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

MORTON HOLBROOK III

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is November 17, 2018. This is our first interview with Morton Holbrook III. And we always begin with the question of where and when you were born.

HOLBROOK: I was born on January 29, 1942, in Owensboro, Kentucky.

Q: And is that where you spent your childhood and adolescence, or how long did your family spend there?

HOLBROOK: Yes, my family and I lived in Owensboro. I lived there until I went away to college at the age of 18.

Q: Okay. Now, tell me also a little bit about your family, your parents, your brothers and sisters.

HOLBROOK: My father was born in the town of Whitesville, Ky., (population: about 500), about 20 miles from Owensboro. He was educated at the University of Kentucky (1935) and at Harvard Law School (1938). After he graduated from law school, he practiced law briefly in Owensboro. Then, in World War II, he served as a Major in General Patton's Third Army in England, France, and finally in Germany. He then returned to Owensboro and practiced law there for his entire career of 60 years. My mother is also from the area near Owensboro, the even smaller town of Stanley, Kentucky. She graduated from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, with a major in voice and a minor in piano. She did a lot of singing in church and in local opera productions and was also an excellent golf player. I never was able to defeat her even once on the golf course.

Q: Very interesting. Now, where are you in the birth order?

HOLBROOK: I have a younger brother, Allen. Like me, Allen attended college at Vanderbilt University. He then graduated from the Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville. He has also been a lawyer in Owensboro for most of his career. He recently retired. He's four years younger than I am.

Q: So, okay. So, both of your parents are Owensboro region natives. How did they meet?

HOLBROOK: I mentioned that my mother was a singer, a Cincinnati Conservatory graduate. After she graduated, majoring in voice, she came back to Owensboro and was making a recording at a radio program in Owensboro. The accompanist on the piano was Jessie Lee Holbrook, one of my father's four sisters, and also a graduate of the Cincinnati Conservatory. My father drove to radio station WOMI to pick up his sister Jessie Lee after the recording, and that's where my parents met for the first time, at the radio station!

Q: A regular American story.

HOLBROOK: So, that was the beginning.

Q: Alright. Now, describe a little bit of Owensboro when you were growing up. What sort of town was it, was it located near any of the larger cities or was it mostly rural?

HOLBROOK: Well, in Kentucky terms Owensboro is a relatively large city.

Q: Okay.

HOLBROOK: Kentucky only has one semi-large city; that's Louisville, Kentucky, population about 600,000. Owensboro was the third largest city, now recently demoted to the fourth largest. It's on the Ohio River, about 100 miles downriver from Louisville, and across the river from the state of Indiana. The county where it's located, Daviess County, is quite agricultural; farmers here grow soybeans, corn, tobacco, and other crops.

The city of Owensboro is just large enough to have a good many businesses too. When I was growing up, there was a large General Electric plant, which no longer exists, and a Texas Gas Transmission Company. There were also three distilleries that made Kentucky Bourbon Whiskey and other beverages; two of them are still going strong today. There were and are also a lot of churches; if we are not in the Bible belt, we are close to it. This has led to occasional controversies between members of the Catholic church, some of whom owned whiskey distilleries, and Baptist churches, which oppose drinking. Kentucky has local options, so each of its 120 counties, and even municipalities within those counties, can vote on whether liquor sales are allowed.

Q: I see.

HOLBROOK: Today the largest employer in Owensboro is, of course, the health industry, including primarily the regional hospital here, now called Owensboro Health. Owensboro also has a symphony orchestra, and a performing arts center, RiverPark Center. We also have four institutions of higher learning: Kentucky Wesleyan College, Brescia University, the Owensboro Community and Technical College, and a branch of Western Kentucky University, whose main campus is located in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Since my retirement from the Foreign Service and return to Owensboro in 2016, I've taught at two of these colleges.

Q: Which two?

HOLBROOK: Kentucky Wesleyan College and Brescia University. Brescia is named for a town in Italy. The University here was founded by Ursuline Sisters who were in a convent outside of Owensboro. Both Ky. Wesleyan and Brescia have about 1,000 students, counting on-campus and online students. In recent years, I've taught courses on International Law, US Foreign Policy, US-China Relations, and International Human Rights at these two colleges. I've also taught International Law at the University of Louisville, at the Brandeis School of Law. This year I just finished teaching a course at

the Brandeis School of Law on International Law, and I'll teach a course on US Foreign Policy at Kentucky Wesleyan College in the fall semester.

Q: So, roughly at this point how large a city in terms of population, would you say?

HOLBROOK: When I was growing up the population of the city of Owensboro was about 30,000, and now it's about 60,000.

Q: And as a city, is there very much diversity in terms of different kinds of people who have migrated there or how would you describe that?

HOLBROOK: When I was growing up in the 1950s, there wasn't much diversity in Owensboro. The population was and remains less than about 5% Black. The school system was segregated, Black and white schools. Integration began just as I was graduating from Owensboro High School in 1960. Today, Owensboro is more diverse: we have a lot of Mexican immigrants, about 3 percent of the population, and several Mexican restaurants in town. In recent years Owensboro has established an International Center, and has welcomed refugees from Burma, Afghanistan, Congo, Somalia, Colombia, and other countries.

Q: Alright. So, now let's return to your growing up. You went to a public high school or a private one?

HOLBROOK: I went to a public high school, Owensboro High School.

Q: Well, actually, let me just go back one step. Elementary school as well; public or private?

HOLBROOK: All the schools that I attended before university were public schools in Owensboro. Besides high school, I attended Longfellow Elementary School and Southern Junior High School. Longfellow has been replaced by a parking lot; Southern Junior High School continues as the Owensboro Middle School.

Q: Okay. How large a class did you have in those places?

HOLBROOK: My high school class contained about 250 students. In Kentucky this is a fairly large high school. Elementary school, junior high school, these were, again, fairly large schools for Kentucky.

Q: Were there any unique activities you recall from those early years that began to get you interested in international relations?

HOLBROOK: Absolutely. Good question, Mark. In retrospect, the main activity or main force that I now see as leading me towards a life in the Foreign Service was a series of train trips I took across the United States as a little boy. According to my childhood recollection, three times, when I was 5, 6, and 8 years old, three times my grandfather,

Dr. Allen L. Kincheloe, took me out to California to see his brother who lived near Los Angeles.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, we had great passenger train service all over the United States. Even my hometown of Owensboro had several passenger trains a day. As I learned in later years, the number one train, the best-known transcontinental train, was called the Super Chief (you can google "Super Chief" right now and get a lot of information), run by a company called the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad. The Super Chief ran from Chicago to Los Angeles, leaving Chicago in the early evening and arriving in Los Angeles the morning of the third day. Only later, in recent years, did I realize that in addition to my grandfather and myself, this was the train taken by Hollywood stars and other famous people who were traveling across the United States from New York to Los Angeles. I suppose they would take another famous train, the Twentieth Century Limited, from New York to Chicago, and then the Super Chief on to Los Angeles.

Each trip was a great adventure. I can still remember being awakened by my mother about 3:00 in the morning. She (and I think, my grandmother) would drive me and Granddad to Evansville, Indiana, about one hour away, where we would take a train to Chicago and spend most of a day there. In Chicago I recall going to the Field Museum of Natural History on at least one occasion. Then in the evening we'd get on this wonderful train called the Super Chief, at Dearborn Station (which has now closed as a train station but is still preserved as an office building). This was a busy train station in mid-America; the equivalent today, in air service, would be Chicago's O'Hare International Airport! There would always be many other trains in the station, next to each other, either arriving or preparing to depart. Departing trains would leave very smoothly; sometimes I recall seeing that a train was moving, but the movement was so smooth that we had to wait to see if it was our train or the adjacent train that was moving!

We were on the train for two nights, and arrived in Los Angeles on the third day, in the morning. The first morning we woke up in Kansas City (About 30 years later, in 1979, I took the same train, renamed by Amtrak as the Southwest Limited, on the same route, from Chicago to Los Angeles on the way to my first diplomatic assignment in China, at the US Embassy in Beijing). The train continued across Kansas, through parts of Colorado, and finally stopped in Albuquerque, New Mexico. There we would get off and they would wash the outside of the train. There were merchants from Indian tribes selling handicraft goods. And then we'd go on to California. The route took us through Pasadena, and I still recall all the flowers we could see in the morning along the route in Pasadena. Granddad's relatives would meet us at the station in Los Angeles, and we would drive to his brother's farmhouse in the countryside, near Corona, California.

The Super Chief featured not one or two but four engine cars, in order to get us through the mountains in northern New Mexico and Arizona! There was also a dining car, there were waiters, there were tablecloths. This was not an Amtrak snack car! Anyway, it was the thrill of my childhood, and remains my most compelling childhood memory. And I see those train rides today as having established the thrill and adventure of travel that

later propelled me into the Foreign Service. For the rest of my life, I've always taken trains as much as possible: in France and many other European countries; in Russia, in Taiwan, in China, and in Japan. In France, Taiwan, China, and Japan today there are wonderful and scenic high-speed trains, while, mysteriously, in the United States at present we have none, and only a few remaining long-distance trains. Later, in the Foreign Service, one of my domestic assignments was to Columbia University for a year of study. I always took Amtrak trains from Washington, where my wife and I bought a house in suburban Virginia, to New York City and return.

Q: Okay, okay. Before we go too much further, I did want to go back to your high school for a little while to find out what were, in general, the subjects that you were interested in that began sort of broadening your mind.

HOLBROOK: Just a general, normal public high school curriculum. I do recall in particular a world history course that I thought was interesting. I also had an excellent course in American History from a fine teacher, Virginia Fitzgerald. I always did well in math, including calculus in college. I had an excellent English teacher, Vista Morris, though I didn't appreciate her at the time! She insisted that we make an outline setting out in advance what we wanted to do in an essay! Very sound advice, I later agreed! In fact, her advice was entirely compatible with what I would call our Foreign Service writing style for cables: first you write a succinct summary, setting out what's really important, and then the body of the cable simply expands on your summary and essentially writes itself.

Q: Had you begun taking a foreign language in high school?

HOLBROOK: In high school I did not. In junior high school in Owensboro I took Latin for one year. I think maybe it was a requirement. I still remember a few words from it. I didn't take any language courses in high school. When I got to college, of course, there was a language requirement in those days. I selected French because I thought it sounded nice!

Q: It varies. But the other thing I wanted to ask you about high school was, were you involved in any extracurricular activities?

HOLBROOK: I was in the high school choir. We had an excellent music teacher, Dorothy Murrell, who took pride in her students' performances in competitions around the state and in performances for Christmas and other occasions in Owensboro. I still remember the many extra practice sessions Ms. Murrell would hold, 45 minutes before the normal start of the school day, several days a week.

Also, I started playing a game called handball in junior high school, which I still play today, in fact, roughly 65 years later! It's the best exercise, as well as the most simple: you hit a ball against a wall with your hands!

As I mentioned, my mother was a graduate of the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, in voice and piano. At her initiative I started taking piano lessons when I was five years old. I sometimes didn't want to continue, but Mom insisted, and I'm so glad she did! In high school, I was the pianist for Sunday School at the First Baptist Church. I'm now again taking lessons, this time from a professional concert pianist, and I perform various pieces, both classical and religious, at the First Christian Church in Owensboro, and at recitals.

Q: What about reading for pleasure? Were you particularly interested in various topics or did you read newspapers and so on?

HOLBROOK: I liked to read the sports pages! I did notice that my father had a subscription to The New York Times, and occasionally I would take a look at it. It seemed kind of dull! I subscribed myself to Sports Illustrated magazine (and I still do) and thought that was much more interesting!

Q: Okay. Now, in other ways were your parents encouraging of your reading? Did they say oh, you should really take a look at this or you need to prepare yourself with these sorts of materials?

HOLBROOK: Well, not really, no. I did very well in school, and I was always getting all As, and Dad paid $1 per A. That did encourage my studies! A couple of summers I did work down at my father's law office. I would read some of the cases down there and some of them I found very interesting. I also did research at the County Clerk's office on land titles, and found that work very boring! I also had a summer job at the Medley Brothers Distilling Company, where I learned to watch where you put your fingers when working in a rick (a storage warehouse where we would wrangle 350 pound whiskey barrels, rolling them on narrow tracks for storage purposes). Another summer job was at the Murphy Miller Chair Company, where I tried to help them figure out the costs of the chairs.

Q: Okay. Now, I think this is a good place to pause because we've sort of taken you through your early education and so on, and I think when we resume, we'll look- we'll follow you into college and further.

HOLBROOK: Okay.

Q: The only other question I wanted to ask before we conclude was, was there any other- did you have any other access to international things, either from visitors or your own travel or family members visiting, that sort of thing?

In the early years, you know, aside from California, which seemed international to me, I do recall making a trip up to Canada to a church convention for young people, and thinking that was pretty neat, pretty exciting to go across the border and have people come in and ask how old I was and ask all these questions. I do have a recollection of that, yes.

Q: In that case, just a very last question, I promise, did church attendance and church community play a big role in your upbringing?

HOLBROOK: Well, yes and no. I was not one of those who was going out on missionary trips or anything like that, but I did have a whole string of attendance medals, and that was because I was the piano player in the Sunday school. My mother cleverly had nominated me as piano player, so you know, when you're doing that you can't skip Sunday School: everyone would notice if the piano player didn't show up! But certainly those attendance medals did ensure that I was pretty well grounded in the Bible. We used to have "sword drills" where our Sunday School teacher would give several of us a Biblical citation, like Colossians 5:14, and see who could find it fastest and read it to the rest of us. I attended the First Baptist Church. I do recall learning that each Baptist church had a measure of independence, though generally there were prohibitions against drinking and dancing. This created a certain awkwardness in the community, since the three whiskey distilleries were major employers in the community, and employed members of Baptist churches, including myself for a summer job.

Q: We'll end this meeting, and what I'll do is, I'll send you an email with the opening that I've got and we can figure out when the next session will be, now that we've overcome all the technical details and we know how to meet.

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Q. So, today is November 13, and we're resuming our interview with Morton Holbrook as he goes to college. And where did you go to college?

HOLBROOK: Okay, I was an undergraduate at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Q: Okay.

HOLBROOK: Vanderbilt is just a two hour or three-hour drive from my hometown in Kentucky. And at the end of my freshman year Vanderbilt announced this new program in France.

Q: Ah, okay

HOLBROOK: And just for no particular reason I chose French to study my freshman year because I thought it sounded pretty; no other reason. It was required, I had to choose a language, so fortunately I chose French and then even more fortunately Vanderbilt announced its first overseas program toward the end of my freshman year.

Q: And what year was that?

HOLBROOK: I started in 1960, so this would have been the spring of '61. Starting in 1960, by the way, Kentucky was one of the first states that allowed 18-year olds to vote.

So, my first vote, an absentee ballot from Vanderbilt, was for John F. Kennedy. I still remember that. Anyway, around March of my freshman year, Vanderbilt announced this new program in France, and I thought that sounded great. So, I applied, and it was mostly for upper class students, but they didn't have enough people from upper classes applying, so they were willing to consider a mere freshman, even though I think I wound up having a C in French that second semester! But they were desperate, so they accepted me!

Q: Now, let me just ask here quickly, you had never been to France before; what- did they provide you with any training or did they give you any advice on what you'll need to do when you get there. How did they organize it?

HOLBROOK: Besides my train trips to California, the Vanderbilt program in France was the other important event that led me to apply to the Foreign Service. After I was accepted into the program, I recall at least one or perhaps a few meetings in April and May as a group on campus. There were about 25 of us, and the professors described where we would be going in France, to Aix-en-Provence, a beautiful and historic former Roman town in southern France, not far from the Mediterranean. The program began in August, 1961, so I had time to take an intensive French course on the Vanderbilt campus in June and July. With the incentive of a future trip to France in the balance, I did a lot better than the previous semester, and I got an A in that summer course!

Although it was possible in those days to fly to Europe, the Vanderbilt administrators made arrangements for us 25 or so students to go by boat, from Montreal for what for most, perhaps all of us, was our first international adventure!

We met as a group in Montreal and boarded the good ship Arcadia, a Greek-registered boat with a Greek crew, and, we soon learned, plenty of Ouzo, a highly alcoholic Greek aperitif or drink. About an hour or two after leaving Montreal, going out to the Atlantic Ocean on the St. Lawrence River, there was an announcement: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are now outside the 3-mile limit." We wondered: why are they telling us this? We were informed that there were two reasons: (1) there was now no minimum drinking age, and (2) there was no tax on alcohol. The pleasant result was that we could freely purchase all kinds of drinks, without showing any proof of age, at very reasonable prices, like ten cents or 15 cents a drink! The Arcadia in fact had an extensive drink menu, and I can recall that during out five-day voyage many of us (including myself -- strictly for scholarly research, of course) systemically went down the list and tried out the many mixed drinks we had heard of but never sampled: the Singapore Sling, the Pink Lady, martinis, and so on and on!

Landing in Le Havre, we took the "boat train" to Paris and for the first time heard French as spoken by native speakers in France. You know, it was a big thrill on the one hand; on the other hand, most of us had never actually spoken with any French people before. We could hardly understand what was being said. We got off the boat and onto the train to Paris. And I recall there were baggage people there and they were saying celle-ci, celle-la? And we thought what does that mean? Well, it meant which bag is yours, this one or that one?

So, we arrived in Paris and the first evening we went out to a restaurant. Now, we're all 19-21 years old. I was 19, others were 20; maybe the oldest might have been 21. And in front of every place-setting there was a small bottle of wine. No one asked us how old we were! And I thought wow, what a country! We then spent about five days sightseeing in Paris.

And then we had the good luck, for the only time in Vanderbilt's history, of spending a month in the city of Nice before going to Aix-en-Provence. I think this was some sort of last-minute arrangement because I don't recall being briefed about Nice until a few days before our arrival in France. In any case, from Paris we boarded a train that went to Nice by way of Marseilles.

We were so naïve! There was debate among us while we were en route; where exactly was Nice? Was it in the mountains? Was it on the sea? We really didn't know, and of course, there was no Google to check it out in those days. We spent the night on the train, and because it was the first time, we discovered the Vanderbilt program had not gotten any sort of couchette, a sort of a bed on the French trains that you pay extra for, but they didn't reserve couchettes for us. So, I recall we all kind of sprawled out on each other trying to sleep through the night. It was about a 12-hour train ride or perhaps 15 hours.

But then, the next morning we woke up from our cramped positions and looked out and saw the beautiful blue Mediterranean Sea, and we're riding along the seacoast from what we later learned was from Marseilles to Nice, just a beautiful and scenic ride! And then, on arrival, we realized Nice, in fact, was on the Mediterranean, and it also had mountains, the Alpes Maritimes, the Maritime Alps, which meet the Mediterranean at Nice. So, it had the best of both worlds, the sea and the mountains.

We had just a fabulous time in Nice, getting to know the city and the surrounding area, including Monaco. Vanderbilt later decided that the Nice experience, at a summer institute there, which taught a lot of foreign students, not just Americans, was not up to Vanderbilt's standards. And of course, that's exactly why we students liked it because we had a lot of free time. We probably learned as much French outside the school as in the school.

My friend Norman Lane and I rented motor scooters. I'd never driven a motor scooter before, but we rented them there in Nice and I learned to drive by sudden immersion, diving into very thick Nice traffic. By necessity I quickly figured out the basics: how to change gears, and how to put on the brakes! Norman and I made extensive trips by motor scooter along the three corniches (coastal highways) to the east to Monaco, and also to the west, to Juan Les Pins, Antibes, and other beautiful towns on the Riviera; we also drove up in the mountains to the north of Nice.

Then, after a month in Nice, our group took a two-week trip by train to Italy, visiting Milan, Venice, Florence, Rome and the Isle of Capri. We saw a lot of Italian art, including a lot of nudity in paintings and in statutes. I think some of the Vanderbilt girls, all from

the very conservative South in the US, were shocked; for the boys, our reaction, of course, was "bring it on!"

Then finally, in September, 1961 we arrived in Aix-en-Provence, the site of the semester-long Vanderbilt program. We took courses in French literature and politics, and European politics, taught by Dr. John Wahlke and by a local-hire French professor. We learned about the "langue d'oc,"the ancient language of Provence, and tried to read the poems in that language, written by its most famous cultural icon, Frederic Mistral. His name lives on in the history of Provence, and also in the name of the wind that often blows down the Rhone River to the Mediterranean, a wind called the Mistral!

And during our time there, we went to visit the American consulate in Marseilles, and then I myself on a subsequent trip to Paris went to visit the American Embassy. I still recall going into the Embassy and talking to someone in the political section there and learning that they actually paid you to live overseas and learn foreign languages! My reaction was that I would pay them for that experience! And I asked where can I sign up? And of course, I was just a sophomore in college, and they wisely said well, perhaps you should go back and get your degree from Vanderbilt first and then consider whether you want to enter the Foreign Service. So, that was the beginning of my interest in the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, before you leave France, what did you think of the training program in Aix? Did you come away with a reasonable facility with French?

HOLBROOK: Well, yes and no. It was just for a semester, but we had a lot of courses on French literature primarily, as well as basic French grammar. And after that semester everyone else, except for me and one other student, went back to Nashville and went on with their lives with, I would judge, a mediocre level of French. But my father wrote me suggesting that I might want to stay longer in France. It wouldn't have occurred to me as a 19-year-old, you know, what did I know? And I thought gee, Dad is sort of suggesting this; I'll look into it. So, I went to Paris and I dropped out of Vanderbilt for a semester and made my own program through some contacts that Vanderbilt had in Paris at a place called Reed Hall. With their assistance, I became an "auditeur libre," a free auditor at Sciences Po (Institut d\'Etudes Politiques) in Paris, and also a student at something called the British Institute in Paris, which taught French to foreigners. I didn't attend many lectures at Science Po -- my French wasn't up to it. But I did learn a lot at the British Institute. I think my first day there my accent improved about 50 percent because we had a wonderful teacher, Madame Peyrollaz, a native French speaker who specialized in phonetics.

For one of the tests in the course, each student was required to recite from memory a poem in French. I chose the "dormeur du val," by Rimbaud. About fifty-five years later, I recited the same poem at an event on campus in Nashville hosted by the Vanderbilt French Department. I had to review the poem, but it didn't take long to memorize it again!

Anyway, my accent improved under Madame Peyrollaz. She drew pictures of the tongue in the mouth, said this is where your tongue goes when you say the R. Or this is the way to pronounce the "u." And so on. I never had that kind of instruction before and I thought oh, that's how you do it.

Q: Yes. That is linguistics, and the reason I know that is because I took a course to become a teacher of English as a second language, and they do show you how the English language is verbalized, including fricatives and glottals and all of those things. Yes.

HOLBROOK: So, I thought wow, this is great; now I understand these mysterious noises, how you're supposed to make them. I mean, I guess I'm still- I'm certainly not a native speaker but certainly my accent's a lot improved just because of that one teacher.

And so, I spent an extra semester there in France, came back to Vanderbilt and the French Department people showed me off as an example of how you could vastly improve your French with a year in France. For my part, I would tell my fellow students that if they go to France, don't make it just for a semester if you're really serious about the language.

My extra semester in France, the spring semester in 1961 in Paris, was a time of turmoil in French history! Algeria had been a French colony, and actually had been incorporated into France itself, but had been struggling for independence for several years. There were battles between the OAS (the secret army organization), which wanted to keep Algeria as a part of France, and Algerians who supported independence. President De Gaulle was in favor of independence. The result, in Paris, was a series of plastic bombs going off for many weeks while I was there, set off by the opposition to De Gaulle; there were also several attempts to assassinate him. Finally, in April, 1962 President De Gaulle made the momentous announcement that Algeria would be set free. On the evening of the announcement the French Army sent tanks to surround the Eiffel Tower because of rumors that the OAS would try to destroy it.

As for me, as a typical college student who thought of himself as bullet-proof, I felt no personal danger, even though one of the OAS "cells" was discovered about two blocks from where I lived in Paris. I returned home from school one day to discover police and soldiers all around the neighborhood. The OAS cell group had threatened to blow up the entire quarter! Finally they surrendered. I also recall making several trips back to Aix to see friends there and visit the Vanderbilt program. On one of my trips, De Gaulle himself appeared at the square in front of the Hotel de Ville. He began his speech by singing the Marseillaise! But no one joined him! Many people in Aix were "pieds noirs" -- French people who lived in Algeria but had moved back to southern France due to the turmoil in Algeria. (Later, in 1968, I participated in an Experiment in International Living program for two months in Salon de Provence, not far from Aix. I lived with a pied noir family; nearly every day family members would reminisce about the "good old days" when they lived in Algeria!)

Following my sophomore year in France, I came back and finished my junior and senior years at Vanderbilt. I majored in economics, with a minor in International Relations. I also took courses in Russian and Spanish, as well as more courses in French. I would have taken Chinese back then, but Vanderbilt did not offer it at that time.

Q: Well, here let me interrupt you with a question before you go on with the curriculum. Take a moment to describe what Vanderbilt was like back in the early '60s, you know, at this moment of the very beginnings of desegregation and what was the campus like?

HOLBROOK: Well, it's embarrassing to say that Vanderbilt was a white school, a white private school as many schools were in those days, except Vanderbilt, I guess somewhat to its credit, did admit Black students to the divinity school. On the other hand, just a few months before I got to campus my freshman year, some of the Black students and other students in the divinity school staged sit-in strikes at places like Morrison's Cafeteria, near the campus, which refused to serve Black people. The students were arrested and charged with trespassing! James Lawson was a Vanderbilt Divinity School student involved in the sit-in, and was kicked out of Vanderbilt as a result. It took Vanderbilt several decades to apologize for this treatment and give him an honorary degree.

The then-Chancellor of Vanderbilt felt that sit-ins were not appropriate behavior. Going in the other direction, however, sometime during my Vanderbilt years, Stokely Carmichael of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) came and spoke at the Vanderbilt campus, and as I recall he was well-received by the students. And I had some dealings with Fisk University, an all-Black university in Nashville.

Nevertheless, there were a lot of white segregationists in the student body at Vanderbilt. I recall some of them got angry at the Black divinity students who were staging sit-ins in restaurants just asking to be served. And a couple of my fraternity brothers were on the wrong side of history, you could say, in protesting against integration. Finally, in my senior year, Vanderbilt announced it would begin admitting Black students to the undergraduate college (and other Vanderbilt colleges) for the year afterwards, that is for the fall of 1964. And during my senior year I recall seeing groups of Black students touring the campus, and my own tiny, tiny contribution was to welcome them and shake hands and talk with them whenever I saw them on campus, but otherwise I was kind of blissfully sailing through this all-white institution, doing my own thing, majoring in economics and interested in languages and the Foreign Service.

Q: Now, the other question is, when you went to Vanderbilt did you join a fraternity or any of the other sorts of clubs on campus?

HOLBROOK: Yes, I was in a fraternity at Vanderbilt. A few of my fraternity brothers were among those who objected to Blacks being admitted to one of the restaurants inside the campus, a private restaurant. And in those days, you had people saying private property owners have the right to decide who can come in. There was no public accommodations act in those days, although it was on the runway in the US Congress, getting ready to be passed, a public accommodations act.

Q: And was there anything noteworthy, anything else noteworthy about your membership in the fraternity? Did it undertake any projects or other- do other things that you recall of importance?

HOLBROOK: I don't recall any community service projects by us or any of the fraternities and sororities in those days. Mostly fraternities had parties and participated in athletic events. We had a tag football team; I was on the football team. We had a bowling team; I was on the bowling team. I've played handball all my life and we actually had a small intramural handball team there. And we had lunch together. Vanderbilt, unlike many of the larger universities that have huge fraternity and sorority houses that house many students, had tried to get some control over fraternities and sororities, and implemented restrictions: only six members could reside in fraternity or sorority houses. I never lived in the fraternity house; I either lived in a dormitory or off-campus, but I would go to the fraternity house for lunch and I participated in their athletic teams.

Q: Now, then the other question is, were there any foreign students on campus?

HOLBROOK: Very few. Very few. I can't think of hardly any other than Charlie Churchill, who was, I believe, a nephew of Winston Churchill. He was sort of a famous campus figure, famous mostly for his social life, as I recall. But diversity-wise, I can't recall any foreign students. I don't recall foreigners enrolled in any of the classes that I took in Nashville. Of course, that was another aspect of my sophomore year, which was spent in France: in Nice, there were many international students at the school we attended, and I became friendly with several of the German students there. In Aix en Provence, of course, I had French friends. Then, when I made my own program in Paris the second semester, I took a Berlitz course in German, and learned what you might call "travel German," and met students from France and other countries who had enrolled in the course.

Q: Now, you had begun talking about all of the languages that you began to study. Were those a part of your major or what was your specialty?

HOLBROOK: Well, I ended up majoring in economics. I started out with political science and switched majors to economics. Since I was in France for a full year I had almost as many courses in French as I did in economics, which had been my father's major at the University of Kentucky. I think I had 10 economics courses, and eight courses in French language. My minor was actually called international relations, so I had some political science courses as well as language courses. And of course, I still had a lot of extra courses to choose from, in the liberal arts curriculum, so I used those to take year-long courses in Russian and Spanish. In retrospect, I should have just taken one or the other, or perhaps just concentrated on French, rather than getting just a smattering of Russian, Spanish and (in Paris) German. I was also on a summer program with the Experiment in International Living in Poland in the summer of 1963, and learned a smattering of Polish.

Q: And were you satisfied by the time you completed your studies that you had a reasonable grasp of economics or did you feel like you needed to do a bit more?

HOLBROOK: No, I needed more. After I graduated from Vanderbilt, I went to graduate school in economics at the London School of Economics for a year. In London, I never got quite used to the continental style of teaching, which is far less rigorous than I was used to at Vanderbilt. Instead of testing you all the time, at LSE you're more or less on your own there, attending weekly lectures. So in London I lost interest in economics and began thinking about pursuing Chinese language and area studies and looked into various Chinese language programs.

I had become interested in Chinese when I returned from the Vanderbilt in France program in 1962, and visited my Vanderbilt friend Norman Lane, at his parent's home in Bronxville, just north of New York City. He and I went into Manhattan and visited Chinatown. By this time I'd studied several European languages, and could make a stab at the meaning of words that were spelled with an alphabet. But I recall being completely baffled by Chinese characters.

I should add that a highlight of my time at Vanderbilt was the visit by President Kennedy in May of 1963. At a time of racial turmoil in the South, the President gave a well-received speech advocating equal opportunity under law for all Americans.

Q: Now, during this study of languages and your European studies, did you make friends or make contacts that were useful later? You know, as people who helped you network and so on.

HOLBROOK: Well, let's see. No, not really. I mean, I had a French friend, William Wulfmann, who was in my German class in Paris in 1962. We later traveled throughout Europe, to Vienna, Prague, Berlin, Hamburg and elsewhere. We took a train from Prague to East Berlin, and then walked through Checkpoint Charlie on the Berlin Wall to get to West Berlin. As we walked up to the Wall, two grungy students, we were surrounded by East German police with their guns at the ready! But we produced US and French passports so they let us go through to West Berlin. William later visited me in the United States and stayed in my parents home in Owensboro, Ky.

I did meet people at the American embassy in Paris in the political section but didn't really follow up with them in my later career.

Mostly I just got interested in languages, and -- to return my visit to Chinatown in New York, despite all my background in European languages, and knowledge of the Cyrillic alphabet, I saw those Chinese signs and I thought, I don't have a clue as to what that means; what an interesting and difficult language this is, and I'm going to see how far I can get with it. So, later, in London I started applying to all these Chinese language programs. So, the one I was eventually accepted to and attended was at the University of Michigan, which has an enormous Center for Chinese studies that spans many academic departments: Chinese art, Chinese history, political science, economics, as well as

language. It's a great place both to learn Chinese and learn other things about China, and that's where I ended up in a master's program.

Q: Oh, I see. Okay, okay. The only question I wanted to ask about London was, at that time, were you learning economics with a great deal of mathematics and calculus and all of the quanta aspects that economics would take on?

HOLBROOK: Not so much in those days, no. No. You know, Keynesian economics was in vogue. In terms of math, about all I remember is there's something called the Phillips curve concerning the relation between inflation and unemployment. Professor Phillips was a professor at the London School of Economics. So, I remember that.

So, I ended up in a master's program at Michigan that was called Far Eastern Studies, Chinese. I mostly took Chinese language and history courses. I took two-and-a-half years to get a MA degree. At the end of that I was in a PhD program in Chinese history, which I did not complete. At the end of my second year I became a teaching assistant in Chinese language where I helped the professor, a very distinguished professor named Harriet Mills. She was distinguished both because of her knowledge of Chinese and also because she was the last Fulbright scholar in China before the Communist Party took power. She was captured by communist forces and spent five years essentially in prison in China, where she was subjected to what was then called "brainwashing." She was finally released in 1955.

The US had no formal relations with China then, but the US Government was able to get her and a couple of other Americans who had been caught up in the communist revolution out of China. So, she became a professor of Chinese at the University of Michigan. I had the privilege of being her student, and then her teaching assistant for a year, essentially helping her teach the textbooks that I had just finished myself in my first year, which she was the author of. She wrote a textbook called "Intermediate Reader of Modern Chinese Literature." I still remember it well today!

Q: Now, were you able at any point while you were studying Chinese at that point to go anywhere for immersion?

HOLBROOK: Well, in those days we had these National Defense Foreign Language Scholarships, and my summer programs essentially were intensive programs. It's not really immersion in the sense of only speaking Chinese. I did visit Middlebury University one summer, for a couple of days, and I recall going to the Chinese table at lunch at Middlebury and then going to the French table at night at Middlebury, and students had to pledge to only speak a foreign language for the summer. I thought what a great place this is to study languages.

But I myself, after taking what Michigan called their intensive introductory Chinese language course, I received an NDFL grant and went to Columbia University for a summer. I had further studies in Chinese language. And then, for my second summer I had a choice of accepting NDFL grants to go to Stanford, Michigan, or Hawaii. My

advisor at Michigan advised me to stay at Michigan because otherwise the sequence of courses would be interrupted. I kind of regret that I didn't take the opportunity to go to Stanford. And he said with regard to Hawaii, no serious scholar goes to Hawaii. And I thought right, that's me; I'm not a serious scholar, I should go there! But anyway, I stayed at Michigan for intensive Chinese for the summer. Though it still wasn't immersion, it was quite intensive. Overall, I took ten or 12 courses in Chinese language during my four years at Michigan, including courses in Classical Chinese and in Qing Dynasty documents. I recall translating and making comments on part of the massive legal code of the Qing Dynasty into English. In a very interesting course taught by Professor Charles Hucker, we examined closely and did our best to translate parts of the Classic of Filial Piety (the Xiao Jing), and the Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu).

Q: Now, after all this time, did you feel that you had some command of Chinese even without the exposure to an immersion experience?

HOLBROOK: Well, "some command" would be about right. Actually, in my first year in Chinese we did a lot of speaking Chinese with a native speaker for an hour every morning, five days a week. This was in part by necessity: our teacher, originally from Beijing, had actually departed from China by swimming down the Pearl River from China into Hong Kong, and then somehow winding up as a language teacher at Michigan. His Chinese was great, of course, but his English was quite limited, so that made it even more necessary for us students to communicate with him in Chinese. In the afternoon five days a week we'd have someone like Harriet Mills or another person who was American come in and talk to us in English about Chinese grammar. After that first year, however, subsequent courses were mostly about translating from Chinese into English, rather than speaking Chinese. At that time, I thought this is not good for speaking Chinese. So, in that sense I would have preferred to continue with spoken Chinese, but instead that's just the way the program was, the spoken Chinese kind of lapsed in terms of classroom use.

Q: At this point you had now undergraduate and graduate experiences and the possibility of a PhD; where were you envisioning yourself going at the end of your education?

HOLBROOK: Well, I was interested in the Foreign Service. And I took the Foreign Service for the first time in graduate school at Michigan, and I passed the written but didn't pass the oral. And at the end of the oral one of the three- in those days you just had three senior Foreign Service people grilling you. One of them was very encouraging and he said something like you came very close, encouraged me to take the exam again. So, I went on back to graduate school and I did take it again; unfortunately, I didn't pass it that time either.

Q: Did they tell you, at the end of the oral exam, did they tell you where your weaknesses were?

HOLBROOK: You know, I don't really recall. I just don't recall. Maybe they said something about immaturity or something like that, but basically, I don't recall their making it a point to tell me weaknesses. I do recall one of the examiners who encouraged

me to take the test again, saying I had come very close to passing. So I continued in graduate school in a PhD program in Chinese history.

I didn't quite feel comfortable in this program. My advisor, a very distinguished professor named Albert Feuerwerker, asked me whether in my gut I wanted to be a Chinese historian. And oddly enough, I'd never really considered that question. I thought well no, that's not really what I want to be at all. So, at that point I dropped out of the PhD program and I went to law school. I switched vocations completely and went to the University of Chicago Law School. Attending law school had always been at the back of my mind, because my father was an attorney and my brother also, although he was not then an attorney. So, that was always something that was sort of there in the background as a possibility. So, I left Chinese studies for the three years of law school.

Q: At that time, when you went to law school, was law something that you were interested in or, like so many people, you sort of did it as the alternative?

HOLBROOK: I mean, there was a family background in law, and I'd worked in my father's law firm during a couple of summers when I was in high school, so I felt comfortable about going to law school. Also, once again, my father gave me very wise advice: he said even if you don't practice law, a law degree is very useful to have. And that definitely proved to be the case. Subsequently, the law degree proved very helpful in several of my Foreign Service assignments, including an assignment to the Legal Adviser's Office. After I retired from the Foreign Service, having what academics call the "terminal degree" in law also was crucial in my securing employment as a professor both in China and in the United States.

Q: What year did you begin law school?

HOLBROOK: That was 1969, at the University of Chicago. In Chicago at that time they were having the infamous trial of the Gang of Seven, who had been involved in the protests at the Democratic Convention in 1968.

Q: Yes, right after the 1968 democratic convention and all of the subsequent unrest and so on in Chicago. Did that affect you in your school?

HOLBROOK: No, it didn't really affect us in the school. Certainly we all knew it was going on, but we weren't really directly involved and there wasn't too much interest in law students in going down to the center of Chicago and observing the trials either. We just read about it, and saw it on the news.

On the other hand, we were affected by the incident at Kent State, in May, 1970. National Guard soldiers killed 3 students on the Kent State college campus during a Vietnam War protest. There was an immediate and spontaneous reaction in colleges all over the United States. I and several of my fellow students essentially jumped in a car and drove to Washington, DC a day or two after Kent State. You know, in virtually all colleges in the United States students went on strike, quote, unquote; that meant we didn't go to class.

And along with thousands of other students, we went to Washington, DC to protest. Nixon was President in those days. The evening we arrived in Washington, we went to the Mall and we saw a lot of demonstrators taking their clothes off and dancing in the Reflecting Pool between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, and yelling obscenities at President Nixon.

Our reaction as law students was, we didn't want any part of this kind of protest. We wanted an effective protest where we used the law to end the war. We wanted to protest the war itself, but we certainly were not interested in dancing in the Reflecting Pool and yelling obscenities. So we drove back to Chicago and went back to class.

Q: Speaking of which, during this period your conscription or your, you know, as a potential draftee was- you received deferments because you were in school?

HOLBROOK: Yes. Initially, those enrolled in graduate school were deferred. Then when they started cutting off graduate school deferments, they allowed those who had already completed a year or two of graduate school to continue, which I did. And then, eventually, they gave a test to everybody and I somehow managed to pass the test. And finally, there was a lottery and my number was something like 350, far down on the list of those who might be drafted. We did have a few students in the law school who served in Vietnam and then returned to the law school

Q: So, while you're in law school and you're conducting the protests, are you imagining yourself in some kind of legal job? Or what were you thinking about for post-law school?

HOLBROOK: Yes. I was thinking in terms of either a job involving international law, or I was still interested in the Foreign Service. And with regard to international law, yes, I was interviewed by some law firms, I looked into the legal office, as I recall, of the Department of Commerce. And I also took the Foreign Service test again my third year in law school, and again passed the written test, but by the time of the oral test I had really not been paying a lot of attention to foreign policy. And I recall being asked a lot of questions about US foreign policy, and I had to acknowledge frankly that I'm really not very well informed about these foreign policy subjects. So I didn't pass the oral exam, and I wasn't too surprised not to pass it that time.

I subsequently went to Washington, DC, passed the bar in Washington and became a lawyer. At one point, I left one job and was unemployed for several months, sort of usefully unemployed before taking another job. I used that time both to watch the Watergate Hearings on TV, and to prepare for the Foreign Service test, which I thought I knew how to do, having taken the test in the past. I systematically studied every aspect of U.S. foreign policy and studied other questions that I thought might come up because they had come up before, about American history and American culture and the wide variety of things in those days, today too, I suppose, you get asked. And in keeping with what is still good preparation for the Foreign Service exam, I read the New York Times and the Washington Post every day, including not just the domestic and foreign news, but the culture and entertainment sections. So, I sort of felt that I was ready.

As a kind of footnote, by the way, the written exam that year, for those living in the Washington area, was given at a high school located in Washington DC. I recall showing up on a Saturday at the high school, along hundreds of other applicants. And, amazingly, the doors were locked! Somehow the administrators of the test had failed to ensure the doors were open! Anyway, eventually the doors swung open. I passed the written exam, and a few months later took the oral test. In those days, you found out the oral exam result immediately. I was told I did quite well on the oral. In fact, they told me that some people get a marginal pass, and might not later get an offer to join the Foreign Service, but that I was "way up there " on the list of those who passed and so that I would certainly be on the list of people that were offered a position, though I guess then and perhaps as now you still don't know when that call might come.

Q: Yes, yes. But what, just to go back one moment, what made you interested or why did you decide to take a job as an attorney in Washington? Principally so that you could be a bit closer to taking the State Department exam, or was there something else?

HOLBROOK: Well, that's a very good question, Mark. It had to do with family history and family connections. In Washington there was a lawyer named Bill Greer. Mr. Greer is originally from my hometown in Kentucky. Mr. Greer's first job out of law school was working for my father in Owensboro, Kentucky. He then moved to Washington, DC. So, I called him out of law school, knowing of this family connection, and asked him for a job. And he said certainly, be happy to employ you. He had a very small office there consisting just of himself, although he had previously worked for Covington and Burling, which is one of the large firms there, and he actually had an office, his own office in their building and access to their law library. So, it was kind of an unusual one-person firm, and I worked there with him for a year. He had a very unusual specialty. One of his clients was the Georgetown Citizens Association., and as a result of his work there is no Metro stop in Georgetown today: his clients didn't want Georgetown to be overrun with tourists!

Q: That was exactly the question I was going to ask you. Because that was when they were making the decisions for the Metro system.

HOLBROOK: Exactly.

Q: And I arrived as a student at Georgetown in 1977 greatly disappointed that I had to use every other form of very slow transport. I suffered from that choice at Georgetown.

HOLBROOK: Oh, you suffered because there was no Metro in Georgetown.

Q: Yes, exactly.

HOLBROOK: Mr. Greer's very effective work on behalf of his client was what kept the Metro out of Georgetown. The citizens association opposed a Metro stop. They made the case that Georgetown was already a very busy and crowded place; a subway stop would

just make things worse. They prevailed, and that is why the "Foggy Bottom" stop is the closest stop to Georgetown today. So, I spent some time at the District of Columbia Board of Zoning Appeals, I think it was called, among other tasks that I had in that very small law firm.

Q: Okay.

HOLBROOK: So, I worked for him for about a year and then I took off, essentially, and prepared for the Foreign Service oral exam. And by the time I passed it, at least in those days you still don't know when they might call you up, and I recall they called me up in January of 1975, and said we have a class starting in two weeks, would you like to join that class. At that point I was working with another small law office in Washington DC, on DuPont Circle, the office of Stephen L. Bluestone.

In that office, I won my very first case, the first case that I handled entirely on my own, a traffic accident involving a student at American University who was from Ethiopia. I don't recall the details, but I represented the student against a large insurance company. We had a short trial in front of a judge, and my side won, resulting in a verdict requiring the insurance company to pay him money! This was a good feeling, since I was by myself and the insurance company, as I recall, was represented in court by three attorneys. After the judge announced his decision, I went over to the opposing attorneys just to introduce myself in a friendly way. They were not happy or friendly! And they were even more unhappy when I telephoned one of them several days later to ask for the payment due to my client. The response was, we plan to appeal. My response: according to District of Columbia law, you must still pay the amount owed, even though you will appeal and we might have to repay you. They paid, appealed, and I won the case on appeal also! A slam dunk, you might say.

So when I got an offer to join the Foreign Service in two weeks, I said well, I'm practicing law, I have a trial in two weeks. Can't I just join a later class? And you know what the answer was; the answer was well, “I can't guarantee that we'll ever call you again.” That's the way they did things, not just to me, but I heard it from other people too, you know. Many of us, I discovered, had bad feelings about this abrupt method of forming a Foreign Service class! So, I sort of gulped and said okay, and I was able to make arrangements for my boss, Mr. Bluestone, to handle that particular trial; we had both been working on it anyway. I told him that I had this great opportunity, but there was a deadline to enter the Foreign Service in two weeks!

So, I joined that Foreign Service class, and was sworn in very shortly after the class began in January 1975. My parents and grandmother, Antha Kincheloe, flew up from Owensboro, Ky for the occasion. Assistant Secretary Phil Habib administered the oath of office to the class of about 52 people, up on the 8th floor of the State Department, where there are reception rooms along with an impressive collection of early American antique furniture. Separately, my father arranged for a reception for me at the Sheraton Park Hotel, and invited his closest contacts in Washington, which included the Kentucky

Senators, Wendell Ford and Walter Hutchinson, who both attended. What an honor for me!

My A-100 class orientation then began in cramped quarters in Rosslyn. The staff there referred to our classroom area as Gate 41 at Washington National Airport (now Reagan Airport) because we were right under the flight path for landing aircraft; it was quite noisy. I think the A100 course was scheduled for six weeks. Though many of my classmates ended up with overseas assignments, I recall being offered three possible assignments in Washington, including an assignment to the office of the Under Secretary for Secretary Assistance, Carlyle E. Maw. Mr. Maw, of the New York law firm of Cravath, Swaine, had been Henry Kissinger's lawyer in private life. When Kissinger was appointed as Secretary of State, he appointed Mr. Maw as the Legal Adviser. Then, a few months before my arrival, Maw was "kicked upstairs" to the Under Secretary position. I was told the reason was so he would be literally closer to the Secretary's office -- it was just down an inner corridor, next to the offices of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and then the Secretary of State.

I accepted the offer from the Under Secretary's office! I later learned that my law background was crucial to the assignment. Everyone in the small office, aside from the secretarial staff, was an attorney! In all there were four of us: Mr. Maw, and two other attorneys from private life, Judd Kessler (who had also worked in Chile with AID) and Bob Craft, of the firm of Sullivan and Cromwell. Judd and Bob had the title of Special Assistant. I was the Staff Assistant, the junior officer on the staff. So suddenly I went from practicing law in the District of Columbia to being on the seventh floor in the State Department, working down the hall from Henry Kissinger with Henry Kissinger's personal attorney, Carlyle Maw. That was my first and still remains the most unusual, and also a very enjoyable job as a Foreign Service officer. I don't know of any other entering Foreign Service officer that had that kind of job; most of my colleagues went overseas for their first assignment. So right away I could see how wise my father had been in encouraging me to get a law degree.

Q: I see.

Now, let me take you back one second. Before you actually got this assignment, was there a training program when you first entered?

HOLBROOK: Yes.

Q: Because you'd mentioned the class, that you entered the class.

HOLBROOK: Yes. It was then called the A-100 class. I think they- do they still use that name?

Q: So, now, this was in 1975 that you joined and had the course?

HOLBROOK: That's right.

Q: Were any, in your class 50 was there any diversity at all? Were there women, were there African Americans and so on?

HOLBROOK: Yes. Not many, but there were some women; maybe of the 52, there were 10 or 15, including a few who had previously been required to resign. Up until the 1970s, when two Foreign Service Officers married each other, the woman was required to resign. Then the policy changed, and the Foreign Service then went out and took back some of the women it had forced to resign, and a few of them were in my entering class. I don't think there were any African Americans in my class. There were a few Asian Americans. Not awfully diverse, but on the other hand, my class was diverse in terms of education. I don't think we had a single Ivy League graduate in that class, so it didn't meet the stereotype of Foreign Service officers as being elite, Ivy League educated people, that is, as some said, "pale, male, and Yale" We were, however, mostly pale and male. But not Yale and not the Ivy League. There were people from colleges all over the United States in the class.

Q: Okay. So, now you're- okay. So, they pull you from A-100 and you're now in the State Department. What were your duties in that job?

HOLBROOK: Three separate responsibilities, two of which remain with me today in my teaching career as a professor.

Let me say first what a thrill it was to begin my new job in the Department of State, particularly since I was entering at the highest level, on the 7th floor, down the hall from Secretary Kissinger's office. Just driving to work was a thrill! Since I was attached to a high-ranking office, I was eligible for a parking place in the garage underneath the State Department. So I would drive down from my group house (shared with five other young people, each with jobs in different fields) near the National Zoo, at 2844 27th Street, to the Department of State in what was and is called Foggy Bottom. Just before my arrival, I would enter a short tunnel, at around 20th Street NW. Sometimes, the sun would be rising just as I drove out of the tunnel, and would highlight the Washington Monument, which would be directly in my field of vision in my car. Then, after parking downstairs, I would go to my office in the Under Secretary's suite, from where we could see, just one block away on the Mall, the Washington Monument, parts of the Lincoln Memorial, the National Science Foundation, and part of the reflecting pool. I appreciated both the beauty and the significance of the mall and felt very lucky to be in the Foreign Service and have a job at this historic place.

Now, I initially had no clue about what my office, the Office of the Under Secretary for Security Assistance, did; it seemed like a very mysterious title. Well, it meant arms sales. This was the office that was charged with approving or not the sale or grant of U.S. military equipment to foreign countries. Not rifles and more routine munitions, but helicopters, weapons systems, and more serious and lethal equipment to our allies overseas. And these included countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, the Philippines,

Guatemala; a lot of different countries, 39 different countries that we provided arms to, intended for their self-defense, and also to keep them on our side in the Cold War..

Now, just at this time you had some people in the Congress and other people and organizations, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in the United States who objected to our policy of proving arms to dictators who were using these arms, or so it was alleged, not for legitimate self-defense, but to incarcerate or even torture or kill domestic opponents. And the legislative result, and this became my first job, was something called Section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act. And 502B essentially said the United States should not sell or provide arms to countries whose governments engaged in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. So, my first job in the State Department was to help set up a reporting program for our Embassies in all countries to which we provided "security assistance," that is we sold or provided arms or military training. We called them human rights reports. This is the beginning of human rights reports, which are now the annual reports on human rights on all foreign countries that the State Department produces.

Q: So, let me ask here, so this human rights report was mandated by Congress.

HOLBROOK: Right.

Q: What did it require back then?

HOLBROOK: Well, can you see this? I was astounded to find this on the internet. It's an unclassified memo - I can send it to you, actually. It's an unclassified, formerly classified now declassified memo sent on July 10, 1975, and it goes to the human rights officers in the five bureaus that covered the entire world in those days: the Americas, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and Africa. And these were the initial instructions, prepared by Judd Kessler and I, along with a lawyer in the legal advisor's office named Charlie Runyan. He was the head of L/HR, Legal Advisor's Human Rights Office. So, we worked with him to draft these cables going to all these embassies, explaining that they should send us a human rights report on the human rights conditions in all these countries. So, what do you think we got back when we first sent that request out?

Q: I can't imagine you got much.

HOLBROOK: Exactly. It was definitely a mixed bag. Now, we'd made it clear, these are supposed to be unclassified reports on human rights conditions. In several cases, US Ambassadors personally wrote back saying we're really busy and we have a lot of reports to do, and we just don't think it's a good idea to publicly criticize our allies. So, we had to go back to the drawing board and send a stronger cable that said this is not a request, this is required; it's required by law. Please send your report to us.

Then the first reports came in and you can imagine they were often simply whitewashes. They said things like well, human rights conditions have really improved since the Middle Ages, or conditions here are much better than in the countries next door where

they torture even more. Stuff like that. There'd be no reference to reports that were available to us in Washington from organizations like Amnesty International and other human rights organizations. The Embassy reports wouldn't even mention those.

So, then we went back to the drawing board essentially for the second time. Charlie Runyan, in the Legal Advisor's Human Rights office, took the lead in this. We drafted a format to be used in all countries preparing human rights reports. It stated that posts must answer these questions, such as are there political prisoners; what do other international organizations say about human rights; are there free elections; are there reports of torture. A lot of very specific questions about human rights that had to be answered on every country. That format, enhanced over the years, still exists today. Now there are requirements to report about women's rights, abuses of children, trafficking in persons, subjects like that, some of which have expanded into their own reports, for example, on religious freedom and on human trafficking. Our initial human rights reports were path-breaking, the first time human rights reports had been done systematically by the State Department.

In fact, we had in-house hearings, if you can imagine this, hearings in the State Department where I and the other two staff lawyers in my office would cross-examine witnesses from each of the bureaus. Some of them were very senior people, you know, some were ambassadors themselves or had been or were deputy assistant secretaries, and some of them would come in and plead for us not to put their countries on the list of those engaged in egregious violations of human rights. And so, we would prepare for our "hearings" in advance, based on the human rights reports that we had seen and based on other information that we had, we would ask them all these questions about human rights in their countries, including, of course, what are the good things to say about it.

The result was that in my time in the Under Secretary's office, we did not identify any country as being a persistent violator of internationally recognized human rights (my colleague Judd Kessler recalls that we did make identify a couple of countries with egregious records on human rights, but nothing came of our recommendations; this may have happened after my departure from the office for assignment overseas). What we did do was shed a lot of light on human rights conditions in all those countries. And it was certainly both educational and shocking for me. I think I recall in particular that in many Central and Latin America countries to which we supplied security assistance, torture by government agents was virtually a way of life, according to our own human rights reports. This was also the case in some of the Middle Eastern places too, especially Iran under the Shah. There was an organization called SAVAK (Sāzemān-e Ettelā\'āt va Amniyat-e Keshvar, literally "National Organization for Security and Intelligence"), where there were a lot of credible reports of torture of, you know, not of criminals but of domestic opposition there. The Philippines also, under President Marcos, was not known to be friendly towards the opposition. The bottom line was that we didn't make a list of egregious violators as such, but we did produce factual human rights reports on all countries which received security assistance, publicly available for those who wanted to read it.

I was only in the office for about a year, a year-and-a-half, in 1975-76, but we set up that basic reporting mechanism and format for human rights reports, much of which is still used today. This is a continuing story here, I'll continue it somewhat out of sequence to follow the human rights angle, and then provide more details later. I went overseas, I was in Taiwan for a couple of years, in language training and in the Economic Section of the then-US Embassy in Taipei, in 1977-78, and then my first job in China was when we opened our embassy in Beijing in 1979.

One of my first jobs in the new US Embassy in Beijing was to help prepare human rights reports on the People's Republic of China! The US did not provide security assistance to China, of course. But one of the results of our initial human rights reports, in 1975 and 1976, was a lot of people, including members of Congress, said well, all you're doing is criticizing our allies and the worst human rights violators are not our allies, even though certainly there are some problems, but are the communist countries, the Soviet Union and China; why don't you say anything about them? Well, of course, the reason was we weren't selling arms to them, we were not providing them with security assistance. So, the State Department quickly moved to requiring a human rights report on every foreign country, not just those to which we sold arms. So, human rights reports went from the 39 countries to which we sold arms to every foreign country in the world.

So, by the time I got to China in 1979, I was there just in time to help draft the first human rights report about the People's Republic of China. I did so with some enthusiasm because I was so familiar with the format and also familiar with the problems that other posts had had writing human rights reports. So, actually the first three or four human rights reports, I was either a co-drafter at post or sometimes the drafter at post of the human rights reports on China. Now, of course, after drafting at post, they are sent in to Washington, they're edited in the State Department. In fact, one of my later jobs on the China desk (the Office of Chinese and Mongolian Affairs), in 1984-86, was editing the human rights report that came in from the Embassy in Beijing. And then, subsequently, I was out to Beijing again in our embassy on assignment in 1996-99 and contributed again to the draft human rights report. So, I have a long history of involvement in State Department human rights reports.

Now, to return to my first job as an FSO, I also had other responsibilities in the Office of the Under Secretary for Security Assistance. At that time, a former NSC staff person named Morton Halperin had filed a lawsuit against President Nixon, Secretary Kissinger, John Ehrlichman, H. R. Haldeman, Attorney General John Mitchell, and other top officials, literally "All the President's Men" at the top level, alleging illegal wiretapping. Nixon had been furious when reports of the US bombing of Cambodia appeared in the media, and demanded an investigation, including by wiretaps, of all those who had access to the information about the bombing. Kissinger and other top officials supplied the names of about 17 people, including Halperin. Then the FBI conducted the wiretap operations.

When news of the wiretaps came out, Mr. Halperin, represented by the ACLU, filed his lawsuit. The Justice Department represented Kissinger. I became the liaison between the

Justice Department and Mr. Maw, who was Secretary Kissinger's chief adviser in the State Department regarding this case, in coordination with the Justice Department. As a result, I actually got to read the transcripts of the wiretaps on the 17 staff people whose names had been supplied as having had access to information that had been allegedly leaked about our bombing of Cambodia. The wiretaps were completely boring and mundane conversations: Please pick up groceries before you come home, and that sort of thing. Kissinger regarded the lawsuit as simply political harassment, and his strategy was to delay, delay, delay.

At one point, Kissinger was served with lengthy interrogatories (questions posed by the Halperin attorney under the authority of the Federal District Court), with a deadline by which for the responses to be filed in court. As instructed by Mr. Maw and in coordination with the Department of Justice, I drafted a brief memo asking for delay, and attaching the Secretary's schedule for the next several months, showing the full gamut of meetings with foreign officials in Washington DC and many trips overseas (including shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Egypt). I was told that the judge granted our motion right away, without even asking the other side for a response!

Finally, after years of litigation, extending far beyond my tenure in that office, it turned out no one had leaked! The information came from someone on the ground in Cambodia who saw the bombing!! But the result, no doubt still relevant today, was the first civil judgment against a President (well, Nixon was no longer President at the time of the judgment), or rather against actions taken by a President that were possibly illegal, even though there was no wiretap act at that time. For that reason, damages assessed were modest: $1. On the other hand, legal costs incurred on all sides, including Nixon's (I recall Nixon's lawyers in private life also visiting Mr. Maw's office one day to discuss where the case stood regarding Kissinger, Nixon's co-defendant): millions! Valhalla for attorneys!

I also had other interesting assignments regarding Secretary Kissinger.

One day Mr. Maw told me to call the Swedish or Norwegian Embassy and tell them Secretary Kissinger wanted to return the Nobel Peace Prize -- this as Vietnam was falling to the North Vietnamese Army and the Americans were getting picked up off the Embassy roof by helicopter. I was supposed to inquire about how to return the prize, and I did. I was told there is no way, no such procedure. I duly reported this information to Mr. Maw and never heard further about this matter.

Another tasking was to find the Peking Man!

Secretary Kissinger had, of course, played the key role in setting up President Nixon's 1972 visit to China, resulting in the Shanghai Communique, which set out a roadmap for normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China. Nixon resigned in 1974, of course, but Kissinger remained as Secretary of State under President Ford. In 1975, as a friendly gesture and a means of improving our still -unofficial relations with Beijing, Kissinger wanted to help the Beijing Government find the "Peking Man." This was not a

single person, but a collection of hundreds of human remains (bones) from as early as 700,000 years ago, originally found at a place called Zhou Kou Dian near what later became Beijing. They had at first been kept in a museum in Beijing, but in the chaos of the invasion by Japan before and during World War II, they had disappeared.

I went over to the FBI and learned they had made a "full field investigation" shortly after the war, a very thorough series of interviews with all those who were then accessible to the FBI who might have had some knowledge of the Peking Man. According to one report, parts of this archeological treasure were given to residents of Beijing by an American physician attached to the US Army. The residents had been his local patients. The physician asked them to bury the remains in their yards. Another rumor was that the entire treasure was placed on a train that took them to a ship that left the port near Tianjin, but was sunk by Japanese military forces. Unfortunately I struck out on this assignment; despite the FBI investigation and other sources I consulted, I could not find the Peking Man. There are a number of books and articles available today sketching various theories about what happened to the Peking Man. See also [Peking Man Site at Zhoukoudian - UNESCO World Heritage Centre](https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/449). Zhou Kou Dian is now a World Heritage site.

My third area of responsibility of the Office of the Under Secretary for Security Assistance concerned the Law of the Sea Convention. Mr. Maw was the chief delegate to this vast set of international negotiations that later led to the UN Law of the Sea Convention, UNCLOS (which the United States has signed but still not ratified). Bob Craft in our office was the staff person primarily responsible for handling this issue. What our office, led by Mr. Maw, did was to hammer out the US Government negotiating position on the many issues that were being negotiated by delegations from over 150 countries. On occasion, representatives of many US Government Departments and agencies, especially from the Department of Commerce and Department of Defense, would gather in Mr. Maw's very large office and have sometimes very contentious discussions.

I was not involved, but was sometimes present in that cavernous office (the largest on the 7th floor, even larger than the Secretary of State's office) working on other matters -- Mr. Maw was a multi-tasker, and sometimes his attention would be focused on Law of the Sea issues, and other times he would walk over to my small desk and talk about my work on the wiretap lawsuit, somewhat to the consternation of the assembled representatives of several US Government departments whose sole concern was the law of the sea negotiations. So in terms of substance, I was not much involved in Law of the Sea issues, but I do recall doing a legal memo on the Fishermen's Protective Act. This was US legislation under which the USG would in some circumstances compensate American fishermen whose boats and catch were confiscated by foreign governments asserting jurisdiction outside what the United States regarded as their proper sphere.

Though Law of the Sea matters were not my priority, this initial introduction certainly left an impression on me. Later, at Columbia University in 1983, I was shocked one day when my International Law professor announced that President Reagan had just refused

to sign the LOS Convention, even though the USG had spent years negotiating it. The US did, however, issue a statement confirming that much of the Convention represented what had been customary international law, which we considered to be binding on the United States. Later, President Clinton signed a Convention that essentially removed the provisions to which Reagan had objected, concerning deep sea mining. I continued to pay attention to law of the sea issues, in teaching courses on international law when I was a professor in China (2007-2012) and in the United States, since 2016. I also organized many policy simulations in which student groups would represent the claims of various countries (including China, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam) to islands and features in the South China Sea, and engage in debate to try to resolve these issues.

I actually never met Kissinger during my time in Mr. Maw's office, in 1975-76. Everything I did was reported to Judd Kessler, Bob Craft, or Mr. Maw himself. Staff people were not welcome at the daily 8 am 7th floor senior officials meetings with the Secretary. Later I did meet Kissinger in Beijing in my first assignment there, when Kissinger, who was no longer Secretary of State, came for a visit as a private citizen in 1979. When I reminded him that I had served as liaison between Under Secretary Maw's office and the US Department of Justice with regard to the wiretap suit filed against him, his response was that he wished the Justice Department could continue to represent him, since now he had to pay for lawyers himself!

Q: Now, let me ask you here, because you've now kind of arrived in the People's Republic of China, while you were in Taiwan, go back for a moment and describe a little of that experience. Were you also required to do a human rights report in Taiwan?

HOLBROOK: Although I was in the political cone in the Foreign Service, my first job in Taiwan in 1977-78 was in the economic section of our former embassy there, and actually, I don't really recall who drafted the human rights report. I'm sure it must have been drafted by someone in the political section. That's normally where they are drafted in our overseas posts.

Q: And one other question about Taiwan. Did you find it helpful there for your Chinese? Were you able to develop your command of Chinese there?

HOLBROOK: Yes. I was fortunate enough to be assigned to a year of language training at the US Embassy language school, then located in Taichung in central Taiwan. I ended up at the three plus/three plus level, called adequate for full professional use. Then and now I still think the three plus/three plus level is not adequate! In my ideal foreign service, I would require every officer to have a 4/4 (interpreter level) rating in at least one foreign language. The three plus level is fine as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough in my view.

Q: Now, did you have enough training to go out and make contacts in Taiwan?

HOLBROOK: I did, yes. In fact, I met my wife, Shao Pei, in Taiwan, though I must concede that her English was and remains better than my Chinese.

In my work at the Embassy in Taipei, I had both Chinese and American contacts. I was the Embassy representative for the American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei. The Ambassador would meet every month or so with top Amcham members, and I would usually give briefings at those meetings (in English, of course) on US-Taiwan economic relations and on the Taiwan economy. I also dealt with Republic of China officials and would speak Chinese with them, but at the three plus level in a country like Taiwan, their English is better than your Chinese! Many of these officials would have graduate degrees from top universities in the United States. Still, the three plus level was certainly useful for getting around Taiwan (and later, around China) and ordering meals and doing a lot of things, but that doesn't compare with a graduate degree in a foreign language.

I recall giving a speech in Chinese at the Taichung Rotary Club on US economic relations with Taiwan, my first public speech in that language. I worked hard in preparing my talk, with help from the local employees from our Embassy, and did my best at the Rotary Club meeting. Afterwards I asked our Chinese employee who had accompanied me whether the audience had fully understood my speech. He said, with a smile, yes, 60 % did! I was taken aback—only 60%? Then he clarified that only 60% of the audience spoke Mandarin! The others spoke Taiwanese, the local dialect. I felt better then!

Q: Yes, yes. Now, what I want to ask you is, how long will the tour be in China, starting in 1979, how long did you spend there?

HOLBROOK: I was there almost four years during my first tour in Embassy Beijing, from 1979 until 1983. I subsequently served for three years as Consul General in Shenyang (1993-96), and then was back in Beijing for another tour in 1996-99.

Q: Okay. And the reason I'm asking is because perhaps this is a good moment to break, because if you're now going to a four-year tour maybe we should take a break here and then begin again with the tour in China so that you can spend a little more time on the details.

HOLBROOK: Regarding my assignments in China, I was already kind of on the China track when I came into the Foreign Service, because of my background in Chinese studies at the University of Michigan. I had indicated a strong interest in going to China when I entered the Foreign Service, and was fortunate, after my initial assignment in Washington, to be assigned to Taiwan (the Republic of China) for my first overseas assignment. Actually, in those days it was unusual to have an assignment, it's still unusual for your first assignment to be in Washington, but as I mentioned before, the office of the Under Secretary for Security Assistance was very interested in selecting a lawyer from the incoming Foreign Service class, and I fit the bill. So I worked in that very unusual assignment for about a year and a half, during which I continued to make it clear to my career counselor that I was interested in an assignment in China.

So, yes, I did some lobbying for a China assignment, you can say, but it was pretty easy because I had the background in Chinese language and history. Also, US policy as set out

in the 1972 Shanghai Communique was to move towards establishing relations with Mainland China. So, I got that first assignment initially in Taiwan in 1976, and then while I was there, for my second China assignment, I was assigned to go to the United States Liaison Office (USLO) in Beijing, which had been set up following President Nixon's visit to China in 1972. This was an "unofficial" office, staffed by professional US diplomats, my colleagues in the Foreign Service, but headed by Leonard Woodcock, a political appointee with the personal rank of Ambassador. USLO was small in size, about 30 American officers, and its contacts were restricted to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For most of USLO's existence (1973-79), the Cultural Revolution was raging in a China that was not interested international diplomacy.

I was supposed to leave Taiwan in September, 1978, spend about six months in training, focused on China, in Washington DC, and then arrive at USLO Beijing in March, 1979. During that time in Washington, I attended special Chinese language classes taught by a Chinese-American teacher who had just arrived from China, asserting her American citizenship after spending decades in China. These classes were focused on reading the Big Character posters that were then being displayed in Beijing on what was called the Democracy Wall (see below for further comments).

I rented an apartment in Washington DC, in Georgetown during those six months prior to my arrival in Beijing. I can still recall precisely that on December 15, 1978, I was watching television news in my apartment and who do I see but President Jimmy Carter announcing normalization of relations with China, along with his Chinese counterpart, Hua Guofeng. The two of them simultaneously, or roughly simultaneously, in Washington and Beijing, made the same announcement. Now, I had known that something was in the works. During the time I was preparing to go to USLO Beijing, there were rumors about possible full normalization of US-China relations, but nothing was known for sure and nothing solid until when I saw President Carter on television; that was solid, that was the highest authority!

So, I thought well, this is exciting! I'm not going to the liaison office, I'll be going to the United States Embassy in Beijing, which had closed back in 1949. In fact the Embassy was scheduled to open on March 1, 1979, a few days before my scheduled arrival in mid-March!

Soon after the December 15 announcement, the US invited China's leader, Deng Xiaoping, to come to Washington, DC in January 1979. This was highly unusual in terms of protocol; Deng's government position was Vice Premier. Hua Guofeng was the Premier and Carter's protocol equivalent. But we all knew that Deng was the person in charge. So we invited Deng for a state visit, the highest form of official visit, usually reserved for a head of state.

The United States broke official ties with Taiwan as of January 1, 1979. And on January 29, Deng Xiaoping arrived in Washington. I was then at a language class at the Foreign Service Institute for half a day in the mornings. I and my FSI classmates in the Foreign Service Institute were able to watch Deng on American television. He made remarks, and

was interviewed by American journalists. Unusually, the TV network let us hear his full remarks in Chinese, before the interpretation into English. We were all shocked! We could hardly understand a word of his very pronounced Sichuan accent! I later heard him talk on many occasions in Beijing, in meetings with top US officials, and became somewhat accustomed to his accent, but certainly still needed to rely on the translation to get a more complete rendition of what he said!

In Washington, I attended the welcoming ceremony for Deng on the White House lawn, where he and his wife were greeted by President Carter and Rosslyn. When President Carter spoke, a member of the press corps, who were standing on bleachers not far from the White House, began shouting what we later realized were objections to the US policy of normalizing relations with Beijing. That person was escorted from the grounds, while Carter simply spoke louder so as to drown out the reporter. Then another reporter also began shouting objections, and also was politely removed! This was a good introduction for Deng to American democracy and freedom of speech!

Following that welcoming ceremony, I continued my consultations in Washington, which included working on the China desk (Office of Chinese and Mongolian Affairs), in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research China office, and at FSI, on Chinese language. At FSI we had a wonderful language teacher who had recently emigrated from China. At that time in Beijing there was something that western reporters called Democracy Wall that had sprung up, a wall a couple of hundred yards long, facing the main street in Beijing. The wall area was also a major, perhaps the major bus stop and transfer stop in Beijing. There were always hundreds of people milling around, waiting for their buses. Some of them began writing posters and pasting them on the wall -- a combination of individual grievances, praise for Deng and his new policy of 'reform and opening," criticism of other Chinese officials and sometimes of Deng, and even calls for democracy -- overall a grab-bag of posters on many subjects. My FSI teacher had pictures of many of these posters and provided invaluable help to me in reading the handwritten Chinese characters, some of which were quite different from the printed version. This was very useful for me since one of my first assignments at Embassy Beijing was to go down to the wall and read the posters!

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Q: Today is November 15 and we are continuing our interview with Morton Holbrook as he begins his first tour in China, the People's Republic of China, in 1979.

HOLBROOK: Then, a couple of months later, on or about March 12, 1979, I arrived in Beijing. As an historical moment of virtually no significance, I believe I was the first US diplomat assigned directly to the US Embassy in the People's Republic of China, without first being assigned to the unofficial US Liaison Office.

Q: What was it like, because this would have been the first time you arrived in Beijing, what was it like to see the city as you just arrived?

HOLBROOK: Well, let's see. Let's put it this way. First, I came in flying first class from Tokyo -- quite unusual in the Foreign Service, where we nearly always fly economy class. How did that happen? Well, the Embassy opened March 1. Suddenly, half the Congress and all of President Carter's cabinet wanted to come to China, and we only had a staff of 30 in the Liaison Office.

Normally when people like myself were assigned to Beijing in the liaison office days, they would first travel through Hong Kong and consult there at the US Consulate. Hong Kong was the source in those days of much of our knowledge about China. So I was scheduled to spend the night in Tokyo and then fly to Hong Kong the next day. But I got a message in Tokyo saying do not go to Hong Kong; come directly to Beijing. We have all these CODELs (Congressional Delegations), we need help desperately to handle business in Beijing. So I changed my flight from Hong Kong to Beijing, but the only seats available were in first class—so I was forced to fly first class! I complied without complaint!

You asked about my first arrival, I landed at Capital Airport in Beijing. This turned out to be a very sleepy terminal! China was only three years removed from the isolation of the Cultural Revolution, when contacts with many foreign countries were cut off. There were very few international flights in those days. So, my plane from Tokyo (Japan Airlines) landed in the middle of a huge concrete tarmac. Because I was in first class, I happened to be the first person off the plane, stepping down a ladder to the tarmac (no jetway to the terminal or anything like that). So, I walked down, and I looked around; there was no one there. There are several buildings off in the distance, in various directions! So, that was my first impression: in an airport, but I didn't know where to go!

My second and immediate impression was breathing: I could feel that I was inhaling something in the air! I looked off in the distance, the air was kind of yellow. Well, it turned out Beijing was having a dust storm, not unusual in the springtime!

Anyway, I was there on the tarmac, in a dust storm and didn't know where to go. So, of course I just waited a couple of minutes until other, more experienced passengers emerged, and I followed them into the right building, the terminal building. At the terminal, I met the former USLO officer who was there to greet me, Rick Bock. In fact, Rick was scheduled to leave Beijing shortly, and I was his replacement.

Then we rode into Beijing in an Embassy vehicle on a tiny two-lane road which was the only road to the airport for most of my first assignment there in 1979-83. I soon discovered that at night in the summertime many small groups of men would gather in the middle or on the side of this small road and play cards under the streetlights. Beijing is hot and humid in the summer, and there was virtually no air conditioning in those days, so why not play on the highway? So if you wanted to drive to and from the airport, and we did frequently to meet or send off official visitors, we often would come upon card players in the road, and we discovered the card players wouldn't move! We had to move! This was about a 15-mile ride.

Q: A very quick and funny aside; were they also playing mahjong?

HOLBROOK: Probably so, I don't know. I couldn't tell exactly, but very likely it could have been mahjong, which is played all over China.

Okay, so. I got into Beijing. I had a room at the Peking Hotel, the Beijing Hotel, which then was perhaps the best hotel in town, certainly the place where foreigners would be most likely to stay if they were lucky. It was a perfectly adequate 1950s style hotel in terms of rooms and restaurants, and located next door to Tiananmen Square, right in the center of Beijing. And as we were riding in with my embassy friend Rick, he said oh, you must know somebody because I had this hotel room for you, but then I was also given an apartment key \-- there's an apartment waiting for you also in the diplomatic compound. And I said no, I didn't know anybody. Well, it turned out that because of my unusual arrival time in March (summer is normally the transfer season in our diplomatic service), there just happened to be a vacancy in the Jianguomenwai diplomatic compound. In those days most officers assigned to the embassy would be assigned for two years, and for the first entire year they would stay in a hotel; there was just no room for them in the diplomatic compound. In fact there was a hierarchy of hotels! A new officer might spend several months in one of the second-rate hotels, then move into the Beijing Hotel (a step up), and then finally into one of the three diplomatic compounds. So, I really got lucky. Here I had both a hotel room key and an apartment, where I moved after spending one night in the hotel breathing the downtown dirty air; then I got to breathe the same dirty air several blocks away in the diplomatic compound.

Q: Yes. So, you're now in your apartment; what's that like?

HOLBROOK: Again, you know, the diplomatic compound was perfectly adequate. Certainly nothing fancy. In those days in fact the best places in town were the diplomatic compounds. As China's economy took off, however, they became some of the worst places in town! But I had a two-bedroom apartment, with adequate furnishings. You had to be careful with the water; you didn't drink the water there. We had these large canisters with candles in it, sort of candle wick-type things in it that we put water into to supposedly either purify or take calcium out. But the heat was adequate in the winter, and there was air conditioning in the summer.

My apartment was in a compound open to all diplomats, not just Americans, so my neighbors could be from anywhere, from Japan or Yugoslavia or any country with which China had diplomatic relations. In our apartment on the eighth floor we had a nice view of the main street in Beijing and of a 400-year-old observatory that the Jesuits had helped construct or had designed. Matteo Ricci was the main Jesuit priest there. I don't know whether he personally was associated with that observatory which still had these ancient instruments on top of it or not. And the observatory was formerly right next to one of the city walls. There used to be a city wall all around Beijing. The Communist government destroyed the walls after they took over in 1949, but they left up several gates, and the one near us was called the Jianguo Gate.

Q: If I'm not mistaken, Matteo Ricci also wrote a great deal about China in that time and there are extant works by him.

HOLBROOK: Well, that's correct, yes, yes. Something called "The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci," I recall, and other books also. He also traveled to Macau.

The other thing one noticed immediately about Beijing, well, several things, was that rush hour was very quiet because rush hour consisted of hundreds of thousands of bicycles. There were no, or virtually no private automobiles. There were automobiles available to government officials. There were trucks, and there were buses. Most people rode bicycles, and Beijing being entirely flat, It's a great place to have a bicycle. I quickly got myself a "Flying Pigeon" model bicycle and rode around the streets of Beijing too. Beijing then was very accommodating for bicycles; there were guarded bike parking lots everywhere; you would pay a very small fee. On the other hand, when you bought a "new" bike, you were advised to take it immediately to the repair shop to put it in riding condition! And there were many bike repair shops. This whole bike infrastructure has now disappeared, of course, and Beijing streets are dominated by private automobiles.

Another feature of Beijing in this period was that everyone looked alike! They dressed alike; they were all dressed in blue. Their haircuts were alike; unisex haircuts. This also, like the bike culture, would change rapidly beginning in the 1980s, as people shook off the rigid controls of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

What else? There were not too many restaurants. It was said in those days that New York had more Chinese restaurants than Beijing did. There were a few very nice,historical restaurants. There were three well-known Peking Duck restaurants where we foreigners would go often. But for ordinary restaurants, we learned that if you didn't get to the restaurant early, like maybe 6:00, by 6:15 or 6:30 a lot of the dishes would be sold out. But still, one of the nice things about the early assignments was there were various groups of us diplomats who were all trying to understand a China that had just opened up, after being essentially closed to the world for ten or more years. So we would get together. I was a political officer and we had what we called our Gang of Four, political officers from some combination of the US, UK, German, French, and Japanese Embassies. We would meet on a rotating basis in our apartments and just talk about what was going on in China. Sometimes there would be a larger group with other friendly embassies involved and we would reserve a room in one of the traditional Chinese restaurants.

Another feature of Beijing in those days was travel restrictions on foreigners. On nearly all roads leading out from Beijing there were signs in Chinese, English, Russian, and Japanese that said “No foreigners beyond this point without a permit.” And we could only get a permit to drive to Tianjin, about two hours away. On the road to Tianjin, where my wife liked to shop for antiques, we would show the permit at a guardhouse outside Beijing, and then, about two hours later, there would be another guardhouse at the entry to Tianjin. On occasion one of the guards would ask us, ‘what took you so long?” The Chinese definitely did not want foreigners, particularly diplomats, wandering around

in the countryside in those days. The only exception was the road leading to the Ming Tombs and to a section of the Great Wall called Badaling, where we could drive without a permit. As an aspect of Deng's policy of "opening," these and other travel restrictions were gradually relaxed over the years. First an entire province would be declared open for foreign diplomats – though we still needed to get a travel permit first. Then later the travel permit became unnecessary. In the United States, we tried to reciprocate these travel restrictions on Chinese diplomats. At one point, when I was assigned to the China desk at the State Department (1984-86), I helped open my hometown, Owensboro, Ky, to Chinese diplomatic travel after China had opened a new city to US diplomats.

Q: So, yes, I just wanted to check to see if I'm thinking about it in the same period of time because different people have recorded their oral history and recorded their impressions of a first assignment in China during the early years when we were first establishing diplomatic relations, and so I have some images, but not, obviously—

HOLBROOK: Do you mean early years when the liaison office was set up, which was 1973, or early years in '79 when we set up the embassy?

Q: Both. Actually both.

HOLBROOK: Both, okay. Okay.

Q: But, so that's why I was asking if different people overlapped with you because it's sort of like the blind man with the elephant; you get one story from one person that tells you one thing about those early days and then another person with a different point of view who tells you something else and it's very interesting to hear—

HOLBROOK: Have you talked to a fellow named John Thompson?

Q: No, actually. That's not a name I recognize. And I'll check.

HOLBROOK: John Thompson, certainly you should talk with him. He's one of those who overlapped with me. When I arrived in 1979, he'd been there with the liaison office for at least a year or maybe more, and then stayed through another year or so.

Now, my impression is that there was a tremendous change starting just as we opened the embassy in 1979. Before I went to China, I met in Washington, perhaps in October, 1978, with Foreign Service Officers who had recently been assigned to the US Liaison Office in Beijing, which had been set up after President Nixon's visit to China. Well, I remember quite well that one of these officers, said first, you'll never be able to have a conversation with a Chinese person on the streets because when you start talking, after a few minutes someone will come along and say, not to you but to your Chinese interlocutor, get out of here, move along! Secondly, you'll never visit the home of a Chinese person.

Of course, that was the old days and suddenly, within two weeks of my arrival in March, 1979, I was inside a Chinese person's home, along with John Thompson, and it was a

Chinese official who had actually gotten permission to invite foreign guests over. I subsequently discovered in my travels all over China, and that was part of my job, to travel frequently to various provinces, many of which I'd never heard of, people were eager to talk with me on the streets. There was no reticence. The policy had changed. People were not only not afraid to talk to a foreign visitor such as myself, but were eager to do so.

Another minor but perhaps revealing indication of the new openness in China was the appearance in Beijing, the same week, in September 1979, of both Bob Hope and Big Bird. Mr. Hope called the Embassy for help in putting on a comedy routine involving playing golf; he asked if anyone in the Embassy had a set of clubs he could borrow. I lent him my clubs and he invited me to watch his rehearsal in the Peking Hotel. Later, he performed before a mixed Chinese and American audience at the Capitol Theater, with astute translation by Ying Ruocheng, who later played a role in the Academy-Award winning film The Last Emperor. Separately, I witnessed Big Bird walking around the streets near the Peking Hotel, to the bemusement of Chinese pedestrians and bicycle riders.

Q: Very interesting. Yea, yea, yea. But let's go back a moment. So, you have all of these congressional visitors, they take up a lot of your time. But what were your responsibilities, at least officially?

HOLBROOK: Well, my job, I was the staff assistant to Ambassador Leonard Woodcock, and I was also a member of the political section. So, you could say I had two jobs. I was also appointed to be the Embassy "protocol officer," a third job. I had no idea what this meant but I found out soon enough. Ambassador Woodcock was hosting a dinner for a delegation from a foreign country -- I actually cannot recall what country it was. The Ambassador's secretary asked me to prepare a seating chart. I think there were two tables. I put the Ambassador and myself with all the women in one table, and everyone else in the other table. I thought this would be interesting. I handed this to the secretary. A few minutes later she called me into her office and said, sternly, "you need to take another look at this!" I soon came to realize the importance of seating charts involving high-ranking officials, and how these were done among diplomats and officials in Beijing!

As I mentioned, as soon as our Embassy opened its doors, there was a flood of official visitors from Washington, members of President Carter's cabinet, members of Congress (Codels), and, eventually, from the Judicial Branch, the Chief Justice of the United States. So all of us on our small staff were immediately involved in planning visits and escorting these visitors around town, and escorting, of course, meant accompanying them to their high-level meetings. We didn't just sit there; we took notes and wrote cable reports on these meetings to send to Washington. There were actually five Codels within the first two months of my arrival, some of them with 50 or more members of Congress. We joked that we had a quorum of the Congress at one point!

So, people like myself and other FSOs, particularly in the political and economic sections, got to see a lot of Deng Xiaoping because every official visitor and every group who came out there, of course, wanted to see Deng; he was like a rock star. He was Time Magazine Man of the Year in 1978. And the way things were in those days, the Chinese would never reveal the schedule in advance or certainly not the leadership schedule. So, we would sometimes be in the situation of going out to the airport to meet an incoming delegation and not know what the schedule was going to be. I recall being criticized by a member of Congress because I not only didn't know the schedule, I didn't even know where they were staying, because it was the Chinese who were making the arrangements, both for the schedule and for the accommodations. Certainly, many of the cabinet members and Codels would stay not in a hotel, but in guesthouses, several of which had been embassies early in the 20th century. I recall the former Belgian Embassy which the Chinese Government made into a guesthouse, used to accommodate the delegation of Joseph Califano, President Carter's Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. I think I was the Secretary's control officer. Of course, the term control officer was a total misnomer; we actually had no control over the schedule, the accommodations, or, in the other direction, the requests made by the American delegations. But we did our best to accommodate all of them. Our most important job, of course, was to report accurately what was said in the high-level meetings, noting in particular the consistency or lack thereof with what Chinese officials said in other such meetings.

Q: At this moment, let me ask you a quick question. Since you were in meetings with Deng Xiaoping with different Americans who would probably have a different agenda to talk to him about, what were your impressions of him? Was he more or less giving the same song and dance to everybody who came, or did you get the impression he was on top of policy?

HOLBROOK: Well, both of those areas. He was on top of policy and the policy would be explained in roughly the same way to the visitors, the policy of reform and opening. That was his own policy, and also was consistent with what he had advocated as far back as in the 1950s. In a word, he emphasized economic development, not ideology. ‘It doesn’t matter what color the cat is, as long as it catches mice” is a saying attributed to Deng.

I should add that not only were we in a lot of meetings with Deng, but we were signing a lot of agreements with the Chinese side, and often Deng would be the person signing for China. For those signing ceremonies, I had a special role: besides making seating charts for dinners, my job as "protocol officer" at the Embassy meant that when we signed an agreement, I was the one who stood alongside the American official (who would be seated at one end of a table) and showed him or her where to sign the Chinese language document. The agreements would be in both languages, so for the English language document, there was no problem about where the American official would sign. But, also, there would be as identical document in Chinese language, and none of our visitors knew Chinese, so I would be standing there next to the US official, and my Chinese counterpart would be standing next to Deng Xiaoping (or another Chinese official), who would be seated at the other end of the table, each of us showing the top officials where to sign the foreign language document.

So that meant that in comparison with others in the Embassy I probably had more exposure to the top officials, both accompanying Codels and other visitors, and, whenever there was going to be an agreement signed, making sure it was signed in the right place! For me, the most memorable signing ceremony concerned the US-China Consular Convention, the first treaty (in the US sense) between the United States and the People's Republic of China. I had participated in all the negotiating sessions for this Convention. These were held in Beijing. In preparation, I took a look at US Consular Conventions with several other countries, particularly Communist countries where we wanted heightened protection for US citizens who might be arrested there. Of course these Conventions are reciprocal, and therefore also protect foreign citizens in the United States. Anyway, after we completed negotiations, there was a very simple signing ceremony: Ambassador Woodcock and I went to the Great Hall of the People, and a top Chinese official signed along with our Ambassador. I actually cannot recall whether it was Deng or another top official on the Chinese side. This Convention was later ratified by the US Senate.

Now, you mentioned Deng Xiaoping. He was very courteous with foreign visitors. When agreements were signed, champagne glasses would come out and Deng would take a glass of champagne and go around the room and he'd clink glasses with everybody, not just with the top people, but with junior staff people like me also. So, I don't know how many times I did joined Deng for a toast, but every time I would just say "nǐ hǎo" (how are you?) and just have a short conversation myself with Deng Xiaoping. Not all Chinese officials would do that. Some would just pay attention to the single top official or maybe a couple of officials, but I appreciated Deng's attention to everyone on the US side.

Q: Another very quick question; he reputedly, at least during some of the period he was in power, his daughter was his interpreter. Was that true?

HOLBROOK: I think you may be referring to Deng's daughter Deng Rong, who did interpret at times for Deng, but not during the meetings at which I was present. The interpreter that I saw most of the time, who became an Ambassador and a United Nations official, was Ji Chaozhu. Ji was actually raised in New York City, went to Harvard, dropped out and returned to China in 1949 or 1950. He was Deng's interpreter during Deng's visit to Washington in January, 1979, and later also became a Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Q: Now, the other question that I wanted to ask you sort of in general from these meetings was, you had all the different Americans. Afterwards did the Americans share their impressions and what were they like?

Because you know, you mentioned Joseph Califano and congresspeople and so on.

HOLBROOK: Actually, no, normally in those days, visitors would be on a tight schedule and would depart Beijing soon after their meetings with Chinese leaders. Often, in 1979, another delegation would be arriving at the airport in a few days! Weekends were when

we went to the airport, dodging the card players on the highway, to meet the next Codel or other high official. It was just gangbusters. And I actually don't recall discussing with our officials what their impressions were. They were just in and out the door. And we would go back and write up their conversations with top leaders while they were off seeing the Forbidden City or the Great Wall. And frankly, since most of us were junior officers, the top US officials were not likely to come to us to share their impressions with us anyway.

Q: While you were out with them, did you have any way to stay in contact with the embassy in the event of some emergency, one of them got sick or the transportation break down?

HOLBROOK: If we were at a meeting, our ambassador would be there, the ambassador and his driver and car would be there, would have been one way. And of course, otherwise we didn't have cellphones or anything, but fortunately I don't recall any urgent crisis that occurred, although with so many people involved, I suppose something could have happened. But we would have had to rely on the Chinese side. I mean, they just had endless manpower and endless drivers and other resources.

One of the occasional problems we encountered was dealing with the Chinese drivers for the American delegations. Sometimes we would finish a meeting and the delegation would suddenly make a request for an unscheduled visit somewhere. The drivers might say "It's our lunchtime." We quickly discovered this was an important time. We couldn't really ask that they work on our schedule, even when a US member of Congress made a request; we had to work on their schedule, which included a lunch break!

Q: The reason I ask this question is because roughly the same time, when I was doing congressional delegations in other places in the world, I had to carry around that two-pound radio that you would use to stay in contact with the embassy.

HOLBROOK: Oh, I see. Well, I kind of recall something like that that our duty officer would regularly have. When I was duty officer, I had all this equipment and briefing books, but I do not recall myself carrying that around during CODEL visits. Maybe someone else was, but I don't recall it myself.

Q: And so, did it trail off? Did the congressional delegations finally trail off at some point?

HOLBROOK: Well, I don't think we ever had quite as many as during those first two months. I think that rate was not exceeded, but certainly there were so many cabinet members that wanted to come out there, also; that just continued during my entire first assignment in Beijing, from 1979 to 1983. As I mentioned, Warren Burger, chief justice of the Supreme Court came out there, and I was his control officer. I also handled the delegation of Howard Baker, then the Senate Majority Leader. The Chinese gave VIP treatment to both officials, regarding each as the head of a separate branch of the US Government. There were other unofficial delegations that for whatever reason we would

assist. President Kennedy's brother-in-law Sargent Shriver came out with his law firm, as I recall, and I had some dealings with them, helping out with their schedule.

Besides scheduling we were also assisting with drafts of various agreements. Many of them became the foundation of US-China relations, the building blocks. One was a science and technology agreement. I was working with people in the economic section of our Embassy, as we all engaged with officials on the Chinese side to hammer out the final draft text of an agreement. Normally the embassy would not have started these agreements. There would be officials in Washington, or perhaps a delegation from Washington would come to Beijing. And we on the Embassy staff would work with them and help them coordinate with their Chinese counterparts. So, that was a fair amount of the work we were doing. Besides that work, and there was a lot of that work, we in the political section were watching the newspapers, trying to figure out what was going on in China, what the main headlines in "The People's Daily" were saying about party congresses and personnel shifts and things like that. But mostly we didn't have to read the newspaper, we could just see who showed up at the meetings that we were going to.

When I arrived in Beijing, Hua Guofeng was the Premier of China and Deng was only a vice premier. And you may know, Hua was the one who had arrested the Gang of Four, which included Mao's wife, and attempted to take power after Mao's death in 1976. Hua played a crucial role, really, in the transition and ensuring that the transition of power went to Deng, rather than to the Gang of Four. But after that, Hua was eclipsed by Deng and was quietly removed from power.

And if you look in the picture I sent to you, that's Vice President Walter Mondale. He was one of our early visitors too. And in that picture, you see all the key officials in U.S.-China relations; Richard Holbrooke is the first row on the left. And then to the right of Mondale is Ambassador Leonard Woodcock. Right behind Deng is Hua Guofeng, to the left of Deng. And Huang Hua, the Foreign Minister is to his right. Up on the top row are US Embassy officials. On the far left is Bill McCahill, who later became DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) in Beijing. And then there's a really tall guy; can you see the tall guy?

Top left is McCahill. I'm standing next to McCahill with a beard and glasses. That's me. And then Charlie Silvester, who later was consul general in Shanghai; that's John Thompson next to him. Then Bill Thomas, who was US Consul General in Chengdu. Then Phil Lincoln, tragically, was our Consul General in Guangzhou who was later killed in a car accident in China. See, this is a signing ceremony, I think, for a cultural exchange agreement.

Let's see; was I responding to a question before I got distracted there?

Q: It was the, yes, the congressional delegations and those eventually trail off.

HOLBROOK: Not much, though. I mean, that was certainly a prominent feature of my entire first assignment and also my second assignment in Beijing too, in 1996-99. Twenty

years later the relationship was recovering from the 1989 Tiananmen incident and step by step the level of our visitors increased, starting with Under Secretary Tom Pickering and working up to Vice President Gore and then President Clinton in 1998. At that time, it appeared, briefly, as though the relationship had recovered from the setback of the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989.

Q: Well now, wait one second. Because I think now you're referring to a subsequent tour because in this tour you're going to straddle the change from Carter to Reagan.

HOLBROOK: Oh, okay. Besides shepherding numerous congressional and executive branches and other visitors, the other thing that we did in those days, in 1979-83, was travel out to the provinces as much as we could. China had just opened up, with Deng's "reform and opening" policy starting in December 1978, but initially only parts of China were open to foreign visitors. The Chinese Government actually acted really fast to implement an important part of "opening": that was the announcement of normalization of relations with the United States on December 15, 1978.

So after I arrived in Beijing in March, 1979, China gradually moved from being closed, virtually closed to all foreigners to being virtually open to all foreigners. And in doing so, they initially used a system of travel permits for diplomats. So, the places that I succeeded in going to were provinces, or provincial capitals that had been declared officially open, but "open" meant, at least for diplomats, that you had to get a travel permit first from the ministry of foreign affairs and you had to apply three days in advance and show your proposed itinerary.

We tried to take advantage of that. With growing momentum every couple of months there'd be another province pronounced open for foreign travel, or at least the provincial capital would be open. I guess usually they would open a capital first and they didn't really want foreigners running around the countryside anyway, so only the capital would be open. I would go by train as much as possible. On arrival in a provincial capital, there would be a desk at the station near my train and that's where the foreigners were supposed to stop and register. And of course, if you're a Caucasian foreigner like me, it was easy to pick me out of all of the hundreds or thousands of Chinese that were traveling.

Q: Especially with your beard.

HOLBROOK: Well, yes. So, there was no way that I could avoid that, not that I wanted to. I mean, they were the ones who were also facilitating my accommodations and most of the appointments there. So, I made a lot of trips. My assignment in 1979 initially was for two years, but by the end of two years I had never really done much political work. I was taking care of all these Codels and I did some work in the economic section and some work in the political section, but I felt I really hadn't had a political job, so it was easy to stay another two years because we were creating new jobs, new positions. So, I simply stepped into a new position and stayed nearly an additional two years, ending up leaving in January of 1983, almost four years after my arrival in March 1979. So, that's

four years, traveling as much as possible when other business allowed, to a good many provinces. It was fascinating. I recall trips to Shanghai and Guangzhou, both cities where we were in the process of setting up Consulates. During the 1979-83 period I also made official trips to Chongqing and Chengdu in Sichuan Province, to Wuhan in Hubei, Hefei in Anhui Province, Changsha in Hunan, Nanchang in Jiangxi Province, Kunming in Yunnan, Nanning in Guangxi, and Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province. In Henan I visited the capital, Zhengzhou, and also went to Kaifeng and Luoyang.

Q: Okay. In your travels now in the early '80s, what were the key impressions you had of the differences between life in Beijing and life in the provinces?

HOLBROOK: In some respects, things were the same in terms of the general level of economic development. There were bicycles everywhere except in mountainous cities like Chongqing in Sichuan Province where there weren't any bikes. But there was a low level of economic development, the people dressed alike, and looked alike in terms of hairstyles. But on the other hand, in terms of culture, one of the first things you learned traveling around was that every province was different. Every province had its own culture, its own provincial museum, its own accent and/or dialect, sometimes a combination of an accent and a local dialect. And also, every province was different in the kind of welcome that we, or I, coming from the embassy, would get. Even though we would go there with a document either from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or sometimes from the China Travel Service identifying us and saying please help this diplomat, each city would decide on its own type of welcome.

I developed a standard list of appointments that I would request to visit in each city: a university, a local newspaper, a factory, a commune, the cultural affairs bureau, the economic development office, and so on. In some places, for example, as I recall, such as Chongqing in Sichuan Province, they would take my list, fulfill all my requests, and make suggestions for further appointments! I was invited to make a speech at the Southwest Institute of Law and Politics, which I did! But in other places, and I recall Nanchang in Jiangxi Province, I was told by someone from the foreign affairs office that they were really too busy to do anything for me! Same story in the city of Chengdu also. So, in Chengdu, and I sort of developed this elsewhere too, I simply hung out. In Chengdu I went and rented a bicycle for one yuan a day, about 20 cents, and the bicycle shop wanted some identification, so he took my diplomatic ID card as security deposit. So, I spent five days riding my bicycle around Chengdu, talking to people in public parks and sometimes being invited to apartments for noodles. And I later submitted a travel voucher for five yuan, about $1. I thought I should get some kind of commendation for conserving US Government resources, but our administrative section made no comment!

Q: Yes, yes. Now, I just wanted to ask, when you talked about different dialects, were you able to more or less understand everyone wherever you went?

HOLBROOK: Yes, if you emphasize the less. Depends on where I was. In a place like Shanghai, for example, certainly I could never understand Shanghainese; it's a completely different language. But they would also speak Mandarin but with a Shanghai accent. So, I

would get used to and do the best I could to understand Mandarin spoken other than with the standard accent we learned. One of the other first things I learned was that no Chinese leader that I ever met ever had the standard dialect that we had learned, especially including Deng Xiaoping. Anyway, I did my best to carry on in Chinese all over China.

One of the first things that I would try to do everywhere, and I would run into difficulty sometimes, was simply buy a local newspaper to prepare for my meetings. I'd read up what I could about the provinces that I was going to from our translation services that were providing information in English in our embassy, but that would just be bare bones, just a few articles on each province. So, on arrival in a provincial capital, I'd try to buy a newspaper right away, a local paper just to do what I could to read it and see what was going on. Well, I discovered in those days in some places they would not sell me a newspaper. They were not allowed to sell even the local version of "The People's Daily." In Wuhan, in Hubei Province, a newsstand would not sell me Hubei Ribao, the local version of the People’s Daily. And I remember challenging a newsstand employee at one point in Wuhan, and asking him why he couldn't sell me the local paper. And so, he showed me a list, he had in his hand a list of all these publications, and there were marks as to which ones could or could not be sold to foreigners, and sure enough, the Hubei Ribao,” was on the list of items not to be sold to foreigners.

So, what to do then? Well, I discovered this was actually a great bonanza. In the parks in China in those days they posted newspapers onto the walls. So, I would simply go into a park, and I'd stand there, and read the paper. Chinese people would come up to me and talk. You know, they were no longer afraid to talk to foreigners. And they might even invite me into their homes. They weren't afraid to do that either. It’s true that, when I would follow them to their house, they would look around and make sure no one was watching too closely.

Q: Now, when they invited you, in general, what were they interested in knowing?

HOLBROOK: Well, they were just interested because they'd never met a foreigner before. And when they discovered I was an American they were just very friendly. I must say, I got friendly receptions all over China just walking around the streets and walking into parks. I also discovered that usually I could go into a library if I couldn't find the newspaper in a park. Sometimes I could find a library and I'd just walk in and go over and read a newspaper in the library, usually without being challenged either. So, I soon developed a way of going about this provincial travel where I didn't care whether or not I got official appointments. If I did, so much the better. If I didn't, no problem.

I recall that in Chengdu in Sichuan Province, I ran into some Tibetans in a park and they invited me to their apartment, and they served me all of this Tibetan tea with yak butter and other Tibetan treats. And I thought this is actually better than an official meeting; I'd never get an official meeting with a Tibetan anyway. And they described to me also, in that case, their grievances with the Chinese majority and how the geography of Tibet had changed. You know, the Chinese had taken a lot of Tibet and divided it among three

different Chinese provinces and left Tibet reduced in size. A lot of the things I learned on the streets that I wouldn't have learned in an office.

The other aspect of my provincial travels was I always wanted to visit churches and also visit Americans. I decided that I would normally not ask Chinese officials to direct me to a church, a Christian church, but would simply ask resident Americans (teachers) about churches, about which they were nearly always knowledgeable. These were officially sanctioned churches, not so-called house churches. On Sundays, I would attend services at the officially-sanctioned churches, and might have a short discussion with the pastor or pastors after the service. I would of course assume that my conversations would be reported to Chinese authorities.

I never liked to go through Chinese authorities to contact Americans. I would go into a city and I would use my hotel telephone and I'd call the university. Due to a combination of my own limited Chinese and the local accents, I might have to make several phone calls just to get the phone number. For example, I would say what's the number of Wuhan University, and operators in those days were quite discourteous, I must say, all over China, and they'd say something fast and then they'd hang up immediately; I might understand only a couple of numbers. Then I'd call them back. And then I'd get a couple more numbers and I'd finally get the number of the university. So, then I would call the university and ask to speak to the foreign experts building, and that would go smoothly because nearly all the universities that I called by then, in 1979-83, had foreign teachers of English and other subjects. The foreigners were housed in a separate building for a variety of reasons, including protecting the foreigners, or restricting and controlling contacts between foreigners and Chinese students and faculty. Also the Experts building might have better facilities than regular universities dormitories or faculty apartments.

So, I'd call the experts building and then somebody would answer, and I'd say can I speak to an American? And they'd say which American? And I'd say any American will do. Strangely enough, this jury-rigged system worked all over China. I never struck out except for one province where it turned out there were no Americans, as best I could determine, at least during the time of my visit. That was Jiangxi Province.

So, then I would explain to that one American, that I was from the US Embassy in Beijing, and I would like to take all the Americans out to dinner. And they always were happy to accept my invitation! They all knew each other; they all knew where the churches were too. Not every American was religious but there would always be somebody there who knew the church scene, who went to church, and I would find out from them where the officially sanctioned churches were, and I would go myself.

I'd take the resident Americans out to dinner; the best restaurant in town might cost maybe \$15 to have 20 people for dinner. At dinner I'd do my best to find out what their view of the situation in the province was. And of course, they were very much a mixed bag in those days. Some of them had no clue as to what was going on; they didn't know any Chinese language or history. They were just ideologically sympathetic to socialism and had come out there to teach English. Others, though, were quite knowledgeable and

spoke Chinese and knew something about the provincial leadership, and how the new policy of reform and opening was being implemented in the province.

After each of my provincial visits, which usually lasted about five days, I would try to make sense of what I had learned about the province from my official appointments, from talks with Americans, from visits to churches, and from just walking around the streets of the provincial capital. I was really privileged to be able to do that kind of work all over China in many provinces. Overall my impression was that China had relaxed after the rigors of the Cultural Revolution, and ordinary Chinese citizens were not only not afraid but eager to engage with foreign visitors. As I mentioned I also learned that each province in China is different, with its own history, culture and language or accent. Finally, each in its own way was grappling with the new policy of reform and opening, aimed at improving living conditions of people in China.

Q: Were you able to stay reasonably healthy given all of the health risks there?

HOLBROOK: Yes, I guess I was lucky or foolish. I always stopped at these little outdoor street places and had things to eat and talked to people. And never had any problems at all, all over China, although I would later read these books saying don't ever do this; stay away from street markets' it's not healthy and all that. But maybe just because I was young, maybe I felt immune. I never had any health problems.

Q: From your point of view on the local end of diplomacy, how would you describe the difference going from the Carter Administration to the Reagan Administration, if there were any differences?

HOLBROOK: From my point of view, at the level of the Embassy, and of the "China desk" at the State Department, there was no significant difference. I mean, essentially during my entire time in China, as both a diplomat and a professor, until the Trump years, the policy was 90 percent the same. The rhetoric sometimes changed. As a candidate, Ronald Reagan spoke about upgrading relations with Taiwan, and there were minor changes in the way we treated Taiwan authorities through our two unofficial organizations, the American Institute in Taiwan, and TECRO, the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Relations office.

But in terms of working level, you could say, in our Embassy, and in Washington, it was the same policy, a policy of engagement. We cooperated with China where we could. We reserved differences, and made clear our views on these differences -- on human rights issues, on Taiwan, and on economic issues such as intellectual property rights. In fact, US-China relations today are much more confrontational, but there is a resemblance to the engagement policy: once again we cooperate where it's in our interest to do so (for example, on climate issues; on fentanyl) but make clear our views on issues of contention, such as Taiwan, the South China Sea, arms supplies to Russia, and human rights. Today the balance is different, with contentious issues in the forefront.

You asked about my duties in this first assignment to Beijing. After we recognized China, the year following, in 1979, was probably the smoothest period ever in US-China relations because we put a year's moratorium on our arms sales to Taiwan. And it was the year, also, that we had to give Taiwan a year's notice to end the defense treaty.

In fact, there was a press conference in Beijing the day we announced normalization of relations in both capitals, a very unusual press conference, and someone asked the then Chinese leader Hua Guofeng, what about U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. And he said we're always opposed to that, we will never accept that, but we have moved ahead with normalization. In those days, China and the USSR were not on friendly terms. In fact, Chinese officials tried to enlist us in an alliance against the Soviet Union, so they had bigger fish to fry than arms sales to Taiwan.

But after 1980, we resumed arms sales, to which Beijing objected. Finally, we ended up signing a joint US-China communique on August 17, 1982, where we said we would gradually reduce sales as tensions in the area diminished, in light of China's commitment to pursue peaceful unification with Taiwan. To date, we have not seen a reduction of tensions in the Taiwan Strait, and we also have not reduced our sales of arms to Taiwan. This remains a flashpoint in US-China relations.

What else was going on in those days? During my first assignment in Beijing, the US and China signed many bilateral agreements that provided the legal foundation for bilateral relations. There was a Science and Technology Agreement, an Aviation Agreement, a Textile Agreement, a Maritime Agreement.

As I mentioned earlier, I was most closely involved in the negotiations leading up to a bilateral Consular Convention. Both China and the United States were already signatories to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. But we wanted a bilateral consular agreement also, one that strengthened protections for American citizens (including diplomats) in China -- and of course, reciprocally, for Chinese citizens and diplomats in the United States. So the negotiations began at our initiative. Because of my legal background, I became the focal point in the Embassy for these talks. First there was a delegation from Washington with a representative of the Legal Adviser's office, Fil Shamwell. He had vast experience in negotiating Consular agreements with several other countries. The Chinese were inquisitive -- why was such an agreement necessary? Mr. Shamwell patiently went through every provision of our draft agreement and explained both the rationale, and how it differed from the two Vienna Conventions (not all articles differed, of course). There was agreement on many but not all provisions immediately, but there were still several outstanding issues. Following the departure of the US delegation, I supported our Deputy Chief of Mission, Stapleton Roy, in holding talks with Chinese officials over several months to try to iron out the remaining issues. The result was I myself became something of an expert on US Consular agreements with many other countries; I also, in negotiations, made suggestions and helped draft some provisions of the Consular Convention with China.

Overall, the Chinese side was receptive to our draft, and generally accepted the rationale for having a new, bilateral Consular agreement. We finally ironed out all the details, and the US-China Consular Convention became the first Senate-confirmed treaty between the United States and China.

Among the more interesting of the many official American visitors who came to China in those days were Chief Justice Warren Burger, in September, 1981, and Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker, in May 1982. In both cases, the Chinese demonstrated that they had progressed in their understanding of the US Government. Deng Xiaoping was said to have remarked that the US had three governments! And certainly, when US-China relations were normalized in 1979, China's diplomats were more or less baffled by the sometimes conflicting views of the Executive and Congressional branches. Both the Chief Justice and Senator Baker were, in protocol terms, the head of a branch of the US Government, and the Chinese treated them that way! Deng Xiaoping met with each visitor. The Chief Justice was invited to give a talk at Beijing University, a rare invitation for a foreign visitor. In Shanghai, the Chinese hosts put the Chief Justice and his entourage, which included me as control officer, up not in a hotel but in a separate guesthouse. As an aside, my wife and infant son Allen accompanied me. One morning over breakfast, the Chief Justice held up my son and pronounced him the best-behaved baby he had ever seen!

Senator Baker also got special treatment, his own railroad car to travel to Xian to see the famous terracotta warriors, thousands of statues dating from 200 BC, unearthed only a few years previously. Normally visitors to the site could only stand at ground level and look down on the statues, and no photos were allowed. But the Chinese were aware that the Senator was an avid photographer, so they gave him special permission both to walk down among the statues and to take pictures! Another special treat, at least in my view, came at the welcoming banquet for the Senator in Beijing, at the Great Hall of the People. Among the guests on the Chinese side was Pu Jie, the younger brother of Pu Yi, the last emperor of China. His name was on the Chinese guest list without any attribution or explanation! But I recognized the name and informed Senator Baker's delegation – who took no particular interest. At the event, I made it a point to meet him and have a brief conversation.

Besides making bilateral agreements with the United States and other countries, China's new policies of reform and opening also entailed welcoming American and other companies wanting to trade and invest in China, reducing internal travel barriers for foreigners, and allowing more and more Chinese citizens to receive passports and travel overseas for business, tourism, and studies. There was actually an incipient move in China to separate the government and the party, to reduce the presence of the party, even though the party would still be supreme, but the government and enterprises would have more say-so in their areas of authority. That separation of party and state came to a screeching halt in 1989 with the massacre in Tiananmen Square.

Q: Now, as you are then approaching the end of this four-year tour in China at this time, what are you thinking about as your next assignment and what is the department thinking about in terms of where it wants to send you?

HOLBROOK: Well, there was sort of a happy coincidence there, I guess. Again, the China desk at the State Department in Washington was expanding in those days too, as was the Embassy Beijing staff, so that was one possible destination. At the same time, I was a lawyer, and I was aware that Chas Freeman (then the Deputy Chief of Mission in Embassy Beijing) had dropped out of law school, become a Foreign Service officer, and then gone back to law school courtesy of the State Department and finished up law school.

So, I thought well, why not me too? Harvard Law had a program in Chinese law and Columbia University also had a center for Chinese legal studies. So, I floated this idea to my career counselor, and he said oh, no, the department doesn't send people to law school. And I said well, what about Chas Freeman? So, Chas wrote a letter on my behalf, saying how useful it was for him to have had this final year in Law School. So, to make a long story short, I was able to persuade the department to send me to Columbia University for a year, where I got a master's in law (LLM) degree. I took Columbia's courses on Chinese law as well as other international law courses, and a couple of political science courses too.

Q: Now, what did you learn that was interesting or useful for you later in this one-year course?

HOLBROOK: Well, the Columbia courses, taught by Professor Randall Edwards, covered the history and development of the legal system in China, including its copying parts of the USSR's legal system in the 1950s, and then the renewed system that began in 1979. When I was in Beijing in 1979, on July 1, China promulgated five laws concerning criminal law and procedure, civil procedure, and perhaps most important regarding opening to the outside, China legalized foreign investment into China. One of my jobs in the Embassy as a political officer was to write reports on the new legal system and how it was being implemented.

One interesting article in the criminal procedure law provided for public trials in most cases and allowed defendants to be represented by an attorney. Based on that article, I and another officer in the Embassy's political section went down to a court in Beijing where, it had been announced, there would be a trial for one of the accused dissidents in China. We arrived at the court with copies of this article in hand and tried to enter, saying that we were members of the public. We were denied entry -- we were told foreigners were not members of the public! Foreign reporters also tried to attend trials and got the same response. Finally, faced with mounting requests from foreign organizations, the Chinese authorities simply arranged for a public trial just for us, a show trial in every sense of the word, in which the defendants were declared guilty despite a very meek representation by their attorneys. We later learned that for Chinese legal authorities, a "public trial" meant that invitations would be sent to selected work units, whose members

could attend a selected trial. Needless to say, Embassies and foreign media outlets were not on the list of selected work units!

So, anyway, back at Columbia we studied about the Chinese law system. I also had a wonderful course called the Constitution and Foreign Policy, which described the on-going struggle between the executive branch and the Congress over who has foreign policy authority. It was taught by Professor Louis Henkin who was then, and even today, the acknowledged authority in the United States on that subject. He's passed away now, but his revised book is still carefully scrutinized by everyone in the executive branch and the Congress who deals with those issues.

Q: Do you recall what the conclusion was about a particular issue, the president's authority to, on his own recognizance, terminate the defense treaty with Taiwan.

HOLBROOK: Yes. Well, that had happened before I got to Columbia Law School. This issue arose in 1978 when we recognized the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China, and at the same time gave a one year's notice to the Taiwan authorities (the Republic of China) that the US would terminate the Mutual Defense Treaty signed with Taiwan in 1954, in accordance with its terms. And what actually happened was immediately after President Carter announced normalization of relations with China, which was December 15, 1978, five U.S. senators filed suit in the federal district court in Washington, claiming the president lacked the authority to terminate that treaty. And the rationale was that the Constitution provides that the Senate must approve treaties by a two-thirds vote, but there's nothing about terminating treaties. So the Goldwater argument was that since the Senate played a role in making the treaty, it should also be involved in terminating the treaty.

The State Department legal office was confident the President had the authority to terminate a treaty without consulting the Senate, a general foreign affairs authority not deriving from a specific clause in the Constitution. But actually, the Federal District Court in Washington ruled in favor of the Goldwater side, asserting that President Carter lacked the authority to terminate the US Defense Treaty with Taiwan without the consent of the Senate or of the US Congress. By the time that ruling came out, I was already stationed at the new US Embassy. The Executive Branch appealed the decision immediately.

Since I was the only lawyer on the staff in the embassy, I was assigned to go over to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and explain that we were confident that President Carter's authority to terminate the defense treaty with Taiwan would be confirmed on appeal. One of the conditions to which we had agreed in establishing relations with China was that we, the US, would terminate that defense treaty.

So, I recall going over there and telling Chinese officials that yes, there was a setback at the district court level, but we, the Executive Branch, were confident the president's authority would be upheld at a higher level. And in fact, that proved to be the case, both with the Court of Appeal in Washington DC and then the US Supreme Court. The

plurality opinion at the Supreme Court did not reach the merits of the case, but called it a nonjusticiable political question. Despite not reaching the merits, that decision was later relied on by President Trump in terminating the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia, also in accordance with its terms.

Q: So, so far it appears on this issue that the President, the office of the Presidency, the executive branch, is winning more often than now.

HOLBROOK: Yes. Certainly, the lesson of those two treaty terminations is that notwithstanding a lack of clear constitutional provisions, or maybe because there are no clear constitutional provisions, the President has often taken the initiative, has taken the ball and run with it.

Q: Yes, yes. Okay. That's, no, that's quite interesting. And it's particularly so because of the historic subsequent issues that arise in presidential power from that decision.

HOLBROOK: Right, right, yes. And continue to arise.

Q: Yes, interesting.

In your one year at Columbia, though, were there other issues of law that particularly stand out for you?

HOLBROOK: Well, it wasn't an issue, but there was a legal development that I recall that shocked us. I was in an International Law course taught by Professor Richard Gardner, who just passed away a few months ago. He was a distinguished professor; he was also U.S. ambassador to Spain and Italy. He was a lawyer also. And in one of our sessions he announced that President Reagan had just refused to sign the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Q: Right.

HOLBROOK: And I guess there was no question as to his authority to do that, but it was a tremendous disappointment for people like myself. I had only played the most peripheral role in the treaty negotiations, but my first boss, Carlyle Maw, was the chief negotiator for the treaty, and I was fully aware of the massive number of people on the US side who were directly involved in the negotiations. Subsequently, as it turned out, the president only objected to one out of the 12 major provisions of the treaty, and other countries were willing to accommodate us. President Clinton then signed the amended treaty. We didn't call it amended; we just had another name for it. And then, it went to the Senate, referred to in my textbook as the graveyard of treaties.

Q: Right.

HOLBROOK: And it never surfaced. It's still a matter of frustration because on two occasions the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously passed it out and yet, the

opposition, the determined opposition of only a handful of senators has prevented the Senate from ever voting on it.

Q: Yes.

HOLBROOK: But I suppose the light at the end of the tunnel and also something you learn in law school, I learned in that master's program is that agreements like UNCLOS, that many other countries have signed onto, become part of customary international law. And customary international law, according to U.S. Supreme Court decisions, can be a part of U.S. law. The U.S. military has been one of the most vocal proponents of that treaty because it clarifies what the territorial sea is, what innocent passage means, and it clarifies many, many law of the sea issues. It doesn't take away US sovereignty, it actually reinforces US control over a 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone, and a Continental Shelf, among other provisions. And currently, perhaps strangely, we, the United States, are constantly in the position of actually enforcing that treaty, which we have never become a member of. And every time we try to enforce it in the South China Sea against China, for example, there's always a Chinese official who disputes our allegation on grounds that the US is not a party to the Law of the Sea Convention.

Well, if Chinese officials had attended law school in the US, as some Chinese students do, they would understand that we do have grounds for asserting our rights under the Convention, to the extent they are also part of customary international law as recognized by the United States. In fact, the US not only recognizes important articles in UNCLOS as reflecting customary international law, but we enforce it with freedom of navigation challenges, not just in the South China Sea but all around the world. Every year the Defense Department puts out a report that details all of the US Navy's the freedom of navigation exercises, and it's really interesting to read because they're not just against China in the South China Sea, they're against the Philippines, they're against France, they are undertaken with respect to any country in the world that steps over what we regard as the line, which is also the line other countries have agreed to.

Q: Yes.

HOLBROOK: One thing you learn about making treaties that I also learned both in law school and in the Foreign Service is that some treaties are supposed to reflect unanimous consent of all parties. And sometimes in order to get unanimity you have to forgo clarity. So, there are provisions in the Law of the Sea Convention that were deliberately left vague because if they were too clear some countries wouldn't approve of them. So,with regard to the territorial sea, ships of every country have the right of innocent passage, but the question of whether ships must ask permission first is not specifically addressed. And China, in fact, in signing on to the Convention made a reservation asserting that foreign ships must first ask permission to enter the territorial sea. The United States' view has been that you don't have to ask permission; that if you do, that nullifies the right. This is an ongoing dispute between the US and China.

Q: A humorous aside on this treaty; I joined the Foreign Service in 1984 and went right to my first assignment, which was Jamaica. And Jamaica was particularly sad that the U.S. did not sign- did not- that the Senate did not approve the treaty. Well, Reagan didn't sign it and the Senate didn't approve it because Jamaica's the depository country and the headquarters for the Law of the Sea treaty.

HOLBROOK: I didn't know that.

Q: And they were so looking forward to getting on the map.

HOLBROOK: Oh, yes.

Q: —as an international treaty depository country, they were very disappointed, while I was there in '84 to '86, and this was a topic of conversation in our bilateral relations.

HOLBROOK: Yes. Reagan didn't sign it because it had a provision about sharing these nodules under the sea, manganese nodules-

Q: Right.

HOLBROOK: -which allegedly would be very wealthy. And actually, nothing ever happened there -- so far.

Q: Right.

HOLBROOK: That issue somehow went away. Maybe they lost them, or they decided they weren't worthwhile or whatever, so it was deemed this failure to sign.

Q: Alright. So, the other thing is, you're in New York City, you're going to- you're getting your LLM at Columbia; were there other activities or networking or anything that you took part in that would later be valuable for your career?

HOLBROOK: Well, you know, the Center for Chinese Legal Studies, you know, continues at Columbia. I've maintained contact, not daily, but occasional contact over the years and decades with that Center.

Q: That's fine. Now, the other thing is, since it's only one year, you arrive there, let's say, in August or early September and already, by the end of September, you have to begin thinking about bidding on your next assignment.

HOLBROOK: Right. That was pretty easy. I was assigned to the China desk in the State Department, the Office of Chinese and Mongolian Affairs, in 1984-86. It just seemed like a natural progression. And in fact, during the 1983-84 school year I had invited two of the China desk officers to come up to Columbia to give talks to our center. And I knew the people on the China desk too, having served in China for four years previously, from 1979 to 1983.

When I arrived on the China desk, there had just been an exchange of visits between Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang, and Ronald Reagan. And the desk was clamoring for me to get onboard. They sent messages to me at Columbia University saying when are you coming, when are you coming, we're so busy here. So, I sort of rushed things. I didn't go to the graduation ceremony at Columbia, not that I really cared that much, but I heard their message, so I made things as quick as I could to get back to Washington. And I got to the China desk and there's nothing going on. The visits had ended. And Don Keyser was, I think, he was my supervisor then, was the deputy on the desk, and I said Don -- he was the one sending me all these messages\-- Don, what's going on here? This is just the slowest job I've ever had.

Q: Now, at that time, how was the China desk organized? How many people? How did you divide up the responsibilities?

HOLBROOK: We had political and economic sides of the desk. I think in those days there were just eight of us. I was on the political side. And my friend Steve Schlaikjer was on the economic side. Don Anderson was the head of the desk. I was working with Don Keyser, who was the head of the political side. I was doing human rights and I was the one who gave the view of the desk, which usually became the State Department view, on political asylum requests. We were also constantly raising human rights issues with the Chinese Embassy. Essentially, the Chinese Embassy didn't welcome our raising any kind of human rights issues. They said this is our internal matter.

Finally, their position changed. They no longer questioned our right or ability to raise human rights issues in China, but asserted that China did protect human rights; they also raised HR issues in the United States. The issue we raised the most frequently and for the longest time concerned Wei Jingsheng, a dissident who had advocated for democracy in China, and had, as a result, been arrested and sentenced to a long term in prison. After many years of advocacy by us, Mr. Wei was finally released a few months in advance of President Clinton's visit to China in 1998. There actually was something of a pattern, not guaranteed but possible, of China releasing a dissident in advance of a visit by a high-level US official, kind of setting a friendly atmosphere for the visit.

Q: This is great.

HOLBROOK: I hope you get to interview Wei.

Q: There's a bit of an interesting historical continuity there. In old Europe, when a new king came on the throne often there would be a general amnesty for people who had committed certain crimes to demonstrate is magnanimity or whatever. And what you're describing sounds kind of similar in that each time a president came through China there was an expectation that there would be maybe not a general amnesty, but some amnesty as a demonstration of goodwill.

HOLBROOK: Wei Jingsheng was one of those activists or you might say dissidents who were posting things on Democracy Wall, which was about a 100-yard wall in the center of Beijing, the major bus stop in the city of Beijing. There would be thousands of people congregating there. And he put up a poster saying that China didn't just need the four modernizations, that was a Deng Xiaoping policy, the four modernizations of industry, agriculture, science and technology, and the military. Wei said that China needed a fifth modernization, that's democracy. Well, that's not something the Chinese communist party has ever wanted to listen to except as they define democracy, which means they're in control. And they talk about internal party democracy, which is also a sham. Anyway, Wei Jingsheng was arrested at Democracy Wall. That was one of my jobs, was to go down and scope out what was posted on the Democracy Wall in Beijing. And I saw some people arrested, not him, but some others- there were other small, sort of dissident-type or free speech groups who got arrested.

So, anyway, we raised these cases with the Chinese, saying we support the right of peaceful dissent. And these people weren't calling for violent overthrow; they were just calling for democracy. So, we started raising that Wei Jingsheng case, it was already being raised before I got to the desk in '84. Finally, in 1998, fast forward. Actually, there was a two-step process. I think in '94 or so he was released initially, and then one of our human rights assistant secretaries met with him in Beijing during a high-level US visit. The Chinese clamped him in jail again. They didn't like that. So, he was in jail again.

And then, as I mentioned, a few months before President Clinton's visit in July, 1998, suddenly we're told they're going to release Wei Jingsheng, and they didn't even tell him, apparently. They took him out of prison, and an hour later he's in the first-class lounge at Beijing Airport with one of my political section colleagues. This is a funny story. And we got Wei a first class ticket because the foreign press had gotten wind of the story, that something might be happening, and we wanted to exclude them initially, at least until Wei was safely out of China. So, he gets in the first-class section of a Northwest Airlines flight to Detroit, and what does he do? What did most Chinese do in those days? He pulls out a cigarette; he wants to smoke. And the flight attendant says no, no, you can't do that, you can’t smoke here. And Wei Jingsheng (in Chinese) says gosh, it was better in a Chinese prison; I could smoke there! So, they flew to Detroit and my colleague later wrote a cable about it called "Wei Jingsheng's Flight to Freedom." Worth looking up and reading, if you can find it. Probably declassified by now.

So, that was one of our human rights cases on the China desk in 1984-86. I was also providing our view regarding political asylum requests. We turned most of them down. These were people who had managed to get to San Ysidro, which is on California’s border with Mexico. And about 90 percent of the applications came from poor farmers from Fujian Province who had somehow wrangled their way, probably paid a lot of money or somehow wrangled their way to Mexico and then gotten into California. And they all had identical political asylum requests. And I recall at one point thinking some lawyer is not being a very good lawyer, he's not really doing anything. There would just be identical requests saying they were oppressed politically, you know, a farmer. And they've got, many of them seemed to have eight children or a large number of children.

They were clearly economic refugees. So, we turned down virtually all of them. I mean, there may have been a few special cases that for whatever reason we recommended approval, but there just wasn't anything to be made of these cases in terms of the definition of a political refugee.

Towards the end of my China desk assignment, in 1986, I talked with the Legal Advisor's office to see if I could get an assignment there. L, as it is called, has its own recruitment system, completely separate from the Foreign Service. Still, since I had just received an LLM from Columbia to go along with my JD degree from Chicago, they were willing to take me on, especially since bureaucratically they didn't pay for me, the Foreign Service did.

Q: But, why did you want to work in that office?

HOLBROOK: Well, in part because I was a lawyer and you know, and my father and brother and his wife were attorneys. I'd just finished Columbia University Law School; and had an interest in both diplomacy and law, and I thought well, why can't I combine those and work in L, for a while. And I also thought that perhaps I could bring a certain perspective from the field into L. Finally, I had worked previously with Charlie Runyon in L on human rights matters, and with L's Phil Shemwell in negotiating the US-China Consular Convention in Beijing, and found both assignments very interesting.

Q: Alright.

HOLBROOK: In L, the lawyers are sometimes looking at treaties and documents but are not so familiar with facts on the ground. At that time, there were about 95 lawyers in the Foreign Service, 95 people who had, for whatever reason, had left the practice of law and joined the Foreign Service. One of them worked in the State Department personnel office, and I was able to work with him to actually establish one position in the Legal Advisor's office reserved for Foreign Service officers who were attorneys, who could bid on that position as though it were a regular Foreign Service domestic assignment.

Q: Interesting.

HOLBROOK: I don't know if that position still exists, but I know we set it up. Occasionally, over the years I would look back to make sure it was still there. It may have been for a two-year assignment instead of one year. But no, I enjoyed working in L. So, that was an interesting assignment, also quite different from most Foreign Service assignments.

Now, how did the office generally work? Did it basically just wait to be asked for opinions, or did it have sort of a- in certain areas of responsibilities where they followed things?

HOLBROOK: Basically, L is divided in the way the State Department is, so that every other part of the State Department, if they have a legal question there's a place in L they can go to to get the answer.

Q: Yes.

HOLBROOK: There's an L/EAP for East Asia and Pacific affairs. And I was in one that was initially called Special Functional Problems, and then became L/DL, diplomatic law, the office handling diplomatic immunity issues in the US and overseas. One of my responsibilities in fact was to give lectures on diplomatic immunity to incoming US Foreign Service Officers, to help them understand both the meaning and the limits of that immunity.

So, I felt particularly qualified to do that since I'd served overseas. I would start my lecture holding up a diplomatic passport and I would say what do you think this gives you? And then I would say it doesn't give you anything until a foreign government recognizes and acknowledges your diplomatic status. It's a two-way street; the US Government cannot by itself bestow diplomatic immunity on US diplomats. Also, the immunity belongs to the government, not to the individual officer. Also, diplomats are obliged to obey local traffic regulations! It was enjoyable, lecturing my colleagues on what diplomatic immunity was and was not.

Q: Right.

HOLBROOK: And that was something in L I was uniquely qualified to do. I think the time I was there, I think there was one other Foreign Service officer who maybe departed within a week or two and then after that I was the only Foreign Service officer in that shop.

Q: Well now, while you were there, was there any particular friction with a country over a U.S. diplomat's immunity?

HOLBROOK: Not that I recall. The frictions that we dealt with regarded foreign diplomats in Washington. You know, in those days, at least, and even later, there were a couple of horrible traffic accidents caused by drunken foreign diplomats.

Q: Right.

HOLBROOK: People in Washington, including in the Congress, were outraged and demanded either changes in the treaties providing diplomatic immunity, or that the foreign governments involved waive immunity in these cases.

Q: There was one famous one of that with the embassy of Georgia where Georgia did withdraw the diplomatic immunity. And yes, the guy, I'm sure, went to prison because he was- there was no question of his guilt.

HOLBROOK: Yes. Another problem we dealt with in those Cold War days was the mistreatment of our diplomats in various ways in Moscow. Finally the US Congress passed a law called the Foreign Missions Act. It's a very powerful act that essentially says we can do to them whatever they do to us. It's very powerful because it can override American property laws, for example. It can override just about anything domestic if it's done in retaliation for what's being done to us overseas. So, armed with that, that's when we started licensing foreign diplomats with State Department license plates and State Department driver's licenses. That was to get a hold of all these miscreants who were having traffic accidents in Washington and in New York City, who were scofflaws, who were piling up thousands of tickets. On the one hand, we still can't throw them in jail. But we can take away their driver's license, we can force them to buy insurance, and if they don't do those things, we can kick them out of the country. So, now we have the power; it's just a question of whether we want to use that power. There is an Office of Foreign Missions in the State Department that oversees that process.

The Office of Foreign Missions worked with the legal advisor's office, but sometimes not closely enough. One of the strangest cases I ever came across in L was the day I got a call about the takeover by a private lawyer of Iranian Consulate property in Chicago. When the US and Iran broke diplomatic relations in 1980, each country had an international legal obligation to preserve and protect diplomatic property until relations were restored or some other arrangement was made.

After the Iranians departed from their Consulate in Chicago, the City of Chicago began sending property tax notices to the address, assuming that it was no longer immune from taxation as a diplomatic mission. No one paid the tax bills; I was told that they had been forwarded to the Office of Foreign Missions in the State Department and then discarded, on grounds that the property was immune from taxation. But no one informed the City of Chicago that we still regarded it as diplomatic property, or even responded to their tax bills. After a number of years, the property was seized and sold at auction by Chicago, as a means of reimbursement for taxes owed.

I spoke on the phone to the purchaser, a very combative attorney, and explained that this was diplomatic property, immune from taxation, for which the US Government was responsible. He said essentially, to hell with you, I have a deed from the city of Chicago!

I had a contact over at the Justice Department that I had worked with previously on a local zoning case, and I said I've got another one for you; you won't believe this one. So, I don't know how much it cost us, but the Justice Department had to go into court in the state of Illinois because this lawyer would not back down. In the end, long after I left the legal advisor's office, the case was resolved, the property restored to US Government control, and the Chicago deed and tax bill canceled.

Another interesting thing that I worked on with the Justice Department involved District of Columbia zoning regulations and the Embassy of Benin.

Q: Wow.

HOLBROOK: The Embassy was located in a quiet neighborhood near the zoo in Washington. They constructed a huge communications tower that clearly violated zoning ordinances. The neighbors complained. Benin responded that Embassies have a treaty right to communicate with their home government, including constructing communications facilities. So there were three different legal systems involved: District of Columbia law, Federal law, and international law. The Justice Department lawyer I worked with said it's one of the most complicated cases he'd ever encountered. Again, I departed on another assignment before this case was resolved!

Q: Oh, while you were there, were there any particular issues of Chinese law that you ended up having to deal with?

HOLBROOK: Regarding China. Well, let's see. There was a continuing dispute then, even though I wasn't handling it, it was a continuing legal dispute on the China desk over something called the Huguang bonds case. There was a railroad in China built by foreigners under contract with the Qing Dynasty in or about 1911.

Some Americans bought the bonds over the years, and carefully hoarded them until we established relations with China, and then they tried to cash them in. And yes, this is both a China desk issue and was continuing into L. One of the things we tried to do on the China desk was to explain how the American system worked to Chinese diplomats. Remember, China had had virtually no foreign relations during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. The first diplomats they sent to Washington in the 1980s were simply inexperienced, and did not understand the separation of powers in the US Government. They thought the State Department could help them with American domestic legal problems. So, initially they wouldn't appear at all in domestic cases involving China, including the Huguang bond case. A US District Court in Alabama issued a default judgment against China for \$40 million. Eventually the Chinese Government began to understand the US system and to sometimes hire very high-powered US law firms to represent them in court in the US. But the Huguang case was still rattling around in 2020, when a US Senator tried to pass a resolution asking China to repay $1.6 trillion, including interest, on the Huguang bonds. As far as I know, the Chinese Government has not paid US bondholders anything.

I probably mentioned before the case of the Twin Oaks diplomatic property.

Q: I don't recall that.

HOLBROOK: That was diplomatic property owned by the Republic of China on Taiwan. I think maybe it was the ambassador's residence. It's still a wonderful place in Rock Creek Park; you can drive over and see the magnificent gates. It's called Twin Oaks, and Taiwan still has it, even though it was diplomatic property and should by international law have been turned over to the PRC Government after we recognized the PRC as the sole legal government of China in 1979. But the ROC Government was clever: the day after the US and China announced normalization of relations in 1978, the Taiwan

Government purported to sell Twin Oaks to an American citizen for $1, and then said it was no longer diplomatic property. And the Chinese Embassy asked the State Department to restore this property to China as a matter of international law.

Our response was, you're absolutely right, and if you hire a lawyer and go into court, we will make a presentation on your behalf as a friend of the court. The Chinese Embassy didn't like that response and did nothing other than tell us that we in the State Department should handle this matter for them. Soon, however, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, which contained a provision that superseded any international obligation to turn over diplomatic property to China. As far as I know, Twin Oaks is still in the hands of the Taiwan authorities, still used for cultural functions.

Q: Alright. So, it sounds like we're coming to the end of your tour, your one-year tour in L. And once again, in a one-year tour you have to look relatively early in that period for where you're going next.

HOLBROOK: Yes. Well, I was, on the one hand, lobbying the China desk for some kind of China job. At the same time, I was aware that an official named Max Kampelman was the Counselor to the department then. And he was the chief negotiator for the INF treaty. I think I had met him in a department event, and I thought he was personally very nice, was an effective diplomat, and was in charge of negotiating an important treaty, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty with the then-Soviet Union. It turned out he was looking for staff people. I was from L; so I visited his office and he interviewed me and hired me as a Special Assistant in his office. And so, I ended up spending a year or so there, and that was the year that the INF treaty was signed in Washington between Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan.

My job, essentially, was to help publicize the treaty. I wrote articles that got published in various places, magazines, and also in my hometown newspaper, the Owensboro Messenger.

Q: Just take a moment, if you can, to describe what the INF treaty did.

HOLBROOK: Well, it was the first treaty that aimed to abolish an entire class of missiles, medium-range nuclear-weapon carrying missiles. The idea, from the US viewpoint, was to protect Europe, and to protect U.S. forces in Europe from these intermediate-range missiles from the Soviet Union. So, in terms of arms control, instead of limiting numbers, it reduced numbers to zero. It had a very rigid inspection regime. And that's the treaty for which Ronald Reagan famously learned to pronounce one phrase in Russian, which, in English, was "trust but verify." He actually would say it in Russian.

And on that basis, that's how he was able to persuade the Senate to ratify that treaty. I mean, we knew we couldn't go to the Senate and say we've got to trust the Russians. So we emphasized that the treaty was not built on trust, but on rigid inspection regimes. For example, there's a huge part of the treaty that provides the precise locations of all

these missile manufacturing places and missile sites. There were provisions for quick reaction inspections with minimal notice to the other party.

So, in the Office of the Counselor we were quite proud of the treaty. And the day it was scheduled to be signed by Reagan and Gorbachev, by odd coincidence, a leading Chinese author whom I had known in Beijing was visiting Washington, after attending the Iowa Writers Workshop on a US Government program. Max Kampelman had expressed interest in meeting him. But the scheduling on both sides was tight, and my friend arrived at the State Department literally just as Gorbachev and Reagan were getting ready to sign the INF Treaty at the State Department. As he and Mr. Kampelman were talking, Max was literally looking out the window to see if the motorcade with Gorbachev and Reagon was in sight! We had to cut short the conversation, since Mr. Kampelman was expected at the signing ceremony.

Scheduling of the INF Treaty signing ceremony between Reagan and Gorbachev proved challenging. Ambassador Kampelman had access to the President's schedule, and made several proposals for the date of the ceremony, always for days and times when it appeared that nothing else on the President's schedule would interfere. But several times, mysteriously, word came back from the White House that particular dates were not convenient. We later were told that Nancy Reagan had been consulting an astrologer in Georgetown, who finally pinpointed the most propitious day for the ceremony!

Anyway, working for Ambassador Kampelman, we all had a feeling it was a very important treaty, and I still think it was an important treaty. President Trump, however, abrogated the treaty in accordance with its terms, following the precedent set by Jimmy Carter in abrogating the US-ROC Defense Treaty. In Trump's view, the Russians were cheating and violating the Treaty. The Russians (Vladimir Putin) of course claimed that the US was violating the treaty. Putin denied that Russia had been cheating, and then stated that Russia would immediately resume building up a force of intermediate range nuclear weapons.

Q: Now, but the other thing about being in the counselor's office the year you were there, '88 to '89, you had what they used to call the friendly takeover, Reagan's administration leaves, Bush's comes in; were there any significant changes you noticed as that happened?

HOLBROOK: Well, at the most fundamental level, yes. The office staff.

Q: Oh, of course.

HOLBROOK: After President George H.W. Bush took over from President Reagan, Ambassador Kampelman resigned as Counselor and Robert Zoellick was named to replace him. Zoellick came by the Counselor's office one day and we met him. "We" were the four Foreign Service Officers on the staff, we were all career people, and our view, at least my view, was if Mr. Zoellick was interested in having us continue in the office, that was fine, and if he wasn't interested, that was fine too, we'd look somewhere else. And so,

at that first meeting, we didn't get any clear word one way or the other. And I recall later that I suggested to the senior staffer among us, a real expert on Russia who had a 4/4 in Russian, why don't we just ask Mr. Zoellick if he wants to keep us, or keep some of us, on his staff? But his view, with which I complied, was that Zoellick would let us know on his own time, there was no need for us to inquire.

So, sort of famously, or infamously in State Department lore, one morning, perhaps two weeks later, the four of us, by total coincidence, showed up outside the main door of our office at the usual starting time, 8:00 in the morning. We entered and discovered that there were four people unknown to any of us sitting at our desks! So, we were totally surprised. And the response from them was -- oh, didn't somebody tell you?

And so, we all repaired down to the cafeteria sort of in a state of shock. Again, we were career FSOs. We still had a job, but we suddenly didn't have an assignment, or even an office! Soon, however, perhaps the next day, we were given office space in what had just served as the transition office between the Reagan and Bush Administrations. Normally in the Foreign Service you know your next assignment months in advance; suddenly we were looking for an assignment for perhaps the next day! Fortunately for me, I called on my friends at the China desk, and they were only too happy to have my assistance on an informal, unassigned basis for several months! In fact, I was the (informal) acting head of the desk for a short period when the acting Director, Jeff Bader went on vacation for two or three weeks! During that period, I was signing off on memos on behalf of the China desk. No one noticed that I was not even assigned there – except Stape Roy, then the Executive Secretary, called me one day and said “Mort, I didn’t know you were working on the China desk!” But he didn’t object at all when I explained what had happened.

This was just when the events that led up to the June 4, 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square were unfolding. Hu Yaobang was formerly the head of China's Communist Party, but had been demoted due to his toleration of dissent and more open policies that went beyond the boundaries of "reform and opening." He lost his top position in 1987, and then died in April, 1989. There then began a series of demonstrations led by students from China's two top universities, Beijing University and Tsinghua University, initially aimed at honoring Hu's memory.

Over a series of weeks, the demonstrations grew in both size and scope. Demonstrators occupied Tiananmen Square, the largest public square in Beijing, located right in the heart of the city. On the China desk, we formed a 24-hour monitoring operation to ensure that someone with China experience was watching developments in Beijing all the time. In May, 1979, Secretary Gorbachev came for an official visit from the Soviet Union. Normally high-ranking foreign visitors are greeted with a welcoming ceremony in Tiananmen, replete with a band and marching soldiers. In this case, the Square was completely occupied by thousands of students and others who were demonstrating, now not just in memory of Hu Yaobang but in favor of a more open and more democratic China. A large plaster statue called the Goddess of Democracy, resembling the Statue of Liberty, was set up in the middle of the square.

Finally, on about May 20, 1989 China's new premier, Li Peng, declared martial law in China. When he did that, I was attending a function for a Chinese delegation in Washington, composed of members of the People's Daily. They actually were sympathetic with the demonstrations, which had expanded to include not just students but workers, and also members of the press in China, including the People's Daily. And there were, for a few days, actually free and uncensored news broadcasts in China, reporting accurately on what was going on in Tiananmen Square.

On the day of Li Peng's announcement of martial law, the newspaper delegation in Washington was attending a farewell banquet, and there was a television in the restaurant. I was in attendance. We could see, via CNN on TV, Li Peng holding his hands up and denouncing the "counter revolutionaries" in the Square. This put a pall over the farewell banquet. We all knew something bad was going to happen. In China, Zhao Ziyang, the Premier, was, like Hu Yaobang, an official who supported more openness in China. He had even gone into the square and spoken directly to the demonstrators at one point, in a conciliatory way. But Zhao made the mistake of going on a visit to North Korea at a crucial time, during which he was ousted from his position and replaced by a hard-liner, Li Peng. And Li Peng, who Bill Clinton later called the "butcher of Beijing,' was the one who declared martial law -- although Deng Xiaoping, behind the scenes, remained the most powerful leader in China, and was clearly pulling the strings backstage, ousting Zhao and appointing Li. So Deng was ultimately the leader who was responsible for the Tiananmen Massacre.

A relevant factor was the state visit of Mikhail Gorbachev in May, 1989. The welcoming ceremony for Gorbachev was held at the Beijing airport because the Government did not have control of the Square. This was an embarrassment for the Government and Party, one that was played out around the world, because many foreign reporters had assembled in Beijing to cover both the Tiananmen demonstrations and the Gorbachev visit.

Still, there was a pause of about two weeks following Li Peng's declaration of martial law. And in Washington, on the China desk, we actually had concluded that it looked like the Government was simply going to wait out the demonstrators. On June 3 we told our 24-hour one-person operation to stand down. But within an hour or two, we received a cable or perhaps a phone call from Beijing telling us that army troops had just entered Tiananmen Square.

I recall personally calling back up to the Operation Center (Ops Center), the 24-hour alert center in the State Department, to our China person, and saying "Don't stand down." And of course, this was the beginning of a huge military operation, really a massacre, in the center of Beijing. In Washington, within about two days, we had assembled one of the largest 24-hour operations in Ops Center history, with three different 24-hour task forces: one to help Americans leave China, one to deal with policy towards China, and a third one -- perhaps to follow military issues; I don't recall exactly.

We tried to get every American that we could out of China. Some of them didn't want to go. This was mostly a Beijing operation, but not entirely. There were demonstrations also in Shanghai, in Shenyang, and perhaps in a few other places too. But Americans outside of these areas were reluctant to leave because things were normal. The worst of it by far was the military attack in Beijing. I believe we were able to evacuate all Americans who wanted to leave China, with only a single injury, which was not life-threatening. On the other hand, there were hundreds if not thousands of Chinese students and others killed by the troops, supported by tanks, which entered the Square.

After that, the Communist party was a lot more concerned with maintaining its own power. The idea of a separation between the functions of the government and the party never raised its head again. You could say that was kind of a prelude to Xi Jinping taking over as leader in 2012. The lesson of the Tiananmen Massacre was that economic development is important to the Communist Party, but if the Party feels that its monopoly of political power is threatened, it will take extreme action to preserve that monopoly, notwithstanding the cost to economic development and to China's international reputation.

On a personal level, I was able to arrange for an assignment as US Consul General in Shenyang in 1990, preceded by additional language training in Taiwan. So my family and I departed Washington for Taiwan in July or August, 1989. At that time, on the China desk, we were de-constructing the relationship that we had been building up since normalization in 1979: cutting off military ties, closing down cultural exchange programs, warning businesses about conditions in China, and generally waiting to see whether China was going to head back towards another Maoist dictatorship or not.

So, anyway, my assignment to the office of the Counselor ended with my working on the China desk during a crucial period in US-China relations.

Q: Well, how did that get finally resolved? Were you finally officially assigned to the China desk?

HOLBROOK: I don't think I was ever officially assigned to the China desk. My next official assignment was to be Consul General in Shenyang, following a year in Taiwan for language training.

Q: Morton, what were the years for Taipei training and Shenyang assignment?

HOLBROOK: That was 1989-90 in Taipei, and then we arrived in Shenyang in June 1990, and departed there in July of 1993.

Q: Okay. Now, once you've arrived in Taipei and you're settled, did you just study Chinese or did the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) have you involved in other activities as well?

HOLBROOK: It was overwhelmingly just studying Chinese. We language students would sometimes visit the American Institute in Taiwan, the successor to our embassy. We would go in there every week maybe or maybe every two weeks for a couple of hours just to read cable traffic relating to China. And that's about it. We also, at AIT request, helped them observe a local election. I did spend just a few days down-island, in Taichung. Actually, we didn't actually observe elections, we just spoke with a lot of the candidates and officials and helped AIT monitor an election.

Q: Was there anything that stuck out in your mind about that? Because, you know, Taiwan very slowly moved towards greater democratization.

HOLBROOK: Right, right.

Q: Was there anything in particular that stood out in your mind about that election?

HOLBROOK: My only recollection was being told by a lot of people that bribery was not unusual.

Q: And other, once again, other than the training you had, were there indicators of developments in Taiwan that you noticed? You know, growth in industries and so on.

HOLBROOK: No, not really. The AIT language school then was literally up on a mountaintop. A beautiful setting. On a clear day we could see the ocean. It was both physically and you might say intellectually removed from much of Taiwan.

Q: But you were being trained in Mandarin regardless, not in the Taiwanese dialect?

HOLBROOK: That's correct, but Mandarin is now also the standard language in Taiwan, the language of instruction in the school system. I should say, there were already a certain number of people in Taiwan who spoke Mandarin, but that increased vastly after the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT army on the mainland, following which they fled to Taiwan and took over the government there in 1949-1950. What happened then was Taiwan changed from Japanese control to KMT control and there was actually quite a bitter confrontation between the local people and the KMT army. Only in recent years has the KMT owned up to what they did back in 1949. And there's something called the February 28 massacre that is now commemorated in Taiwan now that Taiwan has become a democracy. But back in 1989-'90 the KMT had a tight grip on politics there. They had not yet had their first democratic presidential election.

Q: Alright. And you felt the language training prepared you pretty well for Shenyang?

HOLBROOK: Yes. My focus was on my own language training. I was planning to arrive in Shenyang as Consul General for the July Fourth reception, so I took advantage of my teachers in Taiwan to help me prepare my initial, you might say my maiden speech in Chinese on the Mainland, in Shenyang. My July 4 remarks were short and simple, but

still, I wanted to get it right. So the training was useful. When I arrived in Shenyang in June, 1990, I felt prepared for my first July 4 reception.

Q: Now, the Shenyang consulate had been chosen as a location for a constituent post for any particular reason?

HOLBROOK: Yes. We had a Consulate in Shenyang starting in 1911, and like our Embassy and our other consulates in China, it was closed not long after the end of the Civil War in China when the Communist Party took over in 1949, and China became the People's Republic of China.

Regarding the location of our Consulate, in my first assignment in Beijing, from 1979 to 1983, we had discussions in our Embassy and with the State Department about where to reestablish Consulates in China. I recall that the Deputy Chief of Mission (and later Ambassador) was Stapleton Roy, and he took a survey in the embassy about where we should have consulates. Shanghai and Guangzhou were obviously important cities where we wanted Consulates. Otherwise, in Northeast China, there was debate on whether to have a Consulate in Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning Province, or in Dalian, the largest port in the Northeast, also in Liaoning. In the end we chose Shenyang because it was the provincial capital, and also because it was closer to the northeast's border with Russia, and we wanted to monitor Russian-Chinese relations.

Q: Now, has Harbin ever been considered?

HOLBROOK: Well, Harbin is actually much closer to Russia than Shenyang is, and it's a provincial capital itself of a different province, called Heilongjiang. But I don't recall that we seriously considered Harbin. I think we previously did have a consulate in Harbin, also, but my recollection was simply that Shenyang and Dalian were the leading candidates, and we finally decided on Shenyang. That was a decision taken as a result of our early agreements between China and the U.S.to allow each side to establish five consulates. We also considered whether to have a consulate in southwest China in Chengdu or Kunming. Chengdu was then the gateway to Tibet; you had to fly into Chengdu and then fly on to Tibet, even though Chengdu itself was not in Tibet. The argument for Kunming was that it was near the border with Vietnam, and would allow us to keep tabs on China's relations with that country. In 1979, in fact, China had invaded Vietnam in a brief military encounter. We eventually chose to establish a Consulate in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province, and the entryway to Tibet. Many Americans were interested in Tibet.

Q: Okay. Now, when you arrived in Shenyang, what were the provinces or how large was your consular district?

HOLBROOK: The Consular district was composed of three Chinese provinces and was roughly the size of Texas. Those were Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang Province. Liaoning borders on North Korea. Jilin also had a border with North Korea, as well as a

short border with Russia. Heilongjiang was the northernmost of the three provinces, and bordered on Russia.

I arrived in Shenyang at a tense time in US-China relations. The Tiananmen Massacre had occurred one year earlier, on June 4, 1989. At that time, a Chinese dissident, Fang Lizhi, and his wife had been given asylum by the US Embassy in Beijing. This was quite unusual since we do not normally grant any kind of asylum overseas, but we make an exception when someone is in imminent danger, as Mr. Fang was. So he and his wife were allowed to enter our Embassy and actually stayed there for over one year. During that time, I was told, Chinese police or other security forces gave special scrutiny to all vehicles leaving our embassy compounds (there were three locations), to ensure that we were not attempting to smuggle the Fangs out of the Embassy and perhaps out to the airport and out of the country.

Finally a deal was reached allowing the Fangs to leave the country and fly to the United States, I believe for "humanitarian reasons," for medical treatment. This happened just a few days after my family and I arrived in Shenyang, in fact it was during the first weekend that we spent in Shenyang. This certainly improved the atmosphere of the overall US-China relationship, and no doubt made it easier for me in Shenyang.

In the event, we did have a warm welcome from Chinese authorities on first arrival. We took a daytime train from Beijing, about a 12-hour ride for my wife Shao Pei and three young children, Allen, Stephen and Kristen. We were met at the Shenyang train station by representatives of both the Consulate and the "Waiban," the foreign affairs office of Liaoning Province. Subsequently, when I made my first calls as Consul General, we were also greeted warmly. In Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province, the authorities took my entire family on a boat ride in the Songhua River, and also provided ice cream for our children. Calls on both municipal and provincial leaders in Changchun (Jilin Province), as well as in Shenyang (Liaoning Province) went smoothly. In those days, China's policies of reform and opening meshed quite well with the US policy of engagement: China was gradually opening up and soliciting foreign investment. It was also becoming somewhat more free internally: Chinese citizens could more easily get passports, and had more money to spend on foreign travel. Gradually, they were able to fly domestically as well as overseas; previously, they needed a letter from their work unit in order to be eligible to travel by air anywhere.

Besides initial official calls, we were invited by Liaoning Provincial officials to spend a few days in Beidaihe, a resort on the North China Sea that was actually just outside my Consular District. Our entire Consulate American staff and family members were invited and attended this pleasant area, which was also located near where the Great Wall meets the sea. In fact, invitations by municipal and provincial governments throughout the Northeast (shorthand for the three provinces in the Shenyang Consular District) to both our staff and family members became a hallmark of my assignment to Shenyang.

On overall US-China relations, we were not certain where China was headed after the major setback of Tiananmen. Would there be a return to the days of the Cultural

Revolution? Or would China continue to implement Deng's policies of "reform and opening?" Finally, in 1992, Deng Xiaoping made a famous "southern tour" to Shenzhen, next to Hong Kong, in which he reiterated that China should move further, faster to reform and to open the door to the outside. At this point, we realized that the Tiananmen Massacre was a major step backwards, but not a reversal of the policy of reform and opening.

Deng's southern tour had an immediate impact on us in Shenyang. Among the first events I attended as Consul General in 1990 was the opening ceremony for what was then the longest high-speed highway in China, a four-lane divided expressway running from Shenyang to the port of Dalian, a distance of about 400 kilometers. Representatives of the tiny Shenyang Consular Corps, which consisted of Japanese Consul General, the North Korean consul general and myself (along with my family) were invited to attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony in Dalian, following which we were all driven in a Chinese Government van on the new highway up to Shenyang.

The purpose of the highway was to facilitate trade with the outside world. However we, the representatives of the outside world, were all told that foreign diplomats would not be able to use the highway in our personal or official vehicles! We could only take public transportation, such as trains or buses. I did in fact ride a bus to Dalian at one point. But in 1992, only a few days after Deng's southern tour, we were told we could now drive down to Dalian. I quickly made official appointments there and "flew the flag" in Dalian in my official car, showing the American flag for the first time since the 1940s.

Q: Okay. So, it was really quite a large consular district. You were limited, though, if I remember, in how far you could travel outside of Shenyang.

HOLBROOK: Oh, oh, yes. Yes, initially we could not travel in our personal vehicles or in consulate vehicles, even though our drivers were, of course, locally hired and were presumably required to report regularly on everything we did. We weren't supposed to take any kind of vehicle outside of, I think, 35 kilometers around Shenyang. Unlike in Beijing, there were no signs on roads saying "no foreigners beyond this point" or "no diplomats beyond this point," but we were told that our travel was restricted, and so we generally abided by that, we didn't want to create some kind of incident by violating travel regulations. And more specifically, we enforced the same or similar restrictions on Chinese diplomats in the United States, for what it's worth. But still, that was sort of irritating. But we could take public transportation. So, we did travel extensively by train all over this vast Consular district. So, the travel restrictions were more of an irritation than a real impediment to moving around the consular district.

Q: Alright, now then, how large was the consulate when you were there? How many Americans?

HOLBROOK: We had six full-time American employees and four locally-hired Americans, along with about 60 local Chinese employees.

There was one American spouse who did consular work on a full-time basis and another American was the spouse of the local McDonnell Douglas representative. She worked as a Foreign Commercial Service officer pretty much full-time. The Foreign Commercial Service withdrew its own full-time officer just the weekend before I arrived in Shenyang. The FCS chief representative in our Embassy in Beijing told me that nothing was happening in terms of American commercial activity in the Shenyang consular district.

However, within a month or so after I got there, I was invited to four ribbon-cuttings for new American businesses which were opening up, most of them restaurants. So I sent a message back to Beijing saying what are you talking about? I'm being inundated, more or less, with these invitations. So, it took me about a year to get authority to hire locally an American FCS representative, the spouse of a business representative, and eventually FCS returned to Shenyang with its own employee, who supervised four or five local Chinese employees. We also had an American teacher; we set up a school called the Shenyang American Academy. Initially I was both the President of the School Board, and the father of the entire student body, which consisted of my two sons. Later our school expanded to four or five students.

Q: Now, talk a little bit just of the size and the economic sectors that were at the heart of Shenyang. What were the major economic drivers there?

HOLBROOK: Yes. Well, Shenyang had been the center of heavy industry in China, including machine tools, steel, and other products, starting when the Japanese took over the Northeast in 1931. In fact, I can still recall visiting at least one factory with dirt floors that had been established about 50 years earlier and was still in operation. There was an aircraft company in Shenyang. Changchun, the capital of the next province to the north, Jilin, was one of China's major auto production centers. And there was some American interest, from Chrysler, in a joint venture to make automobiles in Changchun, that didn't come to fruition while I was there. Volkswagen did have a joint venture with a Chinese company there.

The main characteristic of northeast China and actually most of the rest of China in those days was gigantic, inefficient state enterprises. These were the enterprises where on paper there might be 100,000 people there, but then if you looked more carefully at how many of them actually worked, you'd find the enterprise was a small city, with stores, restaurants, nurseries, and other activities besides manufacturing. We referred to them as "poorfare" compounds: subsidized by local governments, emphasizing production not tied to market demand. So, you had these vast enterprises and when I was in Shenyang, the new policy of reform and opening essentially had not yet reached Shenyang. In fact, it had not really gone very far in the rest of China, either, outside of Beijing.

In the Northeast, the city of Dalian was the most advanced, that is the most open, and the most foreign investment. There was actually a Holiday Inn in Dalian. I thought this was amazing. And there was a doughnut shop there that we would go to and bring doughnuts back to Shenyang. There was a pizza place so we might bring pizzas back too, to share with Consulate staff. But essentially you could say that both Shenyang and the entire

Northeast was characterized by the old Soviet model of inefficient heavy industries, ripe for reform. And in later years, some of these enterprises were the ones that went bankrupt when the central government, under Premier Zhu Rongji, decided to stop subsidizing them. This was politically difficult to do, because there were vast numbers of people who depended on them, both the direct employees and those who ran small stores inside these enterprises. But those moves had not yet started when I was there.

Q: Now, talk a little bit about the pollution because I guess all of their industries up there were fired by coal.

HOLBROOK: Yes. Yes. I think I mentioned before that Shenyang was surrounded by what we called the Iron Triangle. There were six major industrial cities within roughly a 100-mile radius of Shenyang. Anshan was one of China's leading steel manufacturing centers. Another was called Benxi, where they also produced steel. There were also four other major manufacturing centers, so the result of that was it didn't matter which way the wind was blowing in Shenyang, it was always an ill wind! Certainly the air pollution was a prime reason why Shenyang was a 25% hardship post. That is, we received an additional 25% of our salary for being stationed there.

Q: As you were working there, did the changes reach Shenyang or was that after you left?

HOLBROOK: There were harbingers. Shortly after I arrived in June 1990, quite a few American companies were established as joint ventures in Shenyang and elsewhere in the Northeast. There were fast-food restaurants. One was called the California Beef Noodle King, with several branches. There was already an aircraft manufacturing joint venture between McDonnell Douglas and a Chinese company, to produce cargo doors for M-D aircraft. There was a Boeing representative in Shenyang. One of the major American investors was Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, which set up a branch in Dalian. I was in frequent contact with the Pfizer people; they were setting up what they said was one of their most advanced research facilities.

About midway through my tour of duty, six General Motors employees called on me at the Consulate. I don't know who was more surprised, me or them. GM had already made arrangements to set up a joint venture in Shenyang, through negotiations that took place elsewhere, perhaps in Beijing or even in Detroit, of which we were totally unaware. And the GM employees who suddenly arrived in my office were equally unaware that there was an American Consulate in Shenyang, although they had been assigned to go to Shenyang several months beforehand. For our Consulate, this was a big deal, a $100 million investment in Shenyang, the largest American investment in the Consular District.

Unfortunately things did not go well. The joint venture was supposed to produce a small pickup truck, with a front seat for two persons and a small truck bed in the back. The first problem the joint venture faced was that the Chinese partner already produced a larger version of the same product, with a double cab and larger truck bed. In those days, there were no machines to help load and unload trucks; the way to unload trucks was simply to

pile a bunch of workers in the double cab, who would provide that service. So from the beginning, there was not much market demand for GM's smaller truck, which also was much more expensive than their partner's own larger truck. Another problem was the partner insisted that the joint venture hire far more local employees than, in the view of GM, were really needed. To make a long story short, the joint venture simply did not last more than a couple of years after I left Shenyang. However, the experience may have been useful for GM, which later set up a much more successful joint venture in Shanghai to produce not small trucks, but Buick automobiles, which were very popular in China.

Q: So, would you say that the thrust of your sort of day-to-day work was more directed towards economic development and building economic ties?

HOLBROOK: Yes, certainly we wanted to promote US business interests, but I would add that we were also reporting on political developments because of the geographic location of the consulate. The Consular district bordered on Russia to the North, and on North Korea to the South. That was the basic reason for having a consulate in northeast China. And back in '79 the rationale, of course, for establishing ties with China was strictly strategic and political, as a way of off-setting the Soviet influence, of taking advantage of bad relations between the Soviet Union and China, ensuring that the United States did not face a Sino-Soviet alliance. This was the strategic vision of Henry Kissinger and President Nixon. The economic dimension didn't really play a role in the diplomatic ties that were established. So, when I was in Shenyang we saw the beginnings of American economic relations with the Northeast..

Q: Was there anything that interested the consulate regarding China-North Korea trade?

HOLBROOK: Absolutely. We were doing what we could in terms of reporting on relations between China and North Korea, both political and economic relations. So, I and other consulate people made trips such as we could, with help from the Chinese Government. I visited the city of Dandong, which is on the border with North Korea, and other consulate officers did too. And in those days, in Dandong the authorities would take us on a boat ride in the Yalu River, and after a short ride they would say "you are now in North Korea." The contrast was striking: Dandong was a bustling Chinese city, with stores and restaurants, but on the Korean side, in the city of Sinuiju, there was virtually nothing in sight except for a few buildings.

I recall taking a drive along the Yalu River with Chinese officials in the car, seeing a dam across the river that produced power that went both to China and North Korea. That was of reporting interest in terms of economic relations between China and North Korea. We talked with Dandong officials and asked how are your relations with North Korea? What's going on on the border? And we learned that there was a certain level of tension, even some shooting incidents between Chinese and Korean fishermen disputing where they could fish. Occasionally the North Koreans would arrest some of the Chinese fishermen. So, that was definitely of interest, especially just at this time when, as I recall, North Korea withdrew from the non-proliferation agreement, the NPT.

Q: Yes.

HOLBROOK: North Korea was a signatory to the Treaty, the NPT, but they withdrew right towards the end of my tenure in Shenyang, and began developing nuclear weapons. So we especially tried to find out what we could about North Korea. There were some think tanks in Shenyang where you had people who had a lot more direct knowledge of North Korea than we did and we would talk to them. As I recall, one of the Chinese think tank researchers had actually been a classmate of Kim Il-sung in earlier times. So, yes, definitely relations with North Korea were of interest to us, not just across from the city of Dandong, which was in Liaoning Province, but going up the Yalu River and the Tumen River, both of which form the border between China and North Korea.

We were also interested in reports about refugees from North Korea. In my time we didn't have anyone seeking refuge in our Consulate, but I think later you had some refugees from North Korea who climbed the walls of our Consulate and asked for help or asylum. It became a tricky issue, what to do with these people in terms of providing protection for them and working with or handling the Chinese authorities. Of course, the Chinese didn't want to be seen as helping North Koreans escape.

The other issue we looked at was relations between ethnic Chinese and ethnic Koreans. Elsewhere in China, like Tibet and Xinjiang, there were very tense relations between ethnic Chinese and local minority people, such as Uighurs and Tibetans. So, that was an issue also in my province or in my consular district in part because there was an historic Korean claim on Chinese territory that went way up into northeast China. So we did our best to meet with officials and just ordinary people in the Northeast to try to judge whether the kind of tensions that existed in other border areas of China also existed in the Northeast. Somewhat to our surprise, we didn't detect significant tension. We came to the conclusion that the Chinese were doing a pretty good job, that the ethnic Koreans did not feel discriminated against, and did not feel that the majority Chinese were trying to ruin their culture. On the contrary, in Jilin Province, where there were a lot of ethnic Koreans, the Chinese and Korean cultures existed side-by-side. Street signs and other commercial signs were often bilingual, in both Chinese and Korean. The Northeast was a rare Chinese Government success in dealing with ethnic tensions in a border area.

There were two other areas of foreign policy that, again, were part of the rationale for Shenyang, concerning North Korea, and also the Soviet Union. And while we were there relations were noticeably improving between China and the Soviet Union. In fact the Soviet Union disappeared during my tour, and was replaced by Russia. And the Russians then established a consulate in Shenyang, about midway in my tour there, rounding out a very small consular corps. We had close relations with the Japanese Consulate. They were located literally right next door to us, and we had a lot of contacts with them and also were interested in what the Japanese were doing in northeast China. Of course, we had no contact with the North Korean Consulate, so we sort of- we were happy to see another consulate established. During the time I was there, the Russians, the Russian Consul General, Mr. Nikitin and his wife, and their staff, initially lived and worked in a hotel. There was no Russian national day reception because Russia had not yet decided

on when its national day would be!. But still, we saw a lot of the Russians. Later, after my departure they moved into their own Consulate building.

But certainly, we were interested in the state of Sino-Soviet relations. In fact, with the assistance of the Russian Consul General, I and three members of our staff were able to make an official visit from the Chinese city of Heihe across the Heilongjiang river to the Russian city of Blagoveshchensk. In those days, there were no bridges at all between Russia and China. This was in the winter of 1993. The river, quite a broad one, was frozen solid. The Chinese authorities in Heihe, with the agreement of Russian officials in Blagoveshchensk, arranged for us to travel in a jeep across the ice to Russia. So with the agreement of both governments, a Chinese driver from Heihe drove us in a jeep across the frozen river. There was a divided highway, with the two lanes separated by at least one hundred yards of ice. At first I thought why is there such a big separation, and then I realized -- of course, because you don't want the lanes to be too close together, that might put too much weight on the ice!

So the four of us from the Consulate, including Economic Officer John Ellis, Political Officer Jim Heller, local employee Yang Jing and myself, spent a full day in Russia, meeting in about five different Russian Government offices, We got a warm welcome everywhere, and also we were toasted with vodka at every stop! None of us spoke Russian, but we were assisted in our day trip by a Russian-speaking American officer from the US Consulate in Vladivostok. Overall, our impressions were (1) that in contrast to the bustle of Heihe, just opposite Blagoveshchensk, the Russian city was barren, with little commercial activity in the streets. Russian officials also told us there was only a small amount of trade with China; and (2) Nevertheless, relations between the two sides at the border were good. Although Russia had an historic claim to part of China's Heilongjiang Province, the Russians were not asserting that claim, according to the officials we met.

Q: Now, these were the things that were of interest for the consulate. Did you end up doing a great deal of public diplomacy events?

HOLBROOK: Well, we did. We had two successive very active cultural affairs officers, Ruth Kurzbauer and Wendy Lyle; Wendy later was Consul General in Wuhan. They organized many cultural events in Shenyang and elsewhere in the Consular District. I recall in particular an American jazz pianist who gave a concert or two in Shenyang and also performed in my residence. The Harlem Globetrotters also paid a visit to Shenyang, and we invited many Chinese contacts to see them play basketball. I myself did a lot of ribbon-cutting at US-China joint ventures. But in the sense of going out to universities, no, that was still quite sensitive, and I think I had only two invitations to go to speak, at an economic institute in Shenyang, which I did, and another event at another university, where I gave the keynote speech at a conference on Science and Technology. In that speech, as well as my remarks at ribbon-cutting ceremonies and July 4th receptions, I spoke in Chinese, but with careful preparation, working with a native speaker on our staff to ensure my grammar and pronunciation were correct.

I might say parenthetically, after I retired I taught for five years (2007-2012) at a Chinese college in Zhuhai, which is in the Consular District of our Consulate in Guangzhou. I learned from the US Consulate how rare it was for their officers to receive speaking invitations from universities, just as it had been for me in Shenyang. And also in Guangzhou if they did receive an invitation, they were asked to supply a copy of the remarks in advance.

And so, at our college in South China, which was a joint venture between the Hong Kong Baptist University and a Chinese college, I was the person in charge of inviting Consulate officials and Consulate cultural exchange visitors to our college. And, for Consulate officers, security people would ask me to provide their remarks in advance. I would write a summary and send it to them, and I would send it to the consulate, and I'd say look, they want something, so this is what I gave them. And that would satisfy them. These visits also included information about applying for student visas; our college had exchange agreements with six small colleges in the state of Minnesota. The result was that my college, called United International College, was the destination of last resort for Consulate visitors when other colleges might turn them down; we would always say yes.

Q: Did you have a large consular function while you were there?

HOLBROOK: Well, the July Fourth reception was our largest annual large function in Shenyang. In addition, I would invite all the Americans in the consular district for Thanksgiving dinner and for Christmas dinner. I was able to do that because there weren't that many Americans in the District; we knew about 50 visitors would show up, most of them from Shenyang. We had a newsletter addressed to all the Americans we could find out about in the consular district and we would publish invitations in our consular newsletters for all Americans citizens.

Q: Oh, but what I meant was your consular function within the embassy; in other words, visas and American Citizen Services and so on.

HOLBROOK: Oh, so your question was what sections did we have in the consulate you mean?

Q: Well, because you had to have a consular officer to deal with applications for visas and so on; what I'm really wondering is had the student visa, had it had interest by Chinese students become very strong and were you dealing with a lot of student visas?

HOLBROOK: No. There wasn't the flood of student visas in those days that you have today. There were some, but I would say not a large number. I don't know the precise numbers, actually. We had one full-time American consular officer, actually the spouse of our administrative officer, who had been trained as a consular officer. In my three years in Shenyang, the number of student visa applications did increase slowly so that we did need another officer. But we were not like our Consulates in Shanghai and Guangzhou or our Embassy in Beijing, posts which might have had hundreds of applicants per day.

Q: Now, when you traveled, you got down to the Port of Dalian, was there any important information you drew from that for what was going on in that area of China?

HOLBROOK: Sure, sure. Both economic and political. Economically it was far advanced over the rest of northeast China in terms of opening to the outside, in terms of soliciting foreign investment, in terms of the presence of foreign investment, mostly Japanese. Again, the Pfizer company was a major American investment there. And as I was leaving, General Electric was looking at a joint venture to produce railroad engines there. Dalian also had the reputation of being more open than other cities in the Northeast.

Dalian was also where I met the most famous official in northeast China, named Bo Xilai. When I met him, he was the Vice Mayor of Dalian, and well-known for his boosting economic development in Dalian, to attract Japanese investment in that port city. He was also the son of Bo Yibo, one of the top officials in Beijing and a well-known supporter of Deng Xiaoping, China's top leader. Bo later became the Governor of Liaoning Province, and then Minister of Commerce in Beijing. His final position was as Party Secretary in Chongqing. He was a rival of Xi Jinping to become China's top leader, but was involved in a scandal, convicted of corruption and sentenced to life imprisonment.

As I suggested earlier, Dalian was far ahead of other cities in northeast China in terms of openness. On my first trip there, I could see right away the difference between that city and Shenyang, which was still mired in the old Japanese factories. Dalian had something called a clothing festival, to which I was invited. And this featured an outdoor runway where models from the United States and Europe displayed the latest in dresses and women's apparel, accompanied by western music. Having spent only one month in dour, gray Shenyang, it was astounding to me and others at our consulate, to see a Western fashion show in Dalian. And to stay in a Western hotel there (the Holiday Inn).

Q: Were there any other important events that occurred while you were there, VIP visits from Washington and so on?

HOLBROOK: Shenyang was mostly a place that Washington avoided, especially during the winter, when we knew we were unlikely to have official visitors. But the rest of the time there were a number of officials from Washington who would visit for a few months. We particularly were happy to welcome Chris Clark, a very knowledgeable China expert from the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research. In terms of high-level visitors, certainly we never had a Congressional delegation, though I did send a number of messages to Washington making the case that if Shenyang was important enough for us to establish a Consulate, it was important enough to receive high-level visitors. But members of Congress just wanted to go to Beijing, and then Shanghai or Guangzhou. We did have a visit from the governor of Vermont at one point. Also, the state of Illinois was quite active in terms of having an office in Shenyang and occasionally we'd have an Illinois state official, though not the governor in my time there. The most important visitor we had was the American ambassador, who would come about once a year. That was Jim Lilley for my first year, and then Stapleton Roy, who

visited the Ice Festival in Harbin and a Rime Festival in Jilin City, as well as our Consulate in Shenyang.

The Ice Festival was the most famous cultural event in the Northeast. There would be an international ice sculpture competition, in which American teams would compete along with teams from many other countries. And the Chinese authorities there did a great job of hospitality. We went on horse-drawn sleigh rides on the ice and snow. We saw what they call the "winter swimmers" in the frozen Songhua River. Workers had cut a swimming-pool sized hole in the ice, and to our astonishment, in sub-zero weather, 7 or 8 men and women in very skimpy bathing suits strolled out onto the ice, slid into the pool, and swam around casually for 10 minutes. Even more astonishing, they climbed out and walked over to us foreign visitors and talked with us, as though it were a warm summer day. We were wearing heavy jackets; the temperature was well below freezing. The swimmers told us they swam every day of the year, rain or shine, hot or cold. .

Q: Wow. Did they at least have, you know, oil on their body? You know, sometimes you hear about these Americans called Polar Bears who go in the ocean in winter.

HOLBROOK: Well, not that I noticed.

Q: Wow.

HOLBROOK: If they did it was transparent, I guess, and didn't notice.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Okay.

HOLBROOK: Anyway, the Harbin ice festival was well-known in the foreign community in China and if we were going to have an important visitor in the winter the only chance of doing so would be to tie it into the Harbin ice festival; there was no such event in Shenyang. Actually, in my time as Consul General, we were invited to and attended several local festivals, including a Rime festival in Jilin City, a flower festival in Anshan, and a Korean culture festival in Yanji, in Jilin Province, where a lot of ethnic Koreans lived.

Perhaps the most spectacular, other than the Ice Festival, was the Korean festival in Yanji, in Jilin Province. Again, several members of our Consulate and their spouses were invited to visit Yanji and see various ceremonies and sports events, including Korean-style wrestling, where the wrestlers had one leg tied to their opponent's leg! From Yanji, we were taken by Land Rover on a drive of about three hours to the top of a volcanic crater. At the top, there was a beautiful lake about 1000 feet below, a crater lake. We were told that the border between China and North Korea passed through the center of the lake, and that the small figures that we could make out on the other side of the crater were North Koreans.

Q: Yes. Alright, well it sounds like we're approaching the end of this tour. Unless there are other sorts of recollections.

HOLBROOK: There was one other important political development we reported on, and that was China's relationship with South Korea. In 1992, China established diplomatic relations with South Korea. Now, this was kind of a shot across the bow with North Korea, a signal that whatever special relations Beijing had with Pyongyang did not prevent them from also dealing with South Korea, mainly for economic reasons. China subsidized North Korea's economy, but hoped for a far more balanced relationship with South Korea's booming economy. Finally, after my departure, China allowed South Korea to set up what was really a rival Consulate in Shenyang, a rival to the North Korean Consulate.

Q: Now, then, as you're approaching the end of your tour in Shenyang, what are you thinking about as a follow-on post?

HOLBROOK: I was looking for a position in Japan. In those days, US relations with Japan, both political and economic, were more important than our new ties with China. I didn't have any Japanese language background, but I noted that there was one position that didn't require Japanese fluency, I bid on and got that position, the Pol/External Chief position in the political section.

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Q: Today is March 18, and we're resuming our interview with Morton Holbrook as he starts his new tour in Japan. Morton, when did you arrive there?

HOLBROOK: Let's see. I left Shenyang after our July 4, 1993 reception and my family and I took some home leave in Kentucky. Meanwhile, former Vice President Walter Mondale had just been appointed and confirmed as US ambassador to Japan. I was fortunate that, as I was consulting in the State Department, probably in August of 1993, he was being sworn in as our new ambassador. So I attended the swearing in ceremony, over which Vice President Gore presided. I was able to have a nice conversation with both Gore and Mondale; I explained that I had been assigned to Mondale's staff in Tokyo. A few weeks and my family and I arrived at the U.S. embassy in Tokyo.

Q: Very good. Okay. And you were head of the political external unit there?

HOLBROOK: Yes. We used that abbreviation: pol/external chief. And let's see, initially someone else was the deputy in the political section, but then he transferred out so I became the deputy in the political section also. There were three parts of the political section: external (that is, foreign policy), internal, and military, the pol-mil part. David Straub was the head of the Internal part, and David Shear was the head of pol-mil. And Larry Farrar, a real Japan hand, formerly Consul General (in Osaka, I think) was the political counselor.

Q: And so, within the section then, what were the particular things that you were responsible for?

HOLBROOK: Well, as I mentioned my job was the only one in the political section that did not require fluency in Japanese language -- and I later decided I did not want any more jobs in which I was not language-qualified. But my view out of Shenyang was that someone would get that job and why not myself? Japan was and remains a highly-desirable post in our foreign service, with lots of bidders on jobs there.

And the reason my job did not require language fluency was that it entailed dealing entirely with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I discovered soon that the people in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs not only spoke English but spoke it exceptionally well. Many had been trained overseas and had received degrees from top schools such as Harvard and Oxford. So I discovered that not being a language qualified officer was not a handicap at all in dealing with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I also thought that the Japanese were setting a good example for us: our Foreign Service Institute does a good job of training diplomats to the 3/3 level for "full professional use," but what we need is to go higher, either at FSI, or by enrolling in a foreign university and taking courses in a foreign language.

In terms of living in Japan, obviously it was an impediment not to speak Japanese, even though there are many Japanese in Tokyo who speak English. I should say, one of the highlights of my time in Japan was in sports. There was an organization called the Japan Handball Association, and I joined that association and had perhaps hundreds of games of handball at the Toyocho YMCA in Tokyo, and another YMCA and other clubs in Tokyo, as well as at the one court located inside the US Embassy housing compound. I met a lot of Japanese players, some of whom spoke English and many of whom did not. I did learn a keyword in handball, subarashi, which in handball jargon meant "good shot." Through the handball connection I met many Japanese that I might not otherwise have known, including players from the Tsukiji fish market and the Roppongi bar district. We had frequent tournaments, and I have several trophies from my time there, though most often I was runner up rather than winner!

So, anyway, my job was dealing with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We had a nickname for ourselves; it was called the Tin Cup Brigade. Can you guess what that might mean?

Q: Well, I imagine you were always the ones to be going over to the foreign ministry, asking them to do something for you.

HOLBROOK: That's exactly right. We would say: "wouldn't you like to contribute to this worthy cause?" We were trying to prod Japan into having a more active foreign policy, and also to join us, to support US foreign policy priorities. And at that time, the number one leading worthy cause was the Middle East peace process, MEPP. And there were other worthy causes too, such as earthquake relief in Central America.

The typical Japanese response to our various requests would be, how much are you contributing? And after some consideration on their part, they would usually make a contribution. Also during my tour, Japan hosted a major Middle East peace process

conference, featuring representatives of several Middle East governments and organizations. The Japanese are past masters at hosting international events, and had superb facilities for the occasion, which the United States also attended, of course.

We also had a state visit by President Clinton while I was in Tokyo. This was in 1996, but was originally scheduled for 1995. In the summer of 1995, an advance team visited the Embassy, a pre-advance team. Then in the fall there was an advance team, closer in time to the scheduled visit in October or November. But then, only a few days before the visit itself, the Congress failed to pass a budget and the US Government shut down for 21 days! This was the first extensive US Government shutdown, and it happened only a few days or perhaps a week before the scheduled state visit to Tokyo, when there were literally already hundreds of Secret Service agents and other Washington visitors on the ground in Tokyo. So we were all wondering what's going to happen, both in terms of the Clinton visit and in terms of our paychecks!

The visit was originally scheduled for four days. Suddenly the first word we had from Washington was to collapse the visit to two days. We had already meticulously set up this four-day schedule, but then, following orders, cut out enough events to make it a two-day schedule. But then came the final word: postpone the visit! So that was it; the visit was postponed until 1996. Meanwhile there had already been significant expenditures for the advance teams; the President's car and the President's helicopter had been flown to Tokyo, and there were hundreds of officials from Washington DC already on the ground in Tokyo. And we discovered that US embassies overseas were regarded as essential for national security, so US Embassy Tokyo continued to work during the government shutdown.

Q: Wow. So, in other words, literally all the planes and so on, the advance team arrived and went back?

HOLBROOK: Right, right. All that expenditure, all that work, just down the tubes.

Q: Now, aside from this presidential visit, we certainly have a lot of dialogue with the Japanese on external issues. What were the principal ones that you found yourself going to the MFA or contacting your counterpart?

HOLBROOK: Yes, good question. I already mentioned the Middle East Peace Process. Another key task we had was to coordinate US and Japanese policy towards China. And of course, I had just come from my post in China, so my natural inclination was to get to know the Japanese officials who dealt with Chinese affairs, which I did. By this time, the Tiananmen event was three years in the past. The Japanese had been the first country to move towards re-establishing normal ties with China after Tiananmen. And of course, we watched carefully how that went. And then, we finally did so ourselves, but you could say there was a probation period for us in terms of watching what China was going to do, what direction it was going to go in, so we were watching closely how the Japanese and Chinese were getting along. There were a few issues, including World War II issues, but generally speaking, Japan and China resumed a normal relationship.

US relations with North Korea were of course an important issue. The US engaged in negotiations with North Korea, and actually reached an agreement called the Agreed Framework. We would support the US negotiating team when they came through Tokyo on the way to Beijing, where they met with the North Koreans. Our job was to keep the Japanese informed about the talks, and also to enlist Japan's financial support for the agreement, which entailed provision to North Korea of light-water nuclear reactors (less likely to be used to make nuclear weapons) to replace an existing North Korean nuclear reactor at a place called Yongbyon.

In fact, at one point, one of the officers in my section actually was assigned to North Korea to be the political advisor to a team of technical experts from the United States who were overseeing the dismantlement of the Yongbyon nuclear reactor. Our officer did good work! At one point the Koreans had invited the American team to a big celebration of Kim Il-sung's birthday. And our officer correctly advised the technicians not to go, not to get involved in any celebrations honoring Kim Il-sung. In the end, the Agreed Framework fell apart, with each side accusing the other side of cheating.

Q: Right, right.

Now, let me just ask you while we're on this subject, did the Japanese discuss with you what their concerns were regarding North Korea?

HOLBROOK: Oh, sure, yes. They're concerned about being attacked by North Korean nuclear weapons.

Q: Well, certainly by that, but did they discuss any of their other issues with North Korea, you know, the famous kidnappings of Japanese citizens and other frictions that arose.

HOLBROOK: Yes. We were certainly aware of those issues. But front and center was the nuclear weapons problem. It got so tense on the Korean Peninsula that I know at one point there were actually evacuation plans for Americans in South Korea to come to Japan. And there was concern, of course, also about an attack on Japan. And then, of course, as I mentioned, after the Agreed Framework was concluded, it turned out that the North Koreans were cheating on it, although later the North Koreans also accused us of cheating on it. And there was a certain logic there because we had promised to supply North Korea with fuel oil pending construction of a light water reactor, and funding for fuel oil ran into problems with the Republicans in Congress. So, there were delays on our part. We were not really cheating; we just had the usual U.S. Government inefficiencies in getting our act together, whereas they were actually cheating on the ground and developing nuclear weapons.

Q: Was your part of the political section, the external part, did you do any of the work on some of the international economic accords, or was that separated out to the econ section?

HOLBROOK: No, that was the Economic Section of the Embassy. In those days, the North Korean nuclear issue was very important, but another continuing US concern was the US-Japan trade deficit and our desire to open up Japan's markets to American products. My recollection is we had a major success when the Japanese finally allowed American apples to be imported into Japan. And, soon enough, American rice came in and we were sort of perturbed when later, in response to our call to provide humanitarian assistance to North Korea, they sent the American rice there. At one point, a minister in the Japanese Government actually said that Japanese stomachs were different from American stomachs; they were not used to these foreign products, rice or apples or whatever.

One economic aspect of life in Japan was the dollar-yen ratio went down to its lowest point, to 79 to a dollar. We felt stretched tight by prices in Japan, but fortunately we had access to US Government facilities at our bases in Yokosuka and Yokota, and we'd drive there and spend $300 or $500 at the PX to save money. We also had a Cost-of-Living Allowance while in Tokyo, but discovered that the allowance was not as good as a strong dollar might have been.

We also dealt with issues involving U.S. bases in Japan, in Okinawa, particularly. And we had one terrible incident of a rape by American soldiers. And Ambassador Mondale did a fine job of expressing our own sorrow and outrage but preserving the overall US-Japan relationship from those who called for closing US bases and ending close relations with the United States. And aside from that, the political-military section was always handling the daily frictions that might arise from keeping so many troops there.

Q: Did you frequently talk to the MFA, your counterparts on UN issues? On votes and things like that?

HOLBROOK: I don't recall us discussing UN issues, no. No. I mean, I think later at some point we were advocating that Japan be a member of the Security Council, but not in my time, no.

Q: Okay. No, that's fine. Some of the typical external issues would also relate to the-issues of navigation and China's claims in the South China Sea and so on; had those become major issues yet when you were there?

HOLBROOK: No, they had not. Certainly later, and continuing today, Japan and China dispute ownership of the Senkaku Islands, called Diaoyu Islands in Chinese. That was simply not on the radar screen in those days. I think China was just starting to really ramp up economically and wasn't too concerned, wasn't paying much attention to those issues. If you'd asked the Chinese, they would say yes, those are ours, and then there'd be silence and nothing was going on. As for the South China Sea also, probably even more so, things were quiet. Certainly, I don't recall any time that we ever went over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to express concern or to make it clear that we considered the Senkakus to be part of the area administered by Japan that's covered by our defense treaty. But the issue was not on the radar screen during my time in Japan.

Q: Then, on the other hand, what did the Japanese come to you about?

HOLBROOK: Well, with China hands in Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we would just discuss US and Japan's China policy and where we thought China was going.

Q: Are there other issues that I have missed that were the subject of your attention when you were there?

HOLBROOK: I think that about gets it. I wrote down some things before we started here, and those are the ones that occur to me.

Q: Now, did your spouse end up working there, and how did you handle the education issue while you were there, for your kids?

HOLBROOK: No, Shao Pei did not work in Tokyo. Our kids went to ASIJ, the American School in Japan. Our youngest child, our daughter Kristen, also attended a pre-school. The U.S. has a wonderful housing compound right in the center of Tokyo, a 10 minute walk from the embassy, and it had a pre-school, so she attended there and then went on to ASIJ. And we had two boys. Allen went three years at ASIJ and Stephen went to another international school called Nishimachi for one year and then transferred to ASIJ. So, ASIJ is a nice, international school, though a long bus ride from our Embassy housing compound. The compound, I'm sure, is one of the finest facilities we have in the world, featuring three apartment towers, two rows of townhouses, tennis courts, a swimming pool, and a convenience store, as well as a pre-school and a handball/racquetball court.

Q: In the external section, did you employ local Japanese as well? Was there an institutional memory with locally employed staff?

HOLBROOK: There were a lot of local employees in the embassy, but I don't recall that we were relying on them much in the political section. Aside from myself, most of my fellow officers were Japan hands who had had prior assignments in Japan.

Q: And did you have the opportunity, or did you try to learn Japanese while you were there?

HOLBROOK: Well, I did, yes. The post language program was a good program and I progressed to a modest level. It helped that I knew a lot of Chinese characters, and Japanese of course borrowed those characters and gave them a Japanese pronunciation (as well as retaining a Chinese pronunciation). But the characters did not always match. On our first visit to the American School in Japan, we tried to take a light rail train back to our Embassy. There was a train station nearby, so we decided to walk over there -- but we couldn't find it. So I wrote the Chinese characters for train station on a piece of paper and showed it to a Japanese pedestrian. They gave me a very strange look. Well, it turned out those characters meant fire station in Japanese! They thought it was very strange that my wife and I were trying to find a fire station.

Q: Oh, dear. So, now as you're moving through the tour in Tokyo, are you thinking about where you're going to go next? Because it's a three-year tour in Tokyo?

HOLBROOK: Well, it was a three-year tour and I had successfully engineered a fourth year there, and then suddenly our embassy in Beijing sent me an email asking if I would be interested in coming to Beijing. They had an assignment in the political section that had fallen through. And the answer was yes. So, I ended up staying the regular three years in Tokyo, canceling my extension in Tokyo, and suddenly there I was back in Beijing. Actually, it was the same position; I became the deputy in the political section and the pol/external chief. From pol/external Tokyo to pol/ external Beijing.

Q: And so, you arrive back in Beijing in '99?

HOLBROOK: So, that was summer of '96, August/September of '96.

Q: Alright, so now you're back in Beijing. The '90s is still a period of time with China where the growth in relations is still relatively positive, we're still- there weren't, at least as I recall, a lot of friction, so what were your key responsibilities in the political external section?

HOLBROOK: In Pol/External we were trying to get the Chinese essentially to sign on to a whole bunch of international treaties especially concerning arms control and non-proliferation. There were reports about Chinese assistance to Pakistan and to Iran in terms of nuclear weapons components or precursors, and we wanted to stop that if we could. So we asked China to sign various treaties and join something called the Australia Group, a group of countries pledged to keep a lid on WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction), including nuclear weapons and components.

On the overall relationship there was just a gradual step-up in the level of visitors, U.S. visitors to Beijing and going back the other way too. Again, this was a gradual restoration of normal relations following the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989. In sequence, Under Secretary Tom Pickering came out. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich. Vice President Gore. And then, in June-July 1998, President Clinton made a state visit to Beijing.

Prior to the Clinton visit, we're considering the sensitivities. You know, there'd been no US state visit since Tiananmen, and we all knew that the Chinese always have a welcoming ceremony for state visitors in Tiananmen Square. And the Great Hall of the People, where official meetings and receptions are held, is located right on the square. And we all knew that, no matter how we tried to emphasize the benefits of better US-China relations, the press would focus on, and comment on, President Clinton being greeted in the Square where Chinese soldiers massacred hundreds of Chinese students and others.

But at that point, we felt the relationship had progressed and that China had clearly shown that reform and opening was still their policy line. They were not heading back to the dark ages, not heading back to the Cultural Revolution, and therefore, we thought it was appropriate for President Clinton to make a state visit to meet China's new President, Jiang Zemin, and it turned out to be, in my view, a highly successful visit. Jiang Zemin, by the way, had been hand-picked by Deng Xiaoping to be China's top leader because he was in Shanghai at the time of the June 4, 1989 incident, and was not involved in that incident.

After Clinton's arrival, the first event was the welcoming ceremony at Tiananmen, and, as we had anticipated, the Western media had fulsome coverage of that ceremony and did not fail to note that it was the same place where China's army had fired on demonstrators nine years previously. And then there was a meeting in the Great Hall of the People, sort of the small group meeting of the top leaders, which I did not attend. It was followed by a short press conference which, to everyone's surprise, was televised live inside China, although we didn't know it in advance; we had concentrated our efforts on persuading the Chinese to televise live Clinton's appearance at Beijing University.

But, at that press conference, which I attended, Jiang Zemin quite unexpectedly took the initiative to raise Tibet with President Clinton. We were astounded. Now, Jiang had his own style as leader; quite unpredictable, I can say that. He sometimes would sing a song. Or recite poetry, American poetry. And he raised the very sensitive Tibet issue, essentially saying this was an internal affair and that there were no human rights problems in Tibet. Clinton, of course, took advantage of the opening and kind of lectured Jiang, saying "You're on the wrong side of history" in your treatment of Tibet and Tibetan culture. This was not supposed to be the format for a discussion of bilateral issues; it was supposed to be kind of an informal press conference, very brief, maybe two or three questions to be raised and then they'd head off to lunch. But instead we had this riveting unplanned dialogue between Clinton and Jiang Zemin on Tibet, one of the most sensitive issues in the relationship.

Then the president did go out to Beijing University. I and many others from our Embassy accompanied the whole entourage that went there. Clinton is so good at public diplomacy. We were in a large assembly hall, with hundreds of Chinese students. The students were not shy; they asked him sensitive questions, why are you selling arms to Taiwan, why is America trying to contain China, and so on. Clinton answered in an open and friendly way, making a good impression with his approachability, while giving very accurate questions about policy. Accurate but not combative; you could see that he was completely at ease in this kind of dialogue, certainly a dialogue one would never hear between students and a Chinese leader. And as we left the university, the students cheered and followed us outside, where many were climbing trees to get a glimpse of the American President. It was really a highlight, I thought, of Clinton's visit to China, and, as it turned out, of US relations with China. There was even a draft document setting out a "strategic partnership" between the US and China, that, however, did not get signed.

And the president went on, I think, to Shanghai and Guangzhou. And at the end of the visit, to show U.S. support for Hong Kong, Air Force One became the first aircraft to land at the newly opened international airport in Hong Kong. This was probably not something that Beijing was not too pleased with, but it symbolized that the United States supported Hong Kong, one year after the "handover" back to China, which resulted in Hong Kong retaining a measure of independence, under the "one country, two systems" agreement that China and the United Kingdom had signed several years previously.

Q: Now, while we're in 1998, that was also the year when both Pakistan and India had nuclear tests, and there was a great deal of friction and concern that this may spiral out of control. Did you have things that you were told to say to the Chinese?

HOLBROOK: Sure. We leaned on the Chinese, trying to persuade them to use all the influence that they had with regard to Pakistan to persuade them not to make nuclear weapons and also to continue to have peaceful relations with India. Yes, that was a major issue for the political section at that time.

Q: So, now, did you have a three-year tour there, '96 to '99?

HOLBROOK: I did. When I went there, I was taking over the last two years of an officer whose tour had been curtailed, so my term in the political section came to a close in the summer of 1998, when another officer was scheduled to replace me. But my son Allen had just finished his junior year in high school, so I looked around for a way to remain on the staff in Beijing so he could graduate from the International School of Beijing.

Fortunately, the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) section of the Embassy was willing to take me on, so I departed as pol/external chief and went to work for FCS, whose goal is to help American businesses export to China. This was a very different job from being in the Political Section and was actually very enjoyable.

I became the FCS officer in charge of helping US companies enforce their intellectual property rights in China. And that was, and remains, a contentious issue in our relations with China. I worked with the American business community; they had their own organization at the time called the CACC, the China Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition, composed of many of the American companies doing business in China. As I recall, Proctor and Gamble played the leading role in the CACC. We would have regular meetings, maybe a lunch meeting, and the US company representatives were so concerned about their discussions that whenever any waiter came into the room, we wouldn't say anything. Maybe the rooms were bugged, I don't know. The business representatives were very, very cautious about discussing their business practices and their ways of avoiding getting ripped off by fake products.

I think their rule of thumb was that when they introduced a new product in China, they had only a few months to sell as much as they could in China before a knock-off product would appear on the market there. So, I worked with them and at the same time I made, as I recall, visits to 10 different Chinese enforcement agencies located in and around

Beijing, both national agencies and Beijing city organizations whose purpose was to enforce the IPR laws on the books, on behalf of both Chinese and American companies. The existence of these agencies, in every province and large city in China, is not well-known, and their effectiveness certainly varies a lot. But they do exist, and to the extent American companies spent time and attention on using them, they could be effective. I went one time to a ceremony where the American company that manufactures Beanie Babies -- do you recall Beanie Babies?

Q: Sure.

HOLBROOK: They were made by a US company called Ty Inc. Ty Inc paid attention to the Chinese enforcement bureaucracy. And at one point the Chinese confiscated something like 200,000 fake Beanie Babies and burned them up. And the Ty Company had a ceremony where they presented awards to the Chinese enforcement agency that was involved. I attended on behalf of the US Embassy. I asked the Ty Inc representative why they didn't make a public announcement praising the enforcement action. The response was that the event was too close to Christmas time, and the US company didn't want to publicize the image of 200,000 Beanie Babies burning up at Christmastime – even fake ones!

Also, on IPR, I recall that the resident American attorney who represented Proctor and Gamble was quite active in enforcing his company's IPR. He told me he traveled all around China buying shampoo and actually tasting a small amount to see if it was genuine! This was really a hands-on lawyer, I thought.

I also recall the Motorola company had a vigorous program to protect IPR. They maintained a list of about 1,000 people engaged in protecting against counterfeit products in agencies all over China; these were Chinese bureaucrats. Motorola paid attention to these people. They would send a card on Chinese New Year. Any time the agencies took action to enforce IPR, Motorola would place an ad in a local newspaper praising their action. Plus, Motorola maintained a staff of both American and Chinese attorneys in Beijing whose job was to enforce IPR.

So there was a constant battle to protect IPR, but a battle that the American companies could win, or at least make progress in, particularly if they devoted resources on the ground to IPR protection. FCS supported them in our meetings with Chinese authorities. We also made the case that IPR wasn't just an American issue. It was also in the interest of Chinese companies not to be undermined by fake products.

The other part of my duties there was I was the "complaints" person. If a U.S. businessman walked in and had a complaint about business conditions in China, I was the one they talked to. So, then I would draft a letter, maybe signed from me, or the head of the FCS office in China, or, in a few cases from our front office, from the Ambassador Sasser or the Deputy Chief of Mission, concerning the US business person's complaint. The main issue raised in those days concerned joint venture partners. Initially, US companies doing business in China needed to set up a joint venture with a Chinese

partner, though later it became possible to have a wholly-owned foreign company. But in those days there were all kinds of problems. Essentially the joint venture partner would often be a huge Chinese company with, say, 2,000 employees of whom 200 were actually working. And they wanted to load as many employees as possible onto the joint venture with the American company—which actually wanted to hire as few employees as possible. So, you had an instant conflict just between the productivity of the American versus the Chinese companies.

So, I would do what I could to try to smooth out these disputes, particularly when it was a case of financial impropriety being alleged against the Chinese partner, you know, allegedly stealing, not trade secrets but money on the American side.

Q: Okay. So, back to the Foreign Commercial Service, were movies, CDs and music also major issues?

HOLBROOK: Oh, yes, major issues. In those days there was something called the Silk Market, S-I-L-K. And it was actually right next to my apartment in the diplomatic compound, though it was outside the compound. It was famous or infamous as the center of counterfeit products of all sorts, movie tapes, Beanie Babies, and many other products. And there was a famous incident when the US Trade Representative, Charlene Barshefsky, came to China for talks with Chinese authorities about IPR enforcement.

Q: Yes, correct.

HOLBROOK Well, she bought some Beanie Babies in the Silk Market, apparently not realizing they were knock-offs. And when she went back to the U.S., U.S. Customs inspected and confiscated the Beanie Babies. The American media had a field day with that story; the chief guardian of IPR on behalf of American companies getting caught carrying fake products into the United States.

Q: Right.

HOLBROOK: As a result of that episode, I drafted a notice to be provided to all US official visitors, actually for all US visitors, warning them about buying fake products in China, particularly in the Silk Market in Beijing, noting that purchasing these products and carrying them back to the US violated Chinese, International, and US law.

Q: But in general, it was a time- the period you were there for the one year with Foreign Commercial Service, was a time of expanding U.S. commercial relations with China, if I recall correctly.

HOLBROOK: Well, yes, just, yes, exactly. It was. You know, with all the frictions that that implies, but again, on the whole, despite problems with IPR, U.S. businesses felt that they had to be in the China market. Every major company looked around, they saw their competitors going out there, they saw that huge domestic market in China.

Also in my time in FCS, I was the embassy representative on the American Chamber of Commerce Law Committee. At that time, the National People's Congress (NPC) was drafting laws affecting foreign commerce. They would sometimes ask the American Chamber to comment on their draft laws. I recall being involved in formulating Amcham comments on a draft contract law. Of course, the NPC didn't necessarily accept all of our comments, but we thought it was a measure of China's progress and growing openness that we were given the opportunity to comment on draft legislation.

Q: Now, since you had the one year in the Foreign Commercial Service, you would have had to be looking ahead at where you're going to be next at that point.

HOLBROOK: Right, right. Let's see. I was interested in being Consul General again at a China post, but my timing wasn't good, there were no positions coming open in 1999. However, a colleague of mine had previously been sent for a year to the Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank in New York. He told me how nice it was there and that if I was looking for an assignment or looking for a year somewhere that was a good place. So, I did; I wrote to them, and at that time they had a position called the "State Department Fellow" at the Council on Foreign Relations. I think now it's called the Cyrus Vance fellow. There was also a CIA fellow, three military fellows, and a journalism fellow. So I accepted that assignment to be the State Department fellow at the CFR.

Q: Interesting.

HOLBROOK: And we State Department fellows always felt that we were the, kind of the outsider because the other US Government fellows got better allowances. The military fellows got to live on a base in Brooklyn. I had to pay my own rent in New Jersey.

Q: Today is August 14, 2019. We're resuming our interview with Morton Holbrook in New York City at the Council on Foreign Relations. And Morton, what year was that?

HOLBROOK: This was 1999-2000.

Q: Okay, great.

HOLBROOK: I got there in August of '99 and I left roughly July/August of 2000.

Q: Okay. When you arrived there, who was supposed to be your supervisor?

HOLBROOK: There was a person and an office at the Foreign Service Institute who handled the 50 or so FSOs who received "academic training" assignments that year. I also later sent a report to FSI about what I'd done. Essentially, I was detailed to the Council on Foreign Relations, which is like a think tank. There are no classes there, there are just lots of seminars, often involving a breakfast, lunch or dinner meeting or reception on important topics and featuring important outside speakers. I mean heads of state, cabinet members, members of Congress, and so on. Joe Biden made a presentation while I was

there. Tony Blair. And what I discovered while there, when I arranged for seminars myself, was that when you call people and invite them to speak at the Council on Foreign Relations, the answer is going to be yes.

Q: Now, what I was driving at earlier, though, was who set our work requirements? In other words, what were you expected to do during the year you were there?

HOLBROOK: Oh, that's a good question. I don't recall that I had any work requirements other than to go there. And what I did mainly was set up seminars on China's compliance with international law. I invited the State Department legal advisor, for example. I invited our chief arms control negotiator, Robert Einhorn, who did a lot of negotiating with China on arms control issues, on non-proliferation issues, I should say. I had the head of the China desk there. I had probably five or six seminars about China and international law.

So, it was really a great assignment. I continue to have contact with the Council on Foreign Relations today. I'm working right now with the Council on a series of lectures on U.S. foreign policy offered every semester. They will schedule perhaps seven different interactive seminars with seven different experts, some of them on the council staff and others from outside. They make presentations and students who are on-line in many universities can interact and ask questions. I'll be doing that at Ky Wesleyan College this coming fall semester.

Q: Well now, it sounds like, at least while you were there you were able to use your expertise in China quite a bit and the period of time you were there was relatively close to when China joins the WTO (World Trade Organization); it's only about two years later.

HOLBROOK: Right, right.

Q: So, I'm wondering, was there a lot of back and forth on the issues related to what China would need to do to get into the WTO?

HOLBROOK: At the Council, we didn't focus on the WTO but certainly, I mean, China had just joined and the question of China's compliance with the WTO wasn't really clear yet. Subsequently, I covered that subject when I was later teaching in China, and we went over the record of China's compliance with its WTO obligations.

Of course, some people say communist countries never live up to their pledges, but if you go onto the WTO website you find cases where China won, and cases where China lost, and at least in several cases where China lost it appears that they did comply with the unfavorable ruling. Overall I would say China has a mixed record of compliance with WTO decisions.

Q: Had the issues that currently plague U.S.-China trade relations, you know, lopsided trade balance and China's forced requirement on U.S. companies to share intellectual property, had those become issues as far back as when you were in the council?

HOLBROOK: Yes, even before that. The question of the imbalance in trade was a longstanding question, and under the Clinton Administration also, when I was at the U.S. embassy in '96-'98, there was a trade imbalance then, and the embassy was constantly making the point, which proved prescient, that this imbalance was, in the long run, not politically sustainable in the United States.

At the same time, on intellectual property rights, the issue of forced technology transfer had not raised its head really. My last year there, as I mentioned, I worked with the Foreign Commercial Service, and the area I worked in was intellectual property rights. r- I met with American companies frequently, concerned about fake products, and that was their main concern, rather than technology transfer.

Q: Now, so back to the Council on Foreign Relations, what were the key issues back then, 1999 to 2000, that you found the council particularly concerned about?

HOLBROOK: There's no particular focus for what the council does. It's got experts everywhere, area experts, subject experts on its resident staff. I was in what you could call a small China shop or department. There was an economist named Elizabeth Economy who has written a lot of books about the Chinese economy. Paul Heer, the CIA Fellow, was also a China expert and later the National Intelligence Officer for East Asia. I worked with Professor Jerome Cohen, the leading US expert on China's legal system. He had three hats; he was a practicing lawyer, he was on the Council, and he was a professor first at Harvard, then at NYU. When I was at CFR, Professor Cohen and I would take the subway down to New York University Law School once a week and I would attend his seminar on Chinese law.

Again, the focus of what I was doing was on China's compliance with international law and sort of as a tentative conclusion, I gave them a grade of about a B or a B-. Compliance with agreements where they had a clear interest in doing so was pretty good, and initially that would have included WTO cases. On the other hand, China also signed a lot of international human rights conventions and obviously, that was lip service, especially in terms of freedom of speech or freedom of the press and religion. Those rights don't exist in China. So, we were still trying to shine a spotlight on the general attitude towards international law.

For a starter, China did join the UN. China used to, in the old days of the Cultural Revolution, have total disregard if not contempt for Western law, although China's initial legal system came from the Soviet Union, that's kind of the West too, from China's perspective. So, the whole process of China opening to the outside world included signing up for a lot of international commitments, both treaties and joining international organizations like the UN, the IMF (International Monetary Fund), and lots of other organizations. That was the focus of what I was doing at the council, shining a spotlight on that process, you could say.

Q: Now, every once in a while, the Council on Foreign Relations through their journal will choose a specific topic and then have multiple scholars from multiple disciplinary fields all discuss it.

HOLBROOK: Right.

Q: So, that was what I was wondering in terms of the year you were there, you know, sort of the future of the environment or future of the dollar as the international currency, or you know, these sorts of things.

HOLBROOK: Yes. Right. Between Foreign Affairs Magazine and the Council, there was kind of a dividing line. The daily goings on in the council are not related to the journal, and so, I also was not directly connected with the journal. So, when the journal had a focus on something, that didn't affect what those of us on the staff at the council were doing.

Q: Okay. But then, separately there was no similar overarching activity at the council itself. They continued in their various fields.

HOLBROOK: Yes. That's correct, that's correct. Yes. And extremely broad fields. When I later taught in China, as well in the United States, I also taught my students to go to the cfr.org website for information on just about any foreign policy topic.

Q: Did you find when you were teaching then that the students were actually allowed to go to these outside places?

HOLBROOK: Yes. I taught in China from 2007 to 2012 at a university, and it was pretty casual, pretty free and easy. I can't recall having any trouble getting to outside websites. I was able to order whatever textbooks I wanted. Now, that has changed. It in part changed because, you know, self-censorship. People on the faculty now know you can get in trouble for treading on sensitive topics in China.

When I was teaching in China, I recall one of my fellow foreign teachers put up a big banner kind of praising the Dalai Lama on his office door, and someone else said to him you really need to take that down. If you're going to be teaching here you can't be seen as someone who supported Tibetan independence. But on the other hand, the textbooks that I used were American textbooks written by American professors and they had very full discussions of Chinese human rights abuses, including what happened in Tiananmen in 1989. And I would go over that with the students. I would give as objective a view as I might in the United States.

Q: Well, we will come back to that because that's coming in your oral history, but I just want, yes, I was just curious while you were at the council.

And then the other aspect of the council I'm also curious about is did the relationships that, you know, the professional relationships you started at the council, were you able to continue them? Were they valuable later on in your career?

HOLBROOK: Yes. In pre-Covid days, there would be an annual meeting of Council fellows, to which I would be invited. I would talk with old friends there and meet new ones, and these would be future resources for my courses or for the Owensboro World Affairs Council meetings. So my year at CFR was really a nice experience that has had lasting benefits.

Q: Now, one other thing. Obviously, the council exists through grants and donations and so on, were you- did they involve you in any of the development or fundraising?

HOLBROOK: No, not at all, not at all.

Q: Now then, the other thing to mention is, as soon as you get there in late summer/early fall of 1999, you're going to have to look at the bid list again.

HOLBROOK: Right, right, yes. That's correct, yes.

Q: So, what was going on as you began to get yourself settled in New York and you're already having to think about your next assignment; what was going through your head at that time?

HOLBROOK: Yes. Well, I was looking for an appropriate China-focused assignment, a China assignment. I recall also at one point when I went over to the United Nations, I was supposed to see Richard Holbrooke, who was our ambassador then, and I had met him back in the days when he was the youngest assistant secretary in the State Department. So, I'm looking for an assignment, and I was supposed to have an interview with him. He had a reputation for being late for meetings and being very undisciplined, and sure enough, I showed up in his office, and he didn't! Somehow, he was going off on a trip or something so the meeting didn't occur then and it never rejoined, and so whatever chance I had for an assignment at the United Nations, it didn't work out.

So, eventually I ended up as Economic Counselor in Manila. It wasn't my first choice and yet, as it turned out, we ended up extending my tour in Manila! You never really know in the Foreign Service how things are going to work out until you get to post.

Q: Right. Well, you're still in the East Asia Pacific bureau, and what position was it going to be?

HOLBROOK: Well, I was economic counselor. In the Foreign Service, my "cone" or area of specialty was as a political officer, so my assignment as Economic Counselor was a little bit unusual. But my first assignment overseas also had been as an economic officer in Taiwan. I'd majored in economics in college, so I had some qualifications there. So I arrived there in Manila with mixed feelings, especially after my first journey in the

Philippines, from the airport to our temporary housing. An Embassy van picked us up, and as soon as we got in the van all these street people were literally knocking on the car windows, asking for help. This was not a good first impression. And my initial thought was, this is the poorest country I've ever served in. I mean, it was poorer than China when I got there in 1979.

Q: Wow.

HOLBROOK: At least in terms of the prominence of poverty. There were beggars on the streets and beggars at the airport. And again, though, it turned out to be a good assignment.

Q: Well now, when you arrived there in, I guess, the fall of 2000, how many people in your family are now still accompanying you?

HOLBROOK: Well, we had sent off our oldest son, Allen, to college at Vanderbilt University in 1999 just before the rest of us moved to New York for my assignment at the Council on Foreign Relations. So my wife and I had two children with us in New York and Manila, Stephen and Kristen.

Q: Alright, so, now your kids go to an international school or to an American school?

HOLBROOK: There were two prominent international schools in Manila; one of them called the International School of Manila; the other was the Brent International School. Now, the Brent school was south of Manila and it involved a 40-minute bus ride. But it had a brand-new campus and my kids went there and fell in love with the place the first day. It was just a beautiful tropical, open campus, filled with flowers, with all kinds of track and field facilities, swimming pool, everything you could possibly want in an international school. And the other school had an older, inner-city campus. So even though it was a much shorter bus ride, the kids really liked the Brent International School. Stephen graduated from that school, after three years there. My daughter went there four years, graduated from the middle school and then went on through 9th grade there. So, schooling in Manila was quite good.

Q: Now, you arrive there; how large is the economic section that you're going to?

HOLBROOK: We had about 15 people; there were 10 Americans and four or five really good Philippine employees, one of them with a PhD in economics. As usual, you know, it was the local employees who really knew what was going on; they were just invaluable to our work there.

Q: What were the key goals that at least when you arrived you were given to follow or to accomplish?

HOLBROOK: 9/11 occurred about one year after my arrival in Manila. The result was the US paid a lot of attention to counterterrorism issues in Manila as well as in the rest of

the world. We tried to persuade the Philippines to join FATF, the Financial Action Task Force and to pass legislation aimed at diminishing bank secrecy. This would encourage banks to get to know their customers, to make sure the terrorists weren't stashing money away in their accounts. In the southern Philippines you had a group called the Abu Sayyaf, a terrorist group that claimed to be Muslims, although we generally regarded them just as a local criminal gang that robbed and kidnapped people for ransom, not really connected with any kind of ideology or with worldwide terrorism.

But still, as part of U.S. worldwide counterterrorism efforts we spent a lot of time promoting membership in FATF. I would go over to the Philippine congress and talk to members of congress. We had good access in the Philippines. I worked often with Mar Roxas, an economic official who was the grandson of a former President of the Philippines, who later was a candidate for that office himself, so far unsuccessful. The Philippines did not join FATF in my time there, but eventually did become a member of the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering, which pledged to implement FATF recommendations.

One of our Filipino contacts who was a banker told me many of Filipinos who were ethnic Chinese opposed the greater scrutiny of their bank accounts which FATF would entail, because the information might be passed to kidnappers who targeted wealthy Chinese business representatives in the Philippines. Indeed, during my tour of duty, there were a few incidents involving ethnic Chinese families where criminal gangs surrounded vehicles taking children to school, and kidnapped the children and held them for ransom.

Because of my background in China, and also because of the Philippine situation, I paid particular attention to the banking community in Manila, which as it turned out was almost entirely composed of Filipinos who were ethnic Chinese. And they would hold regular meetings and sometimes invite me, and the meetings would be conducted in Chinese. And I also played golf with some of those bankers. This was a very enjoyable professional relationship, both the professional part and the golf part. And it soon became clear that if you really wanted to know what was going on in the Philippines you needed to play golf with the top officials! Now, I hadn't played golf since high school years, but I took up the game again! Several of my golfing partners were influential members of the business community. Playing golf proved to be a good way to learn about how the Philippine economy really worked! Certainly, on the whole, the Filipinos were the most pro-American people of any country that I'd served in, just amazingly warm people, warm towards the United States in particular. Millions of Filipinos have relatives in the U.S.

Politically the Philippines was the wild wild East! When I arrived, the President, who had won a democratic election, was Joseph Estrada, formerly a film actor. Shortly after I arrived, I met a businessman also named Estrada. I asked whether he was related to the President, and learned that Estrada was actually his movie name, which he retained when he ran for office! After a few months, there were massive street demonstrations against President Estrada, and he resigned, to be succeeded by the Vice President, an economist named Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. But then, at the last minute, Estrada took back his

resignation. He had been elected president and there's a U.S. law that says the US will not recognize a coup against a democratically elected president. So, we faced a dilemma when Estrada took back his letter of resignation.

Meanwhile, on the ground, the Vice President took over. Fortunately, there was a Supreme Court in the Philippines and fairly quickly the Supreme Court ruled that the Vice president had legally succeeded the President, notwithstanding this matter of the President's letter of resignation being purportedly withdrawn. The Embassy took the position that we should support the Vice President as the new President, and that this did not violate U.S. law because the supreme authority in the Philippines had ruled that the move by the Vice President to take over the Presidency was constitutional.

Besides that change of Presidency, there were, in those four years, a couple of unsuccessful attempts to take over the Government. But we always had some concern about the stability of the Philippine government, and always had some concern about terrorism in the southern part, in Mindanao.

One problem that was in the background of much of my assignment was a terrible kidnapping case. A US missionary couple with four kids, living in the Philippines, hardworking missionaries out in the countryside, took a weekend off, and went to a really nice resort just for a day or two. It happened to be the very time when the Abu Sayyaf terrorists struck. And they kidnapped the missionary couple and held them for a long, long period of time, changing locations in the jungles of Mindanao. They wanted ransom money. The economic section wasn't directly involved; other parts of the embassy were involved. The four children were sent back to the US. Eventually, the law enforcement people in our Embassy who were handling this case asked for an exception to the U.S. rule of not paying ransom. Their idea was that ransom would be paid and that we would immediately grab the criminals and retrieve the money. Well, it turned out the kidnappers knew their turf better than our forces (some combination of Philippine military forces and US advisers) did, and the Abu Sayyaf took the money and kept the hostages. And so, finally, after some interminable period, perhaps a couple of years, there was a firefight between the Philippine Army and the Abu Sayyaf, and the husband was killed. The wife survived, and she stayed in our US Embassy compound for a period of time before leaving and, I think, returning to the United States.

Q: Well, while we're on this subject then, to what extent does an economic officer, did you become involved with the growing, how to put this best, the growing violence in Mindanao perpetrated by various groups, but including the groups that were seeking independence?

HOLBROOK: Well, the economic section mostly was not involved in Mindanao. We were involved in the business part, and business is mostly in Manila and in Cebu. Cebu is in the central part of the Philippines. I did make a trip down to Mindanao, in the far south. In Mindanao, I went to Davao, which actually had a small branch of the American Chamber of Commerce, and I had a wonderful visit with the chamber down there, meeting their mostly Muslim members there. Back in Manila, my section actually had a

regular speakers forum where we would invite Filipino economists and business representatives to make presentations. These included Muslim speakers. We tried to do our part for religious tolerance and made it clear we're not just representing the U.S. before the Catholic community (most of the Filipinos are Catholic), but also with the Muslim community.

Before my visit to Davao, I confess, I was a little scared, a little cautious about it because this was the home of the Abu Sayyaf. And our security office gave me a full briefing on the security situation along with their standard advice, which was to keep a low profile.

So, I flew from Manila to Davao on Philippine Airlines. I got off the plane on the tarmac, and walked towards the terminal. As I walked, I could see plainly, posted above the main entrance of the terminal, is a huge banner that said AMERICAN CHAMBER WELCOMES MORTON HOLBROOK, AMERICAN EMBASSY ECONOMIC COUNSELOR. And I thought , oh yes, low profile! Inside the terminal are these wonderful and friendly people meeting me, the staff of the Davao branch of the American Chamber of Commerce, all three of them Filipino natives. They asked me if I had seen their banner. I of course expressed my appreciation for their friendly welcome, including the banner.

And then as we drove off they asked me if I liked to see cock fights (these are legal in the Philippines). I said that I had never seen one. Soon we stopped at a circular arena, like a small Roman arena. Instead of thousands of people seated around a circular area, there were hundreds of people, all seated on circular benches—except for me, it turned out. My hosts escorted me to a special chair inside the arena itself, where the cockfights would be held! So I became the most prominent person in the arena—so much for low profile! The spectators were very excited—not by my presence, but because they were placing bets on the fights, using hand signals to ushers who took note of the bets and managed to keep track of them without writing anything down.

Then two fighting cocks were carried into the stadium and placed right in front of me. They were so close that when they fought, the feathers blew over on me! I watched about 15 or 20 contests. Most were very brief: there would be a short struggle, with talons flashing and feathers flying, and suddenly one of the cocks would fall over dead. The action would be so fast that it was impossible to see exactly what happened; it would be over in about two minutes. I learned later that in addition to their own talons, the cocks had metal talons attached to their feet. The loser would be dragged off to be eaten; the winner would fight another day. And later, I asked my Amcham hosts what would have happened if the chickens had come towards me? Was I in danger there? And they told me that while I was seated in the chair, there had been two large men standing behind me, just in case! Needless to say, the cockfight was the highlight of my visit to Mindanao. In addition, I joined other US Embassy and US company representatives in a hotel in Davao, displaying various American products and opportunities.

Q: Alright. To go back to your work in the economic section-were there frictions between the U.S. and the Philippines in economics or business that you had to address?

HOLBROOK: I'd say there was more cooperation than friction. I worked closely with the American Chamber of Commerce in Manila. It's one of the oldest such chambers anywhere in the world.

There was one area of friction in which I was involved. American airline carriers were trying to expand their routes into the Philippines, and we were supporting that. We held negotiations with the Philippine Government, advocating for what we called an "Open Skies" aviation agreement, which would allow more American airline flights to and from the Philippines, and reciprocally more Philippine carrier flights to and from the US. But the main Philippine carrier, Philippine Airlines did not welcome increased American competition. The US sent a negotiating team from Washington to hold talks in Manila on an aviation agreement. I attended the sessions representing our Embassy. When we adjourned for lunch on the first day of negotiations, we discovered there were picketers outside the building with signs opposing any aviation agreement with the US, claiming that the American carriers would "wipe the skies" clean of Philippine carriers. So, certainly that was an area of friction, and in the end, we were not successful in getting an aviation agreement.

Otherwise, the American Chamber had good relations with the Philippines government. They would invite the president of the Philippines to address them once a year at one of their general meetings. The Philippines economy was struggling. There were high population growth rates and low GNP growth rates. I mean, the population growth would often offset any economic growth. The very influential Catholic Church obstructed family planning efforts. That was an area where the embassy had to tread lightly. We had a big USAID (United States Agency for International Development) mission that did promote family planning in the Philippines, notwithstanding Catholic Church opposition.

I was on occasion invited out to universities to give talks and meet their students and economic experts, at the University of Philippines and at Ateneo University.

Q: Alright. Well, in that case, as you are then approaching the end of the tour there, it would have been 2002, what were you thinking, first of all.

HOLBROOK: 2004.

Q: Oh, 2004.

HOLBROOK: We extended my tour. I had a three-year tour and I liked the Philippines, my wife liked it, my kids liked it, we all liked it, so I stayed an extra year.

I should add that another meaningful aspect of my assignment to Manila was the presence there of the American Cemetery and Memorial in Manila. This is the only American cemetery for the entire Pacific theater of World War II, and contains the graves of over 17,000 soldiers, nearly all American, who perished in that war, along with massive Walls of the Missing, with the names of over 36,000 soldiers who lost their lives in the War, but

their remains could not be found. These included my uncle, who was my father's youngest brother, Woodie Holbrook. It was my honor to deliver a speech on Memorial Day in 2001 at the ceremony, honoring my uncle along with the other American soldiers who died in World War II.

Woodie had been stationed at Clark Field in the Army Air Corps the day the Japanese attacked Manila, shortly after their attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. He and a companion had escaped in a plane which crashed-landed in the sea near Mindanao. He eventually was captured by or surrendered to the Japanese and was a POW in Davao. Finally, he and several hundred other American prisoners were placed in an unmarked prison ship for an unknown destination. The ship was sunk by an American submarine off the coast of Mindanao, near Zamboanga,, and the Japanese guards on the ship then fired at the Americans in the water, killing Woodie, though there were some 70 Americans who survived.

Q: Alright. But now, were you promoted in that period? Had you entered the Senior Foreign Service?

HOLBROOK: Yes. I was promoted in 1999 into the Senior Foreign Service.

Q: Okay. And then, now, this changes the list of countries and positions that you might be interested in because I imagine now you're thinking about becoming a DCM.

HOLBROOK: Right, right, yes. I was very interested in being either DCM or political minister-counselor in Beijing, at Embassy Beijing. And the result of that was I ended up in Paris!

Q: How did that happen?

HOLBROOK: I think the usual kind of Foreign Service shuffle when you are bidding on senior positions. I had the proper rank and experience for either of those two jobs in Beijing, and I also had known our ambassador there for several years. As it turned out the DCM position went to someone with China experience who had also previously served in Afghanistan; in those days we often rewarded those serving in dangerous posts like Kabul and in Iraq with good ongoing assignments. As for the political counselor job, I had the qualifications, but the job went instead to a lower-ranked officer. What can I say, these things happen; Ambassadors get their way, regardless of assignment regulations. But my consolation prize was not bad at all, an assignment to Paris, as Economic Counselor to the US Mission to the OECD. I couldn't really complain. Paris was where I had first become interested in the Foreign Service when I spent a year in France as a student in 1961-62. I had over the years always thrown in a bid for an assignment to France, even though all my professional experience was in Asia. And I was language-qualified, even though my position in Paris did not require French.

So, that's how suddenly I wound up in a bureau where I've never served, where I had no apparent professional qualifications (other than some proficiency in French, at the 3 plus

level). When I showed up in Paris, nearly all my colleagues were EUR (Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs) veterans and, and they were very curious about how I had gotten a very desirable assignment in Paris.

Q: But for your actual job you wouldn't have needed French; it was not a language qualified job.

HOLBROOK: That's right. The OECD has two official languages, English and French, and guess which one everyone used, at least 99 percent of the time, except for the French ambassador who of course insisted on speaking French in his own country!

Q: But now, one other just general question about the assignment. Once again, you are in an economic assignment when you are a political officer. Was that considered any way harmful for you?

HOLBROOK: Oh, of course. I mean, I knew there was no chance of promotion from Counselor to Minister Counselor in the Senior Foreign Service. But I was getting close to mandatory retirement age anyway. In fact, as it turned out, had I been promoted I would have had exactly one month in that new rank before my mandatory retirement at age 65. It was perfect timing, you could say.

Q: Yes. Yes, yes. Well, alright, then let's go ahead and follow you to Paris. At this point are your remaining kids going to college or are they still going to spend some time in school in Paris?

HOLBROOK: Well, let's see. My second son, Stephen, had graduated from high school in Manila, so he was already in college, first at Indiana University, and then he transferred to UCLA. Our daughter Kristen then was our only child in Paris, and attended ASP, the American School in Paris for her final three years in high school. Most parents in the Foreign Service try to arrange assignments so their children can attend the same school during high school, and I was able to do that with all three of our children, Allen in Beijing, Stephen in Manila, and Kristen in Paris. So, she went to the ASP, located in a place called Saint-Cloud, just on the outskirts of Paris. And I remember my first trip there, coming from this beautiful Manila international school, the Brent International School of Manila, with a brand-new campus, a beautiful school. I was thinking that the school in Paris, the City of Light, would be even better. Wrong: ASP was located in a World War II -era former US Government building, a hand-me-down site! Why was that? Of course, it was because of high prices in France compared to low ones in the Philippines.

Q: Right.

HOLBROOK: I thought how ironic, you know. We come from the poorest country I've ever been to and it's got a wonderful school. We had a swimming pool in Manila, too, at our house. And we go to Paris and we've got this shabby school and my wife asked me, where's the swimming pool at our apartment? Of course, as it turned out, we had a really

nice embassy apartment near the Arc de Triomphe, but in Manila we had a two-story house with a swimming pool. The bottom line is you can live better in poorer countries in the Foreign Service than in rich countries, just due to the fact that the US dollar goes further in the developing world.

Q: Yes. But was- did your wife- could your wife find work if she wanted to in Paris while you were there?

HOLBROOK: Well, I don't know because she didn't apply for a job. She did come to appreciate French culture in many ways: the flower markets, the monuments, the Cathedrals, the chateaux, and so on. And prior to our arrival, she had bought beautiful furniture in the Philippines to ship to our four-bedroom Paris apartment

Q: Okay.

HOLBROOK: Way back she had worked in the US Embassy in Beijing for a while as a receptionist. She is Chinese, from Taiwan, but her English is excellent, and she taught English to some of our local employees in Beijing. And then after that, she wasn't looking for work. However, in many of our assignments one or more of our children worked during the summer at the Embassy, in Beijing, in Manila, and in Paris. I think they appreciated those summer experiences, although later none of them has, so far, showed interest in joining the Foreign Service.

Q: Alright. So, now let's follow you into the OECD position. How big a section was the U.S. delegation economic section?

HOLBROOK: The OECD is an economic organization. So at the US Mission to the OECD in my time, in 2004-2006, there were about eight State Department officers, on the economic side, but then we had other agencies represented in my section, such as the Department of Energy, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Ambassador was traditionally a political appointee. We had a wonderful ambassador, Connie Morella, a representative in Congress from Maryland for eight terms. And then there was a career FSO who was the DCM. And I was third in the pecking order.

Anyway, we were all responsible for supporting and keeping tabs on the work of the OECD secretariat, the professional staff of about 1500 people. The OECD then had 30 member countries, mostly developed countries in Western Europe, but also including Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, as well as the United States. It was sometimes called the Rich Man's Club. The OECD professional staff was replete with economists, but also had other specialists, in education, in governance, business, and in other areas. Although there were only 30 member countries who provided the financial support for the staff, the OECD produced many economic and other reports that covered global issues.

One of our jobs at the US Mission, in particular my job was to watch the OECD budget. As at the UN, we were trying to reduce the percentage that the U.S. paid of the OECD

budget, and we were successful in lowering the US contribution from perhaps 25 percent of the budget to slightly over 20 percent; budget contributions were assessed according to the GNP of the member countries. Japan and Germany, as the number two and three economies in the OECD, were also the number two and three contributors to the OECD budget.

At the same time, I also got involved in the chaotic US budget process. To make a long story short, I would on occasion need to make a discreet late-night phone call to Washington to ask when the US would be able to make its latest required (and agreed to) contribution to the OECD budget. We would sometimes be in arrears not because of any kind of philosophical objection to OECD activities, but just because of the uncertain US budget process, which often resulted in having a continuing resolution at the last minute, rather than a new budget that might finance new programs.

I represented the United States on the OECD budget committee, composed of representatives of each of the 30 member countries. Sometimes other countries would ask why the United States was often late in paying its assessed contributions. I would deliver my Marshall Plan speech. I would remind my colleagues that the United States founded the OECD (with a slightly different name) after World War II. It was originally the organization that helped distribute Marshall Plan funds to European countries devastated in the War. And we would certainly meet our obligations, even if we might be a little bit late. However, we were late on more than one occasion so my colleagues got used to my Marshall Plan speech, and someone might say to me, "Mort, you don't need to go into your Marshall Plan speech again; we take the point." And we did eventually pay our OECD dues.

One matter where we did make timely budget contributions was a large construction project to build a new conference center at the OECD. The OECD normally might have five different meetings in progress, on economic development, education, business practices, IPR protection and other subjects. Representatives of each of the 30 member countries might attend these meetings. There was really a need to have a conference center and the US and other countries had agreed to support it perhaps five years before my arrival. And fortunately, somehow in our chaotic budget process, we were able in my time and I think during the entire construction period, to set aside money for that project so the construction could continue. And it was completed shortly after I left and subsequently, I went back and visited it. It's a beautiful conference center, just exactly what the OECD needed, very useful in OECD work -- work that benefits both OECD member countries and often countries everywhere, in terms of objective, professional advice on economic development, model codes of business practices, education, and other subjects.

Q: But now, the other question that I wanted to ask you before we go into any further details, additional other U.S. Government agencies, did you have FBI, did you have Treasury? Some of these typical departments that would follow various kinds of international crime.

HOLBROOK: Of course, the embassy would have an FBI office, I assume. We at the US Mission did not. We were a mostly unclassified office. And yes, there was a Department of Energy person there, as I mentioned. There was an Environmental Protection Agency representative also on my staff.

Just for clarity, in those days there were three U.S. ambassadors in Paris. There was a US Mission to UNESCO headed by a US ambassador; a US Mission to the OECD, with Ambassador Morella; and the US Embassy in France, with a US Ambassador. These highly desirable ambassadorships nearly always went to political appointees. The Embassy, being much larger than the two Missions, would handle a lot of our administrative matters, including finance, personnel, and a community liaison office. Someone from our Mission to the OECD would attend the embassy staff meeting once a week. Otherwise, we were not really plugged in to what the embassy was doing; we weren't getting embassy reporting cables, for example.

Q: I'm sorry. So, now you're on the budget committee and you're overseeing expenditures on the conference center, but what were your other mission goals as the head of the econ section?

HOLBROOK: I was also on a committee called the non-members committee, where we were reaching out to other countries, particularly China. And we were exploring closer relations with China, because China was an important and growing economy on the world scene. The OECD did economic surveys on China and was also exploring setting up a small office in China, and actually did send some observers to spend a few months in China.

While I was there, we had the first ministerial visit from China. Every year there'd be what they call a ministerial meeting where the USTR head or another high-ranking US Government official would head the U.S. delegation and similar high-ranking people would attend from each member country. And one year we invited China to send their minister of commerce and he came. And I was involved in sort of preparing the way for his visit and was there when he met our USTR, whose name was Rob Portman, later Senator Portman from Ohio. The Chinese Minister of Commerce was Bo Xilai, my former contact in Dalian, the Vice Mayor of Dalian when I was Consul General in Shenyang.

Q: What a surprise.

HOLBROOK: Anyway, Mr. Bo was the representative of China at the OECD ministerial meeting. He and US Trade Representative Rob Portman had a bilateral meeting, which I attended. Then a few years later, as I mentioned before, Bo was first a rival to Xi Jinping for the top positions in China, and then was convicted of corruption and sentenced to life in prison.

Q: But didn't the OECD also have a function of, aside from publishing documents, it also had some committee that dealt with questions of corruption and—

HOLBROOK: Yes, thanks, that's a good reminder that the OECD does publish draft laws and draft codes, such as a corporate responsibility code, a model tax code, and other codes that member countries and other countries too can take into consideration and possibly implement. Just about everything the OECD does is geared towards policy recommendations. Of course, the OECD has no authority to make policy, but they do provide valuable objective advice that countries, both members and non-members ignore at their peril. What the OECD is saying is, here is our considered view, based on our examination of what has worked or not worked in many countries around the world. The view is objective and doesn't have any political baggage. It's just a nice, objective, outside view of what's going on in whatever area, the environment or education or economy or anti-corruption, and other areas.

Q: Okay. But now, were you- so, then, were you involved with the writing of any of the OECD publications as the head of the econ section?

HOLBROOK: No. The professional staff, the Secretariat at the OECD wrote the reports. What we would write would simply be a report to Washington on the reports! .

Q: Yes, well that, okay, that's fine. All I was trying to do was get at, just a bit, the various partnerships that OECD has with elements of the U.S. Government to development and probably grants through the World Bank and so on. In other words, there are a lot of connections between the OECD and other initiatives that the U.S. undertakes.

HOLBROOK: Yes. Well, through the various officers on our mission staff, they would be communicating with various departments in the U.S. Government back in Washington.

Q: Okay. Now then, with 20/20 hindsight, looking back on your time at the OECD, were there any sort of either valuable connections or valuable information that was useful to you later?

HOLBROOK: Well, on a personal level, when I go back to Paris, I go over to the US Mission. I've kept contact with my successors in the U.S. mission, and I've kept a couple of contacts with the OECD professional staff also. The professional staff is made up of various experts, many of them economists, from all the member countries, so if you're a citizen in one of those countries you can apply to work there. And as it happened, professional people that I knew most closely were Americans on the staff there. So I do have contacts with the OECD and the US Mission on occasion, just to keep up to date and to supplement my knowledge when I teach a course on US Foreign Policy.

Q: Alright. But, nevertheless, you are coming to the end of the tour and you're looking at retirement?

HOLBROOK: Well, mandatory retirement at 65 was looking at me!

So, yes, I retired after two-and-a-half years at the US Mission. We moved out of our nice diplomatic apartment into a much smaller place, self-financed! And my daughter was still in high school, so we stayed in Paris an extra few months so she could finish high school. And I actually had a part-time teaching position lined up in France in the city of Nancy.

Q: Oh, yes.

HOLBROOK: Not Sciences Po Paris, which is the famous one. I knew people on the faculty there and they helped me line up a job at Sciences Po in Nancy, in eastern France. So, actually I went out to Nancy and gave a talk to some students there. And then, on January 1, 2005, I officially retired, and just a few weeks later I was pleased to see that first retirement annuity check in my checking account. Ambassador Morella had a nice reception for me at post. Washington sent a nice certificate praising my diplomatic service. In my entire career, the State Department had always spelled my name correctly, but my retirement certificate, with the signature of the Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, was awarded to "Martin" Holbrook. We had to send that one back!

Q: Right, right. Very State Department.

HOLBROOK: So, I had this teaching job in Nancy lined up. But then, from my friends and former colleagues back on the China desk came with an offer to be WAE (When Actually Employed) at the US Consulate in Hong Kong, in the Political Economic section, headed by Laurent Charbonnet, who formerly worked for me at the US Consulate in Shenyang.

I didn't mention this earlier, but my very first assignment overseas in the Foreign Service was supposed to have been Hong Kong. I was assigned initially to language training in Taiwan, with an ongoing assignment in Hong Kong in 1977. But just before my scheduled transfer my position in Hong Kong was eliminated, and I was assigned instead to the Economic section of the then-US Embassy in Taipei, which became my first assignment after language training. Actually I enjoyed the assignment in Taipei, but I also felt that the Foreign Service "owed" me an assignment in Hong Kong. So, nearly 30 years later in Paris, after my retirement, I received an offer to go to Hong Kong which I wanted to accept. But I felt guilty about abandoning the teaching job in Nancy -- even though it was just for one course.

So I worked with my OECD colleagues and found three people willing to take my place, alternating trips to Nancy to teach the course I was going to teach, on US foreign policy. Every couple of weeks one of them would take a train up to Nancy to deliver a lecture, so I didn't feel guilty about not doing it.

I showed up in Hong Kong roughly on April 1, 2007 and Laurent met me at the airport. So, January 1 was my first day out of the State Department, and on April 1 was back in, at the US Consulate in Hong Kong, scene of my original assignment that had been canceled. That was the beginning of nearly ten years of employment in Asia!

Q: Alright, so, maybe this would be a good place to break and we can pick it up tomorrow with the next 10 years in Asia.

HOLBROOK: This was totally serendipitous. Maybe everyone's retirement is sort of like this, but it wasn't planned at all. After working several months at the Consulate, I taught five years in China, then worked three years in Hong Kong.

One more item I want to mention, a special aspect of service in France. There are 12 American World War I and World War II cemeteries in France. I mentioned earlier I had the honor of speaking at the American Cemetery in Manila at a Memorial Day ceremony. I was fortunate to also be invited to speak on Memorial Day in 2006 at the American Cemetery and Memorial in St. Mihiel, in far eastern France. I represented the US Embassy in Paris, and a US Army General stationed in Germany represented US military forces. There was a band, and a flyover by US Air Force jets. There were also several French speakers, including a representative of the French resistance in World War II. After the ceremony, we all walked a short distance into the adjacent small village of Thiaucourt, past the Rue Patton, to the City Hall. Along the way, I noted that every house in the village was flying the American flag. I had never seen this before anywhere in the world, even in the United States. We walked to the City Hall, where the Mayor held a reception for those attending the memorial service.

There I learned the rest of the story. The German Army had occupied the village in World War I, but had eventually been driven out by American forces led by a Colonel Patton, who had himself resided with a family in the village. In World War II, once again, Thiaucourt was conquered and occupied by the German Army. And once again, the US Army, led by the same George Patton, now General Patton, threw the Germans out, and Patton himself again stayed with the same family in the village. So today, in my mind, this remains the most pro-American village in the world. And I remain grateful for the opportunity to speak at two cemeteries, across the globe, honoring America’s opposition to tyranny in Europe and in Asia.

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Q: Okay. Today is August 15 and we are resuming our interview with Morton Holbrook.

Morton, now what year do you leave the OECD?

HOLBROOK: Well, that was December 31, 2006, my last day on duty as an FSO and at the U.S. mission to the OECD.

My next job was the WAE assignment at the US Consulate in Hong Kong. My assignment there, in the combined Political and Economic section, was to assess how Hong Kong was doing under the one country/two systems formula which Beijing and London had worked out for Hong Kong's future after the former British colony was handed back to China. There was something called the McConnell Act, named for my home state senator, Mitch McConnell, that required annual reports to the Congress on

how “one country/two systems” was working. And we had done so since 1997, which was when Hong Kong reverted to the mainland. The end of that reporting requirement, I think, was the previous year, 2006, that was our last required report, but the Consulate decided to go ahead and do a report for 2007 anyway.

So I set up a series of interviews all over Hong Kong relying mostly on local staff at the consulate; I asked their advice on who I should talk to, and made appointments with many people: business representatives, professors, newspaper reporters, the heads of NGOs, and overall to a wide variety of people in Hong Kong, both natives of Hong Kong and foreign residents, asking their views on how "one country, two systems" was working. I drafted a report that the Consulate sent back to Washington. Essentially it stated that on one hand, Hong Kong's economy was doing quite well, and in fact continued to be rated as the world's most free economy by the Heritage Foundation, the conservative think tank in Washington DC.

On the other hand, on the political side we had concerns: there was some erosion of press freedom and democratic freedoms, but we still gave good marks to Hong Kong. There were, for example, annual demonstrations on June 4 commemorating the Tiananmen Massacre. It was possible to buy books in Hong Kong that were not available on the Mainland. Overall, the Consulate report gave a passing grade, "so far so good," with regard to "one country two systems."

Actually, my wife and I got to experience life in Hong Kong in a sense far more than I would have had in a regular assignment. Because I was simply WAE, in that brief five-month period we lived in three different places, just because people were transferring in and out of Hong Kong and we were provided temporary housing as available. I personally enjoyed the three different neighborhoods and different views of Hong Kong. And since it was the Consulate which was moving us around physically, Consulate staff did all the work -- they would show up one day and say well, now we're going to move you over here to this housing compound.

Then, in August, my WAE assignment was coming to an end and I'm wondering, what's next? And serendipity intruded. I went to an academic conference at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), representing the Consulate, which featured a Chinese professor from Beijing University whom I had known during my last tour of duty in Beijing. In fact, I attended just because I wanted to say hello to him. So, I went to CUHK and had a nice chat with him. Then, while I'm watching conference presentations by several professors, a group of obviously American students came into the conference auditorium. They dressed loudly and talked loudly too; I thought "my people!" And so, I went over and met them. They were escorted by Glenn Shive, then the head of the Hong Kong America Center on the CUHK campus. I talked to Glenn and mentioned the upcoming end of my assignment there, and Glenn asked if I might be interested in teaching in China. I looked in my schedule and there was nothing there. I said I think I can work it out! So, a week or so later I took a ferry to a city called Zhuhai inside China, about an hour ferry ride from Beijing.

In Zhuhai I went to a college called United International College, an educational joint venture set up between the Hong Kong Baptist University and the Zhuhai campus of Beijing Normal University. The joint venture was just entering its third year. It was an English-speaking college, and students who graduated received both a certificate from Beijing Normal University and a degree from Hong Kong Baptist University. I went there and had an interview with Professor Edmund Kwok, originally from Hong Kong, who was the head of the new branch in Zhuhai. Afterwards I was invited to be the head of the Department of Government and International Relations (the Political Science Department). I had not majored in political science at Vanderbilt University, but I did have a minor in international relations. In addition, I had spent 32 years as a U.S. diplomat dealing with foreign governments. In addition, my son Stephen, who was visiting me in Zhuhai, had just graduated from UCLA with a major in political science. He had been a very good notetaker. And he brought with him his notes and the syllabuses from his political science courses at UCLA. So with the combination of my own background in college and as a diplomat, and Stephen's own recent experience at UCLA, I felt qualified to head the Government and International Relations (GIR) program, with Stephen as my unofficial teaching assistant the first semester.

There was only one other person in the GIR program at that time, Dr. Ken Lan. Ken was from Hong Kong, and had been educated in Canada and Hong Kong; he had a PdD from Hong Kong University. So he and I became the "founding fathers" of this new GIR program in this new college. And because it was physically separate from both its joint venture partners, UIC had a measure of independence as a separate college.

So when I arrived there, the first task that Ken and I faced was staffing our program, so we could teach enough courses to establish a major in GIR. I quickly learned that both the Chinese and the Hong Kong systems were vastly different from the American system, where students don't need to declare a major until the end of our second year, and it is easy to change your major. No, not in China, not in Hong Kong either, apparently. I was kind of shocked. I guess that was one of the many things I learned teaching, which was that the students were required to designate a major before they set foot on campus. And then students had one chance, at the end of the first year. to apply to change majors. And when they applied to change majors, they needed the permission of both the exiting and entering major. So, it was quite different from the American system.

The result was when it was time for students to choose a major, it was actually their parents who made the choice. And nearly all the parents wanted their children to major in business! So the school would at some point say sorry, we can only take a limited number of business majors; what's your second choice? And that's how we were able to set up the Government and International Relations program. Our program might be the second or third or fourth choice of students who wanted to attend our school, but couldn't be approved to major in business.

So I started teaching at UIC in September, 2007 as the head of GIR, the Government and International Relations program. It was just a very rewarding assignment following my WAE assignment at the US Consulate in Hong Kong. I spent five years in Zhuhai. Most

of the courses I taught fell well within my own experience. I taught courses on U.S. foreign policy, U.S.-China relations, Chinese foreign policy, the US Presidential Election System, and a course on the Chinese Legal System, which I had studied back at Columbia University's Center for Chinese Legal Studies.

Q: Yes. I just want to quickly confirm yes, you did talk about the experience of the Chinese legal system.

HOLBROOK: Yes. One of the first things American teachers notice about teaching Chinese students is that they're not used to being asked to speak up in class. You have the deer in the headlights phenomenon. So, I always welcomed anyone who was the exception to that rule. One day a student challenged me and said what are your qualifications to tell us about the Chinese legal system, Professor Holbrook? And instead of being kind of irritated, I welcomed this, and I told him well, here's what I did, and I was at Columbia University, it's quite well-known internationally. You know, Chinese students, if they want to go to the U.S., if they don't go to Harvard, they'll want to go to Columbia. It's quite well-known internationally. Besides which, I used as a textbook an English language book written by a professor at Hong Kong University who had been one of the people that I interviewed when I did my WAE assignment in Hong Kong. He was a specialist in the Chinese legal system, wrote a textbook about it, and I had met him personally. So, I really had no hesitation in saying I can teach a course on the Chinese legal system. And I did it my own way and I encouraged them to go to observe local courts in Zhuhai. I mean, I didn't go myself. I didn't think that was appropriate at all, but I thought it was useful for my students to go just to take a look. And there is a functioning legal system in China. It seems to function well unless you're a human rights advocate, that is, or regarded as a dissident. But for routine matters, like a traffic accident or a normal commercial dispute, there is a functioning legal system and I wanted them to see it.

I connected our college with the U.S. consulate in Guangzhou, to their cultural affairs and visa sections in particular. And the Consulate would have an assortment of American professors, poets, musicians and others coming through Guangdong for cultural exchanges. We would invite them to come to UIC. Plus, also, some of the consulate officers, like a visa officer, for example, would come and talk to students about applying for a student visa in the United States. And we would also invite the U.S. Consul General in Guangzhou to come about once a year to give a talk on US-China relations.

When I was a diplomat in China, especially when I was Consul General in Shenyang, I came to realize that contacts between embassy and consular people and Chinese universities were always tricky. And I was rather surprised to realize that, even though China had opened up in many ways, cultural exchanges with foreign diplomatic missions was not one of those ways. If the consulate wanted to pay a visit, or sponsor a visit, to a university, the request went to the Waiban, the foreign affairs office of the university, who were quite likely to turn down a request. But the Consulate in Guangzhou realized that at our college, I myself was the unofficial Waiban. They would just call me up and I'd say sure, we can program your visitor. And they'd say what about your foreign affairs office.

I'd say that's me. Come ahead. So, we were able in a sense to get away with that. I don't think that would be the case today.

But we had a lot of very distinguished people. For example, we hosted Richard Gardner from Columbia University, who had been my professor there, who was also an attorney and had served as US Ambassador to Italy and Spain. He gave a wonderful presentation, at our college, and met the faculty and many students. We did have a couple of musicians; we had an American poet.

Q: Let me ask a question here. As you were talking about Chinese law, did you or the Chinese students compare that to American law? And if you did, what was their reaction?

HOLBROOK: That's a good question. That reminds me that one of the programs we tried to get on campus was the Fulbright program. Fulbright was carefully controlled by the Chinese Ministry of education and private universities such as ours were not eligible for regular Fulbright grants. However, I discovered that Fulbright has many manifestations, and one of them is a short run program, like two to four weeks. The Ministry of Education was not concerned about that program. So we were able to welcome a distinguished American federal district court judge, Paul Magnuson. He came to our campus for about 4 weeks.

And I really wasn't sure whether the students would be interested in this. He was a representative of the American legal system, and we didn't have a course in American law; we had a course in Chinese law. But I was wrong. Judge Magnuson set up a mock trial to consider a theoretical case involving a traffic accident. The judge himself was the judge! Students played all the other roles: attorneys, jurors, and witnesses. The issue was who was at fault, who should pay damages for a mock car accident. Magnuson was a senior judge who had done this kind of simulation before in other countries and knew what he was doing. And he also conducted about 600 actual trials in the United States.

Students conducted the voir dire process, where the judge and the attorneys try to find a neutral jury. The Chinese students were intrigued by the concept of a jury. They noted jurors were picked randomly, and they had no particular training in law at all, and yet they were given the responsibility of deciding important cases. One student commented that since the members of the jury were not selected until right before the trial, it would be hard to bribe so many people at the last minute!

So, we set this whole mock trial up and the judge explained to the attorneys that they would have the opportunity at times to cross-examine witnesses. And again, this goes way beyond what Chinese students are ever asked to do in their own educational or legal system. Mostly, Chinese students sit in class, the professor lectures and then leaves. No dialogue. But when the judge explained that at our mock trial, attorneys can ask adversarial questions, the Chinese students understood and actually proved good at cross-examination; they even seemed to enjoy the process! They really pushed and pressured the witness in a very professional way, the way an American lawyer might do.

So, that's responding to your question about comparing the two legal systems. Usually, of course, I was only teaching about the Chinese system, which is more based on civil law, really, than the adversarial system we have in the U.S. The Chinese system was based in part on what they did in the Soviet Union, which again sort of derived from Europe, but not an adversarial system.

Actually, the best course I taught at UIC was a course where I didn't teach! I worked with the Hong Kong America Center (in Hong Kong) to set up a course we called American Identities. Once a week, an American Fulbright scholar assigned to Hong Kong would come to UIC to teach for about two and a half hours on the subject in which the Fulbrighter specialized. At that time, the HK America Center was assisting American Fulbright scholars who were helping transform the eight major Universities in Hong Kong from three year to four year colleges. There were just enough Fulbrighters to fill out a semester. We had an historian, an English professor, and even an American chef!

And another memorable event of my time in Zhuhai was not a course, but a Presidential debate between John McCain and Barack Obama! No, of course it did not take place in China. But in those days, or at least for the first two or three years that I taught there, we had full or at least plentiful access to the internet, at my home and also in our classrooms at the College. So one day I discovered that a Presidential debate between Obama and McCain would take place in the U.S. at 9:00 am (China time), precisely the time that I had a class in China! I thought to myself I wonder if I can bring that into our classroom. Classrooms at UIC and other colleges I visited at that time in China were well-equipped with computers, the internet, and screens on which to project images.

So to my astonishment and despite my very limited technical skills, the next morning I was able to turn on the computer in my classroom and very quickly bring in the live debate between Obama and McCain! This was completely unplanned and unanticipated, not part of my course, which (I think) was on US Foreign Policy. So, I thought this is wonderful. I recall making very brief remarks, just noting that debates before Presidential elections are commonplace in the United States. Then I got out of the way while we all watched the entire debate on a big screen in the front of the classroom.

There was a whiteboard next to the screen. I didn’t talk but simply wrote brief notes on the white board for the students explaining terms or issues I thought they might be unfamiliar with. It goes without saying that the students had never seen contentious issues discussed in public among competing Chinese leaders! At the end of the debate, we took a vote. I made no comment one way or another, and I had not prepared the students for this debate in advance. There were about 35 students in the classroom. The vote was Obama 34, McCain 1! I had to admire the one student who spoke up for McCain; this took some courage in a culture where there is pressure to conform to what the group does. But I feel very good about exposing my students to that kind of give and take between politicians, which is so normal in the United States and so completely abnormal in China. What lasting impact that might have, I don't know, but I suspect that all the students in that class today still remember that debate!

Our college also set up exchange programs with 6 small colleges in Minnesota. So there was a constant flow of professors and staff people from those colleges coming to our campus. Not many, but perhaps but maybe each semester there would be one or two American professors. And we also sent some of our Chinese students to Minnesota, mostly for summer programs, but some of them went for a year, and a couple of them actually transferred and ended up graduating from colleges in Minnesota.

When I arrived in Zhuhai, there were about 2,000 students at UIC. That grew to about 4,000. Now, I haven't been there since 2012, but I understand they now have a new campus in a different location, though still in Zhuhai. Again, this was a private college, so students paid what in China was an expensive tuition. I heard it was in fact one of the most expensive colleges in China, where most of the colleges are public and are free, or virtually free, and there are only a small number of private colleges. So, they're still there, but I think now under much greater party supervision. When I was there, the controls were very loose. There was a party office on campus staffed by one person. As far as I knew, he never interfered with the curriculum, never interfered with anything. In fact, he was useful when we had an opportunity for our GIR students to attend a conference in Macau. I was surprised to learn that I, with an American passport, could come and go freely for short visits to both Macau and Hong Kong, but PRC students needed a special visa. The party representative was able to assist them in getting the visas.

So with his help our students were able to participate in programs in Macau and also later in Hong Kong. For example, there was a program on the climate change negotiations, organized in Hong Kong by the Hong Kong America Center, on the campus of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The program involved student teams from many universities in Hong Kong and from my college, and perhaps a team from Macau or Taiwan, plus an on-line team from a college in the United States. There would be presentations by teams representing perhaps ten, including the countries that contributed most to global warming like the United States and China, and those who were most affected, island or low-lying countries like Jamaica or Bangladesh. The student teams would negotiate and try to reach an agreement.

UIC was a college just getting underway; it had been in operation for only two years when I arrived there in 2007, as one of the few English-speaking colleges in China. In my first year the English level of students was not very good. I quickly learned to speak slowly and write difficult words on the board. By the time I left there after five years there was a noticeable improvement in the English language skills of my students. By then, I could essentially talk at a normal speed and very seldom would have to resort to an explanation of a particular word. The school was getting a better reputation and rather than getting students who might not be admitted to Chinese universities, it was getting students whose parents saw this as a way to getting a good international position, due to fluency in English language.

Q: Now, also while you were there, I imagine you also had opportunities to talk to other Chinese, Hong Kong scholars, professors and so on; were they talking to you about changes in the Chinese education system?

HOLBROOK: Not so much. I do recall making a trip up to Beijing for a conference hosted by the Ministry of Education, and in those days, at least, the focus was on opening up China's education system. We were interested in having our little college be treated more like one of the big Chinese government-supported universities in the sense that we would be eligible for Fulbright scholars. That was our interest.

We were part of China's changing system in those days in another sense. In addition to the Hong Kong Baptist University, which set up UIC, other foreign universities were setting up programs in China. The earliest, actually, had been done back in 1980 or so when Johns Hopkins University set up the Hopkins-Nanjing Center, a bilingual program. And while I was in Zhuhai, another program was set up by Nottingham University in England; it's called the Nottingham Ningbo Center. And I visited their campus in Ningbo two or three times, a large campus with a lot of British students in a predominantly Chinese student body. The campus also featured a Big Ben-replica clock.

And at the same time, more and more Chinese students were heading overseas, to colleges overseas. I mean, that's still the case, although I recently read that just last year that fewer came to the United States for the first time than in many years, but I think they're still going somewhere, they're just not coming to the U.S. Maybe they're going to Canada or UK or to universities in the EU.

Q: The other sort of longer-term question that I wanted to ask you was, now or looking back, having been there and having taught six, seven, eight years.

HOLBROOK: Five years as a teacher, yes.

Q: Oh, it was five. Okay. So, are you now in touch with any of the graduates from the school that you were teaching in? Have you seen their career trajectory?

HOLBROOK: I'm just in touch with a few of them. One of them I emailed this morning. He came to the United States, he was down in New Orleans at Tulane, or was it LSU?. He's graduated and has become a Trump supporter. Another student worked for the National Committee on US-China relations for a while and is now employed at the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai. One of our best students went to Carnegie Mellon University and from there to Stanford, after which I lost track of her. When I left the teaching job, I went to Hong Kong and I was the head of the Hong Kong-America Center for three years, and several of my former UIC students were in Hong Kong to work or continue in school. So they would call me up and we'd go out to dinner or something; every four or five months I was in contact with them in Hong Kong, but mostly have not heard from them since I left Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong-America Center was set up in the 1990s just before Hong Kong reverted to Beijing's control under the one country/two systems formula. It was set up to show continuing American academic and cultural involvement in Hong Kong as the 1998 date of the handover to China approached. It was set up with the support of the US Consulate

in Hong Kong and the US Embassy in Beijing. But it was not a part of the Consulate or the US Government. It was supported instead by the universities in Hong Kong and its office was located on the campus of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where I met Glenn Shive, who was the Director of the Center who both preceded and succeeded me. The Center would organize seminars on important topics like the conflicting claims in the South China Sea, and climate change, and we would solicit participation from students in all of the universities in Hong Kong and also sometimes from Macau and my college in Zhuhai, and elsewhere.

On a typical policy simulation, there might be 50 students participating, representing maybe eight to 10 institutions, and divided into teams. For example, for our Paris climate talks simulation, as I mentioned earlier we chose six or seven representative countries, China and the United States obviously being two of those countries. But we also had Saudi Arabia, Philippines, India, Bangladesh and a couple of other countries.

I took advantage of my own diplomatic background and telephoned various consuls general in Hong Kong. So the Consuls General from France, Bangladesh, and India, made presentations on their country's position on climate change to our students, and also the Japanese and Philippines consulates sent representatives. I did my best to persuade the Saudi Arabian Consul General or other representative to join us, but in the end, after many phone calls, they declined.

This was actually a three-part simulation. First there were briefings by the Consuls General or other Consulate officials on their country's position on climate change. Then about a month later, the student teams would debate the main climate issues being considered in the Paris talks. I think we actually did come to a mock draft agreement. And then the third part, which we held at the Asia Society, was right after the Paris Convention itself actually concluded, in December 2015. We had a live report on the Paris results, including a presentation by the French Consul General in Hong Kong, and by a retired US Foreign Service Officer, my former colleague Fritz Maerkle, in Paris. In addition there was a taped message from French President Hollande on the climate talks results.

Anyway, we did that for climate change. We also did it for South China Sea issues. We had teams representing China, Japan, the United States, and representing all the claimants, including the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia. And these were mixed teams, like the team representing China might have a student from China and a student from the Philippines. Sort of deliberately we weren't having people representing their own countries, although some people would represent their own countries, to see if they could come to grips with this kind of intractable dispute about islands in the South China Sea. Actually, it was broader than that. We were talking about island disputes in East Asia in general, including the South China Sea. There also are two groups of islands that are disputed between China and Japan on the one hand, and between South Korea and Japan also.

So, that's the sort of thing the Hong Kong-America Center did. We also set up programs for Hong Kong students to travel to the United States during summer months. The one I set up was in Washington, DC. They stayed in dormitories at George Washington University. And we arranged for a couple of retired FSOs in Washington to arrange their schedules there. Connie Morella, my Ambassador when I was at the US Mission to the OECD, spoke to the students in Washington, as did Joe Mussomeli, the Deputy Chief of Mission when I was at Embassy Manila.

Q: So, during all this time, did your wife also work?

HOLBROOK: My wife did work at our Embassy in Beijing for a short period. She also did a great job of finding nice places to live both in Embassies and after my retirement. In Zhuhai, we had a two-story house on a golf course. I could be on the first tee in about five minutes from my house. It was very convenient. In Hong Kong, we stayed at Deer Valley, a housing complex with great views of Hong Kong and the South China Sea.

Q: So, as you're going through all of these jobs in China, were you thinking that maybe this would be a good place to retire, or where were you beginning to look in terms of where you'll be over the long-term?

HOLBROOK: Yes, yes. Well, those were great jobs, but I never really thought of myself as a long-term resident of Asia or Europe. Well, for a starter, I never really thought much about that question. In Zhuhai after I taught for five years, China began enforcing a rule about not hiring foreign teachers who were over 65 years old. Actually, I was 65 when I started teaching there, so I was fortunate to be employed for five years.

But again, I really wasn't thinking of either Zhuhai or Hong Kong as retirement places. I felt a certain pull back towards my hometown in Kentucky, where my parents and brother and his wife Forrest Roberts (who is also an attorney) had lived and made many contributions towards the community. So I departed from Hong Kong after three years and returned to Owensboro, Ky.

There are two small colleges in Owensboro, Kentucky Wesleyan College and Brescia University, and both were happy to have my services teaching courses like US Foreign Policy in their political science departments. So I have alternated between those two schools, just teaching one course per semester. Then it turned out that the Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville also offered me the opportunity to teach a course there, on International Law, so now I switch among the three colleges.

Q: Now then, from this vantage point now, looking at where China has come, are there overall lessons learned or insights at this point that you'd like to share?

HOLBROOK: I would divide both China and US-China relations into two periods of time since 1979.

US-China relations: the US policy of engagement and the Chinese policy of reform and opening proved compatible. Bilateral relations expanded more or less across the board from 1979 until 2017 based on a foundation of about 50 agreements in areas ranging from trade and investment to cultural exchanges and nuclear energy. Differences on issues such as human rights and Taiwan were not resolved, but openly discussed.

In roughly the same period of time, China itself changed significantly. In rural areas, China abolished the communes set up during the Great Leap Forward, and allowed farmers to move towards land ownership by means of long-term leases. In urban areas, subsidized, inefficient state enterprises were told to trim down and make a profit, and private enterprises became the engine of growth. Chinese society as a whole became much less rigid. Ordinary Chinese citizens could get passports and travel, work, or study overseas. Universities reopened, and graduates could find their own jobs rather than awaiting assignments from government authorities.

Both US-China relations and China itself moved in the other direction in the second decade of the 21st Century. Presidents Trump and Biden imposed high tariffs on Chinese goods, and US policy in general towards China moved from engagement to confrontation in some areas, while preserving competition and even cooperation to a lesser extent.

In 2012 Xi Jinping came to power in China and proved to be the most repressive Chinese leader since Mao. The Party became paramount, with strengthened controls in every organization in China. Term limits, a key reform implemented under Deng Xiaoping, intended to prevent a new, Mao-style "cult of the personality," were abolished. China moved back towards emphasizing state enterprises and made clear that Party control and state security was more important than economic efficiency.

So, when I think back on both US-China relations, and on China itself, I think this way: from 1979-2012, the trend was two steps forward, one step back – with Tiananmen being a giant step back. Since 2012, just the opposite, one step forward and two steps back, with it being increasingly difficult to identify that one step forward.

I do not believe China is an existential threat to the United States. China is not spreading its ideology around the world; it's not trying to bury the United States. But China is boosting its military forces, even though no one is threatening China. This to me suggests we must engage in arms control talks with China., as we did with the USSR. I also think that rather than disengaging across the board, as some advocate, we should engage even more strongly in cultural exchanges such as Fulbright scholarships and International Visitor grants, both of which, I believe, we have cut off. I do think that the US engagement policy and China's original reform and opening policy produced a large number of people in China, both in the Party and out, who favor good relations with the US, and who are not happy with China's current policy directions. Sooner or later, I hope, these people will be able to change China's present hostile attitude towards the US.

Q: Yes, in fact, I was about to ask you a question directly related to that, which is, now that you are an American professor teaching with some international aspects to your instruction, how would you advise students who are interested in becoming Foreign Service officers, how would you advise the department? In other words, what does it take now, from your point of view, to become a U.S. diplomat, and how would you advise the department to improve the way it does business?

HOLBROOK: Well, certainly, just as a general matter, I would emphasize language training more. We generally train diplomats only to the 3 level, which we call full professional use. I would say that if you cut things off at the three level, essentially, you're relying on the reality that many other countries teach their diplomats English at a higher level than we teach our diplomats foreign languages. I myself have a 3+, 3+ rating in both Chinese and French. This is useful, and I gave many speeches in both languages in my assignments, always carefully reviewing them in advance with a native speaker. But the interpreter level is better! In my foreign service, I would require that every FSO reach the 4 level, the interpreter level, in one foreign language. In at least one foreign language. In Japan, for example, the very professional Japanese diplomats that I dealt with in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spoke excellent English. Many if not all of them had not only studied English in Japan, but had gone on to study at Harvard, Oxford, and other top English-speaking schools.

Q: And then, for individuals, for students now who would be considering working for the State Department, what preparation would you recommend for them?

HOLBROOK: Well, I guess the standard thing that we tell them is to read "The New York Times" very closely every day, and not just the political articles but the articles on culture too. Read "The Economist." I would also tell them, if you study a foreign language, go as far as you can in the US, but then go on a program where you're a student in a university that's taught in a foreign language. In State Department FSI training, you get a reading level and a spoken level. This is fine as far as it goes, and FSI has fine teachers. But we should spend the resources to go to the next level of full interpreter-level fluency. We've had a few diplomats go through the Hopkins-Nanjing program, it's very valuable. In Hopkins-Nanjing, located in China, everything is bilingual. The Chinese students are taking courses taught in English; the Americans take courses taught in Chinese.

Q: And do you- are some of your students right now interested or are they ______ really more that this is something interesting to study briefly, but international service or international work is really not part of their aspirations?

HOLBROOK: I would say that in general it's not on anyone's radar screen in Kentucky. Actually, there are a few students at Ky. Wesleyan College and at the University of Louisville that have expressed interest in diplomacy, but not many. I try to make the case that international relations do affect us here. This is an agricultural state, and we sell a lot of soybeans, or we used to sell a lot of soybeans to China, for example, and we have

Chinese delegations here sometimes, we have some Chinese investment here. And there is a lot of Japanese investment in Kentucky. I do try to make it relevant.

Q: And the other thing is, you're also acquainted with the program of Diplomats in Residence.

HOLBROOK: Yes.

Q: You know that an offer has been made for any of the western Kentucky colleges, but sometimes if you make a request you can get one.

HOLBROOK: You mean like a retiree like me or active?

Q: Active duty.

HOLBROOK: Yes. Yes, I can- I have not suggested that to the colleges here, but I can suggest that.

Q: It's a one-year program where an active duty, either O2 or O1, comes out and does a variety of things with the campus.

HOLBROOK: Well, I almost did one of those myself when I went to the Council on Foreign Relations. One of my alternatives, I think, was to go to Northwestern University. And I think in the end I ended up going to the Council because the Council somehow didn't count against my time in class, but the university did. Does that sound right?

Q: Yes, that does, absolutely, yes.

Alright, now, so it looks like we're approaching the end of our interview. Are there any final thoughts or recommendations you'd have for the administration or the State Department in the conduct of our policies?

HOLBROOK: Well, certainly regarding China policy, I mentioned earlier my view that we should re-start the Fulbright and other cultural exchange programs that we have, that go in both directions, that offer hope of reversing the current hostile level of relations between the US and China.

Q: Alright. So, if you feel we've reached the end then, given the trajectory we've covered, then what I'd like to do is thank you very much for taking the time with us to record your oral history. And we'll conclude here and provide you with the transcript in a very short amount of time, and we'll look forward to placing it on the ADST website and depositing it with the Library of Congress.

End of interview