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

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAMUEL DE PALMA

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INTERVIEW

Q: Let's start with your academic background to see whether there was any connection between it and your interest in foreign affairs.

DE PALMA: There was a connection, but I don't think it was terribly important. I graduated from the University of Rochester which is not noted for its international affairs program. It had a decent political science-government program and I found myself torn between my literary interests and public affairs. The latter won out in my junior year. I thereafter took all the government courses I could find, including a couple in international relations. By the time I graduated, I was looking around for a way to continue my

education, but I was flat broke. I had gone to Rochester on a scholarship. I decided to start earning some money before going on with the academic world.

I took advantage of a small scholarship being awarded by American University in Washington. American had evening courses and I took advantage of that and worked during the day, to the detriment of the academic endeavors. This was in 1940, so that I was also facing the uncertainty of the draft. I was subsequently disqualified because I had lost sight in one eye. I was therefore left to make the best of this work-academia combination. I became addicted to international affairs thanks in part at least to the Washington atmosphere. For a while, I considered a career in journalism and worked part-time for the Newsweek bureau in Washington. I did other odd jobs to try to stay financially afloat.

After a year of working in the day and studying at night, I met my wife-to-be and were married a few months later. In the meantime, with the war on, I felt somewhat awkward not being in the service. So I decided to take on another job in Air Force intelligence--it later became a combined Air Force-Army unit. I did that for a couple of years working primarily on Air Force targets. While I was in that job, I began to consider my academic career and realized that I had lost my yen for it. I guess I was just tired of the grind and although I had completed 18 months of graduate work, I didn't even get a Master's Degree.

When an opportunity arose to get into State Department, I took it. The job was in a part of the Department that had just been created to work on preparations for the United Nations. The job came to my attention through someone I had met at American. He told me that the Department was looking for people for a new unit. This unit was essentially a Columbia University "Mafia" that had come to the Department to work on the creation of the United Nations. There were five or six ex-professors from Columbia who were very interested in this subject. One had been recruited by the Department and then he recruited to others. As they were establishing this new unit, I was interviewed and was offered an entry level job. The one ex-Columbia professor that I was beholden to was Durward Sandifer who was in charge of the part of the unit that I worked in. Willard Barber was another of the ex-professor. Dorothy Fosdick was another. I went to work in the little sub-unit that Fosdick headed.

The new unit was certainly not a bureau, but I think it may have been attached to the Secretary's office. By the time I joined it, the UN had already been formed so that the main focus of the unit was on US participation in the UN. The people were working out all US policies for our participation in the UN. This was in late 1945 and I stayed with this unit and its successor organization until I went to the War College in 1958. I had been anxious to leave the UN work for sometime before then, but we were specialists and typed as so. But I could never quite break-out. We were not Foreign Service officers and did not really seem to be part of the Department.

Q: Was this unit the embryo for the Bureau for International Organizations (I.O.)?

DE PALMA: Yes, it was. The unit focused during the period I served in it on the gambit of UN and International Organizations' work. Having gotten the UN started, then we went to work on the specialized agencies. As these agencies were created, my unit was involved in the back-stopping of the US participation--the organizing of conferences, our participation. The unit grew like Topsy--it was mushroom growth--because these organizations kept being formed and we were under the gun to handle all the details involved in our participation. The unit was about 15-18 people when I joined it.

Q: Which particular aspects were you working on?

DE PALMA
For the first part of my tour, I worked on the problems of establishing and organizing the UN Secretariat. This was something about which I knew absolutely nothing. There were all kinds of problems--i.e the kind of international civil servant that was wished for the system of international organizations. Some how I got stuck with that with sort of thing. For a while, I even got shunted into the question of administration of these agencies. It was only two or three years when I began to be assigned responsibility for one or more of these UN specialized agencies, like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). I was a sort of a desk officer for that agency.

Q: I assume that the group you were working with viewed the UN with considerable amount of favor.

DE PALMA
It was a group that was not at all typical of the State Department. These people were dedicated international organization types. They had come to the Department because they were interested in developing international organizations--multi-lateral diplomacy.

Q: Had any of them had any background or previous experience in international organizations?

DE PALMA: Several did. They were some whose careers went back to the League of Nations--Denny Myer for example. Most of these people who had joined State Department had worked at their Universities on these kinds of problems. They were already "experts". These people were on the leading edge of the post-WW II multilateral period. They had the idealistic notion that multi-lateral diplomacy and these international organizations were the ways in which peace could be preserved and through which the under-developed countries could be helped. They didn't accept much opposition. They were very much fixated on their program.

Q: Was there much opposition in the Department?

DE PALMA

Not really. As a matter of fact, at that time, I didn't sense any opposition. I was of course only a junior official. There was a tremendous gap between my unit and the rest of the Department. We were pretty much left alone to do our thing. The rest of the Department wasn't paying any attention to us. We had a pipe-line into the Secretary, beginning with Stettinius, whose assistant was Alger Hiss. So we had a direct connection with the Secretary's office, but it wasn't until many years later that an interface with the rest of the Department began. That was when problems arose about our participation in these international organizations which effected bilateral relations with certain governments. This sometimes created some friction with the Regional Bureaus.

Q: What kind of support did you get from Stettinius and his successors?

DE PALMA: Stettinius was there only a very short period of time. Alger Hiss was a fervent supporter. That was an easy relationship, as far as I could see. We were pretty isolated for a long time.

Q: You moved up in that unit. Were you still working on the same problems?

DE PALMA: By the time, I joined the unit it already had an Office of Political Affairs, an Office of Administrative Affairs (concerned with the management of the US system, the administrative back-stopping including UN personnel) and then an Office which included experts on each of the individual UN agencies. Some years after I joined, I was desperate to get out of the office concerned with administrative affairs and I joined the Office of Political Affairs in 1952. Before that, I became staff assistant to John Hickerson, who was the Assistant Secretary for International Organization--the unit I had joined had become a Bureau several years earlier. This was an eye-opening job because John was a very interesting person to work for. He was very easy to talk to--in fact, too easy; he loved to tell stories. He would come to my office and spend a half-hour telling me stories. It was great fun. I had access to the whole flow of papers dealing with the complete work of the Bureau, which gave me a much better feel for the work of the total Bureau.

Q: Before we leave your experience with the management of the UN system, let me ask whether there was anything occurring in those days that suggested that management issues, like salaries, would become a bone of contention later?

DE PALMA: I am not sure we were anticipating those problems. We could sense the potential difficulties. First of all, we had connived, before I joined the Department, with other people in setting the standards for international civil servants, which were difficult to maintain. They were supposed to work for the international organization and not for their government. It was already obvious even to me that once the US began looking at American personnel and got involved in the security clearance business for our own people, it was almost pre-ordained that other governments would do that and other things as well. One could see that problems were going to develop. But those were innocent days and my colleagues felt that a genuine class of high-minded international civil

servants could be developed. They would carry on the work of these organizations in a way that would insulate them from pressures from their own or other governments.

Q: Had the practice of allocating positions to each country already started at that time?

DE PALMA: It had started and it was an obvious problem which didn't seem pernicious at the time. There had to be a certain geographic representation in the leadership of the UN. That was part of the Charter along with the requirement that the staff was supposed to be a disinterested international staff. There was always the question of how the jobs would be apportioned. Since we were one of the great powers, we definitely wanted our share. The question was which particular high level job should be reserved for an American. Parenthetically, from the beginning we probably made a mistake. We foresaw that there would be management problems since this was a new bureaucracy and therefore went after the management jobs. That was our strength--the United States is the great manager. We thought that if we could manage the organization properly, it would work effectively. In hindsight, we didn't recognize that there was only so much you could do in terms of administrative efficiency in an international staff of that kind. It contained people from many different countries with many different backgrounds. Many were placed there because their country had to have some representation in the international staff, even if they didn't have a good candidate. Therefore, at times, you got indifferent performances. It was very hard to apply our standards. So we were stuck with the management jobs, while other countries sought substantive positions. It was only later that we realized out mistake, but we always stuck with the managerial-administrative side.

Q: Was that because we saw our strength in that area or was it because we thought we could control the UN in that way?

DE PALMA: It was a little of both. It was natural of us to think in our immodest way that we were the best managers in the world and that we knew more about it than anyone else. That was the primary motivation. But I think there was also the feeling that you could get a grip on the organization by running its administration.

Q: Let's return to the Hickerson days. You were his special assistant across the board?

DE PALMA: Yes. I was the staff assistant. I managed his front office and screened the papers. It was very different from what I had been doing. I saw all the things that flowed into Hickerson's office except the few things that he wanted to keep private. For one year, this was a heady experience and permitted me to see the broader aspects of the UN.

Q: What were Hickerson's relationships to other Assistant Secretaries?

DE PALMA: I was not really in a position to judge, but from my point of view, he seemed to have a very good, solid relationships all around. He was not one of the outsiders who had been brought in. He was an insider. Given his personality, I had the feeling that Hickerson was part of the team, of the establishment of the Department.

Q: By this time, did the Department show any greater interest in what IO was doing?

DE PALMA: By this time, some interest had developed if only because the UN itself and the six-seven other related organizations were becoming involved in matters which had political and economic ramifications which did then involve other parts of the Department. The interface that developed came through the need for a lot of joint efforts in the Department. By that time IO was definitely integrated into the Department.

Q: Did you have any recollections of White House interests at that time?

DE PALMA: I personally have no recollection of such interests. Since the UN had always been a special institution, it always had a special kind of relation with the White House. When a question of the US joining one of the UN organizations arose or when some major US statements in the UN was required, we always had a sense through the Secretary of what the White House desired. It continued that way for many years.

Q: In the period 1953-55, who was our Ambassador to the UN?

DE PALMA: I began when Warren Austin was our representative. Then came Henry Cabot Lodge who stayed for several years. They were not members of the Cabinet, which was a practice started later.

Q: Did you get a chance to go to New York frequently?

DE PALMA: Yes. That began a very awkward part of my life. Before I became the staff assistant, I had gone to New York on several occasions. But after I left the job of staff assistant, I joined the Office of Political Affairs and was in New York frequently. Beginning then and thereafter, I spent an inordinate amount of time going to conference and meetings without my family. I look back on those days and considered myself a "conference bum". I went to New York, Geneva, Beirut--all over the world.

Q: What was the size of the New York office in the mid-50s?

DE PALMA: It was certainly augmented during the General assembly meetings. We began to get help from other parts of the Department which would send other officers to New York to help our delegation. They were needed extra hands and served as liaison officers. The New York office was not small, but I would guess that there were probably a dozen officers plus that many more support personnel.

Q: What was the major issue in the UN in the early-to-mid '50s?

DE PALMA: This was the period of the Korean War. The Cold War had already started which gave much of the impetus to the Korea affair. Then there was the China problem.

Q: What is your interpretation of Truman's decision to intervene in Korea?

DE PALMA: From my vantage point, it seemed that he felt almost compelled to react in a vigorous manner because of our political-security interests. He must have felt that Korea could not simply be allowed to fall under Communists. He also felt that the way to handle the situation was through the UN. That was the reason the UN had been established. The Security Council was supposed to deal with issue of this kind. Even though by then we and the Soviets were at loggerheads in the Council, he must have felt that he had no option other than going to the UN. It made the intervention much easier to justify domestically, at least at the beginning. He could say that we were obligated under the UN Charter to come to rescue of the injured party.

Q: This was a precedent for the UN. The conventional wisdom says that the reason we got UN support is because the Soviet absented themselves from the Security Council.

DE PALMA
The reason we got the vote that enabled the UN to intervene was that the Russians chose to absent themselves from that particular Security council meeting in protest. That was a stupid thing for them to do because it enabled us to pass the necessary resolutions. The Russians knew what the agenda item was going to be. But they intentionally stayed away as a protest against this kind of UN consideration. Something went wrong with their back-stopping. It was clearly a mistake. Everyone else voted in favor or abstained.

Q: Did that particular Security Council action change our view of the UN and the UN's view of itself?

DE PALMA: It certainly did for a while. It seemed to move the UN on a path that had been laid out for it; it was acquiring teeth so that it could deal with international security problems. For the first year or so of the intervention, it was a pretty heady experience for the UN itself.

Q: Did the US delegation have any great difficulties in convincing other UN members of the propriety of the recommended action? Was there a lot work necessary before the resolution was voted on?

DE PALMA: Yes, a lot of work was done, but I didn't sense that our proposal needed that much selling. There were many delegations that were not enthusiastic as we were. I have a dim recollection that the French, for example, were not that eager. The British with their usual reserve had to be massaged quite a bit to come along. But I don't recall any strong opposition among the countries with which we were closely associated. It was a very rapid decision-making process compared to other UN decisions. It came up quickly and was decided quickly.

Q: Let's discuss China briefly in the UN context.

DE PALMA: There was never any argument about our China policy when I was in the Office of Political Affairs. Our policy was to keep mainland China out of the UN; that became automatic. We worked against the admission of the People's Republic of China in successive assemblies and in the UN and related organizations. No argument. The few voices which accused the government of being stupid did not have any effect and were ignored. That is not to say that some of us who were carrying out the policy didn't think too highly of the policy, but we never fought it. Our position was that the PRC was not a legitimate regime. We concocted a line of argumentation which we supported automatically because we repeated it so often. The PRC regime was not a legitimate government and therefore should not be admitted to the UN. I don't think anyone struggled too hard to find legal and substantive underpinnings to support this argument. We decreed it. We used all the muscle we had to bring others into line. I don't know of any other issue in which we used as much muscle.

Q: What does "muscle" mean in the UN system?

DE PALMA: It means that we told other representatives that we had to have their vote on this issue; that it was terribly important to us and that we would take it amiss if they didn't support us. Along with that, there were considerations when you got to countries which didn't see the merit of our position. I wasn't privy to these dealings, but obviously there were instances when we had to take into account another country's pet peeve. We found ourselves trading over this issue over the years (for example, helping Portugal fight off UN pressure on the liberation of their African colonies in return for access to the Azores). The "trading" had begun early in the UN's history, but it was not really build into the system. But it inevitably came along.

Q: The original assumption having been that all countries would work for the welfare of the UN and not their narrow interests?

DE PALMA: Right. But very soon--by the early '50s--that ideal broke on the shoals of reality. Some of trading was just inevitable. For example, we supported our friends during the decolonization process. Some resisted it and therefore so did we despite the fact that we favored decolonization, except for the few little territories we were administering in the Pacific, which we insisted we needed for security reasons. I recall, for example, that we were the last country that was voting with the Portuguese on the issue of freedom of their colonies in Africa. We had several votes in which we and the Portuguese were arrayed against the rest of the world. The other NATO allies abstained. This was consistent with the whole vote pattern during the decolonization. When the new African regimes came to power, most were left-wing because they had received support from the Soviets. They were not friendly to the US.

Q: Wow were the internal debates in the Department on colonization?

DE PALMA: They were mostly hard-headed, almost crass. No one was really defending colonialism, except perhaps for a few individual officers. The British were never much of

a problem because they had set their own agenda which was progressing well. It was mostly a case that "these are our allies; we need them and therefore we have to pay attention to their policies". We were sure that there would be decolonization, but it had to be an orderly program, the speed of which should be left to each colonial power. We should help and not get in their way. That was essentially the EUR position.

Q: When did the Bureau of African Affairs weigh in on the other side?

DE PALMA: I was not very conscious of AF during these discussions up to 1957. By the time, the US became the sole defenders of the Portuguese, AF was being heard from. They couldn't see any point in our position, which was true of most of us as well. But we needed the Azores and that was the price. It was a price that people recognized we had to pay, but it was also recognized that we were incurring a real cost.

Q: Still talking about the pre-1957 period, what was the level of competence of the UN bureaucrats?

DE PALMA: I had a rather favorable impression. There were people I met who seemed to be very able, but I had plenty of reason to doubt that there was a uniformly high standard because it was obvious that some of the people that were assigned were not pulling their weight. They didn't have the background for this work. But that didn't seem important. They were there, but the ones that were carrying the work-load seemed to be able people. Those who were not carrying their share of the load were limited by the lack of background. A country would send some very young officials or in a few cases, old retreads. In the case of newly independent countries, the young official was sent because he had a college degree, who may have spent a year in the Foreign Ministry. These were people without experience.

In addition of course was the Soviet problem which developed quite early on. It was clear that many for the Russians had been assigned for reasons other than their suitability for the UN. The Soviets refused really to have their people come in as international civil servants. They in effect said that they wanted so many slots and they would then assign whomever they wanted. The UN fought this for a time. We all thought it was a terrible procedure, but it soon became obvious that this was the only way the Russians were going to play the game. They developed subterfuges to make things look differently, but in fact the Russians had so many slots which they filled as they wished. Worst than that, their salaries were not paid to the individuals, but centrally to the Soviet government. The government skimmed some off the top. It was a very awkward situation from the very beginning. I would guess that half of the Soviets were quite able and clever and knowledgeable. The other half were obviously there for other purposes or at least it was hard to figure out why they were there. At first it didn't seem quite that bad because it blended in with some other countries representatives who were just there and didn't have much to contribute. After ten years or so, though, it became obvious that the Soviets were using some of their slots for illegitimate purposes. I should mention that they were not the only ones who used the UN this way.

Q: What are your views about the difficulties of running international organizations when staffed by people with widely differing backgrounds, cultures and experiences?

DE PALMA: It is very difficult to do well. One has to make allowances for those factors when you establish standards for performance in a Secretariat staff, for example. It is virtually impossible to have in that kind of setting an integrated, disciplined staff work that you expect in a national administration. You therefore get very spotty performance from an international organization. You can have a brilliant performance here and there and average performances in many places and terrible performances elsewhere. The real problem comes when the organization has been around for some time and begins to flounder, when the organization is no longer a focal point for country's foreign policies. That happened to the UN because of the cold war and other events. It became a debating club--certainly by the mid-50s. At that point, the organization does very little--it just becomes a sounding board. The staff had no real initiatives to take. Initiatives are very hard in case for a Secretariat to take, but at that stage they were just blocked. No one was paying much attention to it. What develops in that kind of situation--it might have developed in any case--is the professional international civil servant--a kind of inner club of people who love to go to conferences and parties and who acquire a reputation as being members of a little inner-club who don't like any government. All governments are bad in their view. They become quite detached from reality and their performance thereby suffers.

Q: You have just discussed the problems of a multi-cultural civil service staff. It raises the question of whether, if the international staff had been more effective, could the UN have been more than just a discussion group?

DE PALMA: If the UN has something to do, it becomes painfully obvious very quickly if it has adequate staff. If the personnel is inadequate, then something has to be done one way or another. If it doesn't have something to do, that problem doesn't arise. That is why you had people of real competence. There was Brian Urquhart--the guy who handled the UN peace-keeping function. That was a job that the UN was giving to do and he rose to the top doing them. He was an able guy--highly respected. Ralph Bunche was another. He was the lead UN person on decolonization. He was a very able guy. There were a succession of people like that at the UN, but always associated with a specific UN activity which made it worth while for a person of ability to be around.

Q: It is very difficult for someone in the Secretariat to initiate some action?

DE PALMA: Very difficult. That relates partly to the status of the Secretary General. Under the Charter, the SG is supposed to be a much more active and energetic person than most Secretaries have been. Hammarskjold was the first one to really try to grab hold of the Secretary General's powers and he did a good job given the circumstances. It wasn't until the current Secretary General, Javier Perez de Cuellar, that we had another one who was willing to explore the limits of his job and use his own personal efforts to try to get

the UN involved in important matters. When you have that kind of Secretary General, then you have the need for a staff. He has to rely on some people. Then he brings in a handful of able people whom he can trust. If you have a Secretary General that is going with the flow, then the staff can be mediocre. A good Secretary General can make a difference. A good one can also break his head. If he gets cross-wise with one or more of the major powers--especially the US and the Soviets--as Trgve Lie did for example, he becomes terribly handicapped--becomes crippled. But if he is clever, if he can play the game and doesn't become a "persona non grata" with one of the major powers, he can make a real difference. He can even help governments by bringing the UN in on matters that governments would like to see the UN involved, but for domestic reasons, can't take the initiative. He can do a lot of behind-the-scene work as well as fronting for others.

Q: You have observed the UN and its relationships with countries for forty-five years. Do you see any change in that relationship? Are individual countries becoming more supportive of the UN?

DE PALMA: I have certainly seen a change in the last year or two. It is definitely on the rise again. Until then, its performance had been very spotty. Certain things would happen in one organization or another which would give it some spark, but only a couple of years ago that the UN really perked up. It got involved in important matters, not just in peace-keeping, but peace-making. The Secretary General became involved in several important issues. This is actually what the UN was supposed to do from the beginning. The involvement became possible as cold war tensions eased and the Secretary General found opportunities. And we now have a SG who is very interesting, very quiet and soft-spoken, unassuming, not threatening and yet is willing to tackle some tough issues.

Q: Let's return to 1957 when you left IO and were assigned to the War College. After that you went to Paris, once again assigned to an international organization. Was this your desire or were you typed by that time as an international organizations expert.

DE PALMA: I had by that time obviously been typed. I had not tried for that job at all. I had no definite idea of what I wanted to do after the War College. I just wanted to stay out of IO, but I recognized that the Paris job was only getting me partly out. The thing that made it palatable was that I was not assigned to the technical part of our Mission to NATO, but as a political officer. NATO had developed an embryonic political consultation process. There was a subcommittee which met weekly to exchange political information on various situations. Various political issues were discussed in this forum. I was in the US section, under Joe Wolfe, which handled these consultations. We were part of the United States Regional Organization (USRO) mission. We were discussing general run-of-the-mill issues. I did not have a sense that the political issues that we were discussing loomed very large. We did consult periodically at higher levels involving the senior representatives, who exchanged views on some important issues. But at our level, the discussions were about more mundane political issues in part to keep the NATO delegates informed of the various views of their governments on current issues. It was not

a place to settle extraneous political issues. I am referring to issues which did not involve NATO Itself.

Q: What was USRO's relationship to the Embassy during this period?

DE PALMA
It seemed to be quite separate. We did not feel a part of the Embassy.

Q: There was always tension in Paris because we had three or four American Ambassadors, one to France and the other to various international organizations. Did that create any problems at staff level?

DE PALMA.
I don't think it did. We were aware of the problem, but we had such a separate activity that this issue really never interfered. We would go to the Embassy for a briefing periodically and exchange views and get some information. Then we had shared security services. But it was not a close relationship.

Q: What about your counterparts from other NATO countries? Were they separated from their Embassies as well?

DE PALMA: Yes, except the very small ones. The large Embassies--France, England, West Germany--had separate delegations.

Q: Was this multi-lateral consultation a worth-while endeavor?

DE PALMA: I think it helped in a sense. It certainly wasn't absolutely necessary because the consultations were going on in other channels as well. It was more a way to flesh out the NATO activity so that it wouldn't focus so narrowly on security that it might miss the "big picture". It was a way of keeping the whole NATO staff much more alert to general political developments that it might other wise have been. I didn't sense that it was a very important function. It became more important later and it is certainly more important right now. But at that time it didn't seem to be critical.

Q: Then you moved to The Hague as Chief of the Political Section in our Embassy. That was in early 1961. You were there for two and half years. Was there anything special about your tour in the Netherlands?

DE PALMA: First of all, it was my only break away from multilateral diplomacy. I welcomed it. It was my first exposure to Embassy work and to a politically appointed Ambassador--John Rice, who was a very nice guy. I saw how the Embassy system worked. Dick Service was the DCM when I arrived. I got an insight in how an Embassy worked with a political Ambassador who was being shored up by his staff. It worked quite well. I was also interested in the general work of an Embassy, but I also discovered that I was not as enamored of straight Embassy political work as I thought I might be. I

found some of it not being that important and some of it was just plain routine. I was both fortunate and unfortunate being at the center of a bilateral problem with the Dutch. We were trying to get them to leave Indonesia. It was our policy that this should occur for long-range strategic reasons which were valid. The Dutch resisted strongly, like the Portuguese; they found it very hard to leave. They had their own time-tables which stretched out indefinitely. The task of talking to the Dutch was a very unpopular task in the Embassy because who ever had this assignment would be very unpopular with the Dutch. For some reason, the task fell to me. Dick Service was too smart to get caught with it; he was also very busy running the Embassy. I guess I was next in line as Counselor for Political Affairs and it was left primarily to me. It was heady in some ways, but it was also trying. I had developed a couple of good friendships with members of the Foreign Ministry--nice guys. The Dutch were easy to get along with; they are such wonderful people. These friendships could be strained by this disagreement. Some of my friends in the Foreign Office agreed with me, but had of course to toe the party line. So I was kind of a marked man. I kept being pushed more and more into this issue, making representations of our views to the Dutch Government. The Ambassador had no real stomach for this. Dick Service did as little as he could. They used me which wasn't exactly right because it undercut our position by assigning the issue to my level. The bottom line is that we did finally manage to convince them to leave Indonesia.

Q: Did the Dutch think that we were not pushing very hard because the representations came from the Political Counselor and not the Ambassador or the DCM?

DE PALMA: I am sure they couldn't have been overly-impressed. I think too much was done at my level and not enough by my superiors. Washington was very much aware of how the issue was being handled in The Hague. As a matter of fact, I got ticked off once. The Dutch had finally come up with a formula which showed some movement. So I prepared a message to Washington, suggesting that obviously the Dutch's plan was inadequate, but if we added this and that, might that not be acceptable? I got a return message written personally by Bill Sullivan, who was then the Deputy Assistant Secretary for EUR, telling me that the US Government was not interested in compromises. It was short and to the point. I had never been stepped on in that way.

Q: But Washington never insisted that the Ambassador take on a greater share of the representations?

DE PALMA: I can't say that they never insisted. Obviously the Ambassador did make some calls so that you can say that he was on top of it. But it was pretty obvious from my point of view that I was the fall guy. It may have been part of a game that someone in the Department was playing. I am sure that EUR was not that interested in beating on the Dutch. It was the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (FE) that pushed the issue. I am sure therefore that there were some little games being played. The Under Secretary, Chester Bowles, who had signed Bill Sullivan's cable to which I referred earlier, of course, sided with FE. And Sullivan had no trouble hammering people when it served his purposes.

Q: You served in ACDA after your tour in the Netherlands. Tell us about that period.

DE PALMA: First of all, I was shocked and terribly disappointed to be assigned to ACDA, another organization involved in multilateral negotiations. Secondly, I was literally shanghaied from my post in The Hague. I had been there two and half years and I get a message telling me to report to ACDA in three weeks. Right out of the blue! No one asked anything. I didn't expect to be consulted, but no forewarning at all. Not a rumor--nothing. So we returned but I was not terribly interested. I must say, that although I was trying desperately to get out of ACDA during the four long years I served there, I did finally get involved in something interesting--the non-proliferation treaty (NPT). I was the principal deputy to Butch Fisher and Bill Foster, the Director of ACDA, for that important issue. That gave me some satisfaction. It was also my cross because I was hoping to get out of the Bureau. But Dean Rusk called me and asked me to stay there to see it through--it was very important. He knew I wanted to leave, but since he had been kind enough to call, I stayed. It was a significant issue and I was glad to have been a part of it. But I was also very glad to leave the Agency.

Q: How did you and Dean Rusk meet?

DE PALMA: It was somewhat strange. Colonel Dean Rusk lived right across the court from us in Parkfairfax early in my married life. He and his family lived kitty-corner from us. We got to know them very slightly. We then separated and never kept up had any social relationships with the Rusks. When he called me in ACDA, there was some personal element to it even though that was the first time I had really talked to him since he had become Secretary. I had become the director of the Bureau for International Affairs in ACDA. I used occasionally go to the Secretary's staff meetings. So I saw Dean Rusk a few times, but it was always in a setting which was not appropriate for social talk. I think what happened was that Bill Foster asked Rusk to make the call. I appreciated the Secretary taking the trouble.

Q: You left ACDA in 1969. Then you became Assistant Secretary of the Bureau for International Organizations (IO) for four years. How was the appointment offered to you?

DE PALMA: That is still a great mystery to me. I was minding my own business, thinking about my future in ACDA and the Department. I was not very happy. I had been passed over for promotions a couple of times much to my disappointment. My wife and I had begun to talk about looking around for another career. But I wasn't doing much about it. So I was flabbergasted when I was called by Bill Rogers-Secretary of State designee--who asked me to come upstairs to his office. I didn't know Rogers at all. He started the conversation with a few preliminaries and he asked a few questions to get some feel of me, I guess. I recall very vividly that he was fishing around for my attitude toward the UN. In my usual cynical fashion, I told him that the UN was a tough place to work in. It was not a very efficient organization. It was a trial and very difficult and we couldn't count on it on various issues, at least under then current circumstances. That seemed to

please him, because he apparently was not a great fan of the UN himself. He closed the interview by saying: "Thanks very much. I am just trying to get an idea of how things work".

Two days later, I am asked to come upstairs and I go to the Secretary's office to be told that I was going to be appointed Assistant Secretary for IO. I didn't know what to say or do. It was very heady. He asked me what I thought of the idea. I told him that I had worked in this vineyard for a long time. But he pointed out that I had never done it at this level and that I could therefore make a difference. He said before I say "No", he wanted me to go next door. So we walked into the next room and there was Richard Nixon. The President elect says that he wants me take the IO job. Apparently Nixon did this also with Joe Sisco and some others. I don't know why the President came to State Department to do this personally. I that point, one could hardly say "No".

Q: You have no idea how your name came to Rogers' attention?

DE PALMA: My only guess is that someone had prepared a list for the new Administration of possible experienced Foreign Service Officers and that my name was on it. It could have been Dean Rusk that put my name on the list. I have never found out. there was another interesting aspect to this process. Joe Sisco and I were always colleagues, although Joe of course zoomed up much quicker than I. It was always obvious that Joe would be the Under Secretary and he may have had something to do with it. I should also mention that no one could ever have accused me of being a Republican.

Q: That is an amazing story. Who were the Ambassadors at the UN when you were Assistant Secretary?

DE PALMA: First, Charles Yost. Then George Bush for a couple of years, followed by John Scali for a brief period and then Daniel Moynihan, now Senator.

Q: Were they members of the Cabinet or did practice start later?

DE PALMA: No, at least Yost wasn't. Working with Charlie was a joy because he was a wonderful person, he was very knowledgeable, he easy to work with. He was not that fortunate in his relationships with the rest of the Department or the NSC.

Q: At that time then, there was direct reporting relationship from our Ambassador to the UN to the Secretary through IO.

DE PALMA
Yes. The Ambassador reported directly to the Secretary when he felt the need. But Yost, being the decent man that he was and having worked in the system, tried to use the system so that I did definitely have a place in that channel.

Q: Did that change with Yost's successors?

DE PALMA: Yes, it did. They tended to work more directly with the Secretary. The White House was involved here and there, depending on who was at the UN. If he was really a White House appointee, than the White House would be more involved. But generally speaking, the non-Foreign Service appointees did not see much point in reporting to an Assistant Secretary. There was no staff in the White House which showed a great deal of interest in the UN. But there were issues in which the President could be interested. In those cases, the pipeline led directly from New York to the White House. While I was in IO, a number of issues arose which were discussed in WASAG--one of the inter-agency committee that the Nixon Administration instituted. I remember vividly one occasion when I said seven or eight words which sparked an explosion. It concerned the India-Pakistan problem. Dr. Kissinger was laying down the law about what US policy; namely that we were tilting toward Pakistan. He wanted us to make a statement in the UN and we were trying to hammer out the outline of the statement in this meeting. At one point I said something about needing to soften a part of our position or eliminate an element of it if we were to sell it the UN at all. He looked at me and said : "What do I have to do to convince you that the President wants to tilt towards Pakistan?". And he just started laying down the law. This leaked to the press and the news magazines. Newsweek had an article on it and had a picture of Kissinger, Joe Sisco, Admiral Crowe and me. I had just made a little comment that occasioned a famous outburst. Fortunately, I was not accused of being the source of the leak. There was an investigation, which became a big deal when it was attributed to some military officer, who had been taking notes at the meeting.

Q: What other major issues were you involved in?

DE PALMA: There was always the Israeli problem. We kept getting caught time after time in UN votes on Israel. We were fighting off the whole crowd which kept racking up big votes against us and Israel. We were sometime the only vote with Israel and sometime there were only three or four others, except on a few issues on which we had lots of company. But I mostly remember Security Council meetings that were somewhat painful. There was always a risk that we were being pushed to a veto because our friends were wobbling. I remember a couple of occasions when the French and the British would not go along with us on some issue or other. We wanted to avoid a veto, not because we were tender-hearted about vetoing--by that time we had gotten quite used to it--but because it was not a good situation for Israel to be defended by only one government. So there was lots of squirming. Time and again, there would be these sessions in prime time because the UN had gotten into the habit of looking for TV time. So the Security Council would start late in the afternoon and go into the night. I would be sitting in my office in Washington, monitoring the debate--we had a hook-up with New York. Then the time would come for a vote. Yost would call me and tell me what he wanted to do. We were always under time pressure. I usually could not find the Secretary in the evening. He isn't wasn't in or he would duck. I would have to go to the National Security Council people, who were often not there that late at night. Very early on, it became obvious that Henry Kissinger would not get involved in UN matters. He didn't think much of the UN and

wasn't going to waste his time. So I had to look for his deputy whom I could usually find and who usually get me the decision or tell me that we were on our own. More than once, Yost had to vote on his own because I couldn't get him a decision.

Q: It was understood then that on major issues you would consult the Secretary or the National Security Advisor or his Deputy?

DE PALMA: Yes. The reason that I was doing this so much of the time is because events were taking place late in the evening and our eminent leaders were not around. Yost couldn't very well go into a telephone booth and spend an hour trying to track these people down when the Council meeting was going on. So he had to have a back-stop and that was me. Had it not been for the hour, he probably would have talked to the people himself.

Q: The process would suggest however that there was a considerable amount of interest on major issues.

DE PALMA: Of course, particularly on the Israeli questions.

Q: What kind of decisions were left up to you and our Ambassador to the UN?

DE PALMA: Basically, management issues. Other matters were rather easily handled by discussions with the regional bureaus. We would work with the regional bureau and develop an agreed on line. There were very few instances when the issues could not be resolved between the regional bureaus and IO. Not often did we have to go to the Secretary.

Q: By this time, the UN-associated agencies had grown by leaps and bounds. Did you devote much time to them?

DE PALMA: Unfortunately, I had to devote far too much time to them. Nobody in the State Department gave a damn about these other agencies, except perhaps when some little issue impinged on their area of concern. Other areas of the government did care and had to be consulted. I was stuck with the whole area. The main problem was the Congressional interest. I had to present and defend the requests for appropriations for the US contributions to these various multilateral agencies. This was a large array and sizeable sums therefore. I was left pretty much on my own. It was not something for which I was well equipped. I was certainly not a budget expert and worst than that, when I got to the Hill on these matters, I was beaten over the head by the Committees. Fortunately, there were not large public hearings on our requests. It was usually John Rooney making a record in one chamber and Otto Passman in another. Passman particularly had a star-chamber proceeding. He had the hearing in a relatively small office. He would get me in there with three or four of his staff and no one else was permitted in there. He would chew my ears off and then would send me away with 125 questions to be answered in writing. It was a miserable experience. It was very obvious on

many occasions that I was not being supported by the Department. I remember once some one saying:" I hear you, but I don't know that this the Administration's policy". It was painful. And it took up a lot of my time.

Q: Were the Rooney/Passman attacks significant or did they in the final analysis approve your requests?

DE PALMA: For the things they were interested in, it was no problem. For other things, they played their little games. But in general, they approved the appropriations necessary. The US contributions were not reduced significantly.

Q: How were your relationships with the rest of the Department during your IO stewardship?

DE PALMA: I felt things went very well. No there was no sense of strain. The Bureau had worked out a relationship with other Bureaus by this time. We knew when we had to consult and we did so.

Q: Was there more interest in the '70s in the UN than when you started?

DE PALMA: Interest in the sense that the need to consult multilaterally had become greater. There was not anymore liking of the UN--no great support. But there was no fighting it either by this time. It was an accepted nuisance. There was not any positive view of the UN. No one saw it as an opportunity. We were still in the Cold War period and it didn't seem to be an very useful avenue.

Q: What about your own views of the UN when you were Assistant Secretary?

DE PALMA: I suppose I had become cynical about it as well. I never lost the hope that the UN could become, if not the organization its strongest proponents wished, then at least a very useful international system. I never denigrated it, even though that was a popular activity. But I was pretty cynical about it. Certainly not much could have been done at the UN at the time I was Assistant Secretary that wasn't tried. I might have tried a few more things, but I would not have been surprised if they hadn't worked.

Q: Why your skepticism of the UN?

DE PALMA: The UN is not only the sums of its parts; it will only work if its members, particularly the major powers, wish it to work. It has no independent way of working. during my whole time, that situation never rose. Now that there is some hope for that, I can see that there is some real chance of it operating as it was designed--a genuine place for conciliation, mediation, peace-keeping, peace-making. And the development work which it undertakes all around the world--the good things that are done by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and others.

Q: Those agencies have pretty much a life of their own.

DE PALMA: Very much so and also serious problems of their own, like the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and FAO. These specialized agencies have distanced themselves from the UN itself over time.

Q: Did you spend much time yourself in looking at files of officers or American citizens who ere to be appointed to UN positions?

DE PALMA: Yes. In some instances, considerable time. The Bureau also had a "sham" office that was supposed to look after American placements, but it never amounted to very much. It was also responsible for placements in the UN-related agencies so that there was always something going on. But the top level jobs in the UN didn't go through the Bureau, although I was consulted. There were only a few cases when I felt I had some real input. Usually, it had already been decided that someone like Bill Buffum would assigned to an important job. In those cases, I was more told than asked. I had no objections. Buffum was a good appointment. But these cases were decided at top level. We did do some positive recruiting mostly for the lower level positions. It was never a very successful effort because it was hard to reach out from a little staff. What we found was that we had to go to an Agency in the Government which had some expertise in the position we were trying to fill. They would play their own games and would always come up with some Joe Doakes that they either wanted to reward or to get rid of. It was not a good system. There were only a handful of little jobs. The results were that you didn't search the whole country, but focused on one place and got somebody.

Q: In the whole scheme of foreign policy development, during your period in IO, I gather there was not yet recognition of the potential value of an UN.

DE PALMA: You are essentially correct. The UN hit bottom roughly after the Korean War. Thereafter for many years, there was never the appreciation of even the potential of the UN. Some encouraging words might have been spoken occasionally, but it was never perceived as a very important asset. This is not to say that different parts of the US government didn't show special interest in one aspect or another. For example, there was considerable interest in establishing the International Atomic Energy Agency, for obvious reasons. WHO had always strong support in this country. It depended on the subject matter, but the UN itself did not look very promising.

Q: But you feel that today it is a potentially useful channel to secure US interests?

DE PALMA: For broader US interests, yes. For example, the possible UN involvement in the Cambodia issue may be very useful since it is very clear that we are not able to manipulate it. The UN involvement in the Namibia settlement is another example. We (i.e., the US) were involved in shaping it, but couldn't have achieved such a good result

without the UN input. Now, I am looking forward to the great lift that the new democratic countries will give the UN. It's going to be a lively place!

Q: With that up-lifting note, let me end our discussion now and thank you very much on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and its Oral History program for your contribution.

End of interview