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

LARS H. HYDLE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background
- Born & raised in Indiana
- Occidental College in Los Angeles
- Columbia University
- Entered Foreign Service in 1965

Saigon, Vietnam 1966-1967
- Consular & political (biographic) officer
- Local elections- Thieu & Ky
- Reporting dilemma

State Department- Speaking engagements 1968

Ben Hua, Vietnam 1968-1970
- DEPCORPS
- Hamlet evaluation system
- Reporting problems
- The US media
- Corruption

State Department- Vietnam Working Group 1970-1972
- Speaking engagements- hostility
- Agent Orange

Belfast, Northern Ireland 1972-1973 &
Belfast, Northern Ireland 1973-1974
- Consul- political reporting
- The Irish conflict
- US-Irish support of IRA
- British attitude & policy

Bien Hoa, Vietnam (TDY) - III Corps 1973
- Reporting

Department of Defense- Marine Corps Plans Division 1974-1975
    Congress Escort to Vietnam
    Fall of Saigon - (TDY State- Operations Center)

State Department- Policy Planning 1975-1977
    Speech writer
    Kissinger views and operations

State Department- Bureau of Public Affairs 1977-1979
    Hodding Carter & Secretary Vance

State Department- Ethiopian Desk 1979-1981
    US interests & views
    Somalia

Ghana- Political Officer 1981-1983
    US political interests
    Political climate

Trinidad & Tobago- Political Officer 1983-1985
    US interests

State Department- Inspector General's Office
    Functions & operations

Kuwait Task Force 1990-1991

Bahrain- Political/military officer 1991
    US-Bahrain history of cooperation
    US interests

State Department 1991-1993
    Operation Provide Comfort
    INR- Near East/South East Asia Office- Palestine & Jordan
    Arab-Israeli talks
    PLO

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is July 21, 1994. This is an interview with Lars H. Hydle. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

I wonder if you could start by giving me a little about when, where you were born, a bit about your family first.

HYDLE: I was born in Indiana in 1940. My mother was from Indiana. My father was originally from Norway. He was a professor at Ball State Teacher's College in Muncie, Indiana. It was then called Teacher's College and then Ball State University.

I spent my early years there and then we moved to California in 53 after my father retired. So I went to high school and college there.

Q: Where did you go to in California?

HYDLE: Glendale, California in the Los Angeles area. I attended Occidental College in Los Angeles.

Q: What was your father teaching?

HYDLE: He was teaching psychology.

Q: Were you attracted at all to the field of psychology?

HYDLE: Not especially. I was interested in journalism, I guess. It was not the first profession or line of work that I was interested in. In high school, I worked on the high school paper and I worked at a local newspaper writing, doing this and that.

Q: At any where along the line did a career in the Foreign Service attract you while you were in college?

HYDLE: That's when the idea first came up because in the last couple of years that I was there, say 58, 59 and 60.

Q: You were in the Class of 60, I assume.

HYDLE: I was in 60. They created a new interdisciplinary major which was called "Diplomacy in World Affairs." It included political science, history, languages and English. I think it must have been designed to prepare people for the Foreign Service exam. It seemed like an interesting idea. It was interesting to do at that time. So I took up that major and graduated, maybe in the first class that graduated with that major. There were only a handful of us at the time. One of them was David Aaron who later became Deputy National Security Adviser in the Carter administration.

Q: Were you getting anybody from the Foreign service talking about it or did you have any contacts with the Foreign Service?

HYDLE: I can't recall if we had a Foreign Service officer speaker. I wouldn't be surprised but I just don't remember it. One of our distinguished graduates from

Occidental College was Alexis Johnson. His son, Steve, was a classmate of mine at Occidental.

Q: There was sort of a period, when you graduated from Occidental in 1960 what did you do?

HYDLE: I went to graduate school at Columbia University in their Department of Public Law and Government. It was a regular graduate school and not their school for Foreign Service. I went there full time for a couple of years, just getting the classes that you need. I took the Foreign Service exam, I think at the end of 61 or the end of 62, I forget which. Did well in the written exam and later, I don't recall the exact dates but I took the oral exam not long after that. And I was admitted to the Foreign Service but then I immediately requested leave to finish my Ph.D. They had a system where you didn't have to get your master's if you were just going right on to get your Ph.D.

Q: So you asked for this leave of absence.

HYDLE: Yes, I never had worked. You could take a leave in order to finish academic work, graduate school.

Q: Did you get your Ph.D.?

HYDLE: Eventually I did but it took a long time. I did, I think it was the first draft of my dissertation in 1965, and then actually started to work in the Foreign Service, to take the A-100 class as it was called then in December of 65. Eventually I managed to get the degree, not until 1972. I was interrupted by all this work. At one point I took some more leave, or I took accumulated comp time after my first tour in Vietnam. It's a long story but basically I did get it in 72.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service in 64.

HYDLE: Well 65, maybe you've got the records.

Q: No I just looked from, I've got you, it sort of says that you

HYDLE: I think that's right. I was sworn in in 64 but I really started working in 65.

Q: How did you find the A-100, the basic course?

HYDLE: I liked it a lot. For one thing, for some reason, maybe it was because it was in December, we had a fairly small class of about 25 people. So we really became friendly and a close knit group. Those of us that are left still have dinner every year or so. I was enthusiastic and it seemed like good preparation for what I was going to have to do.

Q: Just to get a little feel for the Foreign Service in the early 60s. Were there minorities, women, in your class?

HYDLE: Out of that 25 there was only one woman, no blacks. I don't recall any other people who are now called minorities.

Q: Because this became very important, how did you, yourself, view the Vietnam War at that time? It was just getting cranked up.

HYDLE: I was influenced at the time by President Kennedy's view of the Vietnam War. I thought that it was part of the Cold War; that we had a nuclear standoff with the Soviets, the Communists; and we had a standoff in Europe and in Asia because of NATO and because of the Korean War and so forth. And the Communists were now trying to subvert countries on the periphery that were being friendly with us. We had to combat that too. Kennedy called it, "A long twilight struggle," or something like that.

I agreed with that, I was very interested in the idea of supporting countries' rights to become strong, independent, democratic and anti-Communist.

Q: How about in your class. At that time were you told that Vietnam was a prospect or not?

HYDLE: You mean in my A-100 class? Yes, in fact I volunteered to go to Vietnam for my first tour.

Q: You served in Saigon, your first tour, from 66 to 68. What did you do after you got out of A- 100?

HYDLE: There were just a few weeks, here and there. The A-100 class was finished in January of 66. I did just odds and ends of things. I got there, I think in April 66.

Q: What were you doing in Vietnam?

HYDLE: Initially, I was a consular officer, Consular section but that lasted only 6 weeks or so. Then I went into a vacancy in the political section. The political section at the time was very large. I would say there were about 20 people, it must have been the largest in the world. I was the biographic officer, the full time biographic officer keeping track of all the Vietnamese personalities.

Q: 66 is the time--what was the political situation in Vietnam?

HYDLE: We were in the midst of a big American buildup. The political situation was that Thieu and Ky, there was a military junta more or less led by Thieu, who was not only the Chief of State, and Nguyen Cao Ky was the Prime Minister. The situation was a little more stable than it had been in the period after Ngo Dinh Diem was killed. Then, as you may recall, there was a lot of turbulence but things were stabilizing at this point.

Q: At this point, how did you view the Vietnamese government?

HYDLE: I thought it was kind of a weak government, not very effective but I felt sure that it was better than anything that the communists might offer as an alternative. I wanted us to shore them up and strengthen them better.

Q: How did you feel about, you know we've talked about shoring them up and all of that, but there's the problem that the more one gets in there, the more we get involved, the weaker it makes it, the more dependent--was that a concern at that time?

HYDLE: Yes, it was. I thought it was a dilemma, but at that time the US was encouraging the South Vietnamese government to develop its own institutions--not only militarily. The government infrastructure in the countryside, and especially the political infrastructure, there was a push for a presidential and a congressional election which culminated in late 1967.

Thieu ran as president and Ky as vice president. They won an election but I think it was a pretty fair election. They had only 35 to 40% of the votes but they had about 7 opponents who, Vietnamese style, refused to give way to each other and split the votes. They were able to win.

There was also a lower and upper house that were freely elected toward the end of my final tour there. I felt that was good. I felt that would strengthen the government among the South Vietnamese people, and also would make the South Vietnamese government more acceptable to the American public and Congress, whose support, of course, was needed for our own continued efforts there.

Q: How'd you work as a political officer and as a biographic officer?

HYDLE: Mostly I would just gather biographic information that came up about Vietnamese figures, file it and make reports if somebody needed to know something about some individual. As time went on, when the elections were coming up for example, I made it my business to learn more about the different political parties and the different new guys that were coming up. I did an analysis of the new lower house, it was a constituent assembly, as I recall its members--their origins, their professions, their religions--a sort of demographic analysis of these people. We did an airgram, as it was at the time, about 130 pages because there were 130 guys and each one got his own page.

Q: Did you find yourself working closely with the CIA? Or were they doing their thing and you were doing your thing. How did this work?

HYDLE: It wasn't that close. They were doing things separately. If I saw a report of theirs that I could use, of course I would file it and draw upon it.

Q: But you didn't find that CIA was somewhat a different operation?

HYDLE: Yes, they were on separate floors of the embassy.

Q: This is in the new embassy.

HYDLE: Well, it was during that time that we moved from the old embassy into the new embassy. I started out at the old one and then I moved to the new one in 1967 along with all of the other people.

Q: How was the political section organized? Who was the head of the political section?

HYDLE: When I first got there, as I recall it was Phil Habib, but the section was so large that there was also a deputy in the political section. I'm afraid I don't remember everybody. Sorry, Phil was the political counselor and Martin Herz was political counselor, and John Calhoun followed him eventually. The deputies, or the guys who actually ran the section most of the time, Tom Reichnavel filled that role at one time; Galen Stone later and so forth. But I'm getting the dates a little confused because I was there for 2 tours.

Q: This is during the Johnson administration. Was there a sort of, in the political section did you feel any constraints? I mean biographic was a little bit neutral but still, within the section, did you feel any constraints about reporting?

HYDLE: Yes, this was something that bothered me a lot over the years. On the one hand I thought that the embassy was basically trying to make the South Vietnamese government look as good as possible, to minimize critical reporting. On the other hand, I knew that there were opponents of the policy out there who wanted to be hypercritical of the South Vietnamese government and our effort there. The argument that the senior political section guys would make was that: "Yes, we realize how bad it is but if you write critical reports they'll be leaked and they'll be used against the policy." That was their rationale, anyway. Reports were continually massaged and changed around to make them seem less bad than they were.

Q: I can understand. This is true say in African nations and other places. For example, if you report on corruption this is part of life in many places. If one, not over-reports but just reports instances of this, it tends to get blown up and stops everything.

HYDLE: I've heard that argument before. I felt at the time, and I still feel, that it's our job to report objectively. It's the right thing to do. Also, you have to maintain some sort of reputation if everybody thinks that the embassy has gone to the tank for the local government, then eventually you disillusion everyone. So yes, I was constantly concerned about that kind of thing.

Q: What was some of the, at that time, our major concerns about the problems in Vietnam?

HYDLE: Corruption and inefficiency on the part of the South Vietnamese government and authoritarianism were some of the problems then.

I supported the main thrust of our policy. I volunteered to go there. I wanted us to win, wanted the South Vietnamese government to become better that it was. I wanted the South Vietnamese people to achieve democracy and development. I knew that the critics of the Vietnam War, for the most part, didn't care about that at all. All they wanted was either to get us out of there and just wash our hands of it; or in some cases, they were actively pro-Communist for some reason.

Q: (garbled) Let's talk about this. Did you get any feel for how they operated or were they too removed?

HYDLE: I felt that Lodge had a good reputation because of his first tour there in 63, for being an independent guy, and then again in 65 to 67, but I didn't have a good feel for what he was. I think that maybe he was becoming a little disillusioned and was trying to find his way out by 1967. Things were just falling apart and he wasn't quite sure how to deal with it.

Bunker, of course, was a towering legend even before he came there. I always felt that he also wanted to emphasize the positive. The people around him also didn't want to tell him things. It's one thing if the ambassador knows what's going on and then he decides to spin it in a certain way. It's another thing when his senior staff people protect him from knowing what he needs to know.

I remember that we used to have, this is more my second tour, but the ambassador did try to keep in touch with the younger officers. He was always very nice to us, certainly, but you had the feeling that he too was sort of looking at the bright side and not ready to confront the problems.

Q: Were you getting a feel for the military situation, about how the ARVN, the army of the Republic of Vietnam, was doing?

HYDLE: At that time it seemed that they were gradually improving but I didn't know as much then as I did in my second tour about the ARVN. Generally this was a period--things almost fell apart in 64, 65. In 66, mostly because of the enormous increase of the US presence, things were stabilizing and the ARVN was not falling apart. As I recall, it was really later that we got into a serious Vietnamization program and the capabilities of the ARVN became more important to everybody than they were at the time.

Q: Did you get out and around at all?

HYDLE: At that time I didn't get out that much but often we would have congressional CODELs or VIP delegations and I would be assigned to escort them around. So I did get out, occasionally, to different parts of the country.

Q: Here you were, a junior officer, first tour out there. There were a lot of other junior officers, many of them in CORPS and stuck out there, what were you getting from them, you know, they'd come into Saigon

HYDLE: I think the basic difference between attitudes of the junior officers and the senior officers was that we were more focused on problems at the ground level. For example, senior officers would have counterparts who were Vietnamese officials. We would have counterparts who were Vietnamese politicians, labor union leaders, people who were more likely to tell us that things were not going well. We all would hear a lot of criticism of the course of events. We were cynical of this problem of reporting honestly. We knew the newspaper reporters that were covering, we'd hang out with them, but we weren't the same as anti-war activists in the US, although maybe the senior officers thought we were. They may have thought we were some kind of fifth column.

Q: Did you ever get that feeling that any of the senior officers were sort of, was there a real gap do you think?

HYDLE: Yes I would say that there was a significant gap along the lines that I was just describing.

Q: Do you have any examples of when they'd say that you just don't know enough, or something like that?

HYDLE: Oh yes, we would tell them how bad things were and they would say, "Hey, we read reports that you don even read, and things are worse than you say but we can't say that because blah, blah, blah."

Q: There is this problem of understanding (1) what the mission is and how you work this, but also, how about the real cynicism? Do you think it developed a lot of cynicism, particularly among the junior officers?

HYDLE: Yes, it did.

Q: I'm just trying to get a feel for the flow of information. There must have been people coming out from Washington of all levels. Was this sort of the time to kind of unload on them?

HYDLE: We did that. I remember that in September, it was the Fall of 67, one of the people that I was assigned to escort was Roger Hilsman. Hilsman had been the director of the INR and then had resigned, more or less, or left. He was friendly with Bobby Kennedy. I believe he had already written his book, <u>To Move a Nation</u>, which was very critical of our Vietnam policy making.

I was assigned to escort him around. I took him to places like Bien Hoa near Saigon. John Paul Vann was the DEPCORDS as we called it, Deputy for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Developments Supports, the civilian pacification chief. Vann was a legend

already because of his exploits as an army officer. Vann would brief him. Vann was a hero already to me at that time because he had been very honest about the shortcomings of the South Vietnamese. Also, he wanted not to drag down the policy and cause it to fail, but because he wanted it to succeed.

Q: How did Hilsman

HYDLE: I think he already had his views. For example, there was an election, the election that I was describing earlier, was coming up. Ambassador Bunker urged him to stay an extra day and watch the election. He didn't want to stay an extra day and watch because, I think, that would have conflicted with his agenda. He was then in the position of being basically against our policy.

Q: While you were there, the Tet business, were you there during that?

HYDLE: Not exactly. I actually left my first tour in December 67, during my first tour I had been learning Vietnamese at the embassy from a tutor that was paid for by FSI. I was doing pretty well, in fact, I picked up a lot of Vietnamese through a combination of learning that style and just listening to it all around me, talking to people whenever I could. I was going back to take more Vietnamese and to take the course, and then to come back to be an officer in the provincial reporting unit, which was a sub-unit of the internal unit of the political section.

So I left in December 67 and I was actually away in the US when the Tet offensive struck. I didn't really return to Vietnam until June of 68. But when I was back there, I was taking these courses and I was also speaking on Vietnam to audiences around the country.

Q: Talk a bit would you about your reception and how these--you know, they were taking anybody who had been in Vietnam and putting him out on the speaking circuit. This was combat sometimes under very difficult conditions.

HYDLE: It was, it was tough although later it was even tougher. But around 68 the big problem was that the Tet offensive had shattered American complacency about Vietnam and the notion that things were getting better. Of course students were particularly concerned, not least that they were going to get drafted when they finished school. Since I was relatively young, I was often put out there to talk to student audiences. I did the best that I could but obviously people were very skeptical.

I felt, in a way, that this proved that I was right about the way we were reporting on Vietnam. We were overly optimistic. Therefore, when the Tet Offensive occurred, people felt that they'd been duped--even though the Offensive failed militarily and greatly weakened the Viet Cong, who never again posed a significant military threat--because of the over inflated expectations created by our own reporting. We were screwed. We had hoisted ourselves on our own cartage.

So I was in this same position. I had to admit that things were not going well, that it was going to be a long struggle, but I thought we had to persevere. My line was that the South Vietnamese people may be dissatisfied with their government but they still, whenever they had the chance to live in the Viet Cong or the South Vietnamese countryside, they would choose the latter or become refugees. I said that the government was an elected government, there's no chance that this would happen under the Viet Cong. I wanted us to persevere.

Of course I was more focused on what would happen to the South Vietnamese people. The American public, at this point, were far more interested in what was happening to them; what was happening to the Americans; what else was happening in the US and do forth. So this interim period was when the Tet Offensive happened. It was when Johnson, in late March, announced he would not run for reelection; it was when Martin Luther King was killed; and finally, it was when Bobby Kennedy was killed. All this was a tumultuous period back in the US as we all remember.

But it was also, as I recall, Johnson said that he would increase the troop presence in Vietnam a bit more but that it would top off at a certain level. He also replaced Westmoreland with his deputy, Abrams. That was when the program, I can't remember if it was called it then, but basically the Vietnamization Program began. I was in favor of that too, because I thought we had to have some kind of, eventually a way of strengthening the South Vietnamese so that they could defend themselves. So I still felt at that point, although it was a tough blow, that we were on the right track.

Q: Were you in contact with the, it was more than a desk it was a whole organization, but the equivalent to the Vietnam desk.

HYDLE: When I wasn't taking this CORPS course, I was doing this public speaking. I was loosely linked with, or responsive to, the Vietnam Working Group as it was called, which was the country desk dealing with Vietnam.

Q: Right after Tet were they understanding the currents in the United States or were they seeing this on the military side?

HYDLE: The working group?

Q: Yes, the working group, the people you'd talk to.

HYDLE: Well, I think they were right in the middle of it because they received all the reports from the field. They also were the ones drafting replies to congressional letters. They were off speaking all the time. I was not the only one. So they were just buffeted by the different forces. Of course you know that policy was made at a level way above the working group.

Q: One thing, back on the speaking things, were you ever shouted off the stage?

HYDLE: No, it never came to that. I was chuckled, sure.

Q: This is a great time for the campus blowhard or the campus agitators who, I guess, were in their heyday.

HYDLE: There was at the time the Bureau of Public Affairs--had a big speakers program in which they would send out teams of speakers on various subjects. They went to some of the smaller, not big cities but kind of medium sized and small cities. So I went out on some of those, it was kind of fun.

Q: They didn't make you go to the University of Wisconsin and give a talk.

HYDLE: No, I never did that but I could have. I went to Northwestern, for example, that's one that comes to mind. At various times I went to universities where I knew that there was no enthusiasm for our policy. But, you know, I had a lot of credibility. I had been there and I was going back. So they couldn't say that I was just telling other people that they should go out and get involved.

Q: You went back.

HYDLE: June 68.

Q: June 68, where you were there until how long?

HYDLE: I was there until March or April 1970.

Q: When you went out initially, what were you up to, what were you going to do?

HYDLE: For that tour?

Q: For that tour.

HYDLE: I was assigned to the provincial reporting unit. This had 8 officers, basically junior or young officers. Two of them in each of the CORPS areas. You know, there were 4 military CORPS areas that the country was divided into.

We were suppose to be reporting on the political situation on the countryside. Some of us, at least, were also supposed to be political advisers to the DEPCORPS. So we had a unique insight into the situation in the countryside. Also, we were supposed to come back and report regularly in to Saigon.

I was assigned to Bien Hua and I was working for John Paul Vann, the DEPCORPS.

Q: Bien Hua, it was a very large base.

HYDLE: Yes, it was. It was a huge air force base as well. It's about 18 or 20 miles area from Saigon. It was a III CORPS area. It's area included several provinces around Saigon including Long Khanh province which was to the south.

I would spend part of my time in paperwork there, part of my time in Saigon, partly in traveling around the provinces and talking. There were always a good supply of young officers in the pacification program like myself, and military officers, sometimes. The Vietnamese, of course, that we would talk to.

Also, there had been created in III CORPS, where I was and eventually it expanded, a team of Vietnamese public opinion surveyors. As I recall, there were about 3 to a province. They would write reports on situations in the province. Sometimes they were individual province by province reports. Sometimes they were survey questions that had been issued province-wide. My job was to direct them. We also had a translating unit and I also vetted the translations and rendered them into good English. These reports were circulated.

I think that what we did was quite interesting. It really sort of gave a second opinion on how the South Vietnamese government programs were, how our programs were, and how they were going down in the countryside.

Q: The pacification program--there was this hamlet evaluation system that's come in for a lot of criticism, particularly in the hands of the military. You always, if you were an officer assigned out there, you had to show progress. Progress was not always there.

HYDLE: Everybody sort of joked about the hamlet evaluation system. It was subject to that problem of showing progress, that you point out. Since most military officers were only district or province senior advisers for 6 months or a year, there would be steady progress during their time. But then, it would fall again because they were succeeded by somebody else who had a fresh look and was creating a base for himself.

Sure there was a lot of cynicism involved but, on the other hand, people would say that what really counts is not exactly the hamlet evaluation system--which says that we have 40% of the hamlets secure and so many percent were not so secure--what mattered was not the actual numbers but the trends. Over time these swings from individual advisers would work themselves out. What had counted were the trends.

I basically bought that. I thought then, and I think most historians say now, that actually in that period the situation in the countryside did, in fact, improve from 1968, the Tet Offensive, the hamlet evaluation system was put into effect; and the pacification programs were coordinated in ways that they had not been initially. There was a gradual improvement in coordination on the American side and the Vietnamese side. The countryside did, in fact, become more secure. There were roads that you could travel on, during the day and even at night later on, that you couldn't have done earlier.

Now, why this is so, I don't know. Some people would say that the North Vietnamese were just laying low until we left and they would come back. But, remember, when they did come back they had to use conventional military forces. There was no general guerrilla uprising, it was an invasion.

So I think the pacification program was well conceived and on the whole it was well executed.

Q: There was a book written on John Paul Vann called <u>A Bright Shining Lie</u> from your observation, how did he operate? Can you tell me about the man?

HYDLE: I read the book by Neil Sheehan. Sheehan had known Vann in the early 60s, in that period when he was an army officer and he was very critical of the South Vietnamese government at the time. Sheehan was able to show that Vann wasn't actually as courageous, from a career point of view, as he led people to believe he was, because I think he was retiring anyway, or he had no chance to advance further or something.

Well, I don't know about that, that was before my time. When I knew him, that was a period that Sheehan pretty much skips over in his book because he wasn't there when I was there. That was the period when Vann was head of the pacification program III CORPS when I was working with him. Later, he was down in IV CORPS and finally he was down in II CORPS toward the end.

I thought he was brilliant. He obviously had no illusions about the South Vietnamese government. He was a great organizer, he was a charismatic leader, he was an inspiration to me and especially to a lot of other junior officers. People would tell John Paul Vann stories when they would gather, all the time. I never worked for anybody since who even was remotely as exciting and as interesting to work for.

Q: Can you give me a little flavor? Can you think of any of your John Vann stories?

HYDLE: This is a story that I used to hear, it was later but it does give the flavor.

When he went into II CORPS later, he put a young guy that he had confidence in into the position as his deputy. There were 3 or 4 officers already there, maybe civilian and military, who outranked him. So they all caucused and then they came to him and they said, "We don't really think it's right that this junior guy is the deputy over us." He said, "You're absolutely right." They were out by nightfall.

This is the kind of story that we junior guys used to love. as you can imagine.

He seemed to be interested in getting things done. He did use more junior people where I thought that they were good. They would be province or district advisers.

There were a lot of stories, of course, about his sex life. He encouraged those stories and would tell them himself, and, it was mostly that he was a very active guy.

Q: Were you able to get out? In your going around, what were your feelings? You're saying that this was a relatively progressive period.

HYDLE: Yes, I thought that things were getting better. We, in the provincial reporting unit, were controversial. We were reporting things about how the South Vietnamese government or specific officials were screwing up. We had friends in the countryside but we also had constant clashes. The same kind of reporting problems that I described to you in the earlier period.

Q: Were you getting any constraints on your reporting? You were basically sending things into Saigon and what happened to them?

HYDLE: They would adulterate them.

I remember one time, for example, that there were some elections for a province, or maybe it was village districts or village councils. The elections were less than they were cracked up to be. For example, there would be 10 seats but there would be only 12 candidates, so 10 out of 12 would be elected. In order to make sure that the communists couldn't disrupt the election, the government would keep secret the location of the elections. How do you have elections? At the last minute, the government would show up in trucks and bus the people to vote.

We would point out these shortcomings. At one point, a report that we did was, we wanted to be a telegram--we wrote it up as a telegram. It was held up for a little while and eventually it was sent as an airgram, which meant that it went in the mail. Basically, they couldn't dispute the facts but they didn't want as many people to see the report. That's the kind of thing that would happen--mostly not blatant lying but they would sort of downplay it and undercut.

Q: Martin Herz was the

HYDLE: Martin Herz was the political counselor. The head of the provincial reporting, that I worked for, was Nick Thorn.

Q: Were you coming in and telling your piece fairly frequently?

HYDLE: Yes, especially since I was so close to Saigon.

Q: How were you received?

HYDLE: This was a period when we would have dinners, from time to time, with Ambassador Bunker, Herz and others, the provincial reporting unit. But it was an occasion when we thought we should use the occasion to warn him about the problems that existed. But he thought that he should use the occasion to, sort of, cheer us up. I guess he said, or I heard that he had said this from somebody after one of these sessions,

that he hoped that it had made us feel better and that it cheered us up about the prospects. So he didn't really see it the same way we did, kind of patronizing in a way.

Q: The American military was impacting on the Bien Hua.

HYDLE: Very heavily, especially in the part of the Bien Hua area. The economy tended to be oriented around the care and feeding of the military. So it distorted the economy quite a bit and it led to social problems and so on.

Q: I was there at this time. I was there from 69 to 70 in Saigon just doing consular work. Did you view the embassy as, not the enemy but at least a, almost a hostile power or something?

HYDLE: I was not fond of Martin Herz at all. I thought that he was basically a bad guy. He was the one who was suppressing the reporting and creating a rationale for doing it because he would say, "We know how bad it is but we can't report it that way." Bunker seemed like a benevolent but elderly guy who didn't know, or maybe didn't want to know, what was happening. Nick Thorn, the provincial reporting unit chief, was in the middle. He had been a province senior adviser so he knew what we were talking about but he was under pressure from the top as well. He was troubled, I think, by all the pressures that came from both sides.

Q: What about your military counterparts? Did you feel that, as a Foreign Service officer, not under the same discipline as a military person? Would be that you were sort of freer to operate and to report than they were?

HYDLE: I didn't feel that way. Also, we knew a lot of military people in these pacification teams, people in Bien Hua, and some of those guys were barely more disciplined than we were. Like they were lawyers who somehow had to be military officers, they were graduate students who somehow were doing their time. So at times there was not such a big gap between military and civilians.

I, myself, although I never served in the military per se, I never was anti-military and never felt like I wanted to bait them or taunt them or call them baby killers or any of that stuff. I respected what they were trying to do. I thought that they should be subject to criticism like everybody else.

Q: How about the media? What was your feeling towards the reporting in the media that you were in contact with?

HYDLE: They were also a mixed bag. I don't really remember very much about them but certainly Bob Kaiser of the Washington Post was a reporter in those days. Now I think he's the managing editor. Johnny Apple was there as the New York Times correspondent and married an FSO. I think they're no longer married.

We would hang out with them. I remember one time during Joe Alsop's visit, one of his visits to Vietnam, I somehow got caught up with him. He took a bunch of us to lunch and

asked us what we thought. He really already knew what we thought. Joe Alsop's wife, Susan Mary Alsop, was a cousin of Charlie Whitehouse who was the DEPCORPS succeeding John Vann, 1969 I think. When Vann went down to IV CORPS which was a bigger pacification problem and had a smaller US government presence. So, somehow, I got acquainted with her one time. Later, when I came back to Washington, they had at the time old fashioned entertainment Washington dinners, old fashioned dinners where you had equal numbers of men and women so that you could seat them at table. Sometimes I would be asked to fill in. I knew Joe, I guess I'm getting far afield.

Basically I thought the media were a mixed bag. Some of them understood the problems, others were just in there to stir things up and cause problems

Q: I did get the feeling at that time that there were, what you would call the professional people, but there were also the stringers and the ones going after a little adventure. They were, in a way, just looking for trouble but they weren't serious.

Were you getting from any of your friends or anything, because this is the period where the sort of, the Vietnam protest was really picking up. Were you getting any reflections on this through correspondence or people visiting you or anything like that?

HYDLE: We were getting reflections of it but I'm sure it wasn't nearly as intense for us as it was for people back here. People here were feeling the heat. Occasionally, I was asked by Ambassador Bunker, through Martin Herz or Calhoun, to draft letters responding to letters to them from student critics. They thought I was a young guy and I could think of some way to answer a young guy's letter, I suppose.

Q: You left there 1970. How did you find the problem of corruption and ineffectiveness of the government of Vietnam by the time you left. What was your evaluation.

HYDLE: I thought that it was still a big problem and that it was important that the US government should try to fight that problem and try to tell the South Vietnamese government to set up structures in which they would be less corrupt. You know, inspectors or whatever. But because of our support for the general policy of being there, I thought that Americans were--the US embassy and the US mission--was more involved in trying to downplay the talk about corruption than they were doing something about it.

There was a guy, Bill Hitchcock, I think he was the political counselor or the number two guy in the political section at one point. In 1969 I had moved from Bien Hoa up to Da Nang. I was in the consulate working for Terry McNamara, the consul general. The marines were up there in the I CORE-gram, as we called it. Hitchcock was there and I was complaining about corruption and so on. He said, "I just came from Calcutta, tell me about that, I know corruption." But he was missing the point. We didn't have half a million troops. We had to do something about it.

Q: When you were in Da Nang, Terry McNamara was quite a character.

HYDLE: Yes, he was.

Q: Actually, we probably met at that point because, purely technically, I was consul general in Saigon and I use to write Terry's efficiency reports but I didn't really have any control, who could control Terry. But anyway, it was really more of a political thing.

Could you tell me your impression of Terry and his operation.

HYDLE: I remember that as being a lot of fun. He was a smart guy, I thought he understood about pacification, our policies and so forth. But he never took himself too seriously; he never took the situation too seriously. We use to joke around a lot and we still remain good friends to this day. I was the, sort of the vice consul for political affairs. It was more or less my title. So I never really did consular work unless there was an overload of visas to be signed. I don't know if I should tell you this or not.

Q: It's all right, it's all over now.

HYDLE: One thing that happened up there that sticks in my mind, was that we were changing the status of the office from a consular office to a consulate, or something like that.

Q: Yes, that was it.

HYDLE: We wanted to make a big deal out of it and invite Ambassador Bunker and so forth. I thought there was a man up there who was a geomancer, and who was an old guy, and who was reportedly very highly regarded by the Vietnamese. I thought, you know we're just picking a day to open the consulate, let's pick an auspicious day. We called the guy in and we talked to him about it. He said that it was important that the cat, the goat and the monkey be in confluence, if memory serves.

We were reporting all this to Ambassador Bunker and we actually did get him to change his original plan to the exact date, telling him that this would be an auspicious time. Of course we let all this be known to the Vietnamese that we had paid attention to this issue.

Ambassador Bunker came up to Da Nang. At first he went out on the bay with Alex Hurfer, who was the AID guy up there. It was not a very good day for sailing, overcast weather, no wind and so forth. So he finally came back over to the consulate, it was 4:00, the clouds parted. We had a beautiful day and we got a good picture of Ambassador Bunker and the geomancer--who told Ambassador Bunker that he hoped he'd work for 50 more years.

Terry. Not everybody in the Foreign Service would have gone along with this fanciful approach.

Q: Did you find a different situation in Da Nang than you did in Bien Hoa?

HYDLE: The main difference at that time was the marines. The marines had a different approach than the army did toward the Vietnamese. I'm sorry I just can't remember the name but they had a system in which marines and South Vietnamese troops actually were in the same squad together. I just can't think what it was called.

They were integrated at the squad level. The marines were able to provide their supplies of course, but also their military knowledge to the South Vietnamese troops. I think they were pretty successful. Although, once again, it was hard to make the transition from a mixed unit to a purely South Vietnamese unit. We had some good officers up there. The then province chief of Hue, I'm sorry I can't remember his name but later he was the I CORPS commander. It was possible to travel in most of the coastal areas although it was a bit dangerous to go inland.

Q: I remember that it was about that time that I drove from Da Nang up to Hue.

HYDLE: Oh yes, you could easily do that.

Q: It was the old "street without joy."

HYDLE: You could drive on up to Quang Trai.

Q: Did you have any problems with reporting on corruption? I recall the South Vietnamese general in I CORPS was notorious for his corruption.

HYDLE: I just don't recall. I don't remember writing, or wanting to write, about that in particular. In general, I didn't have trouble writing candid stuff. Terry McNamara certainly never would muscle us on that.

Q: Were the South Koreans in that territory?

HYDLE: No, they were more in Quang Ninh which was in II CORPS. I never dealt with them very much.

Q: When you left in 1970, whither Vietnam, as far as you were concerned.

HYDLE: For a while, I was thinking of going back for a third tour in Vietnam, and working in a sort of an evaluation unit in the pacification headquarters that was headed by Craig Johnstone, a bright young officer. But I eventually ended up going to the Vietnam working group.

But after I left in April 70 I took some accumulated comp time, as I mentioned earlier, to finish the draft of my dissertation. I had finished a draft and they had sent it back with some revisions. I worked on that. I was in California living at home with my parents.

Q: What was your dissertation?

HYDLE: Before I got involved in Vietnam and the Foreign Service, it was about Africa. In 1960, you may remember that, there was a flood of African countries that became independent. I ended up writing on the press and politics in Nigeria. I've always been interested in the whole subject of freedom, especially in developing countries where people say that they can't really be free because they're undeveloped. This kind of stuff. I was interested to see how it had worked in Nigeria, which is a complex country that did have more of a free press than the rest of Africa had.

I was always more in favor of democracy in Vietnam than most of the other people in the embassy, certainly most of the senior people. The senior people tended to be paternalistic when it came to talking about the possibility of democracy in Vietnam. I said that it was possible, that you had to work toward it. That's the direction rather than making excuses on why you couldn't do it. We should be building institutions.

Q: After you got your dissertation done, what did you do?

HYDLE: I came in September 1970 to the Vietnam working group in Washington, that was a country desk. I was there with a number of other relatively junior guys who had been in Vietnam. I think Jim Engle was the head of the Vietnam Working Group.

Most of what we did was reporting. There was the relationship between the embassy and the Washington community that was interested in Vietnam. I myself, for example, wrote the Weekly, which was just a weekly report that was sent to every post in the world, whether they wanted it or not; just a summary of developments in Vietnam in the previous week. I wrote a lot of congressional letters. I worked with other offices, mostly in the Department, on various policy issues. Once again, I did a lot of public speaking.

Q: How did you find the public speaking at that point?

HYDLE: It was nastier that it had been. Remember that in May of 1970 was the Kent State episode.

Q: Cambodia.

HYDLE: Our invasion, or temporary invasion, in Cambodia.

Even though the war was also winding down, in so far as the Americans were concerned, we really were withdrawing from, I think 1969 on. There was still a lot of venom out there on the college campuses. That was the period when there were a couple of massive demonstrations in Washington.

I guess since you're looking for anecdotes, you might remember that Bill Macomber was the deputy under secretary for Management during that period. There were 2 major demonstrations, I can't remember which one this was in 71. Somebody was lying down in front of the State Department, from that off ramp that comes from that expressway onto D street. Macomber was watching this. I saw this happen.

Anyway, the lady was just sitting there in her car because the guy was lying down. He went over to the window and said, “Drive forward, slowly.” Figuring, I guess, that the guy at the last minute would get up.

It was really tough, of course. The thing that bothered me the most, since I was the one who was speaking for the US government, not so much that people didn’t want to believe what I told them, because they thought that their government had been lying to them all along, I could understand that. What I couldn’t understand was why they were willing to believe the North Vietnamese. I would have to do basic things. I would have to point out, for example, “Look the North Vietnamese don’t even admit that they have any troops in South Vietnam, in Cambodia, or in Laos. At least the United States government has never hidden the fact that we’ve got people there. So how can you believe in these jerks?”

I wouldn’t say that. I was making a speech. But anyway, it was some of the groups that I talked to.

I’ve got another anecdote. One time I was out with another group of public speakers. We had been speaking. It was a very tough audience, people always harassing us from the back. Then we went to just have a bite to eat. One of these guys, who had been harassing us, came up and harassed us again while we were eating.

Later I was talking to a professor and said, “That guy seems to be really intense.”

The professor seemed to be very sympathetic and indulgent to the guy, he said, “I’ve had him in class, he can’t quite seem to articulate what he wants, he gets very excited.”

I said, “Well, I’m only a layman but I thought he was a real prick.”

The professor looked at me with shock on his face. Later I told that story to my colleagues who were on the road with me. We just all laughed hysterically.

Q: There was an awful lot of indulgence in that period. Faculties didn’t really face up to, you might say, their responsibilities. They didn’t have to agree, but they seemed to allow the sort of lunatics to take over the asylum.

HYDLE: Right.

Back in 68, if I may go back for just a minute, I was defending my dissertation at Columbia University. The defensive dissertation was delayed because the students were occupying the building. So it was delayed for a couple of weeks while they managed to rearrange things.

Q: How long did you stay with this Vietnam working group?

HYDLE: Two years, until April of 72.

Q: Did you see a deterioration in the situation at that time?

HYDLE: That was a period when the situation in South Vietnam continued to improve on the whole. The pacification progress pretty much continued. However, there was an election in late 71 which was basically bad. Thieu got rid of Ky, his vice president, who wanted to run against him. He sort of manipulated the election against Big Minh, General Minh, who was very popular in some circles. That, I think, undermined the legitimacy of the government.

If memory serves, the embassy at the time wanted to issue a statement regretting the way the election had been handled. Big Minh withdrew in a huff and it was pretty clear that the election had been tarnished. Washington toned it down and took no position that there was anything wrong in the way the election had been handled.

Q: Here you'd been involved very closely with Vietnam. What was your feeling about Kissinger and Nixon and Vietnam in this period.

HYDLE: This was a case where I didn't know much about what Kissinger was doing. We were left to deal with the routine things. He was doing, as we later learned, all of these secret negotiations that led to the breakthrough. I was generally an admirer of Kissinger, and of Nixon, at least for their foreign policy efforts. Which included as you recall, the opening to the Soviet Union and to China. All that seemed to me to be quite a good approach. Also, I generally supported this pacification program which showed, I thought, some promise of getting us out of there even if we couldn't negotiate with the communists.

Q: In the pacification program, part of this was the Phoenix program. Did you have, it's been termed by some to be sort of an assassination program of the cadres--how did you feel about this?

HYDLE: I had a slightly different take on that, in that I had already learned to be skeptical of body counts when it had to do with main force battles. I thought the idea of the Phoenix program was good and that you had to root out the communist cadres that were undercover in the villages. You'd get reports that so many had been killed, so many injured, so many captured. I thought it was possible that their civil rights were being violated. On the other hand, this was a war. It was more likely, I thought, that people who were already dead were being portrayed as communist cadre. That wasn't one of the things that I focused on the most.

One thing that I did work on was Agent Orange, that was an issue that I know.

Q: This is defoliant.

HYDLE: Defoliant.

Q: What was the impression at the time?

HYDLE: As I understood the issue, there were different uses for Agent Orange. One of them was, of course, clearing away areas like in front of your own defense perimeter. Another purpose was clearing trails along which infiltrators might come. Still another, prompt destruction in communist areas.

It was during that period that there were some studies that Agent Orange might lead to birth defects or cancer. It was inconclusive but there were indications. I thought that some uses of Agent Orange could be justified while others were hard to justify. Particularly, it seems to me, if you can't defoliate your own perimeter, you have to allow the communist to sneak up on you then clear up your perimeter. You're losing lives by then.

So I would favor balancing the long-term dangers of Agent Orange against the short-term safety. Eventually, we basically abolished it. I think Alex Johnson, then the deputy secretary for political affairs, made the decision in 1971, if memory serves. I think he just thought that there was too much heat on it from the critics.

Q: In 72 you moved over where?

HYDLE: A job came open in Belfast, Northern Ireland. For some reason the personnel guys thought of me. I suppose they really didn't have anybody in Europe. You had EUR, the European bureau who would have been accustomed to doing anything like that.

Q: You're talking about the time when there were, you know, the growing of the IRA. We weren't particularly targeted, but still.

HYDLE: They thought I had more relative experience than these other guys who were accustomed to wearing suits and going to teas. So they asked me if I would like to do that. I said yes.

It was a two-man consulate general which had been in Belfast for a long time since 1796. At that time the conflict had flared up. Initially, this phase of it was kind of a civil rights struggle in which the Catholics wanted to be treated equally in Northern Ireland with the Protestant majority. But in which they didn't challenge the right of Northern Ireland to exist as they had always in the past.

Then the British troops got involved. There had been a big massacre, it was called, I don't remember how many people were killed, maybe in the teens, let's say, in Londonderry or Derry as the Catholics called it. The British had imposed direct rule and had taken away the power of the local Protestant dominated government. There was an outcry in the US, mostly from Irish Americans, for the US to do something. Nixon didn't want to do anything that would have created problems with the British government. So he sent me.

In other words, he wanted to watch the situation closer but not to change the policy in any significant way. So I was there, kind of like in Da Nang, I was the vice consul for political affairs and I basically did political reporting.

Q: You were there from when to when?

HYDLE: I started there in April of 72. I finished in June of 74. Strangely, that was broken by a TDY back in Vietnam in 73 after the peace agreement. You might remember that there were 5 guys that went back for a 6-month TDY.

Q: We'll move to the Vietnam thing in a minute. But, how did you find things in Belfast? Who was the consul general?

HYDLE: A guy named Grover Penberthy.

Q: I knew Grover in Belgrade. How did you find it? Here you had these two groups who were literally at each other's throats. We were there and everybody was trying to get us committed and we were trying to stay out of it. How did you find the situation?

HYDLE: I thought it was very interesting. I was very interested in the whole subject of counterinsurgency in those days--we had experienced and written about, and so had the British. It was a different feeling because we were not being blamed for the situation. We were observers and both people wanted to appeal to us. So we had good access to both sides of the conflict, and also to the British who were there.

We didn't deal with people who said that they were IRA. There were plenty of sympathizers to the IRA position--that Northern Ireland should be part of Ireland. But the IRA, an illegal organization as such, we couldn't really talk directly to knowingly.

Q: A name that pops out is Ian Paisley, a right wing, very strong British-Irish Protestant. How did you find the various people?

HYDLE: There were a lot of very colorful characters and Paisley certainly was one. One time I went to a sermon in his church. He was saying, "It's a great morning to be a Protestant." Tribalism is basically what it was all about, more than it was about religion. The Protestants were a mixture of Anglicans, who were sort of British people who had come over; and Scots who originated from Scotland. That group was united in their desire not to be Irish. It was more not to be Irish than it was to be part of the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom was their refuge against being Irish.

Q: It must have been a very difficult thing because Irish-American politicians are a very strong group. Did you find that representing the United States, did you find that you were tripping over Ted Kennedy, Tip O'Neill and all the Massachusetts Irishmen and all?

HYDLE: A little bit. None of those big names came during the time that I was there. But there was one congressman whose name I can't remember, he was Irish-American. He

was from somewhere in New York, not far outside New York city. He came to visit, but of course he already knew what he thought.

One of the things that struck me, soon after I got there when I got to know about it, was that actually there were a very significant number of Irish Catholics who did not want to be part of the Irish republic; wanted to be part of the UK but they wanted to be treated fairly. They were not separatists. They were civil rights guys basically. Whereas I found that most Irish American politicians and their constituents have ideas about Northern Ireland that were formed maybe back in 1920, frozen in time.

This congressman who came, I was sort of his escort, I suggested to him some moderate politicians that he could visit. There was, for example, a party called the Alliance Party which actually was both Protestant and Catholic, consciously you know multi-cultural. The SDLP, the Social Democratic Labor Party, also was basically Irish Catholic but within Northern Ireland.

His idea of a moderate politician was Jerry Adams who was then clearly an IRA guy. Now he's become a member of parliament and is sort of a Sinn Fein leader, the political figure. I drove him to an area, I couldn't just drive the consulate car into these areas, they were called "no- go" areas where you couldn't go safely. He walked in to see Jerry Adams and them came back. I showed him these statistics about how most Irish Catholics wanted to be part of Northern Ireland not Ireland. He said something like, "The Rockland Democratic Club isn't going to like this."

Rockland--where is that?

Q: I don't know.

HYDLE: Somewhere in Yonkers, you know, in his constituency.

Q: It's in Cleveland, New York.

Did you find that you had to exercise constraint in reporting because of, yet you've got a couple of places where one has to worry about. If you're in Israel you have to worry about everything that you report will probably end up on a congressman's desk before it gets to the action officer. I would imagine that Belfast would be somewhat the same.

HYDLE: It was a little different. I didn't have any trouble from Grover Penberthy trying to sanitize my stuff. He edited of course and he approved it, but there was no ideological baggage that he was carrying. But we had to report through the embassy in London. They had their own British spin that they wanted to put on things. They did talk to me one time about how they would like, if I was going to write something controversial, they hoped it would be to them and they would put some spin on it. We also had no ability to receive classified messages so we went down to Dublin to pick up the pouch every now and then. So we were in touch with those guys quite a bit too.

The problem that I saw was that few people understood the specifically Northern Ireland perspective on events in Northern Ireland. The embassy in London understood how the British saw it, which was just a pain in the ass. Of course Dublin saw the Irish government perspective, but nobody quite understood how it was seen up there, so I tried to emphasize that point.

Q: Dealing with the Brits in Northern Ireland, were they sort of the "hell on both your houses."

HYDLE: The British that I dealt with, of course, were basically military people--they saw that they couldn't solve the problem. They were just holding a line and keeping things from getting completely out of hand, until the politicians worked out a solution. They had no problems with us, particularly because we were not creating any problems. We were not challenging their control but I felt that in Britain itself, we would read the British papers, they were getting increasingly fed up with the whole situation in Northern Ireland as time went on. I'm sure that there were some Brits who would have liked to get rid of that problem, if only by doing so they wouldn't have been giving in to the IRA.

Q: At that time, and in your own analysis, what would have happened if the British had said, "Oh the hell with it." And just pulled their troops out.

HYDLE: There would have been a big, like a civil war. The Irish government is certainly not prepared at any time to invade the north. The IRA certainly wasn't prepared to raise some general uprising and take over the country. There were already at that time major Protestant underground movements like the Ulster Defense Force, Ulster volunteer force, they were very bloody then, as they still are.

So that would have been, the British--I don't think they would have wanted to do that because there would have been a major conflict which still, after all, is right on their doorstep. If you look carefully at the IRA positions at the time, they were not merely saying that the British should leave and that Northern Ireland should be Irish. They were also saying that the British should convince the Protestants that they should be happy to be part of Ireland. This was never on.

I think the British felt--why do we have to do that? It's up to them and why do we have to convince the Protestants? Most of the issues that existed then, I think, pretty much still exist today from what little I've been involved in.

Q: What was your impression, again at the time, was the IRA doing a major fund-raising, even recruiting? Were you having problems with Americans getting involved in IRA activities?

HYDLE: A few problems came up like that but most of what was happening was not directly visible to us. I think the IRA raised funds in the US and then used that to buy weapons or whatever. They would do the fighting themselves.

Q: Did you have the normal diplomatic receptions, the dinners, and all this. Were you constantly getting hit with the tribal status of one side or another?

HYDLE: Oh sure, but I loved it. That was why I was there.

One thing I might mention. One of the issues that came up from time to time, was whether we should give visas to the people who were going to the US, but who had been involved in some fashion with the IRA. I can't recall now all of the details of the law which, I think, since then has been changed. If you were a member of an organization, if you yourself advocated overthrowing an established government, or a member of an organization that advocated that, then you could be banned. But the State Department never wanted us to make those decisions ourselves. They wanted us to forward the facts to them and they would decide, but they would let us announce the decision.

I always felt that's where the Irish-American pressure came in. They rarely denied a visa to people even though, I think, a reasonable person would have said, "That person had said plenty of things that were contrary to the norm, and may have been going to raise funds."

I remember giving a visa to Bernadette Devlin, who is a famous civil rights leader in the earlier period; and refusing one to Mary Drum, who was an irate--clearly there were a lot of books out, people quoting what she said--I said, "Did you say that?"

Well, I may have said that. You know, she would say things in the heat of public speaking.

I didn't decide these questions but I would write about these because it was political. I think we denied her a visa. She assumed--she said that she was sure this was because the British got to us. There were very solid grounds for denial in the law.

Q: So we'll leave there. You did have this interlude over in Vietnam after the peace agreement in 73. What were you doing?

HYDLE: I was in Northern Ireland from about April, as I recall, until January 73. When the peace agreement was reached I remember hearing that Alex Johnson had said, "We need to send 100 old Vietnam hands back to monitor the success of the peace agreement." People supposedly said, "100?" He said, "Okay, 50."

It wasn't that vigorous an analysis of personnel needs but it was decided that we would go back, and we would be attached to all of our consulates there, and we would be reporting on the progress of the agreement.

So I went back and I was assigned, once again, to Bien Hoa III CORPS. The consul general at that time was Bob Walkinshaw. I was there from January to September although I squeezed in some home leave and some leave in the middle of that. They were very generous with leave provisions and other things. It was kind of silly, in a way, to

take me out of Belfast where they had just added me, an additional person, and they were in the midst of trying to normalize the situation with elections and so forth. But they didn't want to make exceptions because everybody else would start coming in with requests for exceptions.

We just did reports which at first were daily reports and later tailed off, led to less. We got about 5 FSOs there. After a while, I was made sort of like the chief of this mini-reporting in Bien Hoa.

That was a very interesting time because since all of us were back there on TDY, we all knew how things were done in Vietnam before. We were not about to put up with any nonsense about reporting. We would report just whatever we'd want to report. I remember, for example, there was an election coming up for the senate. A regular election under the South Vietnamese government system. That would have been an opportunity to bring in the communists, if you were really pushing for peace and normalization, but they were excluded and the election was run on the old system. It was just a silly process. We wrote something like: Enthusiasm for the senatorial election in III CORPS is under total control.

Another thing that we did that I was involved in was a dissent message. Tony Elito and I wrote a dissent message to the Department about the impending visit of President Thieu. Thieu, now that the peace agreement had been reached in January 73, Thieu wants to visit the United States. We recalled that after Vietnamese leaders had made previous visits, they had come back and felt sort of re-strengthened vis a vis their opponents, including legitimate opposition figures. We wanted to forestall that especially since we knew that Nixon, like many other people, tended to go into hyperbole during state visits. One time Nixon had said that Thieu was one of the top, maybe 5, politicians in the world.

So we wrote a message saying that we didn't think we should go overboard in welcoming Thieu because of this past history. Tony and I sent it out. People in the embassy didn't exactly quarrel with what we said. They said, "We don't disagree with that much so why are you calling it a dissent?" But we sent it anyway.

Then we got a message back from San Clement, the western White House, I think from Ambassador Porter, then the under secretary for political affairs, he said, "Your message was received and read carefully." It was an encouraging response. In fact, the Thieu visit did go off without the excesses that we had feared. So we were very encouraged that we had done the right thing.

Q: It had gotten up to make, hopefully, some penetration.

HYDLE: I think so. Of course that was also the period Nixon was preoccupied with Watergate, he had other things on his mind. But still we had accomplished everything that we could have hoped with that message.

Q: How did you feel this time in 73 about the situation in Vietnam. This is basically your third time, how were you seeing it?

HYDLE: I thought there was a military stalemate of course. I thought there was no progress toward peace and that the South Vietnamese were just going to have to hang in there. That proved to be right. Eventually, things fell apart.

It was the US government that was unable to come to the aid of the South Vietnamese because even though the agreement required us to stop all of our military presence there, if we had been able to bomb the North Vietnamese troop concentrations, because these were not as I said earlier, these were no longer guerrilla operations but main force North Vietnamese units with big guns and tanks and all that. If we couldn't respond to that then things were doomed.

My feeling is that because of the Watergate crisis and American fatigue with Vietnam and so on, the eventual defeat was because of that more, in my opinion, that it was the weaknesses of the South Vietnamese.

Anyway, the North Vietnamese chose to be a highly armed garrison state. The South Vietnamese tried to be more like a normal state. Why should that mean that they are not allowed to survive as a state? But at the time it just seemed like a stalemate.

Q: Then you finished off in Belfast.

HYDLE: That would be October 73 until June 74.

Q: Then what did you do?

HYDLE: During that period, I got married by the way in September 73 and took my wife to Belfast, that was a period in which there had been elections and the local legislature had been restored. There was local government although not quite as autonomous as it had been before. By June of 74, the Protestants conducted a strike which basically made Northern Ireland ungovernable. There had been a change in the British government, Harold Wilson, the Labor Party, replaced Heath and the Conservatives. In that period I just continued to do my reporting.

Q: You left there in June of 74, did you see any hope for the situation when you left?

HYDLE: I had a view of that, which was kind of different than most people at the time, I thought that eventually there had to be an independent Northern Ireland with boundaries redrawn. Some of the parts of Northern Ireland, the border areas, are very Catholic. Those could have just been hived off to the Irish Republic while what was left could have been a small state. Admittedly small but still viable if it was in the common market like Britain and Ireland were. It would have been a more heavily Protestant state.

The problem there was that the Protestants were about two thirds of the population, the Catholics one third. The Catholics tended to have more children. The Protestants constantly felt that they were going to be out-breeded or outnumbered by the Catholics. So they felt, to them, putting the Catholics down and mistreating them was really policy. It seemed to them that it would get the Catholics to move to the UK which they were entitled to do.

So this tension, I felt, could continue indefinitely because it had already been going on for years. But, maybe it wouldn't continue if there was a state that was clearly likely to be always Protestant. Then maybe class factors would have asserted themselves and you would have a Catholic and Protestant working class being more sublime, as they should.

So my idea was to let, somehow arrange independence for Northern Ireland. I said that not that people are enthusiastic about that idea. But it had some merit as sort of a fall-back solution for the Irish. At least for the Irish, they would be getting the British out of Ireland; for the Protestants at least they wouldn't be going into Ireland.

This is not a view that has ever picked up much support.

Q: The whole time you were there the American policy was one of really trying to stay out from it.

HYDLE: Yes, it was.

Q: We'll pick this up when you left there and went to where?

HYDLE: I was assigned for a year to the Marine Corps Plans Division in Washington. I was part of the Defense Department-State Department exchange, from the political/military bureau, I was exchanged with them.

Q: Today is August 10, 1994. The exchange thing with the marine corps, what were you doing? You were there from 74 to 75.

HYDLE: Basically I was just slotted in as another middle ranking officer in their Plans Division. The Plans Division was the staff for the commandant of the Marine Corps, in his role as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The commandant is not quite a full member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff because he is somewhat subordinate to the navy. But the rule that had developed was that he could get involved in any matter before the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, in his judgment, was relevant to the Marine Corps. Which is almost everything because something that would not directly affect them would at least indirectly affect them through their budget.

We just worked on issues that the Joint Chiefs worked on. One that comes to mind is President Ford's amnesty for draft evaders and deserters, people like that. I don't remember much about that except that the president did want to have some fairly

significant form of amnesty and basically asked the Joint Chiefs not to give him a lot of problems with this because it was really in the national interest. They went along.

Q: You were with the Marine Corps at the time and Vietnam fell. By that time the marines had gotten out of there, a major commitment. You had served in Vietnam. What was sort of the attitude about the marines, about what they had done, how this whole thing--both their performance there and maybe that of the army.

HYDLE: You mean how did the marine officers feel?

Q: The ones you were talking to.

HYDLE: I feel that they thought that they had done the best they could. The situation had fallen apart through circumstances beyond the control of any US military ability to turn it around for political reasons. Like Nixon's fall and the lack of will, in the Congress and in the country, to save South Vietnam once the North Vietnamese launched their offensive in 1975.

I had some role. I was called upon to be an escort/interpreter for a CODEL that was led by-I can't remember who led it. It was the House Appropriations Subcommittee chairman. The name escapes me. I remember Congressman John Murtha was on, Bella Abzug was on that trip. Phil Habib was the main State Department official that was on the trip. We took a military aircraft to Vietnam. This would have been late February or early march of 1975, after the fall of Phuoc Long province, I believe. One of the provinces in the III CORPS border.

Q: Islands.

HYDLE: Not islands but it was in the remote border area. The province had fallen. It was becoming time to do something about it because it was a remote province being enveloped by the North Vietnamese. You remember that Graham Martin was then the ambassador to Vietnam. It was a very interesting trip because I felt that the members of congress saw, during the first part of that trip, that things were going to--it was clear that things were going to fall apart unless they did something--but, it was not clear that even if they did something, something on the scale that they were willing to do, things would not fall apart anyway.

This was a week long trip. After they got back, I think that they would have been willing to appropriate some more aid to the South Vietnamese government but before they could do that, the North Vietnamese launched their final offensive. Things fell apart, as you recall, at the end of April 75.

It happened that I was in the operations center. They had a task force, the State Department Operations Center, I was seconded back over there. I was in the operations center when we got the dispatch that Saigon had fallen.

Q: What was the reaction that you were getting? There were a lot of Vietnam hands in the State Department.

HYDLE: Some of them were very sad about it, as I was. Others sort of tried to move on with their lives and didn't want to think that much about the whole conflict. That was pretty much true for years after that. I thought most people really didn't want to relive that. They felt like it was just a bad dream.

Q: What was the marine view that you got from this Policy Planning of the Department of State and all this. Did they understand where we were coming from and all?

HYDLE: The guys that were in the marine corps Plans Division were among the brightest and most politically sophisticated officers in the marine corps. So while they knew that they had some marine corps stereotypes about the State Department, they also understood what we were doing. I felt comfortable there. I could defend or could explain the kind of viewpoints that the State Department like to have without feeling liked some kind of an outcast.

Q: You moved to Policy Planning from 75 to 77 of the State Department. What was that?

HYDLE: This was in the middle of what was anticipated to be a 2 year marine corps assignment. Basically they needed a speechwriter. In those days, Winston Lord was Director of Policy Planning, also one of Secretary Kissinger's closest confidantes. The Secretary used the speech writing process very, very heavily to put forward the views of the US administration, and also to change those views because in the process of clearing a draft of a speech, you would be making policy.

Kissinger, his own principal speechwriter was Charlie Hill but there was a number 2 speechwriter position available. They were looking for somebody for that. I guess they thought that my writing, my reporting and so on was good and that I could do the job. So I was called in to do that. For 2 years, basically, I did various speech writing chores, some of them for the deputy secretaries in State, other people of that kind, and occasionally for Secretary Kissinger.

Q: As you say, speech writing does not take place in the vacuum. It actually is the way policy is often changed, by going through this. Could you talk about how you went about this? You're sitting there, you're the number 2 person, sort of the speech writing thing. Orders would come down, what would you be after and how would you go about it?

HYDLE: We had many different kinds. When you say speechwriter it's not just a speech in the long sense. You had remarks, short things, witticism and so on. Kissinger liked jokes. It was a whole variety of things that you would be writing about. I would get instructions from Winston Lord or one of his deputies, sometimes Rich Bartholomew, he was a deputy of Winston Lord at the time, or Charlie Hill would supervise my efforts.

I would work with the people. Sometimes we would do a draft if it was an overall foreign policy speech or if it was something that mainly involved the, sort of the evocation of the personality of the person who gave the speech. At other times, we would get a draft from the substantive bureau that was involved in the speech.
Q: By substantive bureau you mean like EUR, Asian or African

HYDLE: Yes, that ‘s right. Or other members of the Policy Planning staff did a lot of speech writing too in their area of expertise. In that case, when somebody else had drafted it, we would try to polish it and put it into better punchier language and make it more coherent and all that sort of thing. Of course there were plenty levels of clearance in the Department and sometimes outside.

Q: Would somebody come to you and say--we want a speech to change our policy on Central America to reflect such and such. Or would they say--give me a speech on Central American--and then everybody would start playing with it. How would you go about it?

HYDLE: No, usually the secretary knew what he wanted to do. The speech writing process was to move us in that direction.

Q: I mean, it's not like I'm pushy, which I am, can you think of maybe an example of a speech you worked on that was moving things in a direction. Would you start out with the secretary saying, "I want to make a speech, I want to make the following points." Then you take on from there.

HYDLE: That could happen. In those days Secretary Kissinger was very concerned. He could see the end coming in Vietnam, and it had come. He was concerned that this would lead to an overall revulsion of the American public toward foreign affairs and reluctance to get into any foreign situation for fear that it would metastasize into another Vietnam. So almost all of his speeches had several common themes about the continuing importance to America of America's place in the world, and the fact that the world couldn't do without American leadership, and all that. All those things were in the speeches but each speech might have a specific area that it would go into in more detail.

My memory is a little vague on this, frankly because, I wasn't the main speechwriter. Kissinger didn't like deputy secretaries to break new ground on policy. For example, there was UNCTAD, UN Conference on Trade Development. Kissinger was trying to move toward a more prosperous, a more open world. He had to fend off the efforts of the Third World countries to get all sorts of unilateral concessions from us and other members of the First World. At the same time, he had to bring along other elements of our own government toward a less tight-fisted and less narrow policy. We should respond in some way to these problems because it wasn't in our interest that all of these countries be diving constantly for the end of poverty.

The themes would be written by the people in the Policy Planning staff, often under guidance from the secretary and Winston. Then the thing had to be farmed out for

clearance, could come back quite different from places like the Treasury, for example. It was very tough to get the Treasury to loosen its purse strings and, of course, its control over US contributions to international organizations, financial institutions.

Q: Let's say you would send something on UNCTAD to Treasury. It would come back with almost a reversal of policy. Then what would happen?

HYDLE: Eventually, you just had to escalate it, the secretary would, to Secretary Simon, the Treasury secretary. But the speeches were the vehicle through which these disagreements were resolved or papered over.

Q: Did you find that sometimes you were able to sort of work on the telephone or something with somebody in another department.

HYDLE: Yes, we would work on the telephone or on paper.

Q: At a certain point, I suppose you'd say, "we really can't iron this one out here, it really has to go up."

HYDLE: Right, that's right.

Q: Winston Lord is still involved, what is it the head of Policy Planning, what's he doing now?

HYDLE: East Asian.

Q: East Asian Affairs. He's been sort of very much a major figure in American foreign policy for some time. How did he operate? What was your impression of Winston Lord at that time.

HYDLE: Then he was relatively young. I think he was in his late 30s or early 40s, I can't remember. His main card was that he was close to Secretary Kissinger. He worked with him, in particular the opening to China. He was a very good writer. He liked to run a Policy Planning staff. I think we all felt that we were in the midst of sort of an extraordinary band of brilliant people, including ourselves. He liked to encourage us to feel that way about ourselves. This was a very special organization and very close to the Secretary of State and to the policy making process. He pushed exchanges with other policy planning staffs in other countries as well. So that further enhanced the whole process of policy planning, in our country and in other allied countries also.

Q: Although you were more on the speech writing side, did you feel that under Henry Kissinger we were looking a long way ahead? Supposedly policy planning is suppose to be looking where we're going.

HYDLE: I thought that we were doing the best that we could, to look a long ways ahead. Certainly Secretary Kissinger wanted it. He had an overall idea about the US and the

world, which I mentioned earlier, which he wanted to preserve against the isolationism. At the same time, as he said in his own memoirs, the policy planners have to react, like athletes, instinctively to situations that come up. I do feel that especially in comparison to subsequent Secretaries of State, this is a Secretary of State who did indeed have an overall concept and a long view about foreign policy. One which I generally shared and was happy to support.

Q: Did you have the feel that Henry Kissinger had a world view, which some have said makes sense, but in a lot of cases it doesn't make sense, that was East-West confrontation, and seeing it in the Middle East, Africa or Latin America where actually there were other factors. I mean there might have been a small East-West component but mainly it was Arabs and Jews have a hard time getting together, and other things of this nature.

HYDLE: I think he certainly did view diplomacy, or at least his role in diplomacy and the policy planning staffs', as oriented more toward East-West problems. But he did try to bring the Third World along, as I mentioned, in this debate over UNCTAD for example. He didn't understand economics that well but he did understand that there should be some sort of better future for the Third World and we couldn't ignore it.

Sure there were parts of the word that he pretty much did ignore, or that he went to just to show that he wasn't really ignoring them. I think he went to South Africa once when I was there.

Yes, he was an East-West guy at the time.

Q: From your impressions, and I realize that there are impressions, your having to deal with the various bureaus, did you find that there was almost a ranking order or not? About how, say, East Asian Affairs, Near East, Europe, Africa and American republics, how these various bureaus responded at your time.

HYDLE: It's hard to remember that much about it but, of course, the Secretary was more interested in EUR and in East Asia and so forth. There was always some tension between those bureaus and the policy planning staff since, whenever he wanted to, either he would leave the bureaus alone to do their policy or he would get involved and sort of take over. Certainly he was a very secretive guy. So I certainly sensed there was a lot of tension between him and the policy planning staff on the one hand, and bureaus on the other hand because the bureaus were always jealous about being left out or being ignored.

I guess that was inevitable given his style of operation. I don't think it's inevitable that the Department of State has to be run by a small cabal of people but it's one way that's been done.

Q: From what you were gathering, what was the view of the Soviet Union at that time?

HYDLE: I think that we all thought that it was a major adversary but that one could deal with it. There were a lot of US-Soviet agreements during that time. I guess this was a

little before my time but the attempt to have a sort of code of conduct between the US and the Soviet Union which would sort of manage the Cold War, to keep it from spiraling out of control.

I never quite understood that because I thought the Soviets don't believe in codes of conduct and that they don't believe in the spirit of agreements. But they may sometimes, you know, not violate the letter of agreements. I thought we were setting ourselves up for a fall when we dealt with them, and they would push things to and beyond what we understood were the breaking points.

But I don't think that we sensed at that time that the Soviet Union was collapsing from within. Maybe it wasn't yet, at that time it was 75 to 77.

Q: It was certainly considered a major part, I mean that was the threat.

HYDLE: Oh sure, and also it seemed there were times when it seemed that the US was really on the decline. I had the sense that Kissinger felt he was trying to manage a sort of rear guard action because the US had been traumatized by Vietnam, and we had other problems which were making it difficult for us to stand up to the kind of threat that we perceived from the Soviet Union. So there were things that he was doing that later he was criticized for by conservatives, for accepting the notion that the US was declining, and the Soviet Union was there to stay, and that we had to deal with them.

I think that he did the best that he could, at the time, with the situation that we were in.

Q: This is before the fall of the Shah but do you remember--was there any concern about what was happening in Iran or not?

HYDLE: I don't think there was. I don't remember surfacing any concern about Iran. I think that we thought the Shah was a very valuable ally and friend. You remember that this was at the time of the peak of OPEC. The Shah, this was a friend that we had in OPEC although we had problems with price increases.

Q: And China? The great sort of foreign policy coup during the Kissinger-Nixon period was the opening to China. Was there any sort of disappointment with how things developed? How did we feel?

HYDLE: As I recall, at that time things were going reasonably well between ourselves and the Chinese. I think Mao died in 76, and sure there was a lot of turmoil, but the US-Chinese relationship remained good during the Nixon and Ford periods. I do remember that Winston and the Secretary saw that with special fondness. It was one of their greatest triumphs. They also thought that Zhou En-lai was one hell of a guy. They used to talk about the discussions between Zhou En-lai and the Secretary and say that these had reached an extraordinary high level of abstraction and sophistication and subtlety and all that.

They thought the Chinese, particularly Zhou En-lai, were a lot smarter and were more interesting than the Russians, guys like Brezhnev and Gromyko.

Q: You left Policy Planning in 1977, this is obviously part of the switch over to the new administration.

HYDLE: Yes. In January 1977 the new administration came in. Tony Lake replaced Winston Lord as policy planning staff director. He brought in most of his own people. Also the speech writing operation was switched to a guy named Michael Jainwain, who had been working in Atlantic Monthly, I think. He was not in the policy planning staff, he was some kind of a special assistant or something.

So basically I had little or nothing to do for several months. Then I switched over to the Bureau of Public Affairs, I think it was June 77, and was deputy director for Plans.

Q: What do Plans mean in the public affairs business?

HYDLE: The Bureau of Public Affairs was then under Hodding Carter who was also the press spokesman. You know at times the press spokesman and the public affairs bureau have been separate and other times together. In this case, Hodding had both positions and they were sort of merged back together during the time I was there.

What the bureau tried to do was to have a public affairs strategy that supported its policies, you know the foreign policies. But you couldn't go too far in this because the Congress was very vigilant and they controlled our budget. They didn't want people to go into their districts and campaign against their positions on issues. On the other hand, they were not highly principled about this, anybody could go in and campaign for them. Some members of congress, for example, agreed with our positions but said they had constituents who disagreed, they didn't mind all that much if people would go in and explain the position supporting their inclinations.

We tried to have public affairs strategies to support major policy issues. There was, I think when I first got there, there was a lot of focus on the Panama Canal treaty. We tried to support efforts that were underway. Ambassador Bunker was then the negotiator on Panama and Ambassador Sol Linowitz had joined him. Bunker was left over from the previous administration and Linowitz came in. They moved toward the treaty which was, I think, eventually passed in March 1978.

The public affairs strategy, there was nothing magic about it. We just tried to identify themes that would be important in supporting the treaty, you'd have questions raised by people who were opposed, places that you would go and people that you would see, whether it was groups, editorial writers, TV appearances. All of this was supposed to support the administration's diplomatic and congressional efforts.

Q: Let's take Panama Canal which was highly debated and very emotional at the time. This was basically getting the United States out of control of the Panama Canal. Did you

have, sort of like, no-go zones where because of congressional district opposition or something, you felt that it wasn't a good idea to cross such-and-such a congressman and that sort of thing?

HYDLE: I think such things existed. Anyway, you concentrate on swing votes rather than just going in to challenge some guy in his territory. It doesn't make any sense.

Q: Did you get any impression on how Hodding Carter ran his office and all?

HYDLE: He was really most interested in the press spokesman job that consumed most of his time and that is virtually a full time job. In the morning you have to start preparing questions and answers based on press reports and to be ready for the noon briefing. I believe that it was during that time that we started televising that briefing. So he was a very high profile guy. He left more to others, the planning stuff that I was interested in and involved with.

One interesting point was that we tried to impose some logic on the process by doing a memo from Hodding Carter, as I recall, to Secretary Vance which would say, "These are the 5 or 6 priority issues for public affairs purposes." In other words the definition was (1) it had to be an important issue and (2) it had to be an issue where public affairs efforts could make a difference. It would not be something that everybody already agreed on.

We tried to get the Secretary to do that but basically I felt that it didn't work all that well. One problem in particular was that Hodding Carter was engaged to, and later married to, Patt Derian, the Bureau of Human Rights. So they always had to say that human rights was one of the issues regardless of whether it was controversial or not. I felt that the idea of having human rights as a factor in foreign policy was not all that controversial but the questions arose in specific situations where you would balance that against other things.

Apart from that, Secretary Vance, he never really paid any attention to these fine distinctions that we were trying to get him to make. He would just decide: whatever is most important to me is what we should have a public affairs campaign on. He also was not the kind of outgoing person like Secretary Kissinger. He wasn't all that crazy about traveling around the country giving speeches about foreign affairs. He was more of an insider, so we didn't have the same high receptivity from him underpinning the policy planning staff we had from Kissinger.

Q: You did that until you left in 1979. Then you moved over to the Ethiopian Desk from 79 to 81. What was the situation in Ethiopia when you arrived in 79?

HYDLE: As I recall, our relations in Ethiopia were bad and getting worse in 79. I think we had just cut off aid to them for various reasons. There were many provisions of the Foreign Assistance Act that they were violating. They weren't paying any of their bills for military aid. Benditsku, the leader of Ethiopia, was really a communist and he would even say he was a communist. Relations were very bad.

But it seemed that there were people in the administration who still had a soft spot in the heart for Ethiopia. Ethiopia, at one time, was really a major US friend and ally in Africa. A lot of people had served there. Paul Hendsy, I remember, was at the White House NSC at that time, he really thought Ethiopia was wonderful. There were not very many people around who thought much of Somalia, who had become out partner because they had kicked out the Soviets at the time, the Soviets choosing to side with the Ethiopians.

Q: You were the desk officer. Other than some of this feeling that people had because of so many years in this relationship, what did we see as our strategic interest in Ethiopia at that time?

HYDLE: We wanted them not to become even more of a Soviet ally than they were. Fore example, the Soviets were very opportunistic and forward pushing during that period. We didn't want them to be able to use Ethiopia as a base for spreading Soviet influence into the rest of Africa. So in the context of the Cold War, this was a valid concern. I think, for example, the Ethiopians had a naval base in Dalak, an island in the Red Sea. We didn't want them to allow the Soviets to use Dalak to spread their influence in the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and that sort of thing. That was a preoccupation of ours.

Q: Had we given up Tetnu at that time?

HYDLE: Yes.

Q: So at least it took that particular issue off. What was your impression of Benditsku?

HYDLE: I thought he was a very, very bad guy, very cruel and crafty tyrant.
Q: Did you feel that we had any influence on events there?

HYDLE: Virtually none.

Q: Was there any effort, from the Secretary of State down, was anybody pushing to say we should be doing more here or something, or would you say that it was sort of written off.

HYDLE: There was constant concern about Ethiopia. Some people did want to somehow, against all evidence that was in front there, they looked for ways to restore relations with Ethiopia in some way. I recall the Ethiopian charge also said that he was trying to improve relations between the US and Ethiopia, but I thought this was a sham. They were just trying to keep us slightly off balance, so that we could never quite reach a consensus that the Ethiopians were bad guys, and that they were our enemies and that we ought to treat them as such.

I was more of a hawk than most people in AF at that time. The AF guys were generally against Cold War thinking in terms of Ethiopia and Africa, generally. They wanted to find a way back. I think President Carter also wanted to find a way back to Ethiopia, if memory serves. Dick Moose, who was the assistant secretary for African Affairs, also wanted to find a way to good relations with Ethiopians. Although he ended up signing the

Access Agreement with the Somalis, that came in 79, you remember after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in, what was it?

Q: It was December of 79 that they invaded.

HYDLE: Then there was an enhanced push by the US to have our own access agreements in the region. The Somalis were willing to offer us a lot of access to Berbera, which is on the north coast of Somalia, and other things as well. Moose ended up signing the agreement with the Somalian ambassador which gave up access and increased our aid to Somalia, although we never gave them as much as they wanted. They wanted us to be really their ally and to take the IR side against Ethiopia because Ethiopia has some Somali language areas, as you know.

Q: Ogaden.

HYDLE: Yes, Ogaden province.

As I recall, the agreement that we had with the Somalis was a secret agreement in some respects, and the Ethiopians were constantly trying to find out what was in it. I would tell them that I couldn't tell them what was in it but that they shouldn't worry. If memory serves, the agreement did not really commit us to supporting, going all the way with the Somalis. It put some restraints on the Somalis, if anything. But I suppose that the secrecy created an ambiguity in the Ethiopian mind.

Q: Which is not always bad. Was somebody else on the Somali desk?

HYDLE: Yes, there was another officer.

Q: Did you find yourself in the classic thing, it's not really clientitis but saying, particularly Somalia and Ethiopia, it's almost a zero sum game. You do anything for one, the other is going to be mad as hell. Were you making any, you know, saying--if we do this, this will mean this with Ethiopia--or did you really care?

HYDLE: No, I never was clientistic toward Ethiopia, that was a period in my career when I was particularly attuned to US interest and less attuned to the country that I was dealing with.

Q: This is part of your thing coming out of planning, I think.

HYDLE: Maybe, who knows why, but I did think that it was stupid, frankly, to become a desk officer for a country and then become an advocate of that country in policy matters in the US government. I, for one, was never going to be a part of that, I never did. I always tried to look for ways to advance US interest in Ethiopia. It was not that hard because Ethiopians were so reprehensible. Nobody really liked them that much, the Ethiopian government that is.

Q: At that time did you see Ethiopia, perhaps, whither Ethiopia; by the time you left in 81, where did you think Ethiopia was going to go?

HYDLE: it was very closely aligned with the Soviet Union. I didn't see much chance that it would break with the Soviet Union especially, remember in 1979 after the invasion of Afghanistan, the Ethiopians supported that. They supported the Soviet Union invading a country because it wasn't communist enough. I mean, it's totally against their interest to be seen as some kind of lackey of the Soviet Union. So, I didn't see any prospect for improvement and I was happy with an anti-Ethiopian policy on the part of the US. I thought that the Ethiopian attempts to say that they wanted better relations with us were basically fake and hypocritical attempts to keep us from understanding the truth about Ethiopia; to play on the sentiments of the old Ethiopian hands in the State Department.

Q: You left in 81, where did you go?

HYDLE: I went to Ghana.

Q: You were there from 81 to 83, what were you doing?

HYDLE: I was the political officer in Ghana, also labor reporting was included in my duties.

Q: What was the situation in Ghana in that period?

HYDLE: When I went there, Ghana in 1979 had had a multi-party election and had elected a president, vice president and, I think, it was a single chamber legislature. It was really a multiparty democracy in that period. It was friendly with the United States, but it was ineffective in terms of dealing with the economic problems, in particular, that the country like most countries in Africa was facing.

Q: When you were there, what did you see as your main task and how did you go about it?

HYDLE: At first it was just a classic political reporting job, where I would get in touch with different factions that were in the legislature and party leaders exchange views with them, and report back on what they were doing. We had the usual run of demarches that we were suppose to make to the foreign ministry, saying what the US position was on an issue and why they should support our position and all that sort of thing.

Q: The UN.

HYDLE: Yes, the UN issues especially.

Q: Were there any serious problems with that during this period?

HYDLE: No serious problems. That was a period, in late 81 we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Peace Corps which had come to Ghana first, I guess, after it was created. We had a ship visit by, frankly I don't remember but it was a US ship.

Q: A navy ship.

HYDLE: Yes, a navy ship. That was all very nice. Everything changed dramatically on December 31, 1981 when Rawlings and his friends launched a coup against the elected government. The new government, you may remember that Rawlings had been Chief of State in 1979, he was a relatively young army officer but he had then turned over power back to what was then to become an elected government. Well, he was disgruntled because he hadn't been treated well enough by the elected government since then and, of course, there was a lot of discontent in the country because of economic problems.

So when he launched a coup it was a fairly small affair, not many Ghanaians, my view then and still is that the coup itself was not that popular but neither was the government. So it was kind of a small scale dispute between a few people who wanted to get rid of the government and fewer who wanted to keep it in power. But those guys had become radicalized and they were anti-American. Several of them, people at the heart of the coup, were anti-American and would like to have aligned Ghana with the Soviet Union.

So we were in for a very rough time. They started out trying to attack the US as a way of rallying nationalistic support behind them. We were just bystanders, too much so I felt. Here was an elected government, inept as it may have been, it was overthrown and we tried to just carry on without missing a beat. Some people hoped that the new government would be more resolute about dealing with economic issues. Certainly Ambassador Tom Smith, I think, was of that school. He was more focused on economic issues. He wanted, above all, to get the Ghanaians to get together with the World Bank and with IMF, and to get their economic act together. He was less concerned than I was, certainly, about the rape of democracy.

So we just carried on as best we could and we turned the other cheek, pretty much, when they attacked us and criticized us and blamed us.

Q: One of the things that can happen is if you have something such as this, that knowing what you report in Washington has pretty wide dissemination, that there maybe, that you maybe sort of hurting your cause if you do feel that you want to try to maintain relations by publicizing all the slings and arrows of a government that's trying to use you as its whipping boy. Did you find that you all were sort of pulling your punches as far as reporting goes or not?

HYDLE: I felt that Ambassador Smith did want punches pulled because he wanted to keep things going, to maintain relations, and that he was sympathetic to the Ghanaian people so he wanted US aid to Ghana to continue. He also didn't want to be the bad guy who would be cutting them off.

It was kind of a classic ambassador thing. To my mind it's what one hears about US ambassadors wanting their countries' relations, bilateral relations, to be good even at the expense of US interest.

I felt that here was a government that was anti-American, that had overthrown a democratic government, it wasn't even popular in Ghana nor was it doing anything good for the Ghanaians, even things that might be unpopular that would eventually be good for them. What was the redeeming social value of this government? Why should the US not pursue a rather cold and hostile policy toward them? Not that we had a vital interest which compelled us to overthrow them, but just that our whole manner should be cold toward the government.

Q: Did you get any of this from, I mean this is the Reagan administration, was the feeling that there really isn't any great interest in this sort of thing. I thought this anti-American rhetoric would stir the Reagan administration to get really annoyed.

HYDLE: One would have thought so but there were other factors at play. One was that Ghana really was pretty unimportant to the Reagan administration, inherently. Second, I think, although I couldn't tell this directly, I think in retrospect that Jim Bishop, who was then the deputy assistant secretary responsible for Ghana, had been, I guess, a former Ghana desk officer and was kind of pro-Ghanaian somehow. He also had an attitude that he didn't want problems. There was only a certain number of problems he could deal with and Ghana should not be a problem. So we should muddle through somehow and not go for a confrontation with them. This is just my impression of his attitude at the time.

So they would do things and we would have to respond to it. But basically we didn't have an overall policy of much of anything other than avoiding a confrontation and maintaining relations and that sort of thing.

But then in June of 1982 there were 3 judges who were murdered by persons unknown, but who appeared to be close to the government, and who appeared to be directed by the government's national security adviser, Kogo Tchikada, who was the leading bad guy in the administration. So we got involved at least to the extent of calling for an investigation of the murders. Rawlings, in response to domestic and foreign pressure, appointed a former supreme court justice to conduct an investigation but Tchikada remained in office as the national security adviser and obstructed the investigation whenever he could.

The sequence of events is not that clear to me but I remember at the time there was a constant drumming of attempts by the government, and by government supported radicals, to blame us for all sorts of things. I was one of the targets-by name-they would say I was interfering in their foreign affairs. There was one headline on a paper that said, "Lars Hydle must go!"

The problem with me was that I was doing my job. I would try to meet with government officials but, in general, they didn't want to be seen meeting with Americans so I didn't

get much feedback from them. On the other hand, I would be sought out by people who hated the government and wanted to urge us to take some action against the government. I would meet these people and I would report what they said. So I was seen as consorting with these guys. I think Ambassador Smith at times didn't like what I was doing. He kind of reined me in at times because of his desire to keep relations on an even keel.

At one point there was one Ghanaian who kept coming to us and talking about an impending coup. At first we reported what he was saying, then we began to become a little cynical about nothing ever actually happened. But then one day he reported that there was going to be a coup attempt that weekend. To our surprise, there was. We were caught up in it because the guy came to my house and said that things had gone wrong, and the government was after the small band of soldiers who were involved, and that he was on the run. His common law wife was an American citizen so our defense attaché went over to her house during a lull. Their house was where the plotters had been and they were taken away by the government forces and, I think, executed.

During a lull, the Defense Attaché went to her house, picked her up and whisked her out of harms way. She went over to his house initially then briefly to my house, and then finally we decided that since she was a US citizen that we would get her out of the country. We gave her a passport, the Ghanaians put a visa on it, the Ghanaian arm of government not knowing about the other arm that was looking for her. She left the next day or so.

Meanwhile, this guy was frantically calling from in hiding, wanting to meet with me. Of course I was instructed to put him off. Eventually he left the country. A few days later the Ghanaian press had a report about how a US diplomatic car had been involved, that would have the attachés' car.

Then there was also an attempt, by a Ghanaian using a forged German document, to say that the US ambassador himself, in connection with I think Mossad and Togo or a neighboring country, was trying to support some kind of invasion by exiles to overthrow the government. A total fabrication. Supposedly a German ambassadors' dispatch had fallen into their hands. I think the ambassador then realized that the problems with Ghana were not just because of me but they were really after the United States, even after a well-intentioned man, namely himself. So we insisted that we cut off aid and we insisted that they had to retract this allegation. They did retract it in a press report but then Tchikada, the bad guy, got in and sort of shut off the press reports.

So in 83 when Ambassador Smith left and when I left, relations were extremely bad.

There's one other thing I wanted to mention. At one point I was sort of set up by the supporters of the government of Ghana. I was interviewed by a British journalist. He asked when a report of this commission that was investigating the judges' deaths would be finished. I said something like, :I heard it would be soon." I had no inside information but the general talk at the time was that it would be soon.

Then he talked to another Brit who was advising the government and I guess had mentioned me as a source. So they put in a paper that I was saying that the commission's report would be out soon, as if the US and I personally had some special inside track to this commission that was likely to come up with conclusions embarrassing to the government. So then that was what triggered this "Lars Hydle must go" campaign that I mentioned before.

Eventually we did get an explanation from the journalist that I had talked to saying that he had talked to this other fellow. But Ambassador Smith never used that with the Ghanaian government to show that I had done nothing wrong. So there was a press in the diplomatic campaign for awhile to get rid of me which was kind of superseded by the bigger campaign to get rid of Ambassador Smith.

I was rather dissatisfied with Ambassador Smith's position on that. He did defend me but on the other hand he seemed to think that somehow I might be partly at fault for what was going on until he, himself, got under the gun and realized that the problem was bigger than me. Also, Jim Bishop when he was under pressure from the Ghanaian ambassador in Washington. Jim Bishop, once again was the deputy assistant secretary in Washington. He told them that I would be leaving that year but they had asked me to stay an extra year for purposes of continuity. So, in effect, he was undercutting the effort for us to show them that we wouldn't allow our diplomatic personnel to be picked on.

Q: What happened to the Peace Corps while this was going on?

HYDLE: They were still there but they were cut back some. Of course they always resist being linked with diplomatic considerations but they were being reduced. There was an overall reduction of US presence in Ghana around in 1983. It was just in the Spring of 83 that the Ghanaians finally launched an economic reform package which eventually made them sort of the darling of the IMF and World Bank in Africa, and which, I hear, has made them one of the relative success stories.

Q: I saw that in the paper recently, something has happened. Was corruption a major problem there?

HYDLE: Yes. One of the criticisms of the previous elected government was corruption but it was an endemic problem. Rawlings was popular among some Africa watchers because, at least, he was against corruption. At times he had taken action. In 1979 he had signed the death warrants for several high ranking generals who had been involved in corruption in previous administrations.

Q: Were the Soviets involved there much?

HYDLE: The Soviets were there and the Ghanaians wanted to get closer to the Soviets but the Soviets seemed skeptical. They never helped the Ghanaians very much. I remember meeting a Soviet diplomat, probably actually a KGB person, who expressed

the kind of skepticism about whether the Ghanaians were truly socialist and whether they deserved Soviet help.

If I may, I'd like to mention this diplomat whose name I forget. In November of 1982 we had then aloof relations with the Soviet Union because of Afghanistan. When we were invited to their national day, Nov. 7, they sent me as the senior US representative as an indication of their disgust. So I went there and I was chatting with this Soviet diplomat that I met earlier, that I just mentioned to you, and he started talking about how Brezhnev had been a war hero of some kind, (I think he was political commissar) whereas Reagan was just a movie cowboy. So I left.

Ironically I returned 3 days later on behalf of my government to sign the condolence book for Brezhnev. During that time Reagan was still very much alive. So I kind of enjoyed it in a very macabre way.

Q: Did you find, because I'm always interested in how the Foreign Service responds, did you find that when you left there, did you feel that you had blotted your copybook or something like that, or not?

HYDLE: I felt that some people felt that I had blotted my copybook. Ambassador Smith, I think, remained somewhat dissatisfied with the role that I had played even though he had come under the same problems. Jim Bishop, I thought, blamed me for creating problems when the problems were really inherent in the situation in Ghana. On the other hand, Ambassador Fritts who was the incoming Ghana ambassador, told me that I had done on my tour a good job and could hold my head up high. I took some comfort from that.

Q: How did the system respond when you came back?

HYDLE: Because they had first asked me to extend for a third year and changed that, there were not many jobs left so I was just given a few options that happened to be open. I took the one that I thought was best, which was political officer in Trinidad-Tobago.

Q: Where you served from 83 to 85.

HYDLE: Yes.

Q: What was the situation there?

HYDLE: Trinidad-Tobago was a democratic country. However, it had been under one-party rule for all of the years since its independence which I guess was in the 60s. Basically, there were racial politics because the country is divided almost equally between people of African origin and people of East Indian origin. But the Africans had the better electoral situation so they stayed in power.

The country was somewhat aloof from the Americans. They always felt--maybe it was the personal experiences of Eric Williams the previous long time prime minister, or some of the officers in the current government had been students in the US during the black power era of the late 60s--so they all somewhat feared US influence, and even influence unconsciously exercised. They were very sensitive about it in contrast to the other eastern Caribbean countries who were very small and wanted to be very close to the US.

This showed up in the US intervention in Grenada. Where the eastern Caribbean countries wanted it very much, the Jamaican government wanted it although the opposition in Jamaica didn't want it. But the Trinidad government was against the killing of Morris Bishop, Prime Minister, by his more radical opponents, but they also were against the US intervention.

Trinidad-Tobago was a producer of oil. We had some companies that were US owned that were the oil producers. Texaco, I think, maybe Amoco, I don't recall. We wanted to have reasonable relations with them, we wanted to have a supply of oil from them. They had refineries that refined oil from elsewhere. Because of the oil, a small population, it was a fairly wealthy country.

We had not had US bilateral assistance for some time. There were a fairly significant number of Trinidadians who were citizens of the US or green card holders. Immigration was not a big problem because there was sufficient prosperity there, not everyone was trying to get to the US.

Those were our interests, they were not really big at all. The relations were fairly friendly but there were these reservations on the part of the government.

Q: How about, did you find as the political officer, did you have easy access to the various parties and groups?

HYDLE: Yes, I had fairly easy access but I would say that the access was less good to the ruling party, People's Nationalist Movement, than it was to the oppositionists. This reflected their reservations toward the US. For example, I wanted to attend the convention of the PNM. This was a period, I think 1984, when the US government has a policy of facilitating the access of foreign diplomats to the Democratic and Republican conventions. So I asked to be allowed to go and they dithered and turned me down. So I recommended, in the spirit of reciprocity, that our government not let the Trinidadian ambassador come with all the other diplomats to the convention. But that was vetoed in Washington by whoever. I guess they didn't think it was important enough to impose reciprocity in this case.

Generally the opposition was more accessible to us and they wanted to be friends with us.

Q: These are mainly East Indians?

HYDLE: The official opposition was mostly Hindus, east Indians. Then there was Tobago, you know it's Trinidad and Tobago. Tobago is a small island and the Tobagonians, although they are all African-American, tended to be different, oppositionists in comparison to PNM which was more based in Trinidad. Then there was another party, I'm sorry I forget the initials, things change over time but there was another party that was more of a middle class party, and which sort of wanted to be pro-American. But they were always being accused of being too pro-American so they couldn't overdo it.

Q: This is during this period when you were there, 83 to 85, sort of the high of when the United States, particularly the Reagan administration, was very exercised about what was happening in Nicaragua and El Salvador. This was one of the major focal points of our foreign policy. How did this play out in Trinidad and Tobago?

HYDLE: We had instructions, of course, to go in and make demarches on El Salvador, Nicaragua, and so forth but they never had the slightest impact. To the extent that, first, it's important to know that really these eastern Caribbean countries, English speaking and African origin people, they really know next to nothing about Hispanic Central America. Their view, to the extent that they had any views, were sort of conventional Third World views about the US and small countries. They generally, the Trinidadians, were opposed to whatever we were doing in Nicaragua against the government there.

We were lucky that they didn't actually come out against us. We would have demarches saying they should support us. Fat chance.

Q: What happened? You just sort of say, "Okay, here's another one."

HYDLE: We would all go through the motions. We'd go in and make the presentation. They would thank me for our views and say that they would be taking it into consideration and ask critical questions.

Q: How about the media?

HYDLE: They were okay, they were privately owned. That is, the print media were privately owned. They didn't, in general, they didn't give us a very hard time but there was one sort of tabloid style newspaper that published a picture of me and somebody else, at a convention of one of the opposition parties, and that this was yet another CIA plot.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

HYDLE: Ambassador Melon Evans. He had been the delegate from the Virgin Islands, political appointee, black Republican. Unfortunately, he died in September 1984. For the next several months Mike Carpenter, the DCM, was the Charge. As I left in 85, Sheldon Krys came in.

Q: Were there any problems with drugs? I'm thinking about narcotic traffic.

HYDLE: There were some problems. We had a program, an anti-drug program, with the Trinidadians which consisted mostly of training. I wasn't directly involved in that. I think we saw Trinidad as a transit point for drugs that were going in the United States, maybe from Columbia, to try to make an end run against our defenses. And also, the Trinidadians themselves were having a drug problem, cocaine I think, and certainly marijuana was popular among the Rastafarian elements around Trinidad.

Q: But there were no major issues at this time that we haven't discussed?

HYDLE: In 1984, I think, Trinidad became a member of the UN Security Council so we did take up with them a lot of other issues that we wouldn't normally be dealing with them in an intensive way. They adopted sort of classic Third World non-aligned positions in the UN Security Council, despite our hopes that they might do otherwise.

Q: You left there in 1985 and then where did you go?

HYDLE: For a year I was in what was then called the Program Inspector General, headed by Ambassador Bill Harrop, the Inspector General's office. We were doing these program inspections of US Missions overseas. I was attached to a team that was led by Ambassador Frank Kredler, also Ambassador George Roberts was the deputy. While I was there, this turned out to be only a year assignment, but during that time we did inspections of the Office of Medical Services, Saudi Arabia and the other Arabian peninsula countries and then Southeast Asia: Thailand, Laos and Burma.

Q: What was your impression of the inspection process and the effectiveness of that.

HYDLE: I thought that it could be an effective process. That the inspectors could, maybe better than other institutions, they could look at individual missions to find out whether they were complying with American foreign policy and supporting it. Whether other elements of the mission, other agencies represented, were cooperating with the ambassador and whether the State Department was supporting them properly. We also were capable of finding out where the fat was and that sort of thing.

There was a time when it seemed that we were going to do that because in the Fall of 85 and the Spring of 86, the famous Gramm-Rudman Act, it appeared that the State Department was going to have to cut way back and other overseas elements of other agencies also. We were the ones, I thought, who could, on a post by post basis, find out how that should be done. For awhile we were really slashing away in our recommendations, but then Secretary Shultz basically abandoned the effort because he was trying to support President Reagan, who was trying to say it wasn't necessary to do that.

Q: Did you turn up any major problems in these various inspections?

HYDLE: Not really, of course we weren't doing fraud or criminal activities or corruption or that sort of thing. We were just doing efficiency matters. I don't think that we discovered any skeletons, nothing that leaps to my mind. At the same time, I thought that what we were going was worthwhile and should have been continued, as it has been.

At that time, you may remember, Bill Harrop was under fire, from Senator Helms and others, who said, "Here's a guy that used to be the president of the American Foreign Service Association and he's inspecting the State Department operations, they're inspecting themselves. They're not really serious and we have to get a non-FSO as senior inspector." Which they did do I guess in 1986.

Q: Sherman Funk, whom I'm interviewing now. Then you moved over to INR from 86, what were you doing there?

HYDLE: I was in the Bureau of Analysis for Africa. They had 2 divisions: one division was Southern Africa and my division was West Central and East Africa--everything between the south and north Africa which was part of NEA and NISA. I was the division chief and we had several analysts who would draft and I would edit their stuff. I also drafted some of my own stuff.

Q: It seems like that area is coming under increasing scrutiny because almost all those countries, with certain exceptions but almost all, are kind of falling apart. I mean democracy, whatever it is, they're inefficient, lots of corruption and sort of inability to support themselves. Were we seeing this at that time?

HYDLE: Oh sure. That was really before the movement toward democracy. Almost all these countries were either one party states or no party states headed by military type dictatorships. Pretty much all of them since independence have declined. Our interest in them was mostly still Cold War oriented. I felt then, as I felt throughout my whole career, that the US was not paying enough attention to democracy and to corruption. That if we wanted these countries to develop successfully, which we said we did, we ought to be more interested in that. For various reasons we didn't, really.

I tried to show that, sometimes through individual reports and sometimes through surveys of many different countries, that there was a correlation between countries that were relatively democratic and that were using market economies, countries that were democratic and that otherwise were doing things right, compared with authoritarian countries that were not. I think that the movement toward democracy in these countries came later. I can't claim any responsibility for it. Because of the Cold War, we stopped supporting our own fragrance of dictators.

Also, because of the introduction of democracy in Eastern Europe that happened a little later, there was no longer any intellectual underpinning of the idea of the one party state in Africa. There were still people in that period who not only practiced one party state politics but actually still believed that it was a good thing, because you were unifying a

country and fighting tribalism and all that. After that people pretty much saw that it was nonsense and moved towards some attempts to be democratic.

Q: Now we're beginning to look not just at Africa but elsewhere, with the demise of the Cold War and, for other reasons, the rise of ethnic conflicts, and particularly tribalism, and you probably have more tribes in your particular area than all the other areas in the world, practically. What was our attitude then towards tribalism and accommodation and all the problems involved with tribalism.

HYDLE: Our position then was pretty much the same as it had been since the early 60s when the bulk of the African countries gained independence. It's the Pandora's Box theory. People would say, "Sure, some of these countries are states imposed on different tribes. It's a mess but what are you going to do." We were always against questioning the existing state boundaries, even though we could never defend them in any specific case, because it would open Pandora's Box, they said.

That was also one of the justifications of the one party state. In that people said that parties would reflect tribal views and would therefore be divisive. I found that one party states were also tribally based. You would find that the inner core of a one party state would be guys from one particular tribe or one particular village, even. I thought that a political party that represents an ethnic group is not so terrible. They exist in other countries in the world. That, in itself, is not so bad, certainly better than having ethnically based armies.

As I say, at the time our policy was not to question these ethnically divided one party states.

Q: We were in the last from 86 to 88, while you were there we didn't know it but we were in the last 5 years or less of the Soviet Union. How did we view the Soviet threat or influence them at that time?

HYDLE: Certainly we saw it as less of a problem than we did in my earlier African stint, from 79 to 83, because I think we saw them as preoccupied with other things but it was still a factor. Actually I think we were more concerned about Qadhafi, for example.

Q: Of Libya.

HYDLE: The ruler of Libya. I spent a lot of time on the problem of Chad. Hissen Habré was the ruler of Chad then. He was fighting against the Libyans who had invaded northern Chad. There was a disputed area, a genuinely disputed area, but the Libyans had moved beyond that farther south. Our government and I thought that Habré was absolutely wonderful. He had a band of fighters who violated all of the conventions of military operations but who expelled the Libyan from some places in Chad.

I think that one of my contributions, that I claimed when I left there, was that I did some analysis of that which showed that Habré was really not all that keen to push all the way

up, and get all the rest of Chad back because the risk would have been higher. He was content to stay in power in Chad and enjoy the accolades of Reagan and others.

Q: Were there any other major trouble spots? Liberia, was that a problem at that time?

HYDLE: I think that Liberia was a continuing problem but it didn't flare up into civil war till after I had left. I thought that Liberia was another example of us backing a guy because he was there.

Q: This is Samuel Doe.

HYDLE: The people who wanted to do this would present themselves as the realist and say, "This is the way it is, we're going to support this guy, the train is leaving the station, get on board." It proved to be ultimately pretty stupid. If I may take another shot at Jim Bishop. He was the advocate of this policy when it came into effect after a failed election in 85, a flawed election as we call it, a blatantly messed up election. So it was poetic justice that he was the ambassador there when the thing fell apart.

Q: Then you moved on to an interesting, sort of an odd-ball assignment as head of the Open Forum from 88 to 90. Just what is the Open Forum?

HYDLE: The Open Forum was created in the early 70s. It is an institution that is suppose to encourage open discussion of foreign policy issues among employees of the Department of State. Initially it was more or less related to Vietnam. There were people who were opposed to our policy in Vietnam who wanted to have some channel for expressing their views outside their normal hierarchical channels. The Department tolerated and accepted the Open Forum partly I suppose to discourage people from going outside but there had always been a tension between this dissent function and the position of being somehow a part of the Department's machinery

Q: How did you get the job and what were the things you were dealing with?

HYDLE: I was elected to the job, There was an election held among people who said that they were members of the Open Forum, which was anybody who wanted to. It was an official position loosely linked to the Policy Planning Staff, I had a secretary and an office and so on. I could do pretty much what I wanted to.

One of the things that the Open Forum had done in the past was to have a quarterly publication on policy issues, classified generally. They also had this dissent channel function, of making sure that the dissent channel functioned properly although Policy Planning Staff itself was to answer dissent channel messages. But mostly in my day what had happened was we were doing speeches. We were organizing forums, lectures, speeches by outsiders or people in the foreign policy establishments. We did about one of those a week, except for summers we'd tail it off pretty much, but basically once a week for the two years that I was there.

Q: What were some of the major issues that really engaged the department people.

HYDLE: This covered the transition between Reagan and Bush, so some of the speakers that we had were people leaving the Reagan administration and people coming into the Bush administration, including secretary Baker and, of course, Secretary Shultz before him. we sort of introduced senior people to the employees and vice versa through this process. I remember we had the Soviet ambassador on the occasion of their national day. They were talking about the détente that was continuing to develop between our two countries.

I guess that the ferment in Eastern Europe was interesting, democracy was interesting. we had the National Endowment for Democracy, we had Carl Gershmin (I think his name is) talking about what the US government was doing institutionally to support democracy. Central America was a big concern. We had Alberto Cesar, that was before the election that resulted in the defeat of the Sandinistas.

Those are the main things that come to mind but we had a variety of things that anybody might want to hear about.

Q: What was the State Department, not the official I mean the response of the people, you'd have these at lunch time wouldn't you?

HYDLE: We did it normally from noon until 1:00. Sometimes it was followed by a lunch in the 8th floor dining room with about 10 or 15 people. It would be the principals especially interested in the subject, who could talk at greater length and with greater intimacy.

Q: I can see where this would serve two ends. One would be to allow other views to be heard, but at the same time it would be a good way for the Department to get major people who want to speak up, but also be exposed to people within the Department, not under orders but who see things in, you might say, a more official way to talk to them, an exchange. Was this?

HYDLE: Yeah, that was usually or often anyway, you could get senior Department officials to meet with people from the outside or working level people. It serves all of those functions. I felt that the Department really did become more open over the 2 decades since Vietnam. While there are certainly views, some views are more popular than others, there are not that many taboos that were working, or even unwilling to talk about something, or unwilling to meet with somebody. Still it was useful.

Q: Did you see with the Open Forum, we're talking about 88 to 90 which was one of these earthshaking times, 89 being the great, you know it's like 1789, were you able to see a change in what we would, maybe what we'd incorrectly call the "left" in the United States, I mean communism and Marxism and all that baggage that went with it, really just fell on its face, it collapsed. Did you see any reflection in this and what constituted opposition from the academic world or anywhere else?

HYDLE: Opposition was really reduced to a kind of a fringe in those days. We'd get people who didn't like our El Salvador policy but even that was kind of moving in the right direction. I think that certainly things that Secretary Baker did reduced the opposition. For example, they did somehow deal with the Congress and get a position that everybody could agree on with respect to Nicaragua. El Salvador they had a series of elections and so on. There was not all that much disagreement about Central America and more, during this period that I was there doing the Open Forum. Communism was so discredited that I thought it was only on American college campuses and faculties, really, that there were people who actually still believed that there was some merit in it.

Q: Then you left there and you got caught up in the Kuwait task force, what was that all about?

HYDLE: The Kuwait task force was formed after the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. It was just an operations center, 24 hours a day monitoring messages and writing situation reports, one day situation reports, and working a lot of odd hours like the operations center people themselves do. I did that from about October 90 to July 91, encompassing the period of the war, Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Nothing in particular sticks to my mind. I followed events like everybody else did.

Then in January, when the air war started, we had pulled a lot of people back from our posts overseas, especially the Near East post. They were given jobs on the task force so all of a sudden I was out of an assignment. So I went back to say, "Now what?"

They said that they wanted somebody to go to Bahrain to be a political/military officer. This was kind of a strange deal but one that gave me the opportunity to go to Bahrain and watch the war from a ring side seat. They had asked for a political/military officer because there were a lot of agreements that had to be reached with the Bahrainis to support our efforts in Desert Shield. But by the time they had a way of responding to that, all the agreements had been reached.

So it turned out that what Ambassador Hosler wanted me to do was to write a sort of history of US-Bahrain cooperation which would support stronger relationships after the war. Bahrain, as you know, is a very small country in the Persian Gulf. There's a causeway that links it to Saudi Arabia. It's always been more pro-American than the other sheikdoms in the area but it can't get too far out in front of them. So there's always a lot of sensitivity. They want a strong relationship with the US to protect their independence against the Saudis, the Iranians who at one time claimed Bahrain as part of Iran, and other sheikdoms. But they can't overdo it.

So basically what I did was write; miscellaneous things--I did some congressional delegations, people that were coming through. I did this history of relations, bringing it up through Desert Shield and Desert Storm. As I recall, the ambassador and the DCM were rewriting my stuff, it was a matter of tone mostly, they were going for a much more boosterish tone which I think really undercut them. You know how these things are when

people write back saying that the Bahrainis are simply wonderful. You think that the guy is taking leave of his senses and it undercuts what you're really trying to accomplish.

I also had some reservations about relations that would be all that close afterwards. I thought, and I may be wrong, that if the US had extremely close relations with any country people would start looking more closely at that country's human rights practices, at various things. They would say, "Why are we supporting these guys and why don't we pressure them." So it could backfire to some extent.

I think eventually the problem has been managed. The fact that it's not in the news means we're getting, more or less, what we need from them.

Q: How did you find the Bahrain's were, the Al Khalifa family? How were they treating the Iranian minority there?

HYDLE: They were lording it over them; there were differences. Of course the Sheik himself was a benevolent figure, widely liked. The prime minister, his brother, was a more narrow guy. The Bahrainis, most of them are Sunnis, there are some Sunnis, and there are some Shiite Arabs, and then there are some Shiite Iranians. So there's a mixture and that's just the Bahrainis, which is about half a million as I recall. Then they have a bunch of Pakistanis and Indians there to do the actual work, who have no political rights.

Q: Did you sort of get out and mix and mingle?

HYDLE: I got out a lot but it was not so much with the Bahrainis as it was with other US military institutions and so on. We had an air base, two air bases--a navy air and an air force air. A lot of military medical installations there, which would have been used if there had been significant numbers of casualties.

Q: What was the impression of the Bahrain military? was it too small, really?

HYDLE: It was small./ Nobody expected it to be able to defeat anybody except maybe the Qatari military which were next door neighbors. The Qatari were much richer than the Bahrainis. There was a dispute over an island, whose name I forget, but it's an island that's really in, looking at a map you would think it would be in Qatar but it had historical connections to Bahrain.

Q: Not Daasa island?

HYDLE: No. But anyway, the Bahrainis were always trying to get us to support their position on that island. We were usually trying to stay out of it, to get somebody else to mediate it. One time there was talk about a Voice of America transmitter in Bahrain. They took a VOA guy over to that island and said, "This is where we think the transmitter should be." He was new to the area so he really didn't know about it, that this was a disputed island. Amar? Could that be the name of the island?

Q: Yes, I think so. How about relations with the Saudis? Were the Saudis trying to extend themselves into that area?

HYDLE: The Saudi and the Bahraini ruling families had good relations. The Bahrainis certainly relied on the Saudis for help in case they came under pressure, from the Qataris for example. The Saudis were sort of the senior guys in the region but they accepted Bahraini independence. They were not a threat to the Bahrain's independence.

Q: BECKOL Element Oil Company or was that pretty well dead by that time?

HYDLE: The Bahrainis did have some oil but less so than, let's say Kuwait and Qatar which are big oil countries. They were sort of on the same level as Oman, sort of middle income powers. I think that the US refinery was no longer involved.

Q: How long were you there?

HYDLE: Just 6 weeks then I came back but that was during the actual ground invasion.

Q: What was your impression at that time? I mean, what sort of feeling about how this war was going to happen.

HYDLE: Well, by the time I was there, they were preparing for the ground invasion. I did go with a CODEL to a ship in the Gulf that was the headquarters ship for the fleet that was in the area. They gave a briefing which did not really give a hint of the actual strategy for the invasion. This was to Senator Nunn and Senator Warner, I think, or maybe it was Senator Inouye and Senator Stevens, those were the Appropriations Committee senators.

That was an area that was heavily mined. The marines, as we now know, were supposedly preparing to invade Kuwait from the sea. But that was really a feint to keep the Iraqi defenses spread thin while the real invasion came from the west.

I remember feeling at the time that this was really a brilliant US effort. It was brilliantly led by President Bush, Cheney, Baker, Powell and Schwarzkopf. The best source of information seemed to be the daily briefings that we would see every night on CNN. CNN was a big thing, of course, for the first time. The US press seemed like kind of pygmies compared with the briefer. We know now, of course, they were really restricted, there wasn't much the press could do on their own.

Q: I was terribly unimpressed by watching. There's nothing like having the cameras on the press, themselves, when they asked their questions to bring them down to size, I must say.

HYDLE: You know Saturday Night Live, the TV show, they did a press briefing spoof with one of their guys up in fatigues briefing. The press would ask questions like--what's

the one thing that the Iraqis would like to know about our plans for the next few days. That was kind of representative of the seeming stupidity of the press questions.

Q: When you came back, what did you do?

HYDLE: For a while I was working back on the task force again--that became more of a problem of Operation Provide Comfort, feeding the Kurds in the north of Iraq, just keeping track of that--back in the operations center again. When that operation dwindled down then in the Summer of 91, I was assigned to INR again, this time to the Near East/South Asia office as the analyst for Palestinians and for Jordan.

Q: You were there from 91 to 93. What was the feeling towards Jordan at that time, and what we were going to do with Jordan, because Jordan really was not in our greatest favor, having made supporting noises toward Saddam Hussein of Iraq, who was the villain of all villains at that time.

HYDLE: King Hussein was still in trouble with us and certainly with members of Congress. They were really after him and just wanted to cut him off completely. But there is no question that there is a real reservoir of good will toward King Hussein. Even President Bush, I felt, had that feeling toward him; Secretary Baker did. So he was being gradually brought back in during that time frame. Especially when you realize the war with Iraq was over, but now we have to focus on the peace process which was the preoccupation from 91 on.

Q: We're talking about the peace process, we're talking about between Israel and its neighbors.

HYDLE: Right. Jordan played an absolutely key role and King Hussein of course supported the peace process with great enthusiasm. On the one hand, he supported the process; he was always hanging back not wanting to risk his own political base with the Palestinian-Jordanians, not wanting to be out in front of the Palestinians. But really, his private efforts were always supportive.

Q: When you were dealing this, sort of a major focus of American foreign policy which has been for decades, what were your main concerns? Your main occupation?

HYDLE: It was my job to help policy makers understand the Palestinians and why they were doing what they were doing; and not doing what we wanted them to do, and so forth in the peace process. Other people were analysts for Israel, Syria and Lebanon.

In general, I thought that people tended not to understand the Palestinian. The PLO leadership, Arafat and others, they also didn't understand the role of these Palestinians who were on the delegation.

You know that the peace process was structured so that the Israelis didn't have to talk directly at that time to the PLO. They would talk to Palestinians who were from the

occupied territories. Presumably it was thought these people understood the situation. They had dealt with the Israelis, albeit it was occupied, they understood the situation in the territories. They would want to reach an agreement. Yet those people basically were all pro-PLO people and pro- Fatah which is the majority faction, Arafat's faction within the PLO which is a sort of federation of organizations.

As it turned out, those people were more hard-line than the PLO was at often times because they had to respond. They had no structure of their own, they had no newspapers. The delegation in its support had no police force, no nothing to protect itself really. Physically protect itself They were vulnerable to assassination or to intimidation. They had to pander to popular opinion. Popular opinion at that time, the government of Yitzhak Shamir, the Likud led government wanted to be very tough with the Palestinian population to show the Israeli population that it was preoccupied with its security. The people, the Palestinians, reacted against that, although we managed in 91 and early 92 to get them started--get the peace talks started.

Q: This is in Madrid.

HYDLE: There was a Madrid conference in October 92. It's a very complex structure, the outlines of which are well known. But there were bilateral talks between the Israelis and each of the Arab parties in Washington. Talks would go on and then they'd recess. Somebody would kick up a fuss and there would be arguments about whether they were going to start again and so forth.

And then in 92, the talks, nothing much was being achieved and then the Israelis had an election which consumed about several months. Finally they had the election in June 92 and meanwhile of course our election was coming up. Now the Rabin coalition won in 1992, which I felt was definitely a good thing for the peace process because Rabin actually did want to reach an agreement with the Palestinians, and saw them as a separate people of some kind, not as indefinite subjects of an occupation. But the bad news was that Rabin also wanted to be even tougher than Shamir on Palestinians because he wanted to show that he was even more concerned about the security of Israelis than Shamir was.

We ourselves, meanwhile ran out of steam. It's always difficult to conduct foreign policy in the Middle East during an election year. You might remember there was an argument with the Shamir government on US loan guarantees for housing. We insisted that none of it go to the housing in the occupied territories. An agreement was not reached with the Shamir government on that. I, myself, think that Baker was content to have a disagreement with Shamir because he wanted the Israelis to reflect on the notion that the US patience is not infinite, and that there are choices that they have to make. You can't just push the Arabs around, flout the US by launching a new settlement in the occupied territories every time Baker visited, and then at the same time get US loan guarantees.

You can't have it all was his view. That coincided with Rabin's policy which was to tell the Israelis that they had to set priorities. That it was more important to develop Israel than to develop some settlements in the occupied territories. So I don't know for a fact

that this was Baker's thinking because he was like Kissinger, in that he kept his thinkings very closely held. But that's the way it played out.

But then once Rabin was elected, we were in the midst of the election season and we lost our stamina for pressuring Rabin, certainly on housing guarantees, so a deal was struck in July of 92--that took us through the election.

In the Fall of 92 the Muslim fundamentalists, Hamas group, mostly Hamas, provoked the Israelis to the extent that the Israelis expelled several hundred of them to hillside southern Lebanon. This is an example of Rabin going farther than Shamir ever would have done. Hundreds of expellees, nobody expected that, but he was determined to show he was a tough guy when it came to security.

So when the administration changed, their main problem was to get out of that impasse that the talks had been in. It took them several months to do so.

Q: I would think that having this particular charge of the Palestinians, particularly there was a Jordanian desk officer but there wasn't a Palestinian desk officer, that in a way, unlike most other things in INR, you would act a little bit like the Palestinian desk officer.

HYDLE: Not really because actually there is a Palestinian desk officer not only in the Israeli office, I think it's the Office of Arab-Israeli Affairs, but also in the office that has Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Actually there were two Palestine desk officers but apart from that, this was another operation that was very secretive. There was Dan Kurtzer, Aaron Miller and Dennis Ross working closely with Secretary Baker. It was very reminiscent of the Kissinger era. So even though I was reading highly secret stuff, I didn't necessarily know what we were doing. We had to get briefings from Kurtzer and so forth.

Q: What was your impression? Were you removed or did you feel anything from the Israeli lobby, AIPAC and all or not?

HYDLE: I myself didn't have any pressure put on me but I always felt that everybody was looking over their shoulder at the Israeli lobby. Beginning with President Bush, Baker, President Clinton and Al Gore who's always been close to the Israeli lobby. On the other hand, the Israeli lobby isn't what it used to be and now thinks that there should be some kind of settlement with the Palestinians.

Things changed when Rabin came in. He asked the Israeli lobby to let him handle relations with the administration. Then people in the administration, who were most closely involved, really were from the Israeli lobby. Martin, I'm sorry I forget his name. Well, Dennis Ross had been with, I'm sorry I can't remember the name but it's not AIPAC, he's been with the think tank which was a pro-Israeli think tank before he came in as Policy Planning Staff Director, then he continues now as the Special Representative on the Middle East.

So they themselves have become convinced that a settlement is necessary. There's no longer so much a question of pressure, the administration being pressured from outside, but they're working together somehow.

Q: How did you feel with what you were doing then? I mean, if everything was being done by a closely guarded group, were you acting as a funnel in this group or not?

HYDLE: Well, yes. I think that they thought my reporting, my analyses were useful. The main thing that I tried to do was to explain to them the pressures that Arafat was under. I feel that I did make efforts to show that you couldn't really bypass the PLO to have a deal. You just couldn't get a bunch of Palestinians in the territories to sign on to an agreement that was not supported by the PLO. In fact, you could be stronger by actually bringing the PLO on board itself.

I came to realize this. My reporting, or my analysis, I hope planted that seed. I think that from everything I can tell it was really the Israelis who realized this before we did. They were conducting secret meetings with the PLO through the Norwegians before we really knew about it. We were caught by surprise, basically. There were some indications that I recall in the stuff that I was reading of meetings between Israelis close to the government and PLO guys and so forth. But not to the extent that we now know or was the significance of it realized.

At least it was obvious that the Israelis and the PLO had to cooperate with each other in order to get this peace process going. Now they've done so. So I think that my judgment at least was good.

Q: Basically you left on a rather high note then. You didn't come from just a plain holding action. Here is something we've been wrestling with a long time and you were obviously all of us are just a part of the process but you're a part of something that looks like it's untangling. The Arab-Israeli problem and the Soviet Union problem have been the 2 major policy problems of our entire careers.

HYDLE: Sure it was a good thing to have been a part of it. I have to admit on the Jordanian side though, that I became a great admirer of King Hussein like everybody else.

Q: BLK--the Brave Little King--or something like that.

HYDLE: I didn't hear that one. I thought he was a very skilled statesman. Also, during that period, he's been moving his country toward democracy, toward a sort of constitutional monarchy and doing it in a way that has co-opted but allowed some space to Islamic groups. Now that Kim Il Sung has died, he's the senior Chief of State in the whole world. He's been in power since 1951.

Q: I remember meeting him when he came, when I was a vice-consul in Dhahran in 1959. I looked at him and I said, "This poor guy, maybe he's got a year or two." But you just can't last in the Arab world, particularly as a king in a small country like that.

Then you retired in 1993.

HYDLE: That's right.

Q: Well, why don't we cut it off at that, shall we?

HYDLE: Fine.

Q: Great.

End of interview