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

JAMES R. HOOPER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Jim, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

HOOPER: I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on January 9, 1947.

Q: What do you know about your father's side of the family? Where do the Hoopers come from and what were they occupied with?

HOOPER: I know that my father's side of the family came from Cornwall, England. They were tin miners in Cornwall and came to the United States in the mid-1800s. And I understand that they opened the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to mining in the 19th century. In fact, there was a family reunion about thirty years ago, I happened to be overseas at the time and I regrettably could not attend it, in Ontonagon, a town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. There weren't any Hoopers residing there at the time of the family reunion, but the Hooper name is apparently still known in Ontonagon. The townspeople remembered the name and invited several of my relatives to stay in their homes rather than at local motels. My aunt wrote a family history in which she pulled all of this together for the reunion, had it privately printed and distributed to family members.

For those who know very little about Michigan's Upper Peninsula (I lived in the Lower Peninsula), it's pretty sparsely populated. It is probably best known for the Sault Ste. Marie locks and the Mackinac Bridge, which I remember visiting when it was being built in the 1950s.

My mother's side, the Hoyt family, starts in Germany. There were two brothers who came to the American colonies as doctors in the 1600s, according to what my mother told us, though there is no written family history of which I am aware. My understanding is that my relatives participated in just about every major war fought by the United States, from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War through World Wars One and Two.

By the Civil War they were living in Illinois. My mother was born in Decatur, Illinois. The Hoyts were involved in the railroad business, a number of them were engineers and so forth. Decatur was a center of railroad yards. In fact, one of my mother's earliest memories—she was born in 1922—was of a funeral at age three or so that she attended for one of her uncles who was an engineer. His train had been going over one of those big, wooden, rickety trestles and the trestle collapsed; no one survived the crash.

My mother was legally blind for the last fifteen years or so of her life. She had problems with eyesight all of her life which deteriorated as she grew older.

Neither my father nor my mother had been to college. It had always been her dream however to attend college, and in her early 60s she finally decided to get her bachelor's degree. Once she decided to do something, she was very determined to reach her goal, and though it took her about ten years, since her blindness limited the number of classes she could take at any one time, she obtained her degree around the age of 70. She received a standing ovation at graduation, a nice spread in the Grand Rapids Press, and significant coverage on local television. She was extraordinarily proud of the effort that she had made and her accomplishment. She died of rectal cancer in Grand Rapids, Michigan at age 74.

My father was in World War II, having enlisted in 1942 after Pearl Harbor. He was enormously proud of having been part of George Patton's Third Army. He landed at Normandy twice, not on D-Day but a few days later the first time to pick up some equipment and bring it to England, and then he went back a few days after that. He was in transportation units that initially had to take some captured German weaponry back to England, as I recall him telling us. After I had joined the Foreign Service he told me that, in 1938 at age 16, he did not know where Czechoslovakia was when the Munich agreement was in the news. However, he added, in 1945 his Third Army unit ended the war in Czechoslovakia. I believe he felt that there was a lesson in that and that it paid to understand something about what was going on in the world. For him, when we would talk about foreign affairs on occasion, he put great stock in what our allies thought of any particular plan or initiative that the U.S. wanted to implement. That served him in good stead as a shorthand guide to looking at issues, because in 2003 he opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq in view of the criticism of the policy by many U.S. allies.

Q: When he got out of the military, what was he doing?

HOOPER: Cars were always at the center of his career and, along with his family, at the center of his life. He was driving a truck between Grand Rapids and Lansing, Michigan in 1935 when he was 13, unbeknownst to my grandfather, who was a vice president of Michigan National Bank in Grand Rapids. The State Police pulled him over for speeding and informed my grandfather when they realized his age. He later became a service manager in Grand Rapids for several different automobile dealerships, in particular Chevrolet and Oldsmobile. He loved General Motors but saw the faults of its management approach, and noted that the Japanese firms seemed to be much more effective at understanding what customers wanted in their vehicles. He was a pretty honest man, a real straight shooter, and just knew everything about cars.

He died in 2007 at age 84, having worked until 82. The Oldsmobile dealership he was with kept him on, though he wasn't service manager, that was just too demanding and he cut back his work to two or three days a week as a consultant at the dealership. People knew he was trustworthy and would tell them the truth about their cars and wouldn't give them any fluff or spin about what was best in terms of automotive decisions they had to make. He wouldn't try any shady repair deals. Though he was not in sales and had never wanted to be, he developed a wide circle of people who believed in him and who would buy a new car because he was there to oversee its servicing. Every dealership he was with

valued him for the business that his integrity brought to the dealerships. They kept him on twenty years after people normally stop this kind of work.

Q: Where did you grow up?

HOOPER: Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Q: What was the neighborhood you grew up in like?

HOOPER: Middle class, near Alger Elementary School. I look back on it as what was for many white middle class Americans in the 1950s probably considered a traditional upbringing. We lived in the same neighborhood for years, got to know all the kids, playing softball in vacant lots and being chased by a neighbor when we would hit the ball into his yard. I have kept in touch with one of my best friends from those years, who lived next store and now still lives just a few blocks from there, a very decent man who adopted two kids from Romania and Latin America some years after marriage and has raised them well.

Also, I should add that in the summer of 2010, when I returned to Grand Rapids to attend the 45th reunion of my Ottawa Hills High School graduating class, I went by the old neighborhood and tried to visit the house where I had grown up, but the current owners were out of town. However, a neighbor across the street told my wife and I that a movie crew was in town shooting a comedy with Ben Stiller as executive producer ("Thirty Minutes Or Less"), and that the week previously had spent a day shooting the final scene in the driveway of my family's house that we had moved out of in the early 1960s. According to the neighbor, the director wanted to film the scene at a prototypical Midwestern house, drove around Grand Rapids, and when he drove past my (former) house, stopped there and decided that was where he would do the scene.

Growing up, I did a lot of the things that were typical for the location and era—played in Little League baseball, rooted for the Detroit Tigers (baseball), Lions (football) and Red Wings (hockey); collected bubble gum cards (baseball and football players, the Davy Crockett series, etc.); and spent as much of the summer as possible with my parents swimming in nearby Lake Michigan. I also published a neighborhood newspaper for a brief period and did all sorts of odd jobs to make a little money to save for a bicycle. I did not like alcohol back then so avoided related problems with that while growing up, but I smoked cigarettes occasionally when my parents weren't looking, because it seemed "cool." My first day of college, when I was finally on my own and it wasn't any fun hiding the cigarettes from my parents any more, I stopped and have never again smoked cigarettes. My only exposure to marijuana was once in college, with a group of people sitting around a campfire, someone passed a joint around and I took two puffs, inhaled, but it did nothing for me and I never smoked it again nor tried any other such drug. Relatively speaking, it was a pretty innocent youth.

What I regarded as a traditional upbringing is very different from the upbringing my son and daughter had in the Foreign Service. They moved around every two or three years or

so, whereas I had grown up in the same town for my first 18 years until going to college at American University in Washington. As I mentioned, I had lived in the same neighborhood for a number of years and then a different neighborhood, but I really got to know other families, other kids, grew up with them and so forth.

Q: At home, sort of how did things work? You have brothers, sisters, sit around and talk about things?

HOOPER: I had two brothers, no sisters. I was the oldest. We didn't talk that much about international relations. It just wasn't that much of a topic. Some politics, but more sports and that kind of thing, the Boy Scouts. I have one brother two years younger than me, the other is three years younger and so we were all close enough, we made up much of a team ourselves.

I probably got my inspiration for international relations and the Foreign Service from a seventh grade teacher that I had, who was terrific. Through her I became interested in international relations and whereas I had never really thought of it before, around the age of 14 or so I kind of figured I wanted to go into the Foreign Service. Career choice really came very early for me.

Q: Your neighborhood, was it a mixed neighborhood, different ethnic groups or

HOOPER: Virtually all white, as I remember it. It was not a mixed neighborhood at all. Everyone thinks their life experience is traditional or something like that and what I then regarded as a typical upbringing, it wasn't typical, it was just my upbringing and my neighborhood and so forth. There were kids who were refugees from World War Two, but I barely knew what a refugee was.

I remember from first grade a boy who was Jewish and from Germany. I didn't realize much about the Jewish aspect of his faith and he mentioned once in passing he knew German. I said, "Oh, why don't you speak it?" He said, "No, I never speak it." That stayed in my mind for some reason and it was only when I grew up that I realized he didn't want to speak it because of what the family had gone through in the Holocaust.

Q: Grand Rapids, what was going on there?

HOOPER: Grand Rapids is part of western Michigan, about 25 miles from Lake Michigan and the lake dominates much of your weekends in the summer and so forth. Everyone goes there and has a cottage or rents a cottage or something.

Grand Rapids is a fairly moderate conservative area. There's a lot of Dutch immigrants and they had Sunday laws, the stores weren't open and you couldn't buy liquor on Sunday, because there was a heavy Christian Reformed influence. Gerry Ford was our congressman.

Arthur Vandenberg was from Grand Rapids and had been the senator from Michigan. Grand Rapids had produced some real leaders like Vandenberg in setting postwar policy, as a Republican, with the Truman Administration. His break with the isolationists was a major boost for greater international engagement by the United States.

And Gerry Ford, not necessarily known for foreign relations, though he was on the House Appropriations Committee and focused in part on defense matters. He was actually quite interested and quite good in foreign relations. When I was a student at American University's School of International Service, I worked for three years as an unpaid intern in his office and got to know him slightly.

Q: Where did the family fall politically?

HOOPER: Republican then, although I can remember my mother voting Democrat in the Sixties, but it's more a Democrat family now.

Q: Sort of moderate Republican?

HOOPER: Yes, moderate Republican. My father never talked politics that much. My mother was more interested in it. But I would say moderate Republican.

Q: How about religion?

HOOPER: Protestant, Presbyterian, went to Eastminster Presbyterian Church, where the minister was a wonderful man who I fondly remember, Edward Bringham. My last year of high school, I attended a liberal church. There are not many of them. Hard to describe it, very unique, led by Dr. Duncan Littlefair, who was the scourge of conservative religious groups in Grand Rapids. It had evolved out of a Baptist Church, strangely enough. In any case while growing up I remember going to church every Sunday, or three out of four Sundays, and was active in the church youth group.

Q: Did the family, did you, keep up with the news and newspapers?

HOOPER: I read the Grand Rapids Press for news, but as for radio, when listening to rock and roll music I would get bothered with news interruption. I wasn't listening to the radio for news in those days.

Read a lot of books. I really loved reading. I just read all sorts of books.

Q: You recall any of the early books that particularly struck you?

HOOPER: Back then, there was a series of books called the Landmark series and they had fifty, sixty books. I think I read every one of the series and they were from history to biography to whatever.

Reading gives you a field of knowledge and insights and relationships that you draw on for the rest of your life. Some of it is unconscious and you don't necessarily even realize what's there.

As a kid, somehow I was reading a *Reader's Digest* story about the American University in Beirut as a teenager and the American University in Beirut had classes in English and I thought, "I'd like to go there someday." I wanted to go overseas for a year, junior year abroad, I knew that before I went to college. From years back, I thought, "I want to go there." So I applied there and I got accepted and went there and actually found my wife there, but this came, oddly enough, out of reading that *Reader's Digest* article, which ended up changing my life completely.

Q: In elementary school, were you a good student and what things did you like and what didn't you like?

HOOPER: I really liked international relations. Back in elementary school, it wasn't international relations, that's for sure. I did pretty well, I guess, had the same kind of interest in getting gold stars and boxes checked at the top of the list and was very competitive on grades, very competitive in athletics and I was the leader of various groups on the playground.

I liked geography, was very interested in geography. I was most interested in history. And then that kind of evolved into current affairs, international affairs and so forth.

Q: How about math and things of that nature?

HOOPER: I liked math, particularly when we got into algebra, I really liked that. I kind of understood that and did not have any problems with math. When we got into geometry in high school, it really threw me and trigonometry, I didn't realize the utility of them, I didn't have much interest in them and so I really dropped off on that. For me, I didn't see the point of it.

Chemistry and physics, biology, I was not interested. It was not something that spoke to me and my dreams.

Q: Where'd you go to high school?

HOOPER: Ottawa Hills for seventh grade, then to the newly created Ridgeview Junior High School near where I lived for eighth and ninth grade, and then back to Ottawa Hills for high school. I plan to attend the fiftieth anniversary of our graduation in the summer of 2015. The high school was named after a tribe of native Americans that had settled in Grand Rapids, the Ottawas. There were a number of tribes that had lived in western Michigan.

Q: Get involved much in extracurricular things?

HOOPER: I was on the debate team for a year, played trumpet in the band for a while, and at one point tried out for the student play, though failed to get the part. I had no acting ability.

In junior high school, I was vice president of the student council and then the next year was president, and my brother became the vice president of the student council. That kind of thing rarely happens.

In high school I wasn't interested in student government any more. I guess I lost my interest after that. I didn't think I did a particularly good job on the student council.

Q: What about, in high school, dating, was there much dating going on?

HOOPER: I did my share of dating in junior high school and high school, had my share of crushes and girl friends.

Q: The usual thing: going to movies, having a soda and that sort of thing?

HOOPER: Yep, I remember some of them. I remember seeing *Lawrence of Arabia* on a date. I wouldn't describe that as a chick flick.

Did a lot of intramural sports in junior high school and I guess high school.

Q: Did outside events intrude at all while you were doing this, elections or the Cold War or not?

HOOPER: As I was growing up I always thought that people should be more serious, there was a Cold War going on. As I got into my teens there was a part of me that said while at the same time I was enjoying parties and so forth and all the football games and baseball games and all this kind of stuff in the neighborhood that we used to do all the time, I just loved it, but part of me always said, "People should be more serious. There's a Cold War going on." I almost thought of it in those terms, that this was serious business and there's a seriousness there, for better or for worse.

Q: While you were in high school, were you pointed towards university? Was this sort of expected, or not?

HOOPER: Yes. I wanted to go to school in Washington, D.C and in fact I only applied to one college, which was American University School of International Service and there was a man who was kind of a mentor, who was a teacher, a high school teacher named David Newton, really good and when I told him about this, I had him write a letter of recommendation and then later he said, "Well, did you want me to write some more? Which colleges do you want me to write to?"

And I said, "No, that's the only one I'm applying to."

He was shocked and I remember his telling me, "Why? You're crazy! You gotta apply to several. You don't know you're gonna get accepted there."

I said, "No, that's the only place I want to go."

"What if you're not accepted there?"

But I was accepted by AU.

On my father's side, the family college was the University of Michigan and my grandmother had said if I go to the University of Michigan that she would pay. And I told my parents that, no, I did not want to go there. Great school, but I wanted to go to school in Washington, that was my dream.

So that was it, I went to AU without my grandmother's financial support, and I had to go out and get a scholarship and work part time to save money. I was working from the time I was 13, during summers. But I had to take on loans to make it through college.

Q: What sort of jobs were you doing in high school?

HOOPER: During the school year I worked at a convenience store. For several summers I was a YMCA camp counselor for kids at Camp Optimist, just outside Grand Rapids, they had a camp area, it was a lot of fun, probably for the first four years as a teenager, five years, whatever and it was a lot of fun.

And then Gerry Ford's brother Tom had a paint factory and I worked there between senior year and college and got a letter of recommendation from him to his brother, which probably helped me get that unpaid student intern job which I had for three years.

In college, factory jobs, in Grand Rapids or Kalamazoo, where my parents moved when I graduated from high school.

Q: Graduated from high school what year?

HOOPER: '65.

Q: Where did you go to college?

HOOPER: American University in Washington, at the School of International Service.

Q: You did that from '65 to '69?

HOOPER: Yes, with one year spent abroad, my junior year abroad, at the American University in Beirut. It's a similarity in names. There is no relationship between the two universities.

Q: When you arrived on the campus here in Washington, D.C., what was American U like at the time?

HOOPER: It was probably the last year in which there was some expectation that freshman wore beanies and none of us did. The big debate was should the university be *in loco parentis*. That debate has obviously long since been settled but was still lively at the time. Vietnam was gearing up as a serious issue. That was the single biggest issue throughout my college time.

But I thought college was great. I loved Washington and thought AU was a great school. I really liked the education I got. I thought it was very practical and relevant. Liked the courses. I thought AU was terrific.

Q: AU is able to draw on Washington, real practitioners, particularly in fields such as international relations. Did you specialize in any particular area?

HOOPER: After the year at the American University in Beirut, I took an interest in the Middle East. I had none before that.

As I mentioned earlier, I had that in my mind, going to AUB, that seed got planted as a kid. So I took an interest in the Middle East after I returned to AU. It was really in graduate school at Columbia where I specialized in the Middle East at the School of International Affairs.

Q: Let's go to Beirut. You were there what year?

HOOPER: '67-'68.

Q: What was the situation at that time?

HOOPER: Interesting time to have been there. It was after the Six Day Arab-Israeli War of 1967, which was in June. I remember my passport was stamped "Not Valid For Travel" to a long list of Middle East countries that had broken diplomatic relations with the United States during the war. I initially wasn't even sure I was going to get a visa to travel to Lebanon, but it wasn't an issue.

While in the Middle East for that school year I never felt afraid, insecure, even though there were a lot of hostile attitudes towards American policy in the region. I found that the people I met distinguished readily between American policy on the one hand and Americans and American culture. They didn't like American policy very much, or at least on the Arab-Israeli issue, but they liked Americans, were curious about America and respected American culture. I made a lot of friends. I also traveled to Israel while I was there.

It was a great year. I traveled around the region a fair amount, got to know to people, had experiences that I never would have had if I'd stayed in the U.S. It really opened my mind up. I think I was pretty naive when I went abroad, didn't know that much.

Q: Did you find at the university, was there a strong anti-Israeli theme?

HOOPER: People certainly had their points of view, but it wasn't like I imagine it is now. I actually think there was more tolerance, that people tried to understand the situation more. It was considerably less inflamed. But there was a lively curiosity about Israel among Arabs at that time.

And I went to Israel during the Christmas vacation. Back then, you had to go to Cyprus, get another passport to use to travel to Israel, so that you didn't have the Israeli stamp in the passport and I went with four or five other American students and when we returned to Beirut, we had a presentation which we did off campus and talked about it and had slides and so forth. The room was packed and we didn't get tendentious questions. The Palestinians in particular were very curious about Israel and what life was actually like there as they knew the Palestinian and Arab propaganda of the time distorted things in Israel considerably, and so they asked a lot of questions to understand what was going on.

Q: That year, were you taking courses that were particularly focused on the Middle East?

HOOPER: Some, yes. I took a Middle East politics course and there was a professor who was very open minded, just terrific, no political correctness, that term didn't exist then, but would not accept ideological positions that students would take on any issue, be it governments in the Arab world, Israel and so forth. People had to justify their opinions and he understood, I thought, the realities of governing and the realities of politics in the region. I learned a lot from him. The late Dr. John Batatu was a great man and an inspiration to me.

He wrote a book about Iraq and because he had access to files there that they let him copy between governments, they just let him look at the files, so he went in and copied down all sorts of stuff and got a lot of stuff about pre-1958, about what Iraqi society was like and the real strata in society.

He had a way of looking at things that was not ideological. You really felt you intellectually came alive in his classroom. I found that interesting.

Q: Did you get any feel for the large, I guess they're Shia, sort of the underclass, at least at that time, were the underclass Arabs, or were you kind of absorbed by the Christian Lebanese?

HOOPER: I did not get that much of a feel for the Shia when I was there. I'm trying to think who I knew in the student body who was explicitly Shia. It was not just Lebanese, because there were a large number of Arab students from other countries. I'm trying to

think if I remember, there might have been but I do not claim to have gotten a feel for the Shia underclass in Lebanon.

Q: I think this was true of people in our embassy and everywhere else.

HOOPER: I ran into someone from the embassy, I believe he was from the public affairs section, some students were invited up to the ambassador's residence for a party, I went along. And so we were talking to this fellow about whatever political issue and he said, "I don't really care what you believe." It wasn't American policy. "I don't really care." It was a real turnoff to me. And there were Arabs there, too and I thought it was not the way Americans should project themselves.

On the other hand, there was another Foreign Service Officer that I met who was learning Arabic, he was taking a course at American University. I was really impressed with him. This is what I call a real Foreign Service Officer. He had some very interesting stories.

I remember meeting at his apartment, which was near the university, along the Corniche, along the water, meeting Phebe Marr, who was an Iraq scholar, at his house, I haven't kept in touch with her, occasionally over the years I see her on TV speaking about Iraq.

Overall it was a transformative year.

Q: Then you came back, '69 or '68?

HOOPER: I came back in the summer of '68. Just in the last few months before leaving Beirut, Robert Kennedy was assassinated, Martin Luther King was assassinated. I remember meeting with other students, we talked about whether America was going to hold together. You really got that impression that things were serious and that it was a pretty sobering time. I found it difficult to be away from America at that particular time.

Q: How did you stand draft-wise?

HOOPER: When I went to graduate school I was called up. I wasn't particularly looking forward to going to Vietnam but assumed that was going to happen. I'd had a knee operation as a 14 year old for a diseased cartilage and they'd opened it up. I had been on crutches for a long time. At the draft physical, the army doctor took a look at my x-rays and said, "Would you come back another time?" I came back and he looked at my file and my x-rays and said, "You're out! You're not going to serve in the army."

I think they figured I was going to be spending a lot of time at Veterans Administration hospitals due to my pre-existing leg problem after my service and was going to be a long term drain on the Veterans Administration. I don't know what guidance he had. But my number came up, back then you had numbers and I had like 125 or something and I got the call fairly early. So that was my experience with the military.

Q: So you went off to Columbia for grad school? What were you planning to do?

HOOPER: I wanted to join the Foreign Service. I was also getting married, to the sister of my roommate, who was Lebanese, at AUB. I got to know him and his family and would go up to the mountains to their home often on weekends when I was at AUB. We got engaged when I was at AUB, then I returned to the US to finish my senior year of undergraduate studies, so we were separated for a whole year, which was definitely not easy, and then married after I returned to the US and began graduate school in 1969.

Q: Where did she come from? What sort of family and all?

HOOPER: They had Lebanese citizenship at the time and they'd been there for eight years or so, eight or ten years. She'd been born in Aleppo. Her father was in charge of engineering at the American University of Beirut. Before that, he was at Aleppo College, which was an American college in Aleppo, Syria and he had Syrian citizenship then. But he was Turkish, he came from Turkey. They were living there and she was born and had Syrian citizenship and grew up on an American campus. Then he was hired by AUB. Various companies were trying to hire him to come and work in the United States. He was born in Turkey, went to a missionary school, worked very hard, saved up money, went to Roberts College, taught there, got two of his brothers to Harvard.

He was a very honest man, an extremely honest man. He had the son of a government minister in one of his classes at Roberts College, and failed him. And they said, "You can't do that, you just can't do it. At least give him a C."

He said, "No." And he was then told that the government was going to put him in the army and he knew what would happen then. Someone told him they were coming for him. He slipped out of Istanbul and across the Syrian border. He'd just married my wife's mother and in fact they had a little baby who just been born. She remained in Istanbul until he had found a job at Aleppo College and arranged for her to join him there.

It's quite an interesting family story. He was a very honest man. He wasn't going to give someone a grade they didn't deserve, period. He just wouldn't do it. It didn't matter who the student was and he paid a high price. I have very fond memories of him. He was a very honest, decent, tough-minded, honest man.

Q: When you went to graduate school, did you still have the Foreign Service in mind?

HOOPER: Yes and I picked Columbia and the School of International Affairs and in particular Professor John Badeau, who then was head of the Middle East Center at Columbia.

Q: Later ambassador to Cairo?

HOOPER: Actually before that he had been ambassador to Cairo and president of the American University in Cairo. At Columbia, they had the various regional institutes and I took courses with him and various others there.

But I was focused on getting into the Foreign Service. To be honest, it was a great experience in New York and for my wife, it was her first experience in the United States, New York City, that was quite a big thing. And we had nothing. We were penniless. We survived on loans, revolving loans, which we'd repay and take out a new one, from the university and she was working and I was working part time, ten cents a slice pizza that you could get on the street. It was a great time, in a lot of ways.

Q: You were, what, on a master's degree program?

HOOPER: Yes, two years. But I was tiring of school and wanted to get into life and do something real.

I took graduate school seriously and the grades were good and everything, but I could have gotten more out of it. I just wanted to stop studying and start living and be able to better support my family.

Q: You took the Foreign Service exam?

HOOPER: Yes. During the day-long oral exam process, a group of aspirants had to deal with the issue of whether the United States should use diplomatic relations as a tool or should we just establish them with everyone, or should we be very selective, and we had to write something advocating a position.

Then they told us that we had to discuss and defend our views and come up with a consensus agreement. "Okay, here's the rules. Essentially there aren't any. You need to have an agreement or whatever, but from now on I'm sitting here taking notes, but I'm not here. It's all up to you. So don't ask me anything. You're on your own. Go to it!"

And so we all kind of looked at each other. And I said, "Well, why don't we each give a one minute view, so that everyone has a chance to say their view and then let's discuss it and then let's see if we have an agreement." And then the others said, "Good. You go first." And I thought, "Shouldn't have volunteered!"

I gave my view, which I thought was actually probably something that the others weren't going to accept or was controversial and the first one after me said, "Yeah, that's what I think, too." The next one said, "Yeah, that's probably about right." And it just broke that way and so I think the whole thing went pretty well. I remember that group dynamics pretty well.

Then they had us in for our orals. The questions: five of your favorite authors in the nineteenth century and five in the twentieth century, something like that, or five of your favorite authors; what was the last book you read; trace the territorial development of the United States; say you were in the cultural affairs office of an embassy and you've got to come up with three ideas for a theme for a U.S. pavilion in Moscow, what would your

three ideas be? "Now, tell us which one you would actually recommend and why. We see here on your bio that you worked in Congressman Ford's office."

I said, "I was an intern. I gave no policy advice." I did not want to pretend that I was any kind of advisor of his, or that I could swing any weight on Capitol Hill. I said it was a student thing and I had a lot of respect for the man, rather than "He relied on me for everything he did." I said it straight. I'm going to rise or fall on what I know and my abilities and so forth and I'm not going to hide the fact that I did that, that I worked there, but I wasn't going to make it into something it wasn't.

Q: Talk about Congressman Ford's office. What was your impression, down at the fairly grunt level, of how Congress worked? Did you get any feel for it?

HOOPER: I got a certain amount of feel for some of the bruising stuff, but he had a big office at that time and it was right in the Capitol itself. It was so easy to walk in, at that time, no security, so you could walk in, roam anywhere. I thought his staff, he was minority leader at the time, so he had quite a network and he had some staffers that were working on broader issues than would have been the case if he was just a congressman from Michigan. I got to know one or two of his staffers, who tried to educate me some.

I remember meeting Don Rumsfeld. For my many labors as an intern, I got to accompany some of the people from the office to a dinner and there they introduced me to Don Rumsfeld, who was then a crew cut young congressman on his way up. Occasionally I've seen Rumsfeld over the years, because he was doing some Middle East stuff when I was working in London at the embassy and I would always remind him of that occasion.

Q: Did domestic politics interest you at all?

HOOPER: Yes, not that I wanted to run for elective office, but American politics did interest me and regional politics around the world certainly interested me.

Q: Well, when you went to Columbia, the Foreign Service was still the goal, more or less?

HOOPER: Yes.

Q: You have a secondary goal?

HOOPER: I don't know what I would have done if I had not joined the Foreign Service. I didn't give it much thought, to be honest. Looking back, I would say I was pretty naive. What was my Plan B, my fallback? I didn't have a Plan B when I applied to college. I didn't have a Plan B for not getting into the Foreign Service. I figure I would have just gotten on with my life and done something, but I didn't have a plan. My dream and mission was to get into the Foreign Service and deal with foreign policy issues and spend time overseas. If you've got a dream and a mission, I guess the mission follows from the

dream, if you've got that, then the rest sort of follows, you begin to pattern things along that.

Q: Did you see a problem about your wife, as a Lebanese citizen?

HOOPER: When she came, she switched to an immigrant visa because we were married and then later after I joined the Foreign Service she became an American citizen. I assumed this might mean that I would not be able to serve in the Middle East or be limited and that used to be the case in the FS but had changed by the time I joined.

The Foreign Service has changed over the years and it was in the middle of yet another change when I was coming in. They were dispensing with the white gloves, calls on the ambassador's wife and that kind of thing. There was a lot of stuff that was changing.

But I didn't know that much about what to expect. I assumed it was going to limit some of the places I could serve in. Never did, in fact.

My wife, herself, is very apolitical. She is not into politics. She was not interested in politics at all. That has evolved over the years.

Q: At Columbia, what were you studying?

HOOPER: International relations, a lot of Middle East courses, some Arabic, Middle East history and culture and Islam and politics and so forth, plus some general international relations.

Q: I was wondering, in New York, where Columbia is, it's sort of the heart of the Jewish community and it and the Arab view are not exactly in sync. Did this intrude at all?

HOOPER: There were a number of Jewish students at American University who I knew before I went to Lebanon, and at Columbia and many of them were taking Middle East courses, wanted to get into the Foreign Service or were going to do whatever. I knew them and it didn't intrude or wasn't a problem. They were interested in learning about it, too.

I joined the FS in 1971 and fairly quickly after that the October 1973 war occurred and then the peace process that Henry Kissinger pursued. And so I was barely in the Foreign Service when the active process got going, I was really kind of a child of that, but the education I had I think really opened my mind to that and prepared me for that, because I thought there should be ways and went into the job with this instinct that there should be ways of sorting things out and dealing with issues and problems between them and trying to find ways to make progress and so forth. And when the peace process came along, I loved it, I thought that was perfect, long overdue.

Q: Did you have any professors who were acting almost like mentors or particularly struck you at the time?

HOOPER: Again, this professor. Dr. John Batatu, at the American University in Beirut, really awakened an intellectual interest. That is, he showed me that you can understand what the realities of politics and dynamics of a society and a region are in a very practical way and I was very impressed with that and he would certainly be one.

In high school, a chemistry teacher, David Newton, had a discussion group and he got together with seniors who were interested, about a dozen or so, who were interested in discussing issues beyond the curriculum. It was a real inspiration. Again, my seventh grade teacher who got me interested in international relations.

Q: Well, you then got your master's degree in?

HOOPER: '71.

Q: And right into the Foreign Service?

HOOPER: Got the master's degree in May and joined the Foreign Service in September.

Q: How'd you find your initial group, the A-100 course?

HOOPER: Some of them are still friends. It was pretty large. It was around 50, 60, 70 people. Some of them weren't friends then, I barely knew them then and then later in my career got to know them and became friends.

I liked the students. It was a good group. I didn't think that the A-100 course was taught particularly well. I didn't think I learned that much. I didn't think that they were doing it the right way, different people coming in lecturing to you for an hour or two. I didn't think that was the most effective way and there have been significant changes since then. I thought it was pretty shallow.

Good group of new colleagues though and I think people were trying hard to provide us with training and insights, but my impression then and still now is that it was just too shallow.

Q: Were you, at that point, definitely pointing towards the Middle East?

HOOPER: Yes, I wanted to get a Middle East assignment and of course they discouraged that back then, so I reached out and contacted NEA personnel. Back then, there had to be some assignment for you and there were hardly any assignments, because so many embassies had been closed after the 1967 war. And we worked out something, I was going to Jeddah, which was then where the embassy was in Saudi Arabia and I remember that I was told it was actually going to be Dhahran but they were going to announce Jeddah, because it was not yet known when Dhahran would open, but there was a vacancy in Jeddah. So I said okay.

Back then they announced everyone's assignment at the A-100 course graduation and many people didn't know their assignment until then. I knew mine, but they still had to announce it. And many colleagues were surprised that I would be going to Saudi Arabia, which was considered back then a pretty grim assignment, and assumed I had not wanted it. Actually I was looking forward to going to Saudi Arabia. I thought it would be a great adventure.

Dhahran was where the real opening was and that's where I went, in 1972.

Q: And you were in Dhahran from when to when?

HOOPER: February '72 to February '74.

Q: How'd you find Dhahran?

HOOPER: Back then it was relatively small, now it's bustling. The consulate was there largely because the Dhahran Air Base was there and you'd have U.S. military fliers, trainers, there and Aramco was there. And you had a large numbers of Americans, plus the consulate had been running the Gulf. Just as I was getting there, all these embassies were opening throughout the Gulf: Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, before that the Trucial States which became Oman, all became independent, so they all peeled off and there had been duplicate positions. It became more of a backwater post and much more focused on the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Quite interesting for me though.

Q: I was the vice consul there, '58 to '60 and as consular officer my beat consisted of the Eastern Province, Bahrain, Qatar and also the Trucial States.

HOOPER: You got to make all those trips!

Q: Oh, yes, in a little De Havilland Dove plane. There was no causeway to Bahrain or anything like that.

HOOPER: There was no causeway when I was there. I never got to make a single one of those trips, as a reporting trip.

Q: Once a month.

HOOPER: That must have been great.

Q: Oh, it was wonderful.

What kind of work were you doing there?

HOOPER: Consular. I was the vice consul.

Q: Who was the consul general?

HOOPER: Jim Bahti. Lee Dinsmore had just left and had retired and Jim Bahti, who had come from Bombay, arrived shortly after I did. I liked him a lot and we learned about Saudi Arabia together.

Q: I interviewed him, shortly before his death. Wife was a nurse.

HOOPER: He was a lot of fun to work with, he really was. And it turned out he was also from Michigan. There were seven staffers, seven Americans, apart from spouses. Three of us, there was a communicator, also, were from Michigan, which was kind of nice. As I recall, Jim Bahti had a Finnish-American background.

Q: What sort of consular work did you do?

HOOPER: Non-immigrant visas, immigrant visas, immigrant visas were all Yemenis. As for the Saudis back then, you felt that you could virtually leave the machine outside the door and tell them, "Put passport in slot, pull handle, collect visa, leave five dollars" or something like that, because they were never going to stay in the U.S., they were going to come back, they had such a good deal.

But the fun of the job was dealing with the police and dealing with American citizens in jail. That's how you really get to know a society.

I had the same experience that legions of Foreign Service Officers have had. When you are the consular officer and you control visas, you're the one that people really want to see.

Q: Why were Americans getting in jail?

HOOPER: There was a kid, a good kid, who'd been caught with marijuana, a real problem in Saudi Arabia. The embassy was busy working with the king to obtain his release, he'd been there a year and a half, he'd been there before I arrived and so I took over visiting him once a month at the prison. There was this painter there, this Bahraini painter, I used to buy his paintings. Through this, I got to know the head of the *Mukhabarat (General Intelligence)* for the Eastern Province, who'd been to school at the University of Michigan, who I was really impressed with. From him, when we really talked, I got to know how things really worked in the province.

There was another American who was teaching at what was then called the College of Petroleum and Minerals, now it's called something else and he had been drawn into a complicated legal and police case involving a baby that had been killed and they thought the parents had killed the baby and he knew the parents, anyway, because there was a case I got to know him and some of the Saudi students there at the college. And there was this American professor also who had finished up his contract at CPM and instead of a final exam he just gave them a questionnaire: what do you think of the United States? The students filled it out and he actually gave me copies of the questionnaire and said,

"You ought to read some of these." All these students' answers were just extraordinarily insightful about real stuff, about the U.S. and about their lives and their futures and their society, which you can't get anywhere, you just stumble on it because you know someone.

I wasn't looking for that. It just fell my way because I got to know people. We were having a lot of fun, having interesting people over for dinner, and I got to know some of the faculty and people at Aramco.

During the '67 war, it was a time where there were some riots in the Eastern Province and I guess the war was over pretty quickly, but back then the people in Dhahran didn't know what was going to happen. And the consul general at that time was telling everyone in the local American community to stay and not depart, don't panic, there's not going to be any problem and then he put his wife on a plane, to get her out of the country and she was seen at the airport and he lost a lot of his credibility among people out there and at the embassy.

I didn't really know the full story, I heard about it later, but during the October '73 war, the consul general happened to be away when the war broke out, in the U.S. on home leave as I recall. And I thought this was exciting, a great experience. Your first post, you always have great memories of it and I have great memories of that one. I thought this was really living and it was interesting, meeting people and I was out at the university all the time, talking to people, just giving them my views and at Aramco and so forth. I didn't feel afraid. To me, there was a war going on and you really want to listen and talk to people.

Afterwards, a lot of people said that they'd seen me around and the fact that I was acting normally really helped stabilize local attitudes, because they figured people at the consulate really know what's going on, whether in fact you did or not, and often you do know a lot more. They figure you do and they kind of watch you and see what you're doing and how you're reacting and if you're nervous or if you're saying, "Be calm, no problem" and meanwhile you're packing, they catch on.

I found out afterwards about this experience I mentioned before, about a previous consul general. So my actions, maintaining an air of confidence and normalcy without even thinking about it, which made me feel good, but I didn't think I had done anything special. I was just doing the normal thing.

Q: Later, during the Gulf War, this was the 1991 war, we had this very peculiar problem. I talked to Chas Freeman, who was ambassador there and Ken Stammerman, our consul general in Dhahran and there, we were saying, "Maybe people ought to get out," but we didn't want the Aramco people to leave, because they were running the oil industry,, which was vital. And so we tried to keep the Aramco technicians there, at a time of real danger, Scuds were coming around and all that. But it had real strategic consequences.

HOOPER: During the ’73 war I remember seeing some things at the time that, through people I knew at Aramco I found out about, there was an oil embargo that was placed on the U.S. and the Saudis did not break their contracts with the Department of Defense. They continued to provide all the oil that they were contracted to provide, including jet fuel, JP-5, to the Department of Defense. This was not widely known, it was very sensitive and the Saudis relied on Frank Jungers, then the President of Aramco, to be the liaison to the Department of Defense, so that their fingerprints wouldn’t be on these transactions. There was no Bandar bin Sultan, he was in the Eastern Province at the time, he was not the ambassador in Washington.

So what they provide, the technicians and so forth, that’s crucial. The Saudis have always been the X factor in oil. They’re friendly, they were prepared to, whatever the official statistics books say, they usually do produce more and they’re prepared to produce even more and the capability, as I recall, at that time was more than publicly announced.

Q: While you were there, were you getting good reports, accurate reports, on what was happening during this time, because it was touch and go for a while, as far as the Israelis were concerned?

HOOPER: In Dhahran you didn’t get everything that was being produced because it was a consulate and it wasn’t one of the main embassies. I don’t have much of a memory, I don’t know how good the reporting was. I relied on the radio, largely the BBC. No criticism of the VOA intended, but people just listened to the BBC.

Q: The BBC, one tends to do that. Were there any demonstrations at the consulate?

HOOPER: No.

Q: When I was there, the consulate was so far from everything. We were out in the middle of nowhere.

HOOPER: When I was there, it was located next to the then-named College of Petroleum and Minerals and between Aramco, the airbase, and the town of al-Khobar.

Q: Did you have any problems with Yemeni immigrants?

HOOPER: It’s been a long time since I thought about that!

Q: They were all going to Youngstown, Ohio and Lackawanna and

HOOPER: The Detroit area was a major destination point, Michigan keeps coming up, doesn’t it? I remember the non-immigrant visas were easy to deal with, because the decisions were quite easy. Immigrant visas were difficult, putting together that package just threw me. I finally had to do it once. I had an FSN who was the only Saudi working for any State Department facility in the country and he was really good and he used to put these IV packets together.

But it was all Yemenis who were going to the U.S. and we always had to get a clearance from Yemen, because it was felt and I'm sure it was true that there was considerable fraud.

Q: Yeah, they were all named Mohammed and they would give you a scrap of paper, sort of a

HOOPER: It was not difficult to get in Yemen, either. They were all cleared, but I'm sure I signed off on a fair number of people who were not really relatives, but got to the U.S., anyway and are now tax-paying citizens of the Detroit area or wherever, probably loyal Americans.

Q: Did you have problems with automobile accidents, Americans in automobile accidents? 'Cause when I was there, if you were in an automobile accident, you were thrown in jail and that took a while to get you out.

HOOPER: That was not an issue when I was there. Maybe I was lucky.

Q: Well, you might have been lucky and also they might have straightened it out, so it wasn't such an automatic thing.

HOOPER: I understand you were doing the Gulf, but did you also have to go down to Abqaiq and Ras Tanura?

Q: Oh, yeah, I used to go there

HOOPER: The circuit, to deal with passport renewals and notarials.

Q: I even had seamen from time to time in Ras Tanura who'd gone crazy or something like that.

HOOPER: I was spared that. These things, apart from whatever the individual tragedy may be of a situation, you often learn so much and they're great learning devices for you as a young officer, to learn the trade, because you really cut your teeth on real world problems that way. I didn't have that and probably would have learned, I'm sure you benefited from it.

Q: Oh, I had a captain from Bahrain call me up, it was a little hard to get over there and he said, "I've got a mutiny!" Of course, there I was, with my manual, quickly running through mutiny, mutiny, mutiny and I was able to talk to a fellow. It wasn't a mutiny, he had a labor problem. He had to solve it himself. But I thought, "My God, I'm going to have to go have to quell a mutiny on board a ship."

HOOPER: I actually remember the consular course, it was reasonably good. And they spent a fair amount of time on the seamen issue, 'cause there's so many permutations and

there's so many laws unique to that and customs and so forth, there's just a lot you had to absorb. I think I was probably most worried about that, that a seaman would show up with a difficult problem to deal with, because there were a lot of ships coming in, as you know. Never happened though, because down in the Gulf each embassy handled those individually, so it was only Saudi Arabia. Many of the ships would drop off a big list of visa request I would have to deal with.

The Saudis solved a lot of your consular problems. They just wouldn't let the seamen disembark from their ships, so they never had access to the consulate.

Q: Did you get a chance to pick up any Arabic?

HOOPER: I learned some Arabic when I was a student at the American University in Beirut, my junior year abroad, took an Arabic course my senior year when I returned to the US. College Arabic has its limitations. At Columbia, took Arabic, but the serious Arabic I got was at FSI.

After Dhahran I went to Beirut and that was, the Foreign Service Institute, the language school, was then in the embassy in Beirut. It moved to Tunis after I finished my course and the Lebanese civil war made it impossible to continue FSI in Beirut. It wasn't practical anymore.

And there I got some serious Arabic for ten months and I enjoyed it and became reasonably good. I would never claim it was native fluency. I think it was 3+/3+ or something when I left and probably it got up to a strong 3+ after being in Syria for a few months.

Since I left Kuwait in 1989, I remember a lot of phrases but I can't really keep a running commentary up due to disuse.

Q: How heavy was the hand of Islam in the Eastern Province, your observation at the time?

HOOPER: Well, the Wahhabis certainly had sway over the cultural mores, shall we say. The fact that Aramco was there, with its largely American work force, meant that there tensions and problems with the religious police, the Mutaween. The Mutaween were very active in al-Khobar and they would go around and scoop people up and take them in and have them get haircuts or whatever and paint women's legs if you could see them beneath their clothing.

Wahhabism is a puritanical brand of Islam and it was certainly in evidence in the Eastern Province, no question about it. Apart from those kind of things, I found there was a lot of prejudice against Shia. You've got a fair percentage of people in the Eastern Province who are Shia and they were not regarded well and favorably by the average Saudi who was not a Shia in the Eastern Province. They were looked down on and I believe that's still the case. I think Saudis tend to have that view, which is expressed in the way they

deal with other countries in the Gulf, the way they deal with Iraq, the way they deal with these kinds of situations. The way they dealt with Hume Horan when he was the ambassador there.

Q: You do any commercial work, or anything of that nature?

HOOPER: No, except, again, in Dhahran, when you're the vice consul, I would do some. We had an FSN that did that and the consul general was pretty good at that kind of thing, handling the economics. But most of the businessmen that were there had a sponsor, which was required to obtain a Saudi visa, so you don't get any businessmen in unless the Saudis want them there and mostly they're in because they're servicing an Aramco contract and Aramco takes care of them.

So you don't get that many Americans prospecting, looking for business. It's not like a lot of other places.

Q: How were your relations with Aramco?

HOOPER: Very good, I knew a lot of people at Aramco. Their real high level stuff was done directly with the embassy, but I knew a lot of people there and there were some really good people who knew a lot about the history of Saudi Arabia and the Eastern Province and I had a lot of respect for them. It was said and I think it was actually true, the company's obviously out to make a profit, but they were probably better stewards of Saudi natural resources, the environment and so forth, than the Saudis would have been on their own.

Q: The Brits that I talked to, 'cause I was the economic officer for a while, in Qatar and on Bahrain were very annoyed at Aramco, 'cause Aramco was sharing the profits and doing all sorts of things that the Brits weren't doing. Aramco was way ahead of the game and it never had the problems some of the other ones did.

HOOPER: Good point.

Q: You left Dhahran in

HOOPER: '74.

Q: Were you there during the Camp David business?

HOOPER: Camp David, I was back in Washington. It was '78 and I was back in INR.

Q: Were there any royal visits to the province while you were there?

HOOPER: King Faisal was assassinated while I was in Damascus. Zaki Yamani was the oil minister while I was in Dhahran. I was the one who often represented the consulate at events, dinners and so forth at the university and the governor's office, if the consul

general wasn't there, was busy doing something else or didn't want to go, or was out of the country and I liked to do these things. So usually the lot would fall my way. And I always loved doing it. I loved these things.

And oddly enough, when Zaki Yamani was there I would end up sitting next to him, because I was the consulate representative and protocol was protocol. He was at the university because it was part of his role. He had his relationship with people at the embassy and he didn't know me from Adam, but it was a nice chance to talk with him and sometimes you'd get something worth reporting.

Q: There was an emir there?

HOOPER: Yes. Jiluwi, I think, son of a great man.

Q: I was there during the "great man" Jiluwi's time. He was elderly, but very much engaged with Eastern Province affairs.

HOOPER: A real tough fellow, I heard. The son was not of the same caliber. Sometimes with those who cast a giant shadow, their offspring live in the shadow and don't cast much of one themselves, and that was the case with Bin Jiluwi.

Q: You're off to Beirut. I realize you're going to be a language student, but what was the situation in Beirut at the time?

HOOPER: It was okay when I got there. When we left, the incidents that led to the civil war in Lebanon, which went on for about 15 years, they actually began while I was there and I remember, we went from Beirut to Damascus, which was my posting as a political officer, we had to take a different route, we drove, of course and we had to take a different route to get out of the city, because the main road was blocked by demonstrators.

The faculty, the instructors there at the Foreign Service Institute, were excellent. They provided serious instruction in Arabic.

In terms of observations about Lebanon, I lived in there in the period immediately prior to the outbreak of civil war. In the beginning I did not believe that it was going to evolve into the type of brutal and sustained fighting that became the norm. There were incidents taking place, but the pattern of their trajectory was not at all clear.

Q: Well, let's get a little picture. First place, who was our ambassador at the time?

HOOPER: It was Ambassador Mac Godley, who had previously been in Southeast Asia. I think he'd been ambassador to Laos.

When you're taking a language and the Arabic language school was in the embassy itself, in the embassy building—since destroyed in a car bomb—you're not part of the country

team, the staff meetings and the day to day operational work of the embassy. You're not going up to see him, to work with him on issues and so forth. Because my interaction with him was quite limited, he didn't make that much of an impression on me and I think it's fair to say on my FSI colleagues.

Q: How did you find Arabic? You had some before, hadn't you?

HOOPER: I'd had some before, when I was a student at the American University in Beirut, just a taste of it, from 1967 to 68, before I joined the Foreign Service. And then I had some in graduate school and I had a little bit before going out to my first post in Dhahran, but this was serious instruction. It was sustained, it was ten months. I wish it had been two years, or even a year and a half and I could have gotten an even better fluency, I think I ended with a 3+/3+ or thereabouts and was able to develop it during my career and it actually got reasonably strong. I don't know if I could have done interviews with Al Jazeera in Arabic, the way a few people are capable of doing, if it ever got to that level, but it didn't. But it was reasonably strong and I could keep up a conversation entirely in Arabic.

But that was when I left Kuwait in 1989. That was the last time I used Arabic in the Foreign Service and the language goes fast, if you're not using it.

Q: Did you have many colleagues, friends who were still around at AUB or not?

HOOPER: They had kind of moved on and I'm trying to think, I kept in touch with some, but by and large some of the ones I knew best had moved on. And some of the professors I knew best were gone.

I loved AUB as a student. When I was there it really awakened my interest in the Middle East. I had no interest in the Middle East as such before coming there. I developed an interest there at AUB.

It was nice to take Arabic at FSI located in the embassy in Beirut. But, again, everything about that life has changed now: the building was blown up; Lebanon, it's still a country but it never has gotten over the civil war and as we conduct this discussion, today, Stuart, Lebanon is in another crisis and confrontation between some of the different groups in the country and there's talk about the possibility of renewed fighting. Lebanon has never been the same since 1975.

Q: Were you able to get to know any Lebanese while you were there?

HOOPER: Yes and that was fairly easy to do. Again, as a student you like to practice your Arabic and we traveled a lot, my wife and I. Our kids were pretty small, they were three and one when we were there. If you didn't get to know any Lebanese, you really had to be awfully slow. It was just impossible not to get to know any Lebanese.

But, again, it's so different from today. Right now, there's a premium on Arabic language capabilities in the Foreign Service and on learning Arabic and staffing the embassies in the region with people that are Arabic speakers and not just on survival level Arabic but good Arabic and the higher your capability, the more effective you are as an FSO.

But the Foreign Service then had a situation where you could not take Arabic at the Foreign Service Institute unless you had an assignment already set and were already paneled to an Arabic language follow on position. There weren't that many, because between 1967 and the October 1973 war, there were a number of Arab states that had broken relations with the United States and while some had drifted back, they often curtailed the size of the embassy. The embassy in Cairo, which used to have quite a large staff and does so now, consisted of only around a dozen people during the October 1973 war.

And things only began opening up around the time that I came in. When I was there, I think there were just one or two Foreign Service Officers at FSI and the rest were from other agencies of the government.

Now that has completely changed, I believe. The Foreign Service really places a premium since September 11th, if not even before that, on Arabic language capabilities. I was the only Foreign Service Officer there for a time in the group. It was quite extraordinary and, again, State has come a long way I think, not just on Arabic language training, probably on language training in general, recognition of its importance and for integrating it into the service.

Q: Well, first place, your teachers and all, one of things that used to be, if you're an Arabist, at least the Israelis and the Jewish lobby in the United States were saying this is the making of an anti-Zionist, or something like that. Did you get any feel for that while you were there?

HOOPER: I guess I didn't have a problem with that and it wasn't an issue when I was there at FSI. Maybe that was because I joined the Foreign Service in 1971 and went out to my first post in 1972 and the October 1973 war came and that created what became known and is known ever since as the peace process and suddenly the American role became much more activist, acting as a facilitator, a stimulator, a prompter, whatever you want to call it, of helping Arabs and Israelis identify common interests, reach agreements. We obviously did this with Egypt. We did it with Syria in the Golan Heights negotiations.

And over the years this has waxed and waned and there have been periods of very intense activity and real progress and other periods that are more fallow, but I came into the service during that period of a peace process, of looking for overlaps, for commonalities, to find ways to get them together and I think the period of the Fifties and Sixties, where the Arab-Israeli situation had been more frozen or very negative and there wasn't much prospect for any progress, I think that was over. And so that affected my thinking, my approach.

It was a spirit of "Let's find ways to overcome the problems" and "Let's not waste our time sidelining ourselves by trying to identify with partisans in the conflict, let's just try help them find a way, try to negotiate, to try to overcome some differences, reach agreements and better bilateral relationships between the United States and a number of Arab countries were seen as also contributing to this process.

Q: It's a real almost change in attitude, a significant change. While you were in Lebanon, were Lebanese, the teachers, in the embassy, everybody, saying "Boy, this place is gonna blow"? Were you getting that, at least when you arrived, or not?

HOOPER: I remember one of the teachers in particular, who was Lebanese, thought that this just wasn't going to last, that the elite were just gorging themselves a bit too much in the trough, things weren't trickling down, shall we say.

And there were real tensions, because the PLO was headquartered there, Arafat was there. Obviously there still are large numbers, hundreds of thousands, of Palestinians in Lebanon. But then they were on the rise, this is a big issue. While I was there Arafat went to the United Nations. A number of them had to come in and get visas and that enabled elements of the United States government to make contact with them and much of this has become public knowledge since then. I knew a little bit about it at the time. So all of this was picking up.

The PLO did I think overplay their hand in Lebanon. There they were the *de facto* fighting arm of the Sunnis, who don't really have militias as such in Lebanon, it was always the PLO. And they wanted to treat Lebanon as an open base for operations against Israel and this just wasn't going to last.

There were just too many tensions in the country: rich, poor, Palestinians, and much more.

While I was in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, there were two American diplomats and a Belgian diplomat, if I remember correctly, who were taken hostage in Khartoum, Sudan, at a party.

Q: Oh, yes, that was Cleo Noel and Curtis Moore. They were killed.

HOOPER: I remember at the time they were killed and they announced this, I was in Dhahran, someone then at the consulate there said to me, who knew Cleo Noel, "He used to live in that house right over there." I cringed, because that was the house where I was living.

Q: Oh, yeah, 'cause I remember seeing Cleo Noel's signature on papers, it's an unusual name, it stuck in my mind, when I was vice consul there. We're a small little group.

Were there sort of no-go areas for you when you were in Lebanon, at the time?

HOOPER: Probably, in the south, as you got close to the Israeli border, was probably a no-go area. I didn't try to go down there. I didn't spend a lot of time in the south in Lebanon, either as a student or later. I got down to Sidon. I got down to Tyre. But I traveled freely otherwise, all around the country.

Now, I wouldn't go into Palestinian refugee camps, but there was no reason for me to enter the camps.

Q: You're not going sightseeing in a refugee camp.

HOOPER: Yes.

Q: Well then, really, we're talking about, what, '75?

HOOPER: I left Beirut around March of 1975 to go to Damascus.

Q: You were in Damascus from when to when?

HOOPER: Approximately March 1975 to July 1977. So it was about two and a half years. And I was the political officer. For most of that time it was a one-person political section. In my last six months a second political officer came, a junior political officer. I became head of a two-person political section. That person was Ted Kattouf, who later became ambassador to Syria and some other places. Ted became very knowledgeable about every Arab country where he served, especially Syria, and effective too.

Q: I'm interviewing Ted now. He's in orbit most of the time right now.

HOOPER: He's with AMIDEAST, I think?

Q: But he's also been brought in during the Lebanese, the evacuation there.

HOOPER: Last summer. I saw Ted a lot on the media. I thought he did a very good job.

Q: Yeah, he did.

Well, now, first place, who was the ambassador and DCM there when you were there?

HOOPER: Dick Murphy was the ambassador. I think he's a terrific person. I really liked and respected him. He taught me to do everything possible to avoid localitis, clientitis, that kind of thing, which can blight one's outlook and reporting skills. He just did not want to fall into those kinds of traps. And I must say Henry Kissinger appreciated that and rewarded him.

He went from there to be ambassador to the Philippines, which is extraordinary, in fact most of the time ambassadors do the circuit in a region, from one country to another,

back to Washington, back out to the region. The Philippines, not only is it out of the Middle East region of course, but it's a big embassy. I thought it was terrific that he was chosen for this ambassadorship.

Dick Murphy later became the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs. He became a commentator when he retired for one of the networks. Used to see him and he was always very thoughtful.

He's a very decent person, I thought, and very effective as an ambassador.

Bob Pelletreau was the DCM. He later became an ambassador and the NEA assistant secretary. The two of them ran the embassy very well and I've got a lot of positive memories of most of my experience in the Foreign Service and very positive memories of Damascus.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived in '75?

HOOPER: Well, the October 1973 war was still pretty fresh in people's minds. Damascus had been bombed. In the building where we were living was a prominent Syrian doctor and his American wife who lived in the apartment above us, so we got to know them and I remember hearing from her that there was a bombing raid and she had taken her baby from the crib next to the window an hour or so before the bombing. Bombs blew out the window and the glass just shredded the crib that was left there and would have shredded the child. So these memories were fresh in peoples' minds.

Syria had been closed off to the United States. Then, after the war, the Syrians agreed to allow a very small five-person U.S. team there, to facilitate the negotiations and begin the process of moving forward towards establishing diplomatic relations, headed by an FSO named Tom Scotes.

When I was in Beirut I went over twice to serve as backup support for Dr. Kissinger on his trips, for his party, not support for him, I barely saw him in the group, just there in case someone was needed to provide logistic support or help carry their bags or whatever. I certainly wasn't writing memos or whatnot as a junior officer on what we should do in what was then not even called the peace process.

And the relationship with Syria, because it started at rock bottom, it was improving and then we established full diplomatic relations in '74, in conjunction with the signing of the Golan Heights disengagement agreement between Syria and Israel, an agreement which still stands, not violated. And the Israelis, despite their criticism of a number of aspects of Syrian policy, particularly having to do with Syrian support of Iran and Iran-supported groups in Lebanon, have always given credit to Syria for abiding by the engagement agreement signed in 1974, which for Kissinger became the shuttle that wouldn't end, I think it went 58 days, if I remember and most people thought he couldn't pull it off. I think he probably thought he couldn't pull it off but he did. The talks almost broke down any number of times.

But he worked the issue very hard and I learned something about one of the big lessons of diplomacy, that sometimes if you're persistent, if you persevere, even when it looks grim and you just try to keep finding a way to move forward and you put enough effort into trying to understand the positions of the parties, you can actually achieve something that can be very durable.

Again, that Golan disengagement agreement, it's not famous anymore and that's the point. It's there, part of the structure of the region. It's so successful that the ultimate success is taken for granted. For Henry Kissinger, it is one of the real monuments to his talent.

Anyway, the U.S. then expanded the mission, we put an ambassador in, Dick Murphy. I was the second political officer to serve there after the war. The person before me was Skip Gnehm. It was a time when there was a lot of hope about future of the U.S.-Syrian relationship, things were looking up. They certainly couldn't go down. It had been about as bad as you can get, or so we thought at the time.

Hafez al-Assad was quite an interesting leader. He'd been in office, when I got there, for about five years. He wanted to do business with the United States. He was very tough, no nonsense.

Yet things were so different and it was that sense of hope that there were lots of possibilities in the relationship. We were still negotiating with Sadat. We hadn't even done Sinai II, I think. There was supposed to be a Golan II, which never materialized for various reasons, certainly having something to do with the lack of flexibility on the Syrian part as well, but also the fact the Egyptians wanted to push, push, push and move as fast as possible. The Syrians didn't. It was very difficult to harmonize that.

But it was a good time to be in Syria. It hasn't always been that good for people there.

Q: You were a political officer. Was there a political system, or was it all Assad, the Baath Party? What could a political officer do?

HOOPER: There was a political system. It wasn't all that easy to penetrate it. But the common story about Assad was that, when he drives, he comes to a traffic circle, signals left and turns right. That is, he is an ideological leftist but a pragmatic decision maker. This I heard invariably from Syrians in my first six months or a year, first time I met them. This was the perception. They kind of liked it.

The role of the Baath Party was to fill up the pages of the newspaper with policies, so you always knew where the party stood on every single world issue and it was very ideological and there were particular people that focused on the ideology. Assad would disengage from the ideology whenever he felt he needed to. The Baath Party was useful as a political front for the regime, the President's minority Alawite sect, and as a popular mobilization generator to turn out crowds when a backdrop was needed.

Around 70 to 75 per cent of the population is Sunni. The Alawites are considered an offshoot of the Shia. They were about 12 per cent, roughly, of the population. And then Druze, Christians and others make up the remaining ten per cent or so.

Assad, in my view, he did some pretty tough things. Years after I left, he destroyed much of the city of Hama in 1982 when finally the Muslim Brotherhood revolted against him. He sent his brother Rifaat, who commanded the most loyal military unit for the regime, the Defense Companies, to Hama to suppress the revolt, and they destroyed much of the city. It is useful to keep in mind that the President of the country had no compunctions about destroying one of the main cities in his own country in order to retain power.

But that being said, he was probably the most talented leader that Syria had produced in the post-World War Two era. He came out of one of its minorities, a minority that used to be people's servants and so forth and had a lot of the junior positions in the military and they did everyone else's work and they gradually insinuated themselves into positions of power and they then took power. And they ran the country through a network of military and security agencies and they controlled the military units and there was a real stability, though definitely at a price. Syria was not known in the Fifties and Sixties for stability.

Q: You say you had the Baath Party, but was this essentially an Alawite regime?

HOOPER: Yes. Of the key 30-35 positions at the top of the regime, almost all the men who held them were Alawites. The Baath was used to mobilize the population. The party in a way was perhaps more of a Sunni party. It was useful to keep the people mobilized and employed. Again, it was there to maintain the leftist, pan-Arab, socialist visions that were the reigning orthodoxies of the day. As I mentioned, he disengaged their Baath Party ideological approach whenever he deemed it appropriate to cut deals with the U.S.

Q: It sounds like you couldn't play the Kremlinology game too well there, because with one man ruling who was not really overly predictable, you couldn't figure how many people were standing in what order on a tomb or something or read Pravda *and all and come up with something. It sounds like you couldn't really play that game.*

HOOPER: That's right and Dick Murphy, the ambassador, I remember once said that Assad has an infinite capacity to tolerate ambiguity. And often Assad's response was, "Let's take a little while longer on this one. Let's think some more. Let's see if we can come up with something." Not say yes, not say no and you often were left in an ambiguous situation.

But he confounded the predictors. He confounded me. Again, I learned a lot of lessons in Syria.

When I left Syria in the summer of 1977, there were attacks against the Alawites, there was a lot of domestic unrest and various people were saying he was in trouble and I certainly believed he was. I wrote it in my last cable when I left Damascus at the end of

my assignment, I gave Assad a year, maybe two at the most and then he would be displaced. And that was 1977 and he lasted until around 2000.

And I never forgot that. It's humbling to miss the mark so widely early in your career and I certainly did on that.

Q: I realize you were way down on the food chain, but did you get any feel through Murphy or any of the Kissinger staff during this thing that Assad and Kissinger could kind of talk to each other. Kissinger was not an uncomplex person, either.

HOOPER: I got some of it then and I guess more to the point I got some later, after I left. It's relevant to this particular period of my life in one sense, in that I took a sort of permanent interest in Syria. While I was there I had some pretty good sources within the Alawite community, the Sunni, the Christians and so forth and I think I figured the place out reasonably well. Certainly, my prediction about the president's future was wrong, but that being said, there was a lot of stuff I did figure out about how Assad used the peace process to enhance his domestic standing.

Kissinger would get frustrated sometimes with Syria. When I was in London later in my career and after that, two years at the Air Force Academy as diplomat in residence, and after I left the Service, I had opportunities to meet Dr. Kissinger, who was then of course out of office. I would mention Syria and Assad and he would describe the efforts he made to get to understand Assad and learn how to deal with him.

I was always very impressed with Kissinger's achievement in that Golan negotiation and what he did. And I think he had a kind of sneaking respect for Assad. He respected Assad as an able negotiating adversary who gradually became something of a negotiating partner. He was able to speak directly with Assad, talk to him and get to know him, he invested the effort in that. Assad gave him a hard time, but Kissinger got something out of that and once he learned how to deal with Assad and got that agreement, he realized that it was worth it. I think Kissinger is the most senior American government official who has taken the trouble to get to know the Syrian leadership and for that got something of lasting benefit to American interests, Israeli interests, Arab interests, in the Golan disengagement agreement and other things we can talk about.

No one has invested that kind of effort since then. No secretary of state has ever put that kind of time into the relationship and it's never gone all that well. If you put time and effort into working the Syrian relationship there is a payoff.

And right now, as President Bush is in Jordan to meet with Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki and King Abdullah, Syria in the last several months has come back to the fore for a lot of reasons, including last summer's fighting between Hezbollah and Israel and, again, Syria's like a cork, it always pops back to the surface in the region, it very often ends up at a kind of crucial passageway that they stand at and you've got to deal with them. You can ignore them, you can try to go around them and sometimes maybe you have to do that, but they make us pay a price when we do ignore them as a country. And it's just

useful to keep in mind that there is a way of dealing with the Syrians, if you appeal to their interests, if you get to know them, you can make progress in that relationship.

Again, I got a lot out of that time I was in Syria. I enjoyed the Syrians that I came to know. It was relatively easy to get to know Syrians. Americans were the new kids on the block in Damascus back then and opening up to the U.S. meant really opening up to the world and opening up the economy and providing hope for the future and hope for their kids. Dealing with the Americans, there was a lot of hope there. Again, it was a very hopeful time and that imprinted itself maybe on my career and my attitude towards diplomacy, towards the Arab-Israeli issue, towards seeing how senior officials work these issues, and that there's a payoff for diplomacy.

There was a lot I got out of that, I think. Maybe some that I'm aware of and maybe a lot of stuff that I'm not, that just stayed with me in my career.

Q: Well, let's talk about Syria a bit. Looking at it, do you see Syria as being a viable country? It sounds like it. It's got water and it's got agriculture. It looks like it should be doing, under the right type of government and enterprising people, should be doing well.

But how did that strike you? Was there much for it to go on?

HOOPER: I think it has some oil, they found some while we were there. Tourism could certainly improve with the West, if there was a better relationship and it was improving for a while. The people are enormously talented. They've got water resources. They've got arable land, farming is good. They've got a seacoast. You've got crusader castles. You've got Aleppo, Damascus, lots of religious significance, the Street Called Straight. Very pretty. I like Arab *souks*, Arab markets, the old sector, the market in Damascus.

The country, it's a very viable proposition. I think it's held back by its political stodginess, by the political repression that's there.

Again, the fundamental problem with Syria is at the end of the day, seventy per cent of the people, the majority, is ruled by a minority of 10 to 15 per cent of the population, Alawites and that's the reality and so you're not going to have democracy, you're not going to have a majority rule kind of situation. It won't evolve naturally. It's very resistant to democracy because a democratic system would inevitably undercut the Alawite monopolization of power.

Q: Well this is somewhat similar to the situation in Iraq, with the Sunnis, with twenty per cent of the population, prospering under Saddam Hussein.

HOOPER: That's right, it's the reverse. Both of them were Baath, the two wings of the Baath Party. There was a vicious hatred between Assad and Saddam Hussein when I was there and after I left.

I remember a number of explosions. The air force headquarters was just across from the American school and I remember standing in the kitchen of our nearby home with my wife, she was cooking something, I was talking with her and suddenly just boom! The window luckily didn't buckle or we would have been in real trouble. And the sky just turned this funny color and suddenly you get the thump and the explosion. This was maybe four or five blocks from where we were living. This was a car bomb, somebody had blown himself up, across from the air force ministry and later we heard it was an Iraqi, I think there were Iraqi license plates on the car. I think it was an Iraqi-planned terrorist incident. Walking, then, over to the school grounds, I noticed there were body parts scattered around, an arm in a tree limb. Glad it didn't happen during school hours, not least because one of our two children attended the school.

Syria was an Alawite minority ruling a Sunni majority. Iraq was the reverse, the Sunni minority ruling the Shia.

Q: Saddam Hussein was a monster.

HOOPER: That was totalitarian. No question about which place was more professionally satisfying to work in. Syria was a dictatorship when I was there and it still is, ever since and in between it has been, but absolutely no question as to where you had more space to work and meeting contacts and make friends, where you felt, living in Iraq, 'cause I knew some of the people in our mission in Baghdad, what a nightmare that was. You could get around in Syria, get to know Syrians. It was authoritarian, but not totalitarian. Iraq was totalitarian, a Soviet, Stalinist, kind of state.

Q: Well, did you run across the Syrian security forces?

HOOPER: They were all over.

Q: Did they give you rough time, or not?

HOOPER: Not me personally and not the others at the Embassy. I loved being in Syria and being able to engage with the Syrians. I thought this was just where I wanted to be. That was the time I wanted to be there. It was an exciting time. Things were happening, more negotiations were possible. There was hope for the future.

They weren't oppressive towards us at the embassy, though many Syrians had a different experience. I think Assad, because of his relationship with the U.S. in the disengagement agreement and then the Golan Heights agreement and the kind of hopes for the future and the U.S. had an aid program, was giving $75 million a year, he saw that the Americans weren't a threat, were not planning coups against him and had no intention of undermining him. I don't think he had any illusions that he was necessarily going to get everything he wanted from the Americans, but he saw the embassy wasn't interested in planning coups against him. Frankly, the State Department probably would have tipped him off if there had been information of any coups against him, because the USG had

found that it could work with him and I think he realized that. So he saw the embassy wasn't a threat.

Q: What about the Soviets? The Soviets had been supplying the Syrians with weapons, but did that get them inside the doors very much?

HOOPER: The Russians were never subtle. I guess people in the region say that about the Americans now, perhaps. But the Russians had overplayed their hand in Damascus. The Syrians didn't really like the Russians.

There were all sorts of stories. When Kissinger first flew into Damascus, we were told that Assad deliberately prolonged the meeting with Kissinger so that Gromyko could be kept circling Damascus airport. Assad wanted to remind Moscow that he now had options. The Russians, I think they probably bought off much of the Syrian leadership. They never got Assad. He was too much a Syrian patriot, a nationalist and I don't think he particularly liked the Russians. It was the price of doing business. He loved having the Americans there, because it could help him keep the Russians at bay. And of course he could use the Russians.

Syrians were very good at that kind of diplomatic bazaar, manipulating one side to get something out of the other and I thought Assad particularly excelled at that. We knew that, but it's constructive to be manipulated, too, because back then, it's the Cold War, to kind of distance them from the Soviet Union. But there was always an annual arms sale, a fresh renewal of the Syrian-Soviet arms agreement.

When I was there, suddenly Woody Woodpecker cartoons began appearing on Syrian television. The kids just loved it. It became the talk of the town. Before, they'd had all these Soviet cartoons, because they got them from SovInform or whatever the agency was called that would sell these or export them or give them or whatever. They were the most boring cartoons. The Syrians disliked them, but that's all there was. Again, even at the level of cartoons in the popular culture, the sense of freedom, of possibilities, was in the air and the Syrians found a way to stick it to the Russians, even through a simple little thing like that. Probably they're doing that to the Americans now, or probably a few years ago it reversed, with Iranian cartoons or something like that.

Q: What was the Jordan connection, because they've practically gone to war, back at one point not too long before?

HOOPER: Assad didn't like others drawing him into a fight that he didn't want.

In 1969 in Jordan, the PLO was busy trying to take over the country from King Hussein and King Hussein had finally had it, he'd had it up to here and it became a fight and it was pretty rough stuff and the Syrians sent in troops. Assad was the head of the air force but not the leader of Syria. He refused to provide air cover for the Syrian ground troops that went in, because he disagreed with this.

Now we didn't have any mission in Damascus. I wasn't there at the time. I wasn't even in the Foreign Service at the time. But I would hear about this, it was known at the time, but I would hear stories about it when I got there. He would not allow the air force to be committed to that Syrian intervention and because there was no air cover for the Syrians, nothing panned out and he really helped save King Hussein.

He certainly fought against Israel in 1973 and then negotiated an agreement afterwards. And he sent troops into Lebanon to fight the PLO and save the Christians in 1976. Over the years that evolved in a certain direction in Lebanon. And obviously they weren't as welcome when they left as they were when they came in and they were definitely welcome in 1976.

The Golan Heights disengagement agreement made his reputation in the United States. It put Syria on the map. It changed the perception of Syria in Washington.

Sending troops into Lebanon, which took place while I was there, that really made his reputation, because negotiating an agreement on the Golan, at the end of the way, well, it was his own self-interest, but he was willing to reach an agreement with Israel brokered by the U.S. Sending troops into Lebanon to fight the PLO to save the Christians, no one expected that. It completely changed perceptions of Syria in the U.S. and the West. It made Syria seem more like a stabilizing power in the region.

Assad didn't like the PLO. He didn't like Arafat. He didn't like this guy trying to get him into fights. If he was going to fight Israel, he wanted to pick his time and place. He didn't want the PLO to embroil him on their side in their fight inside Lebanon.

And the same thing had happened in Jordan. And it made people understand that there was work out there that could be done and that you could make some progress with Assad and that there were advantages for dealing with the Syrians.

All this stuff is ancient history, it's barely remembered now, given the perception that is prevailing in the United States, or at least the United States government, about Syria, but there was a time when it was possible, when many things were possible and not only possible, many things were done and being there at that time was very useful.

Q: Was Turkey an element?

HOOPER: I think Syria had the psychology of the amputee, was the way I heard Dick Murphy say it and I've always remembered it because I think he was right. They felt they'd lost Lebanon to the French mandate after World War I and they lost Alexandretta to Turkey during the French mandatory period, it was a kind of trade off made by the French. And they lost the Golan Heights in '67 to Israel. And there was just this sense that territory meant a lot to them and they weren't going to lose any more and they were very sensitive about issues of territory.

Q: Were there people to go talk to that made any difference, as a political officer?

HOOPER: Yes, the head of military intelligence and a senior military officer, was very close to Assad, he was one of the channels that Assad set up for Ambassador Murphy to meet with. You could talk with people in the government, the foreign ministry. The then foreign minister, Abd al-Halim Khaddam, was accessible. You'd get a lot of stuff from him, not to me but to Dick Murphy and to Bob Pelletreau, the DCM. He would talk with you and often it tended to be an ideological argument or whatever, but you could approach various people in various ministries. The minister of the economy trained at NYU, his wife was American, wanted to bring American business and finance practices to Syria to the extent possible.

There were a lot of people around at different layers of the government, outside the government, the business community. They'd come to your house, come to your parties, invite you to theirs, it was a relatively open place. Maybe they were looking over their shoulder a little bit, but you could talk, you could engage with them and you could get things done.

Q: Now I take it the PLO, that would have to be the CIA looking at that, wouldn't it? Did you have any contact? Or could you?

HOOPER: I knew a Palestinian who was really good friends with the president of the Palestine National Congress, who was Khaled Fahoum at the time. I never met Khaled Fahoum, but my Palestinian friend used to talk to me about what his views were and I would talk with him about what American views were and it was a way of communicating.

I remember going to the foreign ministry once to meet with the head of the international organization office, there was a UN session coming up on whatever issue of the day on the Palestinians and the question was, "What's Syria going to do, along with the Palestinians?" and we couldn't find out. Their UN ambassador was back, so Dick Murphy went in to call on him and I called on the head of the international organization office. Well, he was very forthcoming, but sitting there, talking with him when I went in was someone I didn't initially recognize. He was one of the people on the PLO executive committee.

Now, back then, you couldn't have contacts with them, which only changed much later and so went to the office, sat down and the MFA official introduced me to him. I picked up on the name and I thought, "Well, here I am, I didn't set this up." He just happened to be there. He was going to New York himself and he was coordinating and they were just talking about positions and they both were telling me what their positions were. I came back with all this stuff, which as a political officer is of what your job is all about. It was a good day.

That didn't happen all the time of course. Dick Murphy had met with their UN ambassador, who gave him nothing. And from these two guys I got what their plans were. We sent that in and it went right up to Kissinger and Kissinger looked at it, because

actually the Syrians and the Palestinians were hoping the U.S. would do something constructive at the time in regard to the Palestinians, I don't remember what it was. Kissinger wasn't interested in doing that. But we provided him with the information he needed to make a decision and I was proud to have been a part of that.

Q: By the time you left was Lebanon rumbling away or not?

HOOPER: Well, more than rumbling away, again, Syria had to send troops in, Assad chose to send the Syrian military in to defend the Lebanese Christians and take on the PLO. And it was very interesting, again, to see that happen. If you visualize Lebanon, the Beirut to Damascus road cuts perpendicularly right through the center of the country east-west through the Bekaa valley. The Syrians sent in troops and they would communicate to the Israelis through us. That is, they would tell us what they were going to do, we would inform Washington, and Washington would go out to the Israelis and then it would come back and so forth. And that was the way the Syrians wanted it.

Q: The idea was to prevent clashes or threats?

HOOPER: The Syrians sent the troops in, they said they were going to try to stabilize the situation, end the fighting. But until they did it you didn't really believe it. And so initially there was some level of trust in Syrian intentions but it was pretty minimal.

The Syrians wanted to put some antiaircraft batteries south of the main Beirut-Damascus highway. Anyway, the Israelis had put these red lines up: "Go any further and we're going to attack you," because they didn't want to be tricked, the Syrian military goes in and then uses that to slice right down south against Israel. The Israelis weren't going to put up with any of that and they weren't sure they could really trust Assad to continue his confrontation with the PLO. We weren't sure either, the U.S. government wasn't sure, because Assad's military initiative was so unexpected.

And as it became clear that they were taking on the PLO and this wasn't phony, this was the real thing and they actually meant what they said and that the Lebanese Christians were welcoming them and that Assad was really going against Arafat, the level of trust steadily grew and so the Israelis would allow Syrian forces to go further into the south to chase the PLO and so forth. It became a process whereby Syrian and Israeli interests went beyond territory on the Golan that Syria wanted back through negotiations, that was a direct, but here it was indirect and you could actually begin to see that Israel and Syria had a common interest in keeping Lebanon stable and keeping the PLO under control and keeping limits on them and so forth.

Now, again, once the Syrians ensconced themselves in Lebanon they certainly brought stability, but once you're there for a while, it's always nice to have your relatives over for the holidays but do you really want them to stay with you for a month or two or a year or two or ten or twenty years? Again, it was seen then, as a real common interest between Syria and Israel and the United States for a kind of balance of power and stability in the Levant itself.

So in the peace process between Israel and Syria, it was not going be like Egypt, which was even then moving ahead. Sadat was full steam ahead. You were never going to get that out of Assad or any Syrian leader, probably. But a cold peace was also peace and had real benefits, particularly if the benefit was a stability in the Levant that prevented a war between Israel and Syria, that did not require Israeli or U.S. intervention, that would help facilitate Lebanon remaining independent, that gave Syria influence within the region yet limited its influence at the same time.

Both the Syrians and the Israelis have protected Lebanese Christians, not always being welcomed or remembered fondly for doing so, at any given time it's been a lot of headaches and burdens.

And that was one of the perceptions I came away with from Syria, I've held it for these many decades, an unrealized possibility in the U.S. and Israeli relationship with Syria, because the pieces are there. It takes serious diplomacy and a serious commitment at the top of the U.S. government to do that. Henry Kissinger was the last one who tried that.

Q: I've heard that George Shultz, when he came in under Reagan, had the Shultz Plan, every secretary of state has a plan and came to Syria and Bob Paganelli, our ambassador, was saying this isn't going to work and Shultz got really mad at Paganelli 'cause Paganelli was saying Assad isn't going to buy it. Of course the thing was that Assad didn't buy it, but Paganelli nearly got fired, because somehow

HOOPER: I remember that. I was in London at the time and I remember Bob came through London, I think it was on his way to post. He made some sort of comment like, "Well, relations are pretty bad now, but one benefit is they can't get any worse." And I think I said, "Well, there's no such thing as a basement, a ground floor. It can always get worse." And I think he felt it did.

That's the opposite of the situation I found. I think Secretary Shultz cut Syria out of the negotiations, negotiated a deal essentially with Israel and Lebanon and then stopped off in Damascus on his last trip out. Assad I think wanted in and then he just watched what the Americans were doing and waited patiently. The Syrians, if nothing else, they're patient, because they're there and we're here, waited until this agreement had been done and then he ripped it up. It didn't include him. He didn't have any commitment to it. And then he essentially tossed it out the window and prevented the thing from moving forward.

U.S. officials of course then got angry at Syria and the relationship went south. I certainly wish Syria would have played a more constructive role, but Shultz decided to cut them out and figured once he'd got a *fait accompli* they would have to accommodate themselves to it. But it doesn't work that way with Syria, and Secretary Shultz never made much of an effort to understand and work with Syria, and his policy paid the price for this strategic approach.

Q: I don't want to get into our intelligence operations work as this is an unclassified interview, but did you find that information that came from intelligence sources, as a political officer were you clued into this and did you find them particularly helpful or not?

HOOPER: Yes I was clued into it and I did find it helpful. It was useful, but there were real limits. I think it was pretty thin, the amount of information, which intelligence officials freely admitted.

Back then, there were times that Assad, because of what he was doing in Lebanon, he felt very uncomfortable doing this, because it may have made his reputation, or added considerable luster to his reputation in Washington, but it was an awkward situation for him and he didn't want to have the American ambassador trotting into the presidential palace every other day, seen as delivering instructions to him or whatever.

So much of the communication took place through direct discussions between Assad and King Hussein of Jordan and then that information would find its way back to the United States very rapidly. I think Dick Murphy showed enormous patience himself. There must have been days when he felt some awkwardness about the U.S. ambassador in Jordan playing a role in maintaining a communications channel with Syria that would normally be done by the U.S. ambassador in Damascus, but there was nothing he could do about it. When you're working on real issues of war and peace and getting something done, diplomacy should be about flexibility.

Overall, I was working with one of the best ambassadors the United States ever produced. I think Dick Murphy was a great guy.

There's plenty of ways to communicate something. If you choose to communicate it through another government or through an intelligence service or in other ways, it doesn't have to be through the ambassador if another channel is more conducive to progress. There's lots of ways to do it and the point is it's not just your turf, it's getting something done. I always looked at it that way.

It would have been nice to have done it through us, but that's the way it was done and then the king found various ways of getting it back to the United States.

Q: You left there in '77. Did you get any feel for the Carter Administration, when they came in? Was there a change in atmosphere, anything like that?

HOOPER: I think Kissinger was smart enough to exercise restraint with the new administration. There was one exploratory trip by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who came to Damascus and the region in the spring of '77, just a few months before I left. Kissinger of course very badly wanted the next administration, which of course was a Democratic administration, very badly wanted them to continue what he had started in the Middle East, but it wasn't his call and he was leaving office. What he suggested, he

was very savvy to do so and we might well have done it anyway, but Kissinger, rather than urging them to follow his set of policies, he urged Secretary Vance and the new administration: “Why don’t you take a trip to the region yourself and make up your own minds. I found it very productive out there and more progress might be possible.” He whetted their appetite by encouraging them in a low key way to become engaged rather than trying to sell them on specific policies. He assumed that once they engaged, a positive dynamic might take over from there.

And I think that was a pretty good insight. It worked. The new administration was just starting to grapple with this when I left.

There was a meeting with Carter, also, in Geneva. Assad never came to the United States, but he and Carter needed to meet and they met in Geneva, as I recall. I think I remember Dick Murphy coming back from that and saying it was a long meeting with Assad. I think Assad was used to long discussions with Henry Kissinger and kind of assumed the new team would respond to him in the same way.

Both Kissinger and Assad liked the cut and thrust with each other and thoroughly enjoyed it, kind of sized each other up and to their mutual surprise liked what they found and respected each other as constructive adversaries.

But Carter was not Kissinger. Assad gave a long historical presentation that did not arouse much interest in the U.S. side.

In general, during the first meeting with an Arab official, their assumption is Americans don’t know much about the Middle East, otherwise they wouldn’t be doing these policies, so they’re gonna tell you their view of history. That’s just what it’s gotta be. I found that throughout my career. You’re gonna hear the history of the Palestinian problem, if they’re Palestinians, or the history of whatever it is and the first meeting you have to allow for a certain amount of this and time to be given to letting them unburden themselves of some of their historical perspective, rather than instantly trying to get down to business. That’s just the way you do it.

Well, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski came out and told Murphy, “Assad could have compressed that presentation. He didn’t have to go on so long.” Murphy was kind of smiling about it when he recounted the story to us back in Damascus.

That’s a formalistic way of looking at something, perhaps, without taking the time to appreciate, learn how to deal with someone. If you learn how to deal with that person, you can do business with them. If not, it’s almost certainly not gonna be as productive a relationship.

In the Middle East, I gradually came to realize that national interests and all this kind of stuff that people talk about, these are abstractions and there’s certainly a lot to that. There’s an awful lot to be gained from personal relationships and it doesn’t just mean it’s

that way in the Middle East. Personal relationships can really help influence policies, can turn policies for better or for worse.

One of the advantages you have being in the Foreign Service, being a diplomat, is you have the time in your career and on any given assignment, even though you may only be there two or three years, you have the time to get to know people, to explore, to develop the personal relationships that underpin diplomacy and I think that works better with Arabs than with many others. It really pays off.

Personal relationships mean so much more in the Middle East, I thought, than in other places. The abstractions, there's validity to them, but you can get a long way on personal relationships in the region, though you shouldn't overstate it.

Moving on, I did what was then an airgram. Airgrams have disappeared probably 10, 15, 20 years ago.

Q: These were, they looked like telegrams, but they were actually sent by pouch.

HOOPER: That's right. I did one on Syrian internal politics and the peace process. It was essentially that Assad had found a way to pursue the peace process in a way that made sense in terms of Syrian internal political trends. This is one of my own insights. I wrote this thing and took it to Dick Murphy and he really liked that.

I've never forgotten that and I've always felt over the decades that was true, that Assad, ruling a difficult to govern people with a certain set of relationships between the different ethnic groups in the country, being from a minority and so forth, with the peace process, he was able to exploit that to strengthen his own role as the mediator in this and the final decision maker and so it helped him fuse his domestic political relationships and his own structure, integrate that and actually he was able to make good use of the peace process in maintaining his own control of the government and his indispensability as a Syrian leader and establish his leadership, because he had to make final decisions and at the end people deferred to him, no one else wanted to stick his neck out.

He would get the best he could and try to push for more. When he realized he had reached the wall, that he wasn't going to get any more, he had to decide, he would often decide, as he did on Golan Heights negotiation and Lebanon, he decided in a way that worked for Syria and also worked for the United States, it worked for our common interests and it worked for Israel and it worked for the region. It was a win, win, win kind of situation. So there was a fusion and integration between the peace process and internal politicking and control of the government apparatus that enhanced his longevity.

In any case I sent in that airgram, it was around twenty pages, who's gonna read that? Dick Murphy came back from consultation in Washington and he said, "You know, I went in to see Hal Saunders and Roy Atherton. They had your piece out on the table. That's really what they wanted to talk about." I was surprised. I was very surprised.

Q: Before we leave Syria, while you were there, the Muslim Brotherhood, was this a cloud on the horizon? Was this anything we were concerned about?

HOOPER: More than a cloud on the horizon, Alawites were getting killed and the Muslim Brotherhood was busy organizing against the regime. There were arrests. There was an assassination campaign around the country. Alawites were getting killed including some prominent Alawites and rumors about restiveness in military units, again, remember, Syria had experienced a lot of governmental change during the Fifties and Sixties, had the reputation of frequent coups. Now it's taken for granted, it's seen as a period of real stability and so forth, but back then you didn't know how long Assad was gonna last. The assumption was there was always another government around the corner.

Q: You were talking about, when you left you were saying

HOOPER: I got it wrong! I gave him a year, maybe two, before he was ousted. And he lasted twenty more, or more than twenty. When I left the Foreign Service, he was still president of Syria.

Anyway, I went on from there to Washington. They wanted me initially to go back as the Lebanon desk officer and then Hal Saunders wanted me to come in and work on the peace process in INR, so I did.

Q: Let's go back once again to the Muslim Brotherhood. What were they after? Was this tied to the same people in Egypt, or that this sort of like the Old Man of the Mountain sending out assassins and all? Who were these people, as we saw them at the time?

HOOPER: I think some of their leaders were in Germany. I don't think we knew an awful lot about them at the time. They may very well have had ties with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. No doubt they did. But it was more a home grown operation and I think their goal was to get rid of the Alawites, get rid of Alawite control and reestablish Sunni political domination. It wasn't because they wanted majority rule. They wanted majority rule by "real Muslims," *i.e.*, the Sunnis, not these Alawite "apostates," which they regarded as illegitimate and not really Muslims anyway. They were organizing and constantly creating problems.

Q: I realize this gets into theology, but how different were the Alawites? Sometimes you just have a tribe and they may be of the same religion, but they're a different tribe. This was really tribal and religious?

HOOPER: Alawites are an offshoot of Shiism. Many Sunnis, some of them have pretty extreme views regarding the Shia and the Saudis in particular and the Wahhabis: "They're not really Muslims at all! They're apostates!"

A traitor is worse than an enemy. An enemy, he's got his job to do, I've got my job to do. A traitor is someone who should be right here at my side and you always reserve that extra twist of the knife for traitors. That was the prevailing Muslim Brotherhood view.

A lot of it was class driven in Syria. They were agricultural laborers, they were peoples' servants, the Alawites, the servants of the Sunnis. It was the Sunnis who ran the government. Whenever there was a coup, one Sunni replaced another one and many of these governments were military. They all come with a cadre. As someone ousts someone else, then their clique is thrown out.

The Alawites got ahead in the military. It was one of the few avenues they had to get ahead in Syria over the years. And as openings would come up they would rise, because you needed to have lieutenants and captains and majors and colonels. And as these guys on top were neutralizing each other there would be more openings.

No one in the Sunni worried about the Alawites. They didn't amount to anything, who cares about them? They know their place. These stereotypes were prevalent and that was the attitude of the Sunnis.

Finally the Alawites got strong enough in the party, in the Baath Party, but through their control of the military, through their strength in the military, to take over. And it wasn't just another military takeover, it was an Alawite takeover. Assad didn't do that; one of his predecessors did.

But the Muslim Brotherhood never accepted this. Look at the United States, the difficulty Americans had with blacks having their rights, having a normal place in society, particularly for people in the South, who were used to seeing them as slaves and then servants. When you've got Jim Crow laws, when you have a particular view and it's hardened, ideologically hardened and it's just so natural and it's there and it's the air that they breathe, from their point of view it's natural, it is very hard to be ruled over by people that used to be your servants.

Q: We're talking about 1977 and you've gone back to go to INR and the peace process really beginning to heat up. You've been asked to go to INR to do what?

HOOPER: I was responsible for Syria, Jordan, Iraq.

Q: A very important part of the peace process that was later known sort of as the Camp David Accords.

You were in INR from when to when?

HOOPER: August of 1977 to December 1978.

Q: What was sort of the view that you were getting from NEA and sort of on your own and with your colleagues, the Carter Administration was just coming in and how did you sort of feel they were handling the Middle East situation?

HOOPER: Henry Kissinger had been secretary of state before, and I think what he did with Cyrus Vance, who was President Carter's first secretary of state, was he persuaded Vance to take a trip to the Middle East in the spring of 1997 and decide for himself what to do about the region.

Kissinger had been very active, of course, in the aftermath of the October 1973 war in getting what came to be known as the peace process started with the disengagement agreements between Egypt and Syria with Israel and particularly the one with Syria, I was in Lebanon, at Beirut, where the Foreign Service Institute Arabic language school was at the time and I would go over to provide backup logistical support for the Kissinger traveling party. I was over there for about a week or several days on a couple of different occasions.

I wasn't involved in the shuttle, other than just an offstage role as a logistical support person, but it became known as the shuttle that wouldn't end. I think it lasted 58 days or something like that and it was an enormous investment of time and effort on Kissinger's part. At the end he got an agreement on the Golan Heights, a disengagement agreement despite the fact that the Syrians and Israelis were pretty implacable enemies. That agreement, negotiated in 1974, has held up well over thirty years until today and I think it's in a way quite a testament to the effort that Henry Kissinger put in and the Ford Administration was putting into the Middle East.

Carter came in and Kissinger, as I heard it, Kissinger of course wanted the new team, Carter and Vance, to continue with an activist policy on Middle East peace diplomacy, but he was a pretty savvy fellow and as I recall it, he decided that rather than trying to persuade the new administration to undertake an activist agenda, he persuaded Vance to take a trip to the region himself early on, which Vance did, and then make up his own mind, which I think was, as I said, a very savvy way to move forward and those were my last months as I was getting ready to leave Damascus in July.

I remember Vance having impressed the Syrians. I think he was impressed himself and decided that the peace process was something worth taking an activist role in. I was supposed to go back as Lebanon desk officer, but it was felt that Syria would have a more interesting role as the peace process evolved and so I was then prevailed upon to go back to INR.

There were some very, very good people there while I was in INR. I would not claim to have had any influence at all on the peace negotiations. I did a lot of analytical work. The NEA view was they were trying to keep things moving forward and it was becoming quite difficult. The process had stalled and they were focusing on more meetings and so forth, but it was felt that a lot of the substance had leached out, so to speak, of the process.

There were several good things about the job and some challenges to it, but the one good thing about being there was Hal Saunders was the assistant secretary for much of this time when I was there and because he was so deeply involved, really, along with Roy

Atherton, as a major architect of the peace process, we got to see the cable traffic and I remember as Sadat just got increasingly frustrated with the fact that this was going nowhere and all this effort that had been put into it seemed to be going nowhere, there were meetings being planned and things but substance wasn't looming on the horizon.

And Sadat, in his great frustration, in part and he had been having background talks with the Israelis, facilitated by the Moroccans, so he had a good channel there and he had a reasonably good idea of how far he could go with the Israelis and how far they were prepared to go.

Barbara Walters, as I recall, asked him, "Are you prepared to go to Israel?"

Q: She was a TV personality, did interviews with people.

HOOPER: Correct and she asked him as he was being interviewed, he was very accessible to Western and other media interviewers, something about "Would you be prepared to go to Israel?" and he said "Yes." People assumed initially that was more empty rhetoric or a kind of stunt or whatever. And I remember being called up to Hal Saunders' office with a couple of my colleagues in INR when the cable came in from U.S. Ambassador Herman Eilts in Cairo saying he'd just talked with Sadat and Sadat said, yes, he was going to Israel. He was serious about going to Israel.

It was extraordinary move on Sadat's part and an emotional moment. It shattered a lot of the preconceptions the Israelis had towards the Arabs or at least towards the Egyptians. And in fact it really shattered some of the preconceptions that the Americans had about the constraints, or the need to accept, perhaps, a fallow period or slow period in the negotiations.

He then went to Israel, that's well known and the administration quickly pretty much dropped everything and refocused its efforts on following through and that led to Camp David and so forth.

I was there during that period. Again, I was not at Camp David. I had very little to do with the preparations for Camp David.

Q; I'd like to pick up sort of job-specific, how would you say, what was the role of INR at the time? It's waxed and waned. How close to the Near Eastern bureau and all?

HOOPER: It was a very close working relationship between INR and NEA, the Near Eastern bureau, at the time and this was driven in part by then need for serious analytical work, but I think it was largely driven by the relationship between Hal Saunders, who was the INR assistant secretary and Roy Atherton, who was the NEA assistant secretary, who, again, were the two major architects of the peace process, below the secretary of state and presidential levels.

And Roy Atherton needed analytical support. Hal Saunders wanted to play an active role. He valued the analytical support he got.

They created an analytical mechanism which evolved, because the Secretary and the President needed to focus on peace process-related events before I arrived in the late summer, early fall of '77, so they created this daily peace process summary with bullet points of events, plus an analytical section and this was produced and I was involved in producing that.

I found that actually quite interesting. It lasted for a long time. It lasted well after I was gone, lasted for years, because it was actually a useful analytical tool. NEA was usually grateful for the products that we provided. It helped them target on issues relevant to operational matters. A lot of interesting people in NEA and in INR worked on it or exchanged ideas and so forth and it was a good product and I think that was one of the key things that I did.

And INR was a player, I don't want to say policy player. INR is not a policymaking bureau. It's more a policy referee, if even that's the appropriate term.

It's meant to have no policy stake, unlike the geographic bureaus, which are always seen as flogging particular policies because of their operational equities and the Secretary and people on the Seventh Floor need independent views. INR is supposed to provide an independent analysis that the Secretary and the Seventh Floor could rely on that was not overly influenced or distorted by the policy vehicles that were being run at any given time by the geographic bureaus.

And I think INR played that role very effectively. It gave INR an influence and a standing in the peace process that it hadn't had before. It's a great credit to Hal Saunders.

Phil Stoddard was the head of the Middle East branch at the time and I think he was a serious fellow and he was a very savvy fellow and he worked closely with Hal to enhance the role of INR, to bring the analytical talents that people in INR had to bear on issues that were important to the Seventh Floor and the geographic bureaus, who were grappling with the various stages of the peace process.

And I think it was a very, very effective role that INR played.

Q: You, sitting in your position, where were you getting your information about Iraq, Jordan and Syria?

HOOPER: From the State Department cables, from the daily take of CIA reports and analyses, and from other USG agencies, but primarily it was from State and CIA. Again, the State Department was really in the thick of the peace process.

The U.S. ambassadors out there and particularly Herman Eilts in Cairo, Dick Murphy in Damascus, Tom Pickering in Jordan. Just looking at those three, that's probably the best

lineup of top talent that the Department had all together at one time, working on this issue and the various components of the peace process. And they were well plugged in, particularly in Jordan and Egypt.

It was harder in Damascus. Assad wasn't having frequent meetings with the U.S. ambassador, the way Herman Eilts did with Sadat. But the embassy was reasonably well plugged in.

There were good things coming out of Damascus, Amman and Cairo, as well as several of the other embassies. Again, you really felt you were working with first class professionals and it was interesting to see how the political level interacted with the professional level. I think the process from the 1973 war to the Camp David agreement in 1978, I think that was probably the period in which, especially with the lead-up to the Camp David period, when the relationship between the professionals and the policy level, the secretary of state and the national security advisor and the president, when they were working most effectively together towards advancing the peace process.

I think people felt there was real hope in the air, that after decades of frustration with the Arab-Israeli issue, with just trying to manage it and with only wars and terrorism and all the negative things you can think of, it became challenging and I think sometimes exhilarating for people to work on the issue, because hope was there and a lot seemed possible.

I certainly think that molded my attitude. The peace process, being a part of it, a very minor part of it, in its formative stage was transformative for me.

Q: Looking at this, how effective or useful did you find what was coming out of CIA, from Langley? Was this sort of duplicating what you were getting from the embassies or was there a different element there?

HOOPER: I think given where the peace process was going and the sensitivity of it and who was directing it in the Middle East, that is it was Sadat and very few people around him knew what he was going to do next. The late King Hussein of Jordan, the late Anwar Sadat, the late Hafez al-Assad of Syria, they played their cards very close to their vests.

I don't recall the CIA and I don't mean to be unfair to them, I just don't recall that the key reporting about what was coming next and what they were considering, where they were going, was coming out of the Agency. That is sometimes or often the case in other places, or perhaps in the Middle East prior to that, since then, whatever. This time it was the ambassadors at the embassies who were producing this. So I think most of it really was less so for the CIA during this period of time.

Of course they were doing their other things, working on combating Palestinian terrorism for example, but, again, the main policy focus was on the peace process. That's what American society, to some extent, was riveted on. They often were playing catch-up. The

sources were right at the top. It was the ambassadors and the DCMs and so forth that were really producing a lot of this material.

Q: You were getting these things from the various embassies. What would you be producing? Would you sort of sit there and stare at the ceiling and say, "Well, I've heard from here and here and here and this is what I think may be going on?" Or would you talk it over with other people? Just to get an idea, what an intelligence

HOOPER: Every day we would have to sort out what was the analytical issue that we were going to focus on for the Secretary's peace process report. We had access to the NODIS and so forth, but it was taking these events, the events that were happening, the disparate events and trying to make sense out of what this meant and how this could impact on the peace process and what the expectations were of the parties in the region, based on the tools we had, what kind of reporting we were getting from the region and our own background knowledge and information and so forth, to give the Secretary and the Seventh Floor and to help focus Hal Saunders and Roy Atherton, 'cause they were avid readers of this, how events were shaping perceptions in the region, what the expectations were on the part of the parties, this kind of thing.

There were always things happening. The peace process was always on the verge of collapse. It was always at a crossroads. It was always a watershed. I've never heard or seen more watersheds, crossroads, turning points and whatever, it was kind of every other day. In a certain sense it was overused and we just heard it all the time from people, but at the same time there was often some truth to it.

When issues which had been frozen for a long time unfreeze and you have people that were trying to push the ice and crack it even further, they're trying not to fall in as they do it, but they're trying to unfreeze issues, a lot of things melt, a lot of things begin to break loose.

Great strategic visions try to take advantage of this, but tactically you have to maintain your footing, because you never know if something else is going to break loose in a constructive way. You've always got to be prepared. At the same time, there are red lines.

Syria was in Lebanon because it had gone in when the PLO, which was really the fighting arm of the Sunnis in Lebanon, went after the Christians, I think were on the verge of really defeating them, in what became the earlier phases and bloody phases of the Lebanese civil war, the Syrians went in themselves to take on the PLO, which just shocked people.

So that was still playing itself out. Lebanon would play itself out for more than another decade.

So you had the peace process going, but you couldn't take your eye off other regional matters as well such as Lebanon. It involved Israel and Syria, the PLO and the Lebanese, of course.

And you had a lot of these elements. It wasn't just what's Sadat going to do next. Things didn't look all that stable in Damascus and there was violence. So there was a lot going on and policy makers were scratching their heads. So we tried to integrate a lot of material from whatever sources we could find.

And, again, I give NSA a lot of credit, too. We didn't speak about that. Perhaps it's best not to discuss it. NSA was very useful.

Q: Just to point out, NSA is essentially the organization that listens in on communications.

HOOPER: To hear what people are communicating to governments, or communicating to each other when we're not around. I found their material to be very interesting, very useful. It really increased even more my respect for them, for their abilities and for the effectiveness of the product that they were turning out, on the Middle East and that's all I was dealing with.

Q: I think one of the things you point out, I think it's sort of endemic in the system, INR usually gets higher ratings than the CIA, but the point is that if intelligence is any good, it has to be connected to the product, which is foreign policy and you're sitting practically in the laps of the people who are dealing in foreign policy, whereas the CIA has a bureaucracy, things go through it. It's not as keyed into the immediate problem, whereas you were keyed to the immediate problem.

HOOPER: To do analytical work, to be close enough to the policy maker without necessarily accepting the policy maker's policy assumptions, that's the trick, because if you just become an adjunct to the policy people, then you're not providing anyone a service. If you're standing back and looking up at the ceiling or looking out the window or whatever, or you're talking about how things might be five years down the road, when people are trying to figure out how to respond to Sadat's latest issue, it's useful to have that sense we can improve the situation, it's useful to have that sense of this is an opportunity and if we get this right we can improve the situation, we can leave it behind us better than it was when we got there.

I don't think people had illusions that they were gonna solve the whole Arab-Israeli problem, but to have that kind of relationship and it was useful for me to see it, professionally, close enough to the policy people without being asked to, required to, accept their assumptions, but write things that would help move the process forward but not just flogging the latest policy vehicle.

You could do serious, honest, analytical reporting that had an impact and it was a very, very fruitful period for INR's Middle East shop.

Q: Who was in charge of Iraq at the time?

HOOPER: Saddam Hussein and it's interesting, Stu, because all this talk about the peace process, Iraq was not obviously part of the peace process, or anywhere near it, except to throw stones at it or worse than stones.

Saddam Hussein and Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr were the two leaders, as I recall it, who were running Iraq. There was an NIE on Iraq I remember that I was involved in.

Q: That's a National Intelligence Estimate.

HOOPER: Nothing like the famous NIE before the U.S. military effort into Iraq. That NIE became quite well known. This was more a standard product, because Iraq wasn't seen as any place that was gonna engage in the peace process. It was a tough, tough, vicious, violent regime.

We had an interest section out there. We had very good people out there. I remember trying to figure out what the Iraqi government was up to, it was almost a hopeless case. In this case, I recall getting some good information by CIA channels. But, again, the interest section wasn't able to produce much material, because they just couldn't get it. No one could get it. Even the Arab embassies couldn't get it. The Iraqis couldn't figure it out and that was the way Saddam wanted it.

People doing Iraq around town were, it was kind of isolated, marginalized, no one cared about their product. It wasn't part of the peace process. There wasn't any war with Iran going on.

Ayatollah Khomeini, who the Iran analyst in INR was reporting on, trying to draw peoples' attention to, suddenly, as I was leaving in December '78 to go to Libya, he was just coming to power around that time. He had gone from almost unknown, quite well known in Iran, but in the West and in the bureaucracy in the State Department unknown, to being, suddenly they wanted plenty of stuff about his background and policies. He had been living in exile in Iraq.

So Iraq was pretty small potatoes. They were seen as a very hard line, viciously hard line, promoter of terrorism. Some pretty grim Palestinian factions were operating out of Baghdad. Again, I found the Iraq thing kind of interesting to have it and I remember that period, having done Iraq for a year and a half or so, at a time when it didn't really matter that much and having learned something about Iraq, apart from what I learned while I was in the region and having visited there when I was a student.

Q: I think it puts it in the proper context.

Okay, let's come to a key player: Jordan, King Hussein. How did you view King Hussein at the time?

HOOPER: We really had a good embassy, with Tom Pickering. Rocky Suddarth was DCM at the time, just a terrific, terrific embassy.

King Hussein was very close to the U.S. and Britain and the West and no question about his moderate credentials and it was a very close operational relationship and I think he wanted to act and he was hopeful of acting.

He took personal responsibility for the loss of the West Bank and Jerusalem, because Nasser, as I recall the story, in the '67 war, I was not in the Foreign Service then at all, Nasser had called King Hussein and persuaded him now is the time to attack, they had the Israelis on the run and so forth and ignore these press reports about all of our air force being smashed.

And King Hussein, to his everlasting regret, he bought in and started lobbing some artillery shells and moving some troops around and the Israelis took that as an opportunity to let 'em have it.

Had he done nothing and I think the U.S. ambassador and others at the time, in '67, were trying to tell him "For God's sake, stay out of this! Don't get involved! Stay out! Stay neutral! Say whatever you want publicly, but Jordan should not get involved in this."

And of course he had had any number of hours of talks with the Israelis over the years, since the early Fifties. He had a reasonably good idea of the Israelis and how they might act, probably better than any of the other Arab leaders, who hadn't met with them. He had done this, of course secretly. And he attacked.

So he felt very strongly that Jordan should play a role in the West Bank/Jerusalem and the Palestinian portion of the peace process, rather than it being just Egypt and Syria and he wanted to be involved in that. Because he believed his actions had led to the occupation of these particular lands by the Israelis. At the same time, he was never certain how much he could trust the U.S., how far the U.S. would go, how much the U.S. would continue to push the process, because at the end of the day Jordan is a small and a weak country.

He continued to want to see more oomph, more pizzazz, more pressure by the U.S. on Israel, various things that he wanted to see, because he didn't feel he was Sadat, he wasn't sitting on top of Egypt, with the Egyptian populace that had just recovered their honor in the '73 war, that moreover was almost entirely Egyptian, whereas Jordan had a significant population of Palestinians.

He was very nervous about how far he could go, so he was not prepared to go as far as Sadat, but he was not taking the tough line often the way Assad did, either, not trying to apply a brake to the process.

And he was in the middle, but you always felt that when the process really moved

forward, at the right time that he could make his move. Ultimately he did, but that was at a later time.

But he was quite close to Assad and Assad used him as a channel of communication to the U.S., because it was less awkward for Assad than having the U.S. ambassador trooping in every other day. So they talked a fair amount of the time and Hussein would pass on what he had picked up from Damascus and what he'd picked up from Cairo and so forth. So it was a useful communications channel.

A lot of analytical work was done, particularly by the embassy in Amman. They turned out top rate analytical stuff. I remember a fifty page NODIS on the West Bank/Jerusalem issue, here's the various components you have to take into account in negotiations. And it just had everything there. I thought it was terrific. But, again, there weren't any agreements.

Q: When one looks at Camp David, Camp David at some point was supposed to have said a lot of things, but moved over to the Egyptian-Israeli thing, which in many ways was the easy part of the thing and sort of skipped the two other major players, which would be Jordan and Syria.

HOOPER: Syria kept pushing for a broad based conference in the region and Sadat kept pushing for more action, more action. He didn't want just a conference that sat there and did nothing. So, again, he was the accelerator and Assad was more the brake and King Hussein was in between and didn't cast that much of a shadow on the process.

I think Sadat just got fed up with Assad and with the lack of U.S. effort to move things forward and that's why he went to Israel, that historic trip and they capitalized on this in the U.S. in the peace process and that led to Camp David.

Camp David, no one had done anything like this before. It was unexpected. People were making things up as they went along. I thought the U.S. planning for Camp David was absolutely top rate, much, much better than the current kind of planning that's being done now for the current phase, just in my own personal view of the peace process and the absence of much integration between the professionals and the political level.

They really sat down, Roy Atherton and Hal Saunders and President Carter, they met some days before to sort it out. It was a very, very serious approach that they took and I just thought it was a most effective professional approach, much of which I learned about only later.

But they didn't know it was going to work. I think they felt reasonably confident they could make a lot of progress on the Egyptian front. I'm not sure they felt that they could get as far as they did on that, or at least there was no guarantee of success.

They knew there had to be a Palestinian element to it and the real policy question I think was what the Palestinian element would be, because the less the Palestinian element, the

more Camp David was going to be attacked by the rest of the Arab world and the less legitimate it would seem and the less shadow it would cast, in terms of breaking the log jam.

The more it outlined a way forward on the Palestinian issue as well, the more likely it was going to be that one could move on from Camp David to another round of talks, maybe with Syria, Jordan, whatever, more focused on the Palestinians. The Syrians, after all, were always pressing on the Palestinian issue.

Camp David had been written about extensively and I was not there. I have very little to add. But a lot of the expectations and hopes for Camp David were dashed almost immediately, when Israeli Prime Minister Begin sent over his interpretation of the understanding that had been worked out with Carter and Sadat on a West Bank settlement freeze. And once he said that his understanding was that the freeze was limited to three months, rather than kind of semi-permanent, once that came over and Carter didn't really call him on it, Sadat felt that he had been snookered but that he had little choice now but to go ahead with the part of the deal affecting Egypt.

It really took away a lot of the hopes for Camp David as something that would be a breakthrough for the rest of the Arab world and would lead on to other things in the near future, that just didn't pan out, because the Palestinian thing was seen to be unaddressed and the U.S. was seen in the region as being unwilling to press the Israelis on a longer and more durable settlement freeze, so that they could move ahead on Palestinian negotiations.

So I think Camp David, it was this great achievement in terms of Israel and Egypt. I think they both got really what they wanted bilaterally, but it was going to take a lot longer to move on to another phase after Camp David because of the lack of progress on the Palestinian component of the problem.

Q: Well, let's look at Syria. Basically, Syria, was it the Golan Heights? Was this the issue, or were there other issues?

HOOPER: Syria had three issues in the late Seventies that it was focused on. It always talked about the need to help the Palestinians and so forth and they had several hundred thousand Palestinians living in Syria who were honeycombed also throughout the bureaucracy as well. They always talked about the need to help the Palestinians. This was their way of trying to make the issue of the next steps in the peace process into a pan-Arab issue and help them rally support in the Arab world, to try to block and blunt efforts that the U.S. or the Egyptians or Israelis might be making at any given time.

Of course, in principle they were not going to give up one inch of the Golan Heights, but Assad downplayed the Golan Heights. It's actually much more salient. I think it was always important to them, but Damascus wanted to speak with a pan-Arab voice and the way to do that is not talk about the Golan Heights but, front and center, the Palestinian problem.

And then Lebanon, in 1976, became a real focus of Syrian policy and things became possible between Israel and Syria in the Levant, as Syria, again, went in initially and people have tend to forget this, initially to save Lebanese Christians and to take on the Palestinians.

So those were the three sets of focus issues for Syria. Hafez al-Assad was a pretty tough man and you can look what his regime did later on, in the early Eighties, to the city of Hama and one should have no illusions. That being said, it's very hard to imagine democracy breaking forth in Damascus, because, frankly, in Syria, if you have a free and fair election, there's going to be a Sunni president and parliament and so forth. The Alawites don't want it, it would undermine their dominant role in the country.

But you need to find a way to speak to concerns that the Sunnis have and the Sunnis tend to be pan-Arab in their outlook and the Palestinian issue is a natural and, again, I'm not saying that it was totally manipulated, that Assad didn't have some principled beliefs on this himself, but I believe that that enabled him to maintain Damascus' role on the cutting edge, or as the "beating heart of Arabism" and to try to position himself to play a broader role in the region than might otherwise be the case, given Syria's population and the size of its economy and so forth.

Again, Syria's population was much smaller than that of Egypt, about one-fourth the population. At the same time, whatever was happening on the Palestinian issue was going to affect Assad and the Palestinians that he cracked down on in Lebanon and he wanted to have a role in that so that he could play on a larger stage. So it was useful to play up the Palestinian issue, downplay the Golan issue, while you're working the Lebanon thing, which was really, for a period of time, his major preoccupation.

Q: Jim, was there a feeling sort of on NEA's part during the process that led up to Camp David and all, of saying, "The Palestinian problem is at the core and here maybe we have a chance to do something," because, in a way, looking at it, the Israelis and Egyptians didn't want to fight each other and there was a bunch of empty ground between them. It wasn't that simple, of course, but essentially they were pushing on an open door.

HOOPER: As I recall it, the Palestinian issue, it was always felt that something needed to be done, that it needed to be dealt with, but no one had any first class ideas on how to do it. Now things have evolved and you've got an elected Palestinian president and prime minister and parliament.

But back then it was the PLO led by Yasser Arafat, and Arafat was held in contempt by the Israelis and frankly by many in the United States, and he was not seen as someone unambiguously committed to peace by any means, that's putting it mildly. He had just blotted his copybook further in Lebanon, so that even the Syrians went after him. So there wasn't much to work with. People would look at the mayors and I was kind of sniffing around at varying people on the West Bank and what not, which is why King

Hussein was there in the wings, because it was felt he would be a more acceptable negotiator for the Palestinians as far as the U.S., Israelis and the international community was concerned.

Of course, there was always hope that King Hussein and Arafat would cut some sort of deal and this became, under Reagan, later on, when I was in London, that became the policy goal of the U.S. People realized that something needed to be done, but there weren't a lot of good candidates to work with, to directly represent the Palestinians and who were Palestinians themselves.

Q: Did you feel, where you were, any of the influence of the Israeli lobby, I'm using it in the broadest terms, not AIPAC, particularly, but the whole thing. Was this a factor in your thinking or analysis?

HOOPER: I think analytically, in INR, it was not something that we dealt with. We did our analytical product and we had a very very good Israel analyst as well.

Q: Who was that?

HOOPER: Sam Roberts, just a terrific person. His assessments were tough minded, independent and professional. I learned a lot from Sam. I thought he was a rigorous, fair analyst who understood Israel very well and also understood the dynamics between Israel and the Arabs. I recall that his doctoral dissertation, written years before the October 1973 war and Camp David, predicted an Israeli-Egyptian rapprochement.

In any case, we knew that every so often Secretary Vance and Roy Atherton and Hal Saunders would go to the White House, as things were leading up to Camp David and then in the aftermath of Camp David. Camp David was a sudden event and only in retrospect were things "leading up" to Camp David. But they would go over to the White House, as I think people have before that time and after that time to see how far politically the envelope could be pushed and the issue worked on, what the guidelines were or the constraints and so forth, on how to address an issue.

It didn't affect our day to day work at all in INR. We did the analytical stuff, we did it straightforward. I thought we were fair to the parties. We weren't trying to take a pro-anyone or anti-anyone stance. It was seen as a time, as I said, of great hope, when things were moving forward. One could get over the usual finger pointing between Israelis and Arabs. There was always a danger that one could get sucked into that on the American side, because both sides would turn to us, turn to the Americans, to say, "Now, you be the honest broker," the mediator, the peace facilitator or whatever the term was at the time. And of course both wanted an honest broker, but both tried to put their thumbs on the scales and that's perfectly understandable.

Q: What was the impression that you were getting from your colleagues and all of Jimmy Carter, a new man doing this, who seemed quite serious about this thing? What was your take on him?

HOOPER: I think the belief was that Carter really was serious about progress in the peace process. Again, what became Camp David wasn't foreseen. Carter tried his best to figure out ways to get there.

I wasn't in the Foreign Service long before Nixon was out. When I came in, Bill Rogers was secretary of state and then Henry Kissinger shortly thereafter. I think Henry Kissinger was probably one of the best secretaries of state that the United States ever had. If there is a small group of five or six secretaries from history, a handful, he'd be in that handful. I think he understands diplomacy far better than most of his contemporaries and predecessors.

Regarding Nixon, history will never look kindly on Watergate. It will look kindly on many of his foreign policy initiatives and is already looking kindly on some of his domestic policies. He was very savvy in foreign affairs, confident in his own understanding of the players and the policy process.

Carter I don't think had that same strength that Nixon did, in terms of a familiarity with foreign affairs. I think Vance had been more familiar with it and the two of them worked on it reasonably well together. But, again, Vance was not a Henry Kissinger. Who is? Very hard to see anyone like that coming along again.

Carter needed to feel his way around internationally. He tried to establish a relationship of some sorts with Assad. Obviously Sadat was going to be the key player there and it was very easy to establish a relationship with King Hussein.

He took great pride in Camp David. Obviously Iran was his low point. Anything to do with Iran was probably seen as very negative on President Carter, in terms of presidential decision making.

On Arab-Israel issues and getting to Camp David and making it work and so forth, he regards that as the high point, at least in foreign policy and it's probably the high point in any of the policies of his presidency.

And he has the Carter Center. He obviously found his footing in the international arena and has played quite a role internationally since leaving the presidency.

But he was learning his footing. I think he more or less gained his footing, to the extent any president can, on the Middle East, on any geographic area. They're all supposed to be good on Europe. That used to be a given, with FDR, Truman, Eisenhower and Nixon. You had to have a good understanding of Europe, NATO, the Cold War, that was the focus of things.

These regional issues, they weren't things usually learned in the process of becoming president, in the presidential training school that one goes through, in the Senate or the

governorships or whatever it is. Carter learned the Middle East pretty well, better than can be expected for a president.

Kissinger had learned the Middle East through the searing fires of the October '73 war and the various peace process negotiations afterwards. In think he had become an expert on the Middle East. I always remember he used to say, he said it to me a couple times, I asked him, "Do you think a comprehensive peace is possible?" And he said, "We have to, from a policy point of view, it's not what I believe, but from a policy point of view we have to act as if we believe it's possible that there can be a full peace."

And I always thought that was a good answer and I think he was right. It didn't really matter whether he thought they could go all the way on this one.

I think to some extent that was probably the way it was with Carter. Again, they wanted to leave something behind and move the process forward. And you had to learn, you couldn't just be spoon fed to do that and Carter, I think, had to learn to take the Middle East very seriously and it paid off.

Again, it's useful to have a Sadat out there.

Q: Sadat was a catalyst.

HOOPER: It would have been hard for Carter to fail, when you've got a Sadat there who's trying to reshape the whole political and diplomatic map of the region. In that case, you just want to make sure you don't screw it up.

But no matter how, whether you're really gonna move it ahead or just avoid screwing it up, when it's a situation in flux, you gotta learn, you gotta get your footing, you can't just leave it all to the professionals, or read the advice columns. You've really gotta learn and develop a feel for it. And I think Carter did.

Q: This, of course, is a problem, in retrospect, with the Bush II Administration. They made a very deliberate effort to push the Middle East issue away, because it was a tar baby and you didn't want to get caught up in that. So they seemed to put it on hold and now they've sort of picked it up again. We have gotten so involved in that damned thing that you can't just let things develop on their own.

HOOPER: Kissinger persuaded Vance to take a trip. "You don't have to commit yourself, to put a lot of your chips out there in the Middle East, on the peace process and the Arab-Israeli problem, just take a trip to the region and judge for yourself. I believe that if he had taken the opposite tack and told them, "I did a great job in the Middle East, and now I'll pass the baton to you so that you can charge ahead and spend fifty per cent of your time on it," it would have fallen flat. He was too smart for that.

He said, "Go, make up your own mind" because he believed that once Vance went to the region he would be inevitably drawn into it and people in the region were smart enough

to engage with him in a certain way that would present it as a region of attractive possibilities, rather than just a lot of headaches.

And so Kissinger, he got Vance into the region. Roy Atherton and Hal Saunders, again, as I recall it and, again, I was not at a policy making level, but I had access to a lot of things, their argument, in part was and I think this became also part of Camp David, to making that real push, their argument to Vance from within, from the professional level, was, "The Middle East is now so much in flux that just to manage it and stay on the treadmill, to keep it where it is, it's going to take a real effort. For the investment of a bit more effort, you can actually make some progress with the parties, because they're ready to go, ready for forward movement, to varying degrees they're ready to go. So for a little more effort, you can really advance United States interests by locking in some more achievements out there."

And I think that was a useful bureaucratic strategy to take and also it was a strategy with more than a grain of truth to it. So a lot of things had coalesced and come together and I think Vance and Carter bought into this and what we saw, what we got, what we ended up with, again, as long as you've got a Sadat out in play, you can be pretty confident that there's gonna be some nice victories you're gonna have to chalk up on your resume when you leave office.

But it hasn't always been that way since. Certainly, the Arab-Israeli process, as you've touched upon, the Arab-Israeli process has been moving backwards I think, since President Clinton, he almost made it, if he had started a few months earlier, I think he could have gotten a significant breakthrough on the Palestinian issue, but he waited too late and then put everything into it and then blamed Arafat for the failure of his own initiative. In fact, I've heard from a number of people that he told Bush, when he met with him, "Arafat fucked me! That bastard, don't trust him!" Clinton provided no incentive for his successor to engage on the Middle East. Ironic, isn't it?

Bush I think found that to be useful advice and it fit with his initial inclination to go low key in the Middle East. I'm not sure if Clinton had said, "Arafat is a wonderful guy who you ought to spend some time with," that Bush would have done so in any case.

Q: Well, then, in, what, '78, you

HOOPER: Went from INR to Libya, because they needed a political officer and I wanted to give it a try. My assignment hadn't ended in INR, but it was broken. So I went from INR to Libya, to Tripoli.

Q: You were in Libya from '78 to when?

HOOPER: December of '78 and I departed January 1st 1980. I was there a year and left several weeks after the attack on the embassy.

Libya was our worst experience as a family. A lot of experiences were different there than anywhere else in the Middle East. After our first full day there, I remember my wife just right away saw that this was not going to be the typical assignment.

We'd been in Saudi Arabia and Damascus and were willing to endure hardships. For just a lot of reasons I think she felt just instinctively right up front, "This is going to be a tough and perhaps unhappy assignment."

And it was. It was a tough assignment; in a lot of ways from a family point of view an unhappy one. Living in that society and working there, it was just difficult to do.

The U.S. embassy was attacked after Khomeini had overseen the seizure of hostages at the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November '79. I'd been there almost a year when that happened.

Q: What was the situation in Libya when you got there, sort of the political situation and how did we view Qadhafi at that time?

HOOPER: We had Bill Eagleton, one of our most experienced diplomats in the Middle East, who'd never been an ambassador. I think he'd been heading missions though, apart from time in Washington, since the Fifties.

He was the head of our mission in South Yemen in 1969, when the South Yemenis broke relations with us. Bill was quite a character, in a lot of ways. I was asking him about his experience in Aden. He said the foreign minister had summoned him to the ministry, and when Bill returned to the embassy, he told the staff that, "I was just told by the foreign minister I've got 24 hours to leave the country. And the rest of you have 48 hours to get out."

Bill said the foreign minister told him, "In alignment with pan-Arab policy, we are cutting diplomatic relations with the U.S., so you've got 24 hours to get out of the country."

Bill said, "I'm very sorry to hear that. Would you reconsider?"

"No, I won't. This is a decision by the entire leadership."

"Okay, well, in any case I've got my new assignment. I'm going to Algeria as chargé."

And the foreign minister said, "Algeria? What do you mean, Algeria? They broke relations with the U.S. a year or two ago."

Bill said, "No, no, we have an interests section there. I'm going to be the chargé and head it."

And the foreign minister was clearly thrown off balance, because officially the U.S. did not have diplomatic relations with many of these countries. Unofficially, we had interests sections in many of them. So the South Yemeni minister was very confused.

Anyway, Bill went and stayed in Algiers for five years and he was chargé there, again, ambassador in everything but title.

Because they had nationalized Wheelus Air Force Base and expelled U.S. forces, and Qadhafi was giving the U.S. a hard time on a lot of issues, Washington decided to send a message and downgraded our relationship from ambassadorial to chargé level. But Washington recognized Qadhafi's penchant for causing trouble, so State wanted an experienced person at the helm in Tripoli. Bill was always ready to go anywhere in the NEA region and so he ended up in Libya.

When I arrived he was in Libya and the Libyans were trying to be nice to the American people. They were trying to get around the U.S. government, establish direct relations with the American people. They had these "popular committees" and Qadhafi had his Green Book, the *Jamahiriya*, it's called, *The Nation of the Masses*. I learned all about that stuff. He was running everything, but there was this fiction of committees and so forth and of democracy.

Bill, with very little to go on, was trying to get some sort of Washington interest in seeing whether we could at least improve the relationship a bit. And so I watched him and got involved in that myself. You try to work the bilateral relationship and see if there's something that can come out of it.

Qadhafi of course was no player in the peace process. One time prior to my arrival the U.S. caught him in a plot to assassinate Herman Eilts. I think Bill's predecessor had gone in and met with Qadhafi's *chef de bureau*, with Qadhafi in the next room and had handed the official a letter from the president that informed him we knew what he was up to in Cairo and warned that there would be serious consequences if anything happened. It was a pretty tough message. And that was the last of this plot.

It was not a good bilateral relationship. It didn't look like it was headed anywhere. Bill couldn't get much attention for Libya policy from Washington, for understandable reasons. People were focused on a lot of other things that frankly were more important than Libya.

Qadhafi was losing interest in trying to go around the U.S. government, trying to appeal directly to the American people and so forth through his diplomacy. So he tried a different tack. During the summer of '79 Bill was on leave and I was chargé and the German foreign minister came to town, so I went over to see my counterpart at the German embassy and talked to him and he said, "Oh, by the way, when we met with Qadhafi, the Libyan leader asked if we would like some more oil." And the German minister said, "Yes, we could always use some more oil." And Qadhafi said, "That's

good, because we're going to be cutting the oil to the United States pretty soon and we'll have a lot more to put on the market."

I went back to the embassy and reported this. Mind you, the Arab oil embargo was still pretty fresh in peoples' minds from the '73 war, this was 1979, politically very fresh in peoples' minds, in terms of the impact it had, political impact it had and financial impact it had and so forth. So I sent that in. Within 24 or 48 hours we got a call that the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, David Newsom, was coming out to visit and would be there within a few days.

It turned out that cable had really gotten peoples' attention and suddenly Washington decided that State needed to give Libya a little more focus than had been the case. And Bill came back, he was in Spain and he suddenly was asked to get on a plane and come back to be there when Ambassador Newsom—who had been ambassador to Libya earlier in his career—arrived for the sudden visit. Newsom met with Qadhafi and the crisis seemed to pass, though a sense of foreboding hung in the air.

Then Bill resumed his leave and Washington sent someone else, Pat Quinlan, to be chargé, because they suddenly realized that they couldn't have a mid-level FSO as chargé when the country might be about to cut off oil to the U.S., there were big issues at stake, and Qadhafi was so unpredictable. So they brought in Pat for a month or so, and he turned out to be a wonderful and quite thoughtful and professional FSO who it was a pleasure working with.

I remember, again on the family side, a new economic officer, Joe Moyle, also joined the team that summer. The chargé's residence had a swimming pool and during the summer the embassy staff could swim there a couple days a week.

Joe came in from the airport with his wife and two kids, we met them and Bill Eagleton was having dinner for him, so he could introduce the staff, we were swimming at the pool before heading inside for dinner. There were just the three families, and our kids were small at the time, age eight and six. My wife Sylvia was keeping an eye on what's going on in the pool, we're standing next to it. Joe and his wife were standing around the pool in their clothes and the kids in their bathing suits. Joe's daughter jumps off the board, goes right down and my wife notices that she's still on the bottom and she said, "Excuse me, Joe, does your daughter know how to swim?"

And Joe said, "No, she doesn't. We told her to stay in the shallow end."

Sylvia responded, "For God's sake, she went off the diving board. She's down on the bottom!"

Joe turned, dove in, with all his clothes on, pulled her up and she was okay. I credit Sylvia with perhaps saving this girl's life, no one knows what would have happened. The girl was okay, she hadn't been down long enough to drown when Joe pulled her out. But,

still, it was a scary close call. His plane had landed three hours earlier and what a thing to happen.

In any case, we were trying to establish some sort of relationship with the Libyans and it was not easy going. Khomeini then took over the embassy, the hostages were taken

Q: This is in Iran, yeah.

HOOPER: Right. There were then other events in some other Middle East posts and the U.S. began evacuating staff from its embassies.

Q: Islamabad, of course, was the worst.

HOOPER: For a moment it looked like, not just a moment, for a while it looked like Khomeini was there, he had his particular view of the U.S. and he was going to do something about it. There were the hostages and no one knew what Carter was going to do at the time, this was before the failed rescue mission and anything was possible and people were scared and so they were evacuating staff from a number of places and we started to monitor demonstrations taking place in various Libyan towns against the U.S.

And the demonstrations began moving from the south, getting ever closer to Tripoli and there seemed to be a pattern here. And the staff started getting very nervous. Many of the families wanted to leave.

Bill found this an awkward time, because this was going to undermine our effort to improve relations and try to get somewhere. And I think he actually tried to talk some family members out of leaving, which was not welcomed by them. He minimized the import of these demonstrations and I was trying to focus him on, "I think something is possible here. I'm not saying something will happen, but the odds of Qadhafi doing something unpredictable are rising."

But he didn't think it was likely at all. I said that we needed to have an evacuation drill at the embassy to make sure the staff knew what to do if there was an attack. Bill disagreed, so we organized the drill on the weekend without his permission or knowledge.

A few days before the actual attack on the embassy there was a group of school kids that came by and demonstrated outside the embassy. And they left.

That was a real sign that the demos had now reached Tripoli. The administrative officer came to me and said, "I asked Bill about putting some of the tear gas canisters at various places inside the building, and he said no, he didn't want it." And I told him, just put them around, I'll take the responsibility. I was really beginning to feel that enough's enough, the likelihood of an attack was growing, and we have to take precautions. Virtually all the rest of the staff agreed. We all pretty much concluded that Bill had his head in the sand and we had to act on our own.

Then one morning, one of our employees, it was a German employee, an FSN who was married to a Libyan woman, came in for work and informed Bill and Jack McCavitt and said, "The Revolutionary Guards came by my son's high school yesterday and announced that they needed students to sign up for an attack the next day against the American Embassy. Bill dismissed the story, and the FSN said, "I only came in to tell you. What you do with this information is up to you. I'm going home. I'm not going to be here when this happens."

Shortly thereafter an American came to the embassy and said, "There's a group of people moving down the street." So Jack McCavitt and I decided to follow this crowd down to Green Square, the main square downtown. Many of the spouses had part-time jobs in the embassy, because there wasn't anything else for them to do there, and before Jack and I left the building we told the spouses—including my wife Sylvia—to go home immediately in case something happened.

Jack and I then walked to Green Square. We got there and they were whooping it up and the crowd was becoming more emotional. We understood enough of what they were saying—"Down with the Americans"—and there were the signs and we could read enough of it to figure it out things were bad. And then it was "On to the embassy!"

We started running to be ahead of the crowd, to get back there in time to warn the others. This was the pre-cell phone era. I remember we stopped at a pay phone, I reached into my pocket for a coin and realized I didn't have any with me. For years after that I would always carry 25 cents or whatever it took to call from a pay phone, just because I became almost superstitious about it, the day will come when you'll have an emergency and you'll be able to use the phone.

We got back to the embassy just a few minutes ahead of the outriders of the crowd and said, "Quick, get the protective grills down!" We were just getting it down with some effort and those inside who wanted to get away quickly scampered out the door. We pulled the steel shutters over the doors. The windows were barred.

In an experience like that, I'm sure I was scared through all this, but I don't remember being scared at all, because with one exception all of the staff acted very well. We started destroying documents. We'd been destroying them before but had not finished.

And we held them off, we moved up from the first floor to the second floor. On the second floor our admin officer, John Dieffenderfer, who was just a great guy, a real hero, he saw someone knocking an air conditioner out of the wall and then was gonna climb in through the hole. He went and pushed the guy back out.

All of us who were in there know this, but it hasn't really been said before, so it's very awkward, in some ways to describe this, but our charge fell apart. He lost it. He was no help to us. In fact, he kept saying, "Call the head of security, Libyan security! Let Qadhafi know! Someone has to stop this!"

I said, “Bill, please just get out of our way! These are the guys that planned this! Just get out of our way!”

He kept repeating that, “Someone has to do something! Call the foreign ministry!” Because he had never thought it was going to happen, he was not mentally prepared for the attack. If you think something might happen and prepare yourself and run through some drills, you’re psychologically better prepared for what comes.

I don’t remember being scared as it occurred. We did not have shredders. We had these things that had a big barrel and had like a fan, we’d put stuff in and crunch it up. I was trying to do that part at the end. We were now back in the vault area getting rid of lots of these papers, because we assumed the whole thing was going to be lost.

And I didn’t know, because I hadn’t done it before, that you have to turn on the vacuum pump to get the document destruction mechanism working. So the shredded paper in there was building up. When the paper reached the top of these two barrels they both stopped working. We couldn’t shred any more documents.

Again, always learn how to run shredders and document destruction machines. From then on I always made it a point to learn how to work the shredders at embassies I went to, because you never know, not that I thought we were gonna be attacked in London or some of these other places. But, again, always good to know these things.

Because of the air conditioning vent system throughout the embassy, the tear gas from the canisters we had thrown on the lower level of the building to delay the demonstrators trying to break in, was coming now through the air vent into the vault. So we began to become overcome by it. About an hour had gone by, all the most sensitive documents had been destroyed, and we figured that we could hold out no longer and had to leave because it was just getting impossible with the tear gas.

Our embassy was part of an apartment complex. There was a courtyard and we walked through the courtyard, and while we were going across the courtyard the shutters of a window across the courtyard opened. There was this guy in uniform and he sits there leaning with his shoulders on the windowsill. Actually that guy just watched us going across the courtyard. It felt a bit chilling.

We went into the next building, where we had a storage room, and entered this storage apartment from the courtyard door. We said, OK everyone, we’re gonna go downstairs to the front door and go out in groups of two or three and then our plan was to walk casually about a mile to the British Embassy, because this entrance was around the corner now from our embassy entrance and we hoped that if we just walked out of the building in small groups, we might just blend in with the demonstrators if there were any there. At least, that was the plan.

We went down to the front door. I was in the lead. I opened that door onto the street and as I mentioned, it was around the corner from the embassy and there was the edge of the crowd. I closed the door and that was the one time I remember feeling scared.

And I closed the door and I said, "They're out there, too!"

Bill Eagleton pushed me aside, opened the door, tore off and started running and he didn't stop until he got to his residence, which was about a mile past the British embassy, about two miles away.

We started going out in groups of two or three, walking away. I remember looking back and there was this smoke coming from the embassy building and so forth. No one bothered us. Of course, we could hear people saying, "There they are! There they are!" But people on the edges of a crowd, they are more the onlookers. So they were trying to alert people in front but it was chaotic and no one paid attention.

And we walked and we made it to the British Embassy and we were okay. Then Bill went over to the foreign ministry and extracted an apology from the foreign minister. I believe that Qadhafi's objective had been to take hostages so that he could emulate Khomeini. Whatever their goal was, it hadn't panned out, probably because they had not counted on the embassy staff mounting effective resistance and they knew that we did not have Marine Security Guards at the embassy.

As I recall it the next day the remaining spouses and children were evacuated. My wife and two children thought for a few hours that I had been trapped in the burning embassy. From that day my daughter had for six months or a year a kind of an involuntary choking noise that she made and then it just went away. But it was a very scary time for them. I think they initially had believed that the worst had happened.

Washington wasn't sure what to do. Bill got a call from Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, which I didn't know about for two or three days, because he forgot to tell anyone on the staff, that was another story. It looked more like the Middle East was lurching towards some sort of new broad based instability. They decided to evacuate some of the staff and that there would be two people left there, me and Jack McCavitt.

Q: What happened to the embassy?

HOOPER: It was partly burned, but still usable. The internal gates and the tear gas had been pretty effective. The demonstrators carted away all the consular records, because they wanted to see which Libyans had been to the U.S. and who was applying for visas and so forth. They took out a lot of things but they didn't get up to our second floor, which had the executive area, because with the internal gates, they just weren't able to break through them before they were overcome by tear gas.

So we were able to go back in later that night. We sent out a report that night or the next day. Shortly thereafter Bill departed to spend the Christmas holidays somewhere with his

family. I learned a lot of lessons about leadership, especially things not to do. Once he was gone I remained as charge and allowed all of the remaining staff, except a communicator, to depart on leave.

Right after the embassy attack, I remember being really scared, because we caught one of the FSNs breaking into one of the staff houses. So some of us began carrying pistols. You just didn't know what was going to happen.

Bill asked me to stay at his residence when he left and I never had had much experience with firearms and we were getting these eerie reports of things being planned and we had moved $50,000, that was a lot of money back then, into the residence safe and the staff knew about that. I would go around at night, pistol in hand, checking the house to make sure no one was hiding there before I went to sleep.

Bill Eagleton arrived back in late December and some time before that I'd written a NODIS cable saying "You just can't trust Qadhafi. We can't work with him. There's no point." It was a judgment based on the embassy attack and my reading of Qadhafi. My conclusion was that it would not be possible to improve the bilateral relationship for some time.

They then arrested one of our FSNs. The situation kept getting worse and worse. So I left New Year's Day, expecting to be gone for two weeks. And sometime in the first half of January the Libyans then attacked the French Embassy and set it ablaze. People had started trickling back in, staff was building up, they were going to go back to a sort of semi-full complement, not that it was a large embassy, Bill was pushing for that. But after the French got hit, Washington decided, "That's it, we're closing the embassy."

Since then, until a few years ago, we've had the Belgians as our protecting power. We didn't have an interests section. The Belgians had one or two persons there and they were our protecting power, but we didn't have an interests section with American staff in Tripoli for over twenty years.

Q: When you got there and while you were doing it, what was the impression of Qadhafi? Was he considered to have a psychological problem? How did we view him? I'm talking about the whole time you were there.

HOOPER: He was mercurial. He was always trying to make a splash in the Arab world. He had a lot of money from the oil. He got in a plane and Sadat only learned he arrived in Cairo when his plane was circling the airport. And he was trying to socialize the economy even more, put more and more of the small shop owners under government control and ultimately out of business.

On the other hand, I felt there was kind of method to his madness as well. The guy is very savvy. I think he'd come to power '69, '70, around then. He'd lasted almost ten years in office by the time I had arrived, so he had to be fairly savvy.

If you step back, Americans knew little about Libya. The last impression Americans had of Libya was World War II, Rommel and Montgomery chasing each other along the coastal road through Libya, and I don't recall anyone asking the Libyan peoples' point of view about whether they would accept this, that's just the way it was. And it was run after World War II essentially as a colony by several powers, including the Americans and British. The monarchy that was there depended upon Europe and the United States.

And I think the Libyans had gotten used to outsiders telling them what to do and just disregarding their views on everything. I felt and I've always felt this since then that Qadhafi, when he sticks his finger in someone's eye internationally Libyans feel good about that in a lot of ways, because the rest of the world was sticking their finger and much more than that in Libya's eye and just ruined the place during the war. There are still minefields there that haven't been cleaned up from the war and you still see rusted hulks of tanks. Minefields were all over in certain parts not too far from the coastal road.

I think Qadhafi expressed something or he touched a cord among the Libyan people when he stood up to the international community. He connected with his people on this level. And although the international community regards him as a buffoon and foolish and the other Arab leaders tend to see him as somewhat ridiculous, petulant and a teenage child almost in the way he acts and misbehaves, some Libyans like it, because finally a Libyan is speaking up on their behalf.

So I thought that it wasn't just that he was shrewd and knew how to pull the military and security services behind him and appoint his relatives and so forth, but that he actually touched something, a kind of Libyan nationalism if you will.

Of course, he was a thug. At the embassy I remember Jack McCavitt saying that this guy is like a jackal; if the body twitches, he'll run away, will back off. But if you just lie there, he'll take a chunk out of you. So you've gotta stand up to him. That was the attitude we developed toward Qadhafi.

Again, he's mercurial, he's often unpredictable or reliably unpredictable or predictably unpredictable, call it whatever you want to call it. Look at what he did on the nuclear issue and with the U.S., after I think a long period of groundwork through talks with the British. That was a huge step forward. No one would have predicted this. This was unpredictable also.

I don't think it was just because we attacked Iraq and got rid of Saddam Hussein. There was a lot of diplomacy that went into this initiative. And so we now have an embassy there, which is an extraordinary turnabout in the relationship.

Q: Did you have the feeling, we're talking about the time you were there, that you could call on the Sixth Fleet to get you out of problems?

HOOPER: I recall during the summer of '79, suddenly I got called in by the Libyans, by the foreign ministry. They said the U.S. Sixth Fleet ships had crossed the line which

Libya claimed in the Gulf of Sirte as delimiting their territorial waters, and they demanded an explanation, said this was going to be very bad for the relationship and so on. So we went sent a message back and Washington in effect said, "Well, go in and tell the foreign ministry we don't recognize this boundary."

Q: It's a huge gulf, so the distance between two outermost points was well beyond the normally accepted range.

HOOPER: This was not an internal lake or bay or whatever. That was the biggest thing that had happened to date and the Libyans took it very seriously. Well it turned out there was a policy that had been agreed upon in an interagency meeting and looking at it once I saw the broad picture I realized if you accept everyone's assertions in regard to their maritime boundaries, if we don't occasionally challenge that without notifying them, their claim becomes accepted. So there was a deliberate policy, in terms of Libya, of actually reminding them that we don't consider this Libyan territory.

We didn't know that at the embassy at the time; we were told that later. So therefore the Sixth Fleet, when the embassy was attacked, I think we figured, in talking about it beforehand, these things happen pretty fast. If there had been an American fleet off Iran in November of '79, when the hostages were taken, what could it do? It unfolded over the space of several hours and our embassy attack in Tripoli unfolded over the space or an hour or so. Can you really summon help that will arrive in time to affect the outcome, when there is so little time?

So we weren't expecting any help. And as I mentioned, we didn't have a Marine Security Guard detachment in Tripoli.
Q: Well, Jim, so 1979, was it, or

HOOPER: I left January 1st, 1980.

Q: And where'd you go?

HOOPER: I went to London for my next assignment.

Q: What were you doing in London?

HOOPER: The political section in the embassy in London then had two geographic positions in it, one for someone from NEA who would liaison with the British government on the Middle East and the other was the Africa position, so it was someone from the Africa bureau. Gib Lanpher was there from AF when I arrived and a couple of years later Bob Frazier replaced Gib. Bob was killed in Bosnia in that horrific incident when the armored vehicle he and colleagues were in rolled down the side of a mountain.

What the NEA bureau did then was the Middle East and South Asia, so the British Foreign Office had a Near East and North Africa Department, a Middle East Department, and a South Asia Department and so I worked essentially with them.

Q: You were there from 1980 to

HOOPER: 1984, the summer of ’84. It was four and a half of the best years of my family’s life.

Q: On the work side, in your various portfolios, how did we mesh with the British at that point?

HOOPER: I meshed very well with them. I loved the assignment and loved being in London, as anyone in their right mind would. Maybe earlier in my career I might not have, but at that point, the embassy in Libya having been attacked and then dealing with the aftermath, that was very traumatic for my family, London was just a great period of time in our lives.

The Middle East can be a contentious issue in the Atlantic Alliance and the British had a respected position in the Middle East, they still have a respected position in the Middle East.

We had the Iran hostage crisis to deal with. There was a lot of involvement in that, as virtually every embassy in the world had a lot of involvement. That was a key issue.

They had an ambassador in Tehran, the British had an embassy and an ambassador that was quite good.

HOOPER: There was the peace process, which was another issue. There was Britain’s military and political role in the Middle East. Libya, I could never get away from it. We didn’t have any embassy in Libya. We had a protecting power, the Belgians and so almost no reporting was coming out of Libya and I used to do a certain amount of reporting based on what I got from the British, because they had an embassy. There were one-off issues, but the peace process and the hostages were the biggest issues.

The hostage issue was resolved a year after I arrived, approximately, I got there in February 1980. With Ronald Reagan coming in the Iranians let the hostages go. But there was that year in which I would have sensitive meetings with people and report back. The hostage stuff was very sensitive and a lot of people had various ideas or they had contacts in Iran and messages were coming through.

The contacts that led ultimately to the release of the hostages, or at least played a role in that, actually that began in London, not while I was there, it had begun just before I got there. I wasn’t involved in it, it had already happened.

There were two people, French speaking and they actually had very good contacts in Tehran. And so Hal Saunders, who was the NEA assistant secretary, came over to meet with them and it turned out French was the common language.

Well, they needed someone who could translate for Hal, so they tapped into the fluent French language capabilities of someone who when I arrived was one of my colleagues in the political section, Peter Sommers, whose wife was Haitian and they spoke French around the house. So his French was absolutely fluent and he translated for them for two days, several hours each day, very intense discussions on how to sort out the hostage issue and Hal Saunders felt that their *bona fides* were good.

Lebanon was another issue, the Israelis went into Lebanon right after the Israeli ambassador to London had been shot in the head by a Palestinian terrorist trying to assassinate him, which left the ambassador permanently paralyzed. The Israeli defense minister, Ariel Sharon, was planning an invasion anyway and this became the trigger. So, I was very much involved in Lebanon. The British were involved because they were part of the peacekeeping force that was there.

The peace process was just a continuing issue. So there were just a range of issues.

Q: I want to sort of work on each issue, but who was our ambassador when you were arrived?

HOOPER: I had three: Kingman Brewster, who had been the president of Yale and he was terrific, he was there my first year. None of the three were professional Foreign Service. He had been a close friend of Cyrus Vance, the Secretary of State at the time and they used to speak regularly each week.

He enjoyed public speaking, the first person I ever met who enjoyed public speaking, rather than seeing it as a burden, as something you just have to do because it comes with the job. That wasn't his approach at all. He really liked it and enjoyed it and he was very good at it and that opened my eyes to something that I had not thought of before in this way, and I gradually grew to like public speaking. I did a lot more of it when I left the Foreign Service.

I thought it was just terrific to work with someone like that and I worked very closely with him, because he was very interested in the Middle East and very involved and wanted to be kept up to date. And Lord Carrington, who was the British Foreign Secretary at the time, very professional, probably the best foreign minister in Europe at the time, probably one of the best Europe has seen in the last few decades.

The second one, John Louis, a really nice man, didn't have a mean bone in his body, he was heir to the Johnson's Wax fortune.

Q: He went to my college, Williams.

HOOPER: Unfortunately for him, he liked hunting, and stories of this came out before he arrived, so the public wasn't all that keen on him. Walter Annenberg had gotten the appointment for him from Ronald Reagan, that's why Kingman Brewster left.

As I said, if the State Department had ordered him to be mean, he wouldn't have known how to do it. He was just fundamentally a very decent person, who was a bit out of his depth in the job, but a pleasure to work with around the embassy.

So the DCM, the man's name was Ed Streator who, when I left, he was leaving a few months after me, when I left in summer of '84 he was the only person who'd been there longer than me, because they'd done away with people staying there 12 years. People used to get to London and never leave and wisely the Foreign Service had done away with that, so the max you could stay was four years. But Ed was there for seven years, because he was pretty indispensable and they kept him there and he really helped keep the embassy together.

Q: I think when the Falklands crisis came our ambassador at the time was back in the States and he asked, "Should I go back?" and the word was, "No, no, no, just stay!' In other words, just leave it in the hands of the professionals.

HOOPER: This happened not during Kingman Brewster's tenure but after it, under John Louis

Q: John Louis was the next ambassador, yes.

HOOPER: Sometimes when your policy is successful, it's forgotten. And that's what you want. It's the ones that aren't successful, because they blow up, that tend to be remembered.

There is now something called the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai. That monitors Israeli-Egyptian troops levels and related matters pertaining to the Camp David agreement on Sinai between Israel and Egypt.

Israel had to give up its settlements in the Sinai and pull back all of its troops. Sadat would not bend on that. That was part of Camp David. And it was of great concern, because of what was happening in Israel, that Israel might not follow through on this and there was real concern about the implications of this.

The British were considered to be the linchpin of the Sinai peacekeeping force. Would they join this? I said they would. I said I thought it would be a tough sell, but they could be persuaded.

Carrington didn't want to do it. He was afraid it would undercut his relationship with the Palestinians and he was trying to position the EEC, as the EU was then called, through Britain, to deliver the Palestinians to the United States so that we could have a fully engaged peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians. Well, Washington wasn't interested in having the Palestinians delivered to them, so that was part of the contention.

I wrote a long message on how to go about this and said it could be done and here's how to do it. And Washington bought it and we started working and the first pitch was to Lord

Carrington. And I went in with Ambassador John Louis and we made the pitch. I prepared John to do enough to carry the ball part way. He made the initial pitch and then Carrington started coming back with some very tough but fair questions. He wasn't going to be a soft sell, by any means.

And so I had to start carrying the ball and it became an exchange between me and Carrington for about half an hour or an hour, which was fine with the Ambassador.

Reflecting on the meeting, I could see it was going to be a struggle to bring the Foreign Office around on this, so we concluded that it would be useful for President Reagan to contact Prime Minister Thatcher. Again, not trying to be unfair to the late president, Thatcher was a Prime Minister very much on top of her brief. She was sharp, incisive. She knew just what she was doing.

So Reagan had a 3x5 card telling him to phone his good friend Margaret Thatcher to ask her to agree to allow British forces to participate in the Sinai mission, and he got her on the phone, and she ended up persuading him to back off and not impose this burden on the UK. Not the expected outcome that we had wanted.

And this is on a Friday or Saturday and I found out about it on Monday. So Washington had written off the British and the Australians, who were going to go the way of the British, their foreign minister was coming in to see Secretary of State Al Haig and I found out he was going to tell him that the British aren't coming and that would also mean the Australians would back out and then the whole thing would collapse.

And so I contacted the Foreign Office, a senior person there and they were aghast at this whole thing. They saw this was not the way it should have ended and so they were prepared to resuscitate the negotiations to see if we could work out something together. And I called Haig's office director and spoke with him and said, "Don't let the Secretary tell the foreign minister that talks with the British had failed, because we think we can still get the British back in, so just say that it still remains to be sorted out and I understand what happened between the prime minister and the president, but it's just still in flux."

And ultimately we managed to turn it around and the British signed up for it, others came in, the force went out there, the Israelis withdrew and now, the MFO is still there, and as far as I know, it gets absolutely zero amount of publicity. Which is a very positive outcome.

Q: There haven't been any incidents.

HOOPER: That's right, none in the Sinai.

Q: At the beginning, I think particularly the Israelis kept testing the boundaries, overflights and trying to do things. I had stories of people who served there early on and it was a testing time, but it's held up.

HOOPER: It was a real struggle, too, but, again, it was the right thing to do but it was some really tense moments, difficult moments, for me. That's what negotiations are about.

Q: It also points out the concern that you might say the handlers of both a prime minister, of a president have, particularly if they're good friends. I've heard people say who've served in the White House how nervous they'd get when Reagan got together with Thatcher or with Brian Mulroney of Canada, because he was so jovial that they were afraid he might give away the store.

HOOPER: Well, he often did give away the store and they knew very well how to play him.

Q: What was the British concern, now, with this? They felt that they were

HOOPER: They felt that this would undercut the brokering role that they wanted to play in the peace process and they felt the Arab-Israeli peace process was the bigger issue. And so they didn't want to undercut their standing with the Arabs by going into this, particularly their standing with the PLO, because they wanted to broker a compromise with the PLO, in which the PLO would compromise some its policies and then this would make it possible for the United States to broker a deal between Israel and the Palestinians.

Haig wasn't interested in a deal with the PLO brokered by the British. In fact, during this period of strain he allowed some stuff to leak out or said some stuff publicly where he called Carrington a "duplicitous bastard" over the issue of the Sinai force.

And Carrington sent him a message back, the British ambassador in Washington was instructed to go in and tell Haig that this undercut Carrington in Europe, that Carrington did a lot of the heavy lifting for the United States, in terms of missile and defense issues that had nothing to do with the Middle East and by allowing his criticisms of Carrington to become public he undercut Carrington's ability to carry water for the U.S. in Europe, on various things that were happening then in the Cold War, which was a fair point.

Q: Did you feel, in your position, granted, you're way down in the food chain of diplomacy, but were you comfortable with Al Haig, or did you feel that he might get too far on one side or another, or not? I'm going on the assumption that Cyrus Vance, he'd been sort of in the diplomatic business for eons, practically.

HOOPER: Vance, I had a lot of respect for him, but shortly after I arrived there in February of 1980 he resigned because he thought the hostage rescue attempt was going to be a disaster, that it wouldn't work and that it was really an overreach by the President. That's what he foresaw. So he wasn't in office that long while I was in London.

I think Vance was trusted by the White House, by the president. It was very easy for the London embassy there to work with the State Department and there was no real static, as

I recall, between the White House and the State Department, or it wasn't serious compared to Haig's relationship with the White House, where they just entirely mistrusted him, so it was very contentious and so one had to be careful about this. But it wasn't that way prior to that.

And then when Haig was ousted, he was replaced by George Shultz who I think was trusted by the White House, though he had difficult times with Cap Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense. The relation between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense often tends to be prickly.

But it was a better relationship for Shultz with the White House. They didn't have concerns that he was out trying to be the vicar of foreign policy. In fact, they actually trusted him to carry out the president's policies, because he had previously worked for Reagan. It was a lot more mellow relationship, even though it had its problems. The White House is an institution, State is, DOD is, and so you're always gonna have institutional tussling. That's the nature of the game.

But when I was there in London I had to get permission to be away on leave more than one week at a time, because there were so many sensitive issues that I was involved in that touched on the Middle East and there was always stuff happening out there. Once I wanted to go away one summer for two weeks and I was the only one that had that stricture placed on me at the embassy and it was due to the nature of the Middle East issues.

Q: I was thinking about that time you were there, there were lots of issues. Just sort of generically, here you are in London dealing with these things, but the stuff is essentially bubbling within the Near Eastern bureau. How did you get the spirit of the Near Eastern bureau? In other words, reading telegrams doesn't do the whole thing.

HOOPER: Talking with people on the phone. The Foreign Office would often tell me what's going on. I had really good access back in the Department, dealing directly with the assistant secretary, which were top people while I was in London: Hal Saunders, Nick Veliotes, Dick Murphy. And that's what made it work, as well as just the other people at various levels and I could deliver on things, which the Foreign Office appreciated and I could deliver with the Foreign Office, the British, which the Department appreciated. So there was a lot of good stuff that was being done by the embassy.

The third US ambassador was Charles Price, who I thought was very good. Again, he was non-career, but he was serious about being an ambassador. He wanted to learn the issues. He took the Middle East seriously. They all had to take the Middle East seriously, because there was just stuff happening and I worked closely with him.

I remember once I had a particular idea for a final status peace conference and sold him on it and he was going back to meet with Reagan and he called me from California, they were at Walter Annenberg's and said, "Get ready! I'm coming back in a few days and we're gonna have to start working on this, 'cause the president's bought your idea."

Just because the president said yes doesn't mean that the bureaucracy's gonna accept that and of course they didn't, so nothing ever came of it.

But Price was very good at taking the issues seriously and he wanted action, wanted things to get done and it was very easy to work with him to get things done.

Q: Did Hal Saunders, Nick Veliotes, others who were involved with the Middle East thing at that time, did they come by, I assume they came to London quite often?

HOOPER: Yes, all these people came through and I would get them together with the British, private dinners, lunches, calls at the Foreign Office, to talk real policy issues and intentions. I certainly learned a lot that was going on, much more than I would have if I'd been at some embassy in the region or back in Washington, because Washington valued British support, British views, Britain's independent views on the Middle East.

Q: There really is what one can call a "special relationship," wasn't there?

HOOPER: Yes.

Q: Did you find that most of the time we were going in the same direction on things in the Middle East and all? Where were the divergences?

HOOPER: Washington, at the bureaucratic level, I think State had and NEA had an interest in advancing the peace process and seeing what could be worked out. At the political level, with Al Haig and to some extent the White House there were real limitations on that and one was often caught in the middle on these kinds of things.

So the British definitely wanted a more activist U.S. role in the Arab-Israeli peace process and they were very frustrated with the lack of an active role on the part of the Reagan Administration in its first couple of years and with Al Haig in particular. So there were some real divergences there.

Again, Iran kind of overshadowed the last year of the Carter Administration when I was there and not much was going to happen with the peace process, so I don't think that anyone had any serious expectations.

The Iraq-Iran War started in 1980 and I began doing more reporting on Iraq and talking about Iraq and about this war and the implications and what role Britain would have, because Kuwait was sitting right down there and the Kuwaitis looked to Britain and I remember talking with Douglas Hurd, who was then the minister of state, which was the junior minister in the Foreign Office and really pressing him at a dinner privately, about how would Britain respond, if the Kuwaitis went to Britain and asked for military assistance. He didn't want really to comment on that but finally he said, "Well, I guess we would probably have to," that is, send in troops, which is what I hoped the answer would be.

The British had sewn up the Gulf before. They had a very deep relationship out there. We did too, we had the Fifth Fleet, called MIDEASTFORCE back then. There were just so many issues on the plate at that time.

But the peace process was the most contentious, because they were frustrated and then Lebanon became a big problem.

Q: Well, let's hit this thing, let's talk about the hostage crisis first. You might say, was our policy floundering? Did we know, did the British know, what was going on? In fact, did the so-called Iranian government know what was going on? It was a very amorphous thing to deal with, wasn't it?

HOOPER: One of the ironies of the Iran hostage crisis was that it served as a fresh reminder that it helps to have a diplomatic mission in a country—at least one that has not been taken hostage—because otherwise you're at the mercy of so many intermediaries purveying various approaches and telling you various things about what's going on, most of whom have an axe to grind.

An embassy helps to put a relationship into context. You can talk with people in the government who will give you on background why someone said something, what it means. And sometimes it's shading the meaning, but other times it explains things: "This is just for a domestic constituency, don't take it seriously" or "Did you notice what was said? The prime minister was really serious about that. You guys better pay attention!" This kind of thing. All the things that make a relationship three-dimensional.

And the British had that and we of course did not, because our diplomats were all under arrest, except for the ones who happened to be in the foreign ministry for an appointment when the embassy was attacked and seized.

Q: I think three: Bruce Laingen, Victor Tomseth and Michael Howland.

HOOPER: And they were under obviously a form of house arrest and the ministry was run by Ghotbzadeh, the foreign minister. But no one knew how this would play out. Initially, I was in Libya and I remember the feeling among the Foreign Service Officers there and when I would call people back in Washington and we kind of felt that this would just be forgotten, ignored, it would be no big deal.

Foreign Service Officers are used to having these kind of things ignored in the United States. And the fact that this became what it was, such a front and center issue for the American public, was a surprise, I think, to the Foreign Service. Surprise to me and surprise to the people I was talking with.

But the British had an ambassador, Johnny Graham and he came back occasionally and I would get him together with people for briefings and he was just so good. And he would

go to Washington to share his perspectives with officials. Just a terrific person. He became a senior official, rightly so, in their Foreign Office.

He helped put it into context, would explain what he understood to be the tensions between various elements of the Iranian government and what was going on. It was very useful to have that on-the-ground perspective from someone who headed a diplomatic mission, who dealt with these people and this really helped put the relationship into context.

And I think people valued that in Washington, the kind of information that they would share, because they were very good about sharing. They would just give us cables, often and we would just exchange cables. The relationship is just that close with the British.

Q: At a certain point the Algerians got into the act. How were we seeing that from your perspective?

HOOPER: I met with a lot of people. Probably every Foreign Service Officer did, there's nothing special about me or what I did.

The Department asked me to meet with a religious figure who was tied in, I went over to Knightsbridge and met with this guy in his apartment.

It was just all sorts of people that one met with, but a lot of it was trying to help provide perspective to Hal Saunders and those who were trying to work this issue and Saunders had decided from the beginning that he was going to outlast the Iranians and he was not going to let them frustrate him, he was going to get the hostages out, get all of them out.

By the way, this is a complete aside, one of the hostages was someone who'd been in Libya with me. His name was Robert Blucker, Bob Blucker. I got there in December of '78. In the summer of '79 his tour was up, he was replaced. He went to East Berlin. Lo and behold, a few months into the hostage crisis I found out that he was a hostage. Complete surprise.

Because when I was in Libya, he said, "You know, Jim, you're a young fellow. You've got a future. Why do you want to spend it in the Middle East? This is a place that's really dangerous. You don't really want to have your family exposed to what's gonna happen around this region" and so on. "Go to Europe. That's where I'm gong next. I've got this assignment to East Germany."

"Thanks, Bob, appreciate the perspective."

He didn't want anything more to do with the Middle East? So what's he doing in Iran?

It turned out he apparently had a run-in with someone on the staff, with the ambassador, I think, in the embassy in East Berlin at the time and it was just not going to work, but the only way he could get out of that job was to take Iran, because they needed volunteers for

Iran, they would break you from any assignment, no matter what, no matter where, if you were prepared to go to Iran. He took the assignment and the day after he arrived, he went in for his security briefing, which turned out to be the day the embassy was taken over.

I heard he drove his captors absolutely crazy and he was capable of doing that. Bob was quite a character. I have never seen him since the summer of 1979.

Q: Did the freeing of the hostages on January 20th, 1981, when Reagan was inaugurated, did that sort of clear the air for you in a way, okay, now we can go back to the real game?

HOOPER: It removed one very big issue. Now, in London, the movement of funds, I remember Washington sent someone out from the Treasury to actually do this with the British and he and Ambassador Brewster and I met and he said, "Well, this is all very sensitive and there just may not be a chance for me to coordinate. I realize that you're the ambassador. But things are just going to start happening."

I was really impressed. Brewster said, "You do what you have to do. You don't have to ask permission from any of us. You have a blank check. You just do what you have to do here with the Bank of England." And I thought, here was an ambassador who wasn't going to try to micromanage and get his hands on every single decision that came by, an ambassador who kept a perspective. I was very impressed with that. Sometimes it's good to know when to back off and when to let people do their job.

Q: Did the Iranian embassy in London or whatever the hell it was called in London play any role? Were you privy to this, or not?

HOOPER: No, not that I'm aware of.

Q: I gather that the foreign ministry of Iran really was out of the loop, I think. It was in the hands of Ayatollah Khomeini and his religious cohorts.

HOOPER: Ghotbzadeh, the foreign minister, I think he felt, because he had helped Khomeini earlier on and had been an adviser when Khomeini may have been a household name in Iran but nobody even knew him in the State Department, in INR I think there were few people that knew the name. But Khomeini, he'd been living in Iraq, went to Paris and Ghotbzadeh had done favors for Khomeini and made the mistake of some others who felt that because they had done something for Khomeini earlier on that therefore Khomeini owed them. Khomeini didn't want to owe anyone anything.

So in the end he was executed. He got involved in, he did it almost openly, kind of plotting, but it was about the easiest conspiracy to uncover, might as well have been covered as the lead story in the Tehran media. And I think he felt right up until the end that he had a special dispensation from Khomeini for his actions.

And in certain ways the foreign ministry was, they didn't go in and grab the Americans that were there, but he bit the dust, as many others did. In my view, at the end of the day the students who took the hostages captive, this was at the behest of the regime. They were not acting independently of Khomeini and so forth. Whatever Khomeini decided to do, he could have ended that crisis any day after it began.

He strung this out and if one had sufficiently pressured him, I believe it would have ended sooner. I think he was just afraid of Ronald Reagan. They were afraid of Ronald Reagan and the Republicans and what they would do. They weren't afraid of Jimmy Carter.

So that's why they ended it. He wanted nothing to do with Reagan and he wanted to end this. He had humiliated Carter. He didn't want to blot his copybook with Reagan. He just wanted an end to it.

But if they had sufficiently pressured him before, such that he was worried about the future of the regime, I think the hostages would have been released.

Q: What were we getting out of Iraq, sort of from the time you got there and all? Was Iraq of much interest?

HOOPER: Once the Iraqis invaded Iran it became a place of real interest and I began trying to follow that more closely. The British had an embassy in Baghdad as well and it was extremely difficult to follow Iraq.

Sometimes having feet on the ground and maybe it's the antidote to what I said earlier about Iran and having a mission in Tehran, in Baghdad the fact that we had a mission out there didn't necessarily mean we knew much, or anyone one else knew much more about Iraq in the time that I was in London than people who didn't go there. It was just an extremely difficult place to break into, in terms of understanding it.

Q: Well, during the war, Iran had given us a really bloody nose and particularly the Foreign Service people, even though the hostages were free and Iraq invades Iran. Were we kind of rooting for Iraq or we wanted to see these two bloody themselves?

HOOPER: Iran still held the hostages when Iraq invaded in 1980. Everyone would have their own reaction to Iraq's attack on Iran. To be honest I don't remember mine. I probably wouldn't be human if I didn't acknowledge a bit of "Well, these guys are gonna get their comeuppance and maybe they deserve it."

But the Iraqi offensive stalled so fast. It was just over in the historical blink of an eye and then it became that long, World War I kind of trench warfare, so to speak, on the Gulf, with the poison gas and all this other horrendous stuff.

I think that's one of the reasons why this administration found it so easy to believe and I think they genuinely believed that in 2003 there were at a minimum chemical weapons

and probably bioweapons and wouldn't be surprised if they were working on nuclear, too. And I think they believed it.

And Saddam Hussein became for a period an indirect and *de facto* ally of the U.S., Washington began sharing intelligence with him because it was felt that it was in the best interests of the United States that Iraq not lose and be overrun. That war created an almost embarrassing overlap of interests to some extent between the U.S. and Iraq and while Saddam Hussein was extremely mistrustful of everyone, that's how he survived, from his family members to his tribe to Sunnis in Iraq to Shia and Kurds to foreigners. You name it and he was mistrustful of them and, again, that's why he survived so long.

But I think he felt that the West was probably stoking Iran and the feeling in Iran was, too, that actually there was some overlap between Iraq and the U.S., that Saddam did actually have some common interests with the West, after all. For a time it appeared to some that it would be possible to develop a better bilateral relationship with Iraq as a result of that understanding, the help we provided.

Q: How were the British responding to this? Was there some distance between our policies towards Iraq?

HOOPER: I think the British were pretty quick to see this offensive wasn't going to last and, again, within a month it had already begun to stall in the pattern that was going to hold for several years and began worrying more about the blowback and the waves that this would generate elsewhere, as you got these titans clashing right next to little Kuwait, these tiny little Gulf sheikdoms, as well as Saudi Arabia, which generate such a huge chunk of the world's petroleum which passes through the Strait of Hormuz and all you have to do is, if the Iranians say they're thinking of blocking the Strait of Hormuz, suddenly tanker insurance rates skyrocket, even if the Iranians don't necessarily follow through on the threats and our fleet's there to keep the straits open and the British have their own naval vessels there, too.

But this broader strategic perspective, as the two sides became locked in that World War I trench warfare situation, I think the British foresaw that coming pretty quickly. But whether or not anyone foresaw that, it was upon us within just a month or so of the launch of the offensive.

And then the question became how does one deal with all the side affects from this and now just how does it affect our relationship with Iraq and Iran, but really what effects could it have on the Gulf, how does one ensure the security of the rest of the Gulf, really on the Arab side of the Gulf.

And Saddam had the tin cup out all the time, because he needed funding for this. Arabs weren't going to send any troops, but he got a lot of funding and they "loaned" him money, the Kuwaitis and the other Gulf states, which of course he had no intention of paying back, which I think they understood. And they felt they now had a certain amount

of leverage over him, which he never saw in that way and never accepted. The Kuwaitis learned a very bitter lesson on that.

But the question was, what are the implications of this for our broader strategy in the Gulf, that's what I recall. I think the British and we were both worried about it and whatever differences there were, were not massive differences or strategic differences of policy. I think we both felt that it needed an active U.S. role there and British role and that we needed to coordinate a lot politically and on the defense side and so forth, to ensure that the Gulf remained stable and that the oil routes remained open. That's what I recall.

Now mind you the Falklands is going on, so the British were totally focused on the Falklands war for that period of time and, again, that was over relatively quickly in historical terms. Thatcher made pretty short work of the Argentinean military. So there were a lot of other things happening, but Iran-Iraq, the fighting started in 1980 and that continuing war then cast a shadow over, certainly in the period I was there, over the relationship. But, again, I think it helped bring Britain and the U.S. more together on the Middle East.

Q: All sorts of things were happening, but let's take the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It was instigated, as you pointed out, by the tragic wounding of the Israeli ambassador in London.

HOOPER: Yes, outside one of the hotels along Park Lane.

Q: And it was immediately tied to the PLO. Were the British, were we seeing the same instigators of this assassination attempt?

HOOPER: This was what brought the final ouster of Haig and the White House had just had it with him, because it was felt he had actually been planning the invasion with Sharon. This just happened, the attempted assassination. That wasn't anything that was foreseen. But finally that's why the White House decided enough was enough and they got rid of him. And even then he went down to the Greenbrier and he took a communications set with him to try to continue to give Ariel Sharon political cover for this.

I remember it very well, because the British got involved in the Multinational Force in Beirut and again I was very much involved in negotiating that. It was the British, French, Americans and

Q: Italians

HOOPER: The reason this sticks in mind is because there were these conferences at Ditchley House, the British had these usually there were about two a month. They were on all sorts of issues: Cold War issues, Middle East, South Asia, the future of Africa and

when it was the Middle East I would always be invited. I went to about four while I was there, really loved them.

It was a wonderful setting. You would come in on a Friday afternoon. There would be a dinner that evening, then there would be a meeting and it would always be on an issue, the Middle East or arms control and you would get top people. Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense, used to attend defense related conferences.

Anyway, there was one on the Middle East and Phil Habib had agreed to head that. This had happened Thursday night, the attempted assassination. The Israelis, they started right away. We drove down, with our ambassador to Jordan, Dick Viets, I drove them down to the conference.

They needed a special envoy to go out there right away and I remember the whole time I would be taking messages for him and relaying them in to him and then trying to sort out, because they had a plane coming to pick him up and take out to the Middle East during that weekend and they wanted to pass on what was going on to him and so forth.

Meanwhile he's trying to also chair this conference and you've got the cream of the British Middle East press and people in business and so forth out there who follow the Middle East and people from the Foreign Office. So it was a good chance for him to get their impressions. It really does attract absolutely top caliber people, one of the things I miss the most from London.

Anyway, he took off to go out there and I did a lot of backstopping for him. He would come through London and meet with the British, because he really needed their help. So there was a lot of real politicking going on, in a lot of different directions.

But it was kind of a thankless task almost for poor Phil Habib. It just went on, as he was trying to slog it out with Sharon and Prime Minister Begin while Washington tried to gear itself up to finally end the Israeli siege and then shelling of Beirut, as just one building after another was leveled and Arafat keeps popping up and telling the media that he's still surviving.

Finally, Reagan called Begin and said, "Enough's enough," which is something that I think Mike Deaver in the White House had finally persuaded Reagan that he had to do, that this was just hurting America too much, we were too close to Israel to allow Israel to do this to a modern city. So Habib ultimately succeeded.

Q: Was there a feeling, fairly early on, that the Israelis were basically out of control?

HOOPER: That was the British view. And it was certainly the view of the White House, that there was an understanding between Haig and Sharon.

Q: The so-called "green light."

HOOPER: Yes and I think there was something to that, it was true. And, again, that's what Deaver and company, those who were really close to Reagan and Haig wasn't really that close to Reagan but those who were close to him from his California days certainly came to believe that and that's why he was fired.

And then George Shultz was brought in. Shultz was in London, so the embassy tracked him down. He was then a businessman

Q: With Bechtel, yes.

HOOPER: He was asked to become Secretary of State. And he asked if he could speak with Ed Streator, who was the DCM, he'd been there several years.

When Ed left, the *Times* of London wrote an editorial, saying that they hoped the future of U.S.-UK relations, that it had a future but with Ed gone it was not going to be as good of a future, that kind of thing, it was a real testament, it's extremely rare that that kind of thing happens.

Anyway, Shultz knew Ed and actually the call came through, he was told to come in to the embassy, on the secure line and he took the call and said, "I've been asked to go back to be Secretary of State. They're getting rid of Al Haig. We need to talk."

Ed was very good on the substance of the issues, when you're negotiating something, very good on the tactics, but he had this sense for the media. Ed was very savvy. He'd been an office director for Dean Rusk.

Ed knew everyone in the UK, very savvy. When he had bypass surgery, Henry Kissinger sent flowers to him in the hospital and called him. He was close to Kissinger.

In any case, I remember he told me once, after I got there, he took me for drinks after work to White's, which had been Churchill's club, a prominent club and we sat at the table where King George, who had been so rotund that they had to cut out part of the table so he could be seated. I remember that the British Prime Minister who sent Mountbatten out to India working on the negotiations for independence, "Whoever went out had to have the backing of White's." That is the British establishment.

But Ed said after serving the tour as Dean Rusk's office director, he said he saw it all. He said from then on he could not be fooled, because he had seen every duplicitous, underhanded, devious tactic, had heard all the sales pitches, he'd just seen and heard it all, so it was difficult to fool him. And it was.

Anyway, Shultz said, "I've been asked to do this. Let's go into your office and let's talk." And they talk for I think about three hours, just one on one. He said, "What should I do?"

And Ed told him, "Right now, the most important thing you can do is, you're going to get on a plane and fly back and you're going to get off and word is going to get out." It was

going to be announced I guess while he was in the air. “Talk to the airline. Don’t allow any photographs taken of you getting on or off the plane. The first photograph of you should be with Ronald Reagan. That’s what you want to project.”

Shultz thought that was very good advice. Very few Foreign Service Officers have that level of media savvy, would have a clue about that and it was the right advice.

Q: Of course, particularly when you have a White House that was very jealous of Haig, because Haig was

HOOPER: He overreached on January 20th, 1981: “I’ll be the vicar of foreign policy.” He just shot himself in the foot.

Q: And also when Reagan was shot, he said, “I’m in charge here, now,” which was unnecessary.

HOOPER: I think he probably got a bum rap on that one. It made it look like he was so thirsty for power that he

Q: It did, when actually you had people floundering around saying, “Who’s in charge?” and the vice president was in an airplane, everybody was on airplanes going somewhere and they had to

HOOPER: He remembered from Watergate, again, what he remembered was when someone is mortally wounded politically or could be, in this case, physically, what you need to do is steady the country, the markets and the world, there’s someone in charge and you project that.

Really, he wasn’t trying, I think he was pretty realistic, then, but it came across as here’s this power hungry cabinet member.

I’m no admirer of his Secretary of State tenure, but on this one I think he probably got a bit of an unfair reputation.

Haig came to London once after he had left government. They asked me to take care of this. So I go out to the airport. I had escorted Kissinger around a couple of times, but Haig, his memory of Carrington was pretty negative. Anyway, he said, “You ought to see my memoirs. I just finished the draft. They come out in the near future. They’re so hot they’re smoking.”

There was a movie premised on a terrorist takeover of the U.S. ambassador’s residence in London when the Secretary of State is there. Haig said, “They want me to see an advance preview, because one of the characters is based upon me. Why don’t you come along? Are you married? Tell your wife. We’ll just sit there and watch the movie together.”

And so I called my wife and we sat down there and we watched the movie with him and it was kind of a good movie. It wasn't any threat to the Oscar contenders that year, but it was an action movie, where the SAS comes in at the end to save the day.

Anyway, he was what he was and because of being perceived by the White House as overdoing it in trying to establish a preeminent role for the State Department in the making of foreign policy, then it became much more difficult for him to have a role. But, again, maybe it would have been that way no matter what he had done.

Anyway, Haig was ousted over the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. That was the proximate cause. He was felt to be acting inappropriately on this.

Q: Well, Sam Lewis was our ambassador in Israel and Bob Dillon was our ambassador in Lebanon, but from your perspective did you see reports coming out of our embassy in Tel Aviv to be biased towards the Israelis? How did you feel?

HOOPER: There was a long and probably not entirely productive and useful kind of exchange between some of the embassies in the region, including the embassy in Israel and some of the embassies in Arab states.

And I thought on Lebanon, when they ended the Israeli siege and got a multinational force in, that then came a cropper, ultimately, but I thought Sam Lewis, in particular, sold Secretary Shultz on the idea that there could be a peace agreement in Lebanon, an agreement that would lead to a Lebanon-Israel peace and would be a breakthrough in the Arab world and that it's best to cut the Syrians out of this negotiating process.

Lebanon became a running sore and it became a graveyard of many things, many people and certainly many hopes that Shultz ultimately had, but fairly early on, he was working on Lebanon but also he realized, or at least concluded that there needed to be something going on in the Arab-Israeli issue and it had to be a presidential initiative.

So he put together something. We were involved with this at the embassy, that's why I tell the story. Shultz had put a plan together. And Shultz had worked in the region. He knew certainly something about the Middle East.

Q: Bechtel had many projects in the Middle East.

HOOPER: He went to brief the president. There were five or six officials in the room. And Shultz gave everyone a summary of the plan, I think it was one page of highlights, went through it and then Shultz, knowing Washington as well as he did, wanted the President to give a speech to the nation. It wasn't going to be cleared with the Israelis first.

Shultz went around the room and collected the copies of his handout. I heard that Reagan had said, "That's a good idea, George. We don't want this to leak."

Anyway, Nick Veliotes, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, came out to London to brief the British on this beforehand, because they weren't running it by the Israelis, they weren't asking for that kind of clearance. The Israelis got wind of it, but believed that there was nothing to it, that it was just another unfounded Washington rumor.

Washington wanted the British reaction and the British reaction was quite positive. It was a secret trip.

We got Nick and the British together at Ed Streator's house and Nick explained it to Ed and me and then Ed invited a couple of British officials over and our ambassador to Jordan, who was going to be crucial in this, because King Hussein was key and Dick Viets, who happened to be vacationing in England at the time, I contacted him and said, "I think you better be over here for this."

And so I said, "Nick, I think we need our ambassador to Jordan for this, since the king is the centerpiece of this plan."

Mrs. Thatcher liked it. It wasn't done to please the British, but it fit in very well with their own policy goals. I figured the Arabs, the first thing they do is ask the British what they really think of this, so Washington figured they had better try to get the British on board and we had this advance notice of this, about a week in advance as I recall, before the president made his speech. And it didn't leak.

I think the British had some tips to help fine tune the proposal. Nick Veliotes, actually I think he went from there out to Jordan to talk to the king. He wanted British help with the king, because he was closest to us and the British, King Hussein. You can't just drop it on the British if you want their help later.

And so Dick Viets then flew out with Nick Veliotes. Nick been ambassador to Jordan himself, so he knew the lay of the land out there. So anyway the two of them went out and then Dick Viets came back and finished up his vacation. That began my friendship with Dick Viets, who remains one of my best friends, I have a lot of respect for him.

Nick Veliotes, I also have a lot of respect for him. I worked very closely with him. He was assistant secretary when I was in London. There was a lot of stuff we did together.

But, anyway, on this, ultimately the king didn't opt into the plan. Phil Habib was coming out also. There was a lot of activity, working on Lebanon still and on the overall Arab-Israeli peace process.

And I felt that the king was stepping into an empty bucket, I didn't think there was going to be any follow through, but he's got to step into it, anyway. The king ultimately decided not to do it, rightly or wrongly and that was the end of the plan.

I think it was felt that the biggest mistake, in retrospect, that had been made, this wasn't anything that I thought up, this was the belief at the time, that it wasn't that there was something wrong with the plan, but in this case it was felt that the president gave his speech to the nation and then it was "Okay, now, Arabs, you pull yourselves together, because we've got a real plan here," and Washington waited for them to react rather than trying to shape a constructive reaction.

The missing ingredient was Shultz or someone of that level should have gone out to the region, made a tour of the key capitals. It needed follow up and a specific agenda for advancing the plan, the tactics that you take to get people to actually buy in, to know what they have to do and to do it. You need that and as I recall that wasn't done and that was a real missing piece and I think its absence contributed to the plan losing traction.

I remember Dick Viets talking about what a final status peace conference. At the point King Hussein had held about 1600 hours of discussions with the Israelis during his reign and he knew them pretty well. And I thought, "A final status peace conference is a lot more imaginative than just another step forward." I thought about it a lot.

And so I actually put together a plan with Dick Viets and Charles Price, the U.S. ambassador to Britain then, who was very interested in the Middle East. I liked him and we worked together very well, kept him briefed on it. Charles Price was a very effective ambassador.

What happened was that Shultz went in to Reagan and said, "Well, that's not the way I really want to go." And so Reagan said, "Okay" and it kind of died. That was the end of it. Charles Price was disappointed, but he understood Washington well enough to accept that.

I tried to get Price to meet with King Hussein when I was there and the timing just wasn't right and so I failed in that. I came back to London a year after I'd left and called on Ambassador Price and he said, "I want to show you this." So we sat down in his office, he pulled out his guest book and said, "Look at this!" And there was the signature of King Hussein, he'd been to the ambassador's office. He had finally managed to meet with him.

Q: On this Shultz plan, were you getting emanations from Washington that the Israeli lobby had sort of undermined it, 'cause you mentioned politics in Washington, which often meant the Israeli lobby?

HOOPER: No, the plan was done in secret. I mentioned it was not something that was cleared or worked out in advance with the Israelis, not would they have cleared it in advance, because it called upon them to give up the bulk of the territory they were occupying, apart from Jerusalem and made some pretty stiff demands of the Arabs, in terms of recognizing Israel and so forth.

Once the president made his speech, I think the Israeli leadership felt they'd been caught off guard. I think there was some reckoning with the Israeli embassy in Washington, which had heard about it but just dismissed it.

And I don't think that AIPAC or anyone else was involved in this beforehand. This was done by Shultz and Nick Veliotes and some of the others and the president liked it.

I think oddly enough the main problem it had was in getting momentum. The president should have said, "And tomorrow morning at six a.m. George Shultz is getting on the plane and flying to Riyadh and Amman and Damascus and Cairo and Israel to meet with the key leaders and work out the implementation phases."

That didn't happen and I think they lost the chance to gain momentum right away and they never really got that momentum back and then the king made his decision, rightly or wrongly he decided not to accept the role that was being thrust upon him.

Q: The whole Arab-Israeli thing seems to be marked by opportunities lost and of course two groups that just seem to be incapable of making that final decision, although, sometimes, particularly the Israelis, there've been a couple of times when it looked like they were ready to come up with acceptance of plans, but then the PLO, the Arabs, or the Palestinians, never quite get to do it. It's a tragedy. I've been interviewing people now for over twenty years, dealing with these things and one opportunity after another has gone down the drain.

HOOPER: I think that's right. Something's always out of sequence. If one just waits until the time is right, the time is never going to be right.

You need an active U.S. role. If Bill Clinton hadn't waited 'til the end of his presidency and then suddenly, for whatever reason, looking at history, his role in history or what not, decided he was going to have a Palestinian-Israeli agreement and he tried at Camp David and it came very, very close, but the Tabah conference afterwards got it even closer and it still fell through.

I think that the inside wisdom at the time, I wasn't in government then when this happened, of course, this was the year 2000, so it's not strictly speaking part of my Foreign Service memoirs, I left in January '97, but Arafat, he had needed more time to line up his ducks.

I'm sure he needed more time to line up his ducks. That was his excuse. Very difficult to get Arafat to accept anything less than a full loaf.

Q: For one thing, I suppose he was really concerned about in a way his life, 'cause he had fanatics, both sides have fanatics.

HOOPER: No Israeli prime minister has been killed by an Arab terrorist. One has been killed, though and Israeli prime ministers remember that. Certainly Arab leaders have

been killed by Arab terrorists: King Hussein's grandfather was one. There was any number of attempts to get the king.

Among the Palestinians there has been I think a fundamental shift from the time that I was doing the Middle East in the Foreign Service, which stopped in 1989, when I left Kuwait. After that, it was Eastern Europe—the Baltics, the Balkans and then Poland.

You had these nice West Bank Palestinian mayors, but the real focus was elsewhere, because Arafat was in Tunis and the refugee camps and the PLO was outside of the West Bank and Gaza.

So the focus was on the Palestinians outside: the fight in Lebanon, generated by the 400,000 Palestinians in the camps, this armed state within a state.

Now all the focus is what's going on inside. Once Arafat and the PLO leadership arrived in Ramallah, the focus shifted to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and since then the focus hasn't been on those in the refugee camps, armed, unarmed as they may be and that remains the case.

Now our focus is one cutting the deal with Abbas and should Hamas be included and will there be a truce and all of this kind of stuff and what's going on in Gaza, the rockets hitting Israel.

This is very different from when I was working on it, because then it was the external, but now it's more the internal. The center of gravity seems to have shifted. I guess it doesn't change the kind of issues that one needs to deal with.

Clinton, when he met with George Bush, I heard this from some one who should know, that he told George Bush "Arafat fucked me over, you can't trust that son of a bitch" and he used those terms and I think George Bush, not that he was champing at the bit to carve out his own role as an Arab-Israeli peacemaker, he didn't seem to be inclined in that direction, but whatever his concerns and disinclinations, this would have either created caution or reinforced whatever caution existed.

I'm told that this actually had some impact on his thinking, 'cause Bush II was always, right up until Arafat's death, very negative on him, on Arafat, and believed you couldn't trust him and that certainly coincided with Bill Clinton's outgoing assessment.

It wasn't the view that George Bush's father had, but I think the current president I guess in this sense listened more to Bill Clinton on what to do about it.

I don't think Clinton was giving him a "Here's a broad perspective on what you do in the Middle East," it's just "You can't trust Arafat."

So, anyway, the Palestinians, that issue has changed from the time I was working on it, because it's become more an issue of the territories there.

And getting back to 1982 and the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, what happened was there was this long negotiation that was done and Habib was involved and others were involved and it was a strategic mistake for Shultz to believe that you could cut a deal between Israel and Lebanon with no reference to Syria and stiff Damascus.

There was just no way that was going to happen and the British were trying to convey that to Washington. And finally they concluded the deal and Shultz went to Damascus, and the Syrians had figured out what he was up to, it was not all that difficult and they've got some aces. They've also got some deuces, but by geographic proximity they've got a pretty strong hand to play.

You think you can bluff them? Fine, others have tried and have, again, come to naught. This thing was drawn up and it was finished and then the Syrians just ripped it up, said, "We're not going to accept it" and started undermining the proposed agreement and they pretty much put an end to it. And then once they decided to play their cards it was all over.

Sam Lewis, I believe he was at least partially responsible for persuading Shultz that this could be done and I think that was based on a profound ignorance of the situation in Syria and Syria's role. I tried to get Sam Lewis to come to London and he would occasionally vacation in the UK, to sit down, the way every other ambassador did when they would go through, they would all meet with the British and then sometimes go to Paris, too. And the whole time I was there, four and a half years, he never would agree to come. I talked with his DCM and any number of people to try to talk him into it.

I think it was, the Israelis knew what the British were doing in pressing for an activist role in the peace process and I think he was worried, he didn't want to somehow tarnish himself in the eyes of the Israelis by meeting with the British.

I don't know how to explain it, because I never got any feedback from him as to why. It just never happened and there were all sorts of opportunities.

Q: Obviously on the American side anybody dealing with the Middle East has to look over their shoulder at the domestic political process, at the friends of Israel, not just Jewish but other groups, particularly in Congress, a very important political element which had probably been unproductive in our efforts to deal with the issue, but that's debatable. But how about the British? Did they have a similar Jewish lobby and did it have much clout?

HOOPER: The friends of Israel in Britain and there were certainly, there was a Jewish community, not just British Jews, but others, who were friends of Israel. This community was not very strong. It was not a very powerful group as such and Britain's interests in the region were strong and deeply rooted.

So the British felt that the U.S. administration was looking over its shoulder all the time and they gave their advice based upon a different perspective.

They wanted the U.S. to play a balanced role. They were supportive of Israel themselves. They believed that the United States indulged Israel too much and the United States needed to be active in settling the dispute in a way that was fair to the Israelis, the Palestinians and the Arab states that had territories that were occupied.

So they came at it from a different perspective. I think that it's fair to say that the influence of the friends of Israel in the UK on UK policy was not all that influential.

Q: Did the British have a better reading of Assad, do you think, than maybe the Reagan Administration did?

HOOPER: Again, they had no illusions about him and he had, when the Muslim Brotherhood rose up in revolt, they were based in Hama and he essentially allowed his brother to destroy much of Hama. That took place in the period of time I was in the UK and they were pretty sobered by that.

They read him pretty well for what he was, but also respected his talents believed that the U.S. should be prepared to work with Syria to the extent that Syria was prepared to be worked with, to cooperate in advancing things and sorting out Lebanon and the peace process.

Sadat was assassinated while I was in London, too, as I recall, but Syria was not going to replace Egypt as the most moderate and flexible Arab state and Assad was not going to replace Sadat and then Mubarak as the most moderate and flexible Arab leader, so to speak, in the eyes of the U.S. and Europe. So there was no danger of that.

Q: How about the assassination of Sadat? How was that seen in London?

HOOPER: I recall Mubarak actually visiting when I was there. The assassination of Sadat really took people by surprise. The British were very close to him and had a lot of respect for him.

I think Mubarak's wife was British, or had some British background. [Note: Suzanne Mubarak's mother was Welsh. Sadat's wife, Jehan, had an English mother. The two Egyptian first ladies are related on their father's sides.] In any case, the British were quite supportive of Mubarak when he succeeded Sadat.

I just remember when it happened a lot of intensive consultations with the British, exchanging information on where they felt this was going and the effects it would have on the peace process.

One of the more interesting things during that time was Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, who was the former editor of *Al-Ahram* and had been very close to Nasser, came to London

and met with me and I had him in also with our DCM and political counselor. I think he had been given my name, so he contacted me and we met.

It was a very interesting talk. He had been imprisoned by Sadat and he said that he was supporting Mubarak. He said that Sadat had made a crucial mistake arresting all of those Islamists, because he created a lot of enemies that he didn't need to have.

He had been critical of Sadat. Sadat was much less interested in criticism and was rounding up some of those who were dissidents or critics, as is the wont of the Egyptian authorities every so often.

Heikal said he was in jail with them. He said it wasn't a particularly pleasant experience and it wasn't one of those "Club Fed" kind of places. It was a real jail.

But he said it was like a seminar for him. He met a lot of Islamists. Again, we're talking about the first half of the 1980's and he was talking about the early 1980's.

Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, who's still on Egyptian television, he's got his own show, it's a weekly show, I see it sometimes on al-Jazeera in my office, where we get al-Jazeera, he said it was very scary because he could see that whatever his concerns were about Mubarak, and I don't think he was necessarily any great fan, but he said "If something happens to Mubarak, after this it's over the cliff. These guys are very scary people."

And mind you this is well before al Qaeda. I don't remember any of the names. He wasn't talking about Zawahiri and if he did I wouldn't have remembered that any case, because that name wouldn't have meant anything to me.

But it was just a dark abyss and therefore it was really incumbent upon Mubarak succeeding and Egypt pulling itself together.

Often in liberation movements, having been to jail is a badge of honor. That's often where they made their contacts.

Q: I was just thinking of Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya. That's where they recruited the Mau Mau.

HOOPER: Other than the exchanges and analytical work on Sadat's assassination, since there were no troop movements, no war was declared, it was just a scary time and people were nervous, for obvious reasons: what does this mean, because he was so identified with the peace process, so identified with Camp David, with peace with Israel and the U.S.

Would this mean Egypt would lurch into a new direction? It didn't and it didn't appear to at the time.

I don't think that the British had any serious concerns that Mubarak would lead them in new directions or break the Camp David agreement or declare war on Israel or tell the United States to go to hell or anything. That wasn't the concern.

Q: How about King Hussein?

HOOPER: The British were very close to him. Mrs. Thatcher, he's been a favorite of American presidents and he was a real of favorite of Mrs. Thatcher and Lord Carrington.

Thatcher came in, her constituency was East Finchley, which had one of the largest concentrations of Jewish residents in Britain. She came in very sympathetic to Israel and wasn't particularly fired up to do much in the peace process.

And what happened was she met with Menachem Begin, then the Israel prime minister, fairly early in her tenure. She met Begin and was looking forward to this, because Britain has a particular history with Palestine, the mandate for Palestine, then with Israel and Begin was the head of one of the Jewish terrorist organizations at the time that the British held the mandate and had some, as I recall it, the blood of some British soldiers on his hands, or at least of his organization's hands. But she was prepared to like him and establish a close working relationship.

Well, the meeting did not go well. She was often criticized for having a lecturing style herself and whether or not that was true, I think at least to some extent it was true. I'm a great admirer of Mrs. Thatcher and what she did for Britain.

The meeting with Begin, during which he lectured her about what Britain should and shouldn't do, and I think he might have even touched upon experiences from the 1940's, really turned her off.

She was so fed up with him and what she regarded as his inflexible and arrogant approach that that changed her view and she grew to regard King Hussein, with whom she also had a longstanding relationship of respect and trust, as her primary touchstone of wisdom and guidance and perspective on the Middle East and she actually spoke with President Reagan on several occasions to try to push him to be more active in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

It was, again, the Israeli prime minister himself who changed her mind, not the British Foreign Office or Arabists or anything like that. It was Begin himself. I heard that story from a number of people at the Foreign Office. Suddenly she started asking for plans for how to solve the Arab-Israeli issue, after Begin and they began hearing criticism from her about Israel, whereas before that wasn't what they'd been hearing.

Q: Begin had that reputation.

Shultz believed it would be easy to negotiate a deal and cut out the Syrians. I've talked about that and gave you my perspective on that and I think, again, he was persuaded by our ambassador to Israel at the time.

Begin was persuaded by Sharon that he could clean the PLO's clock and remove Arafat for good by going into Lebanon, intervening and doing in the PLO and I think he had political cover and the green light from Al Haig to do that, certainly, in my view.

But more importantly, within Israel, he had it from Begin. If Begin hadn't wanted that done, it wouldn't have been done.

Lebanon destroyed Begin's prime ministership, so that in the end he was hollowed out, it aged him. Begin was destroyed and each death in Lebanon, just day by day by week, six hundred was the count and it just drained the life out of him.

Everyone assumes that Lebanon's an easy target. Even the Syrians made this mistake, when they went in to help the Christians against the PLO, which really sealed their positive reputation in Washington for a while.

Even then what Israel did, when they went into southern Lebanon, the Shia are grouped in southern Lebanon. The Shia had not been actively anti-Israel before. They'd been a relatively quiescent community.

When the Israelis went in, just sliced right through the south right up to Beirut, I think the British were pretty quick to catch on to this, I think I can remember reporting it, they exchanged 400,000 Palestinian enemies or whatever the number was, several hundred thousand in Lebanon, for a million Shia. Israel is still paying for that strategic error.

If I'm going to have to choose between having Lebanese Shia or the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as my enemy and I have to pick one, but I only have to pick one, I'd rather have the Palestinians, because look what has happened.

It was just a huge mistake on the part of Israel to make an enemy gratuitously out of the Shia and I think this was a blind spot. Everyone has blind spots on Lebanon, as we did in 1958 I think and it was a blind spot with Begin, it was certainly a blind spot with Sharon.

Look what happened during the summer of '06, almost two years ago. The Shia shot up an Israeli patrol, grabbed one or two prisoners and then Prime Minister Olmert decided they're going to go after them and go after them big and the Israelis thought they were going to clean these guys' clocks in the south.

They never took a single village and held it. The Shia, they always resisted. The Israelis were never able to take full control over a single village and look what this did to Olmert. This drained him. He came under intense criticism.

People fundamentally make these mistakes about Lebanon, because they misperceive Lebanon. I used to hear it said, "The Israeli Army band can conquer Lebanon." It was always a joke. A lot of policies have crashed on the rocks of Lebanon.

Again, people don't stop to think about these things. To have these people as an enemy, why? It doesn't mean you have to have them as your friend. Why going around getting gratuitous enemies for yourself? I wouldn't want Hezbollah as an enemy, if they didn't have to be my enemy.

Q: What happened, while you were there, sort of the culminating thing was the slaughter in the two refugee camps,

HOOPER: Sabra and Shatila.

Q: Sabra and Shatila. How did that hit you all and your British colleagues?

HOOPER: The British were absolutely furious. I can remember getting the cable from Ryan Crocker, who first went into the camps, looked at the bodies and said, "These reports are true. This has happened." And he reported that based on first hand visual evidence.

The British were furious and something had to be done and they really felt that the U.S. had just lost a lot of its standing and something had to be done.

Q: Actually Sabra and Shatila really did change the relationship with the United States in a way. It's never been quite back to where it was, I think.

HOOPER: I actually think under George Bush II the relationship between the U.S. and Israel has never been closer. The Israelis weren't all that happy with the first George Bush, because he was very active on the peace process and the Israelis would rather not have had things pushed towards a decision at the time by Baker and George Bush.

This George Bush, I think the Israelis have been very happy with him and now the question is, are they going to decide to give him something on the way out, a kind of bouquet on the way out?

He's not going to get an agreement with the Palestinians. They might get some sort of framework or scaffolding or something so at least he can say, "I've achieved something." I think that they're going to conclude that they need to give him something. So at the end of the day something is going to come out of this that he can say, "Ah, yes, we've made some major progress" and so on and so forth. I don't think it will be anything significant.

Q: Going back to this time, did the Lebanese invasion, were the British more indignant about this? Were they pushing for stronger action earlier than, say, the United States?

HOOPER: Oh, absolutely. They were prepared to send troops in. They were consistently pushing the U.S. to be more forceful in putting an end to the invasion, to the siege of Beirut, not because they had any love for the PLO, but they just saw that this was going to undermine any chance for advancing the peace process and it was going to undermine the U.S. relationship with the Arab world and it could jeopardize their own standing, too.

Thatcher was very negative on it. She was not uncommunicative in conveying her views to Ronald Reagan. I wouldn't overdo this, but I think that helped provide an atmosphere in which Reagan allowed himself to be persuaded that he needed to get on the phone with Begin and tell him "Enough's enough! Stop it!"

I think Mike Deaver, who as I recall was the one who finally persuaded Reagan to do it, I think Deaver, I recall in his memoirs he refers to this and he regards it as, in terms of foreign policy and the kind of impact he had, one of his finest moments, where it was the right thing to do and the right time.

Mrs. Thatcher became much more interested in hearing what Arab moderates had to say and what their point of view was and she was much more open to getting the peace process going and pushing the U.S. to have a serious Arab-Israeli peace process on Washington's agenda and she drew much closer to King Hussein as a result of that.

He had a house on Kensington Gardens, next to/across from, one of the palaces. I once or twice delivered messages to him. It didn't involve anything other than brief conversations with him.

But she really grew to rely on him. I remember Mubarak came and was feted there and she became a very active, enthusiastic advocate for a peace process and she and Lord Carrington were trying to get something going, but the U.S. was not interested in dealing with the PLO at that point and Lord Carrington tried to broker a deal moving the PLO away from terrorism and towards a recognition of Israel and a more satisfactory positioning to be a negotiating partner, an acceptable negotiating partner.

I remember Al Haig, who was the first secretary of state under Reagan, did not appreciate that at all and it was difficult to persuade Carrington to accept a British role in the Sinai peacekeeping force, the MFO, the Multinational Force and Observers, which is a success, it exists but it's forgotten and that's a policy so successful that it can become part of the woodwork and another tree in the forest.

I was deeply involved in that and trying to turn the British around, I think successfully. It was a real effort but it was something the British needed to be involved in.

Carrington didn't want to do it in part because he didn't want to undermine his relationship with the Palestinians. The Europeans wanted to be between the U.S. and Israel and the Arabs and kind of an honest broker.

Haig didn't like that. He didn't want the PLO delivered to him. He didn't care about that.

He took a dislike to Lord Carrington. I was working on one set of issues, the Middle East. Obviously there were all sorts of European security issues and a range of things which were going on at the time which I knew something about.

And at one point there was a leaked story in which Haig called Carrington a duplicitous bastard.

Q: Nice diplomatic language.

HOOPER: Not to his face, of course, but it was leaked to the U.S. media and a message went back from Carrington to Haig, it wasn't a message I delivered, it was something that he sent back by his ambassador in Washington, told him to do in to see Haig to say, "We may have misunderstandings or disagreements about the Middle East, but I do a lot of heavy lifting for you, Al, on various security issues related to the Soviet Union and European security and you've really crippled me and my ability to help you on a broader range of issues frankly more important than the Middle East, by your comment."

It was more polite than I'm characterizing it, but it was, "Al, you've let yourself get a little carried away with some of your feelings and now you've undermined what is really your and America's best friend in the councils of Europe, because a lot of people over here on the Continent are not very interested in some of your policies and I have been very loyally supporting that and now it's become much more difficult for me."

I thought that was a very shrewd way of dealing with that. Probably reflected Carrington's real view, but it was a shrewd way of responding to Haig and a very sophisticated way of responding to him.

In any case, Carrington was trying to deliver the PLO. Haig wasn't really interested in Europe playing a big role in the Middle East, trying to broker something and get the PLO into the process, which could facilitate probably the Egyptian-Israeli rapprochement. It had been done, now, moving on to the West Bank and negotiating a Palestinian-Israeli agreement and that's what Carrington was trying to do.

It didn't work ultimately, it didn't work at all, he never got anywhere and then Carrington left, he resigned over the Falklands. I thought he was a sophisticated, savvy and very effective foreign minister and I was sorry to see him go, but I had a lot of respect for him resigning over the Falklands. That is, he felt he should have seen it coming but he had to take responsibility for this and he resigned.

I think Mrs. Thatcher tried very hard to talk him out of it. She was very close to him. She was suspicious of the Foreign Office, but liked Carrington. She certainly had her own views, but they were very close and they operated as a very effective team. I was sorry to see him go.

The Falklands, which wasn't my issue, I couldn't miss it. Everything else faded into the background. The Falklands taught the British that they were a more martial people than they had gotten into the habit of thinking of themselves as, perhaps would be the way to put it.

I remember the BBC, in early days in the Falklands, reported, before the British Task Force had steamed out of Southampton, just in the very early days, the BBC said, "Well, Argentina is suggesting this and Britain is doing that," and Mrs. Thatcher said, "Wait a minute! The BBC shouldn't be playing some sort of neutral role. You're British!" Again, I think I'm probably making it cruder and less sophisticated than she put it, but right away she set them straight.

She didn't want any of that kind of stuff and I remember Britain became more nationalist in spirit. There was certainly British criticism of American policy as well.

Q: Well, if I recall, Haig was trying to insert himself into this as being sort of, again, this intermediary between forces. Essentially Argentina had unilaterally moved troops into territory which was internationally accepted and de facto *British.*

HOOPER: And the British didn't entirely welcome the intermediary role, either. The public certainly didn't. I think the government was prepared to cut Haig some slack.

Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were extremely close and I think at the end of the day it was clear where the U.S. would come out and I think the U.S. just wanted some time to see if it could try to help broker an agreement.

Once the Argentine government made it clear that they were not interested in a diplomatic solution, at least not anything along the lines of what the U.S. was trying to put together, then the U.S. came down backing Britain.

But I think one of the reasons the delay was not entirely welcomed by the more nationalistic British public, while the British government was more charitable or at least more tolerant of U.S. diplomacy, was because at the same time the U.S. was providing all sorts of intelligence and military help to enable the British to prepare themselves for the invasion to reacquire the Falklands, and this was not shared with the British public.

So the government knew where the U.S. was going to come out and they appreciated the help. There was just a lot of help the U.S. provided to Britain in all sorts of ways.

One of the big lessons I remember from that, which I have always kept in my mind in my career after that and I think it's a useful lesson: going to war is a complicated business, even if it's something as simple and clear as Iraq, where it was very clear there were weapons of mass destruction and so forth and everyone knew various things which turned out of course not to be the case, but the Falklands, the fact that it was so far away was I think the essential problem.

What the British took from that experience, the important thing was not to have plans, it was to have planners, not plans. That is, if you've got people that know how to put together a sensible plan, that's more important than having the "right" plan sitting on the shelf, because with the "right" plan, a contingency plan which is prepared before the event, real world circumstances are always going to differ, usually significantly, from whatever is in the contingency plan.

And rather than have plans you pull out and start implementing, page one through 325, step by step, it's the planners that can pull this together, because they're dealing with reality, who are crucial for the enterprise to succeed.

It may be basic kind of ABC's that everyone learns in their first tour, but I never heard it quite expressed that way and explained in these after-action kinds of things that I would sometimes hear about.

Again, I've always remembered that: it's useful to be doing planning, simply because you want to have effective planners around.

Also, on the Falklands, I think the belief was Britain could not lose this militarily. There was distance which was a problem, but they weren't going to lose this militarily.

However, the Falkland Islands in and of themselves are so meaningless, other than the fact that this was aggression and therefore if you don't stand up to it, it reveals that your resolve is weak, so Britain could have lost it politically.

Even though the British public had become more nationalistic, the British people realized that the Falklands were not valuable as islands, there were a few hundred people there, and some in Britain described it as "a village the size of Wales," with people dwarfed by the number of sheep. Frankly I think a lot of people probably wondered why Britain still retained it.

If a British troopship rather than *General Belgrano* had been sunk, it would have raised an unstated issue about proportion; you didn't know what the critical mass was, but the feeling that certainly if several hundred British troops got killed, that would bring into relief the question about the value of the whole enterprise: how much is this thing really worth in British lives?

So there was that issue. That's often the issue one has in war. We experienced that in Iraq, the United States did. We've experienced it in many other places prior to today and we will, we and many other countries will, in the future. What is the calculation?

And you don't really know what it is, because it's not a science, but it's a political art and if there's more people killed than the prize seems to be worth, then it raises more questions about the enterprise, even though you "win" militarily.

Q: As far as casualties go, not too much later, in Somalia, we lost 18 people in the so-called "Blackhawk down" episode and that seemed to stop our willingness to do anything for a while. In fact, the Yugoslavs used to taunt us, or the Serbs did, with "18" when we were trying to say "Don't mess around in Kosovo" and they seemed to think that we wouldn't take casualties. It's a tricky business.

HOOPER: It is. I was deeply involved in that after I left the Foreign Service, the Kosovo War, I was deeply involved in that when I was in the NGO world after leaving the Foreign Service, the Kosovo War of 1999 and what had led up to it in 1998. But the NATO calculation then was, this was an air war.

I was deeply involved in the Bosnian thing before and that was when I was in the Foreign Service but the Kosovo thing, that was an air war, though there were special teams that went in on the ground and the NATO calculation at the time was "We can do this from the air and we will only do it from the air," though it became more and more clear that there had to be at least the credible threat of ground activity in order to end the fighting and persuade Milosevic, the Yugoslav leader, to accept defeat and loss of control over Kosovo.

Every country has to make these calculations. I think for the British, the number of casualties was relatively low or at least tolerable.

Q: A couple of ships and a landing craft loaded with troops were hit. There were real casualties.

HOOPER: I think when the *Sheffield* was sunk, that was the time it was scariest. I think that was when I was having talks with other people at the embassy who were talking to the British, the concern was that they would lose the battle for public opinion, but ultimately it wasn't determined on that basis. It was determined by the military success.

Q: Did you find a different attitude towards other things with the Falklands War? Sort of a more nationalistic group of people at the Foreign Office, or were they skeptical about the whole thing?

HOOPER: They realized that these were a bunch of sheep farmers. This wasn't anywhere near the top of British interests. The Argentine government was aware of this and came to believe that its significance to Britain was minimal, thus it became a temptation for them to move, on the assumption that Britain had become ripe for the plucking.

I think the Argentines thought it was thousands of miles away from Britain, it was low hanging fruit, it was just a crummy piece of territory but it meant something to them, in terms of their own nationalist purposes and they wouldn't have to pay a price for this, that Britain would actually end up having to accept a negotiated outcome.

Well they didn't know Margaret Thatcher very well, despite having persuaded themselves that this fell right at the bottom of Britain's list of interests.

Q: Were you picking up, with the Foreign Office, either respect or dislike for Thatcher, how she was meeting this challenge?

HOOPER: I think respect, respect for the backbone, is what I recall. Again, this happened just when I was going to Wales with my family for a week or two, we'd rented a cottage with another family at the embassy and I remember listening in the car to the parliamentary debate and then hearing Carrington's resignation as we were driving down. It was a very sobering time.

So I was away for the first week, but this thing unfolded over a period of time when I got back, but I think they were proud of their country and proud that some backbone was shown.

But, again, they were clear eyed about this wasn't exactly Gibraltar or one of the Middle East oil countries.

Q: How about within our embassy? Was there sort of renewed respect for the Brits and all, for standing up, or were they saying, "Oh, for God's sake, why are the getting into this?"

HOOPER: No, I think people recognized at the embassy, I think there was renewed respect and I think an understanding. We had some people at the embassy who'd served in Latin America, so it wasn't just localitis or clientitis, which is the bane of the Foreign Service and of most embassies.

Nonetheless, we were clearly supportive of Britain, of its enterprise, of the rightness of its cause and I know the only concern was that if the casualties got too high before the real military action started, then that would undermine Britain's credibility, once you start out on something like this, you've got to finish it off. I think that people realized that.

Q: Also, it did uncover a matter of British naval might, which had gone down to nothing. One of their carriers they were ready to sell, I think. I was on the thing. It came in to Naples when I was consul general there but I was told they were getting ready to sell the thing. Their ability to project force had gone way down.

HOOPER: Again, when I got there, I remember the person in the political section who did political-military affairs, Peter Sommer, who went to the NSC from there and then became ambassador to Malta, he was an interesting fellow, his wife was French-speaking, they spoke French around the home and he interpreted for Hal Saunders and a couple of Iranian emissaries who it was hoped would be crucial in getting out the hostages. It turned out these guys didn't speak English and so they had to draft someone fast and so they pulled Peter in and he did this. This was before I got there.

Anyway, he was very close to the British political-military people and the British military and I remember he said that the debate, I remember him saying before the Falklands, that

the debate in the British government was can they still afford and do they still want a blue water navy, as opposed to just a territorial protection force?

I think after the Falklands it became clear that they had to have a blue water navy and so the debate ended, or at least was settled for the time, although how much you'd pay for that was still an issue.

Q: Well, let's turn to Libya and you were there during the real confrontation with Libya, weren't you?

HOOPER: Not when Reagan bombed. I was in my next post, which was diplomat in residence at the Air Force Academy.

But there had been some confrontations. A policewoman was shot from within the Libyan embassy and I'd been to Libya myself and I'd kept active in staying in touch with the British on the issue. I knew something about how Qadhafi ticked. That soured the British-Libyan relationship considerably.

Q: What went on? I remember that policewoman being shot. What in hell was that all about?

HOOPER: Their embassy wasn't too far from St. James Square and Chatham House. This was obviously a British show. We didn't have any diplomats there any longer. This was being coordinated between the Foreign Office and the British domestic security agencies, the police and so forth. They had their hands full. The public was outraged that this policewoman had been shot from within a diplomatic mission.

But there was real public outrage over this and strong public feeling and something was going to have to be worked out and at the end of the day there was going to have to be a reckoning.

As I recall it, I intentionally did not try to spend all my time on the phone with my contacts. I had excellent contacts at the Foreign Office, at all levels. I knew they were really busy and this was their issue and we didn't have a lot at stake in this. So I figured it's better to back off, let them handle this, deal with it on their own.

So I kept in touch with them, but I wasn't interested in trying to find out when they were going to storm the embassy before it was announced. It was very sensitive and you never know if you report something to Washington, will it then leak?

Q: Invariably.

HOOPER: So if I knew it I might be duty bound to report it. I'd rather not know it, in a way. So I did my duty and checked in with them but not intensively, because I didn't want to be pestering them.

Q: You'd been a Libyan hand and this is before the shooting, Libya didn't have embassies, they called them Peoples Bureaus. Did you have the feeling that it was a pretty disorganized thing, or what?

HOOPER: They had a good embassy in Washington, I remember and I don't recall in Britain, I think it might not have been, plus Qadhafi didn't really pay attention to the foreign ministry there, he was more interested in the peoples bureaus abroad and so forth, these kinds of things they would set up.

But they were running things in through the pouch, obviously weapons and things. The British had some listening devices, they were able to monitor what was going on inside the embassy.

As I recall a settlement was worked out. Libya was a constant topic of discussion, trying to figure out what Qadhafi was up to.

NAVEUR had an office right across from the embassy.

Q: This is

HOOPER: The naval

Q: Operation in London. CINCSOUTH was

HOOPER: In Naples and NAVEUR was in London. And at some point we were doing something with Libya, I think it was another one of these confrontations.

Q: Well, I know we had several over the so-called Gulf of

HOOPER: Gulf of Sirte.

Q: Which was called the "line of death" or something by the Libyans, they were claiming the whole

HOOPER: It was an inland sea, in their view.

Q: Headland to headland and that didn't make any sense and so we were every once in a while putting ships into that.

HOOPER: The first time it happened, at least the first time in my experience, was when I was stationed in Tripoli and it was a sudden crisis in our relationship with Libya. Because I had been through one of these testing of the line exercises in Libya, I was asked to come over to NAVEUR and talk with them about how Qadhafi might react.

The U.S. government felt that we had to challenge Libya, there was a regular policy, this wasn't the only claimed inland sea or disputed blue water claim. And so there was a plan

that every so often the U.S. would traverse this area, just to establish the point that this was not recognized, because an unchallenged assertion becomes a fact.

So we would do it, then the Libyans would, I think one time we shot down one of their aircraft. And I remember telling the navy staff, "They have these peoples bureaus. You've got other military installations around Europe and we're headed into some rough times here eventually. They may not respond against the ships you've got out there. They can try things against other installations that you have around Europe and not just Europe. So I would encourage you to increase your readiness, at least in terms of guard presence, your security presence."

And I gave them my views on Qadhafi and what motivated him and how these things work and then the thing ultimately ended.

Q: We didn't know it, but we were approaching the end of the Cold War, but nobody knew that at the time. How about the Soviets? From your perspective, in the Middle East and all, what were the Soviets up to and how were you and the Brits viewing that at this stage?

HOOPER: This was the pre-Gorbachev era, from '80 to '84 and Solidarity had been created and then you had martial law.

Q: In Poland.
HOOPER: That happened while I was in London. We had some people in the embassy working on that issue, but, again, it wasn't anything in my portfolio. I think the British felt that the Soviets played an unhelpful role in the Middle East and were not trying to help any kind of Arab-Israeli peace process. It was a spoiler role and they were trying to help the spoiler Arab states, and there was no advantage to Moscow to facilitate an Arab-Israeli peace.

Q: It sort of emphasizes the fact that things, it was kind of routine and there were no great crises.

HOOPER: No and I don't remember that there were significant differences of opinion on that issue.

The Arab-Israeli peace process, the British were very, very focused on that, Mrs. Thatcher was focused on that, Lord Carrington and his successors were focused on that, the British Foreign Office was focused on that.

Q: Where'd you go in 1984?

HOOPER: The Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

Q: How long were you there?

HOOPER: Two years as diplomat in residence.

Q: What was your impression when you first got to the Academy?

HOOPER: The position is in the political science department. I came away from there very impressed with the level of the quality of the students who go through the academy, because I didn't know much about the service academies at all.

Q: Had you been in the military?

HOOPER: No, I hadn't. When I was a graduate student at Columbia I got called up and I went in, in 1970, '71, some time around then and I had a low number. Back then there was a draft lottery and my number was called, so I went in.

And I had had a leg operation, a knee operation, to remove some diseased cartilage as a teenager and at my draft physical the doctor there took a look at the scar, which is still there, on my knee and the x-rays and the medical report of that and said, "Well, you're not going into the military." So that was all there was to it.

In any case, I had not had any experience myself of being the military. I worked with defense attachés and so forth in the Foreign Service. In fact, Irv Rocke, who was in the defense attaché's office in London and he had been head of the political science department at the Air Force Academy and I knew Irv. He was the dean of faculty, the number three position at the academy, when I was at the Academy after London.

But I was, again, very impressed with the motivation and quality of the students, very impressed with the motivation and level of quality of the faculty that were there.

I think they were serious about teaching, the students were serious about learning and it was a great environment, a great intellectual environment, a great set of experiences, that fulfilled one of my goals, which was to try something other than diplomacy, away from the Foreign Service and see if I could survive and how I would do and I thought I would like something like that.

I taught eight different courses, from Introduction to Political Science to International Relations to American Government to American Defense Policy, which I'd had no experience in but I'd learned things while I was out there.

I taught more than half of the courses that the political science department had to offer. I came up with my own course on diplomacy and crises. Again, in the political science department I developed some really good friends there, who I had enormous, enormous respect for and in some cases who I'm still in touch with and many of them went on to great things in their careers here in Washington.
They were really, really good people and I have very fond memories of that time.

One of the things that a Foreign Service Officer can bring to that is a different perspective. Several of the military people in the political science department had been to NATO or had been a defense attaché, or assistant attaché, in one of the embassies prior to this in their career or wanted such an assignment, were very interested in the world and international affairs.

And there was a lot of discussion of issues, very open minded and, again, it wasn't that I came with any stereotypes expecting narrow minded military points of view and I didn't expect that, but what I did find was the opposite of that. I didn't find that at all. I found people more open minded to challenge things sometimes than people in the Foreign Service, to challenge assumptions. It was a real intellectually expansive experience.

People in the department made me as a Foreign Service Officer feel welcome. I really felt I was part of the department. I wanted to help them, wanted to be part of the department.

The other thing that you get and this had a strong impact on me, the Air Force Academy has its honor code, which is: "We will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does," that is the "toleration clause" and it was enforced.

That means for example that you cannot cheat on an exam and that has to become really bred in your bones, because when you go out from the academy into the service, people have to rely on you and they have to know that you will live by a code.

And they all want to be pilots, of course. So when you're in the cockpit getting ready to take off and you're going through a checklist of the various things that you have to do before taking off, you're supposed to go through and check every little thing on that checklist and if you don't you're endangering peoples' lives and a set of equipment that you are responsible for.

There's a reason for it and it's very character building and it's a real test, because that means that it cuts against the "I'm not gonna squeal on my buddies" kind of thing that one has in life.

Professors would give the same exam, they'd have different sections and they would start in the morning and then go through the day. Well, people that took the exam from eight to 9:30 or whatever it was, the people that were coming at 11:00 to 12:30 or whatever were gonna get the same exam. The temptation was enormous to share some impressions of what one found on the exam with someone who hadn't taken it yet.

And so there were occasional problems with this. You're not supposed to do that yourself, not supposed to cheat on an exam, but if you know someone else is doing it, you have broken the code if you don't report that.

That's a very high standard and in fact the Air Force Academy, I think they felt that it was a higher standard and a more enforced standard than West Point and Annapolis had.

But I think that may have just been a competitive kind of thing and I don't know the truth of that and I wouldn't cast any aspersions, but people were booted out before I got there, when I was there and after I left, for breaking the code.

So it was very character building and I think to be exposed to that kind of system, where it's expected, where it's built into the structure, that was why a lot of cadets I think felt they could come to me as a civilian and talk with me about things that it might be awkward for them to talk about with a uniformed officer.

It was an intellectually expansive period for me. I dealt with issues back then and looked at issues and thought through them and discussed them with others in our car pool, myself and two others, we had a car pool. I lived on the academy grounds in housing there and we each had a car and if we drove the car that day and picked up the others, then that person's spouse would be without a vehicle. So it would be rotated.

We bought this old Checker car, a huge vehicle, a lot of leg room in the back, we got it for $250, this is the mid-1980's. We were just looking for something really cheap, none of us had a lot of money and we figured that way we would have a fourth car, so we could drive that into work and everyone's spouse would have a car. The thing was a wreck, it was kind of a joke, but the thing is it worked in the winter. It would make it through the rough patches there. We never took it off the academy grounds, because we would be scared on other streets, just to and from the office and the gas station, there was a gas station on the academy.

And it was a lot of fun. The three of us would have serious discussions on the way to work and on the way back. One of my best friends there had graduated at the top when he was at the academy. Several of the professors had been academy grads and several of them not. I don't remember the percentage, maybe it was fifty-fifty, something like that, so they'd have a mix.

A couple of my faculty colleagues had graduated at the top in different years, at the top of their class and in their four years one of them had all A's and the other had I think one B.

I learned so much from these people. You learned leadership there. They teach leadership seriously. Civilian universities teach knowledge. At the academy it's knowledge, of course, leadership and character and they take the leadership training very seriously. They get it in the dorms and they have professional military training.

They also go through prisoner of war training where they learn what the Geneva Conventions and the Uniform Code of Military Justice mean in practice if you are captured and interrogated, and what the limits are on you if you are doing the interrogating. I remember that you could be roughed up within reason and you learn what you are supposed to do and how to resist and what the limits are, name, rank and serial number, and they put you through a real exposure to that, because they knew that this was going to happen to some of them when they graduated and went into combat.

So there's a lot of serious instruction going on, from knowledge to character to leadership and you really come out in a rounded way, more so than at civilian universities. I was enormously impressed.

Q: This is sort of betwixt and between the Vietnam War and Desert Storm and all of that. Was Vietnam hanging over, the consequences of Vietnam? Was this something that was discussed?

HOOPER: Yes, there was a lot of that in defense policy and that was discussed. Some of the faculty had participated in the Vietnam air campaign in some capacity and they had views about it.

This was, again, the mid-Eighties. Ronald Reagan was president and student attitudes tend to reflect the point of view of President Reagan, much more in the spirit of that. The military was building up. It had gotten its sense of direction back and was rebuilding. One wouldn't see this until Desert Storm in '91, just how this had all come together in the military, because at that point Grenada had taken place in the first Reagan Administration, prior to the time I got there.

But this wasn't the same level as Desert Storm, or Vietnam or Kosovo or Iraq now or anything like that, it was a pretty small operation. Then you had the marines in Lebanon. Again, they were serious, they were important, but this was not a large-scale operation of the same sort and didn't show that much about how far the military had come, in terms of integrating advanced technology into a war fighting capability.

One of the things that I've been impressed by has been that the U.S. military does better at learning from its mistakes, at facing up to its mistakes, at investigating them, at learning from them and integrating new procedures and technologies and tactics into what they're doing next, into their operational approach, operational philosophy.

I don't think the Foreign Service likes to do that. It's not systematized.

Q: Well, I think what we're doing right here, in oral history, is being done by a non-profit organization of retired Foreign Service Officers with tacit support of the State Department but it was not initiated by the Department and it's the closest thing that you have of people looking in retrospect and building a historical record.

The State Department is essentially an ahistorical group.

HOOPER: And I don't know why that is, Stu. In part there is a natural reluctance to look at mistakes and errors. There's also a kind of an intellectual sloppiness, perhaps, of "Well, we're dealing with the real world. Things are always a mess. We inherited a mess. It's not a science."

You name it, there are lots of reasons to not want to do these things. There's always sensitivities and so forth.

The military has had its share of investigations which have been criticized for being less than thorough or whitewashes, that kind of thing, but they've also had a pretty good share of investigations where, even if there's not a lot of publicity, they look into it and the person that's headed it is told "Don't hold back. Give me your honest assessment of it." And they do, where they've really learned from this.

And I think what you're doing here, the Foreign Service and the State Department should be more willing to undertake internal reexaminations of itself and of its failure and of its problems and make changes where warranted.

There have been various commissions and so forth, but, again, when there are real problems, no one's asked to look into it.

Q: I've looked at this situation. My basic conclusion is that it's almost impossible to do this, because the problem is that when you're talking about military action, these are generals, admirals, they're doing things. They're government employees. They're trained to accept the bitter with the sweet. Time moves on and they move on.

The problem with foreign policy and dealing with what worked and what didn't work, it immediately gets political, moves right up to the top. The president's in charge of foreign policy. The secretary of state is his or her deputy in foreign policy and so anything that's done immediately will end up as a condemnation of the political group in power.

I think this is a real inhibitor. We should be able to do this at a lower level and take a look and see what went right, what went wrong, but it's pretty hard to do, because it's political.

Whereas if you should have outflanked the enemy, that's not political.

HOOPER: The president is commander in chief.

Q: I know, but there's a real dividing line there. The president's supposedly calling the shots on the foreign relations side, where he's not calling the shots on the military side. They go out and do the best job they can.

HOOPER: I understand what you're saying, but, with respect, I think it is very easy within the State Department for people to come up with ideas for why we don't need to do this. So you don't have the culture of accountability that the military does.

Part of the reason that the Foreign Service is gun-shy on this is the "Who lost China?" thing. Politically the State Department's been tarred, it's been used as a whipping boy, it's been tarred with things quite unfairly and who wants that kind of thing?

Well, again, that doesn't have to be the defining moment. Probably most Foreign Service Officers now have barely even heard of that when they come in and certainly none would

have had any direct experience with it. Probably very few in the Foreign Service still, even the most senior levels, have been around,

Q: No, no, that stuff's long gone. That was the early McCarthy era. We're talking about the late Forties or early Fifties.

HOOPER: But, again, somehow there needs to be more of a culture of accountability I think in the State Department and it isn't there now. But there is in the military, though sometimes honored in the breach, but it really is there and you get it all the way up the chain of command.

Q: Well, to go back to your time there, did you get an impression, because this has been played up quite a bit, about the role, particularly, of the evangelical church there? Did you get any feel for that? The Air Force seems to be much more infused with this.

HOOPER: There were a lot of colleagues of mine or people I knew, friends, character building almost inevitably is linked to religion. That is, there is a reflection of or the values often overlapped.

So they weren't supposed to be flogging any particular religious point of view, that was all understood. But it was definitely in the air and it was a Christian, Protestant, I don't want to generalize, but often there were many people just throughout the academy who were deeply religious and felt these values and tried to live by these values, which made it easier for them to adjust to the honor code and the values of the military. They brought this background to the military.

There were many that weren't, that were agnostic or would show up at church only at Easter. But there was an official respect for religion there.

Now they weren't supposed to teach that and there weren't any courses as such. There were philosophy courses and there might have been a history of religion course.

Q: I take it the place was focused on the Soviet Union?

HOOPER: Yes, that's right, the Soviet Union and the NATO alliance. There was also almost always a civilian professor who was out there for a couple of years, along with the State Department person. It wasn't always, but most of the time there was someone and the two years I was there, there was someone who was a Latin America specialist. It helped expand my horizons about Latin America.

The cadets, they had so many requirements I felt sorry for them. The academy took itself so seriously about the teaching role, took itself extremely seriously. Then they would have to do professional military training also during the week.

They had so much, they just would, the cadets call it mind dumps, as soon as they finished a course and had gotten the grades they would do a memory dump, so to speak, try to flush it out and move on, because they were being asked to do so much.

In fact, there was a feeling that in a way it was overloaded, they were just getting a fire hose jammed in their mouths when they arrived and it wasn't taken out until they left four years later.

A lot of them were kind of burned out in one sense when they departed and they couldn't wait to get the academy behind them and start living. People I knew there who were former students felt at the time they had that fire hose in their mouth and they couldn't wait to get away. But they nonetheless had good memories of the experience and they knew they'd gotten a good education. But they can't wait to get it in the rearview mirror and just move on to pilot training, move on to real life.

I was on the side of those who believed that they needed to cut back on requirements, there were way too many, give them some more electives. They were expecting way too much. They couldn't absorb all this stuff. There was no way.

So they actually did, not because of anything I did, but because they just concluded that this was necessary to do, they had four requirements in political science and I think they cut the requirements from 50 courses to 42 or 43 or 45 or something and political science dropped from four to three required courses they had to take.

But even if you were a political science major, you still graduated with a bachelor of science degree, because you had so much electrical engineering and all these things that they had to learn.

I wasn't good at those kinds of science subjects. I wouldn't have prospered there as a student at all.

Q: Did you find there was much discussion about what was happening in the Soviet Union, because this was the Gorbachev era, or the beginning?

HOOPER: Again, '84 to '86, there was one person who'd been an attaché in the embassy in Moscow, very knowledgeable about the realities of how the Soviet Union worked, another person who'd been involved in debriefing refugees coming out of the Soviet Union, very knowledgeable about how the Soviet Union worked.

There was a discussion of this and how much could we trust them and there were a lot of verification issues. The political science department tended to be, relative to the Air Force as a whole, I think, more pragmatic about arms control. They were more prepared to operate on "trust but verify" and "Let's not assume that we can't reach an agreement because they're the bad Soviets, it's worth a try, let's go in with our eyes open" on this. There were serious discussions about these issues.

The political science department salted people into the U.S. government. The head of the department when I was there had just come from the office of the Secretary of the Air Force. Brent Scowcroft had been head of the political science department earlier in his career.

Someone else from the political science department went from there to be on Vice President Quayle's foreign policy staff. Another fellow was asked to work in the Attorney General's office in the Reagan Administration. Another worked on Africa at the Pentagon and he was asked to be one of the six people working on foreign policy under Leon Fuerth in Vice President Al Gore's office and it was the experience of his life.

People outside the military in government, they recognize the expertise and universities, too, like academy grads, because one thing you learn there, you learn discipline. And I don't mean just saluting and knowing how to walk on the parade ground, you learn how to study.

If you haven't learned how to make time tradeoffs, getting papers done, preparing for exams and factoring all this stuff into your life and surviving the experience by the end of your first year, you're not going to survive out there.

And after four years you don't even have to think about it anymore, it's just automatic, you know what you have to do and so you take that out into your career.

You come into a university as a graduate student, you know how to do time tradeoffs, so you're just slicing through the courses, writing your term papers, contributing to class discussion and so forth.

So after Harvard had one or two academy alums as graduate students, they said, "Can we have more? Can you send us more next year?" Everyone who had an experience with them wanted more at the universities.

Again, government, you bring to it a focus and a discipline and a character and a sense of discretion. You know how to do time tradeoffs. You're productive. You can get a lot done. Many of the qualities they have and their expertise are recognized, acknowledged by people in government and they're very choosy, a vice president or a cabinet level official is very choosy on who he or she is going to have on his or her personal staff. They're not going to do it by political correctness and so forth. These people that have substantive jobs to do, they have to have capable subordinates. The Air Force Academy did very well in producing people like this.

Q: In '86, you finished. Where'd you go?

HOOPER: Kuwait, three years as DCM in Kuwait.

Q: This would be '86 to '89. What was Kuwait like when you got out there?

HOOPER: Well, the biggest issue that I dealt with in Kuwait was the reflagging of Kuwaiti oil tankers, which enabled the U.S. military to escort them through the Gulf and I negotiated that with the Kuwaiti government. So if we can start out on this

Q: Yes, why don't we start out on that?

HOOPER: That happened my first year and then it was the following through during the second two years.

I had two ambassadors. The first year was Tony Quainton, very competent, he later became Director General, just one of the most competent Foreign Service Officers around, a very savvy guy who could breeze through an inbox in a matter of minutes, very good at looking behind the draft to see what's there.

And then Nat Howell was there, he was there three years, my second and third and then I left and the following summer was the invasion by Iraq. So I left a year before that. The Iraqis invaded in '90, Desert Storm was in '91.

I believe that the reflagging operation, which was at that point the greatest postwar success that the U.S. had in the Gulf of a political-military nature, obviously overshadowed by what came after in Desert Storm, of course and now this is just a footnote to that.

I'm not sure we would have had Desert Storm, though, if we had not had the reflagging, because it gave the Kuwaitis a sense of confidence in the Americans and it gave the Americans a greater sense of confidence in the Kuwaitis and the Arabs and an opportunity to see how they operate as allies.

This wasn't an Arab-Israeli issue. This didn't cut across that. The Israelis didn't have any concerns about this. And it was very useful to be involved in something like this, where the Arab-Israeli issue didn't impinge on it.

What happened was the Kuwaiti oil minister, Sheikh Ali Khalifa, had been exploring with the U.S., through Ambassador Tony Quainton, whether we would be prepared to escort Kuwaiti tankers because they were afraid with the Iran-Iraq War going on that their oil ships would be subject to attack.

Kuwait, a tiny little country, very worried about these two large neighbors, you could hear the fighting, you could hear the sound waves from the shelling at night, especially, it would travel across the waters, you could hear 'em when you were lying in bed, just feel them, almost, the war going on.

And the Kuwaitis were very nervous and all of this of course subsequently came to pass, their fears were well grounded. They don't have any strategic depth in terms of territory. You can go from one end to the other in an hour or two. It's just a very small country, extremely rich.

They had no illusions about the Iraqis, the Saddam Hussein regime and the Iranians. They had a Shia community in Kuwait that had contacts with Tehran.

They wanted this insurance. These talks had been going on kind of fitfully. Occasionally Ali Khalifa would call on Tony Quainton and would ask, "Have you heard anything back?" and Tony would say, "No."

Tony was returning to Washington for a chiefs of mission conference and I remember coming into the embassy that morning, I walked him out to his car, said goodbye and went back in and I was then the chargé, he was going to be gone for two weeks.

As the morning progressed a cable comes in: "Give the following response to the Kuwaiti oil minister: After long and thoughtful consideration of your idea and well, we're not prepared to do that. So tell the oil minister this."

So I went in and said, "I've received instructions from Washington to inform you that the decision is made and we're not prepared to grant your request."

And he said, "Okay, well, I'm very sorry to hear that, Mr. Hooper. I guess we'll just have to go to the Russians and have them do it."

The discussion ended and I went back and reported "He said that he is going to the Soviets and ask them to do the escorting, since we have turned it down now, officially."

From then on it was two weeks of intensive negotiations. The Kuwaitis were smart enough to see what would get Washington's attention. I started receiving instructions saying, "Wait a minute! Go back in and talk to him! Say that we're reconsidering this! No, no, no, they can't go to Moscow!"

So suddenly you had interagency meetings in Washington and I was being informally told: "Hold them at bay! Hold them at bay!" I started working with Ali Khalifa on this. I could see where this was going. Washington was going to decide to do it, I concluded early on, because if not, the Kuwaitis seemed resolute about turning the Soviets.

Q: Do you think they were serious?

HOOPER: Yes.

Q: And were the Soviets capable of doing something? They'd have to put ships in there.

HOOPER: Yes, which the U.S. didn't want. I think the Soviets were capable of doing this in some fashion. Not as effectively as the U.S. but the last thing the USG wanted, was to give the Soviets a legitimate presence in the Gulf. They had a relationship with Iraq, obviously, but among the Gulf states that were considered pro-West and friendly to the U.S., obviously Saddam Hussein wasn't considered friendly to the U.S.

So we started negotiating this and Washington was busy trying to make up its mind. And I would see Ali Khalifa sometimes several times a day and the head of the Kuwait Oil Tanker Corporation, Abdul Fattah al-Bader, a great guy, kind of a Falstaffian type, and I dealt with the two of them and I had to decide pretty early on, do I bring in the foreign ministry? I decided that if I brought in the foreign ministry, they would insist on a "balanced" decision that would include some U.S. and some Soviet ships. But Ali Khalifa wanted to give the U.S. the business and we had other means of confirming that in fact the Kuwaitis were in touch with the Soviets on this, so it wasn't a bluff, in that sense, at least.

I think in the end they would have done some of it with the Soviets, but they wanted to see who they could trust and who would work with them, because for them this was a potential survival issue.

I was seeing them sometimes several times a day, taking things back and forth. I would get phone calls and cables and things and it was very intensive, reactive and I was doing this on my own.

I kept other members of the staff, the head of the economic section and the DAO and the political officer, informed. I believe in having an integrated team and keeping them informed and so we had a real team operation. But I was carrying the water on this.

Again, I want to emphasize that it was my decision not to go to the foreign ministry, because if we'd involved them they would have pushed to get the Soviet Union in, they would have pushed very hard. So I negotiated it through the oil minister.

Ali Khalifa, I think he might have said at one point that the foreign ministry was pressing had for Soviet inclusion.

Q: Realistically, other than a maneuvering ploy, why would anybody want the Soviets there? They didn't have much ability at that point.

HOOPER: There were two superpowers at the time. Iran and Iraq were at war. Things could spill over at any time.

As to whether it was a bluff, I don't think it was. I think they would have tried it with the Soviet Union, because what you had was two superpowers and if one of them is doing this, that means if Iran or Iraq is going to attack any of the tankers to try to send a message, they're not only taking on Kuwait, it's obviously not capable of resisting either of them and it obviously wasn't, but they have to factor in that they're taking on the United States or the Soviet Union.

So therefore it's a deterrent factor and the Kuwaitis saw that having some American and/or Soviet involvement it would increase their margin of survivability in a very

dangerous part of the globe, with the Iran-Iraq War going on and who knows how it was going to end.

So I think it was a perfectly plausible approach for the Kuwaitis to take, and a reasonable commitment for the U.S. to undertake.

As I said, I decided pretty quickly if I went to the foreign ministry and involved them in these negotiations, which would be the normal thing to do, we would end up having some Soviet ships, there would be a deal, a package deal. That's what the foreign minister, Sheikh Sabah, would insist on.

The oil minister was prepared to press just for the Americans, and the foreign minister was more allied with the amir. The oil minister, Ali Khalifa, was more allied within the ruling family, they're not called the royal family, with the crown prince and that was the oil minister's patron.

Again, this was a very sensitive negotiation in Washington. So I decided I'm not going to go to the foreign ministry, this had repercussions later, did it through Ali Khalifa, all of it through Ali Khalifa and he was allied with Sheikh Salem, the defense minister, as well.

Again, this took two weeks. Once in this process I received a message which said, "We haven't reached a decision yet. Go in and tell the defense minister, who was a former ambassador to the U.S., 'No, you cannot do this with the Soviet Union. Give us some time to make up our mind.'"

And I knew that it was likely that we would agree to do this in Washington, but the instructions were just to say, "No, you can't go to the Soviet Union." It was really very stiff: "No, you cannot." And so I went down to the defense attaché, showed him the message and said, "I'd like you to accompany me on this, since it's the defense minister."

And he was very happy to do so. We were friends and remained friends. And he said, "I certainly would."

So I called over, got an appointment right away, which was not to easy to get, Sheikh Salem's a very protocol-minded person and I was the chargé, not the ambassador. Then, a few minutes before we were about to head over to the defense ministry, the defense attaché came into my office and said, "Jim, I can't go with you on this."

That took me by surprise, so I said, "Something else has come up? What can be more important than this today?"

"No, no, no. I can't go in while you deliver this message. I know this guy and you give him this message and he's going to throw us out of the office. He's not going to take this. If that happens to me, we've got programs here and they will suffer. I'm sorry. I hope you understand. I can't be seen to be taking in a message as negative as this. If you order me, of course, I will accompany you."

I said, “No, no, Al. I understand your situation. I’m not going to order you.”

So I went in on my own and sat down with the defense minister and said, “I have a message from Washington. I was explicitly told to deliver this to you.” I gave him the message straightforwardly. I said, “Now that is the message I was asked to deliver.”

And he was silent the whole time, just eying me as I’m giving him this stiff dose of bad news on what we, the United States, will and will not allow Kuwait to do, a sovereign country to do. He said, “Is there anything further?”

I said, “That’s the message. However, I want to tell you something off the record and I’m not instructed, but I’m telling you this on my own authority, personally. I believe that the reason that you’re being told this is I believe that we are going to make the decision to escort the ships. Washington hasn’t yet reached the decision, but it’s going to happen very soon and that’s why they want your help in this and understanding. They couldn’t tell you that. They couldn’t promise you that.

“And I can’t promise you that, but I’m telling you on personal background here I believe it’s going to happen and I hope that makes this a little more sensible than just the message itself, because I believe as we’re coming in soon, you’re going to be working very closely with some of the colleagues that you perhaps knew when you were in Washington as ambassador and you’re going to have a major role in this, but right now, that’s not there, but I believe that is going to happen.”

He said, “Well, is there anything further?”

I said, “That’s it.”

And he said, “Well, Mr. Hooper, when I listened to this message from the representative of the United States, the American chargé, telling me in effect what my country can and cannot do, I wanted to stand up and throw you out of my office, because no one can talk to us this way.”

I’m thinking, with a sinking heart, “it’s all over.”

And he went on, “However, I understand the personal comment you made, I appreciate that, I understand the situation you’re in. Now let’s talk about this.” And we then began to have a relatively good talk. He said, “What does the foreign minister think of this?”

I said, “I believe the foreign minister thinks the following, but I have not been in discussion with him. Now, let me ask you: if I were to begin discussing this with the foreign minister, what do you think would happen, if I might ask you that, off the record?” I was alone. I had no note taker. I wasn’t taking notes.

He said, “What will happen is if you involve him in the negotiations he will insist that the Soviets have”—there were twelve tankers, as I recall, to be convoyed—“five, six, some number, be Soviet flagged and be escorted by the Soviets. If you involve him, that’s what will happen, because that will be the dynamics within our government.”

I said, “Well, that’s what I feared. I wasn’t sure. Thank you very much for that insight.” All this went back to Washington in a NODIS message.

Again, I wouldn’t say we became friends after that. He was very protocol-conscious and I was not the ambassador.

But it turned out to be a very useful discussion and I felt our defense attaché called it accurately, it was useful he wasn’t there, for a lot of reasons. But I found that a very useful discussion.

In any case, I continued to work through the negotiations with the Kuwaitis and with Washington. Again, this was late ’86, might have been early ’87. It seemed like it had taken six months. It took two weeks and it was just very intensive, constantly going back, exchanging messages, resolving problems. There were a lot of things that had to be worked out. This was all stuff that I did and I wasn’t getting any instructions from Tony Quainton. He was back there watching this, but he refrained from directing me in any way on what to do.

And I was getting calls from Admiral Crowe, he’d be traveling around the area, at that point he took a trip to Bahrain. I was getting calls from his office,

Q: He was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

HOOPER: Yes. His strong view was that all twelve tankers needed to be escorted by the U.S. Navy.

And a lot of pressure was coming in. It was a real high wire act out there and if it went wrong I was going to take all the hits and if it went right there were plenty of other people around that were going to take credit.

So there was a lot of pressure to get this done, get it right and come out with an all-U.S. operation and in the end Washington decided to do it and said that they wanted to do all twelve and would work all this out.

And I conveyed that to Sheikh Ali Khalifa and then the Kuwaiti government, they approved it the afternoon or the evening that Tony Quainton arrived back. It just happened that the cable came in after he had left the embassy to go back to Washington and the final decision arrived on the day he was coming back. So it all happened in this two week period between his departure and his return. Just a very strange, quirky kind of situation.

Q: The Kuwaiti foreign ministry, it's a pretty small place and how could you be conducting a very significant set of negotiations without them weighing in?

HOOPER: Oh, they wanted to be involved and that's what I'll get to next. They definitely wanted to be involved and if they'd called me over to discuss it I would have gone over. But they didn't. It was being done through Ali Khalifa, the oil minister.

Q: I take it that there must have been control at the top, within the Kuwaiti government you can't have one ministry doing something, where another one, the foreign ministry, obviously should have had a role in it and somebody must have told them, "Leave it to the oil ministry to work out."

HOOPER: I think this is the way governments often, ministries are often, they're jousting and so forth. Now, the day after Tony Quainton returned, he was called to the foreign ministry and they made it known to him they did not appreciate being left on the sidelines in this negotiation.

But the deal was cut. The U.S. got everything it wanted. The Kuwaitis got what they wanted. It was really the defense umbrella, more so than just these ships. In effect, explicitly we were committing only to protect these ships, but the reality was we were committing to much more, symbolically.

And the foreign ministry did not appreciate that this success happened without them and they let Tony Quainton know that they didn't appreciate being left on the sidelines.

I was going to be the one who's took all the heat for this. I honestly thought this through and just figured, as I said before, if I involved them we are going to get a split decision. I said, "If I involve them, it just means we're going to get the Soviets in." So I did it and I fully understood that this may have repercussions on me. I wasn't surprised.

Now later, six months, a year, maybe, they tried to PNG me, they drummed up a pretext, because I had some discussions with someone on democracy there. It was really because they were still smarting from the reflagging decision. They had a pretext and it was on some democracy related issues. I'd asked to see the head of the professional workers union, I don't remember all the details.

The Kuwaiti ambassador in Washington brought this into the Department and then Tony Quainton was told. And he didn't understand it. He felt very defensive, because it seemed very clear that the pretext was pretty thin.

And Washington, to its credit, they stood behind me and they weren't going to accept this and they were going to make a big issue out of this.

If this became public and a big issue, how could I ever get another assignment in the region, but this was going to play itself out, somehow.

Dick Murphy, who was the assistant secretary at the time, who I'd served with earlier in Damascus, happened to be coming through and he got there right around this time, as this was starting to play itself out. Washington was saying, "No, we're not going to accept this." It hadn't become public, but they were going to make it public in Washington.

Dick Murphy happened to come out and he went in to see the foreign minister, Sheikh Sabah and he took me over with him and he went in alone and then came back out and we didn't discuss it, as I recall. Dick Murphy said later he told Sheikh Sabah, "If you do this, you are really going to hurt Kuwait. Whatever your reasons are for doing this, it will not be understood and it will not be accepted in Washington. Congress is going to be right after you. Here we are, we're protecting your ships and taking this big responsibility on and you want to PNG the diplomat who negotiated the agreement with you."

Sheikh Sabah said, "Well, okay, we'll let him stay."

And I wanted to stay and it didn't sour my attitude towards the Kuwaitis. I understood the realities. I was happy to be able to stay and work on implementation of the reflagging initiative.

We dealt intensively with CENTCOM, in terms of following through on the reflagging process and we also were having secret U.S.-Kuwait defense talks to work out various options in case of broader fighting that involved Kuwait.

And we had this channel and I was the one that was responsible for that at the embassy. There was that defense planning underway and there was this oil tanker protection initiative. So we had lots of visitors from CENTCOM, a lot of military things going on, all sorts of people were coming out all the time.

Nat Howell was selected to go to Kuwait as the next ambassador. He had been political advisor to CENTCOM and he got the job after Tony Quainton and was felt to be the perfect person to send to Kuwait as ambassador.

So we had military people arriving all the time and here were all sorts of things we learned from the planning they did with the Kuwaitis. It was incredibly useful.

Then, the first ship that went through the Gulf, the very first one, hit a mine. Tony Quainton was still there. I remember he went over to be interviewed by NBC or one of the network news programs and I thought, "My God, the first one! I thought this was going to be a success but now it's looking like a potential disaster."

And people that were coming through were saying, "Are you the guy that negotiated this?" It was uncomfortable. But that was the last one that was hit by a mine.

Ali Khalifa and Abdul Fatah al-Bader could not have been more helpful in coming up with ways to enable us to get things done. If we couldn't buy something, they would lend it to us. They worked creatively to help us, while at the same time Kuwait wanted to be

neutral in the war and keep its distance from the U.S. There was a delicate balance that we had to be aware of and try to keep.

Frank Carlucci, when he was Defense Secretary, came out and the Amir wouldn't receive him. Because of something on the Palestinian issue and the Amir was taking a "principled" stand. He had his eyes on the large numbers of Palestinians working and residing in Kuwait. And Carlucci took it philosophically, although he was annoyed that, again, we're doing this reflagging, we're doing the escorting and they're playing these kinds of games with us.

So it was tough to keep the relationship going. Ali Khalifa and the crown prince and the head of the Kuwait Oil Tanker Corporation, KOTC, were absolutely crucial in keeping this running, along with the U.S. military. And frankly the U.S. military was more supportive of doing this than the State Department.

The State Department was a little more "on the one hand, on the other." The military wanted to do this. So I felt whenever I needed some help I could get it from the Pentagon or CENTCOM.

Q: You're talking about some of the difficulties of dealing with the Kuwaitis. The Kuwaitis are probably the most disliked of all of the Arab countries by the Arabs. They were not really a friendly country.

HOOPER: Don't hold back, there, Stu!

They had a prickly relationship with Saudi Arabia. They had a prickly relationship with Jordan, King Hussein was always dumping on them. But, again, as a small country, the indigenous Kuwaitis were probably outnumbered by the Palestinians resident in the country, sitting on a sea of oil. I think they had a hundred billion dollars in their Kuwait sovereign oil fund that was managed by an office in London. When the Iraqis invaded in '90, the Kuwaitis were prepared to live off their investments for a while. The fund existed because they were trying to husband their patrimony for the day that oil ran out and they only had their investments to live on.

But they had a certain way of dealing with other Arabs and I think it was probably the psychology of the situation. Obviously the Qataris and the Saudis and Emiratis weren't envious of them, they had plenty of oil themselves. The Saudis, their negative relationship, the static in the relationship, was partly because, as I recall, the Saud family, before it became Saudi Arabia, they were expelled in the tribal fighting, they lost out and had to take refuge in Kuwait. The Kuwaitis did not entirely make them feel welcome. In fact, made them feel like they were a burden.

That's the way things work, you have to take care of your guests, but they let it be known that having the Saudis there was not the most pleasant thing in the Kuwaitis' lives.

That was remembered. That kind of attitude was set within the Saudi royal family. So it wasn't so much about the oil wealth, although there was jousting within OPEC and so forth.

Anyway, negotiating the protection regime and then working it out, working out all the things to implement it and then working out defense arrangements and planning for worst case scenarios. Political-military affairs was one of the things I learned out there.

After the first protected ship was hit by a mine and it became clear that there were mines out there, there were minesweepers in the Gulf. They happened to be Saudi minesweepers and so CENTCOM asked the Saudis to send some of their minesweepers to clear out some of these areas, the shipping lanes where minefields were located.

We all learned things from this which became useful later on, as CENTCOM developed a political-military sense, in practice how you deal with Arab allies.

The Saudis, after some hesitation, initially when the Saudis don't want to do something, they don't like to tell anyone "No," you just don't hear from them. And so there was some hesitation on their side.

Well, this was urgent. This was up to the embassy and CENTCOM. Finally, the word came back, "Well, okay, we will send the minesweepers. However, they cannot sweep in any waters where there are assumed to be mines located."

CENTCOM was aghast. The Kuwaitis were aghast. We at the Embassy were aghast. So we flew in some Navy SEALs, some people to do some mine clearing, brought 'em in and the Kuwaitis helped house them and just took care of them and they started spotting mines and dealing with them. I was just hoping none of them would get killed.

And I think there were U.S. minesweepers, as I recall we finally patched together something and there were no more ships hit by mines, but I think we actually had to send some ships from the U.S. and eventually all of this became routinized.

George Bush was the vice president then, remember, this was under Ronald Reagan, this was 1987 and he met the crown prince at the All-Star Game in Cleveland. George Bush was very good about, he knew how you deal

Q: He was a consummate diplomat.

HOOPER: With important foreign officials. You need to get to know them and he relished opportunities to get to know these leaders. So he invited him out to the All-Star Game to sit in his box and the crown prince had been a British bobby earlier in his career, he had studied in the UK and as part of his training had been a bobby, worn a traditional police helmet and uniform. And he was more attuned to I think rugby and cricket than American sports and baseball is not an easy sport to understand unless you've played it as a kid and followed it.

Anyway, later, when I was DCM in Poland, former President George H. W. Bush came through and I was talking with him about the reflagging initiative and said to him, "I remember that you met the Kuwaiti crown prince in Cleveland and you took him to the All-Star Game, he sat in your box."

And he said, "Yes, I remember that. You know, I don't think he liked baseball, because he got up at the end of the fifth inning and thanked me and said he had to go. I enjoyed my time with him there, but I don't think he liked American baseball."

In terms of obtaining support for this reflagging agreement and getting continuing support from Congress, this was obviously something, if we're doing this, that means we could become drawn into the Iran-Iraq War. It had a lot of implications, of course. That's why I say I believe this was the most successful U.S. policy in the Gulf prior to Desert Storm.

This was really important and I felt when I left that probably when I ultimately leave the Foreign Service that I will look back on this as perhaps the biggest contribution I made and to some extent I still believe.

Earlier I talked about when I was in London, one of the things the British learned was planners, not planning. It's the planning process, not so much the plans that you churn out, that are then put on the shelf and sometimes, if you have time, you go through them, other times, you just have to start over because reality imposes a different set of conditions on you than you planned for.

The U.S. military, particularly the Pentagon, CENTCOM, integrated a body of experiences and knowledge and lore and interactions with Gulf Arabs, particularly the Kuwaitis but also the Saudis, in which they learned a lot of political-military lessons, in some cases by osmosis, in some cases by seeing things work out, in some cases by seeing things not work out.

The minesweeper episode was a pretty good example of the kind of strange things you bump up against. Frank Carlucci not being received by the Amir, even though we're doing this for the Kuwaitis, that was another.

There are still concerns and symbolisms and situations that you have to take into account, all sorts of experiences to integrate in the planning process and the implementation process of that, where the fact that they're Kuwaiti or Saudi and we're American, as you work together on a project, in this case it was the Kuwaitis and Americans, you begin to shed, to some extent, some of the "I'm an American," "I'm a Kuwaiti," because you're working for a common objective.

Now of course you bring American optics and Kuwaiti optics and concerns to the table, but as you're working on a common project you begin to shed some of the previous

perceptions you had and concerns and suspicions and so forth and you begin treating each other as allies and you see beyond the stereotypes.

I'm sure this has happened many times. Every Foreign Service Officer has experienced this on any number of occasions, large and small, from sitting down at a dinner or a sports event to something as important as this. But I think this helped lay a serious foundation for what happened in Desert Storm and why it was easier for the U.S. to respond with a higher level of confidence than we would have if we hadn't been doing the reflagging and with a sense of what we could expect from people in the Gulf and what were some of the red lines and what to watch out for.

Q: During all these discussions, not just the reflagging, but all the visits in all the time you were there, did the question of should we have a defensive treaty with Kuwait come up, because this later came up when Kuwait was invaded and the question came up: did we have any obligation to Kuwait? The answer was no.

HOOPER: We had done defense planning with them for different scenarios and they were most concerned about Iraq. I had so much respect for the U.S. military people I was dealing with. They had a lot of tools, a lot of capabilities, they read, they understood Arabs, they had a good political sense, they understood the Kuwaitis. They really tried hard.

The planning, it was all very secret. It was not going to be enshrined in any treaty. But just the planning itself was meant to be a version of contingency planning, and the Kuwaitis were very clear with us about that.

There was a member of the ruling family who was a general, a senior official in military intelligence, and he was there supervising this, not necessarily the most talented officer in the Kuwaiti military, but he was certainly the most trusted by the political establishment and I remember he was talking with Rich Armitage from the Pentagon, he had all the regional bureaus within his responsibility.

Q: In the Department of Defense.

HOOPER: Yes, within his purview and we were finished with that day's discussions and Armitage got into a discussion with this senior Kuwaiti personage and Armitage told Nat Howell and I afterwards that he had told Armitage, "Here's what we're going to do if we're attacked:" the assumption was it was going to be Iran, "If we're attacked, we are obliged to go to the Arab League to ask for help. But we know they're not going to do anything to help us. So the reality is" and this was not in a group meeting, this is one on one, Armitage would collect this kind of information while he was traveling around, "What we're going to do is call you, America and we will expect your support if we're attacked, because we know the Arabs aren't gonna do anything for us. They're worthless, but we can't say that publicly. So that's why we're doing this planning with you, because at the end of the day we believe we might need your support. We're going to call you!"

And I think that was actually a very useful thing to hear. It wasn't a complete surprise, but it was very useful.

The military learns it pretty quickly when you're in battle, nothing ever goes the way you plan. The first reflagged Kuwaiti ship was hit by a mine, afterwards it looked like, all the people back in Washington who opposed this were saying, "I told you it's gonna be a big disaster!"

Iraqi and Iranian aircraft were flying over the Gulf all the time and the U.S. navy was focused on the Iranians. I said to a senior naval visitor early on, "The reality is, things happen that you least expect. You're focused on an attack from Iran and it's probably going to be an Iraqi plane, because things are confusing out there. So the first attack on an American ship is probably be by an Iraqi plane."

Anyway, sure enough, an Iraqi plane attacked an American ship. I think it was a mistake, because there was nothing that preceded it to suggest an intentional attack.

Q: You had basically told the minister of defense, we were essentially stalling or

HOOPER: Washington didn't have a policy yet, so they were stalling.

Q: So let's continue from here, what happened?

HOOPER: No one in Washington wanted the Soviets to have a role in the reflagging. The foreign ministry would have wanted to give some of the escort responsibility to the Soviets and some to the U.S. The decision making process in Washington was moving towards a decision of having all of the Kuwaiti-owned tankers fly the U.S. flag, but it wasn't there yet. And I tried to monitor the situation back in Washington the best I could, while monitoring the situation in Kuwait, but things were moving very fast and this all took place within two weeks.

And I went to the defense minister to deliver this message and he had been the former ambassador to Washington.

Q: You basically have told the story.

HOOPER: Then I'll skip that.

Q: I'm talking about after you told him, "Hang on, don't take this as almost a rejection."

HOOPER: The tone of it was, "We're not gonna allow you to go with the Soviets, but we don't have anything to offer you ourselves yet." Well, I think I said, our defense attaché, when I asked him if he would like to accompany me, I had him read through the demarche and he came back into my office a few minutes later and said, "Jim, I really can't accompany you on this."

I said, “Sure, Al, what’s the problem?” We were good friends.

And he said, “This is a terrible message. You deliver this and he’s gonna kick you right out of his office, if not out of the country. You can’t go in with this. If you do, I understand you’ve been instructed, but I can’t accompany you because it will really hurt our defense operation here.”

I found that pretty sobering and he knew the defense minister’s reputation. So I went in alone and made the pitch, as I’ve said before and the minister heard me out and said, “Well, Mr. Hooper, first when I heard you I almost threw you out of my office, because who do you think you are?”

It was very much to the point, no beating around the bush. But he said, “I appreciate your off the record comment and I understand the situation, so let’s sit down and talk.”

So he told me that in his view if I went to the foreign minister he would probably get involved and then cut a deal which would have the Soviets taking escort responsibilities for some number of Kuwaiti tankers and we would have some number and the ships would be transferred to both flags. “That’s what he would do.”

Anyway, I worked it all out with the oil minister, Sheikh Ali Khalifa, and Abdul Fattah al-Bader, the head of Kuwaiti Oil Tanker Corporation and their ally in the government was the crown prince, Sheikh Saad and the foreign minister was allied with the Amir and the defense minister was actually allied more with the oil minister and the crown prince.

I got a call from Admiral Crowe, who was then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he was traveling through the Gulf, he was then in Bahrain and he had someone from his office call me and say, “Don’t let them allow a single ship be reflagged to the Soviet registry. It’s got to be all of ours!”

And there were various calls from Washington, but I really felt I was on my own and was just going to have to use my judgment..

Q: How did you report this back, because you delivered the message, but then what did you say?

HOOPER: As I recall it and, again, we’re talking late ’86, early ’87, so it’s twenty years ago, as I recall it what I said was I gave the message, he didn’t take it very well at all. I reported some of his comments but not all. But I think I probably left out the part about he was going to throw me out of the office ‘cause he didn’t like the message. But I think I probably didn’t include it, because I felt why get Washington in a huff and get their backs up. That’s extraneous. Filter that out.

Q: Yes and I have to point out that there is nothing that gets huffier than somebody who essentially has no real responsibility, but wants to prove that they’ve got the right amount of testosterone, or something like that. It just gets in the way of decision making.

HOOPER: I think that's a good observation, Stu and, again, I felt through this process, to some extent I certainly felt that there was something fundamentally important going on here and I felt I was the person on the scene, I had a sense of where this was and a rough and ready sense of where Washington was but a very good sense of the flow in Kuwait, what we needed to do out there and how to load this up and shepherd this through so that they could make their decision.

People could say and do whatever they want, but I was going to make my decisions and call it the way I saw it there. That was my job and then they could make their decision in Washington.

I had my views. I thought we should do this. I didn't have a neutral position. I thought this was best for the U.S. But I also tried to play it straight. I realized that this was a significant undertaking, the biggest expansion of American responsibilities in the Gulf probably since the end of World War Two, or at least since the British pulled out of the Gulf in the early '70s.

But in any case I finally got authorization out of Washington, they made a decision, which was really, as I was told later, it was more forced by the Pentagon and the White House, with State really resisting it. I didn't feel like it was getting much backing from the State Department.

Q: Usually it's the Pentagon, the Defense Department, that just doesn't want to have any commitment of its forces. Fair enough, these are people going into harm's way and the State Department's usually more active. Why did you think the State Department might be more reluctant?

HOOPER: I think people at State felt there's a lot of responsibilities here. There was a lot that could go wrong. This is all happening very quickly. The proposal had surfaced some months earlier, but then all of a sudden it came to a head, for the two weeks that I was the chargé.

Tony Quainton, the ambassador, left to go back to Washington for an NEA chiefs of mission conference and that morning I got the instructions in to go and tell them that we couldn't do it. I went in to the oil minister, he said, "Well, I guess we're just going to have to give it to the Soviets" and that's what started the instant rethink.

But, again, the initial rejection was I think made largely by State. In this case, I think DOD had a broader understanding, a broader perspective on U.S interests in the Gulf than State, probably.

Q: It was helpful that Admiral Crowe was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, because he had been COMMIDEASTFOR before, so he knew the strategic importance, what could be done and all, which no other joint chiefs chairman has ever had. It's just a coincidence.

HOOPER: And Frank Carlucci, who came out once in the implementation phase, he was prepared to take risks. I think they saw this as an opportunity. Again, we're talking about oil and whatever should be done and whatever should have been done back then about the U.S. getting us unhooked from our energy addiction, I'm all for it, but all this is besides the point.

And I think the Pentagon was more surefooted, confident, they had, through CENTCOM, they really worked hard at getting to know the governments in the region, they worked with the local militaries, to varying degrees.

They wanted more. They saw that the U.S. was going to have to take a higher profile role in the Gulf and I think they saw this as their opportunity to do so.

No one foresaw an Iraqi invasion later on, but the Khomeini regime had replaced the Shah eight, nine, ten years earlier, that leant an instability to the Gulf, you had the Iran-Iraq War, a major instability.

And we didn't want the Soviets in there and we didn't want them encroaching on what the Pentagon saw as "our strategic territory." Therefore they saw this primarily as a set of security issues and I think they concluded that if we weren't going to do it the Soviets would do it. They had evidence that that was the case.

They didn't want any Soviet involvement. The Gulf was an American "gulf," so to speak, in terms of who provides security. These governments are important to us. These relationships are important. So we either step up to the plate or let the Soviets take a swing at this and they'll be partners. And they just saw that they couldn't fudge it anymore and they were prepared to make the decision.

And State I think was actually more or less happy to have DOD, in effect, drive the decision and they put down what I saw as a lot of markers coming from them, fair markers, I don't want to just say it was hand wringing, there was some hand wringing, but people making sure that they had their positions down.

State believed it was just going to be disaster. I think that was the problem. And so they kept putting down those kinds of markers in the interagency decision making process. And DOD was prepared to take the risks and State just wanted to make sure their concerns were on the record. That's as I understood it at the time.

Q: Now, well, back to home. Tony Quainton comes back. Here you made really, it was dumped in your lap, but you made really as important a decision as any American diplomat has had to do, at least to guide something, make sure it didn't get off track.

HOOPER: And keep in mind I was the chargé.

Q: And you were the chargé and Tony Quainton comes back, what was his reaction and what happened thereafter?

HOOPER: I respect Tony. He wasn't calling me all the time, pestering me to do this, do that, trying to run it long distance. On the other hand, I think he was probably skeptical about where this was all going and I was prepared to take the responsibility and so that was going to be it.

Were I in his situation back in Washington, having left the DCM out there as the chargé and then this very important event transpires I probably would have had a mixture of feelings.

I would have wanted it to succeed but probably would have been somewhat envious, because that's what diplomats live for, just that kind of opportunity.

Just before his plane had arrived, the message came in, "Tell them that it's agreed." So I went over and told the oil minister that we would do it.

And Tony came in to the embassy and we sat down, I briefed him and the next morning he was called over to the foreign ministry and they made it clear they weren't entirely happy with the fact that they'd been cut out of the action on this and wanted a briefing on what it was all about.

They weren't happy and they registered that unhappiness, but the deal was done, the decision was made. The Kuwaitis got what they wanted. They got U.S. naval escorts for their reflagged ships and we got the responsibility and the burden of doing this and there was no Soviet involvement in this. We made it clear it was all or nothing, so the Kuwaitis accepted that. They didn't particularly like it, the foreign ministry didn't, but it worked out. We got the decision.

When you put an American flag on a ship, that has lots of implications for domestic inspections and all sorts of details like that. We kept telling the Kuwaitis, "Make sure you look into what the implications of this are." For example, American flag ships can be called to national service in a wartime situation. They actually can be taken over.

There were a lot of these things that we learned, a gazillion things that you never learn in the basic training courses. There were a lot of these kinds of things. None of them turned out to be a problem.

Then we went into the implementation phase and that involved a series of planning sessions, I dealt with various officers from MIDEASTFOR and CENTCOM. Our cooperation with the Kuwaiti government and particularly the oil ministry and the Kuwait Oil Tanker Corporation, which was an arm of the oil ministry, we just worked out all sorts of things to implement this, there's lots of details.

Q: Was anything going on at sea at that time, mining, attacks?

HOOPER: Came time for the first ship to go through and Tony Quainton was still the ambassador and the first escorted ship to go through hits a mine. Didn't do much damage, but it hit a mine where mines weren't supposed to be. And right away there was this reaction from State, I heard from people on the phone, "We told you so! We knew this was going to be a problem!"

All this kind of stuff, whereas DOD took it very differently: "Okay, we got a problem. How do we solve it?" And they started to sort it out: "Let's make sure this doesn't happen again!" It never did happen again, by the way.

Okay, you need minesweepers. Where are the nearest minesweepers? It was way the hell away. It was going to take weeks to steam them across.

Well, it turned out there were some other minesweepers around. We'd sold the Saudis minesweepers. So a request goes out to our embassy in Riyadh, "Go in to the Saudi government, ask them to send their minesweepers up to Kuwait, coordinate with the U.S. Navy and so forth."

Saudi Arabia was my first post. When you don't get an answer from the Saudis, you're getting an answer from the Saudis and the answer isn't yes. They don't like to say no. So they will tend to avoid giving an answer.

Sometimes they're just making their minds up and this wasn't an insignificant decision. All the same it wasn't the biggest decision in the world and it was sort of obvious that this was needed.

Then they said no. Everyone, State, Pentagon, our embassy in Riyadh, us, Kuwaitis, were floored by this. Perhaps the Kuwaitis were a little less floored, knowing the Saudis a little bit better, but nonetheless they were still surprised, because our policy of escorting Kuwaiti tankers implied a shadow of additional protection for Saudi interests as well.

By this time we at the embassy in Kuwait were working so close with DOD and they came in, they knew how to talk to the Kuwaitis, they understood, they read books, they tried to look at the background, they really made an effort to get to understand the issues and understand people and work with 'em. So we're working really closely.

What we did was we brought in, we, meaning, in this case, now, the embassy and DOD, brought in some I think Navy SEALs or at least some mine warfare specialists, frogmen and they went out there and the boats were provided by, the Kuwaitis kept coming up with innovative ways to get around the formalities of their rules and laws and so forth to provide equipment.

They couldn't give us equipment, but they could rent it to us, for virtually nothing, let us use it temporarily and we had these frogmen out there and they just started doing their job

and risking their lives and it left a really negative taste in people's mouth about the Saudis.

Q: You often hear about the Kuwaitis being viewed by other Arab states with disdain or whatever. But this is a reverse.

HOOPER: Someone told me this once before about another situation and I certainly found it, in this sense, I think it works almost anywhere: if you treat people like allies they'll tend to act like allies.

And we just developed this cooperation with the Kuwaitis, particularly centered around the oil and shipping companies, they had money and they had assets and they wanted to make this work on their side and they took responsibility to get things done, ramrod things through the government and to give us assets and so forth that we could use.

And so we did it that way and cleared a lot of the mines out. The Saudis ultimately decided to send the ships, but managed to do so in a way that disgraced themselves, they lost face even further, because they put a caveat: they will send the minesweepers, but they will only sweep where there are no reported mines. It was just one incredulous day after another of watching this stuff come in.

Q: Were you getting any communication with our embassy in Riyadh saying why they were doing this?

HOOPER: They were worried about being a part of this. To be honest I don't remember. Our embassy in Riyadh was not defending the Saudi decision. They saw that this was ridiculous.

The Saudis were just afraid of getting involved and they didn't want to go out of their way to help the Kuwaitis. They were just leery of being involved and having any of their ships sunk, which might force them to take a position. The reason was they were afraid of antagonizing either the Iraqis or the Iranians by an action that was seen to be making them involved in something, where was this going to go?

They're a big country, but they're a small population, they're very weak militarily. They couldn't defend themselves against Iraq or Iran for ten minutes. Kuwait wasn't able to defend itself for one minute.

So the Saudis ducked. They wanted to play neutral. So, okay, don't take a position, keep your head down.

Q: Were you getting any feel for Iran and Iraq? In Iraq, there was no doubt who was running the show, that was Saddam Hussein. But Iran, you seemed to have had almost two powers. One would be sort of the regular government of Iran and then you had the Revolutionary Guard, which had its own navy and was much more pugnacious, in a way trying to provoke things, or at least that's what I gather. Did you get any feel for that?

HOOPER: We wondered how the Iranians and Iraqis, again, twenty years ago, how they would react and as I recall they both took a "principled" position against an expansion of U.S. power in the Gulf.

The Iraqis probably saw this as something more helpful to them, in a certain way, because by throwing this mantle of protection over tanker traffic in the Gulf it really helped everyone else. I think the Iraqis were running this blockade on the Iranians.

Q: What about Iran and oil tankers? Were they running oil tankers and were they sort of covered, too, by this?

HOOPER: We weren't escorting theirs.

Q: No, but I mean there's a general "Don't mess around" or not?

HOOPER: The Iranians had various oil loading facilities in the Gulf. Some of them had been knocked out by the Iraqis earlier on.

However, I remember saying to the MIDEASTFOR commander, they had to deal with the potential for Iranian attacks on U.S. flag tankers. We figured the Iranians were going to see this as more directed at them than the Iraqis. And I said, "You know, admiral, this is an odd part of the world. You're protecting against an Iranian attack but, you know, it'll probably be an Iraqi attack. What always happens is what we don't expect." Sure enough, one of the U.S. naval vessels in the Gulf got hit by an Iraqi aircraft.

Anyway, after the first ship hit a mine, there was no other incident with mines that I recall. We became closer and closer in our cooperation with the Kuwaitis. We got involved in defense cooperation with them on what to do in case they were attacked by an outside party. It was undefined who it was, 'cause they didn't want to put that on paper. We worked this out and we had just a lot of military cooperation going back and forth with the Kuwaitis.

However, later a rocket of apparently unknown origin landed on the Kuwaiti coastline. Nat Howell was then the ambassador. It was the weekend, so my wife and I were out shopping and there was a message, "Come in right away to the embassy." So I came in and the ambassador said, "We've got to meet with the Kuwaitis, figure out what to do, how we protect against this, now" and so forth. I think I even have a piece of the rocket at home. But no one panicked. Measures were taken, but there wasn't an awful lot you could do about that, if they started to rain down.

But we came out of this with a much closer cooperative set of relationships with the Kuwaitis and we sorted out every problem, every time there was an obstacle we worked to sort it out.

And most of them weren't diplomatic problems, they were handled by their ministry of oil or defense, so these weren't foreign ministry issues. So all of the effort shifted there and I became enormously impressed with DOD, the way they were able to integrate a strategic policy, protective measures, an understanding of the environment in which they were operating, no arrogance, just a lot of common sense "How can we figure this out?" "How do we have some platforms out there in the water that will enable us to do some things, that will expand the protection capability, without putting an American ship right offshore from Kuwait?" Whoever had an idea, we weren't standing on epaulets and titles. I thought it was terrific.

We worked together jointly and I think that spirit carried over. Whatever would have happened in 1990 after Iraq invaded, the momentum of the cooperation that we had established, the success of that and, again, the betting initially was this was going to be a colossal failure, was going to draw us into the Iran-Iraq war, none of that happened.

It did get us into fighting, but not in that sense and the momentum of this and the feeling of confidence that Washington had for its policy in the region, this came after about six months or so it came to be seen as a success and a relatively low cost success.

The U.S. had reestablished its credibility. Remember the pullout from Beirut in '84? Reagan was still the president. He was the same president that had sent the marines in and then pulled them out after the barracks were attacked, which led to real questions about U.S. credibility, it didn't cut across Arab-Israeli issues, the Israeli weren't worried about this, this wasn't some proposal to do something or other on the West Bank or solve the peace process.

George Bush was the vice president, then he became, in 1990 he was the president when the Iraqis attacked. I think Washington already had this deepened set of cooperative defense relationships in the Gulf and the confidence that the Gulf Arabs can be allies, too and that you can work things out and that you can solve problems in that region.

Again, we might have done exactly what we did, anyway, but I think this certainly helped make the decision for the U.S. to draw the line in the sand, to intervene and not just say, "No more beyond Kuwait," which is what Colin Powell was advocating at the line, draw the line at the Kuwait-Saudi border.

I don't know if that would have happened had this not happened beforehand. So it was a major thing when I was there but it obviously became a footnote to the Gulf War and the vastly expanded cooperative set of relationships that the U.S. had with Gulf states and our role in the Gulf after that.

Interestingly, the naval protection regime we had in the Gulf did not require any U.S. bases in Kuwait. It didn't incite the bin Laden's of that time. There were Americans coming in and out. We actually had a U.S. naval ship visit as I recall at one point.

But there were no bases, it was temporary stuff, it was offshore, but it's probably one of the two things I personally am proudest of in my Foreign Service career and in terms of contributing something to the national interest and to my country, I think this was more of a contribution.

Now, the foreign ministry and the foreign minister, he was not going to forget and a few months later, while Tony Quainton was still ambassador, the ministry tried to have me recalled. I described that incident previously.

And I was sorry when it looked like I would have to leave. I liked the Kuwaitis, I liked the assignment.

The day before I learned about this effort by the ministry, someone in the ruling family died, a relative of the foreign minister and I went to pay my respects along with the rest of the diplomatic corps ambassadors and charges. I used to do this whenever there was a funeral. I took deaths very seriously. So he must have wondered what I was doing there and I was, not knowing anything about this, saying all the appropriate things for the occasion.

Anyway, Dick Murphy came to Kuwait a couple days later and went in and had a private talk with the foreign minister and the foreign minister agreed that I could stay. They called me in, we shook hands, the minister expressed hope that there were no misunderstandings, that he was looking forward to working with me in the future.

So it all blew over. But that was an effort, as I saw it, to settle scores, by the foreign ministry.

Q: Did you feel this was the foreign minister, or was this more a clique within the foreign ministry?

HOOPER: No, I thought it was the foreign minister, or his senior deputy.

Q: How much longer did you stay after that?

HOOPER: I was there three years. This happened at the end of the first year.

Q: So you really continued on?

HOOPER: Two more years, yes.

Q: Tell me, when you were going through all these talks, with the reflagging and the whole concern there, were you or any of your associates, picking up any concerns over the Palestinians in the country, or was this something the Kuwaitis didn't talk to us about?

HOOPER: I think there were about 400,000 Palestinians in Kuwait. They may have outnumbered the ethnic Kuwaitis. Anyway, there was a large number of Palestinians and they had a lot of the jobs, because they had a range of talents. Throughout the Gulf, not just the Gulf, but there were a lot of jobs in the Gulf because these were wealthy states and Palestinians were the educated class, certain lower level managers, advisors and so forth.

The Kuwaitis would have the top jobs, but Palestinians did a lot of the work. And the Kuwaitis never particularly liked them. They saw them as hired hands. There were laborers, Indians and Pakistanis and they saw them also as hired hands but not advisors. In the oil fields there were a lot of Palestinians.

The Kuwaitis didn't want to be involved. They paid off the Palestinians and Arafat and so forth. They always took a very leftist, Arab nationalist position on Palestinian issues. They weren't going to break ranks, but they wanted to stay out of it. They didn't want to be seen as a player. They just wanted to protect themselves. Here's this potential fifth column, from their point of view, in their society.

But there was a lot of animosity towards Palestinians. Again, when you're in a minority in your own country and when you've got a lot of wealth and you've got these other people who don't have land and don't have wealth and they're there. There's just a lot of natural tension in the relationship.

Well, after Iraq invaded, Arafat tried to mediate for a while, tried to duck, as he always did, making any decision, but then he came down on Saddam's side, went with Saddam.

And I think the Kuwaitis, once they got back in, they just cleaned them out. Then they never trusted them again. I understood when they got back they just cleaned the lot of them out, deported them.

Q: But you weren't picking this up at the time?

HOOPER: That was after I left.

Q: People saying, "We gotta be careful, because the Palestinians are essentially a fifth column" for something?

HOOPER: Black September had people there. Before the U.S. was dealing directly with the PLO, there were a lot of indirect ways of dealing with the PLO and Kuwait was an occasional listening post for that, as every embassy in the Middle East was, where there were Palestinians.

But there were senior PLO people, one of the leaders of the Black September organization, one of the more radical elements in the PLO, had a house there in Kuwait. They were there living a protected existence.

Q: There was an attempt to blow up our embassy, wasn't there, at some point and some operatives, I don't know, PLO or whoever, were imprisoned and when the Iraqis came in they left and we never heard of them again.

HOOPER: Two or three years before I arrived, I arrived in '86, summer of '86 and it was in '84, there'd been a bombing of the embassy, a car bombing and the Kuwaitis had not distinguished themselves, the Kuwaitis would not allow a protective barrier to be installed nor would they close off the street to traffic where the embassy entrance was located.

They had more or less told embassy officials at the time, "No, you don't need any special security, we're taking care of things." Before the wall was placed around the embassy, the embassy had, as someone told me who remembered it, a barrier "designed to prevent honest people from getting in," it wouldn't do anything to deter anyone that was seriously trying to do us harm.

People were playing by gentlemen's rules so to speak then and the car bomb killed a certain number of people there, Foreign Service National employees who were killed and wounded.

And after that the Kuwaitis were conscience stricken and they allowed us to wall off the embassy compound and we had real security out there after that. But they had a hand in not allowing it previously.

Those Palestinians or Lebanese, the Kuwaitis caught some people, they had them in prison and the Lebanese or Palestinians kept trying to get them out, trying to cut deals with the Kuwaitis and they wouldn't do it.

Rev. Terry Waite even came at one point and I remember the Kuwaitis saying about him, "He likes the klieg lights" and it didn't amount to anything. We had hostages ourselves in Lebanon at the same time. Terry Waite was playing this mediatory role and then became a hostage himself. But there were various people being held hostage, including people from the American Embassy in Beirut, professors, a lot of grim stuff was going on in the late '70's and '80's.

But, anyway, they had these two or three people, the Kuwaitis and they weren't going to let them go. When I was there the Rev. Jesse Jackson visited Kuwait. The reflagging thing was on and it was the day before Thanksgiving and Thanksgiving Day, we had to brief him Thanksgiving morning. And that was the day the mayor of Chicago died.

So we started that briefing and then someone came in with a message about the mayor's death, so he lost interest in the briefing immediately and after a few minutes said, "I've got to think about this" and he and his colleagues that he was with huddled together and tried to figure out what they would do, would they fly back to Chicago immediately. Chicago was his home base, political base and he was very close to the mayor.

But he was going to be meeting with the Kuwaitis and he wouldn't tell us exactly, but it seemed likely, because he was on record or he implied that he wanted to try to cut a deal to get these people being held by the Kuwaitis, out of jail in exchange for some of these hostages held in Lebanon.

He met with the number two official in the foreign ministry and then had a press conference and then as I recall left, went out to the airport and that was it. And the Kuwaitis told us afterwards, yes, he asked if they would release the bombers. The Kuwaitis replied, "Thank you very much, but, no, thanks." So it all came to nothing.

It's a long answer to your question, but as I recall they were released, or something was done.

Q: Well, I think during the invasion they just disappeared, but I think one of the people imprisoned was the brother of one of the top terrorists in Lebanon, who was absolutely enraged about this and, quite frankly, the Kuwaitis held much firmer on this than other governments. The Greeks, for example, let people go.

HOOPER: Other Arab states let them go.

Q: Other Arab states let them go. Kuwait was the only one that held firm.

HOOPER: I think they felt probably that if they let go of these terrorists they would then be blackmailed every time and their own diplomats would be taken hostage.

Kuwaitis, usually people kind of had the impression of a tiny little country, wussies, didn't have any backbone, but actually, you're right, Stu, they did a number of things that were quite tough and belied that reputation.

There was a real firmness in them. Maybe it was in part the confidence of having a close relationship with the U.S. or maybe they felt there were certain things you don't do, for whatever reason.

And there was a lot of speculation then that someone would be grabbed from the ruling family and would be held and yadda, yadda, yadda. So, okay, there was all that.

That wasn't the only time. While I was there there was a Kuwaiti plane that was hijacked by some Palestinians, I think or Lebanese and was flown to Algeria, the Algerians let them land. We were a year or two into the reflagging initiative. And negotiations were going on between the hijackers, Algerian government officials and the Kuwaitis and this went on for some time. The Kuwaitis weren't going to give in, they preferred not to. I think they wanted us to help them storm the aircraft. We had positioned some people just in case the order was given.

But the Kuwaitis cut a deal and the tradeoff was you let the passengers and crew go in exchange for the terrorist prisoners that the Kuwaitis were holding.

The Algerians believed they had a deal with the Kuwaitis, and on that basis they informed the hijackers and the episode ended. Everyone was released and the Algerians waited for a Kuwaiti plane to land with their terrorists prisoners and we waited for the release and Washington sent out a senior official and we went in to talk with the Amir, we were so worried, to tell him, "Please don't go through with this deal."

It was slow to dawn on us what the Kuwaitis had done: the Kuwaitis had snookered the Algerians. The Kuwaitis let the Algerians believe something, I think without explicitly lying to them and the Algerian negotiators were so proud, they could just taste it, they had this victory and the plane was cleared to take off and the episode was ended and then they realized they hadn't quite paid attention as carefully as they needed to.

Anyway, the Amir explained to us, "There isn't any deal."

We were telling him, in the nicest possible way, "Stop lying to us."

And he started to explain, using very careful language and it very gradually dawned on us that the Kuwaitis had turned out to be smarter than the Algerians and that we didn't really have any reason to be concerned and in fact the hostages got out of the plane and the terrorists stayed in jail.

Again, I felt, "These guys do have backbone and they're pretty smart."

Q: And also, in many ways, you're in the big leagues, as far as intrigue goes. Americans aren't, we can't play that game as well as others.

HOOPER: Whether they lied to them, the Algerians aren't stupid. I believe that they were just using very careful language and allowed the Algerians to interpret it, the Algerians jumped to a conclusion that wasn't quite there. They reached ninety nine steps out of a hundred and it was done so that the Algerians made the hundredth themselves but in fact the Kuwaitis hadn't gone so far as supposed.

Like you say, this is the major leagues in a lot of ways, but to watch that happen, again, there was no loss of life, other than what might have been when they took over the plane and I'd don't recall that.

The plane came back and the Algerians lost some face with the crowd that they were running with at that time.

Q: How about Kuwait's relationship with some of the other Arab countries: Egypt, Libya, Syria, particularly? Were they on their own?

HOOPER: I remember at one point when we were doing these very secret defense talks, defense planning for an attack on Kuwait, which, again, it was useful to have done that

planning when 1990 came, because a lot of real planning had been done on how one responds.

The head of military intelligence, who was a Sabah, from the ruling family, at that point Rich Armitage was the head of ISA at DOD, so he came out to do some of this planning and I remember one of his trips, the sessions were all finished and he was at the airport getting ready to leave and the head of military intelligence comes over and Armitage asked him, "What would you actually do if you were attacked?"

His senior Kuwaiti interlocutor replied, "Well, of course what we say publicly is we'd contact the Arab League and ask them for help, because it's their responsibility to help Arab states. But the reality is, they're not going to do a damned thing and we know that. So we're going to call you. We're going to call Washington and ask you for help, because you're the only ones that'll help us."

I thought, "The ruling family's pretty savvy." Again, a lot of things are said publicly and one has to be very careful publicly, but the relationship was expanding so much privately. I was surprised to hear it articulated so clearly and so candidly.

Q: Where did you go after you left Kuwait?

HOOPER: Back to Washington.

Q: Doing what?

HOOPER: Deputy Country Director for Eastern Europe. I had the Balkans and the Baltics, from '89 to '91, which is when they became independent of Moscow and Yugoslavia split apart.

Q: Jim, did you have any idea when you got the assignment what you were getting into?

HOOPER: Very little. I wanted to move beyond the Middle East, get another string on my bow. I knew the person heading East European affairs, Tim Deal, the country director at that time and then the deputy assistant secretary, Tom Simons. They remembered me from London and I interviewed for that job and I was picked for that. I was very happy.

I didn't know anything about Eastern Europe and initially I thought that was a hindrance. I think it actually turned out to be a great help, because things were changing. A lot of people who had knowledge of how the various politburos in the various countries worked, it was not very relevant anymore.

On the way back, my wife, two children and I flew into Belgrade from Kuwait and stayed there several days, took a train to Bucharest and saw that in what turned out to be the waning days—this was June/July of '89—the waning days of the Ceausescu regime, which we didn't know at the time, no one knew. But it was nice to have seen it and

experienced it for a couple days. And then we took a train down to Bulgaria, to Sofia and had a couple days there. Again, it was a taste, it certainly wasn't an in depth introduction.

Q: You knew you were going to have that assignment?

HOOPER: Yes, I'd been assigned.

Q: So I assume you were able to talk to the ambassadors or the country team in each place?

HOOPER: Right.

Q: Were you getting anything from them about all hell maybe breaking loose, or not?

HOOPER: What I remember was meeting with Warren Zimmerman and some of the others and Louis Sell in Belgrade. Warren Zimmerman was the ambassador to Yugoslavia.

Louis Sell was the political counselor. Louie had been in my junior officer class. He went from Belgrade to be political counselor in Moscow in 1991. That's when the Soviet Union ended and Russia took its place. He spent a lot of time with his ambassador and Yeltsin as the note taker. Louie speaks very good Serbian and Russian.

Q: Okay, when you came back from this little trip, did you get any impressions about your parish?

HOOPER: Yes, I saw how little I knew. It was just so different from the Middle East, so completely different from anything I had experienced.

I was lucky in the sense that when I was still in Kuwait I started getting some cable traffic from our embassies in Eastern Europe and I started reading things that normally I wouldn't pay any attention to or have access to, and I remember two things.

One was the *Economist* magazine had a really good East Europe/Yugoslav correspondent, who wrote some time before I left Kuwait, one of the first things I read and it said, "Yugoslavia, there's a real possibility this place is going to break apart." I thought, "That's interesting" and I had filed that.

Then Shevardnadze, Gorbachev's foreign minister and again, this is before the summer of '89, some time in the spring, had said something like "and perhaps maintaining control, troops and so forth, in our East European allies is not as important as it used to be. They want to decide things for themselves." That just leapt out of whatever else was in the cable. I had remembered that, because I thought, "Well, this certainly is significant. Things could really change."

So these things had prepared my mind for change. I do remember in Belgrade, Louie Sell and Warren Zimmerman, both talking to me at some length about Slobodan Milosevic, who was then the strongman in Serbia. Milosevic had kept Warren waiting for nine months for their first meeting, no courtesy call. This was sending Warren a message. He had made some comment when he arrived about the Serbs needing to improve their human rights record in Kosovo, and this was a message to him: "Don't you start talking about Kosovo. I'm running on that issue."

And he was. Just after I left, I think, on St. Vitus' Day, June 28th

Q: Which is the anniversary, I think it was the 500th anniversary of the Battle

HOOPER: Yes, the Battle of Kosovo, one of centennials. He was riding the Kosovo issue, riding Serbian nationalism.

I was trying to make sense of the data. But much of the data became irrelevant fairly quickly, especially in Bucharest and Sofia.

Q: When you got there, here you are, the new boy on the block, which can be a disadvantage or an advantage. In this case, I think, almost an advantage. Washington tended to assume the Soviet Union was going to be there forever and the Berlin Wall would be there forever and the satellite countries were going to remain satellites. Or was there a stirring within the East European part of the European bureau?

HOOPER: Well, the Office of Eastern European and Yugoslav Affairs was divided into a northern tier and a southern tier. The northern tier was Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (as it was then called) and the southern tier was Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and responsibility for the Baltic states, which had been kind of free floating because it was assumed they were locked into the Soviet Union indefinitely.

When I came in, I was asked, "You want to take the Baltics? Our Hungarian desk officer, who previously had that responsibility, is just too busy. Can you take it on?" So I also had Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. It was just like that, a one minute conversation. So then I had the Baltics as well.

The focus was on the northern tier. Poland was throwing off the shackles of communism. I think that summer they had just had that vote where I think out of a hundred seats in the Sejm, the first free vote since World War II, there was only one communist elected, if I remember right and 99 were non-communist. Hungary had loosened up considerably. Czechoslovakia was still ruled by hardliners.

Q: The real flood started when Hungary opened its borders. Had that started yet, or not?

HOOPER: Yes, I think that started that summer. The Bulgarians also started expelling the ethnic Turks. Just a lot of things were happening.

Again, all the focus was on Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia. That's where these historic developments were taking place. Dan Fried was just leaving that summer as the Polish desk officer. Chris Hill was coming in to take his place. Dan later became the ambassador in Poland. He's now the assistant secretary for European affairs as we speak. Chris Hill is now the assistant secretary for East Asian affairs, trying to push the ball up the hill on North Korea and North Korean nuclear issues.

Jim Swihart was the country director. He had served in Belgrade and Zagreb, the latter as Consul General, where he was responsible for the Croatia and Slovenia republics within Yugoslavia. So he had a different perspective than Belgrade did and was very, very savvy about nationalism. And he, again, helped open my mind to the possibilities for change. He was alert to this, probably the most far-sighted in the Department.

But all this attention was focused on the northern tier: in Poland, would they get another reform communist government, what would happen to Jaruzelski, and so forth. There never was a reform communist government. You had a Solidarity government ultimately and then the Social Democrats, who were former communists, took over when I was there as DCM. But the focus was on that. It was just absolutely historical what was happening. It was a great time to be there.

I remember in one of the EUR Bureau morning staff meetings, the guy who'd been my predecessor as deputy country director, Jack Seymour, who was then deputy country director for the two Germanys, saying that, "The Wall has been pierced, people are pouring across, no one's shooting, the guards have thrown away" their weapons and I think the deputy assistant secretary who was running the meeting just kind of looked at him and said, "Next!" as we went around the table.

It really took a lot of people by surprise and I remember going to our office and there was this cable that had come from our embassy in East Berlin reporting that, "Well, there's lots of talk about these crowds in the streets and demonstrations, but the communist regime is running the show and these demonstrators are after all only about one or two per cent of the population and these guys aren't going to give up their power, so let's keep some perspective on this."

That came in that morning, a few hours before the Berlin Wall came down. It's just incredible how fast things were happening.

Q: Yeah, of course in all due fairness, you're sitting there and looking at the situation and really you don't know what the leadership is going to do. If the leadership is going to fire on the mob, it could bring 'em down, but it also could stop things.

HOOPER: I can tell you a story. Within a short time after I arrived, there was going to be a Communist Party congress in Bulgaria. Todor Zhivkov, the Communist Party general secretary, he'd been in power for decades, now a forgotten figure but then was obviously running the show. So I called this meeting and there were about twenty to thirty people from around town, the various agencies, who were the Bulgaria experts and I talked to a

fellow named Scott Thompson, the INR Bulgaria analyst, who'd been in Sofia that summer for about two or three months and he said, "You know, I wouldn't be surprised if Zhivkov was replaced at the party congress. There's really some interesting things happening out there."

Some of the people at this meeting had been working on Bulgaria their whole lives and I'd been on the job a short while and had visited Bulgaria for two days on the way back to the U.S. from Kuwait, so they weren't expecting much, I think.

And I started off and said, "There's this party congress coming up. Let's go around the table and talk about that. I think there's a real chance Zhivkov might be replaced. Anyway, let's go around the table and see what people think."

To an individual they said, some more politely than others, some of them less politely, telling me, in effect, "Well, my friend, I've been doing this for ten years, eight years, twelve years, thirty years, read everything that has ever been written about it. You're kind of wet behind the ears, sonny. Let's not waste any time on this blather about Zhivkov being replaced. This regime will never change, no matter what happens in Poland."

I initially thought, "Well, I probably misspoke and I shouldn't have been so up front about my views." I was just trying to get people to do some fresh thinking about the implications of the new context out there in the region. I'm concluding, "Well, I've got to be more careful from now on."

The following weekend was the party congress and Zhivkov was replaced. From then on I never trusted an expert, unless I learned to trust them, anyone who was an expert on the *ancien regime*. I understand their situation, but I never looked back and I trusted my own instincts from then on and that served me well for the two years I was there.

Normally one couldn't get away with that kind of thing. But during a period of fast-moving change, you needed the buccaneer spirit in order to thrive and prosper and take advantage of new opportunities and we just worked with the embassy to try to move real democrats into positions of power in Bulgaria. We got Secretary of State Baker to go out there. We did all sorts of things. We tried to help through public statements and through the embassy to get real democrats in power there.

We met with visitors from Kosovo and Yugoslavia. We met with the Baltic diplomatic representatives in the U.S., because we never formally recognized the Soviet annexation of the Baltic countries. Jim Swihart and I, John Zerolis and Paul Goble who were sequentially the Baltic desk officers, made a great team dealing with the Baltics. Eric Terzuolo and then the great Richard Johnson were desk officers for Yugoslavia, another terrific team.

I would get in around 6:30 every morning, call the various embassy to find out what was happening in that particular country, just to see what was up and if they had issues.

Then around seven or so, we were supervised by Curt Kamman, I thought a very effective deputy assistant secretary, I enjoyed working with Curt very much, Sandy Vershbow, the Soviet country director, John Tefft, his deputy, Jim Swihart, myself, a couple of the Soviet desk people were there, we would go through the special intelligence traffic and then talk about events and policy issues that would be coming up that day.

It was about a half hour, 45 minute, meeting, to sort things out for Kamman. Then I met with the Balkans and Baltics team in my office and told them, "Any issue you have, this is your chance to get my feedback, because who knows what's going to happen during the course of the day and I might not be available later. So let's go through all this stuff and sort it out. I'll give you the direction you need and then you go on and do your stuff." That took about a half hour, 45 minutes itself and then they all wanted to charge into what they were doing.

And we used to talk about real issues, scuttlebutt, personnel matters. It was very open. I tried to build a team spirit. I listened to them, respected them, heard them all out. A couple of them told me after a while they didn't initially like spending so much time in this daily meeting but when we got into it they really appreciated, they'd get a sense of direction. They'd see what else was going on with their colleagues and then could go out and do their thing without having to come in and ask me, they could do their open field running for the rest of the day. So it really worked very well.

Q: Before the thing really exploded, we're talking about Hungary opening up and then Czechoslovakia and then Poland, of course.

HOOPER: Czechoslovakia was last.

Q: But prior to that, we had three major sources of intelligence: the CIA, INR and Defense Intelligence Agency. Were these players, from your perspective?

HOOPER: DIA wasn't, at all. Someone told me the best informed person in Washington on Yugoslavia is this guy from FBIS. So I made an appointment, went over to meet with him. He'd been out there on a trip for a month or something like that. And I said, "Well, I'm told you're the best there is. Tell me, is Yugoslavia going to stick together or not, because I was reading this *Economist* article when I was back in Kuwait that said this place just might not cohere, might not last."

He responded, "You know, most people around here in Washington will tell you that Yugoslavia isn't going to fall apart. There's a very strong bias towards believing it will stay together," which there was. People didn't want to deal with the policy implications of it falling apart, obviously.

And he said, "But you know, I actually have come to believe now that it's possible that place is going to fall apart and it's not going to be pretty when it does."

And he had good reasons. And I instinctively trusted him. Even though I couldn't necessarily put it into words, my instinct was this was a hinge moment and that turned out to be the case and as these things started changing, first you got rid of all these governments, all these communist governments.

Romania was the last to go and we actually predicted Romania would go and it would probably be violent and it was. There was no blood shed in Poland's transition, not even a pane of glass broken, which a lot of people forget. It was an extraordinary event. Hungary was peaceful. Dicier situation in Czechoslovakia.

The Soviets helped manage the ouster of Zhivkov and his replacement by this "reform communist" and that lasted for a little while and then he was in turn replaced, with a lot of effort, a lot of support from the embassy, from us in EEY and Baker going out there and revving up the opposition. But it was not violent.

The ouster of Ceausescu and his wife in Bucharest, Romania, was violent as they fell from power. The Romanians used to refer to his wife as "Her" and everyone knew who they were talking about.

Yugoslavia then took a while to play out, of course, because it only really came apart, Slovenia declared independence in the summer of '91 and the then prime minister sent troops, not Milosevic, but the prime minister, to try to keep Yugoslavia together.

In a way it was a last effort to prevent the violence that was about to happen. So he sent the military out but it was kind of a halfhearted effort and then Slovenia went on its way.

And the Baltics then also took longer. They exited the Soviet Union as one unit.

Q: I'd like to go back to this earlier time. Okay, things start changing in Bulgaria first. You say we were doing things. What were we doing and what were you getting from the embassy? How did things work?

HOOPER: I think I might have even sent an email out or a request asking "Will there be any change at the upcoming party congress?" I think the embassy sent something back saying they didn't think so, but I might be unfair. I don't want to be unfair to anyone serving in Bulgaria at the time because there was a group of very talented officers there at Embassy Sofia. And we had a terrific desk officer in Susan Sutton, absolutely indefatigable and imaginative plus a great sense of humor.

Oh and then, I keep forgetting Albania. I don't want to forget Albania, because we were involved in that, also.

Okay, Bulgaria, I had believed that change was possible but it was still a surprise when Zhivkov was actually replaced. Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze had tipped off Secretary Baker. During the UN General Assembly Baker had met with the foreign minister from Bulgaria. We wondered, "Why would he meet with this guy?" It turned out

he had done it as a favor to Shevardnadze. Shevvie asked him to do it. It turned out this was the one the Soviets had picked to be the reform communist to take over from Zhivkov. So when he was picked, we realized why Shevvie had done that.

The embassy had not expected this. And again, why should they have, necessarily, expected the change to take place, since it was top down change orchestrated by Moscow?

But the embassy then became very active in working to support the democratic opposition and to try to use the reform communists, as I recall it they were touting the reform communists and "Let's not forget that they aren't the same thing as the hard liners."

At heart the reform communists were trying to establish their *bona fides* with the embassy, because they knew they were on shaky ground and the opposition was not united.

Baker was making a swing through Europe and we really pressed him to go to Sofia and meet with the opposition and he met the reform communists as well.

And he went and the embassy had arranged to put him together with the leaders of the democratic opposition in his hotel suite and he told them, "Now, there's certain things you have to do if you want to prevail. You've got to be united, you've got to be organized, and you have to believe you can win." Remember, he started as the kind of Karl Rove, so to speak, of his day, as the political advisor who helped bring the first President Bush to power and he had a very close relationship with the president.

And it just electrified the opposition. No one had paid any attention to them before. Now here's the American secretary of state coming at this crucial time. And, wonder of wonders, they went out, got themselves united and organized and began to believe they could win, and in fact they ended up prevailing.

When the meeting at his hotel broke up, he left and there was a crowd outside the hotel and they started chanting, "Baker, Baker, America, America!" For Baker, it was an emotional moment. No crowd had ever done that for him previously. He'd never had that experience. He'd always been the back room guy. So he had a good memory of Bulgaria from that experience.

As I mentioned, this exposure to Baker electrified the democratic opposition. They got themselves together and the demonstrations picked up and they ultimately ousted the government of the day.

I worked with the embassy and with Baker's office, again, when he was on another trip to Europe and said, "Listen, can Secretary Baker meet with Sol Polansky," our ambassador to Bulgaria? "All we need is 15 minutes. The fact that he goes to meet with Baker, who's been to Sofia, to report on how the democratization process is moving. Just the very fact

that the ambassador goes to Brussels for this brief meeting. He can walk out and say, 'Secretary Baker is very concerned about the situation in Bulgaria and the democratization process and wants to keep abreast of developments."

And Baker's staff accepted that. The ambassador went to Brussels, met with him, came back. And the embassy got into the spirit of things and the reform communists were replaced by genuine democrats.

And it was a huge change, because they had been expelling the ethnic Turks into Turkey, which was just blackening the image of Bulgaria, which had a reputation to live down already as the umbrella assassinators.

Q: And the guy who tried to assassinate the pope came through Bulgaria.

HOOPER: It didn't get any worse than Bulgaria. I think they were called the sixteenth republic of the Soviet Union. I think Bulgarians genuinely respected Russia for its help in the past, against the Ottomans.

Now, Bulgaria had protected its Jewish community during World War II, but this was the only positive thing anyone in the West could say about Bulgaria, because it was just a residual Stalinist holdout and a tough place to operate in for real democrats.

And these democrats really began to move this place forward. I thought we played a very helpful role in this transition period, in getting the democrats in power, giving them the self confidence, the belief they could do it and the kind of tools, the techniques.

It would be an obvious exaggeration to say that the East European office and embassy in Sofia stage managed the Bulgarian democratic transition, but we certainly helped it a lot. Our help was crucial at the time.

In the vast sweep of history, this was probably going to happen anyway. But it was all relatively non-violent and it worked. Sometimes if you don't take a movement at the crest and see it through to its conclusion, it ebbs.

And then we began using Bulgaria to shame the Romanians, because they considered themselves head and shoulders above the Bulgarians.

Well, the democratization of Bulgaria then was more advanced and proceeded faster than in Romania. When Ceausescu was ousted, you then had reform communists there, too, but there was a real question as to how "reform" they were and whether this had been stage managed by the *Securitate*. And I thought it was very useful to have genuine democrats in Bulgaria showing the contrast with the lack of change after Ceausescu was replaced and the cautious nature of the change in Romania. So we played that.

When that change took place and it was violent there, I remember on Christmas Day spending my time, much of my day, a lot more than I wanted to and a lot more than my

wife and kids wanted me to, in the office, because we were evacuating the embassy staff by road and the question was, is it safe enough to get through town with all the shooting going on, and talking with them before they moved and getting someone in the Department, a Seventh Floor official to sign off on our decision. Finally we got the green light for the motorcade to begin the drive to the border and they crossed the border without any problem.

But there were lots of things happening then.

Q: Well, let's talk about Romania. Here you have a regime that's held very tight by Ceausescu and his security apparatus, which is more than just the secret police, the whole security apparatus there.

HOOPER: They were running the country.

Q: I wouldn't think an opposition could get going. What was happening there?

HOOPER: The opposition was sort of a front within the Communist Party and probably a coup from within the *Securitate*. I remember it wasn't like Bulgaria. You had to get rid of the Soviet-era leadership first and then the opposition had to develop out of that circumstance, once the crust was removed, so to speak.

But I remember Ceausescu was on a balcony, with some of his aides and at the edge of the crowd people started saying, "Down with Ceausescu" and he turned to some of his aides mystified by it and then they backed off the balcony.

And that was the actual trigger, that and the fact that the *Securitate* began firing into the crowd, the event that really began moving it. Then you had, there was a lot of sound and light, a lot of shooting and so forth, not necessarily a lot of people getting killed. Ceausescu and his wife escaped and then was taken prisoner and executed, he and his wife.

Q: On TV. I saw it.

HOOPER: Yes, they showed them up against the wall. They had to show it, so that people would know that it actually happened. Subsequently, they certainly didn't while I was in EEY, released the names of the people that did the shooting, the firing squad.

Very quickly emerged this man who'd kind of become, hinted at, who'd been regarded as Ceausescu's heir apparent at one time, someone that Ceausescu removed, but was regarded as sufficiently loyal and so he didn't put him in jail and he emerged as the new strong man.

The *Securitate* was not reformed and you had this long period of time, then you had the more interesting period, which was the interplay between the democratic opposition and the "reform" communists in government.

They were reform communists, Romanian style, certainly harder line than in Bulgaria. And the embassy seemed to be very close to them and was discounting the opposition. And we were trying to encourage them to use Bulgaria as a model, to spend more time with the opposition, help them.

The opposition was split, but the government, the reform communist government, was certainly doing its best to keep them split and split them even further, you had around fifty parties on the ballot or something like that.

They were pretty savvy and their focus was clearly on preserving their power and limiting the amount of change that was going to take place and the velocity of change.

I remember there were a fair number of tensions between us and the embassy. As we pushed them, I think the embassy felt we discounted the reform nature or the willingness to change of the reformed communists. And in EEY we believed the embassy was giving the reform communists too much credit. I remember our ambassador to Romania, "Punch" Green, a very decent man who was an old friend of then-President Bush, was back on consultations and we talked to him very honestly about this. Later that day was going to some meetings on the Hill.

Around the time that he arrived in the Congressman's office where his first meeting was taking place, we received word from Bucharest that the reform communist government brought in coal miners, bused them in to Bucharest to break up the democratic party opposition-led demonstrations which had been growing against the reform communist government, they brought in these tough coal miners, who were pretty rough on the democratic opposition demonstrators.

And Punch, he didn't give his sales pitch for the reformed communists, we caught him with news of this development before he went in to meet with his congressional interlocutor and then he came back to the office and we worked out a strategy, with him going back to Bucharest immediately and making a statement at the airport supporting the democratic opposition, critical of the government and their heavy handed tactics.

But there was a lot of tension between us and the embassy on the nature of change and how much do you help and is it interference and so forth. By this time I thought, in regard to the issue of interfering, we had crossed that Rubicon months earlier. I understand the theory and the principle, but this was a particular time and you really had to push.

There were a lot of different views around the building and people on the Seventh Floor wanted to see real action themselves and it was a messy situation in Bucharest.

I must say change has been slower there. What happened at the beginning sort of minted the model. There have been real democratic governments and former reformed communists have regained power as well. The political system has obviously changed

substantially from the immediate post-Ceausescu period, but it's still my impression that change is needed and it was moving pretty slowly then, more slowly than elsewhere.

Q: But do you think that, in a way, what was happening, each embassy is sort of in a cocoon, in its own country and here you are in the East European office and actually the whole damned apparatus, which was getting kind of high on, the Wall was coming down and things were changing and you're out pushing for change, but the people in, say, Bucharest were in their own little bubble and not quite catching the spirit, because they were having to deal with the day to day problems, with a very strong security apparatus and all that?

HOOPER: I agree with that in part, but there wasn't any difference between us and the embassy before Ceausescu was overthrown and that was December of '89, anyway. Things were happening: there was the ouster of Zhivkov and then the Wall and then the real democrats came in in Bulgaria and then to some extent but only partially so, in Romania.

Once Ceausescu was out, there wasn't a bubble anymore. Before, they weren't in touch with any democratic opposition, because any democratic opposition would have been either *Securitate* provocateurs or dead after the meeting.

Again, it was a time of transition. A lot of the tectonic plates were shifting throughout the region.

An embassy has to deal with the government officials that are there. They have the power and one always has to keep that in mind. Democratic opposition, often it's a mixture of people. In Romania, they were less talented.

In Bulgaria, the man who emerged as the new president had been head of the environmental movement and there'd been some allowance for toleration, within certain spheres.

In Romania, there wasn't any of that. So you had people that had been crushed by decades of communism. They didn't have any chance to breathe.

Suddenly the ceiling was removed. Anything became possible and it became possible to conceive of the best case, not as a one in a hundred chance but a ninety in a hundred chance.

Clearly what happened elsewhere in Eastern Europe, that's what got rid of Ceausescu. It touched Romanians, too and it was time.

After that, you wanted to establish as democratic a system as you could get. The embassy was working with the opposition and was working with the government. The opposition didn't trust the embassy. In Sofia, the opposition worked closely with the embassy and trusted them fully. It was different.

And, again, I may be unfair to some people in the embassy, but we thought, it had happened elsewhere, it was still happening, we could get more democratization and there was a very active debate around the Department about Romania, about how far and how fast to push and how far to go, the various components of the bureaucracy pushing and debating, because, again, whatever experts on Ceausescu and his regime and how that politburo worked before weren't as relevant. He was gone.

Now the *Securitate* was there, so the apparatus was still there, but it had changed at the top and that was our concern. Though they had to adapt to the situation, they were resisting the current and so we kept pushing to get more democratization, for the embassy to work closer with the democratic forces.

Representatives of the democratic opposition told us that they didn't trust the embassy and they weren't getting much support from the embassy. So, again, some of what I say may be unfair to the embassy. I don't mean it personally against anyone. But there was a tension between us and them and it was over the extent to which democratization is possible and can be pushed effectively by the U.S. government and our diplomatic representatives in the country.

And of course the new government was trying to establish its *bona fides* with the embassy and with the U.S., but at the same time opposition people were being arrested, beaten up and so forth.

Q: Did you find that you were able to, in a way, turn to USIA as being one of our most powerful tools in Romania, for example? I'm thinking of both exchange programs and information that came out and all that. Or did you find it very good?

HOOPER: I do not remember USIA being a player. Maybe I'm misremembering, unfairly. I don't remember them being a player until after the overthrow had taken place. Then it was how to get more democratization and so forth and suddenly it became possible to bring real people on these international visitor programs.

We worked with them and they had good people and a lot came out of that and there were efforts to establish free media and train them. The SEED Program was set up, the Support for Eastern European Democracy, through then Deputy Secretary Eagleburger's office. There was a lot of money, relatively speaking, for building up democratic institutions now and free media and getting people here and helping the public enterprises. It was a very creative period of time. A lot of money was going out.

Establishing AID missions, the feeling was that we didn't want AID to just set up a bureaucracy, the traditional thing, in all these capitals and then not much happens or having it become very traditional.

Q: Study after study.

HOOPER: Yes, people needed help, they need it now, they need resources now, we need to get experts out there now. We needed all sorts of stuff. We needed it now, not, like you said, studies and so forth.

They wanted massive offices out there, a big local aid bureaucracy and so forth. And I think that the SEED office initially insisted they were not going to allow them to set up offices and then and run everything back here for approvals. If you're going to set up an office, then that person has to have local approval authority for the money, so it doesn't get caught up in the AID bureaucracy. That was the concern. These were revolutionary times, which required action and speed.

It didn't always work, but it often worked. It was a tradeoff. People would go out there, I remember they often wanted to get senior level, counselor level or whatnot, senior level, out there.

Well, there was resistance to that from some of our more savvy people, who protested, "The trouble is if you get taskers out there, the first thing that person wants is someone to actually do the work for him. And so if you have someone at the senior level, by definition you need someone else who is going to actually have to do the work, because that senior person isn't going to do the work. He's going to sit back and have some meetings and tell someone else to all the implementation." So there was that tension underway, but that was more between Eagleburger's office and the embassies.

Q: Moldova, during this time, was that even an embryonic state or anything like that?

HOOPER: The Soviet Union didn't end until 1991. You had the hardliner coup against Gorbachev in the summer of '91, which was stopped by Yeltsin. The summer of '91, I went into the Senior Seminar and I remember the head of the Senior Seminar saying, "Well, this is really historical." And Yeltsin had then taken effective power. Gorbachev had lost all effective power.

Moldova didn't formally become independent until Christmas Day or New Year's or whatever, when the Soviet flag was lowered and replaced by the Russian flag over the Kremlin, but that was the formalization of the process.

Q: So Moldova was not a particular factor at that time?

HOOPER: It was still part of the Soviet Union. The Romanians, now that they had thrown off Ceausescu and in effect were independent of the Soviet Union themselves, it was a future issue, but it wasn't an issue right now. There were stirrings within Romania, but I don't have any specific recollections of Moldova being an issue at that time.

Q: Okay, Albania, up to that point we'd never had relations.

HOOPER: No, they'd broken relations with the Soviets and established them with China. Even Romania looked like an open society, compared to Albania, it's all relative. At least there had been contacts between Romania and the West.

And I remember coming and reading in FBIS, I found FBIS very useful during this period

Q: This is the Federal Broadcast Information Service.

HOOPER: They translate open source broadcasts.

Q: Is that part of the CIA?

HOOPER: They were controlled by the CIA but what they did was overt. I think it was paid for out of the CIA budget.

Q: And this, of course, has been, over the entire Cold War period, a magnificent source of information about these countries.

HOOPER: I have terrific respect for FBIS, for the people there, for what they knew, very impressed with them and very impressed with them when I got to Poland. We had a big FBIS team there as well.
I thought they were terrific, what they were doing.

But during the time I was deputy head of the Eastern Europe office, I just thought it was indispensable. They are a success story. They do their job well.

I think they have kind of fallen on occasional hard times since then. I think they're really, they are just magnificent and I have nothing but respect for the level of expertise, the product, the sense of mission that they had, I have nothing but positive things to say about them.

Again, they translated things, but when you talk with them, they've built up this knowledge and they would share their expertise and views. I've told you about the guy who had been responsible for their Yugoslavia analysis.

Their people really did build up good expertise and since they weren't responsible for flogging any particular policy line, therefore they learned and they thought and they analyzed trends and you could have very interesting conversations with them which didn't start or end with the need to adhere to some policy line of the day, whether right, wrong, whatever it was, on any given day.

It wasn't like eating potato chips. You got a real meal out of a discussion with them.

Q: What were you getting, when you took over, out of Albania? Beyond these borders be dragons, or something like that?

HOOPER: One of the first things that I noticed was an FBIS report of a meeting with an Albanian-American, his name is Anthony Athanas, who was one of the most prominent Albanian-Americans, a restaurateur from Boston who people in the community looked up to. And I've gotten to know members of the Albanian-American community subsequently as a result of the Albanian and Kosovo issues.

Anyway, we noticed that, so we called him. And I thought, the fact that these guys would meet with him and allow the fact to be publicized, are we getting a signal, here? So I wanted to explore that and I talked with Jim Swihart, the country director.

We actually invited Anthony Athanas to come down to meet with us and he did, he came to the Department, told us about his meeting and he said he considered it a signal that they wanted to explore an opening with us and establish relations.

There was so much change going on elsewhere, Albania was not at the top of anyone's list. You could read it different ways. There was no smoking gun here. It was more a matter of interpretation.

People were amused by our suggestion that change was possible in Albania, too, more amused by it than persuaded. They didn't care much about it at the time and probably they didn't think it was possible, because it's one thing for sweeping change to come about elsewhere in Eastern Europe, but Albania is another thing, it was just considered so beyond the pale.

Q: Enver Hoxha, he was dead?

HOOPER: Yes, he was dead.

Q: How long?

HOOPER: A few years. USIA, VOA, I thought the best person, the one really plugged in, because we started working with them after the democratization happened in the other places, the Albanian service was headed by Elez Biberaj, who was just tremendous, knew everything about Albania and Kosovo, very savvy on Yugoslavia in general.

He's written two or three books. Very savvy, well plugged in. You really got something out of talking with him. Just tops in terms of his understanding. He is now the director or deputy director for Europe in VOA. He's really risen. His talents have been recognized. I think he's perhaps the single most talented person in VOA. I have enormous respect for him.

Jim Swihart and I decided to play this as if this was a signal, so we actually used VOA, we gave an interview with them indicating that we would be prepared to explore establishing relations with Albania.

And again, Curt Kamman, the DAS, he signed off on it. No one cared. There was just so much going on elsewhere and it was so hard to conceive of anything happening. We really pushed the envelope.

Anyway, things began picking up. We had intermediaries going back and forth from the Albanian-American community, which is full of a lot of talented, savvy people who are well plugged in with the various components of the Albanian communities back in Europe.

Anyway, we had talks with them in New York, it was possible to talk with them there. That was always the place that we'd talk with them in the past.

Their foreign minister was coming over and it was agreed that diplomatic relations would be established between the U.S. and Albania. They wanted an opening to the West.

Q: We were saying we were interested. They had responded? Did the United Nations play a role there?

HOOPER: No, but the Albanian PermRep was there. Anyway, their foreign minister, who has since become a social democrat, the Albanian government agreed to send him to Washington, where there would be a public signing ceremony.

I thought that there should be some representatives of the democratic opposition present. I didn't have a clue if there was a democratic opposition and who they would be. So I got in touch with the Albanian-American community, which agreed to arrange for two democratic opposition figures to come to the United States. It was all done really fast. The foreign minister was flying down from New York with a person from their New York mission for the signing ceremony. We wanted these two opposition figures to be present at the ceremony. I went to Curt Kamman, the deputy assistant secretary and he signed off on the idea.

We were on eggshells, here, just getting the Albanians to agree to establish diplomatic relations, where we could have an embassy in Tirana. We didn't want to go too far. On the other hand, you don't want to overlook an opportunity.

I think it was a Solomonic judgment. Curt Kamman said, "Ask the foreign minister if it's okay with him. If it's all right with him, then let's do it. If he says no, we don't want them to appear and have him turn around in a huff and leave. It'll just set everything back."

So then it became, who would go out to the airport and bell the cat, or beard the lion, or whatever you want to call it. Curt didn't particularly want to do it and Jim Swihart didn't particularly want to do it. It fell to me and I was willing to do it.

So I went out to National Airport. Actually their man from New York had come down beforehand. He knew the opposition figures were here and figured out what was up and as the foreign minister came off the plane, their diplomat from New York almost elbowed

me aside. I just kind of ignored him, slipped in next to the foreign minister as we walked through the terminal, and I said, "By the way, there are two representatives of the opposition here. Would you have any objection if they're present at the signing ceremony tomorrow?"

And he looked at me and he said, "When in Rome…." That is, he agreed. I was elated.

The two opposition leaders—Sali Berisha and Gramoz Pashko—and Curt Kamman and Jim Swihart and some of the Albanian-Americans who were so helpful to us were in a restaurant in Washington. They were waiting to see what the foreign minister's response was. So I walked up to the table and they all looked at me and I put my thumb up and said, "Get your coats and ties on tomorrow, you're going to be there." And they cheered. Everyone was so happy. It was a great moment and a wonderful evening, talking about the future and what could be done and everyone's hopes for the new bilateral relationship.

We had the signing ceremony and all went well. The government was ultimately replaced. The foreign minister turned out to be a good man. He founded or became part of the Social Democratic Party in Albania. I have very positive memories of him.

I've never visited Albania, by the way, for all the time I've spent on the issue and the effort I put into it. The democratic opposition ultimately took power.

Jim Baker went there; 500,000 people turned out in the main square in Tirana to see him. He had never before and never again received the adulation of such a multitude. It was, again, transformative for Albania, transformative for him.

Q: Often, particularly, exile communities, they can be split into various groups, sort of like the Cuban-American community. Was the Albanian community in the United States somewhat cohesive, or rational, even?

HOOPER: Certainly they were very negative about Hoxha, about the communists, very negative on that, and they had every right to be negative. Some really didn't want to participate in anything to reestablish relations, because they didn't expect much. There were Albanian-American Catholics we plugged into, even though they'd executed their last priest in 1957 or thereabouts. It was disparate community, a lot of differences of views.

Most of them were and are very successful in the United States and integrated fully into American society, kept in touch with relatives living in the Balkans, but thought of themselves as Americans first.

But the people who were activists within the community and were of the part of National Albanian-American Council, their board of directors, which is around 15 to 20 people, there were a lot of differences of views, but we worked with the people who wanted to try to change the situation.

So there was a self-selecting element. People who didn't want change or didn't even want to have any dealings with the vicious Albanian government, they wouldn't necessarily present themselves to us. So we dealt with the people who wanted to move things forward. And the community was absolutely crucial, especially a man named Skender Perolli, who always came through when it came to helping establish the bilateral relationship with Albania and on issues related to Kosovo. He was a pillar of the entire process.

Q: Jim, during the time you were there, what were we able to do in Albania, because here is a country that's been on the other side of the moon, seemingly forever?

HOOPER: The Albanian communities in the Balkans see the U.S. as their protector, as their only real friend, or let's put it this way, their best friend, more so than any other European country.

I think that was in part because there was an historical memory of Woodrow Wilson and the 14 Points, when he tried to help Albania get its freedom.

There was a positive historical memory which transcended the communist era and the official hate. So there was something to build on.

Q: How about the Greeks?

HOOPER: Proximity makes Greece important, but there's the tension of the relationship over the Greek minority in Albania and how are they being treated, a lot of these sorts of issues.

The U.S., on the other hand, we have no territorial objectives and yet we've tried, from the self-determination era of Woodrow Wilson, there was a willingness to see the U.S. in a positive light, apart from the power and the money and so on and so forth, the aid that we could deliver, the U.S. was their best bet internationally.

And I think that's been there and the Albanians throughout the region do see the U.S. as a friend who's been there. We built on that. We created a bridge in that period of time.

We sent in an election monitoring mission, headed by our Albania desk officer Susan Sutton, who did an absolutely great job, she was enormously hard working and creative, we did it once or twice, because they had elections in the spring of '92. It was a very deliberate step by step buildup and now we have an excellent relationship.

I think the relationship we have now was built on a foundation begun early in the last century and then what we have now was built on the work that was done in that '89 to '91 period of opening up, moving gradually forward.

So I think that there is genuineness and depth to that relationship, because they didn't have it with anyone else and we were the ones that they saw who were willing to help them. So I think that's a nice legacy.

We had a position, someone actually was the Baltics desk officer, we had a kind of utility infielder in the office and he became the Baltics desk officer. He actually had an ethnic background from Lithuania.

What I remember about that, at first the Balts were pushing Gorbachev, they were pushing him really hard, led by the Lithuanians.

They really wanted their independence and the United States, we had had this policy, it wasn't an afterthought policy, but I'm not sure how much deliberate thought and consideration was given to it.

The United States never recognized the Soviet takeover of the three Baltic states, so we had the non-recognition policy. So we dealt, officially, with the three Baltic diplomatic representatives, one of whom lived in New York, the other two lived in the Washington area and they would come in and see us.

They were real gentlemen. The Estonian was just a man of real integrity and experience, a classic European diplomat. The level of skill and talent and insight they had, I was so impressed. The manner and temperament, I was very, very impressed with them.

I probably dealt more with the Lithuanian representative, who I was always glad to see. He then became the ambassador to the U.S. after independence.

I think probably the single most important thing we did was Jim Swihart and I came up with a way to build on the non-recognition policy, the basis upon which the United States would recognize the three countries, because they had really pushed the envelope as far as Gorbachev and the Soviets were concerned and there had been a showdown in Lithuania, I think one or two demonstrators had been killed.

I think a couple of Poles, one of whom was Geremek, who'd been involved in Solidarity went to Vilnius to help inspire the Lithuanians and teach them how to deal with the Soviets effectively to advance the independence movement. When you're dealing with overwhelming force, nonetheless you have a lot of room for maneuver.

And we outlined, as I recall, four or five points on which recognition would be based, one of which was control of their borders, which we outlined in an interview with Voice of America. Jim Swihart, one of the most creative FSO's that I have worked with, did that, but he and I both worked on this with the Legal Advisor's office, put this together. Moscow however then used this as a device to keep them under Soviet control for a while longer.

The toughest thing, I recall, was moving the Bush Administration to take a more active role in Baltic independence efforts. Baker was very close to Shevardnadze, didn't want to unduly complicate their efforts to unravel the Soviet Union.

We worked very closely with the Soviet desk at State, which was then headed by Sandy Vershbow, just a tremendous person, I have a lot of respect for Sandy. There's a lot of really talented people that I had a chance to work with throughout that whole experience in the Eastern European office, for those two years.

A fellow named Paul Goble was in INR. He knew everything about the Soviet Union and the Balts. I think he had 12 or 13 what were then called Soviet nationality languages, very knowledgeable about the Balts, he was just terrific. I asked, "Who should I see to learn something about the Baltics?"

And they said, "Go down and see this guy in INR named Paul Goble." So I went to see Paul. He was everything I needed. He had all the information, he knew what he was doing, he was tough minded, not just some bureaucrat, but candid, honest and I felt I could trust him.

He got an award for best analyst in INR, because the key issues at that time period were what were then called Soviet nationality issues, as the Soviet Union began to fragment and various parts of the Soviet Union spun off.

Paul left a few months later to go to Munich, where he was head of the then Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty research office. I went to see him before he left and said, "I was hoping I could talk you into being the Baltic desk officer. If you get tired of what you're doing in your new job over there, let me know and I will try to do the best I can to find something back here for you."

He came back to Washington in about six months and said, "Did you mean that?"

I said, "Yes. Are you interested?"

And he said, "Yes."

I said, "Well, I'll do the best I can" and I worked with others there, Curt Kamman, the deputy assistant secretary and Jim Swihart, we created a new position of Baltics advisor and Paul came back to take the job.

I wanted the Balts to have their chance for independence after all they had been through under Soviet occupation. Probably it wasn't strictly a neutral bureaucratic role that I chose to play, but I thought it was not going to happen at all, they weren't going to get a square deal with some of the people on Baker's team working on Soviet affairs.

There was a fellow named Peter Hauslohner on the Policy Planning staff, and his view was to do everything possible to prevent the Balts from becoming independent, because

that might upset Moscow. I did not trust his approach and found it pretty craven, though it fit with the views of the more senior people on the Seventh Floor. We were constantly at odds. He won most of the bureaucratic battles. But the Balts became independent.

Q: These were essentially not sort of the establishment Foreign Service type people. These were advisors from outside.

I was wondering whether you were up against the "Kremlin crowd," the Foreign Service crowd, which I think also just wouldn't like to see messing around with getting the Baltics out of the Soviet Union?

HOOPER: I didn't think that Sandy Vershbow and some of the others there had any real problem with the Balts leaving. And, again, things were changing. Eastern Europe was opening up. People were beginning to think differently.

The Soviet desk was a very big operation and in EUR it was used to being the preeminent operation and having direct dealings with the Secretary and so forth. I didn't find the diplomats there to be the problem. Peter was not a Foreign Service Officer.

What I wanted was firepower for the Baltics. If it had to depend upon decisions being made and the Balts being helped along within the Department by Baker and his key advisors, my sense was it would never happen, to the extent that the U.S. could help move it along.

Obviously the Balts had to carry the lion's share of the water, but Washington could create room for maneuver and help open up options and further momentum, because the Balts, the train was leaving the station throughout Eastern Europe and they wanted to hook their cars onto that train as well.

What I said to Paul Goble was, "Paul, you're going have to go to all these meetings around the building and write and clear off and so forth on a lot talking points and things you're probably not going to believe it, because that's the policy here. What I really want you to do is, I'm sure you've got to do that and do the daily press guidance and all these kinds of things. But, frankly, what I wanted you back here for is because you have contacts outside the Department and background," he knew a number of people in the media.

I said, "Frankly, you can help foster an atmosphere that will not be supportive of the administration's go slow approach on the Baltics and sacrificing the Balts to avoid disturbing Gorbachev."

I wanted Paul to carry that responsibility.

Q: I've interviewed Margaret Tutwiler and she was sort of the public affairs face of the Department, obviously very close to Baker and I would think that directing Goble off towards the press would be completely at odds with how the Secretary of State and his

press people wanted it to work. He wanted to control the message. You were setting a backfire.

HOOPER: I didn't ask their permission. Again, I said I did not see my role in the traditional bureaucratic manner, rightly or wrongly.

And, again, they had all the cards and I wasn't going to be able to do anything within the bureaucracy. So Paul was the way forward, because he had the kinds of contacts outside the bureaucracy that could help create more of a public campaign among journalists and so forth. Again, he was backgrounding them privately, providing an alternative perspective on nationality issues in regard to the Balts.

Paul really knew how to handle the media. He had contacts out there, a lot them and that was my way of getting around the bureaucracy.

Within the bureaucracy everything we tried to do was always controlled, prevented by the Baker team. And, again, that was their right. He was Secretary of State, I wasn't Secretary of State.

But, again, we were trying to frame the policy from the bottom up and Jim Swihart and I believed that's what was needed, when things begin to crack and suddenly the plates shift and you get a whole new situation, you need a different diplomatic approach and I didn't know anything about these areas when I came in and it was just the perfect time for that kind of operation, because it was a period of time when you could get things done that way, if you knew how to do it.

And it actually worked really well, this kind of bottoms up way to doing things. It was very non-traditional, supporting democracy and working on this set of issues. I think now it's more accepted.

It's just more part of things, working with the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute and others, they're now more part of the woodwork, part of the furniture, it's more accepted, it's more expected that you will be involved in democratization issues.

Back then it wasn't. People were used to dealing with the Soviet Union, from the top down, where you had to have a strong Soviet desk operation that managed what the rest of the U.S. government was doing on it, because it was all Washington and Moscow and it was a chessboard and centralized control was deemed necessary.

Well, it wasn't a chessboard any more. There was a real opportunity for the Balts to get out. I didn't get involved in any of the independence movements in the non-Baltic former parts of the Soviet Union. I was more or less aware of them, but we had enough to do with the Balkans and the Baltics.

So, anyway, that was the spirit with which I approached the Baltics. I was certainly glad that they got their independence, through Yeltsin. The window opened, they were ready to go but Yeltsin did it and things happened, it was the end of the Soviet Union. And I think we did a lot to help prepare the ground for that.

Q: Was there much of a Baltic lobby, both in the public and in Congress, people with Baltic background, certainly in the industrial states, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and all, an awful lot of Balts came to that area to work and so I would think there would be a tremendous you might say lobby, with power in Congress.

HOOPER: There was a lobby. I don't recall it as being that strong, not as strong as some of the other kind of ethnic-based, or nationality-based, lobbying groups. But it certainly existed, it was there and there were organizations and they focused and they were very active and they worked Congress. They did a good job. I didn't think they were that powerful, but they weren't unpowerful. You had to take them into account.

Q: Some of the obviously more powerful ones are, number one the Israelis, probably number two the Greeks.

HOOPER: And the Armenians have, had the last time I looked, two or three years ago, 120 House members in the Armenian Caucus. The Balts had some.

Again, it was not really powerful, but it was not negligible and the administration, senior people in a U.S. administration and probably not just limited to the U.S., they want to check out their profile, how do they look politically and their political standing is obviously very important, because political capital rises and falls on that and the mirror that they're looking at is the media.

And Congress will play in that game, use the media and if you can play in that game and put them on the defensive, you can open up some more room for maneuver.

Q: Well, did you feel the lash of Tutwiler or anybody on what you were up to?

HOOPER: For some months there were almost daily press questions on the Baltics, because tensions were escalating there. Gorbachev went to Vilnius when I was in this job, so it was very important.

Anyway, the Baltic desk officer, prior to Goble's arrival, would draft this press guidance, I'd clear off and we would try to push the envelope.

And I remember one day the EUR bureau press person came in and said, "Margaret Tutwiler thinks that the Baltic desk officer is a wonderful person and she doesn't have anything against him, but just wishes that he would stop sending these things," because they were never taken, they were always completely reworked. "It would probably be wiser if he would just stop doing this and either send up nothing or send up things more along the lines of what we really want."

And so you could figure out what Tutwiler really said from that was "Tell the little pipsqueaks down there to shut up and start giving us what we really want, rather than writing this crap that we just have to throw out every day" but the person was nice enough not to convey it that way.

Q: Well, while you were there, how did the Baltic situation play out?

HOOPER: Again, the four or five points, as the basis for recognition, we got that out in the open. There was a New York senator who took up the Baltics cause, Al D'Amato and he took on the administration, in a very high profile way and went out there and he was pretty good at attracting press attention.

Q: I met him once, this is when he was senator-elect, in Naples, we had an earthquake there and he came down. He was brand new, he wasn't even a senator yet and struck me as sort of being a horse's ass, but I guess it depends on what he was doing. Later, I didn't follow him, so he probably learned quite a bit.

HOOPER: I got to know him a little later. He lost the election in part because he called someone a "putz." Various Yiddish terms have worked their way into American English without people necessarily knowing what they mean. Putz turns out to be very derogatory, but people used it all the time and he used it and his opponent used that against him. But I actually got to know him a few years later, during the Kosovo war.

There were people out there who were making the administration uncomfortable, in Congress and the media. The administration couldn't sell out the Balts. They had to position themselves very carefully. We did have a non-recognition policy.

Q: Our ambassador to the Soviet Union never could go there and this went on from the Roosevelt Administration on. So you couldn't mess with that so much.

HOOPER: Again, the administration would push Gorbachev, then the Balts would have more room for maneuver. That was what was going on, trying to create more room for maneuver and you had to do that politically, by working the Hill and the media. The administration couldn't come right out and say explicitly that, well, they really are trying to help Gorbachev, so they want the Balts just to keep quiet and be patient. You couldn't sell that publicly. So it was a tricky situation.

Anyway, the Baltic states didn't get their independence while I was in that job but they moved along and organized themselves, I thought, pretty effectively to do it.

The Lithuanians were taking the lead. Some of their political leaders visited and we got them in to see the administration. Again, we would advise them privately.

One leader of the Lithuanian independence movement didn't want to come without an agreement that he would be received by the president and secretary of state and what we

conveyed to him through the Baltic community was he's never going to get an agreement in advance to meet them.

If they know they have a veto, he'll never get agreement. He has to announce he's coming and then let things run their course and raise pressure and he'll eventually get the meetings.

I think he had a meeting with Baker. He also had a meeting with Bush. He got some high level attention, but it was by first, if you come to town, they're going to have to deal with you, because politically they can't afford not to.

Q: Did the issue, while you were looking at this, come up of, I think it's Kaliningrad, which is still an anomaly, what we used to call East Prussia? Was that something you all were considering? It used to be Koenigsberg, I think.

HOOPER: I'm aware of the issue and the various claims on it at the time. As I recall it, back then the Soviets had a lot of difficulty in getting people to accept assignments there, because it turned into a dump, not a kind of place you wanted to spend your time. There was a lot of poverty and so forth.

I recall the issue existed, but we didn't really have much to do with it, frankly. The Soviet desk handled that.

Q: But it wasn't an issue that was a deal breaker or something like that?

HOOPER: Well, again, they didn't get their independence in that two-year period. It was later that you had the attempted coup against Gorbachev and Yeltsin stepped in and that's when they, they were very good at finding ways to keep their issue alive publicly and politically, because they weren't going to get independence through instructed diplomats negotiating it. At some point they might formalize it that way.

People were visiting the U.S. The Baltic community here was energized. They were working the media, working the Hill. They would confront the "reformed" communist leadership whom Gorbachev was trying to support. You had confrontations. They were mobilizing the energies of their people.

They all saw what was going on elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Poland was free. Poland was right next door. As I said, they had a lot of help and support, psychological support, which was very important to them and practical advice from Poles.

They could sense that their time had come, their hour had come, at last and that the window might open and they had to be ready. But the window wasn't just going to open on its own. You had to be constantly trying to lift it, a millimeter at a time. So it took a major effort to move it even a tiny bit, then all of a sudden at one point it was up and they were out.

Q: Did you get the feeling with the upper reaches of the Department, the Secretary's office, that you were a little bit of a burr under the saddle of the Baker crew?

HOOPER: To the extent that they noticed me, yes. I don't want to make it sound like, boy, they spent a lot of time trying to deal with Jim Hooper. I think they barely knew me.

The Baltic issue was a sideshow, though an important sideshow, because it related to Soviet policy and Gorbachev and, again, there was a lot being negotiated. President Bush was trying to negotiate the reunification of Germany. Very sensitive commitments were being made.

One had to work with Shevvie and Gorby because they're making this all possible. We understood that.

There weren't a lot of rules anymore and no one expected this and people were trying to find their footing. I actually thought Bush and Baker were very savvy and did some really very deft diplomacy.

Q: Their diplomacy was superb. The Baltics were sort of a sideshow, but could have turned into a deal breaker, or could have really screwed things up. But at the same time, their interests might have been ignored

HOOPER: You had to line things up, create pressure and create this situation in which they felt obliged to say, "Don't overdo it in trying to repress the Balts." Again, it was all maneuvering and trying to increase the space or open the window a little further, so that things could happen.

Q: Well, let's turn to a more trifling area, Yugoslavia and the Balkans.

HOOPER: That became my focus, while I was there, certainly and then after I left,

Q: Yugoslavia existed as a state when you were there. Now how stood things in Yugoslavia? You took over in

HOOPER: The summer of '89, I think I started the week that they had the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo.

Q: And this is also the day that Milosevic went to Kosovo and said, "They shall not beat us!"

HOOPER: Yugoslavia and Albania were the two Eastern European communist states that were different from all the rest, because once Moscow was no longer prepared to keep troops and use troops to prop up Warsaw Pact regimes, it was the end, because those countries had never freely chosen communism and Soviet influence, once the Soviets were no longer prepared to keep their puppet regimes in power by force, communism was all over and that's what happened once the populations could exercise free choice.

The regimes in Albania and Yugoslavia weren't kept in power by the Soviets throughout most of the Cold War. Because of Tito, for decades after his break with Stalin, Yugoslavia was used to balancing between East and West.

Tito used force to keep some of the republics in the Yugoslav federation and had a very active intelligence service, but his regime wasn't dependent on the presence of Soviet troops, so Moscow's decision which created change everywhere else in Eastern Europe, that had no direct impact in Yugoslavia.

Whereas nationalism in Eastern Europe elsewhere was fused with democracy, individual freedom, the rights of citizens and that kind of thing, as exemplified by what happened in Poland, in Yugoslavia nationalism was fused with group rights.

Yugoslavia was a construct and while a number of Yugoslavs saw themselves as Yugoslavs, most of them saw themselves as primarily Croats or Serbs, Slovenes, Albanians, Bosnians.

And so what Milosevic did, he saw his pathway to national power through nationalism. As leader of the Serbian republic within Yugoslavia, he was trying to build up his base and the way to do that was through nationalism, Serbian nationalism.

Whereas Tito understood that the way you keep Yugoslavia together is you've got to create this balance of power among the various ethnicities and create a federal structure, essentially Tito saw that Serbian nationalism would be the end of Yugoslavia, the only way that you could keep Serb nationalism under control was through a federal structure, a revolving presidency, all sorts of these balancing factors which tended to check unbridled Serbian power and the unbridled expression of Serbian power as well.

Well, if Milosevic wanted to increase Serbian power, how do you go about it? You go about it by weakening the federal structure and increasing the power of the individual republics. Well, if you're going to increase the influence and power and strength of the Serbian republic, the Croats aren't going to continue to play the federal game. If the Serbs were playing the nationalist card, the others were going to do the same.

Milosevic used the Kosovo issue to build up his Serbian nationalist credentials, because that was the most potent issue available.

When I traveled through there the summer of '89, June of '89, on the way back to Washington, at that time Warren Zimmerman had been our ambassador there for about a year and I don't think he had seen Milosevic yet or had just once, and the reason was Milosevic was probably sending him a signal, because Warren Zimmerman early on called publicly for Belgrade to be more aware of and sensitive to human rights issues in their treatment of the Kosovars. Now he defined it not as an independence issue for Kosovo, but as a human rights issue.

Milosevic, to teach Warren a lesson, refused to deal with him. Milosevic was not the president of Yugoslavia, he was the Serbian president and he was busy taking over newspapers and building up his supporters, making sure that the major Belgrade newspapers were taking a stridently pro-Serbian tone and people were wondering where it was headed.

I found that often people who had served in our embassy in Belgrade tended to see things from the Serbian point of view. Well, my boss], Jim Swihart, in addition to once serving in Embassy Belgrade had been our consul general in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia and also understood the Croatian point of view.

Q: I can attest to this. I spent five years in Belgrade back in the Sixties and there was very much that Zagreb-Belgrade dichotomy of views. *I was affected somewhat by it, too, although I wasn't a political officer, but I saw the attitude among my colleagues, that the Serbs were the white knights.*

HOOPER: What people remembered was World War II and I think that

Q: The Croats were beastly during World War II.

HOOPER: Right and the Serbs were opposed to the Nazis.

Q: All of us were steeped in this, because our language teachers in the Sixties and Seventies were a gentlemanly Serbian prewar cavalry officer and a Serbian Orthodox priest], I took Serbo-Croatian with Larry Eagleburger and David Anderson, both of whom later became ambassadors there. We got the whole schmeer.

HOOPER: Anyway, Warren did not think it was going to come apart. He later wrote a book in which he acknowledged that he got this wrong.

As near as I could tell, the economic counselor would tell Warren it didn't make any sense for Yugoslavia to disintegrate, because their markets were each other, and thus it would remain united for economic reasons. And the political counselor would warn that the country was disintegrating. Warren was getting conflicting advice. There was nothing inaccurate about the economic assessment, but the whole bottom line that economics trumps politics I think is dead wrong, or at least was in this case. Louis Sell, the political counselor, got it right.

Warren worked very hard to try to keep Yugoslavia together, worked very hard to try to prevent the Bosnians from seceding. He got it wrong and it was my sense and Jim Swihart's sense that there was a real chance that it would come apart.

Larry Eagleburger, because he'd been ambassador out there, people used to refer to him as "Lawrence of Macedonia," he was the Deputy Secretary then and he was smart enough to see it was going to be bloody and he didn't want it to fall apart.

At some point and I think it was in 1990, early 1991, as I recall, he visited the region but did not want to go to Yugoslavia. Tensions were getting worse and you could see where things might be headed.

He just did not want to go. He resisted taking on the Yugoslav issue, because he figured it was going to be a bummer, just a downside for his reputation and yet it had to be him, because no one else understood it. They would all defer to him: Baker, Zoellick, Ross, Tutwiler. They all expected him to do it and so he had to go out there.

We told him "Things are getting grim. You need to talk sense to them. Be tough. "But go out there and see for yourself. It's not going well."

Finally he agreed to go. He saw various senior Yugoslav officials. He met with Milosevic, he had a one-on-one with him, in which he warned him not to push this.

Having more of less forced us to talk him into something he probably knew he was going to have to do anyway and not really seeing how bad it was, he had a lot on his plate, his focus was on other stuff, anyway he came back and I remember he told us, in effect, "You know, I didn't believe you guys, but now that I've been out there and met with them all, it's even worse than you were telling me! Why didn't you let me know?"

So he began to take more of an interest in Yugoslavia. I think it was really too late. Milosevic had a strategy, he had a head of steam and he had momentum and he had the military working with him. We had intelligence about how they planned to divide up the country.

Ante Markovic, the prime minister, came to Washington and we had him meet with Baker, because we wanted to encourage the Yugoslav federal government, because Markovic was trying to keep his country together and he was trying to do the right thing and keep Milosevic under control.

Markovic was doing what he could, but Milosevic was just a juggernaut that was not going to be stopped. And I remember when I started writing memos, as we got into the spring, trying to tell Baker that, "You've really got to put down some tough markers. You can't be nuanced, because Milosevic will take any nuance and just draw from it what he wants and forget all the other stuff."

Q: There was the famous phrase, "We don't have a dog in this fight."

HOOPER: Yes, but he did some stuff when he was out there, it was around May, June, '91, by then it was only by grabbing them by the lapels and shaking them and just run the iron over them like that and then they might back off a little. But it was going to take something like that. That wasn't the way Baker was going to handle it.

He went to Yugoslavia as part of a trip because he had to. It was the last chance to try to keep it together. Swihart, the country director, he saw this stuff coming and didn't think it was going to be stopped and I fully shared that.

And then I was the acting country director, because Jim left to go on to his next assignment and I kept warning in the staff meeting, the daily EUR staff meeting, it's getting worse and this is going to be bloody and it's going to be one hell of a mess.

And actually I remember people, John Tefft, who was the deputy director for Soviet affairs, a couple years later was telling me, he's ambassador, now, in Georgia, was telling me, "You know, I remember, you used to go into those staff meetings and tried to warn people," he actually quoted some of my remarks back to me, which I'd probably forgotten.

Slovenia opted out of the Yugoslav federation. There was to be a communist party conference, I think Serbia was unwilling to attend it.

Swihart told me, the consulate general in Zagreb had responsibility for Slovenia, too, because of the way these things were divided and he said he remembered one time when he had been out there in the mid- to late Eighties, "I realized Slovenia was keeping Yugoslavia afloat economically, not Serbia."

They were the most productive and they were close to Austria politically and geographically and when they opted out Belgrade sent a military force towards Slovenia to bring them to heel.

Now, this was actually not Milosevic. Milosevic was willing to see them go. In fact, he wanted Yugoslavia to disintegrate, because that would legitimate what he was planning to do.

Markovic, the prime minister, sent troops and the Slovenes, they resisted and the convoy stopped and there was some shooting.

Q: Seven were killed, I think, or something like that.

HOOPER: Then it ended. It didn't end with keeping them in. They just gave up on using force, the use of force to preserve Yugoslavia, to keep Slovenia in. It was the last use of federal force, as such, under the traditional Yugoslavia, to keep it together and prevent even worse violence.

That was the last thing that happened on my watch. I had two terrific Yugoslav desk officers. First, a guy named Eric Terzuolo, whose claim to fame, apart from being a terrific desk officer, he played on *Jeopardy* while he was there

Q: It's a TV program.

HOOPER: And he won, he won five times in a row and then you get to come back, once a year they would have a playoff of various people who had one five times in a row and he won the playoff. So I asked him, "What are you going do with your winnings, Eric?" and he said, "It's going to take care of my kids, put it in a scholarship fund, that'll take care of college for at least one of them."

Anyway, he left after a year and we got Richard Johnson, I thought we was just a terrific, terrific desk officer, he knew a lot about Yugoslavia. I relied on him totally. He was very savvy. We had a good team.

Q: One name you haven't mentioned in this is the name of Tudjman, because we had Milosevic, who basically wants a stronger Serbia, including everything Serb, which infringed on a lot of other parts of the federation, but what about Tudjman?

HOOPER: He was the Croatian strongman, very nationalist, strongly focused on Croatia's independence, not overly concerned about the niceties of a democratic process. With the help of his political party and intelligence service he ran things in Croatia.

During the war, as it got going, after the '91 period, he did what he did. Not a particularly pretty picture, very authoritarian.

They've overcome a lot of the legacy of this. There was a lot of concern that people had about fascism, the legacy of the *Ustasha* and all that sort of thing.

Q: Ustasha *being the World War II, was it the party or the secret police?*

HOOPER: It was the party.

Q: Basically it was the Croatian equivalent to the Nazi Party.

HOOPER: Some Croatians found it politic and expedient during World War II to work with the Nazi occupiers of Yugoslavia, rather than fighting them.

Anyway, Tudjman was a force to be reckoned with and difficult to handle, again, very authoritarian leanings and

Q: Well, were we viewing Croatia as the mirror opposite, or, actually, the equivalent of Milosevic, as being two people who were going to rip this place apart?

HOOPER: Yes, clearly, he wanted, it was one thing to be run by a federalized directorate and have lots of checks and balances. That may have checked the Serbs. It was fine with the Croats.

But once you played the nationalist card, then there's no basis for Yugoslavia anymore. What we saw unfold, from roughly 1991 through 1999, the Kosovo War, every single Yugoslav people decided that they were not going to live under Serbian rule.

The Serbs forced even the Montenegrins, who were sometimes seen as more Serbian than the Serbs, or the original Serbs, even the Montenegrins decided they wanted out. That's what Milosevic succeeded in doing.

Tudjman, he had a lot of warts, to put it mildly, but he was the father of Croatian independence and once he died his political party, it kind of disintegrated and fell on tough times and Croatia actually became a much more democratic and open place and a less authoritarian place. I think it now it fully deserves to move into NATO, the EU. They've by and large moved past that era.

But Tudjman was the Croatian Milosevic. It's not quite that bad, but there were a lot of tendencies in that direction.

Q: Our consul general in Zagreb at the time tells me about his problems, that during the Bosnian War he kept getting pressure from Washington to come up with equivalency, the Croats were killing as many Serbs and the Serbs were killing members of the other ethnic groups, which wasn't what was happening in the field.

HOOPER: The Bosnian War did not start until after I left the office of East European and Yugoslav Affairs.

Q: Anyway, one can read his account, but, Jim, at your level, were you seeing any movement within the European context about this? At one point, this was after your time, but the European Union was sort of saying, "Yugoslavia is a European problem, we can take care of it," which it turned out they didn't it and you had Genscher recognizing Croatia precipitously and the Pope getting in on the act.

But while you were there, was Europe at all a factor, the rest of Europe?

HOOPER: I went off to the Senior Seminar, which I didn't really want to do, but I was chosen and didn't have any choice, from '91 to '92 and then got back into Balkan issues after that.

I remember in '91, sometime in the spring, representatives of the EU presidency troika came to Washington and they met with us. They had made it clear that they wanted to take the lead in sorting out Yugoslavia and we were dubious in our office about that, but it was decided at a much more senior level to give them the lead.

And I think we felt that that was something that Scowcroft, the national security advisor and Eagleburger worked out.

Q: Scowcroft had been military attaché in Belgrade.

HOOPER: Right, and he and Eagleburger knew each other. Not that Scowcroft told Jim Hooper, "This what I'm thinking on this matter," it didn't work that way. He had been

the head of the political science department at the Air Force Academy, not when I was there, but, anyway, he had been military attaché in Belgrade and he now was national security advisor.

We felt that probably his view was, "If the Europeans want to do it, all right. If it works, good, they've just saved us from a lot of headaches that we don't need, because there's a lot of other problems going on. And if it doesn't work, then they're going to need us Americans even more."

And that was *realpolitik*. I wouldn't necessarily disagree or agree with it. I think that was probably his perspective, because that was the way he thought about these kinds of things.

I think in the office it was fair to say that there was some skepticism about the ability of the Europeans to handle this and in fact throughout all of the Yugoslav wars the Europeans consistently proved unable to handle those conflicts and the U.S. proved unwilling to try to get in there to prevent things from happening and stop it when it did happen.

It was easier to prevent it than to stop it, because it's like they say about the boulder going down the hill, when you're up there, you just kind of lean on it and the boulder will stand still.

Once it gets into motion, you've got to put more effort into stopping it and at some point, you stand in front of that boulder, no matter what effort you're going to put out, you're just going to get rolled over.

The decision was made to let the Europeans take the lead, the spring of '91.

Q: And so, in a way, were we really doing that, or what were we doing? Were we standing to one side, or

HOOPER: We didn't want to get involved and that was the reality and Baker was too nuanced and was not tough enough on his trip, the last trip before the place blew. We weren't prepared to play a sufficiently tough role to head off the crisis, so we let the Europeans do it, which I think proved to be a serious mistake.

I remember when I left and I was meeting with my successor

Q: You left when?

HOOPER: I think around June or July of '91 and my successor's a guy named Mike Habib. I was acting country director then.

I would actually rather have been the country director, but I got the Senior Seminar, which I didn't really want to do, but I had to do it, because it was considered a plum, I got chosen for it and so I had to accept it.

So he was then my successor as country director and Laura Clerici was my successor as deputy director. And I remember meeting with the two of them on my last day and Laura afterwards told me what she thought then and what she came to think.

I said, "Yugoslavia's coming apart, it's not going to be stopped. The only way to stop it is the use of force and that's going to mean the U.S. and Europe working together, but it's going to mean the U.S. is going to have to be prepared to use military force in Yugoslavia in order to end what is going to be very bloody fighting of a kind that you and I, none of us, are prepared for, that is going to be horrific, once these demons are let loose on each other."

Laura told me later that she didn't think it was actually going to fully come apart, she was skeptical, but she thought I'd really lost it when I said the U.S. was going to have to send in force, military force, whether we wanted to or not, we're going to have to do that to end the fighting, because once it got going it was going to jeopardize our strategic interests in the region and we would have no choice, so better to do it now.

She said, "I thought you just lost it." And she was telling me this a few years later, "How right you were."

Q: When we were talking about this, at that time, was Kosovo, were we thinking, "Let's hope this demon doesn't pop our of the bottle?" Was Kosovo much of a factor at that time?

HOOPER: Ibrahim Rugova, who died, unfortunately, a couple of years ago, was then the political leader of the Kosovars. Serbia had taken over the place, removed their autonomous republic status, under Milosevic. They'd had to work out their own underground school system and underground economy and so forth. Ethnic Albanians living in Europe and the United States were donating funds to help Kosovars.

At the time, we defined Kosovo as a human rights problem and the Kosovars were trying to convince the world it was a political problem.

We felt the only way you could even have a conversation with the Yugoslavs, especially the Serbs, about Kosovo was to talk about it in the human rights context, because if you started talking about politics the Serbs would simply respond emotionally.

People who served in Yugoslavia, who worked the issue much longer than I, had told me one can't have conversations with sensible, normal, decent, Serbs about Kosovo, they just lose it entirely.

They will say, “I’m not rational about this issue,” they’ll tell you that and then proceed to demonstrate it.

Well, again, Warren Zimmerman was cold shouldered by Slobodan Milosevic for his first year as ambassador in Belgrade because Warren raised the issue of Kosovo and Serbia’s treatment of it, not in terms of independence, but as a human rights issue.

Nonetheless, it was felt that one could at least try to discuss it and that was a legitimate way of trying to put it on the table, to improve their human rights record, that was a way of addressing some of the political issues.

The Kosovars wanted their political rights. Yes, sure, they wanted their human rights addressed, but they wanted their political rights addressed.

I did not feel that the Europeans had outshone themselves in the way they handled Yugoslavia from the start and it always fell to the Americans to have to pick up the pieces.

That’s what I believed then and that’s pretty much what I believe now, to be honest, but back then the Europeans were reluctant to deal with it as a human rights issue, they didn’t want to put much effort into the Kosovo issue.

We felt the way to divert the Kosovars from focusing on political issues and just putting two fingers in the eyes of the Serbs every chance they had was for us to focus on human rights and for the Europeans to put more of an effort into human rights.

It was just designed to try to keep a lid on that while we tried to keep the country together. That’s what I can remember about how

Q: How about, did we even think of Bosnia-Herzegovina?

HOOPER: It was left up to Warren Zimmerman, the American ambassador, to carry much of the load on the human rights issue. It was a pretty heavy burden to bear and it cost him.

Q: Bosnia-Herzegovina, it was sort of a bastard configuration. At the time, before you left, did we think much about it, or not?

HOOPER: I think we felt that Kosovo was a potential flashpoint, because the Albanians and Serbs, there was just no middle ground. The Albanians went along with the human rights emphasis, but they constantly were pushing for political rights. The Serbs didn’t even want to go along with a dialogue about human rights.

Q: The Kosovars, for the most part, they looked at it differently.

HOOPER: It always struck me as just I guess a logical oddity, the Kosovars were seen ethnically, the Serbs ethnically, the Croats ethnically, the Slovenes ethnically, the Macedonians ethnically.

And with the Bosnians, it was as Muslims. But "Muslim" is obviously not an ethnicity, it is a religious description, but it's just the way it was done.

Q: It's shorthand. It didn't make sense.

HOOPER: The Kosovars do not like to be referred to as Muslim, because "Muslim," in Balkan terms, in Yugoslav terms, is seen as derogatory.

The two tinderboxes were Kosovo and Bosnia. So we kind of thought a flare up might happen in Kosovo first, it would just get out of hand and them maybe Belgrade might just do what they ultimately did, just crack down so fiercely that the international community would have no choice but to intervene, it couldn't stand by and watch. At least that was our thinking.

And Bosnia was the other. Kosovo was the last to leave, rather than right up there among the first and Bosnia was really the most bloody and violent, obviously.

There was almost no intermarriage between the Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs. When they had power, they took care of their own. When the Serbs had power there, they took care of their own.

But there was no getting around the fact that approximately ninety per cent of the population of Kosovo was ethnic Albanian, so how do you deal with that? The only way Milosevic could deal with it was level the playing field.

Q: Let's go to Bosnia. At the time, how did we feel about it?

HOOPER: Again, it was a potential tinderbox and I left right after the Slovenes went out, to go to the Senior Seminar. Warren Zimmerman took a very active role in writing these instructions and then carrying them out. Washington didn't want to be involved in any fighting.

And so Warren Zimmerman kept pleading with the Bosnians not to declare independence, because if they did, that would just trigger what he knew was coming from Belgrade and then not to seek weapons, because if they did, that would further impede any possible political solution.

Later on, when I found out about it, I thought that was a very questionable policy. It's one thing to urge them not to seek independence, but to urge them not to arm themselves? But that was after I left.

Q: Jim, you were sort of dragged off to the Senior Seminar. You were at the Senior Seminar from when to when?

HOOPER: August of '91 to June of '92.

Q: This was one of the last gasps for the Senior Seminar, wasn't it?

HOOPER: I was in the 34th class and it went on for quite some time after that. It was actually some time in 2003 or 2004 I believe that it was ended. But I was in the last roughly ten years of it.

Q: How did you find it?

HOOPER: I actually found it useful. I hadn't wanted to do it. It's an honor. You're invited to come in. It's more than an invitation. It's virtually a directed assignment. You don't bid on it. It just happens, they just inform you.

I wanted to be director of Eastern European affairs, I was acting director for a few months when my predecessor left, but it just wasn't to be and of course someone else was then put in as director and he had a two year assignment, so it wasn't available once I came out of the Senior Seminar.

What I liked about the Senior Seminar was we really got exposed to broader policy horizons. I think the Senior Seminar did its job, a kind of mix between training, broadening, and you were exposed to people from, there were around thirty people in the group, half of them were from State and then there was one from each of the armed services and someone from DIA and one or two from CIA and then the various other intelligence agencies, plus someone from the Coast Guard and FBI.

So it's a very good mix. I really liked the people that were in it. They really get some of the top from the different institutions that were represented and it was a broadening kind of experience. You travel around the U.S. throughout the year. You'll usually be in Washington for four weeks and then on the road for one, plus some international trips.

The first one, a team building or confidence building, or dynamics building exercise, was offsite in Alaska. I missed that because my father had a heart attack.

It was really a good chance to focus on whole range of issues and hear speakers, we would get really good speakers that would come in and talk to us to Washington, people liked to come in and speak to the Senior Seminar.

We met with Mayor Daley in Chicago, saw the commodities exchange, we did all sorts of things that I never would have done, never would have gotten exposed to, we saw portions of a trial in Arlington, just all sorts of institutions of our federal, state and local government that you don't get exposed to in the Foreign Service, or any of the services.

You get exposed to some, but it was meant to be very broadening and it was.

The last trip was supposed to be the capstone trip, it was to be a trip to China and we had our own jet and everything, there was a cost to this and eventually they just cut the whole trip entirely. It happened suddenly, after all the planning and everything and I think that really burned a lot of people, because people had put a lot of effort into this and a lot of expectations and heightened anticipation. I would have loved to have gone to China and seen it; I've never been.

It's closed, as I understand it, for probably various reasons and the budget may have ultimately been one of them, but what really pushed it over the edge, from what I heard, I had already retired from the Foreign Service, suddenly we had a need, with Afghanistan, then Iraq, there was more of a demand for personnel and this took about 15 positions that you had to fill in the Senior Seminar from State and it took people away from other assignments when there was a real need for their services, particularly at that level, it was the thin waist, rather than the thick waist, of the State Department structure.

That's what I heard at the time, they just couldn't afford the positions, to take them out of the assignment cycle, so it was just closed.

Q: Also, State Department training, except for languages, does not have the same priority as the military has for its training.

HOOPER: I think that there's some things the State Department does well, there are some things that State doesn't do all that well.

I had media training when I was there and when I went out in the NGO world I was in the media a lot during a period of a number of years and I didn't really have that much, I'd done it a little bit in the Foreign Service, but not much. Now it's more expected and hopefully it's better. I didn't find the media training all that good. So I really had to learn to do it myself when I went into the NGO world after retiring from the Foreign Service.

The military takes training seriously. That is, you're going to make decisions, you're going to make life and death decisions, you're going to make budget decisions, because the military sees you as part of a team. You may be a grunt in a foxhole, so to speak, or out in a humvee going along, but there's a lot of people that have gotten you there and if the logistics people aren't performing well and all sorts of people aren't performing well and if you don't trust your officers and your noncoms and all this depends upon training.

So what State does, a lot of it you get by osmosis, it's mostly done at the embassies and it's done informally. When you head out, a lot of what you learn about consular work and so forth is from your FSN's and probably the same thing about administrative work. You get out and you learn the realities.

I wasn't in the administrative cone. It may be that the administrative cone does more serious training. The budget and fiscal operations and maybe the general services officers

get more specific, serious, more effective training. Econ has had some serious training courses. Political officers, maybe they have a prejudice, that they don't need it, or something like that. But you don't get that kind of training, many people in the Foreign Service, or didn't when I was there.

And training is something that I think State does some well, probably a lot of it not so well. They're just not prepared to sink the resources in it and take people off and force them to

Q: And they also don't, in a way, see the value. We sort of feel, somebody can go in a job and doing the job, is going to learn it.

HOOPER: Yes, the old generalist mindset. The military, I think, you go to one of these courses and it actually, I think, helps your career, not just in practice but in terms of facilitating your promotion. State, it sets your career back.

Q: Okay, you left in '92?

HOOPER: I left in the summer of '92.

Q: Where'd you go?

HOOPER: Director of Canadian affairs. I wanted to stay in Washington. That was a country director job. Waiting for something to come up in Eastern Europe.

That was when Canadian affairs was in the European bureau and had its own deputy assistant secretary. Since then it's left and it's become part of the Latin American bureau.

You could see this under discussion, because, the DCM in Ottawa, he thought it would be better to get it in the Latin American bureau, because of NAFTA.

I always thought Canada saw itself as a North American country, not as an "Americas" country. It had much more in common with Europe, as part of NATO, its historical background and so forth it just seemed entirely fitting that it stay in the European bureau.

And then it was ultimately changed. I understand the NAFTA argument. It's not implausible.

I always thought the Latin American bureau had a predatory eye on Canada, because that way they could stick a lot of people up in the nice consulates and move them around there. I felt that there was a real hidden agenda and that's really what it was about, people were getting tired of bouncing around from one Latin American post to another, wanted to have a nice shot at Vancouver, that kind of thing, Montreal. Anyway, that was just my own view and I wasn't around when it happened.

Q: And you were doing this from when to when? '92 to

HOOPER: ’92 to early ’94, when I was broken out early, I was picked to become DCM in Warsaw beginning in the summer of ’94 and before that I had four or five months of Polish language training.

Again, language training, as you said, Stu, is one thing that I think State does very well and I give State and the Foreign Service full credit for that. I think that by and large it’s a very effective program and if you don’t learn it’s because you don’t try hard enough, or you’re not suited, it’s not because of the structure and the dedication of the people doing the teaching.

Q: Well, let’s talk about your time. ’92, how would you describe Canadian-American relations?

HOOPER: Okay, there’s two things I think interesting, at least as I look back, interesting about my tour in Canadian affairs. One was that I learned about something new and it was an interesting time because the Quebec issue, Quebec independence, was a very live issue at the time. Now it’s faded, but back then it was a very live issue.

There were some really good people on the Canadian desk. I thought we had some really good people out in the missions. Pete Teeley was our first ambassador during my tenure and he was already up in Ottawa when I got there in the summer of ’92 and he had been George Bush’s political counselor. It was fun working with him. I liked him personally, liked him a lot. I had a lot of respect for him.

Q: What was his background?

HOOPER: Well, it wasn’t diplomacy, it was politics. Again, he’d worked in the White House and he used to be very frustrated during the 1992 presidential campaign, because he knew these guys very well and he would meet with them and then come over and talk with us and you got some insights that you never would have gotten otherwise.

He was telling me, he called President Bush and said, “Your legacy, you need to be speaking about that. No one is doing this. You’ve got to speak more effectively about your legacy.” He said Bush replied that he would, but I concluded that Ambassador Teeley felt the President never took that on board as much as he should have.

Another time he went over to the White House, James Baker had left the job as secretary of state to go over again to run the campaign, because things weren’t going well and Teeley went over to see Baker and came back and he said Baker was telling him “I really fear the campaign’s lost. It was lost before I came in to this job, rather than after I got here.” Baker was already in rationalization mode. It was already, “In case we lose, I’ve already got my markers down, to protect my reputation.”

I’ve got a lot of respect for Baker. I never knew him, I personally met him once or twice when I was in the Department, but I never worked with him directly. And I thought he

was a very effective secretary of state, but, again, always make sure you deflect the blame and have your preprogrammed "It wasn't me" set of excuses, I didn't think that showed particularly well.

And then Jim Blanchard was the second ambassador to Ottawa I worked with. He was interesting to work with because he had been governor of Michigan and he thought he'd been one of the short-listed candidates for secretary of transportation.

He didn't get it and he didn't have any particular love for Warren Christopher as a result. He felt that Warren Christopher was picking people for senior jobs for Bill Clinton and was putting everyone everywhere else to get them out of his way for secretary of state. He felt that Christopher had, if not done him in, had not exactly done him any favors and he ended up in Canada, so he didn't have much good to say about Warren Christopher, that's for sure.

But I'm from Michigan, so Blanchard and I hit it off right away and I really liked working with him and had to take him around Washington and I met a lot of interesting people around Washington through him.

He went out to the embassy and he figured the most important thing in the job was the trade relationship. He also wanted to keep his hand in perhaps to run for senator and get back into Michigan politics. It didn't work out for him, I'm sorry to say. I liked him.

He was bemused by the Foreign Service. He was the opposite of the political appointee coming in and ignoring the Foreign Service Officers and treating them badly. He didn't treat them badly at all. He cared about them, liked them and didn't interfere a lot with what they did.

He didn't have much interest in a lot of what they did. He made this remark I've always remembered, I think there may be some truth in it. He said, "Foreign Service Officers are like frustrated graduate students. They're always trying to debate various issues, rather than have an impact."

He had had some health problems, so he didn't care about the NODIS traffic and a lot of these things that Foreign Service Officers regard as talismans of what's your standing in an embassy, do you have access to what level of traffic.

He felt that trade was real, that was the guts of our bilateral relationship, that and the Quebec independence issue, which the U.S. had made very good faith, diligent efforts to stay out of for as long as possible, while supporting a united Canada.

Mickey Kantor, that was our U.S. Trade Representative, Blanchard spent a lot of time on the phone with Kantor, sorting out trade issues. These were tough issues. There were real domestic constituencies on both sides of the border and there could be real problems and the Canadians were very sensitive, as they should be, if the U.S. is trying to run roughshod over them.

On the other hand, Canadians seemed often to make commitments sometimes at the national level that they would then roll back on the provincial level.

There were a lot of ways of looking at this and you could make fair debates on both sides, but it took a lot of deft handling, because it was very sensitive domestically, on both sides. I think he had the domestic political sensitivities to be very effective in that.

He also was very outspoken on, this wasn't entirely appreciated by everyone in Quebec, on Canada remaining united. I think that was welcomed in Ottawa, less so in Montreal and other parts of Quebec.

I spent a certain amount of my time doing Canadian affairs and a lot of my time doing dissent work on Bosnia and doing things like that for the Seventh Floor. So it was a bifurcated assignment. Formally I was doing this, privately I was doing that and that was a real focus.

I enjoyed the people I met, the time I spent, the issues and so forth that I spent on Canadian affairs.

Q: Did Ottawa and Ontario sort of see things one way and certainly the western provinces see it another way. I've just been interviewing Eileen Malloy. And she was in Calgary. Ottawa was of little interest to the people in Calgary. They were far closer to the United States on things. Did you

HOOPER: Very definitely that was the case. Eileen knew Canada pretty well, because she'd served there previously. Eileen was really one of the better Foreign Service Officers that I met over my time. I respected and appreciated her and I was glad she got an ambassadorial assignment, she really deserved it.

She was in I think

Q: Kyrgyzstan.

HOOPER: Yes, and she was trying to prevent some corrupt weapons sales, I don't know what and she was under some threat.

And you see this now, the more U.S.-friendly culture in Stephen Harper, who is now the prime minister of Canada. Out in Calgary, they produce a lot of resources, they're much closer to the U.S., they don't have a chip on their shoulder. A lot of Canadians, more from Ontario, have a chip on their shoulder towards the U.S.

Q: It's a residue; this is where all the Loyalists, or a lot of the Loyalists, ended up going.

HOOPER: Without their property, because the Tories went up there without their property.

Q: They're sort of equivalent to the Cuban exiles living in Miami.

HOOPER: And this strained perspective that there's always been, you don't see that out in the West, not at all and you don't see it in Quebec. The Quebecois have great respect, affection, for the United States. They're very pro-American. They're as pro-American as Calgary and Western Canada. The Maritimes I think also don't have it as much. It's really an Ontario phenomenon, by and large.

Q: They're Red Sox fans!

HOOPER: So in some ways, looking back, I almost wish I'd spent more time on Canadian affairs. I did almost everything I wanted to do in the Foreign Service, so I'm not complaining, you can't do everything.

Q: Were there any particular issues in Canadian-American relations that you got involved in?

HOOPER: Trade, it was trade and the role of the State Department in trade was pretty minimal. Christopher didn't have any interest in that, nor did he have any interest in Canada.

Tom Niles, who was our assistant secretary, had been ambassador there, so he had an understanding and an interest in Canada and he was willing occasionally to do things. Tom was a very good assistant secretary.

Q: Actually, Tom Niles, his first job as a junior officer, he worked for me in the consular section in Belgrade.

HOOPER: He'd been ambassador to the EC, then, now EU and so he had this range of issues, he was able to more or less to stay on top of EUR, which is an impossible job.

Anyway, in terms of having an impact on Canadian affairs, I would never claim I had much of an impact on the relationship. Trade, it's very difficult for anyone to have an impact on the relationship.

Of course, Canadians hate it when Americans say, "Oh, we think of you just like Americans," which just grinds the Canadians to no end. Most of the population's within a hundred miles of the U.S. border and there's this behemoth down there that just loves you but doesn't pay much attention to where it sits. It wants to dance with you every dance and yet it steps on your toes all the time, because it wants to embrace you so closely.

Trade was the issue that had the greatest likelihood to sour relations and I thought Teeley, then Blanchard handled it pretty effectively. There were one or two trade issues that were worked out while I was there, not that I had anything to do with it, not at all.

There are various border disputes we have with Canada. People don't realize that. They're tiny little things, this island out in the Atlantic, they're little thingies that no one, it probably grinds the Canadians even more that American don't even realize that these issues exist and they're not exactly World War level events sorts of thing, they're just small things.

I looked around and tried to see if we could make any progress on any of them and I came to the conclusion, after listening to the advice of my team, one in particular, who had been in Halifax and had gotten to know the Canadians pretty well and his wife was a Canadian from Vancouver, actually Canadians didn't have any particular interest in solving them, because they figured over time, left alone, then the U.S. would just gradually forget about it and then these locations would just become almost *de facto* Canadian.

On the other hand, if an issue is not causing divisiveness and we found ways to deal with these things, if you suddenly try to solve it and then fail, well then you've created a residue of very negative feelings.

So you want to be sure that you can actually get somewhere before you do it. And, again, if I had really focused on it for two years and wasn't doing this Balkans stuff on the side, maybe it would have been possible to take it more seriously.

Q: Then, one last question on Canada: how effective did you find the Canadian embassy here?

HOOPER: Very effective. They had two ambassadors during this time. The first ambassador, he was very effective and really knew Washington and Prime Minister Mulroney knew Washington and he was down here all the time.
In fact the Tory Party, the Conservatives, were almost wiped out in the election that took place in '93, I think it was. They lost a hundred seats or thereabouts, they were down to just two seats in Parliament. The last few years they've come back.

Mulroney was seen as too close to Reagan and Bush, too close to Washington. I remember one of my trips to Canada, people were saying, talking to us about Mulroney, "It's okay to be pro-American. It's okay to take a call from Washington sometimes, or often, do whatever they're asking, but at least wait for it to ring! Don't call them up and volunteer before they even dial your number!"

Being perceived as overly pro-American, it can work against you in Canadian politics, let's put it that way. Being critical of America, different story.

And Mulroney paid the price. He had put their new embassy building in Washington, beautiful embassy, they bought that stretch of land back when Pennsylvania Avenue was pretty slummy. It's now attractive.

The first Canadian ambassador during my tenure on the desk was very savvy on Washington, well plugged in to the White House, knew exactly what he was doing and he did a lot of good service for Mulroney.

His successor had been chief of staff of the military and he was a really decent man, knew what he was doing, but he came out of a different background.

Mike Kergin was the DCM. He then came back as ambassador later. He had to deal with a lot of his countrymen who were critical of the United States. I never detected any chip on his shoulder, any prejudice towards American that he had. I thought Mike did a tremendous amount to keep the relationship going. I would tend to tip him off on things that would help out and keep the bilateral relationship going smoothly.

Canada, we like to say France is our oldest ally but Canada's our closest ally. But Canada's the place that you want to have good bilateral relations with. There's some places that you don't want to have good bilateral relations with, that it's a failure on the part of the embassy and the State Department if you have good bilateral relationship.

Canada, you want to and it's worth having good bilateral relations with Canada and the Canadian embassy in Washington has I think, they really put some of their top people into that embassy.

Q: I've heard people who work in the White House, Foreign Service types who were in the NSC and all, they used to worry about, back in the Reagan years, they wanted to keep Mulroney and Margaret Thatcher away from the president, because he got on so well with them they were afraid he might make commitments that they really didn't think he should make.

HOOPER: Yes and Reagan certainly did with Thatcher, she would deal with him directly, she wouldn't go through any bureaucracy, there weren't any barriers and they would do deals, that was absolutely right. Reagan just really had tremendous respect for her and she gave him a lot of very useful political tips.

With Mulroney, again, this is a small event in the scheme of things, but it's timely, Mulroney wanted to slot himself to be the first visitor to see Bill Clinton. The Clinton people were trying to keep him at bay. Mulroney wasn't having any of it. He just phoned Clinton and said, "Hey, can I come down next week?"

So Clinton agreed and the staff had to fall into line. It was very important to his standing in Canada, Mulroney thought, that he come down and be the first to see the new president. We put a lot of effort into it, working with the NSC.

Canada, it's not exactly like the president of Egypt or a Soviet leader coming, because then you've got a mass of issues you've got to deal with, it's god-awful.

But this is easier. It went pretty well. A baptism of fire with the Canadians is probably better than a baptism of fire with the Russians or some of the others, where you've got tough, tough issues to deal with.

I remember the NSC afterwards, one of the senior NSC people pulled me aside and said, "We really want to thank you for this. This has been a struggle. We've learned a lot from this and it will help us in visits to come," because it was regarded as a success, but it was because we gave it a lot of effort to make it come out all right in the end.

I had a chance to meet with Mulroney when he was coming in. They landed at Andrews and most people from the desk, there were some that went out there. And someone had to be here, out where the World War II memorial is now, just to make sure that he got from the helicopter there to his car. So I said, "You guys go out to Andrews, I'll take care of this one down here," because it was seen as the least attractive task, "I'll do that."

So I went down there and was standing with Mike Kergin, the Canadian DCM and he was actually the chargé. It turns out Mulroney just went from the plane directly to the helicopter, didn't go through the waiting room area out at Andrews, so no one even saw him out there. The helicopter lands where Mike and I are standing, and Mulroney gets out of the helicopter, comes over and starts chatting with us. So I said to him, "By the way, I have a message to you from President Clinton. He, as you know, likes to jog and he therefore he would like to go out jogging with you tomorrow at 4:30 a.m. Can you make it?"

And he looked at me and he the twinkle in my eye and he said, "Tell him I'll be down in the lobby at 4:00am!" And we were both laughing, it was a nice moment.

It's one of my fonder memories, because, again, sometimes, I always really believed in giving the team the chance to meet important visitors, that it's a team effort and the team puts the effort in and they should have the first crack at trips and some of these rewards and things, recognize diligence and hard work and extra effort and I thought I'd done that right and was prepared to take the background position on this and ended up having a chance to talk with Mulroney. I've got a nice photo of that moment.

The other thing about Canadian affairs, there was a gentleman on our desk, really good guy, knew Canada thoroughly. And there was the Oslo Accords signing ceremony in the White House lawn with Arafat and Rabin in September 1993.

My colleague knew I'd done the Middle East before and he thought it would mean something to me, they had this on the lawn of the White House, and he'd gotten involved in organizing the arrival part at the White House over the weekend.

So he signed me up as one of the greeters, so that I could actually then have a chance to stay there and watch the ceremony. So I did, I stayed there and watched what was at the time an historic event. Obviously there've been problems between the Israelis and

Palestinians, to put it mildly, since then and it was a complete fluke that I got to witness this, but I was glad to have been involved in that.

Q: Okay, let's talk the Balkans. How did you get roped into the Balkans business again? First, you'd better describe, during this time, what was going on in the Balkans?

HOOPER: Fighting in Bosnia, Sarajevo under siege, just these terrible images every day, Christiane Amanpour's reporting, amongst others, the U.S. doing nothing.

The Clinton Administration, with Bill Clinton having made some tough noises during the campaign, quickly allowed itself to be talked into doing nothing by the Europeans, who wanted to avoid doing anything that would involve use of force.

So you had pretty ghastly stuff going on, pictures of emaciated men behind barbed wire, which brought back memories of an earlier era in European affairs, that is the Forties and the concentration camps.

There were horrific things going on. Ultimately there were about 100,000-plus Bosnians killed, most of them Bosnian Muslims, and maybe two million displaced.

And EUR Assistant Secretary Tom Niles had said before a televised House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing there aren't any concentration camps. Tom Niles had allowed himself to get in this position. So Congressman Lantos said, "Someone," the Department spokesman, "says there are [such camps] and you say there aren't. Now someone's lying here. Tell me what's going on! Who is it?" I think Tom felt very badly about that, but, again, he never should have allowed himself to make that statement.

In late August, early September, I had just come on the Canadian desk and made a trip to Halifax just to see one of the consulates and start to get a feel for my new responsibilities. I had been to Canada as a kid a couple of times and had been there with the Senior Seminar, we'd been to Toronto, Ottawa, Quebec City and Montreal.

So when I became country director I went up to Halifax and while I was there I got a call from Warren Zimmerman, who had just left our embassy in Belgrade and at this point I think we had a chargé there, he was our last ambassador to Yugoslavia.

Baker had gone over to take charge of Bush's reelection campaign and Larry Eagleburger has stepped up to be Secretary of State from the Deputy Secretary position.

Zimmerman told me, "Larry Eagleburger has put me in charge of a special project on the Balkans. I'd like you to be my deputy and to be in charge of a special group to work on sorting things out and give fresh policy views and so forth."

And I said, "Well, thank you very much, Warren. I really appreciate the vote of confidence. But I'm not interested. I don't think there's anything to this. I'm glad to hear that they've taken this step, but I think you've just been drawn into something, you'll find

that you have very little room for maneuver and it's just going to be the same old set of recommendations," another humanitarian airlift, increase the assistance, tighten sanctions, more UN peacekeeping troops or observers that don't stop anything.

"It's just going to go on. I don't want anything to do with it. If it's real policy, that would be one thing. I don't think there's going to be real policy making at all. No, thank you."

I was adamant and he was surprised. He thought I'd jump at the chance: "No, no, Larry said it's going to be blue sky all the way, a full rethink, he wants tough recommendations and he wants to do things."

I said, "Warren, I don't think anything's going to happen. I know myself, I'll get frustrated and I won't be any good to you and I won't be any good to myself, so I want to avoid that. I'm happy doing Canadian affairs. I'm sure that something certainly needs to be done in the Balkans, but this is a phony."

Anyway, he said, "Well, would you agree to think it over and just let me know when you get back from your trip?"

I said, "Fine, I'll think about it overnight, but I'm telling you, the answer's no."

My wife was there in the hotel room and she asked what that was about and I explained to her and she said, "You know, if you don't do this, I know you. You'll always wonder if you could have made a difference and you'll never know. Actually, I'd rather you didn't do it and I think you're probably right, but do you want to go through the rest of your life wondering?"

So I thought about that overnight and I changed my mind. I called him back and I said, "Warren, are you sure about this?"

"Yes, yes, yes, blue sky all the way."

"Okay, I'll take it." It was worked out quietly. Eagleburger told the DAS I had then, Bob Pines and A/S Tom Niles, but others weren't to know.

And I brought Richard Johnson, the fellow that I'd worked with, the Yugoslav desk officer I've mentioned, he was just terrific and he agreed to do it. He was skeptical that things would really happen, but he agreed to do it. He was actually trying to get away from Yugoslavia, he felt burnt out by some of this stuff he had been through, endless memos and no real action, it had been pretty grim, but he agreed to do it.

Warren brought in a guy named P.J. Nichols, who had been the economic counselor at the embassy in Belgrade with him. We were sitting in Eagleburger's office, we were talking over with him what to do. I was trying to see just how serious this was.

Afterwards we came out and everyone went back to their offices and Bill Montgomery, who later was ambassador to Croatia and then Serbia, I knew Bill, because when I'd been doing Eastern European affairs he had been DCM in Bulgaria and he and Eagleburger, they'd served together when Eagleburger had been ambassador in Yugoslavia and he brought Bill back from where he was at the time and put Bill in as his office director.

I remember P.J. saying to Bill, there were just the three of us, "I want something in my file, signed by Secretary Eagleburger, that I've done this, because I want to get a promotion."

And Bill said, "Okay, we'll do it." Then P.J. left and Bill turned to me and he said, "What do you want, Jim?"

And I said, "I want your agreement that there will not be anything in my file from Larry Eagleburger saying I've been doing this, because I don't think anything is going to happen and I don't want anything in my file!"

And he laughed. I tried to see the bureaucracy for what it was. Bill was a very savvy guy, I got to know Bill pretty well.

Anyway, I started working with Warren and Richard Johnson and then P.J. I'd started on a Monday and ten days from then there was an interdepartmental meeting which Warren would chair and there would be people from the Pentagon and a number of other agencies and it was designed to really kick things off, move things along.

And I told Warren I would write papers and give him my views, but I said, "Here's how you prepare for this: the meeting's going to get nowhere, because they're all going to come and the DOD people are most important and when you try to get them to do something, they're just going to say, 'Well, we have to get instructions on that. We can't make any decision here.' And you're just going to get nowhere, Warren. That's how these things work. So here's what you do: we work out of list of what you really want, the key things, because this is going to be your first meeting and you need to set yourself out as someone to be reckoned with around here. So a couple days before, we go up to Eagleburger's office, say this is what you want and have him phone over to Cheney," who was Secretary of Defense, "and have him work it out so they're instructed to come to the meeting and tell you that they agree as you start going down your checklist. And then you'll come out as a force to be reckoned with and that's how you get it done. But if Eagleburger isn't prepared to do it beforehand, then you'll know that and then you'll know how to play your hand."

So he's quiet while I'm saying all this and he looks at me and says, "Well, Jim, I've been around quite a while and I think I know how to run a meeting pretty well. Let's just do it my way and see how it works out."

"Okay, Warren, you're the boss," I replied. So everyone assembled on the day, Warren went down his checklist of things that needed to be worked on to move things forward in

Bosnia and he starts going around the room, “We need to do this and we need to do that” and the military said, “Sorry, we can’t agree to that. I’ll have to take that back to my boss. We don’t have any clearance for those kinds of flights and activities,” and Warren is getting more and more frustrated.

I’m not frustrated, because this is how I knew it was going to go. And it ended up with absolutely nothing getting decided, except to have the next meeting. I didn’t say anything. I decided after that meeting, it was panning out to be exactly what I thought: nothing was going to be done.

So I thought about all this overnight and the next morning, I wrote a note to Warren saying, “I’m leaving this job. I’m going back to Canadian affairs. I’m very sorry. I told you I did not want to do the same old stuff and this is the same old stuff. It’s just wheel spinning, getting nowhere. I told you right up front I wanted nothing to do with any mission like that. That isn’t a mission at all. It’s our job to push Eagleburger and see how far he can take it and load him up, give him the bullets he needs and if it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work, but it’s our job to really do that and not this business as usual, this slight, incremental change approach. It won’t work this time. The situation won’t allow it.”

So I typed this up put it in an envelope and we had our morning meeting and on the way out I handed him the note in a sealed envelope, walked out, got back to my office.

A couple of minutes later the phone rang and he said, “Jim, I read your letter. Can you come back down here?”

So I came back to his office and we talked for about an hour and he tried to talk me out of it. I said, “Warren, I am sorry. I let you talk me into it the first time. I didn’t want to do it. This is not what I want. I know what has to be done in Bosnia and this is not the way to do it. This is just business as usual and I don’t want any part of that.

“So, I’d rather do something else, where I can try to be effective, which is now Canadian affairs and try to do something, rather than just waste my time doing this Bosnian stuff.”

So then he said, “Actually, I agree with you, I understand.” I was pushing for the use of force in the Balkans. “I think there’s no other choice, that’s what we have to do, but if I take this to Eagleburger, if I go up and tell him we need to use force, he won’t listen to me anymore.”

That was the classic bureaucratic dilemma that people get themselves in. The late Warren Zimmerman was one of the most decent, honorable diplomats you will ever meet, very effective, beloved by his staff wherever he worked, one of these models that you look to in the Foreign Service, but that’s the classic dilemma, you get into that kind of situation.

I said, “Well, we don’t know that, unless we try. I thought the whole point of this was blue sky all the way, this is a different situation, it’s not diplomacy as usual. We’re in a situation where all the traditional diplomacy hasn’t worked. Peacekeeping hasn’t worked.

The idea was to come up with alternatives. We've agreed, in effect, on what needs to be done. Now we've got to take it to Eagleburger and if you're not prepared to do that, then I don't want to be part of it and I told you that at the beginning."

He said, "Well, I understand, but give it some more thought and I hope you'll stay and I think we can turn things around."

I replied, "I don't think so, Warren. I'm leaving." I didn't intend to think it over.

It was a candid, frank talk. We weren't yelling at each other, it wasn't that kind of thing, but, again, he's holding himself in check because you don't want to take bad news in to the Secretary, you might lose your access.

Okay, fine, if you preserve your access by proposing a lot of stuff that isn't really going to work, every case is different, at some point maybe you can do some things to ameliorate a situation.

But this had been going on for some time, people were getting killed, concentration camps, rampant ethnic cleansing, Sarajevo under siege, people were questioning NATO's resolve and American leadership.

I went back to my office, closed the door and thought for a few minutes, then went up to Bill Montgomery and I said, "Bill, I've just told Warren Zimmerman I'm not going to do it I'm leaving that and going back to Canadian affairs. Just wanted to let you know, because we've been close, that you won't see me working on this anymore. Richard Johnson will probably leave, too. I just wanted to let you know."

And he said, "What happened? What happened?" So I told him exactly what had happened, we were getting no where and it's just the same old stuff, so I'm not going to be part of this, I'm not going to be part of another policy charade.

And he said, "I've got to tell you something, Jim. Warren picked you as his number two because I told him to do so. I needed someone who would push Warren, because he's the only one Eagleburger would listen to and I thought you were the only person in the Department who would be willing to push Warren in the direction that we needed to go.

"I know we need force and I've been pushing him to do it and he won't do it and he keeps saying, 'No one comes up to him around the Department and asks him to do this kind of thing.'

"I wanted you in this job because I knew I could count on you. I know you and I knew what you would do, you would push him. Are you sure he's not going to do this?"

I said, "Listen, Bill, I just came from him. He's not, because he believes he would lose his access."

So I went back to my office and thought about it some more and got really angry. Warren was supposed to do this job and he wasn't doing it. It turned out he might have been able to have some effect, but from what I could see he wasn't going to, because he was looking at a situation that really no longer could be understood and acted upon within traditional bureaucratic norms and therefore you had to move beyond bureaucratic norms and you needed to push and you needed to get serious.

I went back up to Bill's office. I had written a brief memo and handed it to Bill and said, "I want to meet with Secretary Eagleburger. If no one else is going to do it around here, then I want to do it. I'll tell it to him straight and I just want 15 minutes to do that and I think I've earned the right to do that."

And he looked at me and said, "Well, I'll see what I can do. I can approve a memo requesting the meeting."

And so I went back down and I called Richard Johnson and told him the whole thing, we were very close, we became like brothers. And then I get a call from Bill Montgomery's office, saying, "You're going to meet with Eagleburger tomorrow."

And Richard said, "Can I come, too?"

I said, "Sure." So I typed up a list of five points, which said our policy is failing, this is what you need to do and here's how you start and I want a chance to put together an alternative policy that you will agree to read and consider, which will include the use of force, with a team that will do it.

I always wrote out a script, because I thought if you've got a senior policy maker's time and attention, you should make the best use of the time and know what you want to say and don't make it up as you're going along, so you don't forget and it's a useful reminder, so we don't get taken in by the situation.

And so we came in to the Secretary's office and sat down and he went into his inner office, I think he had to take a call and when he finished I said something like, "Well, I hope that doesn't count against our time."

He looks at me and says, "You're not off to a fast start."

So I said, "You've got real problems in our Yugoslav policy. No one in the Department respects it. It's seen in the corridors as a failure. You're going to be held responsible for this. It's a question of leadership and resolve. The only way we're going to get this back under control is by the use of force and I want your permission to draft an alternative policy that you will agree to read and that you will meet with us on it.

"I want one person brought back from overseas to work with us on this, the three of us will do it. This is the guy, Jim Swihart; he's the DCM in Vienna. Richard, Jim and myself are going to put this together, an alternative policy and it's gonna be as long as it needs to

be and it's go through exactly what needs to be done. We want you read it and listen when we go through it."

And it was in that kind of tone, it was very serious. After about half an hour of discussion, he said, "Okay, Bill, bring this guy back, fly him back here and you guys do it, get it up to me, I'll read it and we'll see what to do next."

I came out of that feeling pretty good, in the sense that we got what we wanted. My attitude from the get-go on this Bosnia stuff, I'm going into this in some detail in part because of the involvement of Secretary Eagleburger, because it was also the beginning, that comment to Bill Montgomery, "I don't want something in my file" before, I didn't see this as something that was meant to be career enhancing or non-career enhancing, to advance my career or retard my career.

I wanted to do the right thing on a tough policy issue, deal with it on policy grounds, factor in moral issues as appropriate, factor in issues of power as appropriate, factor in the various components of this, the political aspects as appropriate and the regional component and put together something of value.

But I didn't want to get sidetracked. A lot of people in the Foreign Service, given a paper to churn out, it's harder and harder to get some of these jobs and so you need a patron and the subtext in meetings is often, and I used to joke with Richard about this, "It's not about this issue, it's about that job," what the next job is.

And so part of this was to stay disciplined and be tough and take the epaulets off. I never treated Eagleburger or any other senior official with any disrespect. Sometimes these discussions were passionate on both sides but never disrespectful.

Bill Montgomery was kind of pleased with how it went, from what I could tell. I could see that Eagleburger had some questions and he wasn't going to show too many of his cards. So we got Jim Swihart back and over about a week or so we wrote a 27-page memo on what we do regarding Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, how to end the fighting.

And it called for the U.S. to intervene militarily, but it looked at how this could work on a practical basis.

Now, again, keep in mind we're looking at the period September through early November of '92 and there's a presidential election in November.

So we wrote this thing up in a week or ten days, the three of us, we all agreed with it, we each wrote parts of it. I just entirely put aside my Canadian stuff, just parked that and focused totally on this.

And once it was completed, I sent it to Eagleburger, as I recall late September, early October and waited for a call. Swihart is back from Vienna, but he does have a job out there as DCM and day after day goes by and Bill is telling me, no, there's no time set for

a meeting yet, he's got nothing from Eagleburger. So finally Swihart gives up, he goes back to Vienna.

Anyway, the election takes place, Bill Clinton wins. The day before Veterans Day, November 10, I received a call from Bill Montgomery, "Eagleburger would like to see you tomorrow. It's a holiday, can you come in?"

I prepared another script, a longer one this time, Richard Johnson and I go in and this was around a two hour meeting with Eagleburger. We argued it out, there was almost shouting back and forth, and it turned out and this was the surprising thing, people decide that they don't want to push the envelope, because they assume that the boss doesn't want to hear the bad news.

It turned out, at least what Eagleburger was projecting, what he said was, "I didn't think that there was any chance that the president was going to sign on for using military force in Yugoslavia in the last month or so of the election campaign. Yes, maybe we should do that, but why do you think this way?"

I wish I could remember everything from it, to be honest with you. And at one point I made some reference to something about the '91 Gulf War and for some reason that seemed to trigger something, some insecurity or some defensiveness and he went off on about a 10 or 15 minute tangent. For me, it was just a throwaway line, I hadn't meant anything by it, but it triggered something in him.

Anyway, we hashed out the Yugoslavia issue, Bill and Richard and me and Eagleburger and it was clear that Eagleburger thought the policy was not serious and knew that more serious stuff needed to be done.

In fact, probably, he was more negative on the policy and more desirous of doing stuff, I won't say than us, but in some ways, maybe because he had actually served out there as ambassador, knew the Yugoslavs, knew how violent it was, and knew that he as a former ambassador to the country was going to get tainted with the failure to act and the failure of policy.

And it turned out that he was more willing to listen to negative views and serious policy alternatives than virtually anyone below him in the bureaucracy had believed up to that time, which I found very interesting and, again, in my view, for those who practice self-censorship, it's not just going in and being emotional, saying the first thing that comes to your mind.

There's an implied criticism of the boss, in self-censorship, or maybe more than implied, because what you're thinking is that they're not really up to the job, or they're not prepared to be challenged by negative views.

Eagleburger asked, "What about the Europeans?"

"If you ask the Europeans, Mr. Secretary, you know this as much as anyone else, if you ask the Europeans what they think should be done, they'll tell you to do nothing. If you tell them, 'We're going in there and the first bombing raid leaves at six a.m.,' the French will come to you and say, 'We're ready to leave at five a.m.!' They respect a display of American leadership and use of power, in appropriate circumstances."

We're talking about Europe, now, not Iraq in 2003. This was seen as a European issue. The U.S. needed to lead the allies, who'd failed. NATO was being called into question.

And these were the themes that we played on, but there were real policy steps you could take and they were tough ones and the key was using force and Milosevic and the Serbs were prepared to back down.

He said, "Well, I'll send this over to Dick Cheney," the Secretary of Defense, "and see what his reaction is." It went over, nothing happened.

Q: Okay, we are talking about the end of the administration and I'm not sure if it already happened, but Clinton was left with sort of the dead fish of Somalia.

HOOPER: That didn't happen until he came in.

Q: Bush went in to Somalia.

HOOPER: Right.

Returning to the November 10, 1992 meeting with Secretary Eagleburger, Eagleburger walked us to the door when the meeting ended and he said, "I want to thank you for telling me that my policy is full of shit."

I was, for once perhaps, at a loss for words but Richard Johnson didn't miss a beat. He said, "I see you were listening."

Q: Richard Johnson, what's his background?

HOOPER: He had been the Yugoslavia desk officer. He was supposed to go out to Yugoslavia, to Belgrade. That assignment fell through for various reasons around the time that the position came open, so we hired him. I thought he was terrific, we became very good friends, still are. A very honest man. He is now retired from the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, then, sort of, what did you do? There's sort of this interim period where a new administration's coming in and you've got this mess in the Balkans.

HOOPER: Eagleburger, I think he said he would send our 27-page memo, which was very tough, advocating use of force against the Serbs over to the Secretary of Defense for comment.

Q: Was the idea, in Napoleon's phrase, "a whiff of grapeshot?" Basically hoping the Serbs would back down?

HOOPER: Yes, though more than a whiff. In terms of Bosnia, that was the case. As has been said, "the United States always does the right thing, after exhausting every other alternative." After Bill Clinton came in and did nothing for several years, after signaling during the election campaign that something more had to be done, but then immediately demonstrating that he didn't have any real interest in doing anything in Bosnia.

Once the U.S finally decided that it had no choice but to exercise a real leadership role and threaten the use of force, then very rapidly Belgrade backed down, we got the Dayton peace conference and shortly after that the Dayton Peace Accords.

But it was clear that the Serbs, what they were doing in Bosnia, all it would have taken was a whiff of grapeshot, maybe not much more, because it didn't take that much, what we did, ultimately and the thing was over.

Q: These were real bullies.

HOOPER: Yes and, again, the U.S. at the same time was mounting an arms embargo on Bosnia. It undermined their ability to arm themselves, while at the same time the U.S. and the Europeans weren't doing anything to stop the Serbs, beyond sanctions.

Q: And the Serbs, of course, were armed to the teeth.

HOOPER: Right, they had the former national army. This was the horrific siege of Sarajevo, which just kept going on and on, which Christiane Amanpour reported on fully and passionately.

Q: An announcer, a newslady, for CNN.

HOOPER: She just made that her signature issue. Again, it just went on, day after day and just never stopped. The U.S. finally acted forcefully when Congress got enough votes to override the president's veto of the Bosnian arms embargo, to break down the arms embargo.

Once it was clear that was gonna happen, then the Clinton Administration decided that their bluff had been called, they therefore moved towards the use of force. That's as I recall it.

In any case, Richard and I finished the meeting with Eagleburger and he said he would send our policy memo over to the Pentagon, see what they thought.

I didn't have much hope that anything would come of that. It wasn't clear he was going to fight for it.

As you run into a problem or a wall here, you look around for another area to push on. So I decided I wouldn't let it end with Eagleburger. So we sent up the memo as a dissent channel message. The three of us decided to send it up in the dissent channel as a formal message, since we never got anything back from Eagleburger as such and it had the status of a non-paper. We thought it deserved more than that.

We wanted to force the system to deal with it and deal with the issue, not just deflect it off and so we sent it up as a dissent channel message.

I wanted to meet with Tom Niles, the assistant secretary for European affairs and so Richard and I met with Tom. Warren asked if he could sit in on that. I said I had no objection to that.

So, again, you take the epaulets off and you talk to them as policy makers, but it's not, "Well, you might want to consider this or that," instead, it's a serious talk.

Our conclusion was that Eagleburger had appreciated that. Who could he talk with honestly about this issue? We'd been doing this. We'd met with him. There was no leak.

In the Eagleburger meeting, after the initial sparring, it got down to be a very serious discussion and it turned out that Eagleburger was at least trying to project that he was more skeptical about his policy than, I wouldn't say than we were, but maybe almost, than many of the people in the Department that were trying to defend it, but he didn't believe in it.

That was what he was projecting, that he knew it was going to fail, it had failed and he welcomed the chance, actually, to have a private talk with people whose discretion he had begun to trust, because, again, it didn't leak.

So I began seeing, with Richard, a number of policy makers around the building, starting with Tom Niles, after Eagleburger, and I think they appreciated the chance to discuss this.

I didn't talk about what I was doing with others around the building. I was still director of Canadian affairs, but not really doing much on Canadian issues during the time I was doing this.

Tom Niles, I'd given him a copy of the paper. Niles was a very, very decent man and Ralph Johnson, who was his deputy assistant secretary for the Balkans, also, I had a great deal of respect for both.

I think Tom had tried to change the policy and had gotten nowhere with Eagleburger and he'd loyally defended it in public and I think he had been burned by it.

Anyway, Richard and I went in to talk with him. Tom had been ambassador to the EC, he really knew all these European issues, down to tariffs and trade and whatnot, an extraordinary amount of detail he was able to absorb and manage in the massive European portfolio.

He started out by saying, "Talking about use of force, you want to hit airbase A and airbase B?"

I said, "It's not that level of detail. About the use of force, the Europeans, if the U.S. asks for their point of view, they don't want to do anything and we're not going to get anything out of them. If the U.S. is prepared to take the lead, a demonstration of American power, purpose and resolve would revitalize the alliance and restore belief in American leadership, which had been lacking, because of the way we'd failed in Europe on this issue. It was draining the life out of NATO. It had eroded NATO's credibility. NATO's credibility and the credibility of American leadership were becoming questions, which they always are in the Western alliance. That's what alliance leadership is all about."

So our argument was that once we showed that we are prepared to use force the Europeans will be right with us and they might even be in a more forceful mode than us, because they can't afford to be seen to let the United States act unilaterally in confronting the most deadly postwar security issue in Europe.

I realize the Soviet threat was different. Yugoslavia didn't have any nuclear weapons. It was a different issue. It was the most violent, it was the most bloody conflict in Europe, since the end of World War II.

They couldn't afford to let us act unilaterally. So they would have to go along with us and we had all the trump cards, if we were prepared to use them.

I told Niles, "In my view, it is the job of the president to decide on this policy. It is the role of the State Department to come up with a strategic game plan for this. Now here is the outline for what it should be. Let's not talk about whether I think it's realistic, that this is going to happen or not. I understand what happened in the election a few weeks ago. This administration lost. But as to which targets to attack first and so forth, that level of detail is not anything we want to get into. Our plan doesn't get into that. That's the job of the military.

"We give them the political parameters and then, that's their job, whether they attack airbase A or battalion B or something here or something there, that's their business and I don't want to get into it.

"The job here is to focus on what should be done and have a game plan and then a lot of these details, it's up to the institutions which have those responsibilities to work that out."

As I recall it was a thorough discussion. It didn't end with any agreement for him to do anything. He might have disagreed with our view.

I think that he and DAS Ralph Johnson had gotten beaten down. Again, they were both honorable men, they'd gotten beaten down by the system, day to day dealings with the Pentagon, the Seventh Floor and everyone else, where it's how do you tighten the sanctions another notch and how do you try to show some activity by the administration when you're really doing nothing and all the day to day compromises that happen when you're in that kind of position and you're dealing with senior policy makers who aren't prepared to change policy.

From a policy point of view, it was an unsatisfactory meeting. I felt we hadn't gotten anywhere in it. It was a good meeting, but we hadn't gotten anywhere to advance a more forceful policy.

At some point it became "What do I do next?" rather than just "I'm going to do this!" And so, casting around, we met with Frank Wisner, who was the Under Secretary for Security. Wisner's a good guy and he subsequently got involved in the Kosovo issue, among a number of other things that he did after he left the Department. That was probably one of the best meetings that we had. I found his staff to be helpful, sympathetic.

Wisner told us that he'd been fighting against the Bosnian arms embargo, he thought it was immoral and wrong and counterproductive and we talked about some strategy for that. I thought that was the best meeting. He seemed most sympathetic to this. He understood the situation. He wasn't trying to defend the indefensible. He wasn't going through the motions. He was looking for ways to do this. It was a very useful meeting.

The more of these meetings we had and nothing leaked out, I think people had more confidence in us as interlocutors. We asked to see Arnie Kantor, who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. We had a meeting with him, Eileen Malloy had set that meeting up, she was one of his key staffers. I found Arnie Kantor kind of thin. Again, it was a useful discussion, as far as it went.

Perhaps I didn't listen enough, sometimes, in retrospect. What insights could I gain into what was the real thinking on the policy level?

He didn't really believe in the policy, either. In fact, I actually had difficulty in finding anyone, in doing this, that actually believed in the policy.

Q: Wasn't the basic policy, "For God's sake, let's not get involved!"?

HOOPER: He believed in that!

Q: That was essentially the policy. Politicians on both sides of the Atlantic just didn't want to do anything.

HOOPER: Right, they were focused with coming up with a lot of activity, to make it look like there's a little bit more play on the string before we face the moment the truth. For the Bush Administration, it was to get out of town before having to do anything.

I continued to meet with these people, but also continued to keep the pressure on Eagleburger. You never knew when you were going to hit pay dirt. I always believed, Richard asked me in the beginning, "You don't think you're going to get anywhere with this, do you?" and I said, "Yes, I think it has a chance." In my view, if you don't view that trying to change it can work, then why do it? I wouldn't have put any effort into it if I didn't believe that there was a chance that the policy could be changed.

There were all sorts of ploys, the kind of typical stuff. Sanctions were a big policy. Following the money, to Cyprus, to here, to there, tightening the sanctions against Serbia. I don't know how many times we tightened the sanctions and we did much more under Clinton and Christopher.

Whenever the pressure would rise, the issue was back on the front pages and in lead stories on the evening news, because of another big shelling incident in Sarajevo or something else, or another town fell and another massacre took place, again, the questions would all arise, "What's the U.S. doing about it?"

So they had to come up with something. Memos going through the system, 14 things to do, if number one is "Use military force" and number 14 is "Tighten sanctions," well, policy makers, if they don't want to do anything, they always check number 14, or "have another meeting with the Europeans to explore allied views," they'd always check the bottom options and then say, "Well, we're launching a new initiative," and Eagleburger was very good at this.

And Milosevic was a smart cookie. He took the measure of the West fairly quickly. He was prepared to go as far as Western inaction would allow him to get and the more forceful we were, the less he would have done. But he kept pushing and he found almost no resistance.

You had Akashi, the UN mediator with UNPROFOR, I think the UN force was called, who was just terrible.

Q: From what I gather, Akashi was viewed as being a nullity, practically.

HOOPER: A dishonorable man, I had nothing but contempt for what he did, which was really what he didn't do, he just continued to run around and throw verbiage, anything to avoid acknowledging that the UN was failing and was cutting deals all the time with these Serb hardliners.

A lot of people with good reputations prior to this, I don't think it enhanced Eagleburger's reputation and certainly Jim Baker had done a lot of really impressive things since the Cold War wound down in Eastern Europe and the Wall.

George Bush had done many great and wonderful things, I have a lot of respect for George Bush and for his presidency. But they didn't go out of office on a high note. It just drained them.

Lord Carrington got involved, and tainted, by his inaction on Bosnia, as well as David Owen, two former British Foreign Secretaries.

Q: Vance was in that, too.

HOOPER: Vance got involved. Everyone that touched it became tainted. The assumptions that they had were the problem: you can't really use force, that would jeopardize the alliance, forceful talk should be enough and we have to negotiate our way out and all of this kind of stuff.

There were so many of these initiatives. I was doing a lot of reading about Munich back then, because it seemed to me a Munich moment that the West was facing, that the danger as others watched this lack of forcefulness and the ability of hard line nationalists and Milosevic, ultranationalists, to use force and get their way and ethnic cleansing, actually a terrible term, but it's stuck and come to be a euphemism for genocide, it would raise the temptation for ultranationalists elsewhere in a situation, as the Eastern European empire of the Soviet Union came to an end and the Soviet Union was in what could be its last days, as part of the then 15 Soviet republics, which became 12 when the Balts left under Yeltsin and then as even more left, it was just tempting ultranationalists that they could get their way through force and ethnic cleansing/genocide.

So the issues were serious out there, but one proposal, to divide Bosnia-Herzegovina into cantons, proposed the same number of cantons as Czechoslovakia would have been divided into under the Munich plan and this got a certain amount of publicity.

The parallels were just leaping off the page, so to speak and these blue chip, blue ribbon people, quite honorable people that had done important things in office, Lord Carrington had resigned over the Falklands issue. Margaret Thatcher tried to talk him out of it. He said, "No, no, no, I failed, it was my responsibility, I should have seen it coming. Someone has to pay the price for this." And he was riding high as the foreign secretary, he resigned, extremely honorable.

Again, their reputations were all getting chewed up and I think this was quite sobering to people and, again, it was an issue in the presidential campaign, not that Clinton had campaigned on it, but he had made a statement signaling that forceful action might be in the cards if he took over, not just a reiteration of the Bush Administration policies.

We continued meeting with people around the building. Everyone wanted a change in policy and I think that people were glad to see that someone was pushing for it.

Q: But there had to be the feeling that the clock was ticking, until the new administration came in. Nobody is going to make a major commitment. There was this action that got us overly involved in Somalia, but was there any attempt to talk to Clinton people who were going to be coming in?

HOOPER: By me?

Q: Well, by someone? In other words, you've got a crisis going on, it's not going to go away and you've got a new administration that's going to come in and the Bush people or somebody should have somebody dealing with the Balkans to talk to the incoming administration.

HOOPER: I didn't know what discussions were going on. I requested a meeting with the State transition team, I think it was Strobe Talbot that was heading it. I might have even attached a copy of our policy paper. Got nothing back. Never got a response.

Q: Again, this is a third rail. I'm not even sure this response was political, because people were seeing the horror on TV and it's something that people at a certain point say, "Enough of this, let's stop it!"

HOOPER: I think it was still possible for the Bush Administration to have done some things with air power at that point. That was perfectly within their power. It wouldn't necessarily have committed them to a military campaign and it would have put down a marker. Well, they weren't prepared to do that. They were trying to get out of town.

I think that Bush felt that history was going to treat him kindly. He had prevailed in Iraq, he had prevailed in Panama.

Q: And he also had committed troops to essentially a humanitarian mission in Somalia. It turned into sort of a disaster, but that was on Clinton's watch.

HOOPER: It wasn't a disaster then.

Q: No, it was designed to help feed people who were inhibited from being fed by these warlords and it was working.

HOOPER: I think the Bush people, I think they felt that doing anything for Bosnia was just a bridge too far. It was just something that for whatever reason they weren't going to undertake it. And there was always Eagleburger, their Secretary of State, the former ambassador to Yugoslavia, "Lawrence of Macedonia" as we called him, who was there to take the responsibility, take the rap. And I think Eagleburger was getting more and more uncomfortable with that feeling, that he was going to take the responsibility for that.

Now, we then continued meeting with people around the building and with someone at the NSC. I remember Paul Wolfowitz once told me, when I had an NGO I had all these Democrats and Republicans on the executive committee and he was one of them, and he told me that he had sat down with Colin Powell and started talking about Bosnia and started to push him on it. More and more people came into the room, it went on for a couple hours. It became a real thing over there at DOD and in the end Powell said, "Well, you tell me if you get the State Department to back this, then maybe we'll consider it."

So there was a lot of this. State and DOD would each defer to each other. When you don't want to get involved in something, there's limitless excuses.

Q: How did you find the reporting coming in from Belgrade? Did we have anyone in Sarajevo, or not, at the time?

HOOPER: No. We didn't have an embassy in Sarajevo. We didn't have much there. Vic Jackovich had been sent out there, operating from Vienna. I think he was the first ambassador. He was a USIA officer, spoke excellent Serbo-Croatian. He would often help out on Baker trips and it just led to him being more and more involved in this. He was based in Vienna and would fly in.

Anyway, we didn't have anyone there permanently, as I recall. We still had the embassy in Belgrade.

In this case, the issue wasn't so much what was the local reporting on the details, because it was very clear what was going on, so it didn't matter a lot, since we didn't want to be involved, anyway.

Where these things matter, in particular, is if you decide you want to be involved and actually get somewhere, then it's useful to have context. The Bosnians, the Izetbegovic government, they were just getting clobbered. Day after day they were losing more ground. They were trying to arm themselves.

We sent in another message in the dissent channel, calling for attacks on the concentration camps, that the U.S., if we weren't going to do something more serious and forceful, there were a number of locations that were identified where people were getting killed. I never said that this was on a comparable scale to Auschwitz, to the Holocaust, I never called this a holocaust, these were people that had been collected, often intellectuals and Muslims specifically, trying to eliminate the leadership in that society.

And it was clear where many of them were located, so we could have at least liberated those camps or some of them. And I sent something up and said if we were prepared to use more forceful measures that would be the way to define U.S. action, start with this.

If we don't do anything beyond it, then at least this puts down an important marker about the limits of what we're prepared to tolerate.

Met with Bill Burns and John Fox—who was a breath of fresh air, totally committed to changing the Bosnia policy and someone who was very creative in his approach and tough minded in his thinking about the Balkans—of Policy Planning and talked with Tom Niles again and Ralph Johnson on that. Niles and Johnson didn't support it. The reason that they gave for not supporting forceful actions to liberate these concentration camps, they said that they wouldn't support that because some of the inmates would be killed in the attacks. In my view, that is insufficient justification, rather ridiculous actually.

Q: We went through that one in '44.

HOOPER: That's right and there were people then who survived the camps who were praying that the bombers that occasionally they would see going over on their way elsewhere would drop bombs on the camps, because they'd rather die that way than face what was coming otherwise.

So I didn't find that to be at all persuasive. That's an immoral argument to use. There are other arguments you can use against it, you don't have to support it, but that's not one.

Eagleburger, he finally called, only in December of 1992, when he was had only about a month left in office, he actually called five or six persons, including Milosevic, war criminals, the first time that that term had been used officially.

Of course, you call people war criminals, it raises the stakes: "Well, what are you doing about it?" So, again, I regarded that as, your last thirty days in office, it's real easy to be a hero and to try to ride out on a white horse.

Bill Burns, who was then acting head of Policy Planning, told me later, I didn't realize this at the time, he said that he felt that this stuff we were doing with Eagleburger had made him worried about his reputation and how he was going to be seen, so he wanted to protect it, because he could see that this just wasn't going to work out, this policy stuff would be seen for what it was and he wanted to salt a few good things in there.

So it had some affect, maybe, in laying the groundwork for the tribunal, but I've never claimed that this actually changed policy. I don't think it did. The proof is all there: it didn't.

Then the new administration was coming in. I decided that I wanted to speak to the Open Forum. I wanted to speak to the Foreign Service.

Rosemary O'Neill agreed to do this. She was head of the Open Forum. She was very helpful in this. And so I worked on what I had to say for a long period of time. It was about the failure of our policy in Bosnia and what should be done and I said something about what I had been doing.

I spoke with Bill Montgomery he said he didn't want to be mentioned himself, though he had been dissenting very vigorously with Eagleburger on the policy.

When you dissent, there are no rules for dealing with the Seventh Floor, but there are penalties if you break any of them, by which I mean that there are unstated assumptions and pitfalls and problems and you have to be careful in negotiating your way through.

And for me it wasn't about trying to use this to get a better job, to secure a patron, to advance my career, it was none of the above. It was focused on how we change the policy, try to be the best exponent of that and come up with the best ways of doing it. But it wasn't just slight incremental changes. It was serious.

I remember going through it before the Open Forum, talked about how the Foreign Service in the 1940's or 1930's, in an earlier era of genocide, had not entirely distinguished itself and this provided another opportunity for the Foreign Service to rise to the occasion and it was time for a serious change in policy.

I tried to be as eloquent as I could in this and not wonkish and focus on national interests, broad policy concerns and practical problems in carrying it out and so forth.

And I was very hard hitting, I was very honest. And I finished and there was dead silence in the auditorium and I just finished and sat down.

Then they had questions and answers and it was just a very spirited time and I actually found people were very supportive of what we were talking about.

The first commenter said, "The fact that there was silence when you finished speaking, Jim, was I think an indication how profound and moving you were. I hope you don't take it as meaning that we here in the audience disagree with you."

They sent the text of my remarks around to all embassies and suddenly I started to get a lot of attention around the building and others began taking more action. It triggered something.

I was asked if I would run for vice president of AFSA, but I didn't want to do this. I said, "I really am not trying to do this to advance my career. I'm not trying to get a better job out of this, or a plush assignment. So I really cannot take any benefit from this."

I really tried to act that way, because I thought I had a responsibility. But I do remember on January 20th saying to Richard, "It's now all over, this administration. And anyone who was going to dissent and try to change Bush Administration policy, that chapter closed. It was over. If they tried, great. If they didn't, there's nothing they can do about it now, because they're out and a new team is in."

Q: What were you up to after January 20th, 1993, as far as this cause that you were espousing? You had a new administration coming in. Were you getting any feel for the new administration, the Clinton Administration, coming in, vis-à-vis Bosnia and the mess there?

HOOPER: Eagleburger was trying to ride out on something of a white horse. He obviously knew that he was going to be tagged by history with a lot of the responsibility for the failure to act. Late in his tenure as secretary of state, he listed some Yugoslav officials, he called them responsible for war crimes. I think that was in part designed to put down a marker, but, again, this was pretty late in the game, just before the inauguration of a new president. It's kind of late to become an activist on this issue.

Clinton had said something about Bosnia, positive about the need to stop the fighting, during the campaign, so there was some hope on the part of many that he was going to be more activist, rather than just going along with the UN, Akashi, the UN representative in Bosnia, and the Europeans, who didn't want to be involved, who didn't want to use force, wanted to define the problem as diplomatic and so forth, which made it easier for the Yugoslav leader, Slobodan Milosevic, to play the international community off.

It was clear that if the U.S. was prepared to use force, then Milosevic was going to have to deal, but there was a lot of bluster. This became even clearer in retrospect.

Clinton, however, after being elected, he received calls from European governments and right away made it clear to them that he was not serious about doing anything in Bosnia.

So I think the Europeans then relaxed. But it wasn't clear yet where the administration was going. Warren Christopher came in and they gathered people together in the Dean Acheson Auditorium in the State Department building and I remember he encouraged Department officials to "write with more active pens." If that was how you were going to define diplomacy and define your agenda, it wasn't much to look forward to.

Q: Warren Christopher came across as a good lawyer for the president in foreign affairs. He was, apparently, from all accounts, an extremely good lawyer, but foreign affairs wasn't his

HOOPER: He was as good a lawyer for the president in foreign affairs as he was a lawyer for Al Gore in Florida in 2000, one of Gore's big mistakes. I think he was just a weak reed, a kind of Mister Milquetoast as a secretary.

I gave a copy of my speech to the Open Forum to Brian Attwood, who was then the Under Secretary for Management, became the AID director, he had been the head of the National Democratic Institute and I knew him and gave him a copy.

And he gave it to Christopher and asked that Christopher meet with me, so I went up with Richard Johnson. I didn't really want to do the meeting, to be honest. I was getting tired of doing this. So I went up and did it, but my heart wasn't in it.

With Eagleburger and Bush and that crowd, at least you had the feeling that if you could persuade them to do something, there was a lot of backbone there, and if they were going to take action, then action you would get and it would be real action.

Very early on n the Clinton Administration, I was picking this up from people on the Seventh Floor, that all they're going to come up with is just talk and meaningless activity.

So, to be honest, my heart wasn't in it and probably it wasn't one of my best efforts with Seventh Floor people. Christopher had Peter Tarnoff, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs there and his office director, Beth Jones and Sam Lewis, the head of Policy Planning.

There were a lot of people sitting there on Christopher's side, which was very different, Eagleburger just had his office director.

And I began by reading a selection from George Kennan on backbone and resolve, that's really what's at stake, without getting into a lot of these issues.

At one point he asked about the Europeans. I said, "Well, if you ask their advice, you're not going to get anywhere, they'll just say, 'Do nothing.' But if you take the lead and you're prepared to act forcefully and we're going to act, because NATO is at stake, American leadership is at stake and it's America's power, purpose and resolve that are at stake and whether it is going to be hollowed out. This kind of violence, ethnic cleansing, the first time in Europe since the 1940's. That's what is the challenge here and if you're prepared to act, they will follow. It will infuse a new sense of purpose into Europe. But if you ask them, they'll just go along with the same lowest common denominator stuff they've done, because they don't want to do it and they're not prepared to take the lead. But if we're prepared to take the lead, they're prepared to follow and then they may try to outbid us, to see who's going to be in the air first."

I didn't think that the conversation was really getting me very far. Again, it probably wasn't my best effort. But at the end, he began to thank me, I said, "One question for you," because I had been answering their questions. "Do you believe this is genocide?"

And he looked at me and there was silence in the room and he didn't want to answer and he turned to Sam Lewis and he said, "Well, Sam, what do you think about that?"

And Lewis, who was on the spot, a former ambassador to Israel, he understands what ethnic cleansing and genocide is. Lewis squirmed a bit and hemmed and hawed and then said, "Well, I believe that these are acts of genocide."

Now, there's a difference, as a lawyer, between genocide, which calls for a response and if the U.S. government says something's genocide we at least have to report to Congress what we're doing to end it, so it does raise the bar a little bit, if you define it as genocide. Acts of genocide, however, they had asserted, or determined that was different from genocide, there was a distinction. Now, to try to split the difference between genocide and acts of genocide to avoid the legal determination that raised the bar, the pressure, on the policy to do something.

This was where the Clinton Administration was. Just after that Christopher headed out to Europe to try to persuade the Europeans to take more vigorous action and he got no where, came back with nothing to show for it.

But my interpretation was the Europeans read him for what he was, that he wasn't coming to tell them what the U.S. was going to do and assign them their roles, which is what they're used to. He was coming to encourage them but essentially to ask them and to implore them if they were ready to be more active and more forceful on Bosnia. Well, they weren't, in the absence of firm U.S. leadership, and that was the end of it.

I just concluded that there was just nothing to gain from continuing. I wanted to do it as long as I believed that there was a chance that it would work, whether anyone else believed that this dissent would work or not, I was willing to do it so long as I believed that it had a chance of making a difference. If I didn't believe in it, I wasn't doing it for anything other than for the mission, the focus of what that was all about. If I didn't believe in it myself, then I can't ask others to do it.

Bill Clinton certainly had no interest at all in doing anything about Bosnia and he had Warren Christopher and people on his national security staff I think whose job was to make it possible for him not to have to focus very much on foreign policy.

Their goal was to keep Bosnia out of the headlines. I tried to spend more time backgrounding journalists. A columnist for the New York *Times*, Anthony Lewis, he wrote a number of columns. The way I did it was not to provide them information on what the administration was doing on the basis of stuff that I heard, from the paper flow, from the desk. I felt that was not appropriate, at least I did not want to get into that. What I wanted to give them was perspective. So there were people from the New York *Times* and Washington *Post*, mostly Anthony Lewis.

I kept trying to come up with different things within the system, to get people to think, to try to stir up some action, to press people to look at it from a different perspective, to see what we were dealing with here, it wasn't just another set of problems that you send out some talking points to your embassy and you trot in and do a demarche.

It was serious. It raised a lot of fundamental issues. I went down and asked Rosemary O'Neill if I could get Elie Wiesel to speak about Bosnia, would she agree to host him at the Open Forum and she said, "Good luck! We'd love to have him here! Any day of the week you get him, just let me know!"

Elie Wiesel was a Nobel Peace Prize winner, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, probably the preeminent spokesman for the victims of the Holocaust. He's written a number of books about it. He's a moral leader and seen as that.

He was teaching at Boston University at that time. So I called him up and spoke with him, said who I was, what I was trying to do, not a long presentation, a summary and I asked if he would come down and speak about Bosnia and he said yes, he would, that he

was coming to Washington for the dedication of the Holocaust Museum and he would be happy to.

And I said, "Okay, this event will be sponsored by the Open Forum, which encourages dissent in the State Department and provides channels for that and they will have someone call you about logistics."

So I went back to Rosemary and told her and gave her his phone number to use in making the arrangements. She was quite surprised, very pleased by this and then she said that she would take care of the arrangements. He actually did come to speak.

I never asked for honors or publicity for what I did and I certainly didn't try to use it to cash in and get a certain job for myself out of it. I determined it's not about the next job, it's about this mission.

However and this is the only time that I felt that I wanted to receive some recognition, when Rosemary introduced Elie Wiesel to the very large audience in the Department auditorium and then said, "And this was arranged by" someone on her staff and I waited to hear my name and it wasn't mentioned and I felt that was really improper. They didn't have the idea for it, I had the idea and obtained his agreement to come and speak and all they did was handle the logistics. That rankled with me at the time.

And at that Holocaust Museum dedication, he turned to President Clinton and said, "If 'Never again!' is to mean anything, what are you going to do about Bosnia?" He did put President Clinton on the spot there.

Then there was a lunch in Wiesel's honor in the Department's formal dining room attended by several under secretaries of state, there were about a dozen people present including me and Richard Johnson.

Meanwhile, the siege of Sarajevo was going on. Back then it was a daily kind of thing, people getting picked off on the streets of Sarajevo by snipers every day, it was just horrific and nothing was being done, except more meetings and more hollow diplomacy, because people kept shying away from the use of force.

Meanwhile, pressure was building on Congress to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia, because, again, not only would we refuse to intervene to stop the Serbs from their siege of Sarajevo and from their ethnic cleansing throughout Bosnia, but we also kept an arms embargo on Bosnia, and naturally had one on Serbia (which the Russians did not adhere to), which projected a moral equivalence between Serbia and Bosnia.

In Congress support continued to grow, in the Senate, led by Bob Dole and Joe Lieberman, to have a veto-proof majority to overturn the arms embargo, and ultimately they got it and that's when the administration's hand was forced.

And, meanwhile, the summer of ’92, George Kenney had resigned, a Foreign Service Officer, he’d been the deputy Yugoslav desk officer, very capable, he was the first of several to resign in protest of our Balkans policy.

And I remember, there was a rumor that he had resigned and I ran into him one day and I asked him, “George, did you resign?”

He said, “Yes, I did. I’m going to go after them publicly.”

Marshall Harris was the next to go, in the fall of ’92 or the spring of ’93. I was talking with him, he was the Bosnia desk officer, he remains a good friend, he was talking about what to do and how to increase the pressure on the Seventh Floor. I told him a lot of the stuff I’d done.

I said, “Why not get together a petition and send it to the Secretary, signed by people who are involved in Balkans policy making, so it’s not just anyone from the Department, but very specific, as many people as you can get. I’m happy to sign. However, I’ve done so much of this, it’s probably better that it not be seen as another Jim Hooper product or initiative,” because, again, you keep looking for ways to increase the leverage, increase the pressure and try to get somebody to do something, working the system.

And he did that. There were 12 people from around the Department that signed a petition calling for more serious action and to end this, more forceful action.

And it leaked. A lot of pressure was put on Marshall. It embarrassed the administration.

The administration’s goal was to keep the policy issue off the front pages. The more it was on the front pages, the more it became a serious issue in the media, the more the pressure would rise on the administration to do something. Sanctions had been tightened about 59 different times, tracking down Yugoslav money, all that had been tried and had failed.

I was very ambivalent about sanctions. Sanctions are often a ruse to avoid taking real action; they give the impression of taking action. There are a lot of questions whether sanctions work or not, and what their pernicious side effects can be. That’s a separate issue, a serious issue. It’s so often a feel good measure.

Then Marshall resigned and there’s a congressman that Richard Johnson had worked with on the Hill on one of these Foreign Service Officer Pearson fellowships, Frank McCloskey, and Richard told Marshall, “Why don’t you contact Rep. McCloskey about a job in his office?” McCloskey had taken on the Bosnia issue, raised it with Clinton at a White House dinner, and would continue to raise it. He hired Marshall to work on foreign policy on his staff and Marshall got a lot of publicity for Bosnia in this way.

And then Steve Walker, who was the Croatia desk officer, he’d been the Croatia desk officer for a couple of months and was very frustrated with the policy. I got to know him.

He came down one day and said, “I’m going to resign tonight. What do you think? Here’s my letter to Christopher.”

I told Steve, “Tomorrow, once this becomes public, just stay at home and make sure the word gets out about what your phone number is. You’re going to get phone calls all day long. That first day it’s going to be big news. You won’t even remember your name after five or six interviews.

“So I would encourage you to rewrite your first paragraph in your resignation letter, first, two, three, four sentences, so that in the New York *Times* story’s lead sentence about why you are leaving, what would you want it to be? That should be your first sentence. And your second sentence should develop the idea and so on. This letter should in effect be a script that you would use to then brief the media on why you’re leaving.”

And so he went back and rewrote it and the next day it was a big splash. He told me a couple days later, he called me up and said, “Man, you were right about that! I was just drained. I could barely think by the end of the day. I’m glad I had that in front of me. I rewrote it and I just went right down through those points.”

I didn’t resign. I was trying to change the policy from inside. With so many resignations, they were moving people into some of these Balkan desk jobs who hadn’t served in the Balkans before, because they couldn’t trust the people that came in there who had some knowledge, they just tended to be very opposed to administration policy. And so they began assigning people that didn’t have much background in the situation, figuring they would be more reliable, shall we say, from the administration’s point of view. Again, they can put in whoever they want, that is an administration’s prerogative, but for a while it became a way to tamp down dissent and leaks and resignations.

I was looking for ways of posing elements of a policy question, or components of a policy, to try to get them to act on it. I got something back from the EUR front office on that, one of Tom Niles’ deputies, DAS Ralph Johnson, he sent me a memo saying, “I’ve given this a lot of thought and ultimately don’t think we could support your idea for bombing the Serbian concentration camps, because some of the inmates would get killed during efforts to free them.”

There are various reasons why you could oppose it, for example, for *realpolitik*, this would involve us in a broader war with Yugoslavia, we don’t want to do this, you can make a case and therefore these are terrible things but we don’t think that force is the way to end it. That is one case he could have made.

Okay, I would have disagreed with it, but it’s a fair case you can make and I understand that. To argue that you shouldn’t do it because some of the inmates might be killed and I’m sure some would, I thought was not grounds for inaction. There are enough memoirs from inmates of the original 1930’s and 1940’s era concentration camps, the survivors saying, “We would hear the allied bombers flying over and we just prayed that they

would bomb us and put us out of our misery and anything would have been better, at least we would have died with some dignity."

The Serbs would focus on one town after another. Srebrenica became the worst single massacre. Goražde was under attack and they were holding them off and at one point they appealed publicly to the U.S. and NATO to "Please bomb us and let us die with dignity."

Steve Walker and Marshall Harris, they then created an NGO to advocate publicly and they had a framed *New York Post* headline in their office, "Goražde to Clinton: Please bomb us and let us die with dignity!"

I could see more and more that there was not much point in advocacy around the Department, because Christopher was just as hopeless as Eagleburger had been. I had some journalists who I knew who I briefed, gave them a perspective on what's going on, so that they had an alternative to the perspective that they were getting from the Department. So many of these people, they knew exactly what the administration was up to and I would give them useful one liners that they could use.

Q: How would you do this?

HOOPER: Call them up and once I established a relationship with them, again, it wasn't about "Here's what the administration is going to do at tomorrow's meeting" or "Here's a secret decision they've made to do something," it was giving my perspective on what was behind whatever issue.

Q: Well, was anybody monitoring you, telling you to shut up?

HOOPER: No. Maybe they were monitoring me. I wasn't broadcasting. I said, "I do not want my name involved in this, no quotes by name," it was always that way, which is fine, because I helped them look smart, because they would come up with these ways, often imaginative ways, of looking at something.

When you're in one of these sorts of issues, where it's a long term struggle to change the policy, you can't keep saying the same things, or you have to find new ways to say the same things, or new ways to package something which are relevant to where you're going.

So you have to keep coming up with these kinds of things and more and more I really got kind of tired of doing this around the Department. As '93 wore on and nothing was happening, I was asked if I wanted to put my name in for a DCM position in Warsaw, where there was a new ambassador who had been picked to go out there, Nicholas Rey and he was looking for a DCM, because the person there was going to leave in the summer of '94.

Mikolaj Rej, his namesake and ancestor, was a founder of Polish literature in the 16th century.

Q: He got quite a bit of mileage out of that.

HOOPER: He certainly did!

I never felt that there was any retaliation against me. I didn't think they would retaliate against me for what I did and I really tried to keep it, what I'm saying about the journalists, obviously that's outside the system, but I really worked the system around the Department and I don't think it had ever been done before. People told me this, it had never been done before.

I used every way I could to try to focus the system and get it to move under first Bush/Eagleburger and then Clinton/Christopher.

Warren Christopher was probably the worst secretary of state we'd had in the post-war era up to that point, though I think he's got some competition for that, but I felt that he was the worst that we'd had post-war and one of the worst of the twentieth century, but certainly in the post-war era.

Anyway, I was just getting more frustrated, so I interviewed with Nick Rey, several others did. It went very well. He learned what I was doing. He went down and asked Tom Simons, who had been a previous ambassador there. Tom knew me and said, "I think that's an honorable thing. I don't think that should be held against him."

Nick was coming from outside the system, he didn't know what to think about this dissent. I don't think he liked the Bosnia policy. No one did. Bill Clinton didn't like his own policy. They just didn't know what to do about it.

Q: Also, one has to put it in a certain perspective, they'd been bitten very badly by Somalia, which had sort of been left to them by the Bush Administration and they handled ineptly.

HOOPER: Right, but I think they'd made their decision on Bosnia before that and the decision was not to use force, that is, they just kept Baker's and Eagleburger's policy in place. Somalia certainly made it more awkward.

Q: Somalia also, there was the feeling that the United States could not stand any casualties, because I'm told that some of our people who dealt with Milosevic later on were taunted with the number of casualties that came out of the so-called "Blackhawk Down" incident and the Serbian military was saying, "They're a hollow force and they can't take casualties."

HOOPER: Right.

Q: Political will just wasn't there and also in Rwanda, too.

HOOPER: Clinton used this more as an excuse and then Haiti turned his views on using force around. But Bosnia just kept going.

It just kept draining and draining and draining and every time they'd think something else would get it out of the headlines and off the evening news, then there'd be another massacre, it just kept on going and Milosevic was having one hell of a time getting American and European leaders to dance to his tune.

It was a pretty extraordinary situation and I don't think anyone involved in the policy process like our policy, but they were unwilling to opt for an alternative which involved the use of force and that's why anything that involved other than the use of force, they were willing to look into that.

Anyway I was picked for the Warsaw DCM job and this involved four or five months of Polish language training. So then in February of '94 I came here to NFATC.

Q: "Here" being the Foreign Service Institute, where we're doing the interview.

HOOPER: Right, in mid-February, as I recall it, of '94, prior to going out that summer to Warsaw, to the embassy as DCM.

So from the time that I began doing language training I was talking to journalists, keeping in touch with Steve Walker and Marshall Harris, but I was putting less effort into it because my energies were focused on learning Polish and learning something about Poland, because I'd never served there and it was a new experience for me, so it was all going to be a new experience.

I continued serving in effect as a sort of counselor to people who asked my advice and views on what to do about Bosnia, because the thing was still going on, but I wasn't actively working the system any more.

Q: You were in Warsaw from when to '97?

HOOPER: From the summer of '94 to September '96, when I came back and did the retirement seminar and I retired on my birthday in January '97.

Q: What was going on in Poland in '94 and the American relationship with Poland?

HOOPER: What was going on, they had the fall of communism in 1989, had a Solidarity government, Lech Walesa was president. I was there two years. Midway through there was an election and Walesa was ousted by the Social Democrats.

The Polish Social Democrats were former communists, but I got to know them very well, we had a really good political section, good economic section, we had a good team there. Warsaw was a very good embassy. We just had top people there who were very talented.

Democracy was there to stay, it was clear, but Walesa was trying to face down the former communists and keep himself in office, keep them out of office.

Some of the former communists had had reporting relationships with the Soviets, but they were pretty open about having taken the initiative, as soon as '89 came along and the Russians said they were leaving and pulled out, these people said, "Goodbye, that's the last you're going to hear from me," and formed this Social Democratic party.

And I thought they were genuine and I grew to like them quite a bit and respect them and respect them as real social democrats. Nick Rey said any society has people that are natural leaders and they go into politics, well, in the communist era, there's only one venue, pretty much, if you wanted to be in politics, as opposed to being in the opposition, and that was the communists.

Those in the opposition were very bitter to see these people return to power and I can understand that.

There were a lot of stories that Walesa might invoke martial law to stay in office. I didn't think he would. We never thought he would go off the rails.

I got to know the Social Democrats, their senior people, pretty well, thanks to our political section. They wanted to show their *bona fides*. They were very open with us.

Oleksy, the speaker of the Sejm, the parliament; Leszek Miller, who later became prime minister, the more I met with him and talked with him, the more I began to understand him. I liked him a lot. I grew to respect him.

Before I went out, I decided I was going to prepare Poland to join NATO, that would be my focus and I worked this out with Nick Rey.

I had four or five months of Polish. It's a tough language and I came nowhere near being able to speak it fluently.

I was doing what a DCM does, managing the embassy inside, but I wanted to really prepare Poland for NATO and that was my focus in Warsaw, because I wanted them to believe that there was a track and I wanted to engage their bureaucracy with our bureaucracy.

We looked at arms sales, got them interested in fighter aircraft and they ultimately bought F-16 fighters, which the Pentagon authorized, and I worked very closely with our military attachés.

We worked with the labor unions, to show them that they didn't have to feel threatened by it. Worked with the defense ministry on a number of things. Getting a working group that involved people from the range of Poland's bureaucracy that would meet once a

month at the foreign ministry and focus on what decisions needed to be done and all sorts of matters relevant to their NATO candidacy.

The Poles have a special operations group and the head of that, someone I got to know very well, so badly wanted to work with the Delta Force people and I arranged for them to visit Poland and things moved forward from there.

We had everything, preparing their runways, to make them NATO-standard, as opposed to former Warsaw Pact standards. There was just so much going on.

Their chief of general staff was close to Walesa and there were a number of people that were critical of the military leader and our military attaché was critical of him, kept sending negative reports back. Nick Rey asked me to go over and meet this guy, let's try to deal with him, because he was becoming a stumbling block, he was seen as a problem as we moved forward in this NATO thing.

No sentence can sum up a career and I don't have a sentence that sums up my career but various things sum up certain aspects of it and I certainly learned a lot of this in Poland: no pancake's so flat that it doesn't have two sides.

I met a number of people who I was told were just no-goodniks and as I got to know them I found that there was another side to the story, quite a different side to the story.

The general began to explain to me the situation, how he saw things and I began to see that we could work with him. So I would meet with him as often as I needed to, to say, "We need this done. We need that done."

The Polish military was not a fast turnaround proposition and one time he said to me, "Since 1989 Polish military strength has more than halved. I have overseen all of that. Have there been any demonstrations? Look at this drawdown, which has put a number of men out on the streets. Has it been done in an orderly fashion that is not disruptive to Polish democracy?"

It was one thing when you're sitting in the defense attaché's office in the American embassy and you look at things, the way you want things to be, but it's another when you're out there making decisions.

It was the only serious military in the Warsaw Pact, apart from the Soviet Union. The Poles are excellent fighters and have a superb military tradition.

He did a lot of things for us and helped us. He wanted to be in NATO, too. There was a lot of stuff that just wasn't true about him that had been reported.

At one point the defense attaché, he didn't like it that I was meeting with this guy. But he also refused to meet with him himself. I had asked him, "Will you come along with me?" He wouldn't do it.

I had a lunch for this guy. There was a DCM's grouping, seven or eight NATO DCM's who would meet once a month and I had one with him as the guest of honor.

Anyway, our defense attaché told me, "My conscience won't let me attend," and I said, "If your conscience won't let you, I will not tell anyone to do something against their conscience. I fully understand. However, there has to be someone representing the U.S. military at this lunch and so you have to send someone along from your office." He agreed.

After the lunch, Nick Rey came into my office and said, "The defense attaché wants to meet with us, because he thinks that you're cutting him out of all the action on dealing with the general and not letting him do his job. So let's, the three of us, go down into the secured conference room and discuss this."

I had kept Nick appraised of all this. I was always very transparent in what I did. We went down. The attaché said, "Jim has cut me out of dealings with the general and it's not proper, I'm the defense attaché and I just think it's not right and I want to be involved in this."

I let him make his full presentation, without saying a word. Then Nick turned to me and asked me to respond. I said, "Nick, I asked him to attend these meetings. He always refused. When it came to the lunch at my place, he told me that his conscience would not allow him to meet with this man. I said I would not ask anyone to do what their conscience does not allow them to do, but you have to have someone there and he agreed. He took himself out of this and I honored his request."

And Nick turned to the attaché and said, "Is that true?"

He said, "Well, yes, but I've changed my mind now."

And Nick Rey said, "Thank you very much, the meeting's over. I've heard all I need to hear on this."

And the attaché then asked if he could be extended for another year on his tour of duty and Rey said, "No thanks. It's time for a successor."

Q: At this time, the Poles, number one, how were they viewing their situation? Germany's united. Were they sort of keeping an eye on the other side of the Oder River, towards now-united Germany? Was this a concern for them?

And, two, what was their attitude towards the Russians?

And was there a problem with the officer corps, moving from Soviet techniques to NATO techniques?

HOOPER: There was a problem in moving from Soviet to NATO techniques in the sense that none of them had gone through Ft. Leavenworth or any of the NATO schools. That didn't happen until after 1990.

So they needed to adapt to Western, U.S., NATO, standards and electricity voltage and refueling gear, that kind of stuff, because what they wanted, Western troops would come in there for exercises and they knew that this isn't something that happens overnight and they were fully prepared to put their shoulders to the wheel on that.

But as officers were getting trained and learning English and learning Western techniques and so forth, a lot of officers had a lot of wonderful experiences but also Moscow training that wasn't terribly relevant to the future of the Polish military. So Polish officers were looking forward to serious Western training, which had already begun to happen.

Their concerns about Germany, I don't think there were real concerns. Throughout Europe, the price of getting into the EU and NATO and really the price of becoming accepted as part of modern Europe is really what it boils down to has been foreswearing historical territorial claims.

When I was there I worked with an orphanage down in southern Poland, right along the Ukraine border and I'd go down there, my wife and I, every couple months or so and that was where the defense minister, that was his constituency, married to the daughter of the famous Polish military leader from World War I, Pilsudski.

Poland had claims on western Ukraine and Poland gave them up, probably with some reluctance, but nonetheless right away and very clearly and publicly. But all these European states, they've really had to give up these territorial claims.

They were worried about Germany buying into western Poland and what all this would do to Polish agriculture, too. Polish agriculture was very worried about having to adapt to the EU.

Culturally, Germans would come in as managers. I remember the American manager of the Marriott Hotel in Warsaw telling me once, "What I find is when the German supervisor gives instructions to his Polish subordinates, this gets back to me in terms of 'What is he really up to,' he didn't really like them, so he's assigning them to undesirable jobs or shifts, when in fact it was clear that the guy was just following routine procedure." And so he put someone else in who was Polish and had him establish exactly the same rota and the Polish workers didn't complain, because they weren't suspicious.

But it was more commercial rivalry, concern over what would the future bring, because Germany was a real economic powerhouse, obviously. It was a low level concern about Germany.

Russia was a problem. This was serious.

Q: Okay, this is '94 to '96. The Soviet Union was no more. What was NATO going to be doing, from the Polish perspective?

HOOPER: They wanted the NATO umbrella over Poland and they wanted to be part of NATO because they believed that would secure their democracy and survival as a nation.

Ultimately, while I was there, Clinton made the decision to support the Polish bid for NATO membership. We had this thing going full blast, this was an eight cylinder operation. Nick Rey really liked it, because I knew how to work the U.S. bureaucracy and it was his fondest dream that Poland would be a member of NATO as well. Clinton made a political level decision at some point that it would happen.

Our aim was to prepare the Poles, get them involved, get them focused on constructive stuff, rather than just sitting around and saying, "Why aren't we in NATO yet?"

Doing all this stuff, preparing, getting them ready, so that you lay the groundwork for it, the foundation, so when DOD, the White House and State, make the decisions, that Poland can have access to F-16's, it's okay if they bid on them, that it was legitimate for the manufacturer to share a certain amount of new technology, enough for them to just show them what the aircraft is all about.

This all increased the momentum towards Polish membership and at least removed a lot of the underbrush of concern.

The F-16's were a big thing, very symbolic. That was a very strong political signal.

The Poles saw their future was in NATO and in NATO they weren't worried about the Germans, it made the Germans their allies, rather than adversaries and gave Poland a standing in dealing with Moscow.

Not only did they want to be in NATO, they wanted a NATO that was strong. It spoke from their whole national history, certainly their twentieth century history.

Within NATO and within the transatlantic alliance, you had over time some pressing for a less active U.S. role and others for a more active U.S. role. Poland made it very clear it was going to be on the more active side of this.

Once the U.S. made the decision they were going to be in NATO, but, still, the other NATO countries had a say in this.

When we went into Haiti, I remember thinking, "Maybe the Poles ought to volunteer to serve in that." Shortly thereafter, Washington wanted to get some of these Eastern Europeans into a Haiti support coalition and send forces to Haiti to join with us.

Nick Rey was gone and I got a call from the Department or the White House to call Lech Walesa and tell him to stand by for a call from President Clinton.

Well, Walesa was up in Gdansk, so I called him. My Polish was just about good enough to pull off a brief conversation. I called and Lech answered, he didn't speak English. I told him who I was and said, "The White House is going to call you. President Clinton wants to speak with you."

The President wanted to know, and asked Walesa, can the Poles get someone to Haiti fast? It was very awkward. Their military wasn't really geared up for that and it was very embarrassing for them and the civilians at the defense ministry were frustrated, so they sent their special operations force, they were assigned to be bodyguards for some of the people that we had out there, like Jim Dobbins.

Oddly enough, there'd been a history of Polish dealings with Haiti. So they got fifty people from their special forces who were ready to go within two or three days to be part of this contingent. So the Poles were actually able to say, "We'll be there!"

Now, again, I don't think that's a huge game changer, on the grand scheme of things, but when you're gearing up, either you're up for it or you're not. Life doesn't always wait until you're ready. Life comes at you and says, "Whether you're ready or not, here it is!" and you have to deal with that.

Anything I did, it was really working with the Poles and gearing up the embassy and having the kind of support and expanding our defense attaché office and leading a full-fledged operation to get them ready for going into NATO.

Nick Rey was good enough to invite me to attend the ceremony in the Rose Garden to commemorate Polish accession to NATO, even though I hadn't seen him for a year or two. He wasn't the ambassador himself, then, either.

Q: Well, then, you retired by that time, '96?

HOOPER: Well, technically, it was in January '97.

Q: Just briefly, what have you been up to since?

HOOPER: My wife and I went on leave to the U.S. in July of '96, we came back and I realized that if I left in September I could take the retirement course, get in it and I could actually retire. And it just was like turning on this giant magnet. It just became impossible to resist the force of that magnet.

I loved the Foreign Service. I really liked the Poles. There were a lot of people I liked at the embassy. But I wanted to do something else with my life. I've always said since then if I were 25 again, I'd join the Foreign Service.

I loved my career and I've loved the things that I've done after my career in the Foreign Service. I would not exchange those for anything, either. So I've been blessed in my life.

Q: Very briefly, what have you been doing since?

HOOPER: I started putting out a newsletter on extreme nationalist groups around the world. I was working without pay, putting this newsletter out at the Balkan Institute.

Elie Wiesel came to Warsaw for a memorial ceremony and I met with him and reminded him of that experience at the Open Forum. He remembered that and said, "What are you doing now?" This was just a month before I left, a month or two and I said, "I want to start up a newsletter or magazine that deals with the rise of extreme nationalism."

He said, "Here's my number. Contact me. I'll help you." I did and he joined our board.

Then when Marshall Harris in left the Balkan Institute in the summer of '97, he and Steve asked if I would replace him. So I took on that responsibility.

Steve then got a job teaching, went back to Connecticut, because he was coming to Washington once every couple weeks, it was very difficult for him, his wife was a doctor, lived in Connecticut and it was hard for him to make that commute down to Washington.

So I then created the Balkans Action Council. Then the issue was Kosovo and Serbia, and then Serbian democracy and worked that very actively and then was the Balkans director and the Washington office director for the International Crisis Group.

And then in December of 2001, a couple months after September 11th, they were creating an Arabic-language radio station, at the Broadcasting Board of Governors and I was asked by someone involved in it, would I come down and take over and get it going, because nothing was happening, it was just a lot of plans, help kick start the bureaucracy and use some of my Middle East experience.

I said, "Okay, but only for two or three months, because I'm working on other stuff." I ended up staying there for six years, until November of 2007. We put this radio station together. I was not a broadcaster. There was someone who really knew certain aspects of radio and another who I found and hired to be our news director and I administratively helped them put it together, but other people really had the vision. I just helped get it going.

I have also been, and am now, a Managing Director of the Public International Law & Policy Group, a Nobel Peace Prize-nominated non-profit group headquartered in Washington.

Q: In other words, you've been active.

HOOPER: Yes.

Q: Okay, well, I want to thank you very much. This is great.

End of interview

Note from Jim Hooper: I want to express my thanks to Stu Kennedy and his team for all of the hard work, thorough preparations and persistence they have demonstrated, as well as the help they provided to me in reviewing the manuscript of the taped interviews.