

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

RALPH J. KATROSH

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: August 28, 1992
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	
Born and raised in Pennsylvania	
Virginia Military Institute, Georgetown University	
U.S. Army, World War II “Palace Guard”	
Post – war Germany	
Entered Foreign Service	1955
Taiwan, Nationalist China	1950-1951
Quemoy, Matsu etc.	
Chinese and Korean War	
Singapore (colony)	1957-1965
Vice consul	
Political situation	
Harry Lee	
Rangoon, Burma	1962-1965
Ne Win	
U.S. Policy	
U Nu	
Sino-Soviet split	
Environment	
EA (Vietnamese Affairs)	1965-1966
Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos Desk	
U.S. Embassy, Saigon, bombed	1966
TDY Saigon	
Vietnam War	
Manila, Philippines	1966-1968
Johnson visit	

Saigon, Vietnam Tet Offensive U.S. policy differences	1968-1969
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia ASEAN U.S. oil interests	1972-1975
INR Interagency liaison Congressional relations	1975-1977
Tel Aviv, Israel Sadat visit to Jerusalem Embassy staffing Embassy role in policy Israeli political factions Influence of the Holocaust Sadat and Israel Prime Minister Begin Palestinians and the UN Resolution 242 Consulate Jerusalem reporting Terrorism Palestinians and other Arabs War in Lebanon Ambassador Sam Lewis Israel and the USSR Nuclear weapons issue	1977-1981

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is August 28, 1992. This is an interview with Ralph J. Katrosh on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Could you give me a bit about your background -- where you grew up and were educated, etc.

KATROSH: I was born in Pennsylvania in a little town called Kingston. My father was a merchant and distributor of General Motors products. My mother was a clerk in an office. I have one sister, a year and a half younger. I went to Kingston High School and was there when World War II started in December 1941.

Q: You were born what year?

KATROSH: I was born 1927. During my years in Kingston, northeastern Pennsylvania was just recovering from the Great Depression. In order for that community to get through the Depression there had to be a real common effort made by the local society. Therefore, when World War II arrived there was a great deal of cohesion and cooperation in the community. The community carried its cooperative spirit created in the Depression years over into the war years and all good men volunteered for the Service. All of us who were younger at the time counted the days until we were able to do so.

In November of 1944 the US Army came to my high school and offered an enlistment and a college education for those who were quite anxious to put on a uniform. So about half a dozen of my colleagues and I enlisted in the Reserve Corps.

In January of 1945 I was sent to VMI, Virginia Military Institute, to learn how to become a soldier and to receive some idea of a college education. To me it was a great experience going from 3 ½ years of high school in Kingston to Virginia Military Institute. I thought for sure, "The Pacific here I come," but for some reason only known to God I was put on a transport for Europe and I escaped the mess of the Pacific at that time. I crossed the Atlantic and was made a member of the Third Army Palace Guard, which, I think, resulted from my experience at VMI where we were very spit and polish. At 17, once you learn to polish your brass, I guess you keep it up. So I was with the Third Army Palace Guard...

Q: Why do you call it the "Palace Guard?"

KATROSH: The Palace Guard was a unit that protected the commanding general. They were always dressed for parade. They were quartered separately. They got a little better food and when you weren't standing at attention you were free to do whatever crossed your mind--within reason, of course. At that time there was a no fraternization ban. You couldn't fraternize with the Germans, particularly the young German ladies, but everyone did, particularly when you could do it in the middle of the afternoon when no one was looking for you. We wintered in a place called Bad Tolz in the Bavarian Alps.

In April of 1946, I was given an opportunity to go to Nuremberg and join a military police outfit that was maintain some semblance of stability and law and order among the German population in the city, because of the war crimes trial underway there. I remained there until October when the trials in Nuremberg ended. It meant six or seven hours a day moving around through the German population trying to look like we were keeping them in order, but Nuremberg was devastated during the war. There wasn't a stone on stone in most of the city and the population was very small in number. These people were picking up rubble for 800 calories of food a day which was made up of whatever was on hand in the American stocks. There was absolutely nothing on the market. You could get some green beer, but that was all.

Q: Did you pick up any emanations of unhappiness? Obviously these are people who are on the verge of starvation. Were there any problems in Nuremberg regarding the trial of Nazi leaders?

KATROSH: No, but there was never any doubt in my mind that the German people at that time had it in their subpsyche to square things someday. You could just see it. They were very bitter and very stubborn and uncooperative. You had to push them around, just a little bit.

Then there were great masses of DPs, displaced persons -- Russians, Poles, Hungarians, Yugoslavs, French -- the refugee problem in World War II deserves a lot more study and more prominence in history than I think it has been given. There were millions of people from places torn up by combat with no place to go. They were put up in DP camps consisting of tents. They had no clothes so what the US Army did was to dye American uniforms, put on black buttons and gave these people the uniforms to wear. The fabric was either blue or black and that was how you distinguished the displaced persons.

In August 1946, I was given leave in Switzerland. That was a great time because there wasn't much to do in Germany but look at the rubble, but in Switzerland it was like a candy store at Christmas with lights and an active society. For some reason or other, the Swiss had a great appreciation for the Third Army. Wearing the Third Army patch in Switzerland got you into just about any pleasant company that you cared to visit.

Q: The Third Army had been Patton's Army.

KATROSH: That's right. While in Switzerland I was invited to a party given by the American diplomatic establishment there. I was sitting in a hotel in Interlaken with an Air Force lieutenant. We had just finished playing some bridge, and this fellow came up in a polished Ford and said, "Would you fellows like to go to a party?" "Of course." So we went. There was a beautiful buffet and a lot of glitter. I thought this wasn't a bad life, the diplomatic business.

That is not as flippant as it sounds because I always excelled in history. If I got less than a 98, I was upset. And geography. There are members of my family who were professional military who spent years roaming around Europe and China. I have always thought of these places, when a youngster, as being very romantic. That, plus the fact that I like history and geography, plus this display of rather nice living, prompted me to write a letter to my Dad saying, "Well, when I get out I think I would like to try to join the American Foreign Service." This was in August 1946.

In October 1946, the trials were over and I was getting ready to separate from the Army at the convenience of the government. I received a letter from Dad who said, "Look, friend, if you are going to do anything about a career you had better forget about this business of bouncing around Europe and get back home. I have a place for you at Georgetown and you probably could get into the February 1947 Foreign Service School class."

So I did. I came home and went to Georgetown and entered the Foreign Service School in February 1947, with every intention of joining the Foreign Service. Between 1947 and the

early part of 1950, the stress, from my point of view, at the Georgetown Foreign Service School, was economics rather than the impending conflict between Communism and the Western world.

So between 1946 and 1950, I thought Foreign Service was all right, but if I went into business abroad I could make more money and still have all the ambience anyway. In 1950 I used some of Dad's contacts and applied for a job with General Motors. They said, "Fine." However, I wanted to go to China or to some other place in the Far East. I had been to Europe and didn't really want to go back there and count stones. General Motors said, "Sorry fellow, there is going to be a war in Korea and we are not sending anyone to Asia right now, but you can go to Latin America if you want to." I said, "I don't think I want to do that." I still know nothing about Latin America.

In 1949-50, Chiang Kai-shek was being driven from the mainland. The Chinese Nationalist government was looking to the United States for some succor but we weren't really ready to make a strong commitment. If you research US domestic politics at that time, the cry of the Republican Party was "Who lost China?" Of course, the Democrats got the blame for that.

At any rate Chiang Kai-shek left the mainland and arrived in Taiwan with absolutely nothing. The United States Government didn't want to make too much of a public move towards Taiwan at that time, so it agreed with China to set up a purchasing commission in the Department of the Army. The Department of the Army would furnish the Chinese government certain people who were expert in buying and selling things the Chinese would need to establish themselves in Taiwan. US personnel also would go to Taiwan and organize the Nationalist military remnants, which were disorganized. Believe me, it was a mess.

I applied and was accepted for this job. There were about 30 of us and we packed off to Taiwan in 1950-51. The State Department had an excellent attitude for dealing with Chiang at that time. The basis of our policy was, "Look fellow, we will protect you on Taiwan, but we are going to support you only to a degree that will allow this protection to be realistic. You have got to do the rest."

Lo and behold, Chiang Kai-shek did it. The first and most important thing that he did was to institute an agricultural reform program. If he had done so on the mainland, the Chiangs would still be ruling the place. What he did was to break up the landed estates on Taiwan, gave the land to the peasants, gave the landlords money and said, "You can't buy the land back, but you can do anything you want with it in terms of industry, banking and making money. But you can't have the land back." Well, you see what Taiwan is today. I maintain that it is all because of US policy goals in 1950.

Q: Did you have anything to do with the people who were helping doing this? We had gone through somewhat the same thing in Japan. Was this an offshoot? Was Chiang looking at Japan or we just putting an awful lot of pressure on him?

KATROSH: This was first. This preceded Japan. Taiwan was pretty much a going concern before Japan got into its program.

We put pressure on Chiang in that "this was the only option you have Jack." That was one of his nicknames, "Jack." "There is no other option for you. This is what we are prepared to do and this is what you must do if you are to receive US aid."

When I arrived in Taiwan there were four paved roads.

Q: This was in what year?

KATROSH: 1951. ...four paved roads. One in from the airport into the city, one running from the Grand Hotel through the city to the eastern side of the city. There was one taxi. The foreign journalists and top officials had some sedans. The rest of us drove either Willys panel trucks or Jeeps. There was absolutely nothing. The Chinese, though, I must say, fed us well and gave us quarters, field clothes, etc.

Q: In the midst of this Chiang Kai-shek was apparently trying to use the Korean War, which was really very hot at this time, to his advantage. There was an offer of "give us the training, the equipment and the money and we will put so many divisions into Korea." How did you all respond to this sort of talk?

KATROSH: Not a chance. That was strictly propaganda. Propaganda even in Chiang's eyes. His army when it came off the mainland was absolutely worthless and in 1951-53, he couldn't put together two divisions that would go anywhere. They had no uniforms, a minimum amount of ammunition, no artillery, no transport. They just had rifles, and some of the troops didn't even have that. Their navy...I think they had two or three LSTs, one of which I rode one time, and I think two DEs that sometimes sailed.

One of the things that did happen...there was just enough of the Chinese Air Force left on Taiwan and just enough of our fleet in the Formosa Straits...at that time we had a policy of physically separating the two sides...to force the Chinese Communists to keep a good number of their divisions in Fuchien and Chechiang Province. Also, the Chinese Nationalists held a number of offshore islands, many of which they still hold. On those offshore islands the Nationalists built up a guerilla force which raided the China coast and captured small Chinese Communist and other flag merchant vessels.

Q: This is Quemoy...?

KATROSH: Quemoy, Matsu, Wu Chen, Poichuan. There is a string of them, most of them lighthouses, but the sizeable one, of course, was Quemoy. Tachen was very small but very strategically located off the coast of Chechiang just outside the port of Wenchou.

There was a rather effective blockade of the Fuchou and other Fuchienese ports. Butterfield and Swire used to love to run blockade runners into the Formosa Straits and try to cut into

Amoy or Fuchou on a dark night. The Chinese Nationalist guerrillas would bring these ships to one of the offshore islands and steal their cargo and send the ships back to Hong Kong saying, "Don't try it again."

The guerrillas on the islands would take the cargo that they stole from the steamers to Hong Kong and sell it. They then would buy provisions. They were fully self-supporting...they weren't going to get a heck of a lot out of Taipei.

The British complained to us that the situation was getting expensive and they didn't want to confront the Chinese Nationalists or us with a military escort for these ships. They wanted us to tell the Chinese to back off. Eisenhower did and that silliness, up to a point, ceased.

But at the same time the people on the offshore islands became even more dependent on Taiwan, because most of those islands...I have been on a number of them and they are not self-sufficient, particularly if you have more than the basic population in residence. If there is a military unit or guerrillas, then you have to send additional supplies to the islands.

This went on all through the Korean War. The Taipei government, of course, when we had tens of thousands of Chinese Communist prisoners in Korea, went up there to try to entice as many of them as they could to defect. My recollection is about 12,000 of the hundreds of thousands did. But this action had no real effect on the Korean War.

The Chinese Communists tried to take Quemoy soon after Chiang left the mainland. An old Chinese general, Hulien, one of the few good ones, beat them back. Quemoy is in Amoy Harbor and it is like holding Manhattan against the United States Army. The Chinese Communists didn't try to take Quemoy all through the Korean War, which surprised many of us in the area at the time.

In 1954, the first heavy Chinese Communist bombardment occurred. This was not the 1958 one when President Eisenhower sent in the troops. The public knew less about this earlier bombardment, although if you read the US foreign affairs records you will find an awful lot about it. They didn't invade, but they bombarded it quite severely. They could do that because of the location of the island.

China did retake the Ta Chens, the northernmost of the Nationalists' island chain. The Communists did that, I think, to free up any nonsense around the Shanghai approaches and Chechiang ports.

They never bothered Matsu. It is a little bit tougher nut...it is a piece of rock sticking out of the water.

By April of 1955, Taiwan was a going concern and it was time for me to leave the "purchasing group." On reflection I thought the Foreign Service might be a nice place after all.

Q: What was your impression of the Chinese officialdom that you dealt with?

KATROSH: There were some brilliant exceptions, particularly the younger men educated in the United States, as well as some of the older businessmen. The military was hopeless, except for two or three generals who would fight. The military was still very corrupt, the troops had as yet no real stake in survival of the Chinese Nationalist government other than, for whatever reason, they would be shot if they defected to the Communists. Taiwan was the only refuge available to them.

I think by 1955 that began to change. The older group was moving out. Some of the younger men were taking the middle level positions. The army was beginning to induct younger people, even Taiwanese, at the enlisted level, not yet the officer level. We had a MAAG there and it was beginning to have an effect.

Q: The military assistance group.

KATROSH: Right. It was a very small group, I don't think more than 20 officers. They made sure that the Nationalist troops had uniforms, received pay, food and medical care. To the Chinese soldier at that point of history, this was very important, this was good living. A better living than many of the peasants.

Then we, the US, re-equipped the Chinese Air Force. Also a cadre was organized and trained for the Chinese Navy. Things began to look up for the Chinese military. So I would say from about 1955 on, they became a more reliable force. But prior to 1955 they were absolutely worthless, really.

In 1955 I came back to the United States. By that time I had married and had a son born on Taiwan. I took lateral entry into the Department of State, which was expanding because this was the build-up years for the Cold War. I stayed in the States for a little while getting trained and acquainted with Departmental discipline and procedures.

My first assignment as vice consul in Singapore was in September 1957 when it was still a colony. Avery Peterson was just assigned Consul General. Singapore City at that time was a very pretty, small town on the southern end of Singapore Island. The rest of the island consisted of plantations...coconut palm, banana and other tropical products. It was a very quiet place, still a colony, and very British. Banking, shipping, and insurance were its strengths.

The Singaporeans began to respond to British suggestions that they govern themselves and become independent. This was a very interesting time to be in Singapore because it was really the birth time of this now magnificent city state, one of the great jewels of Southeast Asia.

As a vice consul, the day was fairly relaxed. One went into the office in the morning and stamped some visas and maybe took care of a shipping matter or two. Then you adjourned around 11:30 to a place called the Singapore Club where you had a couple of pink gins and a typical pukasab luncheon...mulligatawny soup, game pie, and other foods that will kill you in the tropics. Around 1:30 or 2:00 you went out to the veranda where they had these lovely chairs with arms that would fold in and enfold you. You put your legs up on these arms and slept until 2:30 or 3:00. Then one meandered back to the Consulate, stamped a few more visas, went home, changed and put on a black tie and a white coat and went to the Tangelin Club or the Singapore Club for dinner and another bout with the bottle...brandy...on to cocktails, dinner, bridge, etc.

Q: It is a wonder you survived!

KATROSH: Few ever extended their time in Singapore, but we loved the perks during the two years we were there.

As I noted, the ambiance was very, very British, but there was a serious side to it also. In the development of the Singapore polity, the Communists were very active and had a great deal of influence. Those were the days when young State Department officers in Singapore...Ambassador John Holdridge among them...learned how to deal with the Chinese who are now the decision-makers in China, as well as elsewhere in Asia.

Q: Later Ambassador to Indonesia, Assistant Secretary of State, etc. etc.

KATROSH: Holdridge was the chief of the political section. Although I stamped visas, I did political reporting as well and during my last year there, I was a member of John's section. At that time we had quite a good dialogue with World War II Communist functionaries like Lim Chin Song, Fong Swe Song, and Devan Nair, who later became a member of the government. At any rate, John was chief of the political section. In the Consulate there was a lot of discussion as to whether Lee Kuan Yew, then known as Harry Lee and who at that time could not speak Mandarin Chinese, was a sincere democrat. Lee Kuan Lee is a brilliant English educated lawyer who allied himself with the Communists and traditional Chinese entrepreneurs and political warlords in Singapore. He had the toughest unions and a good number of the business people, etc. Harry Lee, of course, became Prime Minister.

The serious part of the two years was monitoring and participating in the struggle between Lee and a British lackey, Lim Yew Hock. The instinct of Washington at the time was to favor Lim Yew-Hock. Harry Lee and his cohorts were "Communists." The British were very nervous about all this because they liked Lim Yew-Hock very much, but Harry was trained in Oxford, spoke the King's English, was an excellent cricket player, etc., and everything the British admire. They didn't want to see Harry roughed up too much. But they worried about the Communist side of it. I am certain of this because of the dialogue we had with the British High Commissioner's office at the time.

The elections were held, I think, in early September, 1959 and wouldn't you know that Harry Lee and his Communist supporters, the People's Action Party, won the election. It is 1992 and the same party still is in power and Harry Lee is still the party's mentor. As soon as he won the election, one of the first things he did...he is brilliant...during the campaign he learned how to speak Mandarin, so now he can speak Chinese. The first thing he did was to round up all his Communist buddies and send them back to Changi prison. Anybody who knows Singapore knows Changi prison's reputation. It was a hell hole during the Japanese occupation and being sent there was no small matter. But Harry packed them all off and said, "You are going to stay in Changi until you repent, recant, and if you do it to a certain degree I will ship you off to England. If you really recant maybe I will let you back into the political process some way." Lim Chin Song never recanted to that extent and stayed in Changi prison for many years and later went to England. Some others like Devan Nair became converts and joined the government.

The interesting thing was how quickly Harry Lee moved on the very people who put him in, because that election turned on the working class of Singapore. That is where the votes were and the Communists had the workers sewed up tightly to a point where I think the Lim Yew-Hock group won something like three or four seats in the parliament. The People's Action Party got the rest.

Q: Did you see this coming?

KATROSH: Yes.

Q: But you see Harry Lee as being a political worker rather than as a dedicated Communist?

KATROSH: He was a politician who had a unique grasp of traditional Chinese instincts for very strong central leadership and a totally free enterprise economic system.

Q: But you saw him at the time as...

KATROSH: It would have been better for US Asian policy if Lim Yew-Hock won, we thought. But we said that the PAP would win. All the dispatches to Washington said that PAP was going to win the election.

Q: The election happens. How did we respond? Were we talking or were we basically bystanders?

KATROSH: No. At that time, and I can only go through 1959 because I got distracted in another country, we said, "All right, so he won." There was enough sense of reality in the Department at any rate to know that this was the fact of the matter and we were going to have to work with him. When he took the action that he did against the Communists, there was full support for him in Washington. He was obviously wanted by the local people and the British were not upset; we said, "Okay."

Q: How were relations...knowing how we operated around the world in that period, we must have been diddling around to some extent? Obviously Singapore is a check point...

KATROSH: But at that time Singapore was a Consulate General and although we had some real professionals there like Holdridge, it wasn't that high on the screen.

Q: What I am saying is that often when something like this happens you end up with the man in power mad as hell at the United States because he knows (1) they might have reservations and (2) they might be helping the opposition or something like that.

KATROSH: Harry Lee certainly had those feelings, but I tell you one thing about Harry Lee, he doesn't let things like that bother him. That is part of the game. Harry Lee knew that if Communism was going to be contained in Southeast Asia, the only country that had any possibility of being effective in that regard was the United States. You have to give it to Harry. He will close down a "Wall Street Journal," he throws out "Newsweek," you can't do this you can't do that. He tells people not to spit and fines them \$200. He ridicules the US but he is careful to maintain close personal relationships with the US establishment.

Q: We are talking now about things that have happened in the last decade...

KATROSH: This is Harry. This is his mindset. This fellow is practical. He doesn't let even his own preferences get in the way of his vision for Singapore. He just doesn't do it. He will go up to Malaysia and kowtow to the king, hating every minute of it, if he thinks it will benefit Singapore. The Malaysians know this and that is why they kicked Singapore out of the Federation. They assessed Harry as too tough. If we kick him out of the Federation of Malaysia, he still has to come up and kowtow, but we don't have to worry about him taking our country or jobs over...which he would have done if he had been successful in staying in the Federation. He is extremely cold in that regard.

Q: So you didn't find all of a sudden what you might call a hostile regime sitting in Singapore?

KATROSH: No. It was not terribly friendly, it was correct, very British. If you had some money and wanted to do business, fine. Harry wouldn't let us push him around. If he didn't like something he told us. However, if something is a deal, it is a deal and he would hold up his end of it.

Q: He is still the presence behind the...

KATROSH: Yes, that is right. But that is the way Singapore operates, it hasn't changed. And Harry is there to make damn sure it doesn't change. It has been 40 years. As long as he is alive, that government won't change. He has enough popularity with the people to get his way if he wants to. You can call it a benevolent dictatorship; a controlled democracy...it is not democratic in the sense that we are democratic. But if you are a citizen and have a beef,

you can be heard. You get a chance to vote. If you want to vote for the opposition, go ahead. I think after Harry goes, the PAP could lose power because the nature of Asian society is such that...and he has done so well and so much for the state that they won't cross him while he is alive. When he is gone a new emperor might come in with a new "mandate from Heaven."

Q: You left there when?

KATROSH: I left there about a month after the elections and came back here and worked for a while on the Southeast Asian Desk. Then someone asked, "Would you like to go to Rangoon, Burma?" That sounded pretty romantic. My experiences with Asia have been...I have never had an unhappy post.

Q: So you served in Rangoon from when to when?

KATROSH: Well, first I went to Burmese language school at FSI under U Khin, who is still living and still making quilts out in Maryland. I went to Rangoon in late summer of 1962 and stayed three years. So I was there for the last year of U Nu's prime ministership and the first two years of the current Ne Win dictatorship.

Burma is another story. It is a beautiful country, very placid people, very religious. The parliament was a theocracy operating under a patina of British parliamentary democracy. It could have worked if they had given the minorities a little more say in the national government but they threatened to leave the union. The army under Ne Win was not willing to accept this and they overthrew U Nu and you have had the Ne Win dictatorship from February 1964.

Q: Could you describe our Embassy and how it operated in those days?

KATROSH: The Embassy, unlike Singapore where we were on several floors of an office building, is located in downtown Rangoon off of a park and square by the Sulu Pagoda. We had 12 to 16 officers and a very active USIS under Jack O'Brien, who is still very much in contact with Burma.

Q: He is another one we must get.

KATROSH: Our interest in Burma under U Nu was to...we had a Military Equipment Delivery Team in and out of there which tried to Westernize Burmese military thinking.

USIS did a lot of educational projects. We also had a small agricultural mission trying to improve the quality of rice, mostly, as well as working up in the teak forests.

It was again a very nice, typical Southeast Asian tour until the revolution when Ne Win moved in and created some very serious problems with the large Indian population ...deported a lot of Indians...and told the minority groups like the Kachins, the Shans and

the Karens, like it or not they were going to stay in the union of Burma and were not going to get any minority rights. He told the Burman that if they didn't like it they could talk it over with the local army commander whose instincts would be to lock them up or throw them into a pit.

Q: How did the revolution...you were there at the time?

KATROSH: Yes.

Q: Could you describe how you observed it and how we reacted to it? How did we feel about U Nu?

KATROSH: We liked U Nu. We had good relations with him. He was very popular here. He had good access to private funds and grants and that sort of thing. The US Embassy didn't predict a coup. We went to bed one night and U Nu was prime minister. We drove to the Embassy the next morning and there were troops all over the street, U Nu was locked up and Ne Win was the ruler.

Q: Ne Win had been what?

KATROSH: He was the senior army commander. He also led the government a few years before when U Nu asked him to come in and discipline some of the unruly politicians, but then he voluntarily stepped back and gave the government back to U Nu.

The US relationship with Ne Win was not good and still isn't. He slowly, slowly put the squeeze on USIS. He wouldn't let Burmese students go to the States and he closed our libraries up in Mandalay, down in Moulmein and, eventually, in Rangoon. He didn't want any more military aid, which we wouldn't have given to him anyway, and he closed down the agricultural programs. He left no doubt in our minds that he wanted to see us there only in a very low key, passive role. All foreign and Burmese businesses were nationalized. The army literally took over the country. It took over the banks, the private businesses and anything else that was worthwhile.

Q: What did you see as our interests there at that time?

KATROSH: At the time we had no serious interests. We didn't want to see the country go Communist, certainly. There was a Communist movement up around the border...the Red Flag and White Flag...but they were not that threatening. During World War II many of the minorities were very helpful to us, particularly the Kachins. They ran guerilla operations for the US.

The US mission in the early 1960s was to make sure Burma didn't fall under Chinese influence. That is where we in the political section spent most of our time. We wanted to make sure that the internal Communist movement was frustrated...that wasn't much of a problem because it never was really popular among the Burmese, but there was a pull from

China. There are many Chinese in Burma...and incidentally they suffered and still suffer under Ne Win. He went after the Chinese who controlled the rice market at the time. He took all of the business and their houses, etc.

Q: It is easy to say that was our preoccupation, but you are sitting at the Embassy in a place where we don't have very cordial relations. What does this mean to keep Burma out of Chinese sphere?

KATROSH: After the revolution it was very difficult and like all other things I think at that time that the Chinese, themselves, were distracted by the Soviets. People were realizing that the Sino-Soviet split was for real, that those fellows were going to go after each other. Some of the earlier pressures...you see, Zhou En-lai, when he was foreign minister, courted Southeast Asia. At that time the Chinese had a very velvet glove policy towards these countries and they were very much attracted to him. Zhou En-lai was a very impressive diplomat. He said: "Why can't we all cooperate. Why do you want to support these colonialists. You are just getting out from under their yoke. Look what they have done to you. You can talk to them, but look to our way."

Q: I am really talking more about what does an Embassy do?

KATROSH: Oh, I see. Well, what you try to do...it took Ne Win about three or four years to effectively do all the things that I have described and I would say for the two years that I was there we could still talk to the government officials, particularly to foreign ministry officers. They would visit your residence, particularly if you showed an American movie, which were very scarce in Burma. We tried to maintain contact, tried to show them the consequences that we saw because of too close a relationship with China. We never said they should fight the Chinese or not have a relationship with the Chinese. The Soviets were there, too, and very active.

Ne Win's instincts...the Soviet Embassy was larger than ours and very active...were that he had these three--China, the Soviets and the US--to maneuver against each other.

Q: Chinese, Soviets and Americans.

KATROSH: Right. Of course we would meet with the Soviet Embassy officers and try to get as much out of them as we could in terms of what they were doing and thinking. They would, of course, return the favor. At their parties they would have the Chinese there and when "no one was looking" we would go over and chat a bit. We worked with the contacts in the government, trying to contrast the options of looking at the United States' proposition vis-a-vis what was in store for you if you worked with the Russians or the Chinese. The Russians would ship in 50 tractors and they would offload them down in one of the ports...the darn things were for the steppes of Russia not the tropical forests of Burma. The tractors would sink in the mud. I bet they are still there; just a pile of rust.

A lot of young men in the Burmese government who were trained in the United States would talk to us. They would go to Moscow and talk to the Russians; go to Beijing and talk to the Chinese. We, in Burma, performed the traditional work of a political or economic officer in an Embassy, of staying involved in the community, of trying to analyze and determine what the intentions of the competing forces are and then getting policy direction to Washington.

In Burma the climate is very important to what you do. From May until October it rains every day. By August you look at the wall and the nail marks are there, you can't get out. It is a monsoon climate with a very heavy monsoon. Monsoon ditches in Burma were as big as a 9' x 12' room. You could drown in them and sometimes an unfortunate youngster did.

Q: So you are really nailed home?

KATROSH: You are nailed in the city. It is very difficult to travel around in Burma during the monsoon season. Now from October to May it doesn't rain. This is the cool season. Then is when you go "up country." Then is when you talk to the villagers. Then is when you go up to Mandalay, or Maymyo or Lashio.

But slowly, slowly, Ne Win every two or three months would narrow, narrow, the scope of our travel until by the time I left there you could go from Rangoon to Pegu and that was it. Now, I understand, one can travel to Mandalay and other cities more often. They are still very much controlled, however.

Q: You left there about 1965. Who was the Ambassador when you were there?

KATROSH: Everton and Byroade.

Q: What were their first names?

KATROSH: John Scott Everton and Henry J. Byroade.

Q: How did they operate?

KATROSH: Everton was very passive, a very low-key person, not too aggressive. He flew the flag. He reminded me of some of the diplomats we had in Asia in the late 19th century. I think he was connected with the Protestant missions prior to his work with Foundations and the U.S. Government. Byroade is an ex- Air Force General who built airfields near Kunming, China during WW II. A West Point graduate in the Corps of Engineers, he was an excellent choice for the assignment. He later went to Manila as Ambassador.

Q: You left in 1965 and went where?

KATROSH: I have always had a tour back home after an overseas tour. I was put on the Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos Desk. That was the beginning of a long and complicated period

when...my first job on the Desk was liaison with other agencies. I worked with officers in CIA, DIA and the Security Council trying to maintain some kind of continuity in the various programs that we were developing to assist the Government of South Vietnam.

At that early date no one knew what we were getting into. When you start on Vietnam, from my point of view you have to start back in 1945. Then after Dien Bien Phu we got involved...1954. Then, slowly, slowly we built up.

When I started my assignment, there was still a reasonable amount of popular support for what we were doing. No one at that time realized exactly what we were getting into. Now this may sound like a little bit of horn tooting, but after you have been four years in Taiwan; two years in Singapore, watching that conflict between the locals; and up in Burma watching that conflict; some of us knew that Vietnam was a powder keg. We knew then we were not going to win it. There was no way we were ever going to go in there and structure a government and army that is going to be solid enough to win the support of the people.

Kennedy said he was going to pull troops out. Well, maybe Johnson would too. I think Johnson has been pillaged on Vietnam. I have my own view on it. I think he was misled. I don't think he would have done what he did if his lieutenants had not told him that was the thing to do and that he would be a big hero if he did it.

My personal views aside, 1965 was the time of the big build-up and our job was to get people there; lassoing people in halls trying to persuade them to go, trying to get money, trying to get some consistency in policy, trying to execute the directions received from the White House.

Q: So as liaison you were running around saying you said this, they said this, etc.?

KATROSH: Well, there wasn't much time given as to whether it was good or bad. It was a policy implementation phase rather than the development phase.

In 1966, (sic. 1965) there was the bombing of the Embassy. That shattered the Embassy structure so I was sent out on TDY, which lasted nine months, to help out.

Q: There was a bomb set off at our old Embassy which killed quite a few people.

KATROSH: Yes. Again I had an "implementation" task. Here is the program, check this, do that, go there, etc. There was no innovation.

Q: Did the situation seem any surprise to you?

KATROSH: Yes. I saw things that were said about Taiwan being said again. It was Singapore again. It was China again. This whole lack of appreciation of the history driving these cultures and subcultures. This is true throughout my career in Asia, frankly. Malaysia and the Philippines come later. If you are sensitive. If you can smell a united Germany in

1945...and you could smell it...that is why you don't want to get into Bosnia. These conflicts do not react well to military forces. Repel aggression yes. Slam the aggressor on the head and get him out of the way, but not this sort of war, not intercultural conflicts. You lose every time. Those involved don't want you there. If they want to kill each other, they want to kill each other and they resent your going in and trying to stop them from killing each other.

Anyway, during my first stay in Vietnam, people would come to Saigon, programs would come in, Congressmen would come in and need to be briefed. It was just like pushing a button. You would give the spiel and they or it would go away. And another would come in.

I was able to leave there when my mother died. I came back and the Department asked if I would like to go to the Philippines? Oh yes indeed. So in 1966 I went out to the Philippines under Ambassador Blair.

This is nice. The Philippines was our "colony"; in 1966 they were our colony. The interesting thing going on in the Philippines, I guess, was again making sure that the Philippines wouldn't get too far adrift from where we wanted them to be...a strong right arm for our Southeast Asian policy and providing us with what were then strategic bases, Subic Bay and Clark Field.

President Johnson made a visit to Manila while I was there. It took two months before his arrival to get ready and two months after he left were spent in repairing the damage. This happens all the time in most Embassies and I am sure you are familiar with it. That was one of the big events, the Johnson visit, and trying to get the Philippines to support us in Vietnam. Manila wouldn't send combat troops but they did send some rural reconstruction battalions there.

Everything was going swimmingly and I had a two year assignment there. I asked for a third and had it approved and then bang!

Q: We are talking about the Tet offensive in Saigon, January, 1968.

KATROSH: Right. Well, I was directed back to Saigon but I don't want to go. I am using all the chips I collected throughout my career trying to get the assignment changed. No way. Your family can stay in Manila. You only have to go for 18 months. They don't even have to move out of the house...it was a lovely house. Everything is going to be fine. You can catch a flight from Saigon to Clark and spend a weekend with your family. They knew I had spent quite a bit of time there earlier and was not very sympathetic about Vietnam...not hostile, but I would say, "let's recognize it." I told them that I didn't want to go back because we had lost it. Not go back? Okay I did.

During this second assignment, I was Ambassador Bunker's special assistant. There is much that I cannot say about this assignment, but my job was to work with the Ambassador

and his other assistants in his office in dealings with the senior officials of the South Vietnamese government.

Q: That being?

KATROSH: Thieu, Ky, the prime ministers, industry leaders, etc.

Q: Before we get to that, did you sense...you had been in 1966...did you sense a difference there?

KATROSH: We were in a new building which was big.

Q: Did you sense a difference in the attitude of those dealing...had Tet come as a shock to thinking or not?

KATROSH: Not really, because amongst the US faithful, Tet was a victory and it truly was, militarily. The Communists took their best shot and didn't make it so now we were going to start rolling them back. That really should have broken the morale of the Communists. The VC did not conquer the South. Regular North Vietnamese divisions conquered the South. It wasn't the people that failed, but the corruption and deterioration of the Thieu government that we structured.

Q: Did you have any impressions of how we operated at that time? I mean the American style of operation in Vietnam...

KATROSH: Stu, I wasn't impressed. The military was given a mission and by God nothing was going to change. They were going to do it, like Grant. I think, frankly the Department as a whole had it right all the way along. People like Marty Herz, and Berger and Bunker...these fellows tried awfully hard. Westmoreland had his way.

Q: He was the general in command.

KATROSH: Right. Abrams, who followed, was more practical. McNamara, and to a certain extent Rusk, just wouldn't give in. They were going to have it their way. I remember one time going up to see a senior US official with an associate and I said, "Can I tell it like I saw it?" My associate said, "It is kind of dicey. I am going to tell you the policy right now, so don't go in there swinging because you will be picking up your teeth." There wasn't much leeway. Again I am speaking about someone who was a very senior official at the time. You did your job the best way you could seven days a week and sometimes 20 hours a day. And thank God you were able to do so because you would go crazy if you didn't. I literally wanted to work all the time, as did most others.

Q: Being away from the family...

KATROSH: Being away from the family, you don't want to think about that.

Q: When did you get out of there?

KATROSH: After eighteen months I came back to the US. I did some work in East Asian affairs. In late 1971, I was asked if I wanted to go to Kuala Lumpur. I had been up to Kuala Lumpur while in Singapore and remembered it as a lovely

town. So in 1972 I went to Kuala Lumpur and lived in probably the most famous house there, Jalan Murchu, located on top of the highest point in Kenny Hill, a suburb of Kuala Lumpur.

Q: What was the situation in Malaysia then?

KATROSH: I was there for a three year tour. The big thing in Malaysia was the formation of ASEAN, and oil.

Q: This was the economic union of...?

KATROSH: Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand to start with. Now Brunei is in the formal group.

Very typically European diplomatic process to organize very productive and now maturing Asian style democracies. Malaysia is the only country that successfully contained an internal Communist armed uprising. By the time I got there the uprising was over. When I was in Singapore, one of the big issues was the Communist insurgents in Malaysia. We did a lot of work on that in the Consulate.

The United States government was doing what it could in terms of support, diplomatic support, to put it down.

Q: But it was the British military..

KATROSH: Well, yes. But the Malays too. Their leadership got on top of the situation and said, "Damn it we are not going to give in to them." They did an awful lot of the hard work and they are justly proud of it. One is not in Malaysia very long before being told they are the only country in Southeast Asia which for the most part contained Communism on their own. The British and the Aussies were in there to stiffen them and to train them. The British Special Branch also did a lot of work, ferreting out the Communist leadership and that sort of thing, but by and large, if the Malays didn't get with it, it wouldn't have happened. It would have turned out like Vietnam - Cambodia. But the Malays decided they wanted to get rid of the Communists as quickly as they could, and they did.

That was the difference between Malaysia and Burma. Malaysia kept the British there about ten years after WW II to rebuild the superstructures, get the road systems in, get the bridges in, get the universities operating, and then go. But Burma, after the war, said, "Hey, we can run this thing, so go." Of course they couldn't but the British said, "Fine," and went.

During the early 1970 years we were winding down in Vietnam and Malaysia was very concerned about this. When the Embassy in Vietnam was evacuated, a Malaysian official came up to me...as a matter of fact the Foreign Minister, who was a friend...and said, "Look, if you fellows weren't there, we would not have had the ten years to build up the democracy we now have. The Chinese would have been down our throat; we couldn't have contained the insurgency. You fellows took the pressure off. Now I think we can make it on our own. Thank you very much and don't feel so bad."

Q: I have to say that I subscribe to this, although we did it poorly.

KATROSH: Nevertheless there were benefits.

Q: This was not a popular theme in the United States at this time.

KATROSH: I know, I quite agree. We did it poorly, but we did it poorly for different reasons. Anyway these fellows said, "Thank goodness you were there." The officials whom I knew from Singapore days also said, "Don't feel badly. We benefitted from it, you fellows didn't. You have your problems at home. You have a terrible split in your social structure, but be happy that some good came out of it."

In my own mind I think one of the reasons why we are one of the dialogue partners in the ASEAN group, despite many mistakes, is because of our stand against Communism in Southeast Asia. We still have an awful lot of influence in Southeast Asia. Go in and give them the US point of view, try to point out the options they have. By 1970 I think almost all of the Embassies in Southeast Asia were operating this way.

We had a little group in the early 1970s which would meet in Singapore, upper level Embassy officers, about once every three months. We would talk about Southeast Asian internal conflicts and send a report back to the Ambassadors about what we discussed and what we concluded. It was very interesting. This was the way the reports generally went. "We are on the right track. We shouldn't insert ourselves into ABC situations. We should offer consultation or advice if they want it and some help if we can afford it." I think that paid off. It certainly paid off in Malaysia.

We have serious oil interests in Malaysia and I worked on oil issues. The relationship between the oil companies and the Malaysia government were tough and businesslike.

Q: You are talking about the time you were in Malaysia?

KATROSH: We worked on US interests as required. For example, the Malaysian Foreign Minister came up with the idea for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality. We talk to him and say there is heavy conflict going on in Southeast Asia, how about standing back. He said, "We want you here, just stay over the horizon."

As noted earlier, another daily issue was the

oil business. Exxon is very powerful in Malaysia. Sometimes they get a little too uppity and the Malaysian government grabs them by the nose and tweaks it a little bit. Exxon then gets upset. But these events, from my point of view, were good events.

After Vietnam one of the things the Malaysians wanted very quickly was a Vietnamese Embassy in town. So there was that. They also were recognizing Beijing at the time. Kuala Lumpur put an embassy in Beijing and Beijing people were coming to Kuala Lumpur. Compared with all of my experiences in the Foreign Service, the time in Kuala Lumpur was the most "traditional"; what I thought an Embassy should be doing. We weren't fighting a war, we weren't shouting "These dirty Communists are coming over the wall." From 1972-75 you could see real growth and progress and construction in bilateral relations. You could see Southeast Asia coming into its own. The Thais began to think independently and Jakarta was well under control in terms of US interests. The Southeast Asians didn't vote with us half the time in the U.N. but when the chips were down and we really needed their cooperation they gave it, and not reluctantly, they gave it willingly.

So I would say that if someone wanted to understand effective Asian diplomacy, if they looked over the period 1970-1985 and see how the Embassies operated in that part of the world, there would be some lessons to be learned.

It was a great tour. The family liked it. My son was here in college, but my daughter was with us. At the end of the tour I returned to Washington, back into interagency liaison at a little higher level than before, but again working the liaison circuit. The last 18 months of this home tour I did a little Congressional relations. One day I was asked, "How would you like to go to Tel Aviv?" Tel Aviv? I knew where it was on a map. I knew a little bit about Islam because one of the countries I served in in Southeast Asia was very Islamic. I grew up with a lot of good Jewish boys who are still my fast friends. But that was about it.

Q: Sam Lewis was the Ambassador.

KATROSH: I went back to FSI...that is the nice thing about coming back home between tours, one usually goes back to FSI to learn a little bit about this and a little bit about that. I studied Hebrew for about three months. The idea was not to learn Hebrew, but I knew, by that time in my career, that if you don't understand the structure of the local language and a little bit about how your hosts communicate amongst themselves, you are hopeless when it comes to trying to understand the predilections of the society, the workings. I learned enough Hebrew to be able to read road signs and find my way around up in the Golan and places like that. Also some polite expressions to use with the government officials I would be working with.

We went off to Israel in 1978 for another three years, plus.

Q: So the war was over and Camp David was...

KATROSH: ...was underway. November 1977 was, I think, when Sadat visited Jerusalem. The operative war was in 1973, the October war. Much of what was happening in 1977 was a result of the 1973 war.

I am still very close to Israel and correspond with friends there. I may even visit there this coming year again. But I must say that if it wasn't for Sadat's visit to Jerusalem we wouldn't be having this peace conference now (1992). That visit was one of the most imaginative moves on the part of world leaders concerned with peace and stability in the Middle East.

Q: But Sadat had made his visit before...

KATROSH: In 1977. But he set the opportunity for peace with Egypt. If he didn't make this move, the Israelis would still be in the Sinai.

Q: What was your impression...this was the Begin government which was a right wing, very nationalist government beginning to go through the peace process. You were the new boy on the block but you had this different view not having been immersed in this. What was your impression of our Embassy in Israel and how they related to the Israelis and how they also saw the Egyptians?

KATROSH: That is a big one.

Q: Why don't we stop for now and pick up the story next time?

KATROSH: Fine.

Q: Today is April 13, 1993. Ralph, when did you get to Tel Aviv?

KATROSH: I arrived 1977 and left there in 1981.

Q: How did you see the situation?

KATROSH: Thinking about it, I would say the Embassy was structured with the idea of balance in mind. One of the more difficult problems that both the Department and the Ambassador faced in staffing the US Embassy in Israel was the religious and cultural preferences of Embassy officers.

Q: You mean the American Embassy in Israel.

KATROSH: Right. ...the issue of Jewish officers. That was very difficult. There were historical preferences by some US administrations, in their words "to appreciate the sensitivity of the religious issue, the emotional aspects of the Jewish issue and an objective look at Jewish-American-Arab relations." There was a strong school of thought that believed senior Jewish officers could not be totally objective. I didn't agree with this, but nonetheless for purposes of historical accuracy there was a school of thought that held this view.

What one found in the US Embassy in Tel Aviv when I arrived there was very senior people were not Jewish. For example, the political section: the political counselor was not a Jewish person. But under the political counselor was a staff that was probably three-fourths Jewish--young Jewish Foreign Service officers who were trained in Hebrew. The rapport that they were able to establish with the community was a very good one, a very close one. In one or two instances, I must say, their heritage, while not a problem, was something that they fought in terms of trying to be totally objective.

Q: My understanding is that the Israelis as a policy put tremendous pressure on anybody who was of Jewish ancestry to coop them in one way or another.

KATROSH: I wouldn't say that was government policy as such, but I would say that there were factions within the Israeli government who wouldn't hesitate to do that. Of course, the more religious or the more conservative the faction, the more their tendency would be to try to pressure US officials who happened to be Jewish. But I have to say that in my experience, and in reading the reporting, and I read all the reporting of the Jewish political officers, I didn't detect prejudice. Where I detected the struggle was from my own personal relationships with some of them because I was very close to them.

Q: For the record, are you Jewish or not Jewish?

KATROSH: I am Catholic. Probably one of the reasons why I was picked for the job was the fact that I wasn't Jewish. My predecessor in my particular position also had not been Jewish. I believe I was sent there because I had absolutely no attachment to any of the issues or any of the people involved. I reasoned that if objectivity was the reason why I was sent there then that ought to be the attitude I should continue to foster. So I tried to remain pretty pragmatic, professional, and objective. But I also tried to understand why this particular Jewish faction felt one way or that particular Jewish faction thought another way.

Q: I just want to make an aside here Ralph. My understanding from doing a considerable amount of interviewing was that the major problem was within the foreign affairs apparatus has not been the professional Foreign Service officer who happens to speak Jewish. It is the political appointees who are Jewish or have been involved in politics where the constituency was heavily Jewish and come into the Department and have brought all their pro-Israeli proclivities. They don't bother to lose them because they aren't really professionals.

KATROSH: Well there are two aspects to that. Firstly, in all the time that I served in the Embassy or my historical references to my predecessors, they were all professionals. Sam Lewis was and is a professional. His predecessor is a professional and his successor is a professional. The political counselors were all young professionals. The attachés were professionals. So at the Embassy level they were professionals. Not that they didn't develop certain preferences, but they were professional officers.

At the Department level, I would say that the political factor and the Jewish preferences played a bigger role. I think you can see it even today. The differences to the approach of the Palestinian/Jewish/Syrian/Jordanian issue is different than what it was six months ago because of the orientation of the policy groups in the Department. Now I don't know how that translates out to the Embassy in Tel Aviv. I can't tell. I have been reading very closely what the Ambassadors have to say about the current round of peace talks and I must say the Embassy seems not to be involved in this political/Jewish factor.

Thinking about this interview over a couple of weeks, I also have to say that what really happens in US/Middle East relations (both Israeli and Arab) at least as far as I can tell from the Embassy in Tel Aviv, and from what I read in the Jewish press, which I still read religiously, and my correspondence with people in Israel, I would have to say that the real issues were addressed not at the professional, diplomatic level, but at the senior political level. From what I can see, more and more of the functions at the Embassy are support of policy rather than having any real significant input on what policy should be. Fellows like Rabin, Sharon, Shamir, Peres don't pay too much attention to what the Ambassador says in terms of something other than a regular message because they know they have their own channels to the political structure here, good or bad, Republican or Democrat. They have their own way of getting their message through. They look on Embassy Tel Aviv, I think, more and more as an implementor rather than as an influence on policy.

Q: Going back to the 1977-80 period. What were the issues that would on the reporting? Here is a kaleidoscope of parties, political activity in a very small country where everybody was in spitting distance of everybody else. How did you sort this out and were there problems in reporting as far as concern about what would happen to reports once they got back to Washington. We are talking about this period of time.

KATROSH: Back in that period of time I think every report that left the Embassy, whoever wrote it, because of the intense political movement or peace negotiations at the time was written for consumption at the highest level. I must say that with rare exceptions, I think it was pretty honest, objective.

Q: Also, am I correct, the normal political life, no matter where it goes you can write about that. The real crux was, wasn't it, how were the Israelis treating the Arabs both in the West Bank, Gaza, etc?. Wasn't that the real problem?

KATROSH: Well, yes and no. That is the real problem then and now. But if you are talking about that time, the real problem was how do you take advantage of the opening for some break in Arab-Israeli relations. That was what those four years were all about, which led to Camp David. Don't forget just prior to 1977 the Labor Government was in power and there was a very set policy in the Labor Party on the territories issue and it is very similar today. It hasn't changed very much at all in fifteen years. As a matter of fact I venture to say that it hasn't changed.

Then you had the Begin factions. The Likuds were put in for a variety of reasons. They have and still have a different view on how to settle this occupied territory issue.

At the same time you had President Carter who saw an opportunity to do something in the Middle East. He wanted to get Geneva Conference going again for a lot of reasons. He planned to have the Russians there and this was going to help a little bit with the US-Russian relationship. Everybody knew that the Israelis had their own lines to the Arabs and there were a few meetings over in Morocco that encouraged everybody about flexibility between the Israelis and the Arabs sponsored by the king there. In a separate meeting with Sadat, Carter determined there was a possibility of doing something. So all of the other factors, which continued to influence it around the edges...they are not insignificant or small...but everything focused on how to get the peace process going and how do we get a crack in the total Arab-Israeli issues...Palestine being part of it and Syria/Lebanon being another part of it.

Carter originally thought Geneva was the way to get the Russians in and then the Syrians will come in. As the preparations for Geneva came up there was the problem of intra-Arab relations.

Q: I want to keep this down to your level.

KATROSH: Well, this is what the reporting was focused on. The strategic issues.

Q: How were you and our Embassy looking at the Begin government?

KATROSH: Shamir and Sharon were minority views in the Begin government. They weren't that much involved in making Israeli policy, frankly. Shamir voted against the Camp David Accord which was sponsored by Begin. They were the very conservative fringe, milling around within the Likud coalition.

I would say from my understanding of the reporting, the issue was Begin.

Q: How did we view Begin? I have heard it said that Begin really didn't rise to the occasion that Sadat offered. An opportunity was missed.

KATROSH: Well, an opportunity for what? If you look at it from an American point of view, from an Israeli point of view, from an Egyptian point of view, there were opportunities for all three of them. Begin was conservative and he was the leader of the conservative party. The conservative party then, and now, doesn't want to give up territory, particularly the Golan West Bank and, I guess Gaza, but this latter point is debatable. But the Sharon/Shamir factions within the Likud wouldn't have even given up the Sinai. "Why should we give up the Sinai? We gave it back once and they kicked our butt, so we are going to keep it."

Number two, as far as Begin is concerned, you can't really understand the Israeli psyche without understanding the holocaust. You just can't do it. Now I know that people get tired of hearing this, just like some get tired of these "bleeding blacks." Nonetheless, 6 million people were killed because of their ethnic and religious preferences. It is very difficult...I don't know if it is possible for one to understand if he hasn't lived with these people for a certain length of time, who hasn't been in off-the-record situations in citrus orchards, in the desert, or over a bottle of beer in Jerusalem; they really forget you are a non-Jew. They forget and let it all hang out. It is only then that you realize how deeply the psyche of this country and this government is influenced by history. And it is not that long ago. Begin was a victim, a lot of people who are still in the government were kicked around by the Poles, the Russians, the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Austrians, the Germans, some by the Americans, and that hurts. It is all very personal. I don't know what it is now with the influx of the Russians, but I hope to find out, but every one of these people are post 1945...all of the leadership...and most of them remember, they were young children. So when you talk about Begin and his reluctance to give up territory in the face of a Palestinian policy which says we are going to throw you right back into the sea, what do you expect him to do?

In some respects, I can understand if the Israelis said, "Screw you all." Their war of independence was fought with Communist weapons. The basic instinct of the old Central European Israeli is Communist. And that instinct coupled with their religious orientation and the holocaust experience is tough. For an Israeli like Rabin to get up and say, "Well, maybe I will make a deal with Syria." Oh my God.

Q: Well, let's go back to the time.

KATROSH: So when Sadat made his move...Sadat made his move for a couple of reasons. I think he saw Carter as an objective leader. Carter isn't going to take sides. He is not going to be terribly pro-Arab, but he is not going to be terribly pro-Israeli. He wasn't, and he paid for it, let's face it. Israelis don't like Carter. Sadat's big card was that in all of the Israeli claims of homeland, Sinai was never included. So he figures, "I can get back all the Egyptian sand without coming up against this historical, biblical, emotional barrier that the Israelis have with the other Arabs. Therefore I don't want to go to Geneva because all the other Arabs are going to be there. And the Russians are going to be there. I threw the Russians out. What am I going to get there? But if I can make a separate deal...I am powerful enough... [don't forget Egypt is the key to Arab unity against Israel]...I am powerful enough, my country is powerful enough, that I don't have to worry about these other Arabs coming after me. I can get back the Sinai and I can even get the Israeli settlements out of there if I try hard enough. I will try to include the Palestinians and make sure the record reads that the issue was discussed, but I am not going to wait for that issue to be solved." Hussein is now (1993) thinking more like Sadat did.

Begin reasons: "Okay. If I can split the Arabs then if ever the time comes to deal with the Syrians on the Golan and the Palestinians, I do not have to worry about Egypt. Egypt is going to be out of the picture in terms of territorial negotiations. I don't have to worry about a serious two front war like I did in 1973 when I almost lost it all. So I get Egypt isolated

and then I get the Americans to cooperate because they want this arrangement." So there were a lot of pluses and Begin was...Begin's reluctance in the early years of Camp David negotiations, was not so much the Sinai but to make damn sure that none of the other Arab issues, particularly the Palestinian issue, was included. The occupied territories were mentioned as a subject for future negotiations only at the insistence of President Carter.

Q: Again going back to this time, how did you and your colleagues in the political section view the Palestinians?

KATROSH: I was wondering when you were going to get to that. There were two schools of thought in the Embassy on the Palestinian issue. This was one of the places where maybe I have a disagreement with Ambassador Sam Lewis. The Israelis are a very engaging people. It is a wonderful country to live in. Not that it is high society or high class living, but it is nice.

Q: Everybody who I have interviewed likes it because...

KATROSH: The weather is good, you kick a stone and you uncover 5,000 years of history. Your mind is always going. No wonder the Jews are considered a very intelligent people. You walk on a beach and you pick up Roman coins and glass. You see crusader castles and you see places like Hatzor which is five thousand BC. In the villages you can sit and kind of figure out how the history of Christianity worked out.

This also intoxicates ambassadors. The Israelis are very warm people in terms of inviting you to their homes. Everybody gets involved in Israeli society. Everybody gets to know really what a bar mitzvah is all about. Everybody gets to know what the Holy Sepulcher is all about. Everybody gets to know about the Dome of the Rock and Mohammed's going up to heaven on a horse. Your mind is filled with all of this and you realize the complexities of the situation. So you grow to like the all people in a very real way.

Q: Will you explain 242 and 338?

KATROSH: Well, 242 and 338 have to do with the Palestinian homeland. These are the UN resolutions that deal with Palestinian history in Israel. If you are totally objective about this, the solution for Israel at that time...the international position was that Israel has to go back to the 1967 borders with a little adjustment here and there for security. Now if you are going to say, "What are the Palestinian rights in terms of the international record?" 242 and 338 e.g. return of the land and return of the Palestinian exiles. But no US ambassador in my memory has really insisted on that, i.e. the settlements, for example. All settlements in occupied territory are supposed to be illegal, but the US has acquiesced in the building of settlements without vigorous protest. Whenever some wag in the Department would try to raise the settlement issue, i.e. the Palestinian issue, or the water issue, or land ownership issue, or even the political rights issue, the Embassy was never too interested in getting involved.

Q: We are talking about when you were there?

KATROSH: Right.

Q: Did the question of settlements, land issues...

KATROSH: No one wanted to talk about it.

Q: Who is "no one?"

KATROSH: No one in the Embassy.

Q: There must have been some young officer who would get up and say...

KATROSH: Well, every once in a while somebody would say something about it, but right away, it was off the table.

Q: I am surprised because Embassies normally have two groups. You have the more senior officers who know what the policy is because they don't want to fight battles they don't have to fight. And you got the young officers feeling their oats, etc., who are picking up the more contentious issues. I would think the Palestinian issues would be just the sort of thing these young officers would bring up. Why weren't they? This is going against human foreign service nature.

KATROSH: I have served in six embassies and I agree with you. There were a couple of other issues. For example, when we give military equipment to a foreign country there are all kinds of restrictions placed on its use. Now in the Israeli/Lebanon situation, on a number of occasions the Israelis used American equipment contrary to the rules and regulations which we put on it.

Q: You are talking about when you were there?

KATROSH: Yes. The military people would sometimes try to make an issue out of that, but if it got out of the Embassy, and it sometimes did, it never stimulated action at the policy level in Washington. So the settlement issue is the same. No one wanted to talk about those issues.

Q: I am sorry to keep dwelling on this, but I find it so against nature...

KATROSH: Well, in most embassies I have to admit that the tough issues that you don't want to talk about are usually raised by energetic young officers. In Israel, the energetic young officers didn't think the settlement issue was an issue to raise for reasons I have already given you. If you have five out of seven political officers at the junior level at the Embassy who are being rigid about their objectivity, but having a struggle with that rigidity, they aren't going to look for issues that are going to make their life more difficult and miserable. Now the officers up in Jerusalem, in the Consulate, were of a different

stripe. I wasn't up there, but I read their reporting. They would raise the issue. They would jump up and down over abuse of Arabs. Sometimes there would be smart remarks made about the Arab-loving guys in the Consulate in Jerusalem.

But as far as serious pressure to emphasize the abuses of the settlement issues, for example, or water use...now water is something I knew something about. I had done some work in the Department the Middle East water issue.

Q: What was the water issue at that time?

KATROSH: Well, everything that comes down to "the Sea of Galilee is Israeli." So many cubic meters of water come down the Jordan and you have some Arabs on one side. They have wells and want the water to seep into them. The Israelis would pipe the water around a settlement and pump it into an area further along. It is the distribution of the available water. Naturally the Israelis favored their own.

Q: Was there ever the feeling that maybe in the future the Palestinians could coalesce into a state, and could live in peace with Israel?

KATROSH: Did the Palestinians ever feel this?

Q: No, I am talking about how you felt about it?

KATROSH: Oh, sure. And there are a lot of Israelis who feel the same way.

Q: But I am talking about you and your officers.

KATROSH: Yes, many of them. I would say the majority felt that the solution to the specific Palestinian was not hopeless.

Q: Were we avoiding looking at how the Israelis were treating the Arabs in the West Bank and in Gaza?

KATROSH: Well, at that time it wasn't nearly the way it is now. The Begin government had a live-let-live policy for a lot of reasons. My wife and I went up to all the Arab villages on a regular basis. So did my Israeli colleagues. There wasn't the community antagonism to the point there is now.

On the other hand, some of the PLO, the more fanatic members of the Fatah, would creep into Israel and put a bomb down in a marketplace. More than once my wife was shopping and "boom" the tomato bin goes up and people got hurt, and sometimes killed. But that was unusual. It always happened on Thursday. We learned after a few weeks in Israel not to go to the market on Thursday because the Palestinians were out there chasing the Shabbat shoppers. (Shabbat: The Israeli Sabbath which starts Friday at sunset.)

And then there was harassment up on the border. Every once in a while the Palestinians would fire a few rockets on Israeli towns and the Israelis would send the Israeli Air Force to bomb the rocket positions or some PLO bunkers. There was an awful lot of this...you are in an area that I worked on very closely with the Israelis... and that was the issue of infiltration of terrorists. We all worked very hard...sometimes with Arab officials when it was a particularly bad situation...to stop the infiltration of PLO hit teams coming from Lebanon and shooting up Israeli villages and taking hostages, etc. But it wasn't like it is now (1993) with "Let's kill all the Arabs." As long as I was there, I don't ever remember any shutdown of Arab workers coming into Israel. Israel's agriculture and industry couldn't have existed without them and there is a question as to whether they can even today.

In Israel at the Allenby Bridge, there would be 50 Arab trucks with Israeli produce waiting in line to go over to Jordan and from there they go to Amman where the cargo gets transferred to other trucks. Sometimes they don't even do a good job pasting Arab labels over the Israeli labels on the crates. Often the produce would go up to Damascus.

Most Arabs don't like the Palestinians. They didn't then and they don't now. Arab leaders have never really done much for the Palestinians. Look at Assad. He was no different then. He was always trying to split the PLO in those days, and he is still trying to split them. He doesn't even talk to them. There are more Israelis talking to the PLO than Syrians. And, everyone knows this. There is always this feeling that if we could only get the Palestinians to accept something less than this militant Palestinian State, something could be worked out. Many Israelis think they can do business together because the Palestinians are good business people. They are the most educated of the Arabs; great doctors, lawyers and entrepreneurs. They are energetic and, I think, an exception to the greater Arab society.

Q: In a way sort of the Jews of the Arab society.

KATROSH: Right. Left to their own they, Jews and Palestinians, could get along. I believe a majority, small to be sure, of the Israelis felt and probably still feel that way. But, going back to what I said earlier, without understanding the holocaust and the psyche of the Israelis, you can't...you have to appreciate the fact that the Israelis will say, "We don't want a Palestinian state. Not on my mother's grave." But he didn't say that this applies to his son. "Let's get an autonomous situation. Let them manage their water, we will do that, we will do this. However, the one thing we are not going to give them is state sovereignty. And, after all, the bible says this is our land anyway, so we are doing them a favor."

I am sure the modern Palestinian leadership, then and now, believe if they can get a reasonably, well-defined, autonomous status, then over time a political state will evolve...and it will, if they want one. The Palestinians may not want one twenty years from now.

Q: What were you getting from our military attachés regarding the Israeli army? The Israeli army has been called the best army in the world.

KATROSH: It's very good. Not always the best in everything, but very good and reliable. Certainly the best in the Middle East but if you put them up against a well trained, modern, elite, European unit, particularly German, probably not, but maybe.

Q: The reason I am asking is because shortly thereafter in 1981 they went into Lebanon. In an interview I did with our American Ambassador there, Bob Dillon, he got a couple of impressions...Basically they were quite ill-disciplined, fire discipline. They would shoot at anything. They had a lot of ammunition. A lot of people died, civilians, who happened to get in their way. A lot of looting. Obviously fighting in the Sinai there was nothing to loot or in the Judean desert or in the Golan.

KATROSH: I was still there for a little bit of that and I stayed very, very close to that situation when I got back here. Firstly, this was a foreign war for the Israelis in their eyes. Their army wasn't trained to fight a foreign type war. They were trained to fight in the Sinai and in the Judean desert and fighting armies with fire power was the way you balanced out. The Arabs have a lot more troops than the Israelis. What the Israelis decided and pursued very vigorously is the way you balance things out is to overwhelm your enemy with fire arms. This is compatible with their history.

Q: Actually it was an American doctrine too.

KATROSH: Well, it still is. Look what we did in Iraq. And civilians getting killed. How about Dresden; how about Frankfurt. Look, war is war. It's not play time.

Secondly, Israel was split over the 1981/1982 war in Lebanon. It was a very unpopular war. Even Begin felt, and I am thoroughly convinced of this, although people will argue with me, that because of the Arab atrocities, particularly the Hezbollah at that time coming over the border, Israel had to go about 14 kilometers into Lebanon. The idea was to stop well short of Beirut and clean the area out. But then Sharon, who was Defense Minister at that time, said, "This is a chance to really cuff the PLO." So Begin was doing one thing and sending out signals to do one thing but Sharon was saying, "Bomb the bastards in Beirut." So there was a serious conflict of leadership. If you get a conflict like this between the President and the military commander-in-chief, you are going to have what appears to be a lack of discipline within the troop fighting on the ground.

Thirdly, as far as looting is concerned, I don't know. I would say that the Israeli enlisted men, particularly the good ones, aren't that far away from David and Samson. I mean their instinct...just like the Arabs loot. Look what Arabs (Iraqis) did in Kuwait. The instinct of those people, that Semitic approach, is "Man, when you are in there, you are in there. If you rape, steal, loot, that is part of the program." Nonetheless, I cannot believe Israeli soldiers raped.

I sometimes wonder if that same Middle East approach to the vanquished is not responsible for some of the actions in Bosnia today. It gets endemic in these ethnic and tribal groups and the Israelis are not that much different. This is what happened in Lebanon.

Q: What was your impression of how Sam Lewis dealt with the Israelis, his mindset and how he ran the Embassy?

KATROSH: Very professional in terms of the Embassy. It was a joy to work with him. In terms of what he wanted, what his DCM was supposed to do...

Q: The DCM was who?

KATROSH: Dick Viets and then Brown.

My relationship with Sam was good. I knew exactly what he wanted. With Sam you have to convince him you are a professional, that goes for anyone on the staff. You have to persuade Sam that you can do your job and he need not have to constantly be checking up on you. He always wished to be thoroughly briefed on everything. Then Sam would let you go to it. That is the ambassador running the team.

I worked with him frequently with Israeli groups and I have to say when we were working officially, he was perfect from my point of view. He was totally objective and followed his instructions. Very tough sometimes. On the other hand, I think Sam respected the Israelis for what they did with the country and the potential...don't forget the Cold War was going on...and what they could do for US interests. I believe he would give them the benefit of the doubt. He was, at times, a little questioning concerning the views of the US ambassadors in Arab countries.

Q: Well, that is part of the dynamics which I find fascinating. I have talked with a number of the ambassadors from the other side and they question Lewis' objectivity on this thing. You can't help it...who you are is where you sit.

KATROSH: I do think that you shouldn't leave a man in there as long as Sam was because he gets vested interests in the community and the people. You can't help it. I don't think any person should serve more than four years at any post. That's the maximum.

Q: Were you there when the Israelis first went into Lebanon and set up a security zone?

KATROSH: Yes.

Q: How was that viewed? I understand that Dick Viets was one of a few people to really sort of scream.

KATROSH: He did. Viets was very much a professional.

Q: I have a very solid set of interviews with him. Could you explain how this was viewed at the Embassy and all? To the outsider when you strip away the verbiage it was a seizure of land.

KATROSH: Unfortunately, I don't think the Embassy was tough enough on that.

Q: Could you explain what happened?

KATROSH: Israel always had its fingers in Beirut, particularly in those years. It was a proxy war with Syria. The Christians up in Lebanon were being supplied by the Israelis and the Muslims and everybody else would get their...the PLO wasn't getting it from anyone except what they purchased...help from the Soviets a little bit, and the Syrians. All these factions fought amongst themselves, plus, without any discipline in the country to control the various terrorist groups, the Fatah, the Hezbollah and the Palestine Liberation Front, a whole gaggle of them were running terrorist operations against Israel.

Q: This is right up by the Lebanese border.

KATROSH: Yes, right up to the "Good Fence. There also were and are a lot of Lebanese coming over to Israel to work. They used to call it the good fence because Lebanese crossed it to go to work and then to return home. The Israelis reasoned: "Why do we have to put up with...there are a lot of Lebanese who support us, we are supporting a lot of Lebanese, particularly the Christians, so why do we have to put up with these awful acts by the terrorists?"

We will establish a buffer zone. Go up there and take the land and of course we will get a little water...we will have a surrogate Lebanese force."

The US hemmed and hawed, coughed a little bit, but realizing...I don't know why Washington...the Embassy in Israel wasn't going to do terribly much, but Washington didn't do anything either.

I think there was a school of thought back here...and they were wrong and were told they were wrong...who felt that one possibility for Middle East movement would be to get a sympathetic government in Lebanon which would make its peace with Israel. This is Shultz in the early days of the Reagan Administration. "How can we turn the Lebanese situation to our advantage? We will sponsor peace." This thinking started during this particular cross border operation. It didn't upset the Lebanese government in Beirut too much, even though it was a Muslim/Christian government at that time, because they weren't controlling anything in the southern border zone anyway. They figured if the Israelis can get a couple of Lebanese to handle security, this gets the Israelis off our backs...But Beirut didn't figure the Israeli government was as serious as it was to gain something for all the support they had given to the Christians in northern Lebanon. A lot of material went up there...tanks, guns, money, training, etc.

The United States figured that maybe we could make the Christian faction work for us. Washington banked too much on what the Israelis told them was the art of the possible with the Christians.

Q: Any dissent in the Embassy at that time?

KATROSH: Yes, there were some people who had the advantage of good intelligence, but you couldn't persuade anyone that was the case, including many "intelligence" people.

Q: Speaking about intelligence, again this is an unclassified interview, how did we view Israeli intelligence? Again like the Israeli army this is considered to be the best intelligence service in the world, etc. At the same time the Egyptians were able to launch a surprised attack on them in 1973. Did we see it as a friend or adversary because we were having...I am not sure if the Pollard case had come up at that time...

KATROSH: Oh, no.

Q: ...but it was well known that if we sent something into Washington that probably the Israeli Ambassador and the Israeli Foreign Minister had it on their desks before it probably reached the Secretary of State.

KATROSH: That is an interesting question. Let me take care of the last one first because that I think is the easiest one. That wasn't because the Israelis had that effective a penetration of the US government, it was the US political leadership who would pass it to them. After all, Israel is our buddy and votes are votes.

As far as I could determine from the information available to me, the Israelis were quite good on some aspects of intelligence, particularly on the Soviet Union. From what people tell me, many were not that impressed with Israeli intelligence on the Arabs. They were good, but they weren't supermen. Sometimes the Israelis came up with good information but they also came up with a lot of their point of view information. Their analysis reflected their prejudices just like ours often reflect US prejudices. I don't know anyone who thought the Israelis were supermen. They were good, but they also made mistakes. They were competent, but nothing special. I think the whole political establishment would say that they were very good at responding to terrorism, and that is where they get the reputation. Somebody hijacks a plane and the special forces go get it back. But that is not intelligence.

Q: Why would they be particularly good at getting things out of the Soviet Union?

KATROSH: Like with the Arabs, Israel always had good connections with the Soviets. Don't forget the basic power structure of the Russian Communist Party...lots of Jews were in the Party leadership. The person who developed the Soviet nuclear bomb was a Jew. And there was some travel back and forth. Labor and Likud party leaders were always in Romania. Israel didn't have an Embassy there, but they had an office that looked like an Embassy, worked like an Embassy and ate like an Embassy. This is intelligence, I guess,

but it isn't intelligence in the sense that we think it is. It is connections, influence, etc. However, there is one qualification, in technical intelligence they were very good. But then that is a fall out from their education.

Q: What is a definition of technical intelligence?

KATROSH: Using your technology to acquire information rather than human sources.

Q: Listening devices?

KATROSH: Well, not so much listening devices, but sophisticated electronic communication systems. But any country with a good technical basis is good at this sort of collection. Even countries that don't have a large technical base are very good, like China. They also are like the Iranians who took the burn bag out of the US Embassy, sat down and pieced the shredded paper all together.

Q: The Iraqis sent a brigade or something that sort of dissolved before it even got there in one of the wars.

KATROSH: The Israeli military had and have very little respect for the Iraqi soldiers. As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, they, as I said earlier...it was my impression that they...of course, remember the Khrushchev speech, the Israelis were the first ones to get their hands on that.

Q: This was a secret speech to the 20th Congress Party.

KATROSH: With all their connections they had good access and knew what was going on because more than half of Israel in those years consisted of Central European or Russian immigrants. In Israel you eat Central European or Russian food. So they were valuable. If you get a Soviet who is a Jew who is working on something that is as sophisticated as a nuclear weapon, you know...

Q: Last question on this Israeli thing, it has been assumed for several decades that the Israelis who got nuclear weapons tucked away which, if push come to shove, that the Arab capitals around there will go down the drain too with nuclear attacks. Was the nuclear situation in Israel sort of one of those no-no topics as far as trying to raise it?

KATROSH: With the Israelis?

Q: Yes.

KATROSH: Oh yes. We knew what was going on but we didn't raise it. Although I will never forget a remark made to me by a senior decision maker in the Israeli government. We got into a discussion about what the Israelis could do if push came to shove?

Q: We are talking about an all out assault.

KATROSH: I said Israel could be overwhelmed if they, the Arabs, all got together, or something like that. The Israeli said something like, "I assure you we will never let that happen. We will never let it come to that." I knew this man well enough, we worked together closely, what he was really telling me was, "We will nuke the bastards."

Q: I think that has always been the assumption.

KATROSH: He didn't say that but that is what I heard.

Q: You left in May 1981. Were you there at the beginning of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon?

KATROSH: I left just before, but I was still involved with things Israeli when the invasion occurred.

Q: What was the view of that in Washington?

KATROSH: The view was that there wasn't going to be much said about it if it didn't go too far. But when the Israelis reached Beirut, we knew that it was going to tear apart any chance we had of doing anything with the peace process. This was when the Republicans came in. They made that assessment. I think they assessed the fact that if George Shultz got out there and talked to both the Arab and Israeli and Lebanese, he could get some sort of peace agreement between the Israeli government and Lebanese government. That was a big mistake. It was a very serious mistake and Lebanon has yet to recover from it.

Every administration, and this one is going to be the same, unfortunately, fails to recognize historical, tribal, ethnic forces. Shultz works out a deal between Lebanese Christians and Israel and takes it up to Damascus and expects the Syrians to buy it. Well, the Syrians said no. That was the end of that. It was a failure. The whole Lebanese policy in those early Reagan years was a disaster. The Administration didn't know what they were dealing with. In my own mind, I think the Israelis pulled a fast one on Reagan, Shultz and the Washington establishment.

Q: There has always been the story that Sharon felt he got a wink from Haig before launching the attack...

KATROSH: He may have. I don't know. I was there when Haig went through Israel. He had some weird ideas about what the art of the possible was. Haig saw the Soviets as the big threat and he was going to line up the Israelis as well as the Arabs. That was just a pipe dream. Haig was never too careful about how he put things, from my point of view. I think if Sharon got a wink, it would have had to have been that kind of wink. But Haig telling Sharon to go ahead and do it, I don't know.

Q: I think Haig may not even realized he had made a wink.

KATROSH: Maybe he didn't and Sharon says "This fellow isn't really a diplomat and I can say he did and get away with it because he is loose enough with his vocabulary to say something like that. So I can just say it and make people believe it."

Q: So you left Israel and basically this is enough, is that it?

KATROSH: Well, it was not enough of Israel, but as far as I am concerned you leave the party while you are still sober and everyone is saying, "Hang around, don't go, we are having a good time." My view is that is when you should leave.

Q: Well, then I think we will call this off.

KATROSH: Good.

Q: Great. Thank you very much.

End of interview