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

CONSUL GENERAL CHARLES L. DARIS

Interviewed by: Raymond Ewing
Initial interview date: March 3, 1998

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background
- Born and raised in Massachusetts
- U.S. Navy
- University of San Francisco

Kabul, Afghanistan - Political Officer 1964-1966
- AID Helmand River project
- Russian embassy relations

State Department - Counterinsurgency Training 1966

Saigon, Vietnam - USAID - Provincial Advisor 1967-1969
- Environment
- Pacification program
- Special assistant to Ambassador Bunker
- Ambassador Bunker
- Tet offensive
- Security
- Duties

Paris, France - Paris Peace Talks 1969-1971
- Phil Habib
- Kissinger involvement
- Relations with Viet Cong delegates
- De Gaulle's death
- President Nixon's Paris visit
- French assistance
- U.S. delegation personnel

State Department - Southeast Asia (Laos Desk) 1971-1972
- Operational problems

State Department - West Africa Desk 1972-1973
- Sahel crisis
- Ivory Coast
- Humanitarian needs
- Houphouet-Boigny visit
- French-U.S. irritations

State Department - Foreign Service Institute - Arabic Language Training 1973-1974

Tangier, Morocco - Arabic Language Training 1975

Rabat, Morocco - Political Officer 1975-1979
- King Hassan
- Moroccan culture
- Western Sahara issue
- Tangier consulate
- U.S. military interests
- Morocco's North Africa role
- Morocco-Algeria relations
- Morocco's African policies
- Morocco-Spain problems
- Arabic language training - critique

State Department - INR - North African Arabist 1979-1980
- Algeria's help in Iran hostage crisis

Congressional Fellow 1980-1981
- The American Political Science Association
- Pearson Fellowships

Johannesburg, South Africa - Labor Attaché 1981-1984
- Relations with African National Congress
- Sullivan principles
- South Africa's future
- Constructive engagement
- AFL-CIO activities

Tunis, Tunisia - Political Counselor 1984-1987
- Working with Tunisian officials
- U.S. aid programs
- PLO relocation to Tunisia
- Israeli raid on PLO headquarters
- Bourguiba
- FSI Arab language school

Bahrain - DCM 1987-1988
U.S. Navy presence
Shiite dissidence
Ambassador Sam Zakhem
Environment
U.S. programs

State Department - West African Affairs 1988-1992
Sahel drought
Liberia civil war
Ghana
Country by country comments
Libyan meddling
Burkina Faso
French interests

State Department - "October Surprise" Project 1992
Vindication

State Department - Board of Examiners 1992-1993
Changed attitudes of applicants
Comments on candidate and career

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - Consul General/Principal Officer 1993-1995
Commercial center
Religious customs
Environment
Duties
Relations with officials
Security
Americans married to Saudis
Saudi future

INTERVIEW

Q: This is an oral history interview with Charles L. Daris. It is the third of March, 1998. This is being conducted at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. My name is Raymond Ewing. Can I call you Chuck or should we call you Charles?

DARIS: My mother called me Charles.

Q: Okay, we'll call you Charles. Tell me first when you came into the Foreign Service and how you got interested in it. I'm not sure I know exactly when you started.

DARIS: I went straight into the Navy from high school having been somewhat unfocused in my youth. I had grown up in a small New England town where there was very little future, evident to me anyway, and school was simply not in order at that time given my lack of maturity. The Navy took me out to the west coast. I think one of the salient moments of that period of my life was precipitated by the Suez crisis. That's because the armed forces, and particularly the Navy, had to draft people during that period and I ended up working alongside colleagues who were either in or out of college. I decided that I was at least as smart as they were and that I could do the same thing, so I started getting serious about my future. From then on it was a winnowing process to determine what kind of career I might be interested in. I liked to write and I was initially attracted to journalism. That was a finalist right up to the end but my intellectual interests increasingly were excited by international relations, and to some degree political science. That became my quest.

In my last years in the Navy I ended up on Treasure Island, facing the San Francisco skyline. The Navy had a very good, very generous after-hours education program and they partially funded evening study for college credits. I was able to get a couple of years of college out of the way by the time I got out of the Navy and thereafter I was able to finish up my B.A. in less than 2 more years. I was very fortunate in that I succeeded in passing the various hurdles of the Foreign Service selection process and was appointed in January of 1964. It was a heady moment in my life when I was ordered to report to Washington.

Q: Your degree was from San Francisco State University?

DARIS: Yes. Having attended the University of San Francisco in their very excellent night program, when I left the Navy I enrolled full time at what was then San Francisco State College. I chose it over Berkeley, where I was also accepted, because State recognized more of the credits I had taken than Berkeley would have. I received my B.A. in international relations in 1963 and was off to my diplomatic career, but not before seriously exploring graduate school. I had been accepted at the University of Chicago's graduate school of international affairs; alas, they could offer me no scholarship money and I was weary of being a working student.

Q: You started in January of '64, came to Washington and had the usual basic officer training at the Foreign Service Institute. Did you go abroad then right away?

DARIS: Yes. I was assigned to Kabul, Afghanistan and in my view it was a perfect first assignment. It was a medium sized embassy. I was able to rotate to all sections and the entire last year was in the political section. Political reporting was where my heart was. Afghanistan was an exotic and fascinating place to be. Given the Russian historical antecedents in Central Asia and Afghanistan's role in the Great Game, Afghanistan had become a unique battleground in the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. It

was simply teeming with intrigue. We put a certain amount of assets in there, not excessive, but just enough to maintain our presence and to keep options open for the Afghans. It worked until the Russians decided to go for broke; they were able to have their way for a few years but were to regret it afterwards.

John Steeves, who was later to become Director General of the Foreign Service, was the Ambassador while I was there. He was careful and professional and good with his staff.

Q: When did you actually get there, in '64 still?

DARIS: Yes. I arrived in the late summer or fall of '64 and was there for almost two years.

Q: Did you have language training before you went to Kabul?

DARIS: I came into the Foreign Service with no serviceable language, having studied but a little Russian in college. I was given initial French language training by the State Department but I didn't get off language probation. That was to dog me for several years because I never had a French speaking post and that situation actually retarded early promotions. It was frustrating for me.

Q: This is not my interview but I have to tell you that I was in Lahore, Pakistan from '64 to '66 and visited Kabul twice in 1965. There were a lot of things happening in Afghanistan, certainly in Kabul. We drove up over the Khyber Pass and up the Kabul River Gorge and so on. I was impressed with that highway which I guess was an American financed project.

DARIS: I can't remember whether we contributed to part of that, we may have. We and the Russians collaborated indirectly, or inadvertently almost, with the Afghans acting as the clearing house. For example, on the loop highway that went all the way from Pakistan to the Iranian border, we did the Kabul-Kandahar part. We had a big AID project in the Helmand Valley, near Kandahar. The Russians built the rest of the road to the Iranian border; they also did roads to the northern border, which they ultimately used to invade the country. At the time, everybody did their segments and the Afghans profited. They knew how to play the various parties and did it reasonably cleverly. Afghanistan was, and is, a very poor country.

By way of vignette, not too long after I arrived, I was invited by colleagues in the Embassy to join them for the next in an ongoing series of get-togethers with colleagues from the Russian embassy. On the appointed day of the dinner, which this time was being hosted at the standard blockhouse-looking Russian Embassy, we heard the news that Khrushchev had died. We wondered whether the dinner would take place, but the Russians after some hesitation told us to come ahead. It was somewhat unreal; the Russians naturally didn't know what to say about the event, let alone succession, so they

were even more boisterous than usual in plying us with vodka and caviar all evening to avoid discussions of their internal drama.

Q: Compared with what happened later on it was a relatively quiet period, or a positive period in terms of U.S. Afghan relations. It was a place of competition as you say in the Cold War context.

DARIS: Yes it was a tranquil period bilaterally. The country was extremely backwards in all ways: economically, politically and socially. It was run by the royal family in, I think, benevolent fashion at least in the period that I was there. I happen to have a number of Afghan friends who immigrated to this country, most of whom had to cross the mountains with their families carrying what belongings they could.

All in all, it was a memorable first tour. I love the memory of Afghanistan. It will never be, never can be, what it was then and I regret that enormously.

Q: Where did you go after Kabul then?

DARIS: I grew up in a period between the wars and I felt that I had to see what war was like. I had in hand an assignment to Tunis, which had been my first choice, but I decided to send in a cable volunteering for Vietnam. Somewhat to my chagrin, my Kabul tour was curtailed by two months because the Vietnam machine was in full swing. I was sent back here for training prior to heading for Vietnam.

Q: Did you have Vietnamese language training?

DARIS: I did not, but they gave us some various kinds of training for public works and...

Q: Counterinsurgency?

DARIS: Counterinsurgency, yes that's right. And I had some more French but it still wasn't enough to get me off language probation.

Q: Were you assigned then to the embassy in Saigon or somewhere else in the country?

DARIS: I went initially to the Delta to An Giang Province as a provincial advisor detailed to AID. Our advisory presence went through a number of organizational permutations while I was there but administratively we were attached initially to AID, subsequently to an organization under the U.S. Military command called CORDS.

An Giang was a relatively peaceful corner of the country. The Hoa Hao were the dominant local Buddhist sect and they managed to maintain some kind of equilibrium with the Vietcong. It was a place where we could do some development. I was charged with education, public works and public administration. I had money to spend and I tried to keep the local officials honest, positive and forward thinking, not always successfully. I

have memories of entering newly constructed hamlet classrooms to inspect them; if the concrete pad looked flaky, which they often did because the local government chiefs frequently stole the cement we had furnished, I would jump up in the air and come down on the pad with my jungle boots, shattering the diluted cement. It was pretty spectacular, but word got around and I began to see some improvements. To the point where I was chastened on one occasion when I jumped up, came down, and failed even to dent the suspected cement. I stopped that little trick.

By and large I found the work frustrating. I did not speak Vietnamese and very few of my counterparts spoke French. I came away from my tour in Vietnam probably the least attached to any country that I served in, no doubt partly because of the war but also because of the cultural alienation I felt. I think many of my Foreign Service colleagues felt the same way. By contrast, I left local friends at every other post where I served, and I don't think I ever got on a plane to leave for the last time that lacked a tear or two.

Q: Were you the advisor to the provincial governor particularly? Were you working more with the Vietnamese or was there a U.S. military presence in that province?

DARIS: At the time the bureaucratic evolution in our so-called "pacification" program witnessed the creation of joint civilian/military U.S. presences in each province. That usually meant the senior provincial advisor in peaceful provinces was a civilian with a military deputy, and vice versa when the security situation was very contested. I was a member of that team on the civilian side. I dealt with the deputy province chief, a civilian, and with his civilian service chiefs. The province chief was a colonel, a charming but corrupt man, and I wrote some things about the situation there that brought the South Vietnamese army inspectors down to our province. He was ultimately cashiered. I didn't see him again for some months, but months later after being posted to Saigon I accompanied my boss, the Deputy Ambassador, who was invited to deliver a lecture at the Vietnamese National War College. Whom did I meet but my old nemesis Colonel Pham, now in a bureaucratic holding pattern as a student. His expression upon seeing me in those circumstances came as close to ironic as I ever witnessed on a Vietnamese face.

It was as I say an interesting experience but far from mainline Foreign Service. For example, we had primitive communications, with radio messages passed along by voice through regional relay points by Filipino employees. On one occasion, when I had failed to write to my parents for some time, my wonderful, assertive spinster Aunt Esther took matters into her own hands and wrote to her Congressman. A congressional-interest message duly went out from the State Department to Embassy Saigon, signed by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, urging Charles Daris to write to his mother. This message was relayed by voice at least ten times by the diligent communicators, to my acute embarrassment. I eventually received the text in paper copy, and still have it.

After about 11 months in the Delta, I was asked to move to Saigon to be a special assistant to the Deputy Ambassador, who at the time was Eugene Locke, a political appointee from Texas. He was only there a couple of months after I arrived and then his

post remained vacant for some months before his successor, Sam Berger, arrived. In the interim and intermittently over the remainder of my tour, I worked also for Ellsworth Bunker, who was our very distinguished ambassador. Basically it was a staff aide job with marvelous advantages: not only did I see most of what was going on in the country in this all-consuming conflict we were in; it was also a chance to work for a great American. Ellsworth Bunker was one of the finest gentlemen and public servants I ever had the pleasure of serving with.

Q: Let's stop back just for a second. Eugene Locke had been Ambassador somewhere else before he came as Deputy Ambassador?

DARIS: I don't know. Could he have been Ambassador to Pakistan?

Q: I think he was but not for very long though after my time there.

DARIS: Now that you mention it I'd forgotten that but I guess he may have been. He was not comfortable in a bureaucratic environment. I'm afraid that is the kindest I can be in commenting on his effectiveness.

Q: Being Deputy Ambassador is kind of a unique role too. It probably was not easy.

DARIS: On the other hand, Sam Berger was a very experienced, savvy guy. I was extremely fond of him and he treated me well and I learned a great deal from him. He had been Ambassador to Korea and a Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Asian Bureau before Ellsworth asked him to come to Saigon. He had a distinguished career and was one of our first Foreign Service Labor experts, having been posted in London at the time of the transition between the Tories and Labour after WWII [World War II]. So he was the one with the contacts when the new government came to power. That gave F.S. labor specialists a great boost. They always cite Sam's key role as one of their historical high points.

Sam did me the honor of being his witness when he married another widower, Betty Lee Pressey, in Hong Kong. We have been good friends ever since. Sam died some years ago after a long struggle with cancer.

Q: You had lots of visitors to Saigon in those days I'm sure, up to and including the Vice President or the President?

DARIS: The President never came when I was there. Very often high-level visitors would come into the country but not come to Saigon. In my recollection in that 13 to 14 month period when I was in Saigon, neither came but of course we had many, many congressional visitors and endless senior military comings and goings.

Q: You were in Vietnam between the Delta and the capital for a total of two years?

DARIS: Yes, I was there about two years and saw the war at both ends. And because I was between bosses at the time, I had the occasion after Tet to accompany the embassy's highlands political reporting officer on his rounds just two days after the attack, bearing witness to the bodies still on the barbed wires. The Tet attack, which occurred in January of 1968, was a turning point in the war for us. I remember arriving at the embassy and witnessing the carnage. I went up and inspected the Ambassador's office before he arrived with the idea of ensuring that no attackers were lurking in his bathroom. I'm certain this had already been done, but I remember holding my breath as I opened the door. I have pictures of me accompanying Ellsworth Bunker as he picked his way through the corpses littered around the embassy grounds. Alan Wendt had been the Embassy Duty Officer the night of the attack. He was on the phone all night with Washington and the U.S. military as the Vietcong came very close to penetrating the Embassy. Afterwards, I took him home to give him some breakfast and try to calm him down. He did a great job.

At the time I don't think there were more than a fraction of my colleagues who didn't believe what they were doing in Vietnam was worthwhile. I certainly did or I wouldn't have volunteered. However, the war had become a quagmire that our political system could not sustain and it was a lesson painfully learned for the country. I visit the Vietnam Memorial, which as you know is very near the Department, from time to time and never fail to feel sadness as I scan the 58,000 names on the Wall.

Q: At the time you were there from 1966 to 1968, is that not the period? You left in 1968?

DARIS: I left in early 1969. I arrived in early 1967.

Q: How did you feel about Tet at the time or right immediately after it happened? You certainly probably didn't see it as a turning point at that stage. Was it seen as a defeat for the Vietcong, that they had shot everything and really hadn't achieved their objectives? Do you remember how you felt about it right afterwards when you went up to the highlands?

DARIS: I think we were all stunned that they made their way into the villages and into the capital, including our own compound. It was most sobering but the statistics showed that they paid a very, very dear price for it. It was only over time that the political costs in terms of our own political processes became apparent and over the long run it was not much of a victory for us, certainly not the victory General Westmoreland attempted to portray while talking to the press in front of the bullet-shattered teak door that was probably all that kept the Vietcong commandos from violating our embassy.

I'll tell you a little story. Many of us forget that 1968 was a very, very violent year all over the world. The Paris peace talks had begun in 1968 and Ambassador Bunker and his staff made a trip back to Washington, also stopping in Paris. I didn't go with him. I can't remember whether the sequence was Paris/Washington or Washington/Paris, but in the months following Tet I recall that Saigon was frequently under rocket fire and other violent reminders of war. From this scene in Saigon you must picture the party arriving in

Paris. The famous *evenements* [French: events] were occurring, and Charles de Gaulle was tottering. Paris was burning. So they were under escort in Paris. Meanwhile, they arrived in Washington to experience the aftermath of the Martin Luther King assassination, and areas of the Capital were burning. In the end they all were glad to get back to Saigon, which of the three was the calmest. 1968 was quite a year.

Q: We are all kind of being reminded of that this year because it is the 30th anniversary of various events: Tet, the King assassination, and soon we'll probably be talking about Robert Kennedy and the events at the Democratic convention in Chicago, and so on. To come back to Saigon for a minute, where did you live? Did you have an apartment in the embassy compound?

DARIS: No. I had an apartment in a largely AID building on the road to the airport.

Q: You were a junior officer and you were in the Ambassador's and Deputy Ambassador's offices so you certainly were at the center of things but did you feel kind of a personal sense of vulnerability with security or did that happen maybe more after you left Vietnam that you felt relieved to be out of danger so to speak?

DARIS: I never felt any great vulnerability. In the province where I was, there was some Vietcong activity but I was young and considered myself invulnerable and traveled at will. I carried a concealed automatic weapon, but I'm happy to say I never needed it. In Saigon the only real danger I felt was a wayward rocket that, fate would decide, might or might not kill me. I try not to worry about such things in life and I certainly didn't then.

Q: There wasn't much you could do about it anyway.

DARIS: No, nothing at all.

Q: Anything else we should discuss about the period in Vietnam? That was certainly a pivotal period, certainly in retrospect, while you were there.

DARIS: No. I guess the point I made was that everybody, or virtually everyone, believed that it was worth doing, worth trying and very good people were giving their all to serve their country at a time of war. Hindsight is always clearer but it wasn't evident at the time that it was going to end the way it did, not to most of those of us involved in it. That is not to say that we accepted all the official optimism, far from it. Until Tet, there were very few thinking we ought to give up the game.

Q: Did you have much experience in Saigon with the government, with Vietnam officials or was that pretty much done by others and you were pretty much working inside the mission?

DARIS: No, I had almost no contact because mine was an inside job. At other posts I was always a substantive officer out making contacts and that's what I missed most in my experience in Saigon.

Q: You were trying to make sure the memos arrived on time.

DARIS: Yes. It was an administrative job in which knowledge of substance was required, but it was a classic staff aide job.

Q: Where did you go after Saigon?

DARIS: I was assigned back to INR to work on Southeast Asia but before I assumed my responsibilities I had the good fortune to be asked by Phil Habib to be part of our delegation to the Paris Peace Talks. I was the Executive Secretary of the delegation and I went on to do that for two years.

Q: That was really on an assignment? You were transferred to Paris?

DARIS: Yes we were transferred to Paris. It was a makeshift arrangement and no one, especially the French, thought that we would stay that long. For example my orders read "for the duration of the talks," and that was 1969. We occupied a wing of the embassy and had a fantastic team there. At the time I arrived Henry Cabot Lodge headed the Mission and the incomparable Phil Habib was his deputy. Phil stayed the whole time I was there. Cabot Lodge was replaced by David Bruce, another splendid public servant. We had a sterling cast of all agencies represented by very skilled people. Unfortunately the format, as you know, was one meeting a week with mostly posturing so I have to admit that we had plenty of time to profit from France. Not that I regret having done that, but it would have been nice at the same time to have made more progress toward ending the war.

As it turned out, while I was there Henry Kissinger started sneaking in secretly to meetings with Le Duc Tho. Ultimately he involved small elements of the delegation – myself excluded -- in the talks that he was having with the North Vietnamese. Over time, these were to yield some results. The Thursday format at the elegant Avenue Kleber conference site, which the French very gamely kept providing us, was simply a front because the moment wasn't ripe for negotiations. I still look back with awe on the collection of people that we had in that group. It was as talented a bunch as I've seen in the Foreign Service in one location and a lot of it was due to Phil Habib's leadership. He selected the best and he kept morale up. He kept us at task and we all loved and admired him.

Q: You mentioned the side talks that were beginning after the 1968 election and the Nixon administration via Henry Kissinger who was then national security advisor. I suppose at some point the delegation, somebody like you as executive secretary, became aware that these side talks were going on. Did that sort of undermine the rest of the

process or was it something that was essential that had to happen to get some new thinking and new vigor into the process?

DARIS: We were about 25 officers in the delegation. I think by the time he eventually brought some of us in -- and this was after I don't know how many trips -- maybe four people were included in the substance of what was going on. My colleague David Engel, who was special assistant to David Bruce, was one of these; his splendid Vietnamese language capabilities were put into play as Kissinger's interpreter. The rest of us knew something was going on but were not privy to the details and I guess that undermined our sense of mission a little bit. But we were left with continuing the facade, if you will, and that was worth it in and of itself. We prided ourselves in being professionals.

Q: And you were meeting with the Vietnamese delegation once a week and probably other times as well.

DARIS: Yes, we also saw our South Vietnamese colleagues socially.

Q: North Vietnamese too?

DARIS: No. There was no social contact. There were a few secret talks with them but not very many.

Q: And the same was true with the Vietcong delegation?

DARIS: Yes.

Q: At some point it became known that Kissinger was having talks in Paris with the Vietnamese. I was in Rome in September of 1970 when President Nixon made a visit and as I recall Kissinger came to Rome by way of Paris where he had had some talks and I think that was publicly known. Does that sound right?

DARIS: I don't think it was in the public domain that early. I left in '71 and I don't think those talks were in the public domain at that early point. They were happening, however.

You mentioned Nixon's visit to Rome; that reminds me of de Gaulle's death. Nixon was in the middle of traveling somewhere, so he brought to Paris a large part of his cabinet and his entire senior White House staff, including Ehrlichman, Haldeman, George Shultz, who was then his economic advisor. The embassy pleaded for help, so I was drafted to be control officer for John Ehrlichman. Meanwhile, the funeral at Notre Dame Cathedral was turning into a logistical nightmare for the French and they stringently controlled traffic for blocks around the funeral ceremony. David Bruce's driver had been able to drop him off but he couldn't get back to him in time for the pickup for a meeting scheduled with President Nixon. Bruce, who must have been in his late 70s by then, started walking from Notre Dame as fast as he could to try to make it to the President's residence. He didn't make it in time for the appointment. Back at the embassy when I

looked at him I feared for his well-being. He was wan, just slumped in his chair. I said, "I hope the President's people understood the situation?" He looked at me wryly and said "No, they did not understand."

Q: They didn't understand a lot of things as it turned out. You mentioned that you got to enjoy Paris and work on your French. Did the embassy call on you and other members of the delegation to help them out in different cases or was this pretty much an exception, the time of the funeral visit?

DARIS: That was largely an exception. Occasionally if we had an asset that they were in great need of we would help them out, but generally we went to them for help, and they were generous.

Q: Was the delegation pretty much in place through much of this period? Were there people coming from Washington constantly to help out, or to second guess, or whatever?

DARIS: Oh, yes. We had an interesting setup. The presence became institutionalized. Governor Harriman and Cy Vance set up the talks in '68 before the change of administrations. The talks went on well into the '70s until the treaty was signed, in 1973. I left in 1971. We had temporary-duty interpreters and court reporters coming and going. The Legal Adviser's office always had a senior person there who would rotate. The Asia person in the political section in Paris sat with us in the delegation. John Gunther Dean, then Patricia Byrne filled the slot at the time. I had Air Force couriers at my disposal. There was a senior CIA operations officer, Bill Koplowitz, who headed a group whose work was dedicated to the Delegation and there was a senior CIA analyst specifically assigned to the Delegation. There also was a military delegation headed by a three star general; Fred Weyand was in that job when I was there.

Q: Most of these people had on the ground experience with Vietnam?

DARIS: Everyone had been to Vietnam except perhaps some of the technical specialists and the legal people.

Q: As executive secretary you coordinated a lot of the preparations. Did you actually participate in the negotiating sessions? You took notes I suppose?

DARIS: Yes, I was a member of the delegation. I attended the meetings and participated in the substantive work of the delegation as well as handling administrative liaison work with the embassy and sometimes with the French. I also helped out our Press Spokesman, Steve Ledogar, at his weekly press briefings after our plenary meetings. Things as I say were working almost automatically by this time. It was a reasonably satisfying experience professionally but with some obvious professional limitations, and it was those limitations that led me to forgo the tempting "for the duration" phrase in my original orders and opt to move onto another assignment.

Q: This in State Department personnel bureaucratic terms was considered a Paris assignment, not a Washington assignment?

DARIS: Yes, it was a Paris assignment.

Q: Anything else about the Vietnam peace talks?

DARIS: I think not. Nothing substantive occurs to me. It was simply not a productive time in the talks because it was not a time of movement in the war itself.

Q: Because it was a bit of a stalemate in Vietnam itself and of course the Nixon administration had just come into office in much of this period. Where did you go from Paris?

DARIS: I went back to work on the Laos Desk, where I was one of three officers. I thus continued to work on Southeast Asia, but from the Laos perspective. I got to know some of the aspects of that poor little country's involvement, reluctant involvement I might say, in the war. I did travel out there once. It was an interesting job. I came to appreciate the need for the State Department to organize itself bureaucratically for decision making and the bureaucratic infighting that went on vis-à-vis other agencies. The Department does not breed good bureaucrats. Part of it is the individualist nature of the culture but part of it is also the fact that we rotate people far too often. I found that counterparts from other agencies, particularly Langley and the Pentagon, were able to get to their principals much more quickly than we and to outflank us on a daily basis. This is particularly true in the political- military area. I came to see this kind of situation again in my subsequent experience in the Persian Gulf.

Q: This was probably also a time in the early '70s when to the CIA and the Pentagon, Laos was a very high priority country situation whereas maybe for the State Department it wasn't seen quite that way.

DARIS: Yes and no. It was certainly not the central show but it was an adjunct and the Department was not absent there because we had Ambassador Mac Godley out there as field marshal, and he was no slouch. The Department was a player and was informed. Bill Sullivan was our deputy assistant secretary for the region at the time and having been ambassador in Vientiane he knew the terrain. But even he couldn't get the Department's processes engaged at times to avoid losing battles. It was also a time when the National Security Council was hyperactive in policy formulation, not just arbitration but formulation. Some of my memorable battles were with old colleagues detailed over there who shall remain unnamed.

Q: From the State Department and the Foreign Service?

DARIS: Yes.

Q: Were there peace talks going on related to Laos, Pathet Lao at that time or not really because Vietnam was the priority?

DARIS: I don't think so. There may have been some contacts. I guess there were now that I think about it but nothing of any consequence and nothing that could have any consequence. The U.S. was running that country, at least the parts of it we were able to control.

Q: There were three officers on the desk you said concerned entirely with Laos and then you were also in an office together with people concerned with Cambodia and...

DARIS: Cambodia and Thailand. I had gone into the job with the expectation that I would move up in the senior desk officer job. The incumbent was an extremely knowledgeable officer particularly on Southeast Asia and Laos and for various reasons was unable to find a job so he hung on, and hung on, and hung on. I decided that I would get out of the Southeast Asia conundrum. I talked to personnel about alternatives and found my way over to a desk in West Africa. This was in 1972. I took over what was called the Entente desk, consisting of the Ivory Coast, Upper Volta and Niger. Thus, I left the war zone for the relief and development zone. It was a welcome change, if less exciting.

Q: At that time this was the Sahel crisis?

DARIS: The Sahel crisis was in full bloom and we were undertaking extraordinary measures to provide relief to a lot of starving people.

Q: The African bureau was quite involved with that together with AID I suppose?

DARIS: Yes and it was a time when State and AID were working together reasonably well. It was not always the case in my subsequent incarnations in the Africa Bureau, but that was a positive time in which we were responding to real human needs.

Q: Was that a time when in these three countries, besides the drought and the Sahel related situation, things were going pretty well, for example in Ivory Coast?

DARIS: Yes, I think Ivory Coast was the success story of the region to the extent that there was one. The French were heavily subsidizing it and it was a very paternalistic society politically and otherwise, but in that historical context it was working well. It was quite a contrast with the rest of the region and in fact with most of Africa.

Q: Whereas in Niger and Upper Volta things were much more...

DARIS: Things were really pretty basic.

Q: Did you get out to the entente countries, your region?

DARIS: I did.

Q: That was your first time in Africa?

DARIS: Yes, it was my first time on the continent. I managed to visit all three of my countries plus countries I was backup for, Benin and Guinea. I had a memorable overnight train ride from Bobo Dioulasso in Upper Volta to Abidjan, passing through the savanna and then the rain forest. It was one of those old sleeper trains and I shared a compartment with a classic-looking, bald-headed Franciscan priest with a rope holding his tunic around his big belly. We drank lots of wine and he regaled me with tales.

Q: He told you all about Africa.

DARIS: He told me all about the real Africa.

Q: He probably knew it. Was he French?

DARIS: He was a French Franciscan monk.

Q: Certainly compared with Vietnam and Laos, there was probably not a lot of interest in these countries in the higher levels at the State Department but was there adequate attention do you think? Could you get attention when you needed it?

DARIS: Yes, I think so up to a point. During my tenure there, (I had negotiated to make it a one-year job, incidentally) there wasn't a real political crisis but if there was, I don't know that we would have gotten the attention we needed unless some American citizens were in jeopardy. As regards the humanitarian need, which was a regional thing where we interfaced with international organizations, we certainly got the attention we needed. In addition to that, the Bureau at the time was responsible for between 40 and 50 countries because it included the North African countries. David Newsom was the assistant secretary. When you have three countries in such a context, you really have much more latitude as a desk officer than you do elsewhere, so that was satisfying. What was less satisfying was that it wasn't very political and my interests were largely political. As a change of pace, as a change of emphasis, it was interesting but I did feel a lack of political content to it all.

The highlight of the assignment was the State Visit of Houphouet Boigny. A desk officer's most all-consuming experience is a state visit. In those days, before word processors, preparation of the briefing books – with all the clearances entailed – was a nightmare. But it was also heady stuff, for when the visitor arrived, you got to rub elbows with the great and the near-great. So I was invited to the White House for the arrival ceremony on the south lawn, and I was invited to the after-dinner portion of the State Dinner, to get my gracious pat on the back from President Nixon and Houphouet. The visit went well - Houphouet was an old friend of the U.S. – and we were almost breathing easily on the morning of his scheduled departure. However, we woke up to learn that

Vice President Spiro Agnew had resigned; he had been scheduled to bid farewell to Houphouet, and suddenly there was a gaping hole in the schedule. So the President stepped in, and we hastily arranged departure from the south lawn. Houphouet called the President aside for a moment during the ceremony, making a pitch on behalf of his good friend, King Hassan, for more U.S. help for Morocco. Nixon knew what to do, and although stiff he handled foreign affairs well. Better, alas, than he handled his domestic affairs.

Q: Was Abidjan, the Ivory Coast, seen as a region focus, center, for all of the Sahel and other activities at that time or not particularly so?

DARIS: I don't think so. It was not uncooperative but there was very much more to the French-speakers vs. Anglophones competition at the time than there is now. We worked individually with the affected countries rather than solely through the Cote d'Ivoire.
Q: At that time how did you see this sort of manifesting itself in response for example to the Sahel crisis? Were we trying to be more responsive than Paris or how did that show itself in your experience?

DARIS: My recollection is a little vague at the time but one was aware, at all times and throughout my career in dealing with that part of Africa, of tension between Paris and Washington, mostly reflexive of tensions coming out of Paris. I recall there was ambivalence but ultimately cooperation, because the French knew they couldn't do everything. I remember as a desk officer traveling to the region and going through Paris and meeting some of my counterparts in the Quai D'Orsay and Cooperation. They were serious people talking about serious issues and willing to share views and to see what could be done together. It certainly wasn't to the point where France was sabotaging anything in the humanitarian field we were trying to do. I don't think too much should be made of such "competition," but it was always there and you had to be aware of it and to deal with it, albeit less so on the humanitarian side than in the commercial and political arenas.

Q: Anything else about your first involvement with Africa, West Africa, that we should cover?

DARIS: No.

Q: You were on the desk about a year then? Where did you move from there?

DARIS: I went into Arabic training with a view to being posted in Morocco. After a number of permutations in my orders between Casablanca and Rabat I ended up in Rabat as a political officer. I had studied Arabic for a year, six months of which were in Tangier. Unfortunately a year is not enough, at least for me, to learn Arabic so much to my regret it did not make me an Arabist. But I stayed longer in Morocco than at any other post I ever had. I was there for almost five years including the Tangier time. It was an excellent assignment. Morocco is a fascinating country physically, geographically,

culturally and even intellectually. As a political officer I did what I enjoyed doing most in the Foreign Service and that is getting out and meeting people. I found my dealings with the opposition more satisfying in the relatively closed society that Morocco was, but I knew a lot of people from all walks of life and thoroughly enjoyed my work there.

Q: Was that a problem for you, for the ambassador, that you were having good contacts with the opposition? I assume that everybody kind of knew that but was that subject to sensitivity at times?

DARIS: No. King Hassan was very wise in creating opposition parties that served to let off steam, while they were closely watched and controlled. They existed and therefore it was perfectly normal that we talk to them. It would have been a contradiction otherwise. I don't think it ever caused any problems or certainly none that I was ever aware of. I was there over a span that included three ambassadors: I overlapped with Bob Neumann only briefly, followed by Bob Anderson and Dick Parker. Our relations with Morocco were close. While we were talking about the French a little while ago in terms of their domination of sub-Saharan West Africa, in Morocco their presence was very heavy but the King cleverly played his American card whenever he could to maintain leverage in his relations with France. This is a game you see time and time again in North Africa, an area where I must say I particularly enjoyed working. As we'll talk about later, I subsequently served in Tunisia.

The blend of African and Arab cultures and the proximity and vestiges of European presence in the region make it a very unique place. Morocco is especially diverse. It is a crossroads for so many cultures: Spanish, African, Arab, French, in addition to being a very rich country in terms of its topography. The fact that I met my wife of over 20 years in Morocco adds to the special memories I have of the country.
Q: That makes it special certainly. You mentioned that you had good contacts with the, if I could use the term authorized opposition or established opposition. Did you also try to make a point of getting to know people in the universities, labor, and I don't know whether there were other elements that were perhaps neither government supporters nor a part of the opposition, Islamic elements or otherwise? I don't really know Morocco at all so I'm not sure that that is a valid question but I guess after what happened in Iran it's probably worth asking as a political officer would.

DARIS: Yes, a good political officer will do as much as he can to get to know as many people as he can, and we did this. The Islamist movements, and remember this was in the late '70s, were not really coming into focus as political movers and shakers at that time but there were a few people with Islamist views who weren't affiliated with any parties who were around and one got to talk with them quite a lot.

The most prominent political issue arose after the demise of Franco, the Western Sahara question. This occurred in 1975. Shortly after that the King sent tens of thousands of unarmed people on a so-called "Green March," a peaceful march, into the territory to claim it for Morocco. That set off a conflict that is still unresolved to this day, basically

between Morocco and Algeria, over the sovereignty of this territory. It has dominated the political agenda for Morocco for the last 25 years.

Q: Besides the Western Sahara issue which began really while you were there more or less, were there other regional issues that you were involved with like the Arab-Israeli issue? This was not too long after the '73 war and King Hassan in Morocco has certainly on occasion played a significant role, or a role in facilitating talks or dialog or some kind of a process.

DARIS: The King has always sought ways to be helpful and instrumental, or instrumental and helpful. I'm not sure which his priorities would be, I suspect the latter but nevertheless he has been in some ways helpful, and his willingness to help has always kept us engaged with him on regional subjects. His ability to be helpful, given his distance from the problem, has varied in effectiveness but it has been a characteristic of the King that we have always nurtured. I personally think that his usefulness has been overemphasized, but I understand why we encouraged him.

Q: How about the United States role? I think you've touched on this before. We certainly have a long history with Morocco. I guess the consulate in Tangier goes back centuries or a long time. There was a military presence I think at the time you were there. What else can one say about our interests? Obviously it's partly related to Morocco's geographic position.

DARIS: As you say the consulate in Tangier I believe is our oldest U.S. owned diplomatic property overseas. It is still in our possession. There is a foundation now running it and they give conferences and hold colloquia, and I think give some grants as well. Morocco geographically sits astride the Straits of Gibraltar and has feet in the Mediterranean and on the Atlantic. In times of war, whether the Second World War or the Cold War, it was of some value to us. When I was there we were phasing out our last navy facility and actually closed down Kenitra which was the last military base, military presence, we had there. It was a small naval communications center. The U.S. Navy presence was a potential political liability for Hassan. Subsequent to that, however, the U.S. military got its foot back in but Hassan's motivation was to influence the U.S. position on the burning issue, the Western Sahara.

Our assets in Morocco were never central to our strategic posture. And, as is the case in so many third world countries where we have military facilities, it depends on the conflict whether they can be used at all. I think it is a useful exercise for those who seek to strive to obtain facilities, military facilities especially, to try to project under what circumstances you can actually use those facilities. That is because countries, if they don't agree with what we want to do, can and often do prevent us from using their territory. It isn't very useful for military planners to have expensive facilities that they can't use. I've seen this occur time and time again.

Q: At the time that you were there we had, and I guess we still have, a consulate in Casablanca. I hope it is still there.

DARIS: Yes it is.

Q: I think there was at least one reporting officer, a labor-political position there. Did you spend much time in Casablanca yourself or try to draw on the reporting by the consul general and the labor-political officer there?

DARIS: Ironically that labor job was the one I was initially slated to go to. The situation went back and forth and I finally ended up in Rabat. The Casablanca Consulate people came to us more often than we went to them because Casa was their territory and they were covering things pretty well. Some of the opposition movements were more present down there than in Rabat and it was that aspect that drew me there when I did go, but it was potential duplication of effort for Embassy people to be spending too much time doing reporting in Casablanca.

Q: We talked about the role of Morocco vis-à-vis the Middle East peace process, the Palestinians, at the time you were there was Morocco trying to play a role or seen as playing a role in North African organization? Obviously Morocco had its problems or had problems with Algeria about the Western Sahara but were they trying to find common ground with other North African states or with Southern European states in a broader Mediterranean context? How did Morocco see its place at that time in its immediate region?

DARIS: The question in a way was more, how did the King see his place? The King always was looking for ways to play a larger role, often, I felt, to satisfy his ego. This does not mean that it did not at time serve Morocco's greater good. Over the years Hassan floated a number of ideas, concepts, and proposals involving the region, but their concretization was seldom achieved, in my view.

The main impediment to Hassan's would-be aspirations in this regard were Morocco's very bad relations with Algeria. That really dominated regional political equations. In this regard, it was an interesting professional experience to watch the advocacy from our embassies in the two warring capitals and the way it played out in this period. Our embassy in Algiers was usually arguing for "balance" in U.S. policy in the Western Sahara dispute and our embassy in Rabat was often more inclined toward the Moroccan thesis, although not always. There were spirited exchanges of telegrams between the capitals and Dick Parker, who was in charge of the Algiers Embassy at the time first as Interests Chief and subsequently as ambassador, was a formidable advocate. In fact, Dick probably suffered in Moroccan eyes for his role in that period, because his later assignment as Ambassador to Rabat was curtailed at Hassan's request.

Q: He was in charge of which embassy?

DARIS: Of Algiers.

Q: Because later he was ambassador to Morocco.

DARIS: Later when he came over as ambassador to Morocco, he didn't last long because the King and his people I think felt that Dick, shall we say, was too balanced. That is no reflection on Dick whom I admire enormously and who is a friend. On the contrary it is if anything a positive reflection. I think he was quite right to argue (and argue effectively I think) for a go-slow posture on the part of the U.S. in terms of the Western Sahara conflict because the legal and moral aspects of it raise questions which the U.S. government still hasn't come to terms with.

Q: The Western Sahara conflict at some point, and I don't' remember the details, became a United Nations issue and the UN has played a role ever since. I don't know when that happened. Was that when you were there?

DARIS: It has played a role for a long time. In the most recent period, Jim Baker has negotiated a package that is being played out now.

Q: That is on behalf of the secretary general I think?

DARIS: The secretary general has just appointed an old colleague of ours, Charlie Dunbar, as his special representative to the Western Sahara. He is going to try to do something with this package but it is problematic because the same issues that prevailed then prevail now, the most important of which is, who is a Saharan and who votes?

Q: What about Morocco with regard to Africa south of the Sahara in the other direction? Were they doing much at that time either bilaterally within the OAU or within the United Nations?

DARIS: Morocco was a player in the OAU. It became a very intense player particularly after the Western Sahara, but then subsequently absented itself when the OAU recognized the Polisario. Morocco has always spent time looking southward and, when it wishes to, projects itself as an African country because of its geography and because of its historical antecedents. In the western part of the continent the substantial Islamic heritage emanated largely from Morocco. There are tombs in Morocco which draw pilgrims from Senegal, Mauritania and Mali, for example. There are still lingering views in some Moroccan circles propounding the idea of greater Morocco; these extremists can produce maps showing Morocco's frontiers extending well into these areas. At one point in history local leaders paying fealty to Morocco ruled in the famed desert city of Timbuktu. In more recent time, Hassan was close to Mobutu and he sent troops to Shaba twice. Morocco also tried to overthrow the regime in Benin and was quite activist an in Francophone Africa in the '60s and '70s.

Q: You mentioned post-Franco development of the Western Sahara problem and the green march and so on, what about the two enclaves that Spain has within Morocco or on the Mediterranean shore? Was that an issue or was that seen, basically that arrangement, as beneficial to Morocco for economic and other reasons?

DARIS: Ceuta and Melilla, and there are also three small islands, actually. Morocco and Spain in a way have agreed to disagree on these issues. Morocco, quite interestingly and I think prudently, is tying activism on the recuperation of these territories to movement on Gibraltar between the British and Spanish. But while there are small groups in Morocco who militate for the return of the territories it is not something the King has not been able to manage. At this time, it is not in my view a burning issue. It is something the Moroccan government can use and turn on if it wishes to. For example, it briefly applied pressure on this issue after Franco's death when it was trying to get Spain to favor its position on the Western Sahara.

Q: What about Gibraltar again? Has Morocco taken much interest in that?

DARIS: Morocco says that it supports Spain's position on Gibraltar.

Q: It supports Spain's position?

DARIS: Yes, and the King says rather cutely to Spain that once you get Gibraltar back, of course you won't need Ceuta and Melilla and that will be the time for you to give them back to us.

Q: Meanwhile don't hold your breath. So you were there almost five years besides the time in Tangier. Let me come back to the language question again. A year of Arabic training is certainly not enough, particularly the writing system and all the nuances of Arabic. Did you find that you were using Arabic a lot in Rabat or were you using French more?

DARIS: That was the trap, combined with my own linguistic lackings. French was so widely spoken among the people I dealt with that I worked in that language and my Arabic faded away, never having been at the working level anyway. The Department continues to make this mistake on Arabic. They keep training people for short periods. Perhaps it has some utility on the visa line but I don't think it justifies the investment. Arabic is traditionally a language that needs to be studied for 21 to 22 months before you can put somebody out there with the foundations necessary to reasonably expect them to function. It makes no sense to me to study it for any less a period.

Q: Could you read the newspaper in Arabic?

DARIS: I read it. I tested at a three level. It was a weak three in reading but the problem in addition to all of this, in the Maghreb context, and particularly the Moroccan Maghreb context, is that the Arabic is highly corrupted by the Berber dialects. The two extremes in

the Arabic language exist in Iraq and in Morocco. In Iraq, Kurdish has corrupted the language. Arabs can't understand colloquial Moroccan. The Moroccans can understand them but not vice versa. What little I took away from Morocco didn't transplant anywhere when I went to other parts of the Arab world.

Q: This was about '73, '74, '75 maybe that you were in Tangier?

DARIS: '75.

Q: At that time we had an overseas Arabic language school in Beirut and also in Tangier?

DARIS: No. There had been an Arabic language school in Tangier and it had been closed but a few teachers were still there. When they were trying to train me for whatever job I was going to take, be it Casablanca or Rabat, they tailored my instruction and hired a couple of the old instructors who were still living in Tangier to work with me. Mohamed Senhaji, who wrote FSI's Moroccan Arabic textbook, was one of my teachers, and he is a friend.

Q: In theory they were particularly giving you western Arabic?

DARIS: The reading and writing were in classical arabic, so perhaps half the time I continued what I had been doing in Washington, which is what is called modern standard. But my oral exercises were all in the Moroccan dialect.

Q: Anything else we should talk about in context of almost five years in Morocco?

DARIS: No, I can't think of anything.

Q: Where did you go from there? This would have been when, 1979 maybe?

DARIS: Yes, it was 1979. With my new French wife I was obliged under existing Department regulations to come back and "Americanize" her. Incidentally Anne-Marie had worked in the French embassy in Rabat. We met in that time. We left Rabat, were married in the mairie in Versailles, and came back to the Department. I was the Maghreb analyst in INR for a year, and I enjoyed that.
Q: That could build on your experience in Morocco and you were probably more involved with Libya.

DARIS: Yes, it was a time when the Libya account was very busy. The Libyans were sending hit men to silence Libyan critics living here in the States and we were having to deal with that. The Libya account took up a lot of time, also Boumediene died when I was in the job. And the Western Sahara was continuing to preoccupy us. This would have been in 1980-81.

Q: Right and that was also a time when Algeria was playing an important role in helping facilitate the release of the hostages in Tehran.

DARIS: That's right, the early '80s.

Q: The actual release was in January of '81. We were sort of seeing Algeria in I guess a positive way for that assistance.

DARIS: It greatly helped the relationship, in my view. It forced us to balance our posture on this parochial problem in the Western Sahara. You are right, now that you remind me. The Algerians were very professional, very helpful on that. They had a marvelously competent diplomatic corps. Obviously they were trained by the French but they chose particularly competent diplomats. Time and time again I was always impressed with my Algerian counterparts.

Q: That was also a time when economically some interesting things were going on in Algeria with Bechtel, and gas.

DARIS: Yes, the development of the liquid gas business, and that was driving our policy to some degree too.
Q: I think lots of people have covered what INR analysts do so we won't spend time on that. Anything else particularly about that assignment in INR?

DARIS: No. I came to have more respect for the Bureau, which has not been a place for mainline Foreign Service officers to seek out assignments. It had a good mix of permanent civil servants and rotating Foreign Service officers and I think it is a useful assignment for an officer to serve in INR. I briefed Warren Christopher in his office one morning on the Western Sahara conflict, and INR was all abuzz with that "coup." I reminded Christopher of that day later when he came to Jeddah as Secretary of State and I had to entertain him while King Fahd kept him waiting for seven hours for an audience.

Q: At that time you were part of the Middle East division?

DARIS: Yes. I think it was called NESA. George Harris was the director for a long time. He is now retired.

Q: Where did you go after that?

DARIS: I did a year on the Hill as a congressional fellow.

Q: Under which program?

DARIS: The American Political Science Association.

Q: So you had some months of...

DARIS: Yes, we had several weeks with Fred Holborn at SAIS giving lectures and congressional orientation, classroom stuff. He was really so knowledgeable and entertaining that it was a stimulating and rewarding experience. After that you were expected to go up to the Hill for the remaining six months of the year and split your time between the two chambers. In my view, that split formula made the American Political Science Association fellowship less satisfying as a work experience than the Pearson Fellowships. With the Pearsons you go up and are assigned to a member for the full period, a year or if you want you can extend it to a second year, and you can get your teeth into work. The one regret I had in that year was that I was so transient in the two offices in which I worked that I was never really able to contribute very much.

I worked first for Gary Hart. I was just coming in at a time when the Republicans had taken control of the Senate. While Gary's interests in foreign affairs were considerable, the Democrats were weaker players than they had been when they were in the majority. Part of my work was helping him adjust to that.

Q: He was a member of the foreign relations committee?

DARIS: No he was not, he was on the armed services committee. But he nurtured his foreign affairs expertise and he always had a Foreign Service officer on his staff. I went to his district with him once and sat in his home office and got the sense of the flow of things, but it was in a rather superficial experience.

After that stint I went over to the House and worked for Jim Leach, who was on the HFAC and who gave me a little more to do. Jim was for a brief time a Foreign Service officer himself. He is very competent and an extremely decent guy, and he took some personal interest in me. We are still friends. I traveled to his district with him and I attended some constituent meetings with him. It was interesting, and a good year. I draw often on my Hill experience in terms of my professional development, and do so with satisfaction.

Q: And the downside of a Pearson assignment to an office that doesn't fully utilize you, is that it can be a long time, one year, and it can be frustrating whereas the year that you had it was orientation, it was training, it was exposure more than....

DARIS: I'm sure I came out of my year with a far better perspective on the Congress as a whole than the Pearson would have provided.

Q: Although you can have a great Pearson assignment and really have an opportunity to do great things but some people didn't have that chance. To come back to Senator Hart for a minute, this was before his abortive presidential candidacy?

DARIS: Yes. He clearly had aspirations at the time but it was before he really went into gear for the '84 election.

Q: Anything else about that year?

DARIS: No. You mentioned the Iran hostages and I remember I was working in Jim Leach's office when they were released. I walked down to the corner of the street that goes by the foot of the Hill as the hostages were coming by in buses, and throngs were out there cheering. A very moving moment.

Q: That was right after the inauguration of President Reagan, a couple of days after.

DARIS: Yes, and while I'm getting ahead of the game, I should mention another footnote to my experiences. In 1994, I had the occasion to spend a few months directing research in response to Congressional inquiries into something called the October Surprise. I read all the documents from that period on allegations that President Reagan and his campaign chief – later his CIA Director – William Casey made "commitments" to Iran if they would not release the hostages until after the elections.

Q: We'll come back to that. Let me come back to Leach again for a minute, I don't think he was a member of the House foreign affairs committee.

DARIS: He was.

Q: At the time the Republicans had a majority in the House or just in the Senate?

DARIS: No. They had flip-flopped as I recall and were in the minority in the House. I went from working for a member in a recent Senate majority to a member who had been minority and vice versa. Jim had a foreign affairs person working for him full time on his staff but he very kindly managed to give me things to do and gave me a good exposure to his office.

Q: I think as you say as a former brief Foreign Service officer, he has always been friendly toward the service and certainly individuals that he has come know over the years. I have heard of others that have had a personal affinity with him because they worked with him or somehow came to know him in other ways. Where did you go from Capitol Hill?

DARIS: From the Hill I went to South Africa. I was labor attaché at our consulate in Johannesburg. The job was a regional one so I covered not only South Africa, which was my main account, but also Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, and Namibia. It was a pleasant three years for us. We were able to travel to the other countries in the region and my wife and baby daughter Christine were able to join me for much of it. We traveled inside South Africa a lot. South Africa is a fascinating, beautiful country, geographically diverse. Politically it was morose but my job covered perhaps the only sector where there was some political movement. That was in the black trade unions, which was the only sector

in the country where Black political expression was occurring. That was in fact the reason I took the job, because it did have substance and it did have promise to witness change. I found the world of labor arcane and I was not very comfortable in it. The Department gave me a few weeks of labor orientation and sent me on details to two American trade unions back when I was slated to do the Casablanca labor job, but I never felt I was anywhere near being a labor expert. Nevertheless, I enjoyed Johannesburg and I think substantively it was probably the best political reporting job in the country at the time, certainly far better than following Afrikaner or white liberal politics.

Q: Did you have any contacts at that time with the ANC to the extent that they had people around actively?

DARIS: It was illegal of course for anybody to admit being ANC in the country, but there were people I was in touch with who subsequently held high positions in the ANC after Mandela was released and when the ANC became legal. The most noteworthy was Cyril Ramaphosa, who was a black trade unionist I sent to the U.S. on a visitor grant.

Q: When you traveled to your other regional countries, Lesotho, Swaziland and I'm not sure what else you said, did you have contact then with some South Africans who were in exile or who were out of South Africa, or did you tend to focus more on labor in those countries when you went there?

DARIS: I did not seek out declared ANC elements outside of the country. We did not do business that way. The contacts that we had with the ANC were handled differently. I should say that most of the ANC in the neighboring countries were in the radical and military elements of the organization and were conducting acts of violence in South Africa so that for me, as labor reporting officer, would have been doubly inappropriate.

Q: The labor job at the time was in the consulate in Johannesburg as opposed to the embassy in Pretoria which of course is pretty close. Why was it done that way? Why weren't you in the embassy?
DARIS: Rabat-Casablanca and Pretoria-Johannesburg were analogous situations. The distances were similar, the commerce-government juxtaposition was similar. The labor unions were much more present in Johannesburg and in fact I'm not sure there were any labor unions worth visiting in Pretoria. They were either in Johannesburg or in the industrial cities to the south.

Q: Within how many years after you left Johannesburg was Mandela released and things began to change? That must have been six, seven years or more?

DARIS: I left in 1984 and Mandela was released around 1990 or '91.

Q: So that's only six or seven years.

DARIS: You are going to ask, could I have predicted that and no, I not only could not have predicted it, I could never have imagined that things would go anywhere near as well as they went. South Africa is not without problems, but it was really a political miracle - if such things exist.

Q: At the time you were there that was the period of, what did we call our policy, constructive engagement?

DARIS: Yes. The Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Chet Crocker, was the architect of that and in the context of the world view of the Reagan administration, constructive engagement was as clever a way as we could have contrived to soothe a difficult relationship with a government we were trying to change.

***

Q: This is a second session of a foreign affairs oral history interview with Charles L. Daris. I am Raymond Ewing. It's the 18th of March, 1998. Chuck we have been talking about your assignment as regional labor attaché in Johannesburg and I think this was a period in the early '80s?

DARIS: That's right. It was '81 to '84.

Q: So it was in the Reagan administration, the period of constructive engagement with South Africa. I guess the other question we wanted to be sure to talk about today a little bit is your involvement with the application of the Sullivan principles as far as U.S. companies operating in South Africa were concerned.

DARIS: The Sullivan principles were not a U.S. government program but they were largely endorsed by the administration at the time and served a useful purpose for putting pressure on American companies. Many of those companies didn't need pressure incidentally because their employment practices in the context of South Africa were more enlightened I think than most, although that was not always the case. Pushing Sullivan was also putting pressure on the government of South Africa, so it was a focal point in my approach to my work and in general I found it quite useful.

Q: The Sullivan principles were really a set of objectives, or a set of ideas that companies voluntarily tried to apply in their operations in South Africa, is that right?

DARIS: Yes, that is right. They were workplace codes of conduct with the obvious intention being to level the playing field race-wise, to the extent that was possible in apartheid South Africa. The focus of it really was back in the States, particularly in New York where very active working groups followed treatment of black workers and issued reports on performance under the Principles. It was a very active campaign, rather well organized, to put pressure on American companies that were not adhering to the Principles by ginning up pressure from shareholders. There was also considerable activity

to organize boycotts and threats of boycotts at state and local levels. It was quite an interesting situation and as I say I think that helped our efforts to push the South African government in the direction which everyone wanted to see it go.

Q: Did you anticipate the end of apartheid and all the changes that were going to place only five years or so after you left?

DARIS: When I left in 1984 I could not have dreamed that evolution could be so quick, could be so total, and could be so peaceful. It was astonishing, no question about it. I would never have dreamed, even in my wildest hopes, that things could have gone so well. It's not that the country is perfect now. I believe that it is irreversible, and South Africans are on their way to being able to maintain and sustain a multi-racial society and prosper. The country obviously is very rich, in human terms as well as infrastructure and natural assets.

Q: Anything else we should cover in your assignment to Johannesburg?

DARIS: No. I made some allusion to constructive engagement just as we were terminating our first session. I want to put a little perspective on that. I think that constructive engagement reflected the visceral inclinations of the Reagan administration. It succeeded in making us about as activist as we could be at that historical moment both in terms of our politics and the situation on the ground. It was a framework, certainly a policy that I generally had few problems with. Obviously many of us would have liked to see us push a little harder than we did but constructive engagement set the stage for the more activist policy that came later when the situation in South Africa was maturing. So I think it was effective.

I might offer one unique Foreign Service experience I had in South Africa as a result of my labor role there. Although I'm not a labor expert, I became conversant in the subject in the three years that I held the job. Seeking a key domestic partner in the constructive engagement policy, Chet Crocker induced the AFL/CIO's international branch to get involved and to work together with the (Republican led) U.S. government. In those days, the AFL-CIO's international operations were run by a colorful Cold Warrior, Irving Brown. Washington constructed a formula where AID money was effectively going into our labor union movement so that the AFL/CIO's international branch was enlisted to work with black unions in South Africa. It became a lively issue, because as the representative of the U.S. government there, I became very involved in pulling and tugging over whom we should be influencing most and to whom the money would go.

I had some very lively exchanges with Washington and with my good friends in the labor movement over the period I was there, particularly in the last several months. It was a question of tactics rather than policy over which we were arguing, but it's a normal thing that happens when people are trying to control funds and to monitor them, which I viewed as my job. Irving Brown's repute and renown were legend in view of his very activist

anti-communist history in other parts of the world and I did not always share his perspective on what was happening in South Africa.

I felt that certain black unions - especially what was then called FOSATU - although they certainly sympathized with the ANC, were not directly affiliated with the ANC's violent activities. In my view - and history is on my side - these were the more viable and effective trade unions in the country. But anyone associated with the ANC at that moment in history was viewed by a lot of people in Washington, and certainly by the AFL/CIO, as not the kind of people we should be dealing with. The unionists with whom the AFL/CIO wanted to work were not usually the most effective trade unionists. And I would note that they are not around today.

Q: The AFL/CIO's concern was with the Communist Party of South Africa support for the ANC and possible involvement with some of these unions?
DARIS: The ANC was the sum of many parts. Those pro-ANC syndicalists who were still working in the country were not engaged in violence. Indeed, the ANC was not a monolithic organization then, although the sympathies, tendencies, and loyalties of its adherents evolved into a movement that ultimately dismantled apartheid. I think it was the leftist aspect of it that bothered a lot of people, but I and others felt that the violence was associated with the ANC in exile. That, and the influence of the South African Communist party among the expatriate community, were justifiably matters of concern for all of us.

Q: After South Africa you went where and this would have been 1984?

DARIS: I went to Tunis as political counselor. It was a very satisfying assignment. It was really the end of the Bourguiba reign so there was an end-of-regime atmosphere about the place and not always a rational decision making process, but it was basically a very amicable one where we knew we were dealing with a very old friend. I dealt with both the government and the political opposition, which was fairly well developed. Because it was really my last political officer job I guess I enjoyed dealing most with the opposition, the government being quite tentative in the environment that Bourguiba's failing health created. We had lots of Tunisian friends and we have retained them. Many of them are in the government now or have been brought into the government from the opposition. Tunisians are very sophisticated, engaging, with a distinct European content to their education, culture and government mechanisms. I found it easy to relate to them, as a friend and as a substantive officer. I had a really wonderful three years there. And our son Patrick was born in Tunisia.

Peter Sebastian was our Ambassador. He arrived the same day we did, and our tours coincided almost perfectly. He became a friend and trusted colleague, and remains so to this day.

Q: The United States has a good relationship with Tunisia historically and traditionally but we don't seem perhaps to have as many economic or energy or perhaps military interests as we do in Morocco or have on occasion in Algeria, is that right?

DARIS: Yes. When I was there the economy was largely oriented toward Europe, although they were interested in diversifying. But they didn't have a great deal to offer U.S. firms on big ticket items. There was not a lot of oil, and phosphate production was modest and to some extent in competition with ours. We maintained a presence with our old personal ties and a moderate AID program. We were grateful for Tunisia's moderation in the Arab world and in international affairs in general. Bourguiba was enlightened about the realities of the Arab-Israeli equation and his views were more than often pro-U.S., more so than most Arab leaders. We found ways to show our gratitude for his willingness to be actively supportive in international fora. We had a modest military assistance program and a joint military commission in which I actively participated. We had cooperation in the anti-terrorism area. I might recall for you that the Arab League was seated in Tunis at the time I was there. It has subsequently moved back to Cairo. That gave the capital another dimension. It wasn't a terribly active one but it generated some activity for us.

The PLO had also relocated to Tunis from Beirut in the early '80s. We had at the time no contact with them but they were in town and we were aware of that and that added still another diplomatic dimension to Tunis. As a matter of fact the PLO presence led to one of the lowest periods of my stay, after the Israelis bombed and almost killed Arafat at one of his houses on the bay south of the city of Tunis. I remember sending my Foreign Service National assistant and a junior officer assigned to the Political Section to the bombing scene to try to help us sort out the confused situation. They came back shaken; a wild-eyed PLO fighter had come out of the bombed compound waving an AK-47 that had been shattered in the bombing, with its stock broken loose and hanging by the shoulder strap. The Tunisian police told them to get out of there immediately. The reaction of the Tunisians was that we had to have been aware of and probably in collusion with the Israelis. Nothing we could do could disabuse them of that and we had a tough few months of dried-up contacts and access, which was a little frustrating but which time eventually overcame.

Q: We had not yet started to have any direct contact with the PLO in Tunis?

DARIS: No. Washington decided to authorize that not long after I left. It was just the way things developed but we had our marching orders. I regret that events had not evolved to the point where we could have handled that contact while I was there.

Q: You mentioned that you particularly enjoyed your contacts with some of the opposition people some of whom are now in government in prominent positions. Was that difficult? Was there sensitivity about having a lot of contact with the opposition on the part of the government or was it fairly open and easy to do that? Secondly related to that,

you mentioned the health of Bourguiba. I don't remember the dates of the death or when he gave up his position, did that happen while you were there?

DARIS: On the first question the government was aware of our contacts. Our embassy had insisted on maintaining those contacts over the years. It was part of the game. We policed ourselves I think pretty well making sure we were even-handed. We never received any serious indications that this was a primordial matter for the government. I felt no particular pressure and did my work quite openly with the one exception being the Islamists. I had contacts with the budding Islamist movement at the time and one particularly good contact that I maintained with the discretion that I think was indicated, but it wasn't a covert relationship.

As to Bourguiba, he was removed from power by Ben Ali in the early autumn of 1987, just two or three months after I left so I was not there to see that transition.
Q: So you weren't there when that happened?

DARIS: No, I wasn't there.

Q: But was it a little like the death of Tito, that anticipation that there would be a transition coming?

DARIS: Yes, well Bourguiba didn't die. He was gently removed. There was no bloodshed, and while it occurred against his will it went as well as those extra-constitutional events go. There was unspoken consensus that he should relinquish power. Ben Ali has maintained stability in the country. He has a background in intelligence and security issues and that is something that tends to show in many things he does. It has not produced an active democratic society but the Tunisians I think seem reasonably comfortable with a paternalistic executive and the country is doing quite well in terms of its economy.

So little Tunisia was and remains a friend. I'm proud I contributed to the relationship. It certainly was a satisfying assignment for us.

Q: It is also the site of the FSI Arabic language school and I don't know if there are other regional U.S. government activities there. That perhaps is the only one that has an impact wider than Tunisia by quite a bit.

DARIS: Yes, the school was and is there, and they were largely independent. I didn't see a great deal of them but the environment was pretty good for Arabic study. Perhaps not the best that could be imagined but it was a tolerant, safe society in which our students could study Arabic, and the school operation there has worked out well.

Q: Anything else we should say about your assignment to Tunis as political counselor? You were the acting deputy chief of mission on occasion I guess?

DARIS: Yes, I was acting DCM for my last three months there.

Q: Who was the ambassador there?

DARIS: Peter Sebastian had left in early '87. Gordon Brown was DCM and became chargé.

Q: In 1987 you went where?

DARIS: In 1987 I went as deputy chief of mission to Bahrain, having actively sought the assignment. It was a very disappointing moment in my career. I found considerable reason to question the probity of the political appointee ambassador. Almost from the beginning we were at loggerheads on both my role, the running of the mission, the substantive work of the mission, the policy and just about everything, so it ended badly. I left the post after seven months. It is not one of the more shining examples of our political patronage system but every administration has had its bad choices and it certainly does not lead me to argue for termination of political appointees. I've worked with some of the finest public servants I've ever known in Ellsworth Bunker and David Bruce and some good ones subsequent to that as well. Unfortunately, Reagan's person in Bahrain was not one of them and I don't wish to dwell here on that misfortune except to say that it was an important time for us in the region and I was sorry not to have been able to do more for our interests.

Bahrain has been a very staunch friend of the U.S. The U.S. Navy has been staging in and out of there since the Second World War. This very tiny nation has resisted the inclinations of large elements of its population who would rather not see a U.S. military presence on the island. At the time I was there in '87 and '88 the Iran Iraq War was in a very active and bloody stage and we were trying to do a number of things, one of which was to ensure that Kuwait was able to continue to supply oil to the world. Our Bahrain-dependent Navy was involved in reflagging and escorting Kuwaiti tankers. We had a large naval presence in the area. In one incident that occurred just before I arrived, Iraqi forces shot and almost sank one of our destroyers, the USS Stark, with great loss of life. While I was there the U.S. Navy also conducted some actions against Iranian units and installations.

The political-military element of that job was crucial. Bahraini sensitivities were severely tested and the embassy was heavily involved in trying to facilitate the continued used and increasing needs of our military in and out of Bahrain. It was a time for persuasive, quiet, and prudent diplomacy. One of the substantive issues that resulted in the difficulties between myself and the chief of mission centered on political military issues. The Bahrainis really have had to put up with the various excesses and inconsistency of U.S. policy over the years and they are still with us, thank goodness. As we speak, Bahrain is still one of our staunchest friends in the on-going tension in the area stemming from both Iraq and Iran. Yet the Bahrainis are still willing to house us and to put up with the problems this creates for them in the region and at home. They are true friends.

Q: In this period 1987-88 we were building up our presence in Bahrain for all these reasons you've just mentioned. You've mentioned that it does among other things cause them problems not only in the region but at home and I know later on there have been some demonstrations, some unrest, in Bahrain. I don't know whether that was present when you were there or still to come?

DARIS: It is a very small island and it has a tiny population. The ruling family must contend with a population that is majority Shiite and which has to a considerable degree felt alienated from the political process. Sheik Isa is I think a still loved father figure but the absence of any political participation by a large part of the population has led to understandable tension. Dissident groups, both at home and abroad, have made the presence of American military in Bahrain a central element in their bill of complaints.

Q: I guess just for the record we should probably say the name of the ambassador to Bahrain at the time, if you would.

DARIS: The ambassador was Sam Zakhem.

Q: So you left in 1988. Was there anything else we should say about that assignment to Bahrain of only seven months?

DARIS: We were very sad to leave. We loved the Bahrainis that we knew. It was an exciting job. What we were doing in the region was important. Leaving precipitously also created a difficult moment for our family.

Again I would go back to my earlier experience in Southeast Asia to point out that the Department is weak in political-military work at the country directorate level. The Pentagon decided early on what its regional goals were going to be, and quite rightly so because maintaining stability in the gulf region reflected our own high political and commercial priorities. The Pentagon has been by and large much more focused than the State Department in achieving its goals in the Gulf. State has not had our best people at the working level -- and I stress the working level -- or on the ground in political-military roles, so the Pentagon generally has driven policy. And, as in the case of Bahrain, I believe it doesn't always drive it in a way that is helpful to our political objectives with the small and fragile political entities we are dealing with in the region. I have often regretted that things were done as they were and that our decision making process did not reflect a larger input from the organization for which I worked. But desk officers are more than often overworked, understaffed, and inexperienced in political-military matters and we end up being driven by others, rather than leading.

Q: Was there a large U.S. military presence on the island, on the ground in Bahrain, in addition to all these ships in the Gulf and in the area at the time you were there?

DARIS: There has always been the support unit, the sort of non-base presence which has expanded I guess since I left. It effectively housed a command structure and some support

structures on the ground. I know that has since grown. At the time I was there we were building for the Bahraini Air Force a very modern air base on the southern end of the island and that has since served us well. We've been able to use it and are currently using it for some of our monitoring missions over Iraq.

Q: Anything else about Bahrain and where did you go from there in 1988?

DARIS: From Bahrain I came back and worked again on West Africa. I went in as a deputy director for the English speaking countries in the West Africa directorate and did that for two years. Then, on the recommendation of inspectors, the office was divided in two between English and French speaking countries and I took over as the first director of the French speaking West African countries. Incidentally, that reorganization has since been reversed and it is now a unified office again.

This return to AF/W offered a change of pace not unlike the one I experienced when I left the war zone in SE Asia many years before, this time from the war zone in the Gulf to the poverty and political disarray of West Africa. It was a welcome change in the sense that the name of the game initially was development and activities centered on endeavors that were more positive than war.

Alas, whereas the Sahel disaster and drought had been the highlight of my stay in the West Africa bureau earlier, the Liberian Civil War was the highlight of my stay in that office in the time I was to be there. It went on for years and is still not resolved. The carnage, suffering, and death has had a terrible toll on the very poor people in that region. In some ways it is easier in our system to manage foreign policy in Africa, as I learned earlier, because there is less interest in it, less competing interests as well. But I can't say that we managed the tragedy in the Liberian Civil War very well. I don't think we anticipated, and I don't think we reacted very well in retrospect. I certainly take as much blame as anybody for that. We were simply surprised at the rapid decline into anarchy that occurred after Doe was killed, and from there on our efforts were consumed, it seemed, by protection of American citizens and keeping our embassy from being overrun. We were largely ineffective in settling the conflict.

Q: We are having this conversation within a few days of President Clinton traveling to West Africa which is pretty unusual that there is that degree of high level interest at all, let alone West Africa. But certainly what you described has been more normally the case where there isn't a lot of higher level interest.

I'd like to talk just a little bit more about Liberia if we could. Charles Taylor kind of began his movement into the country I guess in late '89 and I think Doe wasn't actually killed until September or August of '90. As you know I was in Ghana at the time and I think there was some feeling in Ghana hoping, expecting, the United States to be more active, to take more of a lead, to feel more of a sense of responsibility for Liberia which of course has historic links to the U.S. Was that considered at the time that you were

directly involved or were there just so many other things going on that it just wasn't feasible to have more of a dynamic U.S. interventionist role, if you will?

DARIS: The problem at the time was finding what we considered valid interlocutors. We dismissed Taylor as a man with a criminal record in the United States, a fugitive actually, and considered those around him to be of the same ilk. The anarchy that developed very quickly left us without serious people to deal with. Even the efforts that we undertook were erratic and ineffective, as it turned out. I suspect that had we been willing to engage and back up some viable third-party African involvement, it would have cost us more money than we wanted to spend but the situation might have been stabilized sooner and the terrible loss of life avoided, some of it anyway.

There were outside factors contributing to the problem. There was clear Libyan involvement with Taylor, with Burkina Faso serving as Qadhafi's agent. The role of the Cote d'Ivoire was problematic as well. I still think that those things could have been overcome by a more active U.S. leadership, both directly and by using other Africans. I don't think that there was ever any question of U.S. forces going in to stabilize Liberia and I wouldn't even argue for that now in retrospect. But I know that everyone in the region was wondering why we, given our special role in Liberia, didn't do more and I think probably our leadership has to be faulted on that.

Q: There were obviously lots of other things going on in the world including the end of the Cold War.

DARIS: I speak of our leadership on Africa policy.

Q: Before we leave Anglophone West Africa, how about Nigeria? Did that take a lot of your time, interest, and attention at the time you were involved with Anglophone West Africa?

DARIS: No. At the time Nigeria was strangely enough not the major player you might expect on the workday agenda. Our relationship was reasonably stable at the time and I don't remember any major issues that required political judgments of any magnitude on Nigeria in the period.

Q: How about any other particular countries of Anglophone West Africa: Sierra Leone, Ghana? Sierra Leone I suppose is a backyard of Liberia.

DARIS: Yes, but at the time Sierra Leone was not directly affected by the civil war, that only developed later. Ghana was an interesting country and you know better than I the issues that pertained at the time. It had done development well for many years and had become the darling of international aid organizations as well as our own assistance people. At the same time we had a very complex political relationship with Ghana and it was exacerbated by the unfortunate spy incident that left a bad taste on both sides. I happened to feel at the time, and I know you didn't share this, that we were probably

devoting more of our assets to Ghana than we ought to, given the size of the pot and given our political objectives in the region. Ghana was not a friend of ours in many ways and was politically opposed to many of the things we wanted to do. I felt it was not the friendly political force that you would like to see given the amount of assets that we were putting into the country. I was always reluctant to support the proportions that were devoted to that account.

Q: As you know they were substantial and certainly in relative terms probably more than Ghana deserved and maybe even could use effectively. Ghana was sought after and as you say was a favorite client of the World Bank, AID, and others. Anything else about English speaking West Africa? Maybe we should turn to when you shifted over and were the director for Francophone West Africa. That is nine countries?

DARIS: Yes, I think it was nine countries. Shifting hats didn't really shift the issues, it shifted the clients I had. The Liberian war continued to dominate my agenda and the roles of Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso really occupied almost all my time in ensuing months. Senegal was another active account- (end of tape)

Our relationship with Senegal was quite stable at the time. The Senegalese were helpful to us in regional and international fora and they were, I think, deservedly high on our list of countries that we wished to help.

Mauritania was a problem child at the time. This was particularly true at the time of the Gulf War, when pro-Iraqi sympathies manifested themselves. And Mauritania's ongoing dispute with Senegal over border issues managed to take up some of our time.

The emergence of Tuareg resistance activities in Mali, Niger, and to some extent in Mauritania was an interesting phenomenon which proved elusive to define from our limited information resources. There were also signs of the Libyan hand in this matter.

Turning back to Cote d'Ivoire, it was a country where we were in another end-of-regime, situation with Houphouet losing his faculties. As with Bourguiba, Houphouet was historically an excellent friend of the United States. Our role there particularly vis-à-vis the French had always been a little complex but not antagonistic. The only cloud on the horizon with Abidjan was the inability of the Ivoirians to maintain a credible posture on the Liberian conflict.

A pleasant development at the time I was in the job was the evolution of the political and economic situation in Benin, where new players brought in some new ideas for the region and introduced participatory government. Togo on the other hand went in the other direction. Having been a very stable and reasonably prosperous society, it entered a period of unrest and political instability which was to concern us in the months to come, particularly after I left the job.

Q: How about Mali?

DARIS: Mali was in an evolving situation when I was in the job. It was unclear which way it could go and I simply was unable to get a good read on it up to the time I left. I might say that I had a trip planned there and I had to postpone it for personal reasons, so I never visited Mali in the year I was in the job.

Q: You mentioned that Burkina Faso was difficult and supportive of Charles Taylor and a conduit for Libyan assistance meddling in Liberia. Was there anything that we could do about that or did we try to take a policy posture or actions against the Ouagadougou government in the period that you were there?

DARIS: Yes, we were quite firm with Burkinabe at the highest levels. I carried messages to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Region Leonard Robinson carried messages, and our Ambassador Ed Brynn was always passing messages. We didn't have a lot of leverage on the Burkinabe because our AID program was already minimal and they could get help from other sources, not just the Libyans. They had young pseudo-revolutionary leaders who felt that they could get away with their mischief, and largely did. We didn't get as much support from some friends, particularly France, as we would have liked and as I say the Ivoirian role was a little murky in all of this. The Ivoirians often said the right thing but didn't always act in a way that we felt was helpful. I told their Prime Minister and Foreign Minister as much. This is not to say that they were malevolent but I think it reflected a fin-de-regime incoherence in the Ivorian decision-making process that permitted some mischievous elements to pursue their own agendas.

Q: Would you want to reflect at all more broadly about our relationship with France in terms of West Africa? To what extent did we communicate with Paris, defer to traditional French interest, compete with it?

DARIS: It was a given during both of my incarnations in West Africa affairs that the French should assume the main responsibility in their former colonies in the region. We saw our interests as largely complementary. We didn't have any vital interests in the region and therefore I never felt that we were terribly competitive, except on certain topical issues. The French, probably rightly so given their investment, dominated commercially. In a broad sense, I think we viewed it as a loose partnership. At the working level I seldom found it otherwise. I know that Paris was a standard stop on the itinerary of our officials when visiting the region. Generally I always had very satisfactory meetings with my French interlocutors.

Q: Certainly my experience in Ghana was that the French were anxious to be very active there and to be seen as very interested, involved, having little aid programs and so on. I think they didn't want to just be perceived as being only interested in former French colonies. The other thing I guess I would be interested in your reflections about a little bit is that other things were going on in Africa outside West Africa with of course South Africa being the most positive and prominent but Somalia was going through a difficult

time when you were in West African Affairs. Were you able to get the degree of interest and attention at the highest level of the Africa Bureau, let alone the State Department or the president's attention, or were there times where other things going on on the continent of Africa just took up everybody's time and you and others in West Africa basically were left to manage as best you could?

DARIS: I don't think that getting attention was ever a problem. We were able to get military assets into Liberia twice to protect our facilities when I was involved in it, and I think subsequently they became involved again when the safety of our people was in jeopardy. I do think that imaginative leadership might have been lacking on our side, but attention wasn't a problem. I don't know whether we could have successfully engaged our leadership to play a greater role in Liberia from the outset, and I don't know whether we could have come up with serious sums of money to play a leadership role. It may have been the calculation of Hank Cohen and others that it wouldn't fly. I don't know, but I hope he tried.

Q: Anything else on West Africa before we go on?

DARIS: No, I have to say that I have never been very impressed with the political processes that exist in Africa as a whole and particularly in the region I dealt with. It has been a disappointment and I think a failure of the colonial powers to not have left something better after the Second World War when they left. I think our priorities are right in wanting to continue to help Africa. I think our emphasis on linking economic development with more participatory political processes is right and I think we probably should have done it sooner. I particularly regret that we still seem willing to close our eyes to old dictators who manage to recycle themselves as newborn democrats.

Q: I agree. Where did you go when you left West African Affairs and when was that, '92 or '93? You were in West African Affairs for four years?

DARIS: Yes. I don't remember when I left. Probably '92.

Q: I think it would be '92. Where did you go?

DARIS: I was asked to do a special project for Larry Eagleburger who was deputy secretary at the time. It was a time when various committees in Congress had launched investigations that required large quantities of documents from the State Department. Both Houses of Congress decided to launch investigations into something called the October Surprise, which alleged that Reagan, and particularly CIA Director Casey, made a deal with the Iranians not to release the hostages until after the elections. This was all based on very little else than Gary Sick's thesis in his book, October Surprise. It was a juicy subject for an election year.

After a number of such experiences where the Department's response had not always pleased the Hill, Larry Eagleburger wanted a senior officer to supervise the project. So I

spent a few months sitting in the Secretariat supervising the collection, research, and culling of documents from this period. It was historically interesting because the hostage period was an emotional one for all of us who lived through seeing our colleagues incarcerated. As it turned out the documents revealed nothing to sustain the allegation that somehow an American political contender could rationally negotiate such a complicated scenario with the hopelessly divided Iranian leadership. Both Houses abandoned this quest after largely perfunctory hearings, not however without considerable expense to the taxpayers.

Q: That's not to say that the Iranian authorities may not have calculated or decided that if they were going to release the hostages, they would rather do it after the election (of course Reagan defeated Carter) and that in effect to do it as a gesture or a gift to the new president rather than the one that had been in charge when the embassy was taken over and tried to rescue the hostages and so on.

DARIS: I agree that was certainly part of that calculation. They certainly did nothing at all to help Jimmy Carter, and it is not to say that Mr. Casey might not have liked to engineer such an arrangement, but there is absolutely no way in the situation that prevailed that he could have.

Q: I guess the other question that one can only speculate on was what would have happened if the hostages had been released in October? In terms of the election, would it have made any significant difference?

DARIS: I don't know. I think that it was one significant electoral issue, but it wasn't the only issue that decided the election.

Q: Anything else about that little project interlude?

DARIS: After that I went over to the Board of Examiners for a year and served in the Assessment Center of the Board, examining candidates both here in Washington and in the field. Our panels traveled to many major cities in the States to interview Foreign Service candidates. It was a particularly satisfying experience. I was heartened to see the caliber of people still applying for the Foreign Service and pleasantly surprised to see that people still knew how to write and act on their feet, despite reports to the contrary. I thoroughly enjoyed doing that for a year.

Q: Were you able really to observe their writing ability? They did an essay or something that allowed you to judge that?

DARIS: That was part of the test at the time. It has since evolved in other ways but I think it has still got to be a part of Foreign Service work.

Q: The kind of applicants you were assessing, examining, were older probably than an earlier generation? How was their motivation and commitment would you say?

DARIS: It's true that the majority of the successful candidates were older, people who had had work experience, and there probably were more in this category than there were when you and I took the test. In terms of commitment to the Foreign Service, I don't know. I think the Service as we knew it has changed a great deal it over the years. People's view of careers and their way of pursuing them has changed. I applied for the Foreign Service when Kennedy was still president and public service was a good word. I don't think that kind of motivation is firing as many of our youths as it used to. I'm not sure that's all a bad thing. You can still be a professional Foreign Service officer without a lot of the band music. But I was gratified to see that the Service is still getting good candidates, even though that was at a time when for budgetary reasons we were having virtually no intake.

Q: The drought was because of the budget?

DARIS: Yes, budgetary cutbacks and downsizing. The Service is still taking people in and we must continue to do so if we are to survive. I think that it's been clear from the junior officers that came into the Foreign Service over the past few years that dedication as we knew it has changed. As I said people can still be committed to serving their country for its own sake and to doing that in the Foreign Service context, but I think they are far more pragmatic about it. The system has evolved so that families can function in ways that are more mindful of spouses' needs and rights. As we know this has had the inadvertent effect, if you will, of breaking down what we used to know as Foreign Service discipline. But that is nevertheless a reflection of our own society and the Foreign Service can be no different.

Q: Anything else about the year at the Board of Examiners?

DARIS: No, I thought that the process was pretty good. Of course you had differences among panel members about candidates and there were always a few that got away or there are always a few times that you found yourself overridden, but by and large it was a pretty good system for selecting the best candidates.

Q: And there were probably some that you thought were outstanding that maybe somebody else didn't quite agree on.

DARIS: Yes, I have a few regrets but it was a pretty good process.

Q: Where did you go from there?

DARIS: I went for what was to be my last assignment, as principal officer to Jeddah. It was a wonderful, challenging, and very satisfying experience.

Q: This was shortly after Desert Storm, the second Gulf War?

DARIS: Yes, I arrived shortly after, in '93. Jeddah had been the site of our embassy up until 1985, so the consulate had inherited considerable infrastructure. I in turn inherited a pretty sizable staff because the present King spends most of his time in Jeddah and the many senior visitors coming to the Kingdom always came to Jeddah.

Jeddah is the commercial capital of the country. Its inhabitants are considerably more worldly than other Saudis, particularly those to the east and northeast. The Organization of Islamic Conferences is located there, so that added another dimension to it that was occasionally interesting. And Jeddah is the gateway to Mecca, so each year we witnessed a pilgrimage of many millions of hajjis coming in from all corners of the world.

Q: Including a few Americans.

DARIS: Yes, that is right. We also had a large American business community in the consular district, about 6,000 U.S. citizens. I was quite active with our businessmen. We also had a lot of protection and visa cases. We produced considerable substantive reporting, particularly on the economic side but also some political. I had a good staff and good relations with the embassy, but I profited from the considerable distance separating us and I had a great degree of autonomy. I enjoyed an excellent relationship with a capable political appointee, former governor of Mississippi Ray Mabus, who visited Jeddah frequently for business and pleasure. My wife and I were extremely active in an area that was my highest priority, the Saudi commercial community. We found that very satisfying.

Q: I'm looking at a piece of paper that says you were cited by the U.S. Businessmen's Group in Jeddah as the most pro-U.S. business consul general in memory.

DARIS: The American Businessmen of Jeddah and the American Ladies of Jeddah were the two key organizations for U.S. citizens. They were both very active. I was supportive of both groups and permitted them to use USG facilities, often difficult to find in Saudi Arabia given the religious constraints that foreigners - and especially females - are subjected to in Saudi Arabia. It wasn't just logistical support, however. I participated actively in their board meetings, hosted a number of their functions, and tried to make them viable organizations both for the sake of the American community as well as to further American business. My wife played an active and invaluable role in the American community, as well as the Saudi.

Q: Are women able to do somewhat more in Jeddah than they can in other parts of Saudi Arabia? Is it a little bit easier for them there?

DARIS: Yes, I think it is fair to say that they are less likely to be harassed by religious police in public. They still must obviously respect customs and there is some capriciousness about application of the restrictions that foreigners fall victim to from time to time, but by and large the climate in the Western Province was more open for Western females than in the rest of the country.

Q: Where we also have a consulate in Dhahran?

DARIS: Yes, there is a small consulate there because of the oil industry.

Q: You mentioned that the current king spent much of his time in Jeddah and that senior American visitors would therefore come there to see him. If the ambassador had business with the king, or I don't know if there were other elements of the national government, would the embassy feel like they would come to Jeddah and handle all of that, or did you on occasion get directly involved with either the king or with other elements of the national government in Jeddah?

DARIS: There was a division of labor which was well established. The embassy handled central government issues, with a few exceptions which I will mention. I must say that the ambassador was very good in taking me along to see the king, the crown prince, and other senior central government leaders on occasion when he came down, but that was not an essential feature of my duties. I dealt with local provincial officials, the governor for example, the mayor and other local officials. I did take the lead substantively in dealing with the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The national airline was in Jeddah so I took the lead in dealing with them. The environmental agency was located in Jeddah and we took the lead in dealing with them, although the embassy did send people down and we'd jointly do things. As a general rule substantive government meetings were handled by the embassy if it involved the central government. We were always lending a hand both logistically and often substantively. My substantive officers did reporting and demarches on behalf of the embassy on occasion. It worked out quite well, and Jeddah had more substance and dimension than many of our smaller embassies.

Q: You mentioned that Jeddah is the commercial capital and the seat of the national airline, and therefore probably more involved in some ways with Europe, Egypt, than perhaps other parts of the kingdom. Is it true that they were more involved, more aware, with other parts of the region? Also, what did they think of Israel? Was there any contact apparent in Jeddah?

DARIS: No, there was no contact with Israel and very little sympathy for Israel. I think that the merchants followed both in spirit and letter the official line. I never sensed any deviations from that or any longing to do otherwise. As a general observation the merchant families in Jeddah evolved over the years because not only were they on the trade routes but because of the annual pilgrimages. There was a well developed sense and spirit of the outside world and in modern times countless Saudis have studied in the States. I can't tell you the number of Saudi interlocutors to whom I could speak as I am speaking to you now. I never experienced this in my Foreign Service career. There was a vast reservoir of people to whom you could talk in this manner, without missing a beat in terms of nuance and sophistication about our own society.

Q: Was much of this dialog in English?

DARIS: Always English. I had a couple of officers who spoke Arabic and it was useful, but it wasn't necessary.

Q: Was there much U.S. military presence in the western province in Jeddah at the time you were there?

DARIS: We had some advisors to the national guard and to the air force and a number of American military contractors working with the various Saudi armed forces. In terms of our own operational assets we had some at Taif, which is to the east of the city in the high plateau area, and we had some down near Abha, at Khamis Mushayt. These were remnants of Desert Storm and the monitoring regime, but they did not constitute large numbers.

Q: You had a very large consular district in terms of territory, area. Did you travel quite a bit or was most of your focus in Jeddah itself or close by?

DARIS: I traveled periodically, but most of the American activities were centered in and around Jeddah. There were about 6,000 Americans in my consular district.

Q: What about terrorism? One thinks of that word with certainly the Middle East, Saudi Arabia on occasion. Was that a problem, an issue, a concern when you were there?

DARIS: It's a problem for any manager and of course we are responsible under law in certain circumstances for harm that might come to our staffs if we ignore security. We spent a lot of time on security issues, especially in response to the frequent threats our system disseminates. The two bombs that went off in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996 were targeted against the U.S. military. Notwithstanding these menaces, I felt secure in Saudi Arabia. The security forces are more competent than in many other countries in which I have lived. In sum, while a lot of my management time dealt with security issues, it was not an intellectual preoccupation for me nor was it a distraction.

Q: The two bombs that went off weren't down the street so to speak?

DARIS: The first one was in Riyadh. That went off in the fall of '95. The second one was in Khobar in the eastern province and occurred 24 hours before I left the country. That did change the way that our people worked and lived, and I'm glad, frankly, I didn't have to live in such an atmosphere.

Q: Politics in Saudi Arabia is obviously a somewhat sensitive subject and my question, generally, is did you have a pretty good range of contacts did you feel and were there sensitivities about some of the people that you and the consulate staff would have liked to have seen or did see?

DARIS: I didn't have any problems discussing just about any subject that I wanted. My interlocutors were sophisticated, they were the senior people in society. There were some things however that they just didn't know and the kind of information gaps we had were those which you might expect in a controlled society. In general, information gathering was not easy in Saudi Arabia, although the opinions of my interlocutors often reflected senior thinking. That said, in such a society it is very difficult to ascertain what kind of organizational opposition there might be out there.

Q: Let's go back to the business commercial side again for a minute. Besides working with the businessmen's association and the women's group as sort of an organized entity, did you feel like you could be particularly helpful to American exporters, American potential investors? Or was so much of the business already well organized by large U.S. company people that had been there a long time that there really wasn't much that your staff could do to directly assist them.

DARIS: The Foreign Commercial Service had an office in Jeddah as well as in Riyadh. They were active in helping small traders plug into the U.S. economy.

Q: Small Saudi traders?

DARIS: Yes, to find sources that supplied from the States. I think they did a reasonably good job in that respect. The larger Saudi enterprises, however, knew where to go and what to do. The Saudis had been operating with U.S. companies for years, most had studied and/or lived in the States, many of them have offices in the States. There was not much brokering to be done there. Every now and then there was some major commercial issue we would become involved in. The ambassador was highly engaged, as were we all, on the Boeing /McDonnell Douglas sales to Air Saudia, but those were exceptions rather than the rule. Your supposition that lines of communication already exist and that relationships already exist is largely correct.

Q: You mentioned that there were about 6,000 United States citizens in your consular district. Do you have any general idea of who they were? Were some of them Saudis with American passports, business, military? How did it break down roughly?

DARIS: These were private citizens, they were non-officials. It is illegal for anyone to have two passports but we considered American spouses of Saudis to be American citizens and we treated them that way even though under Saudi law they couldn't be dual citizens. Our records were pretty good. We had to keep updating them. We had an active warden system and it worked pretty well. I think we had good communications with them. I sent my consular officers around in the consular district to service people and listen.

There was one memorable incident involving our successful repatriation of an American spouse and her daughter. It was a classic case of allegations of abuse, use of Saudi law to keep the woman and child in country, etc. The woman's family engaged a wealthy, well-

known American figure to generate some pressure in the USG and in Saudi Arabia. Over the course of one long memorable night, my team and I tag-teamed for hours on the husband and local Saudi officials, while Ray Mabus worked his phone from Riyadh. It was touch and go, but eventually the husband agreed to let them leave, and my people eventually escorted the mother and daughter to the airport - with the husband along to authorize their departure - for a middle-of-the-night departure to the U.S. High drama, with a most satisfying outcome.

Q: Anything else about Jeddah?

DARIS: No, nothing about my personal experiences there. I think that Saudi Arabia has some very difficult times ahead in terms of the way it governs itself, the way it makes decisions, the way it engages its population. It can't buy its way out of its problems anymore. Its population has grown too much and the economy simply can't support the fat years of the oil boom and just permit the leadership to buy everything and build anything that they want to keep the lid on. But Saudi Arabia has enormous assets and just about any other country would exchange its problems. With good management, Saudi Arabia can survive and prosper. The main question is – and this pertains equally to all of the Muslim world - when will it develop institutions that engage the majority of its people?

End of interview