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

AMBASSADOR HERMAN J. COHEN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is August 15, 1996, and this is an interview with Herman J. Cohen. My name is Charles Stuart Kennedy on behalf of The Association for Diplomatic Studies. What I would like to do is could you tell me when, where you were born and a bit about your family so people understand where these people are coming from?

COHEN: I was born in New York City; my parents were born in Lithuania and came to the United States at a young age around 1910. They did not get much education because of economic circumstances in New York and so therefore remained essentially working

class throughout their lives. They worked in very small commerce, trucking, laundry and dry cleaning, milk routes and that sort of thing. We were two brothers. My older brother served in WWII. I missed WWII. Both of us were able to go to university.

Q: What university did you go to?

COHEN: I went to City College of New York.

Q: Now did you get any feel for the Foreign Service or anything like that? What were you majoring in?

COHEN: Well, I majored in government, what today they call political science. International relations became my favorite subject. I decided that whatever field I would work in, I would try to give an international flavor to it. I first thought of journalism, then international business. Then I thought whatever it was, journalism or business, I would do it internationally. I didn't know anything about foreign service, but one of my professors at City College whom I got to like very much, called me aside one day and asked, "Have you ever heard of the Foreign Service?" I said, "No." "Well there are very few people from City College who ever get into it, and I think you might have aptitude for it, so I recommend that you take the exam." That started me on it.

Q: You were at CCNY from when to when?

COHEN: I started in 1949 and left in '53.

Q: Did you take the Foreign Service exam?

COHEN: I did. I was in the ROTC program at City College. I went into the Army just as the Korean War was ending. I got my commission and spent two years in Germany. While I was in Germany I took the exam. When I got out of the Army, I took my oral and that is when they accepted me.

Q: You took your exam about '54 was it?

COHEN: 1954 is correct.

Q: Where did you take it, by the way?

COHEN: I took it in New York City.

Q: I was just wondering because I took mine in '54, no I guess I took mine in '53 in Frankfort. I was an enlisted man in the Air Force. What type of work were you doing in the Army?
COHEN: I was an infantry officer with the second armored division.

Q: When did you take your oral examination?

COHEN: 1955, spring.

Q: Can you remember any of the questions or how you thought about it at the time?

COHEN: I remember it was a rather diverse group of people. They didn't seem to have any set questions they were reading from. They asked whatever was on their minds. One of them was testing my knowledge of baseball. I think I didn't do too badly on that because as a kid I followed baseball a lot. I remember very vividly one question that got them all excited was what can you say about the differences between the Labor Party and the Conservative Party in England? I said, "Well in my view, there really wasn't that much difference. They were both centrist parties who were basically fighting for power and always criticizing the other, but they didn't have such profound differences." This sort of set off an argument among the questioners. One of them said, "Oh, I think that is a good answer." Another said, "I disagree with that." And, then they started, so I felt funny that here I was causing an argument between examiners. I don't remember any other questions though.

Q: Was that at the time when you went out and in a little while they came out and told you if you had passed or not passed?

COHEN: Yes. immediately. I was there with another gentleman. I was quite sure that he was going to make it and I wouldn't because he spoke several languages fluently. I didn't know anything except a little bit of French. He had lived a lot abroad. Apparently he had parents who were in business and he lived in Spain. I said here is a guy, but afterward, it turned out that I made it and he didn't. After that I tried to inquire a little bit and I found out that they didn't consider him American enough. He was too foreign.

Q: This is one of the things, of course, that they were looking at then. When did you come in to the Foreign Service?

COHEN: Almost immediately. They said we will let you know, you are accepted, but we will let you know when you can come in. In days I got this call that said the class starts in two weeks. Fortunately I was not married. I had no family, no job, just out of the Army, so I said yes.

Q: When did you start?

COHEN: August of '55.

Q: I started in July of '55. You must have been class two. I was class one.

COHEN: Were you with Bill Harrop?

Q: No, Dick Murphy, Holsey Handyside, and Irv Okun. Could you describe a bit about the basic officer course and the type of people who were in with you?

COHEN: Well, we had a combination of three categories. There were people like me who had no experience except college and army, and then there were a couple of people with no army, just college. Then there were the so-called Wristonees who had been civil servants, maybe 15 years under their belt, and then there were older people who were not in government coming in for the first time. By older I mean between 30 and 35.

Q: Greybeards.

COHEN: Yes, because I was 23.

Q: Also it was just at the time when they were opening up the Foreign Service again. It was shut down.

COHEN: Right, and there were people turning up from areas where you traditionally wouldn't have seen in the past, such as some obscure college in Arizona. Very few ivy leaguers.

Q: I think at the time they were talking about they wanted a massive infusion of Main Street in the Foreign Service, and they were massively infusing. In the training, did anything strike you as particularly pertinent or non-pertinent?

COHEN: I thought it was very pragmatic, especially on the cultural side. They talked to us about not expecting the same sort of reaction to you by other people, it is cultural, it is not anything else. This was in the discussions. There was a very good consular course I thought. It wasn't too much hands on, but I thought it was a good basis for going further after that. I thought they covered the waterfront in talking about various specializations. I remember being very impressed by the labor attaché. In fact, I even became a labor attaché. I don't remember too much of the details though.

Q: In terms of field trips, did you go up to New York?

COHEN: We did New York, immigration, passport controls and so forth. Also it was half a day. We had half a day of language training. I studied French.

Q: Did you know where you were going; did they tell you?

COHEN: No this was announced at the end. Very many people went to refugee relief programs in Italy, Naples, and Palermo.

Q: Frankfort for me.

COHEN: I was one of the rare ones who got a regular consular assignment in Paris. One of the reasons for this was I had not qualified in French. They said maybe of you go to France, they will help you.

Q: You were in Paris from when to when?

COHEN: I arrived in November, '55, and stayed until about August '58.

Q: What type of consular work were you doing?

COHEN: I did visas for three years, but it was such a big visa section that I rotated around. I had the very important job for one year of dealing with refusable cases that could be very delicate. I also had one year of refugee relief.

Q: Do you recall any cases that were particularly difficult on the refusing side?

COHEN: We had two types of cases. In those days the French Communist Party was very big. Of course we were going through the post McCarthy anticommunism.

Q: Oh yes, the McCarran-Walters Act.

COHEN: McCarran-Walters. So for a lot of French people being a member of the Communist Party was perfectly legitimate and normal. They would come to us for a visa for tourist, business, immigration, and suddenly find themselves ineligible. We had to apply for waivers if we felt like it. These waivers were fairly routine, but we had a few tough cases. One was the famous French actor Yves Montand. Here I was a junior officer, pretty naive, wet behind the ears, and this case comes across my desk. I had better talk to somebody about this. He was not a covert member of the party; he was overt. It was public knowledge. So, I went to the political section. There was a gentleman there who was head of what we called communist affairs, Walter Stoessel, the famous Walter Stoessel. He was very nice, and he said, "No, we would be the laughingstock of the world if we refuse this guy a visa." He was one of the most prominent actors, singers, he was very popular. We can't just be refusing visas to people like this. He impressed me because he said, "Okay, we'll take care of this. I want you to draft a message to Washington explaining why it would be very silly to refuse this visa." He put this responsibility on me right away, so I sent my very first despatch to Washington. Of course I showed it to him before it went out, and he thought it was good. So, it went out and we thought how could they refuse this. But a couple of weeks later, they said no, we don't want Yves Montand in the United States, and they turned him down. Then I had the very interesting experience of trying to explain this to him. He was married to an equally prominent film star Simone Signoret. She was also a communist. I didn't know what to do. I found out there was a lady in USIA who worked with film people. Her name was Cynthia Grenier. She said, "I'll tell you what. I know them personally. We will go over to their house and give them a full explanation." So, we went over. They were not angry or anything, they were just very concerned. Montand was very worried because he had a Hollywood contract to make a film with Marilyn Monroe. He said, "Look, I have got to get out of this problem. Can you explain how to do it?" So I explained defector status and all these things. Then a year later, he was able to get his visa. I had a few cases like that.

Q: That really tests the mettle. I don't think most young people would agree with the

government, because the law wasn't really that popular or didn't make much sense in many practical cases.

COHEN: We also had the U.S. Army that was also still in France in those days before they got kicked out by DeGaulle. Of course, GIs were frequently getting married to local girls. A small percentage married women who ended up being ineligible for immigration because they had convictions for being prostitutes, that sort of thing. Those were the heart rendering cases.

Q: Yes, it was also difficult to ask the questions. Have you ever taken money for the act of love or something like that? It wasn't that easy. One had to steel oneself.

COHEN: I had one who had a conviction on her record for what they call violation of public decency. It was a felony. I said, "Now this can't be true; we can't stop this woman from going with her husband." So, I asked for the details. Apparently she was caught in the back seat of a car with a guy in a compromising position. The French convicted her on this. I wrote back to Washington and said, "Look, this is not a crime in the United States." They said, "I'm sorry but it goes on the basis of their law if it is a felony under their law." I guess they got her a private Congressional bill, and she was able to get into the US eventually.

Q: Well, particularly in those days, young officers learned everything about everything. More than you wanted to know.

COHEN: That is right. So, I found that job very interesting.

Q: During that time, did you get any feel about how the French, their attitude toward the United States in the perspective of developments within France at that time?

COHEN: This was 19551958, I found them kind of resentful of the United States for a couple of reasons. One is we hadn't suffered so much through the war, and they were still recovering. Secondly, it was the Marshall Plan days and we were really pushing them too much in telling them what to do, taking charge of some of their economic ministries. They really resented this because they needed our money and yet they didn't like all the advice we were giving them. Also we had the Algerian problem.

Q: Yes, and Dien Bien Phu was in '54, and '55 was sort of near.

COHEN: I remember on the Algerian problem, we were sympathetic to the Algerian rebels because we were anti-colonial. The French didn't like that, so frequently we would have demonstrations around the embassy.

Q: It was a good entree into the Foreign Service. Did you have any feel because later you are going to end up having a lot of responsibility in Francophone Africa, did Africa cross your radar at all in your experiences or in talking top the French or something like that?

COHEN: Not in that particular time, it was strictly consular matters. I didn't get too much involved in foreign policy except for things like the Yves Montand case.

Q: You left there in 1958; where did you go after that?

COHEN: Originally they had assigned me to be part of the U.S. team at the Brussels World's Fair, but then I ended up marrying a French woman, and they said they wanted me back in the States because they wanted her to be Americanized and become a citizen. I was assigned to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Exchange. In those days it was in State, not in USIA. I turned out to be the first Foreign Service officer ever in that bureau.

Q: You were in that bureau, was it called CU then?

COHEN: IEE, and then it was changed to CU.

Q: How long were you there?

COHEN: '58 and then I left in '61 to do labor training so it was basically three years.

Q: What type of things were you working on in cultural exchange?

COHEN: Well, I was doing public affairs which meant we were answering letters from people. How do I get a Fulbright grant, things like that. I also did a lot of speech writing for Assistant Secretary of State Robert Thayer, a political appointee.

Q: What was your impression of the exchange program?

COHEN: I thought it was quite good. For all of its aspects whether it was VIP visitors or students, I really believe in the whole mystique of greater mutual understanding among nations. I really thought it was working.

Q: Did you feel, I mean obviously you were at a pretty low level at this time but did you feel the cold hand of McCarthyism at that point. McCarthy was out of the scene, but still the anticommunist spirit was certainly very strong.

COHEN: Yes and that anti-communism went along to justify the program. When we did our budget requests, we called attention to the thousands of students going to the Soviet Union. We argued that we could not do less. Nobody was talking about how Latin Americans studied in the United States on their own steam without grants and in the hundreds of thousands.

Q: Well in this were there any particular attacks on the program about things during the time you were there in public affairs?

COHEN: No, not too much. It was Congressman Rooney and his appropriations bunch

and he was constantly harping about waste, but it was a popular program in Congress, especially the Fulbright side of it. The head of the Fulbright program had a lot of clout.

Q: Also President Eisenhower this was very much his thing too. He was really behind it.

COHEN: Yes, it was bipartisan. I had one experience with Fulbright. He wanted a speech written for him in Jamaica and I was told to do the speech writing, so I was able to interface with him. It thrilled me because he was so famous.

Q: You left there in '61 in order to go into labor training.

COHEN: Yes, it was a one-year course. I think it was the second time they had given it. Steve Lowe was in the first one. We had a mixture of going to school and going to internships, going to labor union internships. I went to the Steelworkers internship and the Meat Cutters union in Chicago, and we also served time in different government agencies like the Labor Department and the Commerce Department.

Q: What was your thought and impression as you injected yourself into this labor specialization as a career move at that time?

COHEN: Well I didn't think too much about whether this would be good for my career or bad. I did believe in a very complex world, one should specialize in something. I was drawn to labor because of my family background. My parents were working class and were labor union members. I understood the way ideological battles are drawn into labor unions. The Soviets were always trying to penetrate U.S. labor unions. I was very sympathetic to the idea that labor gives you another window into politics. It is not just dealing with political parties, so I thought I would try it, and that is how I got drawn into it.

Q: What was your impression of the international side of the Department of Labor at that particular time?

COHEN: Well I found it to be very dynamic, a lot of activity going on, they had a lot of clout in the U.S. government and in Congress. They had access to a lot of funding, so I saw it as a very exciting place to be.

Q: Were they tied in to sort of the Kennedy spirit, because you went in in '61? That was when Kennedy came in and he brought an awful lot of enthusiasm in foreign affairs.

COHEN: Yes, that was part of the game. We had the famous Irving Brown of the AFL-CIO who was handling Africa for them. He was a third force.

Q: Could you talk a little about your impression of Irving Brown; he was a major figure.

COHEN: He came out of Europe where he helped the free labor movement defeat the communist labor movement or at least keep its head above water immediately after the

Second World War. He developed a very good reputation. Then, when they assigned him to Africa, he was able to make the type of contacts that gave him tremendous access. He was able to meet with chiefs of state, there was a lot of respect for him. I think he was a great asset in U.S. foreign policy.

Q: Did you have the feeling at the time you were doing this that there were considerable amounts of money going out to the labor unions from the United States? I understand that Irving Brown, one of the things that helped give him a lot of clout was, he was, the Soviets were piling in a lot of money in one fashion or another, and Irving Brown was one of the outlets for getting money either government or union or what have you.

COHEN: What he was doing essentially, well, he was working through two channels. He started the African American Labor Center. They would get grants from AID, and they would give money for various projects through various African unions. We never gave them direct cash subsidies, but there were always projects, training, equipment and travel, for example. The other one was the ICFTU that the United States dominated. The U.S. unions paid dues into it and they channeled money into labor in the third world.

Q: Well, now, in your training you say you went out to several unions.

COHEN: I went to the meat cutters in Chicago and the Steelworkers in Providence, Rhode Island.

Q: What did you do with say the meat cutters?

COHEN: Well, I spent a lot of time in their headquarters learning how they organize, how they make decisions, what their problems are, and it was mainly what unions are all about. I didn't spend much time on the shop floor.

Q: This labor specialty, was there concern that it was political in that labor at that time was pretty much a democratic leaning organization? Did that show up at all?

COHEN: No because the anticommunism thing was so strong, so domestic labor unions were very partisan, pro-democratic, anti-business, anti-republican. But, overseas the anti-communism was so important that it was bipartisan. Republicans supported what labor was doing abroad.

Q: Well, then you finished a year's training of exposure to various things. Were you getting any reflections from the Department of State about being away from the Department of State or were your ties pretty good?

COHEN: The ties were pretty good. We didn't get this feeling of alienation from them. At the end when we had our graduation, the under secretary for Management, Roy Henderson, presided, and he assured us that specializing like this was no deterrent to becoming an FSO1, which turned out to be MC later. He wanted us to be sure that this was not going to keep us down later.

Q: What was your first assignment?

COHEN: My first assignment was to Uganda in the labor attaché position. They had a labor attaché position there because the ICFTU Africawide labor training center was there.

Q: ICFTU is

COHEN: International Confederation of Free Trade Unions that was based in Brussels. This was the counterpart of the communist World Federation of Trade Unions, based in Czechoslovakia. The ICFTU provided a lot of technical assistance and support for free labor in Africa. There was a lot of competition with the Soviets, so they started the Africa Labor Training Center and located it in Uganda. We established a labor attaché position there. That was the vacancy and I opted to go there.

Q: You were in Uganda from when to when?

COHEN: I arrived in early '62 after six months of Swahili training, and I left in late '63, approximately two years.

Q: How did you find the Swahili; how helpful was Swahili?

COHEN: It was not very useful in Uganda. It was mainly used in Tanzania and Kenya. Not as much in Uganda but it was helpful in everyday shopping and dealing with all sorts of people.

Q: What was the situation in Uganda when you were there in '63?

COHEN: I arrived in '62. I arrived nine months before independence. It was still British, so we went through the preparation for their independence and then had the first year of independence. It was very interesting to see how the Africans came in and took charge.

Q: How responsive in your view were the British in getting the Ugandans ready? Sometimes that changeover was done grudgingly and other times it was done with real flair.

COHEN: I think Uganda was one of the cases where they did a very good job. There was a very enlightened colonial government there. They left them with a very good infrastructure and a lot of highly educated, trained people, so it was quite a good job.

Q: Who became the head of Uganda? Was there a prime minister?

COHEN: They had a prime minister for a short period. The Queen of England was the head of state. The Prime Minister was Milton Obote. They had multiparty elections. The Ugandan People's Congress, that was one of the two main parties, won the election, and

Obote became the Prime Minister.

Q: What about the labor movement? I would have thought that labor would have been a very fragile flower in this type of situation.

COHEN: Well, the British were tolerant of labor unions, so there was a certain development there in various fields. There was something to work with. They were not too weak, not bad.

Q: Were there any sort of issues that you dealt with as the labor officer?

COHEN: Well, we didn't deal too much with domestic issues. We were more interested in labor as a window on the government, on politics, but it was the standard issues of higher wages, better working conditions. They needed a lot of training on how to negotiate.

Q: Were there any problems in I mean we were sending experts in trade unions out from time to time?

COHEN: Yes we were or the AFL-CIO was doing that. We used the cultural exchange programs and USIA. We had frequent visitors. Also people were coming to lecture at the training college of the ICFTU.

Q: I would think that this, particularly labor, there is always a certain amount because you really are telling no matter what country you are going out and saying, look, if you get your act together you can make business pay more. You are tilting at the, jousting with the business community, so in a way it can't help but be a partisan activity.

COHEN: Yes, a certain number of people resented it. Well, government people don't like it because here is a diplomat interfering in internal affairs. Business of course was against, but we tried to do it in a way that we were not trying to promote union objectives. We were promoting union freedom, the freedom to have a union. We tried to impress on the management, we also had a policy of keeping contacts with business, people who are on the other side of the table, and to try to convince them that unions are good for them. If you have unions that negotiate in good faith and you reach agreements, you have a more disciplined work force because the unions will try to uphold the agreements. I think that management understood that.

Q: Well, now did you have much contact with the Ugandan government at that time?

COHEN: Well, I had a funny situation there in the sense that when I arrived, I was assigned to be the labor attaché, but it was a small consulate general. The consul general said to me, "You know we are very small here. We really can't afford to have a full time labor attaché as important as that is, so I also want you to be the consular officer and the administrative officer." So I really had three jobs. In my consular and administrative positions I had a certain amount of interface with government. I think it was customs,

immigration, shipping people, as well as the police.

Q: First you had a consul general and then you had an ambassador there?

COHEN: Yes. After independence, we established an embassy, and our new ambassador came in. One of my jobs as administrative officer was to prepare administratively for the shift over because we were going to go from a five-person post to a full-fledged embassy with AID and USIA. We were going to go up to about 80 people. I had to get housing. I had to purchase an ambassador's residence, all sorts of things, so I probably spent about 80% of my time as an administrative officer.

Q: Who was the consul general while you were there?

COHEN: His name was Hendrik Van Oss.

Q: Yes, we have an interview with him. Then who became ambassador?

COHEN: Olcott Deming, a career FSO.

Q: Did you notice a change in operations when you became an embassy outside of sheer size?

COHEN: No, it wasn't that much different. The political and economic reporting had been important even before it became independent, so it wasn't that different.

Q: Well, during this '62'63 period, what was our attitude toward this newly independent state of Uganda?

COHEN: It was pretty much what it was with most of the independent states in Africa which was an emphasis on development. We also had a Cold War objective to make sure they didn't fall under the influence of the Soviet Union. If they remained nonaligned, that was good enough for us, but the main emphasis was development. We wanted to see that AID got in there, they would improve their education, improve their agriculture, their health systems.

Q: Sort of from the viewpoint of the embassy and you being one of the officers there, what was the opinion or perspective from Kampala of developments in Tanganyika and Nyerere and all that?

COHEN: Well the U.S. government loved Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, especially the Kennedys. They thought he was the wave of the future as a progressive revolutionary personality. We sitting in Uganda thought a lot of the things he said were kind of silly, and we resented his influence in U.S. diplomacy, his being the dominant force in East Africa. So, we had some verbal sparring in our telegram traffic.

Q: How about with Kenya; that wasn't independent yet was it?

COHEN: No they became independent in '64, so Uganda was freed two years earlier. Kenya of course, was the economic powerhouse, and there was at that time a federation, an economic union between Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda. There was one postal system, one railway, one airline, one banking system, and one currency. It was really a good thing and we were getting very disturbed at signs it might be breaking up, so we did a lot to try and preserve it.

Q: In subsequent events, there was a mass exodus of Asians from Uganda. What was the role of the Asians as you saw them in Uganda?

COHEN: They dominated the business community. It was not British or European. The Asians dominated the indigenous business community whether it was small business, sugar plantations, or textile factories. Kampala itself, if you didn't know what it was, if you suddenly dropped in by parachute, looked like an Asian town, the architecture, the colors and what have you.

Q: As administrative officer, did you spend most of your time with Asians trying to get things done rent property, that sort of thing?

COHEN: A lot, yes. I spent quite a bit. For example, I arranged the purchase of an ambassador's residence that in 1962 cost $75,000. The owner was a Pakistani, and we purchased it from him. So, any sort of repair work, we found that the people who were very good at packing and shipping were Sikhs, so there was a lot of interface with them.

Q: What was the feeling on the part of the embassy I mean this was sort of the high time of Africa, the Kennedy spirit and this is the wave of the future, and we were very excited about this whole thing. But, here you are in a town that was heavily Asian. Was there an effort on the part of the officers to sort of get out and for want of a better term into the bush and talk to the real Africans?

COHEN: Yes, we spent a lot of time, but Asians stay completely out of politics. In our dealing with political parties, labor unions, university intellectuals and what have you, it essentially was African, so we did see Africans quite a bit.

Q: I'm not sure, when did Amin come in?

COHEN: Amin came in, I'm not sure, he must have come in 1969 or 1970.

Q: Were there any clouds on the horizon wondering about whither Uganda at this time or whether it would hold on to its democratic...

COHEN: Well, Obote, after being in office for quite a few years sort of succumbed to tribalism. It was really a very disappointing situation because here we had one of the most educated countries in the world with a lot of people very capable of running a government. But, tribalism, that is very strong, and ethnic conflict took over, and the

country slowly deteriorated. Obote was a very poor administrator; and there was a lot of corruption, so by the time Idi Amin came in 1969, the country was totally fed up with Obote. Maybe in its initial stages, people welcomed this coup d'état, until they saw what a monster Idi Amin turned out to be.

Q: During this '62'63 period, things were still pretty hot down in the Congo. Did that have any reflection of where you were?

COHEN: Yes, we were right on the Congo's eastern border. We had a lot of administrative work because the U.S. and the UN peacekeeping operation there, and a lot of supplies and a lot of the troops were being ferried in from our side of the border. I remember once we got a telegram from Washington saying the U.S. Air Force would be rotating an Ethiopian regiment down to the Congo and they would be staging through Uganda. We had to be helpful there, and at one point they gave us their requirements of food and aviation gas and so on. I looked at this and went to see the Shell Oil representative about the aviation gas thing. He said, "I've never seen anything like this before. We are going to have to divert ships at sea to bring in enough because this is 100 times our normal usage." So it worked out. We had to take care of hotel rooms and vehicles and all that for the crews, so we were involved.

Q: The government and the populace of Uganda was not opposed to what the UN was doing in the Congo at that time.

COHEN: No. Not at all. There were even American missionaries, a lot of American missionaries in the Congo and from time to time they were being evacuated for safekeeping. They came into Uganda and were welcomed and were allowed to pursue their activities.

Q: Were there any tensions between Kenya and Uganda? Was this a tribal thing or was there a spillover of tribes?

COHEN: When I was there, there was no problem. As I said, there was one economic union, one railway, one monetary system and all that. Things were working out pretty well, and many of the people in Uganda were Kenyans. For example, the head of the labor movement was a guy originally from Kenya, so there weren't that many real problems. Both countries spoke Swahili so they had a common language.

Q: When you left there in '63, what was your feeling whither Uganda at that time?

COHEN: I left on an upbeat note. It looked pretty good. They had a lot of talent. It was economically prosperous; they were making a lot of money from commodity exports. They had a very good infrastructure, especially roads, railway, hotels all over the place, good tourism revenue, so I was very upbeat. After I left, the political situation deteriorated.

Q: What were they exporting?

COHEN: Coffee, cotton, and copper.

Q: Good, rather diversified.

COHEN: Yes.

Q: Well, in '63 where did you go?

COHEN: It was about Christmas time in '63, we got transferred to Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, which is now called Zimbabwe. There, they had a regional labor attaché position covering three countries. Southern Rhodesia, Zambia, which had been Northern Rhodesia, and Malawi, which in those days was called Nyasaland. Malawi and Zambia were independent countries. They had just become independent in '64. I guess they were about to become independent, but Southern Rhodesia was a South African type situation with a white minority with the British refusing to give them independence until they accepted majority rule which they did not do. But, the biggest post in the region was in Salisbury, economically the most important.

Q: It was a consulate general?

COHEN: A consulate general, but still a bigger post than either of the two neighboring embassies.
Q: Who was the consul general at that time?

COHEN: A gentleman named Geren. I believe he was a political appointee.

Q: As a regional labor officer you weren't also a consular or administrative officer any more.

COHEN: No that is all I did. It was a rather large post. They had a full time consular officer, a full time administrative officer, a full time political officer and so on. It was like an embassy although it was called consulate general. It did a lot of regional services for the other posts, so I was just one of those regional officers. In many ways I was my own boss. I would just say I'm going up to Zambia for a few days or to Malawi for a few days. I spent a lot of time though on Southern Rhodesian politics. It was a tough situation there.

Q: Was there any, one always thinks of the white businessmen dominating, Ian Smith's movement and all that, but was there a labor component either white of black in the mix? I haven't heard of that.

COHEN: That is what I found so fascinating. The business community being rather affluent and enlightened, they were in favor of progress toward democracy with majority rule. It was the white working class who were very reluctant because they saw themselves being displaced by Africans, the railway workers, mine workers, service workers of various kinds, banking, auto mechanics.

Q: There was a fairly large group more than anywhere else, of white settlers who came from modest backgrounds.

COHEN: That is right. They said the lieutenants settled in Kenya and the Sergeants went to Rhodesia.

Q: Rhodesia for other ranks.

COHEN: And there were about a quarter of a million. There were a lot of working class types, lower middle class and of course very much afraid of majority rule. They had a labor movement, railway workers, mineworkers, so as labor attaché I dealt with them. But at the same time, there was also a fairly large black labor movement, railway workers, mineworkers, textile workers, what have you, and I dealt with them. What was fascinating there, this was a white government, sort of racist. The consul general, the political officer dealt mainly with them, and they didn't want to get tarnished by dealing with blacks too much. But, as the labor attaché dealing with black unions, I dealt with them and through the unions I dealt with the black nationalists political leaders who were in jail half of the time. So I would go visit them and for me it was perfectly natural, but for the political officer and the consul general it was not easy for them to do that.

Q: Let's talk about the white unions first. The British labor system is sort of class oriented and on the ideological spectrum often particularly at the real union level, what is it they used to sing, the red banner forever, rather leftist and idealistic about the Soviet Union and all that. Did you find that, or was this a different breed of cat?

COHEN: No this I would call them right wing, not so much in their attitude toward capitalism. They still thought capitalism was the enemy, but still their main concern was race being overpowered by the black majority, so everything else took second place. Also, since the standard of living for the blacks was so low, an average white worker, say he is working on the railway, he had a swimming pool and servants. So for him he didn't have a problem of his being on the lower end of the social scale as they would in England.

Q: How did you operate in this dual system? You were working at one level with these affluent by local standards union types who were racist and then with the blacks, you were getting instructions from unions in the United States which were going through a lot of problems then. This was the height of the civil rights movement.

COHEN: The unions, especially Irving Brown, had given up on the white unions. There was no sense of solidarity between the AFL and these guys, anticommunism apart. As far as the AFL-CIO was concerned, Southern Rhodesia and South Africa were essentially racial issues not ideological, so they spent all of their time with the black unions. Therefore, they were looked at as enemies by the regime. I was looked at ambivalently. On the one hand, when I dealt with white unions, I dealt with them as friends of labor, and they sort of accepted me that way. When I was dealing with black unions, the

government looked a little suspiciously as what is he doing with these guys? What rebellions is he fomenting, especially when I used the unions to talk to the political nationalists. I remember once I was invited to give a speech at a school. In the British tradition, schools celebrate “prize-giving” day at the end of the year. So they asked the consulate to supply a speaker. So we called the headmaster back and said Mr. Cohen will do this. The headmaster was very nice; he told me what they were looking for. Then about two weeks later he called and said, "I'm so embarrassed, Mr. Cohen. The government is insisting that you provide a copy of your speech ahead of time." I don't normally do this because I tend to speak extemporaneously from notes. So then I was forced to write a speech. I went ahead and wrote a speech and sent them a copy. I gave the speech, and the headmaster said, "I'm so terribly sorry to make you go through this, but you know, the government said to us “this man is dangerous, so therefore we want a copy of his speech." After I was there about a year, I was classified as being pro majority rule.

Q: When you say you had these contacts and you were working with them, what were you doing? Both with the whites and the blacks on the labor side. We will talk about the other countries later; we are talking about Rhodesia now.

COHEN: I kept them engaged in a lot of conversation about how their unions were operating, what were they doing, how they dealt with management, very labor type issues. They were happy to fill me in and tell me about their complaints and their problems. I would always lead into politics. What is your view of the way the government is working, your attitude toward the blacks? So this was my way of getting political reporting and sent telegrams and dispatches about that.

Q: Were you getting both good information and instructions about, we are really talking about the height of the civil rights movement activity which was rather intense and quite nasty at times in the United States, the integration and all this which was both a pertinent example, you know good example, bad example and so forth. I mean a lot was happening turmoil in the United States. Was this useful, difficult or what for you in dealing with the white and black unions?

COHEN: We didn't have much impact from the U.S. civil rights issues to be honest. It was just the basic policy of the U.S. government to support democratization and majority rule especially from the Kennedy administration. Kennedy was assassinated while I was still in Kampala, but it continued under Johnson. There was a backdrop of support for democracy, but we didn't get that much...

Q: It was not the era today's era where you had CNN where if there is a riot in the United States, particularly white policemen beating up black demonstrators, every village in the world can watch this.

COHEN: That is right. When we talked about moving ahead to democracy and stopping the repression of the blacks, the whites would ask what we did to the American Indian. That was a standard response.

Q: What about in Nyasaland that was later Malawi and Zambia, what were the situations there?

COHEN: Just to backtrack a second, Rhodesia was slightly different from South Africa in that they didn't have enforced segregation. There was no government regulation. It was segregation in the sense that a hotel wouldn't have to accept blacks if they didn't want to, or a restaurant, but there were a few hotels and restaurants that were desegregated, so we in the consulate general made a point of going only to those places when taking Africans out to lunch. To that extent, the U.S. civil rights thing did have an impact. Well, Malawi and Zimbabwe were already independent. There it was dealing with them like in Uganda, to promote free unions as a part of development and part of democracy, so we interfaced with unions, business, and government there. It was standard labor attaché treatment.

Q: Were the governments in either of those places looking at labor unions as being a force outside of their control.

COHEN: Well it was already the beginning of the one party state. It was starting to come in. They started out as democracies. In Zambia particularly the mineworkers union was very powerful because copper mining was such a major element in the economy. They were exporting 400,000 tons of copper a year. They were heavily urbanized, and the British left a very strong mineworkers union, so they were a separate power. They didn't consider themselves aligned, and the government was already eyeing them as an enemy and something that had to be controlled. My going around to see them was not well viewed. Not to speak of the fact that I was coming from another country. I was protected by the U.S. ambassador in Lusaka who was a political appointee from the Kennedy administration, Ambassador Robert Good. It was already getting dicey, but the counterpart of that was the unions really liked me. They saw me as an ally against the totalitarianism of the regime. Malawi was already pretty far gone. They had become a dictatorship. There was nothing much we could do except try to use the unions as a source of information.

Q: Did you ever find yourself either in competition or cooperation with the equivalent to the British did they have labor officers and the like, too?

COHEN: I think we were the only ones doing it. Occasionally some Scandinavian countries would do that. We didn't find any competition in this area. Actually the outsiders we saw the most of were the ICFTU representatives. They had them in a lot of countries, so we used to talk to them a lot.

Q: How about again this is the height of the Cold War, did you see much Soviet playing around in this area?

COHEN: The Soviets didn't do too much with unions as far as I could tell; although, you would have the World Federation of Trade Unions try to recruit. In some countries the central labor federation was affiliated with them. None of the countries I was in. All of the countries I was in were affiliated with the ICFTU, so that was less of a worry for us.

But, it was mainly a question of tensions between governments who wanted to be more and more totalitarian and free labor.

Q: Did you have any equivalent to instructions or a pitch that you made sort of opposed to totalitarian or one party systems and that?

COHEN: No we didn't. In fact, another aspect of our view of Africa, which was sort of linked to civil rights, was that these guys were independent. Who were we to criticize them. If they want to have the type of government they consider good for them; we are not going to interfere. We did want them to have free labor unions, but a totalitarian system can't tolerate free anything, so they had to coopt the unions.
Q: Did you ever have any run-ins with the governments?

COHEN: Well, the Zambian government objected, I think at one point, they said we shouldn't contact the mineworkers any more. It was near the end of my stay. In fact at one point they didn't allow diplomats to travel outside Lusaka without permission. You had to ask it. Southern Rhodesia, they didn't like it, but they never stopped us. In fact at one point I remember giving a party at my house for the black labor unions, and I invited the white labor minister who was a real extreme hard line right-winger. He came and afterward he thanked me. He said that it was his first ever contact with black unions. It shows that politics was far more important that unions and labor relations.

Q: Well you left there in 196...

COHEN: Well in the middle of '65, the whites declared their independence from Britain. It was called UDI, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence. It came a few weeks after Harold Wilson had spent a few days there. That was a lot of time for a Prime Minister. He came there and tried to talk them out of doing it, try to make a deal with them, the whites. The whites decided no; the government decided it was time. I think it was in November, 1965 when they declared independence. I was just completing my second year there, and of course the State Department went ape over that. This was moving backwards, a blow to democracy and all that. We refused to recognize them, and to show our displeasure, we were going to reduce the size of the mission of the consulate general. Of course I wanted to stay because it was a very pleasant place, and was interesting. But, the political officer got to stay and I got moved out. They said you are a regional labor attaché, go to one of your other countries, so they shipped me to Zambia. There instead of being the labor attaché, I filled the slot of the economic and commercial officer who was just leaving on transfer, but I also did labor work.

Q: You were in Zambia from when to when?
COHEN: From late '65 to late '66. I only stayed one year.

Q: The head of Zambia was Kenneth Kaunda. What was the embassy impression of Kaunda at that time?

COHEN: At that time he was one of the freedom fighters. He got his country

independence. He was a great humanitarian. He was a very articulate spokesman for African freedom and independence, so he was very well-liked. He was one of those like Nyerere, Nkrumah, and others who were popular in the United States at the time.

Q: As the economic commercial officer what was the infrastructure of the Zambian government at that time? Were there many whites in it or was it pretty much an Africa for Africans type?

COHEN: It was being Africanized, but there were still a significant number of whites, particularly in the court system, the police, and what you might say second echelon advisors to the government. There were quite a few of them, mainly from the UK, United Nations.

Q: How about in your area of interest, economic and commercial, whom were you dealing with?

COHEN: Well, there were copper mines that were the big business, and some import export people. I felt that my job was to really promote U.S. exports even in those days. I did an inventory of all U.S. investments there, something that didn't exist because the embassy had only been open for a couple of years. I found that there were about 120 U.S. investments. Most of the companies that were there were based in South Africa, so I tried to track that and help. We went through a crisis there because of the UDI in Southern Rhodesia. The British blockaded the oil pipeline that came from the Indian Ocean coast. Now that had the major impact not on Southern Rhodesia but on Zambia, because the Southern Rhodesians were able to get oil from South Africa by land because they were buddies. Zambia was suddenly cut off and there was no gasoline. We were rationed. We had about four gallons a month for each car. We were going to the embassy on bicycles. We couldn't accept invitations for parties. We were heavily involved in helping the Zambians get supplies. We decided to get AID to build a road to Tanzania. There was an existing but very deteriorated road. We were helping them buy vehicles. We were spending a lot of time on this emergency. In fact, at one point we were even airlifting gasoline, a very expensive process. So, as an economic officer, I was spending most of my time on this crisis.

Q: What was the feeling toward Kaunda's economic policy? Was he of the Nyerere socialist thought or was he different?

COHEN: No, he was of the Nyerere socialist thought. He felt that everything should be nationalized. He hadn't done it yet by the time I left, but he was on the verge of doing it. One of the big copper companies there was American owned, so we were doing our best to protect their interest, make sure they were compensated if it was nationalized. We weren't giving them economic advice like don't do it. In those days, we were very tolerant of the one party state and the socialist systems. This was Africa; let them do what they want.

Q: Did you feel working in Africa at this early stage, did you feel there was a bloom on

the rose, a feeling of these Africans are certainly going to do a wonderful job and all this I mean looking at it as being very tolerant all this is going to work out rather than being a practical nation as we often are.

COHEN: Well, for certain countries like Uganda and Zambia there was this very upbeat feeling. These people are serious. They have a certain amount of education. They have a lot of problems; they are way behind in a lot of things. With foreign aid, good intentions, and serious people, they should be able to make fast progress, but that was not true for every country. My next post after Zambia was Zaire that collapsed totally after de-colonization, and nobody was optimistic there; it was a mess. So early on, differentiation among the various countries was emerging.

Q: Did you get any feel from the Africa Bureau, because this was Soapy Williams' fiefdom more or less. I have talked to others who felt that he had a very positive outlook that was not necessarily justified by facts. He didn't want to hear negative things. Did you get any of that?

COHEN: No I think that most people unless you had a terrible situation of chaos like Zaire, most people were upbeat about it.

Q: You left Zambia in the last quarter of '66 and went to Zaire. What was your job in Zaire?

COHEN: In Zaire, I went back to being a full time labor attaché. Apart from being a big rich country, Zaire was important in Cold War terms. Since the country had so fallen apart after the Belgians left, there was a vacuum in which the Soviets and Americans were essentially competing for influence and power. The United States had jumped in and become virtually a proconsul there. We had a big AID machine, a big military machine. We had people in virtually every ministry telling them what to do. We had a major CIA operation that was even running its own airline. It was a totally different thing from anything I had ever seen before. The labor union was an important element in our overall strategy.

Q: When you talk about the labor union, what sort of labor union was there?

COHEN: Like the Belgians, they had both a Christian labor federation and a socialist labor federation, and they were pretty well organized. It was a very highly industrialized country under the Belgians. There were copper mine workers, a lot of textile factories, shipyard workers, and many others. So, you had a lot of union members and people who trained outside to be union leaders.

Q: As the labor attaché, what did the ambassador look upon you to do outside of keep track? As you say we were running sort of a proconsul stewardship there. Did you have any more than just reporting?

COHEN: Well he saw me mainly as a political officer to contribute to the embassy's

political analysis. Also try to influence the political situation there, keep them pro-west and report on their relations with bad guys, the Soviet embassy, what have you.

Q: What type of activity were the Soviets doing as you saw it?

COHEN: They were trying to do a lot of education, bringing Zairean students to Russia for training at Lumumba University. They were inviting people for short visits just like we were doing, giving money, all sorts of projects, health projects, agricultural projects.

Q: I was doing an interview this morning with Ed Horowitz who was sort of talking about the other end being in Moscow at this time about how many of the students from foreign countries particularly the Africans became very disillusioned because the Russians are good solid racist people and are not very subtle about it. Were you seeing any reflection from the people coming back from Lumumba University and how they were? I would have thought they would gravitate toward the unions.

COHEN: We did see some of them coming back. In Africa in those days anyone coming back with a college degree was getting a government job, so they didn't have to worry too much about employment. We did find that people trained in the Soviet Union were viewed as second class citizens. Returning students who had a degree from Europe or the United States received good jobs. A guy who got a medical degree from Bulgaria or any school of the Soviet Bloc, became marginalized pretty quickly.

Q: How did you find your contacts with the unions; was it a problem ?

COHEN: No they were very warm. They were very pro-west and looked to the Europeans or the Americans for support and for projects. They were very pro-American thanks to people like Irving Brown.

Q: I would have thought it would have been a bit difficult dealing with the problem of separatism particularly in Katanga. This was a huge copper area that was trying to separate itself from the central government, and also this was being pushed by some Belgian commercial interests. Did you find yourself caught up in that?

COHEN: By the time I had gotten there, the UN operation had been there for five or six years and they had sort of settled that issue. But, in the middle of '67 we had what we called the mercenary rebellion, because there was still the Zairean regime and President Joseph Mobutu and the army were still employing foreign mercenaries, mainly South African whites and Belgians to pacify certain areas. In June of 1967 there was a rebellion in the town of Bukavu on the eastern border near Rwanda. These mercenary battalions took over and started marching toward the center of the country toward Kisangani. It used to be called Stanleyville. It was obviously designed to topple the regime, and we suspected that Belgian business interests were behind it because once you topple the regime, then you can go after Katanga and other rich areas. We had to evacuate our consulate there. We had a small consulate in Bukavu, and we had to evacuate everyone, so it was a tense moment. This unleashed a lot of anti-white sentiment that was fanned by

the regime. By that time by the way, I had become political counselor because the previous counselor left on transfer. The ambassador said that I'd rather have you become political counselor than get someone I don't know.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

COHEN: The ambassador was Mac Godley replaced shortly thereafter by Robert McBride. Godley and his DCM, Robert Blake, offered me the job, so I left being labor attaché after one year. So, we were coping with this anti-white sentiment being fanned by the regime. We had a lot of work to do saving missionaries from the interior because people were attacking them. Bill Harrop, our consul general in Lubumbashi, was responsible for saving a lot of Belgian lives down there. So we had the very interesting phenomenon, lots of country team meetings deciding what the U.S. reaction to this mercenary rebellion should be, and we decided to ask for U.S. military assistance to the government to deal with this mercenary rebellion. In our telegram to Washington, we said that we had always sent military assistance to defeat pro communist rebels in Zaire and other countries. This would be the first time we would oppose right wing fascists, and we think it would show a nice balance. This was the Johnson administration and they bought that. They really liked that idea, and they sent out a joint task force of four C130 aircraft that were used mainly to transport Zairean troops around the country. That was very successful. This was the first operation of that type that I was involved in and had responsibilities for.

Q: What was the outcome of it?

COHEN: Very successful. The mercenaries got the signal that the U.S. was against them, which was disappointing to them. They would think we were on the right wing side of the fence as well. So, they quickly got the signal and retreated and left the country but after having caused a lot of damage and hatred and what have you. I was very proud of that operation.

Q: Were you able to notice a difference in the attitude of the Zaireans? Were they aware of what we had done?

COHEN: Yes they were, and the president gave it a lot of publicity. Actually the C130 which was flying all over Zaire carrying troops and what have you became the symbol of power for Zaire. You see a C130, it means that help is on the way, you are safe.

Q: A C130 is a standard four- engine transport plane.

COHEN: Yes and they are very wonderful planes. A couple of years later when I was back in the department as Director for Central African Affairs which was mainly Zaire, Mobutu came on an official visit, and Nixon said, "Can we help you with anything?" Mobutu said "I want C130's." Because he realized that the one who has C130's has power.

Q: What was our impression of Mobutu at this period, '66'69, what was our impression of

Mobutu at that time?

COHEN: We liked him although we saw there was tremendous incompetence you might say, but we liked his attitude. He was sort of a can-do, I want to get things done. He was an army sergeant who became a general. He had a certain intellectual base; he had gone to school. We liked talking to him, and of course, he was very anticommunist. He took our advice, but there was tremendous incompetence, inability to get anything done. He was very quixotic, make a decision one day, and reverse it the next, a lot of crazy things going on, but we liked him personally.

Q: What about the problem of corruption? How did we see that?

COHEN: We didn't let it worry us too much. It was an African cultural phenomenon, and it wasn't that big in those days. This was not America, you know. We could not apply our own standards then. It is no longer the case today.

Q: Did you have a problem with young officers coming in of dealing with as you say a rather chaotic political system, decisions would be made and then not made. Sometimes it is hard to get young officers to not get very righteous about things. It sort of spills over into the attitude of writing and all that.

COHEN: No we didn't have that problem. In fact, the guy who worked for me when I was political counselor was a guy on his first tour, Kenneth Brown, who just retired after being ambassador in Ghana. He was very cool, treating it analytically.

Q: You were there sort of at the beginning. Were you seeing a solid cadre of Africanists being developed?

COHEN: Yes. I was one of the early African specialists. Slowly but surely, we were developing a good group.

Q: What about the African Bureau during this time you were in Zaire; did you get any feeling for the direction of the African Bureau?

COHEN: It was very good. They took good care of us administratively. They seemed to have a lot of clout within the State Department with people like Dean Brown, Sheldon Vance and Assistant Secretary Palmer. They were very powerful people, They were all very supportive, intelligent people.

Q: Any high level visits to Zaire while you were there?

COHEN: Vice President Humphrey came. It was an Africa visit. He was going to about seven or eight countries. The trip was related to U.S. domestic politics, designed to demonstrate an interest in Africa. He had a lot of African Americans on the plane, also trying to shore up our relations with Africa to make sure they did not go communist. He spent about two nights in Zaire. That was the biggest. Apart from that, I don't remember

the Secretary of State ever coming. We had, of course, numerous visits from the Assistant Secretary of State.

Q: How about from the Department of Labor of the AFL-CIO, Was there much of a tie with the labor unions during this period?

COHEN: Yes, there was a lot. The AFL-CIO considered the Zairean unions among their best friends in Africa, so there was a lot of interchange, a lot of movement back and forth, a lot of training for example. The AFL-CIO concentrated on very practical things, a school for typists, machine tools, and basic skills. The Africans really loved that.

Q: Did you have any role to play in saying you know it would be good to have a school for typists? Is this the kind of thing you would be doing from time to time?

COHEN: Yes, they consulted me and we would work with AID and see what the needs were. I was intermittently involved with that.

Q: What about the labor ministry there? Was that a...

COHEN: That was very ineffective; it was not operating. We preferred to deal with the labor unions.

Q: How about when you were a political counselor on the side of dealing with the media; was there much of a Zairean indigenous media?

COHEN: There was a very big media before the government established a one party state that came during my time. There were only three newspapers allowed to publish, and each one was part of the one party state. There was a very flourishing media and we had a very strong USIA. The USIA used the political officers to brief the press, to lecture to the press, to have meetings that the press attended. It was a very strong relationship there.

Q: What happened, how did the one party state come about?

COHEN: Well, there was a trend in Africa. It started with people like Kaunda and Nyerere. They said that Africa could not afford multiparty systems; it was too expensive. That was just copying the white man. We have our own more appropriate African way that is consensus. We all sit around the tree and have a palaver. That is what we should have, a one party state and we settle all our differences within the one party. So Mobutu, not wanting to be different and seeing that it would consolidate his power, decreed that there would be only one party and everybody in Zaire would belong to it by birth. If you were a Zairean citizen you were a member. Everything would be coopted into it, labor unions, women's groups, youth groups would all become branches of the party. So, that was the clamping down of a totalitarian system disguised as an African democratic system. That was a trend all over Africa. They changed their constitutions in most countries to allow for only one official political party that became synonymous with the state.

Q: Since we had such a role there, did we try to do anything about it?

COHEN: No, we had no interest in promoting our brand of democracy. Our main interest was that Zaire should remain pro-west, good for U.S. business, supporting the United States in the UN and other forums around the world. Also we wanted stability. If a one-party state could bring an end to chaos, so much the better. We were not on a pro-democracy kick in those days.

Q: I think we might leave it at this point here. You left there in '69 and we'll pick it up the next time, where did you go from Zaire.

COHEN: Back to the Department to be in the office of Central African Affairs.

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Q: Today is October 8, 1996 and we continue. So you went back you were in the bureau of African affairs from '69 until when?

COHEN: Until June, 1974.

Q: What did the bureau of central African Affairs consist of at that point?

COHEN: The whole bureau of African Affairs had a southern African office, central Africa, east Africa, west Africa and north Africa so there were five office directorates, and I was director for the central Africa. I dealt essentially with French speaking African countries.

Q: Well, when you came back to central African affairs in the Africa Bureau, did you sense any change in attitude toward Africa among those who were dealing with it?

COHEN: No it was pretty much continuity. In '69 I had about 10 years experience with Africa. The Cold War was still on very strong, so much of our attitude toward African countries was driven by friends and enemies, pro-west or pro-east in those days. In my particular area, Zaire was the most important country because it was very large, very rich and a big prize. The Zairean government was pro-American, and we were doing a lot to help them, especially in the internal affairs of Zaire where we were heavily involved. Zaire was my biggest responsibility.

Q: Just a bit about what was the feeling at that time of the role of France let's say outside of obviously a country which had once been Belgian place, but in the former French colonies? What role was France playing there?

COHEN: Well, France was obviously the dominant external influence in all of these countries. They were also making a great effort to dominate the former Belgian colonies because the Belgians were not doing a good job. They were very weak. The French under

DeGaulle's influence considered all the French speaking countries as belonging under the French sphere of influence. That included countries like Zaire, Burundi and Rwanda, which they made a big effort to dominate. This whole Gaullist philosophy that the Americans were almost as much an enemy as the Soviets, and should be kept out, was a major element of French policy in Africa.

Q: Did you find that we were maneuvering to outwit the French or outmaneuver the French, I mean how did we fell about that?

COHEN: Our attitude was that the more the French wanted to take responsibility so much the better, because that meant less for us because we saw our major responsibility was in Latin America and Southeast Asia. We didn't want to fight the French. We figured their influence was good; and they were giving a lot of aid. Although they saw us as competitive, we did not see them as competitive.

Q: Did you have any contact with the French embassy to discuss this?

COHEN: The French embassy followed us very closely. They had a full time diplomatic officer who covered Africa and came to see us quite a bit. There were a lot of exchanges between us and the French, both in Paris and in Washington. We could always sense that in the French speaking countries especially, they pushed both their business interests and their political interests.

Q: This is one of the things that comes up again and again, and that is the accusation has been made that the French put their business interests very high in the set of priorities whereas the United States doesn't.

COHEN: Well this was particularly true in Africa. For example, the president of Zaire wanted to have jet fighter planes, so he came to us and said, "Can you help me with that?" We said, "Well, considering your needs are limited. You don't have major external enemies. We would offer you some reconditioned Skyhawk aircraft that are in mothballs now. We can get them out."

Q: This is tape two, side one with Hank Cohen.

COHEN: So we said if you want reconditioned fighter jets, Skyhawks, it will only cost you $50,000 each. This was in 1970. They said, "No we want new planes. You are just treating us like Africans, giving us used material." So what happened, they went to the French, and the French sold them very expensive Mirage jets, for almost $2,000,000 each. They bought ten of them and after one year they were unable to maintain these very complex planes and they were grounded. But, the French didn't care; they were selling their planes.

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs?

COHEN: David Newsom.

Q: Who, by the way, I have an interview with. You came in '69 and the Nixon administration was in. William Rogers was the Secretary of State, and Henry Kissinger was the National Security Council man. Did you sense they had any interest in or differences of approach toward Africa?

COHEN: Well Kissinger did not have that much interest in Africa. He did not have time for it. He was negotiating with Vietnam. Rogers, of course, did not have much power, but he did something very interesting. He was the first Secretary of State to ever go to Africa, and he made a tour of Africa in 1971 in which he made a speech in Addis Ababa which said in effect we do not need a Cold War in Africa, we and the Soviets. Africa has been kept out of the Cold War; we have all worked on development. This was a major speech, and we all were very happy to hear that. Of course, this was all part of what Nixon and Kissinger called detente. It was happening in Africa before anywhere else.

Q: We are saying this at a time when Warren Christopher after three and a half years as Secretary of State was getting ready for his first trip to Africa in the Clinton Administration. What was the view of Soviet influence in Africa at this particular point?

COHEN: The Soviet influence was very strong in two ways. First of all, they were encouraging African governments to be socialist. They were saying the state should control enterprises; the state should control everything. Capitalism was a dirty word. They also encouraged them to have one party states, dictatorships. Of course their objective was to get as many African countries as possible to become communist. This, of course, was a very damaging thing. It set back African economics at least 30 years. They all went backwards instead of forwards. This did not happen in every country, but in many countries it had a negative influence.

Q: I have been interviewing Ed Marks now and he is talking about the pernicious influence of socialists in the home countries both in England and in France also and how it fit into the tribal politics of Africa. More than the way of Soviet, this was a good way to get into power and stay in power.

COHEN: That is true; I agree with Ed Marks. During the pre independence days when the African leaders were students in the colonial powers of England, France, or Belgium, a the people that befriended them the most were the leftists in those countries, the socialists and the communists. They were fully penetrated by these ideas. The state will do everything, therefore they will bring happiness to the people. Of course, it did fit in with African tribal traditions of the paramount chief where there is no such thing as competition or multiparty systems. I would say that as much as I blame the Soviets for encouraging this, I also blame the European left for doing the same thing.

Q: In the area you were responsible for, did we have any way of trying to turn things around? What were we doing?

COHEN: We tended to neglect this aspect of policy. We were not pushing democracy.

We were not pushing free market economics. You could ask why that was the case. I would say first of all, the Cold War. We were interested in making friends rather than getting into controversies. Secondly, I think there was a feeling of guilt among Americans and others as to the colonial experience. They now have their independence. Let them make their own decisions. We won't tell them what kind of government to have. If they say this is African socialism or a form of African democracy; who are we to say this is wrong? We neglected to express the views saying look this is going to make your economies go backwards instead of forwards. We should have talked about it, but we didn't.

Q: Were you on Central African Affairs for the entire '69'74 period?

COHEN: Yes I was on the same job for approximately five years. It was a long tenure, and I enjoyed it. In fact, Zaire was my most important country. I had spent three years in Zaire before that, so in effect for eight straight years I was concentrating on Zaire.

Q: You talked about what you were doing while you were in Zaire, but now for these five years, what were the main issues that concerned you in Zaire.

COHEN: Well, we were interested in first of all the stability of the country. It became independent from Belgium in a very unstable unprepared way, and it continued to be unstable throughout the 60's and most of the 70's. We were doing everything we could to keep it together, keep it from splitting apart. Secondly we wanted to do everything possible to advance economic growth because they had a lot of potential. So we were trying to interest U.S. investors; trying to get the government there to make the right decisions on economic policy. We were playing a very much hands on role, and our ambassador in Zaire was very powerful.

Q: Who were our ambassadors while you were there?

COHEN: Well when I was in Washington, it was Ambassador Sheldon Vance. When I was in Zaire, it was Ambassador Robert McBride.

Q: Well now, Sheldon Vance. What was your impression of how he was dealing. not only with Zaire but also with the Bureau?

COHEN: Sheldon Vance was a very strong willed, powerful person. He was very intrusive in his dealings with the Zaireans, gave them a lot of advice, got involved in a lot of different things. He clearly was the most influential foreign ambassador in Zaire. We liked that; we thought it was good because he was moving Zaire in the right direction, and we gave him as much support as we could. He didn't have to ask us for too many instructions as to what kind of priorities to adopt. He asked us for support and we gave it to him. So, we had a good relationship with Sheldon Vance.
Q: Were you able to get many people from the government or private places to go to Zaire and look around, or was this a problem?

COHEN: No it was an area of great interest, especially banks, construction companies, electric power, agriculture. We had a large AID program that brought a lot of companies in. Mobutu made a state visit to Washington in 1970 and was at the White House with President Nixon. Nixon made a statement saying he thought Zaire was a good place to invest. It was attractive for a lot of people. Mobutu was so happy with his visit that he made a major concession. There was a very rich copper deposit in the southern part of Zaire that the Belgians had been keeping in reserve, and he gave it to American companies. This got the Belgians very upset. They sent their foreign minister to Washington to complain about it, but we said it was all strictly a private deal and had nothing to do with government.

Q: Did you get involved in Mobutu's visit and if you did how did it go?

COHEN: Yes, we organized it. It was a very detailed thing. We worked very closely with protocol and various offices, as well as the private sector organizing schedules. It was a very intense period. I remember as office director, I was not eligible to be invited to the White House official dinner for Mobutu, but I was invited to after dinner coffee, a rather interesting custom. So, my wife and I arrived at the appointed hour, and everybody was standing around having coffee, and we felt kind of left out. But we found Mrs. Nixon to be very nice. She saw us come in and greeted us, took us around and introduced us. So, that was a very pleasant experience.

Q: Did Mobutu know how to play the Washington scene?

COHEN: He did very well. He had his own separate channel in the CIA that was very close to him. If he was not happy with what the U.S. ambassador told him, he went through the CIA and complained, so he was very good at manipulation, but he really played the Cold War game to the maximum.

Q: Well did you see the Soviets, did they have any entree into Zaire?

COHEN: They were there; they had an embassy and occasionally Mobutu flirted with them. He never really got very far. I remember there was one story where the Zairean ambassador to Moscow took his car to the American embassy and said, "Can you look at my car for me? It is not working very well. I know you have mechanics." They opened it up and they saw all sorts of Soviet listening devices in there. He reported this back to Kinshasa. He said that the Soviets asked him to bring my car in for inspection. That is what happened. They got all these listening devices. So the Zaireans said, “Okay” and they called in the Soviet ambassador's car in for inspection. They kept it for five days and didn't do anything to it. They gave it back, and the Soviets assumed it was full of U.S. listening devices. They tore it apart piece by piece and found nothing. So they played the Cold War game.

Q: Did Zaire, particularly Mobutu have any, it is the wrong term but any extremely friendly Congressmen or Senators who were particularly interested in Zaire?

COHEN: Well, all of the people who dealt with Africa. There were a few of them like Charles Diggs. They were interested and they were friendly to him. Plus the right wing conservatives, both Democrats and Republicans, liked Mobutu for his anticommunist positions. Generally, Africa never really attracted that much attention. In the early 70's we already saw the beginning of the human rights movement which was focusing in on Mobutu as a human rights violator and as a dictator who liquidated his opponents. So we saw the stirrings of that, and we had people like Senator Kennedy and others starting to look at those issues.

Q: But at that point, Mobutu was considered by some to be not beyond the pale.

COHEN: He was still quite popular. It was mainly popularity based on Cold War considerations rather than you know this is a "good African."

Q: Looking out at central Africa, when did Mobutu nationalize the copper mines?

COHEN: He nationalized them in 1967 while I was there. That caused quite a bit of a stir. In fact, when I look back, it was one of the diplomatic initiatives that I took that I felt very proud about. He nationalized the copper mines. The Belgians said, "Okay, but you have to pay compensation. It is a Belgian company, so let's have arbitration or something." He said, "No, we don't pay. You have exploited the country for all those years. You have stolen everything. We are not going to pay you anything." So they went immediately to the World Bank and complained. The World Bank immediately cut off all assistance, and that led to all bilateral donors cutting off assistance. That is the way the club works. If you don't pay compensation, everyone cuts you off. So there was in an impasse. We knew that for political reasons, Mobutu could not renege on the nationalism he had stirred up. He didn't want to be seen as knuckling under to the Belgians, so we had to figure a way out of this since we were sort of playing a proconsul's role in Zaire. I was DCM by that time. I asked the economic section to research this and see what possible solutions could be found to save face for Mobutu. They came up with an idea, this was in '67, of having a Belgian company manage the mines because the Zaireans couldn't manage it themselves. In the management contract, the payment to the managers would be inflated to include compensation for the former Belgian owners. It would be sort of hidden compensation. We thought that was a reasonable sort of a thing. Shortly after we did that. Did I say '67; it may have been '68. Shortly after we did that, the World Bank also wanted to find a solution because they did not want to stop assisting Zaire. Robert MacNamara was the relatively new President of the World Bank. He came out there and the first thing he did was to say, "I want to speak to the American ambassador," and he had a briefing. It just so happened that Ambassador McBride was not there; he was in the U.S. on consultation. So, he said, "Let me see the Chargé d'Affaires." That was me. It was a Saturday afternoon. I went to his hotel room and he asked me for a briefing. There he was, this fellow who was known to eat Defense Department officials for breakfast. Here I was as a relatively young Chargé d'Affaires, but he took out his yellow pad and he was writing notes on it as I talked. He said, "Well you know, we have got to get out of this bad situation. Do you have any ideas?" So there I was with the economic section that just produced this solution, and I gave it to him. He said, "Well that sounds very

interesting. Thank you very much." He dismissed me and then he proceeded to negotiate a solution that was in effect our solution. He sold it to Mobutu; he sold it to the Belgians. That turned out to be the final solution. So when I look back on my career at elements that I want to be proud of, I think that is one I like a great deal.

Q: As you were watching Zaire for five years, the mines had been nationalized, granted they were being managed by a Belgian company, were you seeing the beginning of a slide down in the way things were being done or was the copper industry still going ahead pretty much?

COHEN: It was going pretty well. We had to constantly reverse crazy decisions by Mobutu. For example, the main transit route for the export of copper was through Angola on the Benguela railway. Of course Angola was ruled by the Portuguese; it was a colonial power that refused to give independence. Mobutu and his people were very upset about that. He kept badgering us: Why don't you force Portugal to give Angola independence? Once they got so angry with Portugal they decided they were going to rip up the tracks that lead to Angola as a protest against Portuguese colonialism. So we went to see them and said, you realize you need these tracks for the export of copper. You had better think twice before you rip them up. So they did. We were constantly trying to put out fires. But, until 1974 they were doing very well. They were doing well on their World Bank structural adjustment. Copper prices were high and they were making a lot of money, something like $1.20 a pound. But, in 1974 the copper prices dropped very severely. This caused two problems; one it cut down on revenues significantly. Secondly, they had borrowed a lot of money for a lot of projects, such as an electricity transmission line from a hydroelectric dam near Kinshasa to the copper industry a thousand miles away. It was very expensive. They took out a big loan from Bankers Trust. It was true for a number of similar projects. This transmission line was never really able to make money, so they were left with a lot of white elephants on which they were paying debt, and the copper revenue went way down. At that point in '74, they started to sink. They were mired in debt, and more and more, Mobutu had to use what little revenue was left to take care of his patronage system. Social services went down, hospitalization went down. It really started to sink at that point.

Q: Did you find as the American representative that has this big copper producing country during this period, and the United States is also one of the great copper producing countries, and we had our own, what is the name of the great copper company, Kennecott, did you ever find that you were sort of in conflict between the two?

COHEN: We never heard the American copper industry complain about that, even when prices were low. That was not true for other economic sectors, however. For example the people who produced rice in the United States never liked us helping African countries produce rice for export.

Q: This was Senator Long from Louisiana, wasn't it? No matter what happened the Louisiana congressional delegation managed to block assistance to rice growing.

COHEN: Yes. We never had any problem with the copper industry.

Q: What about human rights during this time? Was it more just about reporting on the situation, or were there cases for which we felt compelled to intervene?

COHEN: Well there was one major human rights problem which I think sort of stirred the beginning of the human rights movement. That took place in Central Africa in Burundi. Burundi had a minority tribe in power, the Tutsi tribe. We are still hearing about it today. The Tutsis were 15% of the population, ruling the country over 85% of the population that was Hutu. It was like South Africa with the minority whites in control. It was exactly the same. Their method of heading off political aspirations in the majority was to kill a lot of people. In 1972 which was right at the time I was director of that office, they saw some political stirrings among the Hutus, so their method was to kill as many Hutus who knew how to read and write or had some education, and they proceeded to do just that. They must have killed over a period of about two months about 75,000 people. Of course, our embassy was reporting all of these horrible things, but in 1972 human rights was still very undeveloped in this country. We had civil rights, of course, but human rights worldwide was still very weak. We had no interest in Burundi to speak of so our only interest was stopping the killing, but I found that nobody was interested. The press wasn't interested; the Congress wasn't interested. We did a lot of calling. I remember the only person in the Congress whom I could interest was Senator Tunney from California. He made a speech. He said to me, "I'm going to make a speech on this, but there won't be anybody listening." That was true. He made a speech but nobody came. I finally got somebody from *Newsweek* to go out there and write a story.

Q: Is this somewhat unusual, I mean trying to inspire newspaper people, the media to go out to a place? Later...

COHEN: We didn't have to do that. I was always comparing this to the situation in 1992, 20 years later. I was assistant Secretary, Kenya had a single party state. Opposition parties were illegal, so there were stirrings, intellectuals wanted a multiparty system, so three politicians made speeches calling for multiparty democracy. Just for making speeches, they were arrested. They weren't killed or anything; they were just arrested. We got hundreds of letters from Americans concerned about these guys. Back in '72, thousands were being killed and we got no letters. There was no CNN in those days.

Q: CNN being the Cable News Network.

COHEN: There was no coverage of any kind. But, after that happened, there were some people who started writing about it including Roger Morris who had been on the NSC staff, and who really cared in those days. He started writing about it. The Carnegie foundation did a study. There were hearings by a Congressman whose name I can't remember. He later became mayor of Minneapolis. He was a liberal Congressman, and he held hearings under his international organizations subcommittee, and I testified. They wee wondering if more could have been done to avoid these massacres. I remember it was a hearing, not so much pro-human rights but it was an anti Kissinger hearing. I

remember the Congressman saying to me, "Mr. Cohen, I don't question your commitment to human rights, but it is Kissinger who doesn't care, who is cynical." But anyway that was the first stirring. I read in the Burundi massacres a kicking off of the slow evolution of the human rights concern.

Q: What about some of the other countries. In the first place the Congo Brazzaville, one, did we have relations with it?

COHEN: With Congo Brazzaville we did not have relations. Prior to my becoming director, I believe it may have been around 1965. This was a very Marxist, almost Stalinist regime. They were motivated heavily by the Soviets and the French to be nasty to us. They in effect at one point put one or two of our diplomats in prison for a few days. So, we said we've had enough of this, and just pulled out. So between 1965 and the time I was director, we had no embassy there. In fact, the Germans were looking after our interests in Brazzaville. We had no diplomatic embassy. I remember when I was in Kinshasa I used to be in charge of liaison with the Germans. But I saw when I was director of Central Africa that the regime was evolving. It was less Marxist. It was becoming more pragmatic. I thought that maybe it was a time to try and normalize relations. So, we had a very interesting exercise working through the president of Gabon whose President Bongo who was very close to Congo Brazzaville. He had gone to school there and had friends. He became a mediator between the U.S. and the Congo. It didn't happen while I was still Central Africa director but I think within the year after I left, it was finally consummated that we reopen our embassy.

Q: What about some of the other countries, Gabon for example?

COHEN: Gabon was friendly. President Bongo was one of the few African leaders who did not believe in socialism, although he did have a lot of government owned companies. It was oil rich. It was pretty much a French preserve, but it was always friendly. What we liked about Bongo was not so much the economics of the place; it was still pretty much a French monopoly, but he was such a good regional diplomat. Wherever there were problems in neighboring countries like Brazzaville, he would intervene, and he was usually quite successful.

Q: Some of the other French speaking countries now, at a certain point you move up and you become West Africa don't you?

COHEN: No, we didn't do West Africa. The country that most western governments favored, I guess, was Cameroon which was wealthy. In fact among all the countries I covered, it was my favorite. It had very pragmatic policies. It was a one party state, but it was still open to free enterprise. It was prosperous, making good use of its money. I really paid a lot of attention to it, gave it a lot of support.

Q: Do we have any problems, again this is a French country.
COHEN: It was a French country, but they were not that much of an exclusive French preserve as say Gabon or Congo.

Q: Did UN votes come up at all as far as getting these countries to vote the right way, or was this different.

COHEN: Yes, we had a lot of that. The Bureau of international organization affairs, especially in the general assembly, was bombarding us with UN issues almost on a daily basis. They were constantly asking us to make demarches, or to send our ambassadors to see foreign ministers to get them to vote our way. We were getting pretty sick of it. They weren't very selective. Okay, you have 30 issues; pick five that are high priority and we'll work on those, but, no, they wanted us to press them on all 30 issues. We just couldn't handle it. And, constantly the Africans tended to vote as a herd, and the most radical always led the way. You had a lot of so-called nonaligned voting that often went against the United States.

Q: Was there much of a tie in these countries you were dealing with in terms of students going to American universities or were they pretty much going to the motherland or whatever you want to call it?

COHEN: From he Francophone countries, we had very few in those days. They were mostly going to Europe. Of course they were also going to Moscow to a certain extent. They were getting free scholarships to Moscow. We didn't have that much in terms of government scholarships to offer. We did have scholarships for graduate study, but those tended to be dominated by the Nigerians, Ghana, all the English speaking countries, so the ones that came here from the French speaking were kind of rare. That changed later toward the 1990s when the French speakers started to come in larger numbers.

Q: How did you find their embassies from central Africa? How well did you feel they were represented here?

COHEN: It was a mixed bag. Some of the ambassadors here were quite competent. You know, career people, fully knowledgeable. On the other hand, you had a good crop of political rejects, you know, people they wanted to get rid of or were afraid of. Zaire was particularly notorious for that. We had two former foreign ministers who came here as ambassadors, as well as some generals. That was true in a number of countries.

Q: Did Henry Kissinger, were you aware of Henry Kissinger and the NSC or was this pretty much during this time?

COHEN: The Central Africa Bureau got involved only to the extent they were interested in Zaire. It was a key country. Mobutu was one of the most pro-west influential leaders. So, they always paid a lot of attention to him. As for the rest, there was little interest. I remember Mobutu was at the UN as he went every year, and Kissinger was up there also. The Secretary of State always goes for an annual visit. They had a meeting, and Kissinger went to Mobutu's hotel suite. At that point Kissinger said that he didn't want mere desk officers to be taking notes; he only wanted country directors to take notes, so therefore, I was forced to go to New York just to take notes for that one meeting. I almost got into

trouble because I had known Mobutu for seven or eight years by that time, and he knew me quite well. He was explaining to Kissinger about Portugal and asking why are you guys allowing Portugal to remain in Angola as a colonial power. It is a disgrace for a NATO ally and all that. He sort of interrupted his remarks to Kissinger and he pointed at me and said, "Look, I told Mr. Cohen many times about Portugal. I don't have to repeat it to you." Kissinger, of course, didn't know me and looks at me as if to ask "who is this guy?" On a few other subjects it was the same thing. "Look I am not going to go into this in detail because I have already told Mr. Cohen all about it." At the end, as he was wrapping up the conversation, Kissinger said, "Mr. President, we consider you to be one of our best friends in Africa. You are one of the leading African statesmen, and we will not make a move in Africa without asking for your advice." Of course, Mobutu was very proud of that, very full of it. It went to his head. He was very pleased. They said goodby. We are walking our of the suite and I am walking next to Kissinger, and he looks at me and says, "God will punish me for all these lies." So basically that was it for the NSC; they had little interest in other African countries.

Q: Was there an African man on the NSC?

COHEN: Yes, but the African man also did UN. It was a combined job; 90% of his time was UN and 10% was Africa.

Q: Did China play any role in your area? I know they were working on that railroad through Tanzania.

COHEN: By the first half of the 70's, I think they were starting to fade. They really ran out of money; they were having too many troubles at home. Their glory in Africa was in the 60's when they built this railroad. They were still active. Their thing was to build "people's palaces." These are convention centers that belong to the political party where they have their party congresses and all that. If you go all over Africa now you will see t what they call "palais du peuple," people's palaces built by the Chinese. Many of them are now crumbling.

Q: You of course were in Washington during some tumultuous years, the years of Vietnam protest and all that. Did that reflect at all on anything you were doing? Did you have any feel for those at all?

COHEN: Between '69 and '74 Vietnam impacted on us. We were constantly facing cuts in AID. We need this in Vietnam; we are going to take it away from you. That was one way. Relations with Africans were not really bothered by Vietnam, except for aid cuts. They weren't coming to us to demand that we get out of Vietnam. They were voting wrong in the UN, but in the day to day relations it had no impact at all. But, the AID problem was really hurting us.

Q: How did you find David Newsom related to African problems? Did you have much to do with him or was he occupied elsewhere?

COHEN: Well, we had a daily staff meeting first thing in the morning. All the office directors went up there. I found that although he was more of a Middle East person and understood mainly North Africa (because North Africa came under him even though now it is no longer in the Africa bureau). He had spent his time in Libya as ambassador. He tended to favor that area; however, he learned very quickly. He traveled a lot and he was always willing to be deployed. We'd say look we really need you to go down to Zimbabwe; can you go? He was very good. I found that in staff meetings, I never had to go into long explanations. Two or three sentences, he understood right away. We also had a terrific number two who was C. Robert Moore who had been a diplomat in Africa. I guess he became an ambassador afterward to Cameroon. He was the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary, and he was the one I dealt with mostly. One thing I remember about him, he was a very wonderful person, but we used to call at the end of the day which was officially 5:15 in those days. He would always wait until about 6:00 to call me, and he had a checklist of things to ask me. He would look at the cables and say "I have to ask Cohen about this." He would always call about 6:00. I guess it was his way of telling country directors that he wanted them to stay late.

Q: Did you ever find your central African side coming into conflict with say the east African? I'm thinking Zambia and Zimbabwe. Well Zimbabwe was Southern Rhodesia then. They had copper interests and other things like that. Did you ever find there was a push pull between your office and the other office in that?

COHEN: No we never really had any conflicts that I can remember.

Q: Southern Rhodesia was still this was UDI time wasn't it?

COHEN: I was stationed there when they declared "UDI" in '65, and it was still under sanctions in the 1970s. This was one subject that Kissinger got deeply into. I think it was later. It was during the Ford administration when he got into that and is credited with actually turning that around.

Q: So it was not an area, we weren't particularly dealing with it then.

COHEN: Although we did have a post there, a consulate, and they were working on the issue constantly.

Q: Particularly since your focus is on Mobutu, did Mobutu stick pretty much to his own country, or was he either fishing in troubled waters around the periphery, Zaire being as big as it is, or were other African countries nibbling at his border?

COHEN: Well, Mobutu always had trouble until the end of the 70's with internal rebellion because there were a number of groups, whether ethnically based or ideologically based, that never accepted his coup d'état that brought him to power in 1965. He overthrew the founding father of independent Zaire, Patrice Lumumba, who subsequently became a symbol of left wing nationalism.

Q: There was Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow.

COHEN: That's right. There were always attempts at de stabilizing Mobutu, and there were groups in Angola and Congo(B) that were also very left wing. There was neighboring Burundi that was also very pro east. There were constantly border forays and invasions. His army was horrible, and we were constantly coming to his rescue with all sorts of things. He had Israeli advisors. He had mercenaries, so it was constantly a bubbling cauldron of insurrection.

Q: When you say we were always coming to his aid, in what manner?

COHEN: Well, for example, in 1967, some of the Belgian mercenary battalions rebelled, and they started taking over whole portions of eastern Zaire. So we devised a plan of bringing in U.S. transport aircraft plus military to transport Zairean reinforcements to fight these mercenaries and to bring them arms. When there were rebels coming out of Angola in 1978, we transported Moroccan troops to go fight them. Also we always had to evacuate missionaries. I think some missionaries had been evacuated five or six times.

Q: Well you left there in '74, where to?

COHEN: I was appointed political counselor to the U.S. embassy in Paris. This was a result of Kissinger's so-called "GLOP" policy. I think you may have heard of it.

Q: Oh, very much so.

COHEN: He decreed within six months before I was due for a transfer that you couldn't be assigned to an area in which you were a specialist.

Q: This was I understand from a meeting he had with ambassadors from Mexico and Latin American who weren't as interested in his policies as they were trying to tell him about Interamerican problems and he wasn't very interested.

COHEN: The story goes that he came back and said, "Those guys don't even know what NATO is." So anyway I went to personnel and I had just completed 13 straight years in African affairs. I said, "Where in Africa are you going to send me?" They said, "Didn't you hear of the "GLOP" policy; you are forbidden to go to Africa." I said, "Well, what can you offer me" They said, "We were thinking about political counselor in Paris." I said, "I accept!" So, it was a great happy surprise for me.

Q: You were political counselor in Paris from when to when?

COHEN: From June of '74 to September of '77.

Q: What was the political situation in France at this time?

COHEN: President Pompidou had just died. They had an election and Valerie Giscard

D'Estaing had replaced him. I was coming in just at the beginning. The election was in May of '74, and I arrived in June. There was a spanking new French administration. Gaullism, in effect, had left the scene, and a new modernizing conservative regime was taking over.

Q: I would have thought this would have been a very congenial type of regime to the U.S. or not.

COHEN: It theoretically should have been, but it turned out not to be. One thing, in France, the legacy of Gaullism was still pretty fresh, was that one does not show that you accept American leadership. It was really politically incorrect in France to say that the Americans were the leader in the NATO alliance. French politicians had to show their independence constantly, and Giscard d'Estaing was no different. So, he was constantly flirting with the Soviets and Eastern European countries while we were treating them as adversaries.

Q: You had worked in our embassy in Kinshasa. Did you find here was sort of the mega embassy with always a somewhat distant difficult country to deal with. We were never completely comfortable with the French or the French with us. What was sort of the operating atmosphere in France?

COHEN: Well, I found that people, political party leaders, intellectuals, and press people, were always very friendly in the sense that they always wanted to be close to us and talk to us and influence us. They never refused dialog with us; they were always available, always approachable. Now, their public rhetoric was frequently anti-American, but they were always accepting lunch invitations, and always doing so recognizing the U.S. was the superpower, and they wanted to remain close to us.

Q: Did you find that working as a political officer, you method of operation was different than in other places you have been?

COHEN: Not particularly. I think diplomatic discourse and getting to know people is all pretty much the same. Having worked in Francophone Africa, I found a lot of similarity intellectually in the approaches of people, but in France one must know the language.

Q: A question I have put to a number of people that have served there, what about dealing with the intellectuals? I don't think there is any other country who can use that term and really mean a rather specific group. Could you talk about this?

COHEN: The French had what we called the "classe politique". They were a whole bunch of people who spent their whole waking hours dealing with political issues. One thing I found about serving in Paris is that we had a very deep interest in internal politics. Normally we deal with state to state relations. For example, how are you going to vote in the UN; what are you doing about Iran, and a host of international issues. We had a sub section in the political section to deal only with internal politics. It was fascinating how French people were willing to talk to us about their internal politics instead of saying it is

none of your business. Every Frenchman is politically intellectual. They are always looking for people to talk to about it, so we got loads of information. This went from the far left to the far right; everybody wanted to talk.

Q: In the long run, what difference did it make in our operating policy?

COHEN: Well, there was a great deal of interest in internal politics there because the socialist party that was in opposition was reforming itself, reinvigorating itself. Francois Mitterand, who had taken it over, was sort of a Johnny come lately socialist anyway. It was coming back and it was starting to get popular. Gaullism was on the decline, and his method was to make an alliance with the communist party, so that the left would be unified in defeating the right. Now this blew Kissinger's mind. These guys were saying, "when we come to power, we will have communist ministers." Kissinger was saying that was unacceptable". It is not acceptable for a NATO country to have communist ministers in the government listening to all those secrets. So, we had to watch this very closely; it was very important. It also meant that we had to combat these people who were constantly anti-American, the right who were in power had to constantly show that they were not anti-American but independent. So this worried Kissinger since it threatened his whole European policy. Internal politics had an impact on European policy.

Q: You were there from '74 to '77. Was there one ambassador or several?

COHEN: When I arrived, our ambassador was John Irwin. He left after maybe about six months and was replaced by Kenneth Rush who stayed there until the Carter administration came in. Then he stayed a couple of months and then left. Mainly I served with Rush.

Q: How did Rush operate there? What was your impression of his work?

COHEN: Rush lacked enthusiasm. First, he didn't speak French at all. He was getting a bit tired. He once confided in me that he was in the semi-retirement mode.

Q: He had been an under secretary?

COHEN: Deputy secretary. Before being deputy he had been ambassador to Germany where he did a very good job on the Berlin treaty. He sort of saw that as his crowning moment. In Paris, he was not that energetic; however, on the question of communists in a future French government allied with the socialists, he defended the embassy's analysis that it might not necessarily be against U.S. interests. In fact, it might be pro-U.S. in that it would result in a reduction of communist influence. It was hard to understand why communists in government would lose power rather than gain power, but we had it all analyzed by experts. We had communist affairs officers. Of course sending this analysis to Washington was sort of taking your life in your hands, but he defended us. I give him a lot of credit. He was a conservative American businessman who understood the real world of French politics.

Q: What was the basis for this analysis that it would actually diminish the power of the communists?

COHEN: The power of the communists was to be constantly in opposition and to denounce the bourgeois establishment. By being coopted in a regime dominated by socialists, they would in effect have to defend everything the government was doing. When they stopped attacking government, the people who normally vote for them would just lose interest you see. So the communists would lose their image as a protest party, and it worked out that way later. When they finally did come to share power, that is exactly what happened. Their vote went down from something like 16% to 8% in a couple of years.

Q: Did we have any contact with communist leaders?

COHEN: That was a policy question. It was a great debate. Should we actually legitimize them by treating them like a normal political party as we did every other political party. The answer that came from Washington was that we should keep contact but only at a low level. We had a Foreign Service officer in the political section named John Dobrin who followed the left. He reported on socialists and communists. He was allowed to meet with communist officials, but nobody else saw them. The political counselor was forbidden and of course, the ambassador was absolutely forbidden.

Q: How about with the socialists? Did you see Mitterand in those days or not?

COHEN: The socialists were totally legitimate. The ambassador invited Mitterand to lunch usually once every couple of months. I had the honor of sitting next to Mitterand because I was usually the translator for the ambassador, so I got to know him well.

Q: What was our approach to the French? I mean on major issues, did we kind of know what battles to fight and what not to fight in those days? We knew the French were always trying to look like they were not our tools and it seemed they were always the burr under our saddle every time you turned around. Were we trying to explain this and say let's don't worry about that; let them go ahead. Let's concentrate on this.

COHEN: Basically we tried to ignore the irritations usually from some public statements. We tried to work on issues in a substantive way and make headway. We usually did. For example, you remember when Jeruzelski in Poland had a coup, the army took over to consolidate communist rule and to eliminate democratization tendencies. We saw this as a Soviet move against Walesa and that sort of thing. We denounced it and were calling Jeruzelski all sorts of horrible names. So what does Giscard D'Estaing do; he goes to Poland and makes an official visit. He does just the opposite of what the U.S. is doing. But, we decided to ignore these irritations and work on issues. Usually we had a meeting of the minds on issues.

Q: What was the political section's analysis of Giscard D'Estaing at this time? Where was he coming from particularly as far as American interests were concerned?

COHEN: We found him to be pretty good for U.S. interests. He had his own agenda, but we really didn't find any major problems with him, nor did we find any with Mitterand. Both of them were being very cooperative generally. Both were quite anticommunist and were fully aware of the need for NATO solidarity in moments of crisis.

Q: What about the role of the media in France?

COHEN: The media is very powerful, and we paid a lot of attention to them. We didn't leave it to USIS only and we spent a lot of time with the media political analysts. First of all, they were a great source of information for us. They had a lot of channels that we didn't have. Secondly, we liked to influence them. I had a policy to bring in one of the leading political journalists to the embassy once a month for a little seminar. This was mainly for the political section but we invited everyone else. We found this was very useful.

Q: Did you find that the press could reflect where America stood, not necessarily support it, but reflect our position. I'm talking about different presses although they might have a different attitude or not.

COHEN: Generally they were pretty fair in reporting our point of view. We gave them ample interviews. We brought them in to see the ambassador and the ambassador would serve drinks. We got a pretty fair shake. Of course, it depended. If you are talking about Le Figaro, which was pro-American and conservative, versus L'Humanité, which was communist.

Q: Or Le Monde where was that?

COHEN: Le Monde blew hot and cold depending on the journalist.

Q: Again back to the French intellectuals, How did you sort of work with them? Did you find, from what I've seen although I have never served in France, they always seem to have wonderful constructs of how event come about where I think most Americans there isn't a plot behind everything or there is not a manipulation. Did you find that you were out to cultivate this group?

COHEN: Yes, we did. For example there was always this feeling about the Israelis having too much power in Washington, and we tried to put that into perspective. There were all sorts of special interest groups they were worried about.

Q: How about the officers you were getting? Did you feel you had a pretty strong crew?

COHEN: We had very bright officers. You know you are talking about a mega embassy, there was a mega political section; we had about 15 people including two CIA undercover officers who did regular work. We had one doing international organizations and another doing Asia. They were all very bright, especially the younger ones. They all

spoke good French. I did find a very high percentage of prima donnas that I never saw in Africa. I get the feeling this was the Europeanist. “You know, we are Europeanists; we are better than anyone else.” Coming in from Africa, I sort of had an inferiority complex.

Q: You were sort of the country cousin of the European bureau?

COHEN: That's right. I remember a secretary who worked for me in Africa. A secretary whom I considered to be very smart and competent, and she was working there, and I said, "Brenda, what do you think of these guys who call themselves Europeanists?" She said, "They certainly think a lot of themselves." So, there were prima donnas and people with turf problems. For example, I had one officer who covered French relations with the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. He felt he should supervise the political section's work on communist party and socialists. He was trying to grab John Dobrin’s turf away. I also found the political military guy who was brilliant, a NATO expert, was constantly fighting with the Army Brigadier General who was the military attaché. I was always mediating. I spent so much of my time with this sort of thing instead of doing my substantive work.

Q: Well, in a place like France in Paris as well as in London, you really have people who are reporting on things like French relations with Africa, French relations with the Far East and all this, so in many ways you were much more as political counselor, dealing with the whole panoply of American foreign policy.

COHEN: That is one of the reasons why I valued this assignment so much because it gave me a totally different perspective. For example, the Vietnamese negotiations were going on. We had a guy there who spent all his time on that. I got to know a lot about the Vietnam negotiations.

Q: You were there during the fall of Vietnam.

COHEN: That's right, and I remember one last effort to save things and Giscard D’Estaing offered to mediate between the United States and the North Vietnamese. It lasted a few weeks, and we got involved with that.

Q: Did you find the French were just sort of being politely nice and saying well you didn't do any better than we did? Was this something?
COHEN: I felt they were kind of sincerely hoping to bring that to a soft landing to avoid humiliation. I thought they were good on that.

Q: France at that time was in but not in NATO. Not on the military side, but really was. I realize there was another embassy that dealt with NATO affairs, but from your perspective, how did this NATO thing work out?

COHEN: They were in on the political side of NATO. They had an ambassador to NATO who sat on the Atlantic Council that includes all of the ambassadors. However they were not under the unified military command. Their forces in Germany, for example, did not

report to SAC Europe, NATO command. They reported to Paris, totally separate. They did not sit in the military council and its regular committees. They did not sit in the nuclear committee and all that. However, they constantly protested they were part of NATO. I remember once when General Alexander Haig was SAC Europe. He constantly made the rounds of all the capitals, and he came to Paris once, so Ambassador Rush invited him to lunch with the defense minister. As usual, I got into a lot of these things by virtue of my being able to translate which is always very helpful. I was there for the lunch. Our political-military officer was also there, as well as Haig and the minister of defense and the ambassador. After lunch the conversation became free flowing, and the minister of defense, who was relatively new, said to Haig, "General, I want you to know one thing. If the balloon goes up; if there is a Soviet attack, we will be under your command in under three hours." Haig sort of took it for granted like well I knew that all the time. I, after listening to all this rhetoric, we don't come under American command, all that sort of thing, it sort of blew my mind. After that point I never worried about this separatism from NATO. I knew that was really just rhetoric.

Q: Were we watching Germany, because in many ways almost every, as I look about American foreign policy we had three things: one to keep the Soviets from taking over, two, to keep the Japanese from reviving, and three to keep the French and Germans from going at each other. We had already gone into two wars because of this. Were we watching the French-German connection from your perspective for any glitches or anything else like that?

COHEN: We watched it in terms of our interest in Europe, but we never felt there were any problems. In fact, the Germans and French had always made a point of having a special relationship, very friendly, many meetings between heads of state. We never saw it as something to worry about.

Q: Were there any major developments during the time you were there that particularly absorbed you or problems?

COHEN: As I said, I spent most of my time on the internal French politics. I had a policy. I said the government, the establishment, let the ambassador and the DCM and the minister counselor for economic affairs, let them spend most of their time stroking those people. We in the political section will spend most of our time on the opposition, knowing they will come to power eventually. Let's get to know them and work with them, so I spent most of my time with the left, and I found that this officer who did the left, John Dobrin, was very good, very well connected, and had tremendous contacts. He'd say, look can you make a lunch for the shadow defense minister, and I'd make a lunch. He was really terrific. But, even better than him was the labor attaché. The labor attaché, John Condon, was one of the legendary labor attaches of the Foreign Service. Mitterand was his personal friend. Jacques Attali, who later became the chief of staff of President Mitterrand, was his personal friend. He wouldn't even tell me who was coming to lunch. He would just tell me come to lunch tomorrow, and all these big socialists were there. It was fabulous. The trouble with Condon though was that he didn't like to spend time doing any reporting. He had fabulous contacts, but he couldn't turn it into useful

reports, so he would invite me and other colleagues, and we would do all the reports. That was my main concern, making sure that the left didn't turn bad. We knew they were going to come to power. The other things that were of interest to me, I remember the Turkish Greek problem over Cyprus.

Q: Yes, July, '74.

COHEN: That was my first crisis. I remember the western European director in Paris, a great diplomat named DeMargerie, who later became ambassador in Washington. We became very friendly. Through the summer months we were working on a day to day basis on the Cyprus crisis. We also had the famous Entebbe raid by the Israelis.

Q: Air France was hijacked and went to Uganda.

COHEN: This was Air France. Then we had an American plane hijacked to Paris. It was a TWA flight, New York to Chicago to Paris. It was Croatian nationalists. I was the embassy's anchor man for that. Usually the Americans say we don't negotiate for hostages, we don't negotiate with terrorists, but here was the administration ordering us to negotiate. Get the ambassador out to the airport, because it was all Americans on board. But it was the French who said, "No. Either they give up or we kill them." So, we had a tough time on that one. Luckily, the people who took over the plane eventually gave up.

Q: So what happened? How did it work out?

COHEN: The Croatians demanded that certain things be published, some of their manifestos be published, so we got the Associated Press office n Paris whom we were very close to, and they agreed to put it out on the news wire. Then when we showed them that here it is, it is in the newspapers, and they surrendered. That worked out. They were immediately put on a plane and returned to the States; there was no extradition procedure there. We had a number of these very interesting short- term problems. Kissinger was very worried about the communist-socialist alliance because it looked like in the next election they might win. He was really getting panicky, so he sends an instruction to the embassy to go and see the socialists and tell them that this alliance with the communists is unacceptable. It will kill NATO. You, know, such a real interference in their internal politics which was something the French really didn't like, even if you did it confidentially. So, the ambassador said, "I'm not touching this," and the DCM said, "I'm not touching this," so they both looked at me and said, "You do it." So, I said, "How am I going to handle this?" I was planning a trip to Marseilles anyway because I liked to travel around France, and the head of the socialist party foreign relations committee was the Mayor of Marseilles. His name was Gaston Defferre, who was one of the old socialist barons. He had already given me an appointment, so I came in and I saw him. I decided to make the approach with him since he was the head of the Socialist Party foreign relations committee. So we talked about Marseilles and internal politics, very friendly. He was a right wing socialist. So then I made the pitch and he got very upset. "This is unacceptable of the American government to try to tell us what to do in our internal politics. Who are you to tell us about the danger of communism? After the Second World

War when I came back to the city we found communists installed in all of the city offices trying to run the city. We didn't fool with them. We just got our taxi drivers out with their wrenches, and within five hours these guys were all out. We know how to handle communists and we really resent this attempt to tell us what to do " So, that meeting kind of ended in an angry tone, but I made the pitch and carried out my job. So nothing came of it until about six months later when there were local, municipal elections, and this was seen as a sign of what would happen in the national elections. Defferre was out campaigning, and he was in Bordeaux, and he was in a very nationalistic mood. He said, "Let me tell you a story. This American diplomat who came to se me and try to tell us what to do, and tell us that our alliance with the communists is dangerous to NATO, and I told him off." This got tremendous press play. My phone was ringing off the hook. There is a satirical weekly in Paris called Le Canard Enchaîné. (the shackled duck). They had a picture of me in a cowboy hat that said the sheriff goes south. But, then, of course, I became the darling of the right wing. So, anyway, we had a few of those types of adventures.

Q: Did you have any problem with the French Deuxième Bureau or what ever their equivalent is to the CIA, and our CIA as well, everyone seemed to get into collisions over things. Were there ever any embarrassments over things of this kind or problems?

COHEN: When I was political counselor, there weren't any. We were kept informed. We had pretty good relations. Actually there was a big problem later when I was Assistant Secretary; we were really going off on a tangent with each other in Africa and some African countries, but not while I was there.

Q: One last question on France. It seems like relations with Germany, France and the UK often are secretaries of various departments have their direct contacts; the President has his direct contact and all this. Did you ever feel like the big boys were flying over you and that you weren't quite sure what was happening?

COHEN: This was a problem. Kissinger especially was adept at this. Shortly after I became political counselor, I was at the foreign ministry talking about a specific problem. I can't even remember now what it was. Anyway, they talked to me about it and said in any event Kissinger will be here next week and we know he is interested in this. He and the foreign ministry will settle this. I was new and I hadn't heard that was coming, maybe it was arranged before I came. So I went back and the ambassador said what happened at the foreign ministry? Well they said Kissinger was coming next week. "Kissinger is coming next week? I didn't know that!" This was John Irwin, a sweet man. He was a very nice person, but he got very upset about it. He wrote one of those NODIS cables that are eyes only for the Secretary of state. He said, "I don't see why you need an ambassador here if you are going to come over here and not even tell me you are coming so that we can help prepare the way and all that. This is really unacceptable" It was a very angry cable, and he showed it to me. I asked, “do you really want to send this?” He said, "No, I really feel strongly about it." So, he sent the cable out. About four days later an answer came in eyes only saying, “I'm terribly sorry I didn't inform you about my visit. It was totally due to the incompetence of my staff."

Q: Kissinger is renowned for doing this. If caught with his hand in the cookie jar, it was always somebody else.

COHEN: So he visited a few times; it was usually like that. I remember the ambassadors tended to be kept on the periphery of his visits. He visited quite a bit actually. There was a lot of preparation for it, so we got involved in that. We had one big event that was the first G7 summit ever held, and that was in France in 1975. Giscard d'Estaing thought up the idea to have a summit. They met in a suburb of Paris called Rambouillet. President Ford was in office, so we all had an assignment to deal with tremendous advance parties. I was assigned to getting the U.S. delegation the best possible quarters to stay in. One of my big diplomatic victories was to beat out the Japanese in commandeering a small hotel. The Japanese were very upset about it. I also was in charge of Ford's bedroom. Does he want logs in the fire? Also there was another issue. Did Ford want to go to church on Sunday? There was going to be a weekend involved before he went back to Washington. He is a Protestant, there is a chapel, because he would be staying on the grounds of the palace. There was an old feudal palace there. There is a chapel. we can bring out the American Episcopalian Bishop of Paris. Word comes back from Washington no, he wants to go to a local church even if it is Catholic, it is okay. He wants to go mix and mingle with other people. You can think of the security. We find a local church. The French say look we can't have him mingle with local people. We don't know who they are. I'm sure they are all nice people. So the French say to us, get as many people as possible from the American embassy to fill up the church. So, we put the word out more or less, you must go to this church. We all went to the church. It had Giscard d'Estaing and the Prime Minister of Italy, and I think one of the other heads of government was there, so it was a mini summit in church, but there were no French people there.
Q: Why don't we stop at this point and we'll pick it up you left France for where?

COHEN: I was ambassador to Senegal.

Q: This was when?

COHEN: This was at the beginning of the Carter administration in 1977.

Q: You became ambassador to Senegal in 1977. How did you get your ambassadorial appointment?

COHEN: Well, I was recommended by Assistant Secretary William Schaufele whom I worked with in Paris, sort of took care of his many visits to France. We knew each other, and he recommended me, and it went through.

Q: I take it there wasn't tremendous competition from the appointees side?

COHEN: No. Among the African countries that attracted political appointees, Senegal was one of them because it has a very attractive climate, a nice country to be in, so it has had its share of political appointees.

Q: When you were in Senegal, you were there from when to when?

COHEN: I arrived in August of '77 until July of 1980.

Q: A good solid three years. What was the political situation in Senegal while you were there?

COHEN: It was fairly stable. It was one of the few African countries you could call democratic in the sense that they had elections. Opposition parties were allowed to operate and they were allowed to criticize the government. They had a fairly free press. It was a friendly country; it was always very pro-American, even though their main support came from France. They had a very distinguished president, Leopold Senghor, who was highly respected for his cultural achievements. He was a poet.

Q: He was a member of the academy wasn't he?

COHEN: He became eventually a member of the French academy, and was the founder of a movement called Negritude which was designed to unite the whole black diaspora by emphasizing their African cultural heritage. So even though he was president of a small country, he had the prestige of someone much more important.

Q: Going out to Senegal, what did you see as American interests there?

COHEN: Well it was 1977, and we were still very heavily into the Cold War. We wanted to maintain Senegal more or less on our side. Senegal was very much involved in the Middle East because it is an Islamic country, and they are involved with the Islamic conference. In fact they were presiding over the Islamic conference in those days, so we wanted to get their help on various Arab-Israeli problems. After the Camp David agreements, Egypt was very much isolated in the Muslim world, so we wanted to enlist the help of the Senegalese to reintegrate Egypt into the Muslim world. I spent a lot of time going from the Egyptian ambassador to the Senegalese government discussing ways to prevent Egypt from being expelled from the Islamic conference.

Q: We had no strategic interests in Senegal either in trade or military bases or anything like that.

COHEN: No, we had no strategic interests, but it is interesting that some of our military interests were supported by Senegal. For example, we wanted to bail out the President of Zaire, President Mobutu, when rebels invaded in '78. We transported Senegalese troops to Zaire to deal with the situation. They gave us full use of Dakar airport to take care of that. We transported Moroccan troops to Dakar airport. One thing the military found very valuable in Africa was the use of that airport. It is one of the best in Africa. It is open 24 hours a day. You can get food 24 hours a day and refueling 24 hours a day, so we always wanted to keep in good graces for that reason. The British found it very useful for example in the Falklands War. It was exactly halfway between Britain and the Falklands,

so we helped them with the airport. But in general it was the Middle East where they were very helpful to us, in the Cold War where they helped counter Cuban influence in the nonaligned movement. We didn't have any real strategic interests in Senegal, but we had mini interests.

Q: The Senegalese troops were renowned in the French army. Did they still have a respectable army that was useful in that period?

COHEN: We had a military attaché in Senegal that covered the region. He told me that the Senegalese army was considered one of the best because they did good maintenance; they did good training. They had very good esprit de corps. We did what we could to help them in terms of military assistance with engineering equipment. When I got there, they had had this equipment for 10 years and were still maintaining it. We also helped them with coastal surveillance. We started one of the first coast guard operations in West Africa where they could guard their fisheries. All of those countries there were losing resources because of illegal fishing by foreign boats. We also encouraged the Senegalese to send their troops into UN peacekeeping operations that they did do a great deal. Finally, later even after I had left, after the Liberia civil war started, we persuaded the Senegalese to send troops there; we financed that operation. We have always had very close military ties with them.

Q: What were your relations with the French? You had just come out of France. The French sometimes take a dim view of the Americans particularly in areas they consider their own special province there.

COHEN: Well the French did not worry too much about us. U.S. Business was not very competitive in those days, so the French never saw us as an enemy, and I got along very well with the French ambassador. In fact, he was very interested in the fact that I probably knew more about French internal politics than he did. He was a career diplomat, and he used to get all these visits from these French parliamentary groups, and he used to ask me to give him a briefing about what I had known because I was political counselor in Paris. We got along very well. There was no sense of competition. We were always inviting each other. Later when U.S. business firms started to come in, then the French started getting nasty, but this was way after my watch.

Q: Were you under any brief to get out and drum up business and get American investment in there, or was this not at the top of our list?

COHEN: It was starting to become important, but not as much as it is today. The one thing I was working on was the discrimination of imports into Senegal against non-European community products. Under their agreements with the European community, they were required to have zero tariffs on anything coming in from Europe, and they could do what they want with other products. So, there was a zero tariff on Europe and there were various tariffs on our goods. I kept asking the Senegalese to give us equality with the Europeans, give us zero tariffs too. They kept arguing that the Europeans insist that they have zero tariffs with them. Yes but that doesn't mean you can't have zero tariffs

with us. The agreements with Europe did not prohibit giving equal treatment to non-European exports. I kept going round and round, but I was always unsuccessful, so it was quite clear that they wanted to discriminate against us, or at least not displease the Europeans. So, that is what I worked on. I did try to promote certain American interests, for example, when they bought a satellite ground station, a downloading and uploading link for their telephone system, we did succeed in getting an American to make the sale there. That was a rare occasion; there really wasn't that much business to be done in Senegal.

Q: What about dealing with the president. Was he an aloof figure?

COHEN: No, on the contrary, Senghor liked to communicate with the United States. We got involved not just in U.S. Senegal relations but on broader issues. One thing that was going on while I was there was a war in the Western Sahara, the former Spanish Sahara. Neighboring Mauritania was one of the parties in the war. At one point later on they got out of the war. They had been an ally of Morocco, so Senghor was always trying to enlist our help in trying to find a mediated solution to that war. He was interested in many things. For example, Senegal was a member of the socialist international so they were constantly dealing with world wide issues, not just African issues. I was always welcome to see Senghor. I would make a request, and within 2448 hours, I would get an appointment. I never tried to abuse that privilege. I only wanted to see him when I had something interesting to say or to ask. I remember once it was for about six weeks, and I hadn't asked for an appointment. The secretary called me and said the President would like to see you. I said fine, wonderful, so I went over to see him. He said, "Well you haven't been to see me in a long time. I get very uneasy when the White House doesn't know what my views are, so I'd like to see you regularly." He felt that the ambassador was his channel to the White House.

Q: How did the whole Camp David process play out during this Carter administration time?

COHEN: First of all, the Senegalese were overjoyed by Camp David because as a Muslim country, they were forced more or less to break relations with Israel and join forces with the Muslims in an anti-Israeli posture. However, they really liked Israel. They were together with Israel in the socialist international. Senghor, being a great intellectual, had many Israeli friends who were constantly coming there. He was overjoyed by the Camp David agreements. He said, "Now at last, the Muslims can be friends with Israel." But, what he saw was that Egypt, rather than getting credit, was being ostracized. He was working very hard and was coordinating with us on ways to protect Egyptian interests. He had many Israelis for technical assistance, construction work and all that, even though they didn't have formal relations.

Q: You mentioned the Algerian, Mauritanian, Moroccan Sahara war. What was that war called?

COHEN: The War of the Western Sahara.

Q: The War of the Western Sahara. Did you get involved with our embassy particularly on Morocco and maybe Algeria and all in sort of taking sides? This became renowned at different times because our embassy in Morocco seemed to take the Moroccan side of the war.

COHEN: We didn't get involved. All we did was report the Senegalese opinion. Senghor himself was very pro-Moroccan. It all goes back to this business of Negritude where you had this feeling of solidarity among black peoples around the world. He also considered the Polisario to be surrogates of the Algerians. He said the Algerians and the Polisario were racists. The example he gave me was that whenever Mauritanian soldiers were captured by the Polisario, if the Mauritanian soldier that was captured was an Arab, they were put in prison in a prisoner of war camp. If they were black Mauritanians, they were killed. He totally rejected the Polisario and the Algerians as terribly racist, so he sympathized with Morocco. We never got involved with the ideological fight; we just reported what the Senegalese were saying.
Q: This is tape three side one with Herman Cohen. What about the Cold War? Was there a Soviet embassy?

COHEN: There was a very large Soviet embassy. It was sort of their main office for all of western Africa. There was a large Chinese embassy. Senegal tended to attract embassies. Countries would say they could only afford to have one embassy in these 12 countries; they usually placed it in Senegal because it was the nicest place to be and the intellectual center. So, Senegal despite its small size had about 45 foreign embassies. The Russians were very big there, and even though Senegal was a member of the nonaligned movement, they were very much pro-West, pro-French to begin with, and pro-American and pro-West. They did everything possible to assist us. For example, there was a very close liaison between the CIA station in Dakar and the Senegalese security service. They worked the Soviet embassy together, very happy there, and they did catch the Soviets in various subversive activities working with Senegalese opposition groups, that sort of thing. Also they were very helpful to us in the international field. I remember once there was a nonaligned summit conference in Cuba. A conference in Cuba was clearly going to have an anti-American cast to it even though there were countries from all over the world. We had heard that the Senegalese, understanding that the Cubans would try to control the conference, decided to boycott it. I got a message from Washington instructing us to ask the Senegalese not to boycott it because we wanted our friends in there to fight against Cuba. The Senegalese said no. Finally I had to go up to visit Senghor at his farm in France where he spent every summer. It was actually his wife's farm; he was married to a French lady. He was very gracious, and he received me, and I explained to him why we wanted Senegal to be present. He understood right away, and he said he would send his foreign minister. When the foreign minister went, he turned out to be a terrible gadfly. The Cubans were very frustrated, because every time they would do something anti-American, the Foreign Minister would challenge them from the floor. So this was the general cooperative relationship we had with them The Senegalese were not outwardly pro-American. They wanted to be nonaligned, but they were always helpful to us.

Q: What about our USIA? I always think of the USIA having difficulty in a French speaking French oriented country.

COHEN: Well, USIA was clearly not as strong as the French in the cultural effort. But, it is amazing how much the USIA was able to accomplish there. We did a lot in terms of culture. We had a lot of Americans coming there. We would talk about all kinds of things like jazz and literature, all sorts of things, and they were very well received. There was a lot of English teaching going on. We had three or four professors at the university under Fulbright grants. More and more Senegalese were going to the States for education. When I got there, I started the first club for Senegalese who had studied in the U.S., an alumni club. I found that in one group of about 15 men all had done their B.A.'s at UCLA. It looks like one of them went there and the others followed. These are guys who are very dynamic, getting into business, what have you, so USIA was having a very important impact.

Q: Did the Libyans play any role in there during this period?

COHEN: The Libyans were trying to be active there, but Senghor considered them to be racist just like the Algerians. He had visited Libya and found that they didn't like black people. He sensed this, so they didn't have relations, but they were next door in Gambia. Gambia is sort of an enclave inside Senegal. He was very leery of them and tried to work with us to protect against them. He found the Libyans were financing Muslim fundamentalist groups inside Senegal, and he did a lot to clamp down on them. Fortunately, most Senegalese did not take to fundamentalism, so he didn't have to work very hard at it, but he was always worried about the Libyans.

Q: Did race in the United States I mean did Senghor understand developments in the United States and what we were dealing with?

COHEN: Yes, he did. He followed it very closely. He appreciated people like Jimmy Carter and Lyndon Johnson and others he had seen as working hard to end racism and promote civil rights. He was sympathetic although he understood what was going on in the States and disapproved of a lot of practices. He was sympathetic to the U.S. government on that issue. He was a linguist. He got a Ph.D. in what the French call grammar, but what we call linguistics. He made a study of black American dialects in New Orleans. He claimed to me, although I was unable to verify it, that a lot of the jazz talk, the New Orleans dialect, derives from the Senegalese language, Wolof. He gave me words, for example, when an American says “I dig you” in Jazz talk, in Senegalese language they say "Diggala" which means “I dig you.” So, he had all these examples. Anyway, he was fascinated by the black experience in America, but he was not hostile to us about it.

Q: You were there during the take over of our embassy in Tehran with all the overtones of Islamic fundamentalism. How did that impact on you all?

COHEN: The Senegalese government was very friendly with the government of the Shah, and the prime minister of Senegal who is now the president, Abdou Diouf, was very close with the then prime minister of Iran. I can't remember who was the Prime Minister before the overthrow. They were constantly sending gifts to each other. The Iranians were very active in Senegal. So when the Shah was overthrown, the Senegalese sort of went into a state of shock. They were very upset about that. Nevertheless, the Iranians sent a replacement ambassador, one of the young revolutionary guard types who immediately started trying to stir up Muslim sympathies. He requested the right to make speeches at the Friday Mosque. The Senegalese turned him down. So, they were very leery about it, but the continued to maintain relations with Iran. The Iranian ambassador's house was opposite my residence. I was amused when every night they were showing films about the American atrocities committed during the Shah's reign. Otherwise it didn't impact much on what we were doing in Senegal.

Q: Were there any developments on the borders around Senegal at this particular time?

COHEN: Well, there were the beginnings of problems with Mauritania. The people in southern Mauritania, the boundary is on the Senegal River, the people living in the southern fifth of Mauritania are really the same tribes as in Senegal called the Afro-Mauritanians, as distinct from the majority of people in Mauritania who are Arab Mauritanians. The Afro-Mauritanians were French speakers. They were more advanced than the Arabs, had better education and they tended to try and dominate, but they were discriminated against. They were a minority. More and more, we saw the northern Senegalese were sending arms to their relative across the river in Mauritania. We saw the beginning of a problem, but it didn't erupt until I became Assistant Secretary in 1989. There were full-fledged mass expulsions from each country because there were a lot of Mauritanians who were small traders working in Senegal. So, the Senegalese kicked out about 80,000 of those, and the Mauritanians in revenge kicked out a lot of Afro-Mauritanians. The difference was that the Afro-Mauritanians were Mauritanian citizens, so they were expelling their own people, whereas the Senegalese were expelling Mauritanians. Anyway, we saw it coming, and we tried to get them to think about it. We really couldn't get their attention, however.

Q: Did we have much of an AID program there or any AID program?

COHEN: Senegal had one of the major AID programs in Africa, and it is still going strong.

Q: In what areas were they working?

COHEN: Agriculture, health and education. Health was I thought the most successful because they reversed the trend of building hospitals in urban areas which never worked because the hospitals could never be maintained and they couldn't get the right doctors, so we concentrated on bringing medicine to the villages. If you take care of malaria suppression, basic sanitation, and immunization of children, you have conquered about 80% of the diseases in Senegal. So, we had a massive program of establishing small

health units in about 350 villages. It was a very successful program.

Q: How about efforts to tame the Sahel? Did that get any attention?.

COHEN: When I was there it was during the tail end of a big drought in the late 70's. During the drought in the Sahel, this big desert had advanced southward. So we were working on reforestation, digging of wells, and rationalizing the whole business of cattle herding. A lot of people had cattle that were not being exploited for economic purposes. Our work was all done to help stop the spread of the desert to the south.

Q: What was your dealing with AID? Did you as the ambassador have much control over what particularly new projects or stopping of old projects, or was this something that pretty much got started and had a life of its own?

COHEN: One thing I didn't try to do was micro manage the AID because we knew there were certain sectors the U.S. Congress and the AID managers wanted to emphasize, such as basic human needs, health, and education. What I tried to do was travel a lot to visit the grassroots and find out what the Senegalese people wanted. My gimmick for doing that was to visit Peace Corps volunteers. We had 100 Peace Corps volunteers, so I would go see them in the villages, and I would hang around and talk to the local chiefs. In my travels I found their main interest was getting more water so they could grow vegetables, sell them, and get a market economy going. So, I used my influence with the AID Mission Director to steer him toward that. He developed a project for digging wells. He had a project for 500 wells, so I was quite proud of that. I worked with them to steer them in certain directions; I didn't micro manage. What I told all of the agencies in Senegal, not just AID but FAA, Defense Department, and all the agencies represented there, I was there to help them. I considered the most difficult people to be in Washington. I said, "We all go to bat together to try and influence Washington." They understood that, so we had a cooperative relationship.

Q: How were your relations with the African Bureau at the time?

COHEN: They were quite good although I had one dust up with them. When we transported Senegalese troops to Zaire to help save Mobutu's regime in 1978, and when the operation was more or less over, the Senegalese said, “Okay, please send the planes and take us back,” and somehow Washington refused to do that. I got very upset. I said, "How can we give these guys a one way ticket? We have to give them a two way ticket." I was told later that it was not the Africa Bureau; but it was Brzezinski in the White House who somehow decided it was not a good idea to transport them back. Otherwise, I got along very well. We got very good support. We didn't have much in the way of disagreements.

Q: How about the Peace Corps; how effective was that?

COHEN: The Peace Corps was very effective because they were essentially in the villages. There were very few sitting in the capital city, except for one or two doing

educational work. We even had one tennis instructor. Most of them were in the villages where they became adopted children of the village chief working the village from the chief's compound. They were involved in all sorts of useful work like maternal and child care, nutrition, vegetable growing, educational projects and fish culture. They were greatly esteemed. I found it very striking that among the educated Senegalese, very few of them were willing to go out and work in rural areas. They wanted to stay in the cities in air conditioned offices. The only ones you found out there when you traveled were American Peace Corps volunteers or missionaries.

Q: This so often is the case.

COHEN: Also the Peace Corps learned languages like crazy. They were fluent in local languages and were greatly respected for that.

Q: Well you left there in 1980, sort of at the end of the Carter administration; whither?

COHEN: Well, my last act was to receive an official visit from Vice President Mondale in July 1980. He announced to me that the Democrats were going to lose the election. He predicted that in July already. I was transferred to the Bureau of intelligence and research where I was the senior deputy Assistant Secretary under Ronald Spiers who was Director of INR.

Q: You were there from when to when?

COHEN: I started in September of 1980 until around April of 1984.

Q: What had been your impression of INR and its help in previous times?

COHEN: I had not known them that well except that I was very favorably impressed by their products, that came out to the field in the form of analytical telegrams. From what I could see in some of their publications, I found them to be very good analysts. Amazing because they did so much with so few people. I always had a lot of respect for them. This is not dating back just to Senegal. When I was in Zaire for example, I found it very helpful.

Q: As the Deputy there, did you have a particular area to work on?

COHEN: No, I covered the whole world. After Paris where I worked on European affairs, this was my first opportunity to work on Latin America. I found myself immersed in the troubles of Central America, Salvador, Nicaragua. In fact, in one of my earliest capers, Secretary of State Haig said, "The reason the Europeans don't support us on Salvador and Nicaragua is they don't understand all the subversive activity going on there with the Soviets and Cubans. I want people to go out and brief them, give them classified briefings." So, when you talk about classified briefings, you mean INR. I was chosen to go to northern Europe to give classified briefings in London, Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Oslo. I got deeply educated on all those issues. I went out there and had no success at

all. The people were totally hostile to what we were doing in Central America.

Q: What was your impression from the information you were getting about Soviet Cuban influence in Central America at that time?

COHEN: We found that the Soviets were minimal; while Cuba was strong. The Cubans were focused on Nicaragua to preserve the Marxist regime there, to protect it as much as possible. The regime in Nicaragua felt that it was very important to them that El Salvador move in the same direction. If El Salvador did not go in the same direction, they felt it was a security threat to them. The standard Marxist view is you always have to have the neighbor be like you or it is dangerous to you. So they were working hard to supply arms to the FMLN, the Marxists in El Salvador. It was not easy to detect but the intelligence was able to detect routes of arms going in.

Q: This was during the Reagan administration, and he took this whole Nicaraguan El Salvador thing very seriously. Did you feel any pressure on your office to make reports conform to policy?
COHEN: To begin with let me say the U.S. government policy changed even under Carter. In his last six months, Carter made a decision to send arms to Salvador to support the right wing government there. So it wasn't strictly Reagan. Reagan, of course, intensified the interest. I found Haig to be very much interested in intelligence and was trying to push us to support the policy or find ways to support his policy. For example, they would jump on all sorts of reports and say this is it. For example, once we had a report that the Cubans were about to send 600 troops to Nicaragua to fight for the Marxist Sandinistas. We looked at the intelligence very carefully because all of a sudden planes were filling up with these men going to Managua. Haig had already decided that it was the army, and we had to stop them. We looked at it very closely and although we didn't get the actual facts, some very astute analysts figured out it was Cuban teachers going back after summer vacation. But generally speaking they didn't interfere and actually ask us to cook the reports. Where we saw that happening was in the CIA. Director Casey was very much interested in skewing the intelligence, and since we sat on the national foreign intelligence board that decided the final contents of all estimates, we found ourselves constantly fighting with Casey over certain subjects.

Q: What about some of the other issues that came up during this period. I think of the Latin America the Falklands/Malvinas situation. Was that something that sort of popped up at us in a hurry or were we kind of aware that this would happen?

COHEN: Actually it was essentially an intelligence failure. I remember I was Acting Director of INR before the Argentines invaded. We received a very reliable report that they were on their way to invade and it would be within 48 hours. I took that report, rushed up to Haig's office, and asked if I could see him, and I told him. He said, "I'm very upset. Not just that they are invading, but that you didn't have any intelligence earlier. It is now too late to stop it because they are going by ship, and they are so far away, there is no way for any other ships to get there and head them off." So, he immediately plunged into a diplomatic effort to get the Argentines to back off. It failed, and the war started.

His expression of unhappiness with the intelligence led me to study what happened in that particular case. I went through all of the reports, especially from the military attaches and the diplomatic reports as well as the reports coming out of New York where there were a lot of negotiating going on between the Argentines and the British. We looked at it and I saw there were plenty of early indications that the Argentines just might do this thing. They kept saying if we can't get satisfaction, we might have to take other actions and all that. I found the people in Buenos Aires, especially the U.S. military attaché were saying, "Yes, they are saying all this, it is their rhetoric, but they won't do it." So my conclusion was that the Argentines were considered to be people like us, and democratic nations don't do that sort of thing. You don't invade the territory of another democratic country, and it was a mind set that prevented us from seeing those signals and acting on them. That is not the only case of failed analysis that I have seen.

Q: This was true in the Arab-Israeli '73 war I think in a way. The Israelis said well these Egyptians it didn't make sense if they were to attack.

COHEN: Yes, so after that I was more and more attuned to what I call the failure of analysis, not failure of getting intelligence but failure of analyzing it correctly.

Q: Well, is there anything you could do while you were there I mean this is always a real problem of knowing what they might do and what they are saying but whether somebody will do it. Will Saddam Hussein invade Kuwait or not? That gap between potential and action, is there any way for the analysis to be more forthcoming on that?

COHEN: I think so because what I liked about INR was that we had analysts who had worked on foreign countries for a long time. We had 50% foreign service officers, and 50% civil service personnel. Both the foreign service and the civil service had long experience in the particular countries, so they could look at the intelligence and say "I know how these guys think. I know what is driving them, their domestic political imperatives and all that. I think they are very much likely to do this or not do that. Very often I found that they were right. I encouraged the office directors to allow the individual analysts to go out on a limb and not stifle them by saying "oh you can't prove that." I think we had a better record in INR than they did in CIA where analysis is highly diluted as it goes up the line for pre-publication clearance.

Q: What about Grenada? Was that just a situation that developed or did INR get involved in trying to analyze what the Cubans were up to?

COHEN: I think we did one piece of analysis that was useful. We told Secretary Schultz and others that in effect the Marxists in government were becoming Stalinist. They had decided to kill people to stay in power. They reached the conclusion that it was ripe for doing something because the government had totally lost the confidence of the Grenadian people and they were playing their own little political game. I think our analysis, in effect, helped them make a decision to go in.

Q: What about in the Middle East? This was a very volatile time; all hell was breaking

loose in Lebanon, and Iran and Iraq were at war. Afghanistan was at war with the Soviets. What was INR's role in figuring out what was going on?

COHEN: In the Middle East, INR was very much involved with providing daily analysis to the Secretary of State and the Middle East Bureau. I remember a major problem with our military intervention in Lebanon. The administration wanted to send in the marines, as a neutral force, to try and stabilize the situation. INR did an analysis concluding that the marines would not be seen as a neutral force because of our general backing of Israel. They would be seen as an enemy of the Muslims of Lebanon. We kept bombarding the Secretary with this opinion. At one point, Secretary Schultz's top aide, Charlie Hill, told me that "Everyone up here is getting tired of INR crying wolf. I just want to let you know that. You don't have to stop. I just want to let you know. We didn't stop. We were sorry so many marines were killed in a terrorist attack, but it was a question of "I told you so." We were sort of the gadfly there. The person who disliked us the most there was our ambassador in Israel, Sam Lewis. He kept saying he disagree with or analysis. I think we played a useful role in general in Middle Eastern issues. We played a major role in President Carter's decision to help the rebels in Afghanistan fight Soviet invaders.

Q: Yes. There were red arrows on maps pointed toward the Persian Gulf in magazines and all that.

COHEN: That was because we had some very good intelligence on the Soviet military. These guys were doing all sorts of planning to invade Iran or Saudi Arabia down to Kuwait. When these analyses got to the White House, a red flag went up. President Carter decided to create a new military command to defend out interests in the Persian Gulf. It was called the Central Command, and was based in Tampa, Florida. They got orders that the command be built up to the point where we would even be negotiating base rights in eastern Africa. Reginald Bartholomew who was deputy director of Political-Military went out to Somalia. We were negotiating like crazy for bases. All this was based on very sensitive information that the intelligence community provided. Now we didn't predict that the Soviets were going to do all this. We were just saying their military was planning. There are military plans for all sorts of things. Fortunately, the Soviets never implemented their plan. Our analysis said that if they invade Iran they are going to have more trouble. They will have fifty million Iranians to cope with, so we don't think that was going to happen. We tended to agree with that, but we just provided the facts, but we did create quite a stir with all of these facts.

Q: What about the soviet intelligence and the bloc? I mean this was always sort of the elite within the elite. In the INR was this covered?

COHEN: Yes, we had some very good people, some who have since passed away, some very top notch analysts, all civil servants by the way. They did very well and were constantly doing battle with the CIA in saying they were more realistic than the CIA. I remember one very interesting time was the coup d'état in Poland. General Jeruzelski ousted the civilian regime there. At one point, I think it was actually President Carter who issued a warning on a Sunday afternoon warning the Soviets not to invade Poland. All of

the intelligence said that they would be invading Poland. It was imminent because the regime there was going soft on communism. They were accused of being influenced by the Pope, among other things. It would be like another Hungarian invasion. We had an interagency intelligence meeting to issue a warning, and INR refused to join in the consensus. The Director was Robert Baraz. He was one of the top Soviet analysts, and he refused. They said to him, "Why are you refusing?" He said, "This is a classic Soviet scare tactic. What they are doing is gearing up the military to look like they are going to invade, but they won't do it because they know it would kill all efforts at detente, and better relations with the U.S. which is their highest priority." Now he didn't predict the coup, but he said I'm sure they won't do it. The Soviets were doing everything. They were loading troops on to trains; generals were going into their bunkers. Communications networks were being formed. Tank divisions were being poised, so they were getting ready. So, I was quite proud of that, because when the White House issued a warning predicting an invasion, INR demonstrated its superior analysis.

Q: Do you feel that by having INR that particularly depends on both overt and covert information and having both analysts and working foreign service officers you might say the practicality of the place working together, does this give a certain strength to the State Department INR that is maybe skewed another way from CIA and that?

COHEN: Well, we found that INR was probably superior in analysis, but we used the same sources as the CIA. We had access to everything. To the best of our knowledge, there was nothing that was denied to us. Most of CIA's analysis was based on State Department reporting anyway. Clandestine reporting was much smaller in volume except NSA stuff. The reason the State Department could be more focused and sharper is we had fewer people. Where we had one analyst doing Bulgaria, they might have had five, so things tend to get watered down to the lowest common denominator. We, of course were more focused on the Secretary of State's needs, where they were more focused on broader community needs or what the White House wanted. We felt that ours was more useful and we found that the White House NSC staff relied more on our morning report than they did on the CIA morning report.

Q: What about the Defense Intelligence Agency, their work. Did that play much of a role? What was your impression?

COHEN: We read everything they put out. It was more geared to military and more geared to the Cold War but we found they did pretty good work and it was a useful supplement to what our guys were doing. I fully believe in having different analysis. Some people say it is a waste of money, have one analytical group like the British do. We felt that competitive analysis was good. It kept everyone on their toes. The Secretary of State needed people working only for him, and the Defense Secretary needed people working only for him. You couldn't rely on someone else.

Q: What was your impression of the NSC during this particular time? Did it seem to respond to intelligence or was it going in its own way?

COHEN: I didn't see the NSC under the Reagan administration as being terribly effective. I found them kind of a weak organization until the last two years of Reagan when I joined the NSC.

Q: Oh I see!

COHEN: Generally it was full of ideologues, not terribly knowledgeable people. This was when I was in INR.

Q: What was the impression, you arrived just after it started of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan of how it was going to play out and why they did it?

COHEN: We saw it as a fear of Muslim fundamentalism coming out of Afghanistan into the Soviet Muslim republics. They did it sort of like we were worried about Nicaragua because we saw a domino effect on Mexico.

Q: That's right, Brownsville, Texas.

COHEN: That is exactly the same reaction. They wanted to prevent the disease from going that way. They over reached themselves.

Q: How was INR seeing the Soviet economy because we are really talking about within five years or so the collapse of the Soviet economy toward the end anyway. You were in the last decade of the Soviet time. Looking back on it, were we seeing the problem or were we looking at it having the wrong binoculars on?

COHEN: I think we didn't do well on that side. First of all, one thing INR lacked was economic expertise. We were weak in economics. Secondly we didn't have much economic expertise on our Soviet side either. But, we had analysts who followed it, and they had two views of the Soviet economy. One said it was not that bad. We tended to over emphasize the weakness of the Soviet economy; it isn't that weak. That view turned out to be wrong. The second view said that no matter how weak the economy was, the Soviets could always bleed the people without any big protest and get away with it for international security needs. That was also wrong.

Q: Were there any indications of the divisiveness within the Soviet society. You did mention the fear of fundamentalism which relies on people with an Islamic fundamental bent within the Soviet Union to create that fire. Was that something we were looking at or did we feel the Soviets had it pretty well under control internally?

COHEN: We were opting for the side of control. Nobody in INR up until the time I left was seeing any trouble in internal Soviet politics.

Q: Did you get involved at all in the Iran-Iraq war?

COHEN: I think that was after I left INR. No, I am thinking of Iran-Contra and all that.

We just followed it very closely and did our analysis. It was kind of routine. We didn't see any major problems in reporting on it or analyzing it.

Q: Moving over to the other side, how about with the Chinese? It was not a period of great strain between the United States and the People's Republic of China at all.

COHEN: No, it wasn't. I remember when I was in Senegal we had formal relations established with Beijing finally. Carter did that. I found the Chinese ambassador couldn't invite me enough after ignoring me for two years. During my time in INR I don't recall anything special with the Chinese or particular problems that we worked on.

Q: A question I often wonder with INR. Was anyone taking a look at what was going on in Canada at that time and saying what if Canada splits up what would that mean?

COHEN: No, that was never on the radar screen at all.

Q: I imagine it is today. Well you left INR, what was your impression of the Reagan administration, the first part of the Reagan administration as it impinged on the State Department from your perspective?

COHEN: Well, it was a fairly normal relationship. I think what was important was Schultz who was a very strong, reasonable, courageous Secretary of State. He was constantly fending off some of what I call the crazy ideologues in the White House, keeping foreign policy on an even keel. I was particular proud of the way he allowed Chester Crocker in the Africa Bureau to have good relations with the Marxist government of Angola as well as with the apartheid government of South Africa. He allowed them to explore, to push the envelope as far as possible.

Q: Well, I'd say that of the interviews I've done, I have done well over 400 now, of all the Secretaries of State in recent times, Schultz comes out the best, as being the most balanced. A real pro and one who did not sort of concentrate in one area and leave others alone. He took care of both the administration and covered the planet. How about Cuba? What were we covering at this time and predicting about the Cubans?

COHEN: Nobody was predicting the imminent demise of the Castro regime. We were just sort of predicting that they would keep going the way they were.

Q: The Cuban involvement in Africa, did we see that as just a trouble making thing or was there more?

COHEN: They sent troops into Africa in 1975 essentially. They sent them to Angola and Ethiopia. This was the end of the “detente” of the Ford era. We saw them as one of the real troublemakers for us in the third world. We hated “Cuban internationalism.”

Q: Well then, you left INR and went to the NSC.

COHEN: No, I went to the Bureau of Personnel. I was senior deputy assistant for personnel.

Q: You did that from when to when?

COHEN: From April, '94 to December, '96.

Q: Who was the Director General at that time?

COHEN: When I started it was Roy Atherton. He left after about a year and was replaced by George Vest.

Q: This was the time when we were getting ready for the new Foreign Service Act.

COHEN: Well, the Foreign Service Act was passed in 1980.

Q: 1981 is when I think it came into effect. But you were there just when you might say the first effects of the new Foreign Service Act were coming in.

COHEN: Well the first limited career extensions for senior officers went into effect, and decisions had to be made as to what percentage would get it and what percentage wouldn't. We had a lot of go around with that. Under secretary for Management Ron Spires took a very close interest in these things. After receiving our recommendations, he decided that 60% of all seniors would be offered career extensions. We thought that was quite generous because the act envisaged increased departures. But, we got a lot of flak from AFSA and seniors that 40% departures was much too much. People will have to depart, so we had a few political problems. Looking back now, I think there are zero seniors receiving LCEs. I thought 60% retention was a lot compared to the current situation.

Q: What was your impression of the role of AFSA?

COHEN: Well, having been a militant member when they originally became a union, I was one of the organizers of the labor movement. I tried to keep AFSA involved with personnel decisions. Consultations between management and AFSA were required by law. I believe that AFSA tried to play its rightful role.

Q: Did you feel that AFSA It has always been a little difficult. You have people in AFSA who are going to aspire to be leaders, executives and they usually are. How did you feel about this?

COHEN: On paper it looked terrible. Here you have these people who one day are management officials and the next day are union officials, but it worked out very well. They were able to transform their mentality into union members. It worked out; there was no real problem.

Q: How about dealing with the recruitment retention of minorities at the time you were there?

COHEN: That was a very frustrating problem. We had two things. One thing is we tried to get more African Americans, women and Hispanics to take the foreign service exam. We did everything possible to help them pass. We did a lot of affirmative action like if you got five points below passing, you were still considered to be passing and got to go to the oral exam. We found it very frustrating because many of the qualified people in the minorities didn't want to go to the foreign service. Things were so much better in the private sector. Minorities were in demand, and could command much higher salaries in the private sector. But we were constantly criticized because were not recruiting more African Americans. It was hard to argue that they were not choosing to enter the service. Secondly, we found that some people did very well; and some people just couldn't adapt to foreign service life. If someone had worked for the DC municipal government for 15 years, going overseas didn't necessarily agree with him. It was a mixed bag. We had some very qualified minorities, and some who could not make it.

Q: It always struck me one of the weaknesses we would get picking a minority officers in and then there was no particular follow-up as supervisors to say all right, you have hired this person, now start, be more of a mentor, but I left about the time you went in to there. Were we doing more on that?

COHEN: Well, we started a mentor program for all junior officers. Every junior officer had to have a mentor. Also out in the field, the DCM was made responsible for supervising the mentoring system. That was very effective. Also, we were getting a lot of junior officers who were older. The average age was something like 34. When I came into the service, the average age was something like 26. So most new officers come with previous careers in their background, as well as young families to raise which makes it more complicated.

Q: What about a very special case in point, the women who were already in the foreign service. There were various suits saying they had been cut off, not being allowed to become DCM after an appropriate time and all that. Did that hit you during your time there?

Q: We inherited a number of ongoing lawsuits. I remember one of them came to a conclusion on discrimination, with the lower court judge finding no discrimination, but it went on to appeal. Although there was no proof of actual discrimination, the appeals court ruled that purely on statistical evidence, discrimination was proven. The statistics showed that women got a lower percentage of the performance awards and a lower percentage of the promotions. We had numbers and everything, so we lost the case while I was there, and we began negotiations on what the remedy would be. These cases were mainly dealt with by the legal advisers. We really didn't get involved in the substance too much.

Q: Were you finding it difficult to get rid of people who may be seen as unsuitable,

particularly if they belong to a minority or a woman if they raised an objection? I hear this again and again from people who are in the service but it is only on a person they talk about. "I had so and so and she did terrible things one time. It is ten years later and she is still in and still causing trouble." Did you see this as a problem really looking at it from a management side?

COHEN: We saw it as a problem in that it had gotten so difficult to fire anybody that people weren't even trying anymore. They had to be very careful on what they said on the efficiency report because they would be subject to grievances, that sort of thing, so people would just not bother. Where the problem arose was in assignments because people who were considered unsuitable or not cutting the mustard in their jobs, would find it hard to get assignments. Nobody wanted them. So I remember one or two African Americans, it wasn't that many, would constantly say I want this assignment, and would claim discrimination when they could not obtain those jobs.

Q: Well then at that point you left for the NSC. I thought we might pick that up at that time; would that make sense? Next time we will pick this up in 198...

COHEN: January 1987.

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Q: Today is June 9, 1997. Hank, we are in 1987 and you are off to the NSC. In the first place how did you get the job and then what was it?

COHEN: It was one of those unexpected things that we had so much of in the Foreign Service. I was sort of languishing in personnel work and I wasn't too pleased and was looking for jobs outside. Of course, I was eligible for retirement. All of a sudden they had the Iran Contra affair which meant that the National Security Advisor, Admiral Poindexter, was immediately fired.

Q: Could you explain very briefly what the Iran Contra affair was.

COHEN: This was a revelation that the Reagan White House, through the National Security Council, had secretly supplied arms to Iran. They sold arms to Iran even though the Iranians were our enemies. They used the proceeds of those arms to finance the contra rebels in Nicaragua. The scandal arose from the fact that the Congress had forbidden all assistance to the Contra rebels. The NSC had used a back door method to help the Contras. It was a big scandal. So, because of that, the National Security Advisor, Admiral Poindexter, was fired, and they brought in a replacement, Frank Carlucci from the private sector. He was a retired Foreign Service officer. What he did in order to clean the slate completely, he fired the whole NSC, virtually everyone, even people who had nothing to do with Iran Contra, the Africa Director for example. He immediately had to recruit new people. They called me and asked if I would like to be the Senior Director for Africa, and since I was bored in personnel where I was completing my third year, I said sure and I grabbed it. I went over there to be Reagan's National Security Advisor for Africa.

Q: You were in the NSC from when to when?

COHEN: I started in January of '87, and I left when the Reagan administration went out of office in January of '89.

Q: Could you give me a feel for the NSC for this new slate and all. One, was there a spirit, an attitude of the people who came in and what about the depth of knowledge of the NSC?

COHEN: Well, it was headed by Carlucci, of course, who was a veteran foreign affairs specialist, and he brought in a very terrific number two, Colin Powell who was by then a one star general. They had a very gung ho atmosphere, and they wanted to accomplish things. They brought in all sorts of experts mainly European, Soviet affairs, people like me who had in depth knowledge. It was a very high morale thing. Yet it wasn't too intensive. For example they said look if we work all week we don't have to work on Saturdays. We'll come in on Saturdays only if there is a crisis or something. It wasn't overdoing it. It was very friendly; we were willing to work on weekends. We had to have an early morning meeting at 7:30 because Carlucci and Powell had to brief the President at 8:30 every day, so we had a 7:30 meeting. That was the one hardship. Otherwise, they gave us a tremendous amount of freedom to handle it the way we wanted to.

Q: This was toward the very end of the Reagan administration, and the thought was certainly in the public sector that the President was not terribly engaged in foreign affairs except from time to time. What was what you were getting about what was being fed to the President and coming back reflected by Carlucci and Powell and others?

COHEN: I had a feeling that the NSC did not try to intrude too much on the agencies, State Department, Defense, CIA. They sort of let them do their jobs. Only when there were key issues such as the arms control negotiations with the Soviets, START talks and all that, the Presidency was directly involved and we prepared these summit meetings with Gorbachev. So, they were very active there. In other issues you also had what you call the Reagan Doctrine which was to counter Soviet power projections in various parts of the world. That is where I came in because the Soviet and Cuban troops were in Angola. There was tremendous interest in that in the upper reaches of the White House. We had to keep the President informed and his political advisors constantly informed about that. We were helping an insurgent movement in Angola, the UNITA movement, and this had a lot of problems in Congress, so we had to constantly coordinate how to keep that program funded.

Q: So in many ways the main focus of your time there was Angola.

COHEN: Actually the main focus was the negotiations leading to the independence of Namibia and the departure of Cuban troops from Angola. The Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Chester Crocker, who was a Republican political appointee, had made this his highest priority. He had been negotiating since 1981. Only in '87 did it finally

start getting somewhere. He enlisted my help as an NSC representative, and I went on 18 trips in two years to do these negotiations which ended up successfully in December, 1988 leading to the independence of Namibia and the departure of Cuban and South African troops from Angola as well. It was a package deal. It was a very intricate negotiation. It was very successful and a great triumph for the Reagan administration.

Q: What were the main issues that we, I mean we didn't have troops in the field, what was our role in Namibia and Angola negotiations?

COHEN: Well, Namibia, the independence of Namibia was decreed by a UN resolution back in 1985, Resolution 425 which had been sponsored by the Carter administration. They went out of office and the resolution still had not been implemented. For us it was a very interesting resolution because we wanted to sponsor the independence of Namibia. It was a good thing; it was the last colony in Africa. Secondly we were interested in getting Cuban troops out of Africa. You know our attitude toward Cuba is very negative. To see Cuban troops in Angola, Ethiopia, and Mozambique was not very good, so we wanted to do everything possible. Crocker had the idea of linking the two. He wanted independence for Namibia in return for Cuban troop withdrawal. His plan was resisted by a lot of people especially the left wing in the United States. We shouldn't link the two; we should only be interested in getting Namibia out of the clutches of the South African regime, forget about Angola.

Q: The south African regime at this time was a white only.

COHEN: A white only apartheid regime. So, just getting everyone to talk to each other was difficult. Also it was very interesting that in 1988 a decision was made to ask the Cubans to come to the negotiating table. Here was the United States conservative Republican government negotiating with Cubans and Castro. It took a great deal of courage on the part of Secretary of State Schultz who insisted that we accept the Cubans at the table. Without them, we couldn't have gotten anywhere.

Q: In your impression and from the NSC perspective, what was in this both getting in and getting out for the Cubans?

COHEN: The Cubans had come to Angola in 1975 in order to install a communist government there. They were kind of stuck there. They were sort of bogged down because their action immediately created a civil war in Angola that was supported mainly by South Africa. If the Cubans left, the government would have collapsed. So, the Cubans were stuck there from '75 until 1991 when the treaty went into effect, and it was costing a lot of money to the Soviets who were financing all of that. The Cubans didn't like being in Angola. For awhile they thought it was great helping a communist regime. After a while they started getting AIDS and all sorts of problems, so they were very anxious to get out, but in an honorable way.

Q: Were they seen as being the surrogates of the Soviet Union at that time? We are talking about the time you were with the NSC. Or, by this time, they were there because

they were there rather than being part of the Soviet world conspiracy.
COHEN: Well, it was debated. Those of us in the NSC considered them to be surrogates of the Soviets. They had Soviet arms, Soviet money. A lot of Cuban experts said they were doing it because they wanted to project their own international communist power. It really didn't change the situation on the ground one way or another.

Q: When you arrived there in '87, what was the battlefield situation?

COHEN: It was kind of static. We had started to help the UNITA movement in '86. Between 1975 and 1986 we did not help them because there was something called the Clark Amendment which prevented us from giving aid to anybody in Angola. That was repealed in 1986, and it was a Democratic controlled Congress that repealed it. The administration decided to start a covert action program to help UNITA. It was a pattern that every June or July, the Angolan army would try an offensive against UNITA with Soviet and Cuban help. We would step up our assistance to UNITA at the same time. It usually was a stalemate. The fighting was confined mainly to the southeastern part of Angola. The war did not bother most people living in the capital city.

Q: What was our contact with the authorities in Angola at that time, the government. We are talking...

COHEN: We had no diplomatic relations with them, and we worked through a neutral interests section in the capital, the British embassy. If we wanted to send messages or receive messages, we went through the British. However, starting around early '87, they made contact with us indirectly and said we have to meet face to face to discuss issues. Chester Crocker and I in March of '87 went to Congo Brazzaville right next door to Angola, where we met with the minister of the interior. He came out and we had a discussion about starting a process of negotiations. From that point on, it progressed slowly. After that, our next trip was to Angola itself where we met the foreign minister. From that point on, we kept going back to Angola every two months.
Q: When we initially talked to the Angolan authorities, what were they hoping for from us?

COHEN: We said we wanted to help bring about peace in Angola. They said that is easy. All you have to do is stop assisting the UNITA movement and they will collapse. They are illegitimate and we are legitimate. So, the initial thrust of their diplomacy was to get us to stop doing what we were doing and put pressure on South Africa to get their troops out of Angola. We kept insisting that we could not do that. We could only help bring about a peaceful settlement between the government and UNITA, and also between the government and South Africa, and the price to pay for that was to get rid of the Cuban troops.

Q: How were they responding initially?

COHEN: Initially, they were very hostile and they said they weren't interested; that was not fair and what have you. It was only until we got a message from Fidel Castro in late

1987 to Frank Carlucci that said if the Cubans can participate in these talks, everything will go okay. Then we had a big debate in Washington as to whether we should be sitting at the same table as Cuba. We thought that we could, and Secretary Schultz helped us achieve a policy decision that we would do this. However, we had to promise not to talk about anything except Angola and Namibia, nothing about Cuban-American relations.

Q: Can you talk a little about the dynamics within the White House and Congress and all when you got to this crux of the matter. I assume that you and others with you saw this as the key. Until you had this, it wasn't going to go anywhere.

COHEN: Our line was that it was in the interest of the U.S. for Cuban troops to be taken out of Angola, and also for Namibia to become independent, two big foreign policy objectives. Nobody could argue with that. However, the people who were fervently supporting the UNITA movement asked what is UNITA going to get out of all of this? We said if there are no Cuban troops facing them, it would be easier for UNITA to force the government to negotiate with them. We had wanted to improve the negotiations with a solution for UNITA as part of the package. The Angolan government refused. They said all they would discuss is Cuban troops, South African troops that were also in Angola and Namibia. They would consider that package but not relations with UNITA. We had to keep UNITA supporters stroked. They kept accusing us of wanting to abandon UNITA.

Q: Who were the UNITA supporters in the United States?

COHEN: You had the Republicans mainly, the conservatives. There were some moderate Republicans who didn't like UNITA like Nancy Kassebaum.

Q: Who is from Kansas.

COHEN: Yes, the center. There were also a number of conservative Democrats who believed UNITA represented a democratic force as opposed to this communist Marxist government, like Congressman Richardson. There was also an Arizona senator who is not there anymore. I forgot his name which was Italian. He was very much in favor of that. Even though the Congress was democratic and considered to be anti-UNITA, the support program never lost a vote. Every time it came up to a vote, the UNITA supporters got the majority.

Q: Did the NSC play any role in dealing with Congress on this?

COHEN: I spent a lot of time briefing members of Congress. Chester Crocker, brilliant as he was, did not get along very well with Congress. His “constructive engagement” policy, was disliked by both the conservatives and the liberals.
Q: This was a spill over from the South African policy as opposed to this other policy wasn't it?

COHEN: Well, constructive engagement was designed to set up a framework where we

could negotiate these subjects. Now, that meant you had to have a good relationship with the white minority regime in South Africa, or at least a cordial one. You also had to have a relationship with Angola which was Marxist. The left wing in this country hated that because it meant dealing with apartheid South Africa, and the right wing, people like Jesse Helms didn't like Chester Crocker because it meant dealing normally with a Marxist government. He was getting it from both sides, and therefore, he wasn't popular on the Hill. So, me being kind of virgin in that area, I would go around and not advocate anything but just give briefings. I found that members of Congress, when you give them a briefing, what is going on, what is in the cable traffic, they tended to be friendly.

Q: You are not trying to push anything, you are just saying what is happening.

COHEN: This is what we are doing. This is what is happening on the ground, but also I was considered to be the pro-UNITA guy in the administration. I was always reassuring that we were continuing to help UNITA, so it was a pretty good arrangement.

Q: Did you feel that on this African policy you were working on, there was good coordination between the NSC and the Department of State?

COHEN: I think it was excellent. In fact, I was something like the fifth NSC Africa Director since the beginning of the Reagan administration, and I was the first one who didn't have my own agenda because the others were all from other agencies like CIA or Defense. I was the first State Department guy to hold that job. I considered myself mainly an advisor to the Assistant Secretary, not as someone who was trying to supervise the Assistant Secretary. I was on his team.
Q: What about the role of the CIA because during this Reagan period the CIA was very action oriented although Bill Casey by this time had gone I suppose. He had been badly burned by the Iran Contra affair. At the same time this was action oriented, and this was the biggest action I suppose they had in Africa certainly. I would have thought that they in a certain way wouldn't want to mess around. You know, this was their army.

COHEN: They did their job well, they handled it well, but they saw growing opposition to this. The UNITA movement was not seen so much as a democratic force but as another authoritarian group seeking to replace the government. So, the CIA was very worried. When they had to report to the intelligence committees, they usually brought me along with them to report. They were in favor of the thing, but they saw support for it slipping slowly. They needed our help.

Q: What about the South African part of the equation in Namibia. How did that fit in?

COHEN: The South Africa regime did not like the idea of giving up Namibia. A lot of us felt pessimistic that we could ever achieve our objective because the South African regime saw Namibia as a buffer. They saw all those Cubans in Angola, and they said if we give up Namibia, they will be on our own border, so it was hard to convince them. But they seemed to have their own domestic political problems. More and more of their young white boys were getting killed up in Angola and in Namibia. There was a

backlash. It was very expensive for them to maintain those armies up there. Slowly but surely they realized it was becoming untenable. It made them vulnerable to Chester Crocker's arguments. "Look, you are worried about these Cubans on your border. They could be gone, but the price you have to pay is independence for Namibia." Slowly but surely they bought on to that.

Q: So was Namibia at that point seen basically more as a buffer than a worthwhile piece of real estate?
COHEN: First of all it was worthwhile. They had big diamond exports coming out of there; they were making a lot of money, but it was mainly as a buffer. It is about 1000 miles long, so they say if the communists are coming down from the north against us, it is better to have them at the northern border of Namibia than the northern border of South Africa. But, I think when the Berlin Wall came down in '89, the argument that we had to protect South Africa from a communist onslaught against South Africa was wearing thin. It was hard to convince the South African people that they needed to keep sending troops and paying a lot of money for the defense of Namibia.

Q: Well, in many ways the developments in the Soviet Union and the gradual receding of the Soviet empire and events in Afghanistan were playing into your hands. It was no longer an aggressive power.

COHEN: That is why the negotiations succeeded in '88 when it failed to make any progress between 1981 and 1988. Yes, it was in the context of a new international atmosphere.

Q: What about when you finally got to sit down with the Cubans, what sort of a role did they play?

COHEN: Well, they started off posturing, you know, everything would be all right if only the U.S. would stop meddling in these places. The first few times they sent these wild Marxist party men with big cigars, but after a while these were replaced by younger pragmatic men who really wanted to get results. Their main contribution, well they had two contributions, one is they made very pragmatic proposals. Secondly, they were able to convince the Angolans to get along and accept some of these proposals. The Angolans were afraid to do anything they thought would weaken their security, so the Cubans helped convince them of the rightness of certain things.

Q: Was it helpful having Frank Carlucci who was certainly an African hand as a National Security Advisor?

COHEN: Very helpful. He understood what we were doing, and gave us a lot of leeway as long as we kept him informed.

Q: During this negotiating period were there any particular obstacles or difficulties either with the people you were negotiating with or within the United States being unwilling to sit down with the Cubans?

COHEN: Well there were always these bleats from UNITA supporters. Where is UNITA? UNITA is not involved in the negotiations; you are selling them out. We had to spend a lot of time with UNITA's friends telling them how we were continuing to support UNITA. We'll never give up sending arms. Even though we can reach an agreement on the departure of Cuban troops, that doesn't mean we are going to stop delivering arms. We were constantly stroking UNITA's friends. The Cuban thing, we didn't have that much trouble as long as Secretary Schultz was backing us. Delaying the negotiations was a great deal of mistrust and fear on all sides. We had to constantly break the tie and inject our own ideas. It was a slow uphill fight.

Q: I would have thought that as you move into 1988 being an election year always a key particularly on the Republican side are the Cubans in Florida that this might have become a little bit difficult for you at that time.

COHEN: No we didn't have any of that as long as we let everyone know that our objective was to get the Cubans out. We didn't run into political problems.

Q: What was the feeling. Here you were making these promises to UNITA and its friends that we'll keep supplying and all this. This doesn't sound like a way of developing even after the Cubans get out like the continuation of a war?

COHEN: That is true but we wanted to take it one step at a time. Get the Cubans out. Get the South Africans out. Get Namibia independence, and then we'll attack the internal Angolan civil war. Which we did starting in '89.

Q: How did you see from your vantage point the situation in South Africa as far as the constructive engagement policy, Chester Crocker and where the Reagan administration was going in South Africa?

COHEN: We had a problem with South Africa because in 1986, the Congress enacted severe economic sanctions against South Africa over the President's veto. It is not frequent that Congress over rides the President's veto. There was a very bitter fight. This, of course, caused South Africa to be upset, and they did not talk to the United States for well over 18 months. We weren't able to engage in any dialog from '86 until mid '87. So, while we were convincing the Angolans to start negotiating, we also had a big job convincing the South Africans to get involved.

Q: How were we seeing events in South Africa in this '87 to '88 period?

COHEN: We were discouraged because we were expecting some meaningful change to take place. Nothing really happened. Some of the South African leaders like P.W. Botha were making speeches saying South Africa has to change or die, that sort of thing. But, nothing ever happened, so we were very discouraged. That is another reason why we had problems with the left wing in this country. We said we can't do anything about apartheid now, it is not right; at least let's work on these other issues where we could make

progress. The anti-apartheid people didn't see it that way. The only way you are going to solve Namibian independence or Cuban troops in Angola is to finish apartheid. You have got to concentrate on that. Whereas our government said there is nothing to do on apartheid right now. People were saying we want more sanctions. We were resisting that. We said we need South Africa to cooperate with us on these other objectives, so more sanctions would be unhelpful.

Q: What about two of the other places where there should be interest. One would be in Zaire or the Congo and the other would be Ethiopia. Let's take Zaire first. What was happening there? Was there concern about the regime?.

COHEN: Well we all knew the regime was hopelessly corrupt, and causing great hardship to the people. But we needed Mobutu. The only way we could get arms to UNITA in Angola was to use airfields in Zaire with the full cooperation of the Mobutu. We spent most of our time in Zaire talking with Mobutu, coordinating and dealing with the UNITA issue. What was happening in Zaire itself was low priority.

Q: How about in Ethiopia? Was the rebellion there gaining momentum at that point?

COHEN: No, it had been simmering along since 1975. The government was not winning, the rebels were not winning. It was sort of a stalemate. The big problem in Ethiopia was not the political thing; it was the famine. They were having tremendous famine because people couldn't plant crops while all the fighting going on. We had a lot of work to do to keep the people of Ethiopia fed. There were some people in the administration who said maybe the best way to end the war is to stop feeding, stop sending food. That means the troops won't get fed. Sitting in the White House, I said, "The United States can never say no to hunger. We could never implement such a Machiavellian policy." That was our main issue. We did not have good relations with the government of Ethiopia. We had no ambassador there; it was under a chargé d'affaires. In all his years, Assistant Secretary Chester Crocker never visited Ethiopia. Our relations with them were like our relations with Cuba, very cold.

Q: Were Cuban troops in Ethiopia at that time?

COHEN: They were. They had come in during the late 70's because there was a war between Ethiopia and Somalia, and they came in to protect Ethiopia from Somalia.

Q: What role were they playing during this time you were with the NSC?

COHEN: The Cubans? Well, there wasn't much doing with Cuba until we brought them into the Angola-Namibia negotiations.

Q: But the troops in Ethiopia were also included in say getting them out?

COHEN: No that was not part of the package.

Q: Was it probably assumed that they would leave at a certain point, or were they a critical factor in Ethiopia?

COHEN: They were not critical. After a while the Somalia threat receded. After they left Angola, they took advantage of that to say they were also leaving Ethiopia, but it was not part of the negotiations.

Q: By the time you left there in '89 at the end of the Reagan administration, there had been an agreement assigned.

COHEN: Yes. An agreement was signed in December 1988. It was one month before the end of the administration, and we had a big ceremony in New York to sign what they called the tripartite accords, the independence of Namibia, and the departure of Cuban and South African troops from Angola. It was a big event. Secretary Schultz was there.

Q: How did you feel about it at that time as an agreement; what did you think the long term effects would be?

COHEN: First of all we saw it as a very good agreement in itself for what it accomplished even if there were no follow up in other areas. We thought it opened the door to two big processes. One was an end to apartheid itself. We felt that then we could really concentrate on that. The second one was an end to the Angolan civil war. We could concentrate on that also.

Q: How did you think the situation would end up in Angola in sort of how you and other members of the NSC looked at it. Was it going to end up eventually still under a communist regime or sort of a mixed bag? What did you think was going to happen?

COHEN: We turned out attention in the next administration toward trying to get the government of Angola to negotiate with UNITA. Our main objective was not worrying about what kind of regime would end up in Angola, but negotiating an end to a war causing tremendous hardship.

Q: Well I take it you sort of ended this period feeling that you were, that things were beginning to break.

COHEN: Beginning to break. We thought that we had momentum. This negotiation in Angola and Namibia was a great achievement, a very complex negotiation. I thought Chester Crocker deserved a lot more credit than he actually got, and there was momentum. Now the Soviet Union was no longer a major power; the United States was seen as a peacemaker. I thought the next administration of Bush should take advantage of that to keep going as a peacemaker.

Q: Any other say European powers playing any role, the Belgians, the French in any of this in the United Nations, or was it pretty much...

COHEN: No. Well, the United Nations was brought in to implement the agreement because they had to provide peace keepers and monitors and election supervisors and what have you. That was fine, but they had nothing to do with the negotiations itself. Basically to the extent that the British were influential in South Africa, they helped push the South Africans to agreement, and to the extent that the British and the Soviets were influential in Angola, they helped push the Angolan regime to reach an agreement.

Q: What were events during this period in Mozambique?

COHEN: Well, Mozambique was also having a civil war. We wanted to make sure that civil war and what was going on in there did not interfere with what we were doing in Angola. That was an important issue because conservatives, both in the administration and outside the administration, strongly supported the RENAMO guerrilla movement in Mozambique. They thought it was the Equivalent of UNITA. They saw RENAMO as anti communists fighting a Marxist government. They pushed us strongly to support RENAMO. We resisted. We thought that would just upset what we were doing because the RENAMO movement was a pretty bad bunch. They were terrorists with a pretty bad human rights record. We didn't want to get mixed up with them, but we had a lot of pressure put on us from conservatives who were RENAMO supporters. There were a lot of them in the Defense Department and the CIA. One of my accomplishments as NSC Director was to keep them at bay, keep them from interfering. We were getting letters from Secretary Weinberger to Carlucci saying RENAMO was the wave of the future, they should be supported, but I kept them at bay.

Q: I would think that this would always be a problem in that those who are not involved in seeing the further ramifications of policy as with the CIA and the Department of Defense like to pick up an activist role and don't get too worried about the type of people or the goals.

COHEN: Exactly. If they can get somebody like Secretary Weinberger to write letters, that shows they have a lot of clout. There I thought the NSC could play a very important role in coordinating among the agencies. In fact, as the Africa Director, I didn't have much contact with Ronald Reagan who was busy with a lot of other things, but I once was called to give him a briefing about Mozambique and RENAMO. He said, "The reason I asked to see you, I'm getting a lot of mail from my friends, the conservatives in Orange County California that we have got to support RENAMO. I need your advice. What do I say to these people?" I gave him the whole story about RENAMO and its terrible human rights and their support from the apartheid regime, Portuguese right wing fascists and all that. He listened to that and said, "Yes. I'll tell you what. I'm going to tell all my friends in Orange County that we are not going to support RENAMO, but you have got to tell the government of Mozambique that they have to negotiate with RENAMO. They can't just sit there and expect the international community to get rid of RENAMO for them." So, in effect, he made policy that said we had to deal with RENAMO. We had to get them involved in negotiations, but that was not implemented until the next administration.

Q: This is tape four side one with Herman Cohen. With Renamo, did we have any contacts with Renamo, I mean CIA or anything else?

COHEN: No, we did not. It was a strict policy that we did not contact them. Our only contact was with friends of RENAMO, United States people who would go out to see RENAMO in the bush. In fact it was an office in the Heritage Foundation, it wasn't part of the Heritage Foundation, but it shared an office with them. It was called the Mozambique Information Office, and was staffed by friends of RENAMO.

Q: The Heritage Foundation being...
COHEN: A conservative think tank that supports conservative foreign policy and domestic policy. We would occasionally see these people come in, especially in the White House. They were not very welcome in the State Department, but the White House, you know, we figured they have got to have some outlet, and we would see them and talk to them. Once I remember they got in to see Carlucci. They made a big pitch for RENAMO. I was there also.

Q: How would you respond to this type of pitch?

COHEN: We responded that we weren't convinced that RNAMO was really an indigenous grass roots movement. We argued that RENAMO was the creation of South Africa. We also felt the Mozambique government was making progress, liberalizing their economy, becoming more democratic and less Marxist, so we should work with the Mozambique government and not do anything to try to undermine them or support a rebellion against the Mozambique government.

Q: Was this the period during '87-'89 where the Mozambique government was becoming... I can't remember the president's name.

COHEN: Chissano.

Q: He was a very charismatic person who was really impressing visitors who came to see him.

COHEN: Actually you are talking about the previous president, Samora Machel. He was a charismatic speaker, and he was killed in an airplane crash in late '86. He was replaced by the foreign minister Chissano who was also quite a good man, but less charismatic. Anyway, it is interesting that Samora Machel although a Marxist leader and friendly to the Soviets, made a good impression on Ronald Reagan. Somehow he got to meet Ronald Reagan who thought he was a good man. Foreign minister Chissano, who succeeded him, was a good friend of Maureen Reagan, the daughter of Ronald Reagan. For that reason they said we like these guys; they seem to be moving away from the Soviet Union and toward the west. With that background, we were able to convince Reagan that it was not a good idea to support RENAMO. He was under pressure from not only his friends but also people like Senator Helms who really wanted to support RENAMO.

Q: Were you getting the feeling during this period you were with the NSC that with Soviet power waning and things were really beginning to happen; the Soviet empire was really beginning to break up, that some of the African Marxist regimes were really looking over their shoulder and saying maybe we had better start making accommodations, or were they as attuned to events as that?

COHEN: No, I think they were saying the Soviets are not out there to support us anymore. Also the Marxism we have been practicing does not work. Our countries have gotten poorer rather than richer. Mozambique was a good example. Marxist President Samora Machel privatized state enterprises and liberalized the economy, encouraging private investment and so on. Most of them were going through this, and it really reached a crescendo in 1990 when democratization started sweeping across Africa.

Q: Did you also see any movement at this time from the rather almost dogmatic socialism? I'm thinking Nyerere and others in Africa taking a look and saying maybe we ought to try something different?

COHEN: It was beginning to stir. The World Bank for example, was very active in asking for changed policies, and the Africans were beginning to respond positively to the World Bank.

Q: Well, I thought we might close at this point. So, you left there in 1989 when a new administration came in which was the Bush administration, still a Republican administration, but a new Secretary of State and all. What happened with you?

COHEN: Well, I was told that Bush was going to have a totally new National Security Council staff, and that I should be prepared to leave as soon as he came in. So, I was looking for a new assignment. I was still in the Foreign Service, and I felt that I was qualified to be Assistant Secretary, but I knew that wasn't going to be easy to get because it was a political level job. Chester Crocker was a political appointee, not a career officer. So, I had a game plan to try to become the Assistant Secretary, but as a fall back, the Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary if they wanted a political appointee which was possible. I started lobbying very heavily, calling up people that I knew.

Q: What type of people did you call?

COHEN: People I knew who were Republicans in the business world who I knew were interested in Africa and who were friends of mine. For example, when I was in the NSC, Senator Helms tried very hard to bring about sanctions against Angola, to force the big oil company, Chevron, to leave Angola. I helped them stay in Angola, so I called up Chevron and asked them if their lobbyist can help me become Assistant Secretary. So, whatever networking I had done before, I took advantage of.

Q: How about had you had any contact with the new President, George Bush, who had been Vice President?

COHEN: Yes, when he was Vice President, he took a big interest in Africa. He frequently asked me to come in and give briefings. I knew all of his advisors, and I also tried to use those channels as well.

Q: How about James Baker?
COHEN: James Baker I did not know. He was in the Reagan White House, but tended not to get too much involved in African affairs. He was not on the NSC. I would see him occasionally during official visits of Africans. He was in the room, so he saw me performing during the presidency so he must have gotten an impression of me.

Q: All right, why don't we stop at this point and we'll pick up, you have already talked about wishing to be Assistant Secretary and how you did a certain amount of lobbying in order to get that, and pick it up at that point and what happened.

COHEN: Yes, I have an interesting story to tell.

Q: Well, tell it now.

COHEN: I found out fairly early on that the selection was not me but Frank Wisner, a foreign service colleague. He was ambassador in Egypt, and Baker wanted him to be Assistant Secretary for the Near East, but there were objections from pro Israeli factions who he feared he might be pro Arab, so he would not be acceptable as a neutral, so they were looking. They liked him a lot and they wanted him in there. Since he had a lot of African experience, they said why not name him Assistant Secretary for Africa, and they made that decision. Then they did informal consultations with Congress, and there was a very strong Republican Congressman very close to George Bush named Mitch McConnell from Kentucky. He objected. He said, "I didn't like it when Wisner was Deputy Assistant Secretary and he testified before us. I don't think he was entirely truthful with us about UNITA and Angolans. I think he lied before a committee and I would have strong objections to him being Assistant Secretary." Baker sits there and said he wanted him. I kept getting calls every day from Robin Cleveland who was McConnell's Administrative Assistant saying don't worry, we will fight to get Wisner off. You can't fight somebody with nobody and we are supporting you. So, it was sort of a conspiracy going on. Slowly but surely McConnell said I am going to veto him; I am going to block his nomination. I think we have got a good guy who I think will be just as good as him and that is Hank Cohen. So, that is how I became Assistant Secretary. It had nothing to do with me, it was all sort of politics with Frank Wisner. So, Frank stayed in Egypt as ambassador and I got the job.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick it up next time when in 1989 when you took over as Assistant Secretary and we'll start right at that point.

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Today is September 23, 1997. So you came on board in 1989 as Assistant Secretary. As you sort of got yourself cranked up to do this, what did you see as your major priorities

that you would have?

COHEN: Well, early '89 was the beginning of the end of the Cold War, so for the first time in my career I wasn't required to list Cold War objectives as my highest priority. I was able to look at other things. On the basis of my experience, I reached the conclusion that the main priority in Africa should be development. Africa was essentially a basket case, a charity case and our objective should be to help Africa become producers of wealth and consumers of wealth and good trading partners. To do that they had to get some economic growth and development, so I thought we should concentrate on that. Then looking at that area, I reached the conclusion that on the economic side very good work was being done by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and USAID. They were all pushing Africa through economic reform programs that could lead to economic growth and development, so we didn't have any extra value to add to that area. I saw that the one area where we could make a difference was in conflict resolution because at the beginning of 1989 there were four major civil wars going on: Angola, Mozambique, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Not only were these wars devastating those countries and preventing them from developing, they were having a negative impact on surrounding regions. So, a very large percentage of Africa was stymied in its development because of civil war. We also in the Reagan administration had a major victory in conflict resolution between Angola and South Africa leading to the independence of Namibia. This was a major diplomatic victory for the U.S. I participated in it, so I felt a sense of momentum in that area. We were prestigious in conflict resolution, so I thought we should concentrate on that. So, I in effect decided that conflict resolution should be our highest priority, but with the idea that it would lead to development which is really what we wanted to see happen in Africa.

Q: You came in more or less with the Bush administration. Had they been in place long by the time you...

COHEN: Well, no. Bush was sworn in January 20 and I became Assistant Secretary in April. But, I had worked for the last two years in the Reagan National Security Council that included working with Bush as Vice President. It was a very smooth transition. In fact, while I was still in the White House, Bush was still Vice President, even though he had been elected. It was during the transition, and his staff asked me for a recommendation on Angola. I gave him a recommendation, and Bush made a public statement on Angola while he was still Vice President, and president elect, which turned out to be his first foreign policy pronouncement related to his new job.

Q: What about James Baker as Secretary of State? He had considerable renown in the foreign service for having a closed circle around him and concentrated on a few areas. We are talking about the very beginning. How did this mesh with your concern for Africa?

COHEN: Well, he did not consider Africa to be one of his highest priorities. He was mainly concentrating on the relationship with the new Soviet Union with Gorbachev and, of course, the Middle East, the Arab Israeli problem. He was not able to pay much

attention to Africa; although, he was a very domestic oriented Secretary of State. He always had his eye on domestic politics, and in Africa he saw the problem with apartheid in South Africa as a major domestic issue. Therefore, he paid a certain amount of attention to that, but the rest he left to me.

Q: Which in a way is ideal isn't it? Were you able to call him in when you needed the clout of the Secretary?

COHEN: Yes. There were two methods. One was that I had a very good working relationship with the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Robert Kimmitt, who was one of his inner circle. So, I knew if I had Robert Kimmitt's view on a particular policy or tactic, I knew that it also represented Baker. He could always talk to Baker and get Baker's view if he needed it. He usually knew what Baker liked or disliked. Secondly, Baker had a morning staff meeting five days a week with the Assistant Secretaries, and I had a chance to say anything I wanted. It was a very quick opportunity, like about 30 seconds to a minute, but I had the opportunity to call his attention to something that I thought he should know and was important. Sometimes he would say that is interesting. Write me a memo about that. Come and see me about that. There were very few things that resulted in such a reaction. Usually it was oh thank you that is interesting, and then we went to the next subject. Occasionally he would say oh yes, I want to know more about that, so that was my opportunity to get his ear. Of course, I could always send him written communications that I know he read.

Q: Why don't we move through some of the countries maybe as an approach. Shall we take Angola first since this was Bush's first policy initiative in foreign policy. What was the situation at the time, and how did it work out from your perspective?

COHEN: Well, there was one policy directive that came form the Secretary's office that was not just to me but to all the Assistant Secretaries. The directive was that we had to do as much as possible to cooperate with the Gorbachev Soviet government in solving regional problems. “Regional problems” was a euphemism for Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. So, in effect, I was directed to have early consultations with Soviet counterparts, which I did. I met in Rome with the vice foreign minister of the Soviet Union. He said that his government had two major commitments in Africa, Angola and Ethiopia where there were Marxist regimes engaged in civil war, and the Soviets had major arms delivery commitments to these governments. It amounted to about a billion dollars a year to each government. They had decided this was too expensive. It was something they no longer wanted to do. They were no longer interested in pursuing Cold War objectives; therefore, they wanted to get out of these commitments, and wanted our collaboration to get out. The felt the honorable way to exit was to try and bring an end to these civil wars. They wanted to work with us. Since that was the highest priority of the White House and the Secretary, we decided to work on both Angola and Ethiopia immediately. In Angola, we were supporting the anticommunist rebel movement there, so we were not a neutral player, but the Soviets were supporting the government, so we had leverage over our separate clients. We immediately put pressure on our separate clients to get into a negotiation rather than continuing the war. Our client

UNITA said negotiations were what they had been fighting for. We want a negotiation leading to a free and fair election and a democratic regime. Any time a negotiation is called for, we will be at the table immediately. The government, however, was reluctant. They felt that they were just dealing with a bunch of rebel bandits who were supported by South Africa mostly, and a little bit by the U.S. The only way to get peace in Angola was to stop supporting the rebels and recognize the legitimate government. If you guys want peace in Angola, stop giving arms to our enemies. So they delayed and obfuscated for a long time. We decided the best tactic, since we were not accepted as neutrals, and the Russians were not accepted as neutrals with the rebels, was to get the surrounding heads of state to put pressure on the government to get into a negotiation. So we approached the Gabonese, the Zaireans, the Mozambicans and the Zambians. So, they agreed to cooperate and they had regional summit meetings. Finally they decided to have a big summit peace conference in Zaire in June of 1898. Our job was then to persuade the rebel leader, Jonas Savimbi, to attend the meeting. He was reluctant because he saw it just as neighboring heads of state ganging up on a rebel. He was right in a sense, and we persuaded him to go, but the outcome of the meeting was the government saying we will grant you amnesty, and just join the government, a ministerial job, positions in the army and in effect everything will be nice. Join us and we'll give you money, what have you. Jonas Savimbi called me to a special meeting after that where I met him in Morocco and said, "We haven't been fighting for 15 years to end up joining a Marxist regime as partners. We want a free and fair election so the people can decide who the leaders will be." They were fighting for democracy in other words.

Q: How sincere did you feel Savimbi and his cause was, democracy and free fair elections and all, and how much was for personal power?

COHEN: Well, we never considered him to be a democrat because he didn't run his movement democratically, but we were sort of stuck with him. He was our Cold War surrogate. He kept saying he wanted democracy; we couldn't say you are not sincere. In retrospect after it was all over, I think we should have pushed him harder to accept the offer of collaboration with the regime, but he said no and we said we could understand that. Also we were under heavy pressure back home to go along with him rather than push him into accepting just any deal.

Q: Where was the pressure coming from?

COHEN: Savimbi, with the help of South Africa, had very strong lobbyists. They were well financed and they had the ear of the President and Secretary of State. The conservatives, both Democrat and Republican, supported Savimbi. They had supported him for many years. He also had the support of some evangelical churches. They saw it not just as a Cold War thing but as a fight for democracy against dictatorship and Marxism. While we in the State Department would be happy to see the war end and let him join the government, they prevailed. We were instructed by Baker through Mr. Kimmitt that we were to support Savimbi's point of view that there should be free and fair elections, and we went public on that which effectively undermined the summit conference that had just decided on a coopting solution. So, the war heated up again in

the second half of 1989. A complication set in because the guy who was running the summit conference that decided on an African solution was Mobutu of Zaire. He happened to be the guy Savimbi needed for the arms shipments to get to him, especially the U.S. shipments. They all went through Zaire; there was no other way we could get them to him. Mobutu got very upset that Savimbi had sabotaged his wonderful summit conference, and he said I'm cutting off the flow. He wouldn't allow anything to go through Zaire anymore. The Angolan Government had made a grand gesture of giving amnesty and offering to take Savimbi into the government making him a minister. They were upset because Savimbi had decided that war was better than peace, so they asked the Soviets for one last effort to defeat UNITA, and the Soviets shipped them lots of arms. They were able to buy a lot of arms because they had a lot of oil money. On the one hand the Angolan Government was getting a lot of arms and pursuing an offensive, and on the other hand, UNITA was totally cut off. So, what to do? The Bush administration had the policy of free and fair elections so they would have to continue supporting Savimbi in his war aims. We asked President Bush through Baker to ask Mobutu to come to Washington and straighten this out. They also asked Savimbi to come in. I was in the oval office when Mobutu was there. Bush made a personal appeal. He said we both have been supporting Savimbi for all these years. We can't abandon him now. I know you are upset with him, but you have got to understand his side of it. He won't just join a Marxist regime; he wants free and fair elections. He wants democracy. Mobutu did not want to say no to his good friend, Bush, and he said, "Okay, I'll do it for you, and I will invite Savimbi," who was not in the office at the time, "to join me in my villa in southern France on my birthday." Which was sometime in October. He said, "Please send Assistant Secretary Cohen to be there as the witness to the reconciliation." I duly showed up on that Sunday in mid-October in a suburb of Nice where he had his villa overlooking the Mediterranean.

Q: That is a thing you have to do as Assistant Secretary.

COHEN: Made me work on Sunday. He has this sumptuous Italian villa overlooking the Bay of Villefranche. There was a U.S. aircraft carrier sitting in the bay down below, very appropriate. Savimbi was there. Mobutu made a very moving statement that we have been fighting this fight together for two decades, and we have got to let bygones be bygones. We'll open up the routes again. Later when I talked to Savimbi privately, he had been very angry at Mobutu and was ready to give up on Mobutu. He said, "Oh I think he is sincere. He means it, so we will make friends again." So that settled that little crisis. That was sort of my first crisis in the administration. However we had lost some time. A couple of months had gone by since any supplies had gone through. In the meantime the government had started a big offensive with tanks, artillery, and they were pushing UNITA's forces more and more into the southeast corner of Angola. They were really in danger; they were retreating. I went to the Defense Department and the CIA and said we have to do something about this or else our client is going to lose the war before we can even get into negotiations. A decision was made to deliver 12 months worth of supplies in three months, so they put in extra planes extra personnel and all. I was able to do this without resorting to higher authority or appealing to anyone to work it out.

Q: Just to get the feel for this, without getting higher authority means what?

COHEN: I didn't have to go to Baker and ask him to go to the CIA and ask them to push the troops. We had agreed at my level, we agreed that this could be done. They had the budget. All they had to do was inform the Congressional intelligence Committees. Even though the operation to support UNITA had enemies in Congress; it had never lost a vote. Republicans and Democrats together usually made up a majority. We also had a setback. One of the first planes to go into UNITA territory after the ban had been lifted crashed and killed the crew. So, getting planes back in the air again meant recruiting people, so we lost about four months and UNITA was really in deep trouble. However between January and March of 1990 we delivered lots of equipment, and UNITA was able to halt the offensive. Also the government's offensive ran into logistical problems. You know, the further you advance, the longer the logistic line, and they were unable to handle it. Finally, UNITA started pushing them back, and he started advancing toward the north, pushing them back and we knew he was out of danger. Now in March it was quite clear that UNITA had the upper hand on the battlefield; although, there was no way he could win a victory over the government. He at least had enough to defend himself. In March, in addition to this battlefield problem, the CIA also started a program of selective sabotage. They trained UNITA fighters to go long distances and blow up power lines and water mains, so they were striking around the country.

Q: Where, by the way on this, was there a prohibition about blowing up oil facilities being American oil?

COHEN: Yes, we discouraged him from doing that. It was just harassment to show the government look you can't defeat us, you have to negotiate with us. We had never given UNITA enough to win a war. It was always defensive.

Q: And this was carefully, it was a plan.

COHEN: It was part of what we call covert action, but it was one of the most public covert actions in history. The CIA did a good job. It all started as a Cold War Reagan doctrine Brezhnev Doctrine thing. To push the government into negotiations we had this double approach. One was UNITA could defend itself on the battlefield. The second was those sabotage attacks that went right to the capital city. In March of 1990, there was the independence of Namibia celebrations, and of course, the United States had to play a prominent role in this since we had negotiated this whole thing under my predecessor Chester Crocker and his team. Baker himself decided to go to Namibia to be present on March 20. While he was there, we arranged for him to meet with the president of Angola. He said to the president of Angola, "Look, the recent summit meeting didn't work. Savimbi wants a democratic election. Your offensive didn't work. Now there is sabotage going on. Let's get over all of this and let's have a real negotiation so we can get a reasonable settlement that would please both sides. No one is asking you to commit suicide and go out of power, We ask you to negotiate an arrangement with this guy so that he can be taken into the political system. Jose Eduardo Dos Santos , the president, said, “Yes, okay. Ask Mr. Cohen to talk to my people, the foreign minister and others to

get the ball rolling. I'm willing to cooperate,"

Q: During this, you were not the equivalent to persona non gratia for any side. I mean, they knew you and you could talk to both sides despite the fact that we obviously helping the rebels.

COHEN: That was one of the paradoxes. But, the reason I was acceptable was during the negotiations between Angola and South Africa and Cuba with my predecessor, I was accompanying him to all these visits to Angola. I got to know everybody and was friendly. When he started it took months and months before they would talk to him. They would say to him don't talk to us until you stop helping the rebels. But, since I had been a regular visitor, they were willing to see me. So, I met with the Foreign minister and the other national security advisors and all that about what the next step would be. It was clear that the next step was to find a mediator who was acceptable. We were not considered acceptable even though we were the mediators for the previous negotiation, they said we don't want the United States because in this one you are really too much involved on one side. That's reasonable; let's find someone else. From Namibia, we flew to Zaire where Baker met with Savimbi. He said, "Look you didn't want to work on this other peace deal because you said you wanted free and fair elections. Now it is going to be possible. I want you to agree to a negotiation." Savimbi said, "That is always what I wanted. I didn't want to be given a fait accompli and just take me into this Marxist government. I'm ready any time." With him also we discussed potential mediators. We set up a checklist of acceptable countries. Portugal was on that list. We went back to the government and they chose Portugal. The Portuguese were just delighted because it was their former colony. They wanted to be in on the ground floor of any settlement.

Q: They had also by this time about 15 to 20 years of non-colonial type rule in Portugal. It was a moderate leftist government.

COHEN: That is who gave independence to Angola. The leftist government gave them independence, but made sure that the Marxists won. But they left power and the government in power there was conservative at that moment in 1990. They were delighted to be the mediator. At the same time, Baker took advantage of his presence in Zaire to have a long meeting with Mobutu, of course to inform him because Mobutu was so heavily involved in Angola as well. But he took advantage of his time to have a private meeting with Mobutu with nobody there except interpreters. I was not even there, to talk about starting a democratic system in Zaire because he still had the one party dictatorship. Mauritania said look all over Africa now, multiparty democracy is breaking out. You have to do it too otherwise you will be dragged under. You will be thrown out of office by revolution. We like you. You are an old friend of the United States. We want you to stay in power, but the only way to stay in power is to lead democracy rather than be dragged into it. So Mobutu said okay. A month later he made his famous speech of April 24 where he said Zaire is now open to multiparty democracy. He suddenly allowed newspapers to publish freely, and other parties to exist. So, we thought that Baker had pulled off a real good diplomatic victory there, and we were all quite pleased. Negotiations under the Portuguese began in June in Lisbon. They spent the first few

negotiating sessions insulting each other, yelling at each other and that sort of thing. Then they got down to serious business between June and November, meeting about once a month for about a week. Of course the Portuguese continued to keep us informed and the Soviets informed because we were very anxious to know what was going on. In November I was called to Houston, Texas, because at that time there was this very intense diplomacy between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. They were having ministerial meetings about every three months. It was very intense activity. Each time they met, the Assistant Secretaries would meet with their Soviet equivalents. It was a whole ballet that was going on. The next scheduled meeting after this Angola negotiation started was in Houston, Texas. One agenda item was an update on Angola. After all, one of our objectives was to get the Soviets out of their Angola commitment because it was very expensive for them. I was summoned to Houston to give a briefing, and my Soviet counterpart was there also. His name was Mr. Yukalov, who was the foreign ministry's director for Africa. That was roughly the equivalent of Assistant Secretary even though he didn't have ministerial rank. We come in to the meeting. We were roughly number 12 on an agenda of 15 items or something like that. We had about half an hour. Baker and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze were there and said, “Okay, give us your briefing. What is going on?” “Well, we regret to report, your excellencies, that no progress is being made in negotiations. The Portuguese mediator is sort of in despair. He tried his best. He submitted language for a peace treaty. They can't seem to get anywhere. They can't seem to get any compromises and all that.” So, Baker says, “What do you think should happen now?” We both said, We think the Portuguese should just keep working at it. We might get a breakthrough at some point.” Baker said, “What else can we do?” Shevardnadze was not willing to accept that. He had these steel blue eyes that sort of pierced you when they looked. He didn't speak English and it was all done through an interpreter, but he was looking at me with these steel blue eyes. The interpreter said, "I don't think the Portuguese are really going to make a breakthrough. They don't have the stature or the national clout. I think we are going to have to take direct action." He looks at Baker and said, "I propose the following. Mr. Yukalov, Mr. Cohen, you are experts on this whole Angola thing. I want you to go into a room and make believe that you are the negotiating parties. Yukalov, you are the government; Cohen, you are UNITA. You negotiate what you think is a reasonable outcome, a win-win situation where everybody is happy. Then you take it to the parties and tell them this is what we think the solution should be." I looked at Baker and he looked at me and sort of shrugged our shoulders and said why not. What do we have to lose. I went with Yukalov to a separate room. I had with me, helping me, Kurt Kamen, who was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs who supervised all of our relations with the Soviet Union. He was sort of my analyst. We spent about a good eight hours together. I could see that Yukalov was less knowledgeable about Angola than I was, so I was dominating, but I tried to look at it as a win-win in the Savimbi role. We came up with what we thought was not a detailed solution but a framework for what we thought was a good basis. He agreed and I agreed. We didn't have to go back to the ministers. They didn't have time to see us anyway. We got back to Washington and said, "Call the parties in to a Washington meeting for December 5. Mr. Yukalov will be there; I will be there. Ask the Portuguese to join as well." The Portuguese sent not the minister who was the chief mediator but the director of cabinet who was really running the negotiations. Savimbi came, and the Angolan government

sent the secretary general of their party, a very important person. We were intrigued by this because he had never been party to the negotiation before. He was sort of a fresh face that they flew in there. We spent one full day with them, and at the end of the day, they accepted our framework and were willing to initial it with minor modifications. They authorized us to announce it as the Washington Declaration that was not a solution but a basis for further negotiations, a set of principles. The Portuguese, who I thought would be very upset because we were usurping their mediating role, were calm. They said fine. This is a breakthrough. We'll go back to the negotiating table and work from this. However, they said since the U.S. and the Soviets were so instrumental, we want them to be official observers. In other words they will be in the room as official observers for all this. So, that meant we had to make a team available. We got up a team of military experts, theoretical people. The assistant legal advisor for African affairs went there. All sorts of military people that were familiar with Africa went to these meetings in Lisbon. So, between December and late April, the negotiations really made progress. Any time they had stalemates on particular points, the Portuguese minister of State would call me up and say look, can you come over and break the stalemate, and I would come and spend a couple of days and work on it. I found the Portuguese extremely excited about this because it was their ex-colony so it was important to them. I found in Lisbon that ordinary citizens were fascinated. I could give a press conference every day and they wouldn't get tired. They would keep talking about Africa and Angola. I would ride taxis and they would say, "Mr. Cohen I saw your picture in the paper. You were on TV last night. What do you think? I was in the army in Angola." Because they had military conscription; everybody goes. It was tremendous there. So, I went quite a few times there for meetings. We worked through midnight there. They took over a hotel training school about 20 miles outside of Lisbon. They slept there; they ate there; the hotel trainees practiced their skills. Anyway, by the end of April they were reaching the end game with just a few points left. Then I found that the UNITA people had become frightened. They had been fighting either the Portuguese or the government for 30 years, and they were suddenly faced with the idea of peace. War was a way of life for them, guerrilla war, so they were suddenly frightened. I had to go there and talk to them and say give me a list of all the things that bother you. So we went over it one by one and spent a couple of days. Finally, we worked out every last point. Then we had a final plenary session where I was present to hammer out the final points, and we find out it was bogged down over the issue of police. They were going to deal with the army, but the police was totally in the hands of the government. UNITA suddenly said, oh my god we can't let them control the police. We will be at a disadvantage during the transition and the run up to an election. So, I worked out a compromise at the last minute. The UN would have police on patrol with the government police to protect the interests of UNITA. That was the final point and they agreed. Then we suddenly realized there were no points left and we had a total agreement. We looked at each other and all of a sudden, the office director for Angola was there, Richard Roth, a Foreign Service officer who is now DCM in Tel Aviv. He suddenly screamed, jumped up and started doing a jig, and the champagne started flowing. It was a great feeling to finally get through it. A cease-fire was immediately declared. One thing that taught me is when you go for a negotiation in the world, do not go for a cease-fire first. A cease-fire is a bargaining chip for one side or both sides. A cease-fire comes at the end. So they were willing to declare a cease-fire and decided the

formal signing would be on May 31, in Lisbon in which Baker would come and Shevardnadze would come. But, by May 31, Shevardnadze was no longer the foreign minister; it was somebody else who came at that time. Shevardnadze had issued his famous resignation. I forgot why.

Q: Well I think he thought that forces around Gorbachev were forces of reaction.

COHEN: So he was out of the picture at that point. What I found even more exciting about that particular moment was that we were working simultaneously on Angola and Ethiopia. So we started in June of '89 working intensely on this until we got this peace treaty signed on May 31, '91. We were also working on the other Soviet problem of Ethiopia. We were doing those in parallel.

Q: Was there a lot of carry over?

COHEN: No.

Q: On the Angola thing, when you were asked when you went through this and were getting the Portuguese and all, your team when you were dealing with Angola, the desk officer and all, did you sort of have in the back of your mind a mental plan on how this thing was going to come out anyway, so that when you were called upon with your Soviet counterpart to come up with a reasonable outline? I mean had this already been a mental process what happened within a bureau? Do you sort of do that automatically?

COHEN: Yes, I think that is the great strength of the State Department and the U.S. Foreign Service is that we are so well endowed. We had an office of Southern African Affairs which was so important because we had South Africa and the apartheid problem and the Angolan war and there was also a war in Mozambique, so it was our most important office. Not only did we have a director we had two deputy directors, one for the Portuguese colonies and one for South Africa. Then we had a desk officer for Angola. Plus in our office of regional affairs, we had a military advisor on loan from the Pentagon to help us with the military aspect, and we had an assistant legal advisor. So we had all this talent there, and so as soon as we realized that the solution did not lie in just coopting UNITA into the government, which was our first tactic. We thought it was the easiest. Since we didn't consider Savimbi to be a democrat anyway, we said why not? They just join forces, a co-dictatorship. We didn't think democracy was a big issue in those days. But, when that failed, we said we have got to think in terms of what is a logical solution where both sides would be willing to feel that they have won. So, when we got down into the details about how do you deal with two competing armies, merging the armies, downsizing the army, demobilization, how do you handle that. We had to bring AID into that and the office of refugee affairs because you had a lot of refugees. How do you feed people who are in transition? We had to get people who are expert on election systems because it is a vast country, totally devastated, how do you pull off an election where there is no infrastructure. We were constantly holding interagency meetings on dealing with the end game, not the end game but the implementation. We also had to be discussing all the time the issues of the negotiations. For example, what size would the

new army be? Who should contribute what number of people, so we were constantly brainstorming and advising the Portuguese mediator. So, really the Portuguese were the mediators but we were the drivers of that negotiation.

Q: Did you have a feeling that the Soviets were in the same position or were they more in the arms business and hadn't really gotten down to deal with the nitty gritty? I'm talking more or less from the beginning of this.

COHEN: They were not too interested in the details of the negotiations as we were. First of all, they didn't have the people available that we did; although, the people on the ground there, they had military advisors to the regime who were able to help them, but they didn't have as much talent or they didn't apply talent. They were mainly interested in getting out of their commitment with honor. They allowed us more or less to drive the negotiations and supported us as much as they could. Their main value was when the government balked at certain ideas they would push the government, and we did the same with the UNITA side. They were very valuable in that sense.

Q: Well did you find almost the same team, it wouldn't be quite the same team, dealing with Ethiopia? Were you learning from each other as you dealt with the Ethiopian problem?

COHEN: No, Ethiopia was totally different. Once we got the Angolan government to agree to negotiate because the first reaction of a government is we are legitimate, those rebels are illegitimate. Get rid of those people for us, and everything will be okay. Once we got them to agree that negotiation was necessary, we had a different atmosphere. The Ethiopians we were able to convince that negotiations were necessary, but they had a hidden agenda. For them, negotiations were just another form of warfare. We really don't want to end this war; we want to win it with a military victory, and they used the negotiations as a cover for trying to find ways to pursue the war knowing that the Soviets wanted to bow out. They in effect used it as a cover to find other means of getting arms.

Q: Was this war also more tainted with internal nationalism, ethnic nationalism or whatever than the Angolan one?

COHEN: Yes, because it was partially a war of secession. The Eritrean province felt that they had been wrongfully amalgamated with Ethiopia after WWII. They had been an Italian colony. Ethiopia had not been an Italian colony except for a brief period of occupation during the war. They had been an Italian colony for about 50 years. The UN just went in and said, “Okay, you are part of Ethiopia.” There was no consultation with the people, so they felt they had a legitimate right to decide for themselves. That was one part of the war. There was a second part of the war from other Ethiopians who didn't like the regime that was Stalinist and repressive, They wanted to remove it. There was a lot of ethnicity involved in that; although, the UNITA thing was also ethnic. What I found fascinating was that seven days before we signed the treaty in Lisbon for Angola, the war in Ethiopia ended and we were playing a big role in ending that war as well.

Q: Was that done by a military victory almost or was that done by negotiation?

COHEN: It ended by military victory of the rebels against the regime. While we spent a lot of time in negotiations, we were the official mediator, our main role at the end was to bring the war to a soft landing, end the war, and set the country off on a good transition. All of that happened in one week, so I flew from London where we had the talks on Ethiopia to Lisbon where we had the signing. So, it was a very exciting period for us.

Q: Were we playing any part in the overthrow of the Stalinist regime in Ethiopia?

COHEN: No we did not. We were not arms suppliers. The Russians were the arms suppliers to the government. The arms for the rebels were coming from Arab countries, but a lot of the arms wee just purchased because the Eritrean secessionists had a large Diaspora around the Middle East and the United States. You know, just like the Jews supported the Israeli rebels against the British and all that; they were supplying arms to their people. A lot of arms were coming from sympathetic Arabs.

Q: What sort of relations did we have with Mengistu; was he still the leader at least at the beginning there?

COHEN: Mengistu was the dictator who overthrew the emperor in 1974 and was in power in 1989 when we came in to office. He was put on notice by the Soviets that they wanted to phase out their assistance. Our relations with him were even worse than with Angola. In Angola, we had no embassy there, but we at least had regular cordial relations with them. In Ethiopia, we had an embassy, but no ambassador had been there for 15 years. We had a chargé d'affaires, and our relations were like our relations with Cuba, very bad and very cold. We found it very difficult to contemplate acting as a third party intervener in that war. We didn't know the rebels too well either because they characterized themselves as Marxist. That meant we really couldn't cozy up to them too well during the Cold War. It wasn't easy; however, the Soviets persuaded Mengistu that he had better get friendly with us. So, in effect, while Mengistu was constantly speaking in public about the great Satan, the United States, he suddenly decided that he needed us. The idea was the Soviets were their mentor for making war; we would be their mentor for making peace. So, he invited me to make an official visit to Ethiopia. This was in August 1989. I first had to get clearance on this from higher levels because it was like an Assistant Secretary now going to Cuba. One just doesn't fly off to Cuba for high level meetings. It is a political football. There was opposition in the White house from conservatives, but Baker said it was part of the President's collaboration with the Soviet Union policy so that is the over riding consideration. So, we went to Ethiopia and enjoyed red carpet treatment. The President received me two times and asked how relations could be improved. I told him what we thought was wrong with them. I said, "You have a war going on. You should get into a negotiation instead of pursuing a war that you cannot win. Get in to negotiations. You have a Marxist economic policy that is one of the worst in the world. The whole country is going downhill. Why don't you look at a little capitalism. You have thousands of political prisoners. Your human rights record is very bad. Also you have this community of Ethiopian people of the Jewish faith that

want to go to Israel. We believe in freedom of emigration. We've said that to the Soviets; we've said that to others, and we think you ought to be the same." He said, "Okay, I'll see what I can do," and within a couple of months we started seeing some progress. They asked Jimmy Carter to be a mediator in their war with the Eritrean secessionists, and he actually started mediation sessions. Several hundred political prisoners were released. The Israelis were invited in to set up a consular office to process people out who wanted to go to Israel. They started issuing new regulations about who could own a business. They were starting to open it up a little bit to the private sector, so things were looking pretty good. We decided that while we were not involved in negotiations, we should start getting to know people. We started concentrating on the rebels whom we hadn't known very well. We sent out people to see them in London and Nairobi and Khartoum. I had to go to Khartoum for urgent business on famine relief. I took advantage of that trip to deal with some of the Marxist rebels, both the Eritreans and non-Eritreans. They were very nice people, interesting and what have you. We followed the negotiations; people were going to Georgia to meet with Jimmy Carter and on their way there and back both the government people and the rebels would stop in at the State Department to see us. So, between August of '89 and about August of 1990, we were not directly involved but giving advice behind the scenes. By August of 1990 we understood what Mengistu's objectives were; not to use the U.S. as a mentor for peace, but to use the negotiations as a cover for finding other sources of arms. In effect they decided their best source of arms would be the Israelis, and by releasing this Jewish community, dripping them out 100 at a time, they would be able to convince the Israelis to give them arms. We, wanting to help the Soviets get out of there and wanting to see peace, as well as the departure of the Jews, would not object to their getting arms. We finally figured that out.

Q: What was the name?

COHEN: The Falashas were the Jewish community. Of course we were under a certain amount of pressure from organized groups in the United States on that issue. It was not just the regular Jewish organizations. There were organizations just for Ethiopians. There were two in the United States and one in Canada, and they had a certain amount of influence in the Congress. Bush was interested in it because he had been involved with the first exodus about ten years earlier when they had managed to get some out. Anyway, we realized what was happening, so we had a choice at that point either to denounce the whole thing as a farce or just to play along with it and see what happens. We decided to play along with it, and around August of 1990, the Eritreans got fed up with Jimmy Carter. They said he was biased toward the government. They no longer had confidence in him, so they asked him not to be the mediator anymore. They said they would like the State Department to mediate and the government agreed. So we had to make a decision whether we wanted to take over mediation, and we decided o do that. We thought that maybe by being on the inside we could influence this. W didn't do what Jimmy Carter did which was get bogged down in procedures, you know, what is the shape of the table and who should be observers and who should not be and all the rules. To hell with that, we are going to get right into substance. Nobody objected. Everybody started talking about a possible solution. This was a mediation between the government and the Eritrean secessionists. We worked on what a solution might be. W looked into the history of the

UN operation, how the UN decided to amalgamate the two. The initial thing was a confederation where there were two separate but equal governments, an Eritrean government and an Ethiopian government. They had a parliament and a loose confederation. Then in 1962 the Ethiopian government rode roughshod over that and just made it another province. That is what really triggered the war. So we said maybe the solution lies in going back to a loose confederation where they would have maximum autonomy and still be part of Ethiopia. So, we started working from that general idea. We started pushing both sides to give us some suggestions instead of just being rigid.

The Ethiopians said we are one country; they are just a province. We will give more autonomy to all the provinces. The Eritreans said “we want a referendum where the people could decide. We tried to push them closer and closer. Toward January, we decided to put up our own piece of paper, a framework which was that there will be a federal system for five years in which the government would try to show that a federal system could work, that they really would have autonomy, but at the end of five years, the people would still decide if that was good enough for them or they want to secede . It was a general view that was not accepted by either side, but they accepted it as a basis for further negotiations. Toward February, '91, an interesting phenomenon, the war started going badly for the government, on both fronts, on the internal rebels and the secessionist front. After 15 years of stalemate where the government was able to keep the rebels sort of contained in their mountain retreats, the rebels started breaking out of their mountain retreats and winning skirmishes and capturing towns and all that and the government was retreating. It would sometimes retreat, sometimes recapture, but the overall trend was toward a retreat, and the embassy was getting all excited and saying if the rebels cross this line we have to start evacuating people because they are moving toward the capital city. We used this to put more pressure on the government to make greater concessions, but the government's mindset was we'll make concessions but these are the concessions they should have made five years ago when it could have had an impact. Now the rebels saw they were advancing, they were less willing to accept these concessions that they should have made earlier. Slowly but surely it began to look bad for them. It was hard for us to believe that the government could be defeated. They had air superiority; they had more people, but toward the middle of March we began to say the chances for defeat are really looking possible now. So we had to think of what we could do, so we started planning for a soft landing which was to try to think about how the war would end. The government, realizing that things were getting there, started really making concessions now down to around the middle of April where they were saying let's have a coalition government. The point where they were willing to make the State of Eritrea like the U.S. state of New York with the same type of powers to let's have a coalition government, share power and have an election and all this, so they were really getting desperate. We called a meeting in London at the beginning of May to try and act on these last concessions. Maybe the war could end with the rebels at the gates of the capital city in terms of a coalition government. But, the rebels saw what was happening and kept delaying saying no, we are not ready in May. Finally they agreed to a meeting around May 21. When we reached London on May 21, the war was essentially lost. They were at the gates, but we had to convince the rebels not to go into the city. Let's have this final negotiation, end the war honorably and also without destroying the city.

Q: We are talking the city Addis Ababa.

COHEN: Addis Ababa the capital. When we got to Lon don, we were about to start the talks, and were having preliminary meetings. We received a distress call from Addis from our chargé d'affaires, Robert Houdek, who said the retreating government forces were in disarray. There was no discipline, and they were starting to cause trouble, pillaging, stealing and destroying things. Something had to be done... Also, a couple of days earlier, President Mengistu, seeing what was happening, got into a plane and fled the country. In effect, he decided there was no use negotiating, he was out. He went to Zimbabwe and took refuge there. So, the vice President became acting president and he talked to our chargé d'affaires and said something has to be done about these retreating forces who might destroy the city. So, we had been following the rebels in their advances and we knew they were perfectly disciplined people. They did not destroy anything, they did not harm people; they did not confiscate property. So, we met with the rebels and said it is time to go into the city and restore order. They said we promised you we wouldn't do that, but if you say it is okay, we'll go. I decided I would go on the Voice of America and the BBC to announce to the people of Addis Ababa that these rebels would be coming in who were totally alien to them. These were people from different parts of Ethiopia they didn't know well. They called them the rag head people in their language. They were kind of frightened of these barbarians coming in. So I announced that these people are coming in. Be calm; they are perfectly disciplined, and they marched in and took over the city. There were some disturbances, but it really worked out pretty well. At that point the head of the Ethiopian delegation came in to the meeting. Prime Minister Tesfaye Dinka asked what was going on. You promised that our talks would take place with the rebels not going into the city. You pledged not to do it, and here you are telling them to go in. Well, this was done with the authority of the Acting President. So, he stormed out of the room and got on the phone, and called the Vice President. He came back in and said he talked to the acting President who denied everything. He would never give permission for this. "I think this is a total violation of our understanding and I am not going to take part in these talks", and he walked out. So, we were left with only the rebels. In effect they had won the war; the question is what now. We decided the most important thing was to get them off on a transition toward a new Ethiopia. We said to the Eritrean secessionists, the leader of which was there, "we don't think you should immediately declare independence which you can do since you militarily control the province." He said, "Why not?" I said, "Because this will be such a trauma to the whole Ethiopian body politic that we think you should leave some time. Why not say three years and then we'll have a referendum." I said, "If you don't do that. If you call for independence now, we won't recognize you, and we'll ask the UN not to recognize you." So they said on that basis, they would agree to a three-year transition because they will be in charge of the province, not the Ethiopian government who are these rebels sitting next to us. We'll be in charge, and the rebels sitting next to them said of course; we fought the war together. Then we said what are you going to do now that you control the country? They said, "Yes, that is a good question. What do we do now?" So, we had meetings for two days in which they debated how to get a transition going. This was at the end of May. They said they would call a meeting in Addis Ababa of all the political parties for July 1 to begin establishing a

transition to democracy.

Q: 1991.

COHEN: Yes, all the political parties to decide on the transitional government of national unity. We will set up a traditional parliament and then work toward an eventual writing of the new constitution, and then finally an election in a few years to start a democracy going. They asked me to make the announcement to the press. They had written it all down and they asked me to read it to the press. They felt that it would have more clout than if they did it themselves. I called a press conference at the American embassy in London. This was such a big news item, the end of the war in Ethiopia. The American embassy in London said they had never seen so many television cameras there for a press conference in their recollection. So, I gave this press conference, and found myself getting into trouble with James Baker. During the question and answer period the journalists focused on the Eritrean three-year transition period after which they would have a referendum to decide if they stay in Ethiopia or become independent. What is the U.S. government's attitude toward this? Because, we know that the U.S. government's policy has always been that colonial government's boundaries should always remain intact in Africa and there should be no change. This is the organization of African Unity policy and you have always supported this. How do you feel about this referendum? So, I said, "We believe that the people of Eritrea never had a chance to decide whether they wanted to be part of Ethiopia; therefore, they should have an act of self determination which would be appropriate. But, we hope that they will vote to remain part of Ethiopia." So, this turned out to be the big headline: "U.S. changes policy toward colonial boundaries in Africa and supports self determination referendum." Now, of course, London is five hours ahead of Washington, and after the press conference I went back to the embassy to look at the cables and prepare to go to Lisbon. I had to go to Lisbon for the Angola treaty signing. I got this call from Baker directly. He didn't call me very often even when I was in Washington. It was very rare that I got a call from him. He asked me if what was on the wire services was accurate. I said yes. He said, "You know, this can get me in deep trouble because the German government is trying to get us to recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, and we want Yugoslavia to remain unified. We don't want independence for those provinces. Here you are recognizing the right of the people of Eritrea to independence." I said, "Well, they are two different situations. Do we have to be consistent around the world?" He said, "I understand what you are saying, but the press will carve us up on this inconsistency in foreign policy." He was clearly upset with me. He said, "In the future don't make decisions like that without checking with me on important foreign policy issues." Actually it was the second time I got into trouble because during my confirmation hearings I said something to Senator Helms about Mozambique which constituted making new policy. They said you should never make policy during confirmation hearings. Anyway, he was quite angry, but when he came in for the Lisbon signing ceremonies a week later, he had forgotten about it because the press never picked up on the inconsistencies. He felt that no damage was really done. I flew off to Lisbon and I was quite happy being involved in two successful war endings in one week.

Q: That was a lot of work. One further question on this time you were dealing with the Ethiopian rebels, you were announcing they were Marxist. By this point that didn't make any difference to us did it?

COHEN: Well, we got along with them very well and got to know them, and we found the Marxist label was very fashionable where they were. They were all sort of youngish people in their 30's who had gone to university in various places.

Q: Lumumba University.

COHEN: Yes, that type of thing and Dar Es Salaam where being a Marxist was the thing to be. What else could you be in those days? So, their Marxism was really very hypothetical you know, and they really weren't Marxist. In fact, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, called themselves Albanian Marxists. I met the head of the TPLF, Meles Zenawi, who is now the Prime Minister of Ethiopia. I asked, "Are you really an Albanian Marxist? After what has happened in Albania, you can't tell me that is your role model." He said, "No, you don't understand. I am not an Albanian Marxist. What I meant was Albania was always independent from the Soviets or the Chinese. They never took orders from either of these. That's the way we are. We are Marxists who are totally independent. That is our role model. It is not that we follow their type of Marxism." So, we became totally comfortable with these folks.

Q: Just looking ahead, were you able to have a chance to put in the thought that Marxism may be fashionable for revolutionaries, but it is an economic system that doesn't work. If you want to have a self sufficient country, you had better get off that track.

COHEN: In Angola we had already reached that point. The government, even before it negotiated, said they were going to forget about Marxism. We are going in for free markets. But, in Ethiopia, the new rulers of Ethiopia and Eritrea we felt needed a bit of education. We worked on them all during our negotiating period. In the social events or afterward, we would talk to them about market economies and I think we helped educate them.

Q: I think this might be a good point to knock off. I'll just put at the end where we have to go. We haven't talked about what was happening in Mozambique. We have talked already about Ethiopia and Angola and your relationship with Secretary of State James Baker. We also want to touch on the Sudan, South Africa and developments there. and maybe Tanzania.

COHEN: I think you have got the right ones. Sudan and Mozambique were the two other wars. South Africa was the apartheid issue that was of great interest politically, domestic political, so those were big issues. Then those were the wars and issues that were in existence when we came into office, but after we came into office, three other wars broke out which we had to address. Those were Somalia, Rwanda and Liberia. In effect we worked on seven civil wars in the Bush administration.

Q: Other than that Mr., Lincoln, what were you doing? Thank you very much.

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Today is February 6, 1998. Hank, you heard where we were going so we are picking up, again I just want to be sure I get the dates. You were Assistant Secretary from when to when?

COHEN: April 1989 to April 1993.

Q: Okay. Which would you like to take? How about moving to the south and moving down, the Sudan, or do you have another way you want to do it?

COHEN: No, that's fine, we can talk about Sudan. That's good.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived, and how did one deal with it?

COHEN: Sudan was the first African conflict we had to deal with. There was a pressing domestic issue here. I remember the Deputy Secretary, Larry Eagleburger calling me very shortly after I got sworn in. He said all of these Congressmen are calling me and bugging me about hunger in Sudan and starvation in the south and what is the State Department doing about it. He told me Secretary Baker wants to maintain good relations with Congress whether it is Republican or Democrat. Here on the Sudan issue it is bipartisan. We have Republicans and Democrats all involved. I want you to go to Sudan as quickly as possible and start working on this issue. So, in effect, Sudan became my first African trip after I became Assistant Secretary. The issue there was the long running civil war in the south. The southern rebels, who are essentially black and no -Muslim, were fighting the government that was essentially Arab and Muslim. There were religious issues and there were economic issues and all that, but the main issue we had to face was the people in the south were facing tremendous starvation and famine because the government was interfering with the flow of relief. Lots of humanitarian organizations were out there trying to help, but the government was doing everything possible to stop them. In fact, the government was using starvation as a weapon in the civil war.
Q: Also the reason you were probably there was there were a lot of cameras there wasn't it? It was in the news.

COHEN: That's right. Eagleburger was reacting to the Congressmen, but the Congressmen were reacting to CNN and everything else and the signs of starvation. I must say there were very sincere people like Congressman Wolfe of Virginia, Congressman Hall, a Democrat of Ohio. They felt very sincerely that this is a problem the U.S. should get involved in. So, I went out to Sudan, and it is rather ironic that the government of the day, this was in early '89, was a democratically elected government. It was an Arab government but yet they were involved in this civil war. Anyway my main objective in going there was to persuade the government to be more cooperative with the international humanitarian organizations, and I believe we did persuade them to allow them to do their jobs. I was convinced they would be able t provide the assistance to

avoid starvation which turned out to be the case. But, the second conclusion I reached was that it would be an annual event. We'd have to go back year after year to do this, and to be more effective, we should actually work on the basic conflict and try to engage in a bit of conflict resolution. Again I used this domestic pressure on the starvation issue to get involved in the conflict issue. It was my vehicle for doing that, and we decided to have an intensive effort to work on the conflict issue, which meant that we had to work on the southern rebels and get to know them a lot better and to talk a lot more to the government. So, I instructed Deputy Assistant Secretary Irvin Hicks and the office director, Jack Davison, to develop a plan for working on the conflict itself.

Q: What was your impression in your initial meetings with the government of Sudan?

COHEN: My impression was these people are truly democratically oriented. They had been elected. I didn't get the sense that they were racist in the sense that they considered the people in the south to be just blacks who are inferior. I got the feeling of tremendous inefficiency, tremendous lack of ability to think through problems. Like most democratically elected governments, very sensitive to public opinion. Public opinion there was very Islamist, so when the southerners there were saying we want a secular state, we don't want an Islamic state, the government couldn't just go ahead and abolish all of the Islamic elements of their constitution because they had to worry about their opinion there. We thought there were grounds to work with them. We thought they were willing to work with us as an impartial third country intervener, mediator.

Q: How did it work out during the four years you were doing this?

COHEN: We started talking to both sides and it was really a very ironic situation because the normal situation during a civil war is that the government considers the rebels illegitimate. Then, to talk to rebels is to admit they exist and that they have a legitimate grievance, and the government is usually very reluctant to do that. The big job is to persuade them that these are people from your own country and that you should be willing to have a dialog with them. They didn't come out of Mars; they are there in your country. This was the reverse. The government was quite willing to deal with the rebels because as they said we were popularly elected and we want them to come into the democratic system, run for election and all that, take their chances, but it was the rebels that didn't recognize the government. They said if we talk to these guys we'll legitimize a bunch of Arab racists who are out to impose a religious regime on the people. They have to understand that the Muslims are not even a majority in this country. The non Muslims are a majority both black and non black. My biggest problem was not with the government but with the rebels trying to get a formula for them to talk. The rebels said no we will not talk to them until essentially there is a realignment of the government. First the government must make certain gestures. The main gesture they wanted was to eliminate all Sharia law, the law of Islam, which was in force in Sudan, especially for the criminal side, which is called hudud. We persuaded the government to put it on hold, in other words, to suspend the implementation of the Islamic criminal law.

Q: It had not been in place. I mean, it was going to be in place at this point.

COHEN: No, it was in place. It had been done by a previous regime, by the Nimeiri regime which had been replaced by this democratic regime. Because of the political sensitivities that I mentioned before, the government found it difficult to totally abolish, so the gesture they were willing to make was to suspend implementation. In other words, an instruction went out that nobody's hand would be amputated. There would be prison instead of that. We went back to the rebels and said isn't this a good gesture. You know, a suspension of this until you can negotiate a new constitution. The rebels said no. We want them to abolish Sharia law completely before we will even talk to them. So, our first effort at getting a dialog going failed, but I blame it on the rebels and not on the government. It was totally different from my other experiences. Now, something intervened to totally change the situation very soon after we began these discussions. In the middle of 1989 in June, there was a military coup. The government was overthrown, and in effect the military men who took over were front men for the Islamic fundamentalists. Now the government was not fundamentalist; it was just sensitive to Islamic opinion. These people came in and looked very much like the extreme wings of the Islamic fundamentalists. Now they were hiding a bit when they came into power and we were not sure who they were. One thing that influenced us in Sudan was Egypt because Egypt is so close to Sudan and has so many interests there, and Egypt is such a good friend of the United States. We didn't do anything in Sudan without first informing the Egyptians and getting their point of view. Every time I traveled to Khartoum I traveled to Cairo and talked to people like Boutros Ghali and others. Whereas they did not like the previous democratically elected regime because they felt it was hostile to Egypt, they loved this coup. They said these people will be good. Whereas the previous regime was inept, it didn't have full control. It was terribly inefficient; they didn't know how to negotiate. These guys will come in and negotiate a deal with the rebels, and you should work with them. So, my first visit was shortly after the coup had taken place, and I went there, and our ambassador, I forgot his name now, he was saying let's give these guys a chance. First of all it was overthrowing a democratic regime which was bad because we have laws which say you must suspend aid, so we immediately had to invoke those laws which didn't get us off to a good start with this regime. Anyway, they were friendly. The main message they had for us was we are willing to talk with the rebels any time any place, no pre conditions, face to face. General Bashir, who had taken over, said, “Get John During, the rebel leader, and we'll talk. I'll go anywhere, any city. I think we can work things out.” So this was encouraging, but when I was in Khartoum for these meetings, all sorts of Sudanese intellectuals were coming up to see me saying don't be fooled by this group. They area bunch of Islamic fundamentalists. They will try to export their revolution. They will completely overturn all of the liberal things that have happened in this country like bringing women.

Q: This is tape five side one with Hank Cohen.

COHEN: They will completely overturn everything that has been done in the last 20 years like bringing women into professional positions, magistrates, government civil servants. They will eliminate the labor unions, the free press that we have had and all that sort of thing, so don't be fooled by these guys. It is the worst of the Islamic

fundamentalists. They were all coming up to me and telling me. I couldn't find anybody to say oh work with these guys like the Egyptians were saying. But, we decided to keep an open mind and to try to work with them because our first objective was to try to end the war and the suffering and what have you. So, with the chief of state saying I'm willing to talk anytime any place and all that, we went back to John During, the head of the rebels who was very popular in the United States because he had gotten a university degree, had all of the Christian churches on his side because they were against this repression from the Arab north; he was very well known in the United States. Anyway I went back to him, and he said, "Well I don't like the idea of negotiating directly with this head of state who has come in, and what I would like, and I don't like the fact that he has more or less abolished the labor unions and the free press. He has closed off all the political parties. In fact he has really imposed a totalitarian system. I don't like that. I don't think that he and I should be deciding the future of Sudan. It should be decided by the people of Sudan, so my demand before I talk is that he allow all of these other political factions that have been in existence, the labor unions the women's groups, the press to get involved. I would like a large constitutional conference type of thing instead of just me and him." So, I reminded him that this is what he had before with the other regime, and he didn't want to talk to them. He considered them Islamic repressors because they refused to abolish The Shall laws even though they were willing to suspend the criminal aspects of it. He said, no I will not negotiate with this one person; it is not good. So, I reached the conclusion that he was the real problem rather than the government. Also as I wrote in my book, my basic view of John During is that he is always waiting for the next coup. Rather than see what he has is to wait and see what comes next. He decided right early on that he would want another government rather than this one. But, over the course of the next year, I began this around August of 1990 until May '91. No, I'm sorry, this is August 1989 I'm talking about now, we kept working on this until May 1991. So, instead of trying to negotiate a comprehensive political settlement which John During was refusing to do, we decided to work at it piecemeal, and we worked at it in a way trying to do confidence building measures. Trying to negotiate small deals in the southern part of the country where the war was going on like withdrawal of forces. For example, the rebels controlled the countryside where the government controlled the town, so we tried to negotiate a deal where the rebels would leave more space around the towns, In return for that the government would reduce the size of their garrisons, more of the displaced people would be allowed to go back to their farms, and we tried to do it incrementally. We worked out elaborate schemes. We even proposed at one point that the government withdraw all its forces from the south in return for which the rebels would make a pledge not to secede from Sudan or something like that. We were constantly feeding in ideas. A number of Sudanese intellectuals were willing to act as intermediaries and talk to the north and the south, so there was a constant effervescence of activity, but we were never able to get to the point where they were willing to make a deal on any one thing. There were always problems. The main problem was that During would never accept to negotiate with the government.

Q: What type of rebel government was coming out? Was this a, did you see if he were to gain power, I mean what was he doing in the area he controlled?

COHEN: Well, he didn't really control any, he controlled the countryside, but it was the government that was really controlling the towns throughout the south. Occasionally they would capture a town and then they would lose it, so they really didn't have any geographic area where they could say we are in control of this area and we are governing it. Although, they did have a few towns they sort have been able to keep, but toward the second half of 1990, a new development took place which was a breaking apart of the rebels. The rebels were an amalgamation of several different tribal groups, and it started splitting along ethnic lines. The ideological split was people who want to secede from Sudan saying it is hopeless to deal with the government. We want our own individual country, where those who said no, we want to change Sudan. We want to change the type of government so we can all live in the Sudan, democratic and non racist an all that. It split along those lines. John During who was the main leader of the rebel movement was on the side of those who said we must change Sudan. The breakaway group were saying we must have secession. So, that considerable weakened the rebels who had been steadily increasing the pressure on the government and making life more miserable for the government. Especially the government was constantly sending troops down to the south like the U.S. sending troops to Vietnam with people saying it is not worth it. Why are we sending our boys to die down there? But, this created a whole new dimension of the split in the rebel ranks; now theoretically they were both still fighting the government. They had their separate armies and what have you but considerably weakened then. We were continuing to work on our little schemes trying to develop confidence building measures and gain some sort of interest, but we were never able to come to any conclusion with any of them. In July, '91, I went to the constitutional conference, the political conference in Ethiopia marking the end of that war which we had so much to do with. While I was there, I met with the head of the Sudanese delegation who was Colonel Kalifa, who was essentially head of their intelligence. He is the one who asked to see me and he said, "Mr. Cohen, I want you to know we appreciate your efforts to bring about peace. You are a very neutral person. We always considered you to be one who did the right thing and never was against one side or the other, but we think now, we would rather work without you. We really don't need you anymore." Basically what he was saying was because of this fighting in the south, they were switching from a diplomatic solution to a military solution. They figured they could win the war by exploiting the divisions between the southern forces. In fact, they were able to coopt one of the sides, the side that was in favor of secession. They managed to say to them look we will agree to a referendum in this. The people can decide whether they want to remain in the Sudan or leave Sudan and all that. They brought them to Khartoum and gave them jobs what have you. John During and his faction was in effect greatly weakened, and the government decided they would go for a military. In addition it became quite clear by that point that it truly was an Islamist, fundamentalist regime of the worst type. They had eliminated, you know, women were wearing veils. They had eliminated women as magistrates and professors at the university. In addition, they were working on exporting their Islamic revolution to neighboring countries, especially those countries that had Muslim populations like Eritrea and Ethiopia. What they were doing was taking Muslims from those countries, training them in guerrilla warfare and sabotage and sending them back. Both of these countries had every reason to be terribly friendly to the government of Sudan, because the government of Sudan helped them in their fight against the Mengistu regime, and they

were totally grateful to the government with never a thought of doing anything. But when they saw after a few months that this Islamist government was training guerillas and that sort of thing, they turned hostile to the regime, and in effect decided to help John During in his fight against them, so it was a complete turnaround. We, in the United States became very negative toward the regime although we never stopped communicating with them or tying to work with them. But, our CIA people were keeping close tabs and found that many of the terrorist groups in Africa in Khartoum. It was getting more and more difficult for them to work out of countries like Syria. They were finding it very comfortable to work out of Khartoum. We were keeping close tabs on where they were and what have you. So, our relationship with Sudan went way down, but we never stopped communicating with them and trying to deal with them and try to work things out. The Egyptians themselves, who started out very enthusiastic, suddenly realized after about a year that it was worse than the previous regime for them, because they too were targets because some of the Muslim brotherhoods in Egypt were getting support from the Sudan. It turned out the military who were in charge were really front men for the Muslim political leaders, especially a gentleman named Hassan Turabi who had been running the National Islamic Front party during the democratic days which never got much votes, but he turned out now to be the man behind the scenes who was running everything. So, it was not very bright but generally speaking the vast famines and starvation never really did take place. The one thing we were able to accomplish was to persuade the government to continue to be cooperative with the international aid agencies.

Q: Did you have problems, it seems to be almost endemic to that particular area, with aid workers or famine relief workers being kidnapped by one or the other of the groups and trying to get them out? Was this a problem then?

COHEN: No. It wasn't. Our big problem with the government was trying to prevent them using various excuses from coming in. Of course the aid workers working in the south did not work through the central capital city of Khartoum which was too far away. They were working through neighboring countries. Flying in and out from Kenya and Uganda didn't please the government because they were not controlling these things. I must say many of the aid organizations were very courageous about going in despite restrictions, and there were dangers of antiaircraft and government fighter planes intercepting them. But, in general, they were able to do their work without incurring casualties.

Q: Well, let's turn from the Sudan moving down geographically to Somalia, which of course was a big thing. What, when you arrived in the spring of '89, what was the situation in Somalia and how did we view it at that time?

COHEN: Somalia was very unstable. The government of Siad Barre, the dictator, had been in power since the 1960s and was still there. But, he was facing major instability in the sense that different parts of the country were in rebellion against him, especially the northern part which had previously been a colony of the British, British Somaliland compared to the rest of the country which had been Italian. The people there felt terribly oppressed by the regime, totally cut out of any of the resources or any of the wealth. They

were generally not happy, and they had established refugee exile groups in neighboring Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government actively supported them because there was constant conflict between the two governments because Somalia wanted to take over the neighboring region of Ethiopia which was made up of essentially Somali speaking people, the Ogaden. So, they had been in off and on warfare for many years. We were supporting the Somali government and holding our noses because it was such a horrible, repressive, corrupt government, because under the doctrine of Jimmy Carter, who wanted to protect the Persian Gulf area for U.S. interests, we had established military facilities in a number of countries on the African side of the Red Sea as the back door to the Persian Gulf. One of our most important facilities was in Somalia, the northern port of Berbera, where we had spent $35,000,000 constructing an air and naval facility there although we didn't have permanent forces there. It was totally open to us at all times to come in and out, and we had maintenance people there keeping the air strip and the port going for us. So, we saw Somalia on a slow decline toward anarchy, and the government's writ was slowly shrinking more and more toward the capital city. But, we were kind of constrained because we needed those facilities, and we were always on contact with the U.S. central command in Tampa, Florida, which was responsible of that area. We were giving them a small amount of economic assistance, economic support funds, which were justified on the basis of our military interests. So, we sort of kept watching it. We were encouraging the government to negotiate with these dissident groups, and the government said they were willing but the dissidents, it was a bit like Sudan, the dissident groups saying well never be able to live with this regime. It has to be overthrown. They were well armed from the Ethiopians and it was getting worse and worse. Somalia is a clan based nomadic society and various clans were choosing up sides, but the President's clan was dominant and very repressive. We didn't really do much in terms of conflict resolution until 1991, January, the situation got very bad and, no, let me go back to 1990. In 1990, the African neighbors of Somalia decided to intervene in terms of doing some conflict resolution work, and they held conferences. There was a major conference in Djibouti, which is a little country right next door to Somalia, and in July of 1990, they had an all parties conference and selected an interim president and decided to go ahead with some sort of an interim regime. I'm getting out of sequence here. Let me think. I have to think about my time sequence here. All of this is in 1991; I'm sorry. In the middle of 1991, the neighboring countries decided to try and do something. They had a conference in July, no, what happened, now I have got it straight. In January, 1991, things got very bad, and finally the opposing forces of the government were able to defeat the president. It all boiled down to what was happening in the capital city, and they put so much pressure on the president that he left. He left the city and went into exile in neighboring Kenya, and the question was what would replace them. In the beginning of '91 the rebels were able to put enough pressure on the government that they left the capital city, but the question is what would replace the regime. There was so much anarchy in the capital city at the time, that we had to evacuate our embassy. We had to close our embassy.

Q: Was there problem about the timing of when to do this because his name escapes me, who was our ambassador there?

COHEN: Jim Bishop.

Q: Jim Bishop, because I have interviewed Jim on this and I was wondering at the time as all this is happening, when do you evacuate? The ambassador often wants to hang on longer than the people in Washington...

COHEN: Yes, that always is the case. But in this case, it was absolutely a case of extremists. There was so much anarchy in the capital city and looting, no law and order at all; they were coming over the walls of the embassy, and it was becoming untenable. So, we were lucky because it was at the time of operation Desert Storm. Desert Storm hadn't started yet, but the forces were out there, Desert Shield. So, the U.S. central command had all these helicopters and things right next door, and they brought in these helicopters.

Q: It was a carrier, the Marine helicopters, Saipan or Guam.

COHEN: Right, it was a carrier. They sent their helicopters in and evacuated everybody, not only the American contingent but lots of other foreigners including one diplomatic wife who was having a baby right on the helicopter or something like that. It was a very dramatic thing done in the middle of the night, but anyway, everyone got out safely. So there we were with no embassy and the place was in chaos, so it was essentially the work of neighboring countries trying to bring about peace there, and they had many conferences. They ended up with a major conference in Djibouti in May, 1991. It looked like they had reached a settlement. The various clans had met and formed political parties. They had come up with an interim president what have you. I went out there to Djibouti after the conference to bless it and say we support it, we thought it was a good thing what have you. But, between July and the end of the year there were some dissident clans, some were sending messages out to the rest of the world that they didn't accept it, you know they had offices in London and various places. They never were really able to impose a new regime, and the people in northern Somalia, the former British area, they decided to secede, because they never could get a fair deal from these other guys who had been living under Italian rule, so they established an independent country called Somaliland which we refused to recognize because we were supporting the Djibouti agreement. Things were sort of stagnating along with nothing happening until the beginning of 1992 when fighting started to break out among the various clans. They had been unified in their opposition to the ex-president, but now they were fighting among themselves for power. The main fighting was in the city of Mogadishu between two factions of the same clan. They were just totally _____. It was the interim president against General Aideed, who thought he deserved to be the president because he was the main military leader when _____ the previous. The problem for us was that this fighting had interrupted the flow of humanitarian relief throughout the country. More and more cases of actual starvation were being brought to our attention, people 2530 miles outside the capital were not getting their food supplies and had no other source of food. Then CNN was starting to come in and show babies dying, and we felt something had to be done about it. It was not a question of no food available; there was plenty of food available, but it was not getting through. We found that the various clans with their militias of young thugs were actually appropriating this food and using it as currency.

There was no money available and they were appropriating it and selling it on the black market. In any event, a lot of people were going hungry. Now we were very naive there in the bureau of African Affairs. We said it is a typical problem the UN can handle. Up until that point the UN was handling all of those problems by sending peace keeping forces and what have you. So, we went to see the bureau of international organizations affairs and said this looks like another case for the Security Council to deal with. We think it is not too soon to get on to this case because we are getting these reports of starvation and all that. Unlike previous conflicts and national disasters, we found the international, the IO bureau as we called it, very negative about this. After doing a certain amount of investigation we found there was a big money problem because the peacekeeping fund of the UN for which the U.S. was responsible for 30%, was vastly overdrawn. The reason for that was the Cambodian solution which had just been voted earlier which was budgeted at two billion dollars. The U.S. share of that at 30% meant that we were way out of whack in terms of our contributions. The U.S. government was not about to try to get more money in because the Congress was becoming more and more hostile to this sort of thing. So, the answer of the international organizations bureau was instead of treating this as a security question that needs a security solution; just keep sending more food to Somalia and hope that it will get through. They said it was a food problem; we said it was a security problem, and we just couldn't agree with each other, and we were totally stonewalled.

Q: I mean on something like that you have in an organization one bureau and another bureau and they are not agreeing, somebody at the top a deputy Secretary or Assistant secretary. How did that work in?

COHEN: My technique for handling that was to exercise my authority as the head of the interagency working group on Africa which in those days we called the policy coordinating committee, the PCC on Africa. The Clinton administration changed the name to the interagency working group, but it was the same thing. I called meetings, so I started calling meetings on Somalia. I had a lot of people turning out, Pentagon, CIA all various agencies, but I found very great reluctance on all bureaus and agencies to become involved in this as a security issue. They saw it first of all as hopeless. Somalia is a different type of country. The people love to shoot, they love to fight, it is a very nomadic system It is not like a typical African country where people don't like to shoot. There was only one bureau which was in favor of taking a more aggressive stance and that was the bureau of Human Rights, and the AID office of foreign disaster assistance that had the responsibility to get the food in and found they were unable to do that. So, I had these meetings. I would ask endless questions. I asked the pentagon how about doing an airlift at least bringing food in to the most badly hit places. They said no. We don't think we should be doing that. The best way to do that is through commercial airlift. It is cheaper than we are. Generally speaking there was absolutely very little enthusiasm for that. Of course we would send reports from this upstairs and we were not getting much of a response.

Q: When you say upstairs you mean to the Deputy Secretary.

COHEN: Yes. Of course the NSC was present at these meetings and they would send reports over to Scowcroft, the National Security Advisor. We weren't getting anything, so we started working with the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance which had extensive relationships with the NGO community, to try and get more public consciousness of this. Of course, CNN was getting more interested and Congress was getting more interested. Toward April, May, '91, we started getting Congressional letters. No, I am talking about '92. We were getting letters from people like Nancy Kassebaum, Senator Simon. In fact during the Congressional recess, Easter of '92, Nancy Kassebaum went out to Somalia.

Q: She was _____.

COHEN: And also head of the Africa Subcommittee. No was it, she was a Republican, she was ranking Republican on the committee. Senator Simon was the chairman. Anyway when she came back, we got a joint letter from her and Simon saying something must be done, this is terrible. Children are starving. In the meantime, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance was doing a monthly press briefing on the situation and they were showing things like 50% of all children under five have already starved to death, really these gruesome statistics. In addition, the new Secretary General of the UN, Butros Ghali, had decided to make this one of his causes. While the Security Council was totally preoccupied with Bosnia and Cambodia, he was trying to get their attention on Somalia. In fact he made his allegedly famous statement privately about the security council, "You are more interested in white men's wars in Bosnia. You don't give a damn about black men's problems in Africa." So he was pushing very hard from his end. But we weren't getting much of a stir until around July/August of '92. Remember this was a presidential election year and there was already tremendous publicity about the starvation. We got two signals from higher up. I was holding meetings about every two weeks trying to push the bureaucracy into doing something and gain the attention of the upper levels. The NSC was there and Eagleburger had a representative at these meetings. Starting around June we got a signal. Eagleburger sent us a very terse message saying the President wants you to be more forward leading on Somalia, be more aggressive on that, which was a signal to the International Organizations Bureau that in the Security Council, they should be more supportive of Butros Ghali who wanted to send more troops there, small groups of what they call food guards and what have you. That was one signal. In August as Bush was being renominated to be the candidate, bush without consulting with me or anybody issued an order to the Defense Department to mount an airlift to try to bring relief to some of the most devastated localities. They saluted and sent nine planes to the port of Mombasa in Kenya which is the nearest place they can, and they started airlifting food. Of course we didn't think there was any relationship between that and the election, you know, reaction to CNN and what have you. The military said it would be much cheaper for AID to pay for charter planes to deliver food. Why do you want to use U.S. planes from the Air Force. Bush wanted to show the U.S. flag out there and that we are doing something about it. That broke the logjam. We had an airlift. We had greater support for Butros Ghali who wanted to send more troops there, not peacekeeping but to help facilitate the delivery of food. So that took place. Between August and the U.S. election all these activities were going on, but really they didn't have much of an impact on stopping the starvation. It was sort of like pinpricks. Airplanes, of course, can not deliver

that much tonnage. They are very limited. It is not like big trucks coming down the road coming off ships and bringing in major tonnage. The UN was bogged down because they were not able to do things with troops that had no mandate to defend themselves. They were just supposed to be there as a presence to defend the food stocks, but they had no, they were so out gunned and overwhelmed by the various factions, that they wee unable to do their job. The election took place; Bush lost the election, Butros Ghali and the humanitarian organizations were continuing to report a deterioration in the situation. It was getting worse and worse. Bush, here he is a lame duck president, he sends a directive to the bureaucracy. I want your report on what you recommend we do about this situation. So then, when I called a meeting, people could no longer say we are not interested. We had this directive from Bush. We had to come up with a recommendation. We discussed it and it was quite clear that Bush was determined to do something about this. He was not going to be deterred. So we seriously worked up a set of recommendations to be discussed at higher levels. Our recommendation was, this was interagency it wasn't just State Department, was that we should support a UN, first of all, we reached a conclusion that only the use of force could break this famine, this situation where the armed thugs were appropriating the food and not letting it get through and didn't give a damn about who died. In that society another clan is like a foreign country even though they speak the same language. So, the threat of force was necessary. Secondly, we realized the U.S. after Vietnam and other places was not interested in sending in troops on the ground, so we should support a UN forceful intervention with U.S. money and logistics, but no U.S. troops, a U.S. airlift. So, this recommendation went forward to the deputies committee which is the next highest level after the policy coordinating committee. This is chaired by the number two Deputy national Security Advisor who at that point was Admiral Howe on detail from the Pentagon. I attended meetings to discuss this. The State Department was represented by the under secretary for Political Affairs who was Arnold Kanter. We went to these meetings, and it was quite clear from the National Security Advisor that the President wanted to do something, so there was not going to be any fooling around saying maybe we should do nothing. So, they adopted this recommendation that came out of State Department. The president took this recommendation and he asked the Chairman of the Joint chiefs to give his opinion of this, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs at the time was General Powell. Powell was like the rest of the Pentagon, against the use of U.S. troops in a place where the U.S. had no vital interest. We were just essentially trying to save people from starvation. We expected him to endorse this recommendation, no U.S. troops but support the UN. We were very surprised at the next meeting when Powell's representative General McCaffrey, the gentleman who is now the drug czar, came up and said, "Well, we've studied this, and our opinion is knowing how the UN operates, it would take them at least six months to mount the type of force that could do the job because they don't have any standing forces. They have to start from zero, and knowing how they work from previous operations, we think it will take them at least six months. If you are losing 5,000 people a week from starvation, six months times that, lots of people will die before you can solve the problem. There is only one military force in the world that can bring to bear the number of troops and the equipment necessary to do this quickly, within a matter of weeks, and that is the U.S. We are not recommending that you the president agree to this, we are just telling you our analysis." Of course we were all shocked because we never thought the

U.S. military would volunteer. Now they didn't volunteer.

Q: Well, I mean they were. You say so many people will die unless we go in, but we are not volunteering.

COHEN: After that meeting we in the State Department were all astonished. We walked out and said what is going on here? What happened. Of course, we were thinking the most cynical things, not that they wanted to save dying babies. We reached a conclusion. of course we had no proof for it, that they were under a lot of pressure to use U.S. forces in Bosnia, and they saw Bosnia as a much more tricky difficult place where the fighters there were much more difficult to deal with, and they figured Somalia would be easy. So let's go to Somalia so we don't have to go to Bosnia.

Q: If that was true it turned out to be the worst miscalculation.

COHEN: We don't know if it is true or not. Maybe General Powell was just giving an honest evaluation. The President asked for an honest evaluation. Anyway the President took this and said Yes, we will send troops, however there are certain conditions. First I want the UN Security Council to vote a mandate and second, I want other countries to join us. I don't want to be out there alone. Also I want a promise from the UN that in the six months it takes for them to gear up, they will replace us, that we will not be there forever. He sent Eagleburger to see Butros Ghali to negotiate all this, and he did. It worked out that it would not be under UN, paid for by the UN peacekeeping fund which was broke anyway. It would be paid for by contributions, and that we would go around with a tin cup asking countries not sending troops to give money. It turned out that Saudi Arabia and Japan were the main candidates to finance this operation. Our job in the State Department was to persuade as many countries as possible to send troops for two phases. Phase one was the operation led by the U.S. Phase two for the operation led by the United Nations. This took place around Thanksgiving, this decision making process, and the first troops started arriving within weeks before the end of the year. They assigned Robert Oakley who was retired, to come out of retirement and be the chief U.S. representative there.

Q: He had been a former ambassador to Somalia.

COHEN: That's right. That is why he was selected apart from his qualities as a great diplomat, he had been an ambassador there. He asked John Hirsch who had been a DCM there to come out of his very cushy post as consul general in Johannesburg to join him in Somalia as his number two. He arrived even before the troops. Then the troops came in and he began the process of trying it. So, the starvation problem was cleared up very quickly. The troops guaranteed the food, so by mid-January, the starvation problem was over. The timing was fortunate because this was the planting season, and they were able to plant their crops, so by March or April when the crops were coming in, the Somalis started to be more and more self-sufficient in food. So that got into phase two of what do you do now? That comes under the heading of nation building which a lot of people in this country said we should not be doing, but we knew when we made this proposal that

you can't just go in and stop the starvation. You have to do something about reestablishing some sort of governmental authority which in Somalia would be very tough. They never had any real national consensus on government. It was always just clan driven politics there. That, we expected the UN to handle; it wouldn't be us. So the UN started working on various schemes, reestablishing the police, reestablishing local government, this was going on. Meantime, the various armed clans were not being disarmed. One thing that Oakley did was to take away the heavy weapons and put them in a guarded area, but the small arms. No effort was made to disarm them, and they were still around and were still arguing with each other. After a couple of months say around March or April of '93, General Aideed, who was the guy who torpedoed the original Djibouti agreements decided the UN presence, the international presence was not good for him. He wanted to do everything possible to... So what the UN was driving at was some sort of democratic consensus where the leadership would be elected. He said no. He won the war against the previous regime; he wanted to be installed as the new head. So, he saw that the international presence was not in his favor, and he started doing everything possible to sabotage that. He decided the way to do that was to start shooting UN troops. He did it by ambushing 29 Pakistanis that were there and killing them and in effect signaling that he was not going to stand for any international presence. This led to the slow deterioration of relations between the clans and the UN leading to the disaster of '93 after the Clinton administration had taken over leading to the death of American troops there. The death of American troops happened after I left. I left in April and this disaster happened a couple of months later; I forgot which month it was, May or June. I was not involved with that, but I still believe that the basic operation to save people from starvation was a success.

Q: Was there concern on our part as this was developing on your watch in a way to stay out of Mogadishu and to keep the lines of communication out in the country to starving because part of the problem seemed to have been we got too involved in the city which was not part of our mandate?
COHEN: Well, our mandate was to stop the starvation, you see, and the UN was in charge of doing all the nation building work and we were not. But, what happened was, one thing that I think was a big mistake. Butros Ghali decided in preparation for the U.S. departure as leader of the operation because the scenario was the U.S. troop contingent would be reduced to something offshore on an aircraft carrier to come in in an emergency, and there would be just non-U.S. troops present. But, he insisted on having an American as head of the operation, and the U.S. proposed Admiral Howe. I was opposed to having an American because I thought that would be a real target for these nasties in the clans. In fact, I was Butros Ghali's first choice to be UN rep there. I turned it down, so Admiral Howe was happy to get it because under the Clinton administration he was out as Deputy National Security Advisor. So, he took very badly the killing of the Pakistani troops which belonged to him. He was the UN rep; He was not there as a U.S. man but UN. He took it badly. He said I want to get them, I want revenge. I want to show them that they can't do that. So, what he did is independently of the U.S. people worked directly with the pentagon and the White House to set up this special operation to go after General Aideed which almost succeeded but ended in disaster.

Q: This was after your watch.

COHEN: After my watch. I was opposed to having an American. I thought it shouldn't be because we were in effect turning it over to the UN. Turning it over to the UN would not mean that an American was in charge, but who knows. Someone else might have tried to do the same thing. I think overall I am proud of the fact that I worked so hard to bring in American troops because it was a success. This disaster with U.S. troops was horrible, but it shouldn't take away from the success of the operation.

Q: One further question on Somalia. We had made a great effort to build up Berbera as a port and all. Was it useful during the one time we really needed it during the Gulf War.

COHEN: That was a great irony because the reason we had gotten these facilities, and we negotiated very hard in 19791980 for these, was that the countries of the Persian Gulf did not want a U.S. presence. They kept saying we want your protection but over the horizon. So, what is over the horizon is East Africa, so we got these bases. But, when the crunch came and we had Operation Desert Storm, all of the countries in the Gulf said yes you can have bases; you can have your troops here. So, we were in Kuwait; we were in Saudi Arabia; we were in Jordan, all these places. So, we did not use these facilities. That was the great irony.

Q: Being sort of a guess now geographically, what is the next one?

COHEN: Mozambique, have we done Mozambique?

Q: We have not done Mozambique. Why don't we do Mozambique.

COHEN: Okay. Now, unlike Somalia that was a war that sort of erupted after we came in to office, Mozambique was an ongoing war when we came in like Angola had been going on since the 1970s. Unlike Angola and Ethiopia though, we had no other foreign policy requirement that would push us into Mozambique. In Angola and Ethiopia we had relations with the Soviets. In Mozambique, we had no imperative to go in.

Q: The Cold War was over.

COHEN: The Soviets never had been that strong there. They never had Cuban troops or Soviet troops, so cooperation with the Soviets was not a real excuse. We didn't have a Sudan type hunger problem pushing us in there, so we didn't get involved immediately. It was not one of our high priorities: although, we did have a major humanitarian assistance program which was costing about $100,000,000 a year. Mozambique with a Marxist regime was not terribly loved in the Congress, so it was difficult to be helpful there, but we got involved in two ways. First of all, the main mediation was being done by a non-governmental organization in Rome called St. Egidio, a lay Catholic order that worked in Mozambique. They had very close relationships with the church in Mozambique. They seemed to be very well respected by the rebel group there called RENAMO. They were respected also by the government, so they started getting involved in the mediation effort.

One of our problems in the U.S. was that RENAMO was very well liked by a small group of conservatives, some of whom were working in the defense intelligence agency. We were supporting the rebels in Angola as a Cold War thing, the UNITA rebels. There were, not a lot, but some conservatives who wanted us to consider the RENAMO rebels equivalent to UNITA and to support them against the Marxist government. As I indicated, you had no Cubans there; you had no Soviets there; you couldn't gin up any interest.

Q: They weren't exporting their Marxism.

COHEN: No, not exporting. Also the RENAMO people had a very bad record on human rights. So, while there were people out in Orange County California, including Casper Weinberger the Defense Secretary under Reagan, boosting RENAMO, we felt it was a bad cause. We tried to maintain our distance from both RENAMO and the government. Two things happened to draw us in. First, St. Egidio came to us and said they were good mediators but didn't know anything about cease fires, the movement of troops, logistics, what have you. Will you help us? So we said yes. It was a good cause so we said yes, and we asked our embassy in Rome to have a watching brief on this negotiation that was going on in Rome. This was all around early 1991. The embassy in Rome said they were too busy with NATO issues. We asked our embassy to the Vatican to do it. They were delighted because they did not have that much to do. Also it was a Catholic lay order and the Vatican was involved to a certain extent in backing them up. They found that was an interesting new activity for them, and the deputy chief of mission there became our agent.

Q: Who was that?

COHEN: We began with an officer named Creagan, followed by Cameron Hume. Both did excellent jobs of inserting themselves into this negotiation and being a link between Washington and the parties. The second thing that got us involved was a meeting between Secretary Baker and the Prime Minister of Portugal. This took place May 31,1991, in Lisbon at the signing of the Angola peace agreement. Baker thought it was important for him to be there because the U.S. had played such a big role. The Prime Minister of Portugal asked for a bilateral discussion with Baker. Baker asked me to come along. I said, "You don't need me. This is going to be U.S.-Portugal. You are going to talk about the Azores problem and NATO problems. Why do you want me?" He said, "Well who knows, maybe Africa will come up." So I came along, and it was an hour meeting. The first thing the Prime Minister of Portugal wanted to talk about was Mozambique. Baker kept trying to turn the conversation to the Azores because we had a difficult problem. We were going to cut off our subsidy on the Azores, but the P.M. wanted to discuss Mozambique. The problem was they were not involved in any negotiations or mediation, and for the Portuguese it was a domestic political problem. Portuguese citizens had lost much property there, and so many people had lived in Mozambique and were worried about it. In fact for the Portuguese not to be involved in trying to find a solution meant that they might never get their property back or get compensated. He said it was hurting them politically with the election coming up. He asked Baker to bring the Portuguese into the mediation process. They wanted to be part

of the observer team, as the Soviets and the Americans were in Angola. Baker, knowing that we were having problems on the Azores, quickly agreed.

Q: A good politician.

COHEN: Yes. He instructed me to do whatever I could to get the Portuguese involved. So I followed instructions. I started playing a more important role. I was going to Rome a lot. Jeff Davidow, the senior deputy Assistant Secretary was going there. We were sending teams of lawyers and military people out there to give them advice. Every time they had impasses, I would go and speak to RENAMO. I was starting to meet secretly with the RENAMO leaders in Malawi and Nairobi. We were putting on a full court press, and as we were doing this, we were dragging the Portuguese in behind us. The way it happened was that the negotiation reached a conclusion in the summer of 1992; the negotiations really became good, and in October of '92, just as the Angolans were having their election, an agreement was signed in Rome. At that point the Portuguese were still on the periphery. They had sent a representative to the signing of the agreement, but they were still on the periphery. Where we got them involved was in the implementation. We were determined not to make the same mistakes in Mozambique that we made in Angola for the implementation. In Angola we left it to the two sides to implement their own agreement, and it didn't work. In Mozambique we said we are going to have to have a full international team of observers to implement, and there we got the Portuguese heavily involved. So, we fulfilled our commitment to the Portuguese Prime Minister. In effect, it was a case study of how to do things right as a third party intervener. Even though we were not in charge, we provided all this technical assistance, military, political, and diplomatic. We were using our influence to break impasses. We persuaded the Zimbabwean government, for example, to make contact with the rebels because they came from the same ethnic group, and the rebels would have confidence in the Zimbabweans to bring them on board. We persuaded the president of Kenya to work with the rebels because he had befriended them through fundamentalist Christian connections of various kinds. We were doing the work that we were capable of doing as a superpower with our many tentacles out there and embassies and travel and what have you, using our influence with various people, and it really helped bring things together. But, we never at any point were in charge. I think we played a major role that was outstanding.

Q: This brings up a point that in part, these oral histories are a part of this. In a way, you all learned from Angola as to how to work it in Mozambique. What is your impression of how experiences are passed on in the department because other things have happened other places. Just in dealing with these very complicated issues, is there, I won't say an apparatus, but is there a way of the experiences of people it may have happened five years before, getting in part of how one does things.

COHEN: Yes. I think there is continuity within the bureaucracy. All of the deputies and secretaries were new. The office directors were essentially new. But, I think in dealing with the Angola problem, the bureau showed a certain continuity of approach. We continued the same methods but with modifications. We didn't try to do things differently, so I think there is a certain historical memory. They, of course, worked on the

implementation of Mozambique after we left, so I think things worked out pretty well. Now, of course, I think the way of looking at things and the way of analyzing things will change with the political leadership. I found in the Clinton administration there is more of a tendency to look at the morality side of issues rather than on the realpolitik side, but I don't think it really changed that much.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. I wrote down Tanzania. Was there anything about Tanzania or Uganda?

COHEN: No, neither of those.

Q: Well, we have Rwanda so we'll pick up Rwanda and then South Africa.

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Today is April 8, 1998. Hank, we have been doing, as the French say, a tour of the horizon. My French is awful. How do you say that in French?

COHEN: Tour d' horizon.

Q: Okay, and we are down to Rwanda. Again what was the period you were in African affairs at this point?

COHEN: Well, I started in April of '89 and terminated in April of '93.

Q: What was the situation in Rwanda and well Burundi too at this time? How was it when you first arrived on the scene in you job and what happened then?

COHEN: Rwanda was a country that, in our view, was doing quite well. It had majority rule although it was very authoritarian. It was doing very well in its economic management. AID was very active there and had a large program along with the World Bank and the IMF. In general we had very good relations. It seemed to be a promising country despite its problems with overpopulation and the fact that it was not very democratic, but there were very few countries that were democratic in 1989 in Africa. But, in 1990, an event came that shocked Rwanda very badly. About 3,000 armed men of Rwandan origin came streaming across the border from neighboring Uganda, which is to the north of Rwanda. These were all people from the minority Tutsi tribe who were proclaiming themselves an army of liberation. There is a bit of history that is necessary here. When the majority Hutu ethnic group gained power in 1962 as Belgium gave Rwanda its independence, the transition to self-rule was rather bloody. The Hutu majority took revenge against the Tutsi minority who had been the overlords both before Belgium came and during the Belgian colonial period. This resulted in a lot of Tutsis being killed and several hundred thousand becoming refugees in neighboring countries, most of them in Uganda. Now, Uganda took good care of them. They didn't have to live in camps; they were living in communities; they were working. But, the psychological problem was that the Rwandan authorities decided they would never be allowed to come back. This was

traumatic for the Tutsis living in Uganda in exile. A whole new generation of children grew up not knowing their homeland. Many of these children made their careers in the Ugandan army where they were very successful and rose to high positions. Some of these people in high positions had a dream that they would lead their people back to their maternal homeland, Rwanda. Since they were military people, they were able to make military plans. The president of Uganda was not opposed to the idea because having these outsiders play such an important role in his government was a political liability for him. These were smart people and resented by the Ugandans, so the idea of them all going back to Rwanda was not unappealing to him in 1990. The Tutsi military officers were people aged between 30 and 40. On October 1, 1990, they executed their plan, and they sent these armed people across the border into Rwanda.

Q: Were we getting any indications of what was happening in Uganda?

COHEN: We should have. In fact, the president of Rwanda talked to me about it two years earlier when I was director at the National Security Council during a visit to Rwanda to do some work for USIA. He asked me to have a private meeting and said, "Could you ask your intelligence service to check out the Rwandan exile community in Uganda? I think they are planning something here." So I asked the intelligence services, but it was not something they were focusing on necessarily and they said they didn't have any information. So, we kind of dropped it. We had not received any reports from Kampala in Uganda indicating that something was happening. It came as a surprise to us. Just by chance the day of the invasion, President Bush and Secretary James Baker were in New York as was I for the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly. President Bush was giving a coffee party for African heads of state who happened to be in New York at the time. Both the president of Uganda and the president of Rwanda were there at the coffee party when the news came in. They both professed surprise. President Museveni of Uganda said it was the first he ever heard of it, which we didn't believe. “If these people did that, we will charge them with deserting from the Ugandan army. It is treason.” We think he really knew what was going on. Two days later, he was in Washington where I had private talks with him. Both the French ambassador and the Belgian ambassador called me to say that he had called them to say please tell your governments not to intervene militarily because both of these governments were very close to the Rwandan government. As it happened the French did send troops to the capital city of Kigali to prevent the rebels from attacking Kigali, because it is a very small country. From the border to the capital, the distance is short. Anyway the big shock was that this invading army was not treated like a liberation army. It was treated like the devil coming in because the majority of the people were not of that ethnic group, and they immediately created 250,000 displaced people who were running away from the border area to escape the invasion. It was a mess. A big humanitarian disaster was taking place. The French sent troops because they saw it as English speaking Uganda invading French speaking Rwanda. They were protecting their French speaking buddies. We didn't see it that way and in hindsight, I think we made a mistake. Not that it was an English-French thing, it was not. It was a Rwanda problem. We should have realized that this invasion was like an alien body that was being grafted onto something. It was going to be rejected. It was not a liberation army, and we should have taken steps to try and persuade them to go back, but

we didn't. In fact, we being in a conflict resolution mood said well this is a great opportunity to reconcile the ethnic groups and to push the government into democracy. So, we said let's have negotiations. So, we spent the time from 1990 October to the end of '91 trying to persuade both sides to negotiate, which is what we were doing in every other conflicted country. The government refused to negotiate because they said these are Ugandans. They are people from the Ugandan army. We tell the government yes they are Ugandans, but they are also Rwandans whom you didn't allow to return, so you should treat them like your own people. The Rwandans who had invaded said they were not going to negotiate with the government. They are dictators, cruel oppressive people. They should resign and then let's have democracy. So it was a long period, and we worked hard. The first thing we did was to convince the government to open up their political system and have a multiparty democracy that they agreed to do. Parties were allowed, and both the majority Hutus and minority Tutsis who were living in the country formed political parties. They were working together, and at one point they even appointed opposition party leaders as Prime Minister and foreign minister. So, we found it easier to work with them in terms of pushing negotiations. The Hutus who were in opposition, the Prime Minister and the foreign minister, were just as afraid of these invaders as the government, so we had a hard time persuading them to negotiate, but we finally succeeded.

Q: Excuse me but did the United States, I mean here is a country in the middle of Africa and the United States coming in, the French and Belgians had been there, was the United States considered by both parties in there to be a major player?

COHEN: The French were mistrusted by the invaders because they were totally siding with the government. The Belgians had a history of supporting the Hutus against the Tutsis, so they were also suspect. We were trusted by both sides, at least at the beginning.

Q: Was it the Hutus against the Tutsis? I thought it would have been the reverse.

COHEN: Well, during the colonial period, the Belgians relied on the Tutsis to be their administrators, but at the independence period, the Belgian government at the time, which I think was a socialist government, manipulated it so the Hutus could win. The Tutsis never forgave them for that. So we were kind of neutral because we didn't have a history of being involved there; we had a few investments. So, people listened to us. We had maintained contacts with the invaders in Kampala. Like embassies tend to do, they talk to everyone, so we had good relationships with these army people in Kampala. We did our best. I made several trips to Rwanda, first to persuade them to have a democracy and secondly to accept to negotiate. By the end of 1991, we were able to persuade both sides. The French helped persuade the government and the Ugandans who were very close to the invaders, helped persuade the invaders, who had not won the war, that negotiations were necessary. They all accepted negotiation, and the question was who would lead the negotiations. We did not volunteer, but the Organization of African Unity decided to take it over, and they asked the foreign minister of Tanzania to take charge. He set up a negotiating process in Arusha, Tanzania. We sent people to provide support. First we sent the U.S. ambassador in Kigali to attend all the sessions. His name was Bruce

Flatin. Later when he couldn't spend so much time there, we sent David Rawson who was between jobs. He spent several months in Arusha. He was familiar with the area having been stationed in Rwanda as a junior officer, and having been raised as a missionary child in neighboring Burundi. He spoke the language In mid 1993, they signed an agreement called the Arusha agreement which called for democracy and a new constitution and total integration of these invaders into the system. The invaders would get a guaranteed number of seats in the parliament. It was all a very detailed negotiation. We thought it was quite a good agreement because it made peace. I personally, did not spend very much time on it because these were the years I was working very heavily on Angola and Mozambique, and these were higher priorities for me. I didn't spend too much time on that, and of course, with hindsight, I understood that while the Arusha agreements were very good on paper, the implementation of these agreements would be very difficult. The main force in the country, the government people who had the guns, were really staying aloof from these agreements. They allowed the new democrats, the new political parties to run these negotiations for them while they were standing back planning all sorts of terrible things in order to stay in power, because they felt that in a democratic system they would probably lose. It was mainly the president's family who did not wish to contemplate the idea of losing power, especially his wife's family, and they were planning all sorts of things. There were some very definite signs that the international community seems to have missed or ignored which was the opening of a radio station that was ostensibly private, but spent its whole time calling on the people to hate the Tutsis and to eliminate the Tutsis.

Q: Sort of like Yugoslavia.

COHEN: Yugoslavia or Hitler's Germany where they were saying that the Jews were causing all the problems. Go kill Jews and what have you. It was exactly the same in Rwanda. So, why did the international community listening to this radio not become alarmed? Of course they protested to the government, and the government said oh this is a private radio. It is a democracy now. We can't stop them from broadcasting. Part of the Arusha agreement was that the UN would deploy peace-keepers to observe the implementation. There were about 2,500 UN troops in Rwanda at the time. In early 1994, the implementation of the agreements was going very slowly and not very satisfactorily. In early 1994 the commander of the UN force there was a Canadian. He picked up intelligence information he thought was reliable which was that they were planning to systematically kill Tutsis, sort of a genocidal act. He reported it back to New York and to all the diplomatic missions. I, sitting in the Assistant Secretary chair, do not remember seeing such a report, but now in all these investigations after the fact, it came out that these reports did get sent.

Q: You were saying 1994, when did you leave the job?

COHEN: Oh yes, there is a discrepancy. I left in April of '93, so actually none of these reports had come through in the time while I was in office. They really came through afterward. But, where I look back and say we were really at fault was in what I call the signature obsession you know, as mediators as facilitators, our interest was in getting an

agreement that both sides would accept. Who are we to tell these various sides that were in conflict that their agreement was bad if they accepted it. So, we said if they are signing something it must be good, but if we looked at the agreement, we should have seen that it would be very difficult to implement. First of all, the invading force, that had become a political party and was supposed to participate in the political process, were to have 600 armed troops as bodyguards in the city of Kigali. Just imagine how the Hutus, who over the centuries had hated the Tutsis, would feel seeing 600 Tutsi troops walking around the capital city.
Q: We are talking about a small city.

COHEN: A very small city, maybe about 100,000 people, something like that. Secondly the people with the guns, the real power had not really participated in the negotiations. If they are not with it, it doesn't matter who signs. They could be doing all sorts of things and they were. We should have realized that they were not participating in the negotiations. They were allowing surrogates to do that. Toward the second half of '93, after I had gone, all of the analysts were saying it would never work. But we should have realized it before the agreement was signed and tried to advise people to revise it. After I left, and I am happy it happened after I left, the signs became more and more strong that something bad was going to happen. Apparently the international community did not listen to these, so looking back I could say that my administration did a good job in helping them come to this wonderful agreement, but it turned out it was not a wonderful agreement. It looked good on paper, but it was not.

Q: Why don't we turn to Liberia during this '89 to '93 period.

COHEN: Yes. Well, Liberia was one of the seven conflicts that we worked on. It broke out after we came into office. It was one of three conflicts that jumped in on us suddenly. They were Rwanda, Liberia, and Somalia. In all of these we suddenly went into a crisis mode. We didn't really take the time to study it, so there was a different way of handling it. Liberia was one of those that surprised us. On Christmas Eve of 1989, it was similar to Rwanda where a bunch of rebels crossed the border coming from Ivory Coast. It was a much smaller group than Rwanda, maybe only about 150 people. They started attacking a border town and shooting at policemen and what have you. It looked like a minor thing. We had seen infiltration from armed opposition groups over the previous years. They usually were captured. They never seemed to be really serious. These fellows invaded and the seemed to be well trained as guerrillas. They were able to attack and disappear into the woods and all that, and the government couldn't just dismiss it as just a bunch of bandits. Of course like some of these third world governments, they didn't know how to handle it, and what they did is they sent troops up into the area. Many of these troops had U.S. training, U.S. equipment, and uniforms. Their first reaction after an ambush by the rebels was to kill everybody in the nearby village. They blamed the village for harboring the rebels. So, they would burn down the village. They didn't mind burning down the village of some other tribe. This, of course, generated resentment, and more and more young people from these burned out villages were happy to join the rebels. They were able to get arms from neighboring Ivory Coast which was supporting the rebels as was the next country over, Burkina Faso, which was importing the arms from Libya by air.

Within the first few weeks, it was quite clear that this was an orchestrated attempt to overthrow the government of Samuel Doe whom we had been supporting since 1980 when he took power in a coup. We saw that the government really didn't know how to handle this type of insurgency because the more they fought it, the more the insurgency grew and was starting to advance away from the border toward the interior. So, our first reaction was to tell the government to stop human rights violations. You can't just go burning every village where you see a guerrilla running out. We decided to send some of our military attaches to the combat areas to advise the commanders about the treatment of innocent civilians. This caused a big uproar because the regime of Samuel Doe in the eight or nine years it was in power had created a lot of enemies. The Liberians, of course, have very close ties to the United States. Many of them live in the United States, and the Liberian community in the United States was totally opposed to the regime of Samuel Doe. Many of them had gone into exile because of him. They did not want the U.S. government to support the regime of Samuel Doe. In fact, they were happy to see this guerrilla warfare starting against him. So, when we deployed our military attaches, they saw it as help to the army rather than our trying to stop human rights violations. They didn't agree with our position. They asked Congress, to hold hearings. The pressure was so big that we were forced to withdraw our military attaches. That meant the human rights violations would continue. That left just the diplomatic side, and what could we do? The government asked us to intervene and see if we could get some talks going with these rebels. They refused to recognize the rebels, but they saw that they couldn't defeat them, so they said maybe their friend the United States could do something. We found that the rebels were very well equipped. They even had satellite radio telephones. They could call us and they were starting to call us. They said, “we are not bad guys, we are good guys.” We just want to overthrow this horrible corrupt regime. We want the Americans to be our best friends. We recognize you as our father and our mother. They were calling us up daily. The leader of the rebels was Charles Taylor who had been an official in the Doe government. He was accused of embezzlement and ran away to the U.S. where an extradition was requested. He was in jail for two years in Massachusetts, but the Liberian government was never able to send the papers so they couldn't go to court and get him extradited. He escaped from jail. My feeling is they let him escape because why keep feeding this guy. He didn't commit any crimes in the United States. So he escaped and went to Burkina Faso where he got in touch with Libyans and concocted this operation which was doing well. Anyway he at first said he didn't want to negotiate with Samuel Doe. Doe must resign and then he'll negotiate. Both sides agreed to send delegations to Washington to talk with us. Samuel Doe sent a delegation headed by a prestigious lawyer named Winston Tubman, the son of a former president. Taylor sent a supporter from New Jersey who was running an automobile garage. The guy had suddenly become Taylor’s defense minister. They first refused to sit in the same room with each other and we had proximity talks. We told the Liberian government delegation that the only way they could stay in power was to democratize rapidly, have an early election, and let the people decide. Charles Taylor kept insisting that Doe must resign. That is all he cared about. Once Doe resigned, he would submit himself to an election with anyone. In the meantime while we were negotiating during the months of January, February, and March of 1990, the fighting continued. The government was terribly inept, and the guerrillas were very smart and well equipped. They were getting streams of arms

through the government of Burkina Faso. The Cote d'Ivoire government had no problem in allowing this stuff to transit, and the rebels were making headway. By April, they had captured virtually all of Liberia except the capital city. They were extorting money from the rubber companies and the mineral companies. They were extracting rents, and they seemed to be well heeled. But, as they were capturing areas and government troops, they were killing them because the government was all essentially concentrated in the hands of the Krahn tribe that was only seven percent of the population

Q: This is tape six side one with Hank Cohen.

COHEN: Anyway the rebels themselves were engaging in horrible human rights violations because they were taking revenge on this Krahn tribe. Any Krahn they caught, whether military or civilian, was being murdered in revenge for what the Krahn army had been doing to them. The army, who had retreated back to the capital city, knew they were in a life and death situation. If they were captured, they would all be killed. Therefore, they were fighting very hard; they were fighting to save their lives. The rebels were stalled outside the city. One week went by; two weeks went by and they couldn't capture the city, not even the center of the city. Actually they had captured parts of the city, so we decided that a real disaster was in the making. The city could be destroyed. There were hundreds of thousands of refugees from the interior living in the city. The port was blockaded. You couldn't get in, so we couldn't get food in there, so it was a real disaster in the making. So, in our regular conversations with Charles Taylor, we said why don't you unblock the escape route from the city, and the soldiers will be able to escape to Sierra Leone, and you will be able to capture the city very easily without any destruction. They agreed to that, and he did unblock the city, but something happened within Charles Taylor's own ranks. He was a very tough dictatorial leader, and he had executed some troops for malfeasance of some sort, and this caused a rebellion within his own ranks. Another leader named Prince Johnson decided to fight Charles Taylor and also fight Samuel Doe at the same time. It became a triangular civil war. He blockaded the city not allowing anyone to go outside, so our escape route idea was suddenly sabotaged, and the war continued. Meanwhile, Doe was so desperate that he started to kill enemies living in the city among the refugees. Massacres started taking place. We kept telling Doe to offer to have an immediate election within three months and have a transitional government. Finally, we decided that the best solution would be for Doe to go into exile, just give up, because all he did was control the presidential palace, and there was a small airport that was still open. We were constantly having interagency meetings on this and we concluded that we should ask Doe to leave and let Charles Taylor take over. He is controlling the whole country anyway. We don't know what kind of a guy he is, but if it is going to end the suffering, let that happen, and maybe we can persuade him to have a democracy. We developed a plan to find a place for Doe to go. We called up the President of Togo who was a good friend of ours and said would you be willing to take Doe and his family into exile. They said we don't like the idea but because you are asking us we'll say yes. Then we decided that I, Hank Cohen, should go over there and persuade Doe to leave. We had a plane set up from the U.S. military in Europe to go down and pick up him and his family and his possessions. Of course everything we were doing, we were reporting to a higher authority in the State Department and in the NSC. We had

been hinting to Doe through our embassy that maybe he should think about stepping down. At one point he said, maybe I should go; could you get me a scholarship somewhere maybe to Harvard or Cambridge. He was really not a terribly sophisticated person. Anyway without actually telling him to go, we started getting him used to the idea. I was supposed to go, and then we got word from the NSC, from Robert Gates who was the Deputy National Security Advisor, that the President did not want us to take this initiative. It was forbidden. We should just drop it and not do anything. So we saluted and dropped the idea, and we only found out later why. In our interagency meetings Bob Gates kept saying we have no vital interests in Liberia; we shouldn't get involved. We shouldn't be solving their problems. All we want to do is protect American citizens. That is it.

Q: I thought we did have vital interests in Liberia.

COHEN: That is true. We had three installations there. We had a CIA communications station that served U.S. embassies throughout Africa and the Middle East, and a very big USIA antenna field that served all of Africa. We had an omega navigation station that was run by the U.S. Coast Guard and was very important for air navigation. This was before the advent of satellite navigating. All these facilities we considered very expensive to replace, and we wanted to keep them. In our interagency meetings, all of these agencies, Defense, USIA, Defense for the Coast Guard, and CIA kept saying these are important. We want to keep them. We are not paying any rent. We provide jobs to Liberians. But, when it came to the decision of the NSC not to intervene, all of these agencies kept quiet. They didn't say a word. So, when we did not intervene to install Charles Taylor and remove Doe, then within several months these installations were all destroyed by Taylor who was so angry that we were keeping hands off. He had captured all these installations and they were totally destroyed. Apparently these agencies were not strong enough that they would challenge the NSC and Robert Gates on this. They just said, okay, that is your decision. We were still faced with the dilemma of U.S. citizens. I think in Liberia, which has such close ties to the U.S., there were something like 5,000 dual nationals living there. Liberians who also had American passports, or Liberians who were not Americans but whose children were American because they were born in the States, little kids who were Americans. As the fighting was surrounding them, we had a duty to protect them. So, a decision was made to deploy U.S. naval vessels off the coast to evacuate them. We were encouraging people to leave through the small airport that was still in operation. We were paying for them and sending them up to Europe and paying for them to go to the U.S. where they would be resettled. Money was not a problem, but a lot of them were refusing to leave. We, therefore deployed a U.S. naval group of four ships, including a helicopter ship with 2,000 marines, to go in there in case these people were suddenly faced with extreme danger, and they could no longer depart normally. We had the ironic situation where there were 2,000 marines 20 miles off the coast. They could easily have gone in there and stopped the war and settled everything, but they were not allowed to because their only job was to save U.S. citizens. They were bored sitting off there and doing nothing. At one point they did have to go in briefly for about two days to evacuate some people who were caught in the middle of the town and bring them out to the ships. Mostly they did nothing out there. They also deployed about

100 marines to the U.S. embassy compound to protect that from the fighting as well. All this was due to the NSC decision that we would not intervene. At that point I kind of lost interest. I said if they are not going to allow us to do diplomacy and it is just a question of preserving American lives, I'll just leave that to the people who do that, the consular people, the military. There was no more diplomacy to be done, and I went about my business doing other things like Angola, and Ethiopia was still quite exciting, and I spent most of my time on that. One thing that happened after we dropped out of the diplomacy game, Taylor made a very stupid mistake. He was very much afraid of Nigeria because Samuel Doe and the president of Nigeria were very close friends, and Doe was appealing to the Nigerians to help him. The Nigerians were reluctant to do anything. Charles Taylor had within his lines between 3,000 and 5,000 Nigerian citizens, people living there since there were a lot of Nigerian business people there, traders and what have you. He said how can I keep the Nigerian troops out? I will keep these people hostage just to make sure the Nigerian army stays away. It had the opposite effect. The Nigerian government was not going to let their Nigerian citizens be held hostage. So, the Nigerians, who had been passive up to that point, suddenly became active, and called a meeting of the Peace and Mediation Committee of the Organization of West African States, ECOWAS. They said we must do something about this. It is not just Nigerian citizens, but there are Sierra Leoneans, and Ghanaians and all kinds of people caught up in this war. We have to save them. Since the Americans are not doing their duty, let's set up a peacekeeping force, separate the fighters, evacuate the citizens, and promote a peaceful settlement. This ran into a buzz saw from the French speakers because they were supporting Charles Taylor. Burkina Faso and Cote D'Ivoire wanted to see the regime overthrown. They had a special relationship with Charles Taylor, so they opposed having such a force. They said the deployment of such a force would require unanimous support of all the ECOWAS countries. That is in the bylaws, and of course, they weren't going to get it. The Nigerians said to hell with you, we've got citizens there, so they firmed a military force with Ghana and Sierra Leone and Gambia and Guinea which is the one French speaking country that did not join with Cote d'Ivoire in refusing this. They decided to send this peacekeeping force which arrived in July of 1990, landing at the port of Monrovia. Charles Taylor saw this as a danger to his winning the war, especially since he didn't trust the Nigerians, and he fought back. He was shelling the ships in the port. Finally the Nigerians established a beachhead and went in and took control of the city, and pushed Charles Taylor's forces out beyond the edge of Monrovia. Inn effect, ECOWAS saved most of the city of Monrovia from starvation. Before they came in, there was no food coming in; it was totally blockaded. So, we were very grateful to the Nigerians for doing this, although the NSC said what is the good if Charles Taylor is resisting and there is fighting. Our argument was they went in with peaceful intentions to establish a peacekeeping operation. If Charles Taylor is firing on them, they have to fire back to protect their troops. That was the end of phase one where at least the city of Monrovia was spared. The fighting continued between Charles Taylor's forces and the ECOWAS force that had the name ECOMOG, the ECOWAS monitoring group. The war was not over. Charles Taylor was very disappointed because he expected to march right in. He had been controlling the whole area around the palace for a couple of months. He felt that we had betrayed him because we had said if you open up escape routes, the Doe troops will run away and you will take over. That didn't account for the arrival of Prince Johnson, the

rebel within his own group, so it was a very complicated deal. In the meantime, the war was still going on. The Marine Corps was still offshore; they were guarding our embassy. I was sort of disengaged because there was nothing left for diplomacy. I remember in August I was on a trip to Africa dealing with these other issues, Ethiopia, Angola and what have you, and I was on my way home. I was coming through Rome where I had a meeting with the Soviets because they were very interested in Angola and Ethiopia. I was about to take a plane to go back to the States when I got a message from my executive assistant, Carl Hoffman, saying don't leave, the NSC wants you to go to Liberia. I said, "What do they want me to go to Liberia for? We were told not to do anything but take care of our citizens." "With all that fighting, there was a feeling that the United States should be seen to be doing something, and not to be seen to be doing nothing. If you go there and visit all the neighboring countries, it will look like we are on a diplomatic offensive of some sort." I understood what that was all about. They actually sent a military plane to pick me up in Rome, and Carl Hoffman was on the plane. We took off from Rome on a Sunday. The first stop was Sierra Leone that was in the war on the ECOMOG side, and I talked to the head of state there. The Navy then gave me a military helicopter to take me to Liberia. It was one of these helicopter gun ships where you know you can go deaf, so I had to have earphones and all that. It was about a 50-minute flight from Freetown to Liberia, and I was with Carl Hoffman. We landed in the embassy compound. I was immediately surrounded by something like 50 marines, fully armed. Bullets were whizzing overhead. They whisked me into the embassy for a country team meeting, and I looked at these marines and I said, "you know, with these guys, we can go downtown and settle the whole thing." Of course we were not allowed to do anything like that. I met with Prince Johnson, and I just talked to the embassy and a few Liberians.

Q: Did you have any message or anything on the plate?

COHEN: No just as you said just a tour d' horizon just to probe what was going on. It was the appearance of my making this trip that was more important. From there, I was whisked over to the ships to sort of build up the morale of the troops, to say diplomacy is working, don't worry. Then I flew to Sierra Leone again, took my plane, and went to Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria for more discussions. It was also arranged that when I was in Cote d'Ivoire, I would fly up to the border with the U.S. ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire and go across the border and talk to Charles Taylor. I went to his camp. It was a very frightening experience for me. Charles Taylor was surrounded by adolescent boys with automatic weapons. How do you know that some of them might not take a pot shot at you? I was very nervous, but anyway we had a talk with Charles Taylor, and being one of these inveterate problem solvers, I said to Charles Taylor, "What can we do to help end the hostilities between you and ECOMOG so that some sort of diplomacy can take place? You told me that you were not interested in power for yourself; you just wanted to get rid of Doe and begin the democratic process. Are you still interested in that?" "Yes!" By the way, I forgot to mention that shortly before my trip, Prince Johnson had captured and assassinated Samuel Doe. So, there was a vacuum of power; there was an interim president, the vice president, and I thought we could hold Charles Taylor to his word. He said all he cared about was getting rid of Doe, not power for himself. He suddenly decided that if there is going to be an interim regime, he had to be the head of it, and he

would bring about elections himself. So, it was quite clear that his whole objective was power for himself. The ECOMOG position was we have nothing against Charles Taylor; we just want a peaceful transition to a democratic solution. We want elections, and if Charles Taylor agrees, we will provide the peacekeeping troops. Charles Taylor said no. "Nigeria is against me. I want Nigeria to leave, and I will make war against them until they leave." So, there was a stalemate. We wondered why Nigeria should be spending all this money and getting casualties, for what? We felt that they were sincere in wanting a democratic solution. So, I spoke to Taylor during our meeting in the jungle clearing, looking very imperious very presidential. I said, "What can we do to promote some sort of peaceful transition here? There is no reason why you couldn't run for election and get elected president. You are the one after all who overthrew this terrible guy, Doe, whom everyone hated. Would you be interested in a cease fire and then discussions about a transition?" He said, "Well if the Americans broker a cease fire with ECOMOG, I'll know it is okay because it is the Americans. You know, you have the authority." He said, "If you had sent troops to the center of Monrovia, we would have surrendered to you. You are our father, our mother, the United States. I can't understand why you don't want to take charge of this problem." I didn't want to explain to him about the NSC process and all that. I just said, "I'm sorry about that, but is there something we can do? Would you be willing to accept a cease-fire for say 60 days if we proposed it to ECOMOG? During this period you can negotiate a transitional government and get the election process going." He said, "If the Americans do it, I will believe it is okay." So then I sent a message back to our ambassador in Monrovia and said, Taylor will agree to a cease-fire. Can you talk to the ECOMOG commander? We talked to the ECOMOG commander and the guy said sure. We are not here to fight. We want to bring about a transition. It is the other guys who are fighting. So they said "Okay" and the cease-fire went into effect. I felt good about it. From there I went on to Nigeria and from Nigeria I went on home. When I got there, I ran into a firestorm of criticism from the NSC. You had no right to do this. You were instructed not to do anything to solve the Liberian problem. You were just there on a fact- finding mission. Why did you do this? I was severely reprimanded by the NSC, by Robert Gates and all that, but my State Department superiors didn't seem to take that too seriously, so I wasn't in any real trouble with them, with James Baker, what have you.

Q: When you talk about the NSC as though this was an entity that makes decisions. NSC really had, Africa is pretty low on their list, so what was causing the NSC, I mean you have got a Nigerian lobby in the United States and all that...

COHEN: Well, the way I analyze it, you are quite right. When Robert Gates said the President doesn't want Hank Cohen to go to Liberia or Samuel Doe to leave, was he speaking for the President? I don't know. James Baker had the same reaction as you and he said who are they to give us orders. We are in charge of this policy. I think it is a good policy to get Doe out of there. Robert Kimmitt, the Under Secretary for political affairs agreed. But, after discussing it for a few days they decided not to fight the NSC or to go to the President because they had other more important issues. If National Security Advisers Scowcroft and Gates, and maybe the President, didn't want us to take charge of the Liberia problem, they weren't going to fight it. But, when I brokered the cease-fire, they were not unhappy even though Robert Gates was unhappy. Anyway, it blew over

very quickly.

Q: Was this something you felt was driven by Gates or Scowcroft, this idea of staying out because it compared to things we were doing it sounded almost like a cost free operation.

COHEN: That's right, it was just diplomacy. Actually later we ended up paying a lot of money to support the ECOWAS when the war dragged on for year after year, and the humanitarian bill was horrendous. It was hundreds of millions of dollars. I didn't get into it originally. One thing I noticed, there was no debate at these Deputies Committee meetings which were chaired by Gates. This was the number two of each agency. As I said, these agencies that had these facilities in Liberia never spoke up. Nobody protested. Even under secretary Kimmitt just sort of listened without uttering much, so I figured there is no support for this, I have other important things to do in Ethiopia and Angola what have you. In those two countries, our relations with the Soviets were very important. In Liberia, there was no other relationship that counted. I found out the true story later when I saw an interview with Scowcroft long after he was out of office. The question was why did the NSC object to the Cohen plan. He said that we felt that if we went in there and asked Doe to leave, we would be saddled with support for Liberia for decades. It would be like our long occupation of Haiti. We would be paying for that country for years and years. This is nonsense because all we were trying to do was get Doe to leave and let Taylor take over. Taylor took over eventually after seven years of war, so it was a really stupid argument, and I regret deeply that there was no real debate. In the deputies committee there was never any real debate. Robert Gates said it is like that and it was like that. Also they felt that they had control of the situation because the deployment of U.S. forces was a presidential decision. So, once the U.S. forces were offshore, the NSC took control of everything, including the diplomatic side. Baker didn't want to fight over that issue.

Q: Sounds like a little bit of a Washington power game.

COHEN: I think Gates found that he could grab some turf that Baker wasn't that interested in. I learned later, and I think I may have mentioned in an earlier tape, that they objected to what I was doing in Ethiopia. But Baker was able to over ride them on that one because I was working with the Soviets, which was a very high priority for Baker and Bush. So, at that point, I even further retreated and we just treated Liberia as a humanitarian case, and we tried to find ways to support ECOMOG by giving them arms and money. This thing dragged on; there was no solution. The cease-fire came and went. Taylor kept insisting he had to be the head of an interim regime. The opposition from the other political parties said they would not accept Taylor, so there was no solution. The fighting continued. At one point Taylor said, "I don't mind having ECOMOG peacekeeping provided I know that they are fair, but that means that someone else besides Nigerians have to be involved. I want somebody totally neutral. Then I can talk about a transitional government." So he said, "Why not the Senegalese. They are much further away. They haven't been involved with Liberia. They are good troops. If you can get the Senegalese to come in, then we can agree." In 1992 toward October, the President of Senegal was invited to make a state visit to Washington. We got President Bush to ask

him if he might be willing to send troops to Liberia because Taylor had said he would work with the Senegalese to bring about a transition. Bush in that sense was willing to exercise a certain amount of diplomacy. We briefed the Senegalese president ahead of time saying Bush is going to ask you about this, so be ready. So the President of Senegal said we want to make this contribution to peace in Liberia, but we can't afford it. Sending 1,500 troops would be expensive. Will the U.S. be able to foot the bill? With the President asking him to do that, we were able to get the other agencies to foot the bill. It was mainly Defense Department providing equipment off the shelf for no cost. In fact, we even found some vehicles sitting in warehouses in Senegal that had been ordered by Samuel Doe which could no longer be delivered, so we got them to take over these vehicles to be used by Senegalese troops. Anyway we worked out a good deal. It was a very good visit. They agreed on deployment of Senegalese troops with U.S. assistance. I think that Bush was feeling a little guilty that we hadn't done anything, and he felt good about getting the Senegalese involved and helping them. So, the Senegalese were deployed, and that turned out to be a disaster because Taylor turned out to be a liar when he said he would work with the Senegalese, and he didn't. In fact when the Senegalese came upon by accident a cache of weapons that should have been turned in, the Senegalese troops who found it were murdered by Charles Taylor's people. So, the Senegalese immediately pulled their troops out and the war continued. By the time I left in '93 there was no solution. ECOMOG was still there fighting. We were slowly but surely giving money to ECOMOG to help them, but we were engaged in no diplomacy. I believe that after I left, slowly but surely we began to get our feet wet again with talks. But most of the diplomacy was done by the West African states themselves. Every six months they were having summit conferences, calling Taylor in, so the final solution was in effect done by the west Africans themselves. I just want to make sure that we finish Liberia to your satisfaction.

Q: I still come back to this NSC thing. Did the NSC sort of back away later on our involvement in Liberia because it obviously they pushed us away in one place and yet we found ourselves getting more and more involved no matter what.

COHEN: The NSC found that there was increasing discontent within the Congress which was under a lot of pressure from Liberians living here in exile, as well as their friends, especially the AME church. When they sent me on that so-called fact finding mission, it was already a slight reversal of policy. Then, when President Bush agreed to finance Senegalese troops, that was a major reversal of policy. So, after the Senegalese had their disaster, and of course by that time we had removed all the marines because all citizens who wanted to leave had left by that time. There were still maybe 1,000 left. With the marines no longer deployed in Liberia, and after Bush had helped the Senegalese, NSC let the State Department run it. There was nothing more we could do except support the West African diplomatic effort as time went on.

Q: What about concern about our embassy in Monrovia during this time?
COHEN: With the troops there, they were always completely safe. None of the Liberian side wanted to mess around with U.S. Marines. Occasionally a bullet would fly overhead, but it wasn't aimed at us; it was just wild bullets flying around. In fact, there was a

compound opposite our embassy across the street where several thousand Liberians had taken refuge and they had come under our protection umbrella, too. So, there was never any danger. My visit there showed me what we already know in the foreign service, that this type of thing causes good morale. People were working together and supporting each other what have you, so it was a real good operation going on there.

Q: All right why don't we for the next time, we have pretty much covered Africa except for South Africa, so we will talk about South Africa during this '89 to '93 period.

COHEN: It was a very interesting operation there.

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Q: Today is May 21, 1998. Hank, what was the state of South Africa when you sort of appeared n the scene?

COHEN: Well, my first conversation with James Baker demonstrated to me that he didn't have that much time for Africa. He was spending mostly on the middle East. He said to me "I have two priorities for you. One is to keep in touch with the Congress and get rid of the bitterness over Africa, particularly South Africa, that was inherited from the Reagan administration. There was tremendous bad feeling between the Congress and the Reagan administration over South Africa, and I want you to give very high priority to changing that." The other thing was on the question of covert operations on Angola where he said we should find a way of getting out of that. "The rest," he said, "I leave to you. I'm not going to get too involved in Africa." So I had my marching orders, and I immediately started consulting with Congress on this issue. What I found from people who were not ideologically involved either being pro South Africa regime because it was anticommunist, people like Senator Helms, or people who were on the opposite extreme, let's nuke South Africa because of apartheid and all that. Very reasonable middle of the road members of Congress like Senator Borah and Senator Lugar, various Congressmen, Congressman Houghton for example, they said look we are all anti apartheid but we know it has to be a slow process. You can't have a revolution there. We are against violence. The big mistake the Reagan administration made was in not giving the Congress credit in their sanction legislation of 1986, not giving them credit for striking a blow against apartheid. They denounced Congress and this was a big mistake because we are all against apartheid, and the sanctions weren't that bad. They were kind of mild. If the new Bush administration could show some gesture toward us as being anti-apartheid, you will get appreciation back. So I kept that in my mind and visited South Africa, but in 1989 some interesting things were happening on the ground in South Africa. The old generation of people in their 80's who had really started apartheid in 1948, they were fading out. The President P.W. Botha was a sick man, and he couldn't last much longer. There was a new generation of white Afrikaner leaders in their 50's who were getting ready to take over. These people were much more enlightened and saw that for South Africa to prosper and continue to be a prosperous industrialized country, that the blacks had to be brought in to the system. It wasn't just a question of political rights. Africans had to become consumers and producers because they were the vast majority of the

people. You can't continue to run a modern economy on just 5,000,000 white people when you had 30,000,000 blacks who were not producing anything. So the idea was get them education, get them training, get them more participation in politics. We saw that was happening, but our big problem was since it was a Democratic majority in the Congress, was to stave off increases of sanctions. There were some people who felt that South Africa hasn't made any progress. Sanctions have made them think. Let's get more sanctions to really topple that terrible regime. So, our problem was to walk a fine line between evolution in South Africa and what was happening in Congress. When we saw that F.W. de Klerk was going to be president of the country, this was in the middle of 1989 around August, James Baker said to me why don't you go down there and interview this guy and see if he is for real. See if he is really going to make changes or is he just going to be the same old stuff but maybe with a pleasant face, something like that. So, I went down there. They were in the middle of their election campaign where F.W. de Klerk was running for president. He received me for an hour. He interrupted his campaign. We had a one on one conversation and he told me very frankly that he grew up under apartheid, he made his career under apartheid, he had no apologies for apartheid, but as a new grandfather he saw that unless changes were made, there could be no future for his grandson. He said we have got to change. Apartheid was something we believed in, but we know it is not going to work. He didn't have a moralistic view, he had a very pragmatic view of the thing. He said we are going to change things. You will see. I went back and reported to Baker, and he said well what we have to do now is stave off the new sanctions. Let's find a way to do that. Let's work with Congress. So, I spoke to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee people. I said, remembering what I was told, that Congress wanted a little bit of credit. So they set up a hearing on the situation in South Africa, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. They said we are going to ask you what were the impact of sanctions. We are going to expect you to say that sanctions were helpful in this evolution that is taking place. We hope you are going to say that. So this led up to a very big internal fight within n the State Department because President Bush himself was opposed to sanctions. He didn't believe in it as a way of making change in South Africa. So, I said we are going to get this question. What are we going to say? I proposed language which was the main economic impact of sanctions has hurt the black more than the whites because they have had more unemployment as a result. They have lost income and what have you. However, sanctions have had a strong psychological impact on the white ruling structure, and because of that, one of the reasons for that is that they are now changing. They are making profound changes and we are expecting fairly good things to happen we hope. Now we knew that the left wing would not agree with that, but it might buy us some time. There was a big fight. People in the White House didn't want to say anything good about sanctions, they didn't want to make any concessions, but finally James Baker convinced everyone that my language was acceptable. We weren't saying sanctions were the greatest; we are just saying it contributed to a change in mentality. So the question was asked in the hearing, and it was fully attended. Every member of the Foreign Relations Committee was there which is unusual for an African issue. Usually there is two Senators, something like that. They were all there and the question was asked, and I gave this answer which had been worked out in advance. Senator Simon of Illinois got very happy. He was Chairman of the Africa subcommittee at the time. He actually was chairing the hearing. He said I am very pleased to hear that, and that is very

good, and I hope we will continue working together. But, Senator Sarbanes of Maryland who was part of the very rabid anti- apartheid side the liberal left, being a very crafty lawyer. He said, "Mr. Cohen, that is a very interesting answer but if you say that the sanctions which were imposed in 1986 which were of a rather limited nature had a very important impact, don't you think that more sanctions will have more of an impact and really push this apartheid regime out? had a very important impact, don't you think that more sanctions will have more of an impact and really push this apartheid regime out? You say good things are happening, but when do you think we should look at this again at some point?" I had known from our intelligence information and other sources that de Klerk if he got elected, that he was going to be releasing Mandela sometime in the first quarter of 1990 and legalize all political parties including the ANC and the Communist Party. I said, and this was October, "Senator, let's give it another six months. If within six months there has been no real positive change, let's take another look at more sanctions." This caused a tremendous uproar in South Africa. The press was full of statements from the government we don't accept deadlines from the United States. They can't impose any deadlines on us. We resent this tremendously. But, in the State Department they were saying great work, Hank, you have bought us some time because otherwise we could have had more sanctions now. So I said, "Well it is up to the South Africans. We are giving them six months, and if they do all the right things, then the whole issue will fade away." So, this is exactly what happened. De Klerk got elected in September; he took office, I think, in December. The new parliament met in late January. When the new Parliament met, he announced his changes. All political parties are now legalized including the African National Congress and the Communist Party of South Africa. He hinted that he would release Mandela, although he didn't give a date. Our diplomacy changed from one of putting pressure on them to change the system to working with them to see how they can have a smooth transition.

Q: What were you getting from our embassy in South Africa during this critical time when the new man was coming on, de Klerk. Were they seeing the same thing that you were hoping to see?

COHEN: Yes, they were seeing the same thing. They had a lot of confidence in de Klerk. They said this is for real. It is going to change, and there will be major developments during this first six months when he takes over, so they were confirming everything. Actually the one thing after I interviewed de Klerk personally, I was so impressed with him, with his sincerity and his pragmatism and all that, I said to Baker, why don't you invite him to come to Washington. He is now minister of education. You are minister of foreign affairs. Invite him minister to minister, and then maybe we can take him in to see Bush in the White House as a way of encouraging him and telling the South African people we like this guy. This initiative of mine totally collapsed because in the White House, I think it was Mr. Sununu who was the chief of staff at the time. He said no because Bush is already being tagged s being pro-apartheid because he was against sanctions. If we now invite de Klerk before he has done anything, it would look bad politically. I was looking at it strictly from a foreign policy point of view, encouraging de Klerk, but from a domestic point of view it would look bad, so we lost that fight. Baker told me personally that he supported me, but I don't know. He told me that he made the

recommendation. Anyway, that didn't work out. So our whole plan had to change from pushing change to helping midwife change in South Africa. After Mandela was released, of course, the whole issue of more sanctions faded away. With the hard liners in this country, that is the pro-apartheid, they said we can't let down our guard. We have to keep up the pressure. We don't believe these guys, it might be fake. Just releasing Mandela doesn't mean... it was always the whole thing. We have got to keep putting pressure on them. On the other hand the anti-sanctions people were saying everything is okay now. Let's lift sanctions. Fortunately, the sanctions legislation had its own clauses that said when it could be lifted, what had to be done, very precise things. One of them was Mandela had to be released, but there were other things that had to be done, so we were trying to work with the government to help them implement various changes.

Q: Hank, what was our reading on Mandela? Now, of course people know, but I mean here is a man who had been in jail for 27 years. What was our reading? I mean were we concerned that we might be putting too much emphasis on somebody that might turn out to be a Lumumba or something like that?

COHEN: It was a consideration because we knew that Mandela was sort of living in a time warp. When he went into jail in the early 60's, he was part of the whole African national Congress' belief in socialism, communism, government and everything. It was a traditional third world view of life, but we knew that he was a national hero and he was the one who had to lead South Africa into the future. There I must give a lot of credit to the United States Information Agency. What we did is, understanding that the whole African national Congress was living in this time warp, we said we have to do a lot to educate these people. We asked AID to give money to USIA; I think they got something like $2,000,000. They systematically worked on all these ANC leaders whether they were living inside South Africa or outside South Africa, bringing them to the United States, seeing how the capitalist system worked, and also sending them to Russia and Eastern Europe to see how the socialist system worked. There was a tremendous eye opener for many of these people. When Mandela was finally released and they started looking toward the future, they were at least willing to think about alternative systems. Also, they looked at what was happening in the rest of Africa, that the socialist systems, state planning systems had not worked in the rest of Africa, so they were open to new ideas. Eventually Mandela himself accepted that those old ideas didn't work. Probably even more important than what we did, the Soviets who were very friendly with the ANC, they were giving them money and taking good care of them, said look these old ideas don't work. Take it from us; we tried them ourselves.

Q: You were benefitting, this was one of the spinoffs of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

COHEN: Yes. We benefited from the fact that majority rule in South Africa was coming later so they could learn from the mistakes of the other African countries. The Soviet influence was very strong. Don't do what we do; don't make the same mistakes we did. Go capitalist and so on. So that was very easy. At that point our role changed from one of putting pressure on the apartheid regime to one of trying to keep the transition on the right track, and we knew there were going to be very tough negotiations. The minority

whites wanting to maintain their economic status, wanting to be protected against red majority rule. So, the whites were not going to give up power without real concessions. Of course, the blacks were saying majority rule means majority rule, things like that, so it was going to be a tough negotiation, and we wanted to be helpful in all of that. We knew it was going to be slow negotiation; it would be tough. There would be breakdowns, and we wanted to position ourselves to be useful in that process. So, we had very close working relationships with the British and the Germans who were very active as well. The three ambassadors were meeting weekly and working on tactics. Now, one thing that was much different in South Africa from the rest of Africa going through these transitions or post conflict we call it, they did not want mediators. This was true of the whites as well as the blacks. We are all South Africans and we will work it out ourselves, which I thought was encouraging because they shared a common culture. The whites and the blacks were all South Africans. It wasn't like the blacks said you guys are white colonialists and you come from Mars; you are South Africans too; let's work it out. I was very happy with that. A lot of my colleagues were saying they are never going to get anywhere without a mediator. Some of the British were saying the same thing. What actually happened was what I call invisible mediation. They started a process called Codesa which was a sort of council of negotiators from the various political parties, the white parties, the ANC, all of the African parties got together in a formalized negotiating forum where they set up an agenda with all the problems. What kind of government is it going to be. What would the transition period be. What were going to be the powers of the central government and the federal. All these were out on the table for discussion. Human rights situations, bill of rights, all these things were being discussed, grandfather clauses for civil servants, very detailed discussions. Inevitably in these sorts of things, these discussions would reach impasse. Now, of course, there was no mediator, they were just sort of cochairing these meetings. When they reached impasse, the first thing they did was to call in the Americans, the British, and the French and say, not the French, the Germans. The French were kind of on the margins of all this. They would say look what those guys are doing. They are being unreasonable; they won't agree. The ANC would call in the ambassadors and then the government would call in the ambassadors for support. This was just what our guys were waiting for, and in effect, they started mediating even though they were not formal mediators. This is what I call the invisible mediation, you know, giving ideas on how to break the impasse and all that.

Q: Just within this group of three, they would meet often among themselves and sit and look at the problem so there would be a joint response.

COHEN: Usually would be joint, yes. Not always, but usually, because we were all pretty much on the same wavelength. We weren't promoting our own national interest; it was just to get the transition going. So, I would say in many important issues, the influence of these three governments was very strong in breaking the impasse. Occasionally they would call in bigger guns from capitals when they could not, and I was called in a couple of times to go down there. For example, at one point the negotiations broke down because while talks were going on, terrorist incidents were increasing. Different African factions were shooting each other in the African townships. The Inkatha party Buthelezi were attacking ANC vice versa, and these incidents were increasing. The black

leadership, the ANC, felt this was a deliberate attempt by the government to sort of torpedo negotiations. Just like you are having in the middle east now where Israel is saying we won't negotiate unless we have peace. Anyway, the ANC said unless these attacks on ANC people stop, we will not negotiate any further. This was sometime in about 1993. No, I'm sorry, before that, sometime in 1991 when this took place. So, the embassy asked me to come down and work on it. I gave a press conference where they asked me about this. I said, "If you say that you will not negotiate or continue this process until violence stops, the people who don't want this process will guarantee there will be violence. In effect you are inviting these people to provide more violence. The only way to stop this violence is to continue the process." This was followed by editorials in the press saying this is the voice of reason. Mr. Cohen is right. Don't give in to terrorists, but the way to stop this is to continue the process. So the ANC agreed and they continued the process. This is just one example of how what we call invisible mediation had an impact and kept the thing going.

Q: How did we find the Inkatha and Buthelezi. These always seem to be the odd men out, not quite. It seemed to be a divergence from what was generally happening. How did we see them at that time?

COHEN: Buthelezi was one of the original founders of the African National Congress. He was a colleague of Mandela and all that, but they parted company because he decided to work within the system rather than outside the system. He was the leader of the Quazulu Natal homeland as the whites called it. Now the way he showed his loyalty to the anti-apartheid cause was by refusing to become an independent state. The whole idea behind apartheid was the Africans would have their own independent states and the whites would have their own independent state. Of course, the white would have all the good land and the resources, and the blacks would have just poor patches of land. The white government had persuaded two black homelands to become independent. One was Transkei and the other was Bophuthatswana which had their own puppet governments. They wanted Buthelezi to have his own independent homeland, and he said, “No, I will not do it until Mandela is released from prison,” so he showed his loyalty. The anti-apartheid fanatics both in this country and in South Africa said he was totally a part of the apartheid system. He was beyond the pale. He could only be eliminated. Now when Mandela who was very sensitive to loyalty, he came out of prison wanting to embrace Buthelezi because Buthelezi was loyal to him, but he was faced with the ANC people in Buthelezi's own province. That is where a lot of the violence was going on. ANC was fighting Buthelezi's Inkatha party. These were the same tribal people. So the people in Natal who belonged to the ANC said to Mandela you cannot embrace this guy. He has been killing our people; he is the enemy. So, Mandela stepped back. He didn't call him the enemy but just refused to reconcile with him. This caused a lot of continued fighting. He only reconciled with Buthelezi later when he saw that it was absolutely necessary. Of course Buthelezi was coopted into the system; he was part of the negotiations. He later became a minister in the independent majority rule government. In this country he was also controversial. The Republicans liked Buthelezi, they saw him a s a pro west moderate. One of my first conversations with Ronald Reagan he said, "Do you know Buthelezi? I said, "Yes, Mr. President." He said, "I like Buthelezi." But, anyway, it didn't

really have that much impact on the negotiations which was really between the ANC and the de Klerk government. The U.S. had steady impact through these mediation roles. In 1992, they reached another very difficult impasse where it looked like the negotiations were really breaking down and were very difficult over constitutional issues and how much protection the whites would have. To what extent, what was needed to change the constitution. They were really getting very difficult. At that point James Baker called me in. He said, "Look, I have been reading the press; I have seen the intelligence report and listening to what you have been saying at staff meetings. I am getting concerned about this because peace within South Africa is within our grasp. What would you think if we offered to become mediators just like we are doing in the Middle East. This would be at the higher level, not just at your level but at the Secretary of State level." I could tell that he was really anxious to get involved because the saw that as a good domestic political issue that would be good for Bush. We were not that far away from the next presidential election. Knowing as I did that the South Africans did not want mediators, I probably should have said to him look they are probably going to refuse, but I didn't say that. I said, "Well, they have been reluctant but no harm trying, especially since they have reached this impasse." The next event after that was the President's annual barbecue for the diplomatic corps which was held on the White House lawn. It is the annual event, and all the Assistant Secretaries were invited and all that. You could see the way both Bush and Baker were running after the South African ambassador talking to him about being a mediator, buttering him up and that sort of thing. But, just as they have done in the past, the South Africans rejected the whole idea and said we will work it out on our own, so Baker was disappointed.

Q: There was never a public announcement.

COHEN: No, it was just something in house.

Q: During this critical period, were you or Baker or anybody feeling the pressure of the Black Caucus in Congress an also black leaders both formal and informal leaders on this sort of thing.

COHEN: Yes, well, there were two types of pressure. One was do not lift sanctions until Mandela is sworn in as president, whereas Bush was very anxious to lift sanctions. We were sort of caught in the middle because the law listed five things that have to be certified. Now we were anxious to certify these things. For example, all political prisoners must be released. Now, how do you define what a political prisoner is, so I just turned it over to the lawyers. I said look you go out there. They did release a lot of prisoners, what they considered to be political prisoners, but the ANC was saying you know, we have a list of 6,000 people who are still in prison. Our lawyers were looking into it and visiting them. Many of them were just common criminals, rapists and thieves that sort of thing, but after a certain time the lawyers were willing to sign a statement saying that as far as we are concerned, all political prisoners have been released. The Black Caucus and others were saying nonsense, so we were constantly having these little fights about whether or not we should lift sanctions. That was one sort of pressure. The other pressure was Black Caucus people saw that the ANC was having difficulty

organizing itself. Their leaders were in prison or in exile. They were facing a political campaign. How do they implant themselves in the nation. They needed offices; they needed fax machines; they needed all sorts of things. Now, the white government wasn't about to give them all of that stuff. I remember the Black Caucus calling Baker for a meeting on this issue. Baker took me along. He went to the hill to meet with them. There was Congressman Dellums, Congressman Gray, and a few others who were leaders on this issue. They had just come back from a trip to South Africa where the ANC had pleaded with them, "Look, we need some help." So, they laid out this problem to Baker and said we think the U.S. government to level the playing field should give assistance to the ANC. Baker's reaction to that was normally we don't give aid to political parties in foreign countries. This is interference you know. Where would we be if we were subsidizing parties all over the world. We generally don't do that. Secondly, if we were going to do that, how could we only work with the ANC. There are other political parties there too. How do we decide? The Black Caucus would have none of that because the ANC is the liberating force you know. So, they used a very interesting ploy which got Baker's attention. They said we are 25 votes in the Congress. Your biggest priority right now is aid to Poland, which is very controversial because they are still a communist regime and all that sort of thing, which I didn't know much about.

Q: There are a hell of a lot of Polish votes out there.

COHEN: Right. He said you are going to need our votes for that. We'll make a deal with you. We'll vote solidly for aid to Poland which doesn't interest us at all. None of our constituents are Polish. If you agree to give $10,000,000 to the ANC. Baker took about 30 seconds to think about it and said you have got a deal. That was very happy. We left and so then the question was how do you work that out. Congressman Gray was the chairman of the House subcommittee on operations which controlled funding for foreign aid. He organized the legislative side of it making it legal. The one thing we insist no because of Buthelezi's heavy support in Republican circles was to give some of that money to Buthelezi's. Everyone agreed that we should not turn over cash, but we should buy fax machines and Xerox machines and office space, that sort of thing. It turned out $8,000,000 went to the ANC and $2,000,000 went to the Inkatha Freedom Party.

Q: There was something called the Institute for Democracy that Congress had established. Was there any agency you kind of put it through, or did it go straight? How did we work it?

COHEN: In this particular case it was done through USAID which had an office down there. AID had been there throughout the apartheid period helping civil society, not giving any money to the government, of course. They were there and were able to administer this money, so that kept the Black Caucus happy and kept the pro Buthelezi people happy. The last controversy we had was when we came to certify that those five conditions had been met which was something like mid '92. We were ready to go, and the left wing liberals were still not content. They had big House hearings that Congressman Solarz was chairing. I was called up and I went down the line, read all the lawyers opinions and al of these things. They just wanted to vent their spleen on all of this, but

they didn't try to pass legislation blocking us. That, of course, made the right wing Bush people very happy that we were able to accomplish that. One last controversy we had was on inviting de Klerk and Mandela to the United States to celebrate this. Now this was before Mandela became President; it was still during the transition.

Q: Had they been talking to each other in this rather famous period where they had tea together and started to get to know each other and working that way?

COHEN: Well, the tea business was mainly while Mandela was still a prisoner when he was talking to the previous president P.W. Botha. There were all sorts of anecdotes about how they were preparing for this for about five years before and they would take him out to towns and walk through shopping centers. Nobody recognized him because they remember him as a young man going to prison. Here he was a grey haired old guy. He was such a charismatic person and such a humanistic person that the prison guards all fell in love with him. He was so special. They tell the story when he went in to see P.W. Botha for one of these teas, the prison guard taking him in said, "Oh Mr. Mandela, your shoe is untied." So, Mandela was bending down to tie his shoe and the prison guard got down on his knees and tied his shoe. Here was a white guy tying the shoe of a black man. It was an example of the way things were changing. The last controversy we had was over the visit, inviting them; de Klerk was president. Mandela was still nothing. He was still head of the ANC but of course the great god. So when we asked them to come to Washington it was a question of availability. De Klerk was available in March, and Mandela was available in June, so we wanted to set that up, but this caused a big fight here because the Black Caucus didn't want de Klerk coming first. They wanted Mandela to come first. Finally de Klerk said look I don't want to get into this. Invite Mandela first; I'll come afterward. That didn't cause too much of a problem. In de Klerk's visit we had a certain amount of demonstrations but it was very weak. Most people appreciated him for what he was, a man who made some very important vital decisions for his country. It was a great sacrifice for his own power structure.

Q: I take it in a way you were helped by having George Bush as President because Ronald Reagan would tend to say I like so and so and this would tend to set the whole apparatus in one direction where it might not want to go by the people who kind of knew the field. Bush was much more of a pragmatist.

COHEN: That's true. I think Reagan's attitude had a tendency to encourage the whites not to give in; whereas, Bush, we want to protect the whites, but you have to give in. Plus the diehards in South Africa, not all of them were extremists, were encouraged to hold out by Reign's view; although, de Klerk himself had made some important decisions under Reagan. Bush's view was apartheid must end, but the whites must be protected. This encouraged de Klerk to move ahead knowing that the Americans would do everything possible to safeguard white minority interest.

Q: I know when I was in INR in 1967'68 or so, we all talked, it was African INR, about the night of long knives you know when blacks took over. It was going to happen. By this time was it pretty clear for those of you in the field that it was going to probably have

what would be termed a soft landing?

COHEN: We were worried about that, but we were less worried because of Mandela himself because he had a reconciliation policy. But, there were forces out there that were very anti-white. You had the African National Congress which adhered to Mandela's program of all people whatever their color, they are South Africans, they are citizens. We want them to stay; we want them to participate in the new South Africa. This was the majority view, and we felt this was going to prevail. You had people out there like the PanAfricanist Congress which was very anti-white. They had this slogan one white, one bullet, no one settler, one bullet, which meant we want them out. Also there was the black consciousness movement which wasn't saying we want them out but which was you know blacks could take everything and whites can take the crumbs basically. We were concerned about it. We maintained contacts with these people in the PanAfricanist Congress and elsewhere, but we really were optimistic that the ANC view would prevail, and it did. The first election they ever had, the PanAfricanist Congress which was free to voice its view, one settler, one bullet, got one percent of the vote.

Q: What about sort of using the terms that are use today in Northern Ireland, what about the hard men both on the white side and on the black side? These were people who wanted to settle things with a gun or something.

COHEN: Well, the pan Africanist Congress was at least willing to have decisions made by the ballot box, so when they only got one percent of the vote, they saw where they stood. They knew they had to revise their view. Of course the ANC was very smart and took a number of the leaders of the Pan Africanist Congress and gave them very good jobs. For example, the president of the Pan Africanist Congress became the head of the South African telecommunication corp. It was like that all along, so that was totally defused. It was more of a problem on the white side where some of the extremists thought that the new constitution writing was bad for white interests. They thought they could stir up the people to the old days when they took their rifles and there was a certain amount of meetings with militant talk. People going out and getting guns and shooting them off and that sort of thing. What they found was the vast majority of the whites weren't buying in to that, and that faded out fairly fast.

Q: How about the South African armed forces? Was that considered a problem or was that fairly well under control?

COHEN: It was considered under control in the sense that Mandela and others gave reassurances very early on to the whites that they would not be displaced. This was true not just for the army but for the whole civil service. Nobody is going to be fired; you will all stay in place. We will bring blacks in to learn, to be apprentices. It is going to bloat the civil service too much, but it is a price worth paying for peace and harmony. Of course there always have been a lot of blacks in the military in sub categories and some officers. In fact they even had some black colonels in the military. There was this tradition of working together, so nobody ever worried about them.

Q: Did you and obviously James Baker ever have to call on President Bush to make one of his famous telephone calls? He knew all the world leaders and all that. Did that ever come about or did he stay away from that?

COHEN: I believe if I remember correctly that he did call de Klerk a couple of times and he did call Mandela a couple of times to encourage them on certain negotiating positions when there were impasses.

Q: How about our embassy. Was our embassy heavily taxed to get out and start making contacts or were they pretty well in place with both sides?

COHEN: The embassy under the first black ambassador, Ed Perkins, he organized it in a way that contacts were made deep into the black community way before Mandela's release. So, when Mandela came out, we already had lines out to all of the black leaders. I remember my visit before de Klerk even came in. I was always being taken out to the black townships to meet leaders who were under house arrest, that sort of thing, so they were way ahead of everyone else in that area.

Q: What about with sanctions? I remember at the time sanctions were put in place, there was concern that we were making American companies sort of sell off their equity in companies that were in South Africa. These were being picked up for a song by other people, either South Africans or other countries. What about the economics of this?

COHEN: Basically the sanctions legislation did not require American companies to disinvest. This was one of the controversies in the Congress, and the famous Lugar compromise was that we would prohibit new investments, but companies already there would not be required to disinvest. A number of companies got out anyway because they did not want to be associated with the regime, and they had their shareholders and pension funds were putting pressure on them, so a lot of them got out. Apple Computer, for example, a lot of companies got out. Others came under pressure from state and municipal government. A lot of states and cities like San Francisco passed laws saying any company doing business in South Africa cannot do business in our city. You cannot bid on contracts. That also drove some companies to back off. So, where you had something like 380 companies before the sanctions, it went down to about 150 that were willing to stick it out. We had a big problem with the state and local government. First of all we didn't like it because state and local government shouldn't be doing foreign policy. They weren't just doing it for South Africa, they were doing it for Northern Ireland as well. There was a case in Chicago where the municipal pension fund was required by the city council to sell all shares in companies operating in South Africa. The pension fund didn't want to do that because they said we are going to lose money on that, so they went to court to challenge that decision. A lot of us in the State Department wanted the U.S. government to be a friend of the court and say they should disallow this ruling by the municipal council because it is interference in foreign policy. They shouldn't be making foreign policy. We took it all to the highest level. We failed because the Justice Department believed more in states rights, it is their money, let them spend it the way they want, than the believed in fighting sanctions or this other issue. This is an issue

which is still out there. We have the issue now of Nigeria where various state and local governments are passing laws. We lost that one, but it was a major controversy within the administration. Another thing that was interesting was that companies that stayed, all voluntarily adhered to something called the Sullivan principles. Reverend Sullivan of Philadelphia who was a member of the board of General Motors. He said that companies who stay in South Africa should do the following, train workers to give them higher skills, bring blacks into middle management, help them with housing all that sort of thing. So, in fact the American companies that remained in South Africa became a force for fighting apartheid by helping blacks do better in the workplace.

Q: Well, did you feel that while all this was going on American business investment was sort of chomping at the bit and saying can we get in now and all that, or did the business side have much to do with your work?

COHEN: The business, I spent a lot of my time as Assistant Secretary receiving business executives to talk about South Africa. They were all keeping a close watch because many of them were saying, as soon as the politics are okay, we are going to go back in. In fact, a number of them arranged their departure in such a way that they had a right to come back in. Legally they had some sort of ownership rights or reinvestment rights. So they were coming to see me when is apartheid going to end, this year or next year. They were keeping their fingers to the pulse closely.

Q: During the election of '92 in the United States, was there any South African element to it or not?

COHEN: In the U.S. election of '92, virtually none.

Q: Things had moved by that time.

COHEN: By '92 the issue was mainly defused, yes.

Q: When the Clinton administration came in, I assume you left at that point.

COHEN: I left at that point. The basic decisions had been made. Both Mandela and de Klerk had come to the U.S. Elections were scheduled for 1994, the first parliamentary and presidential elections had been scheduled. Clinton mainly had the thing of the post apartheid relationship. That is when they decided to set up the U.S. South Africa joint commission where the Vice President was the chairman of our side. They have developed a very close and intensive relationship since then, but they didn't have to do anything about the transition; that was complete essentially by then.

Q: I assume you were intimately involved in the visits of de Klerk and Mandela. What was your impression of their coming to the States?

COHEN: Well, the Mandela thing, of course was a great celebration. It wasn't just a visit. The White House lawn with all the trappings and what have you. It was a very big deal.

Bush, of course, took as much advantage of that as possible, and he brought Thabo Mbeki with him who was slated to be his replacement. We had some very substantive talks about economic issues, economic policies. We think we helped educate Thabo Mbeki especially on some of his old fashioned ideas. With de Klerk, it was mainly reassuring him that we would do everything possible to protect the rights of minorities. De Klerk, of course, did not get a lot of crowds outside the White House cheering him on, but people showed respect for him.

Q: Did you have Mayor Barry demonstrating in front of the gate there in front of the South African embassy?

COHEN: No, by that time, that sort of thing had gone away. Especially since we had Mandela come first, so there was really no more problem there.

Q: Well we are about at the end of this I guess. I think we have covered most of it.

COHEN: Yes, I think we have covered South Africa more or less.

Q: What was your impression of the Clinton transition. Sometimes particularly between a Democratic and Republican administration, sometimes in some bureaus there is a problem. Was there any How did it work in your impression?

COHEN: I thought the transition was pretty smooth. There was very little disagreement on policy. The Somali operation was going on, and Clinton people had approved of it in the first place, and they sort of took it over. As far as Africa was concerned, there were no policy problems. The one thing I noticed in the two or three months that I overlapped with my successor was that there was a strong emphasis on non-interventionism or non-activism, let me put it that way. Whereas we had a policy of being very active in conflict resolution, they decided to be less active and less aggressive.

Q: What was sort of the intellectual underpinning for that do you think?

COHEN: I'm not sure but I think Secretary Christopher felt that he had certain priorities, and he didn't want other things to get in the way. I think he felt that we overdid the activism in Africa in trying to deal with conflict resolution. I remember going with my successor, George Moose, to see the new under secretary for Political Affairs about Zaire. Zaire was getting to be very turbulent, and it looked dicey and it could blow up. I had some ideas about pushing Mobutu more toward the exit. I went up and I convinced my successor that this was the way to go. We had already started to impose sanctions on Mobutu. So, we went up to see Peter Tarnoff, a political appointee.

Q: Peter he was the under secretary for Political Affairs.

COHEN: Yes, he had been a career Foreign Service but went outside and came back as a political appointee. Anyway, he listened very carefully. He didn't pour cold water on it but he said you know let's not leap into anything. We'll have procedures and we have to

go through a lot of discussions. What I found was this was an example of how the administration was going to be running foreign policy which was a lot of deliberation, a lot of discussion, but very little action. Not allowing people at my level to be really independent. This was true for all bureaus, not just Africa bureau. I think that many of the initiatives that I had been able to take on my own with Baker not even looking would have been impossible under the next government.

Q: Well, just to sort of finish this up, Hank, when you left, what did you do? You left I assume in the spring of '93.

COHEN: In January, Secretary Christopher called me in and said it will take a few months for your successor to be approved so I want you to stay which was a compliment to me because a number of other Assistant Secretaries were not asked to stay. It was just placed in the hands of an acting. He said we like you; we want you to stay. He said I am going to send your name to the White House to be ambassador to Belgium which I felt very good about and very happy, but it didn't work out because the President wanted a political appointee in that job. I sort of was hanging around from April. I got some speaking assignments to go around the country from the Council on Foreign Relations what have you. That kept me busy. USIA sent me overseas to talk to African audiences, so that kept me a little busy. I started doing research for my book about conflict intervention. In August, I got a call from the Global Coalition for Africa saying gee would you be interested, we are having a vacancy for someone like you. Having worked in the Foreign Service for so long, I was still reluctant to break away. You know how it is, it is the family. So, I talked to Personnel and they said well, the Global Coalition is really part of the World Bank System. We can send you there as an intergovernmental assignment, like sending someone to the UN. Why don't you go there. We'll keep paying your salary, no they said they will pay your salary but you will keep accruing retirement credit. So I went over to Global Coalition. Toward November, I started thinking 38 years is enough after all and they are not going to make me ambassador to Paris which is what I really want. This is a nice place, Global Coalition. It keeps me in Africa, so I decided to retire and stayed on with Global Coalition.

Q: While we are talking right now, you might just explain briefly what Global Coalition is and does.

COHEN: Global Coalition is an intergovernmental group meaning that the members are African governments and governments that give aid to Africa. They have periodic discussions on economic policy. The objective is what do African governments have to do in terms of economic policy to accelerate economic growth. How can the donors help them accelerate economic growth. So, we organize meetings; we write papers; we do research. I found it very interesting because Africans and the donors are speaking very frankly to each other. We don't keep records; we just have good solid discussions.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much.

COHEN: Well, thank you.

End of interview