Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs History Project

WILLIAM A. HELSETH

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Congressional interest
Communists
Syria-Turkey relations
U.S. military issues
Cuban Missile Crisis
NATO

Teheran, Iran - Political Officer 1964-1968
White Revolution
Shah
Mullahs
CIA
Savak

Pentagon - Exchange Officer - Advisor to Chief of Naval Operations 1968-1970
Duties
Nasser-Soviet relations

State Department - Near East Affairs - Regional Affairs 1970-1971
Palestinian refugees

Kabul, Afghanistan - Political Counselor 1971-1974
Relations with neighbors
Pushtu
Soviets
King Zahir Shah
Daud
Coups

West Point U.S. Military Academy - Professor 1974-1977
Foreign policy course

Gustavus Adolfus College (St. Peters, Minnesota) - 1977
Diplomat in Residence

State Department - Intelligence Community Committee [ICC] 1978-1980
Middle East
Outreach Program

INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview has not been edited by Mr. Helseth]

Q: Today is the 5th of February 1996. This is an interview with William A. Helseth on

behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Can we start by saying when and where you were born and a bit about your parents?

HELSETH: I was born September 20, 1925 in Oslo, Florida, a small town that no longer exists. It was just a suburb south of Vero Beach, Florida. My father was a second generation Norwegian. Both his parents had been born in Norway and immigrated to this country in the latter part of the 19th century.

Q: It was not happenstance that where you were born was Oslo?

HELSETH: It was called that by my grandfather, named it that way when he immigrated there in the 1890s. My father then was born and grew up in Florida. He just recently passed away at the age of 99. He was a quarantine inspector with the Department of Agriculture, both of the state of Florida and of the federal government. He was born and raised in Florida, later moved to North Carolina, where he lived the last 20 years of his life. My mother was born in North Carolina and moved down to Florida at the age of 20 or so, and met my father. They were married in North Carolina, but they grew up the rest of their lives in Florida. I was born then shortly after their marriage in Vero Beach.

Q: Schooling?

HELSETH: My early schooling was in Florida. I went to 12 schools in the course of 12 years.

Q: Why 12 schools?

HELSETH: Well, I did that because my father's work moved us about quite a bit. Six of the years were spent at Vero Beach at a school there. But I graduated from Robert E. Lee High School in Jacksonville, Florida, joined the Navy immediately after graduation in 1943 in the V-12 program and received some college training before being commissioned in 1945. Returning from the Navy in 1946, I was able to enter the College of William and Mary as a junior. In two years time then, I got my BA degree from William and Mary.

Q: Could you talk just a bit about your Navy time? Where did you take your V-12 training and where were you assigned.

HELSETH: V-12 training was at the University of Miami for a year and then at Tulane University in New Orleans for the rest of the time prior to commissioning. Then after that, over in the Pacific Theater on Enewetak Island - as, it turned out, a "military government officer." That was where I first learned about the Foreign Service and decided that's what I wanted to do. I made my decision then to pursue a course in college in political science, government, or whatever, however it might be called at the universities I attended.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about Enewetak? This was an important military center. I

take it you were involved with the natives there then?

HELSETH: Yes, the term "assistant military government officer" is what I was in that field of work. Yes, that involved working with the native population. Enewetak is an atoll in the Marshall Islands chain. There are several different islands in that chain. The natives had all been sequestered on one of the islands. The Navy was responsible for providing basic supplies of flour, sugar, and things like that, as well as trying to keep the peace and everything moving along. Keeping the peace with the natives on the island was no problem there. There were also native workers on Enewetak itself, who had come from elsewhere without their families just to be employed and working there with the US Navy. So, the office to which I was assigned for close to a year was responsible for both those groups of native workers there.

Q: What was your impression of how the Navy and you all handled the native problems there? Were there any particular ones?

HELSETH: No problems really evolved. They were, as I say, quite passive and they made souvenir type things which were sold to the Navy for some additional income. They got supplies - I think greatly subsidized by the Navy-for their living. It was a very peaceful operation there. There were no overt signs of any trouble with them in either group. Of course, this was immediately prior to moving them all to Kwajalein Atoll at the time of the a-bomb tests out there. My office was involved in that particular operation. We went over to Kwajalein a time or two to see the new quarters where they would be. They went there later by ship. We did not go with them at that time.

Q: Were you there during the testing?

HELSETH: I was on a ship heading home when the bomb went off. We were several hundred miles away from it. Like everyone else, therefore, we only read about it. So, I wasn't there during the actual time, but I was there during the time the natives were moved from the various atolls where they were living to Kwajalein.

Q: How did you hear about the Foreign Service?

HELSETH: A flyer that came out through the Navy, a brochure that described it. In fact, they were looking for new volunteers and for new Foreign Service officers. I read it and said, "That's just what I want." That is what started me then on the trek that led to here.

Q: At William and Mary, you were there two years, right?

HELSETH: Yes.

Q: What sort of courses were you taking?

HELSETH: I was concentrating on government courses. I had none up to then because in the Navy in my training had been an engineering program, which I wasn't all that

enchanted with and didn't want to pursue it in civilian life. When I got to William and Mary, I had to really focus on government courses as I had not had any in the first two years of college, and then some history and economics. Those were my main courses. Plus some further language training.

Q: What language?

HELSETH: Spanish.

Q: Were you getting any ripples about what the Foreign Service was doing by this time? At William and Mary, you were somewhat closer to Washington, the State Department. Were you able to find out anything more about the Foreign Service at that time?

HELSETH: Not really. There was a Foreign Service officer who came down to the school - I think just one visit while I was there-and spoke about it. I forget his name now. But he was an interesting fellow and it was pleasant meeting with him and talking to him. I was focusing then on graduate work following college so that while this was what I wanted and it was close by Washington, I only got to Washington once and that was when I went up to take the Foreign Service Exam.

Q: When did you take the Foreign Service Exam?

HELSETH: I took it twice. I took it once while still a senior in college, knowing I wouldn't pass it, but wanting to know what it was like and where my weaknesses were. I think I missed passing by about two points, which encouraged me, obviously, and then the individual score showed me where I thought I was weak so that it gave me a chance to focus on those areas then for the rest of the college plus then the graduate school work.

Q: You graduated when?

HELSETH: William and Mary class of '48.

Q: And then you went to graduate school.

HELSETH: Went to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy of Tufts University up in Boston. William and Mary had sort of an arrangement with Fletcher that they would send them whom they thought was a good candidate every year, usually one, maybe two, but usually one. I think my year they sent two of us up there. Then in turn, William and Mary would take on a young Fletcher graduate for teaching. So, it was a process that seemed to work out well for both schools. I was fortunate enough that the head of my department at William and Mary endorsed me and pushed my candidacy there. So, with my record his help, I was able to get in at Fletcher School.

Q: What field were you concentrating on at Fletcher?

HELSETH: What they called diplomatic history then, not the economic program and not

the law part. It was on the history and diplomacy side. I got my master's then in '49 and then signed up for the Ph.D. As a matter of fact, I stayed there a second year at Fletcher.

I took my Ph.D. comprehensive, the oral exam, before I finished the class work at Fletcher in the spring. That was unusual in that it had never been done before, but I managed to talk my way into it. After I did that, several other people followed that. I don't know whether it became standard practice or not. But I was able to take those orals before I finished my course work at Fletcher and then finished the academic portion of my studies at the end of the second year. I enrolled for a third year, but by that time, I had taken the Foreign Service Exam again at the end of my first year at Fletcher and passed that. But this was at the time of money problems for the State Department, severe money problems, and I think my class had the longest wait before we get in. It was just over two years, as it turned out.

Q: When did you take the oral exam?

HELSETH: Yes, I took that down here in Washington at the old Federal Executive Office Building, the EOB.

Q: Can you remember the sort of questions and anything about that exam at all?

HELSETH: No specifics. They were just very general. You'd been warned about some of the questions by all sorts of stories from people at Fletcher that had taken the exam the year or two before. The best advice was, if you don't know the answer, say so. So, that was one thing that I and several others went down armed with. I think we used it a time or two in the course of the questioning.

Q: So, you came into the Foreign Service when?

HELSETH: I enrolled for the third year at Fletcher because in the summer of '50, the State Department told me, "No way are we going to have any money to get you into the Foreign Service now, so you might as well go back and take your third year of graduate school." So, I went back. I had two courses lined up to teach at various institutions in the Boston area. I was just going to spend that third year writing my Ph.D. (doctor of Philosophy degree) or at least getting the thesis started, as much done as I could. But I had only been back to school a month, in September, I guess, or early October, when State called and said, "We have this new program starting in Germany. It's going to be the Kreis resident officer (KRO) program. We are going to need officers to come in immediately, either to go to Germany and get on the job training there for three months and then go out to their Kreis as a KRO, or we can bring you to the Department and give you three months training here. While you come in as an FSS-7 (Foreign Service Staff-a pay grade), you will be transferred to the Foreign Service as soon as possible. It will be the beginning of your FSO career. Do you want it?" So, I guess I took about a week to decide. I guess I basically knew I was going to do it, but I had to clean up my affairs in Boston, what I had started in school, as well as get a couple of willing applicants to take over the two jobs teaching I had located. So, that was done. I had a few weeks then to go

down to Florida and visit my parents, and then back up to Washington. Around the first of November, all of us, some 33 of us, I think it was, reported to the old Walter Johnson building.

Q: This was 1950...

HELSETH: This was November 1950. So, there were just under three dozen of us in the class. I elected to take the three months training in Washington and then go to Germany. That was in part because I planned to be married. I was single then. But I planned to be married and we decided to go over as a married couple rather than having her come over separately, or other arrangements which would only have postponed the wedding. So, I went and reported to Washington. Then about the time we got there, they told us 10 or 12 FSS' that, oh, how lucky we were. We were now going to be sworn in. Instead of getting a $7,000 annual salary, we'd be sworn in at $4,000 or whatever it was to start with. State was pretty cagey then, too. So, we were sworn in on the 15th or 17th of November 1950, those of us who were on the FSS' became FSOs (Foreign Service Officers) then. We had our three months training in German language, culture, and all things pertaining to German then. Then in March, we sailed on the French liner De Grace for Europe and eventually reporting to Frankfurt and got our assignments there.

Q: Now, could you tell me the genesis of the KRO program, the Kreis Resident Officer program?

HELSETH: It came about, as I understand it and as I recall, because DOD (Department of Defense) was pulling out of Germany. The occupation period was being phased out in 1950. State Department was going to take over liaison with the German local authorities. It was decided early on that the way to do that was to have a State representative in each of the German counties or Kreis. So, this was, I think, Marshall Barry or someone that worked with the program early on. I think he was responsible for it, at least for the recruiting of the people. Then we started work in the late '50s. I was the first one over. It really got underway in early '51. However, the FSOs-by the time we arrived in Germany, we were FSOs-we went in to have our interviews in Frankfurt and were told that, "Well, since you're now FSOs, we're going to take the FSOs out of the KRO program and assign you to the various consulates in Germany and the rest of the people, the FSSs, will then be in the KRO program and will be assigned to the Kreis." So, there were nine or so of us who were FSOs. We were all removed from the KRO program and assigned to consulates or consulates general in Germany at that time. I myself was assigned to the Frankfurt consulate general.

Q: You were at the Frankfurt consulate general from '51 until...

HELSETH: From February '51 until late '53. On Thanksgiving of '53, my family and I were on the ship, I think, The USS United States, coming back to the States on transfer to Turkey.

Q: What were you doing in Frankfurt?

HELSETH: I had several jobs in Frankfurt. First, starting out in the visa office, issuing immigrant visas there. Then I worked in non-immigrant visas for a few months. Then transferred to the economic section to do some traveling and collecting information for Trade and Commerce. That was because my German was sufficient to allow me to travel on my own to interview the German employers or businessmen who might be interested in an American connection. Or on the other hand, if there were some problems on the American side that needed resolution, where the consulate could appropriately help, I did some of that. I did that for about the last three months I was there.

Q: While you were there, one, the Korean War started in August of 1950. The Cold War had already been sort of heating up. In '48, there had been the Berlin blockade, the airlift. Was there the feeling among your group and the other Foreign Service officers that Germany was a friendly power rather than an enemy power to be treated with some caution?

HELSETH: I can't answer that with a great degree of certainty. I would say though that I don't think there was any feeling amongst the group, whether it be the young FSOs or the older ones, that we were facing an immediate problem with an enemy or anything of that nature. I don't think that was the attitude. I guess the answer is that I can't really respond to that question with any degree of certainty.

Q: Fair enough. Who was the consulate general at that time?

HELSETH: Mr. Pigott.

Q: Montagu Pigott.

HELSETH: Montagu Pigott.

Q: Chetwynd Montagu de Rinzy Pigott.

HELSETH: As a matter of fact, he was not the consulate general when I first arrived. He came later. The first consulate general there was an older man on his last assignment, I think. I forget his name right now, but Mr. Pigott arrived within the first six months I was there.

Q: What was your impression of how he ran the place?

HELSETH: I think he ran a pretty good ship. It was pretty tight. He knew the business, it seemed to us as juniors. He evinced a special interest in training of the young FSOs, taking a few of them not only under his wing, but making sure they got opportunities to experience in some of the higher levels of activities, taking one of us along on various meetings or when he went out on business.

Q: This was the '50 to '53 period. I was actually in part of this down in Darmstadt as an

enlisted man in the Air Force. I took my Foreign Service Exam up in Frankfurt. I remember Kennedy Schmertz monitored the exam. I took his place later in '55. Germany was obviously economically really beginning to succeed. Was part of the economic reporting to look at whither Germany economically and particularly in the Frankfurt area?

HELSETH: Yes, but my work as the junior officers in the office was more per se just going out for interviews, gathering information, that type of thing. I was not doing any of the dispatch writing on the whither Germany type of thing. That was reserved for the one or two people above me, Mr. Weast, and one or two others there.

Q: You, I assume, were also doing trade reports and that sort of thing?

HELSETH: Yes, very basic work there.

Q: What was your impression of Germany at the time?

HELSETH: Well, looking at it from several points of view, from the point of view of being this young fellow recently married and interested in history, it was a wonderful spot to be. It was a good spot for travel. From the point of view of Germany and where it was going, they were still awfully hard up, they were still extremely short of funds, Germans were not able to entertain or exchange that type of social activity with the consular corps there, so that was a little restricted. They really hadn't yet gotten their feet on the ground. They still were laying the framework for it. But it was not an area of bustling activity. There was still some work going on to remove the debris from the war, from the bombings, but that was very low-key then. It was only later that Germany really got off the ground. In short, they were still struggling.

Q: You left there in '53, is that right?

HELSETH: '53. I came back on home leave to the Department knowing then that I was being transferred to Turkey, Izmir.

Q: You and your now no longer bride but wife were in Izmir from when to when?

HELSETH: We went to Izmir in the spring of '54 because our second son was born on home leave, was two months old when we arrived in Izmir. The first boy was just a little over a year, 14 months.

Q: He was born in 97th General Hospital, I assume.

HELSETH: Exactly.

Q: As was my daughter.

HELSETH: Our boy was there and the second boy was born in Florida, as a matter of

fact.

Q: So, you were in Izmir from...

HELSETH: '54 to '56.

Q: What was your job in Izmir?

HELSETH: Economic officer, number two in the consulate.

Q: What was the Izmir consulate district?

HELSETH: The Aegean region, southwestern Turkey, a very large area. When we went out to make our trips around the area, we used the consulate jeep. Usually I drove it myself and took an interpreter with me because, while I had been studying a little bit of Turkish by then, I only had about four months under my belt. I really wasn't able to carry on extensive conversations, so, I took an interpreter with me. The jeep could only hold two people, so obviously, the driver as well.

Q: How big was the consulate? Was it a consulate or a consulate general?

HELSETH: It was a consulate at that time. It later became a consulate general, but at that time it was a consulate. Ed Wagner was the consul when I arrived. Ed left after the first year and Kay Bracken came down on assignment there as consul. But in between her arrival and Ed's departure was a period of three or four months. The embassy in its wisdom decided that two young FSOs down there, two young vice consuls, shouldn't be left alone to run the consulate in Izmir. They detailed a more senior officer to come down for that three month period. Will Chase was his name. So, Will was there in between Wagner and Kay Bracken.

Q: Now, during that time, what was sort of the political situation in Turkey at least from the perspective of Izmir?

HELSETH: Tight, rough, and just waiting to get at the Greeks on Cyprus. I arrived in Izmir at the height of one of the anti-Greek demonstrations with each politician struggling to outdo the other in that "The time has come to reclaim our native territory on Cyprus. If we have to attack and do it by bloodshed, we will, etc., etc."

Domestically, it was the Menderes period. He had come in succeeding Ismet Inonu and the Republican Party about four years before then. So, he was riding high, wide, and handsome at that time. The Republican opposition was not all that strong and Menderes was able to rule pretty autocratically then, which he did for the rest of the decade.

Q: In talking to some of the Turks, did you find a strong anti-Greek feeling there, or was this more at sort of a mid-level or something?

HELSETH: No, it was a widespread feeling. The ordinary Turk felt that it was time that they should get Cyprus back. I was in Izmir. Will Chase was there, too.

Q: Wilbur Chase.

HELSETH: Yes, Wilbur Chase was there at the time that we had attacks on the Greeks in Istanbul and Izmir. That was in '55. That was a pretty scarey evening or two in Izmir because we were hiding behind doors. This was the time when the Greek consulate came to the American consulate and asked for protection. Will took him in and gave them that protection at the consulate property. There was some vandalism in Izmir at that time, but it was more just...It was prudent not to be out on the streets too much for that 24, 48 hour period. In Istanbul, there was fairly serious property damage.

Q: What was the major thrust of the Turks that you were talking to, the politicians, about Cyprus? Was this their country or was it simply Greeks doing something?

HELSETH: Cyprus had been part of the Ottoman Empire's years before and for a longer period than anybody else. If the Brits were going to leave the island, as they were preparing to do, well then the Turks said, "We're the logical ones to take over, not the Greeks." That was unanimous essentially in the Turkish view, in talking to Turks up and down the line, whether it be talking to the businessmen or the government officials in Izmir, or talking to the local officials out in Bola or Sparta or anyplace else where you traveled or whether you were talking to the peasants in the villages where you would stop to have coffee or tchai with them. It was across the board. "The Greeks should not have it; it's ours if the Brits aren't going to stay."

Q: Of course, the Brits had been basically driven out by not being willing to put up with this guerilla war that they had with the...

HELSETH: Colonel George Grivas and his colleagues.

Q: EOKA, I think.

HELSETH: EOKA (Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston-trans. National Organization of Cypriot Fighters) was the name of it and Grivas was the head of it for most of the '50s until... In fact, they never did capture him in all that time. He eventually, after peace and the accords had been reached in '59 or '60, then he peacefully left the island.

Q: Did we have military installations in your area at that time?

HELSETH: One was beginning at Cigli, just 10 or 12 miles northeast from Izmir. There was a big airfield beginning there. But we had a portion there of a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Southeast Command, which was centered in Izmir at the time. It began there in the early '50s and was on its buildup phase by '53. By the mid-50s, it was a very large operation.

Q: How were your contacts with the Turkish as an economic officer? What sort of contacts did you have?

HELSETH: Well, I had easy entree. One of the more important things was following the developments in tobacco because that was a major economic export of the Turks at that time from Izmir. The people there were engaged in the tobacco business. There were a lot of Americans there, 15 or 20. There were a few Brits and other Europeans representing the foreign companies that bought the Turks' tobacco. So, that was our main economic interest. Others were in the mining business, particularly export of chrome down in the south. They grew other agricultural crops, but the major export business was in tobacco and chrome.

Q: Were poppies a problem at that time?

HELSETH: No.

Q: Later, it became...

HELSETH: There was, and you could see some growing there when you traveled in the countryside. But it was not thought of then as being a major problem. I don't recall any message to us on that subject. That is, coming to us from the Department or from Ankara to go out and check on this. I don't recall that. But in the mid 50s in Izmir, no.

Q: Did you have any reflection of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict there? Turkey was an Islamic country.

HELSETH: At that time in Izmir, no. Later when I was assigned in Ankara, we had a little bit of it there, but in Izmir, no.

Q: Did you do any consular functions there at all?

HELSETH: We had sort of general responsibilities, particularly if the consul was out of town for whatever reason, on a trip in the area, visiting Ankara, or out of the country for a short time, then we sort of would be responsible general-wise. But primarily, I was doing economic work.

Q: I recall that at a later period, and probably this was going on while you were there, there was quite a Social Security problem in that there were some Social Security recipients in that area who would sort of... The number of their children was immense. One was not quite sure... There was a lot of hanky panky going on and it was a little difficult to get to the bottom of it.

HELSETH: I can appreciate how it could have been done, but when I was there, I don't recall any major instance of that kind. We had a second vice consul, a third officer, assigned to Izmir, I guess, about a year after I had been there. He did more of that work. But I do recall, there were a few instances of trying to find out if the person may have

passed away and, if so, when? The check was still coming and still being cashed. But there was not any major hassle, major problem involving Social Security checks when I was there.

Q: Did you get at all engaged as far as observing the political parties in there? You were saying it was pretty much a done deal with Menderes.

HELSETH: We got engaged, yes, and every time I traveled out in the province, even though I was economic officer, obviously, we were picking up political tidbits or finding out what the strengths were of the parties there and what the thinking was. But it was pretty much Menderes country. He came from the Aegean to begin with, plus the fact that the Republican Party of Inonu really did not have specific areas where they were dominant. They were the second party throughout the country.

Q: Were they any minorities where you were?

HELSETH: The Greeks were the major one. A small Jewish population. Also those who had left the Jewish faith, become Muslims. I don't recall any others off-hand. Those were the major ones there.

Q: Were there many Greeks there? I always think of 1921 or something and the horrible exodus of the Greeks from then Smyrna, now Izmir.

HELSETH: Yes. Inonu was the general then, who then pushed them into the sea, so to speak, on their march from Ankara towards the Aegean. Yes, there was a tremendous population change at the end of the conflict, with many Turks coming home from Greece and many Greeks going home. But they didn't all go. I don't know how many there were numbers-wise, but there was a small Greek community in Izmir in the 1950s, a much larger, but still not terrifically large community in Istanbul. But they were some obvious tensions between the two communities, basically just words though.

It was only in 1955, when the riots got out of hand in Istanbul and spread to Izmir on the arguing over Cyprus and feeling that something had to be done, that we saw overt actions taken against the Greek minority in Izmir.

Q: Then, you left there in '56 was it?

HELSETH: No, I left there in '55. By then, the Department had acceded to my request for Turkish language and area training. Well, they had agreed to that while I was in Germany. They said, "First, we've got to assign you to Turkey. You'll study Turkish while you're there." I had two months of Turkish study in the Department in '53 when I came back on home leave from Germany. I then went to Izmir and studied while I was there. I then came back in '55 to Washington to FSI (Foreign Service Institute) for six months of language training and then went to Princeton for the nine months in its Middle East program focusing on Turkish studies. There were five of us who went up that year, I think, in Greek language, Turkish, and Persian. There were various numbers of us

studying that. So, I was in the Department then until August of '57, when I came out to Ankara.

Q: What was your impression of the view of Turkey that you were getting from Princeton? Some universities have almost their own version of things and all. Did you find Princeton was pretty much standard or were they looking at Turkey in a way that was not sort of the State Department way, or not?

HELSETH: I didn't find anything there that surprised me or upset me from the point of view that "Hey, that's not the Turkey I saw" or "That's a different Turkey." Turkey was not in the forefront of Princeton's interest. Princeton was focusing on Iran. That was their main interest in the Middle East. The head of the department was an old Iranian hand. He led us in that direction. Thomas, the western Middle Eastern Turkish [expert] was gone the year I was there. So, Fred Lattimore was brought in to do the Turkish language portion while we were there and, I guess, teach a course also. Then we had some courses with others in the department. So, the focus was not really on Turkey while I was at Princeton. But it was a good year there. I was able to not only keep up the program that State wanted us to do, but I was able to do the first draft or the first half of my eventual Ph.D. thesis.

Q: What was the subject of your thesis?

HELSETH: By that time, it had changed. When I joined the Service five years before, I had a German topic to work on. But I had no time really in Frankfurt. So, I persuaded Fletcher to let me change. My diplomatic advisor there agreed. I changed to the general subject of the US-Turkish relations. That was okayed by Fletcher so that I was able to do a lot of research in Turkey in Izmir and particular on some Turkish sources - not too many then, but a few. So, when I came back to the Department here and went up to Princeton, I was able to work extensively with the materials in Princeton's library on Turkey. I got some help from the Department and some documents, some papers, I was able to either peruse or get copies of. So, I did the first half of the thesis while I was there. I was able to do more then when I got back to Turkey in Ankara. (Finished the thesis and was awarded my degree in 1962.)

Q: Were you focusing on early or later times in US -Turkish relations?

HELSETH: Through the whole period. From the very beginning of relations in the latter part of the 18th century up to the current time. There was not a single monograph in the literature on US-Turkish relations at that time.

Q: As I recall, at the beginning, we got a little bit more favorable treatment than most other nations. It was a rather aggressive type, I think.

HELSETH: It varied. But one of the key early personalities was the retired admiral, Admiral Porter, who went there around the 1840s and '50s. He was sort of accustomed to a certain amount of treatment, but he also was sympathetic with the Turks, helping them

and their own reformation process, their desire to westernize or to adopt some of the western ways. We had helped in the 1820s, before Porter, providing them some shipbuilders to build up their fleet, which had been destroyed in the Battle of Navarino (1827), and replace their ships. In Istanbul, Americans were there building ships, or helping the Turks build the ships. This American assistance was received favorably because we were not one of the European powers that the Turks thought were not all that friendly disposed toward them or looking for their pound of flesh, whatever. We were apparently seen as different. We were helping them. There were good relations at that time.

Q: Also, the university system that we had there, too.

HELSETH: That, of course, came later. The missionaries started in the 1830s, I think it was, when the first ones arrived there. Before that, the 1820s, most missionaries had gone to Iran and Syria and Palestine, parts of the Middle East. But by 10 years later, they were into Turkey and they remained there. They became involved in education, medical works, and they did a very good job over the years in both those fields, and eventually helped set up schools. The genesis of the current Robert College, of course, was a missionary school. Then they had girls schools, too, that the missionaries set up. There was one in Izmir that was going strong when I was there in the ‘50s, the Kiz College. That is still there. I think it has a different name now. I think it's been taken over by. I'm not sure of that. But it's no longer a missionary school, as I understand it.

Q: You went back to, what, Ankara?

HELSETH: I went back to Ankara, the Political Section.

Q: From when to when?

HELSETH: August of 1957 to June, just after the coup d'etat, of 1960.

Q: First, who was our ambassador in Ankara when you got there in '57?

HELSETH: Ambassador Warren was there then, the second Warren. Averell Warren had been the first Warren to be ambassador to Turkey. He was there when I was in Izmir. He had left. His tour ended. The second ambassador Warren came. He had a Latin America background. We met here in the Department when I was still here. He okayed my assignment so that I went out in August '57 with Mr. Warren as ambassador. He was still there when I left in '60. He left in '60 also, as I recall.

Q: Having served in a consulate in Izmir, your first view was obviously provincial. All of a sudden to be in Ankara, which is the capital and certainly has a different perspective. What was the view from Ankara as you and members of the Political Section saw it in 1957?

HELSETH: You mean the Turkish view? The view of Turkish politics, the Turkish

government, economy, and what Turkey was up to. Once again, the focus was on Cyprus. It hadn't gone away. We got it much stronger in Ankara than in Izmir because, as you just pointed out, it was the capital. It was international politics there. That was the primary issue for the Turks, Cyprus. Also, in Ankara we got more of the flavor of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) involvement. Of course, Turkey had been in NATO since '51. That was while I was in Izmir, too, that they entered NATO. We had Lans Hovy's headquarters, as I mentioned earlier. But in Ankara, you got the fuller play of their participation in NATO. We began to get rumblings that they were interested in joining Europe in the European community (small letters; later on in capital letters), but they were interested in becoming more of an integral part of the European Community. That attitude became much stronger in the very early '50s and late '60s. But at this time we were still getting the idea that Turkey was a Western country that wanted us to know that they looked west. They didn't face east towards the Muslim side. They didn't want to deny their Muslim brethren. They wanted to still have good relations there, particularly trade relations. But they basically wanted to be looked upon as part of Europe and to be seen in the international political scene as a European actor. So, that was very strong.

We had, of course, our contacts with the leaders of the government, not leaders of the province, but leaders of the government. So, they were interested in those national level issues also.

Q: What was the attitude, would you say, that you picked up from the Political Section or that you developed yourself about the viability of Turkey as a European power at that time?

HELSETH: They had a long way to go. It was not going to be an immediate transition. They probably, in a sense, "deserved" to come in. They were eager to. And we would not, however, think in terms that they could immediately play too much of a role or be a power. It might be a long learning process. Certainly, that's proven true in the intervening decades. They've sought to become a part of the European Community in the economic sense, to be admitted as a full member. Still trying.

Q: It was still the Menderes government, wasn't it?

HELSETH: Yes.

Q: How did you look at this as a political officer?

HELSETH: First of all, he was in charge. He had won in free elections and he had a majority of the government. All the political tools, democratic elements, functions, were in the Democratic Party's power, in Menderes' power. The Republican Party minority was still under Inonu, but was not strong enough to really challenge him. They would come in perpetually with 30-35% of the vote so that they could not in any way change or threaten Menderes' regime. He was in complete charge. We dealt with him. He was the man.

Q: As a political officer in Turkey, can you tell me what you would do for someone who doesn't know what a political officer does? How, on a typical day, what you would do?

HELSETH: Let me broaden that a little bit. I went there as the number three man in the section. I was the one with the domestic political portfolio. We had the political counselor, Jack Goodyear, who ran the overall office, and reported directly and daily to the ambassador. Then Wilbur Chase returned in Ankara. He had gone from Ankara to Izmir for that short period of time. He was now back in Ankara. He was the international officer, the one who covered Turkish foreign policy and multilateral issues. So, I was doing the domestic scene. I was a Turkish language and area officer. Neither Will nor Jack had the language. I did. Later that year, one and then eventually two more young officers arrived, Turkish language and area officers as well. So, we had others who spoke the language and were able to talk to the Turks. As the domestic reporting officer, my responsibility was to meet with officers of both the major parties and any other smaller party, if they'd talk to me, and meet with the deputies in the assembly. My responsibility would be to follow up where I could, what the individual parties were going to do, how they were doing it, as well as follow what the government was doing on the domestic side. In trips in the countryside, we checked how that translated into activities at the provincial level by making calls, not only on the officials in the province, but upon major provincial actors in economic or political fields. So, my job was to try and find out politically at a level where I could reach, what the Turks were planning, what policies were being implemented; whereas Goodyear, of course, and the ambassador at their level, talking to the upper echelons, were being told what the government planned or how they planned to do it.

Q: Were you feeling any discontent with the Menderes regime at this point?

HELSETH: Well, the Republicans all the time were against it. Inonu, Ecevit, and others at the party level with whom we had access and talked to, were all very much opposed to Menderes and his colleagues. They were very strong in their denunciation of him - the "I can do it better" syndrome. But they would have no chance because they were a minority and there was no possible way they were going to be able to form a government. But then t had lost in two elections. Eventually, they lost, I think, two more.

Q: What about corruption? Was that much of a problem?

HELSETH: Yes, as in most countries of that area, there was a problem of corruption. There were politicians who were getting rich through a cut here and there. There were a lot of rumors of corruption involving the very highest of the officials. But it really wasn't as blatant as I've observed in some other places since then.

Q: The military, did we have any line on them or were we watching the Turkish military and what they were going to do?

HELSETH: Very closely at the time. We had the military mission there. We had close contacts with the TGS, the Turkish General Staff, that ran the military. Our military

people there at the same level, general to general and on down to colonel to colonel, were in close touch with them. We had military officers, younger officers in a language program, and they would be assigned to the country for a year or two to do nothing but improve their language capabilities. That is, they didn't have straight military functions. They were there in a training capacity. So, we had entree at many levels. This doesn't mean we knew exactly what was going to happen when the coup came in 1960, of course, but we did have good contacts in the mid ''50s. That continued on into the latter part of the '50s, too, with the Turkish military.

Q: There was a major development in that part of the world, on July 14th, 1958, when Brig. Karim Qasim and his people slaughtered the royal family of Iraq.

HELSETH: Yes.

Q: Eventually, we put Marines into Lebanon. There was considerable concern about a radical socialist regime in Iraq and a radical nationalist regime in Egypt. What was the reaction at the beginning? How did it develop from the point of view of our embassy in Ankara at that time?

HELSETH: The Turks were very upset by this, very concerned about the events in Iraq and potential threats from Syria, particularly if it was going to be augmented with any type of unity with Egypt. To back up a bit, when I arrived in August of '57, I had been in town about a week, I guess, when the ambassador called two of us up to his office and talked to us along the following lines. "I have here in my hand a piece of paper that Menderes (Prime Minister) just gave me. He says it represents a series of war plans for an attack on Turkey. They are very concerned about it. I need to have it translated, but I don't want to give it to our Turkish personnel to do the translating. You boys are going to have to translate it." He obviously wanted it pretty quickly. It was a fairly long document and we went over it for the next three, four, or five days translating it for the ambassador under strict order to report only to him. It turned out it was not so much a specific war plan, as it was a general assessment of possibilities. But we got it done. Menderes, when he gave it to the ambassador, had expressed his grave misgivings over events in the Middle East. This was before the Iraq coup. The Syrian threat is very concerning, that Syrians is going to march onto southeast Turkey, that they were going to try to reclaim an area, which Ataturk had obtained in the '20s when the Turkish Republic was set up and the Syrians had never acquiesced to that. They looked upon that as irridenta, a land base they should be able to have back. Menderes and Zorlu, Foreign Minister, were very much afraid that at almost any time, Syria might attack them and they were going to need US help to forestall this.

So, when the Iraqis staged their coup and Karim Qasim came into power, the Turks were very much concerned as to what this meant. However, a difference in the Baghdad Pact, which had been formed in 1955, three years previously...

Q: It destroyed it.

HELSETH: Yes, Qasim abrogated the Baghdad Pact, a mutual security pact for involving Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan. The remaining three countries reorganized themselves as CENTO, the Central Treaty Organization. The Turks were solid supporters of that in the beginning. But they were still very much concerned as to what Syria and Egypt (particularly if Nasser were really going to get a foothold in Damascus), what they were going to do. So, there were intense consultations then, telegrams flying back and forth while we all watched with extreme care and interest as to what was going to transpire. Eisenhower sent the Marines in. The Turks basically supported that. They saw it as a means of maintaining stability there, not as a threat to the area. Of course, it wouldn't be a threat to them. If it were a threat to anybody, it would be to the Arabs there. The Turks would not be adverse to that. So, they welcomed the Eisenhower initiative there.

Q: What about the Turkish-Soviet relationship? How was that during this period?

HELSETH: Still very tense. The Soviets were still sniping by clandestine radio at the Turks. They were still being very demanding, still pushing the Turks on the Dardanelles, on the Bosporus. They had not withdrawn their claims on lands bordering the Black Sea in the northeast. Moscow would raise these claims in some of the Soviet press from time to time. In some of the academic meetings that they had Soviet presenters would give papers on people, the laws and other issues, whom they said were really Russians, Slavs, and had to be protected, and the Turks weren't doing this. Moscow hinted that it might after some time move in to protect these people if the Turks weren't being careful enough with them.

The borders were very tightly controlled, with military defenses all around. This was before what you might call beginning in the early ‘60s, the campaign of smiles, when the Soviets backed off and began to change their tune. They did the same thing with the Iranians, too, in the early ‘60s. But in the ‘50s, the Soviets were still pounding on the Turks diplomatically. The Turks were still looking towards us and NATO for protection.

Q: What was your impression of relations between our consulate general in Istanbul and the embassy in Ankara? Istanbul, the former Constantinople, which has always been sort of the cultural, intellectual heart - sort of the New York to Washington relationship. At that time, how did you find things?

HELSETH: It was a very good working relationship. We were the political center of the country in Ankara, due to the fact that the government was there. But the economic and commercial center of the country was Istanbul. Of course, you counted directives from the Turkish central government going out there. But as far as really knowing economically where the Turks were going, that was Istanbul's responsibility. Bob Minor was consulate general (CG), excellent choice to be there and a wonderful man as well. A very good CG. He worked very closely with the ambassador and with the other members of the embassy there. So, the relationship was excellent.

Q: How about the US military? Did that increase while you were there?

HELSETH: Very much so. When I left Izmir, the military was there, but it was not all that pervasive. When I came back to Ankara, the military was very pervasive. We were having status of forces problems. That caused several major incidents when things happened and the US military insisted on its jurisdictional rights under the SOFA (status of forces agreement). When a Turk had been killed or severely injured, there were one or two instances when that really grated upon US-Turk relations. Then there was some opposition in Turkey, although the Menderes government was fully behind it. Basically, I think, Turkish public opinion was behind it. But there were some newspapers and a minority in public opinion that felt that Turkish sovereignty was being overridden by the NATO ties in general and the American ties specifically. So, there was some opposition that developed to the use of Turkish military bases for some US flights in the area, particularly vis a vis the Soviets. Gary Powers, who is one specifically, coming up in 1959/60. There were one or two instances...

Q: These were U-2...

HELSETH: U-2 overflights of the Soviet Union. Some local media asked whether or not we were using Turkish bases in the crisis with the Iraqi, and then, the Syrian problem of '58 and '59 continuing, whether we were using the Adana military base for US interests there. There were some pictures in the Turkish press of US planes taken from the perimeter of the Adana field. There was public discussion of Turkish sovereignty being violated, but these were overall relatively minor. But the US military presence was there, well known, and did cause some problems from time to time. But overall, I think, the majority of the Turks realized and wanted that American presence there.

Q: How did the crisis of the coup situation in 1960 develop? How did it hit the embassy? Where there rumblings or did it pretty much come out of the blue?

HELSETH: There was a buildup. The Turkish domestic scene was extremely tense. There were daily meetings of the GNA, the Grand National Assembly, the Turkish Congress, so to speak, at which there were raucous disputes amongst the deputes. The press was playing it up. There were charges on both sides of what they were doing that was wrong and unconstitutional. But it did not seem to any element of the embassy that I am familiar with (that is, State, Defense, and the station, Central Intelligence Agency), that we were on the verge of military action. That it was tense, yes. That there were serious problems, yes. But not that the military was going to act. I recall the day before the action started, before the coup took place. I had a meeting with one of my best Democrat Party contacts, a senior deputy in the Party, one of the officials whom I had known almost as long as I had been in Ankara, and we met very frequently and chatted. That afternoon when we met, he told me, "Bill, I can't take this anymore. We were actually fighting in the GNA today, not just calling each other names or shouting at each other, but there were fist fights there. I can't take it. I'm going back home. I'm going back to my farm in Giresun. I'm going to stay there." I went back to the embassy that night to write this up. The next morning was too late; the military acted that night. They took charge.

Q: Were these just exaggerated normal political disputes or where they major issues?

HELSETH: Menderes had become more autocratic. He had begun to think that only he could do it and he had to do it. He was still winning elections. He was being pretty autocratic and pretty dogmatic in everything else. The opposition deputes were figuratively up in arms about this. They were trying to call him at every turn. There was more evidence of corruption then, of monies going into private pockets. They were trying to make a real issue out of this and make the evidence public. They were saying that their own freedoms were being restricted and to some extent they were right. There had been a couple instances of censorship of the newspapers. So, the situation was very tense at this time. It was one where, I guess, the embassy, realized we were at a potential watershed, but there was no advance warning that the military was going to act the night they did.

Q: It's always interesting to see how an embassy responds. You know there's a problem. You go to bed one night. First, how did you hear about the coup and what did you do? What was the embassy doing during this immediate post coup time?

HELSETH: That morning, I was up and ready to go into the embassy. I think I noticed that out where we lived in Baccilielaire, which is a residential suburb of Ankara about two and a half miles from the embassy, there seemed to be activity, but I got up and drove to work. There was a pay station about a quarter of a mile from my house. There was a lot of activity there, but I was able to get through. I went on up to the main road to go to the embassy and was about half way there, when I met a cordon. The area was cordoned off. I couldn't go any further. There was no way I could talk my way through it. I tried to get through to go to work, nothing worked. "No, you can't go. Just go home and wait." So, I went home. I was able to get through on the telephone to the embassy and learned more detail about what had happened, why the troops were out. At the embassy, the ambassador apparently had gotten in. There were four or five people that lived close to the embassy and had gotten in to work. So, they were a nucleus there, reporting back to Washington what was going on. The rest of us who were not able to get in were feeding them what we could about what was going on in our specific neighborhoods, what was happening there. Essentially, that everything was quiet, everything was under control, but no one was able to get on the streets.

Q: Was there the usual problem if the military takes over of trying to figure out who the hell these guys are? It often happens that when the military takes over- I'm thinking particularly of Greece in '67. Nobody quite knew who they were. But the ones who took over in Turkey, were they pretty well known?

HELSETH: Different situation. The top level took over in Turkey. The TGS, the Turkish General Staff, took over. In Greece, it was the colonels or generals (whichever coup you're talking about).

Q: The first Greek coup was when everybody was waiting for the generals to take over.

HELSETH: And they were not known.

Q: Yes.

HELSETH: But in Turkey, they were known. They announced immediately who they were and that they were in charge. People knew who they were. The general who was in charge (I forget his name right now.), there was no problem in that sense. So, there was not a question of "Well, who is going to come out on top?" They announced that they were going to maintain basic freedoms in Turkey, that foreign relations would continue as before, they would honor all their commitments, treaties, etc. It was just that "The domestic situation is now out of hand. We can't have this type of feud between the parties, the government and the opposition. That's got to go."

Q: Then, we did not have a feeling that here was an unsophisticated bunch of people taking over, which often happens. A group which adversely impacts on international commitments and that sort of thing.

HELSETH: No, not in that sense. They might not have been "sophisticated" fully in the international political scene, but they were people who had been around, who had been involved in the decision making for many years. We knew various ones at different levels from the top general of the TGS down to the middle grade officers. There was some contact, but not a lot at the lower levels, of course. But down to the colonel though, we had good contacts. American military had various entree into these groups there.

Q: What about the foreign ministry and all? Were the professional civil servants more or less kept in place?

HELSETH: Yes, in time, however, the foreign minister, and some political ambassadors were removed. But the Civil Service, so to speak, the bureaucratic level in the Foreign Ministry remained. In fact, it seems to me that the General Secretary (That may not be his exact title.) came and was named Acting Foreign Minister. He was a man we had been dealing with for many years.

Q: Essentially the top professional Foreign Ministry.

HELSETH: Yes, he had been there for years.

Q: This was when in '60?

HELSETH: In summer of '60?

Q: So, did this put any strain on our relationship? Were we making protests about the military and that sort of thing?

HELSETH: The protests we were making were mostly trying to do what we could to ensure the Turks didn't kill or give the death penalty to the deposed civilian leadership. We did make some demarches in favor of no bloodshed. There was no bloodshed in the

coup that took over. So, we tried to emphasize to them to continue that. Now, my time in Turkey ended in less than a month later. I had been there three years so that I left Turkey at the end of June, a few weeks after the coup. I was then scheduled to come back to the Department to be on the Turkish Desk for two years in GTI, the Office of Greece, Turkey, Iran Affairs. So, I left Turkey later on that same month, in June.

Q: I was just thinking, this might be a good time to stop for this and pick it up the next time when you were the Turkish desk officer.

HELSETH: That will be fine. It sounds like a reasonable place to stop.

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Q: Today is the 25th of February, 1996. You said you have a footnote to add to the Ankara time. Eisenhower visited there - when was this?

HELSETH: This would have been in the late ‘50s - '58/'59. It was the first time a US president visited Turkey and the Turks went all out for this. After all, they saw the visits as a milestone in Turkish-American relations, their entry into NATO, their activity and participation in Korea, as well as, of course, Point 4 and the Marshall Plan. So, the Menderes administration really wanted to make this a memorable event both for themselves and, they hoped, the Americans. Anyhow, the city was decked out terrifically for the visit, including ceremonial arches. The number 23 comes to mind. I'm not sure how many arches there were, but there were a phenomenal number of arches from the airport in Istanbul into town. Then in town, every major intersection had an arch decorated and emblazoned with appropriate words of welcome, etc. for President Eisenhower.

The footnote I wanted to mention was something that I attribute to my colleague at the embassy, Matt Smith. Since Eisenhower, being a former general, was going to review Turkish troops anyhow. I mean, as the President, he would have. But as former general, it was all the more appropriate. Matt suggested that we propose that the President greet the Turkish military, the soldiers that he would be reviewing, with a traditional Turkish statement, which was in Turkish, "Fellow soldier." Eisenhower picked this up. At one point in this review and hokey time, he uttered those words and almost was blown back by the resounding (Turkish) from the Turkish military, acknowledging his greeting and wishing him health. It made quite an impact at the time, I think. I'm not sure it's ever been noted. As I say, I attribute that to my colleague, Matt, who is now in retirement in Texas. But it was a good thing to have done. It really sort of brought it down to Earth, that traditional military greeting to the troops.

Q: Now, on to the GTI desk?

HELSETH: I was the deputy on the desk, the number two, the political slot in GTI.

Q: GTI being...?

HELSETH: Greece, Turkey, Iran at that time., in the Bureau of Near East Affairs It was later submerged and re-submerged. At that time for Turkish affairs, we had an officer in charge and then a political and an economic assistant. So, there were three of us on the desk. I came in to be number two in the political slot.

Q: What were the years you were there?

HELSETH: I left Ankara in late June/early July for a bit of home leave - not much - 1960. I remained on the desk for four years. After two years, I was promoted to officer in charge. So, the last two years, I was officer in charge. I left there in late summer/early fall of 1964.

Q: How did you find the fit at that time with Greece, Turkey, and Iran being lumped together? I can understand a bit combining Greece and Turkey, but Iran seems to be sort of a strange bedfellow in that particular mix.

HELSETH: Well, yes and no. They're all northern tier, non-Arabic members of the Middle East. Greece, of course- Turkey saying, "We are Europe and we don't have anything to do with that." While perhaps a little uncomfortable being grouped in there, Turkey was striving to become westernized, to be a part of the West panoply of nations and, in fact, had already been accepted into NATO at that time. Iran, a little bit different, but still non-Arabic a northern tier country. Dulles had originally thought in terms of geography, although GTI had existed long before then. Plus, the fact that Cyprus being the issue that it was between Greece and Turkey, having Greece and Turkey in the same complex meant that the people handling Cyprus were meeting daily, so to speak, and were housed next door to each other in the GTI complex. So, I think it made sense geographically as well as politically. Iran being a little bit outside the pale, but at the same time, they fit better there than with any Arab country, or with South Asia.

Q: Let's look at this '60 to '64 period through these separate countries. What were the major issues that you dealt with at this time?

HELSETH: I was the one that followed this along with the officer in charge of GTI. The main thing was, of course, the Cyprus issue and trying to work out some agreement between the Greeks, the Turks, and the Brits over the future of Cyprus at the time. That was the overwhelming political issue that we faced still, as it had been in the ‘50s while I was in Ankara. It was the same thing coming back to GTI.

Q: I can't remember, was Cyprus an independent state at this point?

HELSETH: No. The agreement had not been reached. About that time, late 1959/early 1960, they did have the accords that were reached in London that was going to establish Cyprus as an independent state. So, it was in the throws of being set up, organized, recognized or not recognized, as the case may be. It was beginning at that time ('60/'61) a definite part of the political horizon. There were the troubles that arose on the island. The

Turks particularly coming in all the time to complain that the Greeks and the Cypriots weren't adhering to it, that Makarios was being too heavy handed or too devious or whatever the situation might have been. But I met almost two or three times a week with the deputy in the Turkish embassy. The officer in charge of GTI would meet with the ambassador, but my counterpart was the number two man in the Turkish embassy, the deputy there. He and I would meet, as I say, sometimes two or three times a week. But certainly once or twice a week, we would get together. Usually, he would have a list of complaints that the Turkish government had - or if not official complaints, they would just be musings on his part about the problems they were encountering on the island of Cyprus.

Q: As I think of this fit, you were familiar with Turkey, but Greek politics are a thing apart. In a way, the two countries collide over Cyprus and over other regimes. It's always a decimal collision. But each has its own dynamics. So, I think it would be very difficult for somebody to sort of walk in and be dealing with Greek politics, all the internal physics, Papandreou and the various governments at that time. Was there somebody handling the Turkish side and you had to meld the problems together? How did that work?

HELSETH: Let me clarify. I think maybe there's a misunderstanding. I came in on the Turkish Desk of GTI. I did not come in as the overall of GTI. I was on the Turkish side. There were our counterparts on the Greek side as well as on the Iranian side. So, there were three of us on Turkey; there were three on Iran; and three on Greece. We worked together there in these problems. I dealt almost exclusively with the Turks because my colleagues across the way was dealing in the same fashion with the Greeks and their problems as they saw it.

Q: Dealing with it from the Turkish side, did you run across reflections of what I can only call the Greek-American political buzz saw at that time of the various Hellenic-American associations and all that would tend to skew our policies towards Cyprus in favor of sort of the Greeks and Greek Cypriots?

HELSETH: That was a favorite theme of the Turks that time, that the Greeks had better access, they had a better press, and they were able to influence US politics. I'm not sure how deeply they believed that really, but it was a favorite argument that would be trotted almost pro forma from time to time.

Q: But did you feel that? I mean, did you feel that policy at a certain point would get kicked up high enough so it would be in the sort of American political scheme of things, so that in Congress and all that we would seem to be taking the Greek side? Did you ever feel that? Each period is different. This is '60-'64. This did happen later on. But at this time, did you feel it?

HELSETH: Not really. We knew that AHEPA was very strong politically and had their own merits.

Q: The American Hellenic Education and Protective Association, right?

HELSETH: That they had their entrees into various high level personnel in the Congress was obvious, but it didn't appear at that time that they had a dominant voice as the administration sought to defuse an issue, as it sought to find some way of bringing sizeable force together, and to implement the accords that had been reached before.

Q: How did both you personally but also your colleagues on the Greek Desk look upon this creation of Cyprus as a viable entity, as a sovereign nation?

HELSETH: I think we all thought it was a rather fragile development that is rather precarious because neither side on the island trusted the other and the Turkish government was very concerned about the future of its compatriots on the island, the Turkish Cypriots. They were 17 or 18 percent of the population, but the Turks always round that off to 20 percent, of course. It was obvious that it was going to take support from all the interested powers, Turks and Greeks first of all, but also the British and ourselves to make this work because there were constant complaints about Makarios: the fact that he was not as intent on implementing some visions that the Turks regarded as core elements of the agreement, and their feeling that the Turkish Cypriots were definitely a second class citizen on the island and therefore, they needed outside support (read: Ankara). This meant that for Cyprus to really survive, there had to be some continued agreement.

We couldn't let it go down to the fighting that might break out at any time and did occasionally break out. In fact, that was the essential feature that the Turks were always bringing to our attention, that there had been more attacks on the Turkish Cypriots, that sometimes there would be deaths as well as woundings, and maybe some destruction of property. The Turkish embassy was constantly bringing these sorts of situations to our attention. It was obvious that there was a lot of hand holding to be done to try and get both sides to implement the accords. It had to be done across the board for Cyprus to survive. As we know, they did survive. They have survived now for 35 years, a little over that. But there have been some major altercations and fighting on the island during that period.

Q: What about Colonel Grivas? Was he a factor at this point or had he departed the scene?

HELSETH: He had left. That was part of the agreement, that Grivas would leave the island. In fact, he did leave the island after the accords had been reached. The British were quite perturbed that all those years in the ‘50s, they had never been able to apprehend him.

Q: Who handled Cyprus during this time from our point? Was there a Cyprus desk or was it sort of an offshoot of both the Greek and the Turkish Desk?

HELSETH: There was a Cypriot desk. GTI became GTIC, with the creation of a Cyprus

desk within GTI so that there was an officer in charge of Cyprus affairs and other officers as well. Colleagues at our level were reassigned..

Q: What were sort of the internal Turkish developments in this '60-'64?

HELSETH: This was a very difficult period for the Turks politically and economically, but especially politically. The Menderes government had been overthrown in the Turkish Revolution in June 1960. A military government had come in and they were a very fragile institution themselves, as they were seeking to reestablish, they said, and they did try to reestablish civilian control, to return the government to the civilian politicians. But Turkey was so divided politically, although Cyprus was a unifying factor, but each side in Turkey though they could do it better, of course. But there was no single party then developing in the aftermath of the Revolution that could be dominant and could by itself form a government. It had to be a coalition government. The former leading politicians at the top level of the Menderes party, the Democrat Party, were in Asiata, where they were awaiting trial and eventually did undergo trials. As a result, Menderes and his colleagues were hanged, Menderes being the Prime Minister and Zorlu being the Foreign Minister. The President, Celal Bayar, was not. Turkey, politically speaking, was in turmoil. This was reflected in their stance on Cyprus. Whoever was in power in Turkey felt they could not be the ones that yielded anything to the Greeks on Cyprus. It was too much a national issue. As weak as the central government was in each year in these early ‘60s, it reflected upon the ability of that government to reach an accord over Cyprus if that accord meant surrendering portions of part of the Turkish claims.

Q: How did the trial of the former civilian Turkish leaders unfold? How did you deal with the Turks? Hanging a prime minister is... The prime ministers all have dealt with other countries and other countries delt with them. How did this play out and what were the problems?

HELSETH: United States government had dealt with Menderes for 10 years with both of the Democratic and Republican administrations. So, there was some respect for him, some feeling for him, not that he was seen to be a paragon of virtue by any respect. But at the same time, he had been in power - for 10 years, we had been dealing with him. So, at all levels in those early ‘60s, we were, to the extent we felt it politically expedient as well as that we were politically capable of doing so, urging restraint upon the Turkish military and those civilian leaders who were emerging in power. We were urging that they not resort to capital punishment for any of the former leaders. We were trying to convince them that there were other forms of punishment that would be just as effective and that death was not necessarily the best means to send the message that this would not be tolerated. Again, the autocratic type of government that Menderes had developed in the last five years of his rule...

Q: Were there any political reflections within the American Congress or out in the public particularly of...

HELSETH: I don't recall any really significant expressions of that or any real forceful

demonstrations of such feelings. But I think it was accepted within the Congress that they shared this feeling that capital punishment would not be the best way to go. But it was difficult to express this to the Turks at the time. That's why I say we did it to the extent that we felt we were able to do it effectively.

On the public side, there was very little in the public press about it. The occasional article in The New York Times or The Washington Post something like that, reporting on the trial and hoping (I guess that would be the best way to put it.) that there wouldn't be capital punishment. But no organized movement that I recall within the United States in the political side or the public side, any of the broadcasting stations or anything like that.

Q: While you were on the desk, did you get involved with Armenian-Americans? Did they have any sort of campaign about Turkey at all during the time you were there?

HELSETH: Not a full fledged, organized campaign. There were probably some behind the scenes activities. They did work with a few members of Congress. They did have, unfortunately, some Armenians here who resorted to - I don't want to say "terrorist activities" because that means too much now. There was a Turkish consul in California, San Diego or Los Angeles, that was shot by Armenians. We would get in Congress from time to time a resolution to commemorate this or that Armenian event.. The Turkish government would, of course, come in each time and protest. When the Armenians were able to get their entree into Congress and there was some resolution or some sense of feeling on the part of Congress being considered that was favorable to the Armenians in response to their request, the Turkish government would always come in and complain about this both to the embassy in Ankara as well as to the State Department here in Washington. So, yes, there was some expression of the Armenian's wishes and desires, but it was not a major factor during the time I was on the desk.

Q: Speaking about protests, did you get involved at this time - I'm not sure when it came out - with the movie "Lawrence of Arabia." Did this come out about on your watch. I was in Yugoslavia when it came out. The Turks protested violently to us that we could not show it to the rest of the non-American diplomatic community. Was that a factor when you were there?

HELSETH: That movie was released in 1962 and won the Academy Award for best picture that year, so it was hard to miss. It was a factor to the extent that the embassy came in to see us a time or two. The ambassador came in at his level and spoke about it. Their unhappiness with the film, their thought that it depicted Turks in a wrong light and that it wasn't accurate, etc., yes, they did complain about it.

Q: What about Kurds? Were the Kurds at all a factor while you were there?

HELSETH: Peripherally, they were. Of course, the Turks still at that time maintained the fiction that there were no Kurds in Turkey, they were just mountain Turks stemming back from the ‘20s and ‘30s and the time of Ataturk. But, yes, it was a factor there, particularly with the troubles across the border in Iraq. From time to time, there would be some

incursion into Turkey. But it was not the problem it became later when the Kurds became more active politically in Turkey and began to organize a political movement. That came later.

Q: What about relations with the Soviets? Was it a difficult time vis a vis the Turks and the Soviets, the communists?

HELSETH: This was slowing down. About 1960, we see the beginning of the Soviet campaign of smiles towards both Turkey and Iran. They were not brandishing the sword quite as much and they did in the past. They were still there. They still made their feelings and presence known, but it was not with the assertiveness that they had shown in the late ‘40s and most of the ‘50s. So, they were always there. It was a problem, but there were more exchanges now between the Turks and the Soviets. There was some desire and, in fact, some implementation of that desire, to invest on the part of the Soviets in Turkey, to extend some aid to them in helping with their economic development, which the Turks rather generally examined and accepted some of it.

Q: Did we see the Communist Party in Turkey as being a threat or a problem for us?

HELSETH: No. It was outlawed, minor, and not very active at all in Turkey at this time. Soviet radio broadcasts sort of toned down in the ‘60s. As I say, the campaign of smiles; the clandestine radios had been broadcasting so much. The anti-Turkish tirades didn't cease, but slowed down.

Q: What about relations with Syria and Iraq during this particular period? Any particular problems?

HELSETH: There was always the fear on the part of the Turks that either or both of these countries were going to cause some border problems. They remembered and well knew the Syrian desire to regain part of Alexandreta, as they called it, now the country around Iskenderun.

Then there was the trouble over the waters there. The Turks were building dams on the Tigris and Euphrates, building or wanting to build. The Iraqis and the Syrians were both extremely upset by the possibility of having their water, which they depended on as well, of course, interrupted or substantially reduced by the Turks. So, you had not only the border problems and the desire for some political readjustment of boundaries, but you had the water problems, as well as the potential threat of the Soviet aid which was going to Iraq and Syria.

If I may just make a last point to pick up again. The Turks, even though the Soviets were being "nicer" to them, still were very concerned about the continued and increased Soviet assistance to Iraq and Syria. They were fearful that, if something did go wrong, they could be attacked from three sides: the north, the south, and from the east. So, this was a continuing, to them, very legitimate concern. We didn't view it with the same worry that the Turks did, but we realized it was possible. The Turks wanted to have their NATO ties

enhanced and wanted to make sure that NATO would come to their aid if the Soviets did something directly or through their surrogates launch an attack on Turkey.

Q: Then there was the Cuban Missile Crisis. Could you talk about how you all on the Turkish Desk viewed the Cuban Missile Crisis? There was a Turkish factor in that whole thing.

HELSETH: Yes, there was. Those were the Jupiter missiles that had been installed in Turkey beforehand and which were now thought to be ineffective, outdated, and should be removed, but the problem was that the Turks did not want them removed at that time because they felt that it would weaken their stance vis-a-vis the Soviets and that it showed the US was no longer as interested in Turkish defense. They were arguing all along that these should not be touched. But the administration, particularly President Kennedy, was intent on removing these missiles and wanted them taken out of Turkey as a result and in combination with the Cuban Missile Crisis. Eventually, they were removed. They were a thorny issue at that time. The Turks were adamant in saying "These can't be removed."

Q: Prior to the Missile Crisis, were you working on trying to persuade the Turks to allow these missiles to depart?

HELSETH: At our level (that is, on the desk), no. I don't recall any instance where anything trickled down to us - at a higher level were really pushing this. I don't recall any memo of conversation with senior State officials and the Turkish embassy or Ankara government having to do with this particular issue. It sort of surfaced during the Missile Crisis.

Q: Did somebody come running down to you at some point during the Missile Crisis and say "What the hell is this about these Turkish missiles" or anything like that?

HELSETH: That was about the way it happened, I guess. It had not been an issue up to then. I frankly don't recall seeing any paper before then stating that these missiles should be removed, that they were now obsolete and not capable of performing a function, and they could be replaced with something else, something like this. I don't recall any study on that.

Q: What was the reaction to the Cuban Missile Crisis as far as the Turks were concerned What were Turkish contacts with our mission in Ankara saying?

HELSETH: The Turks were very concerned about it from the point of view of what it would mean to them directly with regard to the Soviets. If the Soviets were able to maintain and continue what they were doing on Cuba, the Turks were very much afraid that this would have a bad effect upon them and their relations. So, they were hoping that we could stand fast, that the issue could be diffused in a way that would not enhance the Soviet reputation or position. They felt that could then be used against them. But as far as high level, or even our level, demarches on it, not really. They weren't involved to that

extent. They were part of the discussions with NATO about it. They were briefed that way. They were briefed with the other NATO countries in Washington. They were kept informed of what was going on. To the best of my knowledge, that seemed to satisfy them that we weren't working any back door route, that we were intent on preventing the Soviets from prevailing. That was their hope the way it would end.

Q: My understanding was that there was sort of an either tacit understanding or maybe even a secret understanding that "You've got to get those missiles out of Cuba and, by the way, we're already planning to take missiles out of Greece anyway." So, it gave the Soviets at least a feeling that, by doing this, they had gained something, but it could be interpreted by the Turks as leaving the Turks dangling. Did that come up at all?

HELSETH: I don't recall it in that context, except in so far as it would leave the Turks dangling. That was some of their problem with the whole thing, that it would leave them exposed, that it would strengthen the Soviet hand against them and, even though things had been going a little better for a year or two, they still knew that the sword was there and it could be unsheathed at any time. They didn't want to see any enhancement of the Soviet capability. So, that's why they were against it. That's why many in the State Department argued within our own circle, argued against agreeing to remove the missiles then. In the end, the missiles weren't taken out right away. It was quite a bit later. I don't remember the exact time, but many months later, the missiles were actually removed. So, it didn't appear to be in implementation a part of the agreement at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. But in actuality, that, of course, is where it started.

Q: Did you feel any change in our policy on the advent of the Kennedy Administration in early 1961? This was not particularly of major interest on the part of the new administration?

HELSETH: Not a particular change that you could ascribe to that development. There was this change in view of the Turkish Revolution, the fact that there were new people there and that they were trying to reorganize their government, trying to set up a more democratic government. I think they were sincere about that. The question was how to do it. We had a new administration. They had a new administration. Both were equally determined to maintain the basic US-Turkish relationship, the close ties that had existed and increasingly so since 1945. So, I don't think there was any deeper attachment or any feeling that, "Hey, we ought to change the policy. We don't want to be that close to them." It was mutually seeking ways to maintain the relationship in light of, one, the new US administration, and two, the new administration in Turkey.

Q: How about the American listening posts and regular American military stationed in Turkey as part of NATO? Were there any problems, changes with these relations and troops in Turkey at that time?

HELSETH: Not at that time, but the seeds for a problem that matured later and for the Turks backing off a bit, were laid at that time. The earlier experience of the 10 years under Menderes when at least if we wanted something, it was almost automatic that it

was given to us. That came to a halt and the need arose to justify more solidly our request to the Turkish military and the later civilian government. But those issues were not at that time an immediate factor of discord. Later, they became symbols and the Turks in some instances thought there were derogations of their sovereignty. They were extremely cautious, continued to be, and particularly more so about the use of the airfields at Adana and Cigli to some extent. Cigli is near Izmir.

Q: How about U-2 flights? Did that come up? Were they ceased by the time you came in?

HELSETH: Well, when the U-2 flights became public knowledge in Adana, with the Gary Powers incident in '59 or '60, those effectively had ceased. But many Turks in and out of government were always concerned that the Americans regarded Adana as an American base, as American sovereignty. They insisted, and we also went along that this was a NATO base. It was not an American base. But let's face it, the US was running the show. These were our planes there. To a great extent, we made the decisions there. But there was this deference shown to the Turkish feeling about sovereignty, which was very strong all along, but became stronger after 1960 because Menderes was gone and the new people themselves felt that this was an issue that had to be made clear that this was Turkish sovereignty there.

Q: Did you run across the problem that so often arises with the old Ottoman Empire, that is, what flags could be flown where? Were flags becoming an important issue?

HELSETH: No, only to the extent that on some occasions, we had some desecration of the Turkish flag by American servicemen who came on shore leave in Izmir and Istanbul. But as far as flying the flags was concerned, that was never a problem because that was the US flag or the Turkish flag. There were the two quite rigidly set forth, when and where they would be flown.

Q: What about hashish? Was the cultivation attempt much of an issue at this particular time?

HELSETH: No. That came later. There was the cultivation of hemp. There were also poppies that were grown extensively in Turkey and harvested. But for one thing, we had not as a government turned our attention to it so much as we did in the next decade. So, that was not a major issue with the Turks, almost, I would say, at any level at this time.

Q: You left there in 1964, is that right?

HELSETH: I left there in '64, but remember, in '63 we had the big flare-up over Cyprus.

Q: Oh, yes. Let's talk about that.

HELSETH: That was the first time that we deterred the Turks from invading Cyprus. They had finally had all they could take, the government felt, from Makarios and what they felt were his double dealings and his ingenious ways of evading the issues of not

giving the Turkish Cypriots a proper role. Public sentiment, which was always very high, could be easily inflamed against the Greeks and the Cypriots, and in ‘62 to ‘63 focused on Makarios as evil incarnate. There were continual fighting outbreaks in Cyprus that led to more and more Turkish deaths, more infringement of the Turkish zones, as the Turkish embassy pointed out. My meetings with the Turkish embassy representative came almost daily at this time.

Finally, in the summer of '63, the Turks were prepared to move. We got wind of it or surmised it from what was going on. If I recall correctly, Ambassador Raymond Hare literally sat in the hall outside the room where the Turkish cabinet was discussing whether or not to send the military. Furthermore, the military were poised on the Turkish Mediterranean coast ready to set sail, but he literally sat outside the door importuning the cabinet not to invade and was successful in restraining them and in convincing them that they should not attack Cyprus at this time. The State Department in Washington was also importuning the leaders involved. But I give full marks to Ray Hare who really executed US policy at that time and persuaded the Turkish government not to invade Cyprus in '63.

Q: You left the desk in '64 and went to Teheran?

HELSETH: That's correct.

Q: You were in Teheran from '64...

HELSETH: '64 to '68.

Q: What was your job in Teheran?

HELSETH: I was number two in the Political Section under Martin Hertz, who was counsel of embassy for political affairs. In that office my position was also the consulate coordinator for Iran. That is, I directly supervised the four consulates that we had in Iran at that time.

Q: Where were they?

HELSETH: In Tabriz, Mashhad, Isfahan, and Khorramshahr, which was a seaport on the Shah-al-Arab.

Q: When you arrived there in '64, what was the political situation?

HELSETH: There had just been an assassination attempt on the Shah. If I recall, he had been slightly wounded. There was an attempt by the government to find the perpetrators, to arrest them and try them. While opposition to the Shah was increasing, it was still muted. He kept things under very tight control then politically. He was beginning, however, to expand economically. That movement had begun in '62 or '63 with the Shah's White Revolution, I think it was called. He was trying to expand the economic base. I think it was his belief that if he could successfully bring about economic development, he

could then turn his attention to political matters, such as being less repressive, or granting more political rights to the country. But the political reformation, so to speak, had to wait until the economic expansion had taken place. That was what he was basing his rule on then and which occupied him for the next decade. In the end, he was unsuccessful, but that was, I believe, his belief at the time and why he felt he could not grant political freedoms then. So, the regime continued to be repressive. There was still opposition, but it was pretty well controlled. Savak, the intelligence unit both internally and externally, and the police kept were able to keep the opposition jumping. The opposition wasn't able to unite. They weren't able to coalesce in any united form of opposition to the Shah. Incidents would arise here or there, but they never arose together. They were prevented by the government from uniting.

Q: How did you view as a political officer the political spectrum in Iran during this '64 to '68 period?

HELSETH: This was the height of the Shah's White Revolution, where he was attempting land reform. It was given great publicity, of course, by the government. They were doing some things. They were being successful to some extent. But it was the gloved fist that was still ruling there. There was no doubt about the fact that the cabinet did not make any move without the Shah's direction, maybe acquiescence, but all top level initiative came from him. The cabinet were implementers. The Shah made the decisions. He was the one who decided what would be done and, in some instances, even how it was going to be done. So, politically, it was a period of essentially complete central government dominance. There were no single elements of opposition strong enough, powerful enough to really challenge him. He kept them on the jump so that they were not able to get together, whether it be anyone or Khomeini - Khomeini at the time being in exile in Jordan. The Shah had sent him there earlier on rather than having him tried and whatever sentence might have been given in Iran up to possibly death. It may have been the decision at the top level to exile him rather than to terminate his existence.

Q: Did you see the student, the educated class, as a potential opposition to the Shah at that time?

HELSETH: It worked both ways. There were some young leaders, there were some students. The university was thought to be sort of a hotbed of activity. Yes, it was there, but not organized. It was rather disparate. Once again, the Shah's forces were able to prevent their joining together in unity. The Shah's control even inhibited us. We were not able to penetrate very far into the opposition ourselves and meet with the leaders. We had some sources, some access. The Shah's government was very touchy on this issue. There were, again, during that period, two or three times when he or the prime minister complained to the ambassador that his embassy people were seeing the wrong people, that we shouldn't be talking to certain elements. We would get the wrong picture of what was going on. But we did try to discreetly maintain contacts with various peoples. But they also felt uncomfortable (some of them felt uncomfortable) in talking with us. They were fearful our attention would bring the hand on their shoulder that would take them away.

Q: At a later time during the mid-70s or so, one of the great opposition complaints was that we had completely acquiesced to the Shah's desire that we didn't contact the opposition, and that our contacts really were limited to the Shah and his entourage. Did you feel there was any attempt to... Was there from the American side any attempt to control our reporting to ensure that the Shah was reported favorably?

HELSETH: No. I don't think that was completely true in the '70s either. There were some elements of it, yes, but I don't think we ever took a decision that we were going to view Iranian developments strictly from the point of view of the Shah and certainly not that we were going to try to make him look good. I can speak from personal experience only, of course, from '64 to '68. Our instructions then were to be discreet in any event. But we were never closed off by a decision from the Front Office not to talk to these people. Only to be discreet, to be careful, but don't close it off. And maybe a time or two, the ambassador would say, "Well, you know, we don't need to talk to these people in the next month of so" and let the heat die down a bit. But then we did, as I say, attempt to maintain these connections. But these parties, the nationalists and other groupings there, were not all that significant themselves or powerful or well-organized in the '60s. So, it was difficult to see many of these leaders, but we did make some inroads. We didn't shut them off from ourselves.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

HELSETH: I'm trying to think now. Julius Holmes was ambassador when I arrived. He stayed there less than a year and was replaced by - the name is right on the tip of my tongue...yes, Armin Meyer. Presented his credentials in April 1965.

Q: Were we watching the religious right, the mullahs, as a factor in the political section, looking at them?

HELSETH: To the extent that we could. We didn't have much in the way of direct contacts with them and certainly no meetings with the highest level of the mullahs there. They wouldn't see us and therefore we couldn't see them. We had some contacts in the intermediate levels, but the Agency had some contacts there that we did not have.

Q: How did you feel about the Agency, the CIA? It certainly took credit for putting the Shah back in power after he had been ousted after the overthrow of Mossadegh. From your point of view, what was the role of the Agency?

HELSETH: Because of its support back in 1951 to '53, the CIA had easy access to many people there. They were well-regarded. I think in general, in that period of time that I was there, they played the game appropriately. I don't think they were obstreperous or unhelpful to us. They had their contacts and they received information. Some of it they shared in Teheran and some went directly back to Washington for sharing here. The ambassador and the head of station worked some things amongst themselves. I had myself no problem with the Agency role in Teheran at this time.

Q: Were there any major developments during the time you were there?

HELSETH: We had the continual flaps over developments in the White Revolution, challenges to it. We had problems in the foreign policy field with CENTO, or with the organization that the regional states developed on their own without US or British participation. We had the development, saw the successful conclusion of the Soviet campaign of smiles, which had begun in Iran as it had in Turkey after 1960 basically, in that it led to Soviet participation in economic development in Iran with a steel mill, with the gas development, and the sale of gas to the Soviets. This was a major concern that the Soviets were moving in particularly to build a steel mill down in the Isfahan area. This was coming about 1966 or '67, as I recall. That was a major development and breakthrough for the Soviets at the time. There were other attempts on the Shah's life at this time. But basically, it was not a time of really critical development. The Shah changed government, his prime minister, a time or two. But that didn't change the direction of the government because he was the one telling whoever the prime minister was what to do. The opposition party which he had "created" was active in the Parliament. They would debate in it. They had their votes and we were in contact with those so-called opposition leaders. I met with a couple of them regularly. But they, too, were sort of created. So, it was not a significant challenge to the government. It was to give some semblance to the "democratic institutions," which the Shah really didn't want to have developed until he had economic development under way - or not underway, but enhanced. Then the political side could be expanded.

Q: What was the impression you got from both your own work, the feedback from GTI office in Washington, and from others in the Political Section of the Shah? How did you see him at that time?

HELSETH: Before I went to Iran and I was just seeing the country from time to time and was not really focused on it, I had tended to view the Shah as no exactly some tinhorn dictator, but a still had very low opinion of the Shah as a ruler, as a person, and what he was trying to do. I confess that after four years in country, I left with an appreciation of what he was trying to do and a feeling that he had a chance to succeed, but there was an equal chance that he wouldn't make it. But I felt that he was trying to improve Iran, the situation of the people. I don't say I was captivated or anything like that, but I did, in learning more about the country, come to feel that what he was trying to do was a rational way of doing it, but it was at heavy expense to the country. There were the political killings, the arrests, the tortures, the Savak role. This was there. It was a heavy price to pay. The question in all our minds was "Can he do it? Will it last out or will these disparate forces that were present in the ‘60s ever get together and make themselves heard?" We know in the aftermath that they did and the Shah lost out. But at that time, it seemed that he did have basically improvement of the country as his goal. But the implementation of that was stop and go. The family around him, the royal family, many of them certainly not helping with their own escapades (hand in the till and all that). There were a lot of ways in which government authority was misused, a lot of ways in which the people were not benefitting. That was the price that was being paid. As I say, I

give them maybe too much the benefit of the doubt. I think he was trying to bring Iran out of the doldrums and to make it a respectable and respected country in the Middle East.

Q: Then, you left there in 1968. Whither?

HELSETH: I left Iran in '68, back to Washington for a tour here. My first assignment was an exchange officer to the Pentagon.

Q: You were there for about two years?

HELSETH: Yes, just under two years. I was at the Pentagon assigned as political advisor to the CNO, Chief of Naval Operations.

Q: Why don't we talk about that. What does a political adviser to the Chief of Naval Operations do? During this time, what were you doing?

HELSETH: Most of my time I spent actually working with the Vice Admiral under CNO. So, I was more directly involved with him. That involved reading all the telegrams that came in, particularly political ones about events, particularly in the Middle East, but elsewhere as well, and trying to appraise him of any significance in those, pointing out where these developments might be leading, where these might impinge upon Navy policy as well as US policy, and particularly Navy policy as an arm of overall US policy. But I was sidetracked for most of my tour with the Navy in working on a special Navy project that was then underway called "War at Sea." In this, I followed my predecessor, who had also been assigned to this through the closing months of his stay there so that most of my time in this year and a half, two years, that I was at the Pentagon was spent on this project, which was examining what would happen if US forces were engaged with the Soviets in a war at sea. This was a scenario that the Navy was very interested in working out as to how successful we might be in actual combat with the Soviets. This used projectors to computerize and project what outcomes would be under various scenarios.

Q: What role would a State Department officer have?

HELSETH: [They were charged with] setting the scenarios up, but again following their assumptions, advising how some of the other governments would affected by this, for example, whether they would allow the Soviets to use their territory to take off for air attacks on US forces. My job was to work with the scenario planners defined in a political context of their scenarios.

Q: From your perspective, what countries presented the greatest threat? I'm not talking about the Soviet countries, but the countries that the Soviets might use, that were the greatest threat to the US?

HELSETH: That depended on which scenario was being evolved, whether it was in the

Asian or the Pacific or the Indian or the Atlantic. Countries nearby might be used as a base of operations. So, that would vary as to which scenario was being implemented and whether the Soviets were able to expand their land ties and therefore their political ties with the countries of the region there.

Q: How did we view India at that time?

HELSETH: This, of course, is a period where the Indians were just beginning to be a little closer to the Soviets, but it had not yet resulted in their '71 agreement with them. So, we did not see India as providing a base for Soviet operations, but we didn't see them either as providing a haven for us to use for our own purposes. We saw them as neutral in that sense.

Q: Egypt?

HELSETH: Until Nasser's death in '68, that was, of course, more closely identified with the Soviets-

Q: Nasser died in '72 or something like that, I think.

HELSETH: I'm sorry, yes. Egypt was viewed as a potential Soviet base there for operations against the fleet, whether in the Indian Ocean, or in the Mediterranean, of course. They were more closely there. That would have been during the period that we're talking about.

Q: What was the deal with Israel at that time?

HELSETH: A non-factor in any potential clash of the US and Soviet nations.

Q: What was your impression of the high command of the Navy as far as their political awareness, their training? How politically knowledgeable did you find the people you bumped into?

HELSETH: I thought the upper levels were pretty well read in, from the Vice Admiral I was more closely associated with, down to the captains, maybe senior commanders. Below that, they were more gung ho, more parochial, Navy. “We can do that. We'll do that.” It varied. Some individuals were quite well politically attuned to the possible problems. Others were not so much aware of that and were inclined just to go off on their own. But at the higher levels, there was an awareness of the political ramifications.

Q: About 1970, you came back to the State Department?

HELSETH: I came back to the State Department, requested to come over and work in the Regional Affairs office of the NEA Bureau. By the time I got there, the person who had requested me for that slot had been reassigned. That was Sid Sober. He was the Director of the Office of Regional Affairs, but left suddenly in November 1969 to become DCM

in Islamabad, Pakistan. But I still was assigned there and was back on board. I worked there with a special detail on Palestinian refugees, about whether or not they could be brought back to Palestine and what might happen to them. How would they be handled? For about six months, I worked on that.

Q: So, this was in 1970 already?

HELSETH: Yes.

Q: And then where did you go after that?

HELSETH: In '71, I was assigned to Kabul in Afghanistan. I went there as political counselor for three years.

Q: Okay. Let's talk about this regional affairs. What was the issue with Palestinian refugees in 1970 that you were looking at?

HELSETH: If, when, and how they might be accommodated so that the refugee issue would not be a factor that could upset any Arab-Israeli agreement that might be reached. The Arabs, of course, wanted one day to go back and pick up their lives where they were, go back to their land, their homeland, as they called it, and resume living there. In many cases, that homeland did not exist. Israel had already created developments there, agricultural or economic, or industrial, that had compromised those homelands. So, the question was how they could be compensated and who would compensate them and would they be going back to an entity of their own politically or would it be strictly Israeli sovereignty? Well, that depended on other aspects and we were not examining that so much as pure and simple how the refugees could be gotten out of the camps they were still living in - a couple of million, three or four, I think, are in the various camps in the Middle East, as well as the diaspora of Palestinians around the world that might want to come back to Israel, but in all probability, most of them would have preferred to remain with their work, but they wanted a homeland. They wanted to go back and say "I'm home. This is mine" and then go back to where they had made another home for themselves. So, this was the issue that we were working on for several months, I and several others, tried to develop various scenarios that Israel and the Palestinians and the Arabs could accept that would work out at the UN and that the US itself could accept. Nothing startling emerged. We did produce a paper, that along with hundreds of other papers were probably read, but then they disappeared into that great maw that exists over at the Department.

Q: What was your group? What was the consensus? Was there a feeling that something could be done?

HELSETH: For the refugees?

Q: Yes.

HELSETH: Something had to be done. That issue had to be taken care of in any eventual settlement between the Arabs and the Israelis. This was something that was not going to go away. One way or another, there had to be some relocation, some compensation, for the Palestinian refugees then in the camps. They could not go on living another two decades in those camps.

Q: Was this something where we couldn't talk to the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) at that point?

HELSETH: Right.

Q: Was this something more or less discussed by people here in Washington without much feedback from, say, talking to the people in the camps and what would they like?

HELSETH: Exactly. This was in-house operation. The study we were doing was strictly for State's use, for our principals to use in their own discussions. We were not basing this upon direct discussions, conversations, or contact with the Israelis. The factors were all basically public knowledge anyhow. So, we were just trying to use those to devise plans that would be within the UN resolutions and that would call upon Israelis to accept the principal of compensation or repatriation, possibly with some limits on the repatriation, for example the actual numbers that would come back, but we also felt that in the natural course of events on the part of the Palestinians, that there be a large percentage of them who would not want to come back, but they would want some financial compensation for the losses they had endured.

Q: Then, you went to Kabul, where you served from '71 to '74.

HELSETH: Correct.

Q: As political counselor.

HELSETH: Yes.

Q: What was the situation in Afghanistan when you arrived?

HELSETH: I arrived at the time when the king was still in power. He was beset with problems domestic and abroad, particularly the issue of Pushtunistan with Pakistan because the Afghans had never given up their dream of acquiring that part of Pakistan on their borders, which was the ethnic Pushtun area. They wanted their "brethren" there to join them in a greater Afghanistan.

They were also concerned about the Soviet position. We ourselves were under no illusion there. We knew we were number two in Afghanistan. The Soviets, who had an adjoining border, were number one. That was acceptable to us. That decision had been made 20 years before in the mid-'50s when an Afghan delegation came to Washington to say "We want to join CENTO. What do we sign?" We rebuffed them then and ever since, we have

been number two. We tried to keep a presence there. We had a small AID (Agency for International Development) program. We trained a few of their military in the United Stats. But we recognized that the Soviets were number one. But the Afghans wanted us there. They wanted that window to the West. They didn't want the Soviets to be so dominant that they lost any freedom of action. To some extent, they had. There was always the specter of the Soviets looking over their shoulder at any of their decisions internally or externally. So, I arrived at a time when there was some discontent there. There was some opposition activity. But it didn't seem to be too great in that period of '71 to '73. It was fairly quiet.

Q: How did the government work at that time?

HELSETH: Somewhat facetiously. I guess you could say, with difficulty. But there was a cabinet under the King. There again, he could change the cabinet.

Q: The King was Sardar Mohammad Daud?

HELSETH: No, King Zahir Shah. Daud had been sort of discredited and was on the outside. He was not the king. He was Prime Minister for a long time in the ‘60s, but had been replaced before I got there in the late ‘60s, early ‘70s. Zahir Shah had several prime ministers while I was there. They were changing. Basically, it was a very, very poor country, very little in the way of resources, too hard to govern, a very backward area, still living several centuries ago. But Zahir appeared to be on top of things then, but he wasn't, obviously. I went on home leave in 1973 as scheduled. Late one night, early one morning, one of my sons called me from where he was in college and said, "Dad, what's going on?" I said, "I haven't seen anything yet of TV or newspapers today." He said, "Well, there's been this terrible overthrow of the government in Afghanistan." So, I scurried around to get the newspapers, the press, and called State and talked to the Afghan desk there. I learned that Zahir had been overthrown. The military apparently in conjunction with Daud had moved. Daud had accepted the position of civilian leadership with the new government. That began the first phase. That was the first coup, in '73. Then, I think, after I left there, there was a second one, then a fatal one. Then gradually by three coups, it moved to a communist government.

Q: You went back at the time.

HELSETH: From home leave, I went back to Kabul after my two months here in the States. I was there essentially another year, perhaps 10 months.

Q: How did you find the Daud government?

HELSETH: More restrictive with foreigners, but still wanting to work with us as long as we would accept them, and we did recognize them and moved with them. They were not insensitive to the fact that we could be helpful there. Daud still was interested in having our presence there, this window to the West. That changed later, as the country became more closely tied to the Soviets. But in that first year, year and a half, we were, as I say, a

little more restricted. We still could move about the city with no problem. We could still get permission to visit outside the capital. I took several trips that 10 months after I got back, going around the country as I had before in my position as the political counselor there. It was almost business as usual, but not quite. They had moved away from the king entirely, so it was a new type of government. But it was not all that firmly in power itself. There was still sniping going on within the leadership. There were two fractions to the communist party. There were two parts of the communist party. They were fighting amongst themselves, devouring the leaders of the Revolution, as it turned out, and that was what caused the second and third coups there that eventually led the country to the Soviets.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

HELSETH: While I was there, we had two. The first one was a political appointee from a university in California. I believe it was Robert Neumann. I'm having trouble today remember ambassadors, aren't I. The second ambassador was a career officer, Ted Elliot. He was there my last year.

But the political appointee, Neumann, was a very good ambassador. His, particularly with Zahir (and that's the time he was there mostly), was unique. It had something of a classroom atmosphere. But he had good rapport with them. He basically understood them and was able to be a very effective ambassador, in my view. Ted Elliot came in as ambassador during the last year of my tenure there, so he was dealing mostly with the Daud government, which was still in power when I left there in '74.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Soviets while you were there?

HELSETH: Very little. We were still under that US security rules where, if you'd initiate contacts, if you had any parties or anything, you would have to write it up and report it. There was a slight relaxation. I remember calling once or twice on my counterpart in the Soviet embassy and his return, strictly pro forma, a protocol type of thing. But that again had to be written up as contact with Soviet Bloc personnel. That overall policy was still in effect. So, there was very little direct exchange with the Soviets, except near the end, where there was some relaxation.

Q: Did the opening to China on the part of the Nixon administration have any desirable effect on Afghanistan while you were there?

HELSETH: No, I don't recall any direct effect of that. The Chinese were present in Afghanistan with certain aid projects, fisheries, and some other agricultural cultivation. They had an ambassador there at their embassy, but they were not a major player. There was some concern of the Afghans about Badakh-shan province up in the northeast corner, which bordered China and the Soviet Union. But the Chinese were not a major player at the time and our opening of contact with them did not lead to any major changes or developments in Kabul.

Q: How did we get information about these internal disputes within the Afghan government, which essentially led to this revolving series of coups, which brought in the Soviets?

HELSETH: We maintained contact ("we" meaning the Agency and the embassy) with the Afghan government at this time. It was not as close as it had been before. They didn't tell us as much. They didn't ask our assistance as much. But we also had contact with other elements of the Afghan society. We learned some things through them. We had the ability therefore to monitor, to a limited extent, what was going on internally. There were press items that we could learn. We could see what they were doing publicly. We were not privy, of course, to the internal quarellings of the two communist factions that were going on, except when they erupted and broke out publicly in the street and one side lost and somebody was imprisoned or changed. So, it was with some difficulty, but we still had sources that we could go to and keep relatively well informed.

Q: Then you left Afghanistan in '74?

HELSETH: I left Afghanistan in '74 and was assigned as a State Department representative to the military academy at West Point as a professor, as a teacher.

Q: You were there from when to when?

HELSETH: I was there from '74 to '77. I was assigned there for two years. While I was there, the academy asked me to develop a course on US foreign policy for the cadets because they didn't have one. I was in the Social Science Department on the political science side, international relations. They asked if I would develop this course for them, which I did. The academy then asked State if I would extend my original two year appointment to three years. State asked me if I was willing and I, after checking to make sure whether there was any assignment I might get that I might be more interested in and not finding anything immediately advantageous, said "Yes" because I was interested in teaching the course I had developed for another year to get it well established in the academy's curriculum. So, I was there three years teaching the course on US foreign policy for two years and the course in international relations, mostly to upperclass cadets for the three years I was there.

Q: Then you went where?

HELSETH: Then I was assigned as diplomat in residence at the Gustavus Adolfus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. I was there for 10 months and came back to the Department in '78.

Q: And then where were you?

HELSETH: And then I was over compliment in the Department and was picked up by in NEA to work on Middle East issues. Before then, I was assigned the Intelligence Community Committee (ICC) staff just after coming back from diplomat in residence.

Ambassador Richard Davies, who was head of ICC at the time, recruited me to come over there for that job. After considerable discussion, I decided to accept his proposal. So, I went over to the ICC staff and I stayed there until my retirement in 1980. I was there about a year and a half.

Q: What did the ICC do?

HELSETH: It tried to coordinate political directives, intelligence directives for what was needed, what was needed in our data on foreign countries, and to get tasking papers agreed to by the various intelligence agencies, that this was the information that we needed to focus on, and then to assign who would acquire that, whether it would be the Agency, or DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency), or State, INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research). We sought to acquire information that we essentially had identified as gaps in our knowledge. We tried to coordinate to that extent. It was not a part of CIA, although the head of ICC staff reported directly to the CIA director. It was somewhat anomalous that we were not an official arm of the CIA. It was semi-independent and representing and staffed by the various intelligence agencies, State, CIA, and DIA, but it did report to CIA directly.

Q: For the relatively short period you were doing that, did you feel that we could move our intelligence apparatus, see a shortcoming and focus on it, and effectively make up for that shortcoming?

HELSETH: I think so for example we would do these country analyses, and I worked on the Middle East primarily, Iran, Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, Syria...When we re-evaluated them the next year (sometimes it stretched a little longer than that), but when we began another country review, we would find that a good bit of what we had identified as being needed in the previous country analysis had been obtained. Some of it was very difficult. Some of it was almost perennial, like nuclear developments and things like that. But, yes, we did see that there had been some success on the part of the various agencies in acquiring the information that had been identified as necessary. Never a complete accumulation, obviously, because most people wanted pie in the sky. But we made inroads in what we needed. So, it did seem as though it was a useful function, coordinating USG intelligence requirements and assigning them to the appropriate agency to acquire. It did seem to work.

Q: Yes, it seemed to fill a real need. It's very easy for people to move down different paths in different countries. Somebody has to look back and say, "That's all very nice, but this is what we really need."

HELSETH: And that was worked out in meetings with not only the representative assigned to us, but the agencies involved would send their people over for the final review and approval of the draft the ICC staff had produced. Then they would accept the assignments, the information that we needed. "Yes, we can do this" or "We can try to do this." So, it was a coordinated effort. It did bring together the various agencies in the intelligence field around the same table, looking at the same issue and the same language

for it, and agreeing on who could do it best.

Q: I'd like to thank you very much. This has been a very interesting thing. You certainly had your time with this Turkish, Iranian, and Afghan businesses. It was a fascinating period. Of course, Afghanistan is in the paper even today. These issues don't go away.

HELSETH: The region of the Middle East doesn't go away. It will never go away. There were very few issues that we could tie up and put on the shelf as they got solved. One thing I might mention here, when I was assigned as diplomat in residence, I got my first assignment and experience in the Outreach Program of the Department of State - in other words, public speaking. So, from 1977, when I started as a diplomat in residence, continuing well after my retirement and, in fact, during the next 10 years for all of the '80s, I responded to many requests from the Public Affairs (PA) people, from the Speakers Bureau, to go out and speak to various groups around the country in an effort to help State put its best foot forward and explain what we were trying to do to the public. I made many trips on their behalf. I visited about 2/3 of the states and spoke to various groups from foreign policy councils down to junior high schools. I particularly focused on Oregon because the people out there invited me back each year. I mean, they didn't call PA saying "Send us someone." They would call and say, "Well, when can Helseth come out again?" I had a great time going out to Oregon for about 10 or 12 years. My last visit was in 1991. I met a lot of people and had a chance to talk to so many citizens who had a real interest in foreign policy, but who didn't know too much about how Washington went about it. I even wrote up a piece on foreign policy for the Oregon people. They asked me to write it up after I had retired. They published it as a small pamphlet there. But, as I say, I did get to many other states, too, from Oregon to Florida to Maine to Arizona and California. I really covered the country. I was speaking many times to these groups. I always found them very interested. John Q Public is a very acute individual and these were the ones that were really interested in foreign affairs. That's why they asked State to send them speakers to come out there. So, I did that for about 12 years before retiring and after retiring.

Q: A very worthwhile project.

HELSETH: I enjoyed it very much. I would always go back to NEA whenever I was going out and get briefed on what was going on. I spoke, obviously, unclassified. But I would try to give the inside story to the newspaper after I retired to make sure that I didn't mislead the people I was talking to by following some reporter's penchant for the wrong slant to the article. I usually went out with State Department thinking, but I spoke as a State Department representative there to them. I had a great time doing that for those number of years.

Q: Well, thank you very much.

End of interview