

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

AMBASSADOR JOHN M. KOENIG

*Interviewed by: Jay Anania
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INTERVIEW

Q: It's April the 2nd, 2021. I'm Jay Anania, and I'm interviewing John Koenig for ADST. John, why don't you introduce yourself?

KOENIG: My name is John Koenig, I was a foreign service officer from 1984 until 2015. My last position was ambassador to Cyprus from 2012 to 2015, and then I retired.

Q: All right, John. Why don't we talk a little bit about your early life and what got you interested in the foreign service? So, why don't you start about where -- perhaps where you were born and where you were brought up?

KOENIG: Sure. I was born in Tacoma, Washington. My parents had both grown up there. My dad was a meat cutter and my mom worked as an operator at the telephone company, and their families had been in the area for about fifty or sixty years by the time I was born. My family on my father's side were German immigrants, and my mom's side had been living in the United States for a very long time. I went to elementary school in a place called University Place, where we lived until I got into high school. And it was while I was there that I had an experience that probably influenced my life more than any other in terms of the foreign service. Should I describe it?

Q: Why not? You've piqued my interest.

KOENIG: So my dad, as I said, worked as a meat cutter -- he was the manager of a grocery store meat market, and he had worked for a very long time with a woman who was a wrapper. Her name was Barbara Martindale, she was a family friend as well as a colleague of my dad's. Her family were missionaries, originally in India, and then after Indian independence they worked in Pakistan, and Barbara decided that she wanted to travel to Pakistan to spend Christmas with her family there in 1973, when I was fifteen years old. So, my parents originally wanted to send my sister who was older and already in college, but it turned out that she couldn't leave at that time and I ended up traveling with Barbara Martindale to visit her family at a missionary hospital north of Abbottabad -- the famous Abbottabad in Pakistan where Usama bin Laden was finally found -- and spent a month there when I was a fifteen-year-old during December and January 1973 to 1974.

And that sort of transformed my life. My only previous international experience had been in Canada, where we used to take our boat basically every summer for probably ten years. My family and I spent time in the San Juans and in the Gulf Islands, which are in British Columbia -- but that was not nearly as exotic as Pakistan. I had an interest in international things. I loved National Geographic when I was a kid, for example; my grandparents actually gave me a subscription to the magazine when I was pretty young. But it was this trip to Pakistan at that time that transformed everything. Barbara and I did all sorts of things there that would no longer be really conceivable because of security concerns. We drove along the Grand Trunk Road of Kipling fame, we went into the tribal areas of the Northwest Frontier Province, we visited arms factories in Dera, which is a town where they make a lot of rifles and other arms, we were very--I mean, it was just a completely different time. The British legacy was still very strong. We stayed at a convent in Lahore which was like something straight out of the Jewel in the Crown. It was really quite an experience, so that had a huge influence on the rest of my life.

Q: That must've been quite a journey. Had you ever been on an airplane before you flew out there?

KOENIG: That was my first trip on an airplane, and there were a lot of adventures involved because it was during the beginning of the oil embargo in 1973, which disrupted air travel a great deal. So, our original plans to fly to New York and board Pakistan International Airlines there for the onward journey were disrupted and we had to make adjustments all along the way. There was no nonstop from Seattle to Karachi, needless to say. It was quite an amazing flight. I remember coming in over Cairo. We were coming in over Cairo, and you know, the view of the Nile valley and the city, especially then before pollution was what it is now, was just magnificent. It was really amazing.

Q: And so when you returned, did that alter your academic path at all?

KOENIG: Yeah. I mean, I had already been interested in international cultures, especially because I wanted to be an anthropologist. Actually, that's what I studied in college. This was in junior high, though. I was a good student, and people really encouraged me to do presentations about this trip. I'd taken a bunch of slides and the father in the family that I visited, a guy named David Mitchell, was quite an accomplished photographer, so I had some slides that he had produced, which were really fine photographs. And I gave various public talks about Pakistan and this trip at the school, and at other venues when I was a kid, and that was a lot of fun.

Q: Okay, so you said you were already interested in anthropology. When you went to college, you went to University of Washington in Seattle.

KOENIG: Yeah. I should probably mention one other thing. A year and a half after that trip to Pakistan, I was an exchange student in a sort of solo exchange program. In the meantime, I had moved to a new school, Peninsula High School after my ninth-grade year with my family. We moved to Gig Harbor, another town near Tacoma. While there, I

was studying German and I was pretty good at it. I was selected to be the foreign exchange student in a sort of one-on-one exchange arrangement that we had with the Gymnasium in Mayen in Germany, which is a town about twenty-five miles west of Koblenz. So, I was on my own with a German family for six months. That was a very transformative experience as well. I went to the Gymnasium. I didn't actually produce classwork there, my German wasn't nearly good enough, but that also made a big difference. Even before I went to the University of Washington, I had already enrolled in community college classes in anthropology while I was in high school and drove into Tacoma to take them. And when I went to the University of Washington, I studied anthropology as my major and wrote a short thesis because I was in the honors program and that was required. I intended to become an academic anthropologist specializing in something like cultural anthropology, ethnography, social anthropology, the kind of social science element of anthropology, and got a lot of encouragement from my professors to do it.

My honors advisor was a guy named David Spain, a very good professor who I liked very much, and he really wanted me to sort of stick it out and become an academic anthropologist, but the economic circumstances and the situation in universities at the time was not conducive to that at all. So I began to look around for other jobs and one of my professors, a guy named Valentine Daniel and a couple of others said I should look at the foreign service. So I said, "okay, why not?" And I took the foreign service exam and I passed, took the oral, and I passed, and I was on the register and I was about to go in. This was when I was a senior in college at the University of Washington. But I had, in the meantime, met a woman who's now my spouse, and you know, I was not exactly a chick magnet. I really, really liked Natalie, I didn't want to end the relationship, and if I had joined the foreign service at that time, it would have been impossible to sustain it, so I decided to go to graduate school instead. So at that stage, I kind of curtailed my onboarding procedure with the foreign service, and I went to Johns Hopkins SAIS (School of Advanced International Studies) for two years and we had--Natalie and I had a long distance relationship during that time. She graduated from the University of Washington after one year, went to work in Seattle, and I did my two years at SAIS and graduated from there, took the test again, passed again, and got in after a year in 1984.

Q: And so when did you join? About August of '84? September?

KOENIG: Exactly, it was August, the 23rd class in the new order, which began in August 1984. We were a good group, quite diverse. It was at the time when the foreign service was expanding to include older recruits, so we had people in the class who were up to fifty years of age as they entered the foreign service. Some had come in through lateral arrangements, and then participated in the A-100 training course, having worked elsewhere in the federal government. But we had a few in that age group who were first time in the federal government and that was something that I think was very different from what had come before.

Q: Yeah, so you were still one of the youngest people in your class I would imagine.

KOENIG: I was twenty-five when I joined and I was among the youngsters. We had one guy who was twenty-two, he had just graduated from Harvard -- that's kind of classic -- but I was probably among the five youngest people in my class.

Q: Well, in that we share a lot because I was in the twenty-second class, and also came in from graduate school. I was twenty-four at the time, and we also had somebody from Harvard, who's still a friend of mine, who was about twenty-one or twenty-two when he joined. And we also had several older people, one woman in particular I'm quite certain was well above fifty and that didn't turn out particularly well; I think she didn't even complete her first overseas tour, which was a pity.

KOENIG: Yeah. I mean, some of the older, new officers in my class stayed on until their required retirement age. I'm pleased that the foreign service has evolved in that direction. It's kind of ironic, I don't think you get very many twenty-two-year-old or even twenty-five-year-old or twenty-four-year-old new foreign service officers any longer; it was a different generation.

Q: Yeah. That's an issue that Secretary Shultz actually talked about, that was a negative. He liked the idea that we would bring in people younger who would be acculturated in the foreign service and really embrace it as opposed to bringing in people with more experiences.

KOENIG: Yeah. I tend to agree. I think we need to mix it up a bit again. I'm not sure that we're on the wrong track with our current approach, but I participated in a small way in some of the discussions about the future of the foreign service that yielded all these proposals that came out around the time of the transition to the Biden administration. And one of the ideas that was very strongly supported by a lot of foreign service officers and retirees who were participating in that process, was the idea of carving out more space for younger foreign service officers to enter. I do think it would be a great idea. It had huge support, but it didn't make it into the final report, and I don't know exactly why.

Q: So when you joined then, in 1984, you were married. And tell me a little bit about what that was like; where you lived, what FSI (Foreign Service Institute) itself was like, it's not, it wasn't in the modern campus.

KOENIG: No, it sure wasn't. So I married Natalie, she's Greek-American, we got married in a Greek wedding that most of the attendees now regard as a kind of Big Fat Greek Wedding-type thing. You know, there are--we do have a lot of pictures of dancing from the wedding. And that was hugely important, that Greek angle actually came back a lot in the course of my career. She was working at the time at the Federal Home Loan Bank of Seattle which was a very busy place back then, when there was a whole different system of banking in the United States, especially with regard to savings and loans. But anyway, she dropped her career essentially in order to come with me to join the foreign service--not reluctantly, she was perfectly fine doing it. And we went to A-100, we lived in River Place, like a lot of other new recruits to the foreign service and others did. It had all been upgraded, so it was no longer bad, but the apartments were very small. It was,

however, very close to Rosslyn and all the facilities that we used. And I guess the--you know, that dispersed sort of office setting or office building arrangement for FSI was my experience of FSI for most of the time that I actually did anything at FSI. It was only in my last language training episode that I went to the new campus. There was no campus culture, I mean obviously there was no campus, people just grabbed food wherever they could. There was no cafeteria and I remember -- I guess we called it consul general, or--

Q: ConGen Rosslyn.

KOENIG: Consulate General Rosslyn, ConGen Rosslyn. ConGen Rosslyn was a really strange experience, but it was incredibly relevant to the work that I did. My first assignment was as a vice consul in Manila and everything you learned in ConGen Rosslyn and much more was needed to do that.

Q: Yeah, Rosslyn was a very different place back then and we had -- FSI had space in various leased office buildings. The main building was 1500 Key Boulevard, which then became known later on as Gold's Gym, because they opened a gym in the basement of it, which is I think still there.

KOENIG: Yeah, it was very strange that, you know of course it was more, it was less built up -- Rosslyn -- and Washington of course was a vastly smaller town back then. I remember the experience of bidding on your first assignment, you know, when you're actually just given direct assignments for entry level officers and/or junior officers as we called them back then. And I was really easily duped. So, they gave us a long list of potential places to bid on, and I waited to see my CDO (career development officer) who actually ended up helping me a lot about a year after this. And he said, "I noticed that you don't have Manila on your list." And I said, "Yeah, 'cause I don't really want to go to Manila." And he said, "Well why don't you just stick it on your list." So I did, and I was slammed into Manila immediately, which was actually just fine, but it was not something that I wanted to do.

Q: Well, I recall that when we joined, and I think you would have been in the same room, the coordinators were Glenn--

KOENIG: Kathy Peterson?

Q: --Monroe and Kathy Peterson. And at the back of the room, there was a table and it had all the post reports, which were in paper back then. And they had mostly blue covers, I think maybe some had yellow and they were all just sort of stacked up there. And you could, if you were interested in bidding on a post, you could read all about the post and the post report. And I do recall one that was kind of scary. It was a post where they said that there were so many insects and rodents that you had to hang your food in boxes. So, welcome to the foreign service, but Manila, Manila must have looked pretty good by that standard, at least.

KOENIG: Sure, by that standard. I think in our class, the people--the posts that people

felt bad for were people who got assigned to border posts in Mexico, you know, they had--

Q: Yes, I was assigned to Tijuana and it was not on my list.

KOENIG: Yeah. So the -- no, Manila was not that bad, but our arrival was, I think -- now you know -- really stuck in my mind because I had been to Pakistan, as I mentioned years before, but arriving in Manila, we arrived in the middle of the day, we were picked up by our sponsors. They had a driver, but their car was an AMC Pacer. I don't know if you remember the AMC Pacer--

Q: Oh I remember it.

KOENIG: One of the weirdest cars ever built, you know. It was like something from The Jetsons, and the front, it was a sort of hard top type design. So the front door was about ten feet long, and we got into that thing, and we're driving from Manila International Airport and we -- you know the surprising thing to me was how many fires were burning by the side of the road, I just was not prepared for that. So, we drive toward Seafront Compound, where we ended up living, and where they had the American club and a lot of facilities for the embassy, but also a lot of housing for the employees. And I just remember the kind of shock of all of the fires along the road and then when we got closer to the embassy itself, the embassy compound on Manila Bay, there were just phalanxes of riot police out there to protect the embassy from a planned demonstration. We arrived shortly after the killing of Benigno Aquino at the Manila International Airport and there was a lot of intense political turmoil in Manila, some of it was directed against the United States and there were pretty frequent demonstrations against the embassy.

Q: Now at that time, did we still have our extensive military facilities at Clark and Subic and--?

KOENIG: We did. And you know, that was a big factor in our relationship, but also we had, you know -- Manila was a very peculiar place because it was our largest colony from 1898 or so until the late 1940s, and the American colonial legacy and the burden of colonialism, I think, really was palpable there in ways that I would not have expected before I got there. After you had been there for a while, it was just part of the landscape. But it was very odd to be in this kind of post-colonial Philippine nation where the legacy of the United States and the presence of the United States were so overwhelming. I had not expected it. It affected our work a lot. I was working as a vice consul and you know, the pressure of the "visa mill" that we ran there was huge. It was interesting. We had a very colorful CG (consul general), his name was Vern McAninch. He was kind of notorious, but also had attracted a lot of attention because he had been so successful in some ways. So he had been the CG in Santo Domingo, in Mexico I believe, in Colombia, in Seoul, and now he was fairly late in his career - he was quite an older officer. He was the CG in Manila, and he came in and he solved a very serious public relations problem that we had had under his predecessor. Prior to Vern McAninch's arrival, we had not always cleared the line for NIV (non-immigrant visa) applicants during the day. You

know, applicants would come in, they would line up in the morning and many of them would go home having not been interviewed for their visas at the end of the day. And this was creating a massive public relations problem that was really serious in the Philippine press. So, he came in and I think he was quite a capable manager and he decided that we would see every applicant every day. We would manage to see them, and we did. And the situation improved a lot in terms of the image of the embassy, and its respect for the Filipinos and the people who were applying. Unfortunately, he was also terribly corrupt and he got caught.

Kind of an interesting sort of progression there. I was only in Manila for ten months, and it was just a fantastic group of mainly younger officers. We had twenty-seven officers in the consular section and you know, I was pretty much at the bottom of the whole scheme, along with a lot of others, there were probably fifteen or eighteen of us in the same boat.

The normal progression was you would do NIVs first, and then you would go over to IVs (immigrant visas) and both of them had their sort of magnificent elements. But then I had an opportunity to apply for the second position - there were two American positions - in the anti-fraud unit of the consular section. I got it, so I did like four months of NIV and four months of IV, and then I went over to the anti-fraud unit. I worked there with Joe Mussomeli. I don't know if you know Joe.

Q: Yeah.

KOENIG: He was an excellent officer. Yeah. And Joe was in charge of the anti-fraud unit, he stayed on after I left, but one of the great cases that they cracked while Joe was in charge, which we were beginning to work on while I was still there, was the case of Vern McAninch, the CG who was terribly corrupt. It was obvious that something screwy was going on. Every morning in his office, in the inbox on his secretary's desk, there was a stack of Taiwan passports about a foot high, and he would issue these without an interview, personally. So he was the CG issuing a ton of NIVs, and it turned out that these were not Taiwanese at all, but they were mainland Chinese applicants who had through corrupt arrangements obtained sort of fraudulent Taiwan passports, and then through a corrupt arrangement at the American embassy, obtained non-immigrant visas to visit the United States. And I don't know how many McAninch issued all together, several thousand I would say in the time that he was there. And there was an elaborate compensation scheme that was devised using high-stakes poker games and other things that enabled Vern McAninch to get compensated for this high-risk venture. Anyway, he was exposed. He was sort of -- the IG (inspector general) followed up on the original investigation that Joe and the anti-fraud unit had launched and McAninch was then asked to leave the foreign service. That was the extent of his punishment. And he did, and he then returned to the Philippines shortly thereafter to work for San Miguel Corporation. He didn't live very long after that. But that was a very strange experience. There were other fraud cases, there were a lot of fraud cases in the consular section that I know of, regrettably. But--

Q: So you mean fraud or corruption among the American staff or--

KOENIG: No, I don't know that there were any other corrupt Americans there during that time, only Vern MacAninch, I believe. But Filipino employees were sometimes suborned and then there was the bigger issue just of the constant misrepresentation and fraudulent applicants and others who were engaged in business with -- from the outside -- with the consular section, it was kind of a mess. It was a strange window into Philippine society. But Vern MacAninch also gave all of us a lot of opportunities. He used to drive around in a huge, kind of gold metallic Mercedes, and he wore massive gold jewelry and designer barongs (a type of Philippine formal shirt). He used to wear Pierre Cardin, I think, barong tagalogs. So they were sharp; he was not a very sharp looking man, but obviously looked very prosperous. And he used to -- I used to go along with him on various things.

Then MacAninch sent Natalie and me out one time to represent him in a remote part of Luzon, way down in Bicol where they were having a large celebration of Philippine-American Friendship Day because in this particular town, Nabua, there was a pretty substantial number of retired Filipinos who had worked in the U.S. Navy. And on that visit -- it was very strange. The area was contested by the New People's Army, the main leftist insurgent group in the Philippines, which was very active during these years. So there were a lot of roadblocks and other things, but even so, Natalie and I were put in a convertible, and we did a kind of hand-waving tour of the villages and the countryside around Nabua in honor of Philippine-American Friendship Day. It was really surreal. After the end of the Marcos regime, the holiday itself was canceled. So there is no longer a holiday on the 4th of July called Philippine-American Friendship Day.

Q: Well, that was a real foreign service experience. Getting back to your time in the anti-fraud unit, so you were working for the same consul general, correct?

KOENIG: Yes. And you know, this did not evolve much before I left, so I wasn't really deeply involved in what was done. But it was very awkward and I think that my guess is that Joe was onto it even before I joined the anti-fraud unit. He was handling it mostly on his own. But the perception that something was seriously wrong was very strong. The front office -- you know, we had a large embassy and the consular section was in a separate office building. Vern MacAninch would take people along to the country team meeting and was, in many ways, a fairly decent manager. And he was running a very large operation, needless to say, there in Manila and in many of the other posts that he'd been assigned to. And he would take us along to the country team meetings, the ones that were large, once a week that were held in the chancery, and it was very strange to see him interact with the rest of the country team because he was very fond of the Marcoses. And he, I believe, was the -- I don't know if you have any reason to know this, but there was a big story late in the Marcos regime about a senior American official who was videotaped dancing in Bermuda shorts on a yacht with Imelda Marcos. I'm quite sure that was Vern MacAninch. He would, when the discussion was underway between Steve Bosworth (who was our ambassador) and Bob Rich (who was the deputy chief of mission, DCM) and others in this setting -- and I was always a backseater so I was not at the table -- Vern MacAninch was the one who would always speak up on behalf of the Marcoses in these meetings. And he was even in the newspapers occasionally. He was also in the

newspapers a lot because of his flamboyant tabloid affair with the “Barbara Streisand of the Philippines”, Pilita Corrales. But he was also in the newspapers as a big fan of the Marcoses and -- it was that, I think more than anything else, that toward the end of his time in the Philippines changed the front office's attitude toward him. He became a political thorn in the side of the front office. But before that, because of his ability to manage operations in the consular section, they were very happy with him.

Q: Well, yeah, I had, again, fairly similar experiences with some very strange goings on at Consulate General Tijuana, where we had a big program called the Stateside Criteria Program, which allowed people who were in the U.S. illegally, who were being -- who had petitions for them to have immigrant visas were allowed to go to these border posts, and even if they were found ineligible, even if they were committing fraud, were still allowed back into the United States.

KOENIG: Yeah, we had you know -- I'll mention one other experience at Manila because it was so characteristic of a different time in the foreign service, of a different time in American society, and this is how it kind of interacted with the Philippines. You know in much of our work, what we were dealing with in the Philippines was kind of -- what would you call them? -- transactional sexual arrangements between Americans and Filipinos, mainly women. And that, that was just a constant thing. I mean, that transaction is not illegal, so if that's what's happening, it's fine, but it's very strange. However, one time in Manila, we had a fellow, a very, I think, affluent businessman from Texas come and, you know Vern McAninch cultivated this image of being a little bit like John Wayne. In fact, I think he had even met John Wayne early in his career. You know, he had been a courier, I think, at the outset of his diplomatic career and everything. So he was kind of a real man's man, also a very big guy. Anyway, so this Texan comes accompanying a young woman who wants to get a visa for employment in the United States as the caregiver for his wife. So, she's just incredibly good looking. The Filipina applicant has no substantial qualifications, but speaks English perfectly and is interviewed by one of the few African-American line officers that we had -- I think we had two -- and she's turned down for her visa. So this guy immediately contacts the consular section and gets an interview with this line officer's supervisor, who happens to be an African-American woman. I mean, this was just a very unusual circumstance at the American embassy at that time.

So, this woman, the sort of NIV line supervisor, also turns her down. So, then the Texan asked to see another person and he's given permission to see another person. So he sees that line supervisor's supervisor, the NIV unit chief who's African-American as well. And this African-American man turns her down. So, what does Vern McAninch do? He now gets this problem directly on his desk. This Texan is trying to pull strings back in the U.S., in Congress, and strangely to my mind, instead of just backing up the officers who have consistently turned her down, McAninch decides to convene a panel of three or four white junior officers like me who rendered judgment on her case. And it's only when we do it, that this man from Texas is willing to accept that he's not going to get the visa. And there's kind of a nice postscript to this - she showed up for a fiance visa about six months later, so we were all right. [Laughing] She was not going to be his employee, at least not in the same sense as we were asked to sort of make the arrangement. Very, very typical,

unfortunately.

Q: So now you're -- did you have an 18-month tour there as was the norm, or two years?

KOENIG: Yeah. It was intended to be an 18-month tour and I mentioned earlier that, you know, my CDO had railroaded me in a way, into Manila right away, as soon as I put up my bid list. Anyway, I got a call from my CDO in the middle of the night, one night, this was around maybe the beginning of September 1985, saying "Hey, would you like to go to East Berlin right away?" So, I said, "Of course, absolutely yes." And it's sort of an interesting situation. My predecessor -- the person who had been assigned to that job, Tom Countryman who I think we all know, had married a Yugoslav national. At that time, you were not allowed to take any assignments in the east bloc if you were married to sort of -- someone from the east bloc. So his assignment was canceled and it was canceled at the last minute. They needed somebody right away, so Natalie and I got on a plane and basically moved directly from Manila to East Berlin, and arrived in East Berlin probably ten days after that. And you know, to be honest, East Berlin after Manila looked sort of like Paris. It was much more developed than Manila was.

Q: Food was a lot worse though, I'll bet.

KOENIG: It was. You know, I kind of like German food, but East German food was not the best German food and it was a very peculiar situation. We used to eat quite often at what was called the CD Club, which was a diplomatic club that was set up by the East Germans. They operated a large organization that provided services to embassies, with personnel who were employed by the East German government themselves and most of whom, or all of whom had to report to the Stasi secret police. Some of whom I think actually were full time employees of the Stasi. And another one of the facilities that they provided was the CD Club, which served lunch. And we used to go there quite often, but it was actually faster to cross the Berlin Wall and grab a lunch, quite a nice lunch in West Berlin, and come back to your office than it was to eat almost anywhere in East Berlin. It just -- if you sat down for any meal in East Berlin, it would always take you at least an hour and a half to get your food and stuff. Not that it was bad food or scarce food -- but -- it wasn't exactly what you would call slow food in the modern sense, but it arrived slowly.

Q: And so was the chancery that you worked at on Neustädtische Kirchstraße?

KOENIG: Yeah, it was. That was -- I think that was the original building that we occupied when we opened our embassy in East Berlin in the late 1970s. And it had been remodeled and it was an old Prussian officer's club that was quite adequate for our needs as an embassy in East Berlin. And you know, my office was on the third floor where the executive office also was; the political section was on the third floor. And actually, you know, I was in an office in that same building, not more than 40 feet away from my old office, when I went back as DCM in 2006. But at that earlier time I was a second secretary in the political section and the political section was rather large, I guess, by current standards. We probably had five offices in it; I was the junior officer and did

mainly external reporting.

Q: And did you travel much in East Germany in that role?

KOENIG: Yeah, we did quite a bit because one of the things that we tried to obtain that was very hard to get in East Germany was sort of man-on-the-street information - what were people thinking and saying? So my German was very good and another junior officer in my section was actually a German-American whose parents were born in Germany. And we would travel together sometimes and kind of just be young travelers in East Germany, talking to anybody who would talk to us, so that was quite a useful thing to do. We went to various parts of the GDR (the German Democratic Republic) -- north and south of East Berlin -- and would run into students. You know a lot of times we would visit college towns and you would run into a lot of young people there. These were just normal East Germans, and you'd just see them in cafes and you'd sit down together, because that was the kind of classic thing that they did there. They would seat you with other people, it was very standard. They would not let -- if a table had like one or two people at it, they would put another two people at it who didn't know them. So it was a very easy way to meet people and just start talking and they would never suspect we were from the American embassy. You know, it took a while before they would say, "Well, where are you from?" So it was interesting.

Q: And how did you travel?

KOENIG: By train, mostly. The infrastructure was quite adequate for East Germany, you know, especially the trains. You know, the Trabant and everything on the Autobahn and on the roads were another story, but the train system was basically what they had inherited from Germany before and it was easy to get around. You know, it's a small place, East Germany. So you could go anywhere, to Greifswald up on the Baltic Sea, down to Thuringia or Dresden, Meissen.

Q: And so you didn't have to request any kind of permission to travel, then?

KOENIG: No, you did not, which was a real luxury. It was not as restrictive as that, so you could just go, and you didn't even have to request official appointments when you were traveling. They followed you there all the time. I mean, this was the Cold War -- the closer you got to anything sensitive, including the borders, the more obvious it was that you were being tailed. And by the time you got to the border, or an area that was adjacent to the border, they would tail you visibly, they wanted you to know that you were being followed. So they would take your picture with those little micro cameras that they'd stuff into a men's handbag and that kind of stuff. And they would -- sometimes -- you'd walk around the corner, you know, you were being tailed by somebody and you would go off and look at something and then you'd come back and they'd be right in your face. It was just a little bit heavy-handed when you would get outside of the big cities and Berlin. They wanted you to know that you were being followed.

Q: And so -- how did this affect your ability to talk to the man on the street as it were?

When -- did people notice this and did they recoil or?

KOENIG: No, I don't think they noticed it so much. You know, if they didn't think foreigners were around them, they probably were not particularly on guard against being overheard, and they weren't doing anything suspect. You know, they were in a place where they were supposed to be, doing things that they were supposed to be doing, you know, having a coffee when you were a student in Greifswald, for example. So there was no issue. They would -- it was just a peculiar thing when you would have a conversation with them and they would realize after five or ten minutes that no, you're probably not from Dresden or whatever it is. You're some foreigner. Often they would think we were Swedish or some other nationality that was more commonly encountered in these places. But I never tried to obscure who I was; if they asked me, I would say, I'm an American, I work at the American embassy and then they would clam up. I mean, apart from the people who sought contact with the American embassy - this was an entirely different kind of person - but a typical person would not want to be in that position, talking to an American diplomat.

Q: What else was going on in those days in terms of U.S. and East German relations?

KOENIG: Well, one of the things that Natalie and I got somewhat involved in was the investigation, or the efforts to uncover the role of the Libyan People's Bureau in the organization of a terrorist attack that occurred in 1986, in West Berlin at the La Belle disco. So, the La Belle disco was a discotheque in West Berlin that was frequented by American service members - and kind of their dates and others, and it was bombed in a terrorist attack, and I think two Americans were killed and one German woman of Turkish extraction was killed and others were injured. We believed that the Libyan People's Bureau in East Berlin had been involved in the attack.

And so Natalie and I got involved -- our upstairs neighbor was an employee of the Libyan People's Bureau. We lived in a diplomatic apartment building, most of which were concentrated in two different parts of East Berlin. And we were in the newer diplomatic housing complex, which was further out of town. And there were -- this is where they were building, for example, the Syrian Embassy and other facilities for countries that were friendly with the East German regime. And one of those was the Libyan People's Bureau. So, our upstairs neighbor was an employee of the Libyan People's Bureau. And, you know, through various means, we ascertained that he was in fact directly involved in the plotting of this attack. And he was, I think, among those who were charged when it did go to court in West Berlin, and there was a conviction. It was eventually demonstrated legally that the Libyan People's Bureau had been responsible. But as a consequence of all of this, that was also the reason why the United States, during the Reagan administration, launched the famous bombing raid on Tripoli that attempted to strike Gaddafi's compound. And, of course, Gaddafi was not injured and I think the jury is still out on whether or not his daughter was killed in that attack, but it was a really tense time.

Q: All right. Are there other things you'd like to talk about in terms of life in East Berlin,

maybe things that you and Natalie might've done or enjoyed doing while you were there?

KOENIG: Sure, I'll tell you about one other incident that's kind of interesting. You may recall that there was a big disinformation campaign launched by the Soviets around 1982-83 that the AIDS virus had been developed at Fort Detrick in Maryland. And the KGB clearly was in charge of this initially, but it sort of grew and then receded, and then suddenly it was big in the news again being put forward by an East German scientist, a guy named Jakob Segal. And I got a call, or maybe it was a cable, I don't recall, to go see Segal in East Berlin. He had attended the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Harare, in Zimbabwe, and had distributed there a report that he claimed demonstrated that the HIV AIDS virus had been developed at Fort Detrick in Maryland.

We had not been able to obtain a copy of the report through other means up until that time, the U.S. government that is, so we wanted to get a copy of this report and we also wanted to just kind of size up this guy, Jakob Segal. So, I went off, I just picked up the phone and I called the Segals. I don't know how I got their phone number, I don't remember. And the phone I think was picked up by his wife, Lilli Segal. She said, "Okay, come on over for coffee." So I went over to see the Segals, they lived in an apartment above Alexanderplatz, in a high rise building. He was a professor of biochemistry, I believe, at Humboldt University and he had a long history with the Communist Party in both East Germany and in the Soviet Union.

He was a German ethnic Jew, but he was not a -- I don't think a German citizen when he was born and Lilli Segal was the same. And they were in their, like their eighties when we met, or it was the late seventies -- eighties, I think. Anyway, I go over there. And I, you know -- we have some small talk. For some reason she says, "Are you a Quaker?" I said, "No." She said, "Well, you seem like a Quaker to me." And you know -- it was very bizarre. I mean, she said many of these things to me, and then she subsequently reported them to the Stasi, so they're also reported in the Stasi documents -- that I seemed like a Quaker. And so I asked about this AIDS paper, and it was all extremely friendly. They shared all sorts of observations about traveling in Africa and Cuba and everything about their lives as they had moved around to Moscow for many years, and then back to East Berlin, and everything -- very, very friendly, very strange. So she said -- I asked for the report -- she said I'd have to get it, I think, on another appointment. So I came back and I later met with them at a restaurant, but when I went to the restaurant, I think I also had a colleague along at that time from the political section, Greg Sanford, who was a very good officer, who did mainly domestic matters, and then they brought another person, too, who I think was -- directly worked with the Stasi. And it was a little more awkward, but we got a copy of the report and we managed to get it back to Washington, DC.

Later, this episode had a strange afterlife, it went on to become part of the lore of the AIDS-from-Fort Detrick story. Based on the Stasi files, there was a lot of speculation about who J Koenig from the American embassy was in East Berlin, that I was not aware of, but this was all being discussed by people who study these things. There was a researcher at the Spy Museum in Washington, DC who determined that I did not actually exist, that there was no John Koenig, that I was a plant put in there by the Stasi -- so a

German -- because the Stasi were so exasperated with Jakob Segal because he was continuing to press his story of AIDS developed at Fort Detrick when the KGB no longer wanted it to be out there so much. And so the researcher's argument was that I was a Stasi agent who was just trying to entrap the Segals. I was finally approached via email about ten years ago, while serving as ambassador in Cyprus, by another researcher, who said "No, I'm not buying that John Koenig doesn't actually exist. I noticed that there's a John Koenig in the foreign service." So he called me and I said, "Yeah, I'm the guy, I was not a Stasi officer and this is what happened." And it had also been reported to the Stasi by Lilli Segal. So the reports from me and the Stasi files lined up and then, you know, it all turned out just fine. The second researcher published the story in a scholarly article called "Disinformation Squared."

Q: But did you ever get a sense of where he had come up with this? I mean, somebody planted it or did, was he just like a nut?

KOENIG: Oh, the guy from the Spy Museum, you mean?

Q: No, no, I mean Segal himself.

KOENIG: Oh, Segal! No, no, no, he had gotten a lot of the material from the KGB. And then he had also concluded, I think, on his own, based on his assessment of how likely it was that HIV AIDS had been transmitted from monkeys to humans. What he was focused on was the impossibility of the monkey-to-human transfer of the virus. He just refused to believe it, this green monkey story. So his -- the things that he put out mostly were focused on the weakness of the green monkey story. The sort of very, very random assessment that because AIDS broke out both in Africa and then in the United States, that the Americans had planted it in Africa and then it had somehow gotten to the United States. And he was clearly -- I mean, there had been for a long time a lot of speculation fueled by, among others, the KGB and the east bloc about Fort Detrick, that Fort Detrick was always up to some nasty biological warfare experiments.

Q: So he was just a convenient person to feed this information to because he also had his own theory.

KOENIG: Yeah, he was. He had, he believed in the theory, I think that was why, allegedly, the Stasi got so impatient with him. They didn't want anybody to be involved in this who really believed it, that was very inconvenient.

Q: Okay, and how much time did you spend going over to the west when you were in East Berlin? Did you spend much time there over at the U.S. military facilities and you know, other things?

KOENIG: Of course, yes, we did. And we did shopping at Truman Plaza for example, which was the shopping center for the U.S. military in the West. So, we did a lot of that and we also used the other allied facilities that were in West Berlin you know, French and British. We rode on the British resupply train to Braunschweig, that kind of stuff, but we

were -- there was a kind of hermetic seal between the embassy in East Berlin and the U.S. mission in West Berlin. There was -- it was very important to us and our Berlinery -- the official Berlin status philosophy - that we preserve a real distinction or basically a no-contact policy, virtually, between them, the mission in West Berlin and the embassy in East Berlin. It's not true that there was no contact at all, but the idea was that they were completely separate and that our embassy in East Berlin was very inconveniently located because that was not actually part of East Germany. East Berlin was part of the four-power arrangements in Berlin and therefore we didn't really accept that the diplomatic missions to the GDR were located in this place. So we had a lot of strange nomenclature arrangements about defining what we actually were and we were just called Embassy Berlin and not East Berlin. And we were very careful in speaking with the public in defining what we were up to in this location.

One thing that we did -- diplomats very frequently crossed between East and West Berlin, it was very easy. We didn't use the -- we didn't usually go through Checkpoint Charlie. We went through Bornholmer Straße, which was the -- kind of coincidentally the crossing point that was the first to open in 1989 when they opened the crossing points. So we were at Bornholmer Straße and you could get across very quickly.

One of the most interesting things about Berlin was that the Stasi had absolutely saturated West Berlin with agents. They were totally on top of West Berlin. And so one time my boss, Frank Meehan, the ambassador -- who was a devout Catholic and a very interesting guy, a fascinating man, and a nice man -- he had befriended the parish priest in Pankow, in the neighborhood where he lived and this parish priest like other clergy in East Germany could travel quite freely to the West, but they couldn't bring very much back. So, I got a call late one afternoon from Frank Meehan, "Come up to my office, got a little task for you." So he said, "You know, this priest -- Father Michael let's say -- just came back from a visit to West Germany for a conference and he had -- he has a couple of books that he would like you to pick up for him, and you can deliver them to me and I'll get them to him" - because they would have been banned by the GDR border authorities at the crossing point. I said, "Okay," so I get in the car. He gave me two addresses to go to. So I get in my car, drive over to West Berlin, and go first to a convent there. I pick up a massive box of key chains that are sort of promotional material for the church. And then I go onto the second address, and I also encountered nuns there. I don't remember very much about it. And I got a second massive box. So I've got these two enormous boxes in my trunk. And by this time it's late, it's taken forever, you know, I go see these nuns, they insist you must have a coffee, this kind of stuff.

So anyway, it's really late. It's dark. I get back to East Berlin and it's too late for me to go to the ambassador's or to the embassy to drop off my loot. So I just park in front of our apartment building in East Berlin and you know, just say, "Okay, I'll deliver all this stuff tomorrow to the ambassador's office in the embassy." Next morning, Natalie and I, (she also worked in the embassy), we go down, get in the car, drive down to the embassy, park the car, and I try to pop open the trunk. But overnight, the policemen who stand outside our apartment building door had cut the cable that connects the opening lever inside the car to the trunk.

It was just one of those things they did to make sure that I knew that even when I'm in West Berlin, they were following me everywhere I went, and they knew exactly what I was doing, and this was the constant message of the Stasi: "We know exactly what you're doing." They would come into your apartment, smoke a cigarette and sort of put it out, leave it in an ashtray so that you could smell it when you got back. They would take your refrigerator magnets and rearrange them and this is what they did to everybody. But if they thought you were doing something sensitive -- and that was much more Greg Sanford who covered domestic affairs, mainly the church but also other dissident organizations -- then they would turn up the heat. So, in the case of Greg, he had two small daughters and he lived in a separate house and not an apartment, but the Stasi had keys to everybody's house. They had a room in the basement that they said they needed to have -- only they were allowed to have the keys to that room -- it was purportedly for HVAC purposes or something. And anyway, one day the Sanford family came back to their house and the Sanford girls' dolls had been bound with string and they had blindfolds over their eyes. And, you know, the embassy would then file a diplomatic note: "This is clearly weird, we want to find out what's happened." And the GDR authorities blamed some sort of delinquent youth in the neighborhood. So it was a complete joke, but it was intended as political, sort of psychological intimidation. And I don't know how much it worked, but they invested quite a bit in it.

Q: Well, we served in Havana and we were told, I don't know what the source of this was -- we were told that the Cuban Ministry of the Interior, which was the equivalent, had literally thousands of people working full-time to monitor us. And then we, we each probably had multiple people whose sole job it was, was to keep tabs on what we were doing.

KOENIG: Yeah. I mean, they did all of the normal things like bugging everything. So we had -- every diplomatic apartment building had an apartment on the ground floor, which didn't have a name on the nameplate, and nobody was ever seen going in and out of there. But that was obviously where they just stored the recording equipment so that they could keep track of everybody who was in the building. And you know, it was in part, it was one of the causes of their downfall, of course, their ridiculous investment in all this excessive monitoring that they did. But regrettably with the advance of technology it's no longer such a drag on economies any longer. But back then, it was a very labor-intensive business.

Q: John, you mentioned that they had an organization that provided service to diplomats and ran the club where you ate lunch sometimes. Were they also supplying German labor to the embassy staff?

KOENIG: Yes. All the Germans who worked in the embassy worked for this organization called the Dienstleistungsamt (Services Bureau) and they all consequently, essentially lost their jobs when the Wall came down. And many of them were nice people, you know. It was funny when I went back to Berlin in 2006, some of the people that I reconnected with were former employees of the Dienstleistungsamt. Every job that was

done by an East German in the old embassy was performed by somebody who worked for this organization, and they all automatically needed to report everything that was of interest to the Stasi, to the Stasi. One of the assistants in the consular section was a very nice guy and I reconnected with him after I got back. I'd never worked in the consular section when I was in East Germany, but I knew him. He had moved to Bautzen, which was of course notorious during the East German time because it was the site of the main political prison in East Germany, the Bautzner Loch (Bautzen Hole).

And he was a nice guy. I mean, and the drivers, for example, we connected with a lot of the drivers. You know, it was funny because there was quite a nice atmosphere - working atmosphere - that existed between these East Germans who worked for the Dienstleistungsamt and the Americans who worked in the embassy, and the large number of third country nationals (TCNs), many of whom stayed on and were still working at the U.S. embassy when I moved back as DCM. So, you know, clearly they were reporting to the Stasi; I don't hold it against them. They had no other way to do this work, which was kind of interesting work, desirable work in East Germany and, you know, I don't have a grudge against people who worked for the Dienstleistungsamt in any way. Many of them were excellent employees, even if they were reporting on us in their after-hours lives.

Q: And how is it that you also had non-German personnel who worked for the embassy, who I believe actually lived in west Berlin?

KOENIG: They did. We were able to arrange permits for them to work in our embassy in East Berlin and we had a large number of them. Most of our more sensitive positions for locally engaged staff were occupied by these third country nationals. The majority were British. I mean, that was partly because their English was so good and they were just -- it was a very large number of British expats who lived in Berlin back then. But we also had Austrians, we had Israelis. I would say a quarter of the ones that I knew in Berlin between '85 and '87 were still working at the embassy when I got back between 2006 and 2009. And you know, a lot of them worked in various parts of the management section.

Q: Yes. I had several working for me in 1996. When I arrived, it had been a very traumatic period because after the fall of the Wall, I believe basically all of the staff were terminated officially. And then some were rehired with a break in service for I'm sure technical reasons to make sure that they didn't have a claim on extra pensions or something like that.

KOENIG: Yeah. I mean, we did need to be careful about that, but it was interesting, too. It was a real positive for me that we had this large pool of third country nationals working in the embassy in East Berlin, because they were very connected for the most part with life in West Berlin in a way that we were not. So there was one guy, he was our cashier, he was a transvestite performer in one of the famous transvestite clubs in West Berlin. We had no problem with that. I have to say I'm somewhat pleased to know that the U.S. government, even back in the mid-1980s, did not object that our cashier was a performing transvestite in West Berlin. In many ways, we were much more prudish and squeamish back then, but not in that way. We had a really good group of third country nationals

working at the embassy. And I think from my perception, a large number of them made the transition that you described and got back on when we ramped up to open the embassy in Berlin, unified Berlin.

Q: Well, as I say in 1996, I probably had five or six of them working in the -- in the management section. I was what was then called the administrative officer of our team in Berlin, which at that time was not a consulate, but we were part of the embassy. It was the U.S. embassy.

KOENIG: Yeah. Great. Anyway, that kind of wraps up Berlin. That was a really interesting assignment for me. I made a lot of friends there among the American officers who were working. Some of my best friends from the foreign service came from that assignment. Frank Meehan recommended me to work in the operations center when I came out of that assignment so I went to work at the operations center between 1987 and '88.

Q: Now I, as I recall, this was, this was a job that required -- it was sort of a psychology experiment as well as a career thing where you had to keep rotating your schedule, you worked the night shift and the day shift, the evening shift.

KOENIG: Yeah, it was, we had a rotation of two days, another two days, then two more days, and then you'd have like four days off, something like that. I just loved that. I mean, I ended up writing an article for the Foreign Service Journal about this life. I actually thrived on it. We didn't have kids at the time, that made a huge difference. Natalie was working at the Brookings Institution in DC at the time -- I was young and I just loved it. So I had no difficulty whatsoever with that rotation. I understand how it's been more carefully studied in various occupations, and it's supposed to be disastrous for the people who are involved, but for one year it worked fine for me. And I used to really enjoy ending the overnight shift and then walking home. We lived in upper Northwest, on Connecticut Avenue, up by Politics and Prose and that kind of stuff.

And it was just, you know, for the six or eight months of the year that the weather is just delightful in Washington, DC. It was just a fantastic arrangement to walk from the State Department up to our place there; and sometimes I would take little detours and go to Georgetown or something. You just kind of lived taking advantage of the time when nothing was busy. You know, nobody else was doing anything like this at that time of day. There was a travel bookstore in Georgetown at the time. You know, the thing that no longer exists anywhere in the world, a travel bookstore. And they used to have contests, I mean, if you could answer five questions correctly, you would get like 75% off of any book. You could only do it once a week when they would change the questions.

I probably got 75% off of 30 books at that bookstore. I would just go in there once a week; I was a real geography nerd. It'd be five questions that I could reel off very easily and I would take that book home. That was kind of the way I spent my days after I got off the watch. The beauty of it was because you had no continuing responsibilities when you weren't on shift, you could just drop your work as soon as you walked out the door. And

there was nothing hanging over you whatsoever. The least stressful job I've ever had anywhere, doing anything, was working in the operations center.

Q: Interesting, but you must have had moments though, when things were heating up somewhere in the world and you needed, under great pressure, to connect calls or take notes -- must've been a little bit of pressure or stress there.

KOENIG: Yeah, there's pressure on a busy shift -- there was pressure when you were sitting on the watch. And there would probably be about an hour after you finished your watch, where you were engaged in different things -- responsibilities -- but after that you had no responsibilities. You know, the stress for me is not pressure. The stress for me is anxiety. So I'm always very anxious about what I'm not actually doing at the time, rather than that sort of intensity of working.

Q: Got it.

KOENIG: Yeah, so we didn't have -- it was not a terribly eventful time that I was on the watch, but I met a lot of people there. There were a lot of great officers who worked there. It was the first time I worked with Nick Burns, for example, who became a kind of mentor for me and I stayed with for quite a while in the foreign service working for him. It's where I met Phil Zelikow who was perhaps the most determined to know more than we were really able to know on the watch. You know, it's very much governed by need-to-know there, so they don't really want you to be asking a ton of questions and taking up people's time. But he was kind of the most gründlich (thorough) of all the wo-eds (watch officer/editors).

Q: Interesting, and so then how did it happen that you went to your next assignment, which was as a staff assistant?

KOENIG: I wanted to work in Asia. When I was in graduate school at Johns Hopkins, I had done Chinese and Asian studies and a thing called comparative politics and modernization. So, I expected to spend my career in Asia, which obviously did not happen. But, you know, there were various seventh floor staff jobs, which were considered the most desirable when you left the operations center, but I didn't get those. I think I applied for several, I don't recall particularly well any longer, but I know I tried. And so then my next option was to go to a geographic bureau and I went to EAP (East Asian and Pacific Affairs). I actually succeeded Toria Nuland as staff assistant in EAP at the time. She later was my boss in NATO. And it was Gaston Sigur at the time who was the assistant secretary. He was a little bit of an outsider, a professor. And we had a really impressive set of deputy assistant secretaries, a really amazing group of officers who occupied the rest of the front office suite there. And then Matt Daly was the special assistant and I was one of the two staff assistants. And you know, it was basically just a paper job. You're just chasing paper all the time and that was the extent of the work, but I got to know a lot of people there. It was a lot of fun.

Q: Good for building connections. And still no children at this point?

KOENIG: Our first child, Ted, was born after I left EAP, when I was wrapping up Indonesian language training. So Ted was born in May of 1990. I left the EAP staff assistant job in July 1989.

Q: Okay. So obviously you were well positioned as a staff assistant to get an overseas assignment somewhere in the East Asia Pacific bureau. And you did that. How did that come about?

KOENIG: Fine. I should probably tell one little anecdote that's kind of funny about my time as a staff assistant. We used to go -- I don't know if this is still done, but at that time, every assistant secretary who attended the General Assembly of the UN in New York in September, would get to take up a staff crew. So I was Gaston Sigur's staff, sort of a grunt, and then we had Matt Daley there and then the DASs would rotate in and out. And Gaston Sigur was there for all the meetings that he had to attend that were generally between the secretary and his counterparts, or the president.

Anyway, I went up to New York and I was not very good at that job in some respects, so I hadn't done any real planning. I just kind of showed up in New York and hadn't been in touch with the staff or any of the other people that I should have been talking to, I realize now. And I didn't have any transportation arrangements for Dr. Sigur at all. So, I would get these notices that Dr. Sigur was supposed to be included in meetings for the secretary, but I had not gotten him a seat in any of the vehicles in the motorcades and he also didn't have a vehicle. It's not easy to find a car to rent in New York if you start looking during the second week of the General Assembly. So, I don't know, I guess I just opened the phone book, obviously we didn't have the internet back then. I opened the phone book, and found places where we could get a car. The only car available was a white stretch Cadillac. So, I rented it. It came with a chauffeur, probably came with champagne in the back too, I don't know. Anyway, Gaston Sigur has to go off to, let's say, a meeting with Secretary Shultz and, like President Reagan and the prime minister of Japan, and they integrated the stretch white limousine into the motorcade. So Gaston Sigur goes off and Gaston Sigur comes back. All seems fine. Then, within like an hour, there was an admin notice that went out throughout the department about the use of luxury vehicles, and Dr. Sigur's white stretch limousine was banned forevermore from every other motorcade move during the General Assembly.

Q: Oh, that's a great story.

KOENIG: Yeah, I mean I screwed up so many times in my career, it's amazing that I made it.

Q: So what was, what was his reaction?

KOENIG: Well, I mean, he was quite a philosophical and fun guy. So his reaction was okay, but, you know, you had the secretary riding in like a Grand Torino and then, you know, this thirty-foot-long car pulls up behind him. It was pretty funny.

Q: I had to put myself on mute I was laughing so hard.

KOENIG: Yeah. So, I mean, it was -- I thought I did a fairly good job of, you know, working out an arrangement in a pinch, but obviously it would have been better for Gaston not to make --

Q: No, it could have really, it could have really enhanced his rap. You know, he might've viewed that as a triumph, you know?

KOENIG: Exactly.

Q: Maybe ADST should do a story or an article just excerpting people's stories about limousines and riding around in motorcades, cause I'm sure there's a lot. I did an oral history and I have a story about riding around in motorcades through downtown Jordan, downtown Amman, Jordan.

KOENIG: No, I think it'd be a good one. I think it would be one of the most read, because it's usually among the most humorous, you know. So after that I looked at the jobs that were available in East Asia, I didn't -- or maybe I wasn't even eligible to apply at that stage, I'm not sure, for the jobs that looked interesting in China and Japan. You know, that bureau is focused mostly on just China, Japan, and Korea, especially back then. So I decided to bid on Jakarta, which was a very good job for a person in my position, and I got it and I hugely enjoyed that job, it was fantastic. So I went via language training in Bahasa Indonesia at FSI, which at that time was still in Rosslyn, and I still remember the teachers extremely well. It was a great language training experience for me. I was initially in a group of about five officers who were starting afresh -- with no background on Bahasa Indonesia. And after like a month, I was given a private tutorial because I was better at this language than the other students in the class. So for the rest of my time there, which was like another eight months or ten months, I just had one-on-one sessions with FSI language instructors Pak Andang, Bu Jijis and Bu Antje every day for like five hours. And my Indonesian got really good. I've now forgotten it, but I was reading everything, writing pretty well, and I got a 4-4 plus after, whatever, ten months. And it was an easy language to learn by the way, I don't mean to mislead people. It's not like you became a fluent speaker of Mandarin in ten months, but it was a fantastic language learning experience. And I really, really felt lucky, and it paid off a lot in my work in Indonesia.

Q: And so do you want to talk about that now?

KOENIG: What time is it? Why don't we, why don't we call it quits for today?

Q: All right, it's the second interview with John Koenig, and I'm Jay Anania. The date is April the 3rd, and when last we spoke, John, you were talking about the positive

experience you had at FSI before going off to Indonesia, to Embassy Jakarta. So where were you family-wise at that stage? When you were studying almost a year in DC, what was going on?

KOENIG: That's interesting you ask, because I wanted to take it up there. That was when we had our first child. Ted, Theodore, was born in DC. And that was in May of 1990. And you know, Natalie had left work just like the day before Ted was born, which was a little surprising at Brookings. And then we began to prepare immediately. We already knew about our onward assignment, obviously. I was in language training. So, we began to prepare to move to Jakarta, and I was getting a lot of pressure, strangely, from the political counselor in Jakarta, to get out there right away. My predecessor had left a little while before and so the job was vacant and then the political counselor was also leaving. In fact, he ended up leaving before we arrived, but he wanted us to get there so fast.

Natalie is from a Greek Orthodox family and I subsequently converted, so we wanted to have Ted baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church with his family in Bellingham, Washington. The political counselor at Embassy Jakarta didn't like that, so he actively went out looking for alternatives for us that would enable us to make the move faster. The baptism was going to delay our arrival in Indonesia, like two months, so we would get there in July. He thought that it would be better to bring Ted out there, like just a few weeks old, and he could be baptized by a Greek Orthodox priest in Indonesia. But Greek Orthodoxy is illegal in Indonesia, so the only Greek Orthodox priest was a human rights case. That's how the embassy knew about him, and it would've had to be done in secret. So that was not a really appealing alternative, and I just kind of ignored that. In Indonesia, I mean, strangely, they claimed at the time, and I think they still do, to be very accommodating to religious freedom. But in Christianity, for example, only Protestantism and Catholicism are recognized, not orthodoxy, and Judaism is prohibited in Indonesia. So it's not quite as liberal in terms of religious faith as it claims. So by the time we got there, Ted was all baptized.

Q: And what year are we talking about now?

KOENIG: 1990. So the big event of 1990 was the Gulf War. And I was given the assignment of covering -- I was in the internal unit of the political section. So we had sort of two and a half officers in that unit. I had a supervisor who was like a third- or fourth-tour officer. I had two good ones while I was out there. And that person was one of the two deputies in the political section. And then there was a political counselor, and we had another officer who rotated into the internal unit, who was in a junior officer assignment, rotational with the consular section. The head of the internal unit usually covers human rights, because that was one of our biggest issues. Sometimes they also covered corruption.

I was given Islamic politics, which was a really hot issue in Indonesia at the time. And also because of the Gulf War, it got a lot of attention. So that's what I spent my time doing. I was also one of the main "petition takers" during demonstrations outside the embassy. The embassy fronted on a huge square called Medan Merdeka. On the opposite

side was the presidential palace, and the large Istiqlal Mosque was there on the square as well. It was a very popular place for demonstrations, generally speaking. And quite a few of the demonstrations in the run-up and during the Gulf War were against the United States, so they would come to the embassy gate. They were peaceful for the most part. Very few problems. Sometimes they would shake the bars surrounding the embassy. I was one of the main people who was deputized to go out to the gate and receive the petitions. I don't know exactly why the RSO didn't do it, but I did it and I didn't mind.

And it all went very well, that part. Jakarta was one of my favorite assignments ever. I really loved the work. I spent most of my time outside the office meeting with contacts and cultivating relationships with people mainly in Jakarta, needless to say, but I did a lot of traveling, as well. One of the main things that people wanted to do when they were assigned to embassy Jakarta was to do official travel to the Outer Islands and I managed to do some of that while I was there. So both Borneo and Sumatra, et cetera. It was great.

Q: Where did you live in the city and what was family life like there?

KOENIG: The family life was good. There were a lot of expatriates in Jakarta. So for our family, which had small children, both in the embassy community, and then outside the embassy community, there were a lot of opportunities for Natalie to get together with Ted and spend time with other young families. So that was very nice. We lived in -- it wasn't exactly a diplomatic compound. It was a row of townhouses that had been built by the embassy in a place called Galuh, the name of the street, in a nice part of town, Kebayoran Baru, it's called. and that was one of the main areas of Jakarta where a lot of expatriates lived. The ambassador and the DCM, and a couple of other people lived in Menteng, which was the most prestigious old Dutch colonial neighborhood, very close to downtown, but almost everyone else was further south.

And one of the main places that people lived was Kebayoran. So that was great. Ted could not use malaria prophylactics; small children were not allowed to take them. So that meant that Natalie and Ted really were not able to travel outside of Bali and Java. There was a huge problem with malaria at the time in Indonesia. In the embassy, we had NAMRU, the Naval Medical Research Unit that spent its time collecting samples and data on highly virulent and deadly varieties of tropical diseases, including mainly malaria. And so many people who came through the post actually contracted malaria over time. But generally speaking, you didn't, if you took the prophylactics that enabled you to visit the Outer Islands.

Q: And so you took them?

KOENIG: I took them when I traveled. You'd have to take them, you know, for a certain time before you traveled and then a certain time after you returned. I never had any of the side effects that people complained about, you know, headache, ringing in the ears, bad memory, fatigue. Nothing. I was young, I guess it didn't bother me. I was not sensitive. So I never had a problem taking malaria prophylactics.

Q: Well, that's very fortunate. Now it seems that there are treatments for malaria, but I think in 1990, there weren't so many. So if you had it, you were gonna suffer.

KOENIG: Yeah. So, you know, the work was great. I spent most of my days as I said, meeting with people. I would often go out and just sit for hours talking to leading Islamic political figures in Indonesia. It was an interesting time domestically in terms of the political dimension of this. We were mainly interested because we were more concerned about Islamic sentiment abroad during the Gulf War, because we were being criticized in the Islamic world. We were actively engaged there and worried about opposition. I talked to a wide range of people and groups, across a broad spectrum. Basically, everyone I could reach except radicals or extremists. One of my contacts was Abdurrachman Wahid, the head of the world's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama. The ambassador, John Monjo, also met with Wahid from time to time, and Wahid later went on to be the president of Indonesia after Suharto. Domestically, in Indonesian politics, it was a time when the Suharto regime was reaching out to Muslims in order to solidify its popular base. The ruling party, which was called Golkar, and the armed forces, ABRI, which was really the power behind the party, were not closely identified with Islam. And this, they realized, was a political liability as they were facing more criticism for their human rights practices, basically totally ignoring the principles of democracy.

So they tried to strengthen their support in the Islamic community and they were moderately successful at that. And we tried to keep track of these movements pretty closely. Muslim political figures were perceived by many people as a threat. Most of my reporting suggested that they were not, except for the extreme fringe. And I was very flattered when somebody from another section of the embassy told me that they had curtailed their reporting on this entire set of issues because I was doing it just fine. So that was an unusual sort of "attaboy" from a group that usually didn't share a whole lot about what they were exactly doing every day.

Then I also covered human rights and it was in the human rights portfolio that I also had some of my more interesting experiences. I was the backup. My boss usually had the lead on human rights, but I had three amazing trips related to East Timor. The first time I went out to East Timor for my introductory visit, I had not been there before. And at the time, of course, between like 1974 and 2000 or so, East Timor was an Indonesian province. And we recognized it as an Indonesian province, even though there was a separatist movement based on its separate colonial history under the Portuguese. But we were very concerned about the human rights situation there. We also supported NGOs (non-governmental organizations) there through USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development). And we also had contacts with international organizations like the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) that were active in East Timor, because they were also concerned about human rights in the province.

And there were a few others who were out there doing the same work. Anyway, I got out there, and my visit was being supported by one of the NGOs that we worked with through USAID. They had programmed a driving tour for me through East Timor with two overnight stays. It turned out that my driver was the brother-in-law of the leader of

the insurgency against Indonesia. The brother-in-law of Xanana Gusmão, who was the leader of Fretilin, the armed opposition to the Indonesian government. He spoke Indonesian because everybody in Indonesia does, especially in the Outer Islands. And I spoke Indonesian. So during those – whatever -- fifteen or twenty hours driving around East Timor, it was an amazing conversation about what it's like to be the brother-in-law of the leader of Fretilin and, you know, what's life like here, what was your upbringing like? You know, everything. It was the most amazing experience. One of the most amazing experiences I've ever had in the foreign service.

Then I was sent back to East Timor later, a second time. That was to do additional reporting after the massacre of peaceful protesters at a cemetery in the capital, Dili, which became a serious problem for the Indonesian authorities and a major human rights case on a global scale. So I went to do a little bit of reporting on what was known at the time out in East Timor, but the Indonesian government and the armed forces had decided that they needed to accommodate the demands of the international community. So they decided to investigate and hold a trial of the perpetrators and their commanders. That was subsequently held in Bali, and I attended that trial. It was kind of a high-profile move for the United States to attend a human rights trial in Indonesia. But it was interesting to follow it. I only attended a couple of sessions of the trial, otherwise it would have taken up a large part of my time, but I went out to Bali and attended it. And it was the first time that the Indonesian armed forces actually accepted that they needed to prosecute members of the armed forces for human rights violations. That was quite an achievement. I mean, it was due to intense public pressure and diplomatic pressure from the United States and a lot of other parties.

Q: And was that a credible trial? What was the result of it?

KOENIG: They did prosecute those involved, I think up to the level of regional commander. So that was a fairly decent job, you know, they did not simply find a couple of scapegoats. They prosecuted commanders and convicted them. I think the sentences were not particularly severe, as I recall, but the fact that they actually put, basically, ABRI on trial was a big deal because it was something that simply did not happen in Suharto's Indonesia.

It also shows how America's attitude had evolved towards ABRI and the Suharto government. Long before I got there to Indonesia, back in the mid-1960s, when Suharto took part in the coup against the Sukarno regime and subsequently emerged as the leader, the United States had been very actively supporting ABRI. And this was quite a bitter legacy for the United States because a lot of people were massacred during the coup against Sukarno. And we had remained quite close, in some ways, to the Suharto regime and ABRI for years, due in part to our resource investments in Indonesia. So when I was in Jakarta I was the control officer for Henry Kissinger, who wasn't in office at the time, but had come out for a board meeting of the company Freeport-McMoRan that ran a huge mine in what was then called Irian Jaya. It's now called West Papua province of Indonesia. And I remember riding around in the car with him. That was kind of the sum total of my duties, to ride with him in the car. And he said two things that I thought were

interesting. It was at the time of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Germans had recognized the independence of Croatia and Slovenia before other European countries, which we disagreed with. Kissinger's view on that was that "these Germans, we need to keep them down." He said, they're "getting too full of themselves. And we can't let them start messing around in European grand political strategy. They just don't know what they're doing." I thought that was sort of an interesting comment by Henry Kissinger. Then he talked a lot about how close he was to Benny (Benjamin) Moerdani. Benny Moerdani was like the second man of Indonesia at the time, a Christian general. At the time he was minister of defense, and was considered to be quite a brutal figure in Indonesian politics.

And you know, I guess it's no surprise really to me, but the United States was very much intertwined with authoritarian figures in third world countries from Marcos to Suharto, Benny Moerdani, and others. While I was in the Philippines, I was approached kind of deliberately at an event by the Philippine armed forces chief of staff, Fabian Ver, who wanted to talk to me for some reason. This also very strange. I was working in the consular section. I had just moved over to the anti-fraud unit and he was the general who ordered the assassination of Ninoy Aquino at Manila international airport. You know, this is a certain perspective on American diplomatic engagement, which I think was a little bit regrettable and disheartening and came to affect my attitude about American foreign policy quite deeply,

Q: Indeed. Yes, very different times. But we treated many of these people with respect that in retrospect, I'm sure many of the participants regret.

KOENIG: Yup. Let's see. Is there anything else that was really notable about our time in Indonesia?

Q: Did you travel at all regionally then?

KOENIG: Yes, only through the western Outer Islands, except for East Timor. Sumatra was my favorite. It's a beautiful island. It's very diverse. It's huge. I especially like the Padang Highlands in West Sumatra, it's a region known for its devout Islam. Although not to the degree of Aceh, which is the northern part of the island, where the separatists were most active and where a sort of fundamentalist Islam was a real security problem. In the Padang Highlands there was the Minangkabau ethnic group, it's just a beautiful landscape, beautiful culture, interesting political issues. So I liked going there. I also climbed an active volcano with the DCM, Rich Wilson, in Sumatra. Mount Marapi. Not just active, but actively erupting, hurling massive stones through the air. That was crazy.

And then I also took trips to Kalimantan, or Borneo, to meet with people there. I was deputized to try to find out more about the condition of a long-burning forest fire that had been creating problems in East Kalimantan for a very long time.

While I was out there – you know, there's a great gulf in the culture between Java and especially the Javanese, and the Outer Islands. So the Javanese ethnic group is

concentrated in Central and East Java and Yogyakarta, which are heavily populated and probably make up close to 50% of the population of Indonesia, if not more. And the Outer Islands where the country is incredibly diverse and their cultural norms are radically different. So, I had learned Indonesian and Indonesian mannerisms and so forth from my language teachers, who were Javanese and Sundanese, from West Java. And then these were reinforced over the time that I was in Jakarta.

There are some odd gestures that you do in polite society on Java. One of them is when you pass someone, typically there's a kind of -- if you accept that another person in the room is more senior than you are -- you try to keep yourself lower than they are. This is a very weird cultural norm. When you're moving around a room, that's the only time it's a real issue. And especially if you pass close to them, you're expected to do a kind of grotesque little squat where you put one hand out in front of yourself and another kind of behind yourself, and you look a little bit like one of those wayang Javanese shadow-puppet characters as you waddle past. That's very standard. It didn't seem that odd to me when I went to Borneo, but it seemed incredibly odd to the people who were accompanying me. The district directors, bupati they're called, are mainly from Java, even in Borneo. So they appreciate this so-called etiquette.

But the people I was traveling with, who were from a local NGO that was based in Samarinda, the capital of this province, just thought I was a total freak and they told me so. Many people on the Outer Islands are quite straightforward, but not people on Java. So they said, you know, "What in the world was that you just did? As an American, you should never do that." They said, "You should just never do that in Indonesia." I kind of took that to heart, but I was soon back in Java doing my little ugly squat.

The other experience that I had in Indonesia, it was the first time I had a direct subordinate, a locally engaged employee. We called them foreign service nationals, FSNs. He was the political assistant, Zulkarnain. He was a sincere guy, but I ended up firing him. It was a strange experience. He had worked very closely with a couple of my predecessors. He hadn't worked at the embassy for a long time. One of my predecessors was particularly versed in Indonesian things, and she had worked very closely with this employee on corruption in the Suharto regime, which he was extremely keen to work on. He just loved that work. So when I came in, I was not as engaged on the corruption issue. It had been well covered.

I had moved to a different type of work, as I mentioned, Islamic politics and other things like that. And often this FSN would talk to a lot of the same people I did and then provide readouts on his meetings that were useful. So one time I went to see a contact and he told me something that was significant news. And the contact said, "Well I told"--- this political assistant's name was Zul for short---"I told Zul that two weeks ago, I'm surprised you didn't hear about it." So I went back to talk to Zul and I said, "Is this so?" He said, "Yeah, of course it is so. I don't really tell you even close to everything." And I said, "Well, you're really supposed to, I mean, you're supposed to exercise judgment and know if it's significant, you're supposed to pass that on. Contacts think they are talking to the American embassy when they talk to you." Zul says, "I'm just never going to do that; it

would be too difficult for me as an Indonesian." So I decided on the spot that I was not going to let Zul stay. Within a few days he was fired. And you know, that was kind of a strange experience. I had never fired anyone before, but I think it probably was a valuable experience. I mean, I know that you can't demand the same things from locally engaged staff in terms of that kind of thing, but if they're going to be working for you as a political assistant in particular, it is a rather sensitive matter if they don't pass on news.

Q: Well, indeed yes, significant information from context is what their job is. To pass it on.

KOENIG: I've had great experiences for the most part with political assistants. And never again did I encounter Zul's particular take on the job.

Q: Our own experience with the Javanese was far from Indonesia, but in Suriname of all places where the Dutch during their colonial period very belatedly joined the list of nations which would outlaw slavery and Suriname basically was a colonial plantation economy. And it was run by enslaved persons. And when they finally decided to get rid of slavery -- on terms very favorable to the slave owners, I might add -- they had a labor shortage, and so they searched the world to find labor, and one of the places was Java. And so to this day, about 10%, perhaps more of Suriname's population consider themselves the Javanese and they still speak Javanese. And there's a lot of cultural events and other things in Suriname, it's a very diverse place. Kind of odd to see that outpost of Java in South America.

KOENIG: Yeah, no kidding. I mean I think that might be the largest overseas population of Indonesians except in the Netherlands, where I think there are a large number who immigrated over time. Javanese culture is wonderful, really, but it is very hierarchical and very much focused on the history of kingdoms and so forth and sort of a combination of Hinduism, syncretic religion, and other traditions with Islam. It's fantastic. You know, most foreigners, when they look at Indonesia, they focus more on Bali, which has this kind of seductive Hindu culture and a lot of similarities in a way with Javanese culture. I must say I prefer Javanese design, music, all sorts of other things. They're much less flamboyant than Balinese, but Bali is a lovely place to visit.

Q: And so how long was the tour then for you?

KOENIG: Three years.

Q: Three-year tour? That was the standard then.

KOENIG: Yeah. In fact, my entire career after my second assignment consisted of three-year tours. So after those first, let's say two and a half years between the Philippines and East Berlin, and then two years total that I spent in Washington, it's been nothing but three year chunks. So after Jakarta –

By the way, we also had a second child while we were in Jakarta. Natalie moved for about six months to Singapore. She was on her way back to the United States when we were expecting our second child Alex. Then she saw her obstetrician in Singapore, who said, "No, you can't go any further. You need to stay here with mostly bedrest." Natalie was given an apartment at the intersection of Scott's Road and Orchard Road, sort of the nicest place possible at the time to stay in Singapore.

And she just sat there in bed for most of the time until very close to the due date for the baby, at which point she was given permission to walk around and get out because it was no longer much of a risk. I flew up every weekend from Jakarta, and this was something that was very easy at the time because small regional airlines had proliferated. There were flights, basically one each hour from Jakarta to Singapore, and the flight took about an hour. Every weekend I would fly up to Singapore and spend the weekend with Natalie and our first son, Ted, and Maria, Natalie's mother who had come out to help out. So that was really kind of a magical little time. And Singapore, needless to say, was massively more developed than Jakarta. I mean, the standard in Singapore was at least comparable to the United States in terms of development of public infrastructure. And at the time I think the per capita GDP (gross domestic product) may have been nominally lower, but people lived extremely well. Then I would fly back to Jakarta and it was under a smoky haze, there were floods in Jakarta, that kind of stuff. It was a bizarre six months or so that we had that experience, but it all turned out very well.

Q: You mentioned the smoky haze, Jakarta and Indonesia were kind of renowned for that in the late nineties as well. I guess they were burning forest to start planting palm oil in particular.

KOENIG: Yeah. Palm oil plantations were the main culprit. And it was mainly in Kalimantan or Borneo where a lot of these fires were worst. But also in other islands, Sumatra, for example. Not so much Java, because Java was so heavily populated that intense cultivation was the focus there. No, it was a tragedy in a way. We tracked it closely. Back then USAID was a large organization, though it was transitioning to being a much smaller one. We had a large AID mission in Indonesia. It was a delight to work with these people because we had a lot of sectoral experts back then who knew forestry, for example, they were professionals in the field of forestry. And that's something that we lost as USAID reorganized and cut back.

Q: Yes. USAID went from being an organization of professionals and specialists to basically a project management organization with almost no inherent expertise, working exclusively through NGOs and others.

KOENIG: Yeah, I think it's regrettable. I saw this in EAP, and then also when I moved on to Jakarta. I was a spectator of it, but I saw the policy element of it more in Indonesia than when I was in Washington. We were hoping that we could slash our aid budget but retain our influence and the capacity of our AID personnel in project management. Also that, through our subject matter experts, we could somehow gain leverage over other countries' aid money, especially the Japanese in the case of Southeast Asia. That we

would somehow get the Japanese to fund projects that we managed, but that just didn't work. I mean, it's not surprising that it did not, but for a time we were operating under the illusion that people would let us manage their money for our ends and that quickly failed. And I think that was another step toward the sort of reduction and transformation of USAID.

Q: That's interesting that you mentioned Japan, because my impression from speaking with USAID colleagues over the years was basically that Japan's aid was very much tied to Japanese products and services. And so there was no way they were, they would have given their money to the U.S. to do something with it, unless we were buying Japanese tractors or something.

KOENIG: Well, this was the Japan-is-number-one era, you know, and we were just bowled over by the wealth of Japan at the time, especially prior to the bursting of the real estate bubble. People were just amazed by Japan. So we were looking at any way we could to take advantage of Japanese wealth and interest in an area where our interests by and large aligned. Obviously, given what you said, the hopes that they would really turn the keys over to us were very limited, but we worked on it for a while.

Q: So as your tour went along like all foreign service people you started thinking about your next tour and how did that come about?

KOENIG: Well you know, like all of us, we waited, especially back then when there was no internet basically. I mean, it was just in its infancy in the early 1990s. So you would wait for the cables to come in with the list of available posts and then your bids would go out. I had always wanted to get Greek language training since I had met Natalie, gotten married in the Greek Orthodox church and all that. So I saw that there was a post on the list that was at the right grade, in Nicosia, Cyprus, that came with a year of language training in Greek. That suited me in every way. It would, first of all, let us go home with the two kids for a year, which would be nice. And I would get Greek language training and I had loved my time at FSI before.

It turned out the job was highly sought after; it was one of the most heavily bid 0-2 political jobs in the whole system. So I tried very hard to get it, but I didn't really know anybody in the European and Eurasian Affairs Bureau. I basically sold myself to the desk officer or the office director who was allowed to fill this assignment at that 0-2 level. I told them my personal story and I got it.

So I went off to Nicosia via language training, a year in Washington, DC. And once again, the language training was excellent. Really fantastic instructors, very engaging in terms of their personal interaction with the class. I was once again separated out, I think there were two of us who were put in an advanced class. So, we had tutorial most of the time and, you know, my Greek got good.

Q: And were you studying still in Rosslyn or was it the new campus?

KOENIG: We were at the new campus by then. And everything was kind of new there. I think the move had been made like a year before I arrived. It was lovely. I mean, so much nicer than the Rosslyn set up. The only difficulty was we didn't have a car while we were there. So transportation was a little bit of a challenge, but it was not too difficult. I don't like Washington weather in the summertime, so the walk from the Metro station was annoying when it was like 90 degrees and humid, but otherwise it was just great. We lived in Ballston in Lincoln Tower. I think that was what it was called. It was one of the new condominium developments; there were a lot of executive apartments in Ballston at the time. These high rises were going in quickly, and Ballston Common was a new mall, you know, it was back in the heyday of shopping malls. So it was a really convenient place to live. Ted went to preschool there and Alex was still just an infant, less than a year old when we arrived.

Q: So then it's off to Nicosia, unless there's anything more you want to talk about on language training,

KOENIG: No, it was great language training. I'm still in touch with a couple of the instructors. So that was great.

Q: When you moved to Nicosia, had we moved into the new embassy building there, then?

KOENIG: We had, and it was still fairly new. I think we moved in around 1991 and I got there in 1994.

Q: I think we moved in actually a little bit later than that. So newer still, yes, because I've visited. See, I was the post management officer and I toured the new building just as it was being completed, which was probably about 1992 or 1993. And it had notable defects, as I recall--

KOENIG: I don't recall them bothering me very much, but maybe they ironed some of them out by the time I got there. The biggest shock, I think, were some funny elements to the design. It had been designed by California architects, I believe, who thought that the weather would be fine. And it is fine, Nicosia has fantastic weather, but unlike LA, which gets up to like 95 degrees in the summer, Nicosia gets up to 120 degrees in the summer. So that difference was significant.

And I remember shortly after we arrived that first year, that the ambassador, Richard Boucher -- a friend of mine and a very good guy -- wanted to have the 4th of July reception in the garden of the embassy, outside the ambassador's residence. In the middle of the day, on the 4th of July. And it was incredibly hot. So everybody was kind of taking refuge inside. You know, in Cyprus we invite a lot of clerics to the 4th of July because there are a lot of different religions in Cyprus and religion is quite important there. And these people were all just dying in their black hoods and black hats and black robes. They all were perishing there in our garden during the reception. I took a lesson from that and decided that I was never going to have a mid-day reception in Cyprus if I went back as

ambassador. I think that Richard Boucher learned the same lesson, and I don't think that we did the Fourth of July during the middle of the day the next time.

There were many funny things about the embassy's architectural plan, but I liked the building. There was, I guess, an inadequate setback according to later guidelines, and there was also an inadequate blast wall, but for the Cypriot situation, I believe the design was informed by security concerns that arose from attacks in Beirut in the 1980s. And then also by the problems that we had had in Cyprus in 1974. I think it was perfectly fine. And it wasn't very far out of town. Of course, Nicosia is a small town, so it wasn't a big deal.

Q: Yeah. I had served earlier in Jordan and I was struck by how much Nicosia actually reminded me of Jordan, the same sort of architecture as other places in the Middle East and building materials, even, even the hardware of doors and things was the same as we had experienced in the Middle East.

KOENIG: Yeah. It's really halfway between Greece and the Levant. And it is not Greece. That's pretty obvious when you live in both places, but of course, a lot of the population of Cyprus is Greek. So they're as Greek as any Greeks. They're just not Greeks in the same way.

Q: Nicosia was right on the dividing line between the northern and southern parts of Cyprus. Did you go across often?

KOENIG: Yes, very often. It was very easy. Diplomats were exempted from the ban on travel across the island, so you could easily cross. Ledra Palace checkpoint was the only one that operated at the time in Nicosia. The original buffer zone on Cyprus from 1964 was in Nicosia. Nicosia had been a divided city since 1964. And then in 1974, of course, the island itself became fully divided, but in Nicosia at the time you could cross at the Ledra Palace checkpoint with very few formalities for diplomats. So we spent a lot of time on both sides of the island and really appreciated that greatly. It only later became possible, in 2004, seven years after we left Cyprus, that travel to other parts of the island for each side was fully opened. That transformed the island in a way, but while we were there most people needed a special permit to visit the other side of the island.

Q: And what were the primary issues that you were working on? Presumably the peace process was one of them.

KOENIG: Yeah, I was the head of the political section; I wasn't a counselor because I was an O-2. We worked mainly on the peace process and then a whole range of things from human rights to the international relations of Cyprus. Cyprus was at the time not a member of the European Union. Also military-to-military relations. I had some experience in pol-mil and I supported that. We had a DAO (defense attache's office) with which I worked very closely and they had contacts on both sides of the island, with both the Cypriot National Guard, which was Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish forces in the

north. So basically it was a matter of navigating, for our normal diplomatic work, navigating the awkwardness of this political situation, which was serious.

Richard Boucher tried to emphasize that in addition to Cyprus settlement efforts, we dealt with what he called “real country issues”. This was part of his drive as ambassador. And it's something that I support very much since, you know, Cyprus is also a real country. It's not just a problem. But I would say I probably did spend more than 50% of my time on elements that were related to the problem. Missing persons was one of the most active files that I had while I was there. It was still quite a pressing issue at the time because of the lack of cooperation between the sides. The Cyprus problem was most of our work, I would say, especially the political section, which focused on settlement-related matters.

Q: When you say missing persons, what are you referring to?

KOENIG: There were about 2000 people at the time when I was there, from both communities -- kind of split two thirds Greek Cypriot to one third Turkish Cypriot -- who had disappeared between 1963 and 1974 but whose fate had never been determined. They had either disappeared ---mostly it was Turkish Cypriots who had disappeared between 1963 and let's say 1973. And then it was mainly Greek Cypriots whose fate was unknown from 1974. Often there would be a report that the last time they were seen, for example, they were in a group of 10 people who were being led by Turkish forces outside of their village. It was almost always men, but not all, not exclusively men. And then for Turkish Cypriots a typical case would be someone who was last seen leaving from his office in Larnaca to go to Limassol, for example, and never seen again. Businessman or something like that.

There was a structure that had been created with the support of the United Nations, the UN Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, or UNCMP. It was a tripartite panel, with a Greek Cypriot, a Turkish Cypriot, and then the so-called third member who was somebody from the ICRC who was nominated by the UN. And they basically had endless meetings sharing information with each other and asking for information from the other side, but they were getting nowhere. I got to know the people who worked in this field very, very well during my time there. Among the missing persons from the Greek Cypriot community there was an American, a kid named Andreas or Andy Kassapis. So in addition to doing what we could to support the general effort to ascertain what had happened to the missing persons, roughly 2000 in total, as I said, we had a special interest in Andreas Kassapis.

While I was in Cyprus, Congress passed legislation mandating that the U.S. government undertake a search for the remains of Andreas Kassapis, and an office was set up. Ambassador Bob Dillon was the head of it. He had an assistant, a former RSO. I can't remember what his name was. They hired people and began to work on using ground-penetrating radar equipment and other non-technical investigative tools in order to locate Andy Kassapis' remains. They succeeded, and that kind of broke the dam in a way on a lot of other cases. Just as I was leaving Cyprus, and after I left, the two sides began to take this issue seriously. I mean, to treat it as a humanitarian matter, rather than

as a political point-scoring matter. After I left, the UNCMP set up a large forensic lab on the main UN compound in the buffer zone. And they began to collect and identify remains, and they've done a massive amount of excellent work in the meantime.

Q: So when remains were discovered, you said it was being treated more as a humanitarian issue. Was there not then criticism politically that either one side or the other had murdered these people or---

KOENIG: Definitely, but one of the basic principles of the UNCMP was that there would be no effort to identify perpetrators. That was necessary at the time that the committee was formed. There's unhappiness with that, needless to say, because in some cases it probably would be possible to determine who pulled the trigger. But both sides had reason for huge inhibitions on this, because on both sides people went on from committing these atrocities to participate fully in social life. It's not as though either side was really prepared in any way to renounce the perpetrators. So even though it was uncomfortable and the relatives of the missing persons demanded more accountability, I don't think accountability can be found in the political systems of the two sides. It would simply expose too many people who seek to avoid bearing any responsibility for it.

Q: And was it the case that the disappeared had pretty much all been murdered?

KOENIG: Yes, every case that I know of was a case of murder. It was always ... you know, because the mandate of the UNCMP stopped short of actually identifying the perpetrators, there wasn't a great deal of investigative effort put into describing the precise circumstances of the death of the person. They usually wanted to find out, to ascertain where they were when they perished and precisely when, that was about it. And then obviously, when UNCMP obtains the remains, they typically have evidence of how they were killed, you know so often there would be bullets associated with the remains. And other kinds of evidence. This became the focus for the people who felt as though not enough was being done. If they really developed that forensic evidence along with other leads, they probably could identify perpetrators, but that's not the agreement. Often in conflict situations, as you probably know, it's necessary to stop short of full accountability in order to satisfy, let's say, a more urgent humanitarian demand, because otherwise you would have no cooperation from key individuals.

Q: So beyond the case of the American who had been victimized, what was the U.S. goal there and how involved was the U.S. in these efforts?

KOENIG: We were quite supportive. Our goal was to promote reconciliation between the two communities as a critical dimension of a political settlement of the Cyprus problem. So the mutual hostility that existed between Cypriots of the two major communities, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, the mutual suspicion was an enormous impediment to a political solution on the island. You know, there's an endless debate over whether it's mainly an international problem or an on-island problem. But my personal view is that it is at its root an on-island problem, an inter-ethnic problem. Of course, the international dimension became enormous over the course of the last seventy years or so, but the

mutual suspicion between the sides is significant. How significant? That's a matter of much debate, but the missing persons issue is certainly one on which the two sides have serious grievances against each other. So the idea was that if they could move toward mutual understanding and, in a way, mutual support in terms of investigating the disappearance of loved ones on the two Cypriot sides, they might move closer to political reconciliation.

Q: Okay. Were there other issues you'd like to talk about? That you covered.

KOENIG: Oh, well, one of the more interesting things was just working on the Cyprus settlement efforts and meeting with the people involved all the time. This was the first time that I met a lot with the leaders of the two sides. Of course, Cyprus is a small place, so that happens more easily at a relatively early point in your career than it would happen in a big place. But I used to see -- you know, I was almost always back seating others -- but I would regularly see the leaders of the two communities while I was there. Glafcos Clerides on the Greek Cypriot side, he was president of the Republic of Cyprus. And then in the north, on the Turkish Cypriot side, there was Rauf Denktaş. I would see them all the time, I would say maybe almost once a week. Over time you get to know them pretty well. And, particularly because these two figures were huge in the history of modern Cyprus, it was a fascinating experience. They were actually quite charming. I have to say some of my fondest memories from the foreign service came, I think, from being in the room with Rauf Denktaş or Glafcos Clerides.

During the entire time that I was there, three years, there was an American, Gus Feisel who was the UN special representative and he was actually resident on Cyprus. So Feisel was actively trying to restart settlement talks. During the entire three years that I was there on that first assignment there were no formal negotiating sessions between the two Cypriot sides. There were two or three, what were called "informal dinners", maybe four, which were sponsored by Gus Faisel and didn't actually lead to any form of negotiations. But nonetheless, the U.S. interest in the problem was kind of intense.

The Clinton administration wanted to be active on this problem, so they appointed Dick Holbrooke as the presidential envoy for Cyprus. He remained in that position for, I would say, about a year, and he visited at least once, maybe twice. His previous job was assistant secretary for European and Eurasian affairs, and in that job he had pushed hard for a deal that had a long and deep effect on Cyprus and the region. That was the trade-off between Turkey's Custom Union Agreement with the EU and allowing Cyprus to join the EU as a member without a settlement of the Cyprus problem. That was agreed around the end of 1995 or the beginning of 1996. Holbrooke had pushed hard for that trade.

At any rate, I remember his first visit as presidential envoy, which was near the end of my first tour in Cyprus. The memorable thing on that visit was Holbrooke's first meeting with Rauf Denktaş. I was there; I believe it was their first meeting. Denktaş had this massive bag of tricks. He had been doing this job, as leader of the Turkish Cypriots, most of his life. That included making foreigners feel awkward and outmaneuvering them to get them off his back. Dick Holbrooke did not think that he had anything to fear from

Rauf Denktas, having dispatched, you know, Slobodan Milosevic. But we get in the room with Denktas in Denktas's little, sort of "presidential palace" in north Nicosia, very little. And Denktas pulls out his camera. Denktas was not a very talented photographer, but he was an avid photographer. So he pulled out his camera while Richard Holbrooke was making his spiel about the sincere interest that the United States government had in moving the parties toward a settlement of this massively important problem.

And Dentash started to take pictures of Richard Holbrooke while he was talking. This went on for like ten minutes, just like so bizarre. And Holbrooke was obviously somewhat shaken by all of this. And then, you know, Denktas delivered the talking points that I had heard him deliver a gazillion times before about how Greek Cypriots could not be trusted by Turkish Cypriots because they killed us for a decade every time they could. They would never accept our equality and we depend on mother Turkey and all that kind of stuff. And it got nowhere. So Richard Holbrooke lost interest.

Before Hobrooke was presidential envoy, the Clinton administration named a well-known lawyer from New York, Dick Beattie, as special Cyprus coordinator. Usually, the special Cyprus coordinator was a foreign service position, but the Clinton administration made it a political appointment. First of all, we were talking about motorcades yesterday. Beattie insisted on being driven around with sirens blaring and streets closed and everything like that, so he got that treatment. In Nicosia it wasn't exactly a catastrophe. You didn't hold up massive numbers of people for any length of time. When Beattie went to visit Rauf Denktas for the first time, it was the bird trick. Rauf Denktas kept birds. So while Dick Beattie was sitting there, Denktas had his people release a couple of the birds in the room. A cockatoo went and sat on Dick Beattie during the meeting. And you know, it obviously was disruptive. Sitting on his shoulder. Kind of moving around, you know!

Q: As they do! (Laughter).

KOENIG: You know, it was much mirth, but clearly it just threw everybody off their stride. And I don't know how Denktas justified doing it. Giving Beattie the bird. And it was just classic and this was the way, this is one of the many ways in which this slightly ruthless Turkish Cypriot leader managed to slip away from just about everybody who ever talked to him. He was quite a shrewd guy, but oddly enough, also a friend in a way of the Greek Cypriot leader, Glafcos Clerides, who was like the ultimate gentleman. You see, both of them had been educated in England during the colonial period. And they had both become lawyers. In the 1950s, Clerides was the lawyer for EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters), the Cypriot independence movement, and Denktas was a crown council. So he worked for the British colonial government. But they got to know each other well. And Clerides had once saved Dentash's life, in the 1960s. Clerides had been a pilot in the RAF, which is kind of interesting. His wife was Anglo Indian, and they were just a lovely couple. The family was, in fact, just a wonderful family. Not like Denktash's.

Clerides had had a senior role in the Cypriot government for a long time. He had been acting president during the immediate post-coup period, in 1974, when Makarios was not

on the island. Clerides had been speaker of the house of representatives of Cyprus at the time of the coup attempt, and he then became acting president. He handled that in a very, very responsible way, including when Ambassador Davies was assassinated in Nicosia in 1974, shortly after the Turkish invasion.

So Clerides was a wonderful man. He used to sit there in meetings, playing with what's called a komboloi -- it looks a little bit like prayer beads -- and talk endlessly. Totally charming. But he also did a couple of funny things. For one, we had worked very hard to get him a meeting at the White House with President Clinton, and it was arranged in the late 1990s, before I left. I was not deeply involved in the preparations. My bosses were, especially Richard Boucher, the ambassador, but I was present when we talked to Clerides about how important it was to take advantage of this opportunity to raise interest in the United States in Cyprus settlement efforts. Anyway, I don't know what got into Clerides' head, but as I understand it, when he went in to see Clinton, he said, you know, basically, "How's it going?" He had nothing to say. So they spent about 15 minutes staring at each other. I think it was in New York during the UN General Assembly. And then Clerides came home. You know, he may have been cynical or not expected very much, but he just didn't have any talking points for his meeting with the president. Given that in the U.S. government, we tend to inflate the importance of these meetings beyond all reason, we always expect people to prepare themselves diligently for months ahead of time to make the most of their precious seconds with a U.S. president. And this was a guy who had been around the block a gazillion times, who just went in and said, you know, "It would be nice to know you man. How are you doing?" It didn't make any difference, of course. I can tell you that, if he had had note cards, you know, and graphics and a PowerPoint back in 1996, it still wouldn't have made any difference. There was just nothing to be done about the Cyprus problem during those particular years.

The other weird thing Clerides did was buy S-300s. The Russian air defense system S-300. Clerides was very Western-oriented, and spoke the Queen's English without an accent and all that. Then suddenly he just went off and bought a Russian air defense system that could threaten Turkey. It had a long range and could reach into mainland Turkey, not just north Cyprus. I don't quite understand why he did it, I guess to try to shake things up. Clerides always had a good take on the Cyprus problem dynamic, and would say the problem was that Turkish Cypriots feared Greek Cypriots and Greek Cypriots feared Turkey. Anyway, he bought the S-300s and really shook things up. Turkey started threatening, and we were also very unhappy, and the whole thing just became a mess. We tried to dissuade him, but Clerides just stuck it out. The conversations on the S-300s were the only ones where I ever saw Clerides get totally defensive and maybe nervous. Anyway, eventually it just got too hot for Clerides and the Greek Cypriots, and they agreed to transfer the S-300s to Greece. But that was after I left. Anyway, the S-300s sat in Crete for a while and finally were deactivated. What a strange move.

Q: Now, you mentioned Clerides' family. Did you have any interaction with them?

KOENIG: Yes. I mean, his daughter is a major public figure in Cyprus and a wonderful person. Katie Clerides, very active in the peace movement. One of the things that the United States did, we had earmarked AID money in Cyprus. It was given to us, the administration didn't ask for it. It was programmed in by people on the Hill because there was intense interest in supporting Cyprus. So we made no requests, but every year we got \$10 or \$15 million of AID money allocated for Cyprus. Some of it was used for our large Fulbright Program on Cyprus. Some of it we used for classic brick and mortar-type aid projects. The first one, and the most important in some ways, was doing the Nicosia master plan, the plan for what Nicosia would be if it were reunified as a city. And as a big part of that we funded the improvement and integration of the sewerage system of Nicosia, both north and south. That created a fantastic dynamic between the mayors of South Nicosia and North Nicosia, where they cooperated in very practical ways. The mayor of the south was Lellos Demetriades, an almost legendary figure who just passed away. The mayor of the north most involved in that work, Mustafa Akinci, later went on to be Turkish Cypriot leader and pushed hard for a Cyprus solution.

So that was an excellent program, but we did a lot of these things. You might ask whether we achieved the sort of marginal value-added that you would expect given that aid funds were scarce, but we used the money very, very wisely. And one of the things that we did beginning in the early part of the 1990s, and especially in the middle of that decade, was to work energetically on establishing contact between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to work on projects of common interest. So we helped to create a lot of grassroots intercommunal groups interested in reconciliation. I met a lot of Cypriots in this framework. Katie Clerides was very strongly supportive of these groups and participated in some of them. And she was a fantastic voice for peace. She actually became a member of parliament and was active in party politics for some time. Then, beginning about fifteen years ago, she backed away from politics after her father's electoral defeat in 2003, after the Annan Plan (the UN-sponsored Comprehensive Settlement Plan to reunify Cyprus) and the Greek Cypriot vote against it in 2004, and her father's death and everything. She's no longer much engaged in politics herself. So yes, I got to know her. That was their only child, Katie.

Q: And what about your family life in Nicosia? What was that like?

KOENIG: Great. I mean Nicosia is a family-friendly post and extremely good. Both boys went to two different schools while we were there. The first one had a very unusual story. It was called Horizon and the Boucher kids also went there. It was a small private school, very close to the buffer zone. And it was a really nurturing environment. I'm very happy we went there. It was run on a British scheme. So the preschool and kindergarten and first grade teachers, or "first form" teachers would say things like "I hope you don't expect your child to go into anything quantitative" or things like that. We're talking 5-year-olds and 7-year-olds. You know, very, very sober assessments of the capacities of small children, but basically---

Q: It turned out to not be true, I guess.

KOENIG No, they weren't too down on Ted. I think they said, "you know, he's all right." Same for Alex. You know, it was basically the assessment, they turned out to be good. They were not overly encouraging. As you might expect at a British school, they spent more time, you know, playing the flute and doing dramatic productions than you might get in an American grade school, but it was all extremely good. The weird thing about it was that the school was owned by an Iranian businessman, Hossein Alikhani, who had been rendered by American authorities. He was a victim of U.S. rendition. He had been picked up by U.S. law enforcement authorities in the Bahamas and carried off to detention for Libya sanctions violations. He was held for 130 days but never prosecuted, since back then U.S. Libya sanctions did not cover non-Americans. After he was released, he sued the American government and wrote a book about it.

I never read it. Natalie read it. It was called *In the Claw of The Eagle: A Guide to U.S. Sanctions Against Libya*. He was quite pissed off. But at any rate he ran a good school, essentially for his own children. He had a daughter, and there was a kind of a semi-aristocratic British family that lived in Nicosia at the time, and they also had a daughter. So the daughter of this family, the Iranian family, was like twelve or fourteen years old while we were there. And the daughter of the semi aristocratic British family (which has remained very engaged on Cyprus by the way) was the same age, and they were the two children who justified the existence of this school, Horizon. So Horizon consisted of a rather large K through third grade or fourth grade, and then no other students until you got to these two who were friends and they were the justification for the entire school.

So the school assemblies were odd, like spring and fall assemblies of the school where all the performances were done for the parents. We'd have cute kids doing The Amazing Mr. Fox and that kind of thing. Or you would see the cute kids doing a kind of manger scene at Christmas, that kind of stuff. And then you would get past the third grade and you would just have these two girls who would do a performance of ballet or something for twenty-five minutes. Enthusiastic but not particularly talented. It was kind of a weird, weird, very Cypriot scene because of the homey, small-scale arrangement. Anyway, we decided at a certain point that that was perhaps not the best environment for the boys any longer, so we sent them off to Highgate, which was very close by to the other school and quite a bit larger.

Both schools were very close to the buffer zone. Highgate was also on a British curriculum and the boys were there for, I think, their last year of school in Nicosia. Overall there was a really thriving, private school environment in Cyprus and that was one reason why Americans liked it. There were a lot of places you could find for your kids that fit your personal taste. Natalie was CLO there. So she had a lot of insight into how the schools operated and that, I think, was a role that she really liked. She had also been CLO in Indonesia.

Q: Oh, I didn't know that. And does Natalie speak Greek?

KOENIG: Yes. She spoke Greek growing up when she went to kindergarten in British Columbia, in Kitimat, a small town in the northern part of British Columbia. Her family spoke Greek at home. At first she didn't speak English, so she would come home and she would not have understood what the other kids said in kindergarten, but she quickly picked it up. So Greek was her first language, though she was never educated in Greek. It was only after we moved to Cyprus and then to Athens and Thessaloniki that she really learned to read Greek, and now she's quite good at it. But before that she just spoke household Greek fluently. It is what she spoke with her parents. But you know, her vocabulary only began to expand when she was living in an actual Greek environment.

Q: And as the CLO she must've had some interesting contacts as well.

KOENIG: Oh, she did. Sometimes they were with employees of the embassy. There was one woman who worked in the political section. I was her supervisor and she was the OMS (office management specialist). An older African-American woman, a nice person but not a good employee, so I didn't recommend her for tenure. And after that she filed a grievance against me on two grounds, both of which were dismissed. She accused me of, I think, racial discrimination and age discrimination. Toward the end, she wanted Natalie to listen to her complaints all the time. So she would go down to Natalie's office and air all of her grievances against me, which she in fact spent a large part of her day doing in every part of the embassy. It wasn't only in the CLO office. Natalie tried to handle that as best she could, but she did say, you know, "I'm perhaps not the best person to address your complaints about John Koenig. He is my husband." And she also was found sleeping in Natalie's office. I don't mean to get too deeply into this case, but this particular employee had a classic walk-about problem. You know I would arrive in the morning at eight o'clock and I would not see her again until like five o'clock. And that became the source of a lot of friction and ultimately led to this grievance filing that was dismissed. So Natalie had to deal with that.

She had to deal with a lot of problems that embassy Americans had, infidelity problems that were brought to her. I don't think people realize what it's like to be a CLO, because you're a sounding board for people, many of whom have problems that they ought to take up with a professional who's more qualified to actually address their issues, but they're not interested in that, or they're not comfortable in doing it, or they're just coming to you for a referral or whatever it was. So they would complain about their spouses. You know, how life had cheated them of opportunities for sustained sexual promiscuity, this kind of stuff. Natalie would have to listen to it. They didn't keep records of this kind of thing. She was just a sounding board. And then there was the other work on schools, medical information arrangements, that kind of thing.

Q: Well, yeah, the CLO can be an extremely important resource at a post. And I suspect that Natalie was a very good one because she seems to have the personality for that, bringing people together and organizing people. That's a great asset to any post.

KOENIG: Well, thanks. I agree. Of course, she is my wife, but people really talk to her. I mean, she should have been the political officer because people love to talk to her and

they will share things with her that I would never hear, because sometimes she was indiscreet and told me what they were saying. They would share things with her that just floored me. It's not just that I had not been told these things, it's that I could not imagine a person telling anyone these things. But she, you know, maybe she should have gone to work for the agency. I don't know. She can really bring things out in people.

Q: Turning to a more somber note. You mentioned the assassination of our ambassador in the early 70s, that to some degree still hung over the post. You had at least moved out of the building where he had been shot. But as I understand it, he was shot through the window of his office.

KOENIG: Yeah. Ambassador Roger Davies. I mean, he was, he was shot from the roof of a nearby building, though this actually was disputed by some hardline Greek Cypriots who claimed that he was shot by the CIA inside the building. You know, this was the kind of rumor that you had to deal with on Cyprus. But yeah, his story was one that people in the embassy very much had on their minds. And this is from my next assignment there as ambassador, but we officially named the ambassador's residence after him on the 40th anniversary of his assassination in 2014. We had to get permission from Washington for that. We held a beautiful ceremony with senior representatives of all parts of Cypriot society, and the government, and diplomatic missions. Unfortunately, Ambassador Davies' daughter, who had come out for a visit the year before, had passed away in the interim.

Because the assassination of Ambassador Davies was something that's kind of been forgotten in many ways in Cyprus, we wanted to make sure that people remembered it. So it's now officially the Davies Residence and I am very happy about having done that. We prepared some nice memorial materials for the event. I got the idea for some of those from Nick Burns and his embassy history project in Athens. And as I said, Ambassador Davies' daughter managed to visit the year before, she was in poor health at the time that she came, and the family had been devastated by really tragic events. The mother had died, Davies' wife had died like a year before he was given the assignment in Cyprus in part to enable him to establish a better family life and recover from her death. And then the children were evacuated to Beirut after the attempted coup in 1974. And so they were not present on the island when Ambassador Davies was killed, along with a Cypriot employee, Antoinette Varnava, who was also working in the executive office at the time.

Q: Well, it was a terrible, terrible event. Glad you were able to commemorate him at least.

KOENIG: Yeah. I'm very happy that that happened. We also honored the Cypriot employee in the ceremony, and named the CLO office and lounge after her, and put up a memorial plaque.

One of the security measures that was taken in response to things like the assassination of Davies and other incidents was the use of armored vehicles for our ambassadors. And one funny thing happened while I was in Nicosia, involving our Ambassador Richard

Boucher. He had a standard issue armored vehicle. I don't know what it was. But we were pretty new in the embassy, and the staff did not know the systems very well, and somehow the Marines lifted the Delta barrier under the ambassador's car when he was going through and cracked the frame. We had to get rid of it and find a replacement. But we were not, let's say, a high-priority post for the State Department. So they searched around for readily available used armored vehicles. And the only one that they could find was a powder blue two-tone Cadillac with a white vinyl top, which came from Sri Lanka.

Q: At least it still wasn't a stretch limousine.

KOENIG: Exactly. So this is what Richard Boucher was, in theory, condemned to ride in. But we had other armored vehicles that were designated for like the DCM and other people, and I think he chose not to use the powder blue Cadillac very much.

Q: Alright. So now you're probably thinking about your next assignment again.

KOENIG: That's right. I'll just say one last thing about Nicosia. I had the best experience with locally engaged political assistants in that post. That was just an amazing experience. I've never seen such talented people. They were a very important part of why I enjoyed that post so much. It's a very diverse island in a way, even though it's small, and you have many people who develop a sophisticated perspective on the issues on the island and in the region. Something you would never guess existed based on the positions taken by the government of Cyprus or the Turkish Cypriot community and so forth. So getting to know Cypriots, our FSNs, including getting to know my closest political assistant, a woman named Anamaria Yiallourou – it was one of the greatest things that happened to me in the foreign service. She was just a wonderful person to work with – a great experience, very enlightening and enriching in every way. So I really enjoyed that. She was not alone, but she just happened to be the person that I worked with most. And she was still the political assistant when I returned as ambassador and that was a great thing.

So then we began to think about what to do next and I wanted to go to Greece. It was simply a desire, a personal desire. I thought, I like Greek. I've learned Greek. Natalie's family is from Greece. I just want to go to Greece. So by that stage in my career, you know, it was easier to know people to sort of short-circuit the formal assignment system. I just sort of railroaded this with the DCM, in Athens, Tom Miller. He had also been special Cyprus coordinator. So I moved to Athens, to the political section. It was an at-grade assignment so it wasn't as though it was colossally challenging, but it was not normal to go from one Greek-speaking post to another. It was somewhat frowned upon.

Q: Yes, the mystifying State Department. Learn a difficult language, but then don't let the person use it, right?

KOENIG: Yeah, yeah. So, I went to work as the head of the political military unit and the deputy political counselor in Athens. I had that job for three years. Before I left for post, I managed to meet with the new ambassador who was going to be assigned there. It was

Nick Burns. I ended up working a great deal with Nick for seven or eight years straight. So he was my mentor for the next large chunk of my career. And as I had mentioned before, I think we had initially met at the operations center, but we didn't know each other well. He had already gone on to have a brilliant career up until that point, at the NSC and as State Department spokesman, and then he was assigned to Athens.

Nick Burns wasn't there when I first arrived. Tom Niles was still the ambassador, also a very well-known diplomat, former assistant secretary for EUR. Nick arrived shortly thereafter. We spent the next three years working together, Nick as ambassador and me as the head of pol-mil; we worked together very, very closely. The embassy's big projects during that time included two things that were in my bailiwick: one was assisting with arms sales to the Hellenic Armed Forces, and we sold a massive quantity of arms to them during those years. F-16s, Patriots. And the second was working to ameliorate tensions between the Turks and the Greeks, including in the military field. I got quite involved in that. So that's what I spent most of my time on when I was working in Athens.

I loved it. Nick was very skilled. I don't know if I've ever seen anyone more skilled at persuading someone face-to-face of a particular point of view or course of action. You know, Nick has this charismatic quality, which made him stand out. Among diplomats it's a rare trait in any case. Over all, he was a master of communication, both at the public level and at the directed or personal level. I learned a lot from him, but I also think that he accomplished a lot using this persuasive capability in meetings with all sorts of Greek officials. The one that I saw with Nick most was Tsochatzopoulos, Akis Tsochatzopoulos, the minister of national defense. He was subsequently convicted of corruption, massive corruption in arms deals, but not the American ones, luckily. I would go and see Tsochatzopoulos all the time together with Nick.

To add a little personal note from later on in my career, after Tsochatzopoulos had been driven from office and was under suspicion of corruption, I ran into him at the Munich Security Conference. That was probably six or eight years later. He was all alone at the Munich Security Conference dinner, which is a dreadful part of a great event. And I went over and sat with him and we kind of shot the breeze in Greek for about two hours, which was hugely fun. Afterward, of course, he was convicted, but it was really a great pleasure to run into Akis Tsochatzopoulos in Munich.

So arms sales were a large part of my work. We also met with the Hellenic Ministry of National Defense on all sorts of more operational matters. I worked more closely than I've ever worked with the two military offices in the embassy, the defense attache's office (DAO) and the office of defense cooperation (ODC). I made good friends among the officers who were working there. I think we were a very effective machine working for Nick Burns and for the U.S. government on this set of issues. We really got the job done. We were of course, supported by the companies themselves in terms of the arms sales, that element of the work. But on other things like confidence building measures (CBMs) between the Greeks and the Turks, that was something we did separately working with people in the American regional commands and the NATO command structure. And our colleagues in Ankara. That also went well.

Q: So what are some examples of confidence building measures that succeeded?

KOENIG: Well, most of them dealt with maritime encounters, like maintaining distance, notifications of activities, this kind of stuff. The air domain was really hard to address, even though many incidents and most of the really dangerous ones happened there. Greece and Turkey were just too far apart on legal status issues to make much progress on confidence-building measures in the air. Later on, when I was working for NATO in Naples, I was pulled into some work between Greece and Turkey on air arrangements and CBMs, and visited Athens and Ankara for talks. But it was just too hard, and after a few weeks things broke down. Nothing happened.

CBMs usually came in packets. And our role was to assist in a rather minor way in terms of devising these measures, because you needed to have military personnel who understood the operations do that. But mainly we worked to persuade the sides, working closely with our embassy in Ankara. Effectively persuade the sides, that is, that this was something worth doing, because for most of the time I spent in Athens it was hard. Things changed somewhat after the big earthquakes in Turkey and Greece, which occurred in 1999. But up until that time there was no political reward in either of these countries for making what were perceived to be concessions to the other side on things like this. Military operations in the Aegean. After all Imia, the incident that brought us closest to actual fighting between Greece and Turkey, occurred in 1996. It was often called the Imia-Kardak incident because Kardak was the Turkish name of the islet in 1996. Richard Holbrooke -- as EUR assistant secretary, before he was presidential envoy for Cyprus -- helped to diffuse the incident, along with President Clinton and many others.

So that sense of antagonism and suspicion was very strong in the aftermath of Imia. Greek pilots were killed in the incident, so it was not easy to ease tensions. That was one of the reasons why we wanted to have confidence building measures, but it was not an easy political environment in which to advance CBMs. We kept at it and did succeed in small ways because Greece and Turkey obviously did not want to have another clash. Both sides, I would say, in my perception, and I knew the Greek side better, understood that the politics of incidents of this kind could easily escape their control. So they were afraid of them. The nationalism on both sides could easily explode in ways that they could not control. They tried to keep a handle on it, manipulate it somewhat, but they also knew that a serious incident could quickly spiral out of control, not only in terms of military operations, but also in terms of politics. So they were quite willing to work with us.

One of the strange things about working with Greeks back then is that Greek politics could seem hysterical, not so much recently, but earlier during the seventies, and especially during the eighties and into the nineties. There was a kind of a histrionic quality to Greek politics which people found extremely hard to understand, and foreigners found very off-putting. It was associated mainly with Prime Minister Andreas

Papandreou, but it was a more basic characteristic of Greek politics for many years, wild talk and chest beating and nonsense.

The Greeks also did some seriously bad stuff during this time. I mean, under the Constantinos Mitsotakis government in the early 1990s, for example, they assisted the Serbs in Bosnia and other places. That was before I got to Athens. But the main point I wanted to make is that the Greeks were much more rational when you talked to them behind closed doors, they were not these wild-eyed nationalists. In fact, they were often quite interested in doing sensible things. They didn't want their people to know that they thought this way. So there were many things that you could do with the Greeks because they were more flexible, in reality, than the Germans or the Italians in my later experience. The Greeks just didn't want people to know that they had agreed to things. So there was this constant, strange sort of shell game that was needed for them to do things that they really wanted to do. We appreciated their flexibility and they looked to us to help them by avoiding publicity. They were afraid of their own public opinion.

Q: During that period, or perhaps just a little bit earlier there were some domestic terrorist groups in Greece, quite violent, and I know that the U.S. embassy took threats very seriously and had taken a number of measures at least in previous years to move people from offices, which I think had existed elsewhere in the city, and basically pile everybody into the chancery, which was a building that didn't exactly have the capacity for all those extra people. What was the situation when you were there?

KOENIG: Bad. Actually, I was there in Athens during the last hurrah of November 17, the main terrorist group, when they conducted their last executions or assassinations. And you know, we did have a lot of people in the embassy whose job number one was anti-terrorism in Greece. November 17 was our main concern. It wasn't the only one, there was another group called the ELA (Revolutionary People's Struggle), and the Revolutionary Nuclei, which were also quite active, but all were extremist left wing organizations. I was friends with people, mainly in the military parts of the embassy, and the military was very much the target of November 17. Historically many of their assassinations had been of U.S. and other military personnel, Turks and Greeks and others. Needless to say, there was a lot of focus on this by the U.S. military personnel who worked in the embassy. And a lot of measures were taken in order to protect these people.

Natalie and I were good friends with the head of the office of defense cooperation, Col. Bob Corrie, and his wife, Ellen. The Corries invited us one Saturday to have dinner with the British defense attache, Brigadier Stephen Saunders and his wife. We had a great time. It was a really nice gathering, you know, in the Corries' garden, in Kifisia, a nice suburb in the north of Athens. And then, on Monday, BG Saunders was assassinated in the last major assassination by November 17. He was driving into work in an unarmored car on the main road that led from Kifisia to our embassy and downtown Athens, Leoforos Kifisias, killed by a guy on a motorcycle who drove by and shot him. So, this was a huge thing.

I had my own peculiar concerns, even though I was not from the military. Somehow, because of, I guess, things like my visit to the Segals in East Berlin or the work that I did with Natalie in order to determine the role of our upstairs neighbor from the Libyan People's Bureau in the La Belle Disco bombing, I had been identified by the Stasi as a CIA employee. So this baseless identification came back to haunt me in a way, because when the Stasi files were made public, I was somehow tagged as an intelligence operative. I would hear from State through DS (Bureau of Diplomatic Security) channels anytime my name popped up in some suspect or dangerous setting. And each time I was named in some public document as a CIA operative, I was warned and told that I should therefore take extra security precautions, because it was believed that left wing terrorists would target me.

The assassination of BG Saunders in Athens was also a big deal because it seemed to change things, to turn the tide against ELA and especially November 17. It was shortly thereafter that the Greek government decided, once and for all, that it was going to seriously pursue prosecution of November 17. And once that happened, there was then a fortuitous accident with one of their terrorists, who was preparing an explosive device that went off accidentally, so he went to the hospital. He was identified somehow as a terrorist suspect, and that was the key. Then the whole terrorist organization began to unravel. Prime Minister Simitis and his Minister of Public Order, Chrysochoides, moved to uncover and prosecute November 17.

Q: But in the meantime, it must have been very stressful for you and the family since after all you were riding around presumably in an unarmored vehicle. In, as I recall, extremely heavy traffic in Athens.

KOENIG: Yeah. I would even walk to the embassy from home. Our house was in a wonderful part of Athens. It's a neighborhood called Palaio Psychiko. We had the smallest embassy house in that neighborhood, but it was fantastic. I could walk to work, so I did maybe once a week. I spoke very positively of the climate in Cyprus, but the climate of Athens, it is just the best in the world. I mean, there's just nothing like it. And if you're living in this kind of beautiful, small suburb, close in, with a nice back garden, with a bunch of orange trees that smell just heavenly for a month each winter and produce massive numbers of oranges. It's hard not to just love this place. We would look out the back of our house and you could see Hymettus, the big mountain that surrounds Athens on one side. The air was clean by this time. When I visited in college, back in 1980, Athens was heavily polluted. By the time we got back there in the late 1990s, it was not a polluted city in terms of air quality. Most of the time the air was crystal clear. If you got on any high promontory, you could see Aegina, one of the islands in the Saronic Gulf. You know, it was just a wonderful place to live. So yes, terrorism was a slight drag on that, but mainly I just loved living in Greece. It's probably Greece and Italy -- how shocking, you say! -- Greece and Italy are my favorite places to live in the world. I'm more at home in Germany, but I just love Greece and Italy.

Q: Well, this, this isn't exactly a blinding revelation, but I do think there's a high correlation between people's ability to enjoy the places they go to and their success in the

foreign service. It always struck me as, frankly, bizarre how many people in the foreign service seemed to be completely unsuited to it. They just didn't like wherever they were.

KOENIG: Yeah. I mean, Natalie had to deal with this more as CLO than most people do. She filled in part-time in Athens for a while. What were the complaints that people had in Greece? I mean, a lot of people were unhappy in Athens and there were sometimes good reasons. The commute from the northern suburbs where most people lived was bad because of the traffic, though it's gotten better since then. But at the time it was very time consuming and stressful. And then most of them didn't speak Greek and speaking Greek is a great advantage.

But people also didn't like certain totally trivial Greek practices. For example, when you went to the grocery store in Greece, you would get to the checkout clerk. Back then, nobody was using credit cards for things like groceries. So you'd always get your change in money, including coins. And the Greek clerks would not put it in your hand. The Greek teller, or the clerk would slam it on the counter, they did not hand you the money back. The coins would make this kind of clacking sound, you know, when they hit the counter. I have to say, this didn't bother me very much, but for a lot of people in the embassy, they would complain about that as evidence of Greek malevolence, I guess, that these people were just mean. Good grief, it was just the way Greeks did it. But people would glom onto these small things.

You know, there are so many things that are typical of life abroad that Americans find strange. People don't look you in the eye when you're walking down the street, that's a very common one. In Germany, when I first moved there in '75, people would actually just kind of walk over you on the sidewalk. The way of life was totally not as American as it is now – not in Germany and not in Europe. But none of this bothered me, ever. Remember, I'm the American who was doing the ridiculous wayang-shadow-puppet thing in Indonesia, I adapted a lot.

Q: Well, my impression was that indeed Embassy Athens for many years had very poor morale. So again, the fantastic advantage to have the Greek and of course, as a gifted linguist and then having spent three years already in Nicosia, must've been excellent at that point.

KOENIG: It was great. I was hit by a motorcycle, by the way, I was a pedestrian casualty. Greeks don't drive well. I know this is also a revelation. But I was being foolish. I was in a hurry to get back to the embassy and was getting very close, just two blocks away. As soon as the light changed, I stepped into the crosswalk and I was just wiped out by a motorcycle. I broke my leg, though not too badly. Even that didn't turn me off to Greece! I still love that place.

The weirdest health experience I had while there came from drinking a lot of coffee. I am from Seattle, or nearby anyway, and I used to drink massive amounts of coffee when I was in my thirties and forties, probably ten cups a day. I guess that was not healthy, but at any rate it didn't bother me at all. And I was in pretty good shape during the time that

we were in Greece. So the health experience. I had gone to Mount Athos, the famous monastic peninsula in northern Greece. And there's no caffeine on Mount Athos. There's no tea, there's no coffee, there's no Coca-Cola even. For three nights and four days I had no caffeine and then I came back to work. I was sitting at my desk that Monday and I suddenly went blind. Or at least mostly blind. I think it was called a scintillating scotoma or something. Probably 70 degrees or 80 degrees of the center of my vision was just like pixelated blurring.

Q: Oh my goodness.

KOENIG: So I called Natalie on the phone and said, you know, "Natalie, I don't want to alarm you, but I believe I'm going blind." Anyway, I went to the doctor and was told not to worry. You know, just told me to have a cup of coffee and get back to my old, unhealthy routine. And it worked.

Q: Well, that's very astute of them.

KOENIG: It was very lucky. I mean I care a lot about my vision. And my coffee. I would not have so willingly given them up, either one, but I also didn't have to. Anyway, I wanted to let Natalie know on the phone and not let her freak.

Q: Well that must've been a scary few hours for her, as well as for you, then.

KOENIG: Within three or four hours, my vision was back to normal. Very funny. Anyway, Greece was just fantastic. I love Greek music. We went to the bouzoukia (Greek pop music clubs), we also went to see other kinds of traditional Greek music that were played on Sunday afternoons in the older parts of Athens. Rembetika. I just loved that place. And we traveled all the time. Like many people who live in Greece, we've been to dozens of islands and fantastic cultural sites. I love the food. Really, I just love that place. I enjoyed Athens so much, I decided I wanted to go to Thessaloniki as my next assignment.

It's sort of funny. I was up in the front office talking to the DCM. The DCM at the time was Terry Snell. And Terry said, "We're having a hard time finding somebody to be CG in Thessaloniki." I said, "Well, why don't you just give me the job?" So we walked over to Nick Burns's office. And Nick says, "Yeah, it sounds great. I want you to be our next CG in Thessaloniki." I said, "Okay, great!" Then the personnel system actually screamed when this proposal was put to them, it said, "This is ridiculous." It was not supposed to be good for my own career, but I thought I could worry about that. And it was not good for the assignment pattern. Anyway, I had to have a meeting with Director General Skip Gnehm to get his green light. So Nick Burns and I met separately with DG Gnehm and went over why it was such a great idea to send me to Thessaloniki.

That is, my third Greek-speaking assignment in a row, a total of nine years, ten if you include language training, never leaving a small geographic circle. And it worked out beautifully. We just moved 250 miles north of Athens. I settled in fast. It was right in the

middle of preparations for a massive American public affairs project that we had put together to revive public perceptions of the United States after the Kosovo bombing campaign. We were taking advantage of the Thessaloniki International Fair's practice of showcasing one country each year to stage a year-long cultural and commercial outreach program called Honored Nation USA. We had large amounts of money to spend on cultural programming and commercial support and visitors and things like that.

By the way, many years later, just three or four years ago now, with exactly the same goal in mind, we repeated as Honored Nation at the Thessaloniki International Fair. In this latter case the U.S. rolled out the production in a much larger way with a vice-presidential visit and other things. But even the first time, when I was there, we had a lot of senior visitors. It was a fantastic way to get started in Thessaloniki. Maybe we should conclude for today at this point. And I'll pick it up with Thessaloniki next time.

Q: Okay. We can do that. So let me stop the recording.

Q: Alright, it's April the 10th. This is Jay Anania, interviewing John Koenig. And, John, when we last talked you were headed towards Thessaloniki as the principal officer. So I thought it might be a good idea to ask you a question about your leadership and management experience, and the way you approach those issues.

KOENIG: Yeah, thanks, Jay. I didn't approach them very methodically, I would say. And nonetheless I found that I was reasonably good at it. Throughout my early career in the foreign service, and going back to my education, I focused entirely on political and social science-type issues. I never spent any time, for example, in my free time or formal education, devoted to learning more about managing operations or running an organization or personnel management or anything like that. And then, in the foreign service, I took the requisite courses, which were actually quite good. Before I went to Thessaloniki as principal officer, I participated in the DCM course, which was my first management orientation course in the foreign service. And I enjoyed it. I also didn't read much about management issues. It's perhaps shocking, but maybe it's more common than it ought to be. There are long lists of well-known and important books that people who are going to manage organizations are expected to read, I guess. I didn't read them. I mean, I only read the ones that were required for my training. But I always found this kind of reading un-interesting, and I never delved into it very deeply.

So I was there in Thessaloniki, managing the first organization that I had managed. Up until that time, I had managed onesies and twosies, individuals, but never an organization. And I felt that perhaps it came to me rather naturally, I never had any real problems. In fact, I ultimately got a Presidential Distinguished Service Award from Obama for the quality of my management. The way I did it was based very much on my personal perception of how people like to be treated. So I tried throughout my career not

to be mean, number one. Sometimes I did find myself being mean; we might get to that later on, it was actually in Berlin that I was probably at my most unpleasant. But generally, I always tried to demonstrate respect, and I was quite respectful of people's expertise.

At the principal officer level, that meant mainly foreign service nationals or locally engaged staff. They ran most of the management operations in the consulate, which was small. If you included the guard force, we probably had thirty employees. But we only had three Americans, four if you include one locally engaged American. The deputy principal officer was the one who directly oversaw the management functions at the consulate. I kept an eye on them. But I wasn't terribly intrusive, I was more interested in managing the people and not so much the actual conduct of all of the accounting and budgeting and other functions of the consulate.

At any rate, a couple of interesting personnel-related issues came up early on. This was, I think, the one skill that I had in the management field. I was a pretty decent manager of people. I tried to understand their perspective on things. Two issues arose while I was principal officer in Thessaloniki that might be worth mentioning.

First, in addition to the staff of the consulate, we had two foreign area officers, or FAOs, from the U.S. Army in training, assigned to the Hellenic Armed Forces War College, which was in Thessaloniki. They had already begun on the path where they devote a segment of their career to learning Greek and learning area affairs and that kind of thing. I got to know them both quite well. They came into the consulate a lot. I also saw them in other places.

One of the FAOs got into a very bad traffic accident on the ring road into Thessaloniki. Thessaloniki's a city of about a million people, larger than many people outside realize. It had a busy ring road, a four-lane freeway. Late one night, this particular FAO, he was a major at the time, got in a bad accident when he pulled out quite normally onto the freeway. A car that was being driven by a Greek man with a Greek woman passenger, the woman was pregnant, was exceeding the speed limit by, I don't know, something like fifty or sixty kilometers an hour. They went out of control when the FAO pulled onto the freeway. The Greeks struck, I think, a pillar on an overpass and they were killed instantly.

As soon as I heard about it, needless to say, I got in contact with the embassy front office immediately. And they immediately said, "Remove him from Greece", meaning the FAO. There was a chance that he was going to be prosecuted, but more likely, he would be sued by the family and the insurance company of the victims. But he insisted that he was innocent. The police report indicated that he had done nothing wrong; they had gone out and examined the accident site. Still there was this persistent fear that the Greek court system would be biased against an American in a case involving the death of a Greek couple, and especially their unborn child. Anyway, I played for time for quite a while, because this officer did not want to lose the four or five years of his career that he had already devoted to his FAO training. I ended up essentially defying my ambassador, Tom

Miller at the time, who warned it was on me if this officer stayed, and he got in trouble in any way. I said, "All right." I didn't budge. I mean, what does that mean, it's "on me?"

From earlier work on military and diplomatic jurisdiction cases, I believed that, over time, removing personnel had a very corrosive effect. Both in terms of Americans who were covered by the SOFA (military Status of Forces Agreement) and Americans who were covered by the Vienna Convention, we tended to go overboard in terms of removing them from jurisdiction as a way to avoid trouble. This often caused us a lot of problems. But that wasn't the reason that I did this, why I stood up for this FAO. In this case, I just believed the guy. I believed that he was innocent. I believed that he understood his interests better than I understood his interests. I had some faith in the Greek justice system. And I didn't see a strong American government interest in making him leave.

Q: Or on the contrary?

KOENIG: Yeah, exactly. I mean, we have made this investment to train him, exactly. So anyway, I took quite a bit of heat for that from the embassy front office for about three weeks, maybe five weeks. And then later, when the trial was underway, because there was a civil case that was filed by the family of the Greek couple who had been killed. But the civil suit was rejected by the court. And the FAO remained and completed his training. He went on to be a FAO in Greece and in the eastern Mediterranean, which is something that we were investing in all along, and he was much happier.

The second case involved my deputy, a very, very nice woman, very capable, an older officer, who had entered the foreign service fairly late. There's kind of a two-part thing to this story. We developed a great relationship, but we weren't very much alike. Early on, just before I arrived in Thessaloniki, she had lent a consulate vehicle to her daughter, her adult daughter, who was visiting. That was contrary to the rules, and the daughter totaled it. My deputy was totally upfront about the whole thing. She admitted she was at fault, and she paid for it all out of her own pocket, which was huge. It was like \$25,000 for this vehicle. You know, I think this established an image in my mind of a person who was prepared to be accountable for all of the things that she did. And it turned out that was genuinely what she was all about. She was an incredibly responsible person. She wasn't a water walker, she wasn't a brilliant officer, but she was an extremely good officer of exceptional character, very trustworthy and very dedicated to her job.

She had never had a position where she had a responsibility to interact with the public and represent the consulate and the U.S. Government. In a small consulate, in a place that was fairly busy at the time, she was always required to show up for receptions and other events and represent the United States if I couldn't make it. But she dressed horribly at first; she would wear sweatpants to receptions. It was very awkward for me, because this was in 2000, and I had to have a conversation about this with her. Already by that time, there was this sense that men needed to be extremely careful in raising any issues regarding a woman's appearance in the conduct of her work. It was worse than a gray area, more like a third rail, you could easily be misunderstood, etc. I give this officer tons of credit for taking what I said constructively, as it was intended. I just said, "You need to

dress professionally, because you're representing the United States. So that means investing a little more in your wardrobe and taking greater care in your appearance. Please do, because you're actually seen on TV and people see you and they gather an impression about the United States, and Greeks tend to dress up." She was just totally positive about it; she changed her ways immediately.

This positive experience molded my approach to counseling subordinates about their behavior. I decided I need to be more forthright. Too often, I think, in the foreign service and in the State Department, management of subordinates is reduced too much to the formal evaluation procedure. And people put things off, they store up little points that they're going to make, and they wait for a formal session to counsel their employees. I think this is terribly corrosive. It does not do anybody any good. I mean, I suppose you might say that in those special counseling sessions, a particular set of rules apply, which are not always present in the workplace. So you know that both sides might feel more comfortable with that setting. But I find that too often, it is just an excuse to avoid dealing with issues that could easily be addressed immediately and would then enhance the entire effectiveness of the work unit. So I decided to be much more open about small corrections that I perceive are necessary. I tried to be always very willing to accept the explanations or counter arguments that others would offer, but most of the time they didn't push back; usually employees are looking for direction. I find it odd that so many managers and supervisors in the State Department, at least in my experience, are loath to give direction and take responsibility for the direction that they give.

Q: Yes, I think that's a fair point. It probably extends further than the State Department. But I certainly observed during the course of my career, that there didn't seem to be a lot of incentive to address management issues. And in many cases, I inherited problem employees, precisely because of that. And then when you did try to have a discussion with them, sometimes they would take it well, I have some similar examples. But sometimes they absolutely would not. And they would point to the fact that they had received sterling reviews from their former bosses. And in some cases, when I would talk to those people, they would say, "Oh, yeah, that person was terrible!" So nobody had a favor done for them by passing those problems along. It didn't help the employee to improve and it certainly damaged the institution. But then yeah, that's all too common.

KOENIG: Yeah, I think that's it. I think you put your finger on one of the problems, and that is that personnel, especially American personnel, tend to rotate in and out of these units. So the supervisors are only there for two or three years. Typically. I think the second is just American culture. It's hard to say this in the age of Trump, but we're somewhat too reticent to engage with others on difficult topics where we don't agree or where one side is, actually, the superior, actually gets to make decisions and the other side generally needs to comply. We're not very comfortable with that. As managers we too often try to evade our obligations in that regard, just in a kind of "go along to get along" scheme.

Q: And it must be admitted that managers who do forthrightly address problem employees will sometimes end up suffering, if you will, because they may have to respond

to EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) complaints or harassment complaints, or whatever it might be. As an executive director, I certainly saw these cases that would come across my desk from the posts that we had in our regions. And sometimes, there was no case. But nonetheless, the supervisor had to respond and spend time on those issues.

KOENIG: Well, that's exactly what happened to me in Cyprus, with this person that I already mentioned, who filed the EEO complaint against me. It was entirely baseless, but this person filed an EEO complaint after I had not recommended her for tenure on her second tenure opportunity. And my boss did not support me. The DCM (deputy chief of mission), a perfectly good guy and a friend, told me, "You're crazy to do this, you're going to get an EEO suit against you, and you should just let it go." He did better than I did in the foreign service, but I still think I was right.

Anyway, that was my basic approach to management. I also tended to be more of a leader than a manager, I would say. I was kind of a cheerleader for my organization all the time. There was a person in Thessaloniki, actually a very distinguished American named Bruce Lansdale, you might call him the American hero of Thessaloniki. He's not well known everywhere, but he had been in the city for sixty or seventy years at the time that I was there. He had recently retired as president of the American Farm School, and he had had a huge role in the history of northern Greece. Anyway, I didn't learn all of this from him, but he was certainly a fine example of it. He had a philosophy called "inspired leadership" and he was very deliberate about cultivating it. I don't want to say he was just like a power-of-positive-thinking type, but very much about positive messaging from the management. Not that this would in itself overcome obstacles, but that it was critical to the spirit of an organization. That was the philosophy that I typically had. I always tried to set very realistic goals, but I tried to be enthusiastic about how we did our work to achieve them. Especially in Thessaloniki, this meant getting out of the office, getting out into the community, just getting out and talking to Greeks all the time. Pushing people out the door as much as I could, including this deputy who was not inclined to do it. You know, that was not in her nature. But she did it well, and she thrived. So that was a big part of my approach. Empowering people means respecting them and, in a small operation like Thessaloniki, pushing them out the door.

Q: Well, that puts us in your position as principal officer. And you mentioned previously that there were several quite eventful occurrences that took place while you were there. Perhaps you could go into some of those issues now.

KOENIG: Well, for one, the level of anti-American sentiment was fairly strong in all of Greece, but especially in northern Greece when I arrived. This was something that existed in Greece to varying degrees since the Greek Civil War, which ended in 1949, but the problem had really exploded during the 1970s, when the United States government supported the Greek colonels' junta regime. It never really died down completely, so the left wing of Greek politics was intensely anti-American for the latter part of the 20th century. This sentiment was elevated and expanded by the U.S. support of the Bosniaks in the Bosnia conflict. And then, even more so during the Kosovo bombing campaign. In both of these conflicts, most Greeks sympathized with the Serbs. In fact, there's a very

tawdry story, in which I was not involved in any way, of right-wing Greek government support during the early 1990s, under Constantinos Mitsotakis, for the Bosnian Serbs during the Bosnian conflict.

This meant that people were very harshly critical of the United States in northern Greece while I was there. When I arrived, their memories of the Kosovo bombing campaign were vivid. We therefore had very large anti-American demonstrations outside the consulate. 150,000 to 200,000 people marched down the street to protest outside our windows. We were on the upper floors of a new, very nice office block; we had moved there from a building that was on the waterfront several years before. It would be a sea of people, extending many blocks, protesting in front of the consulate. This major boulevard, Tsimiski, almost as far as the eye could see, would just be full of people basically shouting, "Death to the United States".

This was not a great public affairs atmosphere in which to work, but we were trying our best to overcome it or balance it by organizing, together with the organizers of the Thessaloniki International Fair, a major public affairs extravaganza involving high level visits, cultural programs, and other activities, beginning just after I arrived. When I moved up to Thessaloniki, the impression in the front office in Athens was that this big effort had not been organized very well by my predecessor. It wasn't in good shape. In particular, not enough was being done about fundraising and engaging local partners. So that was my first major task, and we knocked it into shape. We enlisted a much more energetic fundraising organization, and worked much more actively towards certain specific targets. I got involved in lobbying wealthy Greek businesspeople who were based in northern Greece. I got to know them quite well; I became friends, really, with some of them. They were prominent. They weren't wildly pro-American, but they really appreciated the relationship with the United States.

I also worked a lot with media organizations. At the time there was still a somewhat thriving regional press. They would sponsor things and we would get engaged with them, and we would help raise them to a higher level. We also had excellent locally engaged staff in the consulate in Thessaloniki, who were working on all of this. Especially in the public affairs section. Extremely motivated, extremely talented. We had an American commercial officer stationed in Thessaloniki at the time, and he was incredibly helpful.

So we did get this thing up and running. And it did turn out to be a big success. It was called "Honored Nation U.S.A.". We had excellent cultural performances. We had great attendance. We had wonderful coverage in the media. To be perfectly honest, I don't know how much you can move the dial on public attitudes. Because the next thing I'll describe suggests that it maybe didn't do a lot. But "Honored Nation U.S.A." was a very gratifying thing to be involved in. It's a little bit like our Volksfest in Germany, though on a smaller scale, as we didn't have anything quite as grand as the grand opening of an American embassy, just our particular role during this Thessaloniki International Fair.

Q: What was the basis of the fundraising? I know that the government has very strong restrictions on when you can fundraise, and who you can fundraise from.

KOENIG: Yeah, we were authorized to raise funds to support the cultural program, that part of the project, so that we could pay for bringing out all of these groups that did performances. Some of the business sponsors were actually directly involved in cultural aspects of the program. One of the people I talked to most was Alexandros Bakatselos, a big businessman in northern Greece who was also the chair of the board of the concert hall, the Megaron Mousikis, in Thessaloniki. It's a world-class performance venue that had recently been built in Thessaloniki. So he was both a big donor in terms of his own business contribution, and also was critical to us because he put at our disposal the Megaron Mousikis. So this was the kind of thing we accomplished, and it was all governed by the typical set of authorizations that came through the commercial branch of the embassy in Athens to our commercial officer in Thessaloniki.

Q: Oh, as opposed to through USIA (United States Information Agency).

KOENIG: Yeah, this came through commerce. Because our key fund-raising partner, and a partner in the Thessaloniki International Fair, was the Hellenic American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham).

Q: I see. Interesting.

KOENIG: The AmCham were quite happy, I think. As you probably have seen many times in different places, businesses like to associate themselves with cultural programs in terms of major visibility in sponsorship, being able to introduce the performers at the beginning of an event, being able to co-host receptions where they get to brand the performance as their own, that kind of stuff. We were quite generous with that, giving credit and visibility, that is. And I think it's always a good thing to do when you're abroad, to share the spotlight with local sponsors. I think it anchors your relationship and makes it clear that you realize that you're actually just a guest in the country. So that went very well.

I guess the next event that I would recall is September 11, 2001. And what that was like in a small consulate with a large number of resident American citizens. One of the strange -- it's not peculiar at all to Greece or northern Greece, but it is very much characteristic of northern Greece -- is that we had a small consulate staff but we had a lot of American citizens in our consular district. So we had those three or four Americans that I mentioned who worked for the consulate, and then we had the two FAOs in training at the Hellenic War College. And we had about 12,000 to 15,000 Greek Americans who we wanted to get in contact with after the September 11 attacks.

I think the way I learned of the attacks was very typical. I was sitting in my office when Natalie called and said, "You've got to turn on the TV, something is happening in New York." I flipped on the TV in my office, and there it was. The first tower was burning, and then I saw the plane crash into the second tower in New York. And then the TV cut

away to Washington DC, and you see this cloud of smoke and dust rising above the Pentagon, from cameras behind the White House, so it's all kind of compressed, and it looks incredibly threatening and scary. I sent everybody home immediately. I called Athens and spoke with my boss, the DCM, Mike Cleverley, who was very good. We agreed that we needed to get in touch with all the American citizens in our district, mainly Greek Americans, to make sure that they're all notified, that they've all heard from the American Embassy or the consulate in some way.

All of us left the consulate. My house in Neo Rysio, a suburb of Thessaloniki, was the alternate command post. So we had people come over and we just got on phones, and we tried to contact every American. These people were dispersed across northern Greece and not all of them spoke English. We spent probably ten or twelve hours, into the early morning hours, just calling people. People were not at all bothered that we called them at one o'clock in the morning, they were happy to hear from us. For all the sense of anti-Americanism -- and these Greek Americans who lived in Greece felt it more than we did at the consulate, they were the ones who dealt with it the most -- they had registered with the consulate, and they wanted to be contacted. I'm very glad we did that.

By the next day, I think we had essentially exhausted every contact, every phone number, every possibility that we had, in order to reach people. We also put things out, together with the embassy, which had the lead, of course in Greece, informing people how they could contact the U.S. embassy, or the U.S. consulate and so on. So that was September 11 and September 12. And, as you probably recall, the U.S. quickly went into national lockdown, in addition to what we did to enhance our own security measures in the United States and with partners.

We also went into active public affairs mode, trying to generate and amplify international support for the United States. So over the next few days and weeks, we opened condolence books, we had public events and all sorts of other things. This is where the sentiment in northern Greece became a little painful. We opened a condolence book at the consulate, in line with guidance. Meanwhile, we're seeing pictures of mounds of roses outside the embassy in Berlin or the embassy in London that were so large that they had to be kind of trucked away. Nothing like that happened in Greece, and certainly absolutely nothing like that happened in northern Greece. We got the occasional sympathy note or maybe an occasional visitor. When we opened the condolence book, we had for the first couple of hours a steady stream of visitors who came in an official capacity, from the government or organizations or other consulates in town, or businesspeople who were friends of the United States. But then, after that, it kind of dried up. When I heard that the television channels were sending camera crews over to take pictures of the condolence book, because it was going to be on the news that night, we didn't have anybody in line. So I actually had to ask two women, housekeepers, from our char force to dress in their civilian clothes and come in and sign the condolence book so that we had somebody signing the condolence book while the cameras were there.

That was fairly early on. And then it so happened that three months later, on the actual three-month anniversary of September 11, so on December 11, the World Council of

Hellenes Abroad, a diaspora organization officially sponsored by the Greek government, was having its World Conference in Thessaloniki. The head of this organization was a longtime Greek American politician and a prominent figure from Chicago named Andy Athens, a very good guy. And he had decided, in consultation with me and the embassy, that it would be very nice if I could go and deliver a message on the anniversary of the September 11th attacks, the three-month anniversary, to the World Council of Hellenes Abroad global convention.

So that was the plan. And I wrote a nice speech in Greek and had help from some of the staff and practiced it a lot and it was quite decent. And then Natalie and I go to the conference hall. There were probably 500, maybe 600 delegates in the hall. And as soon as we got to the door, the organizers told us, "Come this way. We're having some problems." So they lead Natalie and me off to a holding room. Andy Athens was there; he was fuming mad. The delegates to the World Council of Hellenes Abroad had not agreed to receive a speech from an American official, nor that there should be any event to commemorate the attacks on September 11. This situation lasted for about an hour; we hung out in the holding room. Apparently, there were intense arguments outside in the hall. Many people said it's not fair that we're doing this for America and September 11 when we're not commemorating the victims of the brutal Kosovo bombing campaign by NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) led by the United States. Finally, they let me speak, and it was kind of somber and anti-climactic. It would have been somber at any rate, but it was not a great event. I did my best, I delivered a pretty decent Greek speech, but it was not well received. It was just indicative of the problem we had there. There was deep-seated resentment of the United States, basically rooted to a large degree in the Greek Civil War and its aftermath, and the colonels' junta, but also intense, nationalist dislike of American policy in the Balkans.

Q: And did this particular conference also include Greeks from other countries, expatriate Greeks?

KOENIG: Yes, it was all expatriate Greeks, from all over the world, so there was a large contingent from the United States, but also from the UK, from Australia, from Western Europe, from Russia, as well. There are different points of view in these different communities, naturally, they're rooted in the places where they live. But on the whole, I think, Hellenic views, from the center to the center left to the far left, were typically anti-American, and also some on the far right. This has changed in the interim, by the way, it's not nearly what it used to be. It's improved a great deal. But at that time, it was a big problem.

We also had somewhat similar issues regarding the legacy of the Greek Civil War itself. When I was in Athens, there was always a problem with the Truman statue, it was always being attacked by the Communist Party of Greece and even cut down. This became a really regrettable, almost annual event for a while. The government and police would try to protect the statue. But in the end, they would always retreat in front of the onslaught of enraged Greek students and leftists, who would attack the Truman statue because of Truman's role in the Greek Civil War. As ambassador, Nick Burns worked with others to

put up a statue of George Marshall, because Greece was the largest per capita recipient of Marshall Plan aid in Europe. That assistance had a huge and very, very positive effect in Greece. But in the end, the Marshall statue had to be located inside the security line of the embassy because it would not have been safe on the outside.

In the north, I worked on finding a statue of the U.S. general who had advised the royal forces during the Greek Civil War, a guy named Van Fleet. It had been on the lakefront in a town called Kastoria, home to many Greek Americans in the fur business. The local communists threw it in the lake. But the lake is not deep, so it would have been easy to find. The local authorities just were not interested in finding the statue. So I spent some of my time as principal officer working with the municipal authorities there to get them to fish out the statue of Van Fleet, which for a long time they refused to do. This was typical then. The situation has improved a great deal over the last, let's say, ten to fifteen years as U.S.-Greek relations have strengthened dramatically.

Q: And I believe you also mentioned that there was an assassination of a diplomat which took place?

KOENIG: There was. That was in Athens just before we left. Stephen Saunders, the British defense attaché. He was the last foreign victim, I think the very last victim of the November 17 terrorist group. He was assassinated on his drive into work on Kifisias Avenue, in Athens, in an unarmored car, having been counseled, I think, by a lot of his friends from outside the British Embassy, other attaches, that it was unwise to ride in an unarmored car with no police escort, etc. Our guys, our senior military personnel were very, very heavily protected by bodyguards and using armored vehicles.

In Thessaloniki, I had bodyguards, I had my own detail. The first place I had a personal security detail was in Thessaloniki, and I also lived under pretty strict personal security arrangements there. We had a walled house in a suburb called Neo Rysio, which the RSO (regional security officer) office loved. It was very nicely appointed. It had a tennis court and a swimming pool, which is unusually nice. The house was a villa that a businessman had built to use during summer as a second home, for parties. Really nice place. I was quite obedient when it came to security arrangements. So everywhere I went, I had security; I was accompanied by bodyguards everywhere. I got to know my detail very well. They were from the Hellenic National Police. They were extremely good, very friendly, very competent.

One Sunday, I was sitting at home with my family. My boys were small then, in elementary school. And I decided I wanted to go for a walk. I was very active at the time, working out and running and doing all sorts of things a lot, but inside the residence compound. But I decided I wanted to go for a walk on that beautiful Sunday afternoon with my older son, Ted. I didn't want to wait for the security detail to come and I didn't want them to be bothered on Sunday to just come out and walk with me around my neighborhood. There were contract guards posted at the gate of the house, who also patrolled the grounds. And we also had a surveillance detection unit that was always moving around and occasionally visited the residence. So Ted and I walk to the front

gate, and the contract guard looks at me like "What in the world is going on here?" I said, "I'm just going for a walk with my son, and I'll see you in an hour," and walked out. It was beautiful. I think it was springtime, just a gorgeous time in Greece. It's full of nut and fruit tree blossoms and orange scent from the orange blossoms and everything is just fantastic. So Ted and I have a nice walk up around the hill above our house, through fields, etc., and then come back, safe and sound.

The next morning, back in the office, I got a call from the regional security officer in Athens, asking me, "What in the world were you doing out there? You don't know who was observing your house. We have anti-surveillance running, but we can't see everything." So that was the last walk I took. To be honest, I didn't chafe very much at these restrictions, I was okay with going on vacation with my guards and everything. But I did kind of resent that I couldn't even take a walk.

And the arrangements could be kind of crazy. Early on in Thessaloniki, we didn't have an armored vehicle large enough to hold Natalie, the kids, and me, as well as the driver and bodyguard. So on weekend family outings, I would ride in a sedan, an armored sedan, with my detail and the consulate driver. And Natalie would follow in our Isuzu Rodeo with the boys in the backseat. That was just nightmarish. I mean, Natalie just couldn't drive that way. There was all this kind of tactical driving that they did, even though there was no obvious threat at the time. It was so easy to get separated, and Natalie was frazzled and frustrated. So that stopped and the embassy was good enough to send us an armored Suburban that we could use so we no longer had to be separated when we wanted to move around as a family.

Q: And so what was life like for Natalie and the boys, did they just go about life as normal or did they have restrictions?

KOENIG: No, they didn't have any restrictions really. They didn't get any protection, either, unless they were with me. They were encouraged, Natalie more than the boys of course, to be observant, to vary routes and times, to keep an eye on their surroundings. But no actual physical protection measures were taken on their behalf.

Q: And what year are we now in?

KOENIG: This was from 2000 to 2003. It was in 2003 that November 17 was busted open through a series of fortuitous events that led to the capture of a member of the organization. It was shown that they had been planning a number of attacks. Among their targets were both myself and the consulate general in Thessaloniki. So they evidently had a branch that was interested in conducting attacks in the north. They had never conducted one there. All of their attacks had been in the Athens area. But they were interested in the north, and several of their members were from northern Greece.

Q: And how large a group was it in terms of active membership?

KOENIG: I don't know exactly. But it was small, I would say maybe two dozen active members. There was much speculation, some of it was probably correct, that they were politically connected and protected by certain leftist members of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement, PASOK, which was the party of Andreas Papandreou. The party was not ideologically unified; it was not, strictly speaking, entirely far left, there were many centrist members. Certainly, when I was in Greece, the centrist part of PASOK was dominant under Prime Minister Simitis. But there was always a suspicion that there was a back channel between leaders of the November 17 terrorist organization and certain figures in PASOK, based on their common experience in the student movement against the junta during the late 60s and early 70s.

Q: Okay, are there other issues that you want to talk about in depth?

KOENIG: The only other one I would mention, I guess, is that the Greeks were very good allies of the United States in the NATO context, really exceptionally strong allies. But because of this anti-American sentiment that was quite pervasive in Greece, they were very careful about how they described our relations in public. And they were very sensitive about any kind of public information that might demonstrate that they were cooperating with the U.S. government in any ways that might be controversial.

So, as we were ramping up (sort of mistakenly to my mind) to invade Iraq, the Turks decided that they weren't going to allow us to stage out of eastern Turkey, in order to use the northern route into Iraq. As a result, there was for a short period a lot of thrashing about for other staging arrangements, which might substitute in part for eastern Turkey, but none of them proved to be possible or feasible. One of the places where we made some initial soundings was in Greece. And the reaction of authorities was remarkably positive. As long as it could be kept secret, they were not averse to cooperating with us, far more than I had expected. So they would allow us to pre-position equipment and do other logistical tasks using facilities in northern Greece, as long as this was not public knowledge. Things never got very far. This was not an option that the Pentagon decided was worth developing. But that certainly was not due to obstacles erected by the Greeks; they were quite willing to work with us, which was surprising to me. I had expected that they would be rather more skeptical about taking this on. It would have been highly controversial if it had become known. I may have to strike all of this from my account.

Q: I don't think you've named any names, so.

KOENIG: I have not.

Q: Okay, so now you're thinking about what's next for your career, I'm sure. And how is that going?

KOENIG: Oh, it's going great. Before Nick Burns left Athens, moving up to NATO in Brussels, we had talked briefly about the possibility that I might be his DCM there. Toria Nuland was his DCM when he arrived. So when Toria left after one year, I reminded Nick of this conversation and he put me through as his DCM at USNATO (U.S. Mission

to NATO). That's how I got that job. I went through the normal selection procedure, of course, sending all the requisite papers and personal statement and everything like that. I did a bit of other lobbying. But my main effort was certainly with Nick, and it worked out well. But when I arrived at NATO, I was very different from Toria. I was a neophyte to working in a multilateral organization like NATO. It was interesting, and I enjoyed it a great deal.

Q: Was your role more towards managing the mission? Or were you actively negotiating with the other NATO representatives?

KOENIG: I would say it was fifty-fifty. I didn't like negotiating on language, like negotiating the communique for ministerial meetings and summits. So that assignment passed on to the person who was called the political adviser, but was actually the political counselor, John Heffern, who was extremely good at it. I will confess that the reason I didn't like negotiating documents was because I didn't think it was worth the trouble fighting over a few words most of the time. I had a very skeptical view of negotiating text in the NATO context. I am still skeptical, I think it's a bit of, as the military would say, "a self-licking ice cream cone". But it was held very dear by many NATO-nicks who worked in EUR/RPM (Office of European Security and Political Affairs), and OSD (Office of the Secretary of Defense) Policy. They really wanted to get certain words into various documents, words they thought were critical to U.S. national interest, and they would die in a ditch over these things. I thought it was all overblown and meaningless, and because I hated doing it, I just didn't.

John Heffern was very good at negotiating text. And he liked it. I mean, we used to have these wonderful conversations where he would come back from negotiating sessions and tell me about all the things that had been achieved. He would show me the document marked up with five different colors. And I enjoyed those conversations a lot. But man, that was a waste of time in my opinion. Anyway, I did a lot of negotiating, actually, but not that kind of negotiating, I did not negotiate texts. For example, I did a lot of negotiating over the creation of what was called the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, the initial outreach to establish partner relations between NATO and countries in the Persian Gulf. Shortly after I arrived at NATO, it was decided that it would be useful to the United States and to the Alliance to develop relations with these countries. So I worked a lot with other allied representatives and committees that were staffed by the deputy permanent representatives like me.

I also worked a great deal with the deputy secretary general, who was given the lead on management of relations with Middle Eastern and North African countries as one of his assignments. He is still a friend of mine, Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo. He and I had a similar style which was, I would say, relatively gentle and accommodating and open-minded for people in a security organization like NATO. It was a little out of character for me, to be honest, to be in an organization like USNATO that is so hard-bitten in terms of its attitudes. It was driven by a sort of fervor and conviction, that what it's doing is right and very important, which I found off-putting. Nevertheless, I got into it while I was there. Still, I was always less committed than a lot of my colleagues on

the U.S. side to absolutely drive through what we wanted. And that, in my view, is not a bad thing. My relatively low-key approach, that is.

I had a conversation with Nick about this, a few months after my arrival. I said, "You know, I'm not a hard nose. I'm not gonna be tough on some of this stuff. It's just not in my nature." I was very relieved when he said, "You know, John, I knew you, and I gave you the job. Just don't fret over it." So I wouldn't say I was a "cheese-eating surrender monkey" the way Bart Simpson described the French during the Iraq War. But I have a lot more sympathy for others' points of view than we typically had in USNATO. I honestly believe that the sort of American skepticism about alternative approaches and other points of view that I saw in NATO was not a good thing. In the U.S. Mission to NATO, we tried to ride roughshod over everyone in the Alliance who disagreed with us. I don't put this on Nick Burns. Not at all; he was open-minded and diplomatic. It was just the institutional culture. Baked in almost. And I think that is not the kind of leadership we always need to exercise, even though it is one kind of leadership.

Q: What were some of the other issues that NATO was working on in those days?

KOENIG: Afghanistan was the main one. I was quite involved in that effort. At the time that I arrived at NATO, ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) was confined to Kabul. Earlier it had been a Canadian-led mission under UN (United Nations) auspices, but they had already transferred authority for ISAF to NATO, and the Canadians were getting out of this leadership role. It had been a huge burden for Canada, over, I think, two or three years. It was really exhausting for them to operate as the lead organizer of ISAF. So they had arranged the transfer of ISAF in Kabul to NATO. And we then, as a national project of the United States, working with our NATO Allies, had set as a goal to expand the ISAF mission throughout Afghanistan on a counterclockwise rotation starting with the relatively peaceful provinces directly north of Kabul and working our way around. This was connected to the administration of provincial reconstruction teams as well as other military set-ups for NATO in larger regional centers like Kandahar and Herat, and so forth.

So the plan for ISAF expansion came forward, of course, from SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Forces Europe, in Mons, Belgium). SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe, NATO's most senior military commander) at the time was General Jim Jones, who was an excellent guy. I have the highest admiration for Jim Jones. He later went on to be the first national security adviser in the Obama administration. As SACEUR, he was somewhat independent-minded when it came to interaction with the Pentagon. He didn't always get along perfectly with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

Donald Rumsfeld had brought in an odd assortment of people, some of whom were senior officials in the Pentagon, some of whom were extremely capable, and others like Under Secretary for Policy Doug Feith, who were just completely worthless. And Rumsfeld himself was sort of a force of nature. We didn't have too many problems working out the arrangements for the expansion of ISAF into northern Afghanistan,

handing over to a German-led group, with Germany as the lead nation. But then we came to the west, Herat -- not the southwest, just the west. Like the north, it was also quite pacified, at the time, though there was a problem with a warlord who dominated Herat and the surrounding territory. Basically, however, it was deemed to be ready for transfer to NATO and ISAF, under Italy's lead.

The way things work in NATO, on a well-developed decision like this, you have a discussion at the Military Committee based on a recommendation that comes forward from the command structure, in this case SHAPE. And then they forward the Military Committee's decision to the North Atlantic Council (NAC), which is the political side of the alliance and its highest decision-making body. The NAC includes the representatives of all NATO countries and is chaired by the secretary general. The NAC has a look at the Military Committee decision or advice, maybe makes some additions, some adjustments. And then the Secretary General puts out what's called a decision sheet, which is put out under silence. That is, after a certain period, usually under a week, the decision becomes final, a final decision by NATO, unless one or more countries raise objections -- what's called "breaking silence." The whole thing is called a "silence procedure." It's the way to get the maximum benefit out of consensus versus unanimity. So as long as you maintain silence, in other words, you don't actually raise an objection to the decision, it moves forward as fully endorsed, fully accepted.

I don't know how long the silence procedure was on the expansion of ISAF to western Afghanistan, under Italian lead, with a substantial contribution from Spain. But less than a day before silence expired, I was notified by our office of the defense advisor (ODA), a part of U.S. NATO staffed directly by the Pentagon, that Rumsfeld was thinking about breaking silence. In other words, the U.S. would not allow the transfer to go forward, even though it was recommended by Jim Jones and cleared by the Military Committee. It sounds like a tempest in a teacup, but this would have been unbelievable. It was just something that never happened, that the U.S. would break silence with fundamental objections on a recommendation from SACEUR on a matter of this importance. It is contrary to the logic of the American role in NATO. The system at SHAPE is very much under the control of SACEUR, always an American. It makes no sense to have SACEUR's military advice rejected by the civilian leadership in the Pentagon. Anyway, it really wasn't up to Rumsfeld alone to break silence; instructions for U.S. NATO were coordinated by the White House based on input from the Pentagon and the State Department. But Rumsfeld was making sounds that he wanted to break silence.

So I got on the phone in the middle of the night with various senior people in OSD policy, and begged them not to do it. Not to break silence on this. I don't know that my calls made any difference, but they were certainly remembered by the people that I called. I mean, I woke them at two o'clock in the morning, and they never stopped reminding me of that. But we did not break silence in the end, and it worked out just fine. One of the serious drags on our work in NATO during the time that I was there, though, was that Donald Rumsfeld was so suspicious of the Alliance and had so little regard for many Allies. He was just an incredibly difficult person to work with. Personally, he was

horribly unappealing, rude, and arrogant. He had nearly screwed things up seriously with his prejudice about the Italians leading ISAF in Herat.

Q: And what would the counter proposal have been?

KOENIG: Well, there was no counter proposal in the works, so they would have had to go back to SHAPE for further planning. Rumsfeld might have wanted to substitute some other country. I don't know what he would have done. He was a prejudiced man, he had firmly fixed views about almost everything. I know that he's the inventor of "known unknowns, unknown unknowns," and all that nonsense, but for him, everything was known. He was incredibly difficult to work with. He was the worst senior official I ever had to deal with extensively in my thirty-plus years in the State Department and the foreign service. I had some bad, bad encounters with Donald Rumsfeld.

Q: So, in that case, the idea was that, although ISAF, in some eyes, stood for "I Saw Americans Fight", and in fact, the American forces, with some exceptions, were doing the hardest work in terms of combat, the role of NATO Allies was extremely important in taking on some of these regions and maintaining them so that the United States essentially didn't have to. So it's interesting to hear that Donald Rumsfeld would have objected. It's not so much the idea that it wasn't the U.S. but I guess he just didn't think the Italians were up to the job or something.

KOENIG: Yeah, I don't think he had great regard for the Germans either up in Kunduz, but he just felt as though, I guess, Herat was getting a little bit closer to Kandahar and the west was not quite as settled as the north at the time.

Q: Did you visit Afghanistan, yourself?

KOENIG: Yeah, I did one time. And it was an interesting visit. I went out with SACEUR for a visit. Pierre Lellouche was the other senior civilian who went along on that trip. He was a prominent French politician who was a vigorous supporter of NATO and later had ministerial positions in some French governments. The trip was interesting. We spent most of our time in Kabul, inside the bubble, mostly around ISAF headquarters and the presidential palace and that kind of stuff. And then we also went out to Herat and had a meeting there with both the Italians and the local Afghan military commander. It was a brief visit, probably three days all together. So I don't have strong first hand impressions of Afghanistan.

NATO also had a senior civilian representative there at the time. His name was Hikmet Çetin, and he was Turkish, a former Turkish foreign minister. Turkey had an intense interest in what was going on in Afghanistan throughout the life of the operation. And Cetin, I think, was quite a capable individual and a very nice man. So I spent a lot of time with him during the short time that we were there in Kabul.

Ultimately, this progression of ISAF expansion under NATO, this counterclockwise progression went forward. And you're absolutely right, ISAF did not do the counter terror

operations. That was actually an American coalition operation. This was always a peculiar feature of our operations in Afghanistan. The U.S. always retained national control of the hard side of international military engagement via coalition arrangements. This part of the mission was largely American, with close cooperation with certain allies, especially the UK. It was very important for this reason that the UK was the country that had command of ISAF in Kandahar when we came around to that next segment of the rotation, and that the U.S. retained the east at that time. The southwest around Kandahar and the east were where the counter terror fight was toughest. Those were the two areas of Afghanistan which were considered the most unstable and where the security challenges were greatest. We had the UK and the United States as the lead countries. Elsewhere, things were quieter, especially during my time at NATO Headquarters. Actually, things worked out perfectly well, until much later when security more generally began to break down. Things worked out quite well for some time in both the north, based on the Germans in Kunduz, and in the west, based on the Italians in Herat.

Q: Yes, the Germans ended up having some terrible tragedies in their region. And also in Herat, the Italians had some difficult security situations, I believe. The U.S. diplomatic mission definitely did attempt to open a consulate there. And the facility that was originally chosen just didn't meet security standards, and eventually was abandoned. And I think at some point, it was actually bombed before it was inhabited. And we ended up opening a separate consulate, I think it was under the wing of the Italians.

KOENIG: My time at NATO was sort of the golden age of the international presence in Afghanistan, it was the most hopeful. And even then, I think there were signs of ultimate failure. I actually thought that at the time, based on what I saw. I never thought we were going to succeed. You know, I said before that I'm not a "cheese-eating surrender monkey", but I must be a surrender monkey of some kind, because I already thought we were failing in 2004 and 2005. There were so many bad signs, even early on when the assessments were coming in that were generally positive.

One was narcotics. There was no question that we were presiding, in a way, over a flourishing, unprecedented growth of the narcotics industry in Afghanistan. And we had no scheme to even control it, let alone stamp it out. We talked about it a lot. We had countless briefings in Brussels on this topic. But it wasn't part of the ISAF mission to conduct counter narcotics operations. Nor did we have any idea what to do. I mean, the U.S. did have plans, we would hear from the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) and others who were leading counter narcotics efforts in Afghanistan together with the Afghan authorities, but it was impossible to avoid the conclusion that we didn't have a clue about how to address this effectively.

The second was training of Afghan police and military forces. That was the focus of the ISAF mission in many respects. But it was clearly failing from the outset. And the forecasts, even early on, were that there was no conceivable situation in which Afghanistan, the national government in Kabul could cover more than a very small proportion of the cost of continuing training and fielding capable forces. So they were going to be, essentially, mercenaries working for the U.S. and other international partners

in perpetuity. And there were already colossal problems with corruption, desertion, nothing was working.

Nonetheless, the situation was quite calm for a couple years while we were pumping a lot of assistance money into Afghanistan. Maybe people were just exhausted. And of course, many good things were happening on the ground: increased education for all young people, including young girls, improvements in agricultural productivity, a restoration of calm and some degree of order in rural as well as urban centers, etc. But it just didn't look good from day one, to my mind. I had a lot of friends who worked in PRTs (provincial reconstruction teams). They were very enthusiastic about their work. They genuinely believed that they were making a lasting impact, and maybe they were right. But typically, what would happen after this initial period of cooperation and progress was that the work of these PRTs would slowly be chipped away and ground down. The lasting effect was only some small part of what they thought they'd achieved early on, kind of a replay of what happened with PRTs in Iraq.

Q: So very difficult to build something, it's quite easy to destroy it.

KOENIG: Yeah. I believe we did the right thing in Afghanistan, don't get me wrong, in contrast to Iraq, which was a mistake from the beginning. But I just don't think we ever had a design for the Afghanistan mission that was realistic after the initial phase of toppling the Taliban government. And that's colored my views to this day. Anyway, we worked a lot on Afghanistan.

I also helped to create the NATO Training Mission in Iraq. At the time that I arrived in mid-2003, NATO was still deeply divided over the US invasion of Iraq. Nick Burns has called it "NATO's near-death experience". I would say that's totally correct.

When I arrived, the situation was sometimes quite tense in the North Atlantic Council. That was partly due to the French perm rep, a very, very irascible fellow, who made a kind of vaudeville show out of being critical of the United States. Benoit D'Aboville was his name. The NAC is arrayed in a huge circle, so all the perm reps and delegations can see each other. When Nick was speaking sometimes, because Nick would represent the United States in the NAC, Benoit would occasionally take out *Le Monde* and open it in front of himself and lean back in his chair. And D'Aboville would swivel a lot in his chair, and scoot around and talk to members of his delegation, and just make a total hyperkinetic display, a little vaudevillian show, to demonstrate how little he was willing to pay attention to Nick Burns and the U.S. Needless to say, that was not conducive to Alliance solidarity. This went on for a long time, for many months.

So we were very keen, as was most of NATO, to smooth over this rift that had been created in transatlantic relations because of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Allies were genuinely interested in repairing the damage. That is basically why Germany asked for and was given the task of going to Kunduz as part of the ISAF rotation, because there was a desire to find a role that was supportive of the United States. The Germans were keen to find it. The Germans didn't want tense relations to persist.

In this same vein, another thing that we were able to get Allies to agree to was a training mission that would be under NATO command in Iraq, that would support and supplement what the U.S. was already doing nationally and in a coalition arrangement with the Iraqi armed forces in order to train them. So we set up the NATO Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I). Both of these initiatives were blessed by the NATO summit in Istanbul in 2004. I was acting as a perm rep at the time. Perm reps, let alone acting perm reps, are not very involved at the summit itself. But in the lead up to the Istanbul summit, I was more involved than I might otherwise have been because I was chargé for about four months between Nick Burns and Toria Nuland. Although the name of the NATO Training Mission in Iraq has changed, the basic idea remained in place for years.

We also played around with reviving The Quad at NATO. The Quad was the U.S., Britain, France and Germany, and historically it had sort of run policy development at NATO. But it had been canceled amid all the tension surrounding the Iraq invasion, and Washington wasn't sure whether we should revive it. I am not sure Nick Burns was in favor, either. The other three countries all wanted to, but we held off for a long time and said no. We were still pretty wedded to more of a small state-based diplomatic strategy in NATO. All Washington would allow was monthly meetings at the DCM level, so I got to know my British, French and German colleagues very well, and the discussions were productive in a small way.

I probably should also tell you about my “head-scrubbing” by Rumsfeld. That was the weirdest thing that happened to me in Brussels. I was acting perm rep, and Rumsfeld came to Brussels for the spring meeting of defense ministers, I think it was 2005. I went to his downtown hotel for his morning briefings. Sitting around a table in Rumsfeld's suite, Rumsfeld, his key staff and me. Every ministerial had a lot of group meetings, with different sets of countries. So we were discussing the meeting with NATO partner countries, which included Uzbekistan and other countries from across Europe and the former Soviet Union. I suggested that Rumsfeld use the opportunity to condemn the Uzbek military's killing of scores of civilian protesters in Andijan a week or so before. The “Andijan Massacre”, it was called. It was a major international news story, and the State Department and White House had already condemned it in Washington. The NATO partners meeting would be the first high-level contact between the U.S. and Uzbekistan since the massacre, and I had gotten instructions that Rumsfeld should raise Andijan in the meeting.

Rumsfeld was having none of it. Uzbekistan hosted a major logistic hub for U.S. military flights into Afghanistan. When I said I had received instructions, he raised his voice and shouted, “From whom?” Then he launched into a tirade. I later learned that this was a classic Rumsfeld “head-scrubbing”. I knew Rumsfeld was arrogant and pugnacious. But this was the first time that he turned his ire on me. It was very uncomfortable. And then the 15-minute ride together with him from the hotel to NATO headquarters was totally awkward. Needless to say, Rumsfeld did not say a word about Andijan in the partners

meeting. He left the meeting early and left NATO headquarters about then, way before the end of the ministerial.

My pain was far from over, though. The next day's New York Times carried a front-page story on my "head-scrubbing" by Rumsfeld. It portrayed the SecDef as a bully who had no regard for human rights. Totally fair, of course. At first, I was totally shocked by the article, taken aback, but pretty soon I figured out what had happened. I had only told two of my colleagues about my argument with Rumsfeld when I got back to USNATO the day before, and one of them had previously worked with the author of The New York Times article, in a different place. That had to be how the whole thing reached The Times.

Anyway, what happened next was a frantic effort by Rumsfeld's office to have me fired. The drive was spear-headed by Mira Ricardel, the acting assistant secretary of defense for international security policy. Mira had been in the morning brief for Rumsfeld and had supported Rumsfeld's nasty comments. Somehow, Mira always managed to be even worse than her boss. The afternoon of The New York Times story, Mira phoned to chew me out, telling me she would get me fired. And she called her counterpart at the State Department, Dan Fried, the assistant secretary for Europe and Eurasia, and demanded that I be fired. Dan refused the first time Mira called. She kept calling and Dan kept refusing, over the next two days or so. I had known Dan for years, and we had some policy differences, but he was a great guy and saved my skin. I just felt gratitude after this mess. And a lot of respect for him. Mira was later fired from the Trump White House, reportedly on orders from First Lady Melania. Finally, a little karma.

Another interesting part of my work was planning for NATO's new headquarters building in Brussels. The deputy permanent representatives met as a committee to oversee the planning and construction of the new headquarters. NATO had decided that it wanted to move out of the 1960s era military hospital building, which was serving as the headquarters since 1967, since it was really not built for purpose. It was pretty dysfunctional. There was a central area that had been purpose built for NATO's main meeting rooms, which was deliberately designed to be part of a headquarters for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. But otherwise, the building was still in the original form of a military hospital run by the Belgian armed forces and very little had been done to change that over time.

So it was really poorly designed. Just as an example, it was almost impossible to mow the lawns that surrounded the building. The old headquarters was laid out like a backbone with ribs coming off of it -- maybe eight ribs, maybe ten. At the end of each of the ribs, there was an entrance that was secure. And these entrances were then fenced in and between each rib there was a lawn, sometimes with trees in it. But there was no way to get a lawnmower to the lawns. So once a week they would bring a riding lawn mower, about ten feet wide, down the main hallway of NATO -- the backbone -- it would go out through double doors in order to mow each of the little lawns. It was just a ludicrously bad building, and it was falling apart. It was not built to last as long as it already had.

So it had been decided that we needed to leave that headquarters building and build across the street on land that had been given to us by the Belgian authorities, which we would then swap out with the old property, the current headquarters site.

Before I got to NATO, a committee made up of the deputy permanent representatives like me was set up to manage the project. That was a complete disaster. I don't know who came up with the idea. I'm afraid it may have been the United States that thought the best way to manage the project would be to have oversight conducted by the deputy permanent representatives in committee. We got absolutely nowhere. It was simply the worst possible scheme for managing a major construction project that I could ever imagine. Anyway, shortly after I arrived, many people were saying, "This isn't working." The Belgians came forward and said, "Well, you know, we could do this, we could build this headquarters for you using standard NATO construction procedures. That means NATO would designate our military construction organization, which is part of the Belgian government, as prime contractor to do all of this work. And then NATO would just have to exercise oversight through some mechanism, maybe the management division of NATO. If you want to establish a committee for oversight, you could do that, but not for day-to-day management in any way."

This was a brilliant idea. I worked a lot with the Belgians to get people to accept it, but it was low-hanging fruit. In fact, if we had not handed the project to the Belgians, we would still be living in the old HQ with lawn mowers in the hallway.

The U.S. also had very strange demands for the construction project. NATO was a much greener organization than the United States government. So NATO had come up with a rather sophisticated scheme for cooling the new headquarters building based on a design that had been approved by allies, including the United States. But the Americans reserved our position with regard to cooling our own spaces. It had nothing to do with protecting IT machinery or anything like that; that already was covered separately by everyone and always had been. It was just about the comfort level and labor standards or specifications for federal employees. NATO could not promise us that their system would never let us get too hot.

This innovative cooling system relied on water and condensation and evaporation and other kinds of things, and overnight ventilation. But because NATO could not promise to keep the temperature below 78 degrees or something like that in our workspaces, we opted out. The U.S. NATO mission and the U.S. military delegation (MilDel). We insisted that we were going to air condition our spaces on our own. We were mocked by everyone in NATO about this. Even the secretary general would say, "Since the United States insists on refrigerating its own workspaces, we will just move ahead with our plan. And the United States, regardless of expense, will go ahead and do whatever it feels like in its own units." I think this made us a laughingstock. I really don't understand why, when this was a very, very credible green initiative, we didn't bother to look harder at whether we could somehow join in it. I think we made a mistake.

Q: Well, given trends in global warming, you wonder if you went to NATO now, if everybody would be envious of the United States.

KOENIG: It might be. It can be really uncomfortable in Brussels in the summertime. You've been to Germany and Europe, a lot. The Rhineland and the northern plains there, including the Low Countries, it can be oppressively hot and humid during the summer.

Q: I don't know if you recall, but when we originally designed the Consulate General Frankfurt renovation of the former Air Force and Army hospital, there was very little provision made for any air conditioning. And then one of the years that we were both in Germany, there was a huge heatwave. And they were actually sending people home early or letting them work from home because it was so hot. And we ended up in fact, putting in air conditioning, at least in parts of the building, because some parts, especially the ones that were higher up in the attic spaces and that were facing the sun, were pretty unbearable. In fact, I went down and spent a week there one time just out of solidarity, sweating. In the overseas buildings office (OBO) the thinking was that basically "this is Germany, you don't need any air conditioning". And it wasn't true.

KOENIG: I mean, the new NATO headquarters is a big glass box. It was to be air-conditioned, it just wasn't air conditioned using a classical refrigeration arrangement. Anyway, that was another thing that we worked on.

While I was there, in 2004, we had a big wave of NATO expansion, which was also a wonderful experience. It worked out extremely well. We brought in seven new allies simultaneously. Overall, that worked out beautifully for us.

We also did some things that I didn't like. While I was at NATO, the U.S. had a kind of small-state approach to certain issues, because our relations with France and Germany were relatively difficult due in large part to the invasion of Iraq and the resentment that this created between our countries. We pushed harder on what you might call a small-state strategy, where we tried to isolate France and Germany, based on outreach to small states, chiefly in Central Europe. We worked with those states to advance our rather hard policy toward Russia, for example, or their involvement in U.S. operations in Iraq. I don't think that was a wise move, but we did it quite a bit while I was there.

Our house there, the DCM residence, was phenomenal. And Brussels was a wonderful place to live; life for my family was fabulous. We made a lot of friends in Brussels. A lot of them through the schools that the kids went to. Our sons went to ISB, the International School of Brussels, which is really an outstanding school. We are very good friends, for example, with a Danish-Greek family who we got to know through that sort of experience, and we still do a lot of things together. We just saw them in Rome last year, they're great. So we really enjoyed our time there in that regard.

I guess the last thing I'll say about Brussels was that we had this official, the defense advisor, inside the U.S. mission, which meant U.S. representation in NATO was more complicated than it might look to outsiders. There was the U.S. military representative or

Mil Rep, who represents the U.S. on NATO's Military Committee. The Mil Rep reported to the Joint Chiefs at the Pentagon. The offices for the Mil Rep and his staff were separate from the U.S. Mission; they were located across the hall in the old headquarters. There were maybe fifty or sixty staff, active-duty military, who supported the work of the Mil Rep, who was a senior three star American. The Mil Rep, that office, and the Military Committee reviewed all of the inputs from the NATO Command Structure, especially SHAPE, and also did other kinds of work on military issues.

Then, inside the U.S. Mission, we had a kind of bifurcated structure. Half of the mission was the Office of the Defense Advisor (ODA), which reported directly to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The head of that office while I was there, the defense advisor, was a guy named Evan ("Van") Galbraith. He was a former American ambassador to France under the Reagan administration and was an old-time associate of Bill Buckley's at the National Review. He was, I would say, a right-wing gadfly. He created all sorts of bizarre minor troubles, because he had hoped to be perm rep instead of Nick Burns. In fact, the two of them had to interview with George W. Bush. And Bush chose Nick over Evan Galbraith, who was supported by Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld nonetheless went forward and appointed Galbraith as the head of the Office of Defense Advisor; that created a very strange dynamic.

Van then went around with this bizarre title, "SecDef Rep Europe", which he had put on his cards. He would show up from time to time in other countries, claiming to speak on behalf of Rumsfeld. This really was a lousy thing for Galbraith to do. Anyway, as DCM I was his boss, in theory. I was Van Galbraith's boss. Nick and I, and the U.S. Mission as a whole, were supposed to report to the White House via both the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State. In fact, in Washington there was a policy development and clearance arrangement for NATO, based on the interagency, to ensure that all of the three key elements, the Pentagon, including both the Joint Chiefs and the SecDef, and State and the NSC (National Security Council) are all in line, sometimes including other agencies as well, based on the issue.

Apart from Van, the very existence of ODA was a really peculiar thing. They had more money than we had from our State Department sources, and they were the source of a lot of perks for USNATO – maybe not perks, but special and better arrangements than what existed for people who were assigned in Brussels in other U.S. government capacities. USNATO shared in the tri-mission management support structure that was based on Embassy Brussels and also included the U.S. Mission to the EU. But we only depended on the tri-mission to a certain degree, because we also got direct support from ODA. So it was complicated, and I ended up spending a fair bit of time working on these things with my tri-mission counterparts. It wasn't always easy to reconcile how we would deal with things out in NATO, with the way work was being done with the other two elements of the tri-mission.

In terms of management, I had the most difficult personnel situation that I ever faced while I was working in USNATO, and it arose with a civilian employee of the Office of the Defense Advisor. This person came to my office distraught one day and had a

nervous breakdown on my couch. In many ways, for various reasons, she was under great personal stress. She was also getting a bit of a cold shoulder in the more military-oriented structure that existed in ODA. To my mind, they were making a massive, massive mistake in how they were handling the situation. I don't know what to say. They were pushing her to dangerous, dangerous points. So I intervened, and this became extremely difficult because of the difference of perspective that I brought to the matter from that of the people involved in managing the ODA. Ultimately, the employee was pensioned, based on an emotional disability. But getting there was incredibly difficult. And it was rendered vastly more difficult by the sort of heartless, bureaucratic approach that I found in my colleagues on the other side, in ODA, with whom I generally got along just fine. That case, that situation was one reason why I got this award from the White House, the Presidential Distinguished Service Award. Honestly, I think we didn't just help somebody get through the day; we saved a life.

So that wraps up my time at NATO. I loved it; I really love the organization. There's a huge network of people who are involved in NATO, and I made many friends over the course of my time working on NATO affairs. I really, really liked it. Still, I would say that I am, among all of these people, probably the biggest skeptic about U.S. engagement in the world, the most out-of-the-mainstream in terms of my views on foreign policy, of anybody I've ever worked with in the NATO context. They tend to be true believers; I often find myself to be the Debbie Downer.

Q: Well, it certainly has been my experience that U.S. military personnel are extremely mission focused, which of course they need to be. And if you're fighting an actual war, it's extremely important that everyone is pulling on the same oar; however, if you're trying to devise strategy or evaluate results, then that approach doesn't work as effectively. And perhaps that was some of what you were seeing. Because I think a lot of times, even the civilians absorb the military ethos, if you will, and dissent and creative thinking is not necessarily appreciated.

KOENIG: Yeah, I think this is especially true after a high-level decision is made. Sometimes I found that military officers were a little more outspoken with dissenting views or a wider range of views, let's say, as things move toward the decision-making point. But once things reach the decision point, there's a kind of shift, which I think can be counterproductive except in exactly the situation where you described, where you're actually fighting a war and you need to retain that sort of integrity of the chain of command. Otherwise, I think more second guessing is called for. It's also true, perhaps less so now than it was when I was there, that it can be hard to distinguish between civilians and military when you're dealing with these people, because they're almost all ex-military. Basically, you're talking about people who, at some stage, had military careers, and then shifted to civilian work. But they stayed in a basically military-focused structure, so the transition was not entirely complete by any means.

NATO was also just overwhelmingly male when I was there. Toria Nuland was our perm rep after Nick left, there were a few other female perm reps in the NAC (North Atlantic Council). And there were some other women working in various positions in the staff,

some of them relatively senior. But when you would go into the NAC room, I mean, it was a male zone. I would do a little exercise every few months, just count how many women were in the room during a meeting of the NAC, versus how many men, and it usually would be something like ninety to ten, something like that. That was something that had to change, and I think it has changed in the meantime. But this sort of dominance of current and former military officers, mainly men, in many elements of NATO discussion was really palpable.

Good, should we stop there today, or should we go on to the next job?

Q: It's up to you. I'm certainly free. If you'd like to start talking about Germany right now. I'm just gonna pause. Alright, so you're wrapping up in Brussels at NATO. And you've been looking at your next assignment, which turned out to be DCM Germany, how did that come about?

KOENIG: I had my eye on it for a long time. I mean, not that I was designing my career in order to arrive there. But I had always thought it would be great to go back to Germany at some point. I'd been there as a student and I'd been there in East Berlin as a foreign service officer, so when the DCM job was on the list, it was my top priority. I also had DCM Jakarta on my list. So those were my two serious bids. In the end -- and I'm very glad things worked out this way -- I got the job in Berlin and came in second for Jakarta. So that was a real blessing. I think I'm really glad that things turned out that way.

So I had the support of Toria Nuland, who was my perm rep in Berlin, and I think I had support from the European and Eurasian Affairs Bureau back in Washington. Then I had an interview with Tim Timken, the ambassador in Berlin who had arrived nine or ten months before. That went very well. So it was not very hard to get the job in the end. It was one of those things that just kind of fell into place.

I think you were already there when I got there, weren't you? I'm not sure. And it was just great to be back in Germany. I mean, I just really enjoy Germany and feel quite comfortable there, and the embassy was great to move into. As I mentioned earlier, I moved into an office that was only like forty feet away from the one that I had occupied when Germany was still divided back in 1985 to 1987.

Q: Did the building smell the way it used to?

KOENIG: Did it smell when we were there? Later on? I'm not sure. It probably smelled the same. I don't remember.

Q: I was there from 1996 to 1999. And at that point, we were a subsidiary of the embassy in Bonn, because this was post-reunification Germany. And so at some point we were called U.S. Embassy Bonn Berlin. Before that, we had been embassy office Berlin and my office in the management office was, I think, on the second floor in the corner. Very nice office. But the building had a very distinct smell, which I always took to be the East

German cleaning products. I don't know why. And when I came back in 2006, it was basically the same smell. Yeah.

KOENIG: Yeah, I don't know, I guess the smell didn't impress me as much as maybe it should have. Or maybe I was just too used to it by then so that I didn't notice. We did have a couple of things that had changed, like in the basement. When I was there between 1985 and 1987, there were three walls solid with bookshelves that held the legacy collection of a former CLO who loved romance novels. She had probably left -- I'm not exaggerating -- 5000 romance novels that she had read in Berlin. And that was the embassy library, essentially. For staff. That had all disappeared by the time we came back. I don't know what happened to it. What else has changed? There had been a small building in the middle of the embassy parking lot. I don't think it was there anymore. Was that still there?

Q: There was a very small building, which at that point we were using for our motor pool drivers basically as a break room for them.

KOENIG: Yeah. But before then, you know, in the GDR (German Democratic Republic) years, that had been the observation post for the Stasi (East German State Security).

Q: And I believe that that parking lot had been a church. And I think that's why the street was called Neustädtische Kirchstrasse or New City Church Street.

KOENIG: Yeah, that makes sense.

Q: A church there that was bombed. And so it was a vacant lot. And we somehow in the middle of downtown Berlin had this parking lot.

KOENIG: It was handy, you know.

Q: It was very handy!

KOENIG: Of course, the contrast with the rest of Berlin was stronger by the time you got there later on and in the late 90s. Because, basically, during our first time there, Neustädtische Kirchstrasse was sort of the beginning of the end of East Berlin. So as you got closer to the Berlin Wall from there, there was a lot of vacant space. I mean, a lot of things had been demolished and not rebuilt, just to clear the area closer to the Wall. Anyway, when we got back in 2006, the embassy looked a lot like it did when we had been there before. The basic design of the building inside and out was completely unchanged. We had added a little annex in the back or at least we had expanded the fourth floor. Yeah. And that was really it. Otherwise, it was just identical. I think the furniture may have been updated somewhat, but not too much. It looked a lot like it did when it was our embassy to the GDR.

Q: We had done extensive renovations on the executive floor, in the ambassador's office and around to the side. So that was one part that had definitely been changed, because

Ambassador Kornblum came up from Bonn and he expected that he would have grander offices than what the principal officer in Berlin had had.

KOENIG: Well, I'm glad, I obviously benefited from that. And in the meantime, somehow, the DCM and ambassador's offices had been flipped. I don't understand why the ambassador agreed to this, but as DCM I had the corner office in the suite. And the ambassador's office was the one that was next in from the corner. I just never understood why an ambassador would not want the corner office, it was so much nicer to have more light. It was, I think, actually physically larger. But anyway, it was not for me to ask, I was happy to have the corner office. And getting back to that embassy was great. As I mentioned before, there were quite a few FSNs or TCNs (third country nationals) who were still around from the last time, although almost all of them now worked out of the old mission on Clayallee. Very few of them actually worked in the chancery building.

Q: Yes, in 1996, before the embassy started to move up from Bonn, we had a fairly compact administrative staff and several of the individuals you're thinking of were sort of the core of my team. I had at least a half a dozen of them, in fact.

KOENIG: Yeah. One of the funny things was that there was this Clayallee branch or annex, I would go out and visit you guys quite a bit. There were various offices there on Clayallee, and most of the management section was there. I have very fond memories of seeing you and Jeff Cellars on different visits out to Clayallee and being sort of amazed by that part of the mission, it's odd to have a mission that is geographically so dispersed across the city. Clayallee was very close to our residence, but it was a very long way from the chancery. And that whole part of Berlin around Clayallee had changed a lot. Truman Plaza was gone. Truman Plaza was central to the West Berlin American community when we were there the first time.

Q: Yes. And it was a big deal. And the reason why we had the Clayallee facility was it had been the U.S. mission, the diplomatic component of the U.S. military operation, during occupation. We occupied this one building which was part of a much larger compound, which had been a Luftwaffe Air Defense Headquarters. And so that was Little America in that district of Zehlendorf. And Truman Plaza was right across the street. And there was also, within close walking distance, there was the Department of Defense school, there was a movie theater, which is now actually a very nice museum, Museum of the Occupation basically sponsored by the U.S., Britain, and France. So it was an interesting place. And we loved our offices at Clayallee, it was a beautifully designed building, big thick, stone walls, ample space inside. And under the terms of the occupation, the German government had actually paid for the renovation of the building, which had been done very nicely. And it was almost park-like because our management offices jutted out into what essentially was a garden with trees around and it was just lovely. So yes, it was quite a contrast to the dumpy, East German-renovated offices downtown. That was for sure.

KOENIG: Yeah, I didn't really mind my office, the whole setup. I had gotten very used to it the first time around. And that first time, in the 1980s, it was much better than anything

I'd had up until that point in the foreign service. It also was certainly better than my office in Jakarta.

Q: But you must have been rather struck by the changes in the area right around Neustädtische Kirchstraße, especially Friedrichstraße-Bahnhof. That whole area had been just a construction zone in 1996 to 1999. But by 2006, it was really starting to get nice.

KOENIG: Yeah, it was a nice business district, basically, that hadn't existed before, or at least it had only existed as an East German business district with stores that were called "Obst" (fruit) or "Gemüse" (vegetables). So the new area was much, much nicer than anything that had existed before. Many of the buildings were actually torn down, as you mentioned, and replaced. They weren't of great historic significance. Back in the GDR time, Friedrichstraße-Bahnhof was this weird place because it was a crossing point to West Berlin. So, when we came back, all of the drama of Friedrichstraße-Bahnhof had essentially gone away. It wasn't this dramatic place anymore. It wasn't the sort of interface between communism and capitalism, or the free world and the communist world. So that was very different. And Friedrichstraße-Bahnhof itself was much nicer. They just made it a much better Bahnhof (train station) than it had been before.

The neighborhood was just completely transformed. I mean, it's kind of hard to pick out any particular thing. Everything was new. Pariser Platz was already essentially fully constructed. Before, Pariser Platz had only been half built. All of the buildings from before World War II, I think, were essentially gone. So everything but the Brandenburg Gate was new when we got back. The Hotel Adlon was a new construction, everything was. It didn't look anything like it did before. In the 80s it had a very down-at-the-heel look, and it was not the center of East Berlin, just the end of the road. The center of East Berlin was over at Alexanderplatz, a mile and a half from the Brandenburg Gate. Pariser Platz was the part of the city that you were supposed to ignore in the East German time.

So it was especially nice to get back and walk around that area, to go over to the Reichstag, which was on the other side of the Wall back then. That area, even more than Potsdamer Platz and the area south of the Brandenburg Gate -- I was just astonished by all of the construction of the federal government facilities on the north side of the Brandenburg Gate. That was just phenomenal, the renovation of the Reichstag and the building of the Kanzleramt (Federal Chancellery) and all those parliamentary office buildings and everything. It was just fantastic, unbelievable. Really, really wonderful to see.

We arrived shortly after the World Cup had been held in Germany. And that had kind of transformed Germans, lifted them in terms of the national mood, in terms of the idea of being proudly German in public spaces and that kind of stuff. So it was just a great time to be in Berlin. Angela Merkel was the new chancellor. That had meant a huge revival for US-German relations, because dissatisfaction with the Schröder government was so intense. I don't think the Schröder government was quite as bad as his reputation is, but Schröder himself certainly was. I mean, the fact that he went to work for Vladimir Putin,

essentially, after leaving the chancellor office is quite shameful. And I think Germans are also ashamed of it. But Joschka Fischer was fine as foreign minister, and many good things happened under the coalition government that was led by Gerhard Schröder. But anyway, relations with the U.S. were tense. I understand our previous ambassador had been very uncomfortable with the amount of criticism that was leveled against the George W. Bush administration, over Iraq and other issues.

Tim Timken came in on a mission to restore relations, to lift things up and get out of this kind of defensive crouch that I understand we had been in for some time. And the perfect opportunity was presented by the election of Angela Merkel. Tim Timken was very devoted to the idea of making the most of it. I really enjoyed working for him, he gave me a great deal of latitude on the work that I did, he was not a micromanager by any means. He did set major objectives, he had certain clear priorities that he had received from the White House. He talked with the chief of staff at the White House, or even the president, and had things that he wanted to implement. Things that he devoted a lot of energy to. One was dealing with anti-Muslim prejudice in Germany and somehow embracing the Muslim communities more directly or the immigrant communities more directly. That was a very good thing that Tim Timken started and carried forward energetically. I think it changed some people's minds both about how the United States regarded these issues and also maybe opened their eyes to a way of addressing them differently in German society. So I really enjoyed working for Tim Timken. He was a good boss.

Q: Yes, both he and his wife spent a lot of time on those issues. And I recall they also, out of their personal funds, financed the production of a musical basically at a, you could call it a High School Musical, I suppose. I think it was called "The Streets of Wedding".

KOENIG: Yeah. I think it was. And I think it was a hit, on a small scale. People liked it.

Q: And I guess they, I don't know if they financed it to go on the road, or if the German government did or how that worked. But I believe it was taken to various places. And it gave a real true perspective because it was largely produced by German children who were Muslim or their families were Muslim.

KOENIG: Yeah, I think, both through this funding, but also through their personal engagement both Ambassador Timken and his wife, they really boosted this issue. And they had this friend they brought in, a young man, Todd Fletcher, do you remember him? He was a specialist in this kind of thing, the organization of cultural programs. He was fantastic. I mean, he was an inspiring individual just to be around, very energetic and intelligent and everything. But he also was very good at what he did. His brother won an Academy Award. I think that's the kind of thing that a career officer couldn't have done. I've not known a career officer who would devote the same amount of energy -- and certainly not the same level of resources -- to supporting something like that. So that was really important to be done. And it was done by Tim Timken and his wife, Sue, in part because of their capacity and their interest based on a different approach, let's say, from anything that was typical of a person like me.

On the other hand, I was given more responsibility for just managing bilateral relations and multilateral relations involving Germany than I would have been if we had had a career officer as ambassador. In other words, if I'd been working for someone like John Kornblum, I wouldn't have had the same work as I did for Tim Timken. I really enjoyed that. I mean, I had moved from one kind of big DCM job to another DCM job, which was also big. The difference was not just that the environment was rather radically different. Working for a political appointee was very different. And it's in no way less good than working for a career officer as I did with Nick Burns and Toria Nuland in Brussels. I really, really liked the greater level of responsibility that I had working for Tim Timken. I am not sure I always used it to the best of my ability, maybe. We'll talk later about the umbrella fiasco. But I did my best. I mean, it was a real chance to test my abilities. I really liked it. And Tim Timken was as supportive and positive as I could have possibly wanted. He was a wonderful man to work for.

Q: Someone, early on, gave me some good advice. As you mentioned, I arrived a little bit before you and in fact was in Berlin when they hosted the World Cup and can attest that it just brought a renewed spirit of positivity, which I hadn't really noticed in my previous years living in Berlin. Well, it's a degree of national pride because Germany acquitted itself well but didn't win. So they didn't feel triumphant but they felt that they could take pride in their team, I guess. Somebody told me, Ambassador Timken, he only wants to say something once. So if he says to do it, just go do it. It's not true of all people. You know, a lot of people will say things and then it requires some additional discussion. Or maybe they'll come back to it and change their mind or what have you. But no -- with him, just do it.

KOENIG: Yeah. He wasn't effusive, he didn't talk a lot. I was looking at the videos that you shared with me of the inauguration of the embassy building. And that was about as much as I ever saw Tim Timken speak in one bite. He was not taciturn, but he was a man of relatively few words. But he was very good natured. He could occasionally bark or something like that. But basically, his interaction when he was concerned was usually relatively positive and accepting. And when he was pleased with something he would show it. I mean, he smiled a lot. So I enjoyed working with him a lot.

Tim Timken would also ask me a lot of questions, which I liked, too. It was in part perhaps because he came to Berlin without a background in diplomacy and foreign affairs, at least as a government official -- he had been engaged as head of the Timken Company or the National Association of Manufacturers. But he also just was a curious man. He just wanted to understand. He was not shy about asking the questions he had. He was self-confident. I think he would just ask if he didn't know, and he would be interested in what you said. I really thought he was very, very good.

I guess in our next session, maybe we should start with the construction project, which is a lot of fun, the various elements of it. And we can discuss that as one of the best things that happened during my time in Berlin and one that I really enjoyed.

Q: Okay, we can also perhaps discuss the many high-level visits that the embassy had.

KOENIG: Definitely we could discuss those. Don't let me forget Obama's visit for his campaign, which was one of the more interesting experiences I had dealing with Washington.

Q: Alright, so I'll stop the recording.

KOENIG: We'll probably also go over the embassy project today.

Q: Okay, today is May the eighth 2021. This is Jay Anania. I'm interviewing John Koenig. And when last we spoke, we had advanced your career to the point where you were the deputy chief of mission in Berlin at the US Embassy there.

KOENIG: That's right, Jay. Thanks. I think maybe I'll talk about a couple of political issues to get started. And then I would like to go on and talk a little bit about the terrorism issue that we confronted in Germany and the embassy construction project, which we both worked on while we were there.

So, on the political front, the driving interest, I would say or the driving cause in the embassy during my time there, coming in during the second year that Ambassador Timken was there and some years into the George W. Bush administration -- was to restore a stronger sense of partnership between the United States and Germany, and to be able to rely more on Germany as a partner in the larger transatlantic relationship. Progress had already been made, in part due to the arrival of Ambassador Timken about a year earlier. He had made that a very high priority for himself and the mission. His predecessor had been a bit overwhelmed by the negative atmosphere in Germany toward the United States after the invasion of Iraq and had gone, not exactly into hiding, but had pulled back a great deal from public engagement. At least that was what people said.

Ambassador Timken, on the other hand, decided to dive right into public engagement, and got really involved in a number of interesting things. One of them that we've already discussed was his support for different dimensions of the effort to integrate young immigrants or the descendants of immigrants, mainly from Turkey or other Muslim-majority countries in Germany, especially in Berlin, into broader German life. Integrate them through greater participation, greater respect for their views, greater appreciation for their own cultural contributions, that kind of thing. So he did a lot of great work there.

Timken also had a very good relationship, personally, with all the senior members of the German government, including Angela Merkel. Angela Merkel was really on the other side of this improving relationship, working to improve things. Once she came to office the possibilities for improvement grew immensely, because there was a great resentment harbored on both sides, I think, during the time that Schröder remained chancellor. I

guess, in the political realm, a lot of this played out in a few areas. One, somewhat detracting factor that came later was WikiLeaks. And I'll touch on that in a little while.

But the biggest things that made our efforts to improve relations tangible, that gave them form, were a bunch of summit meetings and other high-level contacts that were framed as parts of the G8 Summit that the Germans were hosting in Heiligendamm in 2007.

Germany also had the EU presidency in the same year, which created another framework for intensified American dialogue. Working on those two efforts was a huge part of my job during my first two years, and I really enjoyed it. And I think the outcome was very positive. It was exactly what we were aiming for.

The relationship between George W. Bush and Angela Merkel was really strong. People remember the shoulder rub, but in fact, that was highly uncharacteristic of their relationship. They had a highly respectful relationship. We only had partial visibility into it actually from the embassy, though. Bush and Merkel had monthly classified video teleconferences between the White House and the Kanzleramt in Berlin. We would get very limited briefings on what happened in those discussions. Even Ambassador Timken got very limited readouts, and I barely got anything at all. Sometimes, if the conversation had some direct bearing on the work of the embassy, they would fill me in from the NSC.

Relations between the embassy and senior levels of the American government back in Washington were superb during this period as well. The Bush White House was extremely easy to work with, as seen from Berlin. They were willing to talk all the time. They reached out, they were considerate, they brought you along in their thinking. It was really a congenial relationship. I had some differences with George W. Bush's policies in a few areas, more than a few. But in terms of functioning, from my perspective in Berlin, which is a little bit different from what it was in USNATO, the administration was running the relationship with Berlin and Germany very well. So I didn't see so much of the internal discord that had been more apparent back at USNATO, between Rumsfeld, for example, and Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell and that kind of stuff. That was no longer an issue.

In organizing the summits, I think I should mention that we had a great team in Embassy Berlin and in Mission Germany (including the consulates general in Frankfurt, Munich, Hamburg, Duesseldorf and Leipzig), for running these kinds of things. It was really a pleasure, especially coming in from posts where I'd never been involved in anything quite of this magnitude, to have so many great colleagues to work with, throughout our team's side, both in the consulates that were involved and in the embassy in Berlin. You are one of them, Jay. Jeff Cellars was another. A lot of the preparatory work for the G8 Summit, in particular, was extremely well done by this team. Duane Butcher was up in Hamburg as the CG (consul general). And he worked a lot with Genevieve Libonati, who was the American political officer there. They just did a fantastic job.

So we were very well prepared in a difficult situation with regard to the Heiligendamm Summit. It was critically important that we got all the rooms that we did, for example. This is something that, as a political officer, I had not been so involved in before. But location was almost more important than policy ideas when it came to Heiligendamm. It

was an incredibly small hotel in a remote area where they decided to host this Summit. So rooms were very limited. And if you could get additional support rooms anywhere in the nearby vicinity, you were much better off than if you had to go further away. Many countries ended up housing support staff beyond Rostock or beyond Warnemünde. So our support footprint was mainly Warnemünde, which was fine, it worked out extremely well. It was only about a two-hour drive, or maybe an hour-and-a-half, to Berlin and much closer to Heiligendamm. By thinking ahead and acting early, our team had nailed down a lot of rooms quite close to the Summit. Still, once the security perimeter went up for the Summit, transport time and access became a huge hassle.

There were a number of preparatory events for the G-8, at the ministerial level in terms of policy, and then in different formats with regard to administrative and logistic preparation for the Summit. And they all went very well. It was notable that this was one of the G8 Summits that was conceived on a kind of grand scale, even though it was held in a remote location. So this was a Summit in which a large number of partner countries were included in the meetings in Heiligendamm, in various configurations of the G8 or G7 with outreach efforts to countries like the BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China], especially China but also South Africa. Russia was there already as a G8 member state.

The Russian delegation was very large. The American delegation was ginormous. The Chinese came in at the last minute because they were invited as an outreach country. And I think they asked for something like 1000 rooms within a radius of 50 kilometers or something. Instead, they only got just a very small number of rooms in Heiligendamm, and I think the rest of their team stayed in Berlin. But it was a manifestation, I think, of what China was going to be like, of its new place in the world. It was already getting to that stage at this point. China came in and it wanted to be essentially the largest or second largest visiting delegation after the United States.

Q: I remember that hotel is a super luxury hotel right on the beach, and it's quite small, in an isolated little, little town. So logistically, as you say, it was extremely complicated having to, you know, bus and put people in armored cars to drive all around these little rural roads in northern Germany.

KOENIG: I mean it was a lovely place. I stayed there also because at one stage they brought people up who were involved in organizing it at the senior level for a weekend—you know, so you got a feel for the place. It was a fantastic hotel. And given that the G8 is intended to create a sort of a relaxed atmosphere, where the heads of state and government can interact personally in beautiful surroundings, it really achieved that. But there's also this enormous press effort that goes into the G7 and G8. And all of the advisors and policy wonks, who surround the heads of state and government—it was a bit of a difficult situation.

Q: And that was, by the way, 6-8 June 2007.

KOENIG: Yeah, great. The Summit did not produce great results, as I recall. I'm a huge fan of the G7/G8. I teach it in university now. I think the grouping is not adequately

understood, and has all sorts of potential even now. But then, I was a newbie as far as the G7 and G8. And I have to say, it is very confusing. It's a mechanism for policy consultation and a sort of policy integration or coordination, which is very hard to understand from the outside. Public understanding also is somewhat limited because it was initially a finance ministers' format. And at least as far as the U.S. is concerned, there is no organization that I know of in the U.S. government that is less interested in interagency coordination than the Treasury Department. They just don't like to talk to anybody else, except for fellow finance ministries. That's changed a little bit when they deal with terrorist finance and other kind of sections. But they're just tough to deal with. So that was one summit, the G8 in Heiligendamm.

The U.S. was less involved, needless to say, in Germany's EU presidency. But because Germany was at the same time trying to improve its relations with the United States, and the U.S.-EU dimension is incredibly important for transatlantic relations in many, many fields, they really, I think, went out of their way to consult with us a great deal. To make sure that we were properly involved in deliberations about the work that they were doing on the EU presidency. And that went very well.

The embassy, as is customary, got a very limited plus-up in staffing for covering these two summits. It wasn't much but we got a small number of positions that were intended for this purpose. Anyway, the whole thing turned out to be very successful. It was a great thing to be involved in, it really gave a huge boost to what was already a very promising vector in U.S.-German relations and transatlantic relations. And it was just wonderful to be involved in it. Everybody, of course, celebrated with wheels ups and everything when these summits were over. But nonetheless, there were no real problems. I have a very positive—I mean, apart from policy differences, George W. Bush is a very nice man. He interacted extremely well with all the staff that he encountered during his time on the ground in Hamburg and then on into Heiligendamm. Just a nice guy. And when he did the embassy meet and greet, it was quite—I think he really did that well. It was a pleasure to have him meet with embassy personnel and families, and he was surrounded by generally very friendly, senior American officials.

Q: President Bush also made a visit to Germany, a bilateral visit.

KOENIG: He did. It was before I got there. His bilateral visit, somewhere in West Germany, involved a closure of the Rhine River, which I believe became quite controversial. But that was before I got there.

Q: Who was it who visited and Chancellor Merkel took them to a barbecue somewhere in East Germany? Was that not during your time?

KOENIG: No, that was not during my—well, I don't think that was during my time. We did not have a bilateral dimension that I recall. But I may be wrong. Well, maybe you're refreshing my memory here. Maybe they did do one day of bilateral visit during the Heiligendamm visit. The barbecue thing kind of sticks in my mind, out at a Schloss (castle) that was used for government meetings in nearby—

Q:—I'm sorry. It may be my false memory, maybe from my other tour in Berlin. When—but no, I don't think so. Because Merkel was chancellor. No, it was definitely—something, somebody went with Merkel to a barbecue, because it was like this little Dorf (village) in East Germany. And it was like picnic tables. And you know, it was very informal. So I don't know.

KOENIG: That's probably right and I probably just wasn't involved or didn't remember it. But I bet you're right.

Q: I just went on the advance. I didn't attend the event.

KOENIG: I know that Bush flew into Hamburg and flew out of Hamburg. So he must have just driven down for the day from Heiligendamm, but I don't really know.

Q: Okay, I've just checked, you know, the internet and it says June of 2006.

KOENIG: Yeah.

Q: And there's a picture of Bush and Merkel eating bratwurst.

KOENIG: Yeah, I didn't get there until after that. I believe I didn't arrive until August of 2006. Very good. We're both right. Okay. Then, of course you know, 2008 came, and that was the end of the Bush administration, or rather January 2009. But I think Obama's visits actually proved to be, in a way, politically far more interesting than Bush's visits, at least the ones that I was involved in.

The first Obama visit, of course, occurred in July 2008, during the campaign, and it was a huge deal. And because it was a visit during the campaign, there were very strict rules governing the involvement of anybody from the U.S. embassy in support of it. Barack Obama was already an official candidate for president of the United States. So he was eligible for Secret Service and other kinds of federal protection. So our RSO's [Regional Security Officer] office was quite involved with liaison with both the German authorities and Secret Service in providing security for this Obama visit in July on the campaign trail.

The visit had gotten massive attention in the media before it happened. And the Obama campaign, of course, also set out an advance team with which we had contact. I remember talking quite a bit with Phil Gordon, when he was out in Berlin. He was very active in Obama's campaign. He worked a lot on this particular visit, both in advance and on the ground. And he went on to be assistant secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs in the Obama State Department. So he soon became my boss, in a way, after this visit.

All the arrangements went smoothly, for the most part, except there was a basic difference of view early on, which was the cause of some tension of which I was aware

even though we as an embassy were not much involved. The campaign had a vision, it wanted to organize a speech for Obama in front of the Brandenburg Gate to make it as presidential in appearance as possible. This is of course where Ronald Reagan famously gave his speech, but it's also a fantastic backdrop for any speech. The German government was very uneasy about this, quite nervous. They didn't like it. And I think the negative reaction actually came from Merkel personally, that is my impression. She thought it was somewhat of a disservice to her relationship with George W. Bush, which she still valued. She thought it was inappropriate for the campaign to organize something that smacked of a head of state speech.

So Merkel and her team worked, I think, quite constructively, with the Obama advance team to select a different location, which probably proved to be even better in a way, from their point of view, because the crowd turned out to be much larger than they had anticipated. They moved the venue for the speech to the Grosser Stern, which is in the center of the Tiergarten, where the Victory Column is. And that was a very good location for this speech because that freed up so much space. The Obama campaign's initial intent, I think, was to give the speech from the Brandenburg Gate toward Pariser Platz. That would have been a confined space; it could have held, I don't know, several tens of thousands of people, but that's all. When Obama gave the speech in the Tiergarten, at the Grosser Stern, they got—I think they say it was 150,000 people who came to listen to this speech. It was immense. It was just people as far as your eye could see between the Siegessäule (Victory Column) and the Brandenburg Gate.

I had a really minor role in everything. But it was insane, the number of calls I got from [Under Secretary of State for Management] Pat Kennedy about this thing. So what was I supposed to do about the Obama speech? You know, because the embassy was not supposed to be involved except with regard to security. Nobody was supposed to get involved in any of the organizing. We could have a listening brief, where we would report back what we were hearing if it affected bilateral relations, but we were supposed to have a very hands-off approach. So about two days before the speech was supposed to happen, I got a call from Pat Kennedy. It was in the middle of the night; it wasn't his fault, that's just the way these things happen. And he says, "John, you can't go to the speech. You have to prohibit everyone from going because when they're abroad, they're regarded as being on duty 24/7, and the Hatch Act precludes that they should show up for this speech." So I said, "That's really hard to do. But okay, I will send out an administrative notice." And we did, telling people that they could not attend this event. I got an AFSA complaint about that actually. It was directed at me because I was the person who signed off on the admin notice, and it was filed by our AFSA rep, a guy who I regard as a very good friend, Ken Kero, because he was really annoyed at this, along with a lot of other folks.

So anyway, there was nothing I could do. I was willing to accept that I had to do this, to stop people from going to the speech, even though it was unpopular in the embassy. But then, one day later, also in the middle of night, I got a call, again from Pat Kennedy, this time saying, "John, you have to go. But only you." And the reason was very weird. Because the McCain campaign—Obama's rival for the election was John McCain—the

McCain campaign had worked with the U.S. ambassador to Canada to put on a public event in Ottawa or Toronto—or I don't know where—where the ambassador was present. And because of this, the White House counsel had advised Pat at some late date that contrary to what they originally said, it was now imperative that I go to this thing as chargé so that we could completely mirror what had happened in Canada. So I had to go, but no other embassy Americans could.

So I went to Obama's speech, and this really annoyed the people who had filed the complaint. And I spent the whole time, basically, hanging out with Klaus Wowereit, the governing mayor of Berlin, having a snarky conversation on the steps of the Siegessäule. It was quite a delightful day. The reaction was incredibly positive for Obama. It really cemented his popularity, I think, in Europe. He was seen as a very positive and progressive alternative to George W. Bush, who was personally unpopular in Europe, as was U.S. Government policy. So the speech really worked out beautifully for the Obama campaign.

For the U.S. government and the embassy it also worked out fine. We managed to navigate this without any serious repercussions. The worst thing that happened was the AFSA complaint. We didn't get at all in trouble for violating the Hatch Act in any broader context, or playing favorites in the election campaign. So it all worked out great. And it was my first opportunity to meet Barack Obama. He and his core team arrived at the airport in Berlin. It was the military airport. I don't remember which one; I think it was just the other side of Tegel, which I had never been to before. And I went out to meet them. That's when I met Susan Rice and a bunch of other people who were on his core team. I met with Obama and we had a prep session. It lasted for about 20-30 minutes max. And he had a very positive visit, in which we were involved, I guess, as much as we should have been.

Q: So that was July 2008?

KOENIG: Right.

Q: And I can second your recollection that the response seemed to have been rapturous. In fact, I remember your response being somewhat rapturous as well.

KOENIG: I was kind of rapturous, you know. I'm a human. I'm a human, like all the rest. Obama was an incredibly impressive person. I mean, first of all, he had a great public persona. But also when you met him, he was a very impressive person. I'm not saying he gave off the vibe of being a nicer guy than George W. Bush—really, George W. Bush is a very thoughtful and kind person. But Barack Obama is an impressive person in a way that George W. Bush is not. So when you meet him, you're somewhat awestruck. Especially when you realize that he's a candidate for president and then, of course, was later president.

I just loved that event. And it's one of my fonder memories from the foreign service to have been involved in it. But then Obama came back for two more summit meetings in

Germany while I was still there. So in that last part of the last year that I had in Germany, he came back twice.

It's probably worth prefacing this part by noting that his initial relationship with Merkel was not particularly warm. They had very serious differences of view over the financial crisis that originated in the United States in 2008, then slammed into Germany and the rest of Europe in 2009. There was a serious difference of view between the United States and the Germans in the run up to the financial crisis. Relations were already very, very tense over the way that we were managing the banking system on the two sides. And that's why we had quite a few visits of senior people from the Department of the Treasury, including Secretary Hank Paulson, but also other senior officials, Bob Kimmitt, others. I think that difference of view, essentially a difference of philosophy about banking, then became even more difficult as the transition occurred, because the United States changed its approach in broad terms. We decided to adopt a very, very expansionist fiscal approach that the Germans also didn't like. So there was that issue that kind of, I think, stuck in the craw on both sides at the outset.

And, you know, these are two highly intelligent—I guess I should say that about all chancellors and U.S. presidents—but Obama and Merkel were two extremely intelligent, engaged individuals on policy matters. And they didn't agree about how to address this. And that became an issue for some time. They later developed a very close relationship, I understand. That was mainly after I left, but they certainly were intellectually engaged with each other throughout the time that I was also involved.

The first visit that Barack Obama made after being elected president was to a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Summit that was held on both sides of the Franco-German border in April 2009, divided between Strasbourg in France and Kehl, which is really just a village, in Germany. The actual German location was Baden-Baden, and I have no idea why they called it Kehl, although Kehl is indeed closer to Strasbourg. I am not sure anything actually happened in Kehl, but some things happened in Baden-Baden, including a very brief, rudimentary bilateral encounter between Chancellor Merkel and President Obama and their teams. The whole senior foreign policy team on the American side was along for that, needless to say. Because it was a NATO summit, there were Secretary Clinton, Secretary Gates—they were all there and that worked well.

It was the only time in my career that I ever was able to greet the President when he came off of Air Force One, or in this case, it was Marine One because he had flown in on the Marine helicopter to Baden-Baden. So I met President Obama and Michelle and I rode in the Beast (the President's personal limousine) into Baden-Baden, which was just a great experience. And the Obamas were very nice. You know, they undoubtedly have ridden with tons of other people who they remember more than I do. But I've never ridden with anybody who I remember better than them. They were looking out the window. You know, it's an incredibly awkward vehicle to ride in. It really is like an aquarium. But they were engaging, and I was in the little jump seat, which is opposite the backseat. It's a remarkably confined space inside the Beast.

Q: As I recall that, originally, it was going to be hosted by the Germans only. And then they sort of magnanimously said, "Well, why don't we do it as a joint thing with the French?"

KOENIG: Yeah, yes. And in fact, the French actually ended up hosting most of it. Strasbourg was a much more suitable location for a summit than anything else along the border on the German side. It was co-hosted, but most of the locale was Strasbourg. All of the big meetings of the summit were there. The dinner on the night before the summit meeting, I believe, was on the German side. But after that, that summit itself was in Strasbourg.

Q: So that was in April 2009. And I could be wrong. But I think the dinner might have been in a large casino in Baden-Baden?

KOENIG: It was. I think you're right. And, you know, it's a head of state and government dinner. I have been around ministerial-level dinners and other kinds of things. And they really limit people being around. I was just hanging out somewhere nearby. I don't know. I don't recall very much about it. I remember it ran late, which these things quite often do. But I remember very little about what actually came out of the dinner. I believe there were a couple of controversial topics. But it was not—there were not the number of controversial topics at this NATO Summit as there were at the previous one which was held in Bucharest, which turned out to be quite a disaster in many ways. Anyway, this was a well-organized summit. I think the outcome was fine. And it was nice to be involved, personally, with Barack Obama and Michelle Obama on this occasion. It's the first and last time I met the two of them together.

Then Obama came out for a bilateral summit about a month or two later, it was in early June 2009. And that summit was held in Dresden. It was a brief summit; I think it only involved two overnights with one full day of meetings and then a bit of touring. Obama and Merkel went to Buchenwald and walked through the memorial park there. The nicest thing about that—I mean once again, there was not a huge and weighty agenda. There were a lot of issues, but the spirit was very much getting-to-know-you. There were of course some sessions that I was not personally involved in, including a pared down small session between Merkel and Obama. But for the large formal session, I got a chance to sit next to Obama, which was quite a nice gesture. It's not always done. I was chargé, after all; I was not ambassador. I got to meet all the other people in Obama's close entourage, like Valerie Jarrett. Jim Jones was there as national security advisor. They were all along for that meeting. And it was a very nice setting in the Grünes Gewölbe, the famous Green Vault of the Dresden Palace, very nicely arranged by the German side.

Let's see. I guess I should note that I was chargé for a long time. Tim Timken decided he didn't want to have anything to do with relations and running the embassy once Barack Obama won. I don't really fault him for that. I was more than happy to be chargé, that's for sure. But usually, you know, even political appointee ambassadors would have stuck around until January. And Tim Timken did, in a formal sense. He came back to Berlin in December after the election, but he essentially left after the election in November 2008

and never came back to do any work. That, I think, perhaps should be a model for political appointee ambassadors -- they should clear out at election time rather than January. Too often they seem to sort of dig in their fingernails and are reluctant to depart post. Earlier in my career, we had had to deal with some real recalcitrant ambassadors who refused to leave. But Tim Timken's arrangement worked fine; his heart was not in it after John McCain lost the election and Bush was set to leave office. I think he genuinely regarded himself -- I'm talking about Ambassador Timken—as the president's personal representative in Germany, and quite fairly so. So he no longer could do that role; he couldn't perform that role for Barack Obama or in the transition.

Q: Yes, and then, of course, it took quite a while to nominate and have confirmed another ambassador. So you were chargé, for what, like seven, eight—?

KOENIG: I think I was chargé, effectively, for about eight to nine months. I'm the only chargé to appear on the list of American ambassadors to Germany on Wikipedia. Which is weird. I just showed up there. You know, John M. Koenig for nine months or ten months.

Q: And when they take you away, you go right back in and put yourself on the list.

KOENIG: Yeah, I know it takes a lot of my time and attention! I gotta follow it like a hawk! I don't know how it happened to be perfectly honest. But it was a rather long time to be chargé. I mean, lately, long chargé-ships have become a little more common. But back then, that was not quite so common.

Q: And were you the chargé until the new ambassador came? Or were you replaced by another DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] who became chargé?

KOENIG: No, I was actually replaced by a person who they dropped in. Bob Bradtke was sent out, out of retirement to—

Q: Oh I see.

KOENIG: —be chargé for a bridge time. I don't think it turned out to be too long, but it was like three or four months. And then the current governor of New Jersey—

Q: Phil Murphy.

KOENIG: Yeah, Phil Murphy came in—who was a huge success. I mean, he was an outstanding ambassador by all accounts. But I think Bob Bradtke enjoyed it. I'd worked a lot with Bob previously. And it was good. You were also an excellent acting DCM. I will say, Jay, I couldn't have chosen anybody better. You made my life much, much better and easier and it was a real pleasure to work even more closely with you than I had up until that time. So thank you very much.

Q: Thank you. I recalled you could just sort of offload the things you didn't want to do on me.

KOENIG: It's kind of educational, I think.

Q: But nothing too onerous. Just on the record there. And I pretty much continued to do the management counselor job as well. So it wasn't an overwhelming workload, because in fact, we had a very good team throughout the mission.

KOENIG: Yeah, we did. Good. Well, that kind of covers the visits. I don't recall any other—We had a lot of visits. You know, needless to say, there were a really large number of visits. I guess I'll mention a couple of other things related to out-of-town visitors, a couple of Munich Security Conferences that I attended while I was there. One is kind of historically significant, the Munich Security Conference in 2007, when Putin announced to the world that he wasn't going to put up with American efforts to dominate Europe any longer. And, I mean, clearly, I think the impact of that speech has grown in people's perception over time. When it happened, people thought it was a rude and sort of troubling speech for sure. But I don't know that people realized it was a sort of watershed between a reasonably cooperative Putin and a generally confrontational Putin—but that's what that proved to be.

Then two years later at the Munich Security Conference, that was when the new Obama Administration decided to propose a reset in U.S.-Russian relations. It was the rollout for reset. It didn't go particularly well, but I can't fault them for trying. To me, that second Munich Security Conference was also notable because I had a chance to see Richard Holbrooke in action. I had seen him in action before; I had never really thought particularly highly of this man. I know that he has an excellent reputation—it's hard to deny that what he did in the Dayton Accords and so forth was extremely important—it really was. But he was also egotistical and difficult and always freelancing and trying to advance his own point of view, if not his own career.

While at Munich that second time, I sat in on a couple of bilateral meetings that Holbrooke had that were unsupervised, except for me. And he was freelancing all the time, he would just propose stuff that was not U.S. policy. He had all sorts of ambitious ideas about how to capitalize on Kurdistan's position in Iraq. He was really a man who was not willing to accept the limits of his formal role in the U.S. government. And this later became a bigger problem during his involvement in what he called the Af-Pak (Afghanistan-Pakistan) theater. I won't go into that – I was not personally involved – but I don't personally have a high regard for Richard Holbrooke. He was a very impatient, even abusive man, in my experience; not to me personally, but friends of mine who have been treated very poorly by the man. And I don't think he was the political genius or the foreign policy genius that he is often portrayed to be. But that's just my personal view.

Q: During my first tour in Berlin, we had a management officer who was assigned to Hamburg who had worked very closely with him and definitely had been screamed at in public and all sorts of other things. She was apparently okay with that, because she kept

working for him. But yes, it was most unfortunate. And in fact, you know, that they have the saying, "No man is a hero to his valet." And I remember my German teacher, telling me that—you know, he had taken German class when he was ambassador to Germany—and, would like, take his shoes off and put his feet up on the table. Yeah, that's kind of the worm's eye view. Literally as in this case.

KOENIG: Now he's—I mean—well, anyway, he was a quite capable individual. But I think he became something of a legend in his own mind. And he thought he had to live up, I think, to his record in Dayton, going forward. And it just proved not possible, and probably never was possible. I also, for what it's worth, I strongly disagree with his general approach to international relations. But that's something that came to be a bigger deal for me later on. At this point, I guess I'll talk—should we go on to the embassy project or terrorist—

Q: Certainly.

KOENIG: —related things? Yeah. Let's do the embassy project. That's more fun.

You know, I don't think I went into it when we were talking about my first tour in Germany, but one of the earliest things I did when I was assigned to the embassy in East Berlin, in the fall of 1985, was related to moving our embassy. I was informally assigned, almost full time, even though I was in the political section, to be the sidekick to Ambassador Nicolas Salgo. Salgo had been the American ambassador in Hungary, but was then given the role of lead overseas property negotiator for the U.S. State Department.

One of Salgo's first missions was to try to negotiate diplomatic property agreements with the East German government. We had long known that the East Germans wanted us to relinquish the property that we had next to the Brandenburg Gate on Pariser Platz, the site of our pre-war embassy. It was completely unusable during the Cold War. It was in the no-go-zone on the east side of the Berlin Wall, the plowed-under area near the Brandenburg Gate where access was prohibited. Some of it may have actually been between the two walls that made up the Berlin Wall, in the actual no-man's-land. But most of it was just unusable land on the eastern side of the Berlin Wall. So the land was vacant and within such close proximity to the Wall that you were not allowed to approach it. You know, in most parts of East Berlin you were not supposed to walk within a certain number of meters of the Wall.

Anyway, Nick Salgo came to East Berlin, and we agreed to open negotiations on some arrangement that would enable us to find a new chancery site because we did not like the building that we had in Neustädtische Kirchstraße. And the East Germans also wanted us to move into a permanent embassy site somewhere else. So we began the negotiations, and our side was led by Nick Salgo. I was Salgo's assistant. And I think our management counselor – called admin counselor back then – Nick Nixon was also involved. The East German side was led by the secretary general of the East German Foreign Ministry, a guy named Alfred Neumann. We held two negotiating rounds, I believe. They didn't last very

long, maybe a day each. And we quickly reached an impasse. I realize now, and I think I probably knew then, that the ambassador, Frank Meehan who I liked very much, had insisted that we would never even consider relinquishing our Pariser Platz site in exchange for a new piece of land. But we didn't even come close to getting to that stage. The East Germans' philosophy was always that they would get us to relinquish the Pariser Platz site, but we didn't even get to the stage where we were talking about any reasonable alternative piece of property. So the issue never really arose.

The East Germans offered us ridiculous places far from public transport, far from the center of Berlin. They clearly desired to put us in a place where far fewer East Germans would come into the embassy or encounter the embassy in their daily lives. So the negotiations fell through very fast. Still, that was an interesting prelude to my work later on the Berlin Embassy project.

There's also one other anecdote from that time involving Nick Salgo. Frank Meehan was a very, very successful career ambassador. He had been ambassador to Czechoslovakia and Poland, and now was ambassador to East Germany. He was, in the best sense of the word, a Cold Warrior, who went way back and understood the East Bloc better than almost anybody. And he was very proud of his role as a professional diplomat. Nick Salgo was very proud of his role as a political diplomat, you know, a political appointee ambassador and a big donor. He was the developer of the Watergate Hotel and condo complex in Washington DC. On Salgo's first visit, I think, when Nick Salgo and Frank Meehan were having lunch, I was there too. It was a really small lunch, maybe four people all together, all Americans. Nick Salgo said, "You know, I think we should have more political appointee ambassadors." He went on, "Nobody else has the connections and sort of the business savvy that we have." So Frank Meehan replied, "You know, that's interesting. I have always thought we should have more political appointee admirals in the U.S. Navy, in charge of aircraft carriers."

Q: Exactly.

KOENIG: You know, that was one of the first and pluckiest examples of something that I came to love about the foreign service – it's like, you take only a certain amount of BS from people who claim to know about diplomacy from the outside. And you also stand up for yourself at every opportunity, because nobody's gonna stand up for you. Anyway, Frank Meehan is still alive, he lives in Scotland. I'm still in touch with him, he's a great guy.

When I got back to Berlin, you were already there, obviously. And the situation had changed radically. Germany was united and the capital had moved to Berlin. And we were still working, in those days, in Neustädtische Kirchstraße. But we were getting ready to move. The project was quite well advanced by the time I got there. You probably have far more insight into the earlier stages than I do. But there were two dimensions to the project while I was there. One was the actual construction project, which I think was quite well managed. There had been some concerns about adjustments to the architectural plans that were made for economizing reasons, fairly late.

Q: Yes. I can, I can speak to that. That had to do with the controversy in part over the U.S. invasion of Iraq. You may recall that Germany and France were very much opposed to it. That was a period when the House of Representatives renamed french fries to freedom fries and other things. There was a lot of hostility towards those European allies at the time when our budget request went up. And this was an unusual embassy. It wasn't a new embassy design, it was sort of a one-off, or wasn't a standard embassy design. And the original budget proposal went up. And I can't remember how much it was, something like \$200 million dollars. And we were basically told by the Hill, you can only have whatever the amount was, I want to say \$130 million. And Secretary Powell basically was faced with a choice to either accept that amount and downscale the embassy or continue to wait, and we'd been waiting at that point over a decade—it was a very embarrassing bilateral issue. You know, sort of hole in the—they call it the gap in the smile of Pariser Platz or something like that, and it previously had been very controversial.

Ambassador Kornblum had made all sorts of outlandish statements about how it was going to be ready when he moved up from Bonn in 1999, and all sorts of things like that. So anyway, Secretary Powell made the difficult decision to "Yes, we'll go ahead." And what that meant was they had to redesign it. Originally, there was supposed to be a basement with all the infrastructure that one would normally find in the basement. But they got rid of the basement—I'm not quite sure how that ever made any sense. And it was supposed to have offices surrounding the courtyard on all four sides, and they removed one of the sides. So we had, basically, our neighbor, a blank wall, on the courtyard, so it made the courtyard much bigger and nicer, as a matter of fact. Well this also meant that they didn't have space for everything else. And it caused sort of a ripple effect.

And once we moved in, there were a lot of issues related to that redesign, which wasn't done in a wonderful way. And it was done very much at the last minute. There was a major problem with the contract because, at that point, OBO [Overseas Building Office] was not managing the tax situation well, and the project should have been free of taxes. But because they hadn't managed it properly, we ended up paying millions of dollars in German taxes on the thing. So there were all kinds of funny little things. And the construction company, I don't think they ever did another embassy. They claimed that they lost a tremendous amount of money. And one of the reasons was that they subcontracted a great deal of the work and they had a lot of problems.

KOENIG: Yeah, and there was the need to retain the Clayallee compound. But did that come from the reduction in the size of the embassy in Pariser Platz?

Q: Certainly, in my mind. I had been there in the earlier period when Ambassador Kornblum was adamant that we were going to move everybody into Pariser Platz. Frankly, that never made any sense whatsoever. Why would you want your accountants and your consular section and everybody else on the most expensive piece of real estate in, you know, in the whole city. And it's not that big of a plot of land either. But he was

adamant, so we really couldn't even discuss it. What really made more sense was to keep the Clayallee building. And that's eventually what we did.

And an interesting anecdote, I went down to sign—I think I signed the papers at the Clayallee building, which had been part of the original U.S. mission—and then the notary, just because he was curious, he looked up the title for our plot of land on Pariser Platz. And what he discovered was, you mentioned that the East Germans had wanted this plot of land. Well, they had actually taken it—legally. And I think I have a copy from the land records, and at some point in the early '60s, it says, “Volkseigentum” if my German is correct on that one. Property of the people. And then it was crossed out. But in German, they left it in the record. So, they had actually expropriated it, unbeknownst to the U.S., I think, as far as I know. And then they had decided that wasn't such a good idea after all, and they canceled it. So for a while there, we didn't actually own the land from a legal perspective, I guess.

KOENIG: Wow. Weird. By the way, by the time I got there, of course, all the cuts had been made. We adjusted the effort in order to complete the project in a reasonable period of time. There were a lot of delays. But there were chiefly two delays in the finishing of the building. Eduardo Gaarder, I thought, was a good project manager, very accessible from my point of view, compared to some of the things I heard about other project managers working with OBO. And it was this incredible design. Particularly from a security point of view, it was somewhat shocking to see that we had zero setback in this building. We were concerned and, of course, so were the Germans, in maintaining perimeter security. But we took considerable risk in order to locate it there, especially from the perspective of the time. Now we would say I guess, that it's not quite so startling, but back then it was, like, unprecedented. And when you look at what we've done in other capital cities like London, it's something that we didn't actually replicate. I don't quite understand why.

Q: Well, again, very controversial. And during my earlier time, in Berlin, we had been trying hard to get the Germans to actually move some of the streets to give us more of a physical setback, something that they ultimately did -- which was kind of amazing, because they intruded into the Tiergarten, and Germans love their parks. So you know that was controversial. But they also pushed into the Holocaust memorial site, and actually chopped off a little bit of that. I mean, it's a very large site, so no big deal. And they ultimately did build the Holocaust site, which hadn't been built at the time. But yes, the building is unique, and incorporates many features that most embassies do not have—that I guess we shouldn't talk about in this venue. There is a setback from vehicles, but yes, individuals can physically walk up and touch the external wall of the building. Which, as far as I know, is unprecedented anywhere now. I mean, in the old days it was standard.

KOENIG: So I'm quite happy with the way it turned out and the way it looked. It was mostly panned by German architectural critics, you know, who said that it was the least noble edifice on Pariser Platz. I can hardly agree with that. It's a fine looking building, I think the United States should be very proud of the way it turned out. And as a place in

which to work, I only know from what it was like in the executive suite, which was not overly large, but extremely well appointed, and very, very nice for working in. The modular setup in the rest of the building I did not find ideal, but you know, it was very common at the time, and it's not badly done. And we managed to fit a lot of people into very limited space. If you walked down to the political section, for example, it was crowded, but I think it didn't feel claustrophobic or anything like that.

Q: Yeah, it was open plan offices basically, with closed offices on the interior. So the people in the open plans could at least get the natural light, which is actually legally required in Germany. Can't have an office without some natural light.

KOENIG: That's good. So part of it was the building and then there was publicity and public relations. Even the building had a certain public relations dimension to it, you know. The U.S. government put a lot of effort into the decoration of this building and to the artwork, and to promoting it overall. And a lot of that was physical. So the quality of materials used in decorating the building was extraordinarily high for a U.S. government building and the art was exceptionally good—

Q: That however, was not from the U.S. government?

KOENIG: No, it wasn't. It was donated by private donors who cared a lot about it. But it was organized in cooperation with the architects—

Q: Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies is the name of that group. And yes, they gave us a collection of modern art from some very distinguished artists, most of whose work I didn't like much, but it was a very prestigious collection. And yes, it did worlds of good public relations-wise with the Germans, and anytime people could get tours, they were thrilled to go through that building. It was itself a public-relations "plus" just having all that.

KOENIG: Yeah, it was. So while we were preparing to do all this, you know, we wanted to draw attention to the art. I actually like the—is it a Sol LeWitt? The big mural in the main public entrance of the embassy?

Q: Yeah, that's beautiful. And it's visible from the outside and lit up at night. So it's a landmark.

KOENIG: Yeah, that was the best thing. There were interesting stories that you probably know better than I do about certain elements of the decoration. So one of them—which I think is sort of unfortunate—is that somebody had donated a Berlin bear for display—the Statue of Liberty bear, in fact. These Berlin bears -- I think they're made from fiberglass -- had been designed by artists and put around Berlin, like five years earlier.

Q: It was a major public art exhibit, and they got artists from all around the world to do their interpretation of these bears. And then at one point, I think they had them all right

next to the Staatsoper Unter den Linden. And yes, then we got the American one, which was a Statue of Liberty.

KOENIG: And at another point—I happened to go to Berlin, for some reason, I don't recall exactly why—while our embassy plot was still vacant, they had set them up there. So, they were all in a big circle on that piece of land next to the Brandenburg Gate. But by the time I got back in 2006, that was not the case, needless to say. Anyway, we had a bear, the bear that was in the form of the Statue of Liberty, that had been given to us by the artist. I thought that—I think almost everybody thought that we should display that bear somewhere around the embassy as soon as it was ready to open. But you probably know that Tim Timken refused to do this. His company, the Timken Company, was one of the major donors for the restoration of the Statue of Liberty in New York. And he felt that this kind of dumpy looking Statue of Liberty, which was basically a bear in a gown, you know, with a tiara and a torch, was an insult to the Statue of Liberty. I don't actually understand how you could think that. It was simply a way to “Berlinerize,” basically, the Statue of Liberty. But anyway, we kept it hidden away until after Tim Timken left.

Q: Well, the bear was banished. It was sent to our warehouse. And I don't know if we threw a sheet over it or whatever, but we kept it. And I could be wrong, but I seem to recall that after the ambassador left, you had us restore the bear to some position of honor.

KOENIG: That's right, I think I did. I think I had us put it—The question was, can we get it outside or do we have to put it inside? Because there's very limited space that's controlled outside the embassy building, some kind of green space near the main public entrance on this side. And I don't know whether we fit it in there or not. Now I believe it is right inside the glass at the main public entrance, with the Sol LeWitt mural.

Q: Well these were called "Buddy Bears," I think. And they're still sold as souvenirs. I mean, you know, little versions of them. Still sold as souvenirs.

KOENIG: Natalie was given a Statue of Liberty Buddy Bear, one of the little versions, by the Berlin CLOs when we left. It was not the least popular buddy bear, you know, it was one of the most characteristic Buddy Bears. And the most American one.

Q: Yeah, I mean, everybody would know—everybody would know what it was. That's for sure.

KOENIG: Yeah. The other big deal when it came to—it wasn't exactly art, but it was memorabilia, so I guess I'll mention it, too. The main item of memorabilia was the piece of the Berlin Wall that had been donated to the embassy. We decided to display it in the courtyard. Installing that proved to be a big deal because it was so heavy. It was this massive chunk of concrete—you know, maybe six feet wide, but twelve or fourteen feet tall -- it weighed tons. Did they lift it into the courtyard with a crane? Do you remember that?

Q: Well, we had that giant sculpture that was sort of like an eye beam.

KOENIG: That's right, we did that. Yeah—

Q: I don't know if that was done at the same time. I was there for that. And I in fact, I think I have a picture of the two of us there for that, where it came in a sixty-foot shipping container. And they drove it up next to the building as close as they could get. And then they had this enormous crane, because our building was five stories high. And then they had to drop that in. And they did such a beautiful job because they placed it perfectly so that the bolts protruding from the ground—the statue went right onto these bolts, and then they just, you know, tighten down the nuts on the bolts. And that was it. I don't remember the wall being moved over. And it's possible—

KOENIG: Maybe it wasn't. Maybe we moved the Berlin Wall section in earlier—

Q: —we moved that in off the street. We might have been able to get that off the street. What I do remember is we had to store it.

KOENIG: Maybe it was only the obelisk. I think they called it "Obelisk." I don't know. I didn't like it by the way. That was one of the pieces of art that I didn't think did a whole lot for the embassy. But it was certainly—it was noteworthy and certainly the event was a big one. I think people really enjoyed it. We got a ton of press coverage, I believe, for that, moving in of the stele or whatever we called it. That was another one of those public-affairs events that attracted a lot of attention.

Q: Yeah, definitely made the newspapers and all that. It was a very notable artist: now I've forgotten his name. And we had several other pieces that Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies donated. They were the ones who actually donated that—whatever you want to call it—statue. And they also donated some other prints, I think by that same artist. And he came out. He was there for the event.

KOENIG: Yeah, the artist was there for the installation. In fact, I think the idea was that, ideally, we would have each of the artists come out for their installation. It didn't prove possible in each case. But there were like three or four of these big ones. The other big piece of memorabilia, which I managed to snatch from everyone initially, was the map of Berlin from General Lucius Clay's office in West Berlin.

Q: Oh, yes.

KOENIG: And I somehow persuaded people that that should be installed in my office at the embassy. And that's where it was for like, as long as I was still there. And then as soon as I left, they quite reasonably decided that it's ridiculous to give this to the DCM and they took it off that wall and they put it in a public place, which is certainly what it deserves.

Q: If I recall correctly, it was—Well, where was that? I think that might have been in the lobby or something like that. It was someplace fairly prominent. I think it was a map that had plexiglass over it or something like that?

KOENIG: It did. It had plexiglass over it. It was known that it had originally been in General Clay's office, in the early years of the occupation of Berlin. And that was why it was preserved. I don't know when the plexiglass was added to it. But then, you know, I think it's quite a fine piece of memorabilia.

Q: It was kind of cut in the shape of Berlin too.

KOENIG: Exactly. Including the plexiglass. Everything was kind of molded to fit the shape.

Q: By the way, that thing we were talking about was by Ellsworth Kelly and it's called Berlin Totem, apparently.

KOENIG: Yeah, he's a very famous artist. I wish I liked his totem better, but I certainly liked the overall effect in the courtyard.

Q: Yeah, it worked well. It was a nice thing.

KOENIG: Yeah. The—

Q: But you've forgotten that Ambassador Timken also donated.

KOENIG: He did. He commissioned an eagle—a porcelain bald eagle from Meissen that was put in the rotunda. And it is really very impressive. I think the Timkens loved Meissen porcelain, but they also loved the idea of giving a significant gift to the embassy, that was from them. As I recall, it was created—You have two options with Meissen when you commission a work of art. One is to have the mold smashed after a certain number, in this case one or two. I think they had one made for their home, as well, so I think they had two made. They can smash the mold, in which case it's a unique work of art, or they can retain the mold. And then after a given length of time, they can make replicas of the work of art. And it costs more if they smash the mold. And I believe the Timkens, who are hardly skinflints in any way, decided not to pay the extra—I don't know how many—thousands and thousands of dollars that would have been for them to smash the mold. So I think it's still possible to buy one of these eagles if you want, Jay.

Q: Well they actually had more than one made. I think they had one made for themselves and one for the embassy.

KOENIG: Correct.

Q: And they also paid, I believe they personally paid, for the case that it went in. A museum quality case, which—

KOENIG: Beautiful. Yeah.

Q: —And then it was placed in the rotunda of the entryway where some people didn't like it. But I thought it was very nice. In fact, the artist made it from a painting that the ambassador had in his office of a bald eagle and it was, you know, kind of a three- or four-foot-high painting. And he actually physically took the painting down to Meissen and said, "This is what I want". And then they made it kind of the same size as I recall.

KOENIG: Yeah, it was pretty big. And I thought it looked fine there. It was a nice piece of art and a nice gesture by Ambassador Timken and Mrs. Timken. And I'm quite sure that they took another one back to Ohio with them.

But one thing, in addition to that, we also were doing—I'll just mention this small, silly anecdote. We were preparing all sorts of public affairs materials about the embassy because we wanted very much to promote it as an architectural masterpiece, or at least an architectural landmark of significance in central Berlin. So, we were doing brochures and we worked with an organization to produce quite a nice architectural analysis of the embassy building and these kinds of things. So I took some embassy staff around on a tour of the site. I think it was right after we moved in, but it was very early on. They were preparing this kind of promotional material. I was, I guess, in my most irresponsible or goofy phase. I didn't know that this was going to be used for anything.

We were in the large open area of the ground floor, and I said something like, "This is really beautiful down here." Near the cafeteria, there was quite a large room with a fireplace that looked out on the courtyard, with a lot of stonework on the walls. And they asked me "What kind of stone is this?" And I said, "Well, this is milky Ovaltine. You know, it's extremely valuable, milky Ovaltine from Sri Lanka", or something like that. And so, you know, that was just some asinine thing that I did. Anyway, they put it in the brochure. I guess they didn't realize that Ovaltine was a breakfast drink from when I was a kid. So we had to destroy all those little brochures. They were just folding brochures, so it wasn't too expensive. But it kind of taught me a lesson, I suppose. I guess one lesson it taught me is that people don't remember Ovaltine. I mean, you have to be a certain age.

But anyway, the whole project in that regard was a wonderful experience. The other element of the embassy project was the promotional side. You know the inauguration, the grand opening, and everything—you were much involved in that as well. We had two major external partners, I would say. One was the American Chamber of Commerce in Germany, which was extremely helpful, but also assisted us tremendously in fundraising. This was all authorized as normal for a project of this kind by the State Department. So they were very, very helpful in helping to organize private sector donations for the inauguration, which had a large budget. And then the American Clubs in Germany also were very actively involved in both fundraising but also in publicizing the inauguration of the new chancery in Germany.

As you know, we came up with a two-stage celebratory event for July Fourth and Fifth 2008 for the new embassy building. We had moved in, basically in April, I think something like that. So, we were relatively well settled into the building, but we had postponed the grand opening until what we thought would be the most significant day of that year, the Fourth of July.

Q: Yeah, so it's a combined July Fourth-grand opening? Yes?

KOENIG: Yeah. The overall organization of this took up quite a bit of my time for several months and I'm sure that same was true for you, as well. That part proved not to be any easier than the construction project, to be perfectly honest. There were so many moving parts, in terms of people's schedules. Making sure that arrangements were satisfactory for Chancellor Merkel to participate in the event, since she was determined to take part as soon as she heard about it. But the arrangements therefore needed to be very, very closely coordinated with the Chancellery so that they liked what they were involved in. The governing mayor of Berlin was also quite a bit involved on both days, but especially day two. What else? All of the logistical elements of planning such a large event were worked out with an event organizer. I don't recall the name of the company, but they're the ones who provided us with copies, I think, of the records of this event.

Q: Lexington Productions. I believe Lexington something.

KOENIG: Yeah. So, you know, they divided their effort between the formal inauguration on the Fourth of July, where the U.S. Embassy role was somewhat larger. And the German-American Volksfest, which was organized on the next day, which was a major public event that was open to all.

The grand opening and inauguration events on day one were by invitation-only. That was really the core element of the inauguration of the embassy. Ambassador Timken was quite close to George Herbert Walker Bush, closer personally to him than to George W. Bush. So he personally arranged for George Herbert Walker Bush to come out. I don't know exactly how he did this, I think it was just through a phone call, to be perfectly honest. But he managed to arrange that George Herbert Walker Bush would come and that was highly symbolic because of the central role that Bush '41 had in the reunification of Germany. So it was perfect. And there were a lot of other VIP guests who came for this thing. Henry Kissinger was one. Quite a few people who had retained a kind of relationship with Berlin, through either long-standing relationships, or the American Academy, which was a focus for abiding engagement with Berlin by American, sort of elder statesman, people like that. So a number of them were given places on the dais for this planned event, which was open to the air. So there was no roof—everything was open air. And then there were—

Q: And the dais was directly in front of the Brandenburg Gate on Pariser Platz?

KOENIG: Right. And then there were risers put up around Pariser Platz for invited guests. And I think we had between three and four thousand invited guests, I'm not sure.

It was quite a large number. And this included just a huge—we always had a very large Fourth of July reception invitation list, but this went beyond that to cover all of Germany a little bit more, to pay more attention to people that the consulates felt, you know, were their most important contacts, who should be invited. Certainly, in protocol terms, people that we wouldn't ordinarily prioritize for our own embassy events were invited to this.

The response was very strong. We had more than enough people who decided to come. And we had tried to prepare for everything: every eventuality. But we knew that weather was a big question mark. We've talked about this regularly, but we had a meeting about a week out from the Fourth when we were kind of—I was worried, and I think you were probably worried all along about the weather. What was the weather going to be like? The record was not particularly good for the Fourth of July in Berlin. There had been many cases where Fourth of July receptions were affected by bad weather in the past.

Q: In fact, June had been a drought. It didn't rain in Berlin.

KOENIG: So we were encouraged by, you know, sort of the idea that today's weather is the best guide to what tomorrow's weather will be like. We were lulled into complacency. Then the seven-day forecast came out, and it didn't look too bad. I mean the chance of rain on the Fourth was very slight. As the week progressed towards the Fourth of July, though, it became a cause for some concern. When we had that meeting, it was only maybe five days out—it was very close, I think, at the very end of the window where we could actually have had special umbrellas made up as a last-minute project in time for the inauguration. And you had a quote, I think, for how much they were likely to cost or at least an estimate. And it was for 4000 umbrellas, so we could give basically everybody who walked through the door an umbrella. And the cost was an amount that we could afford. It was not cheap, but it was much less than I had anticipated. And nonetheless, I went the cheap route, and said "Nah, we don't need to do this." We've already got a warning in the invitation. You know, "In case of inclement weather, make sure to bring an umbrella." Something like that.

Q: I mean, this is Germany, it's Berlin. People, they can read the forecast. So I gotta say, I was with you with that decision, if that makes you feel any better.

KOENIG: Well, it does in a way. I don't feel particularly bad about it. It was just so regrettable in the end. I mean, because it wasn't that it began to rain a just little bit during the ceremony. And, you know, there was this picture of gallantry. All the speakers and most VIP (Very Important Person) guests were on the dais—right with the cameras, it was on live TV in Germany, nationally broadcast throughout the country. And it began to rain lightly. And nobody was prepared. George Herbert Walker Bush, somebody handed him, I think, sort of a broken-down collapsible umbrella. And he draped it over Angela Merkel's head. It was a great symbol, I guess, of gallantry. And later, he was given a better umbrella to hold over Angela Merkel's head, which was a nice thing.

But by the end of the ceremony, it had really started to rain hard. It started to pour. And the ceremony broke up with a certain amount of grumbling; people were wet. Then it

really poured. It poured for like two hours: probably harder than I've ever seen it rain in Berlin. I was sort of sheepishly sulking around the corners of Pariser Platz, trying not to be noticed, talking to people who were at least friendly to me. Some people were very angry about the whole thing; the Russian ambassador made a big scene over it. I think a lot of guests got pretty drenched, sitting out there on the risers. But otherwise, it was a great, great ceremony. All the people we wanted to speak, spoke, nothing went wrong apart from the fact that there was a downpour that grew in crescendo fashion, over the 45 minutes or whatever that the formal speeches lasted. So I looked recently at the film of Tim Timken, speaking at the very beginning, and there was no rain when he spoke. But by the end of the event, it was raining fairly hard.

Q: Well, yeah, and fortunately, he also had a VIP party afterwards, which was inside. So when the rain really started, you know that the VVIPs (Very, Very Important Persons) went inside. So fortunately, the ambassador was very pleased by the way the whole thing came out. And in terms of it being a public relations event, as you said it had live coverage for hours in Germany; it had international press. It had everything. So it was really unfortunate about the rain. But I don't think any of the guests were likely to hang around, even if they had had umbrellas because it really was pouring. That was really a pity because we had all sorts of food tents, and, you know, American wine, American beer, McDonald's and Burger King had set up like miniature—it was a Mac Café, as I recall, which was a thing that they did in Germany with coffee and sweets. And Burger King had a little restaurant that they had set up and you know, there was higher end stuff as well. What could you do?

Then, there was also a very low cloud cover. And we had set up the fireworks display.

KOENIG: Right.

Q: Which I was worried about. But actually that came out spectacularly. It went right over the Brandenburg Gate. So if you were on Unter den Linden, you could see the fireworks going off over the Brandenburg Gate. And the music, it was simulcast with music that was you know, tied to—

KOENIG: Patriotic music. Yeah.

Q: —yeah, the fireworks and that came out well. And I think a lot of Berliners saw that also, you know, not just the 5000 guests, but I mean, potentially tens or hundreds of thousands of Berliners also participated in that respect. So, that was good.

KOENIG: That was very good. And in fact, I think it was a great relief that the rain stopped in time for the fireworks display. So that in fact, it was kind of a nice evening, even for me, by the time that the fireworks display occurred. We had another group of VVIPs up on the roof of the embassy for that. It may have been the same people who could come back in to watch that. And we had a fair number of them, it was a really nice event. I don't know if the rain situation actually impacted the impression that people took

away from the inauguration on TV in any way, because the speeches were not curtailed. It all worked out fine. It was just on site it was a bit of a downer.

And then the next day was beautiful, about as nice a day as you get in early July in Berlin, which means really perfect. And that really helped us to get an enormous crowd for the Volksfest that we had organized also with Lexington and with the Deutsch-Amerikanische Clubs. That was a lot of fun. We had a huge crowd. I think it was estimated over the course of the day at 250,000. When you look at some of the shots, it looks like there were really a large number of people there. We had performers, including some big-name performers from the United States. The Alvin Ailey dance troupe, I think, had a performance there and some others.

I participated in a very short inaugural interview and presentation segment that was also broadcast on German TV, I think, live. It was me, governing mayor Klaus Wowereit, Annette Thörn, the president of the German-American Clubs and a German TV news anchor. Certain elements of it were broadcast nationwide. The ambassador was supposed to do that, but he didn't want to for security reasons. There was really almost no control near the stage, very minimal crowd controls were established along the outside perimeter of this large area where people were allowed to enter to go to the Volksfest. So I did it instead of Tim Timken. It also helped that I spoke German.

Q: The Volksfest was again a huge success and PR [Public Relations] wise it was a big thank you to Berlin. A lot of Berliners had been bent out of shape by our construction project and how long it took. And here we put on this big party, and it was free. And there were all kinds of entertainment ranging from the barbershop quartet composed of teachers from the John F. Kennedy School to, I believe, it was Coca-Cola that had sponsored a battle of the bands in Germany. And so there were some, you know, young Germans who were playing rock and roll and had won this contest. So they were on stage and as you said, Alvin Ailey Dance Company, all kinds of different things. And the party was not just on Pariser Platz, it went all the way down the June 19 Street. So yes, hundreds of thousands of people attended this. And as I recall, it was actually two days, Saturday and Sunday. So Friday was a washout. But Saturday and Sunday were just perfect weather.

KOENIG: Great, yeah. That was a great thing. And it was, I think, really the perfect way to inaugurate the embassy. I think the Volksfest, working with the German-American Clubs and others, was very successful. They were very happy with the outcome, which was very important to all of us. I think, also, that the American Chamber of Commerce in Germany was very satisfied. They definitely had done a good job with all the money that they had helped us to raise. We had some money left over, and I think we used it for the next Fourth of July or whatever, for the fireworks.

It was really just a delightful experience overall. Still, I would say, at the end of thirty-one years in the Foreign Service, if I were to identify one bad decision I made, it would be not getting umbrellas when we had the opportunity to get umbrellas. Because they could have been promotional umbrellas, a nice souvenir. At that stage, I think, we

still had the chance to have them printed with some small logo that would have shown that they had been distributed at the inauguration of the embassy, which might have been a nice souvenir for the people who came. So a little bit of extra PR, you know.

Q: Well, if that's your worst blunder, you've done well.

KOENIG: Well, you know, I'm not the most reflective person, there are surely people who would probably nominate several things I have done that were worse than that one.

Q: Now here's a question for you. Are you aware of any other embassy event in the history of the republic that spent more money than that event? Because we raised close to \$2 million.

KOENIG: No, I am not. But I will say that there have been cases since then that I'm aware of, even though I don't have any idea about the details, which have involved a lot of money. In terms of a private-public partnership to celebrate something related to the United States in a foreign country, this may be the biggest thing that was ever done, because we're dealing with a very large country, a very wealthy country, and a very important relationship. And as skeptical as Germans sometimes are about the United States, not just now, but even back then, we are drawing on a deeper reservoir of positive sentiment in Germany than almost anywhere else in the world. I mean, you might say Kosovo, but it's not quite the same. There's mass support for the United States and the “idea” of America in Germany, which is really notable. So, I don't know what they did—

Q: And that's another thing that was also your legacy, because we left hundreds of thousands of dollars for the next year. And, lest anyone think we did anything improper in fundraising, the reason why this was possible was because normally for July 4th events, you could only solicit money from American companies -- subsidiaries, I think were sometimes also included. But in this case, because it was a grand opening ceremony, it became a public affairs event and our public affairs counselor, Helena Finn, pointed out that we could request special permission to also solicit funds from German companies. And in fact, it was German and European companies who donated most of the money. Airbus's parent company and various others.

KOENIG: Yeah, Helena really got into this, I have to say. And she really did a fine job on all the arrangements. And there was a big public-affairs—I mean, explicitly public affairs, so in the public affairs section—dimension to all of this. Anyway, I think everybody came out of that feeling very good. And I really enjoyed it. Let's see. Shall we move on to terrorism?

Q: Yeah, from the high point to something else.

KOENIG: My involvement in terrorist related matters in Germany was a large part of my work, regrettably in some ways, during the three years that I was there as DCM and chargé. The most significant of all, and I think the one that probably attracted the most attention from other people in the embassy, was our engagement with the Germans in

trying to thwart what is generally called the Sauerland terrorist plot. It was in 2007. This planned attack was organized by the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), a terrorist organization originally based in Uzbekistan, which had been essentially eradicated there and migrated to other parts of the world. By this time, it was closely affiliated with Al-Qaeda. By an almost fortuitous set of circumstances, elements of the Sauerland plot, which was to use large vehicular bombs, probably against a shopping center on a U.S. military base in southwest Germany, were uncovered. It was a really interesting experience to be present in a role—not a central role, but a not insignificant one—while the different strands of this investigation were developed, and more and more was done to thwart the plotting.

I think the original alert came from the United States. But that was more or less simultaneous with information that was developed by France and Belgium with regard to rental vehicles and movement of suspect individuals and telecommunications and all sorts of things. So even at the outset, there were quite a few dots that were connected. And there was a recognition fairly early on that something serious was afoot, involving basically three or four people: a Muslim convert, who was German, ethnically German; some Turkish, German immigrants; that kind of thing. So pretty quickly, the German authorities reacted extremely capably, and they coordinated very, very closely with our own people.

It became possible to move information around this circle very, very adroitly. That's always been a challenge, at least historically. If you had intel (intelligence) information it was not easy to share with law enforcement, if that meant that law enforcement would not be able to develop a case that a prosecutor could use in court, these kinds of things. So there were all sorts of long-standing limitations that existed to the movement of information. This was one of the cases in which ways were found to overcome those limitations. Among these countries, mainly Germany, and the United States, and state authorities in Hessen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Baden-Württemberg. Everything was moving rather quickly. Also, French and Belgian authorities were involved, and other neighboring states were alert. And people began to feed information into this, that revealed amazing things. For example, this was going to be kind of a classic car bomb, based on hydrogen peroxide, I believe. This is a controlled substance, but it's not a banned substance or anything like that. But it's a controlled substance in Germany. So it became possible to trace the purchases by the terrorist plotters of this commodity around Germany. So we knew more or less, how much of it they had.

The Germans, more than us, are very cool cucumbers, and very, very meticulous when it comes to putting together a legal case. So there was an element of tension, as the details of the plot and the plotters and their movements became known. And they didn't make much of an effort to hide their activities, which is somewhat surprising. There was a strong impulse on our side to do something about it, to intervene quickly. And I think if it had occurred in the United States, we would have probably intervened at an earlier stage. But the Germans said, "No." It was, of course, their decision to make. They said, "We want to draw this out much longer, until we've acquired a lot more evidence that we can use to prosecute these individuals."

So the German authorities continued to track them. There were strange incidents that happened. There was actually a collision between a police vehicle and one of the plotters, and it turned into a very confrontational incident. The plotter then drove away and continued to plot, etc. It was very bizarre. The Germans had secretly moved into the farmhouse and barn where these people were preparing their bombing materials and replaced most of the hydrogen peroxide with some kind of neutral, non-explosive material. So, in fact, these guys were continuing to work on the attack, but what they had on hand was not explosive any longer. That was a great load off of my mind.

Before that happened, though, we had sort of reached a kind of climax, where the perception was strong that the plotters were going to strike soon. And I felt under tremendous pressure. I was in constant consultation with EUCOM (United States European Command) in Stuttgart during this time. And I knew the vice commander of EUCOM, who is, in effect, the commander of EUCOM, because the commander of EUCOM is also SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) in NATO, and is almost never there in Stuttgart. So I knew Admiral Gallagher very well. We had very frequent video conferences about this situation during a period of, let's say, a week or ten days, when it was at its most tense.

At a certain point, I decided that I needed to make a public announcement to warn American citizens that there was a heightened risk of terrorism. This is an obligation of chiefs of mission—I must have been chargé at the time—that U.S. diplomatic missions are required to alert the public if there is any threat to which they're going to alert others inside the U.S. government. This situation had clearly reached that stage. People knew about it sufficiently inside the circles of the U.S. government to take countermeasures. You cannot then ignore the interest of the American public in protecting itself. So I issued the announcement, something general about a heightened risk of terrorist incidents, and it caused a real ruckus between me and EUCOM for a day or two. There was great concern that this would somehow cause the plotters to flee or to disperse or to somehow evade arrest. But it didn't. Strangely, the terrorists continued to work. And within a fairly short period of time, the German police conducted a raid against the Sauerland plotters and arrested them. One of them was shot in the process. They were prosecuted and they were convicted of crimes and sentenced to prison, fairly long sentences.

This was one of the most successful counterterrorism episodes that I ever saw. It was really great to play a role in it. I've never had closer cooperative relations with this set of agencies, including foreign partners. All of them were very much working towards a common purpose. We had different timelines, we had different requirements in terms of satisfying legal and prosecutorial needs or whatever. But everybody was pushing for the same thing, to stop this plot, to protect the people targeted, and to have a successful prosecution. And it worked.

Otherwise, my role in counterterrorism was mainly to help clean up the mess that we created with the global war on terrorism, which was pretty bad. Germany was involved in a couple of high-profile cases, so I got involved in those in a small way. The worst, I think -- I would say most people would agree was—Khalid al-Masri. I mean, this is

leaving aside the fact that several of the 9/11 plotters actually were from Hamburg, and did some of their plotting in Hamburg and all that. That was before I got there.

We had picked up this guy named Khalid al-Masri in Macedonia and he was a permanent resident of Germany. He had been erroneously identified while in Macedonia. Macedonian authorities picked him up and transferred him to U.S. jurisdiction, and we took him to Bagram and submitted him to very, very rough treatment over a period of months. And then, when it became, I guess, evident to everyone concerned that we had picked up the wrong person, we released him. We just airlifted him back to Europe and dropped him off.

But al-Masri did not have a "forgive and forget" attitude about this. He decided to seek legal recourse in various ways against the U.S. government. And one of the ways was to file a case in Munich, against the persons that he believed to be involved. This whole sequence of events was very heavily investigated, so the identity of the people directly involved was fairly well known to the people who were preparing the case.

My only real involvement in the Khalid al-Masri case came late. The case had already caused a lot of embarrassment to the U.S. earlier on. It led to a sort of tempest in a teapot over whether Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State had actually apologized to the Germans for the wrongful rendering and torture of Khalid al-Masri or not. Whether it was an explanation or apology or a simple acknowledgement that such a thing had happened, I don't even know. But at any rate, this became a big public affairs matter.

When I got involved, it was because the German government had to decide whether to allow the case to proceed in the Munich court. That would probably have entailed a very tense face-off between the United States and Germany over whether or not we would make the accused available for questioning, these kinds of things. So I went into the Kanzleramt and talked to the deputy national security adviser, a very good guy, Rolf Nikel. I delivered these tough talking points that I then wrote up and reported to Washington. Interestingly, that later was one of the first two or three cables from the trove that WikiLeaks shared with The New York Times that made the front page. So it was my moment of glory on the front page of The New York Times—in addition, I guess, to my head scrubbing by Donald Rumsfeld. I think they said, "threatening and trying to intimidate the Germans not to proceed with the prosecution of the American officials involved in the illegal rendition of Khalid al-Masri." Something like that. So not a great thing.

In all the WikiLeaks stuff, there were only two cables that I was involved in that gained a lot of attention. And it was a lot, though now everybody's forgotten about it. But at the time, it was a huge deal. One was the al-Masri one, and the other was a cable that our political counselor actually drafted and that I worked with him on. It was our assessment of Angela Merkel for the incoming Obama administration. That was the first WikiLeaks cable that was run by Der Spiegel. Spiegel was one of the five or so media organizations involved in the publication of WikiLeaks material. Le Monde, The Guardian, Der Spiegel, The New York Times, maybe one other. And Spiegel chose this one for their

premier article -- our assessment of Angela Merkel as chancellor, saying that she was not particularly creative. I mean, it was overall very positive, but we had included some criticism. And, you know, being Spiegel and being a news organization, they chose to emphasize the negative part.

Q: Speaking of Merkel, I hear her cell phone was controversial, too.

KOENIG: It was. But luckily, that broke after I left. And, you know, I may be alone in believing this, but I don't really feel bad about collecting signals intelligence on friendly heads of state and government. I honestly don't. There are many bad things that we do in the world, and I would put collecting signals intelligence on our allies, heads of state and government, as like number five hundred and sixteen. I have to say we do so many other bad things in the world, this is the last thing we should worry about. Anyway, obviously the Germans didn't like it.

Finally, I was also involved in the release of Murat Kurnaz, a Guantanamo transferee, which was also an extremely sensitive matter. Kurnaz was from Hamburg and had been picked up in Afghanistan. He was not a 9/11 plotter. But he was held for more than five years in Kandahar and in Guantanamo, and was then released, with some delay because of the effort to transfer more prisoners at the same time. It all worked, essentially, as it was supposed to. And it was all arranged without my direct involvement, between the Department of Justice and various authorities in Germany. But it required some fine tuning at the very end. And it created a real negative reaction in the German media because Murat Kurnaz, as soon as he was transferred back to Germany, went to the media to complain that he didn't think he deserved five years of mistreatment at the hands of the United States for simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I'm very glad that we got out of that stuff. I have to say it cast a cloud over our relations with a lot of generally supportive and allied countries over many years, this global war on terrorism and the excesses of the American practice, especially, of rendition, and Guantanamo and black sites and taking people to Bagram. Taking people from other countries to Afghanistan -- you have to wonder, could that possibly be the right solution?

Q: Although interestingly, I think during that same period of time, we had a special envoy—might have been Dan Fried—who was trying desperately to get the allies or pretty much any other country to take these people who were interned at Guantanamo. And many of the countries that had bitterly criticized us for collecting up these people were totally unwilling to have anything to do with them, because presumably, they thought they were highly dangerous. So there was a bit of irony there.

KOENIG: I mean, I think it's ironic. I would say, however, I talked to Dan during this period, and I have to say, my hat is off to him. I think they gave him this role thinking that nobody would be so determined to stay in government and serve that they would do this, because it was one of the hardest and most thankless jobs that existed in the U.S. government at the time. But it's also true that being treated this way, that is, locked up for years in Gitmo, would contribute to your radicalization. You're not the same person when

you're picked up as you are when you're released. And whether you're more dangerous or less dangerous after you're released, that's a good question. I would say probably more dangerous. You certainly have more of a grievance against the United States government and people after you're released, after three or four years in Guantanamo than you did before.

At any rate, yeah, transfers were very hard to arrange. And Dan Fried really worked at it hard. He's a very determined guy. So that's basically it. I think that probably covers my time in Germany. I loved it. I really liked working in Germany. And the team in the embassy was the best I've ever seen. That's in part due to just how hard so many people tried to get to Germany, people who are very skilled. So you find that there's a sort of selection process of really good people finding their way there. But also, I think the spirit in the embassy, people enjoyed living there. People enjoyed working with Germans, it was just a really great place to work. And they enjoyed working with each other.

I guess next time, do you want to go on or do you want to wait till next time?

Q: Sorry, yeah, I'm fine with going on if you'd like to. We have your NATO and then your Nicosia tours to go. Probably can't get that all done today.

KOENIG: Why don't we just do NATO? Okay, that would be easy. And it'll probably take a half hour, something like that.

Q: Okay.

KOENIG: Well, NATO—I just talked about how much I liked working in Germany—the NATO job was, I think, the most fun I ever had doing anything ever in my life. Professionally, that is. I'm not complaining in any way about the responsibility or the burdens I had—needless to say, my job in Germany was not a burden—but my role in Allied Joint Forces Command Naples was very different and so fun.

I was really dissatisfied with the jobs that they were offering me when I left Berlin. I had ruled out bidding on chief of mission jobs in EUR, because the only ones that seemed to fit for me were in the Baltic states, and there was no school there for my son, Alex. There was quite a bit of pressure on me at this stage to take an unaccompanied tour, I had gone from Nicosia to Athens to Thessaloniki to Brussels to Berlin. So people were thinking, I maybe had to do something a little different. Two things were set out that I pursued. One was to be DCM in Vienna, and I think I was the [EUR] Bureau's choice, but the personnel system said, "That is just idiotic, we are not going to send him to do that." So that didn't happen.

And the second was DCM Kabul, and I was really quite interested in that. I was talking a lot to SCA (the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs). But then they changed the length of the tour, from one year to two years, unaccompanied. Unlike everybody else in Embassy Kabul, the ambassador and the DCM would have to stay for two years. That probably was a good move in terms of policy, but I was not so keen on it. So that was a

snag, and held up the development of my candidacy with SCA. And then suddenly they changed everything. They decided to revamp the entire management structure of Embassy Kabul; they were going to appoint a more senior figure as ambassador and send like five other former ambassadors out to be section heads and DCM. They adopted an entirely new model that was very similar in a way to what they were doing in Iraq. So they changed those two missions into something completely different from any other diplomatic mission for a certain period of time. And that happened to occur just as I was finishing up some preliminary discussions about DCM Kabul. I mean, and I'm very happy that I didn't end up getting it because I would have probably been ushered out or put into a lower position right away.

So there I was, very late in the bidding season, and I didn't have any active bids. Natalie said to me, "Well, why don't you look for a job, just look for a job out in the real world." And she found a job in NATO that I could apply for. So I wrote up my application letter and sent it off to NATO along with a bunch of forms. And I got hired for that job, as political advisor at Joint Forces Command (JFC) Naples. I actually moved in behind Dean Curran, a former ambassador, who had taken the job as a foreign service assignment, because for many years, this position had been part of the foreign service system. I knew Dean, we had talked about Naples. I wanted the job, but it wasn't going to be available. Dean intended to stay for many years, so he had shifted over to be a permanent member of the NATO International Staff and taken the job out of the foreign service system. But then he lost the JFC job because of a problem over sharing U.S. classified information with a non-American at the Naples headquarters. So it was vacant, and I applied. I went down for an interview, all kind of secret-style, head-to-head with the two other finalists, and got the job.

Because I was on secondment to NATO, I had support from NATO, the U.S. Navy, which is the support agency for Americans at JFC Naples, and U.S. Consulate General Naples. I had more—It wasn't quite like being an ambassador or DCM, but I had ample administrative support for the whole time I was at JFC Naples, which was good. And I loved the work. I'm sorry, there's no—

Q: So you were detailed there from the State Department.

KOENIG: Yes, I was on secondment. But I also asked the State Department to put it back on the roster of foreign service positions for later.

Q: Did you have the choice to retire and become a NATO employee as well?

KOENIG: Yeah. And I've sometimes wondered whether that wouldn't have been a good option. I didn't take it, for a couple of reasons. We'll get to that toward the end. But it was really tempting. I had a great time there. And I really enjoyed the work.

So what was my work? You know, I had met POLADs (foreign policy advisors) before. And I knew quite a bit about the role of American POLADs in American chains of command. There were quite a few of them. And this was a time when a lot of attention

was being given to POLADs. In NATO we retained the traditional name for them, which is "political advisor." But in the US system, they all became foreign policy advisors. You know, this kind of semantics usually means little to me, but it was a big change. The roles in NATO and the U.S. system diverged. There was a lot of evolution on the American side in the role of the foreign policy advisor. They were given additional staff, typically, and also a more sort of itemized list of tasks that they were supposed to perform. You know, there was an effort after many years to restore PM, that is, the Political-Military Affairs Bureau's ownership of these positions and all sorts of things.

But none of that happened in NATO. In NATO, you were a complete freelancer, you know. The role was up to the commander. And I just loved it. So, I had a staff of about eight officers who were assigned to the political advisor's office, who were drawn from NATO allies, and included two Americans and a variety of others—all of them were very talented. My role was just to be, basically, the personal advisor to the commander on policy, and I had three four-star commanders while I was there, all U.S. Navy admirals. I was their main civilian advisor. So I was part of the command group. I was part of the core command group together with the deputy commander and the chief of staff. So it'd be the commander, the deputy commander, chief of staff, and me as the core command group. The command group as a whole probably consisted of 12 people.

I just provided advice. You know, many people have taken this kind of job in other directions. But when I got there, I had a different approach from many people. A lot of political advisors write lots of papers. I believe that's typical in NATO. So political advisors will work with their staff to provide a lot of well argued—let's say—five- or ten-page policy recommendations to their commanders. But I did very little of that. I provided direct personal political and policy advice. Just one-on-one with my commander or in small group settings.

Otherwise, my effort was entirely directed toward getting involved in the planning process, the military planning process. I just didn't think there was a whole lot of value in having a sort of distinct political planning process. So I spent all of my time working on getting more and more involved in the actual planning process, the development of operational plans and the review of operational plans that were sent forward to JFC Naples by subordinate headquarters. And this effort paid off. I found, for whatever reason, working with the guys I was working with, who had more expertise in many of the fields that we were dealing with, that we could develop insights and inputs for operational plans that were extremely useful. That put us right in the center of the headquarters' work. We were not like one of these, sort of, attached-by-a-dotted-line groups. We were actually integrated into the core network at the headquarters, which was very satisfying.

And the other satisfying part about it was being, together with the deputy commander, the closest adviser to the commander. So I would ride around in a Gulfstream – we traveled a lot, the plane was called Catbird -- sitting opposite the commander and just shooting the breeze for hours on end. And this proved to be very, very useful—I think to him, but certainly I loved it. My bosses, by the way, were very intelligent and capable officers.

Sam Locklear, who occupied the middle year that I spent in Naples, went on to be USPACOM [U.S. Pacific Commander] Commander. Mark Fitzgerald, my first boss, retired out of that assignment. My last boss at JFC, Bruce Clingan, I believe, retired out of Naples. Clingan, in particular, was very much involved in staff work and policy planning earlier in his career. And he was a really interesting person to work with when he was in command.

So I had great relations with all three of these guys. Mark Fitzgerald hired me and was totally fun to work for. Sam Locklear tolerated me -- actually he really liked me. And Bruce Clingan was very intellectually stimulating, we got along as well. And you know, this was something better than I could imagine. That's one reason why, at the end of my tour there, I thought very hard about leaving the foreign service. I probably could have camped out for a decade in Naples, which was pretty nice. And you know, I would be retiring about now from NATO; that was totally within my grasp at the time. It all depends on how each successive commander likes you. They can let you go at any moment. But I was getting along well in the system, I had great contacts at SHAPE and at NATO headquarters in Brussels. I had good relations with our diplomatic missions in the areas where we were operationally involved. It was going well.

We were mainly engaged in three places. One was in the Balkans, where we were the superior headquarters for all the Allied operations and NATO presence in the Balkans. The second was Iraq, where we oversaw the NATO Training Mission in Iraq. We also had some other ancillary things in the maritime domain in the Mediterranean. And then the third main area of engagement was the Libya bombing campaign, where we provided the headquarters. That was quite a story. And maybe I should talk a little bit about that. But it all was interesting. So I guess maybe—would it make sense for me to go through each of these theaters one by one because they each—?

Q: Absolutely, yeah. All very interesting.

KOENIG: So in the Balkans, we were involved most frequently and most importantly with KFOR (Kosovo Force), which had already been downsized tremendously by the time I got there, and consisted at that point of about 5000 personnel. We would make a monthly visit to KFOR. And most months we'd spend the night. So every month we'd have a two day visit to KFOR. During the visit we would get out and go all over Kosovo by helicopter and interact with all of the people who are typically involved in discussions with KFOR. This included all of the critical personnel in the government of Kosovo: the president, the defense minister, and others, plus the Kosovo Protection Force (KPF) commander. And then representatives of the different communities in different parts of Kosovo, so Serbians in different enclaves and in the northern part of Kosovo, and Kosovar Albanians in other places.

We did the same thing, although on a less frequent basis, with Bosnia, where we still maintained a very small Bosnia mission. It was still called SFOR (Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina) I think, but it was really just an advisory mission by that stage. We had much smaller missions that were either curtailed or very, very residual in places

like Macedonia. And then we would visit all the countries neighboring our operations, in order to consult with their officials.

What was revealing to me was interacting with the American embassies in these countries, which I did a lot. I was mainly in contact with American embassies—more than with any other foreign missions. That's one reason, I think, why Americans tend to do well in these political advisor positions dealing with countries like those in the Balkans—the U.S. typically has a larger role in these countries than any other individual NATO member states. So close interaction with the U.S. Embassy is valuable.

Anyway, I always was more in favor of downsizing our NATO missions than any American ambassador in any of these countries. Much of my interaction with them was overshadowed, in a way, by the fact that I, in line with my commander's intent, but also my own personal view, thought that we should be reducing America's security commitment in these countries. My U.S. Embassy colleagues argued that a leading U.S. role was absolutely central to the credibility of NATO, but also the future of these countries in terms of stability. I would not contend that I understood those countries better than they did, they understood their host countries better than I did. But I do think I understood American and Alliance interest as well as they did. I was more responsive or sympathetic to U.S. Defense Department views, and had signed a pledge that I was not subordinate to the U.S. government or to anyone outside of the NATO chain of command. And I believe my commanders and our organization – NATO Joint Forces Command Naples -- wanted out of these operations.

So my intent was always to work with the American embassies to craft ways to get us out. And their intent in all of these same conversations was to find ways to keep NATO in. So that made things a little awkward. It affected, I think, my relations with people who I really liked, like the ambassador in Kosovo, Chris Dell. In the end, NATO tended to downsize all the time, that was the overriding dynamic. And it worked out reasonably well. And this kind of feeds into a larger discussion of my philosophy about U.S. foreign policy, which we don't need to have here. But the—

Q: Well, feel free. This is your oral history.

KOENIG: I impose my philosophy on my students all the time, I don't need to include it in the oral history. So that was our role in the Balkans.

In Iraq, it was basically just to fly the NATO flag. You know, we had a small training mission in Iraq. I helped to set it up when I was at NATO headquarters in Brussels. And it was making very small, maybe not insignificant, but very, very, sort of, artisanal progress, I would say, when compared to U.S. national and coalition efforts in Iraq for training forces. We had a very small footprint. We managed to collect the capabilities of a number of smaller allies and a few bigger allies and find a way to train Iraqi security forces in Iraq that was politically acceptable to these force contributors.

It was interesting just to go out there to see Iraq. You saw a lot more of it than I did. It was a very strange place. And when I was there, you know, between 2009 and 2012, the security situation was not horrendously bad. It was actually probably about—not as good as it ever was, it had been good early on, but it was not bad. Still, movements were tremendously constrained, the risk of moving outside of the wire was huge. And you just didn't do it. So we would fly in by helicopter to the U.S. embassy or to Al-Faw Palace or wherever, have meetings there, and fly out. That was it. You were there for one year?

Q: I was there from July 2011 to July 2012. Yes. When General Lloyd Austin was the four-star for U.S. Forces Iraq. And that was the period when we pulled out almost entirely. All of our fighting forces basically pulled out, leaving behind some training missions at the end of 2011. Yeah.

KOENIG: So I probably made my last visit while you were there. And this was clearly done, I think, within the philosophy of the origins of NATO Training Mission Iraq, which was to provide assistance to the U.S.-led coalition forces in a broader effort to strengthen Iraqi security forces to handle more challenges on their own. But it never seemed—it was very different from the nature of our missions in the Balkans, for example. It was very much supplementary.

Sometimes on these trips we would make stops in the Gulf, because I worked for all these U.S. Navy four-stars, and they all had a lot of contact with the U.S. Naval Command in Bahrain and that kind of thing, and they often knew people out there. So we would get involved in some funny meetings and things. But that was outside of Iraq, and it was essentially separate.

Libya was a bigger story. My place in the Libya operation was sort of peculiar. My boss, Sam Locklear, was the commander of U.S. Navy Europe, and U.S. Navy Africa—and that was pretty relevant in all of this—as well as the commander of NATO Joint Forces Command. So his subordinate, as U.S. Naval commander, was the commander of the Sixth Fleet, and that was Harry Harris—who went on to be PACOM Commander and was later U.S. ambassador to South Korea -- a very bright guy, very good officer, excellent person. At the outset, you know, when the threat of an all-out assault on Benghazi by Gaddafi's forces was mounting, we were involved in the discussion of whether or not the United States should intervene and how it should intervene in Libya. This was a pretty short timeline; it occurred over a short span of time. And there was clearly, even from the perspective of Naples, quite a bit of discord in the U.S. government about this. It had come right on the heels of another issue that involved a lot of discord within the U.S. government, Syria, and whether or not we should have a no-fly zone in Syria and all this kind of thing. So these things were stacked on top of each other. I was really marginally involved at this particular, preliminary phase.

Anyway, within a short time, the U.S. decided that we did want to intervene in Libya, and we wanted it to be a NATO mission. This was not difficult because France and Britain were even more eager to get NATO involved in Libya than the United States was. They were keen, especially France, to get NATO involved in a mission that would include a

no-fly zone over Libya and various other elements. So, far away from Naples, we arranged for UN Security Council decisions that authorized use of force to protect civilians in Libya and that kind of thing. And then, within a fairly short period of time, the operation was organized and launched.

The first two days or three days were a coalition operation only. My boss, who normally spent four days a week at the NATO JFC headquarters, and one day a week at U.S. Navy Europe, which was also in Naples, he disappeared. Admiral Locklear went out on the Mount Whitney, which is the flagship of the Sixth Fleet, and commanded the coalition operation to suppress air defense in Libya, mainly by launching dozens of Tomahawk missiles at Libyan air defense sites. So this all happened out in the middle of the Mediterranean. I was not involved. Sam Locklear was gone. Certain personal staff that came with the command position were out there with him.

And then, after about three days, Admiral Locklear came back to the JFC headquarters and we transitioned to the NATO mission, which was mainly the no-fly zone. There also was a maritime component. And this quickly became extremely interesting. Our role was to oversee what was in fact, the NATO operational headquarters for the Libya bombing campaign, which was co-located in Naples, and commanded by my office neighbor, the deputy commander of Joint Forces Command Naples, Charlie Bouchard, a Canadian three-star. I was not under Charlie's command, I remained under Sam Locklear's authority. And a guy I know, a very good guy, was the POLAD for the actual Libya operation. He went across the JFC campus with Charlie Bouchard, just to the next building.

Anyway, the most interesting aspects of this entire operation for me were, I think, major life lessons about policy. The most important was mission creep and how easily it happens. Going in, I don't really think there was any intention to topple Gaddafi. I honestly don't. I don't think that was our interest, our desire. We didn't think it was necessary to achieve our immediate objective, which was to protect civilians, mainly in the eastern part of Libya. But very, very soon, the mission objectives kind of escaped our control. They just got out of—we just lost control of this mission, very early on, for a variety of reasons. One was that France, in particular among NATO allies, was very keen to do a lot. They wanted to be seen to do a lot. They insisted on running the first bombing raid, ahead of any Americans. The official Alliance approach was no NATO boots on the ground, but France and Turkey had small numbers of personnel in Libya on a national basis. The U.S. didn't actually participate with our own aircraft. We just provided logistical support, intelligence support, all sorts of command-and-control support, but we did not send in any of our aircraft. We did provide a lot of munitions.

So, this was the classic, or rather sort of notorious, “leading from behind” that Obama agreed to. I don't have a problem with this leading from behind; I have a problem with the way we lost control of the mission. Because there were countries that were much more actively engaged on the ground than we were, and they began to lead us in directions that we really didn't initially intend to go. Mainly, that was Qatar and the UAE (United Arab Emirates). They were dragging us closer and closer into a regime-change

operation at every stage. And it was kind of obvious. They were providing targeters for us for air operations. So they had people on the ground to provide target information. The French also did this. France was the only NATO ally who did that. And we were gradually—because of this influence, the way that we obtained information about the situation on the ground in Libya, we were gradually being edged toward providing close air support for insurgents. Ultimately, that's almost what we did. We didn't do it exactly, but we began to coordinate our operations with movements of insurgent forces. I would be hard pressed to describe how this was not close air support for insurgent offensive operations against Gaddafi forces. I guess it wasn't coordinated to quite that degree.

Anyway, this just kept happening, this air support to insurgents. Initially it was happening in the east and in the center of the country, the less-populated area between east and west. Then it arose in the west, in the hills of the west, and approached Tripoli from that direction. There was a big issue with the major port of Misrata in the center of Libya. Turkey was deeply involved on the ground in Misrata. It was just, all in all, it was an operation that was really under no one's clear control.

At one point, we received a request from the subordinate headquarters, the actual commander of the NATO operation, both maritime and air elements: Would we authorize—we ran out of targets early on. You know, we were constantly struggling to find new targets, because we had bombed everything to smithereens. So we were hitting these tactical targets. But what about more strategic targets? Anyway, we received this request: Would we authorize the destruction of the Libyan refinery and oil transport capacity in the northwest part of Libya? I was just stunned when this request came forward. I just couldn't believe it. It's like, we went in here with the intention of protecting civilians. And now we're talking about a massively destructive attack on Libyan infrastructure that would have an impact for many years. To his credit, my boss said, "No way." My boss never lost his bearings at any point. So he rejected this request for authorization to expand the target list to include the refineries and oil transport infrastructure.

But you know, how did we get to that point? I have to say, I'm still conflicted. Should we have gone into Libya or should we not have gone in? Once we went in, we seemed unable to control the further progress of this operation. So, you know, within like four months, it ended, and Gaddafi had been killed. We then no longer had any threat from the Gaddafi regime against civilians, so the rationale for our NATO mission was gone. But the situation on the ground nevertheless remained extremely dangerous and chaotic.

At that point, I got involved in efforts to persuade everyone that we needed to terminate the NATO mission. There were some pretty sensible voices that said, "No, we need to continue to operate while we think about our next move." I don't think the U.S. Pentagon wanted that. But the UK, for example, very much wanted to extend the operation, and so did some of the other Allies. Some people back in Washington, including many people on the State Department side, also wanted that. But I was one of those who advocated strongly in support of my commander to end the NATO operation at this point.

I think it's a reasonable although debatable point, that it is dangerous to continue to operate militarily when you don't have any clear mandate or mission. That meant that we should conclude the current mission and take up as a separate matter the follow-on mission, which was to be the security reform and training mission that was never undertaken. It was clear from the beginning that the United States would not lead and might not even contribute to the security reform and training mission in Libya.

So I feel somewhat conflicted about whether or not I should have advocated that we terminate the mission. If we had continued the NATO Libya campaign, it would have created an additional incentive for the United States to contribute to the follow-on mission. But in the end, where we left it was a total mess. We did not improve the situation by enabling Gaddafi's opponents to topple him, if you ask me. On the one hand, we saved a lot of civilian lives. But we also helped create a situation which was not safe for civilians over a period of many years. And the United States has never really found the groove in which it should engage with and operate in Libya in a way that is in line with our interests and nonetheless has some positive impact. I think it's just been a disaster. So that was my main operational engagement on that side, on the Libya side, and before I left Naples, the operation was over.

Q: And did you feel that you continued to have full access to your commander during that period?

KOENIG: Yeah, I did. I mean, we discussed all of these things that I mentioned. He invited me a couple times to sit off-screen for his small group meetings with -- basically it was just him on our side -- with President Obama and Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates and the National Security Adviser back in Washington. So my boss was on screen, and I was off screen. Sam Locklear was a very good-looking guy, tall, really impressive. One time President Obama said, "Sam, you have a face for TV." And he really does look like an American four-star admiral out of central casting. But those were very good discussions, very meaty discussions.

I have no criticism whatsoever of Sam Locklear's handling of this, he did a beautiful job in my view. But collectively we didn't—we did lose control of what we were doing. And, a few weeks into this operation, we didn't really know what to do. We had no way to really understand where to stop. There should have been some political strategy connected with this operation. Besides, you know, "Gaddafi is no longer a credible leader of Libya and he must go." That sort of maxim, which we have tried to apply to quite a few places, is not a credible one in my view. And it's led us down many bad paths. And in Libya, it happened to lead us down a path that was mainly destructive of Libya itself.

At the end, by the way, there was a kind of exclamation point set on this operation. The UAE was very grateful for the role that they had been able to play in this. So they organized a very, very elaborate party at the most expensive hotel in Naples, the Grand Hotel Vesuvio. It could have been Qatar, which was also a partner in the NATO Libya operation, but I think it was the UAE. Anyway, they invited a lot of people -- I was one of the less important people they invited, because I had never done anything for them.

But I got a goofy bunch of memorabilia-type things, you know, things to put on your shelf in a NATO or military headquarters. Others got bigger gifts. They must have handed out a dozen Rolex watches at that thing, maybe more, off in a side room, and massive amounts of expensive liquor and jewelry and that kind of stuff. It was a scandal. I don't know how many people turned the gifts back. The vast majority of personnel in the HQ for the Libya operation were not Americans, anyway. Still, hopefully many of them turned back the gifts. Obviously, you should not be taking Rolex watches from the UAE or Qatar after you conduct a military operation in a coalition scheme. So it didn't exactly lift my regard for anybody involved, including myself, to be honest. It was an interesting experience. And it showed me I think, in a more encapsulated form than I could have possibly gotten from any other operation, how you can go from, you know, hero to zero in six months.

Q: Very sobering. I'm sure you have a lot to say about that in your teaching.

KOENIG: Yeah, I do. It's a great case study, you know. So that was basically it in terms of that job in Naples. We flew all over the place; I enjoyed it immensely. I could have stayed on. I kinda was tempted to stay on. I made, from a personal standpoint, a lot of friends. I was not in the role of mission leadership, none of the inhibitions that exist between senior members of an embassy staff and others in the mission existed. So, I made great friends among my colleagues, military colleagues in this headquarters. We did more things together than I had done with colleagues for a very long time. We made wonderful friends, we spent weekends in places. It was just great. That tour was professionally interesting, though not perhaps as interesting as some of the other work I did in Berlin or NATO or later in Cyprus. But from a personal satisfaction point of view, overall holistic quality-of-life point of view, it was wonderful work and a wonderful place to do it.

Q: And where were you living and what was the family up to during Naples?

KOENIG: We were living in a place called Parco Azzurro. It's a walled and gated, but not particularly grand development near Pozzuoli. We looked out on the Tyrrhenian Sea—so a beautiful view to Cumae which is a peninsula, kind of a promontory. Cumae was the first Greek settlement on mainland Italy, the ruins of it are still there. And Ischia was off in the distance and just gorgeous. We had a fairly large but still pretty modest house.

Alex was with us, our younger son. He spent his last year in school as a senior at Naples American School. And that was really interesting because to that point all of his education had been in international schools. One of the main constraints on what I could do after we left Berlin was where Alex could stay with us, because we didn't want to be separated in his last year of high school. That's why I didn't even bid on things like the embassies in the Baltic states or anything like that, because there was no suitable school for a 12th grader there. So we went to Naples.

Naples' American School was a classic DoDDS school (Department of Defense Dependents Schools). Alex thrived there, in a way. He was a bit of a fish out of water. He

was active in athletics, though, and all sorts of other things. He was on student council and class treasurer. He did all sorts of things. Alex also attracted quite a bit of attention, for a couple of reasons. First of all, he was a good student; he was a national merit scholar. They made a big deal of that in the military system; they put him on TV, all this kind of stuff. On the other hand, they also didn't like criticism. Naples American School was having an inspection visit from DoDDS, and they had asked students, including Alex, to speak with the visitors. Alex had some complaints. Not only complaints, not at all. But he had complaints about, for example, the way that they handled science instruction, which was pretty bad. They had never unpacked their chemistry lab equipment, for example, and a few other things like that. But the students were told by the leadership of the school that—they were given a set of talking points, “you can only say these things,” it was like a list of a number of topics that they could address. And they were told not to criticize the school. Alex didn't agree to do this, and this led to a kind of creepy situation where the leadership of the school was threatening him. I got a little bit involved. At one point I even said, just FYI, I said to my boss, “They're threatening my son at the Naples American School, because they're afraid he's going to say something to the inspectors that they don't like.” Nothing ever came of it, as far as I know. But that was terribly dispiriting to me, to see what happened in that school.

They also did some other things that I found absolutely mind boggling. For example, every year they gave all the students in the system aptitude tests, which were aimed at assessing their ability to occupy different roles in the U.S. military. And they really stressed them a lot. I mean, I guess I can't complain if they were interested in recruiting people for military employment. But I think they did a bit of a disservice to the students in the school by doing this. They channeled a lot of the students who were not academically strong toward military careers. And I kind of wonder if that's right for the students. I think in many cases, it's not. You found that a lot of the students coming out of this system ended up working in the commissary. They were not adequately encouraged, in my mind, to pursue careers within their ability and that suited their interests that were outside of the military, which is a shame.

I'm not impressed by the DoDDs system. It integrates new kids well into the community, but I have to say, I think it needs thoroughgoing reform. Still, Alex actually grew as a result. It strengthened him as a student and as a kid, because he had to deal with a situation which was vastly different from, you know, the sort of pan-European, upper middle class and German nobility and near nobility classmates that he had at BBIS (Berlin Brandenburg International School). So it was very rewarding or enriching in that regard. He dealt with a much wider variety of people. And he made friends and did well and he liked it. So that was good.

Q: So we didn't really talk about what they had done in Berlin. You said they went—did both of your sons go to the Berlin Brandenburg International School?

KOENIG: Yes, they did. And they actually loved it. I know there was always this discussion, Kennedy School versus BBIS. There were a couple of other options, but those were the two main ones. And our sons just loved BBIS. It turned out to be kind of perfect

for them. Both of them still have friends from there, especially Alex. For many years, until last year, Alex went every New Year's Eve to Berlin to celebrate it with his friends from BBIS.

Q: Wow.

KOENIG: Yeah, it was great. Also, the instruction there was extremely good. Ted and Alex were very much encouraged to pursue math hard. They had Russian teachers in the math department. Both of them did extremely well. And we actually met and heard a lot about the two Russian teachers who taught math there. Ted had a very easy transition on the first day, because he had the woman teacher, but the man teacher, the Russian, was a very peculiar guy. So this is a story about Alex. Alex was new, and it was the first day, the beginning of the school year. So he arrived for his first day at a new school, and he was going to his first class, math. He walks in the door. And Mr. Patyakov says, "Do you have your problem set?" Alex gives him a kind of "What?" look, and Patyakov yells, "Out!" So he made Alex sit at a desk in the hall for the entire class, because he didn't have his problem set. This was Mr. P's didactic method! It took a huge amount of adjustment, but it kind of worked out in the end for Alex. He had no hard feelings, but it was extremely rough for the first few days.

It's amazing that I remember the names, but I think it was Ms. Uspenskaya or something like that. She was the woman teacher. And Alex later moved on to have her and she also had Ted from the beginning. She would always say—Ted always wanted to be a chemist—and she said, "You're wasting your time in chemistry, you need to be a mathematician!" That was her constant advice. "Don't think about engineering, don't think about chemistry, you must be a mathematician, Ted." And then Alex was involved in basketball, they had a good basketball team at BBIS. So she said, "You are wasting your time, Alexander, you should stop playing this stupid game. You need to devote yourself to the math team." So anyway, that was the basic message. And it really worked well, in the end. Did your kids go to BBIS or Kennedy?

Q: They went to the John F. Kennedy School. They also both loved it.

KOENIG: Yeah. So it was great for schools, Berlin, but Brussels had been equally great. I mean, those two posts are fantastic for international schools. Good. Natalie was fine in Berlin. She enjoyed it a lot. You know, she always struggled with learning German. She speaks Greek fluently and naturally English, as well. So she tried German again, and she learned some and she had a lot of friends there. It was a nice community.

We lived out in Dahlem. There was a lot of stuff to do there. It was really a lovely place to live. Natalie did a history of our house, the research and all that. There were a lot of legends going around about the DCM residence there—what was it, what was its history? And there was quite a bit of documentary evidence available and she collected it and refuted some ideas about what had happened there, what notorious Nazi had supposedly lived there, that kind of thing. But the house did have a very interesting past. It was built for a Jewish professor, Paret, as his dream home, and was called the Paret House. The

architect was Herbert Hans Ruhl, who was quite successful during the 1920s. Then it was expropriated as everybody already knew, but it was not given to a senior member of the of the Nazi ruling elite. It was somebody not quite so famous. Then, at the end of the war, it was acquired by the United States as occupation property. The first American occupant was the legal advisor to General Clay, the American commandant of Berlin. The house was among those that we had during the operation of the U.S. Mission in Berlin under the Four-Powers Agreement. And then after the transition, we retained it. I'm very glad we did. It was one of the few houses that we retained after that.

Q: So that was on Vogelsang?

KOENIG: Yeah.

Q: Yes. A beautiful house in the Bauhaus art style. It had been featured in a German architectural magazine at one point. I think we had some records of that. Yes, it was a very nice house.

KOENIG: Yeah, we actually made contact with several people who were involved in the history of the house. Natalie was in touch with the son of General Clay's legal advisor, who was a theater critic for The New York Times, and he came out to visit while we were there. He had been young at the time, but remembered the house a bit. That was all very nice. That was the kind of thing you could do in Berlin quite a bit. You know, there were all these historic connections between the United States and Germany. And there was no other place I've ever worked that you would have people come out to visit so often—interesting, prominent people. On the other hand, sometimes they hadn't been back to Germany for many years. Especially if they were German Jews who had left. You would run into them on their first visit, they would come to Germany for the first time after so long.

Q: Yes.

KOENIG: Sometimes their first time would be when you saw them. And it was just kind of a wonderful thing to be around for this – the very eye-opening and poignant experience that they had when they came back. I really enjoyed that part of the work.

Q: Yes, I remember meeting at—we did the July 4 ceremony at the American Academy which was on the Wannsee. And I remember meeting a gentleman there who had come from Berlin, left, and then had had a very successful career as a journalist. And just absolutely fascinating stories.

KOENIG: Our embassy has benefited a lot, I think, while we were there, and then earlier, and I hope still today, from all these connections. Often, I mean, they were not connections to the embassy per se, but to the American Academy. You know, I've been a little critical of Richard Holbrooke, but one great idea he had was to create the American Academy in Berlin. That was something that only a person with his connections could have done. And he did it extremely well. It did become the bridge between America and

Germany for civil society connections or elite connections between Germany and the United States. The American Academy became a real centerpiece and brought people over all the time.

Q: Okay, I'm going to stop the recording now.

Q: All right, so it's May 29, 2021. And this is Jay Anania, speaking with John Koenig continuing his oral history. And John, I think when we wrapped up last time, you had concluded discussing your time at the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) headquarters in Naples, where you were political adviser. So how did the process go by which you were selected and nominated, and then approved to be ambassador to Cyprus.

KOENIG: Slowly, actually, it was a sort of complicated situation. I was not the first person selected in the scheme. Another very qualified officer with less regional experience than I had was initially selected. But then, I believe through the intervention of somebody on the seventh floor, that person was reassigned to a different ambassadorship. This created a bit of a gap which enabled my name to come forward again, but I was in competition with a very well-connected political person who was a good friend of Secretary Clinton's, and wanted, for some reason, the assignment to Cyprus. The discussion went on about who it should be, me or this other individual, for several months. It delayed things quite a bit. I had heard earlier that I was a prospect, and then things became difficult to follow. In the end, I was selected. After that, everything went smoothly, according to the usual plan with an announcement and confirmation and that kind of thing. But I was surprised by this snag that arose over the possible political appointee, and I do credit, basically, Bill Burns, for having gotten me the job. I think without his personal involvement, it would have been a different outcome, and I would not have been ambassador to Cyprus. So that worked out well and I got back—

Q: When you were going through your confirmation, did you find that there were senators or their staff, who were particularly interested in Cyprus with whom you consulted? And if so, what were their interests?

KOENIG: There were only a couple. Jeanne Shaheen was the most interested generally in international affairs and the Foreign Service. So she had a meeting with me and we had an interesting conversation. I had a good conversation with Tony Blinken, who at the time was working in the White House, as Vice President Biden's national security advisor. I guess the other senator who was quite interested was Senator Bob Menendez. I met with his chief of staff rather than with him personally. He had a particular point or set of points that he wanted to make during the confirmation hearings. I think that one of the purposes of meeting with his chief of staff, and in fact of all the preparatory work with regard to the hearing that I did, was to be prepared for Senator Menendez to lay down his points without overreacting during the confirmation hearing. That was more or less it. There was only modest interest, I would say, apart from Jeanne Shaheen, among the actual senators involved. I didn't get a lot of questions during the hearing there. I was one

of four ambassadorial nominees who were in the same hearing, and it all went rather smoothly and normally without any hitches.

Q: Well, I'm glad to hear that you didn't have some of the horror stories that you hear.

KOENIG: I mean, I was still a bit surprised by Senator Menendez's small diatribe. But, you know, I had been prepared and it was nothing entirely unfamiliar to me. It's just that I guess I wasn't quite ready for the way it would feel when you're sitting there, you know, six feet below them. With a microphone in front of you. So anyway, it was fine.

Q: So in the meantime, was that all happening while you were still in Naples?

KOENIG: No. I had left Naples and was already back in the U.S. for a short time before my hearings were actually scheduled. So I had already transitioned out of NATO.

Q: I see. So now you're going to Cyprus. And this was 2012. What month did you arrive?

KOENIG: I arrived in August of 2012—it may have been early September. But I believe it was August. And you know, that's a quiet time in Europe generally, but especially in Greece and Cyprus; their holidays are really around the 15th of August, the Feast of the Virgin Mary. So it was a good time to go there and settle in. It was interesting to get back because we had left 15 years before and a lot of things had not changed. It was surprising to arrive back in Cyprus and find that so much was the same, including a lot of people who worked at the embassy, many of whom I knew well and really enjoyed working with. So that was really nice. I had a fair number of contacts who were still actively engaged in policy matters, who I had known when they were younger, and when I was also younger of course. And I reconnected with them. So it was all quite nice in that regard. Very different from most other places that I've been. One Foreign Service National (FSN) employee in particular, Anna Maria Yiallourou, probably my favorite colleague—certainly my favorite FSN colleague, or locally engaged staff colleague ever—was still there and as great as ever. I really enjoyed working with her again.

Q: Did you get clear instructions from the European Bureau before you went out? Did you feel—

KOENIG: Yes, I did, but more so from Bill Burns, who was at the time the undersecretary for political affairs. We were quite interested in moving ahead with an effort to restart Cyprus settlement talks, which had been essentially frozen for years. There was a pretty effective UN (United Nations) envoy in Cyprus at the time that I arrived, Alexander Downer, the former foreign minister of Australia. And there was work underway to try to move toward Cyprus negotiations, so that there could be another push for a Cyprus settlement. This was during the Obama administration, not a top-level priority, but a fairly high priority for the eastern Mediterranean region. We believed at that time that Turkey was sufficiently interested to move ahead on Cyprus settlement. So that, really, some of the most important conditions were in place for progress. Those

instructions were pretty clear. We also had an interesting set of security resources or facilities on Cyprus, and those are another important priority for us.

Q: Okay, so you've arrived, how did you view your country team?

KOENIG: Excellent. I mean, it was a great team. I came in, and my DCM (deputy chief of mission) Andrew Schofer had already been there for a year. He basically became chargé as soon as he arrived in country. Andrew had done a great job. He was a great person to have on the country team and he made the transition as comfortable as it can possibly be. He was a really fine officer and a good person to be working with.

Still, there were a couple of difficulties in different sections. I mean, the management section in particular took up a lot of my time during my first year in Cyprus. It was riven with horrendous interpersonal problems that were driving people to quit, mainly locally engaged staff, or to file different kinds of complaints in different places. So it was totally out of control, but that wasn't Andrew's fault. He had done his best to manage it. The personalities involved were really, really difficult. Andrew had been wrestling with this for months. It involved a number of different dimensions. Some had to do with the dismissal of staff that was resented by various people. So much had to do with handling of assistance money that was in the USAID (United States Agency for International Development) or U.S. public affairs accounts, this kind of thing. It was really, really a widespread, nasty atmosphere, so I dealt with it a lot. I mean, I had so many one-on-one meetings, and then small meetings. Finally, I kind of threw in the towel. About six months in, I just sent a message pleading with Washington to send out a team to help us sort through all these things. I think it was considered a rather odd move, but I don't think we would have ever gotten through them on our own without just waiting for everybody involved to get out and leave the embassy. So it actually helped quite a bit.

Q: So when you say a team, did the executive office send out somebody?

KOENIG: Yeah, the bureau executive office and the management office, I think, so the seventh-floor office, combined to send out two or three people who met with everyone, wrote up a report, and proposed some solutions. That eased things a lot. Just the meetings that they had helped a lot, because I think a large part of the problem was that people didn't think that we were taking their complaints seriously. So calling someone in and sort of bringing, not just a new set of eyes and ears to the problem, but demonstrating concern by taking this kind of unusual step helped out quite a bit.

Q: An airing of grievances, if you will.

KOENIG: It was an airing of grievances very much, you know [laughs], extensive airing of grievances.

Q: Well, that was an innovative approach, then. You don't hear about that very often. And actually interesting that they also acceded to your request. They might have just said, "No, deal with it."

KOENIG: They had seen on previous high-level EUR (Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs) visits that there were very big problems, because when they had town halls, there would be crying, tears, this kind of stuff. That was before I got there.

Q: Okay.

KOENIG: It gave a sense that there was a problem. [laughs]

Q: Well, that's a good way to get started at your post. But at least you had an opportunity to demonstrate that you did care about the issues and took care of them.

KOENIG: Yeah, it turned out alright in the end. One element of the difficulty was that we were closing down the assistance program that we had operated in Cyprus for more or less 40 years. And this created opportunities for misunderstanding that, I think, really spun out of control. It also meant letting go of some very talented and committed local-hire Americans. We had to close down most of Fulbright and our Fulbright office. The two Americans who had spearheaded our USAID effort in Cyprus for the last few years were really amazing individuals. We had to let them go; I hated to see that. Anyway, that was one thing that occupied quite a bit of my time during the first, let's say, six months to a year. But it turned out that was a good time not to have to devote entirely to the political or other issues, because at that period of time the two leaders of the Cyprus communities were not intent on making any progress on the UN settlement process. So it was easy enough to look away and not lose anything.

Alexander Downer was very enjoyable to work with. I don't know if you know anything about him personally, but he's quite an outspoken, colorful individual. And that made life always quite a bit of fun. I loved going over and talking to him. He had seen a lot of people at my level come and go, he had this rather impressive experience as foreign minister of Australia. But ultimately, my big opportunity arose when he was basically thrown out by Nicos Anastasiades, the leader of the Greek Cypriot community and the president of the Republic of Cyprus, for just not being sufficiently obsequious, I guess. They therefore needed somebody to stand in for the UN representative, to lead the settlement efforts, and I filled that role for about six months. Not formally; I was still just the U.S. ambassador. But I took on many of the functions of the UN special negotiator for this bridge period.

Q: Oh, interesting. Obviously, your experience there and your language skills made you a good, informal candidate to do that.

KOENIG: Yeah, and it was fun. So I did a lot with Downer's staff, more than I otherwise would have. We actually achieved something. The only tangible thing I could say, personally, that I ever really achieved in terms of advancing a Cyprus settlement, is that, together with a great colleague, the head of our political section, Kristen Pisani, we brokered the agreement to restart settlement talks. Toria Nuland, the assistant secretary for EUR, came out for the final meetings to nail down agreement. It was called the Joint

Statement of February 2014, and it launched a long series of intensive negotiations, which, boosted by a critical political change on the Turkish Cypriot side that happened some months later, lasted until July 2017, when talks finally broke down and we ended up back where we started.

I worked a lot on various aspects of the Cyprus issue over time; on the missing persons issue, on reconciliation, on the Turkish-occupied ghost-town of Varosha, etc. All the elements of the Cyprus problem, but to actually advance work on an overall Cyprus solution, that was the one time that I actually made a significant contribution, and it felt good.

Q: So during that period, were you working pretty much full time on that issue?

KOENIG: Yeah. For that time, it was our number one priority, getting these talks started. I worked with a number of key people in Cyprus, Turkey, Washington. Including Alexander Downer's team—Downer himself left, but we also relied to a great degree on the staff in his office that then became subordinated to Lisa Bittenheim, who was the head of the UN Forces in Cyprus, UNFICYP. I knew Lisa from graduate school, she was an old friend. We were working to iron out differences in a long draft statement that included a lot of ideas that had not previously been agreed in negotiations. That was tough. There have been countless negotiations on the Cyprus issue, and a lot has been agreed. But there were certain key issues that had not been agreed in the past, the most sensitive one being single sovereignty for the new entity, that would be the United Cyprus government. So the government of the Cyprus federation was created through negotiations: would it have a single sovereignty? Would it have dual sovereignty? Would it have derivative sovereignty? These things were complicated and, in fact, rather vague, but they're incredibly important to the two sides. And so we worked a lot on that issue.

We worked on a few other issues that were critically important and sensitive. And this entailed a huge amount of contact with Ankara, which was playing a really important role. Senior levels of the Turkish government were very helpful because the leader of the Turkish Cypriot side at the time we were working on the Joint Statement, Dervis Eroglu, was a rejectionist, a very hardline person who did not believe in a Cyprus settlement. So it was quite a challenge to get him to agree to things that would move the process forward.

Q: And how dependent upon the government in Ankara was he? How much ability did he have on his own?

KOENIG: He was quite dependent. Certainly, the so-called "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus", or TRNC, the Turkish Cypriot administration in the northern part of Cyprus, gets most of its budget from Ankara. It happened in different ways over time, and Ankara was taking more and more control of the budget in the north during the last decade so that it no longer just provided, let's say, a lump sum to support the budget of the TRNC. Ankara actually directed the expenditure of funds much more closely. The Turkish Cypriots were very dependent on those funds. They were also dependent on

political support, particularly this leader, Dervis Eroglu. He, like Rauf Denktaş, was a Kemalist and very, very focused on relations between Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot community. So that was the essence of his political program, Kemalism and strengthening this link.

Eroglu was difficult for Ankara to work with, but Ankara was able to wield a lot of influence over him and often did. It was an interesting circle of people I would talk to. I would talk to Eroglu and I would talk to his negotiator who was also a quite capable person. But at the same time, I would talk to opposition figures. I would talk to the senior officials in Ankara, pretty often. My main contact was Feridun Sinirlioglu, the Turkish undersecretary of foreign affairs, so number two in the Turkish Foreign Ministry. I also worked a lot with the American ambassador in Ankara, Frank Ricciardone. I would meet with them in different locations, the Turks I mean, and gradually, gradually, we moved all this in a positive direction. Turkey was not easy to deal with. Turkey is a difficult negotiating partner, generally speaking. They're tough negotiators. But they had the desire to achieve an agreement, whereas Dervis Eroglu didn't really want to achieve an agreement. So it made a huge difference to be able to work with them.

Q: And why do you think Turkey was motivated after all those years to—?

KOENIG: It's important to remember that Turkey pushed hard for a settlement in 2004, at the time of the Annan Plan. It was the Greek Cypriots who rejected that settlement plan, at the very end, in a referendum. So it's wrong to say the Turkish side had been blocking a settlement over all those years.

Anyway, I think, first of all, they liked the process itself. They like to have a settlement process underway, I think, because they believe it eases tensions in the region and with Europe and with the U.S. to a degree. More importantly, perhaps, I believe they saw at that time there was a new reason to seek a solution to the Cyprus problem—the discovery of natural gas under the floor of the eastern Mediterranean. This was initially discovered a few years earlier in the southeastern Mediterranean, so not really close to Turkey. And this, I think, because of Turkey's basic thirst for natural gas -- they import huge quantities of natural gas -- plus their view of their role as a leading country in the region, maybe the dominant country in the region, and their desire to be a critical energy hub for all of southeastern Europe as well as, you know, the Caucasus and Anatolia. They thought that in order to realize this vision for Turkey to play this large regional role, keying off of energy, they needed to promote a Cyprus settlement. So, they were quite serious. They also were very interested in talking all the time about energy. They wanted to have a back channel, for example, to talk about energy to the Greek Cypriot side, because it was a very sensitive matter for both sides. We helped set that up.

For a certain period of time, this really spurred things forward and engaged Turkey's interest at a higher level than might otherwise be the case. And I think that persisted right up until the end of that round of negotiation, so after I left, until July 2017. There were a lot of different maneuvers that occurred in the interim during the course of the negotiations, some of which seemed to be problematic. Things Turkey did, like

exploratory drilling efforts in the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) of Cyprus and this kind of thing, and other challenges to the EEZ of Cyprus. But nonetheless, I think it was pretty evident that they were still very much invested in this energy issue for the eastern Mediterranean, they really wanted to turn it into something productive. Since then, at least since 2017 if not earlier, it's become purely an arena for political posturing for all the parties concerned. There is really not much of an energy issue left. There is a real energy issue down in the southeast Mediterranean, Egypt especially, but also Israel. But as regards the rest of the eastern Mediterranean Sea, the issue itself has become almost purely political, and almost none of it is about economics or energy security.

Q: And how much of a drain on Turkey's resources was it to keep the Turkish community of Northern Cyprus afloat?

KOENIG: Not much. I mean, Turkey is a huge country. And at the time, of course, it was developing rapidly. It's faltered a little bit since but it had a rapidly growing economy throughout this period. They could easily afford to do whatever they needed to do in the northern part of Cyprus. And in fact, one of the things that was underway while I was there was that Turkish companies were acquiring more and more of the valuable assets of northern Cyprus.

During our first assignment on Cyprus and for a long time, there was a kind of invisible fence between Turkey proper and the northern part of Cyprus. So there were Turkish Cypriot businessmen, who were local in northern Cyprus, who did most of the hotel development, for example, or were in charge of the agricultural economy of northern Cyprus. And that had changed so that Turkish organizations had a huge footprint in the northern part of Cyprus by the time I got there the second time around. And they were operating very lucrative casinos and all sorts of other things. Because Turkey prohibits gambling, north Cyprus was the Turks' favorite place to go for a weekend of gambling and excitement. That generated a lot of revenue for the people concerned. Most of it did not reach the budget of the Turkish Cypriot authorities.

But the Turks were very easily able to sustain whatever they needed to sustain in north Cyprus. And as Turkey was doing things to support north Cyprus more economically, that also had the kind of side effect, or perhaps the deliberate effect, of tying Cyprus to Turkey more. So they were initiating a project to bring water from Turkey to the northern part of Cyprus via pipeline, there were a lot of discussions about high capacity electricity connectors between Turkey and the northern part of Cyprus, that kind of thing.

All of this was perceived by the Greek Cypriots with some reason as kind of rendering permanent the Turkish position on Cyprus and tying that part of the island more closely to Turkey than to the south. And you know, it's hard to deny that that wasn't happening. But it was a consequence of a very, very long sequence of events. And it was hard to really fault the Turkish Cypriots for wanting to bring more water to the northern part of the island since the entire island has a huge water deficit. Same for electricity, they have the most expensive electricity imaginable because it's mainly generated by burning heavy fuel, heavy petroleum fuel. It's incredibly expensive and inefficient. So there are many

rational reasons for doing these things, even if they have a negative impact on Cyprus settlement efforts.

Q: Yeah, so all that seems to indicate that Turkey actually had rather large interest in keeping them separate. And I suppose, as the talks broke down, that would only have accelerated.

KOENIG: I think there's much concern that—this is an argument I've had with many people over the years and, of course, you can only know after the passage of time—but someday the last real opportunity for the solution of the Cyprus problem will come. I understand never say never, but personally I think that last opportunity passed in 2017. I wasn't there when it happened. But since then, clearly, the situation has worsened considerably. Prospects are almost non-existent for a Cyprus settlement process. And the prospects have not been this bad since, I would say, 1988, before the election of George Vassiliou as president. So we're talking about a seriously deteriorating situation with regard to a Cyprus settlement. But that's not the end of the world. You know, it is not a hot conflict. The consequences of the status quo on Cyprus are manageable by all the parties concerned. You need to be cautious about the deterioration of the situation, but there's no reason to believe that it cannot be managed. It's been managed successfully for 60 years.

Q: Now, in the meantime, in terms of the Republic of Cyprus itself, in the negotiations, were you dealing strictly with that government?

KOENIG: Um, no, not exactly. On the Greek Cypriot side, yes, I suppose. But the Turkish Cypriot side and the Greek Cypriot side are equal in the context of Cyprus settlement efforts. And we talked a lot to Turkish Cypriot officials, even in other realms besides settlement efforts. You know, this was always controversial, because some people took the view that it was inappropriate for international organizations or embassies or foreign governments to have contact with officials in the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” who did not deal exclusively with efforts to resolve the Cyprus issue; that should be the only issue you could discuss. We found that it was useful to talk to them about money laundering, for example, because they had a big money laundering problem in the TRNC. You're not supposed to use that word without quotation marks, but they had a big money laundering problem. They had problems with human trafficking. They had a lot of problems that we wanted to talk to them about.

There was also -- given that the buffer zone, even though it's patrolled by the United Nations, the de facto boundary between the north and the south on Cyprus, is quite permeable -- there are all sorts of security issues that arose that you couldn't really address properly without talking to the Turkish Cypriots about them as well. So we talked to the Turkish Cypriots a lot. And we also had a relationship with the Turkish embassy in the northern part of the island, which was considered totally taboo by some Greek Cypriots. And with Turkish forces in the northern part of the island, who are, by some people's definition, occupation forces. We had various levels of contact with the Turkish forces. And I had a series of awkward, but broadly friendly meals and meetings and

dinners out and that kind of stuff with the commander of Turkish forces. It's all very surreal, you know, because typically, they served in NATO billets before, and they're very much like their Greek or other NATO counterparts. But there's this large sort of umbrella of issues related to Cyprus and Greek-Turkish relations, that sort of overshadow everything. So when you're talking to them, these Turkish officers, you find you quite often run into dead ends where you just can't have a sensible conversation and you just get talking points 100%. Even if you're having drinks, or just off in a corner, you still get kind of steely-eyed talking points and you realize you're not making any difference.

Q: And what about the government of Greece, did it have any involvement in any of this?

KOENIG: It did at times, it depended, to a degree, on how interested they were. When I was there, they were not terribly interested, to be honest. We did have contact with them. But then later in the procedure, mainly after I left, and as the negotiations were underway, a Greek foreign minister, Kotsias, who has now left office, he was foreign minister in the SYRIZA (leftist Greek political party) government, created quite a mess. He was a real hardliner on certain issues, supposedly legal issues that bore on the status of Cyprus, and he just created a complete mess. That was not appreciated by anyone. By the way, neither the Turks, nor the Greek Cypriots, nor the Turkish Cypriots nor the United States nor the UN liked what he was doing. But in dealing with a problem in this small country, Cyprus, that has tended to be so reliant on its larger neighbors, for security and other matters, it's very difficult to constrain a kind of gadfly from the so-called "mother countries" (Greece and Turkey), they can create a huge hassle and sometimes real difficulties. And that's what happened in this case.

Q: Now, at some times in the past, the U.S. has had special envoys actually for the Cyprus issue, had that gone away by the time you were ambassador?

KOENIG: It did. I think I was considered to be, because of my background, mainly on Cyprus, to be an adequate substitute for having a Cyprus coordinator. The issue came up from time to time, and people in Washington would weigh in on the pros and cons of having a separate Cyprus negotiator. And the decision was always that it wasn't needed. So when I was doing this travel to meet with people in different places, I was essentially fulfilling that role. It was sensitive, and it couldn't have gone on for very long, but it worked during the time when it needed to work. And then after I left, I think that Kathleen Doherty, who was the ambassador during the time of the negotiation, did fine without having a Cyprus negotiator appointed. It also, I think, reflected a different, more modest presentation, at least, of the U.S. role in this process. The Cyprus negotiator from the UN, who came in in 2014, in the fall of 2014, was a very, very capable person named Espen Barth Eide. He was the former defense minister of Norway, but he was also the executive director of Davos, the Davos Forum. So he was a very well connected and very capable man. And he had really mobilized his team. And they did superb work. I mean, if you want to blame anyone for the perpetuation of the Cyprus issue, the last people to blame are the UN, they've done a fantastic job in maintaining calm and order on the island, helping the two sides interact constructively and fostering progress on the Cyprus

settlement. I'm very, very impressed with the work that they've done over time on the island.

Q: So in addition to that, of course, you're the ambassador, the bilateral ambassador. So what was the situation in the Republic of Cyprus itself during that period, economically, socially, et cetera?

KOENIG: Well, not good. I mean, when I arrived, Cyprus was barreling toward a cliff. They had a left-wing president, Dimitris Christofias, who was not a good manager of the economy in terms of government management, and the government plays a large role in the economy of Cyprus. And he was in his last year of office, and several things had gone seriously wrong during his term. I had known him before. And I knew a lot of people with that party. It's called AKEL (Progressive Party for the Working People). And I'm actually—I had quite friendly relations with AKEL on my first assignment. And also not bad relations with AKEL on my second assignment, not by any means.

But Dimitris Christofias was not successful. He had pushed Cyprus toward the cliff, and it finally fell off. Right as he was leaving office, the financial crisis, the Cyprus banking crisis happened: the Eurozone crisis that happened after Greece and that people tend to forget. It went through the roof. The banking sector was far too large for the real economy of Cyprus and the credibility and financial position of Cypriot banks was destroyed by the haircut that was undertaken in Greece. So this destroyed the Cypriot banking system, essentially. Christofias was not serious enough to address that properly, until things worsened considerably. The Cypriot banking system and this financial crisis arrived at the time when the new president, Nicos Anastasiades, and his right wing DISY (Democratic Rally) government took office. So that was very dramatic.

So the new government came to office. And the first thing that happened to them was this crash. They had to close the banks and they had to shut down the cash machines and everything. People were denied access to their financial assets. And then there were meetings, two successive weeks in Brussels of the Euro Group. And the first week, the Europeans offered the Cypriots an austere package, but one that would have rescued them with a modest, basically, bailing-in of the banks. That is, you don't bail the banks out with external funds, you require the banks to seize the assets of depositors. So at first the Cypriots are offered a modest, not-too-painful bailing-in that first week. And the president, Nicos Anastasiades, is a very dramatic man. I mean a real diva. He rejected this proposal. Well actually, he said he could not dare to accept it without bringing it back and consulting with the people of Cyprus and the parliament, who resoundingly said, "Hell no."

So Cyprus said, "Hell no" to the offer, and that was just a purely destructive decision. The situation continued to deteriorate. And Greek Cypriots were on the phone with everybody in the world, begging the world to help them out. The United States had a rather positive approach at this time, based on our experience with Greece, where we were also critical to providing Greece help with their Euro Group counterparts, including Germany. We also tried very much to help in the case of Cyprus, and we did help in some ways. That

was hugely appreciated and helped me a lot as ambassador. I was talking to these guys. They were out of their heads, they were so worried that the economy was going to absolutely collapse. So even the small things that I could do, like give them another contact in the U.S. Department of the Treasury or make sure that a call happened or whatever, it meant a lot to them. And in the end, Anastasiades went to the second meeting of the Euro Group and accepted a very, very severe bailing-in. So essentially, everything was wiped out. Pension funds were virtually wiped out. We had a huge problem in the embassy. We had to pay local employees with cash. The local employees' pension fund was, I think, shaved back by a very substantial amount. So this was something devastating.

And it went through. Some of those facing losses were partially reimbursed or recovered over time. But basically, they closed one of Cyprus's two largest banks, the Popular Bank of Cyprus, and they merged it with the largest bank, the Bank of Cyprus. And for the Bank of Cyprus, they called in all of the deposits in exchange for shares and used the funds to recapitalize the bank, and then they brought in new capital. So their capital was also diluted. So even their role in managing the bank as owners of capital that had been used to recapitalize the bank was almost eliminated. It was an incredibly severe solution to their banking problem, but it has essentially worked. But that was the big story for that first year, the catastrophic economic situation in Cyprus.

Q: What was happening to the funds of the ordinary investor or not investor but saver even who had money in the banks?

KOENIG: Gone.

Q: So the banks basically declared bankruptcy and all their obligations just—?

KOENIG: No, they didn't go bankrupt. They took their depositors' money--deposits are normally liabilities--they turned them into capital, and that now enabled them to sustain operations until they could bring in additional investors. And in exchange for their deposits, depositors got nominal shares. They got shares in the banks, where they had formerly been deposit-holders. But those shares were massively diluted when the new investors came in and took over management of the bank and swamped the investors who had just had their deposits sort of seized. And this will almost surely never be resolved completely in civil court. It's been contested repeatedly. There are many, many people who believe that this exceeded the legal authority of the banks themselves, or the central bank or even the government of Cyprus, to seize property on that scale. But in the meantime, they are effectively out.

Q: So that just must have brought everyday life almost to a standstill? Nobody could go out and buy much of anything beyond the basic necessities, I suppose?

KOENIG: Yeah, for about a year, I would say, it had that effect. Some people, of course, had protected their money by depositing it elsewhere, not in Cypriot banks. But Cypriot banks had been foolish. As the situation in Greece worsened, Greek banks were paying

higher and higher interest on various instruments and deposits and things like that. The Cypriot banks were already in a difficult position. But in order to maximize their short-term income, they would invest heavily in these things. So when the Greek banking system got shaky, they were already in very, very serious trouble. At the same time, people knew that if they were not sort of confined to using Cypriot banks, as was the case with pension funds and things like that, they could deposit their money in other accounts denominated in let's say, pounds or euro accounts in Europe. There was really no problem with that. And those people were protected and their money came through unscathed.

Q: I see. Now, I seem to recall that those banks were also well known to be not paying much attention to anti-money laundering. So they were also, I assume, taking in shady money from other sources?

KOENIG: Yeah. I mean, they were, very much so. The Cypriots had made some progress on combating this, money laundering, that is, but they actually got more serious as the situation—well, in the context of their adjustment plan, they became more serious. They had been getting more serious over time because they were under intense pressure from various quarters to tighten things up. But they have, regrettably, along with Malta, Latvia, and a few other countries, catered to or tailored their financial sectors to serve the interests of mainly Russian but other international wealthy individuals and organizations that are seeking to evade taxes. Or at least avoid taxes if not evade taxes.

So one of the big problems, I think, in the Cypriot economy and political realm is that this industry of serving the interests of shady depositors and investors, and in some cases, money launderers, chiefly from Russia, but also from other countries, is kind of preponderant in the Cypriot economy and the political operations of the Cypriot government. It's essentially corrupting. I think they know it. But they're unable to get themselves away from it. The president of Cyprus himself, Nicos Anastasiades, is a lawyer who doesn't engage directly in this, but he never closed his law firm when he became president. Anastasiades' daughter continued to operate it. His son-in-law was very much involved in golden passport arrangements where you buy a European passport for an investment scheme that usually involves real estate investments in Cyprus. So Cyprus is one of the bad guys in the European Union on all of these counts. And even though they have, on the books, more serious money-laundering legislation, and regulations and oversight, they have done a poor job of executing that role. And it's known. We talked to them about it a lot.

Q: And you mentioned—?

KOENIG: The U.S. Treasury Department almost closed down one bank. It was not one of the major banks, it was a small bank. But we more or less closed it down by refusing to allow them to have any interaction with the U.S. Fed (Federal Reserve) and blacklisting them, which virtually kills a bank that's involved in international operations. That was an interesting episode. There were a lot of doubts about whether or not this was justified. I don't think anybody in the U.S. government had any doubts on that score. The bank had a long history of shady operations. It had moved its headquarters to different

jurisdictions and had a very opaque way of operating. But some Cypriots had doubts and objections. And clearly the owners of the bank disagreed with us. And they were lobbying heavily to have this ban lifted.

Q: And so when the financial crisis hit and these banks were going belly up, were the international, you know, shady investor types, were they also being wiped out in this capitalization?

KOENIG: Yeah, they were affected. In fact, some of them were—I mean, as a result of this bailing-in, there were a number of Russians who came to be on the board of the Bank of Cyprus, which was the largest remaining bank in Cyprus, because they had been the largest depositors and became, temporarily at least, the largest shareholders.

Q: Right.

KOENIG: They wanted to be able to control the bank. But also, it was kind of a toxic asset. It wasn't worth very much—the bank. So having a controlling interest in a bad bank is not a great thing. But they were for a time dominant on the board. But then, speaking of shady international operators, Wilbur Ross came in. Wilbur Ross, in a maneuver that has persistently been described as "shady", working with the former CEO (chief executive officer) of Deutsche Bank, Josef Ackermann, and several others, acquired a controlling share of the Bank of Cyprus. Ackermann even became chairman of Bank of Cyprus for a time. And you know, most of the people who were involved in this deal had a bad reputation themselves of being at least suspected of involvement in money laundering in the past. So, this became the largest U.S. investment in Cyprus, Bank of Cyprus, even though Wilbur Ross's own share was not the majority. I don't think this arrangement has sat well with anyone, this entire scheme of bringing in this particular investment group. I had a chance to meet with Wilbur Ross a couple times when he came to Cyprus, and he was a very sophisticated guy who knew a whole lot about buying distressed financial organizations. He had done it in the Ireland financial crisis and other crises. So he clearly knew his business extremely well. But there were all sorts of rumors about the ultimate effect of this buyout. And of course, Ross went on to be Trump's secretary of commerce and didn't exactly wrap himself in glory there.

Q: And then you also mentioned that in the north, there were a lot of gambling casinos. And that's a pretty clear sign of money laundering going on, if you have a lot of lightly regulated casinos.

KOENIG: I mean there was clearly a lot of money laundering going on at a lower level in a different way there, in the north. Probably more purely criminal funds were involved in that than you had in the south, which was mostly, I think, sort of the profits of large Russian organizations that were laundered, essentially, through the Cypriot banking system in order to avoid tax. I mean, for several years, the largest source of FDI (foreign direct investment) in Russia was Cyprus. So this money was seriously just repurposed, its source was obscured. It was sent into the Cypriot banking system, and then reinvested in Russia. Anyway, yeah, there was a lot of—

Q: That's quite a statistic. The largest investment in Russia was—from this tiny country of Cyprus. Interesting.

KOENIG: Yep. It's the mouse that invested, I guess! The mouse that invested.

Q: Wow. So in the meantime, I believe there were also still some residual British military bases on Cyprus?

KOENIG: There are.

Q: And we had some sort of activities there?

KOENIG: There were. The U.S. cooperates closely with the Brits on those bases. And we have an operation there, called Olive Harvest. As part of the Camp David Accords, one of the tasks that was taken on by the United States was to monitor the ceasefire in the Sinai Peninsula using U-2s flying out of Akrotiri Base, which is one of the two British sovereign base areas on the island of Cyprus. And that continues, so we still have U-2s there.

The strangest thing that happened regarding the British bases while I was ambassador, and I don't think I've mentioned this before, was that Pat Kennedy concluded that he needed to find a place to park the little air force operation that he had been operating out of Iraq. And he chose, I guess, by looking at the map and thinking it over and talking to somebody he knew in the British government, he chose to put it at Akrotiri.

I had a lot of problems with that. We had a number of arguments about this. In the end, it happened, but I was never happy with it. The mission that was given to this unit was preposterous, I think. So the idea was that, as part of our reaction to Benghazi and other threats to diplomatic missions in the eastern Mediterranean, we were going to rely on Air Kennedy, I guess, as a scheme for evacuating personnel and resupplying our diplomatic missions in the case of emergency. We had formerly conducted an operation like this using U.S. army helicopters to support Embassy Beirut for many years.

Q: They called it Beirut Airbridge.

KOENIG: Correct. So Beirut Airbridge had performed it successfully—there was one crash. But it had all of the rules of engagement and equipment that would go along with an actual U.S. Army helicopter operation. That was not a standard that could be met with Air Kennedy. And there was a lot of examination of what exactly was happening with this air force out there on the island of Cyprus. It conducted essentially almost no missions. You know, I got into some ridiculous discussions about certification of aircraft and pilots and so forth for operating over the sea. It turned out to be, I think, a strange expedient for locating these aircraft when we didn't know what to do with them.

Q: Now, you said that they came from Iraq? We had what we call Embassy Air Iraq. In fact, we actually had international flights from Kuwait and Jordan, and they had EAI flight numbers. But these were, these were so-called Dash 8 turboprop airplanes that we flew around in Iraq, and then also to Jordan and also to Kuwait. But then we also had a lot of helicopters. So what was it that made it over your way?

KOENIG: We had the helicopters, or we had some of the helicopters. I'm not sure. I don't recall how many helicopters there were all together, maybe eight, something like that? And they were housed at Akrotiri. And that worked out—I mean, I think it achieved nothing except parking them there and keeping them essentially active, pending some final decision on what to do with them.

Q: Yeah. So these would have been, not U.S. military. These would have been leased, I think through the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, which had the contracts. And then there were contractors who were, in my experience, all former U.S. military, who were the pilots and the crews and mechanics and pretty much everything else, because the planes themselves had been U.S. military airplanes at one point or another, I think, in most cases.

KOENIG: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I'm quite sure that that remains true. And that is exactly a picture of what we had. They had obviously operated in a relatively hostile environment in Iraq, or at least potentially hostile. But the problem was, of course, that they didn't have a proper logistics tail or sort of reinforcement support from the U.S. military. It just didn't exist. They were operating on their own. This was a commitment in an area that is unusual for the U.S. State Department to undertake, where our capacity was extremely limited in the case of a bad event. So this was done simultaneously with all of these changes that were made to make more U.S. rapid reaction forces from the military available for operations to intercede in something like the assault on our Benghazi offices in Libya. These things were kind of developing in parallel. I don't know what ultimately happened to this airwing of helicopters in Akrotiri. I imagine, it just went away at a certain stage. There was no reason to have it as a supplement to a military capability. So it was just, I think, kept as an expedient for a certain period of time.

Q: Yeah, preserving the capacity, I suppose. Because it's not very practical. We didn't need to fly people into or out of Cyprus from any obvious place, except if there had been some sort of major emergency.

KOENIG: The locales that came up in connection with the use of this little air wing were always the same, Lebanon and Libya. And Libya was far away. I mean, any effort to do Libya would have been a real stretch.

Q: Yeah, they'd have to have refueled probably multiple times to get anywhere useful in Libya. Yeah, that's an awfully long way away.

KOENIG: It is, as was pointed out. But I think, you know, Pat is a very practical person and I think he wanted to hold on to this. And this was a good arrangement in which to keep it.

Q: Okay, and what status did these contractors have? Can you recall that?

KOENIG: They were just private contractors, private Americans working for a private organization. They were residents in Cyprus. So this was one of the complications. They were not members of the mission, they had not been vetted by anybody, really, except by their employer. And a couple of weird things happened with people who were assigned to this unit. One of them disappeared into north Cyprus, for example, and other weird things. But that was another bone of contention between me and Pat, because we had a kind of elevated level of responsibility for these people because they were working on behalf of the U.S. government.

Q: Of course. Yes.

KOENIG: But we had very little influence over their behavior.

Q: And where was that base located?

KOENIG: It's on the southern tip of Cyprus, basically. Akrotiri is southwest of Limassol, the largest city on Cyprus.

Q: I see. So quite a distance away from the embassy, too. So if there was trouble it was probably extremely inconvenient for your staff to have to somehow go down there and figure out what was going on?

KOENIG: Yeah, it was. I had an issue about whether or not I would be responsible for their behavior. You know, they were not—In the end, I retained a kind of watching brief for them, but they were considered part of Mission London. But nobody in the embassy in London even bothered to pay attention to what they were doing. And this was British sovereign territory on Akrotiri itself. The arrangement had been made between Pat Kennedy and some guy who was a friend of his in HMG (Her Majesty's Government) who he met either in Iraq or in some other thing that he was doing. So they kind of did a drug deal to get this thing established. I just didn't think it was an appropriate use of U.S. government funds, and all sorts of other things. But anyway, that's what happened. The State Department Inspector General later looked into it.

Q: Okay. So an interesting little diversion there. And then what about just other aspects of the embassy operation? How many different agencies did you have working for you?

KOENIG: I'd have to count. We had the open source center, OSC, which used to be FBIS (the Foreign Broadcast Information Service). We had a defense attache's office. We had an AID (Agency for International Development) office which closed near the end of my time there. We had the usual sections of the embassy. Who else did we have? We had a

DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) office. We didn't have a resident legatt (legal attaché), but we were working on that because there was quite a bit of legal work to be done dealing with various kinds of cases. Who else did we have? I think that was more or less it.

So typically, we were supported out of Athens for most of our needs from other agencies, including the legatt. We had a lot of legatt work to do. We had one quite high-profile case, a counterterrorism case against a Hezbollah terrorist, while I was there. It was a watershed case for the U.S. because until then, the United States had never convinced the European Union to list Hezbollah or any part of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. So we were quite frustrated by this for years.

And then, it was in 2012, there was a botched effort by Hezbollah, to plan and stage attacks against Israelis in Cyprus. The Cypriot authorities, with the help of Mossad and the British, managed to apprehend and then interrogate the suspect. And the Cypriots agreed to go ahead and prosecute this case as a terrorist case, which was kind of a breakthrough. This had not happened before in the European Union. At the same time, there was another case up in Bulgaria, where a bomb had actually gone off on a bus and someone, I believe, had been killed. But they had a much more difficult time in actually arranging a prosecution.

So there was a great deal of stress placed on this aborted attack in Cyprus. And we worked extremely closely with the prosecutor's office of the Cyprus attorney general, plus the Cypriot authorities and law enforcement and others, to support their effort to prosecute this guy. This was like a psychological adventure, especially for our political assistant, Anna Maria Yiallourou. She was the main point of contact with the prosecutor on this. And mainly her role was just to put him in touch with the legatt's office in Athens, which came out to visit quite often, in order to develop evidence that was suitable for use in Cypriot court, and also to sort of work with them to develop legal arguments that they might use in court based on precedent that the United States was familiar with. Anyway, all of this worked out beautifully. Anna Maria found that a large part of her role was just soothing the fears of the prosecutor, who was convinced that he was going to be murdered by Hezbollah before the case went to trial. So she spent a lot of time, and I even got involved in a modest way, basically just holding his hand, telling him it was going to be okay. That he wasn't going to be rubbed out some morning on his way into the office.

Q: And I hope there's no punchline there.

KOENIG: Nope. It worked out perfectly. He prosecuted the case well. He obtained the conviction. And Cyprus then took that case, with support from the U.S. and especially the UK, back when the UK was in the European Union, they took that case to the European Council and the various organs there. And they got the military wing of Hezbollah listed as a terrorist organization, which was a breakthrough, because that meant that they were subjected to terrorist sanctions on fundraising and things like that, which is really quite useful in combating Hezbollah terrorist operations.

Q: That's significant.

KOENIG: Yeah. Let's see, I have written down a couple of other things I want to mention. There were a couple of curious things. First of all, I was a first-time ambassador, and I was not necessarily good at this job. But President Anastasiades had an incredibly difficult personality. Maybe it's just me, but I think he's a difficult person. He drank a lot. And there were a couple of occasions where his drinking really became an issue, especially as we were finishing the negotiations on the Joint Statement, which I mentioned earlier. A lot of yelling and drinking went on in these meetings, unlike anything I'd ever seen in any diplomatic encounter, anywhere else. It was a total high drama. But, nonetheless, the outcome was fine. So I guess I shouldn't fault him for his excessive consumption of scotch.

We also had a visit by the vice president at the time, Joe Biden, as part of our push to take advantage of the Joint Statement and just generally drive the Cyprus issue closer to a solution by supporting the settlement talks. Washington decided that we would have the highest level visit we had ever had to the island of Cyprus since Lyndon Johnson visited as vice president in like 1962. So Joe Biden came out. He had spent a lot of his political career dealing with Cyprus, so he knew the issue quite well. And he knew some of the personalities well enough.

The preparation for that visit was difficult, because it had to include contacts with the Turkish Cypriots, which the Greek Cypriots found a little bit unnerving. We used as our model an earlier visit by the secretary general of the UN, because the UN has to respect exactly the same parameters as we do. But nonetheless, the Cypriots were incredibly difficult. The Greek Cypriots and Anastasiades just tore me a new one like twice a week on this for several weeks. First of all, Anastasiades was completely unreasonable about the arrangements we were making on the Turkish Cypriot side. He just really wouldn't accept following the model of the UN secretary general's visit, and obsessed on the smallest details and freaked. Several times he suggested that Biden should not go north at all, but instead meet with Turkish Cypriot leader Eroglu in the buffer zone.

But my most ridiculous encounter was with the archbishop of Cyprus. Because one of the things that the vice president and his staff wanted to highlight during his visit was what's called the "religious track" of Cyprus reconciliation efforts, which was essentially sponsored by the government of Sweden. But we had worked quite a bit with them. The Swedes had developed a fairly cordial, if not particularly ambitious, round of talks that involved the religious leaders from both sides of the island. Muslims and the small Jewish community and all the various Christian denominations and, most importantly, the Cypriot Orthodox Church.

I thought that I knew the Orthodox archbishop of Cyprus, Chrysostomos II, reasonably well. He had made some very odd remarks to me during the financial crisis about breaking organized labor in a church-owned brewery. But we had met many times. I thought the archbishop would behave better with the vice president, because he was not

inclined to behave well by any means, if we gave him the honor of hosting the visit. So we did that, and he seemed tickled by the idea and really glommed on to it. Then we had to work out all the arrangements with the advance team on how to seat everyone for this meeting, where the archbishop would be the host and the guest of honor would be Vice President Biden, but all of the religious leaders were there essentially as equals. The decision was made that there should be a semicircle of chairs, so the cameras would see that they were all sort of equidistant, and no one was particularly close to Biden, so that they wouldn't have problems with television pictures and other things. The Muslim grand mufti from the north was the most sensitive about this.

Well, this all seemed to be working out fine until I got a call the day before Biden was supposed to arrive, from the site officer, saying the archbishop had changed everything and moved his own seat right next to Biden's. So I ran over there to the archbishop's palace. I clearly should not have been the one to do this. But I ran over there and within like, five minutes, got in a heated argument in Greek with the archbishop, where each of us was holding the arm of a chair, and basically wrestling and dancing around the room, cussing each other out. This was not wise on my part.

And after a certain length of time, I mean, I may have exhausted the archbishop, but I had not won this contest. So I retreated, and called the foreign minister, a very good guy, named Ioannis or Yannakis Kassoulides. And I said, "I have just screwed things up like you can't believe." So I described the situation to him. And he went over to the archbishop's palace, and over the course of like two or three hours, managed to talk the archbishop off the ceiling, but changed nothing about the arrangements. So in the end, the archbishop got his pictures seated directly next to Biden, with nobody else in the frame. And basically, it was another sort of inconsequential defeat for American diplomacy. But Biden didn't care. I mean, there was no question that, in the end, Biden couldn't care less about the seating arrangement, and the only person he really wanted to see was the archbishop of Cyprus to be perfectly honest, because that was relevant politically in the United States in ways that none of the rest was. So anyway, everybody turned out happy except me.

On that visit, I also got an assignment which just basically killed the remainder of my tour in Cyprus. The White House decided that we needed to get an ambitious set of CBMs (confidence building measures) agreed as a deliverable for the vice president's visit. And I knew, and everybody who followed Cyprus should have known, that people had been negotiating on and off on the elements of this ambitious package of confidence building measures on Cyprus, for like 35 years. It was the same kind of deal involving the Turkish Cypriot airport, the port of Famagusta and the ghost town of Varosha that folks had been working on since the late 1970s. So there was really very little likelihood that I was going to achieve some breakthrough. But nonetheless, I went into this and had what seemed like endless talks with the two Cyprus negotiators and the policy assistant and spokesman of President Anastasiades. All sorts of people on the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot side, and the Greek Cypriot side.

Things didn't go well at all. Even worse than I expected. It really set Anastasiades off. Anastasiades chewed me out yet again, sort of in a rage, you know. Like beet-red eyes bulging, sweating, he's yelling at me so hard. All over which Turkish Cypriot ports would be included along with the airport in a deal for opening the fenced area of Varosha so Greek Cypriot could return. All under UN auspices, of course. Finally, during the vice president's visit, we got a really, really anemic set of CBMs, which was really not worthwhile as a deliverable: some vague promises to open an additional crossing point or two, really a nothing burger. But anyway, that small package was worked out while Biden was in Cyprus, and the vice president and the two Cypriot leaders made the announcement together.

In the end, this was the story of a failed ambassador, I guess. Anastasiades despised me so much that he would just glare at me when I was in the room. So I would go to meetings with him with American visitors, members of Congress and such. He would sit there and look at me with his eyes bulging and his temples throbbing and things like this, it was absolutely ridiculous. Yet I was staying on. I was still doing something useful, I thought. I got constant reassurances from Foreign Minister Kassoulides and everybody else: "You're doing a great job, but you do have a problem with Nicos Anastasiades." Finally, I just felt like, toward the end of my tour, I was utterly useless with regard to the government of Cyprus. Anastasiades just despised me. I had no respect for him, but he found me intensely irritating and couldn't stand to have me around.

The last straw came when I criticized Anastasiades' visit to Moscow in February 2015. That visit broke the EU boycott on high-level visits to the Kremlin, which had been put in place after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. Anti-Putin leader Boris Nemtsov was assassinated right outside the Kremlin just a day or two after Anastasiades' meeting with Putin, and I put something snarky on Twitter. Pretty dumb on my part. Anyway, Anastasiades went on Cypriot television to denounce me, all scowls and fury, as usual.

What happened to me was, I guess, essentially the same thing that happened to Alexander Downer. But unfortunately, I didn't leave as soon as Anastasiades wanted me to leave. Secretary Kerry was asked at least twice personally by Anastasiades to remove me. He defended me both times. But it was just ridiculous. I had an absolutely toxic relationship with this man. And to this day, I despise him. He, to my mind, destroyed every chance of achieving an agreement in the long round of Cyprus negotiations that ended in the summer of 2017, by turning down very credible offers on security from the Turkish side. I devoted a large part of my career to the Cyprus issue and to this place, Cyprus. And I just feel as though Nicos Anastasiades was a person who had a chance to do something good and decided instead not to do it.

Q: Well, that's unfortunate. Were you with the embassy able to find other more constructive avenues of approach when he wasn't involved? I mean, apart from the peace process, were there other issues where maybe more progress could be made?

KOENIG: Everything else went fine, and you know, basically, our interaction with Anastasiades was almost exclusively about the peace process. At least at that point. So

yes, there was no wider problem. We worked on a lot of other issues at the foreign ministry level, the ministry of interior level, ministry of energy level. All those things went fine.

My DCM was excellent: Pam Tremont. That helped a lot. I had made a really big effort to choose my DCM carefully, based on my own experience of what the job required. And there were a lot of strong applicants for the job. It is one of the best FS-01 assignments out there, in a nice and pretty interesting place, DCM of a decent size mission. So I put together a list of criteria and questions and interviewed maybe six or seven candidates, finalists approved by Washington, and kept meticulous notes. Pam just stood out head and shoulders above the rest. She was really just what I was looking for, and proved her leadership qualities all the time. Especially when one of our contract guards, a Turkish Cypriot, died on the job at the end of an embassy reception. Pam just handled all that perfectly – performing CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation), riding to the hospital with the guard, working with the family and the embassy staff. Choosing her as my DCM was the best personnel decision I ever made.

But near the end of my time in Cyprus, it was on the major issue, the settlement efforts and inter-communal relations, and the more strategic elements of the relationship, that things broke down for me. I was particularly bitter about it. Because I had done, I think, a good job on a lot of things that Anastasiades had been interested in, like setting up back channels for discussions with Turkey on sensitive topics and things like that. Things that required a great deal of discretion and planning and a lot of hand-holding and monitoring, bridging of differences.

I even helped Anastasiades and his government in ways he never knew. For example, there was a weird coda to my involvement with Libya in Naples that came along while I was ambassador. It was in the spring of 2014, in March, before the Biden visit. Things were still basically okay between me and Anastasiades then. Anyway, there was a North Korean oil tanker that had loaded oil in Libya illegally and was lingering in the Mediterranean south of Cyprus. The ship was the MV Morning Glory. We wanted to do something to keep it from offloading the oil and selling the oil, but the situation was complicated by the North Korean connection and the divisions in Libya and the chaos there.

So what to do? We had a couple video conferences, led by the NSC (National Security Council) at a pretty senior level, and it was the middle of the night in Cyprus because of the time difference. So we were discussing what the U.S. should aim for. The basic idea was that U.S. Navy Seals should board the ship and take over, but what then? The general consensus was that we should dump the ship in Limassol and let the Cypriots worry about it. Somebody suggested that and everybody just kind of nodded. Look, I never did anything that put Cyprus' interests over ours, over America's. But that was just a stupid idea. The Cypriots had totally screwed up a similar situation a few years earlier. That time it was a shipment of Iranian weapons that were bound for Syria. They were offloaded in Cyprus and eventually blew up. The explosion killed a bunch of people and destroyed the island's main power plant. I think everybody on that video conference

knew about that. I reminded folks, but I think they already knew. So why would we do this again? I think people had a grudge from the last time, the total screw up. I think it was partly meanness, to be honest, a way to screw with Cyprus, which had a bad reputation for money-laundering and loose controls and such, and created problems for us in the EU and NATO. Anyway, I managed to convince the group that the ship and the oil should be returned to Libya instead, and that was what finally happened, and it all turned out fine. President Obama ordered the Navy Seals to take control of the ship and take it to Libya.

Anastasiades and the Cyprus government never knew anything about things like that, of course. And I don't want to sound like Rodney Dangerfield here. But I tried to help relations with Cyprus and accomplished some things, maybe more than the average American ambassador. Anastasiades just, I think, got tired of me, tired of having anybody press him at all on anything. And basically, he went totally evil diva.

Q: What about, what about in your personal life? How did you feel being back in Cyprus? And were you able to get around the country easily? Or did you have to have a lot of security, that sort of thing?

KOENIG: I had security, but it's a pretty safe place. So the security was appreciated, but it wasn't as dangerous as a lot of other places. I didn't have any trouble getting around the island. Of course, I saw more of the island when we were there on our first assignment, because I had more free time, basically. We had small kids, so we went to the beach a lot more and things like that. I liked the island tremendously. And we saw all parts of it. We had a lot of friends. There were some very good friends from before, who remain close friends to this day. They live in London now, some of them. Some of them are still on the island of Cyprus. But we had a lot of friends and we enjoyed life there in that respect.

I got opportunities to do some great things. One thing, I guess it wasn't that exceptional, but I really enjoyed it. I got a chance to fly the length of the buffer zone in a UN helicopter with a couple of other Perm-Five (UN Security Council permanent five members) ambassadors at one stage, that was hugely fun. We visited different observation posts along the UN buffer zone. So that was really cool. I also got a chance to visit South Africa with the negotiators from the two sides, the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot, and colleagues from the UN. The visit was organized by the lead negotiator for the National Party, that is, for the apartheid government side, in the talks that ended apartheid back in 1994. A guy named Roelf Meyer, an amazing man, whose opposite number for the ANC (African National Congress) was Cyril Ramaphosa, who is now the president of South Africa. The idea was to help the Cypriots talk in-depth and in-person with the South Africans who had managed to overcome huge mistrust and a bad history to negotiate reconciliation and peace. Their stories were pretty compelling.

There were a lot of great things about life in Cyprus. It's a beautiful place to live. So there were no problems with that.

Q: Okay, so you're getting towards the end of your assignment. And had you decided that you wanted to retire or what were your thoughts about your career at that point?

KOENIG: Well, that's an interesting question. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was quite dejected, really, for the last three or four months of my time in Cyprus because of this sense of spinning my wheels and this inability to interact persuasively or positively with Anastasiades. So I didn't know what I wanted to do. I accepted an assignment at FSI (Foreign Service Institute). I was going to be the head, the director, I guess, of the School of Professional Development.

Q: Area studies perhaps?

KOENIG: I didn't have the area studies portfolio, this was more about professional training and human resources-type things and personnel. And I was very enthusiastic about that in many ways. It's something that I had worked on a lot in different assignments. And I thought I had a fairly sound approach to those issues and would learn a lot and maybe contribute a lot at FSI if I did that. But I wasn't totally committed and the cost of moving to Washington DC was high. We didn't have a house in DC, and we did not know how much longer we wanted to stay in the foreign service, either, because our parents were elderly, and they were all back here in the Puget Sound area. So we weren't in it for the long haul. And Washington DC would have been a huge drain on our savings just to go and live there for two or three years when I was doing this job at FSI. The cost of housing was prohibitively high, I thought, considering we were likely to move from there into retirement. So I just decided at a certain point that I would retire instead. I notified Nancy McEldowney, the dean of FSI, and others that I was not going to take the job. And I retired as of July 31, 2015.

Q: Okay, anything more that you might want to talk about regarding Cyprus or anything else?

KOENIG: No, I think that's probably good. I've bent your ear for a very long time. I had a wonderful career. I would not have changed it for the world. It's been interesting to see in an academic setting how students react to different reminiscences or perspectives that you gain while you're in the foreign service or working as a practitioner in international relations. So, you know, I couldn't have spent any 31 years in my life better than I did in the foreign service. It was a great, great opportunity for me and for my family, and I did my best, I think, to do some good things. So I really did leave with a sense of accomplishment. I did end on a bit of a down note, but all in all, I think that in my career I managed to do more than I might have hoped for when I first joined the foreign service.

Q: Okay, well, let me stop the recording here..

End of Interview