Jamaican Christian mother, and Iraqi-Jewish father, so he was also multi-racial. Being a member of a religious minority was difficult at times, since community life often centered on church activities and celebration of Christian holidays. In fact, one year in high school I got in trouble because I decided to stay home to fast for the Yom Kippur holiday, and I hadn't "pre-arranged" my absence. My Latin teacher threatened to give me an F for the day, since I had flouted this rule, despite the fact that I was an A student.

CSU was much more diverse. And there were a fair number of foreign students who came to study there. My family used to serve as host family to a couple of these students every year, so we would have them over for meals and take them on outings. That's part of what really piqued my interest in international relations.

Q: Okay. Now let's go to Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. How did that happen? Because it's, wow, it's an awful long distance and an awful specific place for a professor.

CEFKIN: Well, because his area of specialty was African politics he wanted to spend his sabbatical year there to further his research. We almost went to Nigeria, but then the Biafra war broke out and my parents decided it wasn't prudent to take our family there, so he delayed his sabbatical for a year and found the opportunity to teach as a visiting professor at the University of Rhodesia the following year. He also received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation that helped subsidize our travel.

Q: And what year was it?

CEFKIN: Let's see. We arrived there in the summer of 1965 and left the summer of 1966.

Q: And four kids at that point?

CEFKIN: Yeah. It was quite the adventure. My parents wanted to take advantage of the travel to do some sightseeing enroute. So on the way to Africa we stopped in London, Paris and Rome. And on the way home, we visited friends in Nairobi and then stopped off in Israel, Greece, and Vienna, Austria.

Q: So, you were about thirteen?

CEFKIN: I was twelve when we left and thirteen when we returned to the U.S.

Q: It's a good age to kind of take in a foreign country.

CEFKIN: Exactly, yeah.

Q: What impressions stay with you from that?

CEFKIN: Oh, very vivid impressions. Politically it was a fascinating time to be there. When we first arrived, the country, which was called Southern Rhodesia, was a self-governing British colony. It was a very segregated society. The white minority, which ran the government, didn't want to share power with the black African majority. In November 1965, the white leadership unilaterally declared independence and renamed the country Rhodesia. So, it was a very interesting time for my father, and I was old enough to appreciate the significance of what was going on.

Geographically, Rhodesia is a very beautiful country. The landscape is largely savanna. The wide open spaces reminded me of home in Colorado, but the vegetation and wildlife was very different and exotic. During holidays we spent a lot of time visiting game parks in Rhodesia as well as in South Africa, and Mozambique. The climate is temperate, so we spent a lot of time outside. The school system, which was a British system of education, was very different. We had uniforms and they streamed the classes according to aptitude. When we first arrived, since their school calendar was different, I started in Standard 5 - the equivalent of sixth grade. Then I went to what they called high school, but it included the junior high grades. The schools I attended were public, but they were segregated (all white). At the elementary level they were co-ed, but at the high school level, my school (Queen Elizabeth High) was an all-girls school.

Q: Ah, ah.

CEFKIN: I remember being very struck by the inequality between the black Rhodesians and the white Rhodesians. And you know, politically sort of very keenly following what was going on.

Socially, I had a wide circle of friends. I think the other kids were fascinated with me as an American. So, I didn't have any trouble making friends there. There was also a fairly sizable Jewish community there. So the first time I had a circle of friends who shared my religion.

Q: Ah. In Rhodesia?

CEFKIN: In Rhodesia, yeah.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: My family wasn't terribly religious, but partly out of curiosity we would go to different synagogues during the Jewish holidays to experience their services. And there was even a Jewish youth organization I joined. I think it was sort of a Zionist organization, but it was fun.

Q: Was the difference in the way they taught a difficulty? Or did you just kind of adapt to it?

CEFKIN: I adapted. I mentioned earlier how they streamed classes. When we first arrived, they placed me in a medium-level class, but I was soon moved to the upper level class. So, I did fine academically. They put a lot of focus on rote memorization as opposed to critical thinking. They also put a lot of focus on writing skills. At the high school we were assigned weekly compositions, and the exams were written exams. But I credit that experience with giving me a good foundation for the Foreign Service.

Q: Were there extracurricular activities? Were you able to do anything with music or a foreign language or anything? Chess club?

CEFKIN: Yes. None of what you just mentioned, but as I mentioned earlier, we spent a lot of time outdoors. Most of my friends had swimming pools, so swimming was very big. And they had a system where you would be in class until 1:00 in the afternoon. Then they'd break for lunch, and most afternoons we had sports, so I played field hockey and other British games. Of course, I hung out with friends, doing the things teenage girls do. And even though the high schools were single sex, the girls and boys got together for barbecues, and parties.

It's also worth mentioning that when we first moved there, we rented a house in a nice neighborhood across from the first school we attended. There had been another family from Colorado State University there the year before us, so we took over their lease. It was a nice house and sizable. It had gorgeous gardens with all sorts of fruit growing - everything from sugarcane to avocados to apricots and dates. My sisters and brother and I spent a lot of time playing around the garden. There were a couple of girls who lived next door that we'd go on little adventures with. I remember a national park that wasn't too far away that we could bike to and have picnics.

But at a certain point in our time there we were forced out by the landlord who didn't like the fact that my parents invited black and white students to visit the house. So we moved to university housing. In some ways that was quite liberating. We lived in an apartment, not a big house. But the university was one institution in Rhodesia that was integrated. My father had several university colleagues – a British, Australian, and another American professor – who were also living there. So our families became quite close. We had the university grounds as our playground.

My father became quite close to two of his black students. On November 11, 1965, the white minority government, headed by Prime Minister Ian Smith, issued a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain. So the political situation became tenser,

and those students were suspected of being engaged in subversive activities. So my dad and his university colleagues (mentioned above) helped them escape from Rhodesia. After we returned to the U.S. they both ended up coming to study at CSU. One, Leonard Kapungu, eventually ended up going to work for the UN in New York, and the other Esmael Malombo went to work with the Organization of African Union in Geneva. I had the opportunity to visit with both of them during my university years.

Q: Interesting. Did this experience one that sort of piqued your curiosity in learning more about Africa?

CEFKIN: Absolutely. Even before we went to Rhodesia, given my dad's focus on African politics. I had developed a fascination with Africa. In fact as a kid, I used to help him grade the students' exams for his African politics course. The first part of the test was a map of Africa, and the students were supposed to fill in the countries. That was the part I helped grade, so at that point I knew all the countries on the continent. So, yeah, I was very interested in Africa. When I joined the Foreign Service I really thought that Africa would be my main area of geographic focus. That later changed, but we can get to that later.

Q: Right, right. Okay.

So, before we go back with you to Colorado, are there any other distinct memories that you want to share about the experience in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia?

CEFKIN: As I said, we were able to travel a fair bit around southern Africa. We traveled around Rhodesia, of course, to the game park I mentioned, and to the Zimbabwe ruins (which are the remnants of a civilization that is a bit of a mystery), to Bulawayo (the second largest city in the country, and the Matopos Hills (where Cecil Rhodes is buried). We also traveled around South Africa – to several game parks and to Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg. We actually met some relatives in Joburg (second or third cousins of my mom). We went to Mozambique – to a game park and to Beira on the coast. And we went to Zambia and to Victoria Falls on the border between Rhodesia and Zambia.

In Salisbury, I remember having conversations with my friends about the political and social inequities the black Rhodesians faced. A number expressed concern; some said they felt guilty, but they mostly dealt with those feelings by not dwelling on them. All the white families had black domestic help, so it was interesting observing those relationships - how in some ways they were very close, but that didn't translate into genuine respect. It was also interesting experiencing the impact of UDI. In an effort to get the white government back to the negotiating table to discuss a power-sharing arrangement with the black majority, Britain and the Commonwealth imposed sanctions and conducted an embargo against the import of certain critical goods. As a result, gasoline was rationed. Also, even though they grew sugar cane in Rhodesia, they didn't produce sugar. That was one of the embargoed products. So I remember that honey was substituted for sugar in a lot of food products.

Over all, the experience definitely heightened my desire to be engaged in international affairs and in efforts to promote democracy and equality. It also awakened in me an interest in the process of development.

Q: Now, you go back to eighth grade. So, it's middle school and then high school? Once you get back, are you involved with extracurricular activities?

CEFKIN: Yes, definitely, especially once I got to high school. I was a Girl Scout all the way through junior high school. So I went camping and hiking and that sort of thing. My last year in Girl Scouts my troop went on a canoe trip in the boundary waters between Minnesota and Canada. I had a group of close friends from the neighborhood that I'd grown up with that I am still very close to.

Q: Lovely.

CEFKIN: And they, like me, were interested in what was going on in the world. During the Vietnam War there were debates about the war. My father, being a political scientist, had strong views on issues. He supported the war. Initially, I agreed with his arguments, but eventually I was persuaded that the U.S. should not remain mired in that conflict. In high school I was very active in an international relations club, together with my core group of good friends. I studied French and was in a French club. And I was in the American Field Service club. That was another thing that put me in touch with exchange students. My family hosted a group of AFS exchange students (one from Spain, and one from Uganda) for a few days, who were traveling through the U.S. before returning home. And we had several exchange students at my high school. One from Germany remains a good friend to this day. There was also one from Sweden, one from Norway, and one from Mexico who we hung out with a lot.

Q: Wow. So, really a good deal of international exposure early in your life.

CEFKIN: Yeah. And maybe just to mention something else that piqued my interest in international affairs, going back much further, I remember as a kid getting a magazine produced by UNICEF that had features on children in different countries. I loved reading these stories and trying to imagine the lives of these children and the languages they spoke.

Q: I don't want it to be only your extracurricular activities; what about the academic subjects were most interesting for you or most successful or compelling?

CEFKIN: Well, definitely history, civics, government and English. I enjoyed English literature very much. I was actually quite good at math, but it just didn't interest me as much as the social sciences did.

Q: Since you were talking about politics, did you run for student government?

CEFKIN: I did. In my senior year I was on the student council. Also, I was part of a group of activists, led by our student council president who worked to change school policies. We went to the school board and advocated for an "open campus" policy allowing us to leave school grounds during our breaks (to go get coffee or lunch somewhere else). We were successful in that. I believe we also changed the dress code, and we got the school administration to agree to suspend classes and instead host a series of symposia for the first Earth Day.

Q: But now, what about other political contests, you know, national or local or anything in your town?

CEFKIN: My parents, especially my father, were quite active in local Democratic politics. My father held several leadership positions at the local and county levels. He did once run for a state legislative position, but didn't win. He also helped a lot of campaigns. My mother was active with the League of Women Voters, organizations like that. I have very distinct memories at a young age of helping with things like stuffing envelopes and making calls to get out the vote. Also, I turned 18 the year that the voting age was lowered to 18. I immediately registered to vote. Then, a group of friends and I went to our local Democratic precinct caucuses and ended up getting selected as delegates to the county, and later the State convention for the congressional candidate we were supporting. It was somewhat awkward for me, because my father was working on the campaign of the rival Democratic candidate (the incumbent Congressman). My dad and I were really very close, but that temporarily strained the relationship. Eventually, though, he made his piece with my position.

Q: And, of course, as you're growing up, I imagine your parents are talking to you about college and what kind of college and what kind of experience and where and so on. What was that like?

CEFKIN: Yeah. Well, that was an interesting process. Having grown up in the East they liked the idea of my going back East to one of the Ivy League colleges. Of course, my experience growing up was with a big state university, so that environment was comfortable to me, so I was torn between the different options. I had a good friend a year older than me who ended up going to Smith College in Massachusetts, and a family friend, who later became my stepmother, was also a Smith College graduate. So I heard a lot about Smith from both of them. Smith also does an excellent job through their alumnae of recruiting. There was a Smith alumnae group in Denver that invited me to tea, to have an interview and talk to me about what Smith had to offer. The idea of going off to New England was romantic to me.

I knew it was a good school. I was a little concerned about it being an all-female school; that part didn't appeal to me. Those were the days when Harvard and Yale had just gone co-ed. I could have applied to them, and my parents encouraged me to apply to more schools. But the cost and effort of submitting applications held me back. In the end, I applied to four schools: Smith, Cornell in upstate New York, Colorado College (a private, liberal arts school in Colorado Springs), and the University of California at Santa Cruz. I

loved California, and I loved the whole vibe of Santa Cruz. Ironically, it's the one place I didn't get accepted.

Q: Of course. Yeah.

CEFKIN: (Laughs) They told me I could go to one of the other U. of California campuses, but the other campuses didn't hold as much allure. I got accepted to the other three colleges with some amount of scholarship. I was leaning towards Colorado College - one of my good friends decided to go there. But in the end, Smith offered me a very good scholarship and I decided it would be more of an adventure – going further away and experiencing another part of the country. So, I chose Smith.

Q: Okay.

Now, you were talking about California and the whole California vibe, and before we leave high school, the counterculture has arrived.

CEFKIN: Yes.

Q: Did that affect you in your 14,000-person town?

CEFKIN: Uh-huh. It did. Of course, by then Ft. Collins had also grown considerably. I remember considering myself sort of a hippie. By hippie standards I wasn't a real hippie, but in terms of dress, ethics and culture, that's what I gravitated to, as did my friends. Earlier I mentioned our debates about the war in Vietnam. Those debates were understandably prevalent at CSU. In fact, there were some protests that ended up setting a fire that burned down what was called "Old Maine," one of the old buildings on campus; that was quite dramatic.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Wow.

CEFKIN: And of course, male friends of mine were having to register for the draft and worried about their draft numbers. The irony is that I later would marry someone who was a Vietnam War veteran.

Q: We'll get there. (Laughs)

CEFKIN: Yeah.

Q: But for the moment, and then the last thing, before we leave for college is, did you work part-time in high school?

CEFKIN: I did, definitely. Starting out, pre-high school, like most American girls, I was a babysitter. Then my father helped me get a job at CSU, with their catering service, serving banquets at the student center. I did that during summers and even during the school year later in high school, especially once I could drive. Then, when I was in

college, I was able to get a summer job with one of the CSU economic professors, helping with research. But it wasn't really substantive research. It was more organizing keycards. Since I was a financial aid student, I also worked at Smith a few hours a week, helping to wash dishes, etc. And eventually I was assigned to help one of the Government professors with his study projects. I definitely needed the income to help pay my way.

Q: Interesting.

All right, so you're getting ready to go to Smith 2,000 miles away or so, and New England and so on. What were your impressions when you arrived?

CEFKIN: I was a little overwhelmed, to be honest with you. I had a roommate my first year there who was from Wellesley, Massachusetts, near Boston. We corresponded before the school year started and her parents suggested that I come out a few days early, stay with them, and then drive to Northampton, where Smith is, together.

Q: Oh, nice.

CEFKIN: So, I did that. My roommate was very nice, but we were quite different. She was very gaga over Smith, and I was a bit put off by that, because I didn't initially feel the same affinity. I was very impressed with the campus; it's beautiful. And the surroundings in Western Massachusetts are beautiful. And then, it was nice to be in the company of very smart women. At Smith they have something called the house system. Instead of dorms, we lived in "houses." My house, Gardiner House, was one of the larger ones, with about 70 residents. But some houses were quite small. So, the houses we lived in became our communities. I was able to develop strong friendships with the other women in my house, especially the other first-year students. The academic environment was very stimulating - great professors and really interesting courses. And it was part of something called the Five College System. They had a partnership with Mount Holyoke, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Hampshire College. We were able to take courses at any of those schools, so I did take a few courses at Amherst and at University of Massachusetts. The classes also were exacting. I was used to being in the top tier of my classes in high school. At Smith, I couldn't take acing my classes for granted. My first year, I took an art history class. It was a lot of fun, but I struggled to keep up (partly because I wasn't familiar with all the Christian iconography prevalent in early European art). At the mid-term I pulled a *C*. I never in my life had a *C*, so I really had to apply myself to pull the grade up. Also, I did find it odd to be at a school only with women. We used to refer to Smith as the "Ivy Womb." After growing up around a big state university, being in this small, cloistered, all-female environment seemed a little odd.

Q: Were you able to continue French? Or did you want to?

CEFKIN: I definitely did. I actually had initially planned to begin a second language. I was interested in learning Russian, given my family's origins. One thing Smith had was a wonderful junior abroad program. And there was one in Geneva that was particularly good for people who were government majors, which was my interest. I talked to

somebody who studied Russian, who said it was a lot of work. So I decided that rather than begin a second language, I would put my focus on improving my French, and apply for the Geneva program.

Q: And Smith did not go co-ed while you were there?

CEFKIN: No. They still aren't co-ed.

Q: Oh, I did not know that, okay.

CEFKIN: My first year I was also homesick. I seriously considered transferring to Colorado College. But finally, given the prospect of the junior abroad in Geneva, I decided I'd stick it out at Smith. By my second year I was a lot happier at Smith, so it worked out fine.

Q: Were there opportunities for you to study the kinds of things you wanted, like African history or other different things that you'd never been exposed to?

CEFKIN: My focus was government and I took all sorts of government classes: political theory, American politics, comparative politics, international relations, constitutional law, the military in politics, and many other interesting classes. I took English literature classes, and a lot of French classes. I took an interesting anthropology class, focused on Africa, at Amherst. I took a persuasive speaking class at UMASS. I also took a symbolic logic class, which was probably the hardest class I took, but I loved it. The professor was fantastic. He had been a friend of Bertrand Russell and he had great stories and anecdotes. The one class that I signed up for and ended up dropping was a statistics course. One of my political science professors told us that statistics was very important for all government majors, so I was persuaded by that. But once I started it, I didn't enjoy it, and I was carrying a heavy load that semester, so I dropped it.

Smith didn't have distribution requirements for the academic courses, but they did have a physical education requirement.

Q: Ah, interesting.

CEFKIN: They had so many different offerings of what you could do to fulfill that requirement. I did crew; I did Aikido, I did fencing, and I took a synchronized swimming class. So that was all fun.

Q: Lovely.

Oh, Geneva.

CEFKIN: Geneva, yeah, yeah. So, that was the best thing Smith did for me. I mean, that was really a fabulous program, fabulous year.

Q: What was the goal of the program?

CEFKIN: For me or for the school?

Q: Well, for you, for you.

CEFKIN: (Laughs) For me, it was the fact that I was interested in international relations and, as I told lots of people, in Geneva, I didn't just study international relations, I lived it. The University of Geneva is very international, as you might expect, given the UN agencies based there. In fact, I briefly dated a guy from Yugoslavia who had grown up going to the International School in Geneva. I think his father was with the World Health Organization. I got to know students from Switzerland (of course), but also from all over Europe, Africa, and South America. Another friend from Smith, and I ended up befriending a group of guys from Vietnam, who we spent a fair bit of time with.

We started the program with six weeks in Paris to get acclimated and to immerse ourselves in the French language. It also bridged the time between when the academic year in the U.S. started and the academic year in Geneva started. It was a wonderful experience – discovering Paris and traveling around France a bit. When we got to Geneva, they put some of us in dorm housing and others were living with families. I was one of the ones that was assigned to a dorm, which gave me a lot more freedom and flexibility. I had a roommate who became a good friend. My dorm was part of the university's Development Institute. I also took some of my classes there.

Q: Did they teach in French?

CEFKIN: They did, yes.

A nice thing was that we were able to take classes at the university or any of its related institutes including the Development Institute, the Graduate Institute, and the European Institute. And then, they also offered some classes just for our group. I did a couple of French literature classes through the Smith group and took classes at the University and all the institutes. We didn't have to pass tests. We could take the tests just for the experience of them, but it wasn't really determinant to our grade. For our grade, we did a paper on a topic of our choosing, and they gave us grades on our participation in university life and French skills, etc. Socially, of course, the common language was French, except when I was with my Smith junior abroad cohort. I did have a British boyfriend there. But most of my dealings were in French, so that was really good immersion for me.

Q: Oh, yeah. Did you travel around Europe and so on?

CEFKIN: Yes, of course, as much as I could, especially during the long Christmas and Easter breaks. One fun anecdote - the friend I mentioned that was an exchange student from Germany in my senior year of high school, he was going to university in Freiberg in

Germany. He was from Berlin. And then, two of my best friends were doing a junior abroad program through their college in Regensburg, Germany.

For a long weekend in the fall, our German friend, Ludwig, suggested I come meet him in Freiberg and that we then go together to meet our two friends in Regensburg. To get to Freiburg, I had to take an early train from Geneva, and change trains twice – the second change was in Basel. I did that, but at the time we were supposed to be arriving in Freiberg, we still hadn't arrived. At the next stop I leaned out the window to ask an official on the platform if I was in Freiberg. He said no, and that to get to Freiberg, I would have to go back to Basel.

Q: Uh-oh.

CEFKIN: Well, it turns out I'd gotten on the wrong part of the train. The train had split at one point to go in different directions, so I had ended up in Strasbourg, France instead of Freiberg, Germany. So, that was a good lesson on how to ride trains in Europe.

Then, for Christmas, my girlfriends and I all converged on Ludwig's mother's house in Berlin for just a wonderful Christmas. After Christmas, several of us went on to Vienna for New Year's and so, that was the Christmas break travel.

And then, for the spring break, my Geneva roommate and I, with a third Smith friend, decided to go to Italy and Greece. We took the train to Italy (stopping in Venice), and then continued on to Brindisi, where we got a ferry to Greece. We spent some time in and around Athens and then went to Crete for several days. On the return trip, we took a train through Yugoslavia with the intention of stopping for a few days in Belgrade. We did stop there and had a fun adventure meeting a couple of guys who spoke English and offered to show us around. But then the train schedule changed, so we had to cut our visit short. When we got to Italy, I broke off from my two friends and went to the Italian Alps (near Bolzano) to meet Ludwig, who was leading a German ski group there. I returned to Geneva, but then left for a second trip to northern Belgium and Denmark. So I got around quite a bit, and had a lot of adventures.

Q: Were there any particular impressions of Switzerland that stick out in your mind?

CEFKIN: Yes. Well, of course, Switzerland is a beautiful country with the majestic mountains, bucolic meadows, and large sparkling lakes. There are also distinctly different cultures French-speaking, German-speaking, Italian-speaking, and Romansch-speaking parts of the country. Living in Geneva (in the French-speaking part of the country) there were similarities to France, but the Swiss are more prim and proper. They're also known for being very industrious and honest, and are generally quite prosperous. Geneva is a pretty city and enjoyable, but not terribly exciting. As I mentioned, the university was very international. But traveling around the city, riding the buses and the trams, you would see a lot of older women with fur coats and numerous shopping bags. That was a Geneva stereotype. In the German-speaking part of Switzerland the prim, proper rule-obsessed stereotypes were even more pronounced. I visited Zurich at one point and

stayed at a women's hostel. They showed me my bed. Then I went to wash up. There were several sinks in the room, so I picked one. A woman was staring at me and said, "Which bed are you in?" I showed her, she said, "No, you're supposed to use *that* sink." So, the French part of Switzerland seemed convivial compared to the German part. The Italian part of the country was the friendliest and most cheerful of the three. I never spent a lot of time in that part of the country, but taking the train through there to go to Italy, we joked that as we approached Italy the sun would come out and we would see smiling people.

I really loved my year in Europe, and thoroughly enjoyed honing my French-language skills. So much so that when the academic year ended, I was in no rush to go home, so I stayed in Geneva for most of the summer. First, my roommate and I took one more trip – this time to Florence, which was a blast. Then, as a University of Geneva student, I was able to get a temporary work permit. I got a job working at a hotel café, helping to tend the bar. They provided housing (an apartment nearby) and some meals at the hotel. It was so interesting. Most of the other café employees were guest workers from Spain and Portugal. A Spanish gentleman who was the head bar-tender started every day by asking "Is Franco dead yet?" The clientele were interesting. There were a lot of regulars I got to know somewhat, in particular, a group of older men who came in every morning and every afternoon for their classes of wine. It was a lot of fun. When the job ended, I took the train to Paris, spent a few days there and then flew home to Colorado for several weeks, before returning to Smith for my senior year.

Q: And by senior year, you're now thinking about where you're going to be after college. What were those calculations or your thoughts back then?

And you will graduate in what year?

CEFKIN: 1975.

Q: Seventy-five. Okay.

CEFKIN: Senior year was fun. One thing that the Geneva experience did was to awaken a desire to learn more languages. Some of my friends had the same reaction. We were, of course, proud of ourselves for mastering French, but then the Europeans we met, especially the Swiss, spoke multiple languages. So we were a little ashamed of our relative foreign language illiteracy. As a result, in addition to French, I started studying Spanish.

Looking forward to graduation was exciting but also terrifying, since it raised the question of "what next?"

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: As I mentioned earlier, culturally I was very drawn to California, but being a government major, the more natural place to find employment related to government/international relations was the East Coast, and specifically Washington, D.C.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: I did apply for the Civil Service, hoping to get a job in California, but that didn't pan out. And a friend of mine from the Geneva program mentioned to me that she'd signed up to take the Foreign Service exam. So I signed up to take the exam as well, though I didn't pass that time.

Q: So, was that the first time you sort of heard of or had considered the Foreign Service?

CEFKIN: Yes. It was the first time I heard about the Foreign Service. It was interesting because my father had some connections at the State Department. He had a couple of Fulbright grants. He put me in touch with someone he knew from the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA). So, over spring break my senior year, I went to Washington, D.C. and met with my father's contact at State. She was very nice, but interestingly, I don't remember her mentioning the Foreign Service to me. She talked about civil service positions, but the meeting didn't produce any concrete leads.

Meanwhile, my stepmother was working as the manager of Senator Gary Hart's Denver office, so I had those connections, and Hart's Washington office offered me a job as receptionist in his DC senate office. Even though it wasn't the job I most wanted, I figured it was a foot in the door, so I accepted. Then a question arose as to my typing speed. I really wasn't a good typist, but I promised them I would practice and get up to speed. However, they withdrew the offer, which was very traumatic. Just when I thought I would have to go back to square one in my job search, Hart's office came back to me and said they could offer me a paid internship for the summer.

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: So, that's what I did. I joined with two other Smith friends, who had decided to move to Washington and look for work after graduation, to sublet an apartment on Capitol Hill. After the summer, we joined with two other women and rented a house near Chevy Chase circle.

The internship was a lot of fun. I met so many interesting people and became familiar with how the Senate and legislative processes functioned. Meanwhile, I started looking for a permanent job. As summer drew to an end, I hadn't found anything, so Hart's office offered me a patronage position for a couple of months, as a Senate elevator operator.

Q: (Laughs)

CEFKIN: That was also a very interesting experience. (Laughs) I got to really see all the senators in action as they ran to cast their votes. We controlled the elevators to whisk

them to the Senate floor. The other elevator operators were a fun group. When I wasn't on my elevator shift, I helped out in Hart's Senate office. Then eventually I was hired for a position at the Office of Technology Assessment, which was a research arm of Congress. My job was with the "Ocean's Program." It was a multidisciplinary approach to studying the feasibility and impact for three energy technologies that were being considered for construction off the coast of Atlantic City. We had a naval engineer, a marine biologist, an economist, and a political scientist. I was hired as an assistant to the political scientist.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: —They were an interesting and very nice group of people.

Q: And this was full-time?

CEFKIN: Yeah, full-time. I enjoyed the work, but I started to get restless to do something related to international relations.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: So I decided I should go back to school and get a master's in international relations.

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: I was focused on going to Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies [SAIS]. I was particularly interested in the program they had to spend one of the two years studying at their Bologna, Italy campus. But the man who was Gary Hart's head legislative assistant and my mentor encouraged me to apply to the London School of Economics, where he had gotten an international relations masters.

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: I had another friend, also a Congressional intern, who was applying to the London School of Economics [LSE]. So, I decided to apply.

Q: Ah, wow.

CEFKIN: At that time, the tuition for the LSE was very affordable. Also, it was a one-year master's program, as opposed to the two-year program that SAIS had. So, I applied, was accepted, and decided to go there.

Q: Wow. Okay, so that's now fall of—

CEFKIN: That was '76.

Q: Okay. And it's London.

CEFKIN: And it's London.

Q: And this is the first time you're spent any lengthy amount of time in London?

CEFKIN: Yes. We had visited briefly on our way to Africa, but it was my first time really getting to know London. Coincidentally, a guy I had started dating in Washington also decided to go to LSE. He was still an undergraduate, but he decided to transfer to the LSE. So, we had a lot of fun together in the UK. I was fortunate that I was assigned to live in one of the LSE dorms. I borrowed $4,000 (interest-free) from my mom. That covered my tuition and all of my living expenses. At that time, one could live fairly inexpensively in London. Food was inexpensive, and for a pound you could get tickets to the theater and ballet (often nose-bleed seats, or standing room only) but still! There were all the sights, museums, and pubs to discover. And we traveled all over the UK.

Once again, as the year was drawing to a close, I wasn't in a rush to leave London and return to the U.S. So as I was finishing up my masters I found a job doing research for a Japanese journalist.

Q: Wow. How interesting. But wait, one question before we go into that. What did you study—what were the major topics that you studied while you were at LSE?

CEFKIN: Right. So my program was international relations. I took classes on international relations theory, comparative politics, international organizations, international economics, and a very interesting class on theories of imperialism. I also audited a class in the Economics faculty on "the economics of development."

Q: And now a researcher for a Japanese journalist.

CEFKIN: Right. (Laughs) His name was Yasuhiko Doi. He was the London correspondent for Fuji-TV. He was a very nice man, and I became quite close to him and his family. His wife was lovely, and he had three adorable children. He shared an office with a Japanese newspaper journalist. I introduced an American friend of mine who was in my LSE program to them, and the newspaper journalist hired her as his assistant, so the two of us worked together in that office.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Mr. Doi was very interested in industrial relations. In fact, the reason I got the job is that we wanted someone who spoke French who could read and summarize a book by Alain Peyrefitte called "*Le Mal Français*" that attempted to diagnose why the Anglo-Saxon countries had done better economically than the Catholic Mediterranean countries in Europe. Reading and reporting on that book was my first assignment.

I had a lot of interesting projects. For example, I went to Birmingham to report on a parliamentary by-election. It was a Labor Party stronghold, but immigration was a big issue and there was a National Front (far right) candidate who was making waves, so that was a key focus of my conversations with different party representatives. I met the National Front candidate, and was so disgusted with his demonization of South Asian, African and Caribbean immigrants that I went from that meeting directly to an Indian restaurant to have lunch. I also went to Coventry to report on an automaker labor dispute. As an American without a British accent, I couldn't be identified as upper or lower class and was considered neutral. So both the employers and labor union representatives were willing to talk to me.

Q: Ah. Interesting, yeah.

CEFKIN: Occasionally there would be an *Enquirer*-type story that would pique the interest of Mr. Doi's Fuji-TV bosses in Tokyo. I remember one story involving a young couple who wanted to get married, but were under-age to be legally married without parents' permission. That fascinated the Japanese, And Fuji-TV wanted to send a crew to cover the wedding. I had to do some detective work to find out where this wedding was going to take place. I called around, but people were very careful about divulging information, because the British tabloid *The Sun* had obtained exclusive rights to cover the wedding. Finally, someone gave me the name of the caterer. Through the caterer I was able to get the necessary details about the time and venue for the wedding.

There was another time that Fuji-TV sent a crew to do an interview with the sculptor Henry Moore. They were setting up a garden in Japan that was going to feature some of Moore's sculptures. I was asked to call to confirm their interview appointment, and ended up talking to Henry Moore himself. So that was exciting. I worked for Mr. Doi for about a year 1977-1978.

As I said, I became quite close to Mr. Doi and his family. I sometimes babysat for his children. They were very generous. When my parents visited they took us out for lovely meals. So, they really were good friends. Later, after I joined the Foreign Service, I had the opportunity to visit them in Tokyo. By then, Yasuhiko had transitioned from journalism to become a professor. They were lovely and generous hosts. We stayed in touch for many years, exchanging Christmas cards and the occasional letter. But then one year I stopped hearing from them and my letters went unanswered. So I fear that something happened to Mr. Doi and/or his wife. I had lost track of the children, who were of course grown by then, so I didn't know how to follow up.

Q: All right, so we're up to, then, 1978. You're still in London.

CEFKIN: So, I'm still in London. So, by that time, because I was working in journalism, I was very interested in pursuing a journalism career. (I had taken the Foreign Service exam a second time, while in London, but still hadn't passed.)

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: I decided to try to meet with U.S. journalists in London to see if I could get hired in some capacity. I met with a gentleman in NBC's London office who kindly took the time to give me advice. His advice was that if I wanted to make it in journalism, it would be better to start by being a big fish in a small pond instead of a small fish in a big pond. He said, instead of going back to the U.S. and going, say, to New York and trying to break into the media market there, to go to small town America to more easily break into the industry and start to advance.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: That made sense. But before completely giving up the ghost on becoming a journalist in Europe, I decided to spend the summer in Spain to further improve my Spanish language skills, and pursue the dream of becoming a foreign correspondent. (Laughs)

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: Of course, I had very little idea about how to break into that kind of work. I was realistic enough to realize I needed to do something to earn some money while I pursued that goal. So I signed up for a course in Barcelona on teaching English as a foreign language.

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: I spent about a month in Barcelona doing that course. It was fun because of the experience of living in Barcelona and the people I met. There were several other Americans and several Brits in the class and we had a lot of fun together. But by the end of the course, I realized that I wasn't terribly interested in teaching English as a foreign language.

Q: And this was summer of 1978?

CEFKIN: Exactly. After the course ended, I met my younger brother who was coming to Europe for a junior year abroad in Bordeaux, France. We traveled around Spain and Portugal for several weeks, which was a blast. I went with him to Bordeaux for about a week; then I went back to London to pack up. I had decided to go home to Colorado to pursue a job in media there.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: So, I went home and moved in with my mother in Ft. Collins, while I started putting out feelers with news departments at the Denver TV stations. I was fortunate to get an interview with a man who was a producer with the PBS affiliate in Denver, KRMA-TV. He liked my background in political science. He thought that journalism skills could be easily learned, so that having a degree in journalism wasn't necessary;

whereas my substantive background would be an asset. He hired me on as a reporter/producer for a show that the station was beginning on state politics, called "The State of Colorado."

Q: Now, this is TV, not radio?

CEFKIN: This was TV.

Q: Ah-ha. Okay.

CEFKIN: As part of my reporting duties, I hung out at the state capital and got to know a lot of the state representatives. I interviewed them and other state officials for reports on local politics. Periodically, we would also have the governor, who at that time was Dick Lamm, come on the show to answer call-in questions.

Q: Now, this begins, fall of '78?

CEFKIN: Yes, it was. That job lasted about six months. Then the station had to make some budget cuts and reduce staff. My boss helped me get a job as a new producer at the CBS affiliate in Denver – KMGH-TV. I was initially hired to produce their weekday noon news broadcast.

Producing that show involved starting early in the morning by watching the CBS Morning news, which was an excellent show hosted by Bob Schieffer. Since we were a CBS affiliate, we could run segments from that show on our broadcasts. Then I would monitor the news wires (AP and UPI) for incoming national and international news, and our reporters would go out and do reports on local news stories. As producer, I decided what stories to run and in what order. And I had to time the show down to the second, to make sure it filled exactly the time allotted. I liked most of my newsroom colleagues, though there were a few who weren't so nice. And I didn't get along that well with the New Director, who eventually demoted me. (Laughs)

Q: Really? It sounded fabulous, you know, substantive and you're using all your skills and you're making judgements about, you know, all the kinds of things you would need as a Foreign Service officer.

CEFKIN: So, the problem was, according to the news director, my programs were too substantive.

Q: Ooh.

CEFKIN: Yes. He thought the shows should do more to "appeal to housewives," who were a large share of our audience. He thought they were primarily interested in "fluff" news stories - beauty tips and that sort of thing.

Q: Ahh.

CEFKIN: One day I included a report about the revolution in Iran. It was a little before the hostage crisis, but things were getting very turbulent there. I also included a report on Jimmy Carter, who was president at the time, taking a trip down the Mississippi River in a paddleboat called the Delta Queen. And I included a third national or international story, though I can't remember what that one was. After the newscast, the director calls me into his office to complain about the show. He asked why I ran the story on Iran. I said, "Well, it's kind of important." He said, "Well, nobody cares about that." Then, he complained about the story on Jimmy Carter. I said, "Well, he is our president, after all." He acknowledged that maybe that was ok. But it was clear they didn't think that I was appealing to the right demographics. My view was that journalists should try to educate the people watching, not lower the bar. Anyway, they demoted me to producing the weekend newscasts. In some ways, it was a better fit because the shows had a broader audience and I was able to produce more of a straight newscast.

Nonetheless, it was a big blow to my self-confidence. A lot of my colleagues were wonderful. I was very friendly with many of the reporters, photographers, and anchors. But I never had much respect for the station management. Their priority was to focus on what we termed "the blood and guts" stories – murders, accidents, fires – in other words the more sensational stories. I stuck it out for two and a half years (1979 to 1981), but I realized that I needed to start looking around for another job.

By that time, I'd taken the Foreign Service test again. I passed the written and then the oral exam, which fortunately was offered in Denver. So that was very exciting. But, at that time President Ronald Reagan had imposed a federal hiring freeze. I didn't know if I could count on an offer from the State Department coming through before my time on the register expired, so I was also looking around for other TV jobs.

I was contacted by a station in Houston, Texas (KPRC-TV) that was interested in hiring me to do their weekend news. One of the other news producers I'd worked with at KMGH had gone to work there, and he put in a good word for me. I was a little dubious because I never really saw myself living in Texas. But it was a bump up in terms of status and pay. With news, they rate TV markets by population, and Houston was a much bigger market than Denver. They offered to fly me down for an interview. I figured there was no harm in going down to check it out. So, I went down for the interview and was really impressed with the people I interviewed with. They were very friendly and seemed to be serious journalists. So, I decided to accept the offer. In addition to producing the weekend newscast, I helped as a writer for some of the news shows during the week. It was a lot of fun. There was a really good esprit de corps at the station. The news director was an intelligent, thoughtful boss. And I became very good friends with a number of my colleagues. So, it was a happy experience.

Esthetically, Houston wasn't a particularly attractive city (though there were attractive areas), but it was very lively. Eventually I was promoted to becoming the producer of the weekday 10 PM news. I liked that schedule. I could sleep in a little bit later, do things during the day, take care of business, go to the gym, eat lunch, then start my workday

mid-afternoon. After our news program was over, several members of my team and I often would go out together to have some drinks and a late dinner. So, it was a very sociable environment. In fact, I'm still close friends with a couple of people I worked with there.

But I still had a strong desire to work in international affairs, and hoped I would eventually get an offer from the State Department. I decided that if I stayed in the television news business I should start looking for a network news job as a field producer.

Q: What is the difference between a producer and a field producer?

CEFKIN: As the news producer you organize the newscast. You decide what news stories to include, in what order. You obviously consult with the anchors and reporters on those questions, but you have the ultimate authority to decide. The news content can include reports from the network the station is affiliated with (in the case of KPRC, that was NBC), local stories that the station reporters and photographers produce, and stories that the writers draft (based on wire service or local news reports) that the anchors read on camera. (As producer, I also helped draft those reports). Then you make sure that all the reports are finalized in time. If there is breaking news you have to quickly rearrange the broadcast to include that news, which sometimes involves accommodating a live-shot from a reporter at the scene. The timing for the broadcast is really critical. You have to time the show down to the second to match exactly the time allotted for the half hour minus the commercials. Before starting the broadcast, you "back time" the show – timing it backwards and marking the time for every report, so that as the show advances you know whether you're running ahead, behind, or on schedule. During the newscast, you sit in the control room with the technical director, who's the one calling the camera shots, giving instruction to the anchors, and controlling the switches to connect different feeds, live shots, etc. If the show is running ahead of schedule the producer asks the technical director to tell the anchors to stretch things out with a slower pace and more chit chat. If you're running behind, you have to quickly make cuts to make up the time. So, it can be quite a tension-filled experience. But it was very satisfying because you see clearly the results of your work every day. And working as a team was very satisfying. I did conclude that it probably is a good career for younger people since, as you get older, it's harder to sustain that pace and the daily deadline pressure.

Meanwhile, field producers work with reporters to produce their reports in the field. They don't have them at the local news level (or at least didn't when I worked in news), but they do have them at the network level. They travel with reporters to different hot spots, and help organize the reporting – setting up interviews, researching the background, etc.

Q: So, two quick questions here because I'm hearing we're going to be engaging with the State Department shortly—

CEFKIN: Yes.

Q: —but before we do, while you were moving up in the world of broadcast news, did you feel like you were going to face a glass ceiling?

CEFKIN: You know, I don't know if I thought of it quite in those terms, but I did know that there were some inequities. One experience I had, even though as I said KPRC was a very good work environment, is that I learned that I was getting paid about $10,000 less a year than my male producer colleague. He had a little more experience, but not so much that I thought it warranted that big a differential. I did go to the management to point this out. They gave me a little bump in salary, but not to the level of my colleague. Still, at that time I felt like I was making good money and I was enjoying what I was doing, so I wasn't overly focused on the numbers on my paycheck.

Q: And then, the other question is, by now you've acquired a lot of skills in the field of journalism, did they—looking back on this moment in your professional life, were those skills useful to you later on in the Foreign Service?

CEFKIN: Definitely. The leadership experience I gained – directing and motivating a team and making sure we were in sync, working towards the same goal was extremely valuable. I also learned the importance of assuming responsibility. Some days the newscast would go very smoothly, and some days it would be rocky. More often than not the mistakes would fall on the producer's shoulders, but you had to learn from them and move on. The writing experience – having to draft quickly and to convey the essential information in very few words – was also very relevant to my Foreign Service experience, as was learning how to distill information quickly, figure out what's important, and to make decisions under pressure. I think all those skills helped me as a Foreign Service Officer.

Q: All right.

So, the floor's back to you.

CEFKIN: So, yeah, as I was waiting to see if I would be offered a job with the State Department, I was beginning to realize the Foreign Service wasn't the only option available to me. As mentioned, I was thinking about other jobs in journalism. Also, I was approaching thirty and wasn't married. I dated different guys and had a good group of close friends, but I was wondering whether I would meet "the right man" and settle down at some point. I remember having this conversation with a woman that I became friendly with who was a lawyer in Houston. One day we were taking a walk and I was telling her about my hope of becoming a Foreign Service Officer. She told me I was nuts.

Q: Laughs.

CEFKIN: She said "here you are almost thirty, and you're going to travel around the world. How are you going to meet someone to marry? I thought about it and said, "Yeah, but you know, that may not happen anyway. So, I may as well do what I really want to do."

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: That story will have significance later in my Foreign Service story. Anyway, after I had worked at KPRC-TV for a little over a year, right around the time of my thirtieth birthday, I got a call from the State Department offering me a place in the A-100 class beginning in March.

Q: March of '83?

CEFKIN: Of '83, correct. I was at KPRC from fall '81 to February '83. At the time I got the call, my brother was visiting. He had just finished a two-year stint with the Peace Corps and was looking for his next job. Anyway, as excited as I was to get the Foreign Service offer, I was also very intrigued by the idea of going on to work for network news. So I debated pros and cons with my brother. I remember saying, "Gee, I don't know. Should I do this now, or should I stay on the path I'm on?" And he said, "You know you'll regret it if you don't take the Foreign Service offer." I thought about it for a while, but I knew my brother was right.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: So, I accepted the offer and gave my notice at the station. I remember most of my colleagues were very happy for me and supportive, despite being sorry I was leaving, but they had a lot of questions about where around the world I would be sent to serve. I explained that I would start training and then be assigned to a post abroad. Some people were appalled that I was accepting a job, not knowing where I would end up living and working, but I was thrilled by the idea, viewing it as exactly the adventure I craved. So, I packed up and made the move to Washington, D.C.

Q: So, one quick question. When you got the call, did they offer you a position in a cone or was this one of those periods when they said, you know, you'll begin and then your area of expertise or specialty will be determined later?

CEFKIN: At that time they were assigning cones when they put you on the Register, so they offered me the position as a political cone officer. Fortunately, that was exactly the cone I would have chosen. There was a question when they initially made the offer, on salary. When they first told me the salary it was quite a bit less than what I was earning at the time. They could hear my disappointment, so they asked me if I had a master's and whether I could prove I had been earning the salary I was earning for a certain number of months. Fortunately, I was able to answer those questions affirmatively. So they set a new salary that was close to what I was making in TV

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: So, I arrived in Washington at the beginning of March 1983 and started A-100 on March 3. As it happened, my best friend growing up in Ft. Collins was working in DC

and living in Arlington, Virginia, so I initially stayed with her. Once I got my bearings and figured out all the per diem rules I moved to a hotel and then a short-term rental.

Q: And at that time A-100 was still in Rosslyn?

CEFKIN: Correct. We started with a reception to meet our classmates and the coordinators. I found it very exciting - meeting so many impressive, interesting people.

Our class was the 14th class. There were thirty-two of us. At that time most classes were running about that size.

Q: And do you remember anything about the demographics of the class?

CEFKIN: There were 12 women and 20 men, so about a third of our class was female.

Q: Okay. For that period, not bad.

CEFKIN: We had four mid-level entrants. Our average age was thirty-two, so at 30 I was just below the average age. There was one classmate who was right out of college, but almost everybody else had been to grad school and/or had work experience. Geographically we were from all over the country.

Q: Were there any minorities?

CEFKIN: Yes. One classmate was black. He had been a marine guard. And one of our mid-level entrants was Hispanic. But they were the only two.

Q: The experience of going through the A-100 training, how do you recall that? Was it overwhelming or were you kind of bored by, you know, being just talked to for several weeks, or how did you take it?

CEFKIN: I loved it. I definitely was not bored. I found it very stimulating. Our two coordinators had a lot of energy and enthusiasm, and I enjoyed spending time with my classmates. We were a fairly sociable group. On the less positive side, some of my classmates were very focused on what it would take to be successful and advance in the ranks, which tended to make them very competitive. So I remember a bit of jockeying for positions – particularly when we had our offsite where we did the embassy tabletop exercise for a situation in the imaginary country "Anthuria." Some were really eager to be assigned the roles of Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission DCM). I wanted to do well, but I wasn't hyper-competitive. So I didn't tie myself in knots over what role I was selected for. I really just wanted the experience.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: When I entered the Foreign Service, I didn't do so expecting to be an ambassador. That wasn't my goal. My goal was to have a satisfying, meaningful career

and to contribute to the formation and execution of U.S. foreign policy. I enjoyed the training and found it to be useful.

Q: Okay. Now, of course, as training approaches its end, you're thinking about first posts. What—do you remember what was going through your mind?

CEFKIN: When I entered I still had a fascination with Africa, given my upbringing and my experience living in southern Africa. I also had a strong interest in development issues. So, I was really hoping to be assigned to an Embassy in Africa. But on the list of vacancies they gave our class there were only two positions on the African continent – a GSO job in Khartoum, and a position (I don't recall if it was consular or GSO) in Algiers. (Of course, at State, Algiers is part of the Near East, rather than the Africa Bureau.) I wasn't particularly interested in either of those positions, since I was more focused on sub-Saharan Africa. I think I did bid on at least one of those jobs, nonetheless.

The preponderance of jobs on our list were in Mexico and Central America (Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Belize). There were two jobs in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I decided that would be the best alternative to Africa, since – in terms of development levels - it would be more similar to an African experience and would make use of my French. So I lobbied to get assigned to one of those positions.

The other posts that were on our list included. Kingston, Jamaica; Maracaibo, Venezuela; Hong Kong, Seoul, Korea; Frankfurt; Germany; and Calgary; Canada. And almost all the positions were for 18-month consular tours.

The post that interested me the least was Calgary. I thought -why join the Foreign Service just to go to Canada?

Looking back on it I should have realized that, despite my lobbying hard for Port-au-Prince, the fact that I had some Spanish language ability meant that I was bound to be sent to a Spanish-speaking post, since that's where the greatest need was. Indeed, they assigned me to a consular job in Mexico City.

Q: Uh-huh. Sure. Right.

CEFKIN: (Laughs) When I first got the assignment I was a little bit disappointed. But, it was an opportunity to hone my Spanish. Another nice thing is that five people in my class (including me) were assigned to Mexico City, and one classmate was assigned to Guadalajara.

Since I had tested with a beginning proficiency in Spanish (I believe it was 1+/1) when I began A-100, they assigned me to ten weeks of Spanish training. That was sufficient to get me to the required 3/3 level. After that I did the consular training (CONGEN). So, I had had a little over three months of training after A-100.

They insisted that I had to get out to post as soon as I finished training. I remember the head of Junior Officer Assignments telling me that the Embassy desperately needed me, and that I should even think about asking for leave before I went.

Q: Yep. That's typical.

CEFKIN: There was no opportunity to travel via Colorado to visit family. They did authorize consultations in San Antonio on the way down to Mexico City, so I managed to sneak in a couple of days (over a weekend) in Houston to see my friends there before my consultations in San Antonio. Then I flew on to Mexico City. When I arrived and reported for duty my boss looked at me kind of quizzically and said "oh, you're here already?" (Laughs)

Q: Right. The typical experience.

CEFKIN: Yeah, typical experience.

One of the nice things about Mexico City is that we had a large group of junior officers – some 30 of us. We were a fairly cohesive group and spent a lot of time together socially outside of work. We traveled a lot and took advantage of Mexico City's cultural attractions -- museums, markets, and great restaurants.

I was fortunate to get a nice apartment very close to the embassy, so I could walk to work. Crime was a problem. We were advised not to use public transportation and to only use taxis that were based at reputable hotels. Pollution was also a problem. Particularly combined with the high altitude, that really bothered some people. Having grown up at a high altitude in Colorado, I was less affected, but towards the end of my tour State did decide to give us extra credit towards retirement for having lived in "unhealthful conditions."

In terms of work, I spent just six weeks in the Non-Immigrant Visa (NIV) section. We had a very high volume of applicants; we each did up to 200 interviews a day. In those days we didn't have as many security checks we had to do, so the processing was quicker. We would typically only spend about 30 seconds with each applicant.

After six weeks in NIV they rotated me to the American Citizens Service (ASC) unit.

Q: You know, I was about to ask you that because when I joined a year later in '84, I learned that there were over two million American citizens living in Mexico at the time, maybe more now, and it astonished me. And I started thinking, oh, of course, Mexican Americans, Mexicans who had come to the U.S., worked for, you know, work life, and then took their retirement and went back to Mexico. And they told me, oh no. These are Americans who were born in the U.S. who are retiring to Acapulco or, you know, other nice areas.

CEFKIN: Yes, there were a lot of Americans resident in Mexico, and many more who visited each day for business or tourism. So ACS was a very busy section. We had several sub-units: Passports, Arrest and Detention, Death and Estates, and Welfare and Whereabouts. We also had a sub-unit that I believe was unique to Mexico City -- Property Recovery. There were a high number of cars stolen in the U.S., brought across the border and resold in Mexico. The Property unit worked on finding and repatriating those cars.

My first job in the ACS section was Arrest and Detention, which I found to be very interesting. We had quite a few American prisoners in Mexico. Most, not surprisingly, were serving time for drug crimes.

We had a prisoner transfer treaty with Mexico, which allowed American prisoners to apply to transfer back to the U.S. and serve out the rest of their sentences there. But most American prisoners in Mexico, particularly in the Mexico City area prisons, lived pretty comfortably, as long as they had a little bit of money. They weren't forced to work, but they could set up little businesses providing services to other prisoners. Many of them hired maids to keep their cells clean. As Arrest and Detention Officer I visited the prisoners regularly to make sure they weren't being mistreated and to take them mail, magazines, and vitamins (if they needed dietary supplements).

Q: Ah. Interesting.

CEFKIN: I remember visiting one prisoner at the penitentiary. The prison officials showed me into the room where we would be meeting and said, "he'll be along shortly." A while later he breezed in – smiling, looking tan and fit - and said he'd just been playing tennis. There was a separate prison for women prisoners, and they occasionally took the women to the men's prison for social mixers. (Both laugh)

As a result most of our prisoners didn't want to transfer back to the U.S. until they were eligible for parole, so as to minimize their time in U.S. prisons.

Q: Wow. Very different experience.

CEFKIN: Very different experience.

I did have one very difficult case involving an older prisoner. He was a veteran who had some mental issues. He had wandered off from the VA facility where he was being treated in Texas, and had come to Mexico where he set fire to his hotel room. We tried to convince the Mexican authorities to transfer him back to the custody of Veterans Affairs in the U.S., but the Mexicans didn't want to let him transfer until he'd paid for the hotel damages. He didn't have money, and his family didn't want to pay.

He was a cantankerous guy and tended to get in disputes with other prisoners, so eventually, the Mexicans agreed to let him transfer. He was estranged from his family, but

his son agreed to come escort him back to the United States. Then, just as the son was due to arrive, we got a call from the prison saying that our prisoner had died.

The circumstances of his death were murky and suspicious. When he died, we discovered that he had two black eyes. They claimed he had fallen and hit a doorknob. He had become frailer, but it seemed highly unlikely he would have bruised both eyes with a fall. We suspected that he had had an altercation with another prisoner or that a guard had been heavy handed. So it was very sad. His son arrived thinking he was going to escort his father back to the States and instead I had to tell him his father had passed and escort him to identify the body. The family later tried to sue us for negligence, but eventually they realized they didn't have a case and dropped the suit.

After Arrests and Detentions, they transferred me to the Death and Estates unit.

Q: Oh, from the frying pan into the fire.

CEFKIN: Yes. Of course, I'd already had the one experience with the death case. It was a difficult job, but at the same time I found a sense of satisfaction in helping families deal with their loss. One particularly difficult case I handled involved two young men who were killed in a car crash south of Mexico City. The father of one came to deal with arrangements, so I took him to the village where the accident happened to identify the bodies and figure out the disposition of remains. The father was overcome with emotion so it was heart-wrenching. Another case that sticks with me involved an elderly couple who were living in the town of San Miguel de Allende which was a popular place for American retirees. The husband became sick. They brought him to a hospital in Mexico City, where he died. I spend the day with the widow, on a weekend, helping her deal with the necessary arrangements. I felt so sorry for her being so alone in a foreign country.

The last part of my stint in ACS was in the Property Office. It was less interesting, but a much calmer experience.

Q: Were you able, really, to recover many cars that had been stolen?

CEFKIN: Quite a few, actually. We had a Foreign Service National who did the legwork getting leads to find the cars. When the matches were confirmed we made the arrangements to have them returned to the U.S. In most cases the owners of the cars had claimed the insurance, so we were primarily returning the cars to the insurance company.

The final eight months of my Mexico City tour were spent in the Immigrant Visa (IV) section.

Q: Were there any recollections of the immigrant visa experience that stayed with you?

CEFKIN: Yeah. The vast majority of people we were interviewing were already living in the U.S., undocumented, and finally qualified to be processed for their immigrant visas. Most of them impressed me as well-intentioned and hardworking, wanting a better life

for themselves and their children. They were paying their taxes and sending their kids to school to get a good education. So I had empathy for them and was happy to process their visas. At the same time, we were always on the lookout for fraud. The type of fraud we encountered most frequently was marriage fraud.

We would see a fair number of younger Mexican men marrying middle-aged American women. Often, it turned out that the men had wives in Mexico. After they got their Green Cards, they would divorce their American wives and petition for their Mexican families to immigrate. We referred suspected cases to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the agency that controlled the issuance of Green Cards, to investigate, but they unfortunately didn't have the resources to pursue all the probable fraud cases.

I do remember one case I had that I suspected might be a reverse marriage fraud case – a younger Mexican woman married to a much older American man. She came with her young son, who was listed as the son of the petitioner. When we interviewed the applicants, American family members who were sponsoring them often came with them, but they were supposed to wait outside. I asked the woman to get her husband, who was waiting outside, and to bring him in, so that I could meet him. She did, and as soon as the gentleman came in I could see that he was very spry, and I could sense the affection between them. So I was convinced that the relationship was real and that the man was indeed the father of the little boy.

Q: Nice.

CEFKIN: Overall, I enjoyed the IV experience. In contrast to the NIV experience we were able to spend more time with IV petitioners and there was more judgment and understanding of U.S. law involved. I also liked the colleagues in IV.

At the same time, I was a little restless about wanting to get experience in my designated cone as a Political Officer. In those days there was no structured mentoring program for junior officers. At one point, Embassy leadership decided that they should offer us the opportunity to work on special projects outside of Consular. I was assigned to work with a mid-level Political Officer. But all he had me do was to draft some letters, so it wasn't particularly gratifying. I did get the opportunity to support one or two Congressional Delegations (CODELS), which was more interesting.

The Ambassador, during my time in Mexico, was John Gavin, a former movie actor, political appointee. The management dynamics at the embassy were rather bizarre. Gavin had fired his DCM, and installed a mid-level officer as his Acting DCM. I was so junior that the upper-level leadership dynamics didn't affect me directly, but for the senior officers – especially the counselor-level section-heads – it was a very awkward situation.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: I didn't have much interaction with Gavin. The few interactions I did have were fine. I believe he was relatively popular with the Mexicans. They liked his movie star celebrity, and he spoke Spanish. His mother was from Mexico.

Since you had asked earlier about instances of possible gender bias, there is one story worth recounting. At one point the Front Office was looking for a junior officer to serve as the Ambassador's staff assistant. They invited several of us to apply for the position and I was one of those they approached. I had mixed feelings about the opportunity, so I didn't put any effort into lobbying for the position, but I decided I should at least go through with the interview with the Acting DCM. I wasn't chosen, and was frankly relieved. But I remember an interesting conversation I had with a couple of other junior officers that were under consideration for the position. One was a friend from my A-100 class – another female FSO. The other was a male colleague who said that of course the ambassador couldn't choose a woman for the job because it wouldn't look right for the (married) Ambassador to travel around the country with a female staff aide. My friend, Sharon, who had been a lawyer before joining State, said, "Well, Hugh, that may be a reason, but it's not a legal reason." (Both laugh)

Q: Very good, uh-huh.

CEFKIN: But the great thing about my Mexico City tour were the friends I made. As I mentioned earlier, we had a very collegial group of junior officers. Several remain very close friends to this day. And most importantly of all, I met my husband there!

Q: Ah. Okay.

CEFKIN: We were both first tour officers in Consular. He had arrived about six months before me. I was very attracted to him from the moment we met. But I had a long-term off again-on again relationship with a guy back in the States. So, I wasn't necessarily looking for a new relationship. And he was also dating somebody else for a while. So, we were friends and did a lot together with other mutual friends. But eventually we acknowledged our mutual attraction and started dating.

Q: Lovely.

CEFKIN: Yes; we had a great time spending weekends together and doing some travel. He had already been assigned for his next tour, which was Barcelona. Even though we had been together intensively for a couple of months, when it came time for his transfer, it was a little too soon for us to decide we were ready for a lifetime commitment. Therefore, when it came time for me to bid, I tried to find a position in Spain or Portugal, but there really wasn't anything. I had the disadvantage of bidding "off cycle." since I was due for transfer in February 1985. And most of the job openings were in the summer cycle.

Most of the overseas posts on my bid list were rotational jobs in high-volume visa posts (or "visa mills" as we called them) where I would've spent another year doing consular

work, and then a year in a different section. So I decided to focus on jobs at the State Department. I became particularly interested in a desk officer job in the Africa Bureau.

Q: Very nice. Perfectly acceptable second tour.

CEFKIN: Yes. It was actually a great second tour. I figured that desk officer work would be more similar to political cone work. I also figured that once I was in Washington, it would be easier to navigate the personnel system. The job I bid on as my first choice was Desk Officer for Rwanda, Burundi, and the Central African Republic, in the Office of Central African Affairs. I had talked to the incumbent desk officer, and he was very enthusiastic about the experience, so that really sold me on the position.

Q: Okay. So, now that takes us to '85.

CEFKIN: Yes. I left Mexico in February of '85, did my home leave in Colorado, and started the new job in March of '85.

Q: All right. So, you reached Washington in early 1985 -- Africa Bureau, the Office of Central African Affairs. It was well before these countries except maybe the Central African Republic always seemed to be getting into trouble. Rwanda and Burundi were still years away from the really bad things.

CEFKIN: Not really. They'd had violent episodes prior to my time. It's cyclical there.

Q: Okay. But it's your story.

CEFKIN: It was an interesting group of countries. The office was very collegial. I liked being a desk officer for those three smaller countries, because I had a fair bit of autonomy. The Assistant Secretary and Africa Bureau Front Office were naturally more focused on the bigger countries where there was more going on. So, on the negative side I didn't get much higher level attention, but on the positive side I had more leeway to manage my portfolio.

Of course, I was very new to Washington, to the whole State Department/Washington interagency process.

Q: Oh, yes.

CEFKIN: One of the most difficult challenges I faced early in my tour was being tasked with drafting the Employee Evaluation Reports (EERs) for the ambassadors at the three embassies I covered. I'd never written an EER before, other than part of my own in Mexico, and I barely knew the ambassadors I was supposedly evaluating. I literally spent the entire Easter weekend in the office struggling to draft the evaluations. Finally, I thought I had done a respectable job. But Monday when I showed my boss, he said "no, this isn't right at all; they're going to have to be completely rewritten. (Laughs) So that was very discouraging. I don't know why the ambassadors didn't just write their own,

which is what ambassadors did later in my career. Then, of course, the assistant secretaries signed them as the drafters.

What I loved about the job was being responsible for the whole gamut of relations with my countries. I learned so much. I also enjoyed the opportunity to network within State and throughout the interagency. In particular, I dealt a lot with Peace Corps, USAID, Commerce, and the Defense Department. I handled everything from consular issues to political, economic, commercial, defense, and even management issues. I also learned a lot from supporting my three embassies in the field and working with the ambassadors and their teams. I actually worked with six ambassadors in my time on that job because all three of the posts turned over. Working with the nominees – accompanying them on consultations and helping them get briefed up was a very useful experience. Similarly, I worked closely with the Rwanda, Burundi, and Central African Republic embassies in Washington and got to know their Ambassadors and DCMs quite well.

After a few months on the job, I did an orientation visit to my three posts – which was fascinating, and allowed me to get to personally know the Ambassadors, DCMs, and other officers at the Embassies. While in Rwanda, I also had the thrill of visiting the Virunga National Park and seeing the mountain gorillas.

Q: Oh, wow, yeah.

CEFKIN: In terms of big issues, during my time as desk officer the situation was fairly calm in the Central African Republic (CAR), but the country had had a turbulent past. In the mid-1960s, a few years after independence, an army colonel – Jean-Bedel Bokassa – staged a coup and installed himself as president. He later proclaimed himself "president for life" and then "emperor." His excesses and corruption was so bad that France (CAR's former colonial power) had intervened to oust him. He ended up living in exile in France. While I was on the desk he suddenly, unexpectedly returned to the Central African Republic. We started getting reports that he was on a plane that landed in Bangui (the capital). That got our assistant secretary Chet Crocker's attention. He called me to ask what was going on, so I had to scramble to work with the embassy to ferret out more information. There was a concern that he would try to reclaim power and destabilize the country, but that didn't happen.

During my time on the desk, CAR wasn't facing the civil war or terrorism problem it has now. The main issues we dealt with were supporting the country's economic and political development. We had a Peace Corps program there, and we provided security assistance with the aim of professionalizing the armed forces. We also provided support to refugees who had fled instability in neighboring Chad.

As for Rwanda and Burundi, they had both had periods of real turbulence and vicious fighting between the two main tribal groups – the Tutsi and the Hutu. The Tutsi were traditionally herders and the Hutu farmers. In the 18th century, the Tutsi established a kingdom, with themselves as the rulers. During the colonial period, Rwanda and Burundi were originally part of German East Africa, and then in 1916 became Belgium colonies.

The colonial rulers tended to favor the Tutsi, even though they were the minority group (about 14% of the population, with the Hutu comprising 85%). At the time of independence in 1962, the Hutu majority had ascended to power in Rwanda. In Burundi, there was a civil war and genocidal slaughter of the Hutus by the Tutsi in the 1970s, and the Tutsi gained control of the government. (In the 1990s there was further violence, including mass killings of Tutsi in Burundi in 1993 and the horrible genocide of Tutsi in Rwanda instigated by Hutu nationalists in 1994.)

During my time as desk officer, however, Rwanda was fairly stable, with a majority Hutu government. They were viewed as being on the right track in terms of development and governance. The main challenge they faced in their development was being a land-locked country without a lot of natural resources. We did have one American investor in Rwanda. He owned a tea plantation there. So I spent a fair bit of time talking to him and helping him with some of the bureaucratic challenges he faced.

Meanwhile, in Burundi with its Tutsi minority government, there was a lot of tension. The government officials were very suspicious and particularly paranoid about the actions of outsiders. So our relations were strained. They would do things like hold up our diplomatic pouches and try to inspect them, so our Ambassador had a very contentious relationship with his Burundi government counterparts. We had regular mini-crises. One involved an NGO – the humanitarian arm of the Adventist church – which ran a hospital in one part of the country. They were regularly harassed. I think the government was suspicious that they were instigating political opposition. At one point the government rescinded the visas of the Americans involved with the project, so the Embassy and I engaged intensively with the NGO and with the Burundi officials to resolve this issue.

One of the biggest issues I dealt with during my time on the desk was the murder in Rwanda of famed American primatologist Dian Fossey. She was conducting research on the mountain gorillas – work made famous by her book “Gorillas in the Mist” --- and was a leading conservationist, seeking to protect the gorillas from poachers.

Q: Do you recall if there was an understanding as to why she was murdered, or was it just, you know, random?

CEFKIN: Initially the suspicion was that she had been murdered by Rwandan poachers, angry over her work to curtail their livelihoods. But the evidence eventually pointed to the culprit being another American – a young man who was her research assistant. They never came up with conclusive proof. He fled Rwanda and never faced justice. But there was keen interest in the case, so I helped deal with the aftermath, including fielding press inquiries.

Other interesting issues I dealt with included a credible terrorist threat in one of my countries and African relations with Libya. In those days, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was courting African countries and he used to sometimes just show up in one of them with his retinue of Amazonian-style guards and (literally) pitch his tents for a visit.

There was concern about him using these visits as a platform for anti-Western mischief. During my desk tour, Burundi, in particular, seemed receptive to Gaddafi's overtures.

In terms of support to our embassies, one tragic thing I had to deal with was the drowning death of one of our officers in Bangui. His family lived in Maryland, so I went to the funeral and was able to take a letter from the assistant secretary praising the work he'd done. That was well-received by the family, so I was glad to have brought a little solace, but it was still very sad.

I also had to deal with some very awkward problems involving one of our Ambassadors. He was a political appointee. He wasn't a wealthy donor, but he had ingratiated himself with the right people in the Reagan administration and landed an Ambassadorial nomination to one of my countries. It turned out, unbeknownst to us at the time, that he had a drinking problem. He also had some debt issues, so I received letters from creditors about payments he owed. The seriousness of his problems were exposed during a high-level U.S. visit to the country where he was posted. After that the Administration had him removed from his post.

Q: Goodness.

CEFKIN: Towards the end of my tour, the President's daughter, Maureen Reagan, was tapped to head a Presidential Delegation to travel to Rwanda to celebrate their twenty-fifth anniversary of independence. As the Rwanda desk officer, I was assigned to accompany her, along with several other officials from the Africa Bureau. It was quite exciting (including the experience of traveling on a presidential plane). In addition to visiting Rwanda, we visited Gabon and Tanzania. After the official program, we spent the July 4th holiday at a game reserve in Tanzania. That was a lot of fun and brought back memories of my childhood experiences in Africa. On the way back to the U.S. we also stopped off in Bermuda for a day of R&R. It was apparently a customary stop for Maureen Reagan. That was my one time being to Bermuda. (Both laugh) But it was certainly pleasant.

Q: Now, a typical desk job is two years.

CEFKIN: Yes, yes.

Q: So, you would have been there from '85 roughly to '87.

CEFKIN: Correct.

Q: Were you able to stay in contact with your boyfriend in Barcelona?

CEFKIN: Yes; we were in regular touch by phone and letters. (Those were the days before email.) Before I ended my tour in Mexico, I was able to take leave over the Thanksgiving period and visit him in Barcelona. We really missed each other and agreed that we were in love and wanted to be together. I arrived in Washington, D.C. to begin my

assignment in AF/C in March 1985. I was still in temporary housing at Columbia Plaza, and he called me one weekend and proposed to me over the phone. (Both laugh) I immediately said yes. So, the next step was figuring out when we could actually get married and how we could be reunited.

When I went on my orientation trip to the CAR, Burundi, and Rwanda that summer, I stopped in Paris for consultations en route to Africa. I was able to tack on some leave, so Paul met me there. In fact he gave me my engagement ring in the Jardin du Luxembourg. We also went down to the Rivera for a few days. Then on my way back to the U.S. from Africa, I stopped off in Brussels, and Paul met me there. Once we were engaged, Paul contacted his career counselor and said, "I'm engaged. My fiancé's in Washington. I want to curtail my tour in Barcelona, and be reassigned to Washington." The career counselor said, "Call me back when you're married." (Laughs)

Q: Ah-ha.

CEFKIN: So, we decided we'd better get married. Paul came to Washington in August and we went down to the Arlington County Courthouse and got married on August 23, 1985. I was living in Washington, D.C., but we chose Arlington because there was no waiting period, and no blood test or witness required, so it was the quickest, easiest place to get married. (Laughs) Paul only had a week's leave, so we decided not to organize a wedding or have family come out. Some friends did have a party for us that night, and then we went to Chincoteague for a brief honeymoon for a few days. Then Paul returned to Barcelona.

Once he was back in Barcelona, he contacted his Career Development Officer (CDO) again and said, "Well, I'm married." That time the CDO agreed to process his curtailment and reassignment to Washington, D.C.

Q: Because now you were a formal tandem couple.

CEFKIN: We were a formal tandem, exactly.

Q: Yeah, okay. What did your boyfriend, now your husband, do in Barcelona?

CEFKIN: He was *the* vice consul. It was a relatively small consulate. In terms of American staff, there was the Consul General, a USIA officer, his boss - the Consul – and him. They also had a number of local staff, of course. (Laughs)

Q: Wow. All right. So, this is '87.

CEFKIN: He started his Barcelona tour in 1984. We got married in 1985. By the time his curtailment was processed and he was reassigned to D.C. it was March 1986, so he served a total of about 18 months in Barcelona. When he moved back to Washington, we took leave and went to Colorado where my parents had a wedding reception for us. Then we went to the Caribbean for a proper honeymoon.

One observation to add here: you recall the story I told about the friend I had in Houston, who thought I was crazy to join the Foreign Service at age 30, because she thought I would never find and marry a lifetime companion? I had thought about that risk but decided I couldn't base my career on marriage prospects. And here I had fallen in love on my first tour and was married by my second tour. Whereas, my friend (an attorney in Houston) was still single. I later lost track of her, so I don't know whether she eventually married or not. I will admit, though, that in general it is much harder for single women in the Foreign Service than single men to find lifetime partners. To illustrate that point – all the single male Junior Officers I served with in Mexico City ended up getting married or engaged by the end of their tours, while I was the only single female officer who did. In general it's more difficult for female Foreign Service officers to "have it all" – i.e. a fulfilling career and marriage, then it is for male officers. Though I believe that with new generations this is beginning to change. Later in my career, I was gratified to see more women joining the Foreign Service who were married and with supportive husbands who were willing to be flexible in their own careers and accompany their wives to their assignments around the world.

Paul's first assignment back in Washington was in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) on the Watch. It was a little tough because, like the Operation Center, the Watch involved shift work. So at times I'd be getting up to go to work and he'd be coming back to go to bed, and he sometimes had to work weekends, so we didn't have as much free time together as we would've liked. But we were newlyweds and excited and happy.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: I finished up my tour in AF/C and then transferred to a job in the Political-Military Bureau in the Office of Security Assistance and Sales (PM/SAS). I had worked closely with that office coordinating security assistance for my countries, so they recruited me to manage the Africa portfolio.

Q: Yeah, that's a big job.

CEFKIN: Yeah, it was a big job. It was very interesting. It was a lovely office to work in. We had a mixture of Foreign Service, Civil Service, and military officers who came over on detail. It was very collegial. The Deputy Director, my immediate supervisor was a Civil Service officer. She was fantastic and very supportive, as was the Director – a Foreign Service Officer. Of course, I worked closely with Pentagon officials. I even had a Pentagon badge for easy access and learned to navigate the halls of the building quite well. I used to joke that, in the Foreign Service you learn a lot of foreign languages and in PM I learned a new one, "militarese." As part of the training for the job, I spent a week at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio at the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management learning the ins & outs of the U.S. Government security assistance programs we were charged with helping to manage. These included grants to

other countries for military training in the U.S. and for the purchase of U.S. military equipment.

Q: Now, you reached this office in PM, in the political-military bureau in '87?

CEFKIN: Eighty-seven, yeah.

For the first year in PM/SAS, I was responsible for the Africa portfolio, which involved coordinating closely with my colleagues in the Africa Bureau, as well as those responsible for Africa at the Defense Department to decide how to allocate security assistance funding and what programs to approve for various countries. One interesting element of my portfolio was that it included North Africa, as well as sub-Saharan Africa, so I also worked with the Near East Asia (NEA) Bureau. At the time, we had a robust security assistance relationship with Tunisia, so at one point I went to Tunis for annual security assistance talks with the Tunisian Government. That was very interesting, and I also had a free day at the end of the talks for some tourism.

After my first year in PM/SAS, my bosses shifted me from handling Africa to handling the Europe portfolio. For that portfolio, my biggest focus was Spain and Portugal, particularly the latter. Both countries had emerged from years of dictatorship and were in the process of becoming fully integrated into the Western community of nations. Portugal was a founding member and Spain had joined in 1982. And both countries had just become members of the European Union. Economically, they were less developed than the other countries of Western Europe. Given this and the presence of U.S. bases in both countries, we had large security assistance programs.

Q: Sure.

CEFKIN: The relationship with Portugal was especially central to my work. In exchange for U.S. access to Lajes – a base on the Azores – we had committed a robust amount of security assistance and transfer of Excess Defense Articles (military equipment that U.S. forces were no longer using, but that could be transferred to other countries to be rehabbed and used). But the Government of Portugal wasn't satisfied that we were fully living up to our commitments. So I went to Lisbon to participate in security assistance talks with the Portuguese twice during my tour, which was a great experience. We had a fairly large interagency team. I enjoyed getting to know the Pentagon, Embassy and Portuguese officials who participated. And Lisbon was a delightful place to visit.

Another aspect of my work in PM involved commercial military sales. We worked closely with the State Department's Office of Munitions Control to review requests from foreign governments to purchase U.S. military systems. We had to balance the economic benefits of these sales to the U.S. economy and the defense contractors who produced the equipment with national security and regional security interests. Sophisticated technologies couldn't be sold without special permissions, and only with our closest allies. Also, when we did transfer military equipment to other countries – either through commercial sales or security assistance grants, the foreign governments had to promise

not to transfer or dispose of any part of the equipment without our permission – even down to nuts and bolts.

Q: Wow. So, you spent two years there, '87 to '89?

CEFKIN: Correct. While I was working in PM, Paul had finished his tour on the INR Watch and had transferred to INR's Office of Strategic Forces Analysis (SFA). It was an exciting time to be working there, because his office provided support to the U.S. team negotiating the Intermediate Nuclear Forces reduction agreement with the Soviet Union. And once the agreement was finalized, he was able to participate in a couple of missions to the USSR to help oversee the dismantling of their intermediate nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, now the treaty is defunct, since the Trump Administration decided to withdraw the U.S. from the treaty.

In any case, we were able to get on summer cycle and sync up our assignment timing, so in 1989 we were bidding for the first time as a tandem couple.

Q: Now, that experience, bidding as a tandem, was the personnel office, the human resources office friendly to your efforts?

CEFKIN: Not terribly.

Q: Yeah, it was still a time in the Foreign Service when they were not particularly friendly to anything out of the ordinary.

CEFKIN: Very true. At that point, tandem couples still weren't that common at State, though the rate was growing. There was a tandem officer network that tried to encourage the Department to do more to accommodate tandems in the assignments process. We noted that in addition to the morale factor, the Department saved a significant amount of money on tandems, since they were moving one (vs. two families) for two positions, assigned one, vs. two houses, etc. But, at best, I would say that Human Resources (HR) was ambivalent, and at times even hostile. There was also some resentment among officers who weren't tandems who felt that tandems received preferential treatment. But that wasn't our experience. Essentially, tandems had to lobby with bureaus and embassies to identify jobs that would accommodate both members of the tandem and hope that HR would support those assignments.

Q: So, to go back to the moment, how did you and your husband approach it, what was going through your minds about what you could find?

CEFKIN: Well, I was pretty open to a large variety of experiences. I wouldn't have minded serving in Africa, but Paul was less interested in Africa. Also, most of our Africa Posts are smaller so, except for places like Lagos and Monrovia, it was harder to find tandem postings there. Therefore, we focused more on other bureaus. Prior to State, Paul had been in the military and worked in law enforcement. One opportunity that caught

Paul's eye were the jobs with the Multinational Forces of Observers (MFO) in the Sinai. Having served in the military, those jobs had a big appeal for him.

Q: Which branch?

CEFKIN: He had been a Green Beret – Army Special Forces -- and was a Vietnam War veteran. After his military service, he was a policeman in Albuquerque, New Mexico (his home town) for nine years. He earned his college degree (majoring in political science) while he was serving on the police force. Then he took the Foreign Service exam and ended up at State.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: Yeah. So, while I wouldn't have necessarily gravitated to the Sinai jobs on my own, I saw it as an adventure, and agreed to pursue those bids as our top choice. But when we went to talk to the folks in the office that handled the Sinai, we were discouraged. We were told that there had never been a tandem couple assigned to the U.S. contingent there. The assignment was "unaccompanied," so other married officers had to leave their families behind. We were told that assigning us together risked sparking jealousy. Colleagues who had served with the MFO, downplayed this risk. They said that many of the married officers deployed in the Sinai were "having a good time" without their spouses. They thought the claim that we would spark jealousy among the other officers was more of an excuse, than a legitimate reason not to assign a tandem couple. Nonetheless, we concluded that we'd better focus on other options. (It later turned out that we were just a little ahead of our time, since State eventually did start assigning tandems to the Sinai MFO.)

Interestingly, our bid list didn't offer any appropriate tandem opportunities at the large embassies in Europe. So we turned our focus to Asia. There were quite a few jobs in China, but we decided that it didn't make a lot of sense for us to spend two years learning Chinese unless we were interested in doing multiple tours in China, which we weren't. Eventually we found two jobs in Bangkok, Thailand at the right level. We were both midlevel (FS-03) at that time. For Paul there was a position with the Orderly Departure Program. It was a program set-up to process the resettlement of Vietnamese in three categories – former U.S. Government employees, former political prisoners, and Amer-Asian – in the U.S. It was before we normalized relations with Vietnam, so the program was based at the Embassy in Bangkok. Then the ODP officers would go to Vietnam every 6-weeks or so to interview the resettlement candidates. It was a good option for Paul since it would allow him to burnish his consular credentials and having fought in Vietnam he was keen to observe the changes in the country. For me there was a mid-level Ambassador's staff aide position. I would have preferred a political officer position, but I knew the staff aide job was a good opportunity and Thailand held a real allure for both of us. The East Asia Pacific Bureau (EAP) and Embassy Bangkok supported us for those positions, so we bid and were assigned to those jobs.

Q: Did they come with language training?

CEFKIN: Yes, they came with ten months of language – Thai for me and Vietnamese for Paul.

Q: What was that experience like? Did you feel at the end that you were more or less competent? Okay.

CEFKIN: I did. First of all, I love learning languages. The Thai language teachers were excellent. Also Thais love to make things fun, so even though it was hard work, we had a good time in class. At times we would be in a classroom next to Chinese or Japanese language students, and our class laughing and then we'd hear a knock on the wall telling us to be quiet. The Chinese and Japanese sections were very serious, and the students of those languages would frantically study their flashcards even during breaks, whereas we were more relaxed. It's true though that Chinese and Japanese are exceptionally hard languages.

The group of Thai language students I was in training with was a nice group. There weren't too many of us, so we really got to know each other; it was a good bonding experience. Also the ratio of teachers to students was good.

The two things that are most difficult about the Thai language are: 1) it's tonal, so if you have trouble distinguishing the tones it's difficult to understand and you can completely change the meanings of words through the wrong inflection, and 2) written Thai is a Sanskrit-based language so the reading is tricky. Also there really aren't cognates from English.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: The saving grace is that there's absolutely no grammar.

Q: Ahh. Interesting.

CEFKIN: Yeah. One of my teachers used to always refer to it as the Tarzan language – "me go, you come," etc. There are no verb conjugations, no gender distinctions for nouns, or other complicated distinctions that most other languages have. That said, learning to speak Thai at a sophisticated level is naturally more challenging and there's a whole other level of language for speaking to or about members of the Thai royal family.

Q: That's good.

CEFKIN: So, yeah, I found Thai training to be a really enjoyable experience, and I did well. Paul, on the other hand, had a much less pleasant experience studying Vietnamese. That year, he was the only Vietnamese language student. It's a harder language than Thai. Also, he had two teachers who didn't get along very well. One was from the North and one was from the South, and didn't always agree on aspects of the language, so he was torn between the two.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: Still, even though we weren't studying the same language, having the common experience of the language training was satisfying. Of course, Paul got to know the other Thai language students. Sometimes we went to lunch together or saw each other socially outside of training. I really enjoyed the flexibility of the language-training schedule. We were in class five hours a day. To do well, we had to spend a lot of time outside of class studying, but we could structure our study time as it best suited us. It's nice to be able to wear casual clothes every day, and during training you're essentially responsible to yourself, as opposed to many others who depend on you in other State Department assignments. So it was a good change of pace.

Q:Why don't we stop here and pick-up with your arrival in Thailand in the next session?

CEFKIN: Great idea, okay.

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Q: Today is February 27. We're resuming our interview with Judith Cefkin., Now, let's go ahead then and follow you to Thailand. You now have the language.

CEFKIN: Yes. So, we arrived in Bangkok in August of 1990. We had a very comfortable apartment right behind the Embassy, and I began my assignment as the Ambassador's staff assistant. As you know, generally staff aide positions are entry level positions, but because our Bangkok mission is so large, this position was an FS-3 mid-level position. I don't remember what the total number of staff was at that time, but to give you some idea we had thirty-five plus members of the country teams – representing all the offices and agencies working at the Mission. At that time, in addition to the Embassy in Bangkok we had three consulates: one in the north in the city of Chiang Mai, one in the northeast in the city of Udorn, and one in the south in the city of Songkhla.

There were a lot of Embassy offices that were unique to Bangkok, including the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), where Paul worked. There was also an office that dealt with refugees in Thailand from neighboring Indochinese countries. There were a lot of refugees at the time from Cambodia and Laos, in particular, who were in camps in Thailand. In addition to a large military cooperation office (Joint U.S.-Thai military Assistance Group) and the Defense Attaché Office, which is standard at almost all embassies, we had two DOD offices related to U.S. soldiers missing from the Vietnam War -- Prisoners of War-Missing in Action (POW-MIA). One office was focused on finding the remains of those who had died there, whose bodies hadn't been recovered. The other office worked to track down reports of live sightings, on the theory that there were some soldiers who were being held in remote parts of the country. (There were never any found, however.) We had a large Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) presence, and we also had a sizable Centers for Disease Control (CDC) office. These offices were in addition to those of agencies common at our Embassies – Commerce, Agriculture,

CIA, USAID, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) – which was still a separate agency from State at that time, and we had Peace Corps.

As the staff assistant I was responsible for overall coordination, making sure that the ambassador's instructions were conveyed and executed. I was given responsibility for a number of overall embassy plans including coordinating the drafting of the Mission Program Plan that outlined our goals and plans for achieving those goals. I was also put in charge of what's called the NSDD-38 program. NSDD stands for National Security Decision Directive. It's the authority by which Embassy staffing levels are approved. Any time an agency wants to increase or decrease staffing they need to obtain the ambassador's approval. So I helped coordinate those requests, in cooperation with the Management Office. Of course, I also handled general correspondence, helped write speeches, and helped coordinate the ambassador's in-country travel.

Q: Did you accompany the ambassador?

CEFKIN: I did a couple of times. I worked with two ambassadors during my time as staff aide. I don't recall traveling with the first ambassador. I think he generally traveled with "control officers" from other sections. But I did travel once or twice with the second ambassador. We also had a lot of high-level U.S Government visitors who came to Thailand from the executive branch and congressional delegations. I coordinated the ambassador's engagement with those visitors. And, I was the overall coordinator for our annual July Fourth reception, which was a big production. I also supervised the Ambassador's protocol assistant. She and I became good friends and are still in touch.

The two ambassadors I served during my two years as staff assistant had very different styles. Both were very capable, smart, and strategic. One had a bit of a sharper edge; he wasn't shy about letting people know if they weren't meeting his expectations. But I had a very good relationship with him, and he was very supportive of me. The ambassador who arrived my second year had a mellower style and was very easy to work with. Both Ambassadors were very solid professionally and had a depth of expertise in the Asia-Pacific region. So, it was useful to observe their leadership styles and learn from them. I also worked with two DCMs during my time in Bangkok, although the first one was there for most of my stint in the Ambassador's office. He was a wonderful person and a great Foreign Service professional. Interestingly, he had been one of the U.S. hostages in Iran, but despite that experience he always seemed very calm and upbeat.

Q: Oh, wow.

CEFKIN: The great thing about being a staff aide is that you get a bird's eye view of the whole embassy and what different parts of the embassy do and how they come together.

Q: Did you accompany the ambassador on meetings with high-level Thai officials?

CEFKIN: I did with the second ambassador, and I'll get to that.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: And I should just say that overall the tour was really very exciting. It was professionally and personally rewarding. There was a lot happening, as there often is Thailand.

Q: Sure.

CEFKIN: The first big development was a military coup in February of 1991. I was in the staff aide position with the first ambassador at the time. I remember clearly it was over a weekend, so I wasn't at work. In those days, we didn't all have computers, email, or cell phones that kept us in constant communication. Our communications with Washington were primarily by cable. I generally went into the Embassy on Saturday mornings for a couple of hours to check cable traffic and bring key messages to the Ambassador's attention, but other than that I didn't work weekends. Anyway, the day in question, I was at a beauty salon just down the street from where we lived for a manicure. The place was very popular with Embassy staff, and I was sitting there enjoying my manicure when one of my embassy friends came in and said, "Oh, there you are. The ambassador's been looking all over for you. Haven't you heard? There's been a military coup."

Of course, I hadn't heard. So I hustled home and turned on the TV. It had gone to black and was playing martial music, so I knew right away that there had been a coup. I rushed into the embassy where the Ambassador and members of the emergency action committee were working to get information about what exactly had happened, recommending responses and reporting to Washington. So it was an interesting experience.

Q: Now, from your recollection, this was one of the more bloodless coups—

CEFKIN: Yes. It was a bloodless coup. Most of the coups in Thailand have been bloodless, though sometimes in the aftermath the situation turns violent, which is what happened in this case. I remember they had a curfew for a few nights, and we all remarked that it was the quietest we'd ever heard it in Bangkok. Generally there was noisy traffic on the streets all hours of day and night. The prime minister who was deposed by the coup was a gentleman by the name of Chatichai Choonhavan. The justification stated for the coup was that he was too corrupt, but I think there were underlying factors that provoked the military. Of course we, and Western partners, urged the military leaders to hold new elections and restore civilian government. They did have elections, but they were sham elections and the coup leader installed himself as prime minister.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: Over time pro-democracy protests developed and gained steam. In May of '92, the reaction to the protests turned violent, somewhat similar to China's Tiananmen Square crack-down, though on a smaller scale. By then, I was working for the second

Ambassador. I had had the good fortune of being promoted to FS-2 in the fall of ’91, and the embassy and State Department had agreed to reassign me to the Political Section in the summer of ’92 for the third year of my tour.

Since I was on my fourth tour and had been at State for nine years by then, I was very eager to get experience in my cone. While I was still serving as staff aide, I was keenly following the unfolding political drama. The political officers were monitoring the protests, taking turns going down to the site where they were happening, and reporting on what was taking place. My husband and I were also friendly with several international journalists in Thailand, and heard their stories of covering the protests. I really wanted to see the action myself and persuaded one of my friends in the Political Section to let me accompany him to the site of the protests one night.

An Embassy driver took us downtown where the protestors and soldiers were facing off across a barricade. The protestors were chanting, getting more and more animated, and the soldiers were looking more and more nervous. Then something spooked the soldiers and they started firing at the protestors and moving in to clear them from the area. (That had been the pattern of events for several days.) One of the problems is that the soldiers weren’t really trained in crowd control and didn’t have non-lethal crowd control resources (tear gas, rubber bullets, etc.) so they were firing live rounds. So all hell broke loose. The protests were near a hotel – the Royal Hotel - so my colleague and I retreated into the hotel. Medical personnel were bringing wounded protestors into the hotel to attempt to treat their wounds, and journalists were running around to cover the story. I remember thinking “well, we’ll be safe here.” Nonetheless, we decided we should leave the area. We met the driver a few blocks away and went home. Later that night the military swept the hotel and detained the journalists who were there, so we were glad not to be caught up in that.

The turmoil lasted about two weeks, and in total around 50 people were killed. There were also some protestors who went missing and weren’t found. What eventually stopped the violence was that the king, King Bhumibol, who was highly revered, intervened. Actually, one of his daughters, Princess Sirindhorn was overseas and was horrified by the pictures she was seeing of the clashes in the foreign media. (The Thai press coverage was more muted.) She called for an end to the violence and implored her father to take action. So he summoned the military PM/coup leader, and the politician who emerged as the leader of the pro-democracy protestors to the Palace and ordered them to find a resolution to stop the violence and move forward. The pictures of that meeting, which dominated the local press, were quite iconic. They showed the two leaders supine on the floor in front of the King asking for forgiveness and agreeing to heed the King's orders. The military PM stepped down, and both sides agreed to new elections. A respected Thai diplomat, Anan Panyarachun, was appointed interim PM. (He had also served as interim PM in the period after the coup. But he was viewed as an honest broker, and sufficiently independent.) You had asked whether I ever accompanied the Ambassador to meetings, and the one time I remember was going with him to call on the interim PM to urge that the government prepare for free and fair elections. That was fascinating for me. That was about the time I was due to rotate into the political section.

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: So, it was the summer of 1992 when I moved over to the Political Section. I was supposed to be going into a position that was called the Cambodia Watch position. We were in the process of re-establishing the U.S. presence in Cambodia, but we didn't yet have an embassy there. There was a small team in Phnom Penh who formed the vanguard for the establishment of our embassy, but a lot of the work of covering what was happening in Cambodia was done out of Bangkok. Even though that was certainly an interesting topic, over the experience of the coup and post-coup drama, I had become very intrigued by Thai domestic politics. So I made a pitch to be allowed to work on political internal affairs instead, and they agreed to let me do that.

It was quite exciting. I started the job just as the campaign for the new elections was happening. We were in the midst of the summer transfer season so for some time there were essentially two of us, as opposed to the usual six FSOs, staffing the section. So my colleague covered the external portfolio, and I covered internal. That gave me a fairly free rein to cover the election campaign as I saw fit. I traveled around the country with one of the local Foreign Service National assistants to meet candidates and political party representatives in different regions of Thailand, and observe rallies, and other campaign activities. It was really a lot of fun.

Q: When you were doing this, did you find that your Thai language training was adequate?

CEFKIN: It was. That was another reason that I was really keen to do the internal political portfolio; I knew it would force me to use my Thai language skills much more. At that time, most Thai politicians, especially from outside Bangkok, didn't speak much English. When I traveled or had meetings with local officials, one of our Thai political assistants would come with me to help translate, but I found that my Thai language skills were sufficient for conducting most of the conversations. I would then double-check my understanding with my Thai colleague. So that was really great for developing my Thai language skills. Reading Thai is more difficult. I was able to read Thai, but it was slow going. We had a couple of Thai political assistants whose job it was to produce daily summaries of the Thai language press, which was very helpful.

So, the elections that took place in the fall of 1992 were much more transparent and ushered in a government headed by a long-established, credible party -- the Democratic Party. The Prime Minister, Chuan Leekpai, was very highly respected. So, it was an optimistic time for Thai politics. People thought perhaps the country had finally turned the corner on military coups, and there was keen interest in building and strengthening democratic institutions. I really enjoyed reporting on those issues and sharing information with my Thai interlocutors on the U.S. experience.

One of the issues that I covered very closely was discussion of decentralization. Thailand has a very centralized system of local government, similar to France.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: Thailand is divided into provinces, and the province heads – the governors – are appointed by the central government. They are professional Interior Department bureaucrats, similar to the "prefects" in France. The Thai government was considering decentralizing, to give people more local control over their provincial government. I developed a close rapport with the Interior Department official who was heading this effort and provided him a lot of information about state and local government in the U.S. I also traveled to different provinces to meet with governors and get local viewpoints. In general, covering political internal affairs, I met regularly with members of parliament, political party officials, academics, and journalists, so it was a lot of fun.

On a personal basis, the tour was also a lot of fun. I developed a real affinity for the Thai people. The Thai are really very nice. They are generally very gracious and quite gentle. They refrain from showing anger (culturally it's considered very rude), though when they reach a snapping point, the anger explodes. To the western eye, the country is very exotic – with its beautiful Buddhist temples and shrines, the vibrant street life, the delicious spicy food, and Thai aesthetics. Bangkok is very civilized and quite cosmopolitan. Our housing was comfortable, entertainment was plentiful, and the food was amazing – in addition to wonderful Thai food, there were restaurants catering to just about every taste. The main drawbacks of life in Bangkok were the pollution and traffic. Since we lived right by the Embassy the traffic was less of an issue for us (although Paul's office was in another location). But some Embassy staff had to contend with hours of traffic gridlock to get to/from work.

Travel around the country was quite affordable. So Paul and I had a number of wonderful trips. We particularly enjoyed the beautiful beaches in Southern Thailand. For occasional breaks from Thailand, we went to Singapore, Hong Kong, and Australia (for one of our "rest and recreation" trips), and we visited a friend in Laos. We had an interesting group of friends. In addition to a number of people from the embassy who we socialized with, we also became friends with a number of American expats, including several journalists, and with other third country nationals we met through our gym or diplomatic circles.

And a particularly special and unique feature of that tour was that for two of the three years we were in Thailand, my younger brother and his family were also in Thailand.

Q: But not with you?

CEFKIN: No. I think maybe I'd mentioned that before I started working at the State Department my brother had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa. So like me he was interested in international work. After he finished his Peace Corps assignment he was hired by a consortium, headed by "Save the Children" that was working in the refugee camps in Thailand, helping to prepare refugees selected for resettlement in the United States for life in the U.S. My brother was a trainer, training Thai staff who were teaching the refugees. (The refugees were primarily from Cambodia and Laos.) He had fallen in

love and married one of the Thai teachers he worked with. By the time we arrived, they had two children – a three year-old daughter and year-old son. They were working at a camp that was about an hour south of Bangkok, near a town called Phanat Nikhom. So it was wonderful spending time with them. They would sometimes come spend weekends with us in Bangkok. And I would sometimes drive down to Phanat Nikhom to spend weekends with them. It was a nice escape from the diplomatic bubble in Bangkok, a chance to experience authentic Thai life, as well as to get to know my niece and nephew. I also was able to visit my sister-in-law's family a couple of times. They lived near the Cambodian border in a town called Prachinburi. And when family visited us from the U.S., we all got together and took some local trips together. So it was really a very special experience.

By my third year, my brother and sister-in-law had decided to move to the U.S. The kids were getting to school age, and they wanted them to have a U.S. education. So, they moved to Colorado – first to our home town Ft. Collins, and then to Denver, where they still live today.

I could probably talk endlessly about different experiences I had during that tour, but those are my major reflections about work and life in Thailand 1990-1993.

Q: Now, as you're approaching the end of your tour, because this is the third year, you're also looking at where you're going to be going next.

CEFKIN: Yes, exactly.

Q: So, what are you and your husband thinking about?

CEFKIN: Well, I was desperate to have another solid political tour. I mean, here I'd been a political officer for ten years and I'd only really had one year in a political assignment. That meant that I wanted to stay overseas. I decided it was a good time to look into positions in EUR (Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs), given my pre-Foreign Service academic and work experience in Europe. I also looked at some jobs in the Asia-Pacific region. In fact, the ambassador encouraged me to consider Tokyo because he had served in Japan. There was one job in the Political Section there that didn't require Japanese language. So on my way back to Thailand from a visit to the U.S., I stopped off in Tokyo. I was still in touch with Mr. Doi, the Japanese journalist that I'd worked for in London.

They invited me to stay with them and were amazing gracious, generous hosts. They took me sight-seeing and to some lovely restaurants and refused to let me pay for anything. I took one afternoon to go into the embassy to talk to people in the section and interview for the job that was opening. I came away turned off by that experience. The political officers I met made it sound like the work there was a real grind. And even though I had a lovely visit to Tokyo, after the warmth and vibrancy of Thailand, Tokyo felt cold. Furthermore, the man who interviewed me, I think he was the deputy section head, said "I guess a woman can do this job, but it's really tough," and proceeded to make it clear he

preferred a man in the position. (Even though the incumbent in the job was a woman.) So, I left thinking 'why would I want this position," and decided not to actively pursue it.

Fortunately, I got a better reception from the folks I talked to about jobs in Europe. I had interviewed for several jobs there when I was back in the U.S. One job that looked particularly promising was a position in Cyprus. I also bid on a job to head the Political Internal Unit at Embassy Paris and talked to the head of the French Desk about that. My Ambassador and DCM sent strong letters of recommendation for me, but I didn't expect to be chosen for that position. I was set to accept a handshake for the Cyprus job, when the folks on the Cyprus Desk contacted me to say "Paris wants you. Which job is your top choice?

Q: Wow. Holy cow.

CEFKIN: It was actually a tough decision. I had been excited about the Cyprus job, which would have included a year of Greek language training. But the opportunity to go back to Paris and to head a unit covering French domestic politics, was too good to pass up. Also, since it was a much larger Embassy, I figured there would be more opportunities for a tandem assignment for Paul. So I said "yes" to that position.

Unfortunately, though, there was nothing in Paris for Paul. We had gotten kind of out-of-sync in our bidding strategy. He was focused on Washington assignments, and the opportunity to branch out from consular-type work. He was offered the opportunity to go to the Inter-American Defense College at Ft. McNair. With his tours in Mexico and Spain, he had fluent Spanish, and given his military background, the Defense College was interesting to him. It was a one-year gig, so we figured that maybe something would open up in Paris, when it came time for him to bid again.

So we decided to bite the bullet and take the separate assignments. We had some time together in the U.S. during home leave, and some training for me. I already had the French language skills needed, but they put me in a class called "Economics for Non-ECON Cone officers." After that, I went off to Paris and Paul moved back into our condo in SW DC to begin at the Inter-American Defense College.

Paris was a very interesting assignment.

Q: And it did end up being what was advertised? They didn't change you into a different position?

CEFKIN: They did not.

Overall, I had a very good experience, but the tour definitely had its challenges. On the positive side - Paris is a magical city. I always will absolutely adore Paris, and I think the country of France is wonderful. On the less positive side, the embassy wasn't a particularly friendly place. The atmosphere there was very formal. There wasn't a lot of socializing. When I first arrived, the only colleagues who invited me over or to go out

and do things were other newcomers. That said, I developed a group of close friends who I socialized with on weekends. The Embassy was also a very busy place. There was always a lot going on – a lot of issues to follow and report on, and of course we had regular high-level visits, including three Presidential visits while I was there, which generated a big workload. So I tended to regularly work long hours. I'll talk more about the work challenges as we continue. But the issues were fascinating, so I found the intellectual component of the work very satisfying.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry. And you arrived there in fall of '93?

CEFKIN: Yes, exactly. I had a wonderful apartment. It was in the seventh arrondissement, close to the Eiffel Tower and the Champ de Mars. In fact I could see the Eiffel tower from my living room window. The apartment had a lot of charm, and I absolutely loved the neighborhood. It was an easy Metro trip to the Embassy, and, in nice weather, or if there were transit problems, I could walk.

In the Political Internal unit I headed, in addition to me, there were two other FSOs. One covered the Socialist Party; the other covered the Gaullist Party, which at the time was called the Rally for the Republic (RPR). We also had a Foreign Service secretary (Office Management Specialist), and a Foreign Service National assistant. We had a part-time Eligible Family Member (EFM) secretary and a part-time EFM who drafted bios and helped compile guest lists for the Ambassador's functions.

Q: And you're an FS-2?

CEFKIN: Correct, I was an FS-2.

Q: Okay. All right.

CEFKIN: The full Political Section was quite large. We had a political counselor and deputy counselor, and there was a large Political External Affairs unit that dealt with foreign policy issues. Paris was a hub for coordination on a lot of issues, so we had one officer dedicated to coordinating with French officials on Africa. Other officers focused on covering Mideast Affairs, Asia, and Latin America. My time in France coincided with the war in Bosnia. The French had peacekeepers there (before the U.S. became more directly involved) so we had one officer assigned to coordination with the French Foreign Ministry "the Quai d'Orsay," on that conflict, which, of course continued and intensified as the U.S. took the lead on negotiations to end the war, which culminated in the Dayton Peace Accords. (I'll come back to that subject later in our conversation.)

There were a couple of real challenges with the job. It was my first real managerial position at the State Department. That was before State had instituted leadership and management training, so I had to figure out how to manage down as well as up. Another challenge was that one of the two FSOs I supervised was an A-100 classmate and good friend. He hadn't yet been promoted, so he was an FS-3. A third challenge was that my secretary was legally blind.

Q: Oh.

CEFKIN: It was a very sad story. She had been a Foreign Service secretary for a number of years but aspired to become a Diplomatic Security (DS) special agent. She had passed the tests and was set to make the switch when she had a horse riding accident that resulted in loss of most of her eyesight. So, obviously she wasn't able to make the switch to DS. She had some real skills. She spoke near native French which meant that she could back up our French assistant with making appointments and getting information. What she struggled with was typing and correspondence, so our EFM assistant helped out with those kinds of duties. I tried to play to her strengths.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Our unit faced a lot of pressure coming from the political counselor and deputy counselor to do more reporting. But, at the same time, often when we wrote cables and sent them up for clearance, we were told that they weren't consequential enough to send out. So that was frustrating. The friend who worked under me particularly got caught up in that buzz saw, and ended up having to do several re-writes before we could get his cables cleared, if at all. I was caught in the middle of that - helping him adjust his writing style, while also trying to help him avoid getting too discouraged. He was brilliant at contact work, but getting his thoughts down on paper was less of a forte for him. Still he wasn't the only one who faced the challenge. We ended up drafting a lot of "Memcons" (Memoranda of Conversation) documenting conversations with contacts so that we would at least have a repository of the information in our files. But of course, those didn't get the readership that cables did.

Q: Did you get a sense for what—obviously what they wanted, but more importantly why they wanted it?

CEFKIN: I guess amidst the never-ending effort to downsize embassies, embassy leaders were keen to justify to Washington the need for all our positions. They wanted to make the case that these jobs really were important, by pointing to a prolific out-put of reports, but the reports had to clearly explain why the U.S. Government "should care" about the issue we were reporting on. That can be harder to do with internal political reporting than with external political reports. Often external political cables are simply reporting on the delivery of a demarche, so they are short and fairly cut and dry. We, of course, did "spot reporting" – short cables reporting of developments in the French government. But more of our cables tended to be analytical reports than is the case with what our external political colleagues did.

One issue that grabbed me early in my tour was the debate in France over "the Uruguay Round" of trade negotiations under the auspices of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) – the predecessor to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The negotiations were in their endgame. They included liberalization of agricultural trade, which was politically sensitive in France; the agricultural constituency was so important

there, and the farmers were very suspect of some of the terms of the agreement. I decided to explain why signing up to the agreement was challenging for France. I did an initial draft drawing from reading I'd done on French history and leadership and the economics training I'd done just before arriving. I also drew from personal observations from my junior abroad in France and Geneva, including a project I worked on in an anthropology class at the University of Geneva. The professor wanted us to experience anthropology fieldwork. So, we made several trips to a market in the French town of Bourg-en-Bresse just across the border from Switzerland. Our assignment was to talk to the merchants selling their products in the market to understand their culture. It was a lot of fun. We even published a book based on our research.

What I had concluded from my experience with French markets, was that the theory that people always buy what is most advantageous to them in terms of price, wasn't necessarily true in France. Quality is really important there. Consumers would spend more to buy the best tomatoes or strawberries or other produce from the region known to have the best quality. The same was true for other products like French bread – the baguette. You could get cheaper baguettes from large stores (similar to a Walmart in the U.S.), but most French consumers would prefer to spend more to get good quality bread from their neighborhood boulangerie. Another important factor is that the French, including the urbanites, have a deep attachment to the countryside – *"la France profonde."* City dwellers who can afford it have country homes, and they talk frequently of their country roots. The countryside (agricultural France) was really romanticized. With urbanization and globalization, farms were no longer viable leading to what they called "desertification." That sparked fear among the French that they were losing their heritage (and the livelihood of farmers).

Anyway, I worked to explain all of this in my report. But when I circulated it for clearance, I ran into a buzz saw with my colleagues in the Economic section. One of the officers read it and said, "Oh, no, no, no. I don't think this is good at all." I later learned that his reaction was more one of jealousy.

Q: Of course.

CEFKIN: Some of his bosses came to me and said, we thought it was actually really good. At that point, the DCM stepped in and said, "this has real potential." She encouraged me to keep working on it, and polish it a little more. It eventually was sent out and was well-received in Washington. So that was an example of one of the issues where I felt like we had value-added.

Q: But what's interesting is you were following domestic politics, your unit, but this is actually an economic topic.

CEFKIN: Yes, but it was also a political topic. To sign onto the agreement the French Government needed Parliamentary ratification. So I was trying to explain the sociology of the issue and how that shaped the potential political opposition. Ultimately, the French did sign the agreement and get Parliamentary approval, but it could have gone either way.

Q: I see.

CEFKIN: The political internal work I did was wonderful in terms of the contacts I was able to develop. I got to know many members of parliament and their staffs, staff at various ministries (including the prime minister's chief of staff), political party officials, a lot of academics, and a number of journalists who covered French politics.

There's one humorous observation I can share. The French parliament is a bicameral institution consisting of the Senate and the National Assembly. Each body has a president and several vice presidents. Both bodies also have parliamentary groups for the different political parties represented, and the heads of those groupings have the title of "president." France's head of state has the title "president." The bottom line is that there are a lot of French political figures with the title "president." In my first meeting with one of the vice presidents of the National Assembly (a gentleman by the name Giles de Robien) he greeted me and said, "I understand you've met our President." I had recently accompanied the Ambassador to a meeting with Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, a former French president. M. de Robien was from Giscard-d'Estaing's party (The Union for French Democracy), so I assumed that was who he was referring to and answered "yes." Then I stopped for a minute and thought to myself "is that who he meant, or did he mean the president of the National Assembly or the UDF parliamentary group? I realized there were about four different people he could have been referring to. (Laughs)

Of course we covered the various political machinations of the different parties and institutions of government. We covered elections – there were a number while I was there. And we covered key policy issues. European Union developments were of keen interest to Washington. For example, I was in France during the period when the EU was working toward adopting the single currency -- the Euro. There was real skepticism from Washington that the EU would succeed in going forward with the Euro. We kept a close eye on the discussion of that issue among French politicians who kept telling Washington that the French were really determined, and that the Euro would happen, which it did. For a political junkie like myself it was a fascinating job.

Our ambassador at that time was Pamela Harriman. I had the opportunity to work with her quite closely because of my political contacts. I traveled with her to other cities in France a couple of times. For the dinners and luncheons she hosted often our unit was tasked with putting together the guest lists, and I was asked to attend. I suppose that was because I knew many of the invitees and my conversational French was good.

Q: Did she speak French?

CEFKIN: She did. I liked and respected her a lot. She worked hard and had a genuine concern for her Embassy staff. She did some very nice things. For example, a Hollywood producer, who was grateful for assistance the Embassy had rendered to his family in a consular case, told her he would give her any first-run movie she wanted to screen. So she would get movies and invite staff from the Embassy to view it at her residence on

Sunday afternoons. She had a small auditorium at the residence, and the shows were open to all American and French employees and their families (on a first-come, first-serve sign-up basis up to the auditorium capacity). The staff laid out popcorn and soda to enjoy during the show. She was quite generous in that way.

She was also very, very savvy. During the first two years of my assignment, the French government was in a period of what they called "cohabitation." The President (who is directly elected) was a Socialist and the Prime Minister (who is chosen by the parliamentary majority and who heads the government) was a Gaullist. The head of the Gaullist party (the RPR) was Jacques Chirac. But rather than become Prime Minister when the RPR gained the majority in the 1993 legislative elections, he decided to step back and focus on his job as Mayor of Paris, so he would have a free hand to build his campaign for the 1995 presidential elections without being saddled with the weight of running the government. Instead he promoted an RPR loyalist, a gentleman by the name of Édouard Balladur, to serve as the prime minister. Balladur ended up being quite successful as prime minister. He ran a very good government. After a while, people suggested to him that maybe he should vie for the presidency himself. So there was a split within the RPR between Chirac and Balladur in the 1995 presidential campaign.

My Political Section colleagues and I thought that the momentum was with Balladur. He certainly was leading in the polls for quite a while. But the Ambassador sort cautioned that we shouldn't count Jacques Chirac out. She could sense that he had the necessary political qualities to prevail. Sure enough, at a certain point there was a shift in momentum. In fact, I attended several political campaign rallies, and there was one I attended for Chirac, where I could sense the electricity. I remember calling the Political Counselor after the rally and saying, I think the tide may have turned. In the first round of the Presidential race, the Socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin came first, Jacques Chirac came second, and Balladur came third. The National Front (far right candidate) came fourth and Communist candidate (far left) came fifth. That meant the second round was between Jospin and Chirac. Chirac won. So the Ambassador had called it right, way before we did.

We, of course, had a lot of high-level U.S. Government visits to France, including three presidential visits while I was there. Clinton was our President at the time. His first visit was to attend the 50th commemoration of the WWII Normandy landing.

Q: Right. Oh, yeah.

CEFKIN: The White House agreed to split his time to spend a couple of days at the Normandy ceremonies, and a couple of days in Paris for a bilateral program. As part of the Paris program, he accepted an invitation to speak at the French parliament. I was the site officer for that event. That was an exciting first exposure to managing presidential travel.

Clinton's second visit was for the signing of the Dayton Accords, also known as "the Paris Peace Agreement," ending the war in Bosnia. (Even though Richard Holbrooke and

his U.S. team spearheaded the negotiations, we agreed to let the French hold a formal signing ceremony in Paris.)

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: So, Clinton came for that signing ceremony. As part of his program before the formal French-hosted signing ceremony and lunch, we organized a meeting for President Clinton with the three Yugoslav leaders at Ambassador Harriman's residence. I was the site officer for that event.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: The three leaders included Serbian President Slobadan Milošević, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović. There were a couple of challenges. The first was, on short notice, to find flags for the three countries, which weren't readily available in Paris. I called the three delegations to ask if they had a flag they could loan us. The Serbian contingent didn't have a flag to provide, but someone told me their flag was the same as an upside down Russian flag, so I was able to obtain a Russian flag. The Croat delegation was able to provide a flag. When I called the Bosnian delegation, they put me through directly to Izetbegović. That was a surprise, but he was very nice and agreed to provide a flag. (Both laugh)

Another challenge was that the White House advance team was insistent that we prevent any possibility of Milošević shaking hands with President Clinton. Given the Serb leader's association with war crimes, they wanted to avoid any photos of a handshake. Our General Services staff actually built a special table that was shaped in such a way that Milosevic wouldn't be able to lean over and extend a hand to Clinton.

Q: Wow. Wow.

CEFKIN: The other thing during that period is that there was a huge public sector strike happening in France that shut down public transportation. And the U.S. Government had shut down due to a budget impasse in Congress.

The strike in France related to efforts by the government to change the pension system. The Metro wasn't running, most of the trains weren't running, nor were the buses running. I think it was the first time in France that people organized carpools. Some boat owners set up a boat taxi along the Seine, and a number of commuters walked great distances to get to/from work. I remember one great headline in *Le Monde* that said "in France the people go on strike against the government; in the U.S. the government goes on strike against the people." (Both laugh)

Q: Oh, that sounds like a French joke.

CEFKIN: Yeah. I think that by the time Clinton came to Paris the U.S. budget impasse may have been resolved, but the French strike was ongoing. The morning of the

President's meeting I had to be at the Ambassador's residence early to prepare. Since there was no Metro or buses running, I hoped to get a taxi, but there were none to be found, so I ended up walking the whole way. Fortunately, I didn't live so far away so walking was doable, but I was nervous about arriving on time. Fortunately, I did, and the visit went well.

Another high-level visit I worked on was the visit of Vice President Gore to attend the funeral of former French President Mitterrand. After he left office, in the wake of the 1995 presidential elections, his health sharply declined. He passed away in January 1996, and President Chirac agreed to hold a state funeral for him.

Q: Yeah, he was at the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) summit and he looked very bad.

CEFKIN: Yeah. One of the advantages of Pamela Harriman as Ambassador is that she had a lot of clout with the White House. Al Gore had made it clear when he became Vice President that he didn't want to be "the funeral guy." But Harriman convinced the White House that we needed high-level representation, and they persuaded VP Gore to come. Of course, with funerals you don't have a lot of advance notice, so we had to work quickly to put the visit together. The Political Counselor was named the overall Control Officer for the visit, and he chose me to be the Deputy Control Officer, which meant that I did the hands-on organizing, and he provided guidance and oversight. In addition to the short lead-time, the preparation period coincided with a huge snowstorm that blanketed the U.S. East Coast.

A small vanguard of White House advance and Secret Service staff had arrived before the snow hit. But the others who were supposed to come help with preparations never make it. So, we were working with a shoestring team. Fortunately, the vice president's plane, and the plane with his car and Secret Service Agents, were able to make it the day of the funeral. As the lead operational Control Officer, I was able to travel with the advance team in the motorcade to all the different sites. Of course we had Embassy site officers helping out at all the different venues. That was thrilling for me. I remember standing outside Notre Dame Cathedral as guests were arriving for the funeral and seeing dignitaries including Prince Charles and Fidel Castro arrive.

One anecdote I can share – in advance of the visit, I kept pressing French Foreign Ministry officials for the seating chart for the lunch President Chirac was hosting for VIP guests after the funeral, so that we could tell the VP who he would be seated with. The Ministry officials kept insisting that the plan was still being worked out and that they had nothing to share. So we threw in the towel on getting the seating chart, but I told them we wanted to be sure he wasn't seated next to someone such as Castro that would prove diplomatically awkward. After the lunch, the advance staff came back to the motorcade and said that all had gone well, but then added that VP Gore had been seated next to Castro. I asked them how he had handled that. They said "like any good diplomat" he had a brief polite conversation with the Cuban leader, but didn't engage in any substance. I never knew whether the French had done that intentionally – either as a little dig because

they were annoyed by our Cuba policy -- or whether it was just how the protocol order worked out, but I suspect the former.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: After the visit, the team observed that the visit had gone extremely well, and that maybe the White House didn't need such a big footprint of advance staff for high-level visits. Those of us at the Embassy readily agreed. But of course, that didn't stick; the next time we had a big visit it was back to the usual profile.

The final VIP visit I supported before my transfer from Paris, was President Clinton's visit to attend the G-7 Summit, which the French hosted in the city of Lyon. I was assigned to be the FLOTUS (First Lady of the United States) control officer, who, of course, was Hillary Clinton at that time. So I spent about a week in Lyon, along with a number of Embassy colleagues, to prepare for and help guide the visit. It was another very interesting and exciting experience.

I have two memories that particularly stand out – one personal and one related to the visit. In terms of the personal memory, typically with these VIP visits the work hours are long and frantic. But we had a little free time on a Sunday before the President's arrival. One of my Embassy colleagues suggested to a group of us that we splurge on dinner at a Michelin-starred restaurant outside Lyon – a place called *Les Troisgros.* It was a wonderful evening and, to this day, is one of the best meals I have ever had. As for the visit itself, the spouses had a separate program from the leaders. As the lead FLOTUS control officer, I traveled with the advance team to all the venues throughout the visit. In the evening after dinner there was another formal program. The advance teams for the President and First Lady wanted to carve out some time for Bill and Hillary to break away from their formal programs and have some personal time together. There was a lot of chatter back and forth and planning about when we could break them away and where they could go for a fun escape. Unfortunately, the advance staff ultimately concluded they had missed the window, and gave up on executing the plan. It was an interesting insight into the burdens of high-level public office; even though the President and First Lady traveled together and were, of course, staying together at the hotel, their time was not their own.

In terms of management challenges during my tour, I had mentioned the Foreign Service Secretary in our unit who was legally blind. I actually received a letter of reprimand from a promotion panel for one of the Employee Evaluation Reports (EERs) I had written for her. The board criticized me for not addressing her basic secretarial skills (like typing). My impression was that they were trying to low rank her and force her out of the Foreign Service, which seemed to go against Equal Employment Opportunity practices. I thought that was unfair to both of us. What did they want me to say for her "area of improvement" - get eyesight? So I grieved the reprimand. The grievance was successful, and the letter of reprimand was removed from my performance file, but it was a jarring experience.

One of my proudest achievements is the fact that, despite the pressures we faced, the A-100 classmate I supervised and I emerged from the experience with our friendship intact. In fact, he and his wife remain dear friends to this day.

Those were the main professional highlights. I developed a really broad, interesting group of contacts, so that was a lot of fun. The work was fascinating, but also stressful and exhausting. I didn't have a lot of time to get out and enjoy Paris, but when I did it was wonderful! Socially, I had a cohort of friends that I could travel and do things with, but of course, I missed my husband terribly.

Q: Oh, so, you never did find a tandem assignment in Paris?

CEFKIN: No, we never did. After his one year at the Inter-American Defense College, he bid on a job in Paris as the UNESCO observer. It was the only job on the bid list for Paris at the right level. But the incumbent in the UNESCO position decided to extend. So Paul took a job as the pol-mil officer on the Canadian desk for the last two years of my Paris tour. He visited me in Paris whenever he could. Especially the first year when he was at the Inter-American Defense College, he had some nice long breaks. So we had wonderful trips – including to Normandy, the Loire, the Dordogne region, and even Corsica. And we voraciously explored all the historical and cultural sights of Paris. So, I have very good memories of spending time together in France.

Q: Before you left, did your crystal ball show anything unique or unexpected that you sort of left for your successor? You know, looking at the French political system and the internal politics and so on.

CEFKIN: Oh, that's a really interesting question. There always has been a very strong element of pride and nationalism in France.

Q: Sure.

CEFKIN: I probably signaled that that wasn't going to change, but at the same time there was a strong undercurrent of positive regard for the United States, which opened up possibilities for our cooperation. France, is the United States' oldest ally, going back to the Revolutionary War, and the French remained very grateful for the U.S. role in WWII. That was particularly evident during the commemoration of D-Day. When we visited Normandy we saw signs all over thanking U.S. liberators. And every little village in France commemorated the anniversary of their own liberation. I was asked to go be the Embassy representative to the commemoration in the town our French assistant was from. It was really remarkable. They had all old American WWII equipment, like jeeps, that they kept in pristine condition and trotted out for their commemoration parade. The underlying affection was evident there.

At the same time, the French are very passionate people. The analysis I had is that the French tend to be artistic – think of all the great painters and writers who have come from France. And artists can be temperamental - passionate and exciting – but dealing with

them is not always smooth sailing. But once you get to know them, it is an enriching relationship. One of the good things about our alliance with France is that it is one of the few partners that has the will to project force internationally. So France can often be counted on to help in trouble spots around the world. Under De Gaulle, France had pulled out of NATO's integrated military command. When I was there, the French were beginning to rethink their relationship with NATO. And after I left, they did rejoin the integrated military command. So there was a progressive line of thinking emerging. Also knowledge of English was becoming more common among younger French, reflecting an interest in being more open to the outside world. Part of this was probably also a reflection of the growing European Union integration.

So those were trends that I noticed.

Q: Okay; that's great, absolutely.

All right. So, your husband is on the Canadian desk and you are coming to the end of your three years and trying, I imagine again with him to find, this time a location where you can both serve.

CEFKIN: Yes, exactly. It was clear that the emphasis had to be on finding assignments where we could be together. That meant that Washington was the best solution.

There was a job in the European Bureau (EUR) that handled European regional affairs (EUR/ERA). That seemed like a good next step for me. So I lobbied and got support for that position. The office covered relations with the European Union (EU) and the OECD. On the EU side of the office we were divided into political and economic teams. I was the team leader on the political side; I supervised two mid-level officers. My husband decided to go back to INR, to head the Office of the Geographer.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry. And you arrive in this office in fall of '95?

CEFKIN: No, '96.

I departed right after Bastille Day -- France's national day -- July 14, 1996. My husband came over for one last fling in France. We had dinner with friends at the Eiffel Tower, where we had a great view of the fireworks, and flew out the next day. It was a perfect way to end my tour.

I took home leave and probably started the job in ERA in late August. But before I transferred I attended a course on the EU in the town of Maastricht in the Netherlands. One of the advantages of already being in Europe, is that I could just take the train over there, I believe it was in May. At the time, the EU was governed by the Maastricht Treaty, so the course outlined the elements of the treaty and how the EU functions. Several colleagues who were also about to start work in ERA, including my soon-to-be boss – the Deputy Director – also attended the course, so it was a great opportunity to get to know them.

Q: Wait, this is sponsored by State Department or the EU itself?

CEFKIN: It was sponsored by the EU. But I don't have a clear memory of who else was in the course.

Back in Washington, I moved back into our condo. I'm not sure whether I had mentioned it earlier, but we had purchased a condo in South West DC, after we got married. Of course, Paul had been living there while I was in France, and we had had to furnish two households. Somehow I managed to cram all my stuff in. We enjoyed the area. We could take walks along the Potomac River, and on weekends we often walked up to the Smithsonian, go to one of the museums. It was central and easy to get places from there. We ended up selling the condo in 2011. Of course, now the neighborhood has completely changed with the Wharf development.

Q: Wow. Okay. So, back to the U.S.

CEFKIN: Yeah, back to the U.S. Obviously on a personal level it was nice to home with my husband and to reconnect with friends.

But I discovered very quickly that ERA was a very busy office. Our hours were ridiculously long. It's an office that had the reputation of being "a sweatshop." We were next to EUR/RPM, the office that handles NATO. Their hours were probably slightly worse, but we were a close second. Part of the reason we were so busy is that, at that time the EU had a system of six-month rotating presidencies. Every six months a new country would assume the presidency. Toward the end of each presidency we had a U.S.-EU summit – alternating between Washington and Europe as the venue. Leading up to each summit, we had a series of high-level U.S.-EU meetings to prepare for the summit. Also, each time a new country assumed the EU presidency their foreign minister and other senior government officials would seek bilateral meetings with the Secretary of State and other counterparts in Washington. So, we had to crank out tons of papers – decision memos seeking meetings, briefing papers to prepare our principals for the meetings, and cables reporting on the meetings. There was also a big focus on finding "deliverables" for all the summits, to showcase the value of the U.S.-EU partnership. So I spent a lot of time in discussions with the NSC official responsible for EU affairs discussing possible deliverables, and negotiating with EU officials to reach agreement on these measures.

We worked closely with our mission to the EU – USEU, as well as with EU officials in Brussels, the European Commission office in DC and the Washington embassy of whichever country had the EU presidency. During my tour the Dutch, the Irish, Luxembourg, and then the UK held the presidency. They all had their own personalities and operating styles. Under the Maastricht Treaty, the EU had three pillars: economic, political, and judicial/law enforcement. My unit covered 2nd and 3rd pillar issues, so preparation for our summits also involved a lot of inter-agency coordination (for example with the Department of Justice) and coordination with various offices at State.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: There were several prominent issues that we spent a lot of time on. Key among them was the Middle East. The EU wanted to be seen as an equal player in the Arab-Israeli conflict, but they didn't enjoy as much trust from the Israeli side, as the U.S. did. Our view and their views generally aligned on the goals, but not always on the means to those goals. Dennis Ross and Aaron Miller were the Mideast Envoys, so we had a parade of EU officials coming to Washington to meet with them, and I was usually the note-taker for those meetings. We also spent a fair amount of time in discussions over Iran policy. U.S. sanctions against companies doing business with Iran was a thorn in the side of the EU, so we had frequent consultations to explain our concerns and hear the EU viewpoints.

And another big issue was EU expansion. We were encouraging the EU to continue to expand, to help stabilize countries on the EU's periphery and support the development of democracy and rule of law in these countries by anchoring them in Euro-Atlantic institutions. A particular focus for us in that regard was Turkey.

Q: Ah, yes.

CEFKIN: Marc Grossman was our Assistant Secretary, and then became Undersecretary for Political Affairs. He had an intimate knowledge of Turkey, having been ambassador there. So, this was an important issue for him and by extension for us. At the time the EU had an agreement with Turkey that was supposed to lead to a path to EU membership. But a number of EU member states were very skittish about bringing Turkey into the EU. So we spent a lot of time making the strategic argument, encouraging EU countries to make progress towards EU membership for Turkey, though regrettably, ultimately not successfully.

So, my position in ERA was great in terms of the substantive education I got, including how the EU worked, how U.S. interagency processes worked, and how to manage high-level engagements.

Q: Ah, yes. While you were there, did the EU consider expanding the period of the presidency to one year?

CEFKIN: That happened later. Under the Maastricht Treaty, which is what spelled out EU governance during my tour in ERA, the EU bureaucracy – the Commission – had a lot of power on economic/trade policy. They had the competency to enter into trade agreements on behalf of EU member states. However on political issues (second pillar) and justice/law enforcement issues (third pillar) decisions had to be made by consensus (or in some cases by a qualified majority) of member states. So, on those issues we needed to lobby all the EU member governments. So we spent a fair bit of time drafting and coordinating instructions to our embassies to demarche their host governments to try to convince them to support issues of importance to us at their EU ministerial and summit meetings.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: One of the big events I helped support before my transfer from ERA, was the U.S-hosted G-7 Summit, which became "The Summit of the Eight" because President Clinton decided to invite Russian President Boris Yeltsin. I was sent as the liaison officer for the EU Commission delegation. Denver was picked as the site for the summit, which was fun, since I was from Colorado, and the city of Denver was my old stomping grounds. So, I spent a very intense week there preparing for and then managing EU officials' participation throughout the summit.

I was with a good group of colleagues who were liaison officers for other European delegations. We had a lot of fun together. One amusing memory I have is that the State Department was just beginning to allocate cell phones for use at events like that. But they were big bricks that we had to carry around. I remember being at lunch with my fellow liaison officers, and a phone would ring and everybody's grabbing their phone saying "is it mine, is it mine?"

Q: Right, right. I remember those because there is no pocket on any male suit that you could put it in. It fit nowhere.

CEFKIN: Right, exactly.

Career-wise, at that point I was getting frustrated that I hadn't been promoted to FS-1. My supervisors were very supportive and gave me strong evaluations. But, I think that with some Washington assignments, the work tends to sound more bureaucratic and it's harder to demonstrate the significance of what you're doing. So at the end of that assignment I was still an FS-2.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: The job did offer me the opportunity to work with some very interesting and influential people in the Department. Our Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for EU affairs was Tony Wayne, so I worked closely with him. When I first started in ERA, Stu Eizenstat was our Ambassador to the EU. He then became the Undersecretary for Economic Affairs – "E" – at State. He was very, very active, and helped raise the profile of EU affairs. Towards the end of my assignment, my direct supervisor, the deputy director, left unexpectedly, creating a gap. So I served as Acting Deputy Director for several months, which was useful managerial experience.

In terms of issues, as mentioned, the Middle East was a big focus, as was policy towards Iran and Cuba. The EU was annoyed with our extraterritorial sanctions affecting trade with those countries, so we had to manage that concern while pushing EU members to be more forceful in promoting human rights in those countries. Other big issues included the Balkans and EU expansion. Beyond the classic foreign policy issues I dealt with, I had the opportunity to engage on some interesting law enforcement/justice issues. For

example, I helped negotiate a U.S-EU agreement on the control of chemical precursors (to prevent their diversion for use in illicit drug production.) And I helped organize and participate in a U.S.-EU conference on migration, dealing with managing migration over our respective southern borders. We held the conference in Texas, on South Padre Island.

On the trade front, we worked on something called "Mutual Recognition Agreements." It was an effort to harmonize standards on certain products, so that they didn't need to be retooled or recertified in order to be sold in each other's markets, thereby facilitating trade. In fact, I was able to participate in a signing ceremony for this agreement while I was in Denver, which spurred very positive press coverage. The press wrote that while others at the Summit of the Eight spent a lot of time talking to each other, the U.S. and the EU did something "signing a massive deal to cut red tape."

So, ERA was a formative experience. I have good memories of my time in that position, but it was also exhausting. By the end I was ready to turn the page and hopefully get back to a little more work/life balance.

Q: You were there from '96 to '98?

CEFKIN: Yes, '96 to '98, exactly.

Q: Shall we stop here or is—?

CEFKIN: Sure. Up to you…

Q: Well, if you'd like to go ahead —

CEFKIN: I'll just set the scene for the next assignment. At that point, my husband had been in Washington assignments for five years, so he was due to go overseas. Also, he had done several tours outside his cone, so for promotion purposes it was time for him to get back to a consular assignment.

I could have had a job at our EU Mission in Brussels given my ERA experience. It would have been an interesting job, but there weren't any jobs that were a good fit for Paul in Brussels. We looked at EAP options and found two jobs at the right level in the Philippines – at Embassy Manila.

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: Even though I was keen to go to Europe, working out a tandem assignment was more important and we both liked Southeast Asia, so the Philippines seemed like a good next step. Paul's job was head of the American Citizens Services (ACS) unit in Manila. My job was deputy political counselor/pol-mil officer.

Q: Interesting. Okay. So, we'll stop here and pick up with you next time in the Philippines.

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Q: So, today is March 5, 2020. We're resuming our interview with Judith Cefkin.

Judith, what year are we in now?

CEFKIN: We're in 1998.

Q: And you are arriving in the Philippines?

CEFKIN: Yes. We arrived on August 14.

Q: When you arrived did you go right to your permanent quarters, were you in temporary quarters?

CEFKIN: We were in temporary quarters. I don't know if you have any familiarity with Manila but it's a huge city, very densely populated. The embassy is in a central part of the city along Manila Bay. The embassy compound is actually a historic site; it was built as the headquarters and residence for the U.S. High Commissioner in the lead-up to the Philippines independence. It was occupied by the Japanese during WWII. After U.S. forces defeated the Japanese in the Philippines, war crime trials were held there. Then with Philippine independence in 1946, it became our embassy. The embassy also had a second compound, called the Seafront Compound, a couple of miles down the road. The GSO offices were located there. There was also a commissary, and a club with a restaurant and swimming pool for Embassy staff. And there was some housing – apartments and townhouses. The townhouses served as permanent housing for some embassy staff, and the apartments were used for transitional or temporary duty housing. So that's where we were initially. It was actually quite convenient because we had the commissary and the restaurant right there. There was also a shuttle between the compound and the embassy, so it was easy to get to/from work.

In terms of the permanent housing, people were scattered in different parts of the city, some in gated housing communities and some in apartments. We were in an apartment in an area of the city called Makati. It was a modern urban area with a big shopping mall, hotels and lots of restaurants. Our apartment was nice. It didn't have a lot of charm, but it was modern and spacious, with good amenities --- a pool and small gym.

Q: How close to the embassy were you?

CEFKIN: Ah; well as the crow flies not necessarily that far. In light traffic it was a 15-20 minute drive. But traffic was rarely light, and was frequently horrendous. So the trip between home and work could take hours. That was particularly true when it rained. The Philippines is prone to monsoons and typhoons (hurricanes). But even with just a heavy rain, Manila streets would quickly flood, because the drainage system was so clogged with garbage. My husband decided not to have a car there. He used an embassy shuttle to

get to/from work. But since my hours were less regular, I decided to get a car. I bought a Pajero (an SUV) from another diplomat, and hired a driver (which was affordable in the Philippines).

This brings up an anecdote. One of my colleagues planted the idea in my head that it was smart to keep a pair of fishing boots (waders) in the car. That way, when the streets flooded and created gridlock, you could leave the driver to navigate the traffic and get out and walk home. So on a trip home to Colorado I picked up a pair of fishing boots to keep in the car. Indeed, one day it started raining really hard. My husband left work on the shuttle at 5 PM. I worked until 7 PM and then headed home with my driver. As expected, the traffic was horrendous. We inched along at a snail's pace. Finally, at around 11 PM we were about a mile or less from home, but the going was still painfully slow.

Q: Oh, my god. From—

CEFKIN: So, I said to the driver, "I'm going to put on my boots and walk the rest of the way. Make your way as best you can." He said, "Okay, ma'am, be careful." I started walking and within a minute I was suddenly completely submerged in water. I had forgotten that there was a little canal running along the street I was crossing, and I had stepped right into it.

Q: Ah, of course.

CEFKIN: —fortunately, I came right back up to the surface and managed to climb out. I was ok, but soaking wet and shaken up. My biggest fear was that I would become deathly ill from having swallowed some of the filthy canal water.

Q: Sure. My goodness. Yeah.

CEFKIN: I got over to the median of the main street leading to our apartment. It was raised just above the flood line, and I carefully made my way the rest of the way home. As soon as I walked in the door, our maid came running with towels to dry me off, and I called the Embassy doctor to ask if there was anything I should do to protect against the filthy water I had swallowed. His response was, "Drink some milk, it'll coat your stomach." (Both laugh)

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: So, I did. I'm not sure whether that made any difference, but the good news is I never did get sick. Meanwhile, my husband didn't make it home until 1 AM, so it had taken seven hours from the time he left the embassy!

Q: Good heavens.

CEFKIN: I later learned that I was lucky that I had fallen into a canal, rather than what the alternative could've been, because sometimes when it flooded, people would fall into

a manhole and get swept away underneath the street. Needless to say, I never tried to walk home in the rain again.

One other quick horror story I can tell about the risk of driving in flooded Manila streets involved an Office Management Specialist (OMS) who worked in the Political Section. It had actually happened before I arrived, but the story was legendary. What had happened is that she and her husband were driving home and were stuck on a flooded street when she passed out in the car. Fortunately, they were stuck right by a hospital, so her husband carried her into the hospital and they were able to revive her. What had happened is that the flood water had blocked the tailpipe, so carbon monoxide was backing up into the car. She almost died of carbon monoxide poisoning. So the recommendation was to keep our window cracked when driving through floods. But then the rain would come in through the windows, so it was a mess.

Q: Holy cow.

Well, let's go back to a normal day.

CEFKIN: Yeah, well when it comes to the Philippines, days are anything but "normal;" it really is a wild and wooly place. Just about every crisis you could imagine happened while we were there. We had political unrest, and bombs going on at certain times. There were earthquakes and volcanoes. We had hostage takings and even a plane hijacking. There were also a couple of ongoing insurgencies in the country. So, there literally never was a dull moment.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: There's a good book about the Philippines by Stanley Karnow called "*In Our Image*." He has a really great line describing the Philippines as having spent "300 years in a convent and fifty years in Hollywood."

Q: (Laughs) He's the source of that one. Okay.

CEFKIN: Yes, and it's so true. From the 300 years of Spanish colonial rule conservative Catholicism and a sort of superstitious religiosity became quite ingrained in the Filipino culture, as did an oligarchic economic system. At the same time, the Filipino people, who are lovely, are very gregarious and have a penchant for drama – reflecting the influence of their 50 years "in Hollywood" under U.S. colonial rule. Filipino culture is very distinct from other Southeast Asian cultures. In some ways, I felt that Philippine society had more in common with Latin American societies than Asian societies. My experience there was nothing like my experience in Thailand.

Q: If I'm not mistaken, and this is now a National Geographic special, on one of the saint days or one of the Christian holidays, there are still people who crucify themselves.

CEFKIN: Yes, I believe that's right. I never witnessed that, but I do remember hearing about it. One thing we used to kid about also illustrates my point about the culture. Of course, Christmas is a huge deal there. As soon as they got to what we call the "ber months," September, etc. as you drove around Manila, at every street corner there would be merchants hawking strobe-light pulsing Marys and Jesuses. (Laughs) It was definitely very colorful.

Another important feature of the Philippines is the fact that it's an archipelago consisting of over seven thousand islands. The infrastructure isn't particularly strong, but it's also challenging to connect all these islands, which means that creating a cohesive national identity is difficult. The people speak a hodgepodge of different languages; there isn't really a "Filipino language." The language FSI teaches for those going to language-designated positions is Tagalog. It's the dominant language on Luzon Island, where Manila is, but it isn't the majority language in the country. English is used as an official language, but not all Filipinos speak it fluently.

The Philippines is also a very poor country. There are a number of very wealthy people there, but per capita income is low. This is partly due to over-population. The Catholic Church there is very strict in opposing birth control (or at least was at the time I was there). So the poor had big families and stayed in poverty. The country also exports a lot of labor, since many Filipinos can't find gainful employment at home. About a tenth of all Filipinos are overseas workers, and remittances are a huge source of income for the country. Another huge problem the country faces is endemic corruption.

The Political Counselor I worked with the first two years in Manila had a good observation which was that in most countries "the parts come together to make a better whole." In other words, in a cohesive society, when individuals come together as a team they do big things." But in the Philippines "the parts were better than the whole." This isn't a reflection on the talent or the intelligence of the Filipinos. In fact, Filipino immigrants to the U.S. are very successful. But in the Philippines the corruption kind of eats people up and depresses talent and cohesion.

So, my position at the Embassy was Deputy Political Counselor. I was also responsible for covering political-military and political external affairs.

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: In addition to my boss, the Political Counselor, we had an internal political officer, a labor officer, and a junior officer who worked with me helping to cover external affairs and law enforcement issues. We also had two locally-engaged staff members and two office managers.

Q: One quick question kind of related to generalized corruption. Was the corruption also linked in some ways to crime, to organized crime?

CEFKIN: Yes and no. As mentioned, the corruption was very pervasive. There were community rackets, and a lot of government officials, particularly in law enforcement, were on the take. I don't recall real mafia-type organizations, but there were cases of the "disappearance" of citizens who threatened to expose official corruption. It was widely understood that criminal elements of the police were behind these disappearances.

When I arrived, the biggest issue confronting us was promoting the ratification of a military status of forces agreement – called the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). By way of background, as you probably know, the U.S. used to have two major bases in the Philippines – the Clark Airforce base and Subic Naval base. However, we'd been kicked out in 1992 after the Philippine Senate rejected a base lease renewal agreement. The Philippines remained a treaty ally of the U.S., but defense cooperation was limited by the lack of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) spelling out the legal rights and protections of U.S. defense personnel in the Philippines on temporary duty. Specifically, DOD had curtailed large scale military exercises and ship visits to the Philippines. When I arrived the VFA negotiations had concluded successfully, but the Filipinos decided that it had to be ratified by their senate. We took the view that it was an executive agreement, so it didn't need to be ratified by the U.S. Senate. But the Filipino Government was adamant it needed to go through their ratification process. Given our experience with the base renewal agreement, there was a lot of nervousness about what the Philippine Senate would do. The Philippines really has and had, and I think still has a love-hate relationship with the U.S. for understandable reasons given their history.

So my first big task was to promote ratification of the VFA and analyze how the senators were likely to vote. (The Philippine senate is interesting in that all the senators are elected country-wide. They don't have regional constituencies. So, as my boss noted to me, in some ways the senators are like mini-presidents, and have a considerable degree of independence.) Fortunately the Senate did ratify the agreement in May 1999, so we were able to resume ship visits and large scale military exercises. But it wasn't a smooth ride by any means. The Filipinos were hypersensitive to any misdeeds by U.S. military personnel so that what would seem a fairly minor case in other places became a national crisis in the Philippines. That began with the first ship visit we had – a visit by the USS Blue Ridge to the port city of Cebu, which is in the Visayas, south of Luzon. They let the sailors out on liberty. There were a couple of sailors that got in an altercation with a taxi driver, I guess over the taxi fare, coming back from liberty. The driver was beaten up by one of the sailors, though fortunately he wasn't seriously injured. Under the terms of the VFA, we wanted the sailor to stay in U.S. custody and face punishment under the U.S. Code of Military Justice. But Filipino authorities wanted him to face trial in the Philippines. It took quite a while to persuade the Philippine Government to surrender the sailor to U.S. Navy custody and to quiet the national outcry that had arisen over the case.

There were a few other minor incidents surrounding that same ship visit. For example, a couple of other sailors on liberty had apparently skipped out on paying their bill at a pizza restaurant. So that became a huge public relations issue with angry press editorials. Finally, the ambassador said, "I'm just going to send them the money for this damn bill." (Both laugh) And he did.

Q: Wow. Okay.

On a more general note, since you also had some pol-mil responsibility, how would you describe the Philippines armed forces at the time? Did they have some capable forces? Were they considered generally under equipped and not particularly capable? Or how would you describe them?

CEFKIN: I would say more of the latter. They had some capability, but equipment and resources were a problem, as was discipline and training. That was something we wanted to work with them on, so the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) was very supportive of enhanced military cooperation with us.

The public was very leery of the U.S. military though – part of the historical love-hate relationship. To illustrate this point, I remember at one point we were planning a joint military exercise at the former Clark Air Force base. It sparked a lively debate that was reflected in the press. A number of business owners, including local bar owners, couldn't wait for U.S. soldiers to come back and patronize their businesses. Meanwhile, other locals complained that the American soldiers were going to taint the local women. I wrote a cable explaining this complex of emotions surrounding the return of the U.S. military to Clark with a title of something like: "U.S. GIs Return to Clark: Threat or Opportunity?

Q: Just one last question on the general state of their military. Did we believe they had enough of a coast guard to even monitor their own coastlines or reasonably?

CEFKIN: No. That was a real challenge. Their coast guard and navy didn't have the resources they needed to adequately monitor their coasts or their territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). So illegal fishing and piracy were problems. Another problem was competing maritime claims, which brings me to one of the issues of major focus during my tour: the South China Seas. The People's Republic of China lays claim to the entire South China Seas (as does Taiwan). Four other countries, including the Philippines lay claims to parts of that maritime space and the islands and land features there-in. So Chinese encroachment into areas, the Philippines considered their EEZ was a big concern.

There was one atoll aptly named Mischief Reef in the Spratly Island group that is about 200 kilometers off the coast of the Philippine Island of Palawan. So the Philippines considers it within its EEZ. China, as part of its South China Seas claim, considers it Chinese territory. Chinese fishing boats frequented those waters and in the mid-1990's the Filipinos discovered that the Chinese had erected some structures on the atoll, that the Chinese described as "fishing shelters." Then during my first year in Manila, the Filipinos discovered that the Chinese had reinforced those shelters to build what appeared to be military installations on the reef. Naturally, Filipino officials started sounding alarm bells. I reported this development.

I actually ran into some editorial/policy differences with others at the Embassy. The Navy Attaché was skeptical of the report, saying that the Filipinos had a tendency to exaggerate, so my boss asked me to tone down the sense of alarm I was conveying. The U.S. policy was that we didn't take a position on the competing territorial claims, but we encouraged the parties to resolve their disputes peacefully, under the terms of the Law of the Sea Convention. At that time, we also had a position of "constructive ambiguity" as to whether an attack on Filipinos in the disputed waters would be considered an attack on the Philippines under the terms of our Mutual Defense Treaty. This was intended to avoid a miscalculation that could lead to conflict. Privately however, we thought that the Chinese behavior was pretty alarming. The Chinese would frequently claim that the discovery of Chinese pottery on these islands and reefs proved that ancient Chinese had inhabited them, which made them Chinese territory. My boss pointed out "Well, that would be like the Italians saying there's Roman pottery all over the Mediterranean, so it's all ours."

Q: Right, right.

CEFKIN: Anyway, there was obviously keen interest in Washington and at the Pacific Command about what was happening in the Spratlys. Eventually, the Navy Attaché saw the reconnaissance photos the Filipinos had of the construction at Mischief Reef and agreed it was a very concerning development.

A short time later we got word that a member of Congress wanted to visit and travel to Mischief Reef. He was staunchly anti-PRC. He referred to them as the "Chicoms." I was assigned to be his control officer and had to inform him that the Embassy couldn't support his travel to Mischief Reef. You can imagine what a disaster it would have been if we traveled to this disputed territory, or if he went and sparked an incident. He was really angry, sending us a fax accusing us of colluding with the Chinese. Eventually, he decided to hop a ride on a Philippine plane with some of their members of Congress to overfly Mischief Reef. We advised against it, but ultimately couldn't stop him. So we advised Washington and held our breaths. Fortunately, there wasn't an incident and the rest of his visit went ok.

Q: Boy, there's a lot of opportunity for a bad thing to happen.

CEFKIN: Absolutely.

So, during my tour I spent a fair bit of time following and reporting on the situation, ensuring that policymakers in Washington and Hawaii had the best information possible. We encouraged the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) to negotiate a "code of conduct" with China to avoid further escalation of tensions. I also coordinated closely with a Law of the Sea expert in State's Legal Office and put him in touch with the Philippines' maritime lawyers to consult on possible approaches to addressing the competing claims in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

It was a fascinating issue. In fact, of all the issues I've worked on, that was one of the ones I found the most interesting.

Q: Just a quick question on the sort of last thing I can ask about the military; were the Philippines involved in any peacekeeping activities that you followed?

CEFKIN: Let's see. I believe they have participated in some peacekeeping missions, but I don't recall that being a major issue when I was there. A fair number of Filipinos join the U.S. military, particularly the U.S. Navy. When our navy ships visited, inevitably there would be Filipino members of the crew. A lot of them subsequently naturalized as U.S. citizens.

I'd mentioned earlier the large number of Filipino overseas workers and the important role that remittances play in the Philippine economy. Due to their poverty and overpopulation problem about seven million Filipinos out of a population of around 70 million were working overseas. They were scattered all over the world. There were a lot, in particular, working in the Middle East, in the Gulf, so when conflicts erupted there the status of their overseas workers was a big concern for the Philippine Government.

I can relay one anecdote that illustrates the width of the Filipino overseas workers network. It concerns our housekeeper, who was a very nice, sweet woman. She had worked for another Embassy family who had taken her with them when they transferred back to the U.S. But then they were transferred to Europe and weren't going to have room for her in their European home, so she returned to the Philippines. She wasn't from Manila and didn't have a home there, so she agreed to work for us with the condition that she live with us. We did have staff quarters in our apartment so we agreed. That meant her mail came to our address, and we noticed she was getting mail from her housekeeper friends from all over the world: Israel, Hong Kong, the U.S., Europe. My husband and I joke that Filipina maids had their own "foreign service."

Q: Oh, yeah.

CEFKIN: During my second year, the U.S. and the Philippines resumed a large annual military exercise called "Balikatan" that had been suspended pending negotiations of the Visiting Forces Agreement. Fortunately the exercise went well. Towards the end of the exercise, one of the Philippines' volcanoes erupted. This volcano, which is called Mount Mayon, is in the southeast corner of Luzon, in an area called the Bicol region. The ambassador had the very good idea that we should demonstrate the value of our military cooperation by having the U.S. military help respond to the disaster.

It took a fair bit of negotiation to get approval from the U.S. Pacific Command for the U.S. military to assist, but eventually they did. I was able to join their mission to survey the situation and take a planeload of relief supplies – primarily tents and water treatment equipment. It was really something to fly over that volcano and see the lava and boulders spewing out.

Q: Did we have a USAID (United States Agency for International Development) presence?

CEFKIN: We did, yes. We had a large USAID presence.

Q: Okay. Because at some point they could—they, at least, could begin more regular humanitarian relief.

CEFKIN: Yes, exactly. They worked with the military. In fact, some of the supplies delivered may have been USAID supplies. And USAID supported ongoing humanitarian relief.

Another challenge the Philippines had was contending with a number of insurgencies. One was a communist insurgency stretching back decades from a group called the New People's Army (NPA). They were scattered throughout the country but really particularly prevalent in the northern part of Luzon. The political arm of the NPA lived and operated in exile in The Hague. So one of my colleagues dubbed them the "Gouda Guerillas."

Q: Ah. (Laughs) Okay.

CEFKIN: In the southern part of the country, on the large island of Mindanao and smaller islands further south (including Jolo, Sulu, and Basilan), there was a large Muslim population. And there were several Muslim insurgencies. One group, called the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), had negotiated a peace treaty with the Philippine government. So, one of our big USAID projects was a project to support former fighters to convert them to non-belligerents by teaching them livelihoods – primarily farming. However, after the peace treaty, there was an MNLF break-away group called the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that continued to fight in parts of Mindanao.

Then, there was a third smaller but quite volatile group called the Abu Sayyaf Group. We initially viewed them more as a criminal than terrorist organization. They operated like bandits, conducting kidnappings for ransom. But they did have some al-Qaeda links, and I think that the head of the organization had been a foreign fighter in Afghanistan. Later they emerged in some very surprising and challenging ways that I'll get to later in our discussion.

After my first year in Manila, I had the good fortune of being promoted. EAP was good for me in terms of promotions.

Q: Uh-huh. So, now you went from two to one?

CEFKIN: Yes, exactly, from two to one.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Coinciding with my promotion, my boss, the political counselor, who was a great guy, was due to leave. So Embassy leadership supported moving me into the political counselor position for the third year of my tour.

Q: Lovely.

CEFKIN: Yes, it worked out really well.

Before I stepped into the political counselor role, however, things heated up on the terrorism front. The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) I mentioned carried out a daring kidnapping of a group of divers and staff from a resort in Malaysia. They transported the hostages back to Jolo Island at the southern tip of the Philippines and hid out in the jungle. Fortunately, there weren't any Americans among that group. Most of the hostages were European tourists, so we weren't directly involved, but due to the contacts and resources we had Europeans officials looked to us for help in monitoring the situation and communicating with Philippine officials. Eventually the hostages were freed. We were pretty sure that some of the European governments involved paid ransom. U.S. policy, as you probably know, is not to pay ransom to terrorists, because it encourages and helps finance more acts of terrorism, so we had advised against making payment. But the Europeans disregarded that advice. Thus, the crisis ended and, we thought, the threat was past.

Unfortunately, that was not the case. In 2000, a short time after I had moved into the political counselor role, a young American man from California came to the Philippines to find a Muslim bride. This fellow, Jeffrey Schilling, had converted to Islam and wanted to marry in the faith. Someone suggested that the Philippines would be a good place to find a wife. So he came and fell in love with a Filipina Muslim named Ivy. It turned out that she was related to one of the Abu Sayyaf leaders. He decided that he wanted to meet members of her family, so he walked into their jingle camp and they took him hostage. Ivy wasn't with him, and we never found any evidence that it was a set-up by her, but they both had been very naïve. So that became a real crisis for us. In addition to my role as political counselor, my husband was head of the American Citizen Services Unit of the Counselor Section, so we were both very involved in the response.

Q: Of course. Wow.

CEFKIN: Our Chargé, Mike Malinowski, decided that we would leave no stone unturned in efforts to secure the release of this American hostage. So, we had Emergency Action Committee (EAC) meetings pretty much every day (weekends and holidays included). Manila is a very large embassy and lots of U.S. agencies have offices there, including the FBI. The FBI brought in a couple of expert hostage negotiators, specialists, and they had a whole series of teams of hostage negotiators that came in that were helping. The Pacific Command also sent a team out for a while to help coordinate the response. My husband was assigned to be the liaison to Jeffrey Schilling's mother. He stayed in regular touch with her to keep her posted on our efforts, and she visited the Philippines a couple of

times. With support from the hostage negotiators, who advised on the approach, she issued appeals to the hostage-takers via local media.

The Abu Sayyaf allowed Jeffrey to make contact with the Embassy a couple of times. The Chargé spoke to him, and asked him how he was doing and what he needed. His major complaint was that he'd lost his contacts and couldn't see very well. We were able to get him eyeglasses and a few other supplies via local intermediaries. He told us that he'd lost a fair bit of weight, but fortunately hadn't been tortured or beaten. Of course, we worked closely with the Philippine military who tried to pinpoint his location. At one point when they thought they had a reliable sighting they talked about staging a rescue. We were quite nervous that the rescue would go awry. But the Abu Sayyaf kept moving Schilling to different locations, so before the military could act, they lost the trail. This pattern continued for months and months.

While the hostage saga was going on, in late 2000 a political crisis developed involving a presidential scandal. The president at that time was a man by the name of Joseph Estrada. He had been a very popular actor in the Philippines. In movies he played a tough guy who came to the rescue of poor people – kind of a Robin Hood figure. So he was a populist president, adored by the Filipino masses. There were rumblings about his connection to a form of illegal gambling (called "Jueteng") that he supposedly used to help him finance his campaign. So the Philippine Senate began impeachment proceedings.

Q: Ah, interesting.

CEFKIN: There was a group of independent senators who were very concerned about this alleged abuse of office, and wanted to impeach him, and there was another group who had thrown their lot in with Estrada and wanted to keep him in office. One in the latter camp was a well-known figure – J.P Enrile, a former Defense Minister who had been involved in a couple of coup attempts against previous governments. He was considered a disciple of Ferdinand Marcos, the former Filipino dictator, but later rehabilitated himself and was elected senator. (He also happened to be the owner of the apartment building we lived in.)

In January 2001, the impeachment trial was ongoing. The pro-Estrada senators were fairly confident that the trial would result in the president's acquittal. Of course we were watching it closely and reporting on the proceedings. Towards the end of the trial I was invited by one of my contacts to accompany him on a visit to the Bicol region (where the volcano had erupted) for a campaign visit. As I recall, they were campaigning for a congressional seat. It may have been a bi-election. He had a private plane and was taking a couple of legislators along, including J.P. Enrile. I was given permission to join the trip to witness and report on their campaign effort. It was fascinating to observe their tactics, including literally giving out cash prizes to a number of rally attendees in a raffle-style drawing --- in other words – vote buying.

On the flight back to Manila, they were all in high spirits. Enrile was pretty sanguine about the impeachment trial outcome. Then all of a sudden he started getting frantic phone messages and became increasingly agitated. The minute we landed they—Enrile rushed back to the senate. As soon as I got home, I turned on the TV to watch the impeachment trial, which was being covered live. It turned out the prosecutors had uncovered some very damning evidence that looked like it would turn the tide against Estrada. Fearing that they no longer had the votes to prevent a conviction, Enrile and Estrada's other allies walked out of the Senate, forcing the suspension of the impeachment trial.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: That then spurred mass protests, similar to what had happened with the "People's Power Revolution" that resulted in the ousting of Ferdinand Marcos and installation of Cory Aquino as president. The 2001 protests were dubbed "People's Power II." Our Emergency Action Committee, which was already meeting regularly on the hostage crisis, added focus on the political crisis. As tensions rose, with more and more key players joining calls for Estrada to step down, we could sense that things were coming to a head and decided we should set up a 24-hour presence at the Embassy to monitor developments and report to Washington. Since I was the political counselor, I decided I should volunteer to take the first overnight shift.

It was quite a heady experience. I remember talking to representatives of the protestors and the government, urging both sides to keep things peaceful and work through democratic processes to resolve the crisis. I also stayed in regular touch with the State Department Operations Center and the director of the office that covered Philippine relations to keep them apprised of what was happening. The next morning my colleagues arrived to take over, so I went home to get some sleep. I woke up that afternoon and went back to the Embassy, thinking I might need to settle in for a second night shift, only to learn that the crisis was over. What had happened is that the military and police withdrew their support from the president saying he was no longer competent to serve and they joined the protests in endorsing the vice president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, as the legitimate successor. (In the Philippines, presidential and vice-presidential candidates don't run as a ticket, so even though she served under President Estrada. Macapagal-Arroyo wasn't a loyalist.) At that point, Estrada had little choice but to step down and Macapagal-Arroyo was sworn in as President.

Q: Had we—in the course of this, had we been formally asked by anyone to actually be a negotiator, a facilitator between the two?

CEFKIN: We weren't asked to mediate, but both sides courted U.S. support. The Chargé was very adamant, rightfully so, that Filipinos needed to resolve the crisis themselves, and the U.S. should remain neutral. This was different from People Power I where the U.S. did play a key role in convincing Marcos to step down, but 2001 was a different time and different circumstances. So we limited our involvement to urging both sides to remain peaceful and to attempt to resolve the crisis through democratic processes.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: The resolution of the crisis fortunately was bloodless. But the way the change of leadership happened strained the interpretation of whether what had taken place was within the framework of the Philippine constitution. This had implications for U.S. policy, including the flow of our assistance. I was tasked with drafting an analysis to make the case to Washington that the change was within the bounds of the Philippines' legal framework and not "a coup." Internally, within my section, we had some lively debates over how to describe what happened, but ultimately my analysis provided the basis for continuing our cooperation with the new government.

A short time later, we had a second political crisis, when a mob of supporters of former President Estrada marched on the presidential palace "Malacanang," demanding that Estrada be reinstated. Fortunately, the threat was defused fairly quickly, but this experience taught me the need to be vigilant after a crisis appears to be resolved, because the desperation of those on the "losing side" can lead to a violent counter-reaction.

Meanwhile, our hostage saga was still ongoing. As I mentioned earlier, with our regular EACs, my husband and I were working pretty much every day. So we weren't able to take any breaks or get away from Manila. My boss took pity on us, and agreed to let us take leave over the Easter break, so we went to Cambodia to visit Angkor Wat. I also spent a few days in Vietnam (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City) since I had never been there.

When we were at the airport in Cambodia headed back to the Philippines we ran into some friends from the embassy and they said, "oh, did you hear? Jeffrey Schilling escaped."

Q: Wow. You know, at the back of my mind I was thinking, they're moving him all over the forest; I wonder if he ever tried to escape. But I figured—well, go ahead.

CEFKIN: Yeah. Since we'd been off the grid we hadn't heard anything about it. Of course, my husband got very excited and eager to get back to Manila, given all the work he'd done in support of Schilling. As soon as we landed, he got in touch with the Embassy and discovered that sure enough, Jeffrey was free. It turned out that his captors had relaxed their guard a bit, and he was able to walk out of the camp and find some police or military who got him to safety. The Embassy leadership was eager to make sure that he got home without further incident, so my husband was asked to accompany him back to California, which he did.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Not surprising.

CEFKIN: Not surprising at all, yeah. (Laughs)

Needless to say it was a huge relief to have the Schilling crisis behind us. At that point we were getting towards the end of our three-year tour, so we were looking forward to

having more free time to relax and enjoy what the Philippines had to offer. One of the things we particularly loved in the Philippines was the scuba diving, which was fantastic.

I had never been scuba diving before we went to the Philippines, but was able to get certified there. My husband had learned to dive when he was in the army, but had abandoned it after he developed some sinus problems. After I started diving, he decided he wanted to give it another try. On the way back to Manila from the U.S. after our first year at Post, we stopped off in Hawaii. We were walking around Waikiki and saw a scuba store. I went in to buy some scuba gear. Paul ended up buying a whole set of scuba gear, and the day we got back to Manila he signed up for a scuba class and got recertified. So that was a recreational activity we enjoyed together.

There was a place we really liked for diving off the southern tip of Luzon, called Mindoro Island. It was a fairly easy trip for a long weekend. During the Schilling saga and political crisis, we'd hardly been able to get away, so we decided to go to Mindoro Island for the Memorial Day weekend. That Sunday, we came back from our dives and were sitting around the hotel lobby getting ready to have dinner, when some of the people we had been diving with came over and said, "Did you hear? Abu Sayyaf has kidnapped another group of tourists from a resort and there are some Americans in the group." We were sure they were mistaken -- that this was a case of misinformation circulating. The report was particularly unbelievable because the location where the hostage-taking was reported to have occurred was on the island of Palawan.

Q: Which is really remote.

CEFKIN: Yes. Palawan is the Philippine western-most large island. It's also fairly far north from the area of traditional Abu Sayyaf activity.

There was a TV at the hotel bar that was showing the local news, and sure enough they were carrying reports of this daring Abu Sayyaf hostage-taking, including the fact that there were Americans among those captured. We got a hold of colleagues at the Embassy who confirmed that the reports appeared to be true. We were scheduled to head back to Manila the next day, but Paul said, "I've got to get back tonight." I said, "Oh, no. It's too dangerous to make the crossing to the mainland on the boat at night." He was insistent though, so we hired a boat and then a driver to take him back to Manila. I decided to stay on the island for the night and travel back to Manila with our driver the next day, as planned.

It turned out that the resort the group had been kidnapped from – a place called Dos Palmas – was a resort I had visited during a work-related trip to Palawan. It was a very pretty, tranquil place at the southern tip of the island. The last thing from my mind when I visited was that it could be a target of Abu Sayyaf. But they had used Zodiac boats to travel hundreds of miles from their southern Philippines base and then swooped in, snatched the tourists and took them back to the jungles in the south. There were three Americans in the group – a businessman from California who was in the Philippines on vacation, and a missionary couple that had been working in the Philippines for years and

had decided to treat themselves for their anniversary. So they left their kids with friends and went off to the resort expecting to be away for just a few days.

Q: Incredible.

CEFKIN: Therefore, we were thrust back into a routine of EACs and hostage negotiations. It was crazy.

At one point, we had a visit by Defense Secretary William Cohen. At a dinner hosted for Cohen by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and her military leaderships we learned that the Philippines military was planning a rescue mission. That news made us quite nervous; we were afraid the rescue could go awry and endanger the hostages. The military thought they had the rebels and their hostages cornered, but the rebels (with the hostages) managed to escape. That cat and mouse game continued, with the military closing in on the group and then the group evading capture. At times, some hostages escaped or were rescued (though not our citizens) and other hostages were captured. Sadly, in June we got word that one of the Americans – Guillermo Sobero, the businessman from Californian – had been killed. In fact, he was beheaded.

The saga continued beyond our tour in Manila. In June 2002, more than a year after the hostage drama had begun, the Armed forces of the Philippines conducted another rescue attempt. Tragically, one of the missionaries, Martin Burham was killed in the raid. His wife, Gracia, was wounded, but survived.

One thing that resulted from these hostage crises, was that the Philippine Government agreed to accept an offer from the U.S. to accept U.S. military counter-terrorism training. It started with a small footprint of a few advisors, but eventually expanded to a sizeable investment. Some, but not all of the ASG rebels involved in the kidnapping were captured and faced justice.

As you can see our Philippines tour was very lively. Those of us at the Embassy had a phrase “only in the Philippines” to describe the fact that anything that could happen would happen there. To cite a good example, during our second summer there, the day before Paul and I were due to leave for a rest and recreation (R&R) trip to the U.S, one of my political officers and a colleague from the Regional Affairs Office came into my office and they said, “we have some news for you; there’s been a plane hijacking.” They explained that a Philippines Airlines plane that took off from Davao (a city on Mindanao Island) en route to Manila had been hijacked. Of course, we started scrambling, trying to figure out if there were any Americans onboard, and I’m thinking, “oh god, I hope this isn’t going to squash our R&R.”

Q: Exactly. Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: We continued to get updates from local authorities and learned that the hijacker was a Filipino. The reason for the hijacking wasn’t clear, but he wanted the pilot to turn around and go back to Davao. The pilot told him he didn’t have enough gas to do that. At

that point the hijacker decided instead to shake down all the passengers. He walked up and down the aisle and demanded they give him their valuables. He had a homemade parachute with him and as they were getting closer to Manila he asked the flight crew to open a door and let him jump out. So, they opened the rear cargo door and he jumped out.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: The plane landed safely. The hijacker did not. (Laughs)

Q: Yeah. Holy—. So, it's nutty.

CEFKIN: Needless to say, we were relieved that all the passengers and crew were safe. And, personally, Paul and I were glad the crisis was resolved within a matter of hours and we were left with a clear conscience on our R&R the next day. (Laughs)

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: I mentioned earlier that we also had incidents of bombings. Usually those occurred in Mindanao, with the MILF suspected as the culprits. But in December 2000 we were away for an embassy retreat in Bagio – a mountain town north of Manila. The Embassy owned a large house there – another legacy of the colonial era. It was built as a retreat for colonial officials to escape the Manila heat, and was maintained as a get-away for the Ambassador's use. Anyway, the Chargé invited senior staff (and spouses) to come up for a pre-New Year's get-away. Paul and I were driving back home, along with the Ambassador's staff aide, on Sunday afternoon when all of a sudden we started getting calls about bombs going off at several locations in downtown Manila. There were a number of people killed and injured, though fortunately no Americans. So we again convened our EAC and put out advisories. The identities of the bombers was a real mystery. They seemed to have the mark of MILF, but the MILF wasn't known for conducting out-of-area attacks. We thought it was perhaps a splinter or renegade MILF group. Years later, suspicion turned to the Indonesian branch of Jemaah Islamiyah, though the exact motive was unclear. Fortunately, after the spate of bombings that occurred on that day, there was no recurrence.

Here's another example of the quirky things that happened in the Philippines. One weekend, I went with some Embassy friends on a dive trip in an area called Batangas, on the southwestern coast of Luzon Island. Sunday morning we were having breakfast, getting ready for our dives. Talking about how we had slept we discovered that we'd all woken up around four in the morning, which seemed like a coincidence, but we didn't think too much about it. Then we started to hear reports that there'd been an earthquake and a huge power outage through most of Luzon Island. The power outage hadn't affected our resort, but apparently the tremor from the earthquake was what had jolted us awake at 4 AM. Anyway, we did our diving and went back to Manila. The earthquake, fortunately, hadn't done serious damage. But, apparently it caused thousands of jellyfish to swim (or get swept into) the intake area of an underwater marine hydropower facility that generated electricity. That's what had caused the power outage.

Q: Wow. It's just—you can't make that up.

CEFKIN: Exactly. So, those were our adventures in the Philippines.

Q: It's funny that you mention you were awakened at night by something but not enough for you to think it was an earthquake. When I was in Costa Rica exactly the same thing happened. I woke up and the bed was shaking, and I was still really not quite awake, and I remember saying, "Stop shaking the bed." And there was, of course, nobody there to shake the bed and I finally went, oh, it's an earthquake. But it really was not enough to cause any significant damage. Just enough to wake you up.

CEFKIN: Professionally, our tour in the Philippines was very exciting and rewarding. On a personal level, except for the diving, we were less keen about the place. Manila didn't have much charm. There wasn't a lot to do there other than shopping, movies, and going out to eat.

One thing we did enjoy was going to Corregidor Island across Manila Bay. They had a fantastic tour there that covered the WWII history of the island – including the relocation of U.S. forces to the island after the Japanese invaded the mainland, and the subsequent siege of Corregidor by the Japanese and surrender of U.S. forces. We made that trip several times. We also spent New Year's Eve there with friends from the embassy our first year there. New Year's Eve in Manila was wild. People went crazy, shooting off guns and burning tires. Our friends warned us that it was like a war zone. Sure enough, we were at the resort on Corregidor looking across the bay and you could just see a cloud of smoke enveloping Manila.

Our second New Year's Eve in Manila was December 31, 1999. Do you remember the whole Y2K thing?

Q: Yeah, sure.

CEFKIN: Since there was this big fear in Washington that things would go haywire with the dawn of the new Millennium – January 1, 2000, all U.S. embassies were instructed to have a task force that was present at the embassy when the clock struck midnight.

Q: (Laughs) Right.

CEFKIN: My husband was on the task force, so he had to be at the Embassy. I stayed home and went up to the rooftop of our high-rise to watch the fireworks.

Q: Ah.

CEFKIN: It was pretty spectacular seeing the fireworks from all over Manila. But down below, people were shooting off fireworks and guns and burning tires, and the smoke

kept rising higher and higher up the sides of the building, so that soon you couldn't see the ground below.

So, the Philippines was a busy, fascinating place. The embassy community was very nice; we got along well with our colleagues.

Q: Other than the Spratlys, since you also followed the external affairs, were there other major international issues between us and the Philippines or where both of us had some issue that we were working in common with on the international level?

CEFKIN: Most of the external focus was on ASEAN issues, including the South China Seas Code of Conduct. I mentioned earlier that we were encouraging ASEAN to negotiate with China. Human rights issues also came up. I recall a lot of focus on the effort by the Mahathir government in Malaysia to prosecute political rival Anwar Ibrahim on sodomy charges that many believed were trumped up. Anwar's wife came to the Philippines to urge support for her husband, and the Philippine government was fairly supportive. At the time, they were among the more forward-leaning in ASEAN in speaking up on human rights issues. I recall doing demarches on North Korea, and being amazed once hearing from a Filipino delegation that had visited Pyongyang who raved about what an impressive city it was. The cable I sent reporting about how the delegation was taken in by "a Potemkin village," got a lot of positive notice. Middle East/Gulf issues also found resonance in the Philippines. Since they had so many overseas workers in those countries they paid a lot of attention when things heated up in that part of the world.

On the political-military and domestic political fronts there were issues that were a legacy of WWII and of the U.S. colonial period in the Philippines. An example of the former was the case of the Philippine Scouts – the Filipinos who formed the resistance and fought with us during the Japanese WWII occupation of the Philippines. They were a wonderful group, understandable, advanced in age and facing health issues. They were clamoring for Veterans Affairs benefits. So we advocated on their behalf. I believe that sometime after my tour, Congress finally did come through and approve benefits for (the steadily decreasing cadre) of Philippine Scouts.

One colonial legacy issue was the Philippine demand that the U.S. return "The Bells of Balangiga." The background was that, at the time of the Spanish-American War, Filipino freedom fighters were fighting the Spanish for independence. They sided with the U.S. to end Spanish rule in the belief that the U.S. would then grant the Philippines independence. When we failed to do that, they started to fight us. An attack by Filipinos on Samar Island resulted in the death of some 42 U.S. soldiers. U.S. troops retaliated, killing scores of Filipinos, destroying property, and seizing three bells from a church in the town of Balangiga. Two of the bells were displayed at Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming. (In fact, I went to see them when I was visiting my family in Ft. Collins, which is about 50 miles from Cheyenne.) The third bell was held at another U.S, military installation. The status of the bells raised nationalist passions in both the U.S. and the Philippines. They were finally returned to the Philippines in 2018. U.S. Ambassador Sung Kim helped broker the return, but it's worth noting that Wyoming

Senator Barrasso held up Ambassador Kim's confirmation as Ambassador to Indonesia, for quite a while due to his unhappiness over the return of the bells.

We also dealt with a couple of Marcos legacy issues. A key one concerned a plane that a Texas businessman, by the name of Walter Fuller, had bought from the Philippine Government in 1989. The plane had reportedly belonged to President Marcos, and had been seized by the Aquino government as part of Marcos's ill-gotten gains. After he purchased the plane and transferred it to the U.S., a Hong Kong company claimed they had the title to the plane. The courts agreed, so the plane was confiscated. Mr. Fuller then fought a long court battle to make the Philippine government reimburse him for the plane, plus accumulated damages – a total of around $15 million. The courts found in favor of Mr. Fuller's claim, but the Philippine Government resisted making the payment. For some five years the Embassy had been pushing to resolve this. I spent a fair bit of time on the issue my first two years at Post, as did my deputy after I moved into the Political Counselor role. Finally, in 2001 we succeeded in getting the Philippine Government to pay up. Mr. Fuller and his lawyer were ecstatic. In fact the lawyer sent a gushing letter to President Bush and other senior U.S. leaders praising (by name) the officials in State's Legal Office and all those at the Embassy who had contributed to the resolution.

I enjoyed getting to know my diplomatic colleagues in Manila. There was a group in the diplomatic corps called "the Flowers Club." It was a group of DCMs who took turns hosting monthly dinners. Given how big and busy our embassy was, the DCM delegated participation in that group to the political counselor, so my last year in Manila I participated in those dinners, and I attended most of the National Day receptions. It was an active social scene; the ambassador and DCM tended to have two or three events per night.

Q: In spite of the traffic.

CEFKIN: In spite of the traffic, yeah. Fortunately, a lot of the representational events tended to happen closer to where we lived, so it was easier to get home once they were over.

Another social phenomenon worth mentioning is that the Filipinos were very fond of balls and ballroom dancing; so there was a "ball season." Paul and I actually took ballroom dancing lessons so we could do the foxtrot and waltz, etc. at the balls. Filipina women, in particular, loved to show their prowess on the dance floor. They would take their dance instructors (referred to as "DIs") to the ball, so that they could show off.

Q: Interesting. All right. As you're approaching, then, the end of this tour, what are you and your husband looking at for a follow-on?

CEFKIN: We had decided that the most sensible thing would be to go back to Washington. Because of our tandem status we knew it would be easier to both find good jobs in DC. I started looking for positions in EAP or EUR. I stopped through Washington

during my last R&R to talk to folks in the Department. I ran into a fellow that I had worked with in Paris; he'd been the number two in the Economic section there. He's someone I liked a lot. He was back in Washington serving as the Director of the Office of Western European Affairs (the office that covers relations with France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Malta, Monaco, and the Vatican). He asked me what I was thinking of doing, and then said "Well, you know, I'm going to have the deputy director position in my office open. And I'd be very interested in having you join me in that role." The more I thought about it, the more I realized that that position would be an excellent next step for me, so I listed that job as my top choice for onward assignment on my bid list and was paneled into the position. My husband ended up taking a job in the newly-formed Office of Counterterrorism (S/CT).

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Q: Okay. Today is March 19, 2020. We're resuming our interview with Judith Cefkin as she's getting ready to go to Washington, D.C. to the Office of European Bureau.

And just to recall, this is which year?

CEFKIN: This was 2001.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: We left Manila in August and took our home leave in Colorado and New Mexico. Then we arrived in Washington in early September. We weren't able to move back into our southwest condo immediately, so we were in temporary quarters in Foggy Bottom. Our first day on our new jobs was September 10, 2001. (Laughs)

Q: Of course.

CEFKIN: Yes. So, it was out of the frying pan of our very active and adventurous tour in the Philippines, and into the fire of 9/11. I remember very clearly going into my office for my second day in the Office of Western European Affairs (EUR/WE). It was a beautiful, sunny, blue sky day. My boss wanted to take me and introduce me at a staff meeting that our Assistant Secretary (A/S), Beth Jones, and her Deputy Assistant Secretaries had with office directors. A/S Jones came into the meeting from having attended the Secretary's staff meeting. (Colin Powell was our Secretary at the time.) She announced that she'd just seen the most horrific pictures on TV of a plane crashing into the World Trade Center. We all assumed that it was a terrible accident and went on with the rest of the meeting. After that meeting, I went back to our office, while my boss went to a second staff meeting. All of our staff were huddled around a radio listening to the news. They informed me that a second plane had hit the World Trade Center. Then we got news of the plane hitting the Pentagon. One of our young desk officers had a brother who worked at the Pentagon (though his office was actually across the road in Crystal City). Needless to say, she was very worried, though fortunately she was able to reach her brother and confirm he was

ok. My colleagues started asking whether we should evacuate the building. I said, “Let’s wait for instruction because we may be safer inside.”

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: A short time later, the alarm sounded instructing us to evacuate. We went to our rally point at the little park across the street on 21st Street. While we were standing there waiting for further instructions, my husband wandered by and said “What’s going on?” It turned out he had been in computer training when the alarm sounded and had no idea what was going on. I told him about the planes hitting the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. By then, I believe we also had news of the plane that had crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania and understood that we were under attack from terrorists. When he heard that Paul said, “Well, I work in counterterrorism, I’ve got to go back inside.” I was nervous about him doing that, but he was insistent.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: By then, my boss had joined us. He suggested that, since we hadn’t had time to sit down and talk about what was on the horizon for our office, we go get coffee. He was parked in the basement. Once we received word that everyone should go home and that those parked in the building could retrieve their cars, my boss suggested we get away from Foggy Bottom and find a coffee shop closer to where he lived in NW. Driving out of State it was absolute gridlock. It took forever to even get around the block onto Constitution Avenue. Of course, we could see the smoke pouring out of the Pentagon, which was very chilling.

As we worked our way further north towards my boss’s neighborhood it was like “the day the earth stood still.” Businesses were closing down; we didn’t pass any open coffee shops. We were listening to the radio, and they mentioned that the Metro was also closing. By then we had been in the car for a couple of hours. My boss said that it was probably time to give up on getting coffee, though at least we had had a chance to talk a fair bit about the office as we were driving. He was worried that I wouldn’t be able to get back to Foggy Bottom, so he decided to drive back down to that neighborhood and drop me off. He let me off a couple blocks from my temporary apartment. By then it was midday. I hadn’t had anything to eat since breakfast, and was hungry. Near where he let me off, I noticed that the restaurant “Bread and Chocolate? 22nd and M Streets was open, and decided I should go in and get some lunch.

Q: Oh, sure.

CEFKIN: I was listening to other people talk, including one woman who was on the phone to her mother. She was saying that in addition to the Pentagon, the State Department and FBI had been attacked. Since I’d been away from the latest news, I had no way of knowing whether or not that was true, but I assumed the worst. As soon as I finished eating I walked back to our temporary apartment and turned on the TV. Fortunately the reports about the State Department and FBI turned out to be unfounded.

And much to my relief, my husband came home a short time later. Naturally, we stayed glued to the TV for the rest of the day. So that was the beginning of that tour. (Laughs)

Q: Wow. Wow. I think probably you are not alone because the typical return time to Washington is right around the same moment. People are leaving their previous assignment in July/August, taking home leave and generally returning sometime near or after Labor Day. So, I imagine there were plenty of others in the department also literally just days into their job only to find out about the attack.

CEFKIN: Exactly. So, of course, from that point on our office was consumed with the response to the 9/11 attacks. Our NATO allies (which included most of the countries our office covered) quickly invoked Article 5 – the collective defense clause. Once we launched Operation Enduring Freedom against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan our attention turned to coordinating allied support. I was tapped to serve as a point person for our office, so I worked closely with State's Political-Military Bureau, the Pentagon, our embassies, European embassies in Washington, and, of course our team of desk officers, to review what capabilities our European partners could bring to the effort and to make the requests. They stepped up right away. For example, the French and Italians deployed carrier battle groups to the North Arabian Sea to support the combat operations. The French flew a number of bombing sorties, and French, Italian, and Spanish troops helped clear and rebuild runways, clear minefields, and man field hospitals in Afghanistan.

Naturally, there were a number of other 9/11 issues affecting our foreign relations that arose. Since we closed down air traffic for a couple of weeks after the attacks, some high-level foreign officials that were stuck in the U.S. – among them, was the French foreign minister. We had to figure out how to help them get home.

That reminds me of an anecdote, not directly related to my job. I had one A-100 classmate who was an assistant to the Undersecretary for Economic Affairs. They were in the Midwest for a speaking engagement. When the planes were grounded, with no sign of when they would be allowed to resume flights, the Undersecretary and my friend rented a car and drove back to Washington.

Q: Uh-huh, yeah.

CEFKIN: Another issue that soon arose was the capture foreign fighters in Afghanistan who were nationals of various European countries. When we sent them to Guantanamo (Gitmo), some of these countries were quite indignant. We had to coordinate with the Departments of Defense and Justice to determine how to handle their inquiries, and begin a consultation process to determine which detainees were really dangerous. Over time, some were deported back to their home countries with appropriate assurances that the countries would keep them in custody or under surveillance (depending on how serious a threat they posed). The European countries, in some cases, were under a lot of pressure from their publics to get their nationals released, and of course, the legal basis on which they were being held was questioned. Of course the U.S. nightmare was that a fighter who was released would commit another terrorist attack against U.S. citizens.

Once normal air traffic resumed, we had a flurry of high-level visits from foreign leaders who wanted to consult on the "global war on terrorism." Even in non-crisis times, we had a lot of meetings and communications between U.S. and Western European leaders and foreign ministers, but with the 9/11 response the ops tempo increased considerably. Of course, all these meetings/phone calls required that our office prepare briefing memos and readouts. A lot of my job was to review and help provide quality control for the desk officer's work, as well as to clear on memos from other offices that touched on our countries. In sum, there was a lot of paper to chase and it was a very, very busy time.

Q: Yep.

CEFKIN: 9/11 was the biggest, but not the only security scare we faced that year. We also had the scare over the anthrax attacks that occurred at several places around DC. One day, we were in our office and one of the security guards came in and said don't go outside the office. Somebody from a neighboring office had passed out in the hallway and they thought there might be some white power near him. It turned out not to be anthrax, but before we knew that, one of the clerical staff members who did the mail pickup was advised to go on Cipro as a precaution.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: That was also the year we had the snipers killing people around the DC-Virginia, Maryland area.

Q: Oh my god.

CEFKIN: Going out shopping or to get gas became a harrowing, anxiety-ridden experience. I remember rationalizing that if I was in covered space it was probably safe. I went to the Home Depot at Seven Corners for something at one point and parked in the covered parking area. Later, one of the sniper attacks occurred there.

A final indignity was a crazy farmer, I think from the Midwest, who was very upset about something and drove a tractor onto the grounds of the Washington Monument. He claimed his tractor was booby trapped. So, they shut down large areas around the Mall until they could de-escalate that situation. So, it was a very, very strange year.

Q: Yeah. I was in FSI at the time taking a language.

CEFKIN: Okay. So, you experienced it from Washington but a different perspective.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: EUR/WE was a good office. Very busy, as I said, but we had a good esprit de corps. They had three mid-level officers who were the principal desk officers for the larger countries -- France, Italy, and Spain, and then we paired them each up with more

junior officers who helped cover those countries, and also had responsibility for one of the smaller countries. So one helped on France and also covered Monaco and the Vatican, one helped on Italy and also covered Portugal, and one helped on Spain and also covered Malta. It worked quite well and also ensured that we had back-up for all the portfolios. Our desk officers were a very good, dedicated team.

The European Bureau (EUR) also had a very strong leadership team. Beth Jones, our Assistant Secretary, was fantastic and had a very strong team of Deputy Assistant Secretaries. The DAS who covered Western European Affairs was a real pleasure to work with, as was my immediate boss – the EUR/WE Director. I learned a lot from both of them.

In addition to the response to 9/11, one of the special projects I worked on in that tour was supporting the renegotiation of our military basing agreement with Spain. We had a special negotiator, an ambassador, who led the U.S. negotiating team. The Spain desk officer and officers from Embassy Madrid were involved, but my boss asked me to provide strategic support to the lead negotiator and help troubleshoot. I participated in a round of negotiations taking place at the State Department during the endgame of the talks. The negotiations hit a snag, and tempers spiked between our Embassy Madrid representative and the lead negotiator. (Up until that point they had worked extremely well together). I was able to calm those tensions, and help find a practical way forward on the point of contention (involving defense industrial cooperation). The compromise satisfied the Spanish delegation and unlocked some important concessions on their part, which paved the way for successful conclusion of the agreement. That was a good experience.

Another responsibility I had in my role as deputy director was managing the assignments process for our office and our posts.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: I served as the point of contact for candidates bidding on our positions. I spent a lot of time collecting resumés and references, and interviewing candidates. At the time, State hadn't yet adopted the formal three-sixty-degree reference process that's in use now. But we developed our own three-sixty process. In addition to assessing the candidates, I conferred closely with the key decision-makers at our WE embassies and consulates to trade notes on the candidates and get their preferences. I then put together our lists of top candidates with brief justification for each. We submitted these lists for EUR's candidate review meeting (euphemistically known as "the meat market"). I also attended those meetings, which were chaired by EUR's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (P/DAS), to discuss our preferences and participate in the decision-making. The P/DAS was a maestro; he deftly juggled all the myriad considerations that went into making the assignments, coming up with the best possible match of personnel and positions. The process was a lot of work but also a very useful experience, teaching me a lot about how the process worked.

Q: Also, this is a time when the Soviet Union had collapsed, the East Bloc had broken up, NATO was beginning to consider expansion, and we were providing unusual assistance to the Soviet Union. I know it was carried out in a different office from yours, but did you become involved in any of that?

CEFKIN: Yes, definitely but more so in my next assignment, which I will speak to, of course.

Q: Okay, okay,

CEFKIN: Another highlight of my EUR/WE was the opportunity to serve as Acting Director for several months during the summer transition between the out-going and in-coming office directors. We had a crisis that flared during that time that put our office in the spotlight of State Department leadership. It involved a Mediterranean island that was contested territory; both Spain and Morocco laid claim to it.

Q: Hmm. Interesting.

CEFKIN: The incident was somewhat reminiscent of my experience with Mischief Reef in the South China Sea, during my Manila tour. This time, the island in question was called Parsley Island ("Perejil" in Spanish). The crisis was sparked in July 2002, when a small unit of Moroccan soldiers landed on the island and set up camp. The island was uninhabited, but the Moroccans claimed their troops were there to prevent it from being used as a transit point for smuggling. The Spanish became very agitated, and deployed a number of ships to the vicinity. About a week after the Moroccan occupation, a Spanish special forces unit landed on the island to oust the Moroccans. The Moroccans surrendered (fortunately without resistance) and were taken prisoner. At that point the Spanish Government installed Spanish Legion troops on the islands. Nationalist passions in both Spain and Morocco were running high, prompting fears that the dispute could escalate. Needless to say, throughout these developments, I was getting a lot of urgent late night calls from our Embassy in Madrid. I looped in our DAS and State Operations center to the developments. We decided we should try to defuse the situation and see if we could help the two countries find a way forward. Deputy Secretary Armitage engaged, and we thought he had facilitated an agreement, but unfortunately the agreement didn't hold. At that the Spanish Foreign Minister, a woman by the name of Ana de Palacio, appealed directly to Secretary Powell to engage, and he agreed.

The Spain desk officer and I, along with our DAS, spent a very busy weekend in the office, monitoring developments, providing guidance to our embassies and preparing the Secretary for his mediation efforts. We worked closely with our colleagues from the Near East Asian (NEA) Bureau, including the Morocco desk officer, the office director and their DAS. We worked very collaboratively together, keeping at the forefront of our actions U.S. interests in the region. Our respective embassies tended to get more caught up in the nationalist sentiments of the countries they were accredited to, so we needed to remind them at times to step back and see the importance of preserving relations with both Spain and Morocco. There were lots of frantic calls back and forth between the

Secretary and the Moroccan and Spanish foreign ministers and with our embassies. Eventually Powell succeeded in de-escalating the crisis. The Spanish agreed to leave the island and both countries agreed to respect the *status quo ante.* One of the positive things that emerged from the crisis was that Powell and Spanish Foreign Minister Ana de Palacio developed a very positive rapport, which helped us in future diplomatic outreach.

Unfortunately, I don't think Secretary Powell got as much credit as he deserved for heading off a possible military conflict between Spain and Morocco. The experience reminded me of a somewhat similar dispute between Greece and Turkey concerning an Aegean Island that Richard Holbrooke had helped diffuse in the 1990s. In that case, the press reported that "while Europe slept" the U.S. stepped up to end the stand-off. The Parsley Island dispute was another example of successful U.S. mediation, while the EU more or less stayed on the side-lines.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

CEFKIN: That was a very satisfying experience.

Q: This insight that you have about how the U.S. often has to step in behind the scenes to resolve problems among—mostly it would be NATO countries, is something that I think a lot of people don't realize actually goes on, because often these things, as you said, happen behind the scenes. The dispute you mentioned between Greece and Turkey over an island is also very much behind the scenes. Sure, it's reported, but most Americans don't pay that much attention, and they don't realize how big a role we play in NATO, not simply in leading it but also in resolving these little irritants between members.

CEFKIN: Yes, exactly. In my years of diplomatic experience I became fully convinced of the essential leadership role the United States plays globally. It's obviously concerning that the Trump administration has eschewed that leadership role.

Q: That was, yeah, that was what I was hoping you'd conclude. (Both laugh) Okay.

CEFKIN: During my second year in EUR/WE the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq – Operation Iraqi Freedom – dominated our work. This was a much more fraught issue than the Afghanistan campaign had been for our European allies.

Q: And here I do want to ask you one question. Yes, of course, the French were—did get a lot of very bad media and publicity. Of course, later, after the war began, they did offer assistance. What was your understanding in the European bureau about the reasons why France was so opposed?

CEFKIN: The French (rightfully) questioned our intelligence about the alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq. As you know, they turned out to be right. At one point in the lead-up to the war, some U.S. officials were promoting a story that Iraq had procured "yellow cake" (used in the production of nuclear weapons) from Niger. We had worked to track that report down and found no substance to the allegations, so when

President Bush repeated the claim in his 2002 State of the Union address, our hearts (in EUR/WE) sank. I also had a very clear recollection of sitting in our conference room with my WE colleagues watching Secretary Powell's presentation to the UN Security Council presenting U.S. "evidence" on Iraq's WMD programs, as a last-ditch U.S. effort to get UN support for military intervention in Iraq. Early in the presentation Powell shared an intercept of Iraqi officials that seemed very damning. But as the presentation went on it became clear that there were no smoking guns. So the accuracy of the intelligence used to justify the war was a major concern for the French and a number of other European countries. Furthermore, they worried about the destabilizing impact war with Saddam would have on the region.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Our partner countries were split in their reactions. Spain and Portugal, whose prime ministers had a good relationship with President Bush, came on board relatively early in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In Italy, Prime Minister Berlusconi also had a very positive relationship with Bush, so they came on board. But France was the hold-out, and relations became quite tense. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld was particularly critical – promoting the use of the terms "freedom fries" and "freedom toast" (as opposed to French fries and French toast) to taunt the French. The French were also quite strident in opposing Iraq efforts at the UN. Needless to say, we had a lot of relationship management to attend to preserve our bilateral cooperation in other areas. Eventually, once we had toppled Saddam, and to use Secretary Powell's Pottery Barn analogy –"we broke it, so we owned it," the French realized they had an interest in helping to try to stabilize Iraq, so they supported reconstruction efforts.

Another aspect of the job was backstopping our embassies. I enjoyed getting to know our ambassadors, DCMs, and staff at all our missions. The WE Ambassadors were, with the possible exception of Malta, political appointees, but most were serious professionals and quite successful.

Another thing I did in my second year in the WE position was to take on the role of being a bureau EEO counselor. That was a good learning experience.

Q: Did you run into any major problems with EEO?

CEFKIN: The work was department-wide. Every bureau put forward a couple of people to be on the register and the office overseeing EEO matters would assign us cases. Our role was to look into the issue and see if there was a remedy both parties could agree to. Our job wasn't to judge the merits of the complaint. If no mutually acceptable remedy was found, the person lodging the complaint could either request formal mediation, or appeal to the formal EEO body for an adjudication of their complaint. Most of the cases referred to me were complaints by State Civil Service employees. The Civil Service doesn't have the grievance process that the Foreign Service has, so sometimes they tried to fit what would more appropriately have been handled in a grievance process into an EEO complaint. There were a couple of cases I had lodged by Foreign Service Officers,

including one complaint filed by an Ambassador who had served in Africa. As part of my fact-finding in that case, I interviewed the Under Secretary for Management. The experience taught me a lot about the EEO process that was useful as I went on to leadership positions at Missions overseas.

Q: Now, it's only a two-year job; did they ask you to extend or what was your follow-on?

CEFKIN: By the time the bid season had arrived, I was well-known in the bureau and had a positive reputation, so I decided to focus on a follow-on assignment in EUR as my top choice. It was a good place to be bidding from, particularly given the experience I had on the assignment process. There weren't jobs overseas that looked like they would lend themselves to a good tandem assignment, so we bid on Washington jobs. In EUR, the bid list included one FS-1 Officer Director job – Director of Nordic- Baltic Affairs, which obviously was a real plum, so I lobbied hard for that position. To my great satisfaction, I was selected for and paneled to that job.

Q: All right.

CEFKIN: I was very lucky to have landed that position. After having served as deputy office director, becoming an office director was a logical next step. My husband decided it was time to bite the bullet and take a job in the Consular Bureau. He was paneled for a job in the bureau's executive office (CA/EX).

Q: Okay, yeah. He'll have a separate story. I don't want to ask you about his job in CA-EX, although it was a fascinating moment because we're continuing to upgrade the way we do consular work, especially after 9/11, and all of the protections and reviews of visas that began to be done much more carefully once that—once DHS (Department of Homeland Security) was created and so on.

CEFKIN: Yes.

Q: But that's a story for him.

CEFKIN: Yes. Although I should say—maybe this is jumping ahead a bit—but during his tour in CA-EX, State was scrambling to find people to staff our war zone missions in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Given Paul's background in the military he was very interested in going to Iraq.

Q: Ah.

CEFKIN: So, in April 2004, CA sent him out as the consular office to Baghdad.

Q: Oh, okay.

CEFKIN: His initial time there was under the Coalition Provisional Authority, the Bremer regime. But while he was there, CPA disbanded and we opened Embassy

Baghdad. So he was charged with staffing up the Consular Section, including hiring Foreign Service National employees. In total, he was there for six months.

Q: A fascinating moment, and I hope he'll agree to also record his oral history.

CEFKIN: I will encourage him to do that. Yes, I think it would be very fascinating.

Q: But now back to you.

CEFKIN: Back to me.

Q: And was there anything else in the Western European office that occupied you before you went on to Northern Europe?

CEFKIN: There were so many little crises and things that we tackled. I do remember there was one very awkward personnel issue I had to deal with, and I want to be careful here that I'm not divulging identities. This was actually during the period I was acting director over that summer during the interregnum between the two directors. One of the desk officers developed a very close relationship with the ambassador to the country he covered. The ambassador was a political appointee, a businessman, who was unfamiliar with State Department protocol. The desk officer was very capable, and dedicated. The two bonded when the ambassador went through the confirmation process. Even after the ambassador arrived at Post, he relied on the desk officer as a sounding board. The ambassador had a very good team at the embassy, including a very capable DCM. But they didn't mesh as well as hoped. So the ambassador wanted to bring the desk officer out as a special assistant. As soon as I heard that I knew that would undermine the authority of the DCM and senior leadership at post and would be very problematic. So, I had to go to the deputy assistant secretary to lay this out and get his guidance. He took quick action to put an end to the plan. Obviously that led to some hard feelings between the desk officer and his colleagues at Post, but it avoided a disaster.

Q: Yeah. I totally understand and it's an issue of discipline in the Foreign Service.

CEFKIN: Yes, exactly.

Another thing worth commenting on was the crushing amount of work our office faced. Every time there was a high-level meeting between U.S. and Western European principals or travel to a WE country by the President, the Secretary or senior U.S. officials (which happened fairly frequently) we had a ton of briefing memos to prepare.

Q: Oh, yes.

CEFKIN: This paper chase was particularly burdensome for the desk officers. They frequently worked exceedingly long hours. At one point, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Mark Grossman, convened a group of deputy directors to solicit ideas about how we could relieve some of this workload. Unfortunately, we didn't come up with any

creative solutions, but we commented that part of the problem stemmed from the extensive clearance process, which was very time-consuming. Of course, changes to that process would really have needed to come from Department leadership, since it was "the Line" (the Secretary's Secretariat) that enforced the clearance requirements. And every time someone made a move to reduce the number clearances, those who risked being cut out of the process objected, since they would lose influence in the policy process. So the question of workload continued to bedevil us.

Q: Yeah. It's interesting you mention it because I think slowly over time the work/life balance issue in the State Department does begin to get more attention and not least for tandems, especially those with children.

CEFKIN: Yes, definitely. For my generation, the work culture was "nose to the grindstone." We accepted that. But as younger generations entered the Foreign Service they legitimately started raising questions about work-life balance much more. I believe that gender also played a role. A lot of my male colleagues had fairly traditional marriages, with a spouse at home who could take care of shopping, childcare and household errands. Whereas for tandem couples, single officers, and many female officers with working husbands, when they finished their work day, they still had to deal with the shopping and other household errands.

Q: Oh, sure, absolutely.

But okay, then this is a good moment to check in with you on one thing. I mean, so far, your career has moved along quite well. You've gotten successively more responsible positions.

CEFKIN: Right.

Q: But did you feel at all in any part of this period up until now that you were facing a glass ceiling?

CEFKIN: At that point, no. There definitely were times when I detected a bit of a bias, particularly when I was interviewing for jobs. I already mentioned my Tokyo experience. But before that I remember another experience, when I was bidding on my third assignment – coming out of my desk job in the Africa Bureau. I was looking at some desk positions in the European Bureau. I interviewed with the deputy director in one office where there was a good job at my level that I was confident I had the background for. He was friendly enough but, he said they had "some really good candidates" bidding, the implication being that I wasn't "a really good candidate." Then he named an A-100 classmate of mine as being one of the "good candidates." I knew and liked this person a lot, but I also knew that his background and qualifications were very similar to mine. So, it created a perception that, as a female I had an extra hurdle to clear. Of course, in that case, I also had the disadvantage of not yet being known in the European Bureau.

Another thing I noticed was that female officers generally didn't talk themselves up as much as their male counterparts did. It didn't come naturally to us to tout our successes.

Q: Yeah, I would tend to agree with you, at least in my experience. It did change—

CEFKIN: And I frequently had the experience of "speaking while female." I would say something in a meeting. Then a male colleague would make the same point and people would say, "oh, great idea!"

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: That was very frustrating. At one point I raised it with a male colleague, asking "Is there something about the way I'm presenting myself that leads people to just gloss over what I say?" He said he didn't think that was the case, but suggested I might need to be more forceful in meetings, which probably was true.

Q: Wow. Yeah. I understand.

CEFKIN: In critiquing my own presentation skills, I believe I could have improved the way I pitched issues. Nonetheless, it made me feel better to later learn "speaking while female" (i.e. women being ignored while talking) was an actual phenomenon.

Still, by the time I was drawing toward the end of my EUR/WE tour, I was in a very good place career-wise. I felt respected and I obviously had the support of my bureau leadership. So at that point I was feeling quite positive about future prospects.

Q: Very good.

All right, shall we follow you then into this office director job and begin with what your responsibilities were, what the assistant secretary or the DAS had described to you as your goals for the office?

CEFKIN: Yeah. The office I headed – the Office of Nordic and Baltic Affairs – as the title describes, covered relations with the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Iceland) and the three Baltic countries (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia). At that time, the three Baltic countries were in the process of becoming members of the European Union and of NATO, so a big focus for our office was supporting their integration into these institutions. We also launched a new regional initiative – the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (EPINE) that I will discuss more in a bit. And we had a grab-bag of interesting security and economic issues with the various countries. Three of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, and Sweden) were EU members; Norway and Iceland were not. And three (Denmark, Iceland, and Norway) were NATO allies; Finland and Sweden were not. So those affiliations shaped our relations.

Of course, another key focus was supporting our embassies in the field. Some required a fair bit of hand-holding. We had a mixture of career and political ambassadors. One of the political appointee ambassadors was superb. The others were less effective leaders – causing some morale issues at their posts. So we tried to help the staff navigate those challenges. The deputy assistant secretary we worked with was a political appointee, but very serious, very good. She had a strong background in European affairs and was very capable, smart and dynamic.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: Yeah, working with her was a good experience. But I felt that my office was understaffed for the workload. My deputy director doubled as the Iceland desk officer. You might be tempted to think that managing the Iceland account — given the small size of the country — was easy. In fact, it was anything but. Then we had one officer who covered Denmark and Norway, one who covered Finland and Sweden, and one who handled the three Baltic countries. So, on a good day, they had multiple portfolios to juggle. Then if one of them was away on leave or travel, the workload for the back-up officer quadrupled.

A lot of our focus with the Nordic and Baltic countries was promoting ways we could work together to advance global objectives, as opposed to strictly focusing on bilateral matters. For example, I mentioned earlier, the EPINE initiative. It had been formulated before I came into the EUR/NB Directorship, but I was charged with overseeing the plan to formally launch and implement the initiative.

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: EPINE was a great concept but putting the meat on the bones was somewhat challenging. The idea behind it was to harness our Nordic-Baltic partnerships to advance our common values and interests globally. For the formal roll-out, we partnered with Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies to host a symposium, where our DAS gave the keynote speech. That went well. In terms of operationalizing the initiative, a key focus was promoting democratic development in countries of the former Soviet Union. One specific project involved support for independent media in Belarus.

We also worked to promote Nordic-Baltic support for the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq and to manage one of the legacy issues of Operation Enduring Freedom – dealing with suspected terrorist detainees being held at Guantanamo who were Nordic nationals. (Most, of course, were naturalized citizens of those countries, who had immigrated from the Middle East or North Africa and then gotten caught up with jihadist organizations and lured to Afghanistan to fight.) I recall a particularly fraught negotiation with the Swedish Government to broker the transfer from Guantanamo back to Sweden of one of their nationals. The U.S. military had to first determine that the person in question was not a major terrorist figure, and that they did not have grounds for prosecution. And the Swedish Government had to provide strict assurances that once transferred, the individual would be under careful surveillance. Of course, the U.S. fear

was that one of the detainees released would wind up back in Afghanistan killing American soldiers. But we did eventually accomplish the transfer.

Another security issue I engaged on was the negotiation of an agreement to update a U.S. Air Force radar facility in Thule, Greenland. Greenland is an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark. The Island is largely self-governing, but the Government of Denmark oversees Greenland's foreign and security affairs. That made the negotiations tri-partite – including U.S., Danish, and Greenlander delegations. Denmark had the lead for Greenland, but they had to be attuned to Greenlander sensitivities and to avoid railroading them. That made the negotiations tricky, but also very interesting. We had a very good Denmark desk officer who engaged with our Embassy on the ongoing conduct of the negotiations, and I helped provide strategic direction. Secretary Powell helped push the negotiations over the finish line during a visit to Denmark. He later traveled to Greenland to participate in the signing ceremony for the agreement, so that was a major success for our office.

I had mentioned earlier that Iceland filled a lot of our time. That was because we had an issue involving the deployment of a couple of F-15s at the Keflavik Naval Air Station there. The U.S. had built the base during WWII. During the Cold War, it became a NATO base, manned by the U.S. As a very small country (population around 300,000), Iceland didn't have a standing army or air force, so they entered into a defense agreement with us. The F-15s were deployed to handle security for Iceland's airspace. But with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq demands for assets in other theaters, DoD wanted to downsize our defense presence in Iceland and redeploy the F-15s to higher priority missions. They said that they could handle the Iceland patrol with sorties from other near-by bases. However the Icelandic Prime Minister was dead set against redeploying those planes. He had supported President Bush in the war in Iraq, so the White House didn't want us to force the issue, but rather to come up with a diplomatic solution.

Q: Well, this is an interesting question. They didn't want the U.S. planes to leave because they feared loss of strategic value of Iceland to the U.S. or the funds that I guess repay for renting or leasing, or all of it?

CEFKIN: It was largely strategic, as I recall. But it's also true that the base was a major employer and source of income for Iceland. It was a difficult problem, which wasn't resolved during my time in NB. About a year after I left, the U.S. finally decided it was going to pull the plug, so the U.S. planes and defense presence left. But I understand that more recently, the U.S. Air Force has sought new agreements with Iceland to establish facilities at Keflavik for a possible rotational presence.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: Overall, our relations with Iceland were very cordial, but in addition to the base/fighter aircraft issue there were surprising irritants that popped up in the relationship. For example, the Government of Iceland granted asylum to former chess champion Bobby Fischer, who was wanted in the U.S. on charges of violating U.S.

sanctions. Fischer had been arrested in Japan, but before he could be extradited to the U.S., Iceland granted him citizenship and issued him a passport. The decision stemmed from nostalgia over the fact that Iceland had been the venue for the 1972 chess championship where Fischer had defeated Soviet chess champion Boris Spassky. Another point of contention with Iceland was whaling policy. Even though Iceland was a member of the International Whaling commission, which had imposed a moratorium on commercial whaling, the National Whaling Commission, Iceland announced its intention to defy the ban. So U.S. officials were unhappy about that.

Q: Were there any—speaking of legacy and minorities, were there any issues related to Jewish minorities or to restitution?

CEFKIN: Yes, definitely, particularly with the three Baltic countries. We worked closely with the Office of Holocaust Issues on property restitution issues with those countries. We also pushed them to acknowledge and address their instances of collaboration with the Nazis, such as participation in Waffen SS units. We protested instances when government officials sanctioned or participated in commemorations of these units. Their argument was that the veterans of these units were patriots who were fighting the Soviets and that they weren't really Nazis. But we didn't buy that argument.

Another historical legacy issue we dealt with in the Baltic countries was treatment of their Russian minority populations. Not surprisingly, given their history of having been subjected to Russian/Soviet domination, fear of Russia is strong in the three countries. But they also had a sizable ethnic Russian minority population – particularly Latvia and to a somewhat lesser decree Estonia and Lithuania. So in accordance with democratic principles, and their commitments as new EU members, we pressed them to afford this minority group appropriate protections and access to equal opportunities.

Q: You had mentioned we are supporting their eventual entry into NATO. Did any of them accede to NATO while you were there in the office?

CEFKIN: Yes, they all acceded to NATO in March 2004. So that was a triumphant moment; we had a big celebration at the State Department. They also acceded to the EU in the spring of 2004. That was another cause for celebration.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: One of the pleasures of the job was being able to travel to the eight countries we covered (in some cases multiple times). That was very interesting and, in addition to advancing policy priorities with host government officials, allowed me to meet the embassy teams and get a sense of how they were working together. Some had very happy work environments; others less so. In part that could be attributed to the senior leadership (which I'll elaborate on in a bit), but one of the post management officers I worked with had a theory that sometimes, when the environment was extremely nice (which was true for our posts – especially the Nordic countries), the staff manufactured interpersonal conflicts to shake things up. There may have been some truth to that.

Q: Oh, yeah.

CEFKIN: One of my trips to Latvia coincided with the visit of a big Congressional delegation headed by Senator John McCain. They were there to attend a conference the Latvian's were hosting in support for independent media in Belarus. That was the first time I had met McCain. He was very friendly; I remember being very impressed by him.

Q: Of course.

CEFKIN: On another of my trips, I was preparing to head to Sweden, when the news broke that Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh had been assassinated. Sweden was preparing to hold a referendum on whether to join the Eurozone. (Sweden was an EU member, but had not adopted the Euro; which was also true in Denmark, by the way.) In any case, there was a lot of emotion surrounding the issue, and as I recall, the assassination had some connection to that.

Q: Oh, wow.

CEFKIN: Needless to say, it was devastating for the country. I asked our Embassy in Stockholm whether I should cancel my trip. They said I should come ahead. It was a very interesting trip.

Lindh had developed a positive relationship with Colin Powell, so the Secretary decided to attend her funeral. The insights I developed in my visit to Stockholm were very helpful to me in helping prepare the Secretary for that trip, including drafting the eulogy he was planning to give. Unfortunately, a hurricane – Hurricane Isabel – hit the DC area just when Powell was scheduled to depart, so he had to cancel the trip. But Embassy Stockholm delivered the eulogy on his behalf, and the fact that he had been prepared to attend meant a lot to the Swedes.

Q: Had relations with Russia become an issue for you?

CEFKIN: The Baltic countries, having previously been forcibly made part of the Russian (and then later) the Soviet empire, were hypersensitive about Russia. That was the major motivating factor for them to become members of NATO and the EU. Lithuania felt particularly vulnerable, since Kaliningrad – a piece of land sort of between Lithuania and Poland – is Russian territory, so they were always nervously watching what the Russians were doing there. But all three Baltic countries were leery of Russian intentions.

The Nordic countries had varying histories of conflict and cooperation with Russia, but not the acute fear that the Baltic countries did. In general, as far as I recall, we were fairly well aligned on our policy towards Russia, at that time.

Q: Okay. Well, the Norwegians have the North Sea—

CEFKIN: Ah, yes, that's true. That raises another issue NB covered: the work of the Arctic Council. Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, and the U.S. are all members (as are Canada and Russia), so we cooperated with the Nordic countries in that forum, and our DAS participated in several Arctic council meetings. I don't recall it being a major focus for us. With the increased focus on climate change, however, the Arctic council has gained greater prominence in recent years.

Q: Yeah. Any personnel issues that you had to resolve?

CEFKIN: Well, yes, there were always personnel issues to address. As mentioned earlier, I didn't feel our office was adequately staffed. Based on my experience in the Office of Western European Affairs, which had a very heavy workload, but a better backup system for the desk officers, I wanted to establish a bit more depth in NB. I was able to get approval to create a temporary position – a Y-tour – to bring an officer on board to help staff the Iceland portfolio. That relieved some of the burden on my deputy, so that he was able to focus more attention on office management.

Another achievement on the personnel front, that brought great satisfaction, concerned our Baltic desk officer. She was a very capable and dedicated Civil Service officer. Recognizing her potential, I nominated her for a Civil Service executive leadership program. I believe that was helpful to her subsequent advancement to leadership positions at State.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: But with the embassies, we definitely had to help manage some morale problems. Our missions in the Nordic countries (with the exception of Iceland) were headed by political appointee ambassadors who had varying levels of leadership skills. One, a businessman from Washington, was superb. The mission he headed was very happy and productive. Another one was very smart and strong on the policy front, but he was fairly distant when it came to the embassy staff, so that mission was productive, but morale wasn't great there. At a third mission, where we had two different ambassadors during my time in NB, the first ambassador was very dynamic and hard-charging. That ambassador was beloved by the host government. But for the embassy staff, all the "big ideas" this ambassador had were burdensome to implement, so they were frustrated. The second ambassador was lower key and more attentive to embassy staff, so they were happier. But that ambassador was less effective in terms of outreach to the host government.

When I first arrived in NB, our missions in the Baltic countries were headed by career ambassadors, but when they rotated out, two of them were replaced by political appointee ambassadors. They both definitely had difficulty adjusting to their roles and understanding the work of the members of their teams, so morale at those posts declined. We worked to coach the ambassadors and their staffs through those challenges. I don't mean to suggest there were no challenges with the career ambassadors. There were at times, but in general, for those I worked with in NB, their missions operated more

smoothly. In any case, getting to know the ambassadors and their teams – especially their deputy chiefs of mission, who I spent a lot of time consulting with – was interesting and taught me a lot.

Q: But the other thing about political appointees for you is that you're now at a relatively high level of responsibility and you would be looking also for their recommendations for your next assignment. Were they helpful in that way? Because, you know, typically another Foreign Service officer would be aware of, you know, the need that you have for recommendations for wherever you're going next, whereas political appointees don't have necessarily as much commitment to the service and may simply not think in those terms.

CEFKIN: I don't think I called on any of the ambassadors to help on the personnel front, since I felt I had sufficient contacts in the European Bureau. Though I may have asked some of the DCMs I worked with for references.

One of the other interesting leadership experiences I had serving as NB Director was the opportunity to occasionally serve as Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS). Our DAS was responsible for two offices: NB and the Office of North Central European Affairs (NCE) --covering Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania. In that role, I attended the Front Office meetings that A/S Jones had at the beginning of the day (to prepare for her meetings with the Secretary) and at the end of the day (to catch up on what was happening in our countries of responsibility.) As mentioned previously, EUR had a really good Front Office team. I enjoyed getting to know Beth Jones and her DASes better and seeing how they operated. The evening meetings – "Vespers"—were particularly fun. In Beth's office where we met, there was a couch and several chairs where we would sit. The couch was labeled "the couch of shame," and whoever sat there would get teased that they had a particularly difficult problem to discuss.

Serving as acting DAS also allowed me to become familiar with the NCE countries and our missions there. One of my DAS stints coincided with an official visit to Washington by the Polish President. On the eve of the visit I was able to spur finalization of an agreement that eased the clearance process for flights from Warsaw to the U.S., which was a priority for both our governments, so that was well-received.

One other role I was tapped for towards the end of my NB assignment was to serve as EUR's Transition Coordinator to help prepare for Condoleezza Rice's arrival as the new Secretary of State. Of course we'd had the 2004 elections, and even though George Bush won reelection, Colin Powell stepped down and Rice was confirmed as the new SecState. In that role, I worked with all the EUR offices to pull together an overview of key issues and upcoming events in Europe as well as EUR recommendations for how the Secretary should engage with European partners during her first six months.

With the change of Department leadership, we also had a change of EUR leadership, so my final few months in EUR/NB were working under a new Assistant Secretary – Dan Fried – and a new team of DASes.

Q: So, is this then a moment that you're beginning to think about what's next?

CEFKIN: Yes, absolutely. The next logical step for me was to be a DCM. Having been involved in the personnel process through my jobs in EUR, I understood how the DCM selection process worked and I knew the people making the decisions, so I decided to focus on DCM/Principal Officer positions for my next move.

Q: Good, okay.

CEFKIN: I still had contacts in the EAP bureau, as well as EUR, so I decided to look at positions in both bureaus. Of course, the tricky thing was navigating the tandem thing.

Q: Yes, yes, always.

CEFKIN: In EAP, I bid on the DCM position in Cambodia, the Consul General (CG) position in Chiang Mai, Thailand and the Consul General position in Auckland, New Zealand. In EUR my top bids were the DCM positions in Sofia, Bulgaria and in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Consul General position Marseilles, France. I received positive feedback on all those bids. I think that Chiang Mai or Marseilles could have been real options for me, but there wasn't any possibility of a tandem assignment for Paul in either place. With Auckland, there actually was a consular position open, at the right level, and EAP was willing to consider us both for those jobs, but it wasn't at all practical because the consular office backed up the CG so one of the two of us would have always had to be there. In any case, I don't think we would have ever been able to receive an anti-nepotism agreement to serve together at that small post. EAP was keen to offer me the DCM job in Cambodia, and I was very tempted. There was an Ambassador for Cambodia in the pipeline who wasn't confirmed yet. I didn't know him personally, but he had an excellent reputation. But EAP wasn't positive about figuring out a tandem assignment for Paul at Embassy Phnom Penh.

Q: Yep.

CEFKIN: Sofia was also a strong possibility for me, but there really wasn't a position coming open that would've worked for Paul. So I concluded that as appealing as the above jobs were, they weren't the road to go down.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: But fortunately, in the case of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the consular chief position was coming open, and the Bureau and the Embassy were receptive to supporting an anti-nepotism agreement that would allow Paul to serve in that position and report directly to the Ambassador, so that he wouldn't be in my supervisory chain of command. I also knew the Ambassador, having worked with him when he was Consul General in Milan and I was Deputy Director in EUR/WE. He was positive about the work I had done with assignments to Milan, so that played in my favor. Furthermore,

while I was in NB, as I mentioned earlier, Paul had done a six-month TDY as the consular officer in Baghdad. So the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs was very supportive of getting him an assignment he really wanted.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: So, we agreed to push for Sarajevo. We worked out the anti-nepotism agreement with the Legal Advisor's office and were paneled into the DCM and Consular Chief positions.

Q: And now, this is what year?

CEFKIN: This is 2005.

Q: Yeah. Wow. Now, will you do language training for Sarajevo?

CEFKIN: Yes. (Both laugh) The assignments were via one year of Bosnian language training.

Q: Okay. Oh, my.

CEFKIN: So, in September we trot off to FSI to do Bosnian language training. It was a very interesting experience. Now, I should preface my description of the experience by saying I always enjoyed learning languages.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: I enjoyed the flexibility that the FSI language training offered, including being able to wear comfortable clothes and structure the time that you aren't in class the way you want. During the time that you are in training you really are only responsible for yourself. Of course you want to do well and uphold a positive reputation, but you don't really have other people depending on you the way you do when you're "on the job." I also enjoy the process of acquiring a new language and the cultural insights you gain in the process. On the other hand, learning a new language is hard work. That was particularly true for Bosnian, which is a Slavic language. It's the hardest language I've ever studied. And even though you're generally only in class for 5 hours a day, it can be quite exhausting, and outside of class on nights and weekends, there's always pressure to be spending more time studying. Also, since I was going out as DCM and knew I would be supervising the students I was in training with, I was particularly conscious of the image I was projecting. On a positive note, in 2005, coming out of our jobs in CA/EX and EUR/NB, respectively, Paul and I both got promoted, so I entered the senior ranks.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

CEFKIN: It wasn't a big group of students. There were only eight or ten of us studying Bosnian. They split us into two classes. Paul and I ended up in the same class, which was

unusual, since in my previous experience, FSI had tried to avoid having spouses in the same class. That was a little tricky, but we survived the experience. There were three Bosnian teachers, and we rotated among the three. They were all very nice, but there was some friction among them, so that was another challenge (laughs).

Q: Right. Kind of reflects the country that you're going to.

CEFKIN: Exactly, so true. The three teachers had very different personalities. One, who was a bit older, was mellower and seemed to get along well with the other two. But the other two – one a Bosnian-Croat and one a Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) – had some real clashes. I can't say how much the clashes involved cultural differences. They were both supportive of an independent Bosnia-Herzegovina, but their approaches towards teaching were different, so the tension may have been partly over pedagogy.

I later concluded that State had made a mistake splitting-up the Serbo-Croatian Department into separate Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian Departments. In fact, after I got to Post, my DCM counterparts at our Embassies in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and I made a recommendation to recombine the departments, since for all of us it really was the same language – just different dialects.

Q: Now, and of course the other thing is, as you're learning the language, I imagine they're integrating "regional studies," or having people talk to you about what you're getting into. Did you feel that you had a reasonable knowledge of what you were getting into?

CEFKIN: You know, the area studies course was okay. The program was somewhat uneven, not as good overall as the Southeast Asian area studies I did when I was in Thai training, but there were definitely some useful lessons. The other thing I did to prepare for the job was to stop by the Bosnian Desk when I could read the cable traffic from Embassy Sarajevo. Of course, I had regular communication with the incumbent DCM, and I worked with the Bosnian Desk Officer, who was excellent, set up consultations with key players on U.S.-Bosnian relations in Washington before I departed for Sarajevo. We generally had a free afternoon every week during language training for "administrative" business, so I was able to tackle the consultations over time instead of waiting till the very end.

Another thing I was able to take advantage of was an option FSI had developed that allowed us to do an in-country immersion trip during spring break.

Q Excellent.

CEFKIN: So, my husband and I, along with most of the language students and two of our teachers went to Bosnia in April. We traveled around the country and had some very interesting cultural, historical, and political discussions with local experts. We also spent several days in Sarajevo, so we were able to see where we would be working and living,

meet Embassy staff, and I was able to have quality discussions with the outgoing DCM. That was really extremely helpful.

Q: Did you feel by the time you arrived that the amount you learned was at least enough to make you feel comfortable?

CEFKIN: Yes. Language-wise you mean?

Q: Language-wise.

CEFKIN: Yes, but it was a challenge. I regretted not polishing the language, more than I did during my three years in Bosnia. Part of that, I think, was the position. At the embassy we had four protocol assistants, which is bigger than most embassies have, but three of the four were interpreters. Whenever the Ambassador or I went to meetings with local officials or traveled, we took one of the protocol assistants as a translator. At our level it was important to be precise in our discussions, so it was best not to rely on my OK, but not sophisticated Bosnian. But use of the translators was also a crutch. When I gave speeches or did media outreach, I would generally start off with a few sentences in Bosnian (which the protocol assistants helped me script) and would then switch to English, with the protocol assistant providing consecutive translation. But my language was fine for getting around in less formal situations. I was able to watch and understand the local news and read the local newspapers. Also, one thing I found (which was also true when I went back to Bangkok the second time) was that one of the best ways to practice using the language was with my drivers and household staff.

Q: Yeah. Now, I want to begin with just the arrival in Sarajevo because there's so many issues.

CEFKIN: So, many issues!

Q: And what I want to begin asking you is how were you briefed about your own personal security there? Was that a concern?

CEFKIN: It wasn't a big concern. We had a security detail for the Ambassador. When I served as Chargé, I had the detail. But as the DCM I wasn't required to have protection. Sarajevo was a bit unusual in that, rather than relying on local authorities for the Ambassador's protection, we had our own embassy protective detail that the Regional Security Office (RSO) hired and trained. They were a great group, so I enjoyed working with them when I picked up the detail as Chargé. But obviously it put more restraint on my movements. I couldn't be spontaneous; on weekends, etc. when I had the detail; we had to plan what we wanted to do in advance.

Speaking of bodyguards, one of the first management challenges I faced when I arrived concerned protection for two other senior Foreign Service Officers in Sarajevo. One was a former Ambassador who was serving as the Principal Deputy High Representative (PDHR) at the Office of the High Representative (OHR) -- the organization set up to

provide international supervision to Bosnia until the country became fully self-governing. The second was a senior FSO who headed the OSCE office in Bosnia. They had Embassy-provided security details. This was a big expense. The RSO had decided that the threat environment had improved and wanted to cut back on body-guard coverage for those two officials. That sparked a big protest from the PDHR and OSCE head, particularly the former. I worked to facilitate better communication between them and the RSO. Eventually, a new RSO arrived, who approached the issue with more flexibility. She was able to broker a solution that met everyone's concerns.

But back to your original question, there wasn't a big concern for physical security of most Embassy staff except for the problem of landmines left-over from the war, which were widespread throughout the country. We required every member of the embassy to attend a landmine briefing twice a year to remind them not to wander off the beaten path, either in the countryside or in cities (where even abandoned buildings could pose a risk).

Q: Sure. Amazing. What else struck you in terms of arrival?

CEFKIN: So, in terms of arrival, I'll note two broad themes. The first is that the Embassy had just become a "family post" and there were a number of morale issues associated with that transition. The second is that I arrived about a decade after the end of the war, but the trauma from the war and mistrust among communities was still very deep. Also, the government structure set up by the Dayton Accords was very complex and not fully functional. I concluded that the Dayton Accords had ended the war, but hadn't cemented the peace. That made our work very challenging.

I arrived in Sarajevo on July 7 of 2006. I arrived solo, because Paul was finishing up language training and handling our pack-out. My arrival coincided with the embassy's community July Fourth picnic. So I went to that and had a chance to meet staff informally. Then I had a weekend to unpack, get over jet-lag and get acclimated a bit. The Ambassador also had me over to his residence for drinks and to watch the World Cup final with him and his partner. I knew the ambassador from my time as EUR/WE Director when he had been the Consul General in Milan, but we hadn't worked directly together previously.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: Embassy Sarajevo is a medium-sized embassy, with a total staff of around 600. We had several agencies present there. In addition to State, they included Defense, CIA, USAID, and Justice. Sarajevo was classified as a hardship post, and had been designated a danger post, but that designation was lifted while I was in language training. That change meant that families with school-aged children could come to Sarajevo. That was a positive development but raised a number of management challenges.

Q: Ah, yes.

CEFKIN: One of these challenges was schooling. There was a small international school that got mixed reviews. At the elementary level most families were satisfied with the quality of the instruction. But at the secondary level there were concerns. The problem really was that the school was just very small and had limited resources. The high school only had a couple of students per grade, so it obviously couldn't deliver a typical American high school experience. Students who were independent, self-starters did fine with the situation, but some families were disgruntled. Often, they had failed to take advantage of the resources State offers to research the educational options before being assigned to Sarajevo. That was a frustration.

Another big challenge was healthcare.

Q: Yes, I wanted to get to that because I imagine there isn't much.

CEFKIN: There were some very capable doctors who had been educated abroad practicing in Sarajevo, but the hospital was pretty grim and poorly-equipped. We really didn't want to rely on the hospital for emergency care, and strived to medevac any members of our American community who became seriously ill as quickly as possible. But we had a few close calls, so that was a source of anxiety.

Another source of anxiety was air quality.

Q: Ah. Okay.

CEFKIN: Many of the homes in Sarajevo relied on burning coal or wood for heat during the winter. That caused very bad air quality, especially since Sarajevo is surrounded by mountains, which causes an inversion that traps the pollution over the city. People with upper-respiratory problems had a particularly tough time and sometimes ended up having to curtail their assignments.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: Another morale issue was Bosnia's relative isolation. Sarajevo had a cute little airport about 20 minutes outside the city at Butmir, where the NATO/EUFOR base was. There weren't many places you could get direct flights to. The main international gateways were Munich and Vienna. There were also direct flights to Istanbul and Budapest. Flights tended to be expensive though, so it wasn't easy to get away, if you wanted a break from Bosnia. The more serious problem was that the airport was built in a place that was prone to fog, especially in the winter months. It was common for there to be stretches of several days when no planes could land or depart, and that tended to happen around the Thanksgiving-Christmas holiday periods when Embassy staff were trying to get home. Needless to say that fed anxiety.

Q: Land travel? Was that easier?

CEFKIN: That was easier, yeah, but obviously it took more time. You could drive to Croatia or Serbia fairly easily, and even up to Hungary. You could certainly drive to Germany, but it was a longer trip.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Politically it was a very, very complex situation.

Q: Oh, yeah. And still, I mean still you are implementing the Dayton Accords.

CEFKIN: Exactly. Implementing the Dayton Accords was our main focus. As part of that, we were supporting the development of state institutions that hadn't previously existed – including a unified military, a national investigative service (an FBI-equivalent) and state courts. Some of these efforts were more successful than others, but they were major undertakings.

The U.S. had the lead in overseeing the defense reform – bringing soldiers from the formerly warring ethnic armies together in a national multi-ethnic army. A senior State Department official (a civil service officer) was assigned to head that project. It was challenging, but quite successful. Once the army was stood up, the Bosnian government agreed to send an explosive ordnance unit to support coalition efforts in Iraq. The experience of working together in these units helped cement the esprit de corps among the soldiers. The BiH military and government were quite proud of this effort. To reinforce this success, the Ambassador and I made a point of one of us always attending the ceremonies to welcome back and send off the units rotating in and out of Iraq.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) had programs to support the capacity-building of Bosnia's courts and the national investigative service, which was called SIPA. We had DOJ offices at the Embassy overseeing those efforts. Also, there were international judges and prosecutors, including a number of Americans, seconded to work in the courts dedicated to war crimes and to corruption prosecutions.

The Bosnian government structure created by the Dayton constitution is very complex. They have a tri-presidency – one president representing each of the three ethnic groups. They take turns, in eight-month rotations, serving as the lead president (Chairman of the Presidency). But they all had to agree for major policies to be adopted. The appointment of ministers to head the various executive branch departments is done through negotiation, to ensure proportional representation of the three ethnic groups. BiH also has a bicameral Parliament with the representatives chosen through a proportional electoral system. At the subnational level, Bosnia is divided into two large entities – The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which governs the Muslim and Croat majority area of the country, and the Republika Srpska, which governs the Serbian majority area of Bosnia.

There is also a small autonomous area in the north of Bosnia between the two entities. It's called the Brcko District. It's multiethnic and has been seen as a model for relative ethnic

harmony and less contentious governance. As part of Bosnia's international supervisory regime, an International Supervisor (generally an American) is appointed to help guide the Brcko government. You've no doubt heard about that from Susan Johnson, who served in that role. In fact she was the Brcko Supervisor during the first part of my Bosnia tour.

Q: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

CEFKIN: Before I arrived in Sarajevo, the Ambassador and the Embassy had led a big push to negotiate a constitutional reform with Bosnian leaders, in an attempt to make the government more functional. They came close to an agreement, but unfortunately couldn't get the parties over the final hurdles and ultimately concluded the country was not yet ready for this reform.

In this environment, a key Embassy focus was seeking to anchor Bosnia in Euro-Atlantic institutions, by encouraging the country's pursuit of EU and NATO membership. We saw this as a vital step in developing Bosnia as a peaceful, stable democracy. There was broad consensus on the goal of pursuing EU membership, but to achieve this goal the government had to implement a long list of reforms. It was, and still is slow-going. NATO membership was a bit more contentious. The Bosnian Serbs were skittish in their support for this goal. But Bosnia did join NATO's Partnership for Peace program in 2006. After my tour, NATO approved a Membership Action Plan for Bosnia, but implementation of that plan has been stalled by Bosnian Serb intransigence.

Another important area of Embassy focus during my tour was dealing with the legacy of the war by: finding, apprehending and trying war criminals; supporting refugee resettlement; and identifying the remains of the dead uncovered in mass graves. There was still tremendous trauma in the country, and tremendous mistrust among the ethnic groups. The Balkan region is very burdened by its history and legacy of war.

Before and during my tour I read all the books I could to better understand this history. You've probably heard about the tragic loss of three members of Richard Holbrooke's negotiating team in an accident on Mount Igman during the war. One of those killed in the accident was Foreign Service Officer, Ambassador Robert Frasure.

Q: Sure.

CEFKIN: Before his death, Frasure had written that diplomacy in Bosnia "was like whitewater rafting."

Q: (Laughs)

CEFKIN: That description really stuck with me; it sums up the experience of working there very well.

During my time the U.S. Government enjoyed high credibility with the three ethnic

parties, which was an advantage, but it also meant that we were often looked to resolve even relatively minor issues that arose. So, the work was both exhilarating and exhausting.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: Earlier, I mentioned that Bosnia had an international supervisory regime overseeing the country's governance. The implementing body for this regime is the Office of the High Representative (OHR). OHR is headed by a senior European official who serves as the High Representative (HR). The HR has special powers called "the Bonn powers," that enables him to impose decisions on Bosnia's government. The HR is assisted by a Principal Deputy High Representative (PDHR) – a position held by a senior American official. OHR reports to and takes direction from the Peace Implementation Council (PIC). The full PIC includes 55 countries and agencies, but its operational arm is the PIC Steering Board which includes: the U.S, UK, EU, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan, Russia, and Turkey. Representatives of the PIC Steering board met weekly in Sarajevo to discuss developments and make important decisions. The Ambassador attended these meetings, but when I served as Chargé, I attended in his place. It was an interesting experience. The group could be quite fractious, with the Russian Ambassador often blocking consensus on the decisions we were trying to make. About the time I arrived at Post, Bosnia was supposed to be graduating from OHR oversight, but the PIC concluded it was premature. The OHR still exists to this day.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: NATO played an important role in Bosnia during and after the war. During the war, NATO forces provided air support to UN Peacekeepers. Then, in the wake of the Srebrenica massacre, NATO launched an air campaign against the Serbian belligerents. After the Dayton Treaty was signed, NATO troops staffed the initial Implementation Force and subsequent Stabilization Force. In 2004, NATO transferred responsibility for overseeing the implementation of military aspects of the Dayton Accords to the European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR), under EU control. But the U.S. maintained a small American NATO presence to serve as liaison to EUFOR and to provide intelligence support. So the Ambassador and I met regularly with the General who commanded that unit.

So, the preceding background sets the scene for my tour in Bosnia.

Q: Okay, today is December 9, 2021. And we are concluding our interview with a missing portion of Judith Cefkin's oral history. And that is her time first as DCM [deputy chief of mission] in Bosnia, and we'll begin there. And Judith what year was that?

CEFKIN: That was 2006. I arrived in July 2006. In our last session, I talked a bit about the mission and some of the management and policy challenges. So, if it's okay, I could pick up by describing what issues came up during my three years there?

Q: And if you could begin with, usually the ambassador in the DCM [deputy chief of mission] divides things up at the beginning of the DCM tour, how did that work with you and the ambassador? What were the respective responsibilities?

CEFKIN: Well, of course, the ambassador was very, very active in terms of outreach, and policy engagement. So he was on the road, quite a bit, locally within Bosnia. There were also some international meetings that he had to attend regularly. In terms of the overall division of labor, the Ambassador relied on me for the hands-on day-to-day management of the mission, coordination of inter-office teamwork, and counseling staff. I did the typical things DCM do such as having regular meetings with key section heads and chairing working groups to tackle key objectives. He also encouraged me to do outreach, representational events, and policy engagement. I handled demarches that needed to be delivered at an embassy leadership level when the ambassador had competing obligations. I also traveled around the country to give speeches and preside at ribbon-cuttings for U.S. projects. So it was quite a bit of both inside and outside work for me.

Q: With regard to that, I am a bit curious if this is a good place—if you want to comment on the nature of the relationship between the embassy and the high reps [representative] office because this is a very unusual country. And typically, you would be in contact with your opposite number in a bilateral embassy when you needed to be. But in this case, the government of Bosnia has a lot of faces. And, so I'm curious if you want to comment on how the embassy interacted with them.

CEFKIN: With the government or with a high representative's office?

Q: Well, both and neither—in other words, in your recollection, were there important interaction issues that the embassy had? Either with the rep [representative] or the local governments?

CEFKIN: Yes, to both. We engaged very closely with the government, as well as with the Office of the High Representative (OHR). In terms of working with the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), which OHR reported to, most of the other players were like-minded European partners, so we obviously worked closely with them. As noted above, Russia often tried to block consensus on things we were trying to do, so that took a lot of diplomacy. Turkey was a very prominent PIC member. More often than not, we were aligned with Turkey when it came to Bosnia policy, but not always. The Turkish Ambassador had close relations with the Bosniak members of the BiH government, whereas the Russian ambassador had close relations with the Bosnian Serbs, so, there was that dynamic. Often, we would coordinate approaches to OHR issues with like-minded PIC players, the British in particular, as well as the Germans, Italians, and French. There were a lot of moving parts to keep track of.

But maybe I'll start by talking about internal Embassy coordination, which was a particular focus for me. We had a fairly good sized assistance budget, about fifty million dollars, and we had several entities at the embassy that were assistance implementers.

The main one was the United States Agency for International Development [USAID]. They managed programs focused on strengthening democracy/good governance and economic development. But we also had an International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program [ICITAP], which was helping to stand up a national police force --sort of a Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI] equivalent, focused on countering transnational crime. Then we also had OPDAT, which is the Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development and Assistance Training, which is under the Department of Justice. They were helping to stand up the state courts. We had a few other programs managed by other parts of the Embassy, including one called CIVITAS. It worked with Bosnian youth to build support for a multi-ethnic democracy, and was managed by our Public Diplomacy office. One other organization we funded was a non-governmental organization called the International Commission on Missing Persons [ICMP]. It was using DNA technology to help identify the remains of Bosnians who had been massacred during the war.

Given all these interests there was competition for our assistance resources. USAID would have liked to have had all or the bulk of the money, but in contrast to the process in other parts of the world at that time, under the legislation governing our assistance in Europe, the State Department was charged with assistance coordination. We had an office in the European Bureau at the State Department – the Assistance Coordination Office [ACE] -- that made decisions about how to apportion the funds. (Later in my career, State took over the global assistance role with the creation of the Office of Foreign Assistance.) One advantage I had, having worked in the European Bureau for four years, is that I knew a lot about assistance processes, and I knew the Director and Deputy in the ACE.

One of my goals in Sarajevo was to establish a more collaborative way to develop our embassy funding requests and recommendations about how to allocate the funding. We had a mid-level economic officer, who was charged with being the assistance coordinator. She was very, very capable. I decided to create a working group approach to our assistance coordination, with three baskets: political assistance, economic assistance, and justice and law enforcement and assistance. I asked the political counselor to head the justice & police and the political working groups, and our economic counselor to head the economic working group and tasked them with working with the implementing offices and other stakeholders to try to develop consensus funding proposals. I think it worked relatively well. Not everybody was always happy with the decisions, but we worked fairly collaboratively. And our approach was well-received by ACE. I personally worked very collaboratively with the different implementers. The head of our USAID Mission and I developed a very productive working relationship. As a result, I presided at a fair number of ribbon-cuttings for their projects to highlight the work they were doing.

Q: Can you get one second and give an example of a program that you did the ribbon cutting or that maybe you oversaw at the end when it was completed? That would just get a general idea of the kind of thing that you were overseeing?

CEFKIN: Sure. One program USAID had was called “the one-stop shop.” It was designed to reduce red tape in local governments, so that when citizens applied for

permits (for example, to set up a business) they only had to deal with one office instead of ten different offices. So it facilitated business and made peoples' lives easier. Another program dealt with tourism promotion. Bosnia is a beautiful country with mountains and rivers. It was a little bit off the beaten track, in terms of European tourist guidebooks, but we thought there was potential to develop that sector of its economy. So USAID helped the government put together a promotional campaign, with a slick video, encouraging people to consider travel to Bosnia. So, I gave a speech at an event unveiling the video to launch that program. I also did several events with the ICITAP and OPDAT programs. Another program I did quite a bit with was the PD-managed CIVITAS program I mentioned earlier. Every summer they hosted a big camp for youth from all over the country. So I spoke at that a couple of times, as well as at smaller events they did. I really enjoyed talking to young Bosnians about the rights and responsibilities of citizens in democracies and the important leadership role they can play going forward.

Q: And in these programs, were there ever great difficulties in getting buy-in from the local entities from either the Serbian entity and so on, because they wanted something different, that we didn't want to give that.

CEFKIN: That's true. One example is that with our encouragement Bosnia had instituted a system of direct election of mayors. Often the municipal level is where some of Bosnia's more progressive leadership could be found. USAID and State officers had been actively engaged in promoting that reform. The Bosnian Serbs wanted to undo that reform and revert to an appointed system. I don't remember exactly why, but probably because they viewed the mayors being elected as too independent. We lobbied really hard, in partnership with like-minded embassies to preserve the direct election of mayors. Ultimately, we were successful, but it was touch and go.

There was one USAID program focused on political party development that the political counselor and I concluded was counterproductive to U.S. policy objectives. Each of the ethnic groups had their own ethnic political parties. The program worked with all of them, teaching them how to organize, but we concluded that we were creating a bit of a monster in terms of the Bosnian Serb party. They became quite successful in their organizing, which fed their aspirations of creating a separate Bosnian Serb state, so that program wasn't promoting the cohesion of the country, quite the opposite. Accordingly, we phased that program out.

Q: That is a fascinating example, because it also shows why the State Department had been put in charge of the aid effort.

CEFKIN: Exactly. More broadly, there was always the "chicken and egg" argument in terms of prioritizing focus and funding; i.e. were the democracy programs or economic development programs more important. Perhaps it was my bias as a political-coned officer and political science major, but I held the view that nothing was going to work in Bosnia if there wasn't a functioning government and public buy-in for democratic systems. Accordingly, I favored the democracy focus. But the economic programs were also important, obviously, particularly, those working to tackle corruption.

Q: One other technical question on the programs, every now and then Congress will write into the requirements that some international entities' judgments be used. So, for example, Transparency International*, or one of the free government international observers, requires that they meet certain levels of acceptability to those international organizations. Did that occur in any way with the aid that we provided, at least at this time, while you were there?*

CEFKIN: I don't really recall. I know, we certainly looked at the reports of respected NGOs, particularly Transparency International for corruption assessments and Freedom House for democracy assessments. We also met with representatives of those organizations when they passed through Sarajevo. But I don't recall the requirement being part of legislation.

I should mention one other important focus of our work, which led to creation of another Embassy working group. That was the issue of terrorism. One of the legacies of the Bosnian conflict is that a number of Mujahedeen from various Muslim countries had gone to Bosnia to support the Bosnian Muslims during the war. Some of them stayed after the war, and a number of them had very unsavory connections. There was also an Iranian presence in Bosnia. Iran had also supported the Bosnian Muslims during the war. They retained a diplomatic presence there and had various quasi NGOs that we kept a close eye on. There was also a lot of Saudi money flowing into the country, particularly focused on rebuilding mosques destroyed during the war. They also sent Wahhabi Imams to head a number of those mosques, and some of them were centers of radicalization. So, we kept a close eye on all of that. We encouraged Bosnian officials to seek terrorism prosecutions of certain individuals. They were reluctant to do that, given the war legacy, but with enough evidence they did move forward on several key cases. There were several agencies at that post that were engaged in this work, and at times turf battles among them complicated our work, so our counterterrorism working group worked to develop a more cooperative and cohesive approach. And one of the ideas that came out of that was to encourage the Bosnian Government to set up a Counterterrorism Task Force, similar to U.S. Counterterrorism Task Force to improve interagency cooperation. That was an example of some useful initiatives that came from our working groups.

And then there were some interesting things I did on the policy front during periods where I was Chargé. I had talked in the last session about Bosnia's defense reform, and the fact that that had been one of the more successful initiatives, including the fact that it led to the creation of a multi-ethnic unit that deployed to Iraq to support explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) missions there. In any case, during one of my stints as Chargé, the Bosnian government had to appoint a new defense minister. According to the agreement worked out by the three ethnic groups the ministry was due to be headed by a Bosniak and chosen by the Bosniak member of the tri-Presidency, Suleiman Tihić. Given the strong interest that the U.S. had in ensuring that the defense reform remained on track, the ambassador encouraged me to engage with President Tihic to make sure he picked a good candidate. So, together with my colleague who was overseeing the defense reform, I had several meetings with the President. It was a delicate demarche because we

didn't want to come across as too heavy-handed, or seen as directing him. But, we worked to head off certain choices that would have been problematic in terms of our ability to continue to work closely with the ministry. Ultimately, Tihic did choose a well-respected technocrat, so that was satisfying.

During that year, we also concluded a status of forces agreement that allowed the U.S. military to conduct more joint exercises. Another defense issue I worked on concerned the transfer of a U.S. base outside of the town of Tuzla called Eagle Base. Eagle Base had been an important base of North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] operations during the war. Technically, when I arrived, it was still a U.S.-managed base, though by that time we only had a very small residual presence. We were scheduled to formally turn the base over to the control of the Bosnian Government. The ambassador was very keen that we organize a proper hand-over ceremony and not just sort of slink away. But we had trouble getting traction with DOD or the U.S. European Command. No one was receptive to organizing a ceremony.

Eventually during one of my periods as Chargé, an Air Force General from one of the European commands came through. So I met with him and, together with the Defense Attaché, started brainstorming about the Eagle Base handover. The general said he could send a plane to do an air show with some parachute jumps. That was the genesis of a plan that resulted in a very nice ceremony that included the air show/parachute jumps, which the Defense Attaché and members of the Bosnian military joined. The ambassador gave an excellent speech and the senior Bosnian officials attended and spoke. So it was a resounding success. In fact, the Bosnian media wrote that while most officials were on summer vacation, “the U.S. Ambassador in our country…is engaged as if this were a political spring…having intensive military exercises.” This reinforced the message we were really trying to convey which was that even though the U.S. was physically leaving the base, we would remain engaged and still had over-the-horizon forces that could respond in emergencies.

I had a fun culmination of that ceremony. The base is a couple of hours drive from Sarajevo, so I had driven up to the ceremony with my driver. We were getting ready to drive home in the late afternoon after the ceremony, when our NATO general came up and said, “We have a couple of helicopters that are going to be leaving. Would you like a ride in one back to Sarajevo?” So several of my embassy colleagues and I got to ride on the last U.S. Blackhawks to depart to Eagle Base. Needless to say, it was a much quicker trip than going by car.

Another big issue that came up that first year concerned a case pending with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) seeking a judgement against Serbia for having committed genocide in Srebrenica. The case had been pending for several years. During one of my times as Chargé, the ICJ handed down a ruling which concluded that Serbia was not guilty of genocide, but was guilty of not doing more to prevent genocide. That ruling raised all sorts of emotions. The Bosnian Muslims were dissatisfied with the ruling because even though it hadn’t completely exonerated Serbia, it hadn't directly ruled the country complicit.

The first thing we had to do was come up with very carefully calibrated press guidance, which we did. But the next task was to deal with the lingering unhappiness, so that it didn't ignite a renewal of intercommunal conflict around Srebrenica. We were a little afraid that some of the more radical elements might try to orchestrate something. Upon his return, the ambassador came up with the idea of appointing a special envoy for Srebrenica. We identified a great candidate who was a former US ambassador to Bosnia, and he was game for the role. I had a two-pronged role to operationalize the plan. The first was to work with the EUR assistance office to find funding for the position, which we did. We wanted to put the position under the umbrella of the Office of the High Representative {OHR] so that it was a multinational, not bilateral initiative. So I worked to get OHR and PIC approval for the envoy position and for the individual chosen. We managed to do that. The envoy did a great job over a period of about a year and really succeeded in calming down the situation. .

Another big project I tackled, beginning my first year but extending throughout my tour was the construction of our new embassy compound [NEC]. As I said earlier, we were very lucky in that we had procured land for the NEC in the city. The chancery we were operating out of had served as our headquarters during the post-war transition. It was a charming property, but it was completely inadequate in terms of space and security set-back requirements. Congress had appropriated money for the NEC and it was on the Office of Building Operations [OBO] list for construction, but they kept trying to delay start of construction due to other pressing requirements. They had already pushed back the start date once. Then they tried to push it back a second time. The news of this came while I was serving as Chargé. I consulted with the country team, and we agreed that we needed to reclama that decision and push OBO to stick with the planned schedule. So, with my team's help, I drafted a cable strongly protesting the proposed delay. I particularly emphasized the security vulnerabilities of our embassy. The appeal was successful, and OBO put the NEC back on the earlier construction schedule.

Q: Just as a quick aside, I had a little bit of exposure to this in a Washington office, about how the Office of Building Operations makes decisions as to which new embassy gets to be built, and which extensions or renovations got to be built. It is a labyrinthian, absolutely byzantine process, and I am convinced it only finally gets decided all the way up to the undersecretary and maybe the secretary him or herself.

CEFKIN: Yeah, that's right. Obviously, you have to have your home bureau really going to bat for you. But you're right, there are all these competing forces and efforts underway. Sometimes if there's a political ambassador with a lot of clout they persuade State leadership to let their embassy jump the cue.

Q: On a strategic level, it's just astonishing to me that there is so little money given to embassy construction, when you consider the urgency for secure embassy buildings in the world. And compare that to the military budget.

CEFKIN: Exactly!

Q: It's just a source of continuing astonishment to me, but I'm glad we've convinced them to finally put the funds in to get in.

CEFKIN: Yeah, I'll talk more about the process of actually starting to build the embassy a bit later, but it was an important focus for me. Further on the management front, I tried to pay close attention to morale and welfare issues. We did have a marine contingent, so I always attended and encouraged embassy staff to attend the marine happy hours to build that sense of community. We had an interesting Community Liaison Officer [CLO] setup. We had co-CLOs – two part-time CLOs who shared the responsibilities. I thought they were very good and complemented each other well.

One was an older retired gentleman, the spouse of a USAID officer. The other was a young woman who was the spouse of one of our political officers. She was actually from Bosnia originally. The older gentleman focused a lot on arranging tours and cultural programs for embassy staff, whereas the younger woman focused more on the school and family issues. There was some tension between them at times, but overall they managed well and they were effective. I met regularly with them and tried to participate in their events as much as I could.

Q: This does lead to a general question, how would you describe the security threat situation there?

CEFKIN: In terms of personal security, Sarajevo and Bosnia more broadly was pretty secure. It wasn't a high crime post, and you could safely walk around the city and travel around the country without fear of violent crime. As I believe I mentioned earlier, the big safety threat was landmines left from the war. We required every embassy employee to attend a landmine briefing twice a year. The basic message was "Don't ever go off the beaten path without somebody that really knows where they are." So, when we went hiking, we always went with guides. Even around the city, they said, "If you see an abandoned building, never go inside and try to poke around because it could be booby trapped." The other thing we were conscious of, related to the terrorism issue I mentioned, was that there were some unsavory characters wandering around Bosnia. So our Security team was alert for possible threats coming from them, but fortunately that didn't hinder our movements while I was there.

Another typical DCM role is mentoring our entry-level officers. That's something I enjoyed. I had lunch with them periodically, and worked to engage them in special projects that they were interested in doing. I also hosted a fair number of representational events. That was something the ambassador really encouraged me to do, and was something I enjoyed.

I really loved the DCM residence. It was a beautiful Austro-Hungarian-era house, located on a hill above the old town. Also, I had an excellent official representation [ORE] staff. The staff included a household manager, a cook, and two housekeepers. The house had an interesting layout. It had one whole level that was representational space. It included a

living room, dining area, and a staging kitchen. The real kitchen was on the floor below. The two floors above the representational level was our personal living space. The third floor had another living room and dining room, a small kitchen for our own use, and a bedroom with a bathroom. The top floor had other bedrooms, a study, and another full bathroom.

There was a beautiful local fruit and vegetable market not far from where I lived. It was actually famous, because an attack had killed a number of people there during the war. It had a memorial commemorating the victims. There was also an indoor market with stands that sold meat, and cheese, etc. There were small groceries around the old town, and a big modern grocery in another part of town. We also had a small commissary at the Butmir base next to the Airport. It carried some products, such as Mexican food items, that we couldn't get on the local market. We had reciprocal privileges at commissaries run by some of the European partners who were part of the European Union Forces – including a French shop where we could get good wine and cheese, and Italian shop where we could get prosciutto and other Italian food products, and a Norwegian shop that was good for buying winter clothing. One of the issues we encountered though concerned our officers who had "members of the household' [MOH] who were recognized as formal family members. That was before same-sex marriage was legalized in the U.S., so in several cases they were same-sex partners. Due to a change in access protocols at Butmir, the MOH were denied access, meaning that they couldn't access the commissaries. Also, a number of Embassy families attended church on the base. So that created a morale issue. Our management team and I worked to persuade the head of our NATO contingent and the EUFOR command to reverse the ban on MOH access. That was an important victory.

We had excellent local staff at the embassy. To keep a finger on the pulse of their morale I met periodically with the members of their Foreign Service National Committee.

We had two Embassy branch offices. One was in Banja Luka, which is the capital of the Republika Srpska. That branch office had one American officer and a team of local staff. We had a second branch officer in Mostar, which is in the Bosnian-Croat majority area. That office had just one local employee. Anyway, I would periodically visit those offices, to meet with the staff and with local officials. We also had seven American Corners in Bosnia, which are areas in local libraries with books and resources about the U.S. These Corners are also platforms for embassy programming, so I also traveled to the various corners to give speeches.

Sarajevo is really charming. I particularly loved the old town. As I said, from our residence it was just a couple minutes' walk down the hill to the heart of the old town. If you walk along the main street through town, they say that you walk from Istanbul to Vienna, because at one end you see a concentration of Ottoman-era buildings, including several beautiful mosques, and then you come to buildings from the Austro-Hungarian period. It's very lively. All along there are bustling outdoor cafes with people drinking coffee and watching soccer games.

Sarajevo is also sometimes referred to as the Jerusalem of the West because of all the different religions that intersect there. There are mosques, a Catholic Cathedral, a Russian Orthodox Church, and a couple of synagogues within a few blocks of each other in the old town. For their holidays (Christmas, Easter, Ramadan, Passover, etc.) the religious leaders would all host big celebrations. They would all attend each other's celebrations, as would members of the diplomatic corps. It was good to show this show of unity among religious leaders, at least on the surface. Though, in fact, they weren't necessarily always so friendly with each other.

One of the things that was particularly interesting for me was getting to know the Jewish community in Sarajevo. It was a small community. It had been badly decimated during World War II. But the Bosnian Jews were well-respected by the other religions. In Sarajevo, they had helped provide safe havens to the Bosniaks under siege during the Bosnian war. My first year, I had proposed to the ambassador that I host a Hanukkah party. He loved the idea, and encouraged me to make it a representational event. So I invited representatives of the Jewish community, and a number of embassy staff. Our cook made a terrific brisket, and latkes (potato pancakes) – food which is traditional for Passover. They all loved it, so it became an annual tradition.

As DCM, I would also host an annual Santa Claus party for the embassy kids. That was also fun. Our local staff was multi-ethnic, but since we were based in Sarajevo the majority were Bosnian Muslims. Even so, in the former Yugoslavia they had a tradition of Father Christmas, so the local staff, as well as the American staff, loved the kids Christmas party. They would buy presents for their kids, then Santa Claus would hand them out at the party. CLO organized the party and my staff provided refreshments. So, that was a lot of fun.

Sarajevo was the first time in my Foreign Service career that I'd served someplace that wasn't a mega city. It was nice to be someplace with a bit more manageable scale for a couple of years. It did mean that there weren't as many things to do on weekends, but there was enough to do. I never got tired of wandering around the old town and soaking up the ambiance. Outside of Sarajevo, there was some really excellent hiking and river rafting. Mostar is a very charming city, so we often took visitors for a day trip or overnight to Mostar. A little further afield, there was the Dalmatian coast and Dubrovnik in Croatia. We would sometimes go there for a long weekend, which was pleasant.

The embassy community was a friendly one. When Embassy staff decided to have a party they would generally invite everyone in the embassy (at least all the American staff). I tried, as much as possible, to go to those events to show the flag. Also, it gave me a sense of the range of embassy housing. So it was a friendly community.

Q: One topic you haven't covered yet is the extent to which the embassy was promoting commerce. If you had a foreign commercial officer or one officer had some commercial responsibilities, if that was even possible given the restoration of the Bosnian economy even 10 years after the war. It still takes a very long time for an economy to come back.

CEFKIN: The Economic section had three Americans officers. One had commercial advocacy as part of his role, and we had one local staff member who was a Department of Commerce employee. She managed Commerce programs, but there wasn't much U.S. investment or interest in investment by U.S. companies in Bosnia, while I was there. The Bosnians really wanted to see McDonald's come to Sarajevo; they thought it would be a sign that "they had arrived" and were a normal, modern country. Our Econ/Commercial folks had some discussions with McDonald's about opening up a franchise in Bosnia, but McDonald's was skeptical that there was a sufficiently large market. So that didn't happen while I was there, but I understand that there is now at least one McDonald's there.

Q: Similarly, I'm also curious about free media. Was it a major concern of the embassy or had it evolved into a pretty free press?

CEFKIN: Yeah, the press really was pretty free. As I recall, we did the traditional things you do, media workshops, to encourage independent media. But I don't remember there being really big issues in terms of curbing press freedom.

There are other human rights issues. The main issue was dealing with the reconciliation, which meant promoting accountability, including war crimes prosecutions. We were still searching at that time for Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, the two big Bosnian-Serb leaders wanted for war crimes prosecutions in The Hague.

Q: Alright, so, now you've described the first year and, you've set the scene and so I don't want to ask too many questions now, because you'll probably cover a lot of what I'm wondering about in the next two.

CEFKIN: To begin year two, we had an ambassadorial transition. The ambassador I'd worked with in my first year departed in September 2007. So leading up to that, we were busy supporting his round of farewells and preparation for departure. I had about a month interregnum between his departure and the new ambassador's arrival. During that month, a lot of my focus was also on preparing for the new ambassador. I was fortunate that we had a very capable staff assistant, so I put her in charge of a lot of the planning. When the new ambassador arrived, he was able to quickly meet the embassy community, present his credentials. So we got off to an excellent start.

In February of 2008, Kosovo became independent. The US immediately recognized independent Kosovo, which sparked a lot of emotion among ethnic Serbs, including in Banja Luka. Protestors gathered around our branch office and started to get quite rowdy. Of course, we assembled our Emergency Action Committee meetings and did contingency planning. And at one point, I was asked to call the Republika Srpska interior minister to remind him of their Vienna Convention responsibility to protect diplomatic missions. They did make sure that the police cordon held so that the mob wasn't able to breach our branch office compound. But, in the meantime, we had decided that the prudent thing to do was to evacuate our American officer and her husband. They were able to get to Sarajevo safely. That same night, our embassy in Belgrade, Serbia was

torched, by protestors. So, we were glad that we had taken the precaution of evacuating our Banja Luka branch chief. Our local staff was told to stay home and shelter in place, so everybody was safe.

Also that year, we were getting close to finalizing the design for and breaking ground on our new embassy. With approval from the ambassador, I decided to do some preparatory work by visiting our embassies in Zagreb and Sofia, which both had new embassies that were the same model as ours. I was good friends with the DCMs in both places. So, I spent a couple of days in both capitals, consulting with Embassy staff, to learn what had gone well and what pitfalls to try to avoid. From that I developed "lessons learned" that I shared with our management team. It helped us address some design flaws, such as the fact that there was a real shortage of restrooms in the secure embassy space. Even though the Office of Buildings Operations said it was too late to change the design, we convinced them to add another restroom in that area. We finally did break ground on the project later that year. Along with the Ambassador, I had the opportunity to shovel some dirt at the ground-breaking ceremony. Even though, as I wrote in my Employment Evaluation Report that year, "shoveling dirt might not sound glamorous," it was a real highlight of my year.

Q: People don't realize how important it is for DCM and ambassadors to look at the fine details. You would think that the office of buildings would have it down to an absolute inch. But even in the construction process, the people on the ground still need to watch.

CEFKIN: Absolutely. In fact, going into year three, we continued to have to correct some design issues. For example, we discovered that there really wasn't enough workspace in our political section. Thanks to heroic work by our General Services Officer, we managed to get an 11th hour redesign to correct that. Other battles we waged, ultimately successfully, was convincing Bosnian authorities to honor a value-added tax reimbursement agreement on construction materials we were procuring and resolving a visa permit issue for third country nationals who were part of the construction crew.

On a personal note, at the end of our second year in Sarajevo, my husband was due to transfer. The ambassador and DCM were assigned for three-year tours, but other FSO's were assigned for two-year tours, including my husband, in his role as Consular Chief. He could have extended for a third year, but he had been promoted while we were in language training, so he was serving in a down-stretch. Accordingly, it wasn't advantageous for him, professionally, to stay a third year. So he bid for an onward assignment and was assigned to Embassy London as the head of the American Citizens Services Unit. That was very exciting but meant that I was in Sarajevo solo my third year.

Before Paul's transfer, we took a really nice road trip along the coast of Montenegro, to Albania, and on to Lake Ohrid in Macedonia. It was a fascinating trip and nice to see more of the Balkans. In Albania, we spent a couple of days in Tirana. I knew both the Ambassador and DCM there. The DCM was away, but he invited us to stay in his house. We did have dinner with the Ambassador.

Later that summer, after we were back in Sarajevo, something came up that required Embassy Tirana's Ambassador and DCM to both be away. The Department was quite strict about ensuring that at all posts either the ambassador or deputy chief of mission were in country at all times. Since this wasn't possible for Embassy Tirana at that time, the European Bureau asked me to go to Tirana for a few days to serve as Chargé. It was over the July 4 weekend. In truth, I don't think they really needed me there, but there may have been some issues with entrusting the other senior officers at Post with Chargéresponsibilities. I stayed at the Ambassador's residence, and of course picked up his car, driver, and security detail, etc. It was interesting seeing some of the differences from how those protocols were handled in Bosnia. For example, when our Ambassador in Albania traveled by plane, his detail boarded and deplaned him plane-side, rather than via the airport terminal. Even though the DCM was away, his wife, who I also knew, was in Tirana. So I enjoyed spending time with her, including a lovely day-trip we took to the Albanian countryside.

My third year in Bosnia was very active. One of the big events consuming us in the fall of 2008 was the US general election. As I'm sure you know, all U.S. embassies traditionally plan watch parties and invite local contacts to come watch the election returns with us. 2008 was shaping up to be a very exciting election, since – given the slates of Barack Obama & Joe Biden and John McCain & Sarah Palin – the U.S. was going to have either its first black president or its first female vice president. So we promoted that promise of leadership diversity in our public diplomacy [PD] programming. Our PD section came up with the very creative idea of holding our watch party at the Bosnian parliament. We were able to get the agreement to use that space. It was a nice new building with great space on multiple levels. So we were able to plan different activities on the different levels, and we really did turn out the "who's who" of Bosnia to attend the event. I believe that the entire political leadership as well as key contacts in other domains came. We planned a number of side events. I gave a speech on the empowerment of women and minorities in the US, and the Ambassador gave a speech on the importance of democratic elections. As with most of these watch parties, we invited all the guests to cast a vote for the candidates of their choice. We had large screens broadcasting U.S. election night coverage, and watched the returns. With Bosnia being 6 hours ahead of the U.S., the timing worked well for an evening event. It was very lively, and exciting, and Obama's election was extremely well received by the Bosnians.

Another focus for me during my third year was the problem of deep ethnic polarization in Bosnia. I had come to the conclusion that the lack of tolerance was one of the biggest impediments to building a stable, peaceful, democratic future for Bosnians. The schools were fairly segregated, partly because of where the different ethnic groups were living, but in the Croatian majority areas they even had a phenomenon called "two schools under one roof." They had schools where the Muslim kids attended class on one side of the school and the Croatian kids on another side. I just saw that shaping up to be a disaster for the country. The CIVITAS project, I talked about earlier, was a great tool for building democratic civic values and a common Bosnian identity among the country's youth, but it was a drop in the bucket in terms of what was needed.

I discussed this issue with our assistance working groups and they agreed with me that we should seek to elevate building tolerance as a strategic priority in our assistance. So, we made the case to Washington and the Bureau Assistance Coordination office agreed to dedicate some of our funding for this goal. We were able to increase funding for CIVITAS, and worked to integrate the pursuit of greater inter-ethnic understanding and respect into our other assistance projects.

Earlier, I talked a bit about mentoring the Entry Level Officers [ELOs]. We had a particularly engaged group of entry-level officers that year. In brainstorming with them about professional development opportunities they wanted to pursue, they came up with some creative ideas, including a shadowing program and an "adopt-an- American Corner" program. They each chose one of the seven American Corners to sponsor. Then they established contact with the American Corner Directors to help plan programs and events, including traveling to their adopted American Corner to give a speech to local audiences. This program generated a lot of enthusiasm among the ELOs, and even spurred more of the Embassy's mid-level and senior officers to get out on the speaking stump. We calculated that the program spurred a tripling of Embassy outreach.

In addition to the Bosnian war, Sarajevo has two claims to fame. One is that the assassination of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand, which launched World War I, took place in Sarajevo. The second was that Sarajevo was the site of the 1984 Winter Olympics. There were a couple of ski areas remaining from the Olympics about a 20 minute drive outside of Sarajevo. Many in the Embassy went skiing on the weekends. Paul and I had skied previously but for whatever reason didn't resume downhill skiing while in Bosnia. We did pick up some cross country skis and tried to do that a couple of times. But even without skiing, we enjoy going up to the ski areas to have lunch and just enjoy the mountain scenery and air.

That was a bit of a digression, but was a segway to making the point that winters were chilly with abundant snow and ice. In January 2009, during a brutal cold wave, there was a spat between Russia and Ukraine that resulted in Russia cutting off gas to Ukraine. The pipeline that transported the gas to Ukraine was also the pipeline that brought gas to lots of other countries in Europe, including Bosnia. Countries are supposed to have gas reserves for this type of contingency, but the Bosnian government didn't plan for that. That meant that many residences had no heat. Our embassy and embassy residences had backup fuel systems. So our American staff were ok, but many of our local staff lost heat in their homes. We offered them the use of the consular waiting room if they needed a place to stay to keep warm.

Very few, if any, took us up on that offer. Having lived through the war, our FSNs were really so stoic. Most of them had at least one relative who had heat in their homes, so those who had children sent their kids to stay with those relatives, while they toughed it out in their frigid homes.

Unfortunately, another consequence of the gas cutoff was a real degradation of air quality. Air quality was already problematic in winter months, but with the absence of gas more

households began burning coal or wood for heat causing bad air pollution. That spurred panic among some of our American staff, particularly those worried about the health of young kids. They suggested that State should authorize an evacuation for vulnerable staff and family members. At that time, State Department didn't approve evacuations for air quality issues. So dealing with that disgruntlement was challenging.

I had mentioned that medical care was a big source of anxiety for the Mission. So we had a lot of town halls about the pollution and other related medical issues. We didn't have a doctor in our Medical Unit. We had a nurse practitioner and some local nurses. The Regional Medical Officer was based in Belgrade. He visited us regularly and was always available when we needed him. But some staff were clamoring for the assignment of a doctor at post. So, I worked with Medical Office at State to persuade them to assign a doctor to Embassy Sarajevo. It was scheduled to happen sometime after my tour ended, though I'm not sure whether it did, or not.

Q: It's interesting you mentioned all this. Was any of our assistance in the health sector? Were any of the allies working there to improve the health sector?

CEFKIN: That's a good question. I can't recall any of our partners doing work in that area, but I'm not sure.

On a positive note, one of the really fun things in Sarajevo is that they host a big international film festival every summer. It's very popular, and attracts very interesting films and film luminaries from all over the world. Usually, at least one American film star attended. The ambassador hosted a reception for them and the festival organizers and local artists. As DCM, I was given one of the embassy's festival passes, so I checked out a lot of the films and documentaries, which was so much fun.

My third summer in Sarajevo, the Economic section came up with a good idea, which was to take advantage of the film festival to highlight the damage that International Property Rights [IPR] violations do to the film and recording industries. IPR violations – especially selling bootleg videos and CDs – were rampant in Bosnia. So we decided to host a symposium at my residence with members of the local business community, representatives of the industries that were victims of IPR violations, and law enforcement officials to discuss the problem, raise awareness of the impact, and share information from IPR experts on ways to tackle the problem.

The ambassador was away, so I was asked to host our big embassy film festival reception that year. I used my speech to again highlight the IPR issue. Obviously, IPR violations is a serious issue, but we were able to address it in sort of a fun way, by connecting it to the film festival. By the way, the U.S. movie star who attended the film festival that year was Nick Nolte. He also attended the reception.

Then, to conclude my tour, the big (almost) final act was managing a visit by Vice President Biden.

Q: Oh, wow. And so that was 2009.

CEFKIN: Correct; it was the summer of 2009. Having worked on the issue in his Senate foreign relations role, Biden was very familiar with the actors and with the situation in the Balkans and in Bosnia, specifically. We were becoming increasingly worried about the growing fractiousness among the country's ethnic leaders and the lack of progress in building a coherent, democratic, Bosnia. So, his visit really was designed to deliver a stern warning, and urge the leaders to come together for the good of the country.

I was put in charge of preparations as the overall Control Officer. Of course, I had another officer, one of our cracker-jack political officers, who did a lot of the day-to-day organization and planning, but I chaired the countdown meetings and did the liaison with the head of the White House advance team. My mantra always in big visits, and what I preached constantly to our team was "expect the unexpected," i.e. be flexible and prepared to turn on a dime whatever comes our way. It turned out to be a good rule of thumb. Initially, before they arrived in Sarajevo, we had some problems getting guidance from the advance team. So I reached out to the lead advance officer to walk him through what we proposed to have the VP do. He was receptive to our proposals and we established a good rapport.

Of course, we planned for the VP to meet with the Bosnian leaders, but the big centerpiece of the visit was a speech to Bosnia's elected officials and other key figures at the Bosnian parliament. The Embassy worked hard to craft the guest list for the speech. Since we didn't have a long lead-time we were eager to get the invitations out, but again, we were having trouble getting decisions from Washington, which had to approve the list. I engaged with the National Security Council and got their green light for the list, so that was a victory.

The total visit was programmed to last less than 24 hours. The VP was scheduled to arrive in the wee hours of the morning (around 4 AM), go to a hotel to rest for a few hours, then get up, start the program, and fly out that evening. We had all his events nailed down: his meetings with key Bosnian leaders, the speech at the parliament, and finally an embassy community meet & greet. But his arrival time kept changing, so my "expect the unexpected" mantra was relevant. At one point, the arrival shifted several hours later, so we busily set to work rejiggering the program. Then, at the last minute, the arrival time shifted back to the original plan. I remember we had to hightail it to get to the airport in time. But the arrival went smoothly, and we got him and his entourage to the hotel as planned.

In the meantime, we were reviewing the final text of the speech he was scheduled to give at the parliament. The Embassy and State had provided input to the speech, but the final version was drafted by the Vice President's speech writers. As we were going over it, I noticed a phrase that would have been a semantic bombshell in Bosnia. The political officers and I discussed it with the ambassador, who agreed that we had to try to change it, but we were afraid it was too late. Fortunately, the VP's staff agreed to make the change, so we breathed a sigh of relief.

Another thing that happened was that while the European Union [EU] was glad the visit was happening and welcomed the high-level U.S. attention to Bosnia, they were concerned about being left out of the discussions. Washington decided to invite the European Union's High Representative for Foreign and Security policy, who was Javier Solana at that time, as well Valentin Inzko, an Austrian diplomat who was serving as the High Representative in Bosnia. I was also asked to be their liaison and make sure they were integrated into all the meetings. As the control officer, I traveled in the motorcade with the VP's party throughout the visit, and made sure that Mr. Solana, and Mr. Inzko were able to get where they needed to be. It all worked well.

At the end of the day, the embassy community event, which we held in a hotel ballroom, was a real highlight. I don't know if you ever have had the opportunity to be involved in Biden visits, but he was incredibly gracious. Of course he spoke to us thanking us for all the work we had done, and he took time to shake hands and take photos with everybody who wanted to have a photo with him. So, that was an overall successful visit.

Q: I did not have a visit from Biden, but I worked on his senate staff back in 1977–1978 on a Pearson when he was a minority member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Jesse Helms was the majority. Yeah. It's an interesting time.

CEFKIN: Oh, very interesting. That's a great experience.

To wrap things up, before I left post, we had a couple of Congressional delegations [CODELs]. Interestingly, I think those were the first CODELS we had received in Bosnia, during my tour, though we had had a visit from some Congressional staff. The first CODEL that came was large -- around 37 people. It was a bipartisan group and included a number of senators and House Representatives. One of the tricky things we encountered was that different members of the CODEL were associated with different ethnic caucuses. So we had the three Bosnian ethnic groups jockeying to try to program the members who were sympathetic to their perspectives. Meanwhile, we were trying to keep them together and keep them on message. It was a little challenging, but interesting.

The second CODEL was a group that came to attend the commemoration of the Srebrenica massacre. Every year there was a big commemoration of the victims of that tragedy. That year was the 14th annual commemoration. Our ambassador always attended and spoke at the event. I usually stayed back in Sarajevo to attend to business at the embassy. I had been to Srebrenica on other occasions and had visited Potočari cemetery, where the victims who have been identified are buried, but I had never attended the commemoration. But this time, since the ambassador had to be at the site in advance, I was asked to travel with the CODEL to the commemoration.

One side note: I had mentioned the International Commission on Missing Persons [ICMP], the NGO that was helping with identifying the remains of the victims. It was particularly tricky because, to try to cover their tracks, the Bosnian Serbs, after killing and burying the victims, had dug up and cut them up, burying body parts in secondary

and tertiary graves. So when the remains were discovered, they often were not intact corpses. In any case, ICMP had pioneered the use of DNA technology to help make identifications which was a big step forward. At the commemoration every year they buried the newly-identified. That was very emotional, but meaningful, obviously, to the families who were finally able to put their loved ones to rest. The year I attended – the 14th commemoration -- there were around 500 new burials, which was really striking. It illustrates the scope of the trauma the Bosnians were trying to recover from.

In any case, it was interesting traveling with the CODEL to Srebrenica. They were a friendly group, and the bus ride was an opportunity to brief them on the state of affairs in Bosnia. The ceremony was very moving and dignified. I was glad to have had the opportunity to attend before departing Bosnia.

So, that wraps up my tour in Sarajevo.

For my onward assignment, to my delight, I had been paneled to be the DCM at Embassy Bangkok. It made a lot of sense given my previous experience in Thailand, knowledge of the Thai language, and experience serving as DCM. The incumbent DCM was due to rotate in 2010, but it was on the list in my bid cycle to allow for Thai language training. Since I already had had the language training, Human Resources would only let me take a five-month refresher course, which meant that I had another six months to fill, so I was able to work out a short tour with the Board of Examiners to fill that time. So that's what I was heading to next. Do you have any questions about Bosnia?

Q: No, you have answered all the questions for Bosnia that I had. Unless there are any other reflections on the three years you were there, that with hindsight now you'd like to make?

CEFKIN: I would just say that, sadly, things haven't gotten better. Our big hope for the Bosnians was to anchor them in Euro-Atlantic institutions, NATO and the EU, but they really haven't made progress on either front. Inter-ethnic relations have become even more fractious. The Bosnian-Serb leader, who was the head of Republika Srpska [RS] and a member of the national Parliament when I was there, is now the Bosnian Serb member of the tri-presidency. He has become even more defiant, threatening to separate the RS from Bosnia and Herzegovina. OHR is still there, so, in a lot of ways, things haven't really changed. I assume/hope that more physical rebuilding has taken place, and hopefully, people have progressed economically. But, as I think I might have said in our last session, I came to the conclusion that the Dayton Accords had ended the war, but hadn't really cemented the peace.

So politically, the situation's worrisome. It’s a beautiful country. I love the people when they aren't at each other's throats; they have a great sense of humor. There is obviously talent there, but they're just lacking the leadership, cohesion, and the civic identity they need to move forward. They tend to have an inherent sense of fatalism. My hope was that the younger generation would bring more of a sense of empowerment and ability to shape their destiny in a positive direction.

On the management front, it was my first DCMship. Even though the DCM training was excellent, it was a bit of a "baptism by fire," and I definitely made some mistakes. There were lessons learned that I made sure to take on board when I went on to my next DCMship. Sarajevo was a fascinating, engaging, post, but utterly exhausting. Sometimes the frustration of the role the U.S. played – being expected to broker solutions to all sorts of issues -- led to irritability of the ambassador or myself. Looking back, I realize that I should have avoided vocalizing any of those frustrations to embassy staff. DCMs really need to find other outlets for venting. Also, maybe I'm just being overly defensive, but just as a president's approval rating gets tarred by anything perceived to be going wrong in the country even if it's beyond the president's control, I felt that staff anxiety over health care, air quality, schooling, etc., sometimes manifested itself as dissatisfaction with embassy leadership, even those issues were beyond the ambassador's and my control. It reinforced the importance of constant communications.

Q: And, of course, work-life balance. It's great to be busy, especially in a country like Bosnia, where there are so many needs, and you feel like you're really on the front line of a major U.S. policy location. I mean, it's not Costa Rica, it's not Switzerland. It is nice to be busy there, to feel like you're making a real contribution, but it's also exhausting.

CEFKIN: Exactly. In an effort to motivate staff, I would regularly remind them that the issues we dealt with in Bosnia went to the heart of our values as Americans, so that it was really important work. I do feel like we made a difference.

As with any post, we had our share of personnel problems, some of which were aggravated by local conditions. We had quite a few curtailments for medical reasons, including my office manager, who I liked a lot and who was very good. That left a big gap. Also, the ambassador's staff assistant we had in my third year was less successful than the other two had been and generated some personality clashes with others in the embassy. I should have done more to nip that in the bud, but I tend to want to give people the benefit of the doubt and to try to work with them to bring them along.

Q: *It's a high wire to balance, because you want to give the individual the space to do their job without managing. But if they're being overwhelmed, or if they're having trouble understanding their appropriate involvement, how much they need, especially for an ambassador, literally from one hour to the next. Because things can change for an ambassador, and you do really need to be aware of the ambassador's location and venue changes. And even if the ambassador's driving back from somewhere, and there's a problem with the road, or there's a traffic jam, and it's difficult for the ambassador to get to the next location, you've got to be on top of that. That's what can affect the rest of the day. And, of course, but this DCM, on the one hand, you want to make sure everything moves smoothly, but on the other, you want to give that individual the space to do their job and difficult balancing act.*

CEFKIN: Yeah, those were challenges.

So if you'd like I could quickly talk about the intervening year.

Q: Yeah, absolutely. I don't have any other interviews after this. So please feel free to.

CEFKIN: Great! Okay. And let me just say, I'm getting a little bit low on my iPad right now, a little bit low on battery. If it runs out, I will quickly reboot from either my iPhone or my laptop. Okay, the one we don't normally use the laptop with is the camera, which doesn't always work, which probably isn't that critical.

Q: It's always better to have both audio and video.

CEFKIN: Yeah, that's what I thought. Okay, so anyway, I was assigned to do a bridge assignment with the Board of Examiners [BEX], and then my language training. When I arrived at the Board of Examiners, after three very intense years, I was really looking forward to having a slower-paced job without 24/7, on-call responsibilities. That was definitely very true of the BEX job.

However, the pace wasn't as slow as I had been expecting, because Hillary Clinton (who was then Secretary of State) had been successful in getting funding to increase Foreign Service intake. I believe it was the largest peacetime expansion to date of the Foreign Service, so we were doubling the volume of oral exams. That meant there were very few days that we weren't conducting the assessments, whereas previously BEX would only conduct interviews a couple of days and the assessors would work on other projects the rest of the week. So, we had very few down days. Doing the math, I participated in over two-hundred generalist and specialist assessments in my six months in BEX. We even worked some Saturdays to conduct exams for specialist candidates. The assessment days were very busy. We started at 8 AM sharp and generally wound up about four o'clock. We grabbed a quick bag lunch to eat while we were grading the written part of the assessment. Accordingly, the days we did assessments, we couldn't follow the honored State Department tradition of "doing lunch." There was usually only one day a week, when we were in the office handling other responsibilities, that we had flexibility to do things like that. On the flip side, once we left work, we didn't take work home with us, and we didn't have after-hours emergencies to attend to, so it was definitely a break from the intensity of previous assignments.

I enjoyed the teamwork of BEX. I also was quite encouraged by the assessment system. We had clear measures for how to rank the candidates for each part of the assessment. What was really encouraging is that at the end of the day when we totaled up our scores, it was very rare that there was a divergence of more than a couple of points on how the different assessors ranked each candidate. There are the three parts of the assessment: a group exercise, an individual interview, and a management exercise that involves a written essay describing how the candidate would handle a management scenario they are given to address. Two assessors rank every candidate on each part of the exam.

The candidates were, by and large, very inspiring. It definitely felt very good to be giving back to the Foreign Service by bringing in the fresh, impressive, enthusiastic candidates

who were passing the test. I was glad to have done the job for six months. Most people had the assignment for one year, or in some cases two years. For me six months was the right amount of time. Although you meet different people every day, the daily routine doesn't change. Also, while State over time has tried to reward people more for doing that work, it's still generally not a job that gets you promoted (in the year you're working there) because you're one of thirty assessors doing similar work. But it was an excellent experience. I was very glad to have done it, and I left reassured about the process and the quality of the candidates we were attracting. So, that was the first half of my year back in Washington. Then I went on to do my Thai language refresher.

Q: Let me just ask one question about your experience as an assessor. As you were meeting and examining the new recruits so to speak, did you notice differences in the preparation or the background of the people coming in?

CEFKIN: Yeah, there was definitely much more diversity of the candidates. There's obviously a lot of discussion about this now and the fact that State still doesn't have as much diversity as we'd ideally like to see. But, in terms of ethnic and racial backgrounds we are attracting a more diverse applicant pool. There is also a greater mix of ages. Another thing that was very different from when I entered the FS, was that with the change in regulations that now permit dual nationality, we had a number of candidates who were naturalized Americans. (When I entered, you couldn't get a security clearance if you had any nationality other than U.S.). Now, with the change, naturalized Americans, or those with a second nationality by birth of family connections, don't have to give their second nationality up. In fact, I remember one candidate who was a Bulgarian-American. She was a very nice young woman, but when we asked her in her interview why she wanted to work for the Foreign Service, she answered that she had long wanted to be a diplomat but had to decide which country she wanted to represent. That was an automatic black mark, since if you're not passionate about representing the United States, you're not Foreign Service material.

Q: Wow. Yeah.

CEFKIN: Another thing that had changed since I entered the FS, was that BEX now has a process to factor the previous experience of candidates into decisions about who gets invited to the oral assessment. When I took the text, that wasn't the case. In fact, they didn't want to know anything about your background, just whether you passed the test. But later BEX introduced a process called the Qualifications Evaluation Panel [QEP] that was done between the written and oral exams, to help determine which candidates demonstrate the qualities that State was looking for in Foreign Service officers.

CEFKIN: A final change I would note is that there were several programs, such as the Pickering and Rangel programs, that helped feed candidates toward the Foreign Service, who might not have had the means or exposure to pursue the career otherwise. Those hadn't existed when I came into the State Department.

Q: Explain one second what a Pickering Fellow is.

CEFKIN: It's a fellowship that was established to pay for the university education – generally at the graduate level – of candidates interested in an FS career who needed economic support, often from minority groups. Once they finished their degrees they were guaranteed a place in the FS, though they still had to pass the tests to be tenured.

Q: All right, that is interesting. The only other aspect of the people entering in this era now 2009 to 2010 is their acquaintance with the internet and all the different kinds of software.

CEFKIN: Yeah, definitely.

Q: And spreadsheets and all of the things that didn't even exist.

CEFKIN: Yes, yes. We also helped with specialist interviews. For those interviews there was always an assessor from that particular specialty and a generalist officer. The process was a little bit different. It wasn't the same day-long process, but it was interesting. That was the thing that had changed a lot from the time I entered the Foreign Service. We have a lot more specialist categories now.

Q: Alright, so then you move from there to the refresher —

CEFKIN: Correct, the Thai refresher. I had retained enough of my Thai language that I did have a good foundation, so I didn't need to start from scratch. There were a couple of teachers that I knew from my first go-round, but also several new teachers. There were several incoming embassy staff who had started training in the fall, so I joined them, midcourse. It was good for relearning some of the basics. Then they moved me to one-on-one training. One of the big advantages of having five months for the language refresher is that it gave me ample time for consultations and other preparations for Post.

When I was selected for the Bangkok DCM role, I think I was largely an East Asia Pacific [EAP] Bureau choice, because Bangkok was scheduled to have an ambassadorial transition. Though, I also knew and had interviewed with the incumbent ambassador. We had worked together when I was in Bangkok in the 1990s. So, he had a favorable view of me and my work and likely also had input to the decision.

By the time I started language training, someone had been nominated to serve as the next U.S. ambassador to Thailand. The nominee was a very seasoned Senior Foreign Service officer who had already had two ambassadorship. I knew her by reputation, but we hadn't ever worked together. It was awkward, because she hadn't selected me to be her DCM, and thought she should have had the prerogative of choosing her DCM. I would meet with former colleagues who had previously served as ambassador to Thailand, who knew the nominee. They urged me to reach out to her, although she hadn't yet been confirmed. I was very hesitant at first because in previous work I had done on ambassadorial confirmations it had been drilled into me that ambassadorial nominees should avoid premature contact with their future staff so as not to prejudice the Senate confirmation

decision by making it look like they were assured of their confirmation. So, I didn't want to do anything that would complicate her confirmation. But finally, I was convinced that I really needed to reach out to her, so I did, and we started having regular meetings.

That time was also a very tumultuous period in Thailand. There were big anti-government protests going on that turned violent. The tensions culminated in clashes between the protestors and Thai forces in March-May 2010, and resulted in some eighty people being killed and a number of injuries. So, it was a tense time. The U.S. was trying to help the two sides find off-ramps and resolve the issue peacefully. So that was the background as I was getting ready to go to Post.

Q: Right now, your husband remains in London. But does he then join you in Thailand?

CEFKIN: No, he does not. There wasn't any prospect for an assignment for him in Bangkok that would have been in accordance with anti-nepotism regulations. So my last year in Sarajevo, my year in Washington, and my first year in Bangkok he was in London. The year I was in DC, between my tour in BEX and beginning my Thai refresher training, I was able to take a three-four week break to be with him in London, over the Christmas-New year's holiday period. Then he scheduled leave to visit me in DC when we had our language spring break. That was around the time that a big volcano in Iceland erupted, interrupting transatlantic air travel for several weeks, so I thought that would disrupt our reunion, but miraculously his flight made it. Those are the personal stresses we dealt with, on top of the professional ones.

My first year in Bangkok, he visited me in Bangkok once or twice, and I visited him in London one more time before he left. In fact, his first visit to Bangkok was extra special, because while he was on the plane en route to Bangkok, the promotion lists came out and I saw that he had been promoted over the threshold to Counselor. He took a taxi from the airport and when I greeted him at the door I said, "Welcome General." He asks, "General, what? Congratulations for what? For making it from London to Bangkok?" Then I told him he had been promoted (to the one-star flag-rank equivalent – hence the reference to "general"). He was absolutely flabbergasted, because he hadn't been expecting it. Then I showed him the promotion list. He spent the next couple of hours reading and responding to all the congratulatory messages he had received. Being the one to deliver the news to him and then help him celebrate his promotion is a special memory.

After London, he was assigned to Seoul as the Consul General, so my second and third years in Bangkok he was there. Seoul wasn't exactly a hop, skip, and a jump from Bangkok, but it was obviously closer than London, so we were able to see each other a bit more often.

Q: Wonderful. Yeah, obviously, much better. You're at least dealing with the same Bureau.

CEFKIN: Exactly, same Bureau, closer in time zone, so arranging calls and contemporaneous communication by email was easier. At one point I had jotted some notes that I thought would make a good Foreign Service story about the life of tandem

couples. In Bangkok, after a long day at the office, I would be home and would crank up the computer again to catch up on messages. (As DCM, I had a home workstation at my residence.) Often, I would flip back and forth between my work email and my personal email to communicate with Paul. One night I was trading emails with him when I got a message that there had been an earthquake in Thailand. So I was toggling back and forth between messages with Washington (wanting to know of any damage reports), embassy staff who were tracking the reports, and with Paul. So I casually wrote him "Oh, we've just had an earthquake." Then we went on with our conversation. (Fortunately, the earthquake didn't cause any significant damage.) Anyway, those are the kinds of things that happen, but somehow whatever kind of chaos may be swirling around, it just seemed normal for us. It was the way we lived.

Q: Oh, my goodness. All right. Just to conclude this episode. Were there any other recollections then that you had about Thailand that you wanted to add now? Or, if not, you can always add them in the editing process?

CEFKIN: I think when we had that interview, I included some reflections, but I'll give it a little more thought and add anything else I think of. I may want to add some reflections on the situation in Burma, since at the time I was doing the Burma policy advisor job things were looking much brighter for the country. Obviously, with the coup earlier this year (February 2021) things there have taken a very different turn.

Q: Well, I'm glad that we finally could get together and get this recorded. Once again, a fascinating story about Bosnia at that moment.

CEFKIN: Good, great.

All right today is April 13, 2010. We're resuming our interview with Judith Cefkin as she goes out to be DCM in Bangkok, Thailand in 2010.

CEFKIN: Yeah, I arrived in Bangkok on July 10, 2010. As with Embassy Sarajevo, the Ambassador initially encouraged me to arrive in time for the July 4th reception, but he agreed to let me come a bit later to give me more time to prepare.

Embassy Bangkok is a huge Mission; in fact, it really is a mega-Embassy. It had been very large when I served there in the 1990s, but it had grown by leaps and bounds since that time. It certainly was the largest embassy in Asia and in the top five globally.

Q: Now, is the reason for the growth because we had more bilateral things to do with Thailand, or because it was a regional center?

CEFKIN: The latter.

Our total staff was between two and three thousand, depending on whether or not you count the contractors who were part of the local guard force. We had over 50 members of our country team. For those familiar with State Department parlance, we had fifty-eight

different ICASS entities. (ICASS, which is the acronym for International Cooperative Administrative Support Services, is the system for determining the costs the various U.S. agencies present at the Embassy paid for administrative support services.) In addition to the State Department, at least thirty-seven U.S. agencies were present. In terms of State employees, we had a little over 500 direct hire employees. We had one consulate – Consulate Chiang Mai – in the north of Thailand. When I served at Embassy Bangkok 1990-1993, we had three consulates. In addition to Chiang Mai, we had Consulate Udorn in the northeast of Thailand and Consulate Songkhla in the south of Thailand. The latter two had closed down by the time I returned in 2010, but we did still have a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) presence in Udorn. We also had an International Broadcasting Board (IBB) station there that relayed Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts.

And in just Bangkok itself, our official presence was spread over four different embassy-owned compounds, at least four different commercial buildings, and four remote locations. For example, our Centers for Disease Control (CDC) office was co-located with Thailand's Ministry of Health in a suburb of Bangkok. In sum, it was a really large and very spread-out mission. The reason the Mission is so huge is that it is a regional and global support platform. Approximately half of our staff were supporting regional activities and/or global programs. For example, State's office of Global Financial Services, which is headquartered in Charleston, South Carolina and provides financial services (payroll, etc.) for the State Department, had a branch at Embassy Bangkok (as well as one in Sofia, Bulgaria). It was quite a large office. It made sense to have this presence in Bangkok, because it was easy to find well-qualified local staff, and operating costs were reasonable.

Of course, this made it a demanding work environment – in terms of the size and volume of work generated, as well as the challenge of bringing coherence to this very large, scattered presence. A big focus of my work was ensuring constant coordination so that our left hand and right hand weren't working at cross purposes, and seeking to build a sense of community. The latter was also difficult because Bangkok is a large, thriving city. So Embassy staff aren't necessarily dependent on the embassy for their social community the way they tend to be at some posts. Reflecting on the challenge of my leadership role I found inspiration in the U.S. motto, *"e pluribus unum"* – we are many, but come together as one.

This meant that one of the key things I did as DCM was to chair a lot of "cluster meetings" bringing together offices and agencies working on similar topics, to share information and collaborate in support of Mission goals. We had a law enforcement cluster meeting that included DEA, FBI and other DOJ elements, several DHS agencies, Treasury, and State (including an office that oversaw INL-funded training). We also had a regional training center, one of several U.S.-funded International Law Enforcement Academies (ILEA) based in Bangkok that trained police and other law enforcement officials from throughout the region. I also chaired an economic-commercial cluster meeting that included State Econ officers, the Foreign Commercial Service, the Foreign Agricultural Service, and USAID. We had a political-military cluster meeting that

included State, several DOD and intelligence offices. And we had a few other cluster meetings, including one I started, that I'll talk about later.

In addition to chairing the cluster meetings, I had regular one-on-one meetings with a number of key agency heads to make sure I knew what they were working on and that they understood what the Ambassador;' priorities were. Of course, when I first arrived I visited all the Mission offices to introduce myself, learn about their work and meet their staff. It took quite a long time to get around to visiting all the offices and agencies, but it was important to do and very useful. I also held several town hall meetings. Another thing I put as much emphasis on as I could was supporting the Community Liaison Office (CLO) – meeting with them and encouraging embassy staff to participate in their events and attend Marine Security Guard happy hours and other Embassy functions that helped them get to know members of the community.

We had quite an active locally engaged staff (LES) committee, and they organized events for the Thai holidays. The Thais like to have fun and they planned really lovely holiday celebrations with food, games, and contests. Annually, we also had a ceremony to rededicate the spirit house on the embassy compound. That was a very special ceremony. Events like that were opportunities for the community to come together, so I encouraged staff to participate.

Going back to the political situation, as mentioned earlier, when I arrived Thailand had just been through several months of political violence between "the Red Shirts" and "the Yellow Shirts." The Red Shirts were supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shiniwatra – a rich businessman who had a populist appeal. He had done a lot during his time as PM to support rural development and raise the standard of living, so he had a big base of support among the rural and urban poor. Thailand had a growing middle class, and high levels of education, so the rural and blue collar Thais, who had previously felt marginalized, wanted a greater say in their governance. But Thailand's traditional governing elite -- the royals, the military, and the government bureaucrats – felt threatened. In particular, they viewed Thaksin as presenting a threat to the continuation of the monarchy. This fear was exacerbated by the fact that Thailand's highly revered King, King Bhumipol, was elderly and ailing and increasingly less of a public presence. Thaksin faced numerous accusations of corruption. A number of these accusations were well-founded; he tended to confuse benefits to his personal business fortunes with benefits for Thailand in pursuit of government contracts. After Thaksin was ousted in a 2006 military coup, Thailand entered a protracted period of political turbulence, with Red Shirt supporters jockeying for power with Yellow shirt supporters. The Yellow Shirts portrayed themselves as protectors of the monarchy. (Yellow was the King's color.) So members of Thaksin's party would win a parliamentary majority and form a government only to be sidelined by parliamentary and judicial maneuvers, allowing the pro-Yellow shirt politicians to take charge. This culminated in the violent Red Shirt-Yellow Shirt protests of spring 2010.

Q: Yeah. And actually, thank you for distilling that very complicated political scene because following it from outside, and I was in the Foreign Service at the time and just

trying to figure out what was going on in Thailand was very difficult because of the changing names and the changing levels of support for the various atomized groups, very difficult to figure it out.

CEFKIN: Yeah, it's still complicated. Even when you know Thailand, you have to look back to reconstruct exactly what happened and when and why.

Anyway, when I arrived Thailand's government was headed by a gentleman named Abhisit Vejjajiva. He was a well-respected politician. During my previous Bangkok tour Abhisit had been a bright young star who burst onto the political scene in the 1992 parliamentary elections. He was with the Democrat Party, which was Thailand's oldest and one of its most respected political parties, but it was definitely affiliated with the Yellow Shirts. Abhisit had eventually managed to quell the protests, but at the time of my arrival tensions remained. Occasionally there would be smaller protests. There were also a series of small explosions set off around the city. As far as I can recall, the perpetrators weren't caught, but they were believed to be related to the political tensions. This made it a challenging environment, and obviously made emergency preparedness particularly important for the Embassy. We focused on trying to hit the right balance between not locking Embassy staff down, but also stressing the need for heightened awareness, and understanding that bad things could happen unexpectedly in unexpected places.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Another issue that confronted me when I first arrived concerned the VOA relay station in Udorn. The station had a staff of forty-nine local employees and an American director of the operation. There was a move afoot back in Washington to privatize the management of the operation. Someone who worked at the International Broadcasting Board (IBB) headquarters thought that privatizing the broadcast operations would be an important money-saving move; they were in negotiations with the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) about taking over operation of the relay station. They argued that this could be done without compromising the operation, since the U.S. Government would retain control of the content of the programs being broadcast. They said they would encourage the new owners to keep the existing staff, but of course, there was no guarantee, so the Udorn staff members were very nervous that they would face a Reduction in Force (RIF).

Q: But let me just ask a quick question here. If this is an IBB station, in theory it's, you know, broadcasting American news, news about the U.S., once it privatizes were we in essence saying we really didn't need that outlet as a U.S. government tool?

CEFKIN: No. The IBB staff argued that the U.S. Government would retain control of the programming, so that turning over the technical operation of the station to a private, non-U.S. entity could be done without compromising the integrity of the operation. But the plan definitely raised a lot of questions in my mind and in the minds of our Public Affairs team.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Anyway, we had a lot of discussions with IBB without resolving the way forward. Finally, I said, "Wait a minute, all this is being done by phone calls and emails; has anybody really put it into the proper policy/legal channels?" The Public Affairs Officer acknowledged that the communications had all been informal, so we drafted a cable asking State's Legal Office (L) for guidance. Meantime, I had to deal with the staff angst, so I traveled to Udorn to tour the facility and hold a town hall. I had to be careful not to offer false promises. I told the staff that we were cautiously optimistic that we could avoid RIFs, but admitted that we couldn't be 100 percent certain. The staff appreciated that candor. Eventually, our cable did the trick, since it brought more players at State into the decision-making process, and forced more scrutiny of the ethics and legality of the privatization plan. The plan died a quiet death.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: The ambassador I worked for when I arrived is someone I knew fairly well. We'd both worked at the embassy during my first Bangkok tour in the 1990s. In fact, he and my husband had worked together before in the Order Departure Program. So, they were friends. The ambassador gave me a lot of latitude to run the Embassy operations. He was very engaged on the policy front. He had good contacts with the government and key political figures, and he was very active with the business community.

However, he did have a bit of a cloud hanging over him, which was that the embassy had had a difficult inspection before I arrived. The inspection had occurred in the middle of the political violence. It was a very awkward situation, with the inspectors literally second-guessing the embassy's emergency steps. So that had affected embassy morale, but the ambassador and I had a good working relationship, and I was happy to launch my tour working with him.

Q: Just a very quick question about the inspector. Were most of the required changes of a process nature or were there issues like communication throughout the embassy of policy, or how would you characterize just in general?

CEFKIN: Yeah, the majority of the criticisms were in the management sphere – things like improper maintenance of gift logs, and questions about certain expenses, etc. But there were also some critiques about communications and insufficient attention to morale.

On the policy front, one of the first big issues I engaged in during one of my first stints as Chargé at Embassy Bangkok, was the extradition of a notorious Russian arms trafficker by the name of Viktor Bout. (Bout's character is depicted in the movie "Lord of War." He was also nicknamed "the merchant of death.") He had been arrested and jailed in Thailand and the U.S. was seeking his extradition; the Southern District of New York had a terrorism and money laundering case against him. The extradition process had been dragging on for a couple of years. Every time we thought it was close to being finalized, there would be a setback. So the process had been zig-zagging along, when our

Department of Justice (DOJ) Attaché learned that the Thai Appeals Court was about to render a decision, and the indications he had were that the decision might not go the right way. We knew that the Thais were under pressure from the Russians not to grant the extradition request. So, I worked intensively with the DOJ Attaché, our DEA Office and the Political section to craft an approach to Thai judicial officials. It was a delicate situation because we had to be careful not besmirch the independence of the Thai judiciary, while at the same time making clear the U.S. government's keen interest in the case and our conviction that we had made a strong case for extradition. We were facing a lot of pressure for Washington and the southern District of New York to make sure the decision went the right way. So the Attaché and I had several meetings with the Thai Attorney General as well as with officials at the Foreign Ministry and in the Office of the Prime Minister to make our position clear. Eventually we did get a positive decision. But transferring him to U.S. custody was another delicate process. We didn't breathe a sigh of relief until he was on a U.S. plane that DEA agents had arranged, and on his way back to the U.S. Needless to say, that was a big win for Embassy Bangkok.

The resolution of the Bout case was a high note, but shortly thereafter, I had to deal with what was probably the most difficult thing I encountered in my Foreign Service career, which was the tragic death of the ambassador's daughter. The ambassador had two children – a daughter and a son – both young adults. The daughter was starting college in New York City. The ambassador had taken her and his son to the U.S. to get his daughter settled at school and to then spend some time on consultations in DC. Meanwhile, the ambassador's wife was visiting friends in Hong Kong. The daughter was very bright, beautiful and artistically talented. The ambassador had gotten her settled at her school in N.Y., and was in Washington when his daughter died in an accident.

Q: Wow. Wow.

CEFKIN: Not only did she die in an accident; it was a horrific accident -- she fell from a high-rise balcony.

Q: Oh, my god.

CEFKIN: This happened in August 2010. It was just devastating. The first thing I had to do was to help the wife get from Hong Kong to the U.S. as quickly as possible. Then I assembled a core team of senior embassy staff to meet at my house over the weekend to figure out how best to inform the embassy, handle press inquiries, and manage the incoming condolences. We worked to strike the right balance between protecting the family's privacy, while easing their administrative and emotional burden in any way we could. It was a very difficult, intense period.

Eventually the ambassador and his wife and son did come back to post, though obviously very shaken. The ambassador was scheduled to transfer back to DC that fall. The incoming ambassador had been confirmed, and was working to schedule her arrival. Fortunately, in the wake of the tragedy, she thought it was important to give the outgoing ambassador the time and space he needed to seek closure and prepare for his transfer. So,

he did stay a bit longer than he had initially planned. Once they got over the initial shock, they had a really beautiful memorial for the daughter. It was cathartic, but I don't think you ever fully recover from that type of loss.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. I mean, I've worked for several ambassadors who had teenage kids and yeah, anything like that is going to change your life.

CEFKIN: Yeah.

The ambassador and his family left in early December. The incoming ambassador thoughtfully agreed that it didn't make sense to arrive in the middle of a holiday period, so I had an interregnum of about a month as Chargé, and it gave me and the embassy team time to catch our breaths to prepare for the new ambassador's arrival. But of course, it was a very busy time with preparations for the transition. And, as Chargé, I had added protocol responsibilities, including attending a series of royal events marking the Thai King's birthday.

To prepare for the ambassadorial transition, I assembled a group of first and second tour officers, with oversight from a group of senior officers to come up with a suggested roadmap of meetings, events, and travel for the ambassador in her initial months at Post. I also hosted core country team members at my residence for a strategic planning session to identify opportunities for the Ambassador to advance priority issues, and to come up with a plan of initial introductions. The incoming ambassador was extremely media savvy, and we had an excellent Public Diplomacy section, so I asked them to come up with a media plan. They developed a very creative set of recommendations to introduce the Ambassador to the Thai public via both traditional and social media. In fact one of their recommendations was for the ambassador to do an introductory video that we posted on social media, ahead of the ambassador's arrival. That became a State Department "best practice," that other ambassadors were encouraged to emulate.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: The new ambassador arrived in January and quickly launched into a very active schedule. She brought a very different leadership style from her predecessor, so that was an adjustment for me and my embassy colleagues, but she brought a lot of energy and innovative spirit to the role. She and I were like-minded in the priority we attached to building embassy morale and promoting a sense of family at our mega-mission. One of the successful initiatives she embraced at the suggestion of our Management Section was an "employee of the month" program for our locally-engaged staff. Offices would nominate one of their employees, and the employee chosen would be invited to the Ambassador's office along with their colleagues and/or family members if they chose, for a brief ceremony where they received a plaque and monetary award. It was a way to get embassy staff who might not necessarily have previously set foot in the Front Office up to the Ambassadors suite and to have their picture taken with the Ambassador and DCM. The ceremony was quick but provided a real feel-good moment, and I believe generated goodwill among embassy staff.

As far as some of the responsibilities I was engaged in, one concerned an initiative that the outgoing ambassador had launched called the "Thai-U.S. Creative Partnership." The initiative stemmed from the fact that the U.S.- Thai relationship was evolving from one of donor-aid recipient to being more one of partnership. The U.S. and Thailand had long had a thriving trade and investment relationship, and the ambassador envisaged potential for greater collaboration in the creative industries. So the idea behind the Creative Partnership was to spur public-private partnerships in promising innovative industries. Examples included film animation -- Thailand had quite a bit going on in animation and film post-production work.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: It was a great concept, but putting meat on the bones of the initiative was challenging. In any case, I was a co-chair – together with the Director-General the Thai Foreign Ministry's North America Division – of a steering board charged with directing the initiative. The other U.S. members of the steering board included staff from our Economic Section, USAID, the Foreign Commercial Section, the Foreign Agricultural Section, and a representative from the American Chamber of Commerce. We met together with our Thai counterparts every couple of months to review activities that we could showcase as part of the partnership.

Q: Did we still have Peace Corps there?

CEFKIN: Yes, we did have an active Peace Corps program there. Thailand had one of the earliest U.S. Peace Corps programs, and in 2012 we celebrated 50 years of Peace Corps Thailand. Wwe had a big celebration; a lot of former Peace Corps volunteers came back for the occasion. Given Thailand's level of development the program had evolved from a focus on rural development to more of a focus on business development and health projects. Though Peace Corps still continued some English education programs – a longtime standby for Peace Corps around the world. Peace Corps program remained very popular in Thailand, and it was a great way to "show the flag," especially in rural areas that didn't have as much contact with Americans.

Another initiative I had a role in shaping was the "Lower Mekong Initiative." Of course we worked with Thailand bilaterally and through regional organizations – in particular, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) involved a sub-regional grouping of ASEAN countries along the Mekong river basin – Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Burma. There was a lot of controversy over dams that China was (and is) building along the Mekong to generate more power, but that had downstream environmental and other consequences for the Mekong basin counties. Although we didn't feel we could directly intervene in the decisions over the construction of those dams, the objective of LMI was to encourage the ASEAN Mekong countries to collaborate and share information. We sought to encourage that collaboration by increasing scientific cooperation on issues such as health, water resources, and energy. There was a general suspicion among the U.S. embassies in the LMI countries that this

would be a hollow initiative without dedicated resources, and that it would unnecessarily divert attention from other priorities. We talked a lot about it at Embassy Bangkok and I came to the conclusion that there was a very clear imperative coming from Washington in support of LMI so that we could either be part of the problem or part of the solution. So I challenged our team to find ways to be part of the solution. The team responded well. Our USAID Mission, which was a regional mission, was particularly heavily involved. We also had regional and bilateral science and tech officers in our Economic Section, who served as LMI coordinators. Our work on LMI earned us a lot of gratitude from the East Asia and Pacific Bureau at State, so despite the challenges, it was a positive experience.

Q: And again, our principal concern here was environmental degradation?

CEFKIN: Yes. Well, it was environmental degradation, and the associated economic impacts such as damage to the fisheries that communities along the river depended on for their livelihoods and food security.

Q: I'm sorry, one more question then. Since the purpose of the dams is energy, were some of the programs or cooperation that we encouraged among the Southeast Asians energy cooperation?

CEFKIN: Yes, energy was an aspect of the initiative, though I don't remember what specific projects grew out of that pillar of engagement. (Interestingly though, I recently heard from an expert on the Mekong region that with the advent of more accessible alternative energy sources – solar, etc. – the dams are becoming less important for energy supply. Nonetheless, the construction of these dams are ongoing.)

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Another major issue we dealt with at Embassy Bangkok was refugees. Thailand had long played host (albeit, at times reluctantly) to refugees from neighboring countries, and we had a regional refugee coordinator at the embassy (embedded in the Political Section) that was funded by the Population, Refugee, Migration (PRM) Bureau at State. The main focus at the time was on Burmese refugees. There were several camps in Thailand along Thai-Burmese border that housed these refugees. Some had lived in these camps for 20-some years, and kids were born and raised there. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provided support for the camps as did we and other donors, but the Thai military ran the camps. There was some resentment among Thai villagers who lived in the area, who believed the refugees were receiving more resources than they were. But having visited those camps, I can testify to the fact that they were not someplace you wanted to spend your life. We urged the Thais to issue permits to some of the adult refugees to leave the camps during the day to work, but there was a lot of reluctance to do that. Periodically, we would hear that the Thai Government was considering repatriating some of the refugees to Burma, so we had to caution against forcible repatriation stressing that conditions in Burma weren't yet safe for them.

Q: Right, right.

CEFKIN: There were also some other groups of refugees in Thailand, such as Hmong from Laos. Before my arrival, the Thais had caused a big stir by forcibly repatriating a group of Hmong, so we were on alert to prevent a repeat of that. We also spent a fair bit of time coordinating with other donors, in particular the European Union (EU), which together with the U.S. was one of the biggest donors to refugee support. At one point we heard that the EU was planning to cut its support. When the EU Refugee Commissioner visited Thailand, I was tasked with meeting with her to lobby against the cuts. Ultimately, our advocacy efforts were successful, so that was satisfying.

One very interesting situation that developed in early 2011, during one of my stints as Chargé, involved increased Thai-Cambodian tensions and military skirmishes over Preah Vihear – an ancient temple that's on disputed border territory. There was a breach of agreed protocols, with each country accusing the other of initiating the breach to assert their territorial prerogatives. Of course, we convened our Emergency Action Committee (EAC) and issued warnings to Americans to avoid the area. And I spoke with senior Thai officials, including the Foreign Minister, to urge restraint. I reiterated that call for a diplomatic solution during a press conference at a ceremony for the opening of "Cobra Gold" – a big military exercise we have annually in Thailand. We also coordinated with our Embassy in Cambodia, with EAP in Washington, and with USUN to promote a UN Security Council discussion of the problem and to identify off-ramps. Eventually the situation calmed down, though periodically there were more minor flair-ups.

Another challenge I handled during my stints as Chargé was managing fallout over WikiLeaks. We learned that there was about to be a big WikiLeaks dump that would include embassy reports dealing with the very sensitive subject of royal succession.

Q: Ahh.

CEFKIN: Yeah. So, of course, I had to contact certain senior officials to warn them that they were likely to be named in those reports. There really wasn't much we could do, of course. And then, press-wise, we couldn't confirm or deny the reports. But we wanted to avoid our interlocutors being blind-sided, and we worked to assuage their concerns as best we could.

Another unexpected flap I dealt with as Chargé, involved an effort by the U.S. Congress's Helsinki Commission to invite ousted Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, to appear as a witness at a hearing on human rights in Thailand. At that time, Thaksin was living in exile in the UAE. While the U.S. Government had condemned the coup; Thaksin was no human rights paragon. But more importantly, we knew that his appearance in Congress would draw the U.S. right into the middle of Thai domestic politics. Eventually, through intensive coordination with the State Department, we were able to quietly turn the invitation off.

Q: Uh-huh. But while you're on the subject of human rights, did our judgements about human rights in Thailand begin to change as it developed more and more?

CEFKIN: Yes; there had been progress in many areas, but there were still areas of concern in areas. Corruption, though not as rampant as it had been, was an issue. Another area of concern involved freedom of speech. Thailand has lèse-majesté laws, which means that it's against the law to criticize or insult the monarch. Previously, Thai authorities hadn't been terribly strict in enforcing the law, but in the aftermath of the protests, they had started to become quite rigorous in arresting and prosecuting accused offenders, handing down some quite severe sentences that included prolonged jail time. This draconian approach stemmed in large part from the fact that the King was ailing, and was rarely seen in public, and there was lots of nervousness about the succession. The heir apparent – the Crown Prince (who is now King) – didn't enjoy the same respect as his father. And there was starting to be more public questioning about the role of the monarchy. We actually had a Thai-American dual-national who got caught up in the *lese-majeste* buzz-saw. While visiting Thailand, he posted remarks on Facebook criticizing the monarchy, and was arrested and tried. We worked really hard to secure his release, but given the fact that he still had Thai citizenship, Thai authorities weren't inclined to leniency. Eventually, we persuaded the Thais to release and deport him, but the entire saga went on for close to a year.

Another human rights issue that we spent a lot of time on was trafficking in persons (TIP).

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: There were numerous allegations of human trafficking in Thailand, particularly in the fishing industry. I'm sure you're familiar with the congressionally-mandated TIP report that all U.S. embassies are required to draft annually. The TIP Office at State oversees the preparation of those reports and assigns each country a ranking judging how well they were doing in combating trafficking. The TIP Office targeted Thailand as one of the countries they deemed to be making insufficient efforts to crackdown on the traffickers. The Thai Government, like most foreign governments, resented our lecturing them on this issue. One of our Economic officers was charged with managing the Embassy's trafficking efforts. She had to press and cajole the Thais to agree to stronger efforts to combat trafficking. Simultaneously, she worked to dispute allegations State's TIP Office sometimes used in its assessments that were unverified and had dubious sourcing to arrive at a balanced assessment of the problem and what could be done to address it. She devised some quite creative approaches, and of course, the Ambassador and I amplified her demarches in our meeting with senior Thai officials. Ultimately, we were able to avoid Thailand being penalized over TIP, but it was an annual struggle.

Q: On the subject of press and media freedom, did the embassy believe that the press could report freely or was there a great deal of self-censorship?

CEFKIN: There was a very vibrant media landscape in Thailand, and for the most part free. There are two well-respected English language newspapers – The Bangkok Post

and The Nation – and a number of Thai language papers of varying quality. Some were very solid sources of news, and some (as in most countries) were more sensationalist. There was the usual complement of electronic media -- TV, radio, and social media. As mentioned, discussion of the monarchy was a delicate subject. The news always had a segment reporting on royal activities, but there was no critical coverage. They knew what lines to avoid crossing. But sometimes foreign media was censored. I remember one time when *Time* magazine had an article that the Thai Government deemed offensive, so they banned the sale of that issue in Thailand.

The more frequent challenge we had with the Thai press is that they sometimes got caught up in conspiracy theories and reported stories without verifying the facts or talking to reliable sources. It could be challenging to dispel what were essentially rumors.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: One facet of our work at Embassy Bangkok was a strong focus on health diplomacy and research.

Q: Interesting. Okay.

CEFKIN: One thing I failed to mention in discussion of my first tour in Bangkok (in the 1990s) is that Thailand at that time had a big problem with HIV-AIDS. It was particularly spread through brothels. Prostitution was rampant in Thailand.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: At that time there was a government minister by the name of Mechai Wirawaithaya, who had been very successful in promoting the use of condoms to curb Thailand's overpopulation problem. With the explosion of HIV-AIDS, he turned his attention to promoting the use of condoms to stem the spread of AIDS. In fact, in 1992, the Ambassador and our Regional Medical Officer invited Mechai to address Embassy staff about the risk. So we organized two town halls – one for English-speaking staff and one for Thai-speaking staff.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: Since my Thai comprehension was quite good, I decided to go to the Thai language presentation. He really put the fear of god into the audience. One of the shocking things he said was that he had a college-aged daughter "who is going to get AIDS" – making the point that the incidence was so high that those were the odds.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: The other point he made to shock the Thai women in the audience was to ask them "do you know where your husbands have been when they come home to

you at night?" This reflected the fact that it was very common for Thai men to frequent prostitutes. When I returned to Thailand in 2010, Mechai was no longer in government, but he was still active in efforts to combat HIV-AIDs. In fact, there's a well-known restaurant that is run by Mechai's foundation called "Cabbages and Condoms." It's actually a very good Thai restaurant, they sell trinkets made with condoms and display condom art. (Both laugh)

All that is background to explain that over the years, the U.S. had established a very vibrant health collaboration with Thailand, and Thailand had developed a sophisticated health infrastructure and epidemiological capability. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) had a large presence in Thailand. Their offices were co-located with the Thai Ministry of Health. The rate of HIV infections in Thailand had been significantly reduced in the preceding decade, and CDC with Thai health officials were doing important research on further ways to reduce AIDS transmission in vulnerable groups. We had another large health presence doing cutting-edge research, which was the Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Sciences (AFRIMS), which is a branch of Walter Reed. AFRIMS was working with the Thai military medical corps on tropical disease research such as malaria and dengue. They had a big lab that included breeding mosquitos to study the transition of these diseases. The reason for AFRIMS' work was, of course, to learn how to better protect our military from these diseases. They were also doing research on HIV, and had in fact conducted a trial on a possible vaccine.

In addition to CDC and AFRIMS, our USAID Mission was involved in PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) work. Our Regional Environmental Officers included health in their portfolio, and then, of course, we had our Embassy health section (MED) providing health services for Embassy staff. In sum, we had a lot of Embassy resources focused on health. In fact, in one of my evaluations, I mentioned that "while most embassies don't have a budget for lab rats, Embassy Bangkok does." (Both Laugh)

Q: Ah. Of course.

CEFKIN: I had mentioned that a large part of my job was chairing various inter-agency meetings to ensure robust information-sharing and collaborative initiatives. Given all the Embassy health resources, I decided to start a "Health Working Group." I tapped out Regional Environmental Officer to coordinate the group's work – scheduling our meetings and developing the agenda etc. By my third year at Post the group had started to pursue some quite creative initiatives, such as facilitating the development of a public-private consortium to support a phase three trial of an HIV-AIDS vaccine, developed by AFRIMS. That was quite exciting.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: And the thing I kept trying to point out to policymakers in Washington was how valuable the Embassy's health work was. It largely was taking place under the radar; it didn't get a lot of press coverage. I thought it deserved greater recognition for

the contributions the work was making to U.S. global priorities. So the ambassador and I sought to elevate visibility of this work more.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: Also, given Thailand's impressive level of epidemiological capability, the Thais were beginning to share that expertise with its less-advanced neighbors – particularly Cambodia and Laos. We encouraged this cooperation in the health pillar of our Lower Mekong Initiative.

So, the above reflections cap my first year as DCM in Bangkok.

Q: But one question for your first year. To what extent were just average embassy employees subject to questions about crime or areas of the city that were particularly unsafe, that kind of thing?

CEFKIN: Fortunately, not too much. Bangkok was overall fairly safe, other than the risk of pickpocketing, which is true in any big city.

Q: Sure.

CEFKIN: The more serious situation we did encounter a few times concerned women who were out late at night at bars, who were victims of attempted assault by taxi drivers they hailed to get home. It wasn't a common occurrence, but likely there were a few taxi drivers who waited outside bars for women who were alone and who may have appeared drunk. So we recommended that women going out at night use a buddy system and take other appropriate precautions.

Q: Is this a moment to talk about drug trafficking as an element of crime or is this something you'll get into later with one of your clusters?

CEFKIN: We can talk about that. Drug trafficking was a major problem in Thailand and we had a large DEA presence there. That was true during both my tours in Thailand. When I was there in the 1990s, DEA was engaged in poppy eradication, to curb the production and trafficking of opium/heroin. When I returned in 2010, DEA's focus had turned to methamphetamines which had supplanted heroin as the major drug being produced and trafficked in Thailand. Chinese criminal organizations played a major role in the production and distribution of these drugs, which were also transshipped to the U.S. It was a huge problem for Thailand and for us.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: Methamphetamines can be produced relatively cheaply, which meant that the street price was low, and poor Thais easily became addicted. It was also a problem at the schools, including the international schools that Embassy dependents attended.

Q: Were drug gangs or money laundering issues also a major part of your portfolio?

CEFKIN: You know, that was something DEA certainly focused on. Money laundering was part of the Victor Bout case I had talked about earlier. In addition to DEA, we had an FBI office that also focused on these issues and a Secret Service (USSS) office, which in addition to presidential protection has a mandate to investigate cases involving the counterfeiting of U.S. currency. There were some cases of counterfeit bills circulating in Thailand and the region.

Another criminal issue that was a big focus for our law enforcement team at Embassy Bangkok was pedophilia.

Q: Oh my gosh.

CEFKIN: Yeah; unfortunately a number of Western tourists are attracted to Thailand for the wrong reasons, especially (though not exclusively) men seeking to have sex with young boys. The prevalence of Thai children being exploited for this purpose was a sad underbelly of life in Thailand. Under U.S. law, it's illegal for any American to travel overseas to engage in underage sex. It's one of the few crimes where the U.S. government asserts extraterritorial enforcement rights. Of course, U.S. agents don't have arrest authority overseas, but our FBI team worked very closely with Thai authorities to capture Americans engaged in child prostitution, so that they could be sent back to the U.S. for prosecution. We had a very successful cooperation with the Thai authorities on this.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Let's see. So, (laughs) in my second year, we had a very interesting and unusual crisis that developed, which was an epic flood. I should say that Thailand is no stranger to floods. In the preceding year the country had experienced severe flooding in parts of the country. When that happened, the ambassador would exercise her disaster declaration authorities and request emergency funding through USAID's Office of foreign Disaster Assistance to aid relief efforts. However the floods that occurred in the fall of 2011 were the worst Thailand had suffered in half a century. They inundated large swaths of Central Thailand (including the greater Bangkok metro area) and the Eastern Seaboard. The flooding lasted for three months, and all told did $45 billion worth of damage and caused the death of 600 Thais. They also disrupted national and global supply chains.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: Most of Thailand's manufacturing was concentrated around Bangkok and in the Eastern Seaboard area (running from south of Bangkok to the Gulf of Thailand). And the distribution networks all went through that region, prompting shortages of a number of supplies. In fact, at one point while the floods were ongoing, I visited our

Consulate in Chiang Mai, in the north of Thailand. There wasn't flooding there, but they still had shortages (for example of bottled water) because of distribution disruptions. As mentioned earlier, we had a very active U.S. business presence in Thailand, and a number of U.S. companies were affected. In particular, Ford and General Motors had major car manufacturing facilities in the eastern seaboard region. Several of their factories were impacted and had to suspend operations. Even when they were able to maintain production, getting the goods shipped out was problematic.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: Naturally, we were very focused on providing disaster assistance. We worked through USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) to provide grants to the Thai Red Cross. But it wasn't a large amount of money, so we looked for other pots of funds to tap. Our Law Enforcement Assistance coordinator was able to get funds from the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) Affairs) to purchase a few Zodiac boats for the Thai police to use in water rescues. That was well-received.

The ambassador had the idea that it would be great to also show military support for the relief efforts, given our military alliance with Thailand. Thailand is one of our non-NATO treaty allies, and we have very active military cooperation, including regular joint military exercises – the largest of which is the annual Cobra Gold exercise. However, getting U.S. military assistance for disaster relief is complicated, given our humanitarian assistance laws. USAID has to request military support, and that support is supposed to be limited to situations that exceed the capacity of the country's own resources and where there is risk of significant loss of life. That wasn't really the case with the Thai floods. As extensive as the floods were, the damage was mostly to property. In cases where people had to be rescued Thai authorities (police and military) had the capability. There were deaths in the flooding, but it was mostly the result of individuals failing to heed warnings.

So I worked closely with the Political Advisor to the Pacific Commander to try to make the case that it was in the U.S. national interest to have a visible demonstration of U.S. military support for the relief efforts, and ultimately he came up with a creative approach. They diverted a frigate from a strike group that was in the area to come into port in the Gulf. The catch was that they couldn't participate directly in relief efforts, but the crew on the ship did a number of civic action projects, and they were able to deploy helicopters from the ship to support surveillance of the flooded areas. Of course they invited their Thai counterparts to accompany them on the flights and our press team invited Thai journalists to go along, so we got a public diplomacy bounce from that. The Pacific Command also sent a marine humanitarian assistance group that conducted some civic action projects. To be candid, we employed a lot of smoke and mirrors, but ultimately we were able to demonstrate the U.S. care and concern for what the Thais at their time of need.

Another big challenge was managing the concerns of American citizens and the embassy community. We had several town halls for both groups and of course, we had regular Emergency Action Committee meetings. The ambassador and I also increased our efforts to "walk around" the Mission to visit different offices and take the pulse of how the staff was doing.

The area around the embassy fortunately did not flood, but we did move some of our American staff and their families in the Bangkok suburb of Nonthaburi into hotels downtown for a while when their neighborhood was under threat from the encroaching flood waters.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: But the real problem was our Thai staff, since we had no authority to provide housing assistance to them. In the course of the flooding, about a third of our Locally Employed Staff (LES) -- 400 of the twelve thousand -- were washed out of their homes, in some cases multiple times. In some cases, they would be flooded out of their home and would move in with a relative; then the relative's home would flood. So, they were obviously in a very bad situation. We did what we could to support them, including giving them special administrative time to deal with their situations. We had donation drives, and we gave them access to Embassy-supplied drinking water. Eventually, we established a volunteer program that invited American employees who were willing to offer spare rooms in their house to LES who were displaced. A number of Americans did step up to volunteer, and several of our Thai staff members did ask for that support. It was an interesting experience, with mixed results. Some people found it awkward; others really enjoyed getting to know each other and sharing experiences. The ambassador and I decided it would be appropriate to support this effort by volunteering space in our homes. I had a couple staying with me for a week or two. I think they were a bit intimidated staying at the DCM's, so I rarely saw them. But I did host a dinner for them, before they left, and invited my two drivers. We ended up having a fascinating conversation that evening.

It was very bizarre the way the situation evolved. My residence was on an Embassy compound a few blocks away from the Embassy. We weren't in the flood zone, but at times, I would walk around the neighborhood and suddenly see sandbags being stacked up. So I would ask myself "do they know something, we don't know?" Fortunately, it never did flood in the neighborhoods around the Embassy. But, needless to say, dealing with all the flooding impacts was very, very challenging, particularly given the long duration of the crisis.

Q: Yeah, I imagine. Incredible.

Afterwards, were we able to do anything for future flood relief mitigation? I don't know, dig water channels or look at alternative housing that would be more flood resistant.

CEFKIN: We tried to offer technical support in some cases. At one point, the U.S. Air Force sent a team of engineers to see if there were projects they could assist with. There was some discussion of helping with repairing a runway at one of Bangkok's airports, which flooded. Fortunately, it wasn't the major international airport, although getting to that airport was tricky due to flooding in neighborhoods around the airport. The Airport that did flood was the old international airport that had been transformed to a domestic hub. But one side of that airport also served as the Thai military airport. But the Thai Government never followed through with a formal request for our assistance with that project.

One thing we did try to coach the Thai Government on was communications strategy. I neglected to mention that, before the flooding crisis occurred, Thailand had held parliamentary elections and had had a change of government. The party of deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had won a majority. Thaksin's younger sister, Yingluck Shinawatra was elected as the new prime minister. So there was a fairly new government in office, and many of the government ministers were new to their roles. They weren't well-coordinated in their public messaging regarding the floods; one minister would try to reassure the public that everything was fine, no cause for alarm, and another minister would tell people to "run for their lives." Our regional psychiatrist had a crisis communications "lessons learned" that CDC had produced. I believe it was done in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Q: Right, right.

CEFKIN: We shared that with Thai leaders and encouraged them to coordinate their public messaging to speak with one voice. But our guidance didn't affect much change.

Once we got past the floods, we confronted a couple of terrorist threats.

Q: Ahh.

CEFKIN: Thailand's a pretty porous country. The Thais pride themselves on being welcoming to everyone. That means that it was fairly easy for bad actors to enter the country, as well as legitimate visitors. In any case, we received credible information about a serious Hezbollah-related terrorist threat in Bangkok. I was Chargé at the time. So I convened the EAC and we set to work tracking information and issuing appropriate advisories. At one point I even received a call from John Brennan, who at the time was the White House Counter-Terrorism Advisor. Our issuance of travel advisories provoked angst among Thai officials worried that it would damage Thailand's tourism industry. So I had to try to assuage their concerns, while explaining our responsibility to warn U.S. citizens of the risk, since we didn't know what the target was. Ultimately Thai authorities, with the information we provided, did arrest a Hezbollah-linked operative, and they did find a big cache of explosives. So we determined that the plot had been averted.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: About a month later, there was a second incident involving an explosion at a house in Bangkok that was linked to a group of Iranians. It appeared that one of them had been trying to assemble a bomb when it detonated. We never learned what the target of their bomb-making was, but we suspected that it could have been the Israeli Embassy.

Q: Ah.

CEFKIN: Interestingly, with the public revelations of these attempted attacks, Thai public opinion swung in our favor, and the Thai public chided their government for not taking the threats more seriously.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: In addition to security and counterterrorism, another area of focus I spent quite a bit of time on was military cooperation. As noted earlier, Thailand is a major non-NATO defense ally. We have a very active schedule of joint military training exercises, and other forms of cooperation. In addition to the Defense Attaché's Office, we had a large Joint U.S, Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) that oversaw military assistance to Thailand, including the provision of equipment and training (through the Foreign Military Sales and the International Military Education and Training programs.

We enjoyed favorable access arrangements in Thailand, including frequent use of Thailand's Utapao base for the refueling of U.S. military flights heading to the Middle East. So that was important to U.S. interests. I had also mentioned the annual Cobra Gold exercise, which has become a multilateral exercise that is held in Thailand every year. In my role as DCM, I always represented the Embassy at the opening ceremony, and then the ambassador would attend the closing ceremony. In conjunction with Cobra Gold, I also did press outreach to highlight U.S.-Thai military cooperation, so that was fun.

Q: Could—in just a few words, what were the basic goals? I mean, was it readiness training for the Thai? Was it search and rescue in the event of another typhoon to tsunami? Or just sort of the general reasoning behind it?

CEFKIN: In general, the purpose was to increase interoperability among our forces. But the scenario for the exercise changed from year to year. There certainly were times and elements of the exercise that focused on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, but there were other training goals, as well.

The U.S. and Thailand had a long history of defense cooperation. During the Japanese occupation of Thailand in WWII, our Office of Strategic Services (OSS) supported the Free Thai movement, which waged an active underground resistance, helping to undermine Japanese forces. The Thais also fought with us in Vietnam, and at that time, the U.S. maintained several bases in Thailand, which were important to the war effort.

I should mention though, that Cobra Gold had become a multilateral exercise, with forces from a number of other countries in the region participating, so it was important in that respect as well.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: One exciting thing that developed on the military cooperation front during my tour, concerned the Joint Task Force the U.S. mobilized to address the problem of piracy off of the coast of Somalia. Thailand agreed to send a frigate to join that anti-piracy task force. That was the Thai Navy's first blue water operation, so it was quite a big step. I had the opportunity to attend the send-off for the ship, which was exciting. The ship deployed very successfully as part of that Task Force.

Given our defense relationship with Thailand, we had many senior U.S. military and defense officials visiting -- both from the Pacific Command in Hawaii and from Washington. The Deputy Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter made a brief stop-over at one point, and in my role as Chargé d'Affaires I went to the airport to brief him and attend his meeting with his Thai counterpart. That was a good meeting.

We also had a visit from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who at that time was General Dempsey. I was tasked by the ambassador to go meet him and help him prepare for an important Thai TV interview he had agreed to do. At the time we were embroiled in a controversy concerning a U.S proposal to send a NASA plane engaged in atmospheric research to Thailand. It really was a very anodyne mission related to monitoring the effects of climate change. We saw it as a great public diplomacy opportunity to talk about U.S.-Thai scientific cooperation. However, the Thai press, which as I mentioned earlier, could be prone to conspiracy thinking and was not always very good about checking sources and facts, thought that the plane was really on a covert mission to use Thailand as a base to spy on China.

Q: Hmm. Okay.

CEFKIN: So, the Foreign Ministry, which initially had been very supportive of the mission, got cold feet and withdrew their support for the NASA mission. We prepped Dempsey for an extended interview with one of Thailand's premier TV new personalities (a Dan Rather-like figure). General Dempsey did a superb job. But unfortunately we weren't able to salvage the NASA mission.

As mentioned earlier, we also had a very large U.S. commercial presence in Thailand and a very active American Chamber of Commerce, so we did a lot with them. We also had a strong agricultural trade relationship in Thailand. Our Foreign Commercial Service and Foreign Agricultural Service offices were quite successful in promoting U.S. goods and brands in Thailand. The Thais are big consumers and love shopping. Bangkok is full of big, fancy malls that are always packed. For that reason, U.S. companies often beta-tested their products in Thailand before introducing them to the broader Southeast Asian market.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: To give you a specific example, while I was there Krispy Kreme opened its first Asian franchise at one of Bangkok's malls. For months you could hardly get near the place -- the lines were around the block. So it was very successful. (Both laugh)

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Let's see. On a less positive front, personnel issues were a big part of my job. Unfortunately, some people are attracted to working in Thailand for the wrong reasons.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: The permissive environment, sadly, was hard on marriages, especially ones that were shaky going into the assignment.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: Some of our American male staff members took up with Thai mistresses, and sometimes they would try to kick their wives out of the house. Often these cases involved foreign-born spouses, who were less sure about what their rights were. One very sad case involved a spouse who was fighting cancer, and while she was in the U.S. receiving treatment, her husband had his Thai girlfriend move in. Although a staff member's personal issues weren't generally the Embassy's business, when these messy affairs began affecting Embassy morale and performance, it became our business. Of course these cases raised issues of joint property and custody of children. In the specific case, I mentioned, the wife risked being sent back to the U.S. without any resources to live there. I believe we eventually prevailed on the office where the employee worked to transfer him back to the U.S. so that they could deal more effectively with the problem there.

We also dealt with substance abuse issues. I remember one case involving the spouse (of one of our female employees) who had a drinking problem and became very belligerent when he was drunk causing disruptions in the neighborhood where they lived. It was tricky because, while we had the ability to send an employee packing, the only way we could force a family dependent to leave post was by booting the employee from post, and the agency the employee worked for really didn't want to lose her and she didn't want to leave. In that case we finally convinced the spouse to go back to the U.S. to get treatment.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: Fortunately, we had a regional psychiatrist based at Embassy Bangkok and she was very good, so we relied on her quite a bit, in coordination with the other members of our Family Advocacy Committee to handle these cases.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: Other difficult personnel issues I managed that were very difficult involved the leadership of some of our agencies. We learned that there was quite a bit of turmoil at one of the agencies indicating some problems with the office leadership. It was hard, because the head of the operation was someone the ambassador and I liked and who seemed very dedicated to his mission. It's always hard in these situations to judge how much of the criticism directed toward the head was justified and how much was just complaints from disgruntled staff. But there were enough problems coming from that agency that we figured there had to be some leadership lapses. When I inquired as to what was being done to address the situation, I was told that the agency headquarters was dealing with it. But time dragged on and nothing happened. Finally I contacted the agency leadership in the U.S. and said, "Hey, you've got to deal with this." And they did. Unfortunately it meant removing the office head, which was very hard for him. Although very well-intentioned, I think he had just been in a little over his head.

Whereas in the first case, we had to prod the agency headquarters to act, another case involved an agency head that his headquarters wanted to summarily yank. The ambassador and I weren't convinced he was being given a totally fair hearing, so the ambassador asked me to get a better feel for what was really happening. The bottom line was that, while he may not have been the strongest leader, he also wasn't horrible and there hadn't been a breach of ethics or anything like that. So, I was able to persuade the agency headquarters to slow down the train a little bit and let him have a more dignified transition.

Another issue involved an EEO complaint by the number two at one of our agencies against her boss. I wasn't able to and it wouldn't have been appropriate for me to take a position on the merits of the case, since EEO matters have their own well-prescribed procedures. But I was able to put the complaint into a better channel for being addressed in Washington, which dampened some of the angst.

Q: Sure.

CEFKIN: So, those are some illustrative examples of the kinds of personnel issues we dealt with in Bangkok. I guess that brings me to year number three.

Q: Okay, all right.

CEFKIN: The highlight that year was a visit by President Obama. I should add as an aside, that given the nature of our Post we had had a pretty steady stream of high-level visits, including a visit by Secretary Clinton the previous year, visits by other U.S. agency heads and Congressional delegations (CODELs). One of the CODELs that was

particularly memorable for me was a CODEL led by Senator John McCain. He was accompanied by Senators Joe Lieberman, Kelly Ayotte, and Sheldon Whitehead – so a bipartisan delegation. I was Chargé at the time, so I joined all their meetings. We started with a dinner briefing for core country team members, and the next day met (separately) with government and opposition representatives, NGO representatives and press. McCain was masterful in his handling of the meetings and it was a very thoughtful group. So I enjoyed the time with them and found the visit to be good value for U.S.-Thai relations.

But back to the President, Obama's visit was the first U.S. president to visit Thailand in quite a while. The visit was just after our 2012 general election, so he had just been re-elected for his second term. He had agreed to visit Burma in recognition of progress being made towards democratization there – something the Obama Administration had done a lot to encourage. So the White House agreed to include a stop in Bangkok, en route to Rangoon.

Q: Sure.

CEFKIN: We tapped our Deputy Political Counselor, who was a very capable officer, to serve as a control officer. I provided guidance and oversight to him and the team we assembled, and helped troubleshoot when problems arose.

In addition to meeting with the Prime Minister (Thailand's head of government), we decided to seek an audience for President Obama, the Thailand's head of state, King Bhumipol. Since the King's health was fragile, we weren't very optimistic about receiving agreement for the meeting. But we thought we should at least ask.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: The King's Privy Council and the Thai government were supportive of the proposal and obtained agreement. Given the delicate nature of this event, I engaged directly with the Privy Council to organize the meeting.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Putting the visit in context, I should probably take a minute to talk a bit more about the 2011 Thai elections. As noted, when I arrived in Bangkok in 2010, the government was headed by Thailand's Democrat Party, which had the support of the royalist "Yellow Shirt" movement. The main opposition party was the Pheu Thai (For Thais) party, which was the "Red Shirt" party. Pheu Thai put forward as their lead candidate Yingluck Shinawatra, the younger sister of Thaksin Shinawatra. She was a businesswoman, not a politician, but she was an attractive, dynamic young woman, who turned out to be a capable campaigner, so she created quite a buzz. Of course, we were neutral on the outcome of the elections; our concern was seeing that they were conducted in a free and fair manner.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: The Pheu Thai did win the majority in Parliament, so Yingluck became Prime Minister. So when President Obama visited, in addition to the audience with the King, his program included a meeting with the PM, and a dinner that she hosted.

As is always the case with these visits, we were keen to have "deliverables" to highlight the benefit of our bilateral relationship. So we negotiated a joint statement with the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Our Political and Economic teams took the lead on that, but I helped nudge it along when they hit an impasse.

In organizing the visit we faced the usual sorts of challenges. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was invited to accompany the President. She smartly decided to integrate her movements into the President's schedule and not set up a separate program. We were grateful for that. But there was a White House Aide to the President who was quite demanding and wanted some separate activities. She put us through some hoops, but eventually stood down on her demands. Another challenge we faced was finding an appropriate venue for the President's "meet & greet" with Embassy staff, which was the final event on his official program. The hotel ballroom we used for most of our big Embassy events fell through late in the game, and our Management team was having difficulty finding another hotel with sufficiently large space. I encouraged them to think creatively about options beyond hotel ballrooms, and they came up with the option of a gymnasium at a university that was close to the Embassy and the hotel where the President was staying. The University leadership was very gracious – offering it to us without any special strings attached. I don't recall whether it was free or whether we paid a small fee, but in any case it worked out extremely well.

The visit was in November, so the President was arriving fresh off his grueling re-election campaign, so we were a little concerned about what his energy level would be. The Ambassador and I, along with our Defense Attaché and the Thai Government's greeting party were at the airport to greet him when he arrived, not sure what to expect. He literally bounded down the steps full of cheer and energy, and rather than just a perfunctory handshake and "hello, nice to meet you," he stopped to have a conversation with every person in the receiving line. So the visit was off to a great start. I was very impressed.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: The President's audience with the King went really well. There were wonderful pictures of the two together that emerged from the meeting, and the feedback we got from the Privy Council was that the King had really enjoyed the conversation and been buoyed by it; so that was a success. The rest of the visit went smoothly as well, so it was a very high note for our Mission and for me personally, a nice cap to my second Bangkok tour.

Q: Oh yeah.

CEFKIN: Another significant area of focus for our Mission during my last year at Post was celebrating 180 years of U.S.-Thai friendship. Our partnership dates back to 1833 when the U.S, and Thailand signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, which formalized our diplomatic relations and facilitated commercial relations.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: Since 2013 marked the 180th anniversary of that treaty, we decided to use the anniversary to highlight the various facets of our bilateral cooperation. The ambassador asked me to come up with a plan, so I put together a working group to brainstorm. Our Public Affairs team came up with a creative logo that we used in all our programming. We also had special friendship pins and coins made and even worked with the Thai Postal Service to issue a Thai stamp with the logo. For programming we proposed that we chose a monthly theme to spotlight different areas of our cooperation so that one month we would focus on economic cooperation, another month health cooperation, another month law enforcement cooperation, etc. The Ambassador embraced the idea. Different sections of the embassy were put in charge of planning activities linked to the theme for each month, culminating with a reception that the ambassador hosted at the end of every month pulling together contacts from the area of cooperation we were highlighting. That worked quite well, and was a very positive experience.

Q: Oh, just one last question about the political situation. With the election in 2011, during the rest of the time after the prime minister takes office, were you beginning to foresee political frictions that would end up leading to another overthrow?

CEFKIN: Yeah. The tensions were always there. The opposition (the Yellow-Shirt-aligned parties) started accusing Yingluck and members of her cabinet of corruption. In particular there was a lot of focus on agricultural policies to boost payments to rice farmers. We assessed that while there likely was some corruption, it was nothing beyond the scale of previous Thai governments. But the opposition fanned the flames to portray the allegations as a major scandal. It's important to remember that allegations of corruption was the reason given for the coup that had toppled Yingluck's brother, Thaksin. (Though, in Thaksin's case, there clearly was corruption.) But in the cases of both Thaksin and Yingluck, the underlying anxiety motivating the opposition was the fear that they were seeking to undermine the monarchy. Yingluck never gave any sign of disrespect for the monarchy, but the popular base that had elected her included those who were beginning to question the role of the monarchy in Thailand's modern political life. So, yes, there definitely were building tensions, and eventually, after I had left, there was a coup that ousted her.

Q: Yeah. Watching Thailand from abroad, it's sort of always in the back of your mind - how long is this prime minister going to last?

CEFKIN: Yes, exactly.

Maybe I'll talk a bit about life in Bangkok. During my first year at Post, my husband was finishing up his assignment in London. So that first year we were doing the commute between London and Thailand. Once he took up his posting as Consul General at Embassy Seoul, it was obviously easier for us to get together. He came to Thailand as much as possible, since there are so many wonderful places to go in Thailand. I went to Seoul several times as well.

Life in Bangkok has its real pleasures and its challenges. Thailand had changed quite a bit from my previous Bangkok tour (1990-1993). There had been a lot of economic development, which had produced a growing middle class. So the traditional dichotomy between the rural poor and the urban elite was less pronounced. The country also had high levels of education. It was good to see the Thais doing well economically. Despite the political turbulence, the country generally has been fairly successful in fencing the economy off from the political unrest.

Bangkok itself had developed in some really nice ways. One of the acute challenges Bangkok has is awful traffic congestion. That was particularly true when I served there in the 1990s. It was a real morale issue for the Embassy, because staff who didn't live relatively close to the Embassy could spend hours in traffic getting to/from work.

Q: Yes, and I was going to ask you about that, but then I thought well, you'll probably get around to it.

CEFKIN: When I returned in 2010, traffic was still heavy, but there were some alternatives to driving, including a lovely Skytrain system and a metro, that made getting around easier and alleviated some of the strain.

I believe I mentioned earlier that a number of big, glitzy malls had sprung up in the city. There were several that were within walking distance or an easy Skytrain ride away from my house. It was entertaining to go walk around the malls to window shop and people watch. They were urban indoor parks, of sorts. They also had fancy cinemas that showed most of the new release American and other movies. So that was a good form of entertainment. And the Thais have always been very skilled cooks. Bangkok has a seemingly limitless number of great restaurants – ranging from upscale to "street food," including international cuisines in addition to wonderful Thai food. There was also a big fad that had developed when I returned in 2010, which was skyscraper roof-top bars. You could go to the top of a really high skyscraper and sit outside on the roof, with a panoramic view of the city, and have a drink. That was a popular thing to do in good weather.

I felt like Bangkok had a real buzz, kind of like New York City. The vibe was energetic, creative, and very colorful. The one thing it didn't have, that New York does, was much in the way of Western classical cultural activities like concerts and art museums. But, of course it had beautiful wats (Thai temples), the Grand Palace, and

other Thai cultural and historical sites. I loved just walking around to take in the colors and smells and feeling the energy and excitement on the streets.

So, it was great living in Bangkok! I had a gorgeous residence. It was on one of the Embassy compounds a couple of blocks away from the Chancery compound. My residence – the DCR – was one of five dedicated houses on that compound. Further back on the compound, we had our GSO operations and some other offices. So it was both a working and residential compound. My house was an old colonial-style house, really gorgeous and very comfortable. Of course, it had a swimming pool that I used a fair bit. And I had a terrific Official Residence Expenses (ORE) staff who took extremely good care of me. So, that was all very pleasant.

As mentioned, I could walk from my house to nice shopping centers. There was also a hotel down the street with a health club I belonged to that had a good gym and spa services. In the other direction was one of Bangkok's main parks – Lumpini Park. It was a pleasant place to walk around if you wanted to see some greenery. They even had public aerobic classes there, that I joined occasionally, and open air concerts. There was a Skytrain station just a few feet from the entrance to my compound which (in addition to the use of taxis and tuk tuks) made it relatively easy to get around when I was out and about on my personal time. For official business, or when I was Chargé, I had two dedicated drivers, one of whom was always on duty. I did also buy an inexpensive used car for personal use, but I rarely used it.

The ambassador had a security detail who accompanied her wherever she went in Thailand, so that obviously limited the spontaneity of her movements. Fortunately, the Regional Security Office (RSO) determined that I didn't need to have the detail when I was the Chargé, so that allowed me a lot more freedom and flexibility.

In addition to the changes in Bangkok and in Thai standard of living, another big change I noticed in the 17 years since I had last served there was the scale of the Chinese presence in Thailand and Thai attitudes towards China.

Q: Yes.

CEFKIN: Chinese tourism to Thailand was booming -- up to an estimated two million a year with predictions that the number would double in the space of a few years. And there were a lot more exchanges between the Chinese and the Thai happening. It's worth noting that a number of Thais (referred to as Sino-Thai) have Chinese heritage, so culturally there has always been an affinity. But previously, the Thais had been cool towards the People's Republic of China's and suspicious of the Chinese government's intentions towards Thailand. By the time I returned for my second tour, Thai views of China had become much more positive. In fact, I had several friends in academia who told me that their students often expressed more positive views of China than of the U.S. So that was a bit of a red flag for U.S. public diplomacy.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: A further change I noted during my second Bangkok tour was discussion of the question of the Thai monarchy. There was more open discussion/questioning of the role of the monarchy. This was clearly in reaction to the fact that King Bhumibol, who had been on the throne since 1946, was ailing and no longer a public presence, as well as apprehension concerning the succession since the heir apparent was not a popular figure. As discussed earlier, the Thai Government, pushed by the Thai military, worked to stifle discussion of the monarchy through strict application of *lese majeste* laws, but still, I heard more critical talk of the monarchy by some Thai contacts and even some limited discussion of the issue in the press.

Of course, at the Embassy, we spent a lot of time watching for developments regarding the King's health. He had several health scares, and there was a sense that we could hear that he had passed away at any time. We were also concerned about what kind of reaction – beyond the initial outpouring of profound grief – his passing would precipitate. As it happened, he didn't pass away on my watch, but did not too long after I departed. Fortunately, his death did not spark a major upheaval. However, questions about the role of the monarchy continue, particularly among young Thais who didn't grow up under the prime years of Bhumibol's reign. And the government has continued to prosecute and impose strict sentences on violators of *lese majeste* laws.

Q: It was never entirely clear to me what the role of the monarchy was in terms of active political power. There does seem to be something going on behind the scenes, but for a Thai watcher from outside the country, what did you understand the monarchy to be in terms of its political role?

CEFKIN: Well, the King is the head of state and the commander in chief of the armed forces. The Thai military was extremely loyal to Bhumipol and the monarchy in general. In fact, the first time I met General Prayuth Chan-ocha, who at the time was Army Commander, he gave me a book about the queen -- Queen Siriket. (Prayuth subsequently led the 2014 coup and then transitioned to become Thailand's elected Prime Minister.) I can't say what the views in the military are about the current king, but it appears that they still cling to the institution of the monarchy, even if they don't wholeheartedly support the specific monarch, in large part because the monarchy is what reinforces their military's power. It's interesting to note, however, that it was a group of young military officers who, in 1932, forced the change from absolute to constitutional monarchy. Anyway, back to the role of the modern monarchy, in his prime years, Bhumibol was very active in promoting rural development. He was frequently out amongst the people, listening to their issues and seeking innovations to support agricultural development and other forms of livelihood. So, he was beloved by the Thai people and had tremendous moral authority.

On the political front, the King wasn't involved in the day-to-day governance of the country, but he exercised his moral authority at times of crisis. The prime example I witnessed was his role in 1992 after clashes between the military and pro-democracy

protestors turned violent. The protests followed a coup and then flawed elections that kept the coup leaders in power. The King summoned the prime minister (who had orchestrated the coup) and the leader of the pro-democracy forces and demanded that they end the violence and work out a peaceful transition. They agreed to hold new elections which produced a legitimate outcome.

Like other royals around the world, members of the Thai royal family have their patronages, supporting various charities and foundations. One of Bhumipol's daughters, Princess Sirindhorn, was quite active in that regard, and was seen as being very much in the mode of her father. She was out among the people more than her siblings. Of course when I say "out among the people," I don't mean out shaking hands and chitchatting. Royal protocol is quite strict. There's a strict dress code, especially for women – long shirts, covered shoulders, and closed-toed shoes. Generally you wouldn't address a member of the royal family unless they address you, and commoners' heads are supposed to be lower than the heads of royals. I met Princess Sirindhorn several times. She was very friendly and quite charming. She herself wasn't overly formal. At one event I attended with her at the Palace, she sat with her guests and visited as any host would, but when her Palace staff served refreshments they approached on their knees to ensure that their heads were below hers.

There were several big, formal events in honor of the King's birthday every year. I attended one year in my role as Chargé. One event was a reception for the diplomatic corps. Since King Bhumibol was in frail health, the Crown Prince – who is the current King – attended on his father's behalf. We stood in a rectangle formation in order of our ranking on the dipcorp list. When the prince arrived, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps gave remarks, and the Prince gave remarks. Then he walked along the receiving line and nodded, as aides told him who the various representatives were, but there was no conversation, that I recall. In sum, while Thailand's monarchy is a constitutional monarchy, their role and the formality of the protocol they maintain is different from that of modern European monarchies.

Thailand is endlessly fascinating to me. The position of DCM was a wonderful job in terms of the issues I dealt with and the people I was able to work with. But the workload was immense. Among my many responsibilities, I rated or reviewed some 30 members of our State Department staff, which meant I had a crushing Employee Evaluation Report (EER) workload. So basically, in March and April I was just holed up on nights and weekends working on EERs. And there never really was much down time; with a Mission that size there really was always something going on.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: Also, I worked for a very energetic ambassador who generated a lot of ideas for projects. I learned a lot from her, but it could be challenging, to maintain the pace, at times. The job did earn me a promotion to Minister Counselor in 2011, however, and set me up well for a prestigious onward assignment, which we'll get to later.

On the personal front, in the role of DCM Bangkok, I experienced a bit of the "lonely at the top" phenomenon.

Q: Right. Sure.

CEFKIN: This was especially true, since Paul wasn't there with me except for visits. Obviously I was friendly with my work colleagues and I did things socially with a number of them. But I tried to be very careful not to show favoritism by hanging out too much with any one of them. I did look for opportunities to support Embassy community events. For example, one of the regional couriers organized big trivia tournaments that were a lot of fun. So I formed a team with several of my country team colleagues and joined those. It was a good opportunity to "show the flag," and mingle with staff in an informal setting. But for most embassy staff weekends were devoted to family time, and I certainly didn't want to interfere with that.

There were a couple of retired U.S. ambassadors living in Bangkok I was friendly with. One was a former boss. She headed the Political Section when I served in Bangkok in the early nineties. She returned to Thailand after she retired and married a Thai gentleman. So from time to time I had dinner with them, which was very pleasant. Another was someone who had headed the Maritime Southeast Asia Office when I was in Manila. His wife was also originally from Thailand, so they also settled in Bangkok after he retired. They were a really nice couple, and we occasionally got together for a movie and dinner.

Through the LSE Alumni Group in Bangkok, I also met a fascinating Thai family who I spent some interesting evenings with. And I had a very nice group of DCM associates from the other Embassies in Bangkok, a number of whom I became quite friendly with.

But given my workload, by the weekend I was pretty exhausted so I often just puttered around at home, caught up on work, went to the gym, and maybe did some shopping or exploring around Bangkok. Most of the social events I attended were work-related and on weekday evenings.

Q: Sure.

CEFKIN: Of course, I had a number of friends and family who came to Thailand while I was there, including my brother, Thai sister-in-law, and Thai-American niece and nephew. That was a lot of fun and introduced me to a number of their Thai friends. I also visited my sister-in-law's family in Prachinburi (in Eastern Thailand) a couple times. That gave me useful insights into Thailand outside the diplomatic bubble.

And when Paul visited, we traveled around Thailand a fair bit. We especially enjoyed Thailand's beaches and got some good diving trips in. I should mention that I also travel regularly for work, so between my two tours, I felt that I really covered a lot of the country.

Q: What did you find—since we're talking about sort of overall work-life balance and so on, what did you find the most effective way of doing informal contacts with Thai? Was it cocktail parties or was it more lunches or—? How did you strategize that?

CEFKIN: It was a bit of both. Receptions were the easiest to orchestrate since they were more flexible in terms of numbers. If people RSVP'd but didn't show, or didn't RSVP but did show it was easier to manage than a sit-down meal. But I did enjoy doing lunches or the occasional dinner. You could have some really great conversations in those more intimate, sit-down formats. And I had a wonderful Residence staff who handled all those events beautifully. I invited different Embassy sections to proposed events I could host for them to help make contacts or introduce official visitors to Thai counterparts.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: One of the rather awkward dilemmas the ambassador and I encountered was how to deal with spouses' (women's) groups that are traditionally part of the diplomatic social scene, such as the American Women's Association (AWA). As you know, traditionally, when the Ambassador or DCM is male, their spouses are active in the AWA, and in fact often serve as honorary president of the group. But we were both female, with male spouses, and neither of our spouses were with us at Post. In fact, we were both part of a tandem couple. And we both had very busy jobs. So we didn't have time for active AWA participation and the Ambassador thought it was best to be up front and decline the invitation to serve as honorary president.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: We did occasionally make an appearance at one of their events, but couldn't attend regularly, so that sparked some resentment. I felt that there was a bit of a double standard because there wasn't a comparable group for male officers or spouses.

Q: Right, right.

CEFKIN: There was another women's group called the Thai-American Friendship Group that I was eventually persuaded to join. It had originally started out years back, as a friendship group for spouses of Thai and American military officers. By the time I was introduced to the group several generations of the families of the original members had participated in the group. A number of them were business women. The Executive Director of the Bangkok AMCHAM was also a member. The group had monthly lunches that members took turn hosting – either at a restaurant or at their residence.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: The lunches were a big time investment, so I couldn't attend every month, but they were a lovely group of women. I became quite fond of them, and they embraced my participation, so I was glad to have joined the group.

Q: Right. So, we've gone through the three years——and this is now your second DCM job.

CEFKIN: Right.

Q: And one quite large. Are people contacting you to let you know you're being considered for an ambassadorship? Did that begin happening?

CEFKIN: It did; exactly. I should note that I'd been approached a couple of times previously – including when I was winding up my DCM tour in Sarajevo, and earlier in my Bangkok tour – and encouraged to throw my hat in the proverbial "ring" for an ambassadorship, but I wasn't selected in those earlier go-rounds. By the time I was finishing my DCM tour in Bangkok it really was the next logical step, and it was common for someone who served as DCM at our huge Bangkok Mission to go on to an ambassadorship.

The DAS I worked with in EAP approached me and asked if I wanted to be considered for the job of Ambassador to Fiji or to Brunei. After careful consideration and discussion with Paul I said yes to Fiji. Of course, it wasn't a sure thing, so I had to bid on other positions as well. I bid on the job of Consul General in Sydney. EAP was happy to support me for that role, but our Ambassador to Australia really wanted someone in the position who had been an ambassador. I was also encouraged to bid on the job of DCM Paris. I wasn't really keen to serve in another DCM position, but Paris was the one post I was willing to consider. So I did bid on that.

I did make a trip back to the States to look for other job options and to lobby a bit. I met with the Acting Assistant Secretary for EUR to pitch consideration for a Deputy Assistant Secretary position in the Bureau. I was surprised and flattered when she suggested that I put my name on the list to be considered for an ambassadorship in Europe – Armenia or Moldova. So I agreed to be considered for those. Ultimately; EUR put me on the list to be considered for Armenia. They encouraged me to lobby for the position, which was a bit awkward, since I didn't really know how to go about that and also because I didn't want to burn my bridges with EAP with regard to the Fiji option. I told folks involved in the D Committee decision process for ambassadorships, that I would be very happy with either job.

Q: Sure. Yeah.

CEFKIN: In any case, I was getting good feedback from EAP about the Fiji option. The job wasn't opening until the 2014/15 cycle, however, and I was departing Bangkok in the summer of 2013, so the DAS proposed that I agree to fill the role of being the U.S Senior Advisor for Burma as a one-year Y-tour. I agreed to that. In fact, the person in that role was selected to succeed me as DCM in Bangkok, so we swapped jobs.

Q: Hmm. Senior advisor to the secretary?

CEFKIN: In principle, yes, but in practice I worked through the EAP chain of command.

Q: EAP, okay.

CEFKIN: The position was actually created to promote Burma's transition from a military-led authoritarian region to democratic governance. In 2011, long-time Burmese dictator Than Shwe had handed over power to a reform-minded group of Burmese military officers. The leader of the group, Thein Sein had retired from the military and won election to Parliament in a civilian capacity. He was chosen to succeed Than Shwe as President. He began implementing reforms, including releasing a number of political prisoners, including long-time Burmese democracy activist Aung Sun Suu Kyi. In response to the promise these moves offered, President Obama appointed Derek Mitchell to serve as the U.S. Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma to press for further reforms. Elections held in 2012 showed more progress, so we upgraded our Embassy in Rangoon (which for many years had been headed by a Chargé) to an Ambassador and Derek was nominated and confirmed to that position. His deputy then assumed the role of Senior Advisor (policy coordinator in DC). So I replaced him in the role in late summer 2013.

The job involved serving as the point person for coordinating U.S. policy towards Burma -- within State Department and with other agencies and in close coordination with Congress, which took a very active interest in Burma and which had strong ideas about how we should proceed. The job also involved a lot of outreach to a very active NGO community dedicated to promoting human rights in Burma, and coordination with international partners. And, of course, I worked very closely with Ambassador Mitchell and Embassy Rangoon. There were so many complex issues at stake with our expanding relations with Burma. It turned out to be a fascinating, but very busy job.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: So, I transferred back to Washington with the expectation that I would be there for about a year, and that hopefully the ambassadorship for Fiji would work out. Of course, there was no guarantee, so I was again in one of those strange situations where I had to bid on other jobs in case the ambassadorship didn't pan out. I did receive the good news in September that I was selected as the Department's candidate for Ambassador to Fiji. That triggered an avalanche of paperwork to launch my security and ethics reviews and to prepare for submission of my hoped for nomination to Congress. First I needed White House approval. The President, of course, had the prerogative of nominating someone else. But I had a pretty good assurance that the position would be filled by a career candidate, as opposed to a political appointee. And eventually, in April, I received confirmation of White House support, which led to my formal nomination and submission to the U.S. Senate for confirmation.

Q: Excellent. This is a perfect place to stop, so I'm going to just suspend the recording.

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Q: Okay. So, today is April 21, 2010. We're resuming our interview with Judith Cefkin.

Judith, where are you going to begin today?

CEFKIN: Well, let's see. We were going to talk about my assignment as the Special Advisor for Burma, but I did have just a couple of footnotes on Thailand, if possible, a couple things I forgot to mention.

Q: Very good.

CEFKIN: One of the issues I neglected to mention is that Thailand has had a long-running insurgency in the far south of the country. There are three majority Muslim provinces in the country's southern peninsula (near Malaysia) that want greater autonomy. This has sparked some violence. It's not a state of constant heavy fighting, but rather of periodic spurts of small attacks against Thai military or police in the region and of terrorist bombing campaigns. It's not really a religious conflict, but it's certainly exacerbated by religious tensions between Muslim and Buddhist populations and some Thai Buddhists have pushed for greater militarization of the situation. At times the Thai Government has been heavy-handed in efforts to put down the insurgency, at other times they've earnestly engaged in efforts to find a negotiated settlement. But the bottom line is the security situation in the three Provinces (Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat) is precarious. Our Embassy had a travel advisory cautioning American citizens against travel to those provinces, and certainly Embassy staff were not allowed to travel there without approval from the Regional Security Office.

One of the Embassy working groups I chaired focused on the situation. We had some USAID programs designed to promote confidence-building measures. Our Public Diplomacy section also supported programs in the region, and one of our Political Officers was charged with staying in touch with officials from those provinces as well as with NGOs, journalists, and others engaged in the issue. The ambassador was intrigued with the idea of visiting the region, and asked our working group to consider whether a visit by her would be feasible and advisable. Our working group discussed it and concluded that a visit by the ambassador would be too risky. The group instead recommended that as the Embassy number two, a visit by me would be lower-profile and manageable in terms of security. The ambassador agreed that that made sense. So our Political, Public Diplomacy, and Regional Security teams collaborated on arranging a visit for me to Yala Province. I visited a couple of schools, donated books to their libraries, and spoke to the students. I also met with a Thai journalist who was an expert on the conflict and engaged in bridge-building efforts. We did visit as a day trip, to avoid any over-nights in the region. Logistically, the visit was challenging for our Embassy security office. I flew into Hat Yai (the principal regional airport), and an Embassy team, led by one of our Assistant Regional Security Officers met me with a car convoy and

security retinue that drove us down to Yala and back. I never felt threatened, but I could tell the mood was tense, so I was happy when the trip was successfully completed. Of course it was a fascinating visit and added an interesting dimension to my experience in Thailand.

Q: Would this be the kind of trip that your public diplomacy office would highlight, on social media.

CEFKIN: Yes, definitely. The Public Affairs section had a big hand in organizing the visit and someone from the section accompanied me. Of course, we posted pictures from the visit on the various Embassy social media accounts once the visit was completed.

One other issue in Thailand I wanted to comment on was the state of Thai democracy and the contrast of the impressions I had at the conclusion of my first and second Bangkok tours. When I left Thailand in 1993, at the conclusion of my first tour, I was feeling upbeat about prospects for democracy in Thailand. As I recounted in discussing that tour, after the 1991 military coup and sham elections, Thailand had held successful elections in 1992 that ushered in a capable, reform-minded government. There was a real sense of optimism among the academics and NGO contacts I had who were active in promoting democratic reform. So, I was hopeful that Thailand had turned a corner, putting coups in the rear-view mirror. Of course my optimism proved to be misplaced, when a coup deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006. Given that, and the political turmoil that ensued in the following decade, by the time I left at the conclusion of my second tour in 2013, I was much less optimistic about prospects for genuine democracy in Thailand. I realize that some of the change in my sentiment was probably a function of age, since at age 60 I was less idealistic than I had been at age 40. But in addition, observing the continuing cycle of coups, the ways the Thai elite manipulated key institutions to narrow the democratic space in Thailand, and the lack of commitment among many Thai politicians made me more pessimistic about prospects for instilling democratic values and processes into Thailand's political culture. Unfortunately, I would have to say that's still true in terms of what's happened with governance there since my departure.

Q: Wow. Did we ever have to actually issue a travel advisory for Thailand, or it never really got that bad?

CEFKIN: You know, at the height of the violent protests before I arrived in 2010, I believe the Embassy did issue a travel advisory. During my time there, we obviously issued cautions about areas/situations Americans should avoid, but we didn't advise against travel to the country writ large. As mentioned previously, when we had terrorist scares, we put out travel advisories urging appropriate cautions.

Q: And while we're still on this subject, the concerns in the south with the Muslim minority never got to the point where you were worried about ISIS or—?

CEFKIN: No. Fortunately, none of the information we had pointed to a connection with global jihadist groups. The fear, of course, was that the longer the conflict simmered, the

greater the risk would be that the conflict could become internationalized, but really it was a local conflict related to the desire of the Malay Muslim population for greater autonomy, and the conflict didn't really spill over beyond the three provinces. Of course we monitored the situation closely, and were especially on the lookout for any information suggesting the insurgents planned to extend their campaign to Bangkok. Fortunately, that did not happen.

Q: All right. So, then at this point you're getting ready for this one-year policy advisory role.

CEFKIN: Right.

The position was actually a congressionally mandated position, although there was a bit of fuzziness in the language that State Department lawyers interpreted as giving the Department some discretion on filling the position, so when I departed, I wasn't replaced. The DAS, who covered Southeast Asia, assumed direct responsibility for the portfolio, with the support from the Office of Mainland Southeast Asia and the Burma Desk, of course.

As explained earlier, the role was designed for a senior U.S. State Department official to help lead the formulation and implementation of U.S. policy towards Burma. It was a huge coordination job. This included: 1) coordinating within the State Department; practically every bureau or office, it seemed, had some role or interest in Burma; 2) interagency coordination, including with USAID, the Defense Department, the United States Trade Representative (USTR), Treasury and other agencies; coordination and consultation with Congress; coordination with outside stakeholders, particularly NGOs; and coordination with international partners.

Q: The devil in me has to ask, did you find that you were regularly in contact with the NSC director for Burma?

CEFKIN: Yes. Constantly.

Q: Whoever that may have been.

CEFKIN: Yeah. We worked very closely together because Burma was a big priority for the White House. So, the person charged with Burma in the NSC's Asia directorate, and I worked hand in glove together.

Q: Was it comfortable?

CEFKIN: It was. We got along well and largely tended to agree in terms of policy direction. In fact, she and I co-led an Interagency Policy Committee (IPC) review process to recommend ways the U.S. could help provide greater impetus to Burma's democratic transition and normalize U.S relations with that country. As mentioned, this was a huge priority for the White House. In his inaugural address, President Obama had called out

dictators who "cling to power through corruption and the silencing of dissent" as being on the wrong side of history, but said "we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist." Burma was one of the countries viewed as potentially responding to that overture. In recognition of progress towards reform, Obama had visited Burma in 2012 (the same trip that brought him to Bangkok), and if sufficient progress could be made, there was talk of planning a second visit. Deputy National Security Advisor, Ben Rhodes, was very invested in our Burma goals. He chaired the deputies' committee meetings that were part of our IPC process. I generally attended those meetings as the "plus-one," with the EAP Assistant Secretary attending as the principal.

Coordinating with Congress was a huge part of the job. I'll talk more about that in a few minutes. And I also had a focus on NGO outreach. There were a lot of NGOs that had a long-time interest in Burma. Most were laser-focused on the many violations of human rights by the Burmese regime, and a number thought the U.S Government's rapprochement was moving too fast. Some of these groups had significant influence, especially with Congress. So, although we didn't always see eye-to-eye on the best approach to Burma, we knew it was important to stay in touch with these groups to consult and to be as transparent as possible, while still defending steps we were taking.

We also had contact with U.S. businesses who were eager to explore trade and investment opportunities in Burma.

Q: With this issue of business, were there particular sectors that were particularly interested?

CEFKIN: Yes. Well, energy. There is oil off Burma's coast and Chevron had drilling rights in some of those offshore parcels. Also, with all the economic development taking place there was interest by some U.S. companies in infrastructure projects, such as setting up cell phone towers, and in hotels and hospitality services. Burma's quite rich in natural resources, but the U.S. had a very complex and strict regime of sanctions prohibiting business with companies owned by the Burmese military or their cronies, which most of the natural resource interests were.

As I mentioned earlier, international coordination was also part of my responsibility. There was a group at the UN called "Friends of Burma" that met annually to review the situation and recommend actions. So I kept in touch with the UN Secretary General's Special Advisor who was charged with coordinating those meetings, and I traveled to New York to attend the meetings (which took place during the UN General Assembly High Level week). I also engaged regularly with UK officials (given its colonial history with Burma, the UK obviously had a special interest in developments there), with the EU and with a number of individual EU member states. In Asia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, and Bangladesh were key players.

Organizationally, my position was awkward. In some respects, I was a DAS-equivalent, but I did report through the deputy assistant secretary for Southeast Asia to the assistant secretary. Physically, I was embedded in the Mainland Southeast Asia office (EAP/MLS).

MLS had a Burma desk staffed by two mid-level FSOs. They reported to the MLS deputy director and director. So I didn't have line control over the desk officers, but I obviously worked extremely closely with them. We worked very well together, but I tried to be careful not to directly task them. They regularly came to me for guidance, but they had to make sure they were also working through their chain of command.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: But the bottom line was, other than me and the two desk officers there was nobody else in EAP devoted to Burma full-time.

Q: Sure.

CEFKIN: It was definitely more than a full-time job. The two desk officers regularly worked late into the night, as did I. We were usually the last ones in the office, so it was quite intense.

I did have an Office Management Specialist (OMS) assigned to me, who was a contractor. And we recruited staff from other offices -- usually a presidential management fellow or other Civil Service officer – to work for brief stints as my staff assistant.

To set the scene for the substance of my portfolio, Burma is a country of about 55 million in a very strategic location. It's the crossroads between Southeast Asia, China and India. When I started in the position, it had had a fifty-plus year history of dictatorship, poverty and repression. From 1824-1948, the British ruled Burma, although the Japanese occupied the country during WWII. Initially, hopes for the newly independent country were high. It had a high level of education and the economy developed well. But then the political unity unraveled, and in 1962 a military junta took control. Things went downhill from there, with the military rulers becoming increasingly repressive.

A key figure in negotiating Burma's independence was a gentleman by the name of Aung San. He founded the Burmese Armed Forces and is considered "the father" of modern Burma. He was supposed to be the first leader of independent Burma, but was assassinated before independence. His widow, Khin Kyi, became a distinguished Burmese politician and diplomat. One of the couple's children was Aung San Suu Kyi. Aung San Suu Kyi (often referred to in State Department parlance as ASSK), grew up in large part overseas, given her mother's diplomatic postings, and she married a British academic, Michael Aris, moving with him to the UK, where they raised two sons.

Then in 1988, ASSK returned to Burma to take care of her ailing mother. Her return to Burma coincided with a popular uprising against the military dictatorship. ASSK joined the movement and helped form and then head a new political party called the National League for Democracy (NLD). They contested elections held in 1990, winning an overwhelming majority in parliament. However, the military refused to hand over power. ASSK was detained and subsequently put under house arrest.

She continued to inspire Burma's pro-democracy movement, promoting non-violent resistance to the military regime and becoming an international icon. Her husband remained in Britain with their sons. He was able to visit her in Burma a few times, but she wasn't able to travel to Britain. In 1990, ASSSK was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which, of course, she couldn't accept in person. One of her sons accepted on her behalf. Tragically, in 1997, her husband was diagnosed with cancer. The Burmese regime told ASSK she could leave to go visit him, but she knew that if she left, they wouldn't allow her to return to Burma. She felt too invested in Burma and the movement she was leading, so she didn't go. Her husband died in 1999 without being reunited with his wife.

In 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest, and Burma held parliamentary elections. The NLD boycotted the elections, so the military-aligned party won a majority. In 2011, dictator Than Shwe stepped down from the presidency and was succeeded by Thein Sein, a retired general who had served under Than Shwe. However, Thein Sein quickly demonstrated a reformist bent.

Q: Looking back on that, to the extent that we knew, what drove that?

CEFKIN: That's the million-dollar question.

Q: Oh, all right.

CEFKIN: Nobody really knows. That was a question we asked Burma experts all the time, and there were a number of theories. One view was that the military wanted to get out from under the complex web of U.S. and international sanctions that restricted their business and movements.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Some think that it had more to do with worrying about their legacy and wanting a better future for their children. Burma had also been devastated by a severe cyclone – Cyclone Nargis – in 2008. Due to the regime's suspicions they refused to accept direct aid from the U.S. and other western donors, though they did eventually accept aid from ASEAN countries. Some observers thought the military leadership had been sobered by that experience and realized the need for broader international economic support going forward.

Q: Interesting. Okay.

CEFKIN: Yeah; it's a fascinating country, that's shrouded in a fair bit of mystery. The junta leaders were prone to mysticism and would do bizarre things like suddenly change the name of the country, or secretly build a new capital.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: In the latter case, the new capital – Naypyidaw – was quietly built in a desolate area in the middle of the country. It was unveiled publically on Burma's Armed Forces Day in 2006. It's an amazing place; it feels sort of like a ghost town. There's not a lot of signs of day-to-day life there, but it has these huge palatial government buildings, the parliament and wide boulevards radiating out from the government buildings in spokes. (It's clear the design was intended, in large part, to facilitate easy military defense of the government headquarters.)

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: In 2012, the government held parliamentary by-elections to fill a large number of empty seats. ASSK and her NLD party did contest those elections and did extremely well, giving them a foothold in Parliament and making ASSK the leader of the opposition.

So, there were enough signs that through increased U.S. engagement we could encourage serious reforms. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited to meet with the leadership and with ASSK to assess the situation. She concluded that there was a genuine appetite for reform, which then paved the way for President Obama's visit. As part of that the Burmese government signed something called "the Eleven Commitments" that committed them to progress on a range of political and economic reforms. Our goal writ large, was to help Burma become a stable, peaceful country and a contributor to a politically and economically progressive Asia-Pacific region.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: It was a very hopeful time, but the challenges Burma faced really were staggering. The country was simultaneously trying to transition from authoritarianism to democracy, from a centralized to a free market economy, from decades of civil war to a peaceful, united country. Burma is a very diverse country, comprising some 100 different ethnic groups. And there are a number regional ethnic groups – particularly hill tribe groups -- around the periphery of the country, who have been at war with the Bamar-dominated central government throughout Burma's history. Before independence, Aung San, Aung San Suu Kyi's father, had laid out a framework for a federal government that would have unified all these groups. But that plan was never realized. During my time in the SAB role, there were at least sixteen different ethnic groups that had ongoing conflict with the Burmese military.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

CEFKIN: The Thein Sein government was very focused on trying to end the civil wars and launched a peace process with the sixteen warring ethnic armies. Embassy Rangoon was very focused on supporting that effort, so that became a big focus of my work as well. I'll talk about that in more detail a bit later.

Burma also suffered from serious sectarian tensions that erupted in violence from time to time. This was partly a legacy of the country's colonial period. The British had brought in a lot of people from other colonies, particularly from South Asia, to support their administrative rule and various services. So, while the country is predominantly Buddhist, there are also sizable Hindu minority and Muslim minorities. In the border areas among some of the hill tribe groups there are also Christians. The biggest inter-religious tensions were between the Buddhist and Muslim communities. (In Burma, some of the Buddhist clergy are quite militant.) Those tensions were particularly egregious in Burma's western region in Rakhine State, where there was blatant discrimination and pogroms carried out against of Muslims called the Rohingya. I'll talk about that in greater detail later, but the Rohingya were a particularly sad case, because they were not recognized as one of Burma's official ethnic groups and consequently were stateless and had few formal rights.

Q: Ah-ha.

CEFKIN: So, bottom line, Burma is a very, very complex country. Any one of those challenges I described would be overwhelming for a lot of countries. As Ambassador, Derek Mitchell used to explain, a lot of Burma-watchers were sort of frozen in time thinking the story of Burma was the story of "the lady" (Aung San Suu Kyi) "versus the junta. "But the Burma we were dealing with was much more complex than that.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: Congress had very strong views about our Burma policy and there was a lot of legislation in place that dictated what we could and couldn't do in terms of our engagement. That meant that in order to move the ball forward we needed to get Congressional buy-in. So, I spent a lot of time on the Hill consulting with members of Congress and their staff. In particular, I met regularly with staff from the Senate and House Foreign Affairs, Armed Services, and Appropriations committees. Senator McConnell, who at that time was Senate Majority leader and Congresswoman Pelosi, who was Speaker of the House, also had a keen interest in Burma. So I also met regularly with their staff. It was a useful experience for me, since previous State jobs I had hadn't involved as much exposure to Congress.

Q: At this point, with Congress, was it that Congress was prepared to appropriate a fair amount of money for Burma for various projects and assistance and they really wanted to be sure before they let go of the assistance that milestones were met, or was it really more policy oriented in general?

CEFKIN: It was a little bit of both, but more of the policy, I would say, writ large.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: The Administration and Congress had very much the same goals: supporting the development of a democratic, progressive Burma. Our debates were over the best means to that end.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: In particular, many in Congress worried that we were moving a little too fast to engage the Thein Sein government and relax some of our punitive measures. They were eager to see Aung San Suu Kyi elevated to what they viewed as her rightful place as leader of Burma. I hasten to add, that we also believed that if left up to the Burmese voters in free and fair elections ASSK would emerge victorious. Ambassador Mitchell met regularly with her and consulted her on steps we were planning to take to make sure she was onboard before we went forward on new initiatives. But members of Congress didn't always trust that the Thein Sein government was genuine in its commitment to reform.

Early in my tenure in the SAB position, the issue where we ran into the biggest buzz saw with Congress (and with the NGO community) involved the question of engagement with the Burmese military, often referred to as the "Tatmadaw." The Tatmadaw has a horrible legacy of repression and egregious human rights abuses. The military also dominated the economy and was terribly corrupt. They and their cronies controlled state-owned enterprises that they viewed as their "cash cows," and they controlled many of Burma's resources including minerals, gems, and timber. Under Burma's constitution, the military also was guaranteed a certain number of seats in parliament, which meant they could nix legislation they didn't like.

All that said, for whatever reason, after Than Shwe stepped down and Thein Sein assumed the presidency, the military took a step back and (even if not actively supporting) was at least not obstructing the reform agenda. Our defense officials, especially officials at the U.S. Pacific Command in Honolulu, whose job it is to develop positive relations with militaries in the region, was eager to get to know the Burmese military leaders in the hopes that they could have a positive influence on them. And our embassy believed that for the reforms in Burma to be durable, we had to begin some modest, quiet military-to-military engagement with members of the Tatmadaw, particularly its future leaders, to show them how a democratic military operates under civilian control and to help nudge the Tatmadaw in that direction.

What the embassy proposed was to set up some training by the Defense Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS), to explain how the U.S. military upholds human rights and works under civilian control. The ambassador briefed Aung San Suu Kyi on these plans to make sure she was comfortable. She was; in fact, she was enthusiastic. However, when this initiative became public it generated a flurry of opposition and questioning by Congress and the NGO community. It was actually one issue where I differed somewhat from my Bureau colleagues. Even though I agreed that the plan made sense, I believed it was premature to publicly announce the initiative. But I was overruled. So we drew up press guidance, and I was asked to speak to one of the reporters

who was closely following U.S. policy developments on Burma. Unfortunately, that didn't quell the controversy. Eventually, though, we did bring Congress around to acquiescing in the DIILS training. So there were a few small mil-to-mil exchanges, but nothing large-scale.

A few months later, the Asia Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee scheduled a hearing on Burma. So I was asked to be one of the witnesses, along with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) responsible for Southeast Asia at DOD's Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the Deputy Assistant Administrator responsible for Southeast Asia at USAID. They were both colleagues I worked closely with and had a very good relationship with. Preparing for the hearing was a lot of work. Fortunately I had an excellent assistant working with me at the time, who took the lead in drafting my testimony, in close cooperation with the Burma Desk officers. And of course we worked closely with the State lawyers and officers in the Legislative Affairs Bureau and the Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Bureau responsible for Burma. The hearing went smoothly, so it was ultimately a positive and useful experience.

Q: When you did the briefing, did you actually speak to members or staff or both?

CEFKIN: To members. It was a formal hearing.

Q: Oh, I see.

CEFKIN: When I went up to the Hill for informal briefings, I generally met with the staff. Sometimes they requested that I come for meetings. But I also made a point of seeking meetings with them whenever there were developments I knew they would want to discuss, when I returned from one of my trips to Burma, or when we were lobbying for support on a policy or resource matters. Also, when Ambassador Mitchell came back to DC for consultations, I would accompany him to Hill for briefings. We would occasionally meet some members, in addition to staff. As I mentioned, Mitch McConnell and Nancy Pelosi were very attentive to developments in Burma, so we met regularly with their staff. I also met regularly with staff from Senators Menendez and Corker's offices. At the time, Corker was the Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SRC) and Menendez was the ranking member. Another staffer with a keen interest in Burma, who we met regularly was Paul Grove, who worked for the House Appropriations committee. Paul was the son of former Foreign Service Officer and Ambassador Brandon Grove. I had known Ambassador Grove when I served in the Office of Central African Affairs and he was our Ambassador to Zaire.

Bottom line, I tried to bend over backwards to be transparent. I learned that when there were issues of concern where we didn't have all the answers or solutions, it was best not to try to cover that up. But I strove to keep the focus on our bigger objectives, and to remind them that progress in Burma wasn't going to be a straight line, and that we needed to commit to a long-term investment in the country to help it get to the right place.

In terms of NGO engagement, we obviously dealt with big organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. There were also a number of smaller groups that were specifically created to champion democracy and human rights in Burma. A number of them were quite suspicious about the administration's policy. Periodically I would invite the NGO representatives to a roundtable to brief them on what we were working on and to entertain their comments and questions. We knew we wouldn't satisfy all these players, but, as with Congress, my objective was to demonstrate respect for their work by engaging, communicating, and listening.

Q: Is there much of a Burmese diaspora that plays in this?

CEFKIN: There is. Many Burmese have resettled in the U.S. over the years, many of whom came as refugees, and a number of the NGO representatives we dealt with from Burma, so they had a keen personal investment in the future of the country. In particular, there are communities here of many of the Burmese minority groups. One gentleman I met with frequently was a Rohingya. He headed an organization representing Rohingyan Americans, who understandably were extremely concerned about the Rohingya in Burma.

Q: Interesting. Okay.

CEFKIN: Earlier I talked a bit about our efforts on the military engagement front. On that issue, I realized that different parts of our administration weren't coordinating as well as we needed to. So I set up a conference call with the Embassy, the Pacific Command, and DOD so that we could get on the same page in terms of our objectives on the defense front and the best means to achieve those ends. That was well-received, and led to improved communications and coordination. One thing that came out of these discussions was a plan for the PACOM Deputy Commander and State's Assistant Secretary for Human Rights to visit Burma together. They addressed Burma's Military Academy to stress the importance of military adherence to international human rights standards.

Another important focus of our work was supporting the peace process between Burma's central government and the ethnic armies. The Thein Sein government had what we judged to be a very earnest effort to finally end Burma's civil wars. They had a large team intensively engaged in negotiations. Our embassy was very plugged into this effort. One of our political officers, and often Ambassador Mitchell himself, attended the negotiations as observers and provided some backdoor counsel. Our AID mission supported the process through confidence-building programs. The ambassador's view, rightfully so, was that Burma's political and economic reforms wouldn't be durable unless the internal wars were ended. He was quite hopeful about the peace process. In addition to observing the talks he consulted regularly with the government and he traveled to Burma's ethnic regions to meet with their leaders and encouraged both sides to really make every effort to resolve these issues. But he wanted a lot more funding for our USAID programs. In fact, the Embassy requested an additional $10 million for the peace process. That was a big ask, especially because the request came outside of our normal appropriation cycle.

As you know, if you've ever dealt with the bureaucratic battles over assistance allocations, there is generally intense competition for scarce resources – among different U.S. government agencies, among the different bureaus within each agency (in our case (State) and within each bureau. But Ambassador Mitchell was very insistent. So through persistent advocacy with State's F Bureau (which oversees the allocation of assistance) and with USAID, as well as some creative book-keeping, we came up with the funds. We also lobbied Congress to give us the necessary flexibility to use the funds for the peace process programs, so I spent a fair bit of time with Paul Grove. It was a labor-intensive, but ultimately successful effort.

Q: I was just curious; given how many ethnic groups there are and I'm sure linguistic groups, is there a lingua franca in Burma?

CEFKIN: There is. The dominant group in the country are the Bamar.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Their language, the Burmese language is the lingua franca. The ethnic groups do have their own languages, but most of the key figures we dealt with spoke Burmese. A number also spoke English, but, if not, we worked through interpreters. Several of our Embassy staff did also speak Burmese.

Q: Oh, yeah.

CEFKIN: During my time in the SAB role, I had the opportunity to make four trips to Burma. The first trip was before I formally assumed the position. Since I was close by in Bangkok, I got permission to hop over to Rangoon for a few days for an initial orientation visit. On that visit a lot of my time was spent on internal embassy consultations.

After that, on every trip I made, the Embassy made sure to take me to different parts of the country, which was fascinating. For example, during my second visit, in addition to several days in Rangoon and a quick trip to the capital, Naypyidaw, I traveled to Karen State, which is on the border with Thailand. In fact, a lot of the Burmese refugees in Thailand are from Karen. So a big topic of conversation with officials in Karen State, including Karen ethnic army representatives was about when conditions would be right for the Karen refugees to return to Burma. The clear message I heard was "not yet." On that trip, I also went to Mon State, which is further south. Mon State has important cultural linkages to Thailand, including a number of famous Buddhist temples, but it is quite diverse. I also saw a lot of Hindu temples there. The western edge of Mon State runs along the Andaman Ocean where natural gas is being exploited. One of our topics of interest there concerned Japanese plans to build a large industrial park there.

On my third visit, I went to Rakhine State, along Burma's western border where the majority of Burma's Rohingya – a stateless Muslim minority – live and have been

victimized by recurring cycles of violence. The persecution of Rohingya was the most gut-wrenching issue I dealt with in my SAB role. I'll talk more about that trip and the broader Rohingya a bit later.

On my final trip to Burma, I accompanied State's Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, Sarah Sewell, on a visit. That was a very wide-ranging visit. In addition to meetings with Embassy staff, we met with civil society groups, ethnic representatives, and with Aung San Suu Kyi. (I should note that I had also met with ASSK on two of my prior visits.) Then we went to Naypyidaw and met a full slate of Burmese Government leaders. From Naypyidaw, we went by road to Mandalay, stopping to visit two camps of internally displaced persons (IDPs) near a community that had suffered a spate of Buddhist-Muslim classes. (The Muslims in this case were not Rohingya.) One of the camps had Muslim IDPs and the other had Buddhist IDPs. We had Burmese security tailing us the whole time, so it was hard to have candid conversations, but interestingly in both camps, the IDPs were eager to return to their homes and expressed confidence they could again live peaceably with each other. They blamed the violence on outside agitators. In Mandalay, we hosted an Inter-Faith Roundtable and a Civil Society Roundtable, and U/S Sewall did a press roundtable.

Speaking about key ethnic regions inside Burma, one important state I didn't get to was Kachin State, in the north, bordering China. It was an area of active conflict. It's also rich in natural resources including timber and jade – largely controlled by the Burmese military and their cronies, and there reports of serious human rights abuses in conjunction with the exploitation of these resources, particularly the jade mining. So these products were subject to strict U.S. sanctions. It's a particularly interesting part of the country because there are strong U.S.-Kachin links going back to World War II, with U.S. support for resistance groups fighting the Japanese occupation. There was also a long-standing American Baptist missionary connection to the Kachin.

Even though I wasn't able to visit Kachin State, I did have the very interesting experience of receiving a Kachin delegation, headed by their rebel leader at the State Department. The visit was important to our embassy, because they worried that the Kachin were wobbly on the peace process and we wanted to keep them engaged. So we rolled out the red carpet. We set up a meeting for him with the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, we organized an inter-agency roundtable, and I was even granted representational funding (a rarity in Washington) to host him and his delegation for a lunch on the 8th floor. In these discussions we reassured the delegation of the U.S. commitment to ensuring the negotiations resulted in an equitable peace agreement that adequately addressed ethnic grievances. Our discussions helped persuade the Kachin to join a cease-fire agreement that was an important prerequisite for further progress in the peace process.

Q: Speaking of the missionary connection, were there human rights problems for Christians in Burma?

CEFKIN: Burma is predominantly Buddhist, and a number of Burmese Buddhist leaders are quite militant and xenophobic, so that does aggravate religious tensions. In parts of

the country Christian groups are subject to restrictions that make it difficult for them to operate. But they weren't the targets of religiously-motivated violence the way Muslims in Burma were.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Another big issue we grappled with was the complex web of sanctions, and trade prohibitions we had imposed on Burma. As the Thein Sein government proceeded to implement reforms, including releasing political prisoners, allowing more freedom of operation for press and civil society, pursuing the peace process, and pursuing economic reforms (in accordance with the "eleven commitments" the government had signed with President Obama) we thought it was important to offer some carrots to encourage further progress on all these fronts, by gradually unwinding the restrictions.

Q: Ah, right.

CEFKIN: But the industries were pretty notorious. I previously mentioned the problems in the forestry (which included valuable teak) and mining sectors. (In addition to jade, Burmese rubies were specifically sanctioned.) And we had a whole host of financial sanctions on Burma – overseen by the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), including prohibitions and doing business with Burmese banks. That made it very difficult for U.S. businesses to operate in Burma. We also had a lot of individuals and entities that were under sanction. But as I said, with Burma's efforts to reform and transition to a free market economy, we looked for areas where we could begin to unwind some of these sanctions. I spent a lot of time working with Treasury, the Office of U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) and State's Economic Bureau (EB) to figure out where we could make progress. We identified some companies, including a couple of banks, that appeared ready to sever their military connections and to agree to transparent governance that we thought were ready to graduate from the sanctions regime.

I also worked with State's Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Bureau on encouraging reform in Burma's extractive industries. There was a global multilateral effort, led by Norway, called the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (ETI). So we worked to include Burma in the initiative. One of the big steps we took on the economic front was to persuade the Department of Commerce to open a small Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) office at Embassy Rangoon, to support U.S. companies that wanted to do business in Burma. We also got approval for the Export-Import Bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation to extend their support to U.S. companies pursuing trade and investment opportunities in Burma.

Q: Interesting. Wow. Okay. And those steps, of course, are the predicates, the things you do in advance of the American private sector, companies taking the chance of going in.

CEFKIN: Correct, exactly. U.S. businesses were starting small scale operations in Burma. During one of my visits to Rangoon, there was an inaugural meeting of a new American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) established there. A lot of the business

representatives who attended came over from Bangkok and were members of that AMCHAM.

Even in my short time in the SAB position, in the course of my four trips to Burma, I saw a big leap in development, particularly in Rangoon (also known as Yangon) which was the country's commercial and international hub. Even though the official capital of the country had been moved to Naypyidaw, embassies had stayed in Rangoon. A lot of new hotels and businesses were popping up, and traffic was getting bad – sure signs of development. Obviously, our business people wanted to be part of the growing economic opportunities, rather than ceding ground to foreign competitors such as the Japanese.

I had mentioned that a big part of my job was international coordination. Part of that coordination focused on the UN, including the "Friends of Burma" group I talked about earlier. For many years, the U.S. had also worked with international partners to pass an annual resolution in the UN's Third Committee, criticizing Burma for human rights violations. Obviously the Burmese government did not like that. With the progress in human rights made under the Thein Sein government, there was discussion of dispensing with the resolution, but we felt it was premature to completely relieve the pressure. The situation became more acute after a new round of violence against the Rohingya in Rakhine State. The Organization of Islam Conference (OIC) was understandably particularly distressed and proposed a much stronger resolution. Caught between those who wanted a more severe resolution and those advocating no resolution, we worked with the EU and other like-minded partners to propose a nuanced resolution that took the Burmese government to task but avoided discouraging them from further reforms. We also pressed Burmese officials to work with the OIC to show a commitment to addressing the anti-Rohingya violence. That was an example of the diplomatic dances we were frequently doing with our Burma policy

In Washington I regularly consulted with key embassies that had an interest in Burma, and when they had visitors from their ministries they often requested meetings with me. Also, every time I visited Burma I added a couple of consultation stops in the capitals of key international partners to coordinate policy approaches. On one trip, I made stops in Japan and Korea. On another trip I went via London and stopped for meetings there, and then went to Bangladesh. And on a third trip I had consultations in Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Q: This is an interesting moment to ask you what were the other regional governments saying? In other words, what were their key concerns or interests as Burma was changing?

CEFKIN: So, yeah, they all had somewhat different interests. In terms of East Asia -- Japan and Korea -- like us, they were concerned about the human rights situation and joined in pressing for democratic and economic reform. They tended to be more muted in their criticisms on those fronts, than we were, however. So we encouraged them to be more vocal. We also coordinated our development programs. The Japanese and Koreans were keen to pursue trade and investment opportunities in Burma. Their companies were

active there, so we discussed that. In Tokyo, in addition to meeting with government officials, I met with a group of NGOs active in Burma, and I met with the head of a prominent Japanese Foundation – the Sasakawa Foundation. That was a particularly interesting meeting. He pressed us to do more to engage the Burmese military, so I had to explain our legislative restrictions. In Seoul in addition to meeting with government officials I met with a group of Burmese refugees living there.

Working with Southeast Asian countries who, along with Burma, were members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was delicate because ASEAN had a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other member countries. So they were reluctant to openly criticize Burma's repression. (Also, a number of the other ASEAN don't have unblemished records on these fronts, though not as egregious as Burma's.) But that didn't mean that they weren't concerned. Obviously they wanted a stable partner and knew that the country was going to be more stable if it could institutionalize the reforms. Some of the ASEAN countries had an emotional connection to Aung San Suu Kyi and saw her as the rightful leader of the country. Malaysia and Indonesia, being Muslim majority countries, are very concerned about the treatment of Burmese Muslims, including the Rohingya. Malaysia had a sizable population of Rohingya refugees, and of course, Thailand was also impacted by the flood of Burmese refugees.

So in my consultation stops in Bangkok, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, I discussed all those issues – encouraging those countries to continue to provide safe haven for the refugees and refrain from premature repatriation. In the case of Malaysia, as with Bangladesh, I urged them to continue to provide a safe haven to the Rohingya fleeing violence in Burma, and I encouraged them to consider granting the Rohingya refugees work permits and opportunities for permanent resettlement. In Jakarta, I also encouraged Indonesian officials and civil society groups to share with Burma lessons of Indonesia's democratic transition, including their success in establishing civilian control of the armed forces. We thought that some of Indonesia's former senior military leaders could potentially be persuasive interlocutors on that issue.

As the former colonial power, Britain naturally had a special interest in Burma. And there was also the fact that Aung San Sui Kyi's sons were British citizens. We and the British were very much in sync in terms of our approaches to Burma; they were probably our closest diplomatic partner. So in my London visit we discussed our analyses of the situation and strategies going forward, including how our development programs (particularly those designed to advance democratic reform) could dovetail to maximize our resources.

Q: But Bangladesh as well, no?

CEFKIN: Yes. So, Bangladesh. That was a fascinating trip. Bangladesh borders Rakhine State so most of the Rohingya fleeing violence there have ended up in Bangladesh, mostly around a town on Bangladesh's southeast coast called Cox's Bazar. Even though Bangladesh is a Muslim country with ethnic connections to the Rohingya, the presence of the refugees was controversial. The government worried that the refugees were diverting

resources from the local population, and they complained that there were criminal elements among the refugees. They restricted the ability of UN agencies and international humanitarian groups to provide services to the refugees, although some were able to operate under informal arrangements, and periodically they threatened to forcibly repatriate the Rohingya.

Our Ambassador to Bangladesh encouraged me to visit to explain the situation in Burma and convince the Bangladeshi government not to prematurely send the Rohingya back. He really wanted me to also visit Cox's Bazar, but I had to decline given time constraints. In fact, my visit to Dhaka was curtailed due to a significant flight delay. I also had the misfortune of arriving with food poisoning (something I ate during the long lay-over at Istanbul airport). Fortunately, it wasn't a debilitating case, but I definitely wasn't feeling my best. Despite that it was a productive visit. I had good exchanges with the government. I explained the ongoing danger for the Rohingya in Burma, commended the Bangladeshi for the important role they were playing by providing them a safe haven for the refugees, and reminded them of their international humanitarian obligations not to engage in forcible repatriation. I also did a press roundtable to promote those messages publically.

The intercommunal tensions in Burma were very complex. There are Muslim communities throughout the country. For the most part, the different religious communities coexist, though periodically tensions erupt in clashes between Muslim and Buddhist groups, including the community I mentioned that I visited with U/S Sewall. But the situation with Rohingya was heart-breaking.

Q: What is the—in brief, I don't mean to ask you to do a whole discourse, but what is the—at heart -- the problem that the Burmese have with the Rohingya?

CEFKIN: It's a good question. It essentially boils down to deep-seated social prejudice, but why the Rohingya are the worst victims of that xenophobia is somewhat perplexing. The origins of the Rohingya go back centuries. The Burmese refer to them as "Bengali." In fact, they get very angry when we use the term "Rohingya," which is what the group calls itself. The Rohingya language is related to Bengali (the language spoken in Bangladesh and parts of India), and it appears that many Rohingya probably originally did immigrate to Burma from what is now Bangladesh, including a number who were to recruited to work in the British colonial administration in 1800s and others who fled the violence in West Pakistan in the 1960s. But it's believed that some of the population may have originally arrived as Arab traders long ago. In any case, they've lived in Burma for generations. There was a period in Burma's history when they were allowed to apply for Burmese citizenship, but for most of their history they haven't been recognized as one of Burma's official minority groups, and under a nationality law passed in 1982, they have specifically denied citizenship, so they are stateless.

As I mentioned earlier, Burmese Buddhism has definite strains of militancy. The Buddhism I witnessed in Thailand is very different – quite gentle and tolerant for the most part. But in Burma (as in Sri Lanka) the Burmese priesthood is much more political

and has spawned some xenophobic leaders who spew hate for the "other," particularly Muslims (and within the Muslim community the Rohingya are the biggest targets of that hate.) The Burmese Buddhist clergy are also very engaged in the lives of their communities. They provide social services including education and forms of social welfare to community members. When you travel by road around Burma, it's common to see women and children on roadways singing and collecting money for the monks and their local temples. I never saw that type of thing in Thailand. Thais would go out in the early morning to offer food to the monks, and they would make donations to their local temples, but I never witnessed the type of public solicitation of funds they I saw in Burma. I don't mean to suggest that the connection to the communities is a bad thing, and many in Burma's Buddhist clergy have also been strong supporters of the country's pro-democracy movement, but there are unfortunate examples of malign religious influence.

Then, beyond the general prejudice of Burmese Buddhists, there was a particularly strong strain of xenophobia among the Rakhine Buddhists. The situation was further complicated by strong tensions between the Rakhine and Burma's central government. In fact, they're one of the ethnic groups that were part of the peace negotiations. There wasn't open warfare between the Rakhine and the Burmese army during my time in the SAB role, but the Rakhine felt abused and misunderstood and complained that the central government had under-invested in development projects in their State, so they had a strong sense of grievance. So I think, in a twisted way, the central government partly tried to appease the Rakhine by maintaining a hard line against the Rohingya.

Q: Interesting, interesting.

CEFKIN: Yeah, it's very interesting; also very sad.

There have been periods when the Rohingya communities have co-existed relatively peacefully with their Buddhist neighbors. Most of the Rohingya were involved in trades, fishing or farming. But during my time in the SAB role, the conditions they faced were horrific. There had been episodes of communal violence in 2012 that had resulted in hundreds of deaths and some 140,000 residents of Rakhine State being displaced, most of them Rohingya Muslims.

When I visited many of those Rohingya were still confined to IDP camps. I visited one camp in Sitwe, the capital of Rakhine. It was a heartbreaking scene – they had lost access to their livelihoods, access to education, and their access to medical care was severely restricted. In addition to Sitwe I traveled to a couple of towns further north. My visit came in the aftermath of another spate of violence in the far north of the state that had resulted in several Rohingya villages being burned down and precipitated another exodus of refugees. I wasn't able to get to the scene of where the violence had occurred, but I was able to get a sense of the realities the Rohingya faced in the more rural parts of the state, and, as in Sitwe, it was grim.

In Sitwe and the other towns, I met with local Rakhine officials, political party officials, religious leaders, and with NGO workers (most of whom were expats). The level of racist vitriol I heard coming from the Rakhine officials and politicians was alarming – something I had never directly encountered. (Though it reminded me of the rhetoric that was prevalent in the lead-up to the Bosnian conflict.) In fact, a meeting I had in Sitwe with a group of Rakhine politicians was the one time in my FS career that I lost my diplomatic cool. After listening to their anti-Rohingya tirade, I blurted out "hate isn't a plan for the future," and I proceeded to chastise them. They were so angry, they didn't even walk me out once the meeting was adjourned. In some cases, the locally-based central government officials appeared to want to try to do the right thing, but they were intimidated by the Rakhine. The NGO workers walk a real tightrope, striving to provide humanitarian services to the Rohingya, while avoiding antagonizing the Rakhine, so as not to be booted out. NGO workers were subject to specious Rakhine accusations that they were helping to foment a Rohingya rebellion and were at times the targets of physical attacks.

The Rohingya were particularly dependent on the NGOs for medical care. One of the main providers was the group Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders). We met with a couple of them in Rakhine. They were being harassed by the Rakhine Buddhists, who wouldn't allow the Rohingya access to their clinics, but also didn't want MSF taking care of them. The MSF medical personnel took care of the Rohingya medical needs the best they could. For serious cases, MSF had to seek permission to transfer patients to the hospital in Sitwe. Even when permission was received, transferring critical patients there – such as a woman in labor who needed emergency care – several hours by car over bumpy roads, was a precarious exercise.

A short time after my visit, MSF was forced to shut down their operations. So, we worked to restore their access. It was an issue I spent quite a lot of time on. I was in regular touch with an MSF representative from the organization's U.S. headquarters in New York and with the embassy on strategies to press the Burmese to allow MSF to resume its operations in Rakhine. Every time we met with the government we really tried to impress upon them that if they didn't address the problems of Rakhine State none of their reforms would really succeed. We also pressed them to address the citizenship issue for the Rohingya. They indicated a willingness to do that, but never really moved forward. Beyond the hostility of the Rakhine Buddhists, the overall environment was problematic, including the fact that Burma's security services were implicated in atrocities, and the fact that there was broader public suspicion of the Rohingya. I wish I could say that we made progress, but it was elusive.

On a more positive note, as I think I mentioned, I worked closely with the NSC on an interagency policy review process (IPC) to identify ways to advance reforms in Burma and move forward on normalization of relations. Burma was chair of ASEAN that year (2014), and President Obama had agreed to go to Burma for the East Asia Summit that was scheduled to be held in conjunction with the ASEAN summit there, so we wanted to encourage as much progress as we could before his visit, and to lay out a roadmap for the messages the President needed to deliver during his visit. So we articulated a policy that

acknowledged the serious problems that needed to be addressed in Burma (including the Rohingya issue), while also reminding those anxious about our engagement policy that advancing democratic reform would require a long-term U.S. investment.

A big focus of our policy review was how the U.S. could support preparations for elections scheduled to be held in 2015. Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) had overwhelming popular support in the country, so we were confident that if the elections were free and fair, the NLD would win a parliamentary majority. Under normal circumstances that would have paved the way for ASSK to become president. However, there was a clause in the Burmese constitution that prohibited her from becoming president.

Q: Oh, wow. I didn't know.

CEFKIN: The clause in question prohibited anyone who had an immediate relative who had a foreign nationality from being President. ASSK's two sons were dual British-Burmese nationals so that excluded her from becoming president. We were pretty sure that the clause had been put in the constitution (drafted in 2008 during the military dictatorship) explicitly to block ASSK from becoming President. This was a source of great angst. Members of Congress and NGOs were particularly adamant that the constitution should be amended to eliminate this clause.

We agreed that this clause was outrageous and that Burma's constitution should be revised to eliminate this clause and reform other problematic elements. However, we also recognized that we had no control over the matter. We could coax, prod and cajole Burmese officials all we wanted, but Burma's constitution was notoriously difficult to amend and the military members of parliament had a bloc sufficient to nix any changes they didn't like. So we knew that it would be impossible to resolve the issue before the 2015 elections. We also took our cues from ASSK and civil society groups in Burma. They had come to the same conclusion and decided to focus on a more gradual approach to constitutional reform.

As a result, in the IPC process I steered the discussions to focus on what the U.S Government could do to help ensure that the elections would be conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner, instead of obsessing about constitutional reform. USAID was actively engaged in capacity-building programs to support preparation for the elections, and the Embassy routinely advocated for full respect for the democratic process. Ultimately, the elections were deemed to be generally free and fair. As expected, the NLD came out on top, and Aung San Suu Kyi became de facto president. One of her trusted NLD colleagues formally assumed the role, and she took on the position of "special advisor," but everyone knew she was the one who really called the shots. That said, she was constrained in what she could by the outsize role the military continued to have. So, that pretty much rounds out the work I did in the SAB role.

Q: Yeah, yeah. So, this is your one year from 2009 to ten?

CEFKIN: No. I arrived in August 2013 and handed my reins over in mid-November 2014. There was a decision not to fill the SAB position, after I left, so the DAS for Southeast Asia took over the portfolio – with support from the Burma Desk and Mainland Southeast Asia Office, of course.

Q: Oh, okay.

[NOTE: My time in the SAB role and the recording of this oral history took place before the February 2021 coup that re-imposed military rule in Burma. It's been heart-breaking to watch. It's also been inspiring to see the bravery and dedication of the young people of Burma fighting to restore democracy. Still, whether Burma/Myanmar can ever emerge from the current crisis as a stable, democratic, unitary nation is a big question.]

CEFKIN: Also, while I was in the SAB role I was going through the whole ambassadorial process.

Q: Uh-huh. Wow. So, that's also quite a lot of work just by itself.

CEFKIN: It is, it is. In terms of the timeline, as mentioned earlier, I had been approached by EAP while I was serving as DCM in Bangkok to ask about my interest in being put on the list for an ambassadorship. The Bureau suggested that I put my name forward for consideration for Fiji and Brunei. Ultimately I said yes to Fiji, but passed on Brunei.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Not too long after I started the SAB job – I believe it was September – I was informed that the D committee had approved me to be the State candidate for Fiji.

Q: Now, did EUR ever get back to you?

CEFKIN: They had encouraged me to lobby senior State officials to ask them to support my Armenia bid. It was awkward because I didn't really know how the process worked, and I didn't have close contact with the upper echelon of State's leadership. I approached a few people I did know who I thought might have a say to make clear to them that I would be very interested in Armenia, while also noting my interest in Fiji, so as not to foreclose that option. I also let EAP know that EUR had put me on the list for Armenia, so that they wouldn't be blindsided, but I didn't feel I could go to EAP after they'd supported me and say now, can you support me instead for EUR. That just didn't make sense.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

CEFKIN: Bottom line, I was definitely on the list for both Fiji and Armenia, but the D committee looks at the list and decides who they think the best candidate is for the different jobs. They concluded that my talents and experience would best be used in Fiji and in retrospect I don't think they were wrong. Armenia would have been fascinating,

but, even though I had a wealth of EUR experience, I didn't have specific experience in the Caucuses or the former Soviet Union, and my more recent State experience had been in the Asia-Pacific. So Fiji was a good fit.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Once the D Committee approves ambassadorial candidates, it triggers a requirement to complete tons of paperwork for enhanced security vetting, a financial disclosure, and a general suitability review. That took several months to complete, including the necessary security interviews and review by State's Legal Advisor's office (on the financial side) for any potential conflicts of interest. Fortunately my finances were pretty simple, so that didn't present any challenges, and I had had regular security clearances, so I wasn't starting from scratch on that score. Throughout this process, I was in regular touch with State's Office of Presidential Appointments, who helps steer candidates through the process. Once the paperwork was completed and I had the initial approvals -- around April 2014 – I had an interview at the White House by somebody that's charged with White House vetting. After that I got the word that the White House would support my candidacy. That triggered the agrément process, whereby State (on behalf of the White Houses) announces my nomination to the governments I would be accredited to and ask them to agree to receive me as the President's envoy. In my case it was complicated because there were five countries that had to provide agrément: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, and Tuvalu.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: That process took a while. I also had to complete more paperwork for submission to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The information requested, included, detailed family information and a list of all the political campaign contributions I and my immediate relatives had made in the preceding several years.

Q: Right, right.

CEFKIN: Once State received the five agréments, I was told it was far enough along in the process that I could attend the ambassadorial training, otherwise euphemistically referred to as "charm school."

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: I did that in the second half of June. I was formally nominated by the White House July 9th, and I had my confirmation hearing September 10. I felt fortunate that the process moved along at a relatively good pace. I had several colleagues who had been nominated for ambassadorships a year before me, who had been stuck in the Senate confirmation process for over a year. The hold-up wasn't due to any personal deficiency on their parts. They simply got caught up in political jockeying on the Hill that gummed up the works. They finally were confirmed a short time after I was.

Of course, preparing for the hearing is a lot of work. I mostly drafted my own statement, though I had support from the Fiji Desk Officer. The desk officer, in coordination with other State offices with a role in the key issues, drafted a list of possible questions and proposed answers, to help me prepare for the hearing (a standard practice for all Congressional hearings), and the folds in H (the Legislative Affairs Bureau) organized a "murder board" (practice hearing) to help prepare and coach the nominees on how to field questions.

My confirmation hearing was chaired by Senator Tim Kaine (from Virginia) who headed the Near East Asia Subcommittee. Normally, my hearing would have been with the Asia Subcommittee, but to speed the process up H was able to add me into a hearing for nominees headed to the Middle East. It was a good hearing. Obviously, I wasn't the main focus. Most of the questions were directed at nominees for Kuwait and the UAE. They had to contend with some hostile questions, especially from Senator Marco Rubio, who I believe was the ranking Republican member on the subcommittee. The hostility wasn't directed at my colleagues personally, but rather was a statement of dissatisfaction with the Administration's policy and, to be frank, in some cases was simply grandstanding. Senator Kaine was a real gentleman. Senator McCain also dropped into the hearing for a while, and I did get some questions from him, as well as from Senator Kaine and a few other members. The questions I got were not contentious, so in my case, it was a good experience. My husband had completed his tour in Seoul and returned home, so he was able to accompany me to the hearing. It was good to have his moral support and be able to introduce him to the senators.

Prior to the hearing, I had started doing consultations to prepare for my future responsibilities, but until I received Senate confirmation I was only allowed to meet with other U.S. Government officials, so as not to do anything that looked like I was "assuming" confirmation. The full Senate confirmation vote happened in late November. After that, I was able to meet with non-governmental contacts, including the Fijian Ambassador, based in Washington. The other four countries I was accredited to didn't have embassies in Washington, so I made a trip to New York City to meet with their UN Permanent Representatives, who were dual-accredited as Ambassadors to the U.S.

By that time I was winding down from the Burma job. I will be honest with you, there were times I said "why am I still working so hard? Why not just turn full attention to preparations for my Ambassadorial post. Additionally, towards the end of my time in the SAB role, I was roped into serving on the panel reviewing senior FSOs for Performance Pay. It added a lot to my workload, but it was an interesting and useful experience.

Q: This is one of the panels that very seldom gets much attention because by the time you're on it there are relatively few people to describe it. Can you take a moment to just describe in general the kinds of expectations or requirements that are in place for someone to get senior pay?

CEFKIN: Yeah. We were guided by precepts, similar to the precepts that guide State's promotion panels. I guess the key difference is that for promotion panels the boards are

judging candidates' potential to serve successfully at higher levels of responsibility, whereas with performance pay, we were rewarding senior officers for success in advancing key U.S. policies and interests or managing important programs and budgets. The opportunity to get the recognition and monetary reward for performance at the senior level, may be due to the fact that, as you know, for those FSOs who successfully make it across the threshold to become a Senior Foreign Service Officer, succeeding promotions get harder and harder. It's not uncommon to make the leap from Counselor (OC) to Minister Counselor (MC) – the equivalents of a one-star and a two-star, respectively, in the military. However, very few get to the three-star – Career Minister (CM) level, and only a tiny few get to the four-star level, which is (career) Ambassador.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: For the Performance Pay panel, the Human Resources Bureau assembled senior officers from different cones, and different geographic areas. We also had a public member and someone (a senior FSO) who was getting ready to start a job as a DAS in HR. It was a good group, and we worked very collaboratively together. As with the promotion panels, we reviewed the candidates' employee evaluations and we each assigned a numerical score to each candidate. One a week we met to compare our scores and discuss any discrepancies (which were generally rare). When there were discrepancies, we had the option of reevaluating and changing scores. Then we added up the totals and once HR released the cut-off number, we determined who did and didn't make the cut. I should add that seeing the breadth of the challenging roles my peers had taken on around the world was inspiring, and frankly humbling. I concluded that if the U.S. public could see the reports we reviewed, it would silence criticisms of government workers. Though, understandably, there are good reasons why the reports can't be public.

One other thing that crept up in that interim period was a personal medical issue. It was serious, but fortunately manageable. It did require surgery and follow-up treatment. So on top of some residual SAB responsibilities, ambassadorial preparations, and the performance pay panel, I was dealing with that. It was a surreal period because, on the one hand, I was looking forward to the hugely exciting future while on the other hand, the medical problem raised a question mark on my future. Happily, the treatment was successful. I was lucky that I had the fall months to complete my treatment. I only mention this because State career tracks don't always make easy allowances for pauses to deal with personal matters; but "life happens."

Q: Yeah. No, absolutely, absolutely.

CEFKIN: Anyway, getting back to my preparations for the South Pacific, once I was confirmed I had to wait for various White House papers to be signed (attestation), but I was able to start planning a swearing-in ceremony, and make preparations for my transfer to Post. The attestation happened in December, and I planned my swearing-in ceremony for January 5.

Would you like to break here?

CEFKIN: Yeah, I think that makes sense.

Q: Okay. Today is May 20. We're resuming our interview with Judith Cefkin as she prepares to go out as ambassador to Fiji.

And Judith, once again, what year is this?

CEFKIN: This is 2015.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: I was confirmed by the Senate at the end of 2014 and was planning an early January swearing-in ceremony. I scheduled my transfer to post for February. I wanted to give the incumbent ambassador sufficient time to prepare her departure, and I knew it would be horrible for the staff at the Embassy for me to arrive in the midst of, or right after the end-of-year holidays. Additionally, I learned that things in the Pacific pretty much shut down from late December through January. I guess it's the equivalent of the European (August). So it wouldn't have been productive to arrive before February.

My swearing-in ceremony was held on January 5, 2015 in the Benjamin Franklin Room. I was honored to be sworn in by Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources Heather Higginbottom. Preparing for the ceremony is a lot of work, including drafting my remarks, and managing the invitations and arrangements for the ceremony. Fortunately, the Fiji Desk Officer and the fantastic Office Manager I had working with me in the Burma role were a huge help. Sadly both my parents were deceased, so they didn't live to witness that milestone, but all my siblings and their spouses were able to come from Colorado and the West Coast for the occasion. And, in addition to locally-based friends, a close group of friends I had grown up with in Colorado, were able to come. That was really special.

Q: Lovely.

CEFKIN: It was a very nice occasion. My husband hosted a lunch after the ceremony for family and close friends. And we enjoyed several days with all the family that had gathered. It was a great way to launch my transition to serving as an ambassador.

Paul and I departed at the very end of January. (Paul, then retired, had agreed to come with me for the beginning of my tour, with the understanding that he would split his time between Fiji and the U.S. We decided to keep the apartment we were renting in Arlington so that he would have a *pied a terre* here.) We routed ourselves via Honolulu so that I could do consultations with the Pacific Command, the East-West Center, and the Asia-Pacific Security Studies and Training Center. After a few days in Honolulu, we boarded our Fiji Airlines flight, arriving in Fiji on the third of February. Fiji's international airport is in Nadi, on the west coast of the main island. It's a three-hour drive from there to the capital, Suva. The DCM and one of my drivers met us and we

drove back to Suva, so we were able to see the countryside. It's actually a pretty drive, much of it along the coast.

I'll talk later about my first few days in the job, but to set the scene I thought it would be useful to give an overview of the embassy and the countries I was accredited to.

Q: Great.

CEFKIN: In terms of the embassy, the staff totals about 140. In other words it's a medium-small post. The staff included about 100 locally engaged staff (LES), between thirty and forty direct hire (DH) American staff, and some eligible family member (EFM) hires. To understand the work of the embassy, it's important to understand the broad geographic reach of the territory we covered. It's something I didn't fully appreciate until I started preparing for the job. In fact, when EAP first approached me about serving as ambassador to Fiji, they didn't fully explain the entirety of the role. It's a reminder of the importance of "reading the fine print" (both laugh). When my nomination was announced to the U.S. Senate, I had to chuckle reading the announcement that I was being nominated to serve as ambassador to the Republic of Fiji and "concurrently, without additional compensation, to the Republic of Kiribati, Republic of Nauru, Kingdom of Tonga and Tuvalu." The U.S. has one ambassador in the Caribbean that is accredited to seven countries, but I had the second highest number of countries to cover as ambassador. That made the role quite unique and a real adventure.

Beyond the five countries that we were responsible for directly, Embassy Suva is a regional platform that provides support for twenty-one countries and territories in the Pacific Island region. So, it's a vast area. Also, in my role as ambassador I was the principal interlocutor to several Pacific regional organizations. The principal regional organization is the Pacific Island Forum (PIF), which is headquartered in Suva. The U.S. isn't a member of PIF, but we are a dialogue partner, so coordinating with PIF Secretariat was part of my responsibility, and I attended the annual PIF leaders meetings (along with senior Washington officials). The other region-wide organization I worked with is the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC). The SPC is a technical organization that provides development support to the region The U.S. is a founding member. The SPC is headquartered in Noumea, New Caledonia, but also has a large staff headquartered in Suva. So I worked with them, and attended the gatherings of member state leaders. In fact, I headed the U.S. delegations to those meetings.

At the Embassy, in addition to State Department personnel, we had a Defense Department USAID and Peace Corps presence. Peace Corps had active programs in both Fiji and in Tonga. To illustrate the scope of embassy responsibility -- in addition to the five countries that we were responsible for, our consular section also covered the French territories; they provided support to American citizens in the French territories (New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna). In fact, they had the largest geographic consular district of any U.S. Missions. And in addition to our five countries, our defense attaché, supported our ambassador in Papua New Guinea who was accredited to, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. So, they were on the road pretty

constantly. We also had a regional environmental officer who covered the whole region -- all 21 countries and territories. Our public diplomacy section, in addition to our five countries, provided support to our embassies in the northern part of the region – the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau. That seemed pretty crazy to me because we only had one PD officer and a small team of local staff. Getting up to the northern Pacific Island countries was not easy, so it really extended travel time. I advocated to switch the regional support responsibility for those three countries to Embassy Manila, which has a much bigger staff and was closer. EAP agreed with me and made the switch, so that lightened the regional load a bit.

All our embassy sections were very small. Our consular section had two and a half Americans. The political-economic section also had two and a half Americans. The half-time person in both sections was a consular officer who doubled as our economic-commercial officer. The regional environmental officer had two local staff members. Also, we only had two Foreign Service Office Management Specialists (OMS) – my OMS and one who supported the political-economic section. The DCM had an EFM hired as his OMS. So it was a very lean staff, covering millions of square miles of ocean.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: This meant that folks were stretched pretty thin. The DCM and I calculated that between business travel to the various countries we covered, travel for training, travel for personal leave or medevacs, at any given time at least a third of our American staff were out of the embassy.

The other challenge was that everything we did was multiplied by five. For example, every demarche we were tasked to deliver, we generally had to deliver it to five governments. Our small pol-econ section, which was tasked with drafting numerous congressionally-mandated annual reports – the human rights report, religious freedom report, trafficking in persons report, etc. -- had fifty annual reports they had to draft.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: That was pretty formidable. Furthermore, the communications infrastructure in our countries, particularly in the smaller countries, was weak. Delivering demarches to our remote countries (beyond Fiji) relied significantly on phone or fax, since we couldn't just hop on a plane to go meet with them. Flights, in most cases, were infrequent. But even phone, fax and internet service weren't always reliable.

Q: Oh, yeah.

CEFKIN: For example, when we visited Kiribati, we basically had to go for a minimum of four days or not at all because that's when the planes flew. Internet connectivity in Fiji was fairly good, but outside Fiji it was hit and miss. It did get a little better towards the end of my tour, but often when I traveled to Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu, and to some event

even Tonga (which was more developed than the preceding three) I was largely cut off from regular communications with the embassy.

Of course I did travel to my other countries of accreditation as often as I could, but it never seemed often enough, so I never felt that I was giving adequate attention to all five countries. Between that travel and travel to the regional meetings I was tasked with covering, not to mention travel around Fiji, I felt like I was packing and unpacking my suitcase all the time. I think I'm just getting to the point where the thought of having to pack a suitcase doesn't completely overwhelm me. (Laughs)

Q: Right, uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Also, the medical infrastructure in the region (outside Australia and New Zealand) was not terribly sophisticated, so I worried about Embassy staff having medical emergencies. Of course, we would medevac people that had serious medical problems, but I worried about the incidents where time might be of critical importance.

Q: Where would be the closest location anyone would be medevacked?

CEFKIN: Ah, that was another challenge. So, officially our medevac point was Singapore. They had a really great setup there for medevacs, but getting there wasn't the easiest. There weren't direct flights. Eventually Fiji Airlines did instituted some direct flights between Fiji and Singapore but they were infrequent. The closest places with good medical care were Australia and New Zealand. They both had very strict entry requirements for medical-related issues. We were relatively confident that in extremis we would be able to get embassy staff to one of those venues, but there was a bit of a question mark. Our regional medical officer was based in Canberra. He would come through regularly. At post, our Medical unit was staffed by an LES team -- a health practitioner and nurse -- who were very good. There were a couple of hospitals in Suva. The main hospital was rather like what I described with the hospital in Sarajevo – it had some very well-qualified medical personnel, but the facilities were minimal. So it wasn't a place where you really would want to have to be hospitalized.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: In terms of staff, we had a good team. It wasn't a very experienced team, however. Other than me and my DCM (an FS-1 officer), most were mid-level officers. We also had a few first and second tour officers. Most of the staff hadn't had much Washington experience, so it was a little bit of a challenge to help them see the "big picture" and understand the Washington policy process. Also, a fair number of our staff were attracted to Suva with the expectation that it would be a fairly quiet, sleepy place. To some extent it was. In contrast to Posts such as Paris, London, or Bangkok, we didn't have a lot of high-level visits, and all the responsibilities that that entailed. That meant most weekends were free for staff to enjoy family and personal time. That made it a generally good family post.

Suva had an international school that was decent. At least the folks at our embassy were relatively satisfied with it. Like a lot of smaller international schools, the school was better for the lower grades than the higher grades, but most of the embassy dependents were still elementary school students, so they did fine at the school.

One thing I really appreciated about the position was that being "off the beaten path" gave us a lot of autonomy. I felt I could really set the direction without being second-guessed by Washington. That was very enjoyable. And it was a friendly environment. The Pacific Islanders are very hospitable. We lived comfortably in Suva. Even though Suva isn't a large metropolis, it had good availability of goods, some decent restaurants and a couple of movie theaters. Opportunities for outdoor activities, particularly water sports, were abundant. Fiji, and particularly Suva, gets a lot of rain, which makes the environment very lush and green. The rainy season could be a bit depressing at times, but the flip side was the beautiful vegetation. It is a beautiful country.

I'll get into more specifics regarding issues we faced with the individual countries, but in terms of the broader region, the way I sort of framed my approach was emphasizing the fact that the United States is a Pacific nation and that the Pacific Island countries are our friends, partners, and neighbors. Although the region may be far from the continental U.S., the State of Hawaii and U.S. territories Guan, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are very much art of the region, and U.S. Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) adjoin the EEZs of several Pacific Island countries. In addition, we share a common history. As you know, we shed blood together in World War II, and the U.S. presence in the Pacific, including ensuring freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce, has been a force for stability and prosperity in the region.

The Pacific Island countries (with the exception of Papua New Guinea) aren't large in population or landmass, but they are vast in terms of ocean space. The counterpoint to their label as "small island states," is that they also are "large ocean states." They refer to themselves collectively as the "Blue Continent" or "Blue Pacific." And they are full players in international organizations, so they are indeed global players.

With his "rebalance to Asia," President Obama recognized the strategic importance of the region. Additionally, the Pacific Island countries (PICs) were on the frontlines of two strategic priorities the Obama Administration had outlined: #1 climate change and #2 the protection of our oceans. In terms of climate change, two of the countries I was accredited to -- Kiribati and Tuvalu – are particularly vulnerable. They (as well as the Marshall Islands) are atoll island countries, meaning that their territory consists of coral islands, which are generally small slivers of land with an average elevation of only two-three feet above sea level. So they are particularly impacted by sea level rise. But all the PICs were feeling the acute effects of climate, including: eroding coastlines, salt water intrusion onto arable land and fresh water sources, cycles of flooding and drought, and increasingly violent storms.

Of course the ocean and ocean resources are critical to our lives and livelihoods. This is particularly true for Pacific Islanders. But our oceans are increasingly under threat from the effects of climate change (including ocean warming and acidification) and from pollution and overfishing. Senator Kerry had a strong personal interest in the issue and in response launched the "Our Oceans Conference" initiative, which gathered government leaders, philanthropists, scientists, and NGO representatives to devise ways to tackle these challenges and to develop public-private partnerships to support the effort. As shared stewards of the Pacific Ocean, this was another important area of focus for Embassy Suva.

So I reoriented the Embassy's strategic plan to put these issues front and center. The climate focus was also particularly important because when I arrived at Post we were in the end game of negotiations for a new international climate agreement. The meeting of the parties to the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) was scheduled to take place in Paris in December 2015. Achieving a strong agreement was a priority for President Obama. Needless to say, this was also a priority for the PICs. They view climate change as an existential threat and therefore their top security challenge. As a result, I made it a priority to work with Pacific Island leaders to align our positions going into that conference. Broadly speaking we were in sync, but there were a few problematic issues that were red lines for the U.S. that I worked to help find acceptable approaches to.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: On the issue of ocean resources, fisheries are critically important to Pacific Islanders' livelihoods and food security. PIC EEZs are rich in fish, particularly tuna. The U.S. has a treaty – the South Pacific Tuna Treaty -- that gives U.S. purse seine fishing fleets access to PIC waters to fish skipjack tuna (the tuna used in canned tuna). The U.S companies pay license fees, and in exchange are guaranteed a certain number of fishing days. In association with the treaty, the U.S. also provides an annual allocation of Economic Support Funds to PIC governments. The treaty dates back to 1988, and had been an important aspect of U.S-PIC relations, providing an important source of revenue for the island nations, supporting U.S. fishery livelihoods, and ensuring a supply of skipjack tuna to the U.S. But when I arrived in the region, cooperation under the treaty was beginning to fray, with some PIC governments clamoring for more money and believing they could get more revenue from China. (We suspected there was also some corruption involved.) I'll talk more about this latter, but just wanted to flag that that was another important issue Embassy Suva faced.

Fiji is a large contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, and they take great pride in that role. (It's an important source of revenue for Fijian soldiers.) So that was one focus of our security cooperation. Tonga has a small military and at one point had participated in our Iraq coalition efforts. The other three countries I covered didn't have militaries, but they had police forces who served in military-type functions such as marine enforcement, so we nonetheless worked with them on security. And all our countries were full UN

members so we were particularly busy during the UN General Assembly delivering a flood of demarches seeking to align our votes in the UN.

Q: Oh, yeah.

CEFKIN: To be effective in attacking the global challenges we faced, I stressed the importance of strengthening governance, democratic institutions and respect for human rights. So, that was another area of focus.

When I arrived, Fiji had just emerged from eight years of being under coup leadership. They had finally held elections and were transitioning back to democratic governance, so we were keen to see them strengthen their democratic culture and processes. Tonga was particularly interesting, because it's the one Pacific Island country that has a monarchy. It's a constitutional monarchy, but they were working to balance traditional royal prerogatives with the democratic aspirations of the broader public.

On the human rights front, we didn't have the glaring problems that U.S. embassies face in a number of countries face. But sadly, violence against women is endemic in the region, so that was a big focus. And we worked to promote women's empowerment more broadly, as well as LGBTQ rights. Issues with press freedom, freedom of assembly, and labor rights did arise in some countries. To help address all these and other issues supported local civil society groups through people to people exchanges and other diplomatic tools.

Further, in terms of embassy priorities, emergency management was very important given the prevalence of natural disasters - particularly cyclones and flooding. Earthquakes and tsunamis were also a potential threat, but the main issues we experienced during my tour were weather-related events.

Q: Well, I have one quick question about a general topic, which is Trans-Pacific Partnership. Did that play at all with any of your countries?

CEFKIN: Yeah, a bit. None of my countries were involved in the TPP negotiations, though they followed the discussions closely and saw the talks as an important sign of U.S. commitment to the broader region. Some had aspirations to someday join. All the PICs had an interest in increasing trade with the U.S., but outside of Fiji, that was a challenge, given the islands' remoteness, lack of connectivity, and the small economies of scale. We did have a fairly robust trade relationship with Fiji, which I'll talk about more in a bit.

Q: The other question is, you know, you hear about these huge collections of plastic garbage floating in the Pacific, and I wondered if that was in any of their territorial waters or was part of your OES issues.

CEFKIN: Yes, definitely. Marine pollution was a problem throughout the region. We didn't have a huge "garbage patch" – one of those places you read about where tons of

garbage congregates, but it was common to see trash in the ocean and washing up along coastlines. As part of our environmental activities, we regularly participated in beach cleanups. And working to curb marine pollution, and in particular plastic pollution was a key pillar of Secretary Kerry's Our Oceans initiative.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: So, if it's OK, I'll turn to a country by country overview.

I'll start with Fiji, which is where the embassy is based. Fiji is a country of about 300 islands, of which some 110 are inhabited. In terms of cumulative land mass, it's about the size of Hawaii or New Jersey. The population is just a little under 900,000. Most of the population lives on the main island -- Viti Levu. Suva, the capital, and Nadi, which is Fiji's commercial and tourist hub, are both on Viti Levu.

Fiji has a very colorful history. It's believed that the original inhabitants migrated there from Southeast Asia between three-four thousand years ago. They evolved into communities of warring tribes throughout the country, and they were cannibals.

Q: Oh, wow.

CEFKIN: Yeah. Very active cannibals.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: After Western explorers and navigators started visiting the islands in the 18th and 19th centuries, it became a center for whalers and traders of sandalwood and bêche-de-mer, which is sea cucumber. These products were apparently very popular and profitable in America, Europe, and Asia. American and European missionaries soon followed. Indeed, foreign missionaries were very influential in the South Pacific, which means that today most Pacific Islanders are devout Christians.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Eventually, in the late 1800s, the chief of one of Fiji's tribes conquered the others and established himself as the King of Fiji. His name was Cakobau. He also converted to Christianity, which sped up the trend of indigenous Fijian's becoming Christian and giving up cannibalism. One very interesting fact is that Fiji could have become a U.S. colony.

Q: Huh?

CEFKIN: At that time, the capital of Fiji was a town called Levuka, on the island of Ovalau – off the east coast of Viti Levu. That's where King Cakobau was based. Given the American trading presence there, a U.S. consul, by the name of John Brown Williams, established an office in Levuka. But some locals burnt down his property, so

the U.S. government demanded reparations. In fact, American naval officer Commodore Wilkes led a big mission to the South Pacific to map the region. He spent some time in Levuka and threatened military action if King Cakobau didn't pay up. But Cakobau didn't have the funds to pay the reparations, so he offered to cede Fiji to the United States.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: The U.S. Government rejected the offer, however. So, instead Cakobau turned to the British, and Fiji became a British colony in 1874. In exchange, the British paid off Cakobau's debts.

As it sought to govern and develop Fiji's economy, the British brought in a lot of labor from South Asia, mostly India. As a result Fiji has a sizable Indo-Fijian population. I think currently the population is about 38 percent Indo-Fijian and 57 percent indigenous Fijian (also referred to as iTaukei). About 5-6 percent of the population is Sino-Fijian – immigrants from China – many of whom also came to Fiji during the colonial period. A number of Europeans also settled in Fiji, many of whom were associated with the colonial administration. So Fiji is ethnically and religiously diverse, which makes the country quite vibrant, but has also contributed to social and political tensions.

In 1970 Fiji became independent. Things went along well for a while, but intercommunal tensions -- between the indigenous and the Indo-Fijian populations – simmered under the surface. In 1987, after an election in which a party led by Indo-Fijians got the most votes, the military (which is dominated by indigenous Fijians) staged a coup. The Governor-General negotiated a settlement that briefly restored the elected government, but then the military staged a second coup and held on to power. The coup leader, General Sitveni Rabuka, was eventually persuaded to hold new elections. Rabuka stepped down from the military and ran for office as a civilian party leader, becoming a democratically-elected prime minister.

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: Things remained stable for a while. Then, in elections held in 1999 another Indo-Fijian-led party won and their head, an Indo-Fijian, was selected to be the prime minister. That sparked another coup in 2000. The coup leader, George Speight, and his followers took the prime minister and members of parliament hostage, sparking a prolonged crisis. Eventually, Speight and the other rebels were arrested and an interim government headed by an indigenous Fijian was appointed. New elections were held in 2001. Then, in 2006 there was a fourth coup. This coup was reportedly precipitated by the fact that the government was planning to grant amnesty to former coup leader, Speight. Commodore Frank Bainimarama led the 2006 coup and took control of the government.

International partners, including the U.S., condemned the coup. Fiji was suspended from the Commonwealth, and Australia and New Zealand (who have traditionally been Fiji's

biggest donors) led a campaign to suspend Fiji from the Pacific Islands Forum. That really angered Bainimarama, and led to a big chill in relations with those two countries. Since the U.S. isn't a member of PIF, we were less directly affected, but did support the decision and coordinated closely with Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and other like-minded partners on ways to press the coup government to restore democracy. Of course, under U.S. law, we were required to cut off our security assistance to the Fijian military and restrict other forms of assistance to the Fijian government.

Finally Bainimarama agreed to hold elections, which were scheduled for late 2014. Similar to Rabuka, Bainimarama had by then stepped down from the military, and he ran for parliament as a civilian party leader. There was a lot of nervousness about how the elections would go, and whether Bainimarama would accept defeat if his party, Fiji First, didn't win the elections. International partners, led by Australia and India formed a Multilateral Observer Group (which the U.S. also participated in) to monitor the elections. The elections went relatively smoothly and were declared to meet international standards. Fiji First did win a majority, clearing the way for them to form the government with Bainimarama as prime minister.

Other than the preceding historical background, the other general point I'll make about Fiji is that Fiji is very much a regional hub. It's a hub for commerce, diplomacy, academia, transportation and communications. Fiji Airlines is the main airline to service the region. A regional university -- the University of the South Pacific (USP) -- is based in Fiji. The other PICs have small USP campuses, but the main campus, which educates students from throughout the region, is in Suva. It was one of the more successful regional cooperative ventures.

Like us, a number of countries had embassies in Fiji that covered multiple countries. (Though some countries covered the region from their embassies in Australia or New Zealand.) The UN also covered the region from Suva. So there is a large UN presence, representing various UN agencies, there. The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and International Red Cross had regional officers there. And, as mentioned earlier, the Pacific Island Forum's Secretariat is in Suva, and had, in fact, remained there even throughout Fiji's suspension from PIF.

In terms of Fiji's economy, tourism is the most important revenue generator.

Q: And here, as you're getting to the economy, I'm wondering, given that you arrived after four coups, was there a sense that any foreign direct investment was going to be uncertain because of the risky political environment?

CEFKIN: Commerce had more or less been sustained through the coup periods. The risk of political instability was a consideration but not a major factor for investors, since the coups hadn't led to a general breakdown of order. But there were other issues such as lack of transparency that did affect the investment climate.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: Sugar had previously been a big source of revenue for Fiji. The sugar cane plantations had been established during the British colonial period. But the industry was in decline by the time I served there. It was a complex issue because the land is owned by the indigenous Fijians, but most of the sugar cane growers (who leased the land) and laborers were the Indo-Fijians. Even though sugar was no longer a major source of income for the country, it was an important source of employment for the country. The industry was governed by a state-owned enterprise, so the Fijian government was always struggling to keep the industry viable. Other than that, Fiji produces and exports ginger and various other farm products. Their biggest export is "Fiji Water," which comes from an aquifer in the northeast part of Viti Levu. It's actually a U.S.-owned company.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: So that sets the scene for the work we did in Fiji.

Continuing in alphabetical order, I'll turn next to Kiribati. As I said, it's one of the two countries I was accredited to that is an atoll island nation. It consists of thirty-three islands; thirty-two of which are atolls (coral islands). One is a limestone island that was very rich in phosphates, but basically all the phosphate was mined by foreign conglomerates before Kiribati's independence.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: In terms of total land area, Kiribati is very small – about a quarter of the size of Rhode Island. But in terms of ocean space, it's huge, covering over a million square miles. Kiribati actually straddles all four hemispheres.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: It has three island chains: the Gilbert Islands, the Phoenix Islands and the Line Islands. Twenty-one of its thirty-three islands are inhabited. The largest island is Christmas Island (Kiritimati in the Kiribati language). It was named by Captain Cook. It's one of the northern Line Islands and is actually closer to Hawaii than to the capital of its Kiribati. And in fact, the only way to get there, other than via a long sea voyage, was on a Fiji Airlines flight from Nadi that stopped there en route to/from Hawaii.

Q: Ah. Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: It's a refueling stop. But Christmas Island is popular with American sports fishermen who go there to catch bonefish. There's also some scuba diving there. I always wanted to visit, but the problem is if you go, you have to stay a week, because that's when the Fiji Airlines plane comes and goes. On one of my trips to Hawaii I did go via Christmas Island. Those of us in transit weren't allowed to get off the plane, but it was really interesting to see a lot of American men with fishing gear and bottles of whiskey deplaning for their week of fishing.

Q: (Laughs) Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Yeah, that was interesting.

The total population of Kiribati is currently about 120,000; when I was there it was 110,000. Half of that population is crammed into South Tarawa, which is where the capital is. It's very overpopulated. The over-population results from high birth rates and a lot of internal migration from other islands by people looking for jobs.

Spanish explorers are believed to have sighted a number of the islands of what is now Kiribati in the mid-1500s. Then in the mid-1700s to mid-1800s, British naval officers explored the islands, naming them the Gilbert Islands, after one of the naval officers who visited. As with Fiji, Western whalers frequented Kiribati waters. They were followed by missionaries. In fact, an American missionary from Boston by the name of Hiram Bigham settled there and is credited with developing the local written alphabet. Commodore Wilkes also passed through Kiribati. I found a reference to a U.S. consulate existing on one of the islands back in 1888 – something I'd like to research more. And U.S. mail planes, carrying mail between Hawaii and Fiji, used to stop off in Kiribati.

Q: Huh.

CEFKIN: Kiribati became a British protectorate in 1892 and a British colony in 1916. In its colonial administration it was joined with what is now the country of Tuvalu, formerly called the Ellice Islands, and was named the Gilbert and Ellice Island Colony (GEIC). The Japanese invaded the islands in World War II. The first major amphibious landing battle involving the U.S. Navy and the Japanese Imperial forces in the Central Pacific was the Battle of Tarawa in Kiribati.

Q: Wow. Interesting.

CEFKIN: Yeah.

Q: So, are there still World War II ruins?

CEFKIN: Yep.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: The battle took place in late November, 1943. It was a very bloody battle. The U.S. actually made a tragic error in the assault, which was an amphibious assault by Marines. The day of the assault there was a neap tide, which meant that the water was shallower than normal, so the Marines had to wade through this large area of water to get to the beaches. As a result, many were mowed down. The U.S. had to temporarily retreat, and renew the assault the following day. Eventually, the U.S. did prevail, but the Japanese put up a very fierce resistance, fighting to the death rather than surrender.

Q: Ooh.

CEFKIN: Over 1.000 Marines and 5,000 Japanese were killed, as well as several hundred locals. So it was a very defining part of their history. After the battle U.S. forces remained in Kiribati for a while. Eventually it was returned to British control. The country became independent in 1979. We established formal diplomatic relations with independent Kiribati in 1980.

The threat of climate change was front and center in terms of issues for Kiribati. In fact, the gentleman who was president there when I first arrived, Anote Tong, had put Kiribati on the map internationally by sounding the alarm about the threat climate change poses to the country's continued existence.

Q: Oh, yeah.

CEFKIN: He labeled Kiribati "the canary in the coalmine," warning that if the world didn't wake up and do something about climate change, the acute challenges Kiribati faced would become the new reality around the world. As I explained earlier, coral atoll nations, such as Kiribati, are particularly vulnerable, because their islands are small, very low-lying slivers of land. This also means that they have a paucity of arable land. The soil is sandy making it hard to grow many crops. And as sea levels rise, the salt water encroaches onto farming land, ruining it for food cultivation. So maintaining good nutrition and food security is a big challenge. The islanders are dependent on imported canned goods for much of their diet. (This also means that their diets are often not the healthiest, giving rise to problems such as hypertension and diabetes.) Ensuring adequate supplies of fresh water is also a challenge. Freshwater sources are limited, so the islanders tend to rely on rainwater. But some of the islands of Kiribati are also prone to drought, so water security is another significant challenge.

Another challenge is the overpopulation of South Tarawa. The Pacific Island countries are heavily Christian, and in most countries, the predominant denomination is Methodist. But Kiribati has a Catholic majority. The priests are fairly influential and frown upon birth control, giving Kiribati a very high birth rate. Compounding the problem is a steady flow of internal migration – people moving from the outer islands to the capital in search of better livelihoods. So people in South Tarawa were living on top of each other, making sanitation and communicable diseases control a problem.

I had talked a bit earlier about the South Pacific Tuna Treaty. Kiribati's waters are particularly rich grounds for tuna fishing, so we were keen to continue cooperating with them under the treaty, so that was a continuing focus of discussion. On fisheries, one of the cooperative programs we had with Kiribati and most of the other PICs was the Shiprider Agreement. It's a program run by the U.S. Coast Guard, with support from the U.S. Navy. Under this agreement, when USCG or USN ships visit partner countries those countries can put their maritime enforcement officials on board our ships to patrol their EEZs. If they find foreign vessels that are not properly licensed to be fishing in their

waters, they can issue fines or seek prosecution. Given the importance of fisheries to Pacific Island economies, that was an important element of our cooperation.

Of course, another important issue in our bilateral relations with Kiribati was recovery of the remains of the marines who died in the Battle of Tarawa.

Q: Ah.

CEFKIN: Yeah. At the time I was there I think we still had around 500 of the 1000 who perished that had not been yet identified.

And you asked earlier about remaining evidence of the battle. The answer is yes, there are still several Japanese bunkers on the beaches of South Tarawa. There's also a memorial to the U.S. marines who died, so there are things to see in terms of Kiribati's World War II legacy.

Q: So, regarding the problems of overpopulation, is there outmigration?

CEFKIN: There is, particularly to Australia and New Zealand. Both countries have a seasonal worker program. They have a certain number of temporary jobs – mostly in agriculture -- for Pacific Islanders to fill to help them earn money to support their families. There's also a fair bit of regular migration from the PICs to Australia and New Zealand, as well as some illegal migration. Some cities, such as Auckland, New Zealand have large Pacific Island diaspora populations. While I was in the region there was one case being adjudicated in the New Zealand courts, involving a gentleman from Kiribati who was trying to claim asylum based on the climate change threat he faced at home. I believe he lost his case, but that issue continues to come up.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: One the topic of overseas work, one important source of income for the people of Kiribati, as well as Tuvalu, was working as seafarers. They were very capable seafarers. Both countries have seafarer academies. Once trained they sought work on foreign merchant ships, including American ships.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: Unfortunately, when I was there the economies of employing the Pacific Island seafarers was becoming less favorable, since the companies had to pay their way to where the ships sailed from (the U.S. or Europe) and that was expensive. Another challenge was getting their visas, since they had to come to Suva to process their visas, so that added to the cost. One thing our consular section was able to do was to simplify the process for seafarers who had had previous seafarer visas -- they could renew their visas without coming to Suva, but first-time visa applicants did need to make the trip.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: So, that's a broad overview of Kiribati.

Moving on to Nauru, unlike the other countries I covered, Nauru is just one island, rather than a group of islands. The island is a combination of coral and phosphate. The center of the island, where the phosphate is/was, is elevated, so it is in a somewhat less precarious position, in terms of sea level rise, than Kiribati and Tuvalu. Although the population is concentrated along the coast. The country is very small, about tenth of the size of Washington, D.C. in terms of land area.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: It's also one of the world's smallest countries population-wise, with a population of about 10,000. In fact, I believe it ranks as the second smallest UN member state. In terms of history, again, it was a stop-off point for whalers and traders. It was annexed by Germany in the 1800s. In 1900 a British company began mining the phosphate. After WWI, Germany was forced to surrender Nauru and governance was turned over to Australia, New Zealand, and Britain to administer under a League of Nations trusteeship. The phosphate mining continued. In World War II, Nauru was occupied by the Japanese. It was quite a brutal occupation. Two-thirds of the population was deported to the Japanese-occupied Marshall Islands as forced labor.

Q: Wow. Wow.

CEFKIN: Less than half of those deported survived to return home. After World War II, the UN reinstated the Australian/New Zealand/British protectorate. It became independent in 1968. But it had suffered a lot of environmental degradation from the phosphate mining, and most of the phosphate had been mined. Nauru took over that venture, and there it remained profitable for a while. In fact, for a while in the 1970s-80s, Nauru actually had one of the highest per capita Gross Domestic Products (GDP) in the world because of the phosphate revenue.

Q: Wow. (Laughs)

CEFKIN: But sadly, due to mismanagement and bad investments, the profits were squandered. Today, there's still a little bit of residual phosphate to mine, but not much, so the Nauruans can no longer rely on that for the revenue they need.

Sustaining the Nauruan economy is challenging. Fisheries, particularly tuna fishing, is an important source of revenue. During my time as Ambassador, the country's biggest source of revenue was funds they received from the Australian government for hosting an Australian refugee processing center.

Q: Huh. Interesting.

CEFKIN: It was quite controversial. What happened is that the Australian government had a policy of not admitting any asylum-seekers who arrived by boat. The policy was intended to prevent an avalanche of people coming to their shores declaring asylum. So, they declared they would not let any asylum seekers coming by boat to set foot in Australia. They intercepted the boat people at sea and sent them to Nauru or another camp they established in Papua New Guinea. There they were processed for possible refugee status, or they could choose voluntary repatriation. But Australia refused to resettle any of them in Australia. They had to look to third countries for resettlement. (Australia actually has a fairly generous refugee program for asylum-seekers who come through the normal resettlement process, but they feared that if they allowed the boat people to resettle there, they would be overwhelmed.) The UN and a number of NGOs were critical of this treatment of the asylum-seekers. I'll talk more about this issue when I get into the specifics of what we did.

Another quirky thing about Nauru is that they had developed a fairly cordial relationship with Russia. Russia had, at one point, provided the Government of Nauru funding they were seeking. In exchange, Nauru accorded diplomatic recognition to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the two Russian-controlled enclaves in Georgia. This was a bone of contention in our relations, since our policy (and that of most of the world) is to consider the enclaves part of sovereign Georgian territory.

Also, for a very small country, Nauru had very fractious politics.

Q: Huh.

CEFKIN: (Laughs) As mentioned, the people of Nauru live along the coastal circumference of the island. Each Nauruan identifies with their community and I guess, the different communities were originally separate tribes.

Q: Oh, uh-huh.

CEFKIN: That led to a lot of political feuding. Also, their political party loyalties were based more on personalities than on ideology. It seemed that regardless of which party, or group of parties, was in power, they tended to harass the opposition. If the opposition gained the majority they did the same, so there was a lot of bad blood. Before I arrived, the opposition at the time had accused the government of fraud and had staged protests. The protests got a little out of hand and had resulted in some arson. As a result, during my time at post, they were prosecuting the opposition leaders. While the prosecution may have been justified their treatment of the accused was very draconian and there were questions about the legal procedures, in terms of access to legal counsel, etc. We pressed the government to ensure the legal processes were fair and transparent, but they were very resistant.

Q: Yeah. It's funny, you know, you mentioned the Russian influence. I was thinking of asking you a question about the possibility that any of these small islands serve as

offshore money laundering centers which would have immediately made me think of Russia, but it turns out yes, Russia was interested, but for a different reason.

CEFKIN: Yeah. Thank you for asking because that is one thing I forgot to mention in terms of issues with Nauru. It had been a major money laundering site. I don't know whether the money laundering was connected to Russians or who the main culprits were, but yes, it had been an issue. With help from international financial experts they had corrected the problem. One result though, is that they didn't have any banks in Nauru.

Q: What?

CEFKIN: Yeah. When I arrived, they had just finally established a small bank, but it was for paying salaries for Nauru government workers. There was no place where visitors could change money. When we visited, we had to make sure we had enough cash on hand to pay our hotel and restaurant bills. The currency used (as it was in Kiribati and Tuvalu) was the Australian dollar. (Fiji and Tonga had their own currencies.)

By the way, this is jumping ahead a bit, but since we were talking about Russia, I'll tell you about an interesting encounter that I had on one of my trips to Kiribati. A colleague and I were having lunch at the little hotel where we were staying and we struck up a conversation with another couple staying there. They were Russian – husband and wife.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: The gentleman told us that he had been a member of the Russian Duma, but had fallen out of favor with Putin and was no longer in parliament. Instead he was in business, and was in Kiribati to pursue an investment, though he didn't elaborate on what the proposed project was. A while later, when I was back in Suva, a news story popped up reporting that a Russian was trying to buy one of Kiribati's far flung islands (in the Line Island group) to set up a base for descendants of Russian royals to reconstitute the Russian empire. Low and behold, the Russian attempting to buy the island was the gentleman I had met.

Q: Laughs. Wow.

CEFKIN: So we immediately reached out to our contacts in Kiribati to try to figure out what was really going on and determine whether the Government of Kiribati was giving serious consideration to doing business with this guy.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: I raised it directly with the President of Kiribati during my next trip there. He said the Russian was proposing to set up a resort on the island he wanted to purchase and that the cabinet was evaluating the offer but that they had a lot of questions. Ultimately, fortunately, they decided not to go forward with the project. But that's an example of the quirky issues we sometimes ran into in the region.

Q: Sure. A whimsical question. Do all of these small countries put out stamps? I wonder if that's an element of their foreign currency because usually the stamps are very collectible or whatever and I'm not sure whether they actually make a fair amount of money on that.

CEFKIN: Some of them are known for the stamps they produce. One where this is particularly true is Tuvalu. The other thing Tuvalu is known for is its internet domain, which is .TV, so people would pay to get their internet domain. It was an important source of revenue for them.

Q: Ah, I see.

CEFKIN: So, let's see, I think that brings me to Tonga. Tonga is a country of 170 islands, of which thirty-six are inhabited. In terms of total land area it's about four times the size of Washington, D.C. From north to south the islands of Tonga stretch along 500 miles of ocean, and they are divided into three island groups: Vava'u, Ha'apai, and Tongatapu.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: During my time there, the population totaled about 106,000. It's a very, very interesting country. It's believed that the islands of Tonga were first settled around 500 B.C. The settlers developed a system of hereditary monarchs. They were also amazing navigators who traveled great distances by outrigger canoes, settling many parts of the Pacific. By the 13th century, the Tongan kings ruled parts or all of what is present-day Fiji, Samoa, Niue and other parts of the region.

One thing I probably should have clarified earlier is the three major ethnic groupings in the Pacific Island region. Are you familiar with them?

Q: Not very well.

CEFKIN: The three are: Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian. The Melanesians predominate in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. Part of Indonesia and the indigenous inhabitants of New Caledonia (a French territory) are also Melanesian, and Australian Aborigines are related. In terms of physical attributes they tend to be dark-skinned and have features similar to African populations.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: The countries of the northern Pacific are Micronesian. This includes the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Kiribati, and Nauru. The U.S. territories of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands are also part of Micronesia.

Polynesians are predominant in Tonga, Samoa, Tuvalu, Niue, the Cook Islands, as well as the French Territories of West Polynesia and Wallis & Futuna and the U.S. territory

American Samoa. The Mauri in New Zealand, native Hawaiians, and the people of Rapa Nui (also known as Easter Island - part of Chile), are also Polynesian. As I said, they were amazing seafarers!

Anyway, returning to Tonga's history – on his voyages in 1773 and 1777, Captain Cook visited Tonga. In the 1800s, Western missionaries spread Christianity through Tonga. Eventually, one of the Tongan kings (who had converted to Christianity) consolidated power over the other kings and in 1845 became the King of Tonga. He named himself King George Tupou I (after Britain's King George). The Tupou dynasty still rules Tonga today. It is the one remaining monarchy in the Pacific.

Tonga was never officially colonized, but it did become a British protectorate between about 1905 and 1970. I found a reference to the U.S. having had a Treaty of Amity and Commerce with Tonga in 1888. Apparently we also had a consular presence there. But once the British assumed protectorate oversight, those arrangements ceased. Tonga's formal protectorate association with Britain ended in 1970, and the U.S. established formal diplomatic relations with the Kingdom in 1972.

So, in terms of issues, Tonga does have a small, but capable military, and we have an active security partnership with them. Augmenting our security cooperation, we had something that's very common in other parts of the world but wasn't in the Pacific, which is a State Partnership Program. It's a program whereby our state national guards partner with various countries to conduct training and exchanges on various topics. In Tonga's case, the partnership is with the Nevada National Guard. We also have a Shiprider Agreement with Tonga, and we have a Peace Corps program there. In fact, Peace Corps was the one consistent on-the-ground U.S. government presence in Tonga. So, we had a fair bit of activity in Tonga.

In terms of challenges, the people of Tonga had been working to gradually shift the balance between royal and commoner governance. It's a sensitive subject. The Tongan people are very attached to their traditions and respect for the monarchy is very important. At the same time, the Tongan commoners have aspired to enjoy full democracy. In 2006, frustration over the lack of political reform led to riots in the capital – Nuku'alofa. In response, the king at that time, King Tupou V, agreed to expand the number of parliamentary seats that would be directly-elected. (Their parliament has a house of nobles and a house of commoners). But the elections where Tongans were able to exercise that right didn't take place until 2010. One of the principal leaders of the pro democracy efforts was a gentleman by the name of ʻAkilisi Pōhiva. His party won the majority in parliament in the 2010 elections and in 2014 he became the first commoner prime minister to be elected by parliament (as opposed to being appointed prime minister by the King). He served as prime minister during my time as ambassador – a very interesting person, who I will talk more about later.

One other issue worth mentioning is that the People's Republic of China (PRC) had an active presence in Tonga. They financed a lot of infrastructure, but that meant that the

government of Tonga had had a heavy debt burden from their Chinese loans. So that was something we kept an eye on.

On the topic of China, it's probably worth mentioning here that of the five countries I was accredited to, three of them – Kiribati, Nauru, and Tuvalu – had diplomatic relations with Taiwan rather than with the PRC. In the broader region, that was also true for Palau, the Marshall Islands, and Solomon Islands. (Although in 2019, after I had left the region, Solomons, followed in quick succession by Kiribati, switched their recognition from Taiwan to the PRC.) So the jockeying between China and Taiwan was an important geo-political undercurrent in the region.

Last in alphabetical order, my fifth country of accreditation was Tuvalu. Whereas Nauru is the second smallest UN member (in terms of population), Tuvalu is the third smallest. Its population, during my time there, was about ten and a half thousand. It's a country of nine islands, all but one of which are coral atolls. In terms of total land area, Tuvalu is about a seventh of the size of Washington, D.C., but the islands stretch across 350 miles of ocean.

The islands of what is now Tuvalu, were originally settled by Polynesian migrants. As with Fiji, and Kiribati, American whalers from New England passed through the islands in the 19th century. The Wilkes expedition also visited several of the islands. The islands were given the name of "Ellice" by a passing European captain, after the British patron of his cargo. The British claimed the islands in 1866, and in 1916 joined them with the islands of Kiribati, to the north, to form the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony from 1916.

The Ellice Islands fortunately avoided Japanese occupation in World War II. The main island – Funafuti -- became a major base for U.S. naval operations during Operation Galvanic, which was the push to defeat the Japanese in Kiribati. At the height of the battle preparations there were something like 2,000 U.S. personnel and 100 ships in the harbor there, so it was an important piece of U.S. operations for the U.S. After the war, the islanders started to aspire to become independent. Also, given their cultural differences, with the Gilbertese being mostly Micronesian and the Ellice Islanders Polynesian, they separated from the Gilbert Islands in 1975 to become a separate colony. Then in 1978, they became independent. We established diplomatic relations with them that same year.

In terms of areas of focus for our relations, by far the most important issue for the people of Tuvalu is climate change. Like Kiribati, as coral atolls with an average elevation of just six feet above sea level, Tuvalu is extremely vulnerable to rising sea levels and the other negative impacts of climate change. The prime minister who was in office during my time there – a gentleman by the name of Enele Sopoaga -- was very active in international climate change talks. He had previously served as the head of Tuvalu's UN mission, so he was very knowledgeable about the details of climate negotiations and he was an impassioned advocate for the demands of the Small Island Developing States.

Fisheries were also very important for Tuvalu. They are partners under the South Pacific Tuna Treaty and we have a Shiprider Agreement with them.

One other issue I confronted when I arrived was a WWII legacy issue. I mentioned that there was a big U.S. military presence on Funafuti in preparation for the invasion of Tarawa. As part of those preparations we had built a runway on the island. (That runway is still in use as the runway for Tuvalu's airport.) To build the runway the engineers dug up earth from other parts of the island. That left holes around the island – referred to as the "borrow pits" -- that became filled in by water and turned into fetid ponds. They were unsightly and a health issue. The Government of Tuvalu kept asking the U.S. to remediate the barrow pits. We encouraged our military to find a way to accommodate this request, but they were reluctant to take responsibility. So, that issue came up in my initial visit to Tuvalu. Happily, later, New Zealander's foreign minister decided that New Zealand could handle the project. They succeeded in remediating the barrow pits and also extended the beach that ran along the West coast of the island further out from where it had been. (I'll describe this in more detail later.) That was an important change and improvement in the quality of life for the residents of Funafuti.

An issue I'll mention briefly is the issue of Peace Corps. As noted previously, we had active Peace Corps programs in Fiji and Tonga. We had at one time also had Peace Corps programs in Kiribati and Tuvalu, but Peace Corps had pulled out of those two countries. They desperately wanted Peace Corps back. So that issue would come up regularly in my dealings with the leaders in those countries.

So, that's a broad overview of the region and the countries I covered. I guess I can turn now to discussing key developments and what I did during my three years in the region.

Q: Yes. I don't have any other general questions at this point.

CEFKIN: So, I said earlier, Paul and I left Washington in late January 2015 and flew to Honolulu where we stopped for a couple of days of consultations. From there we boarded a Fiji Airlines flight to Fiji. (Fiji Airlines had three flights weekly from Fiji to Honolulu. One went via Christmas Island in Kiribati, one went via Apia, Samoa, and the third, which we took was direct. Unfortunately, it departed Honolulu at 3:00 a.m. But time-wise, it wasn't too bad – about a six-hour flight.)

Q: Right, uh-huh.

CEFKIN: We flew into Fiji's international airport in Nadi, on the West coast of Viti Levu (Fiji's main island). There is an airport close to Suva, but it's mostly for domestic flights because the runway isn't long enough to accommodate big planes. There are regular flights between Nadi and Suva, but in consultation with the DCM, I decided that it would make sense for one of my drivers to pick us up and travel to Suva by car. It's a three-hour drive, a very pretty drive. In fact, most of the times when I flew in and out of Nadi, my preference was to do the trip by car.

The DCM came with the driver and met us at the airport, then we drove to Suva. They dropped us off at our residence, the Chief of Mission Residence (CMR) to rest and refresh. Later that afternoon we went to the Embassy for a formal welcome by Embassy staff. They have a very colorful tradition to welcome the boss or VIPS. It's an ethnic Fijian ceremony called a *sevusevu*. Have you ever heard of kava?

Q: Is that similar to the Maoris, kind of a military welcome?

CEFKIN: No. Kava is a drink that's highly prized in the region. It's made from the root of a plant that's related to pepper plants. They take the plant root, grind it up, and mix it with water. The drink that emerges looks like muddy water, but it tastes like peppery water. If you drink a lot of it, it has a sedative effect. In any case, the *sevusevu* is an elaborate ceremony involving kava. For my welcome, the local staff donned traditional Fijian dress, including grass skirts for the men presiding at the ceremony. I also was supposed to wear, traditional Fijian dress, so my OMS had gone to the market to buy the appropriate outfit for me and deliver it to the CMR so I could change before we went to the Embassy that afternoon. At the ceremony they gave me and Paul beautiful garlands. Then they mixed the kava. The presentation of the kava is accompanied by speeches. They pour the kava into a small bowl made out of a coconut shell. The chief guest – in this case me – is supposed to clap once, to signal they are ready to receive the kava, then drink the kava, and after drinking it clap three times to express appreciation. The kava is then presented to other guests, and sometimes, they come back to the chief guest a couple more times with more kava.

Q: Ah, uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Fijians, especially Fijian men, also drink kava on a purely recreational basis. Often in the evening, or at parties, they'll gather around the kava bowl, like going to a bar and having a couple of drinks. Interesting, there's quite a bit of kava that's exported to the United States, and some cities have kava bars. It's become kind of a hip thing. One company that exports kava to the U.S., started producing a kava drink mixed with different flavors. They marketed it as a sports drink, although it's not the kind of thing that you would want to drink just before a competition, since it's a sedative, not a stimulant. But they advertised it as something to help people relax and reduce stress.

Q: Ah. Hmm. Okay.

CEFKIN: By the way, given how colorful it is, my arrival ceremony even got a mention on the "Diplopundit" blog.

That was my first day at Post. Then, the next morning I presented my credentials to the President of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau. It was a fairly simple ceremony. After the presentation, the DCM, Paul, and I joined him for tea. He was an interesting gentleman. He had been a military officer and a diplomat, whose service had included being the Fijian ambassador to the UK. So he had a lot of international experience.

Once I presented my credentials, I was able to move forward with other get-acquainted meetings. Of course, I did the traditional things ambassadors do when they first arrive, including calling on the dean of the diplomatic corps (who was the Ambassador from Kiribati and who became a good friend) and on other key members of the diplomatic corps. Within the embassy, I visited and met with the staffs of all the sections. The Peace Corps office, which was located outside the chancery, even had their own *sevusevu* to welcome me and Paul.

Of course, I met with Foreign Minister Ratu Inoke Kabulabula as one of my very first meetings. ("Ratu," by the way, is a Fijian chiefly title.) And within my first couple of days I was able to call on Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama.

In the meeting with the PM, he handed me an invitation addressed to President Obama, inviting the President to attend a regional meeting that Fiji planned to host. There was some awkward politics regarding the meeting; it was a gathering of an organization called the Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF) – an organization that Fiji had founded when they were suspended from the Pacific Island Forum. PIDF was intended to be an organization of Pacific Island countries that excluded Australia and New Zealand. Some PICs had welcomed the initiative; others were more cautious. In any case, I knew that the prospects of a Presidential visit to Fiji were slim, but I took it as a good sign that he was eager to have President Obama visit.

There was one touchy issue that came up in that first meeting. Since Fiji had held their elections and returned to democratic governance, we had been able to lift our restrictions on assistance, including security assistance. As part of that assistance, we had offered Fiji a slot in one of the courses under our International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Unfortunately, the person they had nominated was someone my team knew was unlikely to pass the necessary vetting. So we had asked them to nominate a different candidate. However, the candidate in question was very close to the PM, so he pressed me to support the nomination. We went round-and-round, with me explaining that under our rules we really couldn't move forward with the candidate in question, and the PM protesting that the decision of who to nominate should be the prerogative of his government. Eventually, we agreed to disagree – with the outcome, of course, being that we didn't move forward with the candidate. Other than that it was a relatively cordial meeting, and I was able to develop a reasonably good rapport with the PM.

On the policy front, as mentioned, I realigned our strategic goals to elevate climate change as our top priority since the PICs view climate change as their top security threat, and bolstering cooperation to counter the negative impacts of climate change was also a high priority for President Obama. U.S. leaders were seeking to galvanize international support for a robust agreement at the upcoming Paris negotiations. To help align our positions for the talks with those of PIC governments, I made it a priority to showcase the positive things the U.S. was doing to help. We did have several USAID programs focused on climate adaptation, i.e., building resilience. Every time we had a ribbon cutting for one of those projects or a grant award, I did my best to preside at the event to amplify local

media coverage. In speeches, we also stressed steps the U.S. was taking domestically to reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases.

Q: Now, a quick question here about the climate change issues. Certainly, ocean level rise is one of them, but is the increase and the severity of extreme weather also a big issue?

CEFKIN: Absolutely; very much so. I'll give you some specific examples as we talk about the issues I confronted.

Another important issue in our cooperation with Fiji, was peacekeeping. As I believe I mentioned earlier, Fiji plays a prominent role in international peacekeeping operations (PKO). The Fijians took great pride in their peacekeeping role, and we viewed their participation as an important contribution to international security. We supported their deployments through the training and military equipment we provided. In an effort to increase global peacekeeping contributions, President Obama decided to host a gathering at the UN General Assembly in the fall for countries that pledged to increase their PKO deployments. Believing that PM Bainimarama would be keen to attend that gathering, and knowing that this was an issue where U.S. and Fijian interests aligned, I saw this as an opportunity to encourage Fiji to offer to increase its PKO contributions. So, our Political officers worked with Fiji's Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense to convince them, and ultimately were successful. Therefore, PM Bainimarama did receive an invitation to President Obama's gathering.

In addition to peacekeeping, another big focus of our security cooperation with Fiji was building humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) capacity, since militaries are often called upon to contribute to and even lead responses to natural disasters, such as cyclones. During my first year in Fiji, we had a wonderful opportunity to highlight our HADR cooperation when the U.S. Navy hospital ship Mercy visited Fiji. The Mercy first docked in Suva. We kicked off the visit with a big reception on board the ship. I was joined by an Admiral who flew in for the occasion to preside with me at the event. They then spent several days conducting exercises with Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), and exchanges with Fijian medical personnel. They also opened the ship's medical clinic up for free medical care for members of the public.

After several days in Suva, the ship sailed north to Vanua Levu, Fiji's second largest island, where they conducted more exercises, medical exchanges, and exercises. We decided that that was a good opportunity for me to make my debut visit to Vanua Levu, so we planned a visit around the Mercy's visit. But I did several other things, as well, including meeting with local journalists, meeting with U.S. Peace Corps volunteers serving on Vanua Levu, and attending the launch of the sugar cane crushing season at one of the main sugar cane mills. (I even got the opportunity to push the button to dump the first load of sugar cane into the crusher, which was fun.) Also, as part of the Mercy's visit, I observed some of the training taking place at the local hospital, and presided at the ribbon-cutting for the unveiling of a new school room Mercy personnel had built in a local village as one of their Civic Action projects. Needless to say, the Mercy's visit –

both to Viti Levu and Vanua Levu -- generated tons of positive press and good will for the U.S. in Fiji, concretely demonstrating the value of our security cooperation.

On a less positive note, one of the challenging issues that popped up early in my tour was a labor dispute that was festering between Fijian labor unions and the Fijian Government. Of course the Employer Associations were also involved in the negotiations, but the hard line was primarily coming from the government, which feared that if they acquiesced to labor demands, it would harm the Fijian economy. The unions took their complaint to the International Labor Organization (ILO). The ILO had a process to encourage resolution, but as the impasse continued the ILO threatened to launch something called a Commission of Inquiry, which is a black mark against a country. This dispute impacted our relations because: a) the U.S. is a strong proponent of labor rights, and b) if unresolved, the dispute could trigger a suspension of Fiji's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) privileges. GSP privileges, as you probably know, reduce tariffs on products imported into the U.S., so suspending GSP would have adversely impacted Fiji's trade revenue.

We worked closely with international partners to encourage the government to sit down and negotiate seriously with the labor and employers groups to work through the labor grievances. Our POL-ECON officers also met regularly with the parties, and I met a number of times with the Ministers of Labor and Economy to encourage a more constructive approach to the problem. The issue dragged on for quite a while, but eventually they were able to come to terms on an agreement that avoided the Commission of Inquiry, and preserved U.S. GSP privileges.

In a similar vein, another phenomenon we confronted was a hyper-sensitivity on the part of the Fijian Government to criticisms from the opposition. Fiji First, the party heading the government, had won a clear majority in parliament. So they didn't have any problem getting their legislations passed. However, they tended to ram bills through without giving members of parliament adequate time to review and debate them. And the government deployed some very heavy-handed tactics to marginalize the opposition. As a result, I considered it particularly important to meet periodically with opposition leaders to show our support for political pluralism.

Moving on to my initial engagements with my other countries, I made my first trip to Kiribati in late February -- February 23 – about three weeks after my arrival in Fiji. Kiribati faces a lot of health challenges. Malaria and dengue fever are a risk, and when I went for my first visit they were in the middle of an epidemic of chikungunya (another mosquito-borne illness). I was warned by our med unit to make generous use of mosquito repellant while I was there. So I really slathered it on, even when I went to bed!

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: Fortunately I avoided mosquito bites. But at the little hotel where we were staying, we were sitting at the café in the garden with some UN staff who were also visiting, and one of them fainted. They took him to the hospital, and it turned out that he

had chikungunya. Fortunately he recovered, but that gives you a sense of the challenges of traveling to remote islands in the Pacific.

Q: Wow.

You would think on a small island they would be able to eradicate mosquitoes, but.

CEFKIN: No, because Tarawa, the capital of Kiribati, is built on a small strip of land that circles a lagoon. On one side of the land you have the lagoon and on the other side the open ocean, so there's water and places for mosquitoes to breed everywhere. Also, the lagoon is very polluted.

Q: Oh, I see.

CEFKIN: It's beautiful to look at. When you drive along the island, you see this gorgeous aqua water. The locals do sometimes wade in to bathe, but we were warned to not even stick our toes in the lagoon, due to the risk of picking up an infection, and I did hear of cases of visitors getting nasty infections from the polluted water. Also, there's often a scarcity of fresh water on the island, and because Tarawa is so densely populated, with people living close together and often close to their livestock – pigs and chickens -- sanitation is a problem.

Q: Oh, I see. Okay.

CEFKIN: Yeah; it's a challenging environment.

The people are lovely though – very friendly, very spunky, and very cheerful in general. I really enjoyed spending time with them.

The afternoon of my arrival, I met with officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then presented my credentials to President Anote Tong. As mentioned earlier, he had become prominent internationally, sounding the alarm on the existential threat Kiribati and other small island developing states (SIDS) faced from climate change. In fact, shortly before my arrival, Tarawa had been inundated by a very strong king tide that had caused serious damage to parts of the island, including to a maternity hospital that had to be evacuated. I reiterated President Obama's commitment to achieving a robust international climate agreement at the upcoming climate negotiations in Paris, and I reviewed the projects the U.S. was undertaking in Kiribati to build climate resilience.

We also discussed the Tuna Treaty. I had mentioned that the Pacific Island countries that were party to the treaty, wanted higher revenues for access to their waters by U.S. fishing vessels. Kiribati was one of the principal holdouts in settling on new terms, and we were having trouble getting them to spell out their position. So I encouraged Tong to have his Minister sit down with our negotiators.

Q: Oh, I see.

CEFKIN: On the topic of fisheries, we also discussed our Shiprider program, which helped Kiribati crack down on Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated (IUU) fishing in its territorial waters and EEZ, which was a very positive feature of our cooperation. In terms of our broader security cooperation, a U.S. Navy ship was scheduled to visit Kiribati to conduct medical and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) exchanges. (It was part of the same mission that deployed the USS Mercy to Fiji.) We talked about plans for that visit, and we discussed the ongoing efforts by the U.S. to recover and identify the remains of the American marines who died in the Battle of Tarawa. President Tong expressed his keen desire to see Peace Corps (which had closed its Kiribati program years earlier) return. I told him that the Embassy would continue to explore ways to achieve that goal. (The Embassy was working to make the case with Washington policy-makers that we should seek to place a couple of Peace Corps return volunteers in Kiribati and in Tuvalu, which had also had a Peace Corps program that had closed, to replant the Peace Corps flag in those countries. The return volunteers are former volunteers with technical skills, who are sent overseas for shorter stints to work on specific projects.)

Packing for trips to the remote island countries was tricky, because you had to be prepared for all sorts of contingencies. That was particularly true for my first visit to Kiribati. Even though most things in the Pacific are generally not overly formal, it's important for the Ambassador to look professional and presentable for the formal meetings, and dress in the region tends to be fairly conservative – with women expected to wear dresses that cover shoulders and knees. But also the trips sometimes involved visiting rugged areas. On this trip, part of my itinerary was traveling from South Tarawa to North Tarawa to preside at the ground-breaking of one of our USAID projects. The project was part of a program called the Coastal Community Climate Adaptation Program (CCCAP). The particular project we were inaugurating was a plan to build a medical clinic that would withstand the impacts of climate change and also serve as an emergency shelter for the community. To get there, we took a boat across the lagoon and then walked through sand to get to the site. So I was advised to wear shorts and flip flops and take a sarong to wear over the shorts once we arrived at the site. Fortunately, the trip went smoothly, and we had an excellent event to inaugurate the project.

Q: Oh, wow.

CEFKIN: I should mention that during the week that I was in Kiribati, new ambassadors from the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain were also there to present their credentials and make their introductory visits. After we presented our credentials, President Tong hosted a reception for us. In addition to those events, and the trip to North Tarawa to launch the USAID project, I spent my time meeting with various ministers, the Australian and New Zealand High Commissioners (both countries have embassies there) and with other key officials, such as UN representatives. So it was a productive initial visit.

Q: Ah.

CEFKIN: The next country I visited was Tonga. That was in April of 2015. The King of Tonga, King Tupou VI, had ascended to the throne after his brother, King Tupou V died in 2012, but he was scheduled to have his formal coronation in July 2015. It was important to present my credentials then so that I would be able to attend the coronation.

Tonga's a really fascinating country. Culturally it's somewhat unique; given that it is the one remaining monarchy in the Pacific Island region. Socially it's somewhat formal and fairly conservative. I was told that when I presented my credentials to the king, I should wear a hat and gloves. There's a special history to the gloves I wore. My mother was always trying to pass on clothes and things she owned to me and my siblings. I guess that's a typical parent-child thing. Generally they were things I didn't really want, but I took a couple of pairs of gloves that she had (from the days when women tended to wear gloves a lot) thinking they might come in handy at some point. Sadly, both my parents passed away before I became an Ambassador. My father died in 2004, and my mother in 2014. But my mom at least knew that I was on track to becoming an ambassador before she passed. When I was at her bedside just before she passed, I told her that I would wear her gloves when I presented my credentials to the King of Tonga. She squeezed my hand when I told her that, so I believe that she heard and understood. So those gloves had special meaning. I also bought a hat before I left the U.S. and even bought a hat box, so that I could carry it on the plane when I traveled to Post. It was a hassle carrying that extra box, but at least I preserved it from being crushed.

Q: Very sweet.

CEFKIN: The architecture in Tonga is somewhat unique, and the local dress is very distinctive. The men wear a woven straw mat around their waists. It's supposed to show humbleness. The women wear straw belts with woven straw tassels over their skirts. As mentioned earlier, Pacific Islanders tend to be quite religious, and that was certainly true in Tonga. In fact, most businesses were required to close on Sundays there. They were quite strict about that, so that everyone could go to church. The official religion was Wesleyan (Methodist), though there are other Christian denominations there as well. In particular the Mormons have gained a substantial following in many of the PICs, including in Tonga, Fiji, Samoa, and Kiribati.

Q: Interesting.

CEFKIN: In Nuku'alofa, which is the capital of Tonga, I stayed at a hotel called Little Italy. It was owned by an Italian man married to a Tongan woman. It was a friendly and charming place. It also had a very good Italian restaurant. In fact there were several decent Italian restaurants in Nuku'alofa. My Embassy team and I arrived in the afternoon, got settled at the hotel, and the next morning I presented my credentials to His Majesty King Tupou VI at his palace. The tradition was that after the presentation of credentials, the King invited the new ambassador to tea. The ceremony and the tea was just one-on-one. We had an interesting conversation. He's a highly educated, very urbane gentleman. He was interested to hear about my experiences in Burma. We also talked

about Thailand. Of course he knew the Thai royal family. And we discussed bilateral relations.

In addition to the audience with the King, I met with officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the Prime Minister. The PM, Akilisi Pohiva, had been a longtime pro-democracy activist. He was the first commoner who was elected to that position. Among the other officials I called on was the Chief of Defense – someone I found to be very capable and thoughtful. Tonga was one of our closest security partners in the region. As I think I said earlier, in addition to our standard security assistance programs, Tonga (at that time) was the only Pacific Island Country to have a State Partnership Program. We also had a Shiprider program with Tonga. On the public diplomacy front, we had an American Corner in Nuku'alofa, so I visited that and spoke to a group of students.

Very importantly, we had an active Peace Corps program in Tonga. At the beginning of my tour, the Peace Corps Director in Fiji oversaw the Tonga program. But we had a small Peace Corps staff in Nuku'alofa to manage the day-to-day. They were the one full-time U.S. Government presence in Tonga. Later in my assignment, Peace Corps decided to assign the Tonga Program its own Peace Corps director which was a good move. In any case, I visited the Peace Corps Office to meet all the staff and some of the volunteers who were based locally. I also met with local journalists, and officials from the Foreign Ministry and the Crown Prince hosted a dinner for me and my Embassy team. The Crown Prince, a young man with a lovely young family, was very friendly and seemed quite down to earth. So, it was a good first visit to Tonga.

The next country I visited was Tuvalu, but before I describe that visit, it's worth talking about some intervening events.

Q: Yeah, uh-huh.

CEFKIN: The Pacific Island region is very vulnerable to tropical cyclones (i.e., hurricanes). In March 2015 there was a strong cyclone, named Cyclone Pam that swept through the region. The tracks of cyclones are always a little hard to predict. So Embassy Suva geared up our emergency preparations. Ultimately the storm veered further north. We got a lot of rain in Fiji, but didn't suffer the worst effects. Pam did a lot of damage to Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. Also, the storm surge from the cyclone, combined with king tides, impacted Kiribati and Tuvalu.

Q: Ah, uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Normally, as mid-ocean islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu aren't impacted by cyclones, but in this case, the combination of the storm surge and king tides did significant damage to several parts of those two atoll island nations. Fortunately, there were no deaths in either country, but the storm ravaged homes, crops, and livestock on several islands. In Kiribati, the storm also damaged a critical causeway linking two parts of South Tarawa (the capital). In Tuvalu, some 400,000 people suffered property loss. While that may not sound like a huge number, when you consider that Tuvalu's total

population was around 10,000, it meant that close to half the country's population was impacted. Kiribati suffered a similarly strong impact. From my time dealing with flood emergencies in Thailand, where I had worked closely with the Office of Disaster Assistance (OFDA) – part of USAID – and I knew the importance of moving quickly to offer U.S. assistance. So we coordinated with State to tee up a disaster assistance determination – something U.S. Ambassadors can do with Washington approval. And I contacted the High Commissioners (ambassadors) from Tuvalu and Kiribati to ask if their governments would accept U.S. assistance. They quickly agreed.

So we provided $50,000 in emergency relief to each country. Generally this emergency assistance is channeled through NGOs, such as the International Red Cross, which is what we did in this case. It's used to purchase relief supplies such as tents, water purification equipment, and food, etc.

So that was a positive backdrop to my initial visit to Tuvalu in May 2015. The government was pleased that the U.S. had taken notice of their situation and had quickly provided assistance.

Q: Ah. Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Tuvalu, as I described earlier, is a small country, and Funafuti – the island where the capital is – is probably less than a square mile in terms of total land area. When you fly into Funafuti and you look out of the plane window as you're descending, it looks like you're going to land in the ocean. Then at the last minute you see a small strip of land. So that's rather thrilling.

Q: Wow

CEFKIN: As you would expect, the airport there is also small. At the side of the airport they had a little VIP room. Standard protocol, when Ambassadors or other dignitaries arrived, was to take them to the VIP room to wait while the Foreign Ministry officials collected bags and handled the immigration/customs processing. (This was also standard in the other Pacific Island countries.) But the VIP room at the Funafuti airport was particularly interesting.

When they ushered me to the VIP room there were a couple of Tuvaluan ministers there and the Taiwan Ambassador. (Taiwan, by the way, is the one country that has an embassy in Tuvalu.) So they introduced themselves and we chatted. Then the Prime Minister, Enele Sopoaga, came along. (I recognized him from photos I'd seen.) He said "oh, you arrived; good," and he proceeded to make conversation with me. I was confused, because I knew I was scheduled to have a meeting with him later in the afternoon. So I wondered whether the schedule had changed and whether the meeting at the airport was my meeting with him. Eventually he moved on, and I was taken to the hotel to check in. What I discovered was that it was customary in Tuvalu for senior government officials and the Taiwan Ambassador to go hang out at the VIP room when the plane came in (which was twice a week) to see who was coming and going and to schmooze. It was quite charming.

Q: Okay.

CEFKIN: I should also mention that residents of Funafuti who lived by the runway, would bring their chairs outside and sit and watch the planes coming and going. And when planes weren't scheduled, people would play soccer on the runway.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: So, that was the custom. (Laughs)

So, they took me to the Vulangi Hotel. It was basically the only hotel in Funafuti, though there were also a few guesthouses. The hotel was pretty bare bones. In fact, one of the things I learned for succeeding trips to Funafuti was to always take an extra plastic bag or two to use for trash, because the rooms didn't always have trash cans. It was a friendly place though, and they even flew a U.S. flag outside when I was there, in my honor.

Once my team and I got checked in, changed money and had some lunch, it was time to go to my meetings. We toured the island a bit, and met with local representatives of the Red Cross to discuss Cyclone Pam relief efforts. Then we went to the Government headquarters, which was one building, where I met with the Foreign Minister, and with the Minister of Fisheries – a really nice gentleman who was very helpful to us in Tuna Treaty negotiations. Then I had my formal meeting with Prime Minister Sopoaga. We had a good discussion covering the upcoming climate talks in Paris, and the Tuna Treaty. He thanked us for the assistance in response to Cyclone Pam. He pressed us to remediate the barrow pits (that was before New Zealand came in and saved the day). He also urged us to open an Embassy in Funafuti, and pressed us to return Peace Corps to Tuvalu. (As with Kiribati, we had had a Peace Corps program in Tuvalu that had been very popular, but had closed at a point when Peace Corps had down-sized.) The Tuvaluans desperately wanted Peace Corps back. I promised we would make a positive recommendation to Peace Corps.

One funny anecdote – as was the case when I visited the other countries outside of Fiji, the government assigned a car and driver to take me around to my engagements. But at the end of the day, when we left the meeting with the Prime Minister we couldn't find the car and driver. My control officer said, "I don't think it's too far to walk to the hotel." So I looked over, and we were literally right next door to the hotel! That's a good illustration of the dimensions of Funafuti.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Other meetings I had during my visit included a meeting with an Australian who managed the Australian Patrol Boat Program. Like our Shiprider program, it was a program to help the PICs patrol their EEZs to guard against IUU fishing. The Government of Australia actually gave every Pacific Island country a patrol boat (or in some cases more than one) and assigned an Australian expert, often a retired naval

officer, to each country to manage the program. So he was a very good source of information about the local scene. I also met with a former Peace Corps volunteer, who had married a local woman and stayed in Tuvalu. He was also a good source of information, and of course, we discussed prospects for returning Peace Corps to Tuvalu.

One of the two nights I was there, the Government hosted a reception for me, which was lovely. In the category of "it's a small world," one of the people I met at the reception was an American Baptist Pastor, "Pastor Charlie," who, it turned out, was from Fort Collins, Colorado, where I grew up!

Q: Ah, uh-huh.

CEFKIN: His father had been associated with Colorado State University, which is where my father had taught. Pastor Charlie had decided to become a missionary in Tuvalu, though it was never clear to me why he had picked Tuvalu, so he moved his wife and kids to Funafuti. They were a nice family. As with the other PICs, most Tuvaluans were Methodist, so it wasn't clear to me how much of an inroad Pastor Charlie made, but they seemed to get along with the locals. Anyway, I made a point of meeting with him whenever I visited Tuvalu.

There's one point I'll make to highlight Tuvalu's vulnerability, as a low-lying atoll nation. On that first trip I made to Funafuti the Vulangi hotel and the government building were right on the edge of the ocean. One night, as I was in bed, I heard what sounded like big waves crashing against the back of the hotel. I thought it was a bit strange, but I decided not to worry. The next day I mentioned it to a Foreign Ministry official I was meeting. He said that they had had a tsunami warning.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: He explained that tsunami's hadn't previously been a threat to the island, but that such warnings were becoming more frequent. I later learned that the impacts of climate change, such as ocean warming, were damaging the coral reefs that had previously served as breaks against tsunami waves. There really is no high point on the island; the highest point is the third floor (top floor) of the government building. So, the official told me that when they got those warnings, they picked up the elderly and other vulnerable residents and brought them to the government building. The only other option in the event of a tsunami was to climb a tree.

Q: Boy.

CEFKIN: Yeah, that was a real challenge. Even absent tsunamis, if sea levels rise several feet by the end of the century, as a number of climate scientists are predicting, the islands of Tuvalu, Kiribati, and other atoll countries, will cease to be inhabitable, so the people of those countries really do face an existential threat.

On a happier note, I discovered that Tuvalu is a land of spectacular sunsets. One evening I was in my hotel room getting ready for the evening reception when I looked out the window and saw a beautiful sunset. So I started taking pictures, thinking it would just be for a few minutes. But I became mesmerized, watching for an hour as the light, colors, and clouds kept shifting, from one gorgeous scene to another. I had a similar experience during a subsequent visit to Funafuti, and once again couldn't resist taking tons of pictures.

Q: It's a little after three, but I'm fine as long as you would like to go on.

CEFKIN: Okay. I have another thing at 3:30, so maybe I'll just sort of go about another ten minutes or so and then break if that's okay.

Q: Yeah, that's fine.

CEFKIN: Before I talk about my initial visit to Nauru (my 5th country of accreditation), I'll talk about an interesting event I participated in in Suva in June 2015. When I was giving the Fiji overview, I mentioned a new regional organization Fiji had launched called the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF). As you may recall, PM Bainimarama established it due to his unhappiness at Fiji being suspended from the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) after the coup. PIDF excluded Australia and New Zealand from membership, based on the complaint that Australia and New Zealand dominated the PIF meetings and didn't adequately listen to the views of other Pacific Island leaders. (The primary issue of contention was climate change. The PICs were particularly unhappy with Australia's climate change policy, including Australia's continued mining of coal and reluctance to adopt bold emission-reduction targets.)

The other PICs varied in their response to PIDF. Some leapt onboard and joined. Others felt caught in the middle, not wanting to alienate Australia and New Zealand or Fiji, so they participated in PIDF discussions, but didn't formally join. Needless to say, Australia and New Zealand took a dim view of PIDF. I decided that it was important for us to have some contact with the organization, so we struck a middle course, meeting with members of the PIDF Secretariat occasionally, but making clear that we saw PIF as the preeminent Pacific Island regional organization.

Anyway, Bainimarama decided to host a PIDF summit. He invited all Pacific Island leaders to Suva to develop a united PIC position heading into the negotiations on the Paris climate agreement. Most of the PIC leaders did show up, even the Prime Minister of Samoa who had been at odds with Bainimarama, and who had kept PIDF at arm's length. PIDF also invited representatives of business and civil society, making the point that it wanted to hear multiple perspectives, not just those of governments. And they invited the diplomatic corps. I decided to attend the summit, in part because it was a good opportunity to see the leaders of my other countries. So my team and I worked to set up bilats with them on the margins of the summit. Additionally, I thought it was important to hear what the PIC leaders were saying about their expectations for the Paris negotiations.

The conference discussions were very open. The organizers encouraged anyone attending the plenary discussions to feel free to offer comments. At one point, the discussion turned to the issue of "loss and damage." That's the idea that the countries that are the most responsible for climate change (as the biggest greenhouse gas emitters), such as the U.S., should pay countries that are the least responsible and most vulnerable to climate change. The Pacific Island countries clearly fall in this latter category. In fact, Tuvalu, one of the most vulnerable countries, rates as the lowest emitter. So, a number of the PICS, including Tuvalu, were very active in pushing for loss and damage, as part of the Paris talks. This was problematic for the U.S., since we knew that members of Congress, particularly on the GOP side of the aisle, would have real heartburn with any agreement that required the U.S. to pay damages. We were afraid such a provision could sink chances for the U.S. to ratify the future agreement. Therefore, I decided I needed to speak up to defend the U.S. position.

Fortuitously, at the same time as the PIDF gathering was taking place, President Obama was visiting Alaska to highlight the impact of climate change there. He showed the melting glaciers and villages that were being forced to relocate due to rising sea levels. His visit was being prominently covered on CNN which was being broadcast on TV screens all around the conference rooms we were in. So, when I stood up to speak, I was able to point to the President's Alaska trip as evidence of U.S. understanding of the seriousness of the problem and commitment to addressing it. I stressed the steps the U.S. was taking to reduce our emissions and commitment to increasing funding to help the PICs and other vulnerable countries adapt to the effects of climate change. Then I explained the difficulties "loss and damage" would pose. I received a fairly positive response to my intervention. Several PIC leaders came up to me afterwards to continue the discussion with me. The clip of my intervention was also covered by local TV. So, I felt I had helped advance the U.S. agenda.

The summit did result in the drafting of a communique dubbed "the Suva Declaration," that became a common PIC platform for the negotiations in Paris. The declaration contained a number of points, including the demand that global emissions reductions be sufficient to ensure that temperatures not exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. At the time, the working assumption was that temperatures should not exceed 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, but some climate scientists started to predict that the tipping point was closer to 1.5 degrees, so the PICs wanted that as the benchmark. (This became significant during the final Paris talks, which I will talk about later.) In any case, it was a very interesting meeting, and we were able to alert Washington negotiators as to the positions Pacific Island negotiators would take in the Paris talks.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Although not strictly in chronological order, I'll talk now about my initial visit to Nauru, which I did in August 2015. Getting there is a bit challenging. There was one direct flight from Fiji, but it would've put me there over a weekend, which wasn't very practical in terms of the business I needed to do. So instead, I traveled via Brisbane. I also

took advantage of the fact that I was traveling via Australia to spend a couple of days in Canberra for consultations with our Embassy there (since some of the agencies based there provided support to Embassy Suva.) I then flew to Brisbane, where my control office and protocol officer joined me. We spent the night and then headed to the airport in the wee hours of the morning for our Air Nauru flight to Nauru. I will say that the service on Air Nauru was very friendly, and they fed us a ton.

Once we arrived, and cleared the immigration/customs formalities, they took me straight to the office of the President, Baron Waqa, so that I could present my credentials. They had a small welcome ceremony for me with the playing of the anthem and review of troops (which in the case of Nauru, are their national police). Then, I presented my credentials to the President and had a meeting with him.

My other engagements in Nauru included meetings with several cabinet members, officials at the Foreign Ministry, and the Speaker of the Parliament. I also had a very useful meeting with officials at the Australian High Commission. Australia is Nauru's principal development partner, and other than Taiwan, they were the only country with a permanent diplomatic presence, so they had very interesting insights.

Nauru's economy was heavily based on phosphate, but most of the phosphate had been mined. We saw the substantial environmental damage from the phosphate mining throughout the island's central plateau. There was still a little bit of residual phosphate mining taking place, but this resource was nearing its end. Another challenge was the difficulty of transporting the phosphate, since Nauru's port was in disrepair.

During my time there, probably the biggest issue concerning relations with Nauru was the presence of the Australian-run refugee processing center. To briefly recap – in an effort to stem the flow of boat people seeking asylum in Australia, the Australian government interdicted all boat arrivals and sent them to camps they established in Nauru and in Papua New Guinea. The refugees came from all over including Iran, Burma, Nepal, Sri Lanka and other countries in the Middle East and Asia. Australia received a lot of international criticism for this. The UN and international humanitarian groups were concerned, and there were reports by human rights groups claiming bad conditions and mistreatment of the asylum-seekers in these camps. Naturally, we wanted to see the camp and assess the situation, which we did. We were accompanied on our tour by camp administrators, so we weren't able to talk freely to the refugees, but what we observed was a clean, orderly camp – better conditions than other refugee camps I had visited.

The Australians paid Nauru to host the refugees. It was a major source of income for the country. The camp was a source of jobs for Nauruans, but also, very interestingly, the Government of Nauru and local businesses employed a number of the refugees. Refugees whose cases had been adjudicated, were allowed to leave the camp and go out into the local community. A number of them established small businesses, such as restaurants. The Nauruans prided themselves on welcoming these refugees and said they were having a positive impact on the country. They commented that they were very happy that they now had a greater variety of restaurants to choose from. I concluded that the reports of

harsh conditions and mistreatment were vastly overblown, but that the real problem was that the refugees, understandably, didn't want to be stuck for the rest of their lives on a small island in the middle of the Pacific.

Q: Wow. Okay.

CEFKIN: The other big issue in Nauru at the time was the ongoing prosecution of several opposition leaders who had led protests against the government that had resulted in arson. The prosecution was likely justified, but the government prosecutors were taking a very draconian approach to the case, and there were questions about due process. I was able to quietly meet with a couple of the opposition members being prosecuted to get their version of events, so that was interesting.

The president of Nauru was a very colorful figure. He loved to sing and play guitar. Before I left, he hosted a lunch for me where he and others serenaded us. So that was a fun memory.

Q: Laughs.

CEFKIN: Speaking of festivities, I'll talk now about the Coronation of King Tupou VI of Tonga, which took place in July 2015 – July 4th, to be exact. That was definitely an occasion where I had to take formal wear and my hat and gloves. The celebrations included several days of going from one feast to another, where we sat at long banquet tables full of roast pigs and other local delicacies.

Q: Oh, yeah. Eating and drinking for your country.

CEFKIN: Indeed. The formal coronation was held in church with all the pomp and circumstance you would expect for such an occasion. It was a very nice ceremony with a lovely choir that even sang the "Hallelujah Chorus."

Of course, the full assemblage of the diplomatic corps accredited to Tonga was there. In terms of other dignitaries, Crown Prince Naruhito (now Emperor) of Japan and his wife Masako were there. There were also a couple of Europeans who claimed to be Habsburg royals. (Both laugh)

Q: They're everywhere.

CEFKIN: Yeah. At all the banquets they were always seated on the dais with the King and Queen, as was the President of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, who was a cousin of the King. In addition to me, the U.S. delegation included my defense attaché and his wife, a Marine Corps general from the Pacific Command, and the Adjutant General of Nevada (who oversaw our State Partnership with Tonga). We also brought a Marine Corps band from Hawaii to participate in a special tribute to the King, along with the Tongan military band, military bands from Australia and New Zealand and local dance troupes. That was a lot of fun.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: At the various events and when I was out and about in the town of Nuku'alofa I ran into quite a few Tongan Americans who had come for the occasion, so I enjoyed talking to them. Quite a few of them were Mormon. The Mormon Church had made considerable inroads converting Tongans. In fact, one of the King's sons had converted to Mormonism. He was apparently there for the coronation but wasn't at the official events, which was interesting. Clearly the King wasn't happy that he had left the official church.

Q: Wow. Interesting.

CEFKIN: In September 2015, I traveled to Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea (PNG) to attend the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders' Meeting. As mentioned earlier, I was designated by State to serve as the U.S. representative to PIF. Although, for the Leaders' meetings, State usually designated a senior USG official to head the U.S. delegation, so my role was to support the delegation head. The U.S. is not a member of PIF, but we are a dialogue partner. One day of the summit is designated for dialogue partners to join discussions and present a summary of their country's engagement with the region. It's really pretty formulaic, not a lot of real discussion takes place. The real value of attending these summits is being able to schedule bilateral meetings with the various leaders, to advance key issues.

For the Port Moresby PIF summit, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, Heather Higginbottom, was designated as our delegation head. (She had presided at my swearing-in ceremony, so I was happy to be working with her.) In addition to Deputy Secretary Higginbottom and me, other delegation members included our Ambassador to PNG, the Deputy Assistant Secretary who covered the Pacific Island region, the Deputy Climate negotiator, an official from the Ocean, Environment, and Science Bureau who handled Tuna Treaty negotiations, and a couple of officials EAP/ANP (our home office), and an Embassy colleague.

Our main focus for our meetings in Port Moresby was to coordinate approaches with Pacific Island leaders heading into the Paris climate negotiations, which is why the Deputy Climate envoy came. I decided I should get there a few days in advance of the Dialogue Partners session, to join the climate negotiator for bilateral meetings, which I did. We had some very useful discussions. Following up on the discussions I had had at the PIDF Summit in Suva, we explained the difficulties the loss and damage issue posed for the U.S., and asked for flexibility on that point. When Deputy Secretary Higgenbottom arrived, we had some additional bilateral meetings. We also sought to advance progress and the South Pacific Tuna Treaty, so I had some interesting sidebar discussions on that issue. In addition to the formal meetings there were a number of social/ceremonial events. The EAP DAS and I represented the U.S. at the welcoming dinner. It was a very colorful event, featuring dancers in their indigenous dress from many different PNG regions.

The other regional trip I did in 2015, was to Niue, which is a tiny little country northeast of New Zealand. It's a self-governing territory of New Zealand. It's not a UN member, however, it is a member of PIF and the Pacific Community (SPC). Our Embassy in New Zealand covers Niue. The population of Niue, which only totals a little over 1000, is ethnic Polynesian. I was told that there are more citizens of Niue living in New Zealand than in Niue itself. The island rests on tall limestone cliffs and is often referred to as "the Polynesian Rock." It's a charming little place and quite beautiful.

The reason I went there is that I was asked to head the U.S. delegation to a ministerial meeting of the Pacific Community. [NOTE: The Pacific Community was called the South Pacific Community, but to more accurately reflect the fact that some of its members are in the northern central Pacific, it changed its name in 2017. But it still goes by the acronym SPC.] As I relayed in the intro to my tour, the U.S. is a founding member of SPC, as are Australia, New Zealand, France, and the UK. In addition to the independent Pacific Island countries, the various territories are also members of SPC. They held annual meetings of all the members, and every other year the organization members met at the ministerial level.

To get there I had to transit New Zealand, so I stopped off in Auckland for a day to consult with our Consul General in Auckland. There are a lot of Pacific Islanders living in Auckland, so it was useful to get her perspective on regional relations and compare notes on Embassy Wellington and Embassy Suva's coverage of the region. The Niue meetings were interesting. As with the PIF meeting, it was an opportunity for bilateral consultations with other SPC members. I was joined on the delegation by our Suva-based USAID officer, the EAP/ANP representative who covers the regional organizations, and a couple of officers from Embassy Wellington. At the meeting I was able to announce a new USAID-funded climate adaptation assistance program that was designed to be implemented by SPC and PIF. That was well-received. On the lighter side, I discovered that one of the important things about these SPC gatherings is that they end with a talent night, where every delegation is supposed to perform. So we spent a fair bit of time coming up with and practicing a singing performance. We used the Beach Boys song "Surfin USA," and changed the words to an SPC theme. We enjoyed that experience.

Other than that there are a couple of other things I'll mention in terms of my first year at Post. In general, we didn't get many senior USG visitors in Suva, but our EAP Assistant Secretary Danny Russel did make a quick trip to Fiji. Of course, I knew him from my time working as Burma Advisor, so I was happy to have him come show Fijian leaders some attention and to reinforce U.S. support for strengthening democratic governance in Fiji. It was a quick trip – less than a full day – sandwiched between some meetings he had in Honolulu and a visit to New Zealand. His trip was further curtailed when his Fiji Airlines flight from Honolulu was delayed. Together with my POL-Econ Counselor, I had planned to meet A/S Russel and his assistant in Nadi, and I had worked with Foreign Minister Ratu Inoke Kabulabula to set up a meeting for him with PM Bainimarama at a hotel between Suva and Nadi (since the PM was also in the western part of the island). But the flight delay made that plan unworkable. Thankfully, with the FM's help, I was able to rejigger the schedule to accommodate a meeting with the PM in Suva that

afternoon. So my driver raced us to Suva. We had to drop a planned Country Team briefing, but otherwise we were able to preserve the key elements of the schedule, including the call on the PM, a press conference and a dinner with opposition representatives. All his events were positive, so we concluded the visit with a sense of satisfaction, though the poor guy had to endure 24+ hours without a real night's sleep!

The other big visit we had was by the Peace Corps Director, Carrie Hessler-Radelet. She had served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Samoa, so she felt a special connection to the Pacific Island region. She came to Fiji following a visit to Samoa. Our Peace Corps Country Director set up an excellent program for her, and I was able to join several of the events with her and our volunteers. I also hosted a reception for her in Suva. I learned that Kiribati Anote Tong was in Suva, so I invited him to the reception so he could discuss his keen interest in having Peace Corps return to Kiribati. Of course, we also talked to her about our proposal to send one or two Peace Corps Response Volunteers to Kiribati and Tuvalu, to re-plant a Peace Corps flag in those two countries. She was supportive in principle.

After the Director's visit, Peace Corps Headquarters sent an assessment team to visit both countries to explore conditions for volunteers. Of course we continued to advocate for the plan, but never got a definitive response from Peace Corps. What we heard through our Country Director was that Peace Corps had some concerns about the health infrastructure in Kiribati and Tuvalu. In earlier decades, Peace Corps had been quite expeditionary in terms of where it placed volunteers, which is why there had previously been programs in Kiribati and Tuvalu. But in more recent times the organization had become more cautious. This was also a reflection of the modern age. The Peace Corps country directors I worked with, talked about how the volunteers often skyped with their parents multiple times a day. Whereas, in the past, volunteers could only correspond with relatives at home by snail-mail, and were obliged to be much more independent.

So, I guess that more or less wraps up my first year in the South Pacific.

Q: Okay. So, let me pause the tape.

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Q: Today is May 26, 2020. We're resuming our interview with Judith Cefkin as ambassador in Fiji. And Judith, what years will you be covering today?

CEFKIN: Today I'll be covering 2016 and 2017.

Q: Good. All right.

CEFKIN: Although, before I talk about what transpired in 2016, there is one important thing I neglected to mention that our Mission engaged in at the end of 2015, which was support for the Paris Climate talks. I had talked earlier about how Embassy Suva elevated cooperation to combat climate change to our top strategic goal. In all my speeches, I

highlighted the U.S. commitment to tackling climate changes and the steps we were taking domestically to reduce emissions. We also worked to shine a spotlight on U.S. assistance to support climate adaptation in the Pacific Island region. Our USAID programs were concentrated on this goal.

We had one USAID program called the Coastal Community Climate Adaptation Program (CCCAP) that undertook projects at the village-level to help communities build climate resilience. Whenever possible, I attended the ribbon-cuttings for those projects to focus local press attention on what we are doing. I had mentioned the clinic we built as part of that program in Kiribati. In Fiji, there was one CCCAP event I presided at that was particularly poignant. It was in a village called Vunisavisavi on the island Vanua Levu. Due to rising sea levels and coastal erosion, the water was lapping at several of the village homes. So USAID partnered with Habitat for Humanity to build some new homes up a hill, away from the shoreline. These new homes were built to the necessary specifications to withstand the effects of strong cyclones. Pacific Islander villagers attach great importance to living where their ancestors are buried. During the ceremony, in expressing her gratitude, one elderly woman said that she had been prepared to die before she would move away from her ancestral land. During my three years in the region, I presided at ribbon-cuttings for CCAP projects in all five of my countries, some of which I'll talk more about later.

The other thing we did in all our bilateral and multilateral engagements (as I discussed in talking about attending the PIDF, PIF, and SPC meetings), was to work to narrow differences and fortify points of alignment in the negotiations for the new agreement set to be finalized in Paris. That helped tee things up for the final round of negotiations in Paris in December. We sent an FSN from our Regional Environmental Office, who was an expert on the climate talks and knew the key Pacific players to support the U.S. delegation.

Knowing that Pacific Island leaders would play an important role in the negotiations, the White House planned to have President Obama meet with a group of leaders from Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to seek their support on several key provisions. The group included Kiribati President Anote Tong, who, as I mentioned previously, had been particularly active in raising international alarm bells over the existential threat climate change posed to SIDS. The meeting was successful, but one of our partners who wasn't invited to the meeting, Tuvalu PM Enele Sopoaga, was disappointed at not being part of the discussion. Sopoaga was very active in the negotiations and was a particularly strong proponent of the "loss and damage" issue. So, of course, I regretted not having pushed for Sopoaga's inclusion. Secretary Kerry ended up negotiating directly with him a couple of times to broker an agreement on this difficult issue of loss and damage. They eventually found a compromise and then Prime Minister Sopoaga helped sell it to the other small island developing states. So, when on December 12, 2015, all the parties concluded the negotiations to unveil the new Paris Climate Agreement, I took great satisfaction in knowing that Mission Suva had played an important role in this outcome.

My husband came over for the holidays, so we had a nice time traveling around Fiji, including to a lovely resort on Malolo Island, off the west coast of Viti Levu, where we did some great diving.

Moving on to 2016, one of the interesting things I did early in the year was to visit Ovalau Island, off the east coast of Viti Levu. The main town on the island, Levuka, was Fiji's precolonial and immediate postcolonial capital. The downtown area has some lovely old colonial buildings and there is an organization called the National Trust that was interested in trying to raise funds to preserve those buildings. They gave us a tour and explained the history. There are important historical connections between Levuka and the United States, because U.S. whaling ships and other U.S. traders frequented the island. In fact, Nantucket (Massachusetts) and Levuka are sister cities. One of the whalers, a fellow by the name of David Whippy, jumped ship and settled in Levuka and became quite influential in the town's development. There was also a U.S. consul, who had moved from New Zealand to set up a consulate in Levuka. I believe I had mentioned that there was the incident where his property was burned down and the U.S. had demanded reparations. Williams is buried in Levuka. So I visited the graveyard where he is buried and there is a memorial to David Whippy. During his expedition to chart the waters of the Pacific Island region, U.S. naval officer Commodore Wilkes and his crew also spent a fair bit of time on Ovalau Island.

The other important U.S. connection to Levuka, is that there is a cooperative U.S.-Fiji tuna processing venture called PAFCO based there. It was a partnership between Bumblebee in the United States and the Fijian government. I visited the facilities, which was very interesting, and the PAFCO Director and staff hosted us for dinner.

We also visited a start-up producing kava that was having a lot of success marketing to the U.S. market. The company, called Taki Mai, was producing kava that was being bottled as a drink with different flavors added, and marketing them as sports drinks. So we saw where they cultivated the kava and the small factory-style room where they prepared the harvested kava roots for export. We also met with Peace Corps volunteers who were working on the island.

To get to Ovalau the options were either to take a small plane (though flights were infrequent) or to drive and take a ferry. The Political-Economic Counselor, who accompanied me on the visit, recommended the ferry and I agreed that that would make sense so that we would have the use of my car and driver. The trip went smoothly. We drove about an hour and a half north from Suva to the ferry terminal. The ferry was a pleasant experience. It wasn't crowded and the crew was delighted to have me aboard. They put us in the VIP lounge and they had a cook who kept trotting out dishes for us to try.

The trip back was a different story. We had to leave in the wee hours of the morning, when it was still dark, to make the ferry, which was about an hour's drive. We had a police escort, but for some reason the police sped ahead and didn't pay any attention to where we were. Then we had a flat tire. The driver said "we're pretty close, I think I can

make it to the ferry." My control officer said he thought that was a good plan. I had a slight doubt, but I trusted the driver's judgment. I asked him if we had "drive-on" tires that are supposed to be okay for a while after they go flat. He said we did. But, of course, we were in a big heavy armored car, so by the time we got to the ferry, the car was in pretty bad shape. The Embassy had to send another car and driver to pick us up at the ferry port and arrange to have the car towed back to Suva. So that was an unfortunate end to what was otherwise a great trip. But we were all fine, and the car was eventually repaired.

What dominated 2016 was a really strong cyclone that came barreling towards Fiji in February, around the time of my one-year anniversary at Post. As always with cyclones, it's hard to predict the path, but it appeared to be heading straight towards Suva. Our embassy jumped into our emergency action mode, going through our checklist of preparations -- topping off our residential generators and water tanks, putting up storm shutters, stocking up on food and water, and testing our phone tree. As the cyclone approached we sent all our staff home and told them to shelter in place.

The winds and rain started pelting us, but before the storm made landfall, it shifted course, heading north. So it wasn't a direct hit on Suva. Fortunately, everyone from the Embassy was ok. We did suffer some damage. At my residence a large tree from the neighbor's year blew down and damaged my fence. And of course, there were lots of tree limbs strewn around the grounds. Some of our local staff suffered more significant damage to their homes, but all-in-all we emerged relatively unscathed.

Other parts of Fiji were not so fortunate. The storm did major damage to a number of islands in the Lau and Lomaiviti island groups, to the island of Taveuni, to the southern part of Vanua Levu, and to the northern part of Viti Levu. It ended up as a category-5 cyclone. In fact, it was the strongest cyclone ever recorded in the southern hemisphere.

It took a while for the full damage assessment to come to light, but when it did, we learned that in some cases, entire villages were raised. In total forty-four people were killed. (That might not sound like a terribly large number, but when you bear in mind that the total population of the country is under a million, proportionally, it is high.

Q: Oh, wow.

CEFKIN: Most of them were either crushed by debris, flying tin roofs, or drowned by storm surge. There were some really tragic stories of kids who were literally ripped out of their parents' arms by the ocean's surge. There were also tens of thousands of homes and hundreds of schools destroyed, in addition to widespread damaged areas to crops and livestock.

We immediately made a donation to relief efforts through the Red Cross, though it paled in comparison to what other donors did. (I'll talk more in a bit about our further relief efforts.) The main responders, were Australia and New Zealand, which is appropriate, given their proximity to Fiji and the fact that they are Fiji's largest aid donors. They came

in with ships and aircraft to support the Fiji Government's logistics and ability to surveil the affected areas to see where help was needed.

Meanwhile, a few days after the cyclone, I (along with my Defense Attaché and the Pol-Econ Chief) were scheduled to be going to Tonga. That was because EAP Assistant Secretary Danny Russell, together with the commander of the Pacific Fleet and the head of the Coast Guard for our region, was making a tour of several Pacific Island countries, including Tonga. Naturally, we had done a lot of work to arrange the Tonga program and were scheduled to join them for the visit. Due to Cyclone Winston the Fiji airports were closed and flights canceled. We were supposed to actually be flying out of the Suva airport, but that was closed, so we assumed that we would have to cancel our participation in the visit, but our intrepid Pol-Econ Chief kept calling Fiji Airlines and learned that the Nadi airport would reopen the next day and had a flight to Tonga leaving that morning that would get us there in time. We had a lot of discussion about whether it would be safe to make the drive to Nadi in the early morning to make that flight (given our uncertainty about road conditions). I finally decided that it was worth the risk, with the understanding that we could always turn around, if we encountered problems.

We had to leave at the crack of dawn. Fortunately, the roads weren't too bad, and we made the flight and got to Tonga in time to greet A/S Russel and his party. It was an excellent visit. We had an audience with King Tupou VI, and meetings with the prime minister, foreign ministry, and the chief of defense. We also did a ribbon cutting of one of our USAID CCCAP projects. The project had constructed a community center that doubled as a storm shelter. That was lively and fun even. Of course A/S Russel met with our Peace Corps staff. By that time, Peace Corps had assigned a Peace Corps Director to head the Tonga program, so the Tonga Peace Director joined us for many of the events. Another event we had concerned the International Women of Courage Award. I'm sure you're familiar with that award.

Q: Oh, yeah, uh-huh.

CEFKIN: We had nominated a Tongan who was a transvestite for that award.

Q: Oh, interesting.

CEFKIN: Yeah, we thought it was innovative; though it turned out that we weren't the only Embassy that did that that year. In the Pacific, they have a culture -- sometimes referred to as the third sex – involving boys who identify as girls, who are widely accepted by their communities. That said, the issue of LGBT rights is complicated in the Pacific. In some countries there's a fair bit of hostility towards members of the LBGT community. Interestingly, Fiji was more advanced in that regard. Their constitution includes sexual identity as a protected freedom.

Q: Huh. Interesting.

CEFKIN: The president, prime minister and other senior Fijian officials were pretty good about articulating support for LBGT rights. The one area where they put their foot down was same-sex marriage. They weren't prepared to change the law to allow that.

Anyway, getting back to Tonga, we had nominated this trans-woman, Joey, who was very active in advocating for LBGT rights in Tonga and the broader region, for the International Woman of Courage award. She hadn't won, but we decided to use A/S Russel's visit to highlight her nomination. So we hosted a lunch for her, and A/S Russel gave her a certificate commemorating her nomination. So that was also a good event.

Prime Minister Pohiva, together with several members of his cabinet , also hosted a really nice dinner party for our delegation. As is typical for South Pacific events, the dinner included singing and dancing. There's a tradition in Tonga, and in several of the other countries, that you're supposed to go up to the dancers to show your appreciation. In Tonga, you do that by tucking money into their clothes. In Kiribati and Tuvalu, you show appreciation by spraying perfume on the dancers. That was the ceremonial part of the visit. It was very enjoyable, and the assistant secretary's party was very pleased, so it all worked out well in the end.

Q: But did you—is part of these ceremonies where you actually have to go up and dance as well?

CEFKIN: Yeah, often at the end, they invited the guests to join the dancing. In fact, at the last feast I attended as part of the coronation celebrations in Tonga, they encouraged us to join the dancing, which I of course did, and the crown prince came over and gave me money. (Both laugh)

Q: Because, you know, I had to ask because the terrible image, of course, is a grass skirt and a kind of a hula dance, which obviously is a silly, old prejudice, but it's probably the one thing in people's mind when they think about dancing and any of the Pacific islands.

CEFKIN: Well the dress varies in the different countries. In some cases they do wear grass skirts, and in general there is a lot of hip-swaying. But, as I mentioned previously, Christian missionaries had a lot of influence on dress styles in the Pacific Islands, and in Tonga dress was more conservative than in the other countries. So female dancers in Tonga tended to be more covered up. For the men it was different. In fact, I don't know if you remember the sensation the Tongan flag-bearer sparked at the summer Olympics in Rio in 2016. He was bare-chested, and as is the tradition, greased up so that his skin really shone. Needless to say, he was a fit, good-looking guy.

Q: Yes, yes, yes.

CEFKIN: He certainly got the attention of people around the world. Twitter blew up with women all over asking "how do we get to Tonga?"

I should add, that in terms of the dancing, while there were obviously some similarities, the different countries all had their cultural distinctions. The dancing in Kiribati was particularly unique, and I thought, hauntingly beautiful.

Q: Yes, okay.

CEFKIN: Returning to Fiji after the Tonga visit, my focus was very much on the response to Cyclone Winston. As I reported earlier, in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, we had made a donation to relief efforts through USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) in the form of a grant to the Red Cross. But it really was a drop in the bucket in terms of what the needs were and in comparison to what other partners were contributing. Australia and New Zealand were the primary responders, which is appropriate given that they are close neighbors and major donors to Fiji. France also provided a lot of logistical support, deploying planes and helicopters from their base in New Caledonia. In fact there's a disaster response agreement among Australia, New Zealand, France, and the U.S. that the U.S. is supposed to take the lead in disaster response in the northern part of the Pacific region, whereas Australia, New Zealand, and France are supposed to take the lead in the south. The UN was massively involved in providing and coordinating humanitarian assistance through the various UN agencies. And China flew in several planeloads of relief supplies.

Q: Huh.

CEFKIN: That made it challenging to demonstrate U.S. concern and friendship to the Fijian people during their time of need. While the division of labor for relief efforts described above makes sense from a practical standpoint, when you're the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji it is frustrating not to be able to mount a bigger U.S. show of support. I knew from my experience helping to manage the U.S. response to the epic floods in Thailand, that we wouldn't be able to engage the U.S. military in the response. Under our U.S. humanitarian assistance/disaster response laws, the U.S. military will only deploy, if USAID requests their support, based on a determination that response to the crisis exceeds the capacity of the host government and that lives are at stake. Even though the situation was very serious, once the cyclone passed there was no longer an imminent threat to life and limb, and with the support of Australia and New Zealand, the Fijian Government had the response in hand. The minister in charge of disaster response, was quite capable. So I knew that we didn't have grounds to request U.S. military support, but from a public relations standpoint, it would've been immensely helpful to be able to "wave the flag" by having the U.S. military join the efforts in some fashion.

One positive thing our military did do though, was that the deputy commander of the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) called Fijian Chief of Defense General Naputo to express solidarity and tell him to let him know if the Fijian Armed Forces needed anything. That actually made a huge impression on General Naputo. In fact, every time I met with him he recalled that conversation with the Deputy PACOM Commander, stressing how comforting that call had been. It goes to show that small gestures can be really meaningful.

In any case, our Embassy team leapt into action to seek ways to elevate the level of U.S. support. To be honest, we employed some smoke and mirrors. We were able to present a second, larger OFDA donation via the Red Cross, and OFDA dispatched a couple of officers from their regional headquarters in Bangkok to come to Fiji to assess the situation and catalog needed assistance. One thing they did was to accelerate a planned disaster response capacity-building project with the Fijian Red Cross. So we highlighted that project in our press engagement. We also were able to make some donations through UNICEF and other UN organizations. In fact, I traveled with the head of the UNICEF office in Fiji to a couple of the schools that had been badly damaged. We provided books, toothbrushes, and other supplies to help with health and sanitation. And we spent time with the kids, who were adorable, to talk to them about the trauma they had suffered, stress the importance of handwashing and hygiene, and encourage them to continue with their education. It was a positive experience, but on the drive up, we passed tons of blue tents with emblems proclaiming them as gifts from the People's Republic of China, which demonstrated how handtied we were in terms of the visibility of our assistance.

As part of the relief efforts, the Government of Fiji launched an "adopt a school" program, asking foreign donors to pledge to rebuild designated schools. The U.S. doesn't have a pot of money that facilitates that type of assistance. But I challenged our Country Team to think creatively about ways we might be able to respond to the call to help rebuild schools. To my great delight, our USAID Officer and the Defense Attaché (DATT) collaborated to come up with a plan. USAID was able to provide funds to procure building materials, and the DATT convinced PACOM to dispatch a military unit to do the rebuilding as a training exercise, under DOD's Title X authority. We chose two schools – one in Levuka, and one of the schools I had visited in Ra Province, on Viti Levu's northeastern coast. I was able to go back up to the Ra school for the ribbon-cutting when the project was completed, and the DCM attended the ribbon-cutting in Levuka. That was a positive demonstration of the U.S. commitment to the people of Fiji.

Then, when I returned to Washington for State's Chief of Mission Conference in March 2016, I went to USAID to lobby for more relief funding. I was told that there might be a possibility of some food aid through USAID's "Food for Peace" program. My efforts were successful and USAID made a grant to the UN's World Food Program to provide food to affected communities. The challenge with U.S. assistance being funneled through UN agencies is that it's harder to visibly demonstrate U.S. funding at work. But when I returned to Suva, we staged a donation ceremony and press conference to highlight that assistance – similar to what we had done with our other grants.

The other thing we did in all our press engagements was to highlight our ongoing contributions to helping Fiji build resilience through our USAID climate programs, such as the Coastal Community Climate Adaptation Program. In fact, I was very relieved to learn that the houses we had built in Vunisavisavi (one of the areas badly impacted by Winston) had held up and helped shelter the villagers.

Q: Ah. Wow.

CEFKIN: We also stressed that the preponderance of our military-to-military cooperation had focused on building humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capacity. Indeed, it was the Fijian military that was taking the lead in the post-Winston response efforts. So it was another example of U.S. support to Fiji more broadly.

One thing I neglected to mention previously, is that before Cyclone Winston hit, we had relocated a small USAID office from Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG) to Suva. However, the USAID Director and most of the USAID staff covering our region were based in Manila. But the USAID Manila Director, who then transferred back to USAID headquarters to serve as the Deputy AID Administrator for Asia, supported moving the American regional director who was in PNG to Suva for a number of reasons. One, was that Suva is the transportation hub for the Pacific Island region, so it was easier to cover the region from Fiji than it was from PNG. Another reason was that most other regional development offices were based in Suva. UN regional offices were based there, a number of other bilateral donors – including Japan, Korea, and the EU -- had their regional base in Suva, and key regional organizations including the Pacific Island Forum and the Pacific Community were either headquartered or had a large presence there. So having USAID in Suva made sense from a donor coordination perspective. A third issue concerned operating costs. Operating in Port Moresby was expensive, particularly given the city's extremely high crime rate and need to spend a lot on security. So moving to Fiji made sense from an economic perspective and was in the interest of the U.S. taxpayer.

Needless to say, I was strongly in favor of the move, but advocating for it was a bit delicate, since the Ambassador in PNG, a colleague who I admired and liked a lot, understandably wanted to keep the USAID office in Port Moresby. So, I pointed out the advantages of basing the office in Suva, but deferred to State and USAID headquarters to work it out. Eventually, they decided to move the office to Suva, though they kept a small presence in Port Moresby. Having the USAID officer and the very capable local assistant he hired in Suva was immensely helpful to our cyclone response.

Additionally, we inaugurated a new regional USAID climate adaptation program called Climate Ready, which was headquartered in Suva. That was a positive addition to our climate diplomacy.

Also in early 2016, Kiribati had elections. The incumbent president, Anote Tong, was a very charismatic figure internationally. He successfully raised global focus on the existential threat climate change poses to Pacific Islands, particularly to the atoll island nations such as Kiribati. But that meant that he was traveling away from Kiribati a lot. The Kiribati voters wanted a leader who was a bit more focused on domestic issues, so Tong's party lost and the leader of the new majority party, a gentleman by the name of Taneti Maamau, became president.

In the last session I talked about the tuna treaty issue. A number of the Pacific Island country governments were asking for higher compensation for fishing access rights in

their waters by U.S fishing vessels. Our negotiators were working to find an arrangement that would be responsive to the Pacific Islanders' request, but that would still be economically sustainable for the U.S. fishing fleets. The Kiribati waters are particularly rich in tuna, so they were a key player, but we were having trouble getting the Kiribati Minister of Fisheries to engage in the negotiations. We heard that the new President of Kiribati was scheduled to transit Fiji, so my DCM encouraged me to try to meet with him to discuss the treaty. I worked with the Kiribati High Commissioner (ambassador-equivalent) in Fiji, who was a friend, to set up the meeting. Accordingly, I made a quick trip to Nadi to meet with President Maamau near the airport when he transited. We had a very cordial and productive initial meeting. He was receptive to my pitch, and coordination with the Fisheries Minister he appointed did improve, so the meeting was very worthwhile.

The tuna treaty negotiations were very complex, but my DCM had an excellent grasp of the issues involved. So we sent him to join the next round of negotiations. Our negotiators were very frustrated, and were seriously considering pulling the plug on the talks. But my DCM recognized that one of our problems was that we had been negotiating at the technical level with the fisheries ministries, whereas to get the Pacific Island governments on board, we needed to elevate the discussion to the political level and emphasize the important role the Tuna Treaty played in broader U.S.-PIC relations. Accordingly, we worked to engage leaders and eventually succeeded in negotiating amendments to the Treaty that satisfied Pacific Island and U.S. fisheries concerns and preserved the treaty. One of the fun things I had the opportunity to do, once the negotiations were finalized, was to go to a regional meeting of fisheries officials in Nadi, to sign the revised treaty on behalf of the U.S.

Q: Ah.

CEFKIN: Another economic/commercial issue my team and I worked on was a Boeing commercial advocacy case. Fiji Airlines, which was the main airline servicing the Pacific Island region was planning to replace their medium-haul fleet. The planes they were using for their medium-haul flights were Boeing 737s, so, of course Boeing wanted to sell them the new model 737s they were building – the 737 MAX.

There was some important history to this procurement. Originally Fiji Airlines also flew Boeing planes (I believe 747s) for their long-haul flights. They were planning to replace the older long-haul lanes with the Boeing Dreamliner. I think they were the 767s. However, there was a long delay in Boeing's ability to deliver the new planes, so Fiji Airlines pulled out of the agreement with Boeing and purchased Airbus planes instead.

Q: According to the website, it's a 787 Dreamliner.

CEFKIN: Oh, okay. In any case, given this history, Boeing was determined not to lose this sale, but they were facing fierce competition from Airbus. We were authorized by the Department of Commerce to formally advocate on Boeing's behalf, so I had several meetings with the number two in the Fiji Government, Aiyaz Sayed-Khayum (who

served as the Attorney-General and Minister of Economy, as well as heading several other ministries) to talk up the benefits of the Boeing planes. The Government of Fiji drove a hard bargain, but eventually did award the contract to Boeing. That was a clear win for us. .

Q: Okay. Yeah.

CEFKIN: There were a few other trade/commercial issues that were percolating along. One concerned Fiji Water, a very successful U.S.-owned company. The family that owns it, the Resnick family, owns the Wonderful Company in California. It's the company that produces the POM juices and other fruit and nut products. Fiji Water exports are a major source of revenue for Fiji. Also, the unique design of the bottle with its enticing logo has helped promote tourism to Fiji. Nonetheless, there were tensions between Fiji Water and the Fiji Government. The Attorney-General (who I mentioned in conjunction with the Boeing sale) was particularly miffed that Fiji Water had trademarked "Fiji."

Q: Right. Oh.

CEFKIN: The Fiji Water officials were pretty aggressive about enforcing the trademark when it came to other beverage products. For example, while I was there, there was a company that developed a special vodka they labeled as "Fiji Vodka," and Fiji Water challenged that. Ultimately, the vodka company changed their name slightly, to avoid the legal challenge, but there was resentment. At any event he presided over the AG never allowed Fiji Water to be served, and despite lots of invitations, Fiji Water never (while I was there) got PM Bainimarama to visit their operations. Nonetheless, Fiji Water continued to operate successfully.

There was another case we worked on involving an American investor in Fiji's mahogany industry. He purchased Fijian mahogany logs and had a small factory in Fiji to produce planks for the U.S. market. His planks were what was used to make Gibson guitars. He had done a lot of work with the Government of Fiji to get them to adopt and enforce international transparency and sustainability standards. There's actually a U.S. law -- the Lacey Act – that prohibits U.S. businesses from engaging in wood trade with countries not adhering to these standards. So, through years of advocacy work, he had convinced the government to adopt an appropriate forestry management oversight regime, but he came to the conclusion that the rules weren't being enforced. We met with him and with Fijian officials a number of times to urge the Government to step up enforcement efforts. Eventually though, absent the necessary progress, the American investor reluctantly decided that there was too much risk to continuing his business, so he sold it and left Fiji. That was an example where unfortunately we didn't succeed in our economic/commercial objectives.

Other than that, in terms of U.S. business interests in Fiji, there were a number of U.S. owned or operated hotels and resorts. Many of the major international brands -- Hilton, Sheraton, Westin, Radisson -- were present in the major resort area near the Nadi international airport. Marriott opened a beautiful new hotel a bit further south, and there

were beautiful Intercontinental and Outrigger hotels along the Coral Coast between Nadi and Suva. This isn't an exhaustive list, just some key examples. Most of the aforementioned hotels were actually Fijian-owned but were managed by the hotel brands in question. There were also some U.S.-owned resorts, including some very exclusive properties. For example, there was one boutique resort about an hour outside of Suva, in an area called Pacific Harbor that was part of the Auberge chain. It was beautiful, but very expensive. I visited several times to meet with the managers and have coffee. They kept saying oh come stay here and offered to give me a reduced rate. But of course, I couldn't use my position as ambassador to accept discounted lodging if the offer wasn't extended to the broader Embassy staff, and I wasn't going to pay $500 to $1,000 a night for a room, so I never did take them up on the offer.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Switching back to Kiribati, I had talked about the election of the new president, who I had the opportunity to meet when he transited Fiji early in his tenure. A few months later, I received an invitation to attend the Kiribati Independence Day celebration he was planning. Normally I didn't travel to my countries of accreditation, outside of Fiji, for their independence days because it wouldn't have been sustainable. But since this was the first celebration for the Maamau presidency and since I hadn't visited Kiribati since his election, my team and I thought it would be an important show of support to attend. So I agreed to go. It was a very colorful and lively celebration. It was interesting to see which other Ambassador's attended. Since Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan had embassies in Kiribati, their High Commissioners/Ambassadors were naturally there. Other than that, there was an eclectic mix of other envoys, including my friend the Japanese Ambassador (also based in Suva), and the Polish Ambassador (who was based in Wellington). One of the other envoys was the Ambassador for the Order of Malta. He was actually a businessman from California. Kiribati is a Catholic-majority country, and apparently they have formal diplomatic relations with the Order of Malta.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: One special memory from that visit is that during the main celebration, which took place in the Tarawa sports stadium, they read to the assembled crowd the national day messages that foreign leaders had sent for the occasion. As you no doubt know, it's standard diplomatic practice to send these messages to other countries for their national days. Generally, it's considered quite pro forma, but when they announced the message from President Obama, the crowd erupted in cheers. (Something they did not do when the other messages were read.)

After that trip, I started preparing for the next Pacific Island Forum leaders' meeting, which was scheduled to take place in Pohnpei, in Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) in September. FSM is one of the three Pacific Island countries that has a Compact of Free Association with the U.S. Prior to the PIF meeting the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was planning to hold a big international congress in Honolulu. Most of the Pacific leaders attending PIF, were planning to go to Honolulu for

the IUCN gathering, so my Regional Environmental Officer, who together with me, covered the PIF meetings, decided it would be useful to go to Honolulu to see a bit more of the leaders and do some consultations with PACOM, etc., and then travel to Pohnpei from there.

The U.S. has a periodic dialogue with Pacific Island leaders called the "Pacific Island Conference of Leaders" (PICL). It's managed by the East-West Center in Honolulu, but they invite U.S. officials to attend and preside over several of the sessions. The East-West Center decided to sync that meeting with the IUCN, since Pacific leaders were planning to be in Honolulu for that. The State Department designated the Assistant Secretary for the Ocean, Environment, and Science to lead the U.S. delegation, accompanied by the EAP DAS who covered the Pacific. But the East-West Center was able to get White House agreement to have President Obama give a speech to the leaders at the conclusion of the PICL. Given my regional responsibilities, and the fact that many of the leaders of the countries I covered would be there, I thought it was important for me to attend the PICL. The East-West Center organizers were supportive of my attendance, but my colleagues in EAP didn't feel it was important for me to be there, so bureaucratically, it was very awkward. Ultimately, since I had to transit Hawaii anyway to get to Pohnpei, and it made sense to spend some time in Honolulu for consultations and the IUCN gathering, I elbowed my way into the PICL. Obama gave a fantastic speech, and I attended some fascinating and useful IUCN events. Also, I had a chance to touch base with the Pacific Command and have other valuable consultations, such as with the Coast Guard and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) regional offices there. NOAA helps with tracking fishery stocks, maintains a tsunami warning center and provides critical meteor logical information (such as cyclone-tracking) to the region. So that visit was very productive.

From Honolulu I flew on to Micronesia for the PIF. United Airlines services that route. It's a puddle-jumper that makes about five stops between Honolulu and Pohnpei, including two stops in the Marshall Islands, and several stops in various regional capitals of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). So it was a full-day trip even though, as the crow flies, it's not that far. The first evening, the ANP DAS and I met with our Ambassador to FSM and we all attended a welcome ceremony hosted by the FSM President. The next day, our delegation head, who was EAP Assistant Secretary Daniel Russel arrived and we swung into the usual round of activities – PIF events, bilateral meetings with other delegations and some bilateral events the Embassy had planned.

An interesting thing developed in Fiji while we were in Pohnpei. I had explained earlier that the Government of Fiji was very miffed over having been ousted from the Pacific Island Forum during the coup period. Following the 2014 elections, Fiji was invited to return to PIF, but out of pique the prime minister refused to attend, designating Foreign Minister Ratu Inoke Kabulabula to represent Fiji at the PIF Leaders Meeting in Papua New Guinea. For the Micronesia Leaders Meeting he sent Ratu Inoke again, although his portfolio had been switched to Defense Minister. I knew him well, and had a good relationship with him. We were due to have a bilateral meeting with him, when we got word that Fijian opposition leaders, along with some union leaders, had been arrested in

Suva. They were charged with attending "an unlawful meeting," because they hadn't obtained permits for the meeting. This clearly appeared to us to be an infringement of freedom of assembly, and was an example of the Fiji government's heavy-handed treatment of its political opposition. So we leapt into action to coordinate a response.

I approached my like-minded colleagues, other heads of mission from Suva who were at the meeting in Pohnpei, to suggest we coordinate our response, which they agreed was a good idea. And, of course, I kept in close touch with my DCM in Suva. A/S Russel and I had a very candid talk with the defense minister, who I think was personally appalled at the arrests, but he was obviously having to defend the government. We relayed our deep concern to the Fijian government. And we developed press guidance and a statement to note our concerns. Meanwhile, the embassy was keeping tabs on what had happened to the arrested leaders and making our concerns known. Fortunately, after a couple of days, the opposition leaders were released and the government agreed not to press charges, so the crisis was defused. Still, despite the fact that our public statements, while critical, had been very measured, the government was offended. That was another example of the government's hypersensitivity, which complicated the democratization process in Fiji.

My next big trip that year was in October. There's a group called the Coalition of Atoll Nations Against Climate Change (CANCC). I think it had been inaugurated by Kiribati in 2014 to draw attention to the exacerbated threat atoll island countries face from climate change. It included Kiribati, Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands and Tokelau in the Pacific, as well as the Maldives from the Indian Ocean. Tuvalu Prime Minister Sopoaga decided to host a CANCC gathering in Funafuti. In addition to inviting leaders from the other member states, and international organization representatives, he invited all the ambassadors accredited to Tuvalu. I had a good rapport with Sopoaga, and since we had worked so closely with him to conclude the Paris Climate Agreement, I decided to attend to show solidarity. I should mention that I had made a trip to Tuvalu earlier in the year to preside at a ribbon-cutting for one of our USAID CCCAP projects. A number of Pacific Island Communities are heavily dependent on collecting rainwater for their water supply, so the project provided some large, state-of-the-art water tanks to collect and store rainwater. The CANCC meeting was my third trip to Tuvalu.

In addition to me, my friend the EU Ambassador (also based in Suva), and the Swedish Ambassador (who was based either in Wellington or Canberra) attended, as did the Taiwan Ambassador – the one Ambassador resident in Funafuti. (In fact it was very cute – every time Sopoaga introduced the Taiwan ambassador he referred to him as "the dean of our diplomatic corps.") President Maamau also attended from Kiribati, and the other member countries sent representatives. It was a very interesting couple of days of meetings, with a lot of allusions to canoes (an important means of transport in the Pacific) and the importance of rowing together to avoid sinking under the threat of climate change.

While we were there we heard that enough countries had deposited their instruments of ratification that the Paris Agreement had formally entered into force. PM Sopoaga was jubilant upon hearing that news, so that was a great backdrop to our discussions. Another

fond memory I have from that gathering was the party with traditional Tuvaluan dances, at the conclusion of the meetings. We were all encouraged to get up and join, which we did. It was really fun to watch the Pacific leaders and see the look of sheer joy on their faces when they danced.

CEFKIN: Once I was back in Suva, after the CANCC, I was contacted by the U.S. Climate Envoy's Office and asked to approach to Government of Fiji to ask if they would consider being a candidate to head the next global climate gathering as President of the Conference of Parties (COP) – the decision-making body for all the countries signed on to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The presidency rotates among the UN geographic groupings. In 2015, when the Paris Agreement was finalized, the French headed COP-21. In 2016, COP-22 was set to be led by Morocco, and in 2017, a country in the Asia group was supposed to assume the Presidency. At that point only one country had expressed a possible interest in assuming the Presidency of COP-23, and it was a country that would have been very problematic for the U.S. So, our climate negotiators thought Fiji would be a good candidate. Knowing that it would be burdensome for a small country like Fiji to host the gathering in Fiji, Germany had agreed to provide the venue and help finance the conference in Bonn, but have Fiji chair the discussions.

I was confident that Fijian leaders would leap at the opportunity to play this role. They were very keen to do anything that burnished their image on the world stage, and they were obviously very passionate about the climate issue. So, I was pretty sure that I would be pushing on an open door. Also, as it happened, I was about to attend a big conference where the prime minister and other senior Fijian government officials would be present. At the conference, I pitched the idea to the Foreign Ministry Permanent Secretary, and with the Attorney General (the number two in government), and, at a tea break, with the Prime Minister himself. As I expected, right away he said "yeah, we'll do it."

I understood that I was going out on a limb, a bit, since I made the request based on a call from the Climate Envoy's Office, not on the basis of a fully-coordinated front channel instruction. But there was a sense of urgency coming from the Climate Envoy's Office, and I didn't want to miss the target of opportunity I had with the conference to directly raise it with PM Bainimarama. So, I got my wrist slapped a bit by my colleagues in EAP for not consulting with them. But soon, it became clear that Fiji was the best option to head COP-23, so EAP soon came on board in pressing Fiji to follow through in putting forward their candidacy.

Fiji did put forward their candidacy and were formally elected to that position at COP-22 in Morocco, or possibly shortly before the COP gathering. During the gathering, which was held in Marrakech in November 2016, the U.S. presidential elections took place and Donald Trump was elected. Given the threats he had made to pull the U.S. out of the Paris Climate Accord, that sparked a lot of nervousness at the Conference. I'll talk more in a bit about how that affected our cooperation with Fiji.

Meanwhile, in December, I made another trip to Nauru to preside at the completion of another one of USAID CCCAP projects. Nauru faces a real challenge maintaining a freshwater supply for its communities. Most of their water comes from a desalination plant that either Australia or New Zealand helped them finance. But distribution of the water was labor intensive. So USAID got very creative and decided to provide the Government of Nauru with two water tanker trucks that could collect the water from the plant and drive around the island to fill residential and commercial water tanks.

Once the tanker trucks were delivered, USAID planned a ceremony to officially hand them over to the government. It was an extremely positive event. President Waqa was thrilled with the donation. And I was delighted to see the trucks with the USAID logo with two hands shaking and the words "From the American people" painted in big letters on their sides, knowing that wherever they went on the island, the people would know we were helping them maintain their water supply.

While I was there, I also attended to other bilateral business. One of the developments since my previous visit to Nauru was that President Obama and Australian PM Malcom Turnball had made an agreement that the U.S. would resettle a number of the asylum seekers who were being held in Nauru. In exchange, Australia agreed to resettle a group of refugees from South America. U.S. refugee officials were just beginning the interview process to establish which asylum-seekers were eligible for U.S. resettlement when I was there, so I discussed the process with the Nauruan Minister in charge. I also had a discrete meeting with one of the opposition politicians who was facing trial. He had a serious health issue and was trying to get the government to allow him to travel to Australia to seek the necessary treatment. I advocated with the President and Minister of Justice, but they were pretty dug into their hardline position. Other than that, the discussions were fairly positive, and the President hosted a dinner for me and my Embassy team before we left. The Australian High Commissioner to Nauru told me that the President was especially thrilled that I was there because "most U.S. ambassadors come to Nauru once and never come back." (Laughs)

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: So, that was a positive wrap-up to 2016.

Moving on to 2017, a lot of our focus was on managing the response of the Pacific Island countries to the U.S. election. As I said, they had been alarmed by Donald Trump's threats to pull out of the Paris Agreement, during the campaign. In fact, at one point, PM Bainimarama had made some fairly belligerent remarks castigating Trump. I cautioned him and other Pacific leaders to give the new administration a chance, pointing out that often campaign pledges don't get implemented once leaders take office and see the fuller picture of the issue. Fortunately, PM Bainimarama largely headed my counsel, so we were able to avoid a public rift. I was, of course, hoping that Secretary Tillerson and others who I knew favored remaining in the Paris agreement, would convince our new President to stick with the agreement, which ultimately didn't happen.

The challenge was particularly acute in terms of our relations with Fiji since, with our encouragement, they had agreed to take on this role of president of the next UNFCCC Conference of Parties. Once they began preparing to chair that COP they realized that, even though Germany had agreed to serve as the physical hosts – paying the costs for holding the gathering in Bonn, Fiji would also have to bear costs for the administration of the preparations and a significant amount of travel by the PM and other officials related to the preparations. They hadn't budgeted for those costs, so they started passing the hat, asking donors to provide funding. A number of partners, such as Australia, New Zealand, the EU, and (I believe) China did contribute to the fund. We had a little bit of residual funding from the Obama administration that we handed over to the UNFCCC Secretariat to support Fiji, but it wasn't much. Given our political transition to an administration headed by a climate-denying president, it was clear we weren't in a position to help more, so that was very awkward for me and my team.

Additionally, in conjunction with the Paris Climate Agreement, the Obama Administration pledged to significantly increase funding for international facilities designed to support climate adaptation efforts in developing countries, such as the Green Climate Fund. These funds are critical for the Pacific Island countries. Obama had pledged the U.S. would give $3 billion to this fund. We did put $1 billion into the fund before the change of administration, but it was clear that additional funding wouldn't be forthcoming under the Trump Administration, so it was a case of the U.S. reneging on promises. Fortunately, we were able to continue our USAID climate programs. We changed the language a bit to stress support for "building resilience," as opposed to talking so directly about climate change, but thankfully we continue funding and implementation of those programs. So, we continued to highlight that work in our private and public outreach to Pacific Islanders.

Another issue that dominated our focus in 2017 was preparations for Fiji's next elections, which were scheduled to take place in 2018. Since they would be the second elections in Fiji's democratic transition, we saw it as a critical indication of the strength of Fijian democracy. In the 2014 elections, a multilateral group of observers (MOG), headed by Australia, monitored the polls. The MOG judged the elections to be free and fair, but they had also made several recommendations to increase transparency in future elections. So we were met with members of the election commission and government leaders to encourage them to adopt a number of these recommendations. We pointed out that when opposition leaders relayed allegations of fraud in the 2014 elections (which they did regularly) we were able to point to the MOG's conclusions, so that adopting the MOG's recommended reforms would boost the confidence of the opposition and of the public writ large in the outcome of the 2018 elections. Ultimately, I believe they made a few small changes in the election law, by by-in-large, the government was very resistant to the recommended reforms.

We also dealt with a challenging case involving press freedom in Fiji. There are two main English-language newspapers -- the *Fiji Times* and the *Fiji Sun*. The *Fiji Sun* tended to be very pro-government, whereas the *Fiji Times* prided itself on being independent. They were also the oldest paper in the country. Fiji has some strict laws governing media

content, which meant that independent media like the *Times*, had to walk a tight-rope to avoid legal jeopardy. Also, the government, in particular one key very powerful government official, very much disliked the *Fiji Times*. They were subjected to periodic harassment over their reports, and the government did silly things to disadvantage the paper. For example, they placed advertisements for government jobs in the *Fiji Sun* but refused to run them in the *Fiji Times*, denying them that advertising revenue. Given the challenges facing media in Fiji, a lot of our PD programming centered on training related to press freedom.

Anyway, what happened is that a letter to the editor that was published in the iTaukei (indigenous Fijian) edition of the paper was deemed inflammatory towards the Indo-Fijian community. The *Fiji Times* had reams of lawyers who worked hard to make sure the paper abided by all the laws, but this letter had somehow slipped through. The government decided to charge the publisher and the editor of the paper with sedition – a very serious crime. Naturally, this sparked great concern at our Embassy and those of our like-minded partners. We registered our concern with government leaders and our political-econ officers attended the trials. They also met with the accused. I also met periodically with the *Times* publisher to demonstrate solidarity. Even though they weren't jailed, they were forbidden from traveling outside of Fiji. The publisher was from New Zealand and had to miss his own daughter's wedding. Eventually, after I had ended my tour, they were acquitted, but this was another example of the government's sledgehammer approach to dealing with challenges.

Another issue that emerged that year was an outbreak of Zika. You remember the Zika virus?

Q: Oh, yes.

CEFKIN: There were cases confirmed in the Pacific Island region, including in Fiji and Tonga. Fortunately, unlike in Brazil and Latin America, we didn't have any confirmed cases of anencephaly (babies born with underdeveloped brains). Nonetheless, we had to issue a travel advisory to warn about the risk. We also changed our Embassy management policy to allow our American staff and dependents who were pregnant to be medevaced back to the U.S. to avoid the risk of Zika.

Another challenge we worked to manage was an issue we had with Tonga involving Tongans living in the U.S. illegally, who had committed crimes and had to be deported back to Tonga.

Q: Ah. Interesting.

CEFKIN: Most of them had been kids when their families took them to the U.S., so they were basically raised there but remained undocumented. They were concentrated in Utah, Nevada, and California. Their families were poor, and sadly these kids sometimes ended up getting recruited into gangs. They would commit crimes, get arrested, do jail time and then the U.S. would seek to deport them back to Tonga (as we do with any foreign

nationals who commit crimes in the U.S.) This caused great angst in Tonga, because the deportees didn't have strong family or cultural ties to Tonga. As a result, they struggled to assimilate and find gainful employment and often turned to selling drugs. Tongan officials complained, with justification, that these deportees were introducing a gang culture into Tonga that hadn't existed before. They raised it with me every time I visited Tonga, pleading with me to try to stop the deportations. Of course, we had to deport them. Letting them continue to live illegally in the U.S. after they had committed crimes just wasn't an option, and the Tonga Government would have faced penalties if they failed to accept the return of these deportees, so we looked for ways to manage the issue.

Fortunately, we had a really smart, capable Regional Security Officer (RSO) who made addressing this issue one of his priorities. One thing he did was to work cooperatively with the Department of Homeland Security to provide as much information as possible to authorities in Tonga on the individuals being deported so they would be better prepared to monitor the deportees. Then, he came up with this idea of organizing a conference in Tonga to discuss best practices in ways to integrate the deportees. He was able to get some funding for the conference from the State Department and he negotiated with the Government of Tonga to provide the rest of the funding. There was a program in Samoa that was viewed as a potential model for integrating deportees, so we invited the head of that program as one of the featured speakers. The RSO also coordinated with the Nevada National Guard, under the auspices of their State Partnership Program with Tonga, to obtain their support for the conference. They happily agreed. In fact, the Adjutant General (the head of the Guard), along with a couple of his Guard members who were experts on dealing with gangs, attended and spoke at the conference. I went to head the U.S. delegation and give a keynote address. Tonga's Deputy Prime Minister served as the local host. We had a couple of days of good discussions, and enjoyed the customary Tongan hospitality. The conference received a prominent local press conference and from a public relations perspective it was a big success since we were able to demonstrate that even though the reintegration of the deportees was ultimately an issue for Tonga to tackle and solve, the U.S. was dedicated to helping them find ways to handle this problem.

Early in 2017, after our change of administration, the deal I talked about earlier involving the resettlement of asylum-seekers in Nauru to the U.S. sprung into the headlines.

Q: I'm sorry, just one quick question. The refugees are coming from which nations?

CEFKIN: All over. They were coming from all over.

Q: Oh.

CEFKIN: I believe that Iranians, Sri Lankans, and Burmese Rohingya were the biggest groups represented, but it was a mishmash of people from lots of different countries.

In any case, President Trump was having his introductory phone calls with other world leaders, and in his phone call with Australian Prime Minister Turnbull, Trump complained vociferously about "the dumb deal" President Obama entered into with

Turnball to resettle refugees from Nauru and PNG. Details of the call leaked to the press. Needless to say, it sent shockwaves around the world, creating particular angst in Nauru and Australia. I first learned of the call while I was at a meeting with my Australian counterpart. Fortunately, Trump was ultimately persuaded not to renege on the deal, but the refugee processing was delayed a bit, and we had to go forward quietly.

Another issue we spent a lot of time working on after the change of administration related to the famous Muslim visa ban.

Q: Oh, yes.

CEFKIN: Even though the Muslim ban didn't have a major direct effect on Embassy Suva, since none of our countries were targeted, there was a spin-off issue that arose after U.S. courts shut down the Muslim ban. The administration laid out a set of very strict steps countries were expected to take to ensure that no terrorists from their countries could enter the U.S. These steps included things such as issuing biometric passports, and sharing detailed information with us. Nationals of countries who failed to take these steps risked being banned from entering the U.S. A couple of our countries ended up on the "at risk" list, in part due to over-stay rates of their visitors to the list. It was pretty ridiculous. One of the countries flagged, had only had two visitors to the U.S. the previous year, but one of the two had stayed in the U.S. beyond the permissible timeframe, giving them a 50% over-stay rate. It hardly meant that visitors from the country in question were a terrorist threat! In fact, there were no terrorists in any of our countries that we were aware of. Nonetheless, we spent a lot of time in discussions with the host governments in question urging them to take steps to beef up the security of their travel systems and advocating with the State Department to ensure that greater reason prevailed in deciding which countries were put on the "bad list." In the end, we were able to avoid any of our countries getting on that list. We suspected that this exercise was in part designed to find a couple of non-Muslim countries to put on the visa ban list, to demonstrate that the ban wasn't discriminatory in nature, even though the principle focus remained on Muslim-majority countries.

In a more positive vein, Fiji Prime Minister Bainimarama was planning a trip to the U.S. in June 2017 and decided to include Washington in his itinerary. (He periodically visited California where there's a sizable Fijian community, and he regularly went to New York for the UN General Assembly, but he hadn't been to Washington since his days in the military.) Of course he was hoping to meet with President Trump and with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. We decided his visit would be an opportunity to launch a U.S.-Fiji strategic dialogue, with the idea that he and a senior State official could kick it off and then delegate the substance of the talks to other senior officials. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed with this proposal, so we proceeded to prepare for that, and our colleagues at State put forward the request for meetings at the White House and with the Secretary of State. We had trouble getting an answer from the White House. They didn't rule the prospect of a meeting out, but they wouldn't confirm a meeting either, so that left the PM in limbo. We did get a positive answer from the office of the Secretary, but then had trouble pinning down a time and date for the meeting. The planning was further

complicated when the PM decided to curtail the number of days he would be in Washington, giving us a very narrow window to work with.

Needless to say, I went back to DC to be there for the visit. We had by then learned that, unfortunately there wouldn't be a White House Meeting, but we were still hoping for a meeting with the Secretary. The Fiji Desk Officer and I met the PM and his delegation at Union Station when they came down from NY. The next morning we kicked off the strategic dialogue. The PM and our Acting EAP Assistant Secretary kicked it off, then left me and my Deputy Assistant Secretary colleague to steer the rest of the discussion with the Permanent Secretary from the Prime Minister's Office leading the Fijian delegation. It was a successful discussion. Before we launched the dialogue, we had learned that Secretary Tillerson unfortunately wouldn't be able to meet with Bainimarama. They proposed that the newly-arrived Deputy Secretary, John Sullivan, take the meeting instead. The PM was quite frustrated and said he would skip the meeting. I talked to him before we launched the dialogue telling him that the Deputy Secretary was eager to meet with him and urging him to make time for the meeting. Ultimately, he agreed and the meeting was a great success. I think it was Sullivan's first meeting with a visiting foreign leader in his capacity as D. He was extremely gracious and very charming, so the tenor of the meeting was very positive. That concluded a successful visit by PM Bainimarama to Washington.

Another memorable trip I took in mid-2017 was a trip I took all the way around the circumference of Viti Levu – Fiji's main island. I'd been to the west coast (where Nadi is) and along the southern coast many times. I'd also traveled north along the eastern coast – to visit the Fiji Water bottling plant and to visit the Cyclone Winston-affected areas – several times. But I'd never traveled all the way around the northern coast of the island. So I decided to do that. Naturally, it was a car trip. The driver, my control officer and I went first to the town of Rakiraki, on the northeastern coast, where we visited Fiji Water again, hosted dinner for Peace Corps volunteers serving in the area, and spent the night.

The next day we drove inland up a mountain to a little village called Nadarivatu, in a forestry community. We had a Peace Corps volunteer working there, and in cooperation with our Public Affairs Section he had arranged for a donation of books to the school. The trip up was on a twisting mountain road, with beautiful scenery. The school had some of the most adorable kids I'd ever seen. The school administrators and teachers were extremely gracious and excited to have the U.S. ambassador visit. They organized an elaborate program. So the ambience was very positive and the visit was a lot of fun. On our way back down the mountain, however, we had a flat tire. The driver pulled over. The control officer, who was our Facilities Maintenance officer, got out to help him change the tire. But, in the process of changing the tire some of the tire bolts broke.

Q: Ahh.

CEFKIN: We were almost at the bottom of the mountain close to a town. The driver and my control officer assessed that the tire would hold long enough for us to get to the town, so we drove slowly the rest of the way to the town, and went to a hotel to have lunch

while we figured out next steps. I proposed that if the car couldn't be repaired quickly, we continue the trip by taxi, as far as Nadi, where another Embassy car and driver could meet us. So the control officers called back to the embassy to seek agreement for that plan. As a backdrop to this discussion, it's important to understand that Fiji was a low-threat environment. Unlike most U.S. ambassadors around the world, I didn't have a security detail. Nonetheless, you may remember the attack against our ambassador to Korea. It occurred while I was in Fiji.

Q: Yes, he was stabbed.

CEFKIN: Exactly. He was badly injured; it was a very scary incident.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: In the wake of that attack, Diplomatic Security (DS) started to take a harder look at posts like ours that didn't have security details to suggest that posture be revisited. The RSO was able to convince DS that a detail wasn't necessary in our case. But the compromise was that I should always travel in an embassy vehicle, when traveling by car in Fiji, with one of our Embassy drivers who had security training. Given that, the RSO was reluctant to let me travel by taxi. Instead the RSO office called their police contacts, and the police agreed to transport me. (Laughs)

Q: That's great, yeah. (Laughs)

CEFKIN: It was pretty wild. One police vehicle took us to the town of Ba, where I stopped for some meetings. A new police team with another car took us to Nadi, with an intermediary stop at the headquarters of an NGO called Friends that I wanted to visit. The policemen were very nice, but they really sped. At one point, I remember thinking to myself that I might have been safer in a taxi. Anyway, traveling by police car was a unique experience. It was my second car adventure in Fiji. (Laughs)

In July 2017, I was again tasked with heading the U.S. delegation to a gathering of the South Pacific Community (SPC). The gathering was a summit to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the SPC, so it was a big deal. The gathering was held at SPC headquarters in Noumea, the capital of New Caledonia, which is a French territory. Most of the Pacific Island country delegations were headed by their leaders. My delegation included the USAID Regional Mission Director, Embassy Suva's Regional Environmental officer, and the Pacific Affairs Officer from the State Department. The other founding members –Australia, New Zealand, and France – also had senior-level delegations. In fact, France's Minister for Overseas territories attended part of the gathering.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: Noumea is a thriving, well-developed city, and from what I could see on the drive from the airport into town, the New Caledonia infrastructure is robust. Of course,

there is a large French presence, including French military and gendarmes. I described it as "the Pacific with good wine and cheese." So, that was fun. There are underlying political tensions, however, between the European and indigenous populations. The indigenous New Caledonians – the Kanak – who, like the Fijians are Melanesian, have pressed for independence from France. When I was there, the New Caledonians were preparing for the first of a series of referenda on the question of independence. But in those referenda, the majority voted to remain part of France.

Outside of the SPC events, I was able to meet with some local residents dedicated to preserving the memory of the U.S. presence there during WWII. New Caledonia served as a principal base for U.S. naval operations in the Pacific. At the height of operations there were some 50,000 U.S. troops there.

Q: Ah. Interesting.

CEFKIN: There's a memorial commemorating the U.S. presence in downtown Noumea, and the group have organized plaques and other forms or remembrance at various bases that used to house the U.S. troops. They were very dedicated to keeping the memory of the U.S. presence alive and to celebrating U.S.-New Caledonian friendship, and they do this all on their own, with funds they raise themselves, so that was very touching.

While at the SPC events, I was able to organize bilateral meetings with the leaders of my countries of accreditation as well as with key partners – Australia and New Zealand that were productive. And, as with previous SPC events, the gathering concluded with a big dinner and "talent night." So, a big part of our delegation's effort was figuring out what we were going to do and preparing for that. We ended up singing "Celebrate," for our performance. (Laughs)

On a sad note, while I was in Noumea one of my drivers passed away back in Fiji.

Q: Oh.

CEFKIN: I had two drivers who traded shifts. The driver in question had been with the Embassy for about a year. He was a little bit older than the other drivers, but seemed to be in good shape. He had previously worked for the wife of Fiji's outgoing president. He was a nice man, rather quiet, but very dignified. In any case, he had a heart attack while he was home alone and by the time a friend got him to the hospital he had passed away. He left behind a wife and several children. When I got back to Suva from Noumea, naturally, a lot of my focus turned to dealing with that trauma. I visited the family, along with many of the Embassy's local staff, and I attended and spoke at his funeral. So, that was a sad chapter.

Q: Are there a lot of risk factors among the islanders?

CEFKIN: A lot, yeah. Their diet isn't the healthiest; Fijians and other Pacific Islanders eat a lot of fatty meat and starch. Hypertension and diabetes are prevalent. In fact, at our

monthly “all hands” Embassy town halls, one of our Fijian health practitioners often lectured our embassy staff on the need to be more cognizant of the importance of a healthy diet and exercise, noting that too many Fijians, particularly men, were dropping dead at much too young an age.

Moving forward, my next trip was to Apia, Samoa to attend the September 2017 Pacific Island Forum (PIF) leaders’ meeting. Our head of delegation for that meeting was EAP Acting Assistant Secretary, Susan Thornton. The PIF meetings were always interesting, and it was fun for me to visit countries that weren’t part of my direct responsibility, giving me a sense of the broader Pacific Island region. The format for the meetings were frustrating though since the U.S. was a “dialogue partner,” but not a member of PIF. In the course of the meetings, which went on for several days, the PIF members devoted a couple of hours to a meeting with the dialogue partners (of which there are at least 20). Those sessions were very much a set piece, with all the dialogue partners reading statements listing all the things they had done for the region in the past year, and plans for the coming year. We generally tried to have a couple of “deliverables” – announcements of new USAID projects or other programs. There was very little actual discussion, so it wasn’t a very fulfilling experience, and not the best use of time for our busy U.S. principals. As I mentioned previously, the value of attending these meetings was the opportunity for bilateral and sidebar meetings. Additionally, at the Apia meetings we hosted a breakfast for the Pacific Island leaders with Susan Thornton. Most of the leaders did attend, and we had a good discussion. So that was positive.

Meanwhile back in Suva, Fiji was preparing for its role as President of the next climate convention Conference of Parties (COP) scheduled to take place in Bonn in November. Even though the Government of Fiji appreciated Germany’s offer to physically host the COP, they regretted not being able to showcase Fiji. Therefore, they decided to use a meeting known as the “pre-COP,” designed to tee up decisions for the full COP, to gather climate convention delegations in Fiji, and they pushed for high-level attendance.

By that time, Trump had announced that he was pulling the U.S. out of the Paris Agreement. Needless to say, that was a very bitter pill for the Pacific Island countries to swallow. Personally, I wrestled a lot with the implications of that decision, asking myself if I should resign. I decided that the most constructive thing I could do was to use the time remaining in my tour to help manage the fallout with the Pacific Island nations, particularly Fiji, given their COP role.

So my team and I encouraged State to send a delegation to the pre-COP. Under the terms of the Paris Agreement, the U.S. couldn’t formally withdraw until November 2020 (just before the U.S. presidential election), and the U.S. was still a party to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change – the umbrella for the Paris Agreement. State did agree to send a delegation, headed by the Deputy Climate Envoy – someone I had worked closely with during my tour. So, my Regional Environmental Officer and I joined him and a member of his DC staff to form the U.S. delegation in Nadi. We were able to get through the meetings in good shape and also had a number of useful bilateral meetings, including

with Prime Minister Bainimarama and Tuvalu Prime Minister Sopoaga. Overall it was a positive engagement for the U.S, despite the difficult circumstances.

Another interesting issue that arose that year on the political front, concerned Tonga. As I explained earlier, Tongans were still striving to strike the right balance between traditional royal leadership and governance by the democratically-elected commoner representatives. There were ongoing tensions between King Tupou VI and long-term democracy activist PM Pōhiva. To everyone's surprise, the King suddenly decided to dissolve parliament.

Q: Huh.

CEFKIN: I can't even remember the stated reason for the dissolution, but presumably the King hoped that elections would produce a government that he was more compatible with.

Around that time, Peace Corps Tonga was preparing to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its presence in Tonga. Tonga and Fiji were actually two of the earliest countries to have Peace Corps programs. Naturally, I went to Nuku'alofa to be part of that celebration. The election campaign was in full swing.

The Peace Corps anniversary celebration was extremely positive. It brought to the national forefront how much Peace Corps had contributed to Tonga. The Tongans really appreciated the fact that our volunteers learned their language and local customs and really made themselves part of the communities they served in. They also valued the volunteers' contributions to Tonga's development, particularly in education. The King's sister, Princess Piolevu participated in the main ceremony and unveiled a plaque marking 50 years of Peace Corps Tonga. The Peace Corps Director and I also had a lovely meeting with her. The Prime Minister also attended most of the events, including a dinner the Minister of Education hosted for us and for former volunteers who had returned to Tonga for the occasion. There were several from the original group of volunteers. In fact, in chatting with one of them I discovered that she had been at a school on one of the Ha'apai islands where PM Pohiva had been working as a teacher at the time. So I introduced her to the PM and he was thrilled to recall that connection.

In addition to the Peace Corps events, the Pol-Econ Chief (who accompanied me for the visit) and I had several meetings related to the upcoming elections. And PM Pohiva hosted us for an intimate dinner. It was the most in-depth conversation I had ever had with him. He really was an interesting and very thoughtful man, so it was fascinating. Despite being in somewhat fragile health, he appeared energized by the campaign and was very determined to win re-election, which his party subsequently did, by a clear margin, returning him to power. I don't recall if I already mentioned this, but during the visit with Assistant Secretary Russel we discovered that in his youth he had participated in our International Visitor program. He told us that had been shaped his pro-democracy activism. He talked about that and about his hopes for democratic reforms in Tonga going forward. Sadly, in September 2019, after I had returned to the U.S., he passed away.

By the time of my visit to Tonga, we had been asked to seek agrément for my replacement. Like everything else at Embassy Suva, seeking agrément was complicated, because we had to seek it from five countries, and we were instructed to keep the process and identity of the nominee under wraps, until we received the response from all five countries and the White House announced the nomination.

Q: Right, of course.

CEFKIN: The Office of Presidential Appointments was keen that we move as quickly as possible so they could move forward with the nomination. So I was pressing all five of my countries. Tonga was the last to respond, so I took that up with the Foreign Ministry when I visited. I realized that visit would probably be my last to Tonga, but I didn't feel comfortable talking about my departure publicly, since my replacement hadn't been formally announced. So, that was a bit awkward. I had hoped to have one last meeting with the King, but he was out of town until just before I left Nuku'alofa, so that didn't work out, unfortunately. But other than that, it was a good wrap-up in Tonga for me.

Shortly after that trip, we received Tonga's agrément and the nomination became public, so I decided to pay farewell visits to some of the other countries. I was able to travel to both Kiribati and Tuvalu in early 2018. Of course, I also undertook a full round of farewells in Fiji. I was sorry not to be able to make an official farewell visit to Tonga, but, in addition to my own scheduling challenges, Tonga was hit by a serious cyclone in February 2018 which caused significant damage to the capital, Nuku'alofa. So they were dealing with the recovery from that. I had originally hoped to make one more visit to Nauru as well. They were hosting a big celebration for the fiftieth anniversary of their independence in January, which would have been an excellent occasion for my final visit, but among the dignitaries they were inviting were the leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Given U.S. policy, which considers the two enclaves part of Georgia, it was awkward to go to the celebration, so, with State's approval, I sent the DCM instead.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: That's a broad overview of my work and travel around the region. I haven't described every trip. In total, in my three years in Suva, I made four trips to Kiribati, four trips to Tuvalu, two trips to Nauru, and seven trips to Tonga. On top of that, with my regional travel, travel around Fiji, and travel (at least once a year) to/from the U.S. I logged many tens of thousands of miles crisscrossing the Pacific.

Q: Oh, yeah.

CEFKIN: Maybe now it would be useful to talk a bit more about life in Fiji and the Embassy community. One of the positive things about the relatively small size of the embassy is that we could have a lot of staff interaction. Week by week, we alternated between traditional country team meetings (with all the section heads) and country teams meetings that we invited all cleared Americans to join. We also had monthly "all hands"

meetings that we encouraged all embassy staff (American and local) to attend. When the weather was good we held those meetings outside on our plaza. Otherwise, we set chairs up in our atrium/cafeteria area of the embassy. (Those meetings felt a little bit like being in a scene from "Evita," because those of us addressing the staff spoke from a podium set up on a landing overlooking the ground floor.) In any case, those meetings were a chance for me to talk about my priorities, for the DCM to talk about key issues, and for various section heads (most often the Management Counselor and RSO) to share important information. Because our local staff were very shy about asking questions, we had something called "crumpled kudos and comments," where staff could submit comments or questions anonymously. The DCM would read them and respond.

Our Foreign Service National (FSN) Committee, representing the local staff, was very active in organizing celebrations for local holidays. Those were always good opportunities for the whole embassy to come together to enjoy good food and each other's company. Given that the local staff hosted those celebrations, the DCM and I decided that we should host a Thanksgiving celebration for the embassy. It was challenging, of course, because even though we didn't have a very large embassy, we wanted to be sure we had ample food for everyone. Fortunately, my Office Management Specialist (OMS) did a fantastic job of finding good, affordable sources of the basics, so that we were able to put out a good spread without breaking our banks, and the celebration was very well received and appreciated by the staff.

One of my goals when I first arrived in Suva was to find a way to make sure that staff from all over the embassy (American and locally-engaged) had an opportunity to come into and engage with us in the front office. Earlier, I talked about how in Bangkok the Ambassador had launched an "employee of the month" award for local staff. The winner each month was invited to a small ceremony in the ambassador's office, where they would get a certificate and small monetary award and have their picture taken with the Ambassador. It was a very nice ceremony and generated a lot of good will. But given the difference in size of Embassy Suva, replicating that program there didn't make sense. Instead, my OMS helped design and operationalize a monthly "cake and coffee." Once a month, my cook would bake a cake and we'd order up a pot of coffee and invite a group of 6-8 staff members from different sections to come have some cake and coffee, visit a bit and take a photo. I think that it was positively received, although that custom unfortunately petered out after my first OMS departed post.

One embassy management issue that bedeviled me during my time in Suva concerned our embassy space. Our embassy compound was quite new; it was a couple of years old when I arrived.

Q: Oh.

CEFKIN: It was a very nice facility and very beautiful. It was on a hill with lovely, expansive grounds. Our staff enjoyed coming to work there, in part because of its attractive setting. But even though it was new, we were already bursting at the seams in terms of office space –particularly in the unclassified area of the chancery. There were

keen interests in increasing our footprint, particularly on the part of USAID, which wanted to expand its staff in Suva. But finding the desk space where they could word was a real problem. When the new embassy was built, there was one part of the project that wasn't finished because the Office of Building Operations (OBO) ran out of funding. So they agreed to complete that part of the project – which included moving our Embassy warehouse from its remote location onto the embassy compound, as well building a small recreation center – at a later date. This is actually quite common for OBO embassy projects. I tried to persuade OBO to redesign the project to include some unclassified office space. I advocated for this approach every time I returned to DC for consultations, and I worked with the Management Officer to send in a cable laying out our case. OBO was adamant that there wasn't sufficient funding to change the scope of (what was referred to as) "the lookback project." What my advocacy did produce, however, was a visit by Undersecretary for Management (M) Patrick Kennedy.

Q: Wow.

CEFKIN: He came, together with the EAP Executive Director to take a look at that and some of the other management challenges we faced. He was actually the most senior State Department official to visit Suva when I was there.

I have one anecdote to recount connected to Undersecretary Kennedy's visit. He came in the aftermath of a big cyclone. (I don't recall if it was related to Cyclone Winston or a different cyclone.) In any case, one of the impacts of the cyclone – no doubt related to hygiene challenges – was that it spurred an epidemic of pink eye in Fiji.

Q: Oh.

CEFKIN: Given how contagious pink eye is, we had a strict policy of immediately sending home any staff who exhibited signs of the disease. I was hosting a couple of events at my residence for the undersecretary to meet with staff, including a brunch for the American staff and their families and a tea with the local staff. Low and behold, that day my cook comes in with signs of pink eye. (Laughs)

Q: Oh, no.

CEFKIN: So, we had to send him home even though he insisted he was fine.

Q: Oh, god, yeah.

CEFKIN: Fortunately, somebody was able to find a substitute cook on short notice. She did a great job, so the guests never really knew the difference. But it was just one of those examples of the need to always expect the unexpected.

My OMS helped me to ultimately put together a good residence staff team – referred to as Official Residence Expense (ORE) staff. Though we went through several tries before

we found the right house manager. The cook was excellent and was with me throughout my tour.

And the residence itself was charming. It had beautiful grounds and was very comfortable for me. It had some quirks, though. Before I went to post, one of my predecessors told me he thought the embassy should acquire a new residence that had a view of the ocean, which most of the other chief of mission residences in Suva did. A view of the water would have been nice, but to me it wasn't the most important missing feature. And my house had beautiful gardens. It was a colonial-era house. I spent a lot of time working with a contact who headed Fiji's Historical Society and National Trust to research the history of the residence, which was a fun project. But the house did have quirks. It really wasn't a good indoor space for representation of crowds.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

CEFKIN: There wasn't a large space for indoor entertaining, so larger receptions had to be done outside, which meant that the embassy general services staff had to erect tents, since it rains a lot, in Suva. That was a lot of work, but there was really just no alternative. And for sit-down meals in the dining room I couldn't comfortably sit more than eight. For bigger groups we sometimes set up tables outside on the patio, which was covered, but for heavy rain, it didn't offer sufficient protection, so it was a bit of a gamble.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: The biggest quirk was that inside the house there weren't any guest bathrooms except in the guest bedrooms. There were three bedrooms in the main house, all of which had adjoining bathrooms. That was fine when it was just me or me and my husband in the house, since it left the guest bedrooms and bathrooms free for guests to use. But if I had visitors using the bedrooms, it was problematic. For example, when Danny Russel came, I gave him and his special assistant the guest bedrooms to change and shower. I hosted a dinner for him before he departed, so I had to kick the special assistant out of his bedroom, so that there was a bathroom the diner guests could use.

Anyway, I enjoyed the house. In addition to three bedrooms inside, there was one bedroom outside by the pool, and then a second room on the other end of the pool that I used as a study/library/exercise area. My successor had a family of seven children. I'm not sure how they managed, but I guess they did somehow.

Q: Oh, wow.

CEFKIN: In terms of my personal life in the South Pacific, my husband did come out to Post with me when I first arrived, but it quickly became clear that there wasn't going to be a lot for him to do in Fiji as a spouse of an ambassador. So, he spent most of his time at our apartment in Arlington, and would come to Fiji for long visits around the Christmas-New Year's holiday period. Of course I missed him when he was in the U.S. I

was busy with work, so it wasn't like I was sitting around twiddling my thumbs, but still, it was a challenge being there without his regular company.

Fortunately, I did make good friends with several members of the diplomatic community. Suva had a nice sized diplomatic corps. A number of countries covered Fiji and the other Pacific Islands from their embassies in Australia or New Zealand, but in Suva we had about twenty diplomatic missions. It was a pretty cohesive diplomatic group. We had monthly lunches we took turns hosting. Our embassy served as the secretariat, while I was there, so my OMS helped organize the lunches. Then, of course, we attended each other's national days, and saw each other regularly, at Fijian-hosted functions and (for those with regional responsibilities, like me) at big gatherings in other Pacific Island countries. I worked particularly closely with my like-minded counterparts --the Australian, New Zealand, and British high commissioners, and the UN resident representative. The Australian high commissioner and the UN res rep, who were single women, became close friends. So I enjoyed their companionship. But, finding other social circles, especially for activities on the weekends, was a bit challenging. Unlike other countries I'd served in, there weren't a lot of diplomatic dinners.

Nonetheless, recreationally, I had some really amazing experiences. I found great Zumba in Suva. There were two excellent Zumba instructors who had regular classes in the evening and sometimes on Saturday morning. I went as often as I could. It got me out of the office at a reasonable hour, was a great de-stressor, and was a fun way to meet people (mostly Fijian) outside the diplomatic bubble. There was also a jazzercise class at the Embassy, during the lunch period a couple of days a week that a number of our local staff attended, so I also joined those classes when possible.

Fiji has tons of beach resorts, so periodically, when I felt I needed a break from Suva, I would go to one for the weekend. But my main recreational activity was scuba diving.

Q: Oh, yeah.

CEFKIN: I think I mentioned that I was certified to dive when I was in the Philippines. The diving in Fiji is fantastic. There was a British gentleman who had a diving business at Suva Harbor. Since that was very accessible I'd sometimes go out with him and the students he was training for half a day of dives on Saturday or Sunday. When Paul visited, we generally planned at least one dive trip. One year we went diving in the Mamanuca Islands, off Viti Levu's west coast. Another year we did a dive trip to Taveuni – an island in the northeastern region of Fiji that is a premier diving spot. The last year there we made a trip to the Visayan Islands, to the island where "the Blue Lagoon" was filmed. Unfortunately, that one didn't work out as well, due to high winds that made for bad dive conditions. But it was a beautiful spot.

One thing Fiji is famous for is shark dives.

Q: Oh, boy.

CEFKIN: Yeah. The main site for that is an area called Pacific Harbor, about an hour outside of Suva. There are also several resorts there. In any case, somebody that the DCM and I knew from our work on Burma was coming in to visit, and he really wanted to do the shark dive. So, I agreed to go with him and a group of several colleagues from the embassy. That was quite the experience – definitely a thrill being so close to the sharks. I never felt threatened by them.

Q: Uh-huh, okay.

CEFKIN: The most remarkable diving experience I had in Fiji was a trip I took on a liveaboard boat called the Nai'a in May 2016. The Nai'a boat/company is actually U.S.-owned. The boat is a yacht outfitted with dive equipment that has a staff of dive masters (in addition to the captain, crew, and cook), and they run 7-10 day trips to different dive sites around Fiji. So you live on the boat, which anchors someplace where you can do several dives during the day. Then, while we slept, the boat traveled to a new location.

The way I got onto the trip was that on a flight to the U.S. for the 2015 Chief of Mission Conference, I struck up a conversation with a lovely American woman who had just finished a trip on the Nai'a. It was organized by her friend who was a Marine biologist and had worked at the Monterey Aquarium. She told me to be on the lookout for the opportunity to join a future dive trip with him. (Others had also told me that diving on the Nai'a was really a special experience.) So, it was something I definitely wanted to do before I left Fiji. I kept in touch with the woman from the plane; she was an older woman who had had such a fascinating life and had such a warm personality. Then in the aftermath of Cyclone Winston in 2016, she contacted me to say that the marine biologist was organizing another Nai'a trip in May and that a place had opened up. She asked whether I wanted to come along as her roommate, so I agreed. One goal of the trip was to assess how much damage Cyclone Winston had done to the reefs. Given my focus on climate change cooperation, they were interested in having me talk to the dive group about the impacts of climate change on the Pacific Islands and the U.S. Government response. In fact, they even offered to pay my fare, which, of course I couldn't accept. But I was personally keen to go and figured I could use the experience to amplify the Embassy's public diplomacy on climate change and ocean conservation.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: So, I scheduled leave and booked the trip. It was the most amazing trip. We left from the port in Lautoka, on the west coast of Viti Levu, sailed along the north coast, then to the waters off the south coast of Vanua Levu, then on to Taveuni, then to the Lomaiviti islands of the east coast of Viti Levu, and finally back to Lautoka. The trip included the option of a dive before breakfast, a dive after breakfast, a dive or two after lunch and a night dive. Since I tended to develop ear problems if I did too many repetitive dives, I generally only did two dives a day – one after breakfast and one after lunch. All the divers were also asked to donate some toiletries. I also brought a couple of boxes of books from the Embassy's PD section, which we delivered to some villages that had been

impacted by the cyclone. The divers I was with were a very congenial group. They were all from the U.S., and a lot of them had worked with the organizer at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Some were amazing underwater photographers. After dinner every night, someone gave a talk related to the ocean environment, including the one I gave on climate change in the region. And the underwater life we saw was spectacular. My favorite was a dive we did with manta rays. So, it was a very memorable trip.

One final ocean adventure I had was in Tonga. During the southern hemisphere's summer, whales migrate south through the waters around Tonga, so the locals have boat tours that take people to swim with the whales. On my final trip to Tonga, I was able to carve out a weekend to go to the Ha'apai islands to do one of those tours. They take you out on the boat with an experienced whale watcher. When they spot a pod of whales we would put on our snorkeling equipment and jump in the water to watch them. A couple of times we saw mother whales with their calves. It was amazing being so close to them as they breached the surface and then swam underwater. So before I left the South Pacific I had the privilege of diving with sharks and manta rays and swimming with whales!

Q: Wow. Okay.

CEFKIN: Before we conclude, I'll mention a couple of other cultural notes on life in Fiji. Of course, we celebrated all the local holidays, and one of the most colorful was the Indian holiday Diwali. There were a lot of parties to celebrate, some of which were huge. So I had to buy a sari, and have someone help me wrap it, so that I had appropriate attire for those occasions, which were a lot of fun. Another notable thing about Fiji is the importance of rugby. It's like a religion there. And the Fijian rugby players are very skilled – especially their 7's team, the Flying Fijians. I came to really love watching their matches; their hand-offs to each other were so smoothly orchestrated it was like watching a ballet. In 2016, rugby was added to the Olympics (held in Rio), and Fiji won the gold medal! I believe that was the first gold medal Fiji had ever won in an Olympic game. Needless to say, that was cause for huge celebrations in Fiji, especially in the aftermath of the trauma Fiji had suffered from Cyclone Winston that year.

My last day at the embassy was February 23, 2018. I ended the way I began – with a traditional *Sevusevu* ceremony. Then the staff sang a traditional Fijian farewell song – "*Isa Lei*". At the conclusion of that, I got into my car and was driven away; so, it's quite emotional. I had the weekend to finish packing. I had a few friends over to the residence, to help drink some of the wine, etc. I had left. Then on Monday, February 26, I did one last drive with my driver to Nadi, and caught the Fiji Airlines flight to LA, and then onwards to Virginia, headed to the job search program and retirement.

Q: Oh, wow. Okay. I'm just going to pause for a moment. Then we'll conclude this session here.

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Q: Okay. Today is June 8, 2020. And we are concluding our interview series with Judith Cefkin with her reflections on her career and some insights gained over that period of time.

CEFKIN: Okay. The first question you'd posed was about training and how well the State Department training I received prepared me for my assignments. In response, I would say that the language training I received, in general, was topnotch and did prepare me for my assignments. I enjoyed the process of learning languages, and I think that the approach FSI takes toward language instruction is a good one.

My experience with other training was more mixed. I thought the introductory Foreign Service training offered in A-100 was good, and I enjoyed the class a lot. It was also an important bonding experience. The standard consular training I did before heading out to Mexico City was also effective. Between my third and fourth assignments (before heading to my first tour in Bangkok) I did a two-week political tradecraft course. It wasn't bad. It did instill some of the fundamentals, such as how to draft cables and memoranda of conversations, and how to handle a demarche.

But what was lacking was leadership/management training. In fact, it was non-existent until Colin Powell became Secretary of State. The first position where I had any real supervisory responsibility was my assignment in Paris, where I headed the Political Internal unit of the Political Section. I supervised two FSOs, a Foreign Service National employee, two office managers, and a part-time family member. Managing the team in a way that met Section leadership expectations was a bit of a struggle. Looking back, I realize that, as is so often the case at the State Department, I had to rely on on-the-job training and nothing had particularly prepared me for the supervisory aspects of the job.

When Colin Powell introduced the leadership training continuum it filled a real void. I took one of those course when I was at the FS-1 level and found it helpful. Before going to Sarajevo, of course, I did the DCM training, which was also excellent. Then once I was promoted to the senior service I did the Senior Executive Training, which was also very good. My final training was the ambassadorial training.

I do think that the State Department should institute more long-term training. There used to be something called the Senior Seminar – a War College-type program that lasted a year (or close to a year), but by the time I had gotten to that point the course had been abolished. The long-term training during my time at State tended to focus more on econ officers. They had opportunities to do a year at university that earned them a graduate degree. Of course, there was also War College trainings. But, in contrast to the military, only a fraction of FSOs get these long-term training opportunities. FSOs would benefit from more opportunities to step back from their jobs to think strategically and burnish their leadership skills, and it would enrich the service, in my view.

Q: Here I would like to ask one question with regard to training. It isn't exactly training, but it's related to it. In terms of recruitment, over time, as you rose in the Foreign Service,

did you see increasing abilities of newer officers in various areas or decreasing abilities that you think need particular attention?

CEFKIN: Ah. Excellent questions. I would say yes to both of those. In general I think the younger people coming in are extremely capable. Obviously, they have better technology skills than us older officers, particularly when it comes to information technologies. And they are much more comfortable with social media. One area where I was quite impressed with the younger officers was with their public speaking ability. I noted that they tended to be very adept and comfortable speaking in public fora.

On the flip side, I would say their drafting skills often left something to be desired.

Q: In fact, I asked you because that was exactly my experience. I didn't rise as far as you did, but I did supervise several American officers and slowly began to get very disappointed with the quality of writing.

CEFKIN: Yeah, exactly. My husband had the same comment about people he supervised and I've heard similar complaints from other colleagues. I think that's something that's been deemphasized more recently in education. Also, with the advent of social media there's a tendency to take writing shortcuts, so people forget the basics. Often the writing is a jumble, not well-organized. I also noted that the younger officers sometimes played loose with the facts. They tended to report assertions, not fully backed up by evidence. So we had to teach them to better organize their written reports and more clearly explain their conclusions.

Q: And then, one last question, once again with relation to written communication, given the change in the way—the 24/7 news cycle and so on, everything had to be shorter, much more action oriented. Did you see that officers were able to adapt to that?

CEFKIN: Yes and no. I guess to some extent people are forced to adapt, but it was often a struggle. I'm thinking in particular of the scene setter cables that we do to prepare prominent official visitors for their engagement. In my tour as ambassador I remember preparing for the visit of our Assistant Secretary to Fiji. The draft scene setter cable I received to review was a disorganized jumble of information, so I reached back to the A/S's staff assistant to ask what would be most helpful in terms of information. He provided excellent guidance, saying we should provide clear advice about what we wanted the A/S to accomplish and why it was important. With that guidance, the drafting officer was able to re-tailor the scene setter. It was extremely well-received by EAP. In fact, it was lauded as a model. So, with coaching and patience the new officers can learn to draft effectively. Having said that, I realize that those of us who are older have a tendency to over-parse words. It's just our nature, as Foreign Service officers. Also, the clearance process is burdensome and often waters down our messages.

On the flip side, when you're the top person to approve a cable, and (as ambassador) it's going out under your name, you want to uphold the drafting quality. I worked with two different DCMs in Fiji. One exercised a little lighter hand in the editing process. As a

result, I felt more of an editing burden. It was awkward because I didn't want to quash the drafting officer's initiative, but I wanted to uphold the quality. The other DCM was a very good and quick editor. So it took the pressure off me. But he sometimes went a bit too far in just editing the product for the officers as opposed to teaching them how to do better themselves. So, it's a tricky balance.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: But you know, everything you do is under time pressure, so you have to juggle all these considerations.

Q: Right. Good. Now, I think, I want to go on to the management questions.

CEFKIN: We could do that, yeah. Although I was going to say a word about mentoring.

Q: However, you want to proceed.

CEFKIN: Okay. You had asked whether I was the beneficiary of mentoring. In my early years at the State Department there was no formalized mentoring process. What I noticed, and I don't think I'm alone in this, is that more senior male officers tended to mentor the younger men. I think to some extent it's natural. When people see somebody who reminds them of themselves, they want to help them along. But female officers were in a more difficult position. In those days, there were really just a handful of women in senior positions at State, so it was much harder to identify a more senior leader to look to for guidance. Therefore, for me, mentoring was largely absent. That was true in Washington and overseas. In my Junior Officer (JO) tour in Mexico City, there certainly was no mentoring system. At one point, in an effort to give the junior officers more exposure to other aspects of Embassy work outside of the consular section where most of us worked, they matched us with a mid-level officer from our cone to work on special projects. I was matched with a political officer who tasked me with drafting some letters, so it wasn't terribly formative. But as a group, the junior officers banded together and supported each other. So, in a sense, we mentored each other.

Now, I will say that although there wasn't formalized mentoring, I did have some good bosses through the years who were really supportive and gave me excellent counsel, so in that sense I was mentored. Later on, when I was an upper mid-level, State introduced a more formalized mentoring process and worked to inculcate a mentoring ethos. So, certainly served as a mentor to younger officers. There was a program that matched officers in A-100 with mid-level/senior officers working at State. I participated in that a couple of times, but I found that mentoring worked best when it developed more organically through work associations.

Of course, with the greater focus on mentoring, DCMs in all our embassies were charged with overseeing a mentoring program for first and second tour officers (often referred to as FAST) at post. I definitely did that in Sarajevo and in Bangkok when I was DCM. I enjoyed that role; there's a lot of gratification that came from getting to know these

young Foreign Service colleagues and helping them navigate some of the key aspects of a FS career. In the process, I also learned a lot from them. I would periodically host them for lunch at my residence, or do a brown bag with them at the embassy. I worked with section heads to organize discussions on some of the FS basics, such as the employee evaluation process and the bidding process. And I brainstormed with them about what types of career development opportunities they wanted. I found that programs were most successful, when the FAST officers took ownership of the program. They came up with some creative proposals. One example was the "adopt-an-American Corner" initiative that I talked about in my discussion of my time as DCM in Bosnia.

In Bangkok, we had a much bigger group of FAST officers. (And, by the way, although I refer to the group of officers, the mentoring programs also included Foreign Service specialists.) A unique factor in Bangkok was that USAID had a large training program for its junior officers, so I made sure to recruit one State and one USAID officer to co-chair the FAST committee, and I encouraged the USAID officers to participate fully in the mentoring events.

Our ambassador had a goal of traveling around Thailand as much as possible. She had a policy of planning at least one trip a month. Her practice was to structure this travel as day trips – flying, or driving somewhere in the morning, returning by evening. And she wanted the FAST officers to take turns serving as her control officer for these trips. It was sometimes a bit of a struggle getting the FAST officers to volunteer, since it added a lot to their workload – in addition to their day jobs. But it was a great professional development opportunity, and most of them ultimately enjoyed the experience.

When I was ambassador in Fiji, the DCM and I similarly worked to get officers and specialists from different sections (though not only first and second tour) to serve as my control officer when I traveled. I believe most found it to be an overall positive experience.

Q: Excellent. Yeah, that is what I generally hear from retired officers that when you work together with junior officers or entry level officers it's much easier to mentor them because you're seeing them on a daily basis. And you can see developments in some areas, maybe they lag behind in others, and you can give them the—just the kind of one-minute manager version of suggestions, and often that's all they need.

Q: Right. All right. Management.

CEFKIN: Management, yes, okay. I guess I would start out by saying that in my career, I never felt that I worked in an office that was overstaffed. Quite the contrary. So, staffing is definitely an issue. It is true that State's D.C. headquarters tends to be a bit top heavy, although even in my Washington assignments, the offices I worked in were not over-staffed. I judge that by the workload, and the fact that long hours were the norm, not the exception.

Another part of the workload problem is the proliferation of taskings. Washington work inevitably involves a paper chase; every time you turn around there's a tasking to draft a new briefing memo, information memo, or decision memo for meetings, travel, or key issues being discussed. The clearance process adds to the burden. Better prioritization of when formal memos are really needed would alleviate some of the burden.

Another problem, especially for our embassies, but also the regional bureaus in DC, is the huge and growing workload generated by congressionally-mandated reports. It started with the annual Human Rights Report, which ultimately is a pretty valuable report; people around the world really do use it as a point of reference. But since that report was mandated, there's been a proliferation of spin-off reports – mostly on various aspects of human rights, such as international religious freedom, and trafficking in persons (TIP). Drafting these reports is very labor intensive, and finalizing them involves an extensive back and forth as different stakeholders debate whether various sources of information are accurate. The TIP report, in particular, tends to become very contentious because countries face penalties if they're deemed to be making insufficient efforts to combat TIP. It would be great if State could work with Congress to rationalize these reports, to avoid duplication of effort.

Back to the topic of training, as I said before, I think there should be more opportunities for long-term training, but to make that feasible, State really needs sufficient staffing to have a "training float," i.e. staff that can fill positions for people are away on these training assignments, or other long-term leave, such as maternity/paternity leave.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: I'll relay one anecdote on that topic. When I was Director of the Nordic-Baltic office, we were trying to schedule a meeting with an officer at the Swedish embassy. We were informed that he was out on paternity leave, but we were assured that the person who had been sent from Stockholm to cover his portfolio while he was on leave could meet with us. So, when they grant the leave, they make sure that the job is covered and not left to those in the office to pick up the extra workload. And of course, that just doesn't happen in our system, certainly not to the same extent. In fact, in NB, our desk officers covered two (or in one case, three) countries. When one of them was away, the person assigned as back up, would have four countries to cover.

Another observation I have relates to the issue of tandem couples.

Q: Ah, thank you, yes. I would have asked you specifically if you hadn't mentioned it.

CEFKIN: Finding tandem assignments has always been a struggle. I understand there are a lot of reasons for why it's challenging. During my career, the Department went through different phases in how they approached the issue. At the beginning, when Paul and I first got married and became a tandem, I felt that there was resentment, and in some cases even hostility towards tandems, which made it very difficult to work out joint assignments. Eventually, the hostility was replaced by a more *laissez-faire* attitude. If

tandems found posts that wanted them, Human Resources didn't stand in their way, and would usually bless the assignments, but they also didn't really bend over backwards to help couples make the connections. I think, especially for early or mid-level career officers, State could have approached the issue with a bit more creativity. For example, when I was in Paris, my main contact at the British embassy (who was part of a tandem) had a baby and after maternity leave decided to return to work part time. They let her share the job with another female officer who was also part of a tandem, and it worked out very well. I know that there were a few cases at State Department where they tried job-sharing, without great results, but perhaps more effort could've been put into making that type of arrangement work.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: I do understand that once you get to the senior levels, you run into anti-nepotism restrictions that make tandem assignments much more difficult. Anti-nepotism concerns are valid, but there isn't necessarily a lot of consistency in how the restrictions are applied. Paul and I were the beneficiary of an anti-nepotism waiver in Bosnia. He reported directly to the ambassador so we were able to avoid conflicts of interest. But more recently, when I was in Fiji, one of my DCMs had a spouse that was with USAID. They tried to work something out, and we had an arrangement that worked for a while, but when I left Post it all fell apart. Perhaps they've gotten stricter about anti-nepotism cutouts, and there may be good reasons for that, but I think they need to do a little better job of defining what the policy is and applying it uniformly.

Q: I see. Yeah.

CEFKIN: Another observation I have, which I alluded to earlier, relates to the press of State's workload and the difficulty of achieving work-life balance, particularly as you rise through the ranks. Part of the problem, in my case, probably relates to my personal work habits. Additionally, I think there's a bit of macho in the work culture at State, particularly in the Foreign Service, where we believe we demonstrate our value by how many hours we work. I am happy to see that the younger officers coming into State are more insistent on maintaining work/life balance. I applaud them for that. At the same time that approach leads to some managerial challenges, such as the question of how to handle attendance at receptions, with some only wanting to attend receptions if they get paid overtime. In some cases, when attendance at these events is a command performance, overtime is justified and certain categories of staff are owed overtime. But ultimately, for tenured FSOs, the FS is a profession, not a 9-5 job that you clock in and out of, so doing the job right involves putting in the extra time. Where to draw the line though, remains challenging.

I believe that the challenge of balancing work and personal/family responsibilities is especially acute for female officers. I remember one colleague I worked with at State who was part of a tandem. They had a child in the Diplotots. When the child was showing signs of illness they had to take the child home. Inevitably, it was my officemate, the mother who was expected to go pick up the child and go home, so that left a gap in our

office. Arguably, her husband was in a position that was harder to break away from, but it's a trend I noticed. It's particularly hard for singles and for tandems or people with working spouses to keep up with home responsibilities such as picking up the laundry or doing the grocery shopping. Handling pack-out or pack-in is particularly challenging. Two-career couples became more common during my time at State, but I still had a fair number of male colleagues who had wives at home. I sort of thought the State Department should provide "a temporary spouse" to those that don't have stay-at-home spouses to help with key tasks such as pack-outs/pack-ins. (Laughs)

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: One of the things I was really happy to see over the years was more women coming into State with spouses who were willing to move with them around the world. I know it's not easy for either gender really to be a FS spouse. But I'm glad more men are willing to support their wives in their FS careers, and find flexible work arrangements or, in some cases, take care of the home front while their wives go to work. Speaking of flexibility, along the lines of our discussion of long-term training, it would be nice if FSOs had a sabbatical option, that would allow mid-level or early senior officers to either do training, a detail, or a research project that would allow them to step back and clear their heads. I think it would be beneficial to people's long-term productivity.

Q: Yeah. Before you go into leadership, how would you define the difference between management and leadership?

CEFKIN: Ah-ha. Good question. I don't know if I have the best definitions, but I would say that leadership is really about setting the tone and strategic direction and inspiring the staff to achieve the goals of the organization; whereas management is more about overseeing processes and directing more of the details of the work.

Q: All right. Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Both are definitely important.

Q: Oh, certainly. Were there other management challenges that presented themselves but in different ways as you moved up?

Here I'm thinking more along the lines of how the department had to change in order to be more efficient and keep up—things like IT and—

CEFKIN: Oh, yeah, technology has been a challenge for State, but it's an area where I saw big changes in my career. When I first started, State had Wang computers, and only the office secretaries had them. It wasn't until I was a mid-level officer that all staff had desktop computers, and there were different computers for classified and unclassified work. When Colin Powell was Secretary of State, he revolutionized our IT systems, insisting that we also be allowed to access the Internet and personal email on our office computers. Eventually, technology was developed to allow us to switch between our

classified and unclassified accounts on the same desktops, but understanding how the systems operated and keeping them functioning was always a challenge, in my experience.

In my executive leadership positions, I coached our IT people on the importance of ensuring that technical changes – e.g. when they installed systems upgrades – were clearly explained in layperson's terms, so that non-technical experts could adjust to the changes without too much disruption.

Also, one of my pet peeves has been that with a lot of the new systems that have been introduced at State in an effort to automate processes, the result has been that it pushes work up. For example, the handling of travel vouchers was traditionally something that office managers handled, but then State introduced the "E-2 Travel" system, which allows officers to handle their own travel arrangements and vouchers. It was not a user-friendly system in my view. I was fortunate because by the time E-2 was introduced, I was in leadership roles where I had a dedicated office manager who handled travel processing for me. But I question whether it's efficient to have officers doing their own travel processing. It detracts from time spent on other responsibilities. Office managers are experts in shepherding those processes and can handle the systems much more efficiently. Unfortunately, over the years there has been a decrease in office management positions, in part because some of the work they've traditionally done has been pushed to officers to do themselves. In that sense the advances in IT have been both a blessing and a curse. Also, another effect of having so much information at our fingertips via our IT systems is that senior leaders tend to delve more and more into the details of issues, so that it, in a sense, turns them into desk officers, whereas in the past they would have relied more on desk officers and other staff to filter and pass up the chain of command critical information. The result is that senior leaders are more directly involved in shepherding issues that previously would have been handled at a lower level.

Let's see; another management challenge worth mentioning is the process for building new embassies. Obviously, with security being a major factor, many of our embassies have been forced to move out the city centers to outlying areas, which makes access to host government officials and the public more challenging. But beyond that, a difficulty I encountered was the problem of space planning.

As I mentioned, when I was DCM in Sarajevo, we began the process of constructing a new Embassy, but the design and construction process was a long one. The Office of Building Operations (OBO) had developed a standard design for new embassies, with allowances made for variations in size, so embassies were expected to forecast their staff size far into the future. Once the calculation was made, there was very little flexibility to make changes. Obviously, building new embassies is expensive, and OBO was very fearful of incurring the ire of Congress, if they built embassies with extra space. (There were a few cases, where they had constructed NECs that planned for large USAID missions, only to have the USAID Missions phase out, leaving empty office space. As a result, OBO tended to be very sparing in its space planning allocations, not allowing for the possibility of future staff growth. Fiji is a classic example. We had a beautiful new

embassy, but by the time I arrived, we did not have any spare desk space. Given Fiji's growing importance as a regional hub, we had a legitimate need for more staff, so that presented a real dilemma.

Q: Now, as you were talking about that, well, I think then this is actually more a leadership issue in the end, but are you satisfied with the evaluation process? Do you think it actually does what it needs to do?

CEFKIN: Not really. Yeah, that's a perennial issue. As you know, the evaluation process is very time-consuming, if you take it seriously, is important to do, since careers depend on it. Also, a lot hinges on how well the supervising officers can write and explain the importance of the work the rated officer is doing. I think the process did get a little better in my time at State, in that the form was shortened. I'm not sure that I have any good suggestions about how to improve the process. There's been discussion of introducing an element of three-sixty feedback into the process, but that presents its own challenges.

Q: Sure.

CEFKIN: I guess the main suggestion I would make is to make sure to allocate time away from other responsibilities for drafting officers, so that they can really devote the necessary focus to the process, and to streamline the form as much as possible to avoid redundancies in the competencies addressed.

Q: Now, did you serve on—I seem to recall you served on a promotion panel.

CEFKIN: I did, yeah, which was a very good experience. When I was in Paris, as a mid-level officer, I was assigned to serve on a panel reviewing office management specialists. Then later, before going out as Ambassador to Fiji, I served on a performance pay panel. The panels were a lot of work. For the promotion boards, you are supposed to review five years' worth of evaluations for each candidate eligible for promotion and rate them, and the pace is pretty intense. For performance pay, you only have to review the most recent evaluation, but still there are hundreds of files to review. Still, it was a very useful experience and very instructive as to what to do and what not to do in drafting employee evaluations. EERs. One thing that was tricky on the promotion panel was the reluctance of some panel members to promote people who were relatively junior in their grade but were clearly rising stars. I argued for basing our decisions on the potential demonstrated, as to length in grade. On the other hand, I can also see the argument that people that have been doing the job longer deserve extra consideration. One thing I and other panel members definitely thought was unfair was the requirement to low rank a set percentage of the candidates. I believe that the American Foreign Service Association finally prevailed in getting that requirement dropped.

One other thing that concerned me on the OMS panel was that a bit of "corridor gossip" crept into our discussions, which it isn't supposed to.

Q: Yeah.

CEFKIN: Yeah, I hope that that was an aberration, but I'm not necessarily confident it was. (Laughs)

Q: Yeah. Along the same lines, in the evaluation process, when you said people who are clearly up and coming there's this desire to perhaps slow down their promotions, part of that reason is because there are fewer and fewer ambassadorships for career officers. I believe—and I believe that is continuous regardless of administration, regardless of party. Would that make a difference if they strictly limited, let's say, to perhaps 10 percent of available ambassadorships?

CEFKIN: The panel in my case was an OMS panel, so promotion into the Senior Foreign Service wasn't an issue. Panels are asked to give extra attention to candidates who were at risk of being selected out if they aren't promoted that year, which I believe is fair. Also, I do understand that being promoted too quickly can be a disadvantage because officers can hit the selection-out threshold when they're still relatively young, and if it's a bad year for promotions into the Senior Service it can be devastating for them.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: That's an interesting question on the ambassadorships. I don't know how many positions in the senior ranks are linked to ambassadorial postings. As you know, many officers serve in the senior ranks without becoming an ambassador. So, I don't necessarily think that promotion numbers are tied to the number of career ambassador slots. But it is true that it is dispiriting for senior officers to have the prospect of an ambassadorship dangled, only to have the slot go to a political appointee. Right now the balance between career and political appointee ambassadors is way out of whack. During my career, it's generally hovered around 30 percent political/70 percent career, but under Trump it's been more like 40/60, or even higher for political appointees. A cap of 10 percent for non-career ambassadors would be great. I'm not sure that's a realistic prospect, but certainly, keeping the ratio of career ambassadors as high as possible benefits the quality of State leadership and offers incentives for the really talented officers coming up through the ranks to stay.

Q: Yeah. All right. Sure.

Now, to turn to leadership challenges.

CEFKIN: Yes. You had asked me about what experiences I had that helped me advance in my career to the level of ambassador. In terms of my pre-Foreign Service experience, being a TV news producer was extremely valuable.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: In that role, I was really responsible for bringing the newscast together, including deciding what stories to include in the newscast and in what order, directing the

flow of preparations and leading reporters, writers, and anchors to make sure it all came together. So it required judgment, composure, the ability to motivate teamwork, communication skills, and many of the other competencies that are important in the Foreign Service.

At State, I would say that the continuum of my assignments was excellent preparation. In my second assignment as a desk officer in the Africa bureau, I was responsible for working with the ambassadors and DCMs in the three embassies I covered. In my two years in that position, I worked with six different ambassadors and DCMs, so seeing what they did, what was successful and what was not so successful provided useful leadership lessons. Then in my tour as Ambassador's staff aide at Embassy Bangkok, I had the opportunity to work directly with two different ambassadors and two different DCMs, so I had an inside view of the executive role and learned how embassies function. And I was able to see the big picture of Mission goals, and the full panoply of work different agencies and offices were engaged in. Getting that perspective isn't always easy, especially at large embassies. So that experience was extremely valuable.

And then, dealing more intimately with the Washington policy process in my roles as Deputy Director of the Office of Western European Affairs and Director of the Office of Nordic-Baltic Affairs in the European Bureau was an important step in my professional development. In fact, I believe that Washington experience is essential to being effective in Embassy leadership roles. Those jobs also taught me a lot about the management and personnel side of Foreign Service work. As with my desk job, working with the ambassadors and DCMs at the embassies we covered, as well as shepherding new ambassadors through the confirmation process, was very instructive. And, of course, supporting and motivating our office teams was a valuable leadership experience. Finally, my two DCMships were extremely important, indeed foundational, in terms of preparing me for the role of being an ambassador.

Q: There's one area that we haven't touched on too much and that is how you managed public diplomacy in this new age when there's so much information going on and you are yourself putting out a lot of information all the time. Would you have any advice for people following you into positions of authority, positions of executive control, how to manage that?

CEFKIN: Understanding social media is important. I'm not someone who's very good with technology, so I resisted using social media for a long time. When I was DCM in Bangkok the second ambassador I worked with was extremely adept at social media and made use of those communication tools a priority. We also had a very capable, entrepreneurial public diplomacy section that really worked very well with her. Watching them I learned a lot and saw the benefits of these tools. I even suggested at one point that the ambassador do a Twitter town-hall, and she agreed that was worth trying. So being open to using new tools is important. Hopefully you have good PD people that do understand these technologies and can guide you. When I became ambassador, I decided it was time for me to start using Twitter, and I actually enjoyed it quite a bit.

Q: Ah, okay.

CEFKIN: It's a useful communications tool, though you have to be careful in how you handle it. I had several ambassadorial colleagues in Suva who were using Twitter, so I observed how they handled it which was helpful in launching my Twitter account. I would say that the more training State can offer on these media, the better.

One public diplomacy challenge I did face involved the Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) I worked with. One was very capable and creative. The other one had trouble grasping how the PD section fit into the bigger picture and could best support Embassy priorities, so that was a struggle. In my first tour in Bangkok we had a very dynamic PAO who worked hand in glove with the ambassador to support the Mission's policy priorities, so that was the model I wanted to emulate. Unfortunately, in the case I mentioned, I was not as successful as I would have liked to have been.

Let's see. You'd asked about challenges.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: Something that was on my mind when I first started at the State Department was what happens when you disagree with your own government's policy.

Q: Right.

CEFKIN: In fact, when we had our first A-100 off-site during our entry-level training, a reporter from the *New York Times* joined us to do a story about the minting of Foreign Service officers. He observed some of our training and interviewed several of us, including me. One of the questions the reporter asked was what worried me most about the new career, and my response was that I worried about how I would handle policies that I had trouble supporting. One of the ways I did handle it, which you might say is a bit of a copout but also not unusual, is that I didn't seek positions in areas where I knew I had qualms about U.S. policy. For example, in my early years at State, I didn't volunteer in positions dealing with Central America, given my discomfort with the Reagan Administration's policies in that region.

Q: Uh-huh.

CEFKIN: But obviously, when you are a Foreign Service officer, you have to support the policy of the administration. I remember this issue came up in the pol-econ training I did before going out to my fourth assignment. Our instructor's advice was that if you disagree with a policy or a decision you should raise your objections through internal channels. His suggestion was that it's ok to raise concerns up to three times, but that if, after that, leadership isn't receptive, it's time to salute and support the policy, or if the disagreement is too strong, resign. As you probably know, there were several FSOs who resigned in disagreement over our Bosnia policy during the war there.

Ultimately, you really have to find that internal balance with your own moral compass and how you understand the "greater good." One instance when I, and I know many of my colleagues, struggled with this was in the lead-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, after 9/11. At that point I was deputy director in Western European Affairs. I remember having serious questions about the U.S. claims of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in Iraq, including after watching Colin Powell's presentation to the Security Council. So I was worried that we were rushing inadvisably into war.

We had excellent leadership in our bureau at the time, and I think we all respected Colin Powell a great deal. Our assistant secretary had a townhall to let Bureau staff ask questions and air doubts about the course we were one. She acknowledged people's doubts and concerns, then said that she was motivated by her support for Secretary Powell and what he was tasked with doing, i.e., maintaining the relationships and alliances we were charged with managing. For me that was convincing enough that I was able to work along those lines as well. Once the invasion happened and we toppled Saddam, the focus had to shift to rebuilding Iraq. So we worked to convince other countries to be part of that effort. But, as I described earlier, dealing with the strains the war caused, particularly with France, made it a challenging period policy-wise.

Q: Oh, yeah.

CEFKIN: Then, as I discussed in describing my tour as ambassador, dealing with the change in U.S. climate change policy after Trump's election was extremely challenging. That was the most vexing issue in terms of managing our relations with Pacific Island countries, but it wasn't the only difficulty, since there were a range of issues where the U.S. pulled back from international agreements and partnerships. There was also a diminishment of focus on human rights and the democratic principles that had been a mainstay in U.S. foreign policy throughout my career. Additionally, our own internal political struggles began to tarnish the U.S. image as a model of democracy.

Even though I had experienced changes in policy throughout my career, the basic tenets of U.S. foreign policy had remained fairly consistent until Trump. I had considered doing some part-time work for State as a Retired Annuitant (REA), and after I retired I was approached by EAP about a couple of interesting opportunities. But given the trends in U.S. policies, I decided I was more comfortable remaining a private citizen. The key question, of course, is what that means for the people still in the Foreign Service? I do believe that it's critically important we retain capable Foreign Service officers to maintain our international relationships as best we can until we can hopefully get back to a more solid international footing. So, I salute those who are staying with the career, while also understanding that for some the cognitive dissonance is just too strong prompting them to resign.

Q: And the last question that I have for you is in today's world, if you were to explain to an average American citizen why it's important to have a Foreign Service, what value does the Foreign Service give them, how would—what would you say?

CEFKIN: That's really important. I believe, and I know I'm not alone in this, that we need to do a better job of explaining the benefits of our international engagement to U.S. citizens. I think it's important to better explain how interconnected countries are and how the existential challenges we face – such as the pandemic right now, and climate change -- cannot be resolved by any one country alone. You can't put up a fence and stop a virus from coming. Ditto with climate change -- the causes and impacts of climate change are completely global. We're only going to be successful in tackling these challenges through international cooperation. That means that forging those international relationships are essential to keeping the United States and Americans safe.

It's particularly important for us to work with like-minded countries to support common interests and tackle common problems, and we need to manage adversarial relationships so that they don't become major threats. Take China and Russia for example. There's a lot to be concerned about, but we have to find areas where you can and do work together. To cite one example, the work President Obama did to forge an agreement with China for both our countries to announce robust climate pledges really galvanized international support for the Paris Agreement. (Even after Trump announced his intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, I heard appreciation from Pacific Island leaders for Obama's climate agreement with China.) Another example of critical international cooperation is arms control and non-proliferation.

Also, if you look at business these days, with multinational corporations it's often hard to say where a company really operates. They often get parts or materials from one country, manufacture some components in another country, and perhaps assemble their products in yet another country. So we should do a better job of explaining the global interconnectedness of the U.S. economy, particularly since so much of Americans' well-being hinges on economics. I realize that this would take a lot of legwork and research, but when folks from the State Department travel to communities around the U.S. to speak about foreign affairs, they should try to zero in on the economics of that community and point out the international linkages.

The Council on Foreign Relations did a very interesting study on what voters in several states thought about foreign affairs. I read the case study they did on Ohio. It was actually quite reassuring in that it found that Ohioans weren't anti-trade. They understood the importance of trade to their economy; they just wanted fair trade. They were actually eager to attract more foreign investment. So, I think that if you lay it out in clear terms the results of our international engagement, Americans do understand.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

All right. Well, unless you have any other parting shots, I would like to thank you on behalf of ADST for sharing your journey from pre-Foreign Service and into Foreign Service all the way to becoming ambassador. It is a real legacy of diplomacy and a real legacy of public service and we, we ADST, are delighted that you would take the time and give us this opportunity to work with you.

And so, now the next step is to provide you with the transcript and let you put the finishing touches on.

CEFKIN: Great. Well, thank you so much, Mark.

End of interview