

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

**AMBASSADOR JOHN D. NEGROPONTE**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*  
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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Today is February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2000. This is an interview with John D. Negroponte. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Do you go by John?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes.

*Q: Let's start at the beginning. Tell me when and where you were born and something about your family.*

NEGROPONTE: I was born on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1939, in London, England. My parents were Greek. My father was in business. He worked in his uncle's shipping business in London. I was born just a couple of months before World War II.

*Q: What was the background of your parents?*

NEGROPONTE: They were both from business families. My father's family had been in shipping for a long time, many generations. In my mother's family, my grandfather had actually been a Greek politician for a while. He was in the Greek legislature. I guess it was the Chamber of Deputies. Principally, he was a businessman. He owned a big flourmill in Piraeus.

*Q: They were mainland Greeks. They were not part of the exodus that came out of Smyrna in 1922.*

NEGROPONTE: You've got to be careful when you use the term 'mainlander' with Greece. My father was an islander. He was from the Island of Chios, not from Turkey. In fact, it is just opposite Izmir. You may not know this, but Chios is one of the islands that have traditionally produced ship owners.

*Q: Was that Stavros Niarchos?*

NEGROPONTE: Niarchos was my mother's first cousin. She came from that family.

World War II began. As a result of the war, my parents felt they had a choice to go back to Greece, where my father had never really lived, he had been an expatriate, or do they go to the States? They felt those were the two choices. And they decided to come to the States.

Lo and behold, on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1939, or so, we came to the United States.

*Q: So, although you are not native born, you are darn close to it.*

NEGROPONTE: My mother also happens to have been born in the States. She was brought up in Greece, but born in the States during World War I. I derived my citizenship through her. I grew up in New York City.

*Q: Did you have family in New York?*

NEGROPONTE: No, we did not.

*Q: You have younger brothers, is that right?*

NEGROPONTE: We were four brothers. I was the oldest. I have a brother Nicholas, who you may have heard of. He runs Media Lab at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). He's a guru of digital technology. As I was telling you, the twins whose birthdays are today, are about 15 years younger than I am. One is an artist, a fairly accomplished painter, in New York City. The other is a film maker; he makes documentaries.

*Q: What was family life like? I'm talking about the early years. Let's talk about during the war and shortly thereafter for you.*

NEGROPONTE: I would say we were fairly privileged people. My parents were not extraordinarily wealthy, but they were certainly well-off. We grew up in New York City, went to private schools, and had a happy childhood.

*Q: When you went to private schools, what schools were you going to? Do you recall their names?*

NEGROPONTE: I went to the Allen-Stevenson School in New York City first. Then I went to a school called Buckley, which is probably the leading primary school in New York City. From there, I went on to boarding school at Phillips Exeter Academy.

You asked about the war. I guess I faintly remember it.

*Q: The war was really early.*

*When you were at private school, before you went to Phillips Exeter, what subjects were you interested in?*

NEGROPONTE: I wrote a paper on Clemenceau and the whole atmosphere in Europe post-Versailles. There was a combination of things.

My father, who came from a business family, had gone to Sciences Po (Institute d'études Politiques) in Paris. That's where he went to college. He wanted to be a diplomat himself, but when he went back to Greece after studying in France – he had been brought up in France and Switzerland; he was born in Switzerland – the Greeks told him, your French education doesn't count. You have to come back and requalify yourself entirely, go to

college here in Greece before you can enter the Greek Foreign Service. He didn't really have much of an appetite to do that.

The interest in geography and diplomacy in him was enormous. It kind of rubbed off on me from an early age.

*Q: Were you getting much of the international world at the dinner table?*

NEGROPONTE: We lived in a very cosmopolitan atmosphere. My parents taught me French as a first language. They spoke Greek of course. My father, every language he spoke, he spoke perfectly. I've never met anybody – he's sort of a Dick Walters. He spoke Greek perfectly. He spoke German. He spoke French. They had a lot of foreign friends. In fact, they probably had more non-American friends than they had American friends. So yes, it was a very international environment in the house.

*Q: When you went to school, were you able to carry this over?*

NEGROPONTE: As I mentioned to you, the thing I do remember is writing this paper about Clemenceau. The reason I mention this is because one of my classmates, who then went to Exeter with me and keeps writing up the class notes, we had dinner in New York, and he was remembering my interest in Clemenceau 50 years later.

*Q: At that time, did you feel pressure to join the family business, or anything like that?*

NEGROPONTE: On the contrary. That was what made him rather interesting compared to many Greek businessmen. He wanted and, as you can see from the result, he encouraged his children to pursue their own professional interests. In fact, he was more in the school that said money isn't everything. There are more noble professions. He was kind of altruistic about it. If anything, I felt if not pressure, I felt his strong influence to be interested in international relations. That fit in with my own inclinations. From about the age of 15, I knew I wanted to join the Foreign Service.

*Q: Before you went to Exeter, were you aware of the Foreign Service?*

NEGROPONTE: No, not really. When I passed the exam – I know you're going to get to that – I do remember one of the points they made after they passed me on the oral. They said, it's amazing for a guy who seems to want to get into the Foreign Service so badly, how little you know about it.

*Q: Let's talk about Exeter a bit. I'm a product of a smaller New England prep school, Kent. What was Exeter like? You were there from when to when?*

NEGROPONTE: I was there from 1952 to 1956. It was a big school. It's the biggest I think, or one of the bigger ones, of the private boarding schools. It had a very good academic atmosphere, and a lot of strong liberal arts courses. This is what I focused on. I took French. I took Latin. I took Greek for a while. I took history, very little science, just

as much math as I needed. Actually, that's not true. I did pretty well in math and took quite a bit of that. But I focused on the arts. I sort of began my liberal arts education.

*Q: Was it international? You were taking French.*

NEGROPONTE: No, it wasn't that international. There was some international, but it was very political. That I do remember. Those were the kind of things that interested me: I remember when J. Robert Oppenheimer came and spoke, and Adlai Stevenson.

*Q: Did the McCarthy business hit you at all?*

NEGROPONTE: We used to fight a lot about communism and non-communism. Yes, McCarthy did hit us, because it was right during that time. I guess it prompted a lot of debate.

*Q: What about in Greece. It was so divided. So many Greeks came over to the United States, but they came from a different class.*

NEGROPONTE: Correct.

*Q: I take it this wasn't your...*

NEGROPONTE: No, in fact my father, going fast forward, 20 years later, decided to pack up and go back to Europe. After he brought up his four kids, he took my mother and they moved back to London in 1972. He never had a particularly strong affinity for the United States. He remained to his last days very much a continental European. He really was a Francophone. He was kind of a Frenchman in disguise.

*Q: One can understand. After all, if you want to have an interesting life, particularly at that time, that would be the place to do it.*

*At Exeter, did you get involved in either the debating, plays, or various other things?*

NEGROPONTE: You know, I wasn't very good at that. I wasn't as good at getting involved as I might have been. I was more interested in sports.

*Q: What sort of sports?*

NEGROPONTE: I played soccer. I swam. I was on the soccer team. I was on the swimming team. And I wasted a lot of time.

*Q: Fair enough.*

NEGROPONTE: I probably didn't take as good advantage of it. Exeter was a wonderful school. My daughter is there now.

*Q: Were you coming out on your own, sort of falling into a political affiliation at that point?*

NEGROPONTE: No, there was a family orientation towards the Democrats. I think it was fundamentally based on a reverence for Franklin Roosevelt. Secondly, I think there was a feeling that the Democrats were the party of internationalism, which I think they were in those days. That certainly influenced me to be pro-Democratic, but not vehemently so. I was certainly not adamant on the political front. I was more interested in international relations as a subject for study and analysis than I was in partisan politics. I've never been interested, for example, in running for office.

*Q: Were your interests more focused pretty much on Europe, because of your background? I mean, the Far East was there.*

NEGROPONTE: The interest was principally Europe. And France, because I knew French, I spoke French fluently. The rest was sort of peripheral vision. I had a bit of hankering to understand a little bit more about Latin America. None of these interests, other than Europe, really developed much until I got into college.

*Q: Where were you pointed towards college?*

NEGROPONTE: I went to Yale.

*Q: Why Yale?*

NEGROPONTE: It was between Harvard and Yale. Most of my classmates who could get in went to Harvard. It wasn't really a scientific decision, to be honest with you. It was almost a flip of the coin. My father told me, "I don't care where you go, as long as I've heard of the place."

I think it was a good choice.

*Q: You went to Yale from when to when?*

NEGROPONTE: I was there from 1956 to 1960. I graduated in 1960, and I had my junior year in France. So there is the interest in France again.

*Q: What was Yale like when you went there in 1956? This was still the age of conformity, the Eisenhower years, and all that.*

NEGROPONTE: There were a few things that were changing. Our class was the first class where there were more public school entrants than there were entrants from private schools. I think that was an interesting sociological fact. We were still in the Eisenhower time, but I remember very vividly that we had the Hungarian Revolution that fall.

*Q: And the Suez Crisis.*

NEGROPONTE: And the Suez Crisis. So there was a lot going on in the political area. Political Science was what I wanted to do. I was very much into Political Science. That was what I wanted to study, and I did study.

*Q: Did you find that the Political Science Department at Yale had a concentration while you were there? Was it pointed more towards one continent?*

NEGROPONTE: The basic Political Science course at Yale, interestingly, the requirement was that you first had to take the British political system. You didn't study the American political system; you studied the British. It was given by a guy called Cecil Driver, who was one of the best lecturers I've ever heard in my life. He was an Englishman who lectured on the British political system. I still remember many of his aphorisms. He was an extraordinary guy. Certainly there was that. You could get fairly good insights into other regions of the world. I took a course on the Chinese political system. It was pretty good material. The focus was probably more on Europe.

*Q: I was wondering whether the old Yale and China connection was still on the campus?*

NEGROPONTE: It was. There were some good China courses, but that was quite politicized at the time. As you may recall, there was a lot of stuff about Chiang Kai-Shek. There was the polarization of attitudes of pro-Taiwan and anti-Taiwan. I remember the professor that taught the course on the Chinese political system was considered very close to the Chiang Kai-Shek regime and therefore discredited by many of the conventional China scholars.

*Q: Had you started to look towards the Foreign Service?*

NEGROPONTE: Absolutely. I took the exam in my senior year, in December 1959. I thought I had flunked. I was despondent, but it turned that the five percent extra you got for knowing a foreign language – remember, in those days you got extra points for knowing a language – I got 70 or 71 on the exam, my aggregate score.

*Q: I got averaged in. I had a 69.8 or something like that.*

NEGROPONTE: There you go. I had a couple of classmates – Ambler Moss, who ended up being Ambassador to Panama – who took it that year. So did Winston Lord I think. He was a year ahead of me. I don't know when Winston took it, but Ambler took it at the same time.

I took the exam and I took the oral six months later.

*Q: Do you recall the oral exam or any of the questions?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yes, very well.



*Q: Let's talk about it.*

NEGROPONTE: Allison was the guy who chaired the panel.

*Q: John Allison?*

NEGROPONTE: The Ambassador to Japan. Yes, John Allison. He was the Chairman of the panel. I had a job that summer working for Lazard Frères in July 1960. On the radiator behind my desk, there was a book on the Federal Reserve System and how it worked. In my spare time, I read it. Do you remember how you always got one long question?

*Q: Yes.*

NEGROPONTE: My question was, how does the Federal Reserve System work? It was an absolutely incredible coincidence. So I knocked this question right out of the ballpark. I think these guys got the very erroneous perception that I was a very knowledgeable fellow. I do remember that. We also got into a little bit of debate, but I can't remember all of it. It was about what to do about Cuba, because Cuba was a very hot issue at the time. Of course, I was in my younger, more liberal phase of my life. I felt that we ought to try to be understanding and be tolerant. The panelists allowed as how I would get over that.

As you remember, you were told right then and there. You were excused for a few minutes and then you were called back in. I was told I had passed.

*Q: In 1960, was military service in the offing?*

NEGROPONTE: No. I didn't do anything to evade it. There wasn't any automatic draft.

*Q: There was nothing going on then.*

NEGROPONTE: There was nothing really going on. I had been accepted at Harvard Law School. I asked these gentlemen who passed me, "How quickly am I going to get in. It's July."

They said, "We can't tell you. They've been taking six months, eight months, or a year even, to get people clearances."

I said, "I'll probably go to law school for a year anyway. I want to come into the service."

In September that year, I went to Harvard and spent a week at law school. Then I got a telegram saying, please come join the entering class of October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1960.

I dropped everything and went running to the dean's office at Harvard Law School, saying, "I want to get out of here. I've been accepted in the Foreign Service."

He said, “You’ve come in time to even get your first semester’s tuition back.”

So I left law school and joined the service.

*Q: You were at Harvard and in Washington basically during the campaign of 1960. Could you talk about that? This engaged a lot of people, more than most, particularly young people. Did you find yourself...*

NEGROPONTE: It engaged our entering Foreign Service class, at least to the point where I can remember we had a lot of discussion about it. Several times, we would go to each other’s places or somebody’s home to watch the debates. Do you remember the debates?

I was very much rooting for Kennedy.

*Q: In your Foreign Service class in October 1960, can you talk a little about the class and how you saw them at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: I guess it surprised me, coming from my Yale background. I was struck by how diverse the group was. I didn’t think it was going to be as diverse as it turned out to be. Obviously, that’s to the good. That was one interesting thing.

The other was that there were eight women out of 40. I have always been struck by the fact that within two or three years, not one of those eight women was still in the service. I have always thought that was a great pity.

*Q: It was. It wasn’t because of marriage, was it?*

NEGROPONTE: It was marriage. Those were the rules that were thought to be in effect at the time. If a woman officer married, she had to resign. It’s too bad.

*Q: It really was.*

NEGROPONTE: It was a good class. We still have one person left on active duty today. That’s Curtis Kamman, our ambassador in Bogotá. I was the next to last and he is the last survivor of the class in the active service. Interestingly, he had been so smart at Yale. He was at Yale at the same time I was. He finished his senior year half a year early. He then became an instructor in Russian during his last semester. He was very capable.

*Q: How did you feel the basic officer course got you ready for the Foreign Service?*

NEGROPONTE: I loved it. I still remember it. I still get so mad when I hear people talk nowadays about how they never trained us to do commercial work or look out for American citizen interests abroad and all that kind of nonsense. All we cared about was ideology and the Cold War. It’s a bunch of nonsense. You do hear these things.

*Q: I know.*

NEGROPONTE: We spent a week at the Department of Commerce. It was very interesting. We went deeply into trade promotion. We went out to Beltsville, Maryland, to the Agricultural Research Station. I remember it as being a very interesting introduction to not only the State Department, but the government in general.

*Q: Was there a significant other at this time?*

NEGROPONTE: No, I was a bachelor and I married late in life. I was 21 years old when I entered the service. I married when I was 37. I basically got my career launched and then worried about that stuff.

*Q: I take it that unlike so many who come from rather recent immigrant stock, you had no particular feeling towards going to Greece or anything like that.*

NEGROPONTE: Do you mean being assigned there?

*Q: Yes.*

NEGROPONTE: No. In fact, at the end of my career, I declined an ambassadorship to Greece because I actually thought it was wrong. If anything, I feel a little bit surprised the degree which people are willing to go to countries of their own national origin. Although I did end up serving in Greece for one tour when I was Consul General in Thessaloniki.

*Q: When were you there?*

NEGROPONTE: I was there from 1975 to 1977.

*Q: We missed. I was Consul General in Athens from 1970 to 1974.*

NEGROPONTE: Ed Brennan must have been in Thessaloniki at the time.

*Q: Did you have any particular place you wanted to go to? Or did you have the feeling I want to make this my life?*

NEGROPONTE: I did, but these were not very well defined ideas. I had the French background. Do you remember the April Fool's sheet where you expressed your preferences? I asked to go to Sub-Saharan Africa, because it was the era of a lot of newly emerging independent African states.

*Q: Particularly with Kennedy.*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, I thought it would be a great chance to go to the less developed world and use my French. So I got sent to Hong Kong. You know how that works.

*Q: Of course.*

NEGROPONTE: I had to go to a map and look where Hong Kong was. I didn't know where Hong Kong was, I am ashamed to admit.

*Q: When were you in Hong Kong?*

NEGROPONTE: I got there in January 1961 and I was there until April 1963. I had two jobs.

*Q: What was Hong Kong like at this particular time? What was the principal activity?*

NEGROPONTE: It was already a pretty hustling cosmopolitan town, but not what it is today, of course. The ingredients were all there. They were making textiles. They were big textile producers at the time. That was an issue with the United States at the time. The first textile quotas were imposed during the time I was there. They just had an incipient transistor radio business that they were starting to build up.

To me, Hong Kong fundamentally was a very romantic and very pleasant window on China. It had a wonderful atmosphere. The sights and sounds and smells of Hong Kong are really very interesting and very charming. I remember my experience there very favorably.

*Q: What was your first job there?*

NEGROPONTE: I was a visa officer. What else?

*Q: How did you find that?*

NEGROPONTE: That was pretty tough. I didn't like that, although I ended up doing a lot of consular work in my career. I was Vice Consul, Consul and Consul General. I'm very strong on the importance of consular work. I did only one kind of visa for a whole year. I issued what were then called M-1 visas. These were issued to Chinese spouses of Chinese Americans. There was a lot of fraud, based on the fact that the petitioners had gotten into the United States under assumed names, paper identities and all that. We spent an awful lot of time interrogating these people, to try and establish whether or not their husbands had gotten into the United States fraudulently or not. Once we established that, we sent the petition back to the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service). The INS would bounce it back to us saying, "Too bad; the relationship seems to be as claimed. Go ahead and issue the visa anyway."

It was draining and dreary work.

*Q: Did you have a unit to work on the backgrounds?*

NEGROPONTE: We had a thing called the Documentation Certification Unit. It was run by one of these old-line – you will remember them for sure – Refugee Migration Officers who had done refugee processing in Europe at the end of World War II. They had abused their function by, for example, going in uninvited into people's homes and such to search for documents. So the Hong Kong Government made a big issue of it, and the unit was shut down just before I got there.

*Q: One of the problems in the Foreign Service, particularly in those days that continued for some time, was a young idealistic man or woman would come out and all of a sudden, was up against a rather routine job, but also had to say no and saw the seamy side of life. It's a good experience, but it's not much fun while you're doing it.*

NEGROPONTE: It wasn't much fun while we were doing it. I can remember some very unpleasant experiences, both of my own or – since we were in sort of a bullpen pit there, you could also overhear other interviews that were going on. I remember one of my colleagues put his feet up on the table while interviewing somebody, and pointing to a picture of himself in a uniform in Korea and saying, sort of, I fought your people – that kind of thing.

Having said all of that, what I did was agitate to get out of the Consular Section after one year. They had no systematic rotation, but I managed to get up into the Commercial Section. I became the Economic Defense Officer in charge of enforcing the embargo against China. That was a little bit more fun. That was also a dose of trade promotion.

*Q: Well, you weren't promoting, you were denying.*

NEGROPONTE: I was able to work on both. As you remember, in those days, the Commercial function was folded right into the Economic Section. I was basically a commercial officer, but my primary responsibility was economic defense.

*Q: Who was Consul General while you were there?*

NEGROPONTE: There were several and they were very interesting people. There was Julius Holmes, who then went on to become Ambassador to Iran. For the previous seven or eight years, he had not been able to be appointed ambassador because of some problems he had at the end of World War II. Then Marshall Green came from Korea where he had been DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission). Then Sam Gilstrap came.

There were also a lot of very interesting people at lower levels. Some we mentioned were John Holdridge; Bill Gleysteen; Heyward Isham; and David Dean, who was Jonathan Dean's brother; Herbert Levin. All the China hands were there. It was a real window on China, even though I didn't speak Chinese. I did take a few hours of Cantonese. I could see the value of the post and they did a lot of very interesting analyses. I attended some of their debates and discussions. I thought they were fascinating. It was a time when China was undergoing famine.

*Q: That was part of the Great Leap Forward, wasn't it?*

NEGROPONTE: It was towards the end.

*Q: Well, it wasn't going forward.*

NEGROPONTE: They had real food shortages. How we analyzed that was interesting. We read all of China's newspapers every day. We had the Agricultural Attaché, a guy called Bryce Meeker. I remember he spoke Chinese, like all these other people did. It was a big analysis of Chinese agriculture, through these newspapers or refugee interviews or second-hand. I think they pieced the puzzle together pretty darn well.

*Q: What was the attitude towards China? Was this just a big problem or a menace?*

NEGROPONTE: No, it was much more sophisticated than that. There was a lot of interest in China. I think the prevalent undertone, certainly among the younger officers, was that this is a country which... I think the yearning of the younger officers was to normalize relations. The older ones were against it; the younger ones just weren't going to stick their necks out.

*Q: Were you picking up from your colleagues who were in the China watching side a feeling of gee, some of our more senior people got burned?*

NEGROPONTE: Absolutely. I think some people were gun shy. I think the quote-unquote China Service felt maligned and misunderstood as a result of the McCarthy experience. They were still looking inwards, although none of those people there had been implicated in any way, but they were just close enough to it.

*Q: It was passing down. I mean, the virus was still floating around.*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, but it was weakening.

*Q: While you were doing this, did this attract you to say maybe I should take Chinese?*

NEGROPONTE: No, I still wanted to go to French-speaking Africa. I volunteered for Maghrebian Arabic.

*Q: Going back to the time you were there, during the time of Kennedy, there was a great emphasis – Bobby Kennedy was pushing this idea of youth programs. As a young officer, did you get involved in the youth side of things?*

NEGROPONTE: No, not that I remember.

*Q: On the commercial side, who was trying to get stuff out from Red China at that time?*

NEGROPONTE: There was some of that. I think the greater concern was that American products not be diverted to China, such as machinery, equipment, or aircraft.

*Q: Tractors and that sort of thing.*

NEGROPONTE: Right. The specific thing that I remember came up in a big way was air conditioning.

*Q: It was fairly new at that time.*

NEGROPONTE: Then there were these people in Hong Kong and Macau who were blacklisted, Chinese who were blacklisted because they had traded with China during the Korean War, or something like that. So we considered them like they were nationals of China. The term for them was designated nationals. So in addition to not being able to export to China itself, people also couldn't sell to these particular designated nationals. Some of these people were rich and prominent business people.

I just remember that because one of the big scandals we had was that a designated national called Stanley Ho, was still very prominent in Macau. He wanted to buy a lot of air conditioning from us to build his new casino in Macau. A huge scandal erupted because he had signed contracts to buy this American equipment. We had to veto the deal, and that caused a local uproar.

*Q: When you were working on both trade promotion and trade prevention, what about the attitude of the British? Did that count? Or they just didn't care?*

NEGROPONTE: They didn't care, although my recollection is that they shared information with us from some source. I can't remember where. We used to get all the shipping manifests of everything that went to China every month. I've got to believe they were from a British source. I remember pouring over them.

*Q: So you applied for Arabic. Was this Maghrebian Arabic?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, but it didn't come through. Instead of that, principally because of the recommendation of some inspector, I got assigned to AF/EX (Bureau of African Affairs, Office of the Executive Director). He said, "Well, you want to go to Africa. Maybe you should go back to Washington first and get some experience in the Africa Bureau. You are obviously going to be an economic or political officer, but you need a little bit of administrative experience."

So I went to AF/EX. I was a Post Management Officer. That lasted exactly two months.

*Q: Was this still in 1963?*

NEGROPONTE: This was June to August 1963.

I went to my Personnel Officer, George Roberts – did you know George? He was a wonderful guy. I said, “George, you’ve got to get me out of here.”

He said, “I’m sorry. There’s nothing much around. I’ll keep you in mind and see if anything develops.”

A week or two later, he called me up and said, “We are just deciding to beef up the Vietnamese language training program. We need to train more people to be provincial reporters in the Political Section in Saigon. Would you like to go?”

I said, “Give me a weekend to think about it.”

I thought about it for a weekend. I called back that Monday and said, “Let’s do it.”

*Q: Had you focused at all on Vietnam up to that point, either in college or in the Foreign Service?*

NEGROPONTE: Only when I was a commercial officer in Hong Kong. For some reason, I had to go to Saigon once. It was something to do with implementing a commodity import program into Vietnam that involved Hong Kong and us. I had met Ambassador Nolting on one of his trips to Hong Kong. I was only somewhat aware of what was going on.

I do remember the day that Dien Bien Phu fell. I remember thinking back that was very unfortunate.

*Q: When was that?*

NEGROPONTE: In 1954, May, I think. I remember feeling badly about that. I was not deeply into the Vietnam issue.

I did this strictly as a career move. I saw it as an opportunity to be a Political Officer and to get out of being the Post Management Officer in the Africa Bureau.

*Q: I have to ask the question: why didn’t you like being a Post Management Officer? What were you doing and what was there?*

NEGROPONTE: If I remember correctly there wasn’t much to do. We were just moving people’s household effects and keeping track of personnel rosters at these embassies. It was just not a very inspiring atmosphere.

*Q: When did you take Vietnamese?*

NEGROPONTE: From September 1963 to May 1964.

*Q: How did the events of October...*



NEGROPONTE: It was November. Diem was overthrown. It was quite amazing. Of course, I thought about it. I had opportunity to talk about it and think about it a lot later on. At first, I just sort of watched in fascination, I guess. I didn't have any strong views yet. I guess I was sympathetic to the Buddhists. Do you remember the Buddhists who were immolating themselves?

*Q: Yes. They were just barbecues, as Madame Nhu was wont to say.*

NEGROPONTE: I think my views moderated later on. At the time, I think I was quite sympathetic to those trying to overthrow Diem. I think looking back at it today; I think the overthrow of Diem may have been one of those real major turning points in our involvement in Vietnam. By helping get rid of Diem, we got rid of somebody who might have saved us from building up the massive presence that we later put in that country.

*Q: One of the things that language training does is, particularly through the language teachers and the concentration on language, you get a feel for the country. Did you get a feel for Vietnam, which you didn't know much about?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, I did. It was pretty good. First of all, it was reading. And you make good friendships with the teachers. They were all Vietnamese. And actually, the Hong Kong experience had helped. While Chinese and Vietnamese are two different cultures, there is nonetheless some proximity and similarity there. I thought it was a pretty good exposure. I enjoyed studying the language. I like languages. There were only three of us, so we had a small group.

*Q: Who was in your class?*

NEGROPONTE: A fellow called Walt Lundy, who was actually a classmate of mine in the Foreign Service and who was also going to be a provincial reporter. There was also a fellow called Jim Forrester, who was an army officer.

*Q: Later it became quite systematized, but did they have much of a program to get you ready to go to Vietnam? Or was it just language and then you were on your way?*

NEGROPONTE: It was language and area studies. We had the usual four and a half days a week of language. Then on Wednesday afternoon we would do area studies.

*Q: Can you characterize what you were hearing from both the people who were getting you ready to go and others? Was this an interesting place? Or was this a place where you would say watch out, stay out of there.*

NEGROPONTE: Oh no. I think that Vietnam was very much on the front burner. The desk was interesting. That was the other part of our training. I used to spend certain afternoons at the desk. Vietnam was heating up. There was intense interest. Of course, remember that Kennedy got assassinated.

*Q: On November 22nd.*

NEGROPONTE: So that got thrown into the mix in the sense that people wondered what LBJ (President Lyndon Baines Johnson) would do about it, whether things would change.

I didn't try to master everything that was going on in Vietnam. I knew I was going to be out there a number of months later. I wasn't in that big a hurry.

*Q: I was wondering if you were aware of any group within the State Department that was both Vietnamese experts and this is something we've got to do. Was there a feeling that this is a war that couldn't see and it looms?*

NEGROPONTE: You know, this whole strategic hamlet program that Diem had, the pacification program that was sort of in vogue at the time. I think if there was any group in the State Department, there were a number of people who thought it was really a mistake to overthrow Diem. That I would say is a fairly hardcore group. Mostly, those were people I found in Vietnam when I got there in May 1964, quite embittered by what had happened.

*Q: Was there the feeling early on that these were things that were being called from Washington by the best and the brightest, a term that was used later on?*

NEGROPONTE: Who didn't really understand and who had to react to these immolations. I think they felt that they didn't understand. The political officers, generally speaking, the ones I found in the political section when I got out there, the more experienced ones, felt that Washington really had misunderstood Diem's nationalism. Here was this fairly traditional authoritarian Asian figure, who if we could have just figured out how to work with him, might have been the best way to defend U.S. interests in the region.

Of course, the people who wanted to overthrow Diem, or see him overthrown, felt that he had allowed the situation to become intolerable. I think we know that the Buddhists kind of maneuvered Diem into that position.

*Q: It was quite clever, in a way. Maybe basically not for their own good, but they were clever up to that point.*

*When you got out there, when you were talking to your junior colleagues particularly, your compatriots, did you find there was a certain amount of disillusionment or disgust with the revolving set of governments? I guess that had already started, hadn't it?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, I think disgust and concern really. It wasn't so much disgust; it was concern. In July 1964, we saw the first North Vietnamese units starting to appear in South Vietnam. This was really quite an experience for me. My experience up until then had been limited to a bit of trade promotion and issuing visas. All of a sudden, I'm out

there with responsibility for covering political, military and economic events in seven provinces.

*Q: Where were you sent?*

NEGROPONTE: Coastal II Corps, all the way up to Qui Nhon in Binh Dinh Province. Lo and behold, starting in about September 1964, those NVA (North Vietnamese Army) units started showing up in Binh Dinh Province. I was responsible for covering developments there. I remember in the fall of 1964, 50,000 or 60,000 refugees coming from the countryside into Qui Nhon City, the capital of Binh Dinh. They were fleeing. These were Catholic Vietnamese fleeing the North Vietnamese Army units.

My own view that developed as a result of this provincial reporting experience, early on, was that South Vietnam was the underdog and that they really needed help.

*Q: When you got there, did you have time to go into the embassy and get acclimated? Or were you sent out right away?*

NEGROPONTE: We worked out of the embassy. We were part of the political section in the old embassy, not the later one. I think it was the biggest political section that has ever existed. There were more than 20 officers, maybe 25. There were seven or eight provincial reporters.

*Q: Who was the head of the political section at that time?*

NEGROPONTE: Melvin Manful was there. Then Phil Habib replaced him, but that was a couple of years or a year and a half later.

We had time to acclimate, a little bit, but not much. The idea was you get out there and learn. Our boss was a guy called Jim Rosenthal. Do you know Jim?

*Q: Yes, I've interviewed Jim.*

NEGROPONTE: He is wonderful. He was an old marine officer. His attitude was you get out there and learn. You would go out for a week, and come back for a week. It was a wonderful job.

*Q: Did you pick up, either by direction or by osmosis, how you were supposed to view things?*

NEGROPONTE: No. Jim was very fair. He was our boss and he was the one who edited our work. We were allowed to call it the way we saw it. He loved our reports. He was really interested in what we found out. He was a terrific supervisor. We would write this stuff and he would say, "Boy, this is really great."

Or he would tell you, "It was lousy."

We were encouraged to go out and just find out what we could.

*Q: Let's talk about that. How did you out and what were you looking for?*

NEGROPONTE: The mandate was very broad. The mandate was to find out what you can and bring back information, material and analysis that will give us a feel for what is going on politically, militarily, economically and otherwise in that particular province. We did it on a province-by-province basis. It was a geographic focus. That was basically our mandate.

We would normally go and stay at the MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) headquarters. We would stay with the sector advisors, except if you went to some big city like Nha Trang, where you would stay in a hotel. Why miss an opportunity to stay in a hotel on a beach somewhere if you could? If you stayed with the sector advisor, you would meet the province chief and province officials. You would call on the Buddhist or Catholic priests. The usual suspects. It was a reporting job.

When you would go out one or two times, you would find fairly routine stuff. By the time you've hit a province three or four times, you begin to be able to detect changes. So that's what you did. I did that job for a year and a half.

*Q: MACV were military advisors at that time.*

NEGROPONTE: Right, sector advisors.

*Q: We're getting close to the infusion of major American forces.*

NEGROPONTE: At the time, there weren't. When I got there, there wasn't.

*Q: How did you find the American military advisors?*

NEGROPONTE: Most had a tendency to want to say things were going better than they really were. There was a tendency to say my "counterpart is a real tiger, and they are making progress." I would say that was a tendency, although it wasn't uniform. I can remember some advisors impressing me as much more knowledgeable than others, particularly when we got into some of the really tough situations, like in Binh Dinh Province and Phu Yen Province, right south of Binh Dinh. The NVA were strong there. They were really tearing the place up. I remember that the advisors were very sober and very good analysts of what was going on.

*Q: How were seen when the NVA came in? Were they that much better than ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, these were the best NVA units. They were better than ARVN. ARVN had been used to fighting guerilla actions, the remnants of the Viet Minh and the

local guerillas. They had not fought any main force actions for a long time. That's not entirely true, because the Viet Cong had some main force units too. They had some organized.

That really changed the equation. Let's go back a bit. I believe in 1959 the Politburo issued a directive to revive the guerilla war in the south, because unification had not been achieved. South Vietnam did not fall into their laps the way they had hoped it would.

*Q: Was this after the 1954 Accords?*

NEGROPONTE: Right, and there were going to be elections in 1956. There was sort of a vague call for elections in the Geneva Accords. Well, the country didn't get reunified, so they revived the guerilla movement. What they first did was revive the guerillas who had stayed behind. By 1964, sometime in early 1964, there must be a Politburo meeting that meets and says we are not achieving our objectives fast enough. Diem has been overthrown. This presents an opportunity to move in for the kill. That would be my colloquial way of summing it up.

So they decided to send these NVA units in, which is what precipitates, for us five or six months later, this agonizing decision as to what to do about them. This comes to a crunch point in winter 1964-65, right?

*Q: There was this mortaring of our barracks at Pleiku.*

NEGROPONTE: That was in about February 1965, when McGeorge Bundy was visiting.

Let me tell you an interesting anecdote, which you may want to verify, but I assure you it is true.

In July 1964, John Helble was Consul in Hue. He reported to us and to Washington by telegram that the ARVN First Division has just captured two prisoners from NVA Battalion number so-and-so. He says that if true, and he was convinced it was true, this would be the first confirmed presence of a North Vietnamese unit in South Vietnam. Silence from Washington and from Maxwell Taylor, who was then ambassador for a few days.

About a week later, the response to the Helble message arrived stating "henceforth, Mr. Helble, do not send your telegrams to Washington. They will be cleared in Saigon first."

The reason for that was that LBJ and the people around him put out the word that we don't want any surprises, anything. We don't want to see information coming in that suggests that the war might be escalating, because we've got a political campaign going on here. We don't want to have to answer the question about what are we going to do if the war escalates?

It wasn't because they didn't want to face up to reality. They just didn't want the reality to come to the attention of the American people too soon.

I always thought that was very amusing. Helble sends in probably one of the most interesting nuggets that has ever been reported to Washington, and the grateful response he got was don't send us any more reports like that. Send all your stuff to Saigon. I thought it was a real slap in the face. Helble is around somewhere.

*Q: Yes, John has been interviewed. I did an interview with him. I hope he covered that point.*

NEGROPONTE: I'm sure he did.

*Q: Were you feeling constraints yourself?*

NEGROPONTE: No, never. I never felt constrained in what I myself reported. Never. I know some people later on, that was a complaint a few years later. I never did, and I'm quite an outspoken person. I would have chafed if I had been told not to.

*Q: What about corruption? Was this one of the things you were looking at? How well was the central government exercising control over the provinces?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes and no. Corruption became a bigger issue later on. Certainly, I don't think it was that big of an issue in the early 1960s, in 1964-65 when I got there. Maybe I am now interlacing this with subsequent experiences, but my own personal take on that based on my 37-year Foreign Service career, is that corruption is very hard to document. While you want to keep your eyes and ears open, you also have to be very careful about what and whom you believe. You learn very fast that corruption accusations become a weapon of choice, simply used to discredit political adversaries. It goes on all the time. Documenting corruption is a very difficult thing to do. I have always been very careful about that.

*Q: Also, if it's pervasive, obviously our political system is corrupt because of influence and money, if you over-reported it tends to vitiate all the other things that are happening. Our political process tends to focus on that.*

NEGROPONTE: Again, I will credit Jim Rosenthal with this. We tended to focus more on the related issue. We cast it slightly differently. One of the things he wanted us to write about was did the villages, hamlets, and provinces we visited have good governance? He felt very strongly that a lot of this came down to whether you were well governed. So we did have our eye out for who was a good leader, who seemed not to be, who was an inspirational figure and who was not. Certainly, one of the things we were looking for was an assessment of leadership qualities.

*Q: What were you finding in your particular areas at that time, as far as the ability of the province leaders to the town to the village level? I am thinking particularly those sent out from Saigon...*

NEGROPONTE: I would say that most were sort of average. There was a very strong colonial legacy, almost a colonial inertia in the way things were done. They were not up to the challenge of a wartime situation. Occasionally, you would meet a real bright light in the process.

*Q: Were we doing much in aid at that time?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, there was a big aid program.

*Q: Were you monitoring the aid program to see how well they were doing?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, to the extent that we would go and visit aid projects. We would get to know not only the military advisors, but the civilian officials as well. Although frankly, I don't remember doing as much in the area of reporting on our aid programs as I did on political and military developments.

We were focused a lot on following political activities, because there was so much political turmoil at the time in Saigon. There was also a lot of political party activity throughout the country. And there was the Buddhist movement. We were very attuned as to what the Buddhists were doing.

*Q: What about political activity? Was there much in the way of how things were being done out in Nha Trang or Qui Nhon?*

NEGROPONTE: There was some, not much. The Buddhist movement was active up in central Vietnam. That was where its stronghold was, as you remember. Then you had a number of different elections that took place over the years.

*Q: Were you monitoring elections?*

NEGROPONTE: Later on, one of my jobs was to report on the process leading up to the elections. Then I monitored all the debates at the Constituent Assembly in 1966.

*Q: Going back to this reporting period – what happened when all these refugees starting pouring into your area from the NVA?*

NEGROPONTE: The Catholic church took care of them, in Qui Nhon anyway. They played a strong role.

*Q: What was our analysis of what the NVA was trying to do?*

NEGROPONTE: There were various theories. If I remember correctly, one of the main theories was that the NVA was trying to cut the country in half, that they were trying to take possession of II Corps and isolate Saigon and the delta from the rest of the country. That was sort of the conventional wisdom at the time. There may have been some truth to it.

*Q: It sort of worked out that way later on.*

*What about the military situation? Were we running a sort of counter check? I mean, were the young officers in the field keeping an eye on what the military situation was, even though we had military advisors?*

NEGROPONTE: We were reporting on it quite extensively. I wouldn't call it a counter check. Some of the people in MACV didn't like our reporting, because it wasn't formatted or structured the way their own reporting was. I think they complained to Ambassador Taylor about it, because he called us in a couple of times and asked us why we were duplicating some of the military reporting. It wasn't done in such a way as to discourage us from doing it. We continued to report on military developments. He didn't lean on us in any particular way.

*Q: Of course, there's a certain amount of almost bias built into the military system. If you're the advisor to a certain military unit or something...*

NEGROPONTE: You can't say that that unit isn't any good.

*Q: Yes.*

NEGROPONTE: Occasionally we would.

*Q: For a military man, if you say the unit isn't performing well...*

NEGROPONTE: It's a reflection on you.

*Q: It reflects on you.*

NEGROPONTE: My counterpart is a real tiger, like the famous quote.

I've got to take you fast forward for a minute here. You mentioned Pleiku and the mortaring of Pleiku in February. Of course, we began to bomb North Vietnam. We sent the contingent of marines.

I got sent to Hue in March and April 1965 as the Acting Consul, because the Consul was on home leave.

*Q: To I Corps.*



NEGROPONTE: That was the first experience. I was to go there again in a much more intense situation later. I went in March and April 1965, just to stand in for Sam Thomsen because he went on home leave or something. It was a crucial period for me, because I got to know the central Vietnamese scene a lot better. Hue really was the capital of Central Vietnam. I got to know Tri Quang, the Buddhist leader and monk. I made frequent trips down to his pagoda. I got to know some of the radicals. They really were radicals, intellectuals at the university at Hue. I got the flavor of the anti-Saigon rebellious elements of the country. It was a useful and important experience for me.

*Q: What was our reading of Tri Quang?*

NEGROPONTE: In the subsequent year, there was a Buddhist rebellion, in 1966. I happened again to be up in Hue, temporarily in charge of the consulate, in March and April 1966, when Hue effectively seceded from the rest of the republic. The police force and the military in the region were all in rebellion against Saigon. They were in a state of rebellion. I had policemen demonstrating in front of the consulate every day. They were all basically following Tri Quang's orders.

This lasted for about two months, this rebellion. It all had to do with the fact that Saigon had sacked a general by the name of Nguyen Chanh Thi. General Thi had been fired and refused to step down from his job as commander of the first corps. He holed out in Hue, and in cahoots with Tri Quang, he staged this rebellion.

I was left there in this very tense situation. I can remember going to Saigon several times and meeting with the country team. Here I was, 25 years old, and meeting all these high-ranking officials like Westmoreland, Bill Porter and others. They were asking me whether I thought Tri Quang was a communist. I always stuck to my guns on this one. I said I didn't think he was. I thought he was a misguided nationalist. I really thought that passionately, he had Vietnam's best interests at heart. He was just wrong-headed in the way he went about it. I could see considerable skepticism around the table as I made this point. It was a point of disagreement.

There, I think there was a generational issue. I think someone like myself could empathize with someone like Tri Quang better than people who were older than I was.

So I would say the take on Tri Quang was mixed. It always was mixed. You remember, of course, that we gave him asylum in 1963 when he was fleeing Diem's police. He stayed in the embassy in Saigon.

*Q: Whoever was his handler, I've interviewed.*

NEGROPONTE: It was Jim Rosenthal. He'll tell you. Jim is as hardline and conservative as they get. I'm sure he said the same thing. I doubt he thought that Tri Quang was a communist. I think that's been borne out subsequently. I think that later the communists jailed him a couple of times. I didn't feel good for Tri Quang; I felt sorry for him, but I felt somewhat vindicated in my viewpoint.

*Q: Did you find there was a problem in that it was easier for Catholics to talk to American officials like yourself than for Buddhists? Was this a problem?*

NEGROPONTE: I'll tell you what I think. The Buddhist conflict in Vietnam was to a large extent artificial. There was something to it, but was fairly minor, in my opinion. I think Tri Quang seized upon it as an issue and exploited it to the hilt for political purposes.

On the other hand, I think your question is a good one in the sense that Catholics tended to speak French more. They were more Western oriented. Almost by definition, by virtue of being Catholics, they had a little more of a Western outlook. In all honesty, I don't think Vietnamese society was nearly as polarized as Tri Quang made it out to be. It certainly was not polarized in the south and in the delta. It was a very calm and tranquil society socially. There may have been some polarization in Central Vietnam.

*Q: Were you able, either in Hue or when you were working in II Corps, to talk to Buddhist monks, attendants, or that sort of thing? What were you getting, if you were?*

NEGROPONTE: Do you mean people other than...

*Q: At the very top. In other words, the young priests, the young acolytes.*

NEGROPONTE: I met a few, but I can't say I went about it... I really focused on the people we felt had some political influence. We ourselves treated Buddhists as a political matter. I don't think we spent much time looking into the religious side of things. We were interested in them because they had a political voice and they had visibility in Vietnam. Therefore, we felt it behooved us to know what they were thinking. Secondly, we were trying to influence them, to keep the lid on the situation. We were saying, "Hey, you guys. There's a war going on. While we respect your political views and all of that, we thought you ought to keep that in mind as plan your activities."

That didn't work very well with Tri Quang. He did some very disruptive stuff.

*Q: What was your impression of the people, in II Corps particularly, who were sent out to the villages as teachers and all that? Was there a city versus village problem?*

NEGROPONTE: You know, I don't remember that much about that. What I do remember is that as the war intensified, more and more people left the countryside and came into the cities. The cities really got swollen during the war. So I guess if anything, it was just hard to get good people to go into the countryside, very hard.

*Q: I'm just trying to think of anything else about this particular time. You were moved out of II Corps...*

NEGROPONTE: I did two 18-month, almost two-year, tours in Vietnam. My first 18 months was doing this provincial reporting. Then I came back. I was first put in the political-military unit for a little while. We had an inspection. I was kind of oblivious to it, because I was too young to know any better, but several people complained to the inspectors saying that I had been put in the political-military unit because I was being faulted for my views in Hue, my assessment of the Buddhist movement, and all that. They wanted me out of political reporting for a while.

The inspectors made an issue of that. So Phil Habib moved me to a very interesting job, which was covering the Constituent Assembly. So he assigned me and Dave Lambertson, who you may have interviewed, to the Constituent Assembly. The outcome of the Buddhist Rebellion in 1966 was for the government to agree to the election of a Constituent Assembly to write a new constitution. It was understood this would be followed by new presidential elections.

So there was a Constituent Assembly election in 1966. Throughout 1967, they wrote the new constitution. My job was to monitor what the Constituent Assembly was doing.

*Q: Before we get to that, Phil Habib is a really major figure in American foreign policy since 1942. How did he strike in this particular aspect? How did he operate?*

NEGROPONTE: He was just the best boss we all had. He was just terrific. He was full of energy. He was the street smartest guy I ever met in my life. He was indefatigable. He worked all the time. He had these great sayings, you know. There's 24 hours in every day, and all that kind of stuff. He would make us work like hell, but he really shook the place up. He just got everybody moving. He was basically Henry Cabot Lodge's alter ego. That's what he became. In addition to being Political Counselor, he was really Lodge's main counselor.

*Q: You were a junior officer there. What was the impression you gained, particularly from your contemporaries, of Lodge as an ambassador?*

NEGROPONTE: He was a well-meaning and a well-motivated guy. He really needed people like Phil around him. I don't think his operational sense was very good. I think his political instincts were excellent. He had good political instincts. He put a good face on the United States there. As you know, he had a great deal of charm. Broad brush, Henry Cabot Lodge was just fine. How you deal with all these little situations was something that he just wasn't that used to, in my opinion. Someone like Phil became an indispensable advisor to him. I would say he relied totally on Phil Habib.

*Q: Habib did not come with a background in Vietnam, did he?*

NEGROPONTE: No, but he had served in Korea. He certainly had a background in political work. He was a great political analyst. Actually, he had done some work on helping to write the Korean constitution. One of the first things he did was to get the same guy that had helped him work on the Korean constitution to come over. This was a

guy called Flanz, a professor in constitutional law from NYU (New York University). He came out and was there during the entire time that the Constituent Assembly was writing the constitution. He was available to give advice to the Constituent Assembly.

*Q: How did this work?*

NEGROPONTE: It didn't work very well.

*Q: I mean to say here that the Vietnamese are not an unsophisticated bunch of people.*

NEGROPONTE: It did not work as either Phil or Mr. Flanz wanted it to, but he was there nonetheless.

*Q: Did you find that when you were working with the politicians that this is a different breed of cat than you had been dealing with in the province and the military?*

NEGROPONTE: A lot of them were from the provinces. They represented the provinces. No, I think they were quite similar to some of the top leaders you would meet in the province capitals. They were very interesting. I got to know them all.

Phil had managed to convince us that Lyndon Johnson was reading every one of our reports every night before he went to bed, so we took our reporting responsibilities very seriously. We would write literally 30, 40 and 50-page telegrams, describing in excruciating detail what had gone on in the debates in the Constituent Assembly. By the time it was over, I knew every clause in that constitution and how every sentence had evolved through the debates on the floor.

*Q: Outside of exercising this exquisite reporting opportunity, did we have any issues at hand that we were concerned about?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes we did, but if you ask me to remember now, I couldn't give you many details. I certainly remember two.

One was whether there ought to be a president, the whole idea of a presidential system. Perhaps more importantly, the thing that we thought was most important was the adequacy of the emergency provisions in the constitution.

We had a handful of issues that we tried to influence. The main this was we wanted it to get done as expeditiously as possible so that they could actually order the election, which they eventually did.

*Q: Were you feeling the pressure of the war? Or was it a feeling that okay, there's a war going on, but they've got it more or less under control?*

NEGROPONTE: I think the pressure was more to be able to point to favorable political developments in South Vietnam, because this country was moving towards the era of

political democracy and political stability. I think that was the pressure. The government needed some legitimacy, which it didn't have. The overthrow of Diem created this very unstable political period.

*Q: There were these revolving leaders, and on and on and on.*

NEGROPONTE: It stabilized after a while.

*Q: How was this coming out?*

NEGROPONTE: I think this was one of great things of concern. You had Diem's overthrow. Then Nguyen Khanh overthrows Duong Van Minh. Then there's a lot of turmoil. That plays into this Buddhist uprising and everything else I was talking to you about. Then President Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky emerged from that.

In order for them to hang on to the reins of power, I think the feeling in the embassy was, and I think the feeling in the Vietnamese body politic was that they had to commit to some pathway to democracy. That's what led to the Constituent Assembly and the electoral process. Ultimately, Thieu got elected under this new constitution.

*Q: Did you feel that with all the debate that Thieu or Ky or somebody was calling all the shots? Or was this a pretty...*

NEGROPONTE: No, I thought we were living through a real process. Considering that there was a war going on, I've always considered that South Vietnam was fairly democratic really, under the circumstances. After all they were only 10 or 13 years away from having been a colony. They weren't doing too badly.

*Q: Even during the time I was there a little bit later, I was thinking there's a judicial process going on, compared to other countries at the time.*

NEGROPONTE: I think they had some pretty good institutions. It's just they weren't strong enough to withstand the military pressure.

*Q: Did you find yourself at all getting involved and saying gee, you ought to work a little harder on this article or that article of the constitution? Or was it pretty passive?*

NEGROPONTE: Personally, it was pretty passive. I think we had a few sessions where we would invite them around to Phil Habib's house, some of the deputies, for Sunday lunch. Phil and Mr. Flanz would tell them what we thought. I never thought we influenced them that much. My experience with them was that, basically in the end they politely heard what you had to say. They pretty much did what they planned to do anyway.

Maybe there was someone behind the scenes maneuvering, like Thieu or Ky, maybe a little bit of money here and there. There must have been some of that.

*Q: Let's go to your first tour when you were down in II Corps. The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), was that much of a factor?*

NEGROPONTE: Not in the field. In fact, I don't remember them in the field. They were a factor in terms of their reporting, their perception of things. We used to have some healthy debate, but I don't remember any fundamental disagreements with them.

*Q: How about when you got into the Saigon scene? Were they playing any role? Did you think they may have had some guys on the take or in the delegations?*

NEGROPONTE: There was one situation, I can't remember now whether it was in 1966 or 1967, when it came time to have this presidential election – I believe it was in 1967 – I don't think there was any doubt that Phil, the CIA and others were much more supportive of Ky than Thieu. I do remember that myself and a few others, Bob Oakley, felt that Thieu had the greater sources of support within the Vietnamese military. We turned out to be right.

*Q: This is tape 2, side 1 with John Negroponte.*

*What was the attraction to Ky?*

NEGROPONTE: He was more Americanized, I think. He spoke English better. Perhaps we knew him better. He wasn't as aloof. Thieu was a fairly inscrutable fellow, more Asian, more traditional.

*Q: I supposed this in a way would have sent warning shivers up and down, having gone through Diem.*

NEGROPONTE: That's right.

*Q: You didn't want to have another one.*

NEGROPONTE: He was analogized a little bit to Diem in that sense. I don't think he was considered as authoritarian, but he was certainly more traditional, to this day. Look how quiet he has been.

*Q: Is he still in Hawaii?*

NEGROPONTE: I think he's in Boston. Maybe you're thinking of Marcos.

*Q: No, I think Thieu went originally to Hawaii.*

NEGROPONTE: He lived in London for a while, but then Boston.

*Q: How about the atmosphere of the embassy during this period? You weren't there when it blew up, were you?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes I was, in 1965.

*Q: How did that go?*

NEGROPONTE: I wasn't in the embassy. I happened that preceding week to have been in the provinces. I had a back problem and I was in a field hospital in Nha Trang. They released me that morning. I got back to Saigon and the bombing had just taken place. I remember a lot of my friends got a lot of these terrible glass wounds. I think it had kind of a unifying effect. It certainly didn't deter anybody or discourage anybody. People were kind of upset to have all these wounds. There were some heroic stories too.

Edie Smith in the consular section down on the ground floor, she had figured out what was going on. She got everybody in the whole section to lie down on the floor about two or three seconds before the bomb went off. She later became Edie Apple, after she married Johnny Apple from the New York Times. She saved a lot of lives.

Quite a few people got these glass wounds because they heard that policemen fired shots at the Citroen that came by the embassy. It parked right in front, full of plastique. The chauffeur jumped out and jumped on a passing motorcycle. The cops shot at them. So when the shots were fired, everybody went rushing to the windows. Then the bomb went off.

*Q: When did you leave there?*

NEGROPONTE: I left three weeks before the Tet Offensive, in January 1968.

*Q: Were you getting any feel from correspondence, reading newspapers, or something, about the growing opposition to the war?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yes. Ellsworth Bunker had taken me back with him to Washington in November 1967, which was a fairly key trip of his. He appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He made some speeches in New York. No, the controversy back here was pretty evident. Of course, we were up to 500,000 troops. We were fighting that war every night. Every night we would meet with correspondents and everybody else. They were all my buddies. We would debate this thing ad nauseam, whether it was right, whether it was wrong, whether it could be won. As you can imagine, all these debates were just inconclusive.

*Q: What was your impression of the media? You were there when the media was really concentrated on it, before it turned really...*

NEGROPONTE: I had no beef with them. I didn't read all their reports, unlike today when you can get a news report at the drop of a hat. In those days, remember, it wasn't

that easy. You didn't get the New York Times or the Herald Tribune delivered to your doorstep every day. I didn't read their stuff that much on the wireless. We were too busy doing our work. I was certainly on good terms with them. I had no beef with them.

*Q: What I was really wondering is, was the feeling developing in the embassy at that time that these are the enemy, they are cutting us down?*

NEGROPONTE: No, I didn't feel that. I think the military felt that more than we did, I really do. I didn't feel that, I never did. I think also it was maybe vain to try to influence the media. Knowing the American press, there are just limits to what you can do to influence how they report something. If you try too hard, sometimes I think it's even worse. I think that's why ended up calling the daily press briefing the Five O'clock Follies, you remember. God knows, Barry Zorthian who ran that, Harold Kaplan, and all of them, they were just wonderful officers, great guys. They were well motivated, decent and honorable. There is just a limit to what the press in the United States will take from its own government.

I think they ought to reflect a bit on their role, reflect whether they were just too automatically skeptical of what we had to tell them. This idea that we were trying to sell them a bill of goods is just nonsense. People were doing their best to present the situation as they saw it.

*Q: You said you were with Bunker. Did you change your job at some point? Or was that just...*

NEGROPONTE: No, he just asked me to come back as his aide for one trip. I was in the political section. I guess I had finished reporting on the Constituent Assembly, because it was no more, and I was just doing regular internal political reporting.

My big takeaway from Vietnam during that period, probably the thing I feel most strongly about, was that Westmoreland was not the right man for the job. I remember attending a briefing in 1967 when Bunker had arrived.

Westy briefed the country team. I guess I was there as a note-taker of some kind. I was there for some reason. He briefed them on the strategy for fighting the war. He basically told Bunker he thought we could win a war of attrition by positioning U.S. troops in between the North Vietnamese Army and South Vietnamese Army, by having our people fight the North Vietnamese Army while the Saigon military defend the villages. I walked out of that meeting just scratching my head and saying this is a prescription for keeping us there forever. If Saigon doesn't take on some of this burden, they are never going to want to assume responsibility for the war, and we probably can't win a war of attrition. The North Vietnamese have got more people that they are prepared to throw at this thing.

I really thought that the war was suffering from some very poor generalship on our side. I thought Craig Abrams was terrific when he came. The interesting historical point is that apparently LBJ debated in 1964 the possibility of having Abrams replace General



Harkins, rather than Westmoreland. For some reason, he settled on Westy instead of Abrams. I have never ceased to wonder what might have happened if LBJ had chosen Abrams instead of Westy in the first place.

I think Westy has gotten off pretty lightly. People are reluctant to criticize an American four star general. They just are, I suppose you noticed. Considering the enormity of the failure, I am sometimes surprised.

*Q: The political leadership has taken the heat, the blame, more.*

NEGROPONTE: Maybe it should, in the sense that they should have asked more searching questions, like Mr. McNamara did. At the same time, particularly when Americans say well, we ought to let the military have their way; we ought to follow their lead; and let them the war. You know, Westy did not have a winning strategy. Sorry. If you let him have his way, he just would have put in more people. He asked for another 206,000 people in 1968, in the face of what he himself portrayed as a major Viet Cong defeat, which I think it was. But why ask for 206,000 more troops? I do think that was probably one of the salient takeaways for me. I believe Westmoreland's request for 200 thousand more troops after Tet had a catastrophic effect on attitudes back home. Imagine if instead, he had called for a reduction of 100 thousand troops in the wake of the Viet Cong defeat. Things might have been very different.

*Q: When did you leave?*

NEGROPONTE: I left on January 6<sup>TH</sup>, 1968.

*Q: That was just before Tet.*

NEGROPONTE: It was three and a half weeks before Tet.

*Q: When you left there, whither Vietnam in your judgment?*

NEGROPONTE: I didn't have a clue. I left absolutely exhausted. I had worked my butt off for three and a half years, 20 hours a day. I wanted to get away from my Vietnam experience. I wanted to go and do something else.

I got myself an assignment to USUN (United States Mission to the United Nations in New York). The hitch was that there wasn't money to put me in that assignment until the new fiscal year, which started on July 1<sup>st</sup>. So they roped me into going back to the Vietnam desk, going around the country to speak on our Vietnam policy, and to work on the Vietnam desk. The consequence of which was when the Paris Peace Talks began and because I was a Vietnamese language officer, as well as a good friend and colleague of both Phil Habib and Richard Holbrooke, I was recruited to be the Vietnamese language officer on the Paris delegation. My New York assignment went up in smoke.

*Q: I think this is a good place to stop.*

*I'll put it at the end here, so we'll know to do it: we've got you out of Vietnam. You're on the Vietnamese desk, going around making speeches. I would like to ask a bit about your experiences of giving speeches on a very unpopular topic and all that. Then we'll pick up your time on the Paris Peace Talks.*

NEGROPONTE: That's a good end.

*Q: Today is 11 July 2012. We are, after an eleven-year hiatus, picking up with John Negroponte. John, the last time we had you coming out of Vietnam. We stopped just before you got involved with the Vietnam peace talks; you were sent around as an officer with Vietnamese experience to talk to various groups. I wonder if you could talk about this a bit. This was a program where the State Department kind of threw its junior officers into the maw of public unhappiness about Vietnam. I was wondering what you experienced.*

NEGROPONTE: First of all when I left Saigon it was the sixth or seventh of January, 1968, which was three weeks before the Tet offensive. So that was kind of interesting because I had gone to Thailand for a few weeks just on holiday from Saigon, and then was in Hong Kong wending my way back to the States when the Tet offensive occurred.

I was with a group of friends and was just stunned by this offensive. I mean, some in our military had talked about a buildup in the north, sending supplies to the south. I remember coming back with Ellsworth Bunker in '67. I was carrying his bag from the trip he took to Washington in the wintertime. Westmoreland and others were saying there was a big buildup, but it wasn't evident to those of us in the Embassy. So we were really surprised by that.

I was headed to an assignment at the United Nations. I wanted to get away from my Vietnam experience. Ellsworth Bunker had actually asked me to stay longer and be his aide, and I said, "I can't. I am exhausted. I have been knocking myself out for three and a half years at this work I am doing here." So I got myself a job assigned as a political officer at our mission to the United Nations (USUN). That is where I was headed.

I don't know if you remember, in those days the fiscal year started on the first of July. They didn't have money to put me in that job. The State Department was just as bureaucratic as it is today, so they couldn't put me in the job until the first of July. So they said, the Vietnam Desk gobbles people up easily. They will give you work. The first thing they asked me to do was go on this speaking tour. We were a threesome. We were like a truth squad. I don't know if you remember Fisher Howe.

*Q: Yes I have interviewed Fisher.*

NEGROPONTE: Fisher Howe and I and another fellow whose name I can't recall. We went to Indiana for a whole week in March of 1968, and rented a car and drove around to half a dozen cities. We spoke at universities, high schools, radio shows. I counted

something like 45 different public appearances or something in the period of that time. By the way, it was not unpleasant. We didn't have tomatoes thrown at us. At the high schools people were extremely polite and very respectful. In college you got a little bit of pushback. I would not say that Indiana in the heartland there was that much upset that we encountered over the war. Not like the East Coast.

*Q: The East Coast and the West Coast. That is where one thinks of the extremes. Maybe Chicago or something.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah but it was not in Indiana. That was the place I went. Ball State University, various places. It was very interesting. We had radio interviews. Frankly I thought it was a great program on the part of the State Department. I am not sure we have done as much of it over the years as we ought to have, in terms of relating the work we do abroad back to the American people.

*Q: Because this is one of the hardest things we have. That is in a way what this oral history program is all about. What do American diplomats and people involved with foreign affairs actually do? The answer is very few people know. And we have a hard time explaining ourselves, because it is not the cut and dried run.*

NEGROPONTE: It wasn't too hard to explain what I was doing in Vietnam, because people were very interested in what was going on in Vietnam. So look, we were the eyes and ears of the embassy in the field. I had been a provincial reporter. I had done all the things we talked about in the earlier interview. I think the audiences related to that.

In any event, what happened was between that time and the first of July events interfered as they normally do. Lyndon Johnson at the end of March, actually shortly after this speaking tour, announced that he was going to halt the bombing or partially halt the bombing, I forget which, of North Vietnam as a gesture of goodwill to promote peace talks. Ultimately we ended up agreeing to peace talks with North Vietnam.

Averill Harriman and Cyrus Vance were named to co-head the delegation. Phil Habib, who had been my boss in Saigon. He had been the political counselor, was charged with pulling together a delegation. Richard Holbrooke -- the ubiquitous Richard Holbrooke -- was one of his chief assistants in that project. I was one of the first people: since Dick had been my roommate in Saigon, he called me up and asked me if I would be willing to go to Paris. I said, "Oh gosh, I really want to go to this job at the UN in New York. I am dying to get away from my Vietnam experience." I went through the whole ritual. Nothing doing. I ended up having my arm twisted.

*Q: You don't say no to Richard Holbrooke.*

NEGROPONTE: Well and you don't say no to Phil Habib either. You can actually say no easier to Dick than you can to Phil.

So I became part of the U.S. delegation to the Paris peace talks. Because I spoke Vietnamese at the time, I have pretty much forgotten it since then. I was basically made the Vietnamese language officer of the delegation. Not an interpreter, believe me, but the language officer. That resulted in me becoming the liaison officer with the North Vietnamese delegation, which was extremely interesting.

We all piled into a government aircraft in the early days of May in '68. The talks started around the eighth. I was involved in the process right from the beginning, because we were setting it up and I was the liaison and everything else. I was one of the officers who arranged the meetings between the heads of delegations and so on and so forth.

We would go out to the North Vietnamese compound. They had been given a compound by the French Communist party in a suburb of Paris. We had moved into the Crillon hotel which Woodrow Wilson had used some 50 years earlier in Paris, which is right next to the embassy building as you know, right next to the chancery, and we were in the Crillon. We had offices in the embassy of course, but when we had our meetings with the North Vietnamese liaison officers they would come and visit us right at the Crillon. We would have tea in the lobby somewhere in some corner of the hotel. I remember the liaison officer asking me once, "Did your delegation buy this hotel for the conference?" It is one of the most expensive hotels in Paris. Today I am sure it would cost a billion dollars or something like that.

*Q: Were you involved in the table arrangement?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh absolutely. I can tell you all about that. So in any event, the talks started. The plenary talks started in early May of '68. We had this plenary session one day a week up at the French international conference center. It was called the Hotel Majestic. It is up on Avenue Kleber like at the other end of the Champs-Élysées, a ten minute car ride especially if you have motorcycle escorts.

The French were so excited about having the Vietnam peace talks in Paris that they gave Ambassador Vance and Governor Harriman every facility including motorcycle escorts. These guys had big leather gloves with lead inside them so when they banged against cars that were getting in the way you would hear this clanging sound. Really it was quite ferocious. But they cleared traffic. When people see French "Motards" as they called them, they really get out of the way.

People were getting out of the way anyway because you may remember another small thing was happening in France at that time just as we arrived. And the events of 1968. It was literally in May that they had the first of the incidents.

*Q: You may explain what those events were.*

NEGROPONTE: Well, it was an uprising against the educational system and everything else, which basically paralyzed the country for the next month and a half, and just shut

the place down. It was so bad that President de Gaulle left Paris and went to a French army base in Alsace Lorraine during part of this crisis.

There was nothing going on in Paris at that time. The garbage was not being collected. The only two things that were happening were Les Événements. I don't know the right word for it in English but that is what they called it. Les Événements, with thousands of students who had taken over the place and the Paris peace talks. Those were the only two things that were going on.

And of course the French had egg all over their face because they had hoped to hold up this conference as a big symbol of their prestige. They just had other things to worry about than our conference. But we carried on nonetheless, and eventually de Gaulle came back at the end of June. I remember sitting with Dick in the delegation office in the embassy.

We were so excited by de Gaulle's return. They mobilized one of these very popular marches at the Place de la Concorde. Those of you who know Paris - from the Concorde going up the Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe. Dick and I were running in the streets joining the demonstration and marched. I never heard French people saying, "America with us," and cheering when they passed Merrill Lynch or when they saw an American flag. They were so happy law and order was being restored. At least the people in this crowd. I remember that very well.

In any event these plenaries went on, week in and week out: stereotypical statements, boilerplate, nothing doing. As you know, that process basically went on from '68 to four years later, to mid '72. Meanwhile we used to have these tea breaks where we were hoping, at least Governor Harriman was hoping against hope that we might have more substantive talks. But nothing much happened in the tea breaks either.

So at one point, I guess it was around June '68, we got authorization to hold some actual secret talks with the North Vietnamese to see if we could get some things going anywhere. So I had a very interesting assignment. I was assigned the job to go along with a CIA agent called Jacques. I won't mention his last name. We were given the job of finding a safe house in the suburbs of Paris where we could host the North Vietnamese delegation for secret meetings. That was a lot of fun. I felt like a real estate agent.

*Q: How does one go about this thing?*

NEGROPONTE: Jacques. Jacques found a real estate agent who was taking him around. He made up these most incredible stories on why we were getting this. He was going to rent this house for his retired uncle and his wife. People were asking, why would his uncle and his wife like such a big place? Does he plan to have help and so on and so forth. He would say he really likes to be a busybody and so on. He loved to make this stuff up. "Mon oncle est un bricoleur." I don't know how you translate "bricoleur" into English but it is like a handyman.

Anyway we found a good place. I was fixated on the idea we had to get a place with underground garage space so we could drive these delegations right in there without anybody seeing them. So anyway, we got our safe house.

*Q: Did the North Vietnamese agree to secret talks?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh they agreed to secret talks, but they didn't say anything very different in the secret talks from the public ones. They just said "you guys have got to stop the bombing and get the heck out of here."

*Q: Did you have a feeling that this was a process that wasn't going anywhere?*

NEGROPONTE: It didn't go anywhere. I have written stuff about this. I wrote papers back in '69. After I left Paris I went to Stanford for a year and I wrote about five or six monographs. They were finally sort of published in part recently. But I never felt that they were going to settle for anything short of taking over the place lock stock, and barrel.

*Q: At one point there was a great deal of discussion in the paper over how the delegations were to be seated.*

NEGROPONTE: What happened was we had these secret talks in the fall of '68. Then our elections were looming. LBJ said he wasn't going to run. Richard Nixon and Humphrey were the two candidates. So the elections approached, you could sense in the leadership of the delegation who were both Democrats. Vance certainly was not very partisan. Harriman was very partisan, absolutely partisan. I liked Governor Harriman a lot but he was a real Democrat.

They wanted to make progress on the talks, and they really felt that could help Humphrey get elected. So we got into a discussion in the beginning of October. This is very important to my own thinking in the rest of my career about negotiations and the Negroponte Rule: never negotiate anything important about the national security of the United States on the eve of a national election. You just mousetrap yourself into a situation of intolerable political pressure.

Well that is what we did. We maneuvered ourselves into that position where starting in October, late September of '68, we started talking about a bombing halt. A halt of the bombing of North Vietnam, which we would carry out in exchange for certain steps by North Vietnam. It had nothing to do with finishing a war or a final settlement. If we stopped the bombing, they would reciprocate by lowering the level of attacks on cities, no more use of rocketry into the cities, certain kinds of steps that were basically designed to lower the level of violence but were hard to measure and were fairly nebulous and certainly were not conclusive or dispositive of the basic problems of the war.

Anyway that negotiating process went on right up until literally several days before our elections in November of '68. Phil Habib and I were sitting in a French restaurant around

eleven or twelve o'clock one night just before the bombing halt, which was literally two or three days before the elections, where we finally sealed the deal with North Vietnam. Okay, they would do it and we made this deal, and the bombing stopped. I guess they went to a lower level of violence. I am not so sure.

This thing was announced, but obviously too late to have an impact on the election. It was a Thursday or a Friday and the election was the following Tuesday. Humphrey lost, and I always wondered in my mind whether LBJ, I don't think about domestic politics that much and I am really not partisan, but I always wondered whether LBJ did not really care that much about whether Humphrey won or lost. I always wondered how much he liked Humphrey. They were very different personalities, as you remember.

*Q: Very different personalities and knowing Johnson's ability to manipulate, one can't help but wonder.*

NEGROPONTE: If he had wanted Humphrey to win I think there might have been things they could have done sooner to shift things. You asked a question and I know it is a long winded way of getting to it.

The next step was going to be that the parties, the other parties to the conflict were going to join the talks. That was the other part of the deal. So we had the U.S. and North Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Then you had the Viet Cong and then the Saigon government. Therein was the nub of the whole political dispute about the Vietnam War. The North Vietnamese wanted us to think of the Viet Cong as the governmental equivalent, this little rebel group which they totally controlled and created, to be the equivalent of the Saigon government.

Of course. Saigon under the leadership of President Nguyen Van Thieu went ballistic. They just didn't want to be equated with the Viet Cong, who they simply considered an instrument of Hanoi. So what we got into was a very elaborate diplomatic minuet, if you will, about how do you represent each side's view of the political standing of these different entities in terms of the shape of the table and where people sit and everything else.

So that Hanoi obviously wanted something whereby there would be the Hanoi government and there would be the Viet Cong and their idea would be to have them as separate delegations, and then you would have the Saigon government and then the U.S. But we didn't want this. We didn't want the VC to be considered separate.

So, we had this huge argument about how to you shape the table. Do you make it a square, a rectangle, an oval, a circle with little perforated lines on either side? In fact, the media was making fun of this because they thought it was silly, but for the Vietnamese actors in this war it was almost a matter of life and death. We were getting, in keeping with the kind of light hearted attitudes towards this, we were getting designs submitted to us from all over the world. Table designers from Scandinavia and everybody else were submitting these elaborate architectural drawings. So we ended up actually with a slightly

oval table and then with two small side tables on each side. Like so, with a little bit of space between the main table.

*Q: So they weren't actually attached.*

NEGROPONTE: They weren't actually touching and it is actually where the staff sat. It is where I sat with tape recorders and everything because I was responsible for maintaining the transcripts of the sessions, or overseeing them. Then Hanoi, they would sit, the Viet Cong would sit that way with them in the middle and we would sit this way next to each other.

We called it "our side-your side" talks. They would call it the "four party" talks. It is another rule of diplomacy. Sometimes in the end you just agree to let each side call things the way they want to call them. It is very often a good way for just clearing the way for a bit of progress on other issues. So that took us from November at post-election, November of '68 all the way to January when we mounted a new government and had a new delegation. Nixon took office and his vice president, and we got a new delegation. Good old Henry Cabot Lodge came back, my boss in Saigon.

*Q: Were you there during this?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yeah, I am there, in Paris.

*Q: What about the government of South Vietnam? What were the relations? Did they feel we were just selling them down the river or what?*

NEGROPONTE: You have to be patient for the next installment here, because four years later they actually do feel sold out. At this point they are simply fighting for what they consider to be their rights. They still have very strong U.S. government support. LBJ, Dean Rusk, all those people never pulled the plug on South Vietnam. Even though LBJ said he was going to not run again in order to find a solution to the war, he didn't withdraw a single soldier.

So I think going into the Nixon administration and to the beginning of the Nixon administration, South Vietnam still felt quite confident. They knew they had to be wary of and they knew our interests were not identical and they knew we would want to get out of there. They also knew about our political exhaustion with the Vietnam issue. But I would say at that point in time at the beginning of the Nixon administration they were feeling rather confident of our overall support. So then Nixon comes in and Henry Cabot Lodge leads the delegation.

The key difference in the negotiations then becomes the following: Henry Kissinger became Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor, and eventually, I would say in the spring or summer of 1969, Kissinger took over the secret talks with the Vietnamese. In other words, it was no longer being conducted from the Paris delegation. It was being conducted by the National Security Advisor with a team from Washington.



*Q: Well was this done overtly or was this done, I mean were you on the open delegation aware that you were being undercut? Or were you preparing the way to be undercut or what?*

NEGROPONTE: I left Paris in about August of 1969. I went to Stanford, as I mentioned to you. If there had been any secret meetings prior to that, there were very few and far between. At the time I was there I just don't recall any awareness of that. It is definitely something that developed later on because I went to Stanford for a year. Do you want me to continue on the biographical part or get back to the Vietnam part?

*Q: Let's get back to the Vietnam part. What about relations within our delegation? What was your impression of the attitude of Harriman and of Vance? How did they lead?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, we were very fortunate, because we had such a high-powered delegation. You can't imagine the people we had there. We had, in addition to Harriman and Vance and Habib, we had Andy Goodpaster. He eventually became the head of NATO. He was Eisenhower's military aide. This is a man of extraordinary stature. We had people like that. We had Dickson Davis, who was one of the most senior intelligence analysts in the CIA, giving us our daily brief. It almost was like listening to a TV anchor he was so good. It was really fun to listen to him brief us every morning. But the relationships were good. It was a team. It was very cohesive.

*Q: What were you getting, say, from intelligence briefings? Anything else about what was motivating the North Vietnamese? Were they just going to sit there and hold on? Were they having any leeway? How were they operating?*

NEGROPONTE: The North Vietnamese showed basically no flexibility in their political negotiating position. Which was basically to demand a stop to the bombing, the withdrawal of U.S. forces, and the installation of a Viet Cong government. It wasn't enough that they wanted us to leave. They wanted us to kick over the can as we left. In exchange for all of that they were going to give us our prisoners of war back. That was basically the North Vietnamese position. It was from May of '68 until about September of '72. So you have to go all the way to 1972 for this to change.

*Q: Did you have any chance to sit down with the North Vietnamese and chat?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, some of these tea breaks and some of my liaison work. It was pretty superficial though. I liked dealing with them though, with the Vietnamese. Both North and South. I have great respect for them. They are hardworking people. Well, you know, if you served in Vietnam, they are smart and dedicated. Good sense of humor. There are things about them I don't think we understood well enough during that period, which I feel we understand better in retrospect. Namely their concerns about China.

*Q: You were just saying what you were getting with your accountings was pretty much the assumption that the North Vietnamese and Chinese were as close as lops and teeth as they used to say.*

NEGROPONTE: Which is not true. It turned out not to be true. We left Saigon finally when we withdrew in '73, and they over ran Saigon in '75 with regular forces and took over. Within four years they were at loggerheads with China. They had this war in 1979 where China decided to try and teach them a lesson.

*Q: Yeah, and got a bloody nose. I spent about 18 months in Saigon. I was Consul General from '69-'70. I mean these talks are going on and I don't think they raised many concerns, It was like the weather or something. I don't think we paid much attention to them.*

NEGROPONTE: Well then you were there during a very good period, because it was post-Tet Offensive. The Viet Cong had been decimated and there was peace and tranquility over fairly large parts of the country. You were probably wondering where is the beef?

*Q: Absolutely.*

NEGROPONTE: You know, I went back in 2008 as Deputy Secretary of State, which was the first time I had been back to Vietnam after leaving in 1973,. I was really struck by what seemed to be the strong feeling of concern about China and antagonism towards China. If I can bring you back to the Nixon administration we could skip the fact that I went to Stanford for a year.

*Q: We can go to that in a minute.*

NEGROPONTE: Nothing much happened, you see, in these talks between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho for a number of years. They must have met three or four times a year at the beginning in '70-'71-'72. I joined Henry Kissinger's staff in September of 1970, first in a policy planning office for a number of months. But then in the summer of '71 I took over for Richard Smyser, as the director for Vietnam.

So I become the director for Vietnam on the National Security Council. That would have been July of 1971. So I attend a number of Henry's secret talks with the North Vietnamese. Almost all of them take place in Paris. But nothing really much happens there either until the following March of '72. In fact on Easter Sunday in March of '72, North Vietnam sent tanks and troops across the demilitarized zone and attacked the south. It was called the Easter offensive. That offensive was not ultimately defeated until about a month later, by the end of April. But it took a lot of doing by South Vietnamese forces and ourselves.

It was a major development, if you think of it this way: the North Vietnamese had sacrificed the Viet Cong in '68 in the Tet offensive. And so they were almost obliged, if

they wanted to bloody the nose of Saigon the second time around, they had to do it with regular forces, both the ones they had in the country and from across the border. We decided as a consequence of this invasion, and I was very much involved in this decision because I was the director for Vietnam, to mine Haiphong and to bomb Hanoi. Nixon announced that decision on the eighth of May, 1972. It was Nixon's decision. Henry was really wringing his hands about those days. He was very concerned.

*Q: Why would there be concern? In the first place Hanoi was-- the North Vietnamese were -- getting many of their supplies, many of the Soviet supplies in from the harbor in Haiphong.*

NEGROPONTE: Well, here are the concerns. Here were [Kissinger's] concerns. He ultimately went along with it. He gathered us all together. This has been written up in various histories. He got us all together on a Saturday. That Friday afternoon, I was getting my trench coat and was about to go to National Airport to go home to New York for the weekend to visit my parents.

General Haig calls me up and says, "get over here to the White House basement. The president has pretty much decided that we are going to do this, mine Haiphong and bomb Hanoi. I need you to help staff the justification and the papers and speeches and everything has got to be done three days from now."

Oh my God, thanks for ruining my weekend. We then went into this incredible frenzy of activity. Myself, Winston Lord, Peter Rodman, John Holdridge, Hal Sonnenfeldt. We had a meeting that has been discussed many times in the books with Henry about whether we should do this. I think one of the concerns is whether we might cause the Soviets to cancel the summit. We were scheduled to meet in late May. Nixon was scheduled to meet with Brezhnev, first summit meeting in years. In May we were going to go to Moscow.

*Q: Wasn't Kosygin in Hanoi?*

NEGROPONTE: He went later on. I don't know if he was in Hanoi at that time. They sent Podgorny after the summit to go to Vietnam with some messages. But there was concern about whether the Soviets might cancel the summit. I mean. I didn't think there was much risk: I think they wanted the meeting with Nixon as much as we did or more. You know for them for the Soviets, anything that symbolizes and demonstrates the equivalence of the United States with the Soviet Union was always something they were very enthusiastic about. Because they weren't the equivalent of the United States, but they loved it when there were these symbolic manifestations of that.

So they wanted it. But Hal Sonnenfeldt made one point that if you bomb them and you happen to hit Soviet ships, you know, bomb Haiphong, that could cause some problems. We didn't think the risk of that happening was very high. But I think that Dr. Kissinger was just so concerned about the escalation.

I think he always was concerned about his image. He says he was not, but his image in the academic community. Just before the NSC meeting on May 8, Henry called me and George Carver of the CIA into his office to go over plans for the meeting. At one point he said, "I don't want to be the Walt Rostow of this administration," referring to LBJ's last NSC advisor who was not welcomed back to the faculty at MIT when he left the White House. Remember he was having difficulties with Harvard at the time, whether they would take him back after he finished being National Security Advisor. So I think that was one of his reasons for hesitation.

Anyway we went ahead with it, and a summit went forward. We actually went in April beforehand to prepare the summit. I went with Dr. Kissinger. We went secretly to Moscow because Henry always liked to do things secretly. He had an obsession with secret negotiations. I think beyond the point of, it was beyond reasonable in a way.

We had these meetings with Brezhnev too then, setting up the summit. Then we went with Nixon in late May, '72. We signed the SALT agreement. We signed a number of other agreements. We had a big economic delegation and trade. All these things you do in a big summit. It went on for a whole week.

But we also had several long Vietnam meetings. I went to one, which was in Brezhnev's dacha outside of Moscow. On our side it was just President Nixon and Kissinger, myself, and Winston Lord. The four of us. Win and I missed the motorcade from the Kremlin to Brezhnev's Dacha. I remember standing out curbside and Win saying, "Oh my God. Our career is over, and they won't have their talking points. We have all the books." I said, "Winston, don't worry. They are going to know what to say. The problem is we are not going to be there."

Finally, there was some KGB agent who took pity on us and put us in a limousine and sent us out to the Dacha. Of course we hadn't missed a thing, because Brezhnev, you know how chiefs of state exchange gifts. In those days, the gifts were sometimes rather extravagant. Brezhnev had asked for and we gave him a yellow convertible Cadillac. So he was enjoying looking at his Cadillac. I don't think the U.S. government footed the bill. I suspect General Motors gave Mr. Brezhnev his Cadillac.

Guess what Mr. Brezhnev gave to Mr. Nixon? He gave him a hydrofoil, because the Russians are quite good at hydrofoil technology. Heaven knows what Mr. Nixon did with a hydrofoil.

*Q: He may have been a Navy man.*

NEGROPONTE: He had this hydrofoil on the lake at Brezhnev's place and he was showing him. We hadn't missed a thing because they were out joking and exchanging gifts. Then we had this meeting that went on for four hours. It was a great classic old style communist meeting. You have sat through a lot of communist rhetoric in your life and you have read it. You know that the longer they talk the less they plan to do.

When we got past about hour number three I said, “these guys aren’t going to do anything about the fact that we are mining Haiphong and bombing Hanoi. They just making the record amply clear that they object to this.” So they each of them, there was Brezhnev; there was Podgorny; there was Kosygin at that time, and there was Gromyko. Gromyko was the foreign minister. Then there was Alexandrov, their National Security Advisor, and I don’t know if you remember the name Viktor Sukhodrev. Sukhodrev eventually became their ambassador to Ireland, but he was their interpreter. He spoke very good English.

This was another thing. Dr. Kissinger really didn’t respect the diplomatic canon. I mean, he would not bring an American interpreter to these meetings. We relied on the Russian interpreter. It is such bad form, really, and frankly I think it is a serious mistake. He omitted, he excluded American interpreters. He did it for a truly unfortunate reason. He didn’t want Secretary Rogers to know what was happening, the Secretary of State. The reason Secretary Rogers would have found out if we had an interpreter was the interpreters come from the State Department, as you know. And they are the best interpreters in the world. They are really good. And Dr. Kissinger excluded them from all of our negotiations with the Russians. It was a very unprofessional on his part. An example of his true lack of experience.

You and I sit here today, and Dr. Kissinger is 89 years old and obviously an extraordinarily important and gifted man of huge accomplishments. I admire him and I respect them. But you have to remember: back to 1969, he was a totally inexperienced university professor. That is when he settled the Vietnam War. That is one of the reasons we ended up with the unfortunate outcome that occurred. When Henry negotiated the Paris Peace Agreement in 1972, he had a grand total of three years of government experience. Think of it.

So we had the Moscow summit. We talked about Vietnam. Nothing really came of it. They had some sidebar meetings as well that I was not privy to which resulted in Podgorny going to visit Hanoi, and where I think Henry and the Russians discussed the kernels, the seeds of the eventual agreement which was basically look we can get out of there. We can stop our military activity, but you can’t ask us also to overthrow the Saigon government as we walk out the door. So we have got to come to some kind of arrangement that allows the Saigon government to survive our exit from Vietnam and then allow for some kind of political competition to take place.

*Q: You members of the delegation in talking about this, was the feeling sort of okay, when we pull out completely, probably the North will take over the South eventually?*

NEGROPONTE: Well not necessarily. It depended on the terms and conditions under which you did this. Don’t forget that during this process we abolished the draft, which was the most unpopular aspect of the Vietnam War. Why were people demonstrating in the streets? Mostly it was the injustice of the draft. Nixon had abolished it. The casualty levels were way down because finally we had a general who understood Vietnamization,

Abrams. We discussed that I think in the earlier segment. So we had Vietnamization, the end of the draft, Saigon getting a more competent army. It really was better by 1972.

So I certainly felt, and I think others did, if you could just negotiate reasonably good terms and conditions with Hanoi, like maybe leaving some residual force there, U.S. force. Modest. Allow for military re-supply, continued economic assistance to Saigon, and then something that deals with the issue of the presence of North Vietnamese troops in the South, Saigon would have had a chance. That was my view.

*Q: During this time you were there, dealing with Dr. Kissinger, did you really think there was more to him than sort of being an academic. Was he a broad thinker or not? Did he have a plan or what?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh, he is a broad thinker. He is a very broad thinker and I think that probably the best example of that was his whole China strategy. On China it is hard to know where Nixon begins and Kissinger leaves off, and vice versa. Even to the point -- to this day, we debate who was more responsible for the Chinese issue. It took the two of them to do it, in any case. I think their strategy vis-à-vis China was brilliant, and to recognize the opportunities that were presented by the Sino-Soviet split and his went to engage in this triangular diplomacy. I think he played that card very well. I don't think he ended up getting nearly as much for it as he could have. We ended up losing Vietnam anyway. Basically we ended up conceding to China what they wanted on Taiwan also; i.e., they were agreeing to a one China policy also. So I think he was strategic. He definitely managed the China initiative extraordinarily well, but I think there were some important details that did not go the way I would have liked to see them go.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the sort of atmosphere of the White House, Nixon, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and all?*

NEGROPONTE: Sure you do. You work near these guys. I was working on Vietnam. Imagine I had quite a bit to do as NSC Director for Vietnam. I was a busy guy. I didn't spend that much time worrying about other people's problems. You had to deal with them. They went on these trips when I was there. They were at the summit, Haldeman and people like that. I knew even some of the people in the plumbers group. I had known them around the White House. But as you know the National Security Council is a bit apart from the rest of the White House staff, and is viewed as a little bit apart.

*Q: And domestic politics which drove so much of the White House just wasn't your thing.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly. We saw these people, but we certainly didn't feel any sense of what was going on with Watergate. These were revelations to us too, just like everybody else, when the tapes started coming out and the public hearings. As you know they managed to keep the lid on the Watergate from June of '72 all the way until the following spring. It was after Nixon was re-elected that the problem, the hearings came, Howard Baker and all.

*Q: When you went to this big summit in Moscow was there any Chinese or Vietnamese representation there at all or were they completely kept away?*

NEGROPONTE: Not that I am aware. It might have been at the State Banquet but it certainly wasn't in evidence otherwise. This was a bilateral meeting. That is the way I saw it. As I said, I was at this meeting with Brezhnev and the top leadership at the Dacha but I was not privy to the other discussion, which is where I think they talked about the kernels, the seed of some sort of agreement.

So that was May of '72. Then we had a few desultory meetings with the Vietnamese again in Paris. I made literally dozens of trips to Paris at this time in history. The real threshold, the real watershed meeting was in September of '72, where the North Vietnamese indicate to us that they are going to have a proposal for us that will do what I said, sort of allow Saigon to survive the peace process.

The following meeting was in early October. It was like the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> of October. We went to Paris and by then we had upgraded ourselves to something better than a rinky-dink safe house in the suburbs of Paris. Some wealthy American lent us the use of his house near Paris. It was like the kind of house you would like to live in.

We had a meeting there and Le Duc Tho pulls a paper out of his tunic. Here we go now. Remember where we started this conversation in October of '68? Here we are at the beginning of October '72. The pressures of an election, the worst time to negotiate national security stuff. Le Duc Tho says with our election obviously in mind, "You are in a hurry aren't you?" He said, "If you are, here it is."

He gives to Dr. Kissinger the document that agrees to end the war and restore peace in Vietnam. Henry, instead of doing clearly what he should have done, which is what you do in any negotiation--

(This is diplomacy 101, guys. Listen to this. When you do anything important on such an important matter you say, "Really interesting. Gotta study it. Take it home and show it to my President and we will come back to you within a week or whatever with a considered reaction.")

-- Dr. Kissinger's reaction was, "I will give you a counter proposal tomorrow." He had me and Peter Rodman and Winston Lord draft a counter proposal that very same night. We didn't send the document to Washington. We didn't do anything like that. We worked until three or four in the morning. He had gone out to a dinner or something. He came back and saw it, didn't think it went far enough to meeting their points. Had us re-write it. I am not sure we had any sleep that night. So then we went and gave him his counter proposal. But essentially at the end of four days of haggling with the North Vietnamese, we came up with the draft agreement that was, give or take a handful of words, was what we ended up signing on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1973.

*Q: When Kissinger made this statement “okay, we will answer within this short time with a counter proposal,” did he know what was in the paper?*

NEGROPONTE: He gave it to us and then we sat down and discussed it for three or four hours and went over its points. Yeah, he knew what was in it. But I mean the tactical, the negotiating point, I am just making the point again this was the inexperience, the emphasis on secrecy. And the fear or concern that if this was put in, somehow fed into the bureaucracy to study and look at, that everybody would try to find every possible excuse to reject it.

*Q: Well there is that problem.*

NEGROPONTE: There is that problem, but you have to manage that problem.

*Q: That is where the president says, “OK, this, this and that.”*

NEGROPONTE: The president wasn't really given that opportunity either, because Dr. Kissinger was sending back very short summary messages to the President. He was not really giving him detail of the text. He was just giving him short one paragraph sort of bleeps, tweets on what we were doing. So anyway it was not an exemplary negotiation.

So we brought it back to Washington, and I think initially Henry was very reluctant to even show the text around to people. But finally we had to do that. That was October 12<sup>th</sup>. He had this whole elaborate scenario again linked to the election. We were going to go on the 17<sup>th</sup> to Saigon and then on the 19<sup>th</sup> we were going to go to Hanoi and announce the agreement. Talk about election grandstanding. Then on the second of November the cease-fire would go into effect.

Well we went back to Washington. Henry maneuvered the text through the system. He succeeded, because most people wanted us to get out of Vietnam in any event. Then we went to Saigon about the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup>, and that is where the problem arose. We had not shared this text that we negotiated with the Saigon government at all. In fact the first text we brought to them was in English. We didn't even have, we had our English version but we didn't yet have the corrected Vietnamese text. So these guys weren't even looking at it in their own language. Here is this agreement that deals with the fate of their country and Henry was asking them to accept it and oh by the way, you can't change a single word. What is more, a couple of days from now I am going to Hanoi to celebrate this thing.

So Thieu, President Thieu went ballistic. There was this frantic night after Kissinger's meeting with Thieu back and forth with Haig who was in Washington, and the president. The president said, well even if I want to go forward with this, it would look terrible now for me to go forward with it over the objections of our ally on the eve of an election. It would look like a totally political move on my part. I guess we are going to have to stand this project down. So instead of going to Hanoi, we picked up our marbles and came back to Washington, whatever date it was in October, but with Henry absolutely determined to



return to the negotiating process after the election was over. I mean he now had the bee in his bonnet. Let's just get this thing over.

We came back and you may remember this famous press conference we had on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October where he told the media, because then the story got blown about our plan by a man who I was with last night, by Arnaud de Borchgrave of Newsweek. Who wrote this cover of Newsweek said, "A deal with Hanoi, a duel with Thieu." I don't know if you remember this. So it was out there.

So Henry had to deal with that when he got back to Washington in the EOB press room there he briefed the press. He said his famous quote, "Peace is at hand." Which has been interpreted and re-interpreted by people a zillion times. The malicious interpretation, particularly from the left, was he was saying that to deceive people about progress at the peace talks. He wanted to lull the American people into thinking we really were on the verge of having peace. But that was not his motivation. I think his motivation was to send a message to Hanoi to say, "we have not double crossed you. We ran into a few complications but we will be back to the table. That is what he really wanted. Don't think we welched out on you. We will be back."

Then Nixon proceeded to win 49 out of 50 states. It was an amazing electoral outcome, if you recall. He lost Massachusetts. By golly, we were back at the negotiating table ten days later. Then we worked on trying to polish the agreement.

*Q: Were we dealing with the South Vietnamese government, the Thieu government at this point saying okay, what will be acceptable to you and what won't?*

NEGROPONTE: Well we had a bit of a shock in their reaction. No big surprise, obviously that they would react the way they did. So some effort was made to placate, mollify them, right. We found a few areas in vocabulary in words they didn't like, and we tried to get the North Vietnamese to agree to change.

But most importantly what we did was we stepped up the flow of military and other assistance to Saigon so they would be better able to withstand the consequences. Not of a cease fire because there was a cease fire in the agreement, but of the likely almost immediate certainly eventual breaking of the cease fire by Hanoi. So we started, I forgot the name of the program. It was a huge program. So they got several additional billions of dollars' worth of equipment. Plus, since we have pulled back from the deal so late in the planning, some of the Viet Cong in the South and some of the Vietnamese communist units had already given orders to their troops to cease fire. As a result Saigon was able to gain a little bit of terrain during that period.

*Q: Well, during this whole time when you came back and were with Kissinger having the Vietnam portfolio, what was your feeling about the Thieu government and the South Vietnamese military at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, on the latter point, on the South Vietnamese military, I think it was definitely getting better, and it had been getting better since the time of Creighton Abrams. Westmoreland had not paid much attention to the South Vietnamese army. He wanted us to do all the fighting. Abrams was much more focused on the South Vietnamese army as our exit ticket from South Vietnam.

It was a cardinal lesson for me, which I later applied to Iraq when I was ambassador in Iraq, my thinking about Afghanistan. I have been probably one of the foremost preachers of localization and building local capacity early on if you are unfortunate enough to get stuck in one of these types of nation building situations. Don't overuse U.S. military forces. Use local capacity.

So I think that was happening. The first and second ARVN divisions which were up on the border in the DMZ acquitted themselves very well in the Easter offensive. Very well. So I thought they were doing better. Now when we left completely in '73, under the terms of the agreement, and then Congress cut off a lot of the assistance, well yeah, under those terms and Hanoi still having its army intact and them getting help from the Soviets they were no longer a match for that kind of opposition. But I thought the military were doing pretty well. I thought the Saigon government was better than it has been portrayed.

The subsequent narrative about the Saigon government has always made it look much worse than it was. I think the Saigon government frankly looks one hell of a lot better than either the Afghan or the Iraqi government of today. I have a basis for comparison. They had an infrastructure. They had provinces. They had province chiefs. They had a chain of command that went all the way down the districts. You could give an order in Saigon and it could be carried out in a district in Quang Tri Province. They had a fairly reasonable infrastructure. If there was corruption I don't think it compares with some of the hair raising stories you hear about corruption today.

*Q: You know I am a student of the Civil War period in the United States. When I was in Vietnam I was hearing stories about this and that. The Union had a lot of real problems with corruption and everything else. Shoddy manufacturing and poor generalship and everything else, It wasn't much different. I thought they were doing a pretty good job.*

*Well then before we move away from all of this. We still come back later. At Stanford how did you find being a Vietnam veteran and a spokesperson more or less on a campus on which it was not a middle western campus? I would imagine there would be a little more radicalization there.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah there was some radicalization but it didn't manifest itself until the very end of my time there. I had a wonderful time. I went to Stanford for the academic year. I got there at the end of August of '69. I really went there for, if you don't mind me saying, for therapeutic reasons. I mean I really needed a break. If you are the liaison officer and taking all the notes for the secret meetings and doing this, that, and the other thing and LBJ was kind of paranoid of people on the delegation kind of leaking stuff. So he would kind of hand pick who could and who couldn't participate in the secret talks

just to give you an example, because he was tired of reading about it in the New York Times.

*Q: Between LBJ and Kissinger you are getting the real course.*

NEGROPONTE: A course in micromanaging, paranoia and micromanagement. So I was really genuinely exhausted. So I took advantage of Stanford from that point of view. I was at the Hoover Institution. That is where I had a desk. I was assigned to do reading sort of Oxford style under a truly excellent professor, David Potter, a historian. He was a history professor. He wrote People of Plenty, David Potter.

I did some reading in history. In any event, I also did some teaching on disarmament with a professor named Wolfgang Panofsky. I remember him. Then I wrote these half dozen monographs on my experience in Vietnam. I would say it was a fairly leisurely approach to my year there. It got interrupted by the Cambodian Invasion, which occurred in April of 1970. Then the campus erupted.

*Q: This was also the Kent State shooting.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly. Then the campus erupted. The windows in the Hoover institution were broken. It was a nice building. The Hoover Tower was cement but it was adjacent to a wing which was glass. That was all smashed. Then there were students all lined up on the plaza of the campus all with typewriters helping other students write letters to their congressman. You get your instant letter to Congress by all of these people. There was shouting and screaming. I had my next job lined up so I curtailed my stay at Stanford by about a month. The campus was shut down. There was nothing happening.

David Potter was very important to me because he introduced me to a group of American thinkers that I was just not familiar with. He was one of these so-called Southern Historians. He was in the tradition of C. Vann Woodward and various others, but magnificent. I attended his lecture course on the American character. It was a wonderful reintroduction to the United States for me. His book, his seminal book at that point, was called People of Plenty. His study was all about how abundance has affected the American people. It was kind of interesting. So it was Potter, Panofsky to help me teach this disarmament course. The monographs on Vietnam.

*Q: Did you run across any political theory people there or sort of proponents of the Marxist view or not?*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, but I didn't get too involved. There was one professor who was very notorious there. I believe he was an English professor. I can't remember his name anymore, but he had the faculty in a bit of turmoil on campus. Mind you, Stanford was never as radical as Berkley. We had Berkley just up the road. I mean, California was a pretty progressive place.

*Q: Did you make any attempt at recruitment as a scholar in residence? I was wondering if you got a negative reaction from the students.*

NEGROPONTE: No, no, and I didn't. I actually had an opposite experience. We had a half dozen Foreign Service Officers there in different programs; one with me in the same program, Don Norland. You may remember Don. But then there were others. One was at the management school, an admin officer who would go to the business school there. There were a couple of others doing specific courses. We would get together as a group from time to time. We were also taken to meet the president of the university. But I had the reverse experience. Do you remember there had been a group of Foreign Service Officers who had protested the Vietnam War and had gone and written an open letter to the Senate?

*Q: Yeah and Nixon wanted to fire them and all.*

NEGROPONTE: Well some of them were fired. One was fired not because he protested, but because he refused an assignment to Saigon. Remember there was a time in the middle of the 60's when LBJ said all entering Foreign Service Officers would have to go to Saigon and work in the rural development program. Most people just happily did it and actually I think don't regret the experience.

*Q: Well you probably had more responsibility there than anything in the next 20 years.*

NEGROPONTE: Well this one guy I met, and I have honestly forgotten his name but I got to know him at Stanford. We went out to dinner. He was practically in tears because he refused to go to Saigon. They said, we are sorry for you, we don't have any job for you. He had to leave the service. He was just desperate to get back in. It was a great stain on him both professionally and psychologically. He couldn't live with it, and he was seeking my help in getting back in. Frankly I don't think there was much I could do to help him, although I was sympathetic.

We have changed since then in our business. I was Deputy Secretary of State. I know all about this approach of not forcing assignments if we can at all help it. We still have this thing that says you sign up and you are willing to go anywhere in the world subject to the needs of the service, but we try to make these assignments voluntary if we can.

*Q: With inducements.*

NEGROPONTE: We filled all the jobs in Iraq when I was deputy secretary. I mean I had to browbeat people and cajole them and offer them the hope of some great assignment after they left Iraq, but I managed to fill all of the senior positions without any forced assignments. Although you should hear the stories they all have when they come into your office and tell you why they can't go. Their mother-in-law is sick. You know what I mean.

*Q: Let's go back to the time you were getting ready to leave Kissinger's staff and all. What was your feeling about our agreement with the North Vietnamese?*

NEGROPONTE: I was utterly and totally depressed. I knew where it was going to lead. Absolutely and the atmosphere and the way in which we negotiated. It is not a long-winded story but we need to finish the story of how we concluded the agreement.

We go in November. We monkey around with a handful of words, changing a few things where the North Vietnamese are willing to do that. But then we go to big reconciliation of the texts. I think this is recounted in the published history of the State Department now this volume has come out on Vietnam in that period.

I was in charge of doing that with my Vietnamese counterpart. Whereas we thought we only had one or two disagreements to reconcile, we ended up after a marathon session finding that we had discrepancies in 15 or 16, 20 different places. We said to ourselves, 'what is this?' Then they told us Le Duc Tho is going back for consultations in Hanoi. We speculated to ourselves that they generated a few more disagreements with us over language to buy him a little time and space to go back to Hanoi to consult. We further speculated, and I haven't looked into this since, but there was beginning to be some disagreement in the Politburo whether or not to go through with this deal because by having pulled back from it in the first instance, re-supplied Saigon with all the supplies we had. There may have been some debate among some members of the Politburo as to whether this still looked as good in November or December as it had in October.

So Le Duc Tho in early December goes back to Hanoi. Then Henry [Kissinger] and the President, and this I will never understand why they did this, they decided they would carry out the famous Christmas bombing of the north. Which was basically to say, and remember it was a terrifying, a real bombing campaign, it was basically to say 'look, you are dealing with the United States. You have been negotiating about this and this is an example of how we can fly off the handle if you don't come to closure. Let's make this deal now. We have been talking about it for at least three months, so we were so close, within two months. So what are you guys doing?'

I mean that was sort of the message. Of course it generated a huge backlash at home and just exacerbated whatever bad feelings about the war; so I mean in that sense it was something which in my view undermined whatever remaining support we had for our effort in Vietnam. I felt it was a bad thing to do. It was not a long-term effort, or taking the long view if you will.

Sir Robert Thompson felt the same way. Sir Robert Thompson was this British general who had beaten the guerillas in Malaysia and who was an advisor to President Nixon. We met from time to time. He called me up and said, "What are you guys doing?" I said, "Bob, nobody asked me for my advice on this."

Anyway we did that and everybody went back to Washington. I went skiing. My parents had a place in Switzerland. I thought with the Christmas bombing these talks would never

resume again. Lo and behold at the beginning of the year I got a call saying, "Get ready to go back to Paris." We stopped the bombing before we clinched the deal. I wouldn't do that if I were in charge. If you are applying that kind of pressure, why not keep doing it at least until you can get what it is you think you want? We stopped the bombing basically in exchange for them coming back to the table.

I have been quoted as saying, and it is an accurate quote, "We bombed them into accepting our concessions." I said that in 1973. I told that to Tad Szulc of the New York Times in an article he wrote about these peace talks. I think it is as appropriate today as it was then. We came back to Paris and wrapped the thing up in about eight or ten days. No consequential difference between what we had come up with in October of '72 and what we ended up initialing I think just before the inauguration and which we signed, Bill Rogers signed in January.

I felt, just in answer to your question, I felt that the way it was negotiated, the fact that it was negotiated behind Saigon's back, that it ordained the complete withdrawal of U. S. forces and it didn't do anything about the disposition of communist forces in the south other than the call for a cease fire, it was a leopard spot cease fire, I thought the agreement would crumble very rapidly and Saigon would ultimately fall. So I felt the agreement contained the seeds of Saigon's defeat. I felt that from the minute I saw that agreement.

*Q: Was this the consensus of your fellow officers who were dealing with this or not?*

NEGROPONTE: It was not the consensus of the officers dealing with it in our group with Kissinger. I was the only one who made an issue of this within Kissinger's entourage. But the professional diplomats in the Paris delegation, the people on the Vietnam desk they were holding their heads and saying, "What on earth have you done?" They were, people like Josiah Bennett. You probably knew Josiah. John Burke, all these people, the director of the Vietnam office, Jim Rosenthal, all these people, they were despondent. I think they thought I was the one hope of maybe helping get some balance into the agreement, but it was nothing doing. We were honestly depressed.

*Q: Did you feel that Kissinger, I saw this when I was in college, a professor sometimes develops a coterie around them. They absorb something from the professor and they really almost become sort of the professor's creatures. Did you feel this with Winston Lord, Rodman and all? Was there sort of, he is the master and what he does is right?*

NEGROPONTE: Well yes there is a certain amount of that. They certainly admired him. There is a certain amount of hero worship, but I think there is another explanation. But I am not trying to alter the Vietnam War history. I am not trying to tell you the Vietnam War was popular. I mean, the Vietnam War was unpopular in a lot of circles. These people honestly believed that we ought to get out. The group that I tell you was horrified by this were the professionals who had been sent out to Vietnam to try and help save the place and who both knew Vietnam and had a certain level of professional commitment to attaining our objectives there. It was the people who didn't feel you could turn on a dime

from having said we will keep our commitments and keep Vietnam free and then turn around the next day and say, “Oh by the way, we are leaving and we don’t care what happens to you.” We saw the agreement as a thinly veiled...

*Q: Sellout?*

NEGROPONTE: I think sellout is too loaded a term. I think it was a real disengagement. There are some quotes that come today from the Nixon tapes where Kissinger talks about a decent interval and says as long as we leave them intact, as long as the Saigon government is intact when we leave, maybe it doesn’t matter that much what happens two or three years later. That quote was in one of the tapes that we just discussed recently in a meeting.

He has similar conversations with Zhou Enlai where he said if you would just let us withdraw and Saigon stays in power, then why don’t you just have a little more confidence in the forces of history. Now what does that mean? The forces of history? Right. So he wanted to get out. He was the NSC advisor. He was extremely powerful and the president let him have his way and let him do his thing. I would be the last one to say that he did that behind Nixon’s back. I don’t think so. I think Nixon, from what I can glean, and I am still not sure I understand it fully, but from what I can glean, I think Nixon had completely lost patience with having to constantly conduct the Vietnam conflict.

We had a very interesting meeting in June of ’72 in Beijing with Zhou Enlai that I sat in with Dr. Kissinger had with Zhou Enlai. At one point he says to Zhou Enlai, ‘President Nixon does not want to win the election and then continue to have to read battlefield reports from Vietnam for breakfast.’ He wanted to do something else.

*Q: Well of course when one looks at President Johnson he really had some very strong ideas about our country and what to do about them, and yet he got caught up in this war.*

NEGROPONTE: And yet his domestic accomplishments were phenomenal. But what is interesting about Nixon is we actually could have won the war and we weren’t far from doing it. So that is the part that is interesting in the Nixon case. Hanoi had run out of SAM missiles. They had run out of surface to air missiles as a result of the Christmas bombing.

We had a conference of historians about a year ago that Henry came to, Holbrooke came to, I came to in conjunction with the release of the 1972 foreign affairs volumes of our official volumes of papers of the State Department. John Carland was the historian overseeing this. He is a Vietnam historian. He wrote the official history of the Vietnam war, the army history of Vietnam.

He invited a couple of Vietnamese historians, one civilian and one military. These guys, they were goading me. They came up to me at a reception and said, “Did you know that we had run out of SAM missiles when you stopped the Christmas bombing?” What do

you make of this? He said, “Did you know that things were so bad in the Delta during the time that you were in Saigon, that they were so bad for some of our regular units that we had to send them to Cambodia to eat, to get food.”

I think there were a number of times when we had them on the ropes. It is very dangerous to play what-if games with history because you don't get to do these things over, but if you think that Gorbachev decided in '86 or so, '87 to stop interfering in these third world conflicts, it is not as if Saigon had to hang on indefinitely. If they hung on for another decade or so they might have made it. We might have had like a North Korea-South Korea situation.

*Q: You went up to Beijing. How did you find the Chinese? Did you get much contact with them when you went with Kissinger?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I kind of mingle my memories of China with things I have done subsequently in my career. But China has always been an element in my career because my career started in Hong Kong. I served in Vietnam. If you serve in Southeast Asia or anything to do with Asia, China is always a factor that looms large in the background. So even when I was serving as ambassador to the Philippines much later on you are conscious of China's presence, its history, its importance. We loved going to China,

I must say, in '72. It was exciting because even though they were poor and emerging from 150 years of weakness, they have a great culture and are very interesting to deal with. Very decent, I find to deal with. I find them more pleasant to deal with certainly than the Soviets were. They seemed to be quite open to foreign influence and open to discussion. I was just a junior guy taking a lot of notes, but to the extent I could strike up a conversation with the Chinese, banter with them, it was enjoyable to do that.

*Q: Well then you left Kissinger's place when? Was it before Watergate?*

NEGROPONTE: The Watergate break in happens before I leave. That happens in June of '72.

*Q: Did that take up any of your time?*

NEGROPONTE: No.

*Q: It was just some newspaper...*

NEGROPONTE: No, I think somebody in Kissinger's staff, I think Rodman mentioned it to me one time saying this is going to be trouble, when he saw the news item about it. But the trouble didn't erupt until after I left. We initialed the agreement. You ought to know this. I declined to go to the signing of the agreement. I mean you can be a professional diplomat and sometimes protest over something you believe in and still live to talk about it the rest of your career.



*Q: You made it known that this...*

NEGROPONTE: I refused to go. Henry promised them that we would go to Hanoi to check into their economic situation, he was going to offer them aid and he was going to go visit Hanoi after the signed agreement. I refused to do that. I went to him and said, "Look, I think I have given more than my share to this effort. Please let me go and return to the State Department." So in February of 1973 he said, "I want you to do one last thing." Well what is that? "Accompany Vice President Spiro Agnew on a trip to Southeast Asia because he is going to go and sell the peace agreement." I sort of groaned but I did that. I accompanied the vice president to Thailand and places like that.

*Q: What was your impression of Spiro Agnew?*

NEGROPONTE: I didn't get to know him particularly well. He played his part. He wasn't in trouble yet either. But he did get into trouble later.

*Q: Well you think about that, both the president and the vice president had to leave under fire.*

NEGROPONTE: Well I am not happy about that because I am Greek American and we Greek Americans were not happy that a Greek American vice president should leave in such disgrace on him, on his office, and on Greek Americans. I remember I was very unhappy about that.

*Q: I remember having lunch with Spiro Agnew and Henry Tasca, who was our ambassador in Greece.*

NEGROPONTE: Did you serve in Greece?

*Q: I served for a year. I was consul general in Athens. All during the colonel time, '70-'74.*

NEGROPONTE: Have you read Keeley's book?

*Q: Keeley, yeah.*

NEGROPONTE: He just published a book about his experience.

*Q: That is one of the things that sets apart Greece.*

NEGROPONTE: So in some respects the situation was clearer cut. Having said that, there is a lot of misunderstanding out there on just what the Vietnam War was all about. Just who the protagonists were, like the debate about whether it was a guerilla war or a conventional war. It was, of course, some of each at different times. But in a way it was a clear-cut situation.

In Iraq, you are dealing with the political disorder and violence and confusion that results from having removed an authoritarian regime. The actors outside of Iraq don't play that important of a role. They are not as central as the Soviet Union was to North Vietnam or we were to Saigon. That is very different. I have never been in a place that was as insecure as Baghdad. I was able to wander all round Vietnam as an unarmed civilian for four years without serious fear for my life.

*Q: I have a Siamese cat who is rather fierce. I lived out in the economy too and that was my protection, and survived.*

NEGROPONTE: Vietnam was a battle for the control of the countryside. The cities were pretty much safe through the whole war. We had some terrorist attacks. I mean, they blew up the embassy. That was pretty serious, March 30, '65. I happened to not be there that day. I was stationed in Saigon. I discussed it in the first section here.

But Baghdad is the typical urban guerilla warfare of today. Gosh, you walk out your door and your life is in danger. I had a guy who worked in my office in Baghdad who got hit by a bullet. Luckily he was wearing his helmet. Literally walking out the entrance of the embassy in Baghdad and these IEDs and everything else. It is a very different kind of situation. Anyway I will talk about Iraq at some time.

*Q: OK. John, one of the things I wonder if you could address since I have got you trapped here-- As a personal feeling about the Vietnam War, I feel that there are some-- everybody says the Vietnam War was a terrible mistake. I am not completely convinced of this.*

*One of the things I thought about is had we not gone in, maybe we could have done it better and all of that, but Indonesia could have gone under communist control. Sukarno was certainly moving in that direction. That would have been a difficult thing if you had it plus Vietnam and other places could have been a different equation. Do you think this or not?*

NEGROPONTE: It is not what I speculate about the most with regard to Vietnam. It is possible. Certainly the Singaporean view, there is a view among Southeast Asian countries that by fighting in Vietnam we bought them time. The Thais will tell you that, the Singaporeans, the Malaysians. That the result of us being in Vietnam during the time we were there that they were able to shore up their defenses better.

My own view is a little more complicated than that. First of all, having been director of national intelligence and giving quite a bit of thought to analysis, I believe the biggest intelligence failure if you will, the biggest analytic failure of the 1960's was the mindset of LBJ and Dean Rusk to the effect that Communism is a monolith. Even though they had evidence right before their eyes of the Sino-Soviet split, they couldn't bring themselves to accept that. It is very interesting because you can see something in plain view and still not accept it as a guide for your behavior. Dean Rusk, I believe influenced by his experience as Assistant Secretary for Asia during the Korean War, saw Vietnam in

those terms. People like Ellsworth Bunker saw the world in terms like Munich and the Hitlerian era and defense taking a stand against aggression.

So between this unwillingness to accept the fact of a Sino-Soviet dispute and this view of counter aggression emanating from the 1930's where we didn't do enough soon enough, I think it got us bogged down in Vietnam. I don't think we thought creatively enough about the opportunities to exploit Sino-Soviet divisions until it wasn't only in plain view, the Chinese and the Russians came to blows in the summer of 1969 in these....

*Q: ...on the river.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly, the Suri River Incident. So to me that is one big thing. Then subsequent history suggests to me that while the Vietnamese may be communists, they are also very nationalistic. Their behavior towards us today and actually ever since we left Vietnam, they got over the Vietnam War faster than we did. They were more eager to restore relations with us than we were with them. I think that is partly because they see friendship with us today as helping be a counterweight to China. It is very interesting.

*Q: While you were dealing with Vietnamese affairs, did we have much intelligence about the thinking about what was going on in Hanoi? We have had quite sophisticated intelligence about Moscow and Kremlinology and all of that. Was there any counterpart to that?*

NEGROPONTE: The guy I replaced at the NSC, Dick Smyser, had been sort of a Hanoi watcher. He left to go back and finish his Ph.D. at Harvard. Another was Bill Stearman. I don't know if you have met Bill.

*Q: I have interviewed actually both Smyser and Stearman.*

NEGROPONTE: Right. And Bill was a total Hanoi watcher. He would read everything out of People's army and all the different journals. I mean he was almost like living in their world. He was on my staff at the NSC. Most people's eyes glazed over when Bill started to explain to them the debates they are having in Hanoi about corruption and about the Sino Soviet split, but it was actually pretty damn interesting stuff. Again sometimes we don't pay enough attention to what people say about themselves.

So yes there was at that level, at the level of public rhetoric, there was definitely quite a bit of analysis. Here is the problem: unlike some times and some nuggets that we find out, I don't think we ever had insight into the Politburo's decision making process. I remember Henry asking them after it was all over, after we signed the agreement and we initialed it. That day he asked Le Duc Tho, "In the Politburo, do you vote or do you make your decisions by consensus?" Now what would you have guessed?

*Q: I would say by consensus.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, being good communists you would say they do it by consensus. Well Le Duc Tho said, "We vote." That is the only insight we have ever had into the Politburo decisions making process, but it was interesting to hear it from a guy who was a member. We had no real... we penetrated the Viet Cong during the course of the war. Most wars you fight by the time you are four or five years into it, your intelligence gets pretty damn good, as you might imagine because you start recruiting sources. You start capturing people who you interview extensively. So you get into these things. It was just like we know a hell of a lot more about Al Qaeda today than we did at the time of 9/11. It is just the natural course of things.

But we never really got good insights into the Hanoi Politburo. They are a very tight knit group. It has been like the Chinese from the days of the long march. These guys have all fought together. They were blood brothers, and they weren't about to be transparent to outside world.

*Q: OK, John. Let's move on.*

NEGROPONTE: We finally get out of Vietnam.

*Q: OK what happened then?*

NEGROPONTE: So I went Henry said I really couldn't take it any more. I really felt I had done my share and let me go back to the Department. To which he said he was very grateful for what I had done but kind of left me to fend for myself with the State Department. I went back through the personnel system. They said, "Well the political counselor in Quito, Ecuador, has just been curtailed for some reason. That job is open, and would you be interested in doing it? I said, "I always wanted to serve in Latin America. I was always interested in Latin America, but only if you let me take Spanish language training first. So they gave me the five month course, which was great. It is one of the best things we do in our business here at the Foreign Service Institute.

*Q: Did you have any Spanish before?*

NEGROPONTE: I spoke French. I had studied Latin so it came pretty easily, and so I studied for five months and then I went off to Quito in August of '73 as political counselor.

*Q: How long were you there?*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly two years to the day.

*Q: All right, '73 what was the situation in Quito?*

NEGROPONTE: Ecuador, particularly the capital, is isolated from the rest of the world. Ecuador itself until the Panama Canal was built in 1914 was pretty removed from everything. The most important towns in that country are all up in the Sierra.

We had a bad relationship with Ecuador because of the fact that Ecuador, Peru, and Chile had been in the forefront in declaring jurisdiction of fisheries out to 200 miles from their coasts. They were way ahead of everybody else on that. So they had been capturing our tuna boats over the years and giving us a hard time that way. So we had suspended military assistance to Ecuador. Our relations were somewhat limited. They were at the ambassadorial level, but in fact they were somewhat limited. They had us PNG'd. They had expelled one of our ambassadors, Wymberley Coerr, a number of years earlier because they took offense at some statement he made. So I would say it was a prickly relationship. That is the best adjective I can think of.

*Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?*

NEGROPONTE: Robert C. Brewster. Well it was before him, I will have to remember his name. Because it was under him that I got recruited for the job. Then Brewster came in. It was a guy who was an admin type, quite well known in the department. Bob Brewster was someone I knew. Executive secretary and head of Personnel.

*Q: Was Findley Burns....*

NEGROPONTE: Findley Burns was the guy when I was being recruited from Personnel. But then Findley left, and Bob Brewster came about the same time I did. Bob had been a good friend.

*Q: Ecuador was taking our tuna boats away from California tuna boat owners.*

NEGROPONTE: Those were the guys.

*Q: Was there anything else we were interested in with Ecuador?*

NEGROPONTE: I mean I think our interests in Ecuador were more in the developmental side. After all we still had the vestiges of the Alliance for Progress and we had the deputy office director for the Andean Countries was from AID. This was when we had a merged State and Aid personnel effort to implement the Alliance for Progress. We had about 110 Peace Corps Volunteers. Findley Burns was a very conservative old fuddy-duddy type. I don't want to be too harsh on him but he was old fashioned, let's put it that way. He was very suspicious of the Peace Corps. He said, "They have long hair and smoke pot." So he was very suspicious. Bob Brewster said, "Well if Findley had questions about the Peace Corps, why don't we find out what they are doing out there?" So he put me in charge of a little committee of about half a dozen people from the embassy and between us we went and visited every single Peace Corps project in the country. We had the time of our lives. It was really fun. It was very interesting and people were doing very interesting stuff. I became a real fan of the Peace Corps as a result.

*Q: My original impression of the Peace Corps was 'oh my God a bunch of do-gooders.' Yet when I gave the oral exams for the State Department I found the Peace Corps people did remarkably well. Obviously it was a real change.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, well there were all kinds. There were the English language teachers. A lot of people in Agricultural projects. People who came from rural backgrounds. There were various technological projects. So I worked on that, but the main issue we worked on that was of political interest was the whole difference we had with them over law of the sea and fisheries.

You see the United Nations Law of the Sea conference was going on in 1974 in Caracas. Although we didn't discuss it earlier on, when I was on the NSC, remember I was on the planning staff there for a number of months before I went back to work on Vietnam. I was in charge of the study and the eventual first directive that Richard Nixon issued on the Law of the Sea. That was a sort of little sidelight of mine, but it introduced me to all the oceans issues all the way back to 1967.

*Q: Was Nicholas Katzenbach doing any of that?*

NEGROPONTE: No, the person that was doing it, don't forget this was Nixon's time. Katzenbach was the last with Johnson. The guy was Jack Stevenson, was the legal advisor of the State Department. He was the lead person in it at State. There was a guy named John Norton Moore who is now at UVA. He directs the Center for Oceans Law and Policy. It was the beginning of what eventually became a bit of a specialty of mine, which was oceans and fisheries affairs.

*Q: What was the state of ocean law, law of the sea at that particular time?*

NEGROPONTE: We were still in a period where the conventionally recognized limit, the globally recognized limit of marine jurisdiction including for resources was 12 miles. We hadn't yet gone to 200. We were on the verge of going to 200. In fact the United States went to 200 miles in the so-called Magnusson Act, legislation attributed to Senator Warren Magnusson of the state of Washington, a big figure in American marine affairs in 1977. So this was literally just a few years before that. And Caracas, the Law of the Sea Conference taking place in Caracas in '74, was going to move to this new 200 mile concept, that you could have resources jurisdiction out to 200, but between 12 and 200 you had all the navigational freedoms and all the rights that you previously had on the high seas.

*Q: Of course the United States being the preeminent naval power, the idea of...*

NEGROPONTE: And also the largest coast in the world, coastline too.

*Q: Yeah. I mean we were terribly concerned, the Navy too.*

NEGROPONTE: Well that was the big bargain. We would acknowledge a country's 200 mile resource jurisdiction in exchange for which they would recognize the navigational rights that we felt should pertain to shipping, military vessels, overflight of aircraft and submarine passage. So we got free passage through and over international straits in the law of the sea. We got the right of military people to navigate freely beyond 12 miles even though they were in the resource jurisdiction of another country.

So anyway, Ecuador, that was an issue there. I would say I added to my knowledge and experience on sea matters in a very practical way. Then in 1975, in the spring, the ambassador went on home leave and the deputy chief of mission was left as chargé. His mother died, so the top two officers of the embassy were out, so I was left as the chargé d'affaires of the American embassy in Quito, Ecuador. The DCM, as he was leaving to go to his mother's funeral told me, "Well nothing can really happen. The only thing that might possibly happen is they might seize tuna boats. And that hasn't happened for two years." So he went off.

The next day I was out at the Quito country club for doing some recreation of some kind. Someone came and tapped me on the shoulder, walked up to me and said, "It is too bad about the boats." I said, "What boats?" "Haven't you heard, seven American tuna boats had been seized off the coast of Manta, Ecuador. So that precipitated an intense six or seven week crisis in U.S.-Ecuador relations as they held these vessels against their will in the port of Manta, Ecuador.

*Q: Before you arrived what had been the standard operating procedure for American tuna boats?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, they refused to buy licenses because they considered this the high seas. Secondly, our position on the law of the sea was even if it was your 200-mile resource jurisdiction you could freely catch tuna because they are a highly migratory species. They don't come from any one of these countries. They spawn out in the middle of the ocean. We erected a legal theory in support of our commercial tuna fishing interest. I am sure you won't find that absolutely shocking, but that is what we had done.

So we didn't pay for licenses and basically these guys fished with impunity because their vessels were faster than any Ecuadorian navy boat. They were pretty modern tuna clippers. They were, clippers they called them, out of San Diego. But there was no standard operating procedure for dealing with these situations because none of them had happened for a couple of years. So they were holed up there in Manta for six or seven weeks. We were protesting like crazy trying to get them released.

There was a quirky rule and law in the so-called Fisherman's Protective Act which said that vessels seized, fishing vessels whose catch is confiscated because that is what they did. They forced them to off load all the tuna they caught. Vessels whose catch is confiscated in the implementation of a jurisdiction that we don't recognize can be compensated by the U.S. treasury. So what we had to do, they off loaded the vessels but we had to have somebody certify the amount of fish that had been taken off the vessels.

So I sent a group of officers down there to help verify the catch so that we could certify properly when they made their submission under the Fisherman's Protective Act. I mention this because someday I am sure you will interview her. She is not retired yet, but you will get to interview Anne Patterson. Who is our ambassador in Cairo. She and another lady came to see me. I was still running the embassy. They said, "we want to count fish. We noticed you haven't sent any female officers from the embassy to Manta to count fish."

I said, "Why do you want to do that?" They said, "Well first of all, we think you are discriminating against us. Secondly, we know that there is going to be a memo in everybody's file who is going down to count fish. They were heroic and they did this in the crisis of the relationship, and that it is going to be a positive factor in their résumé and when their performance is being judged by the promotion board, so we want to have that opportunity as well." I said, "Well go buy yourselves a pair of hip boots and a couple of tickets down to Manta and be my guest." I will never forget that story about Anne Patterson who has since been ambassador to El Salvador, to Columbia, to Pakistan, and now to Egypt. I mean she has got to be one of the best darn ambassadors we have ever had.

*Q: How did they catch the tuna clippers?*

NEGROPONTE: You know I can't remember how that happened. I think one of them might have stalled or something like that. But they managed to catch them, which is a bit surprising. Maybe they had their nets out. They had these large purse seiners. They don't have much maneuverability when their nets are out. So maybe because of that.

*Q: Well, how did you find the Ecuadorian government dealing with them? I imagine you went up and protested.*

NEGROPONTE: Well, we protested. Ecuadorians are extremely nice. Everything is done in a very courteous way, no one loses their temper on either side. I mean it was all handled in a perfectly civil fashion, but the Ecuadorians were very committed to their legal view. I think they felt they were a little bit in the vanguard on this issue in terms of international law. I think also there was a certain degree of pride on their part feeling they were standing up to the United States. That was their attitude. I always had a perfectly good relationship with them. I enjoyed dealing with their foreign ministry.

Actually you see, this was for me, an opportunity to go move from Vietnam and then the heady thing of the White House and peace talks and summitry and all. It was kind of an interesting opportunity to go back to a more conventional kind of diplomacy. I found I enjoyed it.

*Q: What kind of government did the Ecuadorians have?*



NEGROPONTE: They had a military government. They called it a Dictablanda, sort of a bland dictatorship run by an army general, who had been part of a junta that had overthrown Ecuador's most famous civilian politician. A fellow named Velasco Ibarra who had been elected several times. He was very famous for his statement, "Give me a balcony, and I can win an election." Give me a balcony anywhere in Ecuador and I will win the election.

That is what he did. He kept repeatedly winning elections and he kept repeatedly being overthrown by the Ecuadorian military. So the entire time I was there it was a military government, although it was as I say fairly moderate. I had dealings with civilian politicians. I could invite them to my little apartment and dialogue with them and so forth.

*Q: I interviewed one man whose name I cannot remember right now, but was our ambassador there before your time, and was dealing with an alcoholic president who said something that it was untoward publicly towards the United States, and the man was overthrown.*

NEGROPONTE: Oh really? I don't know who that might have been. The other big issue in Ecuador that gave me some experience I was able to use later on in life was Bob Brewster made me the narcotics coordinator of the embassy. This was the era when cocaine was coming up from Bolivia and Peru, mostly Bolivia in those days, and then getting processed in laboratories in Peru. Then transiting Ecuador or sometimes coming into Ecuador and getting processed in laboratories in Guayaquil and so forth.

So we had a narcotics enforcement issue. We had DEA agents in the embassy in both Quito and in Guayaquil. Of course the DEA at that time was a fairly new agency. To my way of thinking they still act like a new agency, but that is another matter. They were very hands on and always wanted to go on operations with their counterparts. They learned a completely different lesson from the FBI which was learned as a result of being in the field since WWII, that the best way to be an effective law enforcement officer abroad is to deal in liaison and play a liaison role rather than operational role. Well DEA didn't like that. They liked to be kicking down the doors and stuff like that. So we had a relatively inexperienced...

*Q: Were they flying planes at that time?*

NEGROPONTE: They weren't flying planes yet. Not in Ecuador that I remember. They would be flying them later. They had a fairly naive DEA chief in Quito who didn't really know the ground rules for dealing with the media. You know, that happens to a lot of people from agencies that don't have much experience dealing with the press abroad. This fellow while I was there, he was the source of a story. You remember Nicholas Gage, a very good New York Times correspondent. He wrote a book about the murder of his mother during the Greek civil war. A wonderful story, not a novel. It was an extraordinary story.

*Q: They made a movie of it. His mother was bilked by the communist Greeks.*

NEGROPONTE: So anyway Gage did this story on drug enforcement, the narcotics problem in Ecuador. The head of the DEA office in Quito, Walter White, gave him everything on the record. Well Walter was saying, "Well the guy in charge of narcotics enforcement in Ecuador here, Admiral Poveda is a real crook. He is assisted by general so and so who is another crook."

He started talking on the record about all the problems and the corruption that he perceived in the Ecuadorian system. It created a bit of a storm in the relationship. And Admiral Poveda who was in charge of that ended up taking over the government a couple of years later after I had left. So whatever impact this story may have had, it didn't do his political career much harm. He took over the whole thing from General Rodriguez who was running the country while I was there.

Just as an aside, Rodriguez, just to show you what kind of dictatorship they had there. Rodriguez, when he was overthrown by his fellow military, they came and said, you have got to go into retirement, man. We have got to replace you. You know what he did? He said, "That is fine. I am happy to leave, but my daughter is getting married the day after tomorrow. I really promised her that she could get married in the presidential palace. So would you please leave me in power for another three days, so that my daughter can have a palace wedding?" So they obliged him. Anyway that was my experience.

*Q: Was there much political life in the country?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, some, actually. There was a relatively free press, traditional newspapers that had been there for decades. A lot are free today. As I mentioned there were these different politicians that I was able to know and whom I met with quite frequently. But there was no plan during the time I was there to restore democracy. I suspect if a similar situation prevailed today a U.S. ambassador and political section would have been much more active in trying to encourage them back on a democratic path. I don't recall it being a significant feature of our relationship with them at the time. Maybe because we had these other problems.

*Q: What about relations with Colombia and Peru?*

NEGROPONTE: I don't remember much about that. Oh, you mean their relations.

*Q: Yeah.*

NEGROPONTE: Well they have got these disputed areas. They lost a pretty big chunk of their territory to Peru back in the wars in the 40's. They sign their letters on government stationery. You sign your name and then the position you occupy. Then under it, it has the saying, "Ecuador has always been and will continue to be an Amazonic country." Referring to some of the territory they lost.

*Q: I talked to somebody else again whose name escapes me, who talks about a war that took place between Ecuador and Peru.*

NEGROPONTE: You must be talking about Alec Watson, because he went down to mediate it the border country there. It is the most beautiful country I have ever served in during my career. Ecuador, I would say, is the most beautiful country I have ever been in. The volcanoes and everything. Then the other thing was I had a little Volkswagen. You could drive down into the Amazon. You go down the backside of the mountains and you drop precipitously. You go from 9,000 feet in Quito down into the Amazonic region, you are at 2,000 to 3,000 feet above sea level. All of a sudden you see orchids growing out of the tress. It is extraordinary. Beautiful.

*Q: Apparently militarily it is very difficult to get anything going there.*

NEGROPONTE: It is just like Afghanistan. It is that kind of thing.

*Q: People when they have had these border wars...*

NEGROPONTE: I am sure they could defend themselves up there just fine.

*Q: Was there any interest outside of getting the tuna boats back? Did the U.S. government intrude and say you have got to do this or that?*

NEGROPONTE: No. It was a pretty benign period in the relationship. I think mainly because our levels of assistance. We had no military relationship. We didn't have much of a military relationship. We had attachés, but we didn't have a military assistance program. We had a modest aid program, and as I mentioned we had these Peace Corps volunteers. I think you have got to say it is a bit of a backwater in terms of our relationships in Latin America. Just not as prominent as some of the other relationships we had at the time. But there was nothing particularly antagonistic about the relationship either. Even in spite of the tuna boat seizures.

*Q: What did we do? Did the tuna boat people eventually pay up or something?*

NEGROPONTE: No they relinquished their cargo and they were finally let go. But the Ecuadorians held on to them for six months. There was no particular deal with them. They were just allowed to leave.

*Q: Did you get involved more in goings on with the law?*

NEGROPONTE: I went to the opening, up to Caracas. They invited me up to Caracas to attend the Law of the Sea Conference for a few days. So I did get to meet our delegation and know some of the actors up there. I also got invited during that time to a conference of all the hemisphere wide narcotics coordinators. Harry Shlaudeman who I think was then the deputy assistant secretary for Latin America chaired. It gave me a bit of an

exposure to region wide issues. That would have been about it. Narcotics, fisheries, a certain amount of economic activity.

*Q: How about the narcos? Were they pretty strong in Colombia at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: There were no real Ecuadorian narcos. It was all transit. They were really not big actors in this. Ecuador's economics is really, the economics of Ecuador is the banana. Mr. Noboa who is still big, a big family in Ecuador. You could drive from Quito to Guayaquil, which I did a number of times, and about half the time you would be on one of his plantations. It was just absolutely amazing. You get down to the coast, a huge banana plantation. So they were rich in fisheries, rich in bananas.

*Q: Were we the market for the bananas?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes. Maybe Asia.

*Q: Because you get into bananas can be quite a bone of contention with a particular French....*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yeah. I know from my time in Honduras when I was there.

*Q: I understand. I read a book one time about the history of the Panama hat. It is made in Ecuador.*

NEGROPONTE: It is not Panamanian at all. You have got to go to the right village. The better they make them, the better the weave. I am a great hat wearer, and there are some villages where they know how to make the weave so fine that you can take the hat and roll it up and sort of put it in a pencil width box. It is just absolutely extraordinary how they make these hats.

They are very good at that. Handicrafts. There were a number of Peace Corps volunteers who created export businesses sending Ecuadorian handicrafts back to the United States. There is a very famous village in Ecuador which to this day is very famous called Otavalo. It is about an hour from Quito where you have these Otavalo Indians who were very well known traders. They go all over the world selling woolen products from that village. They make these beautiful woolen ponchos. Here still, 35 years later, we still have them at home and use them as blankets and things like that.

*Q: Was there much of an exodus to the United States or was there an Ecuadorian community in the United States?*

NEGROPONTE: Not yet. The big migrations from South America had not yet begun. They were just maybe incipient, but nothing like today. Now it really surprises me to hear how many people come from Ecuador. Back then you would hardly ever run into an Ecuadorian in the States.

*Q: Well we have reached our time limit for today.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah. Where do you want to proceed?

*Q: Where did you go after? I will put at the end here.*

NEGROPONTE: Where did I go after that? I was going to go to Paris. Ken Rush had been deputy secretary of state and then he got sent to Paris as ambassador. I was going to be his executive assistant. Dr. Kissinger heard that I was going to go to Paris. I made the mistake of writing to him that I was going to go to Paris. He called in Larry Eagleburger and asked him to cancel my assignment to Paris because he didn't want me to go anywhere that he might run into me.

*Q: Really? What was the thinking?*

NEGROPONTE: Don't ask me what the thinking was. He was just mad at me over the disagreement over the peace talks. So Eagleburger went back into him and said, "You can't do that. He has got rights and has been assigned to a job like that. He could appeal to the foreign service system. He had been paneled for the job. He has got his orders. The only thing you can do if you don't want John to go to Paris is you can order that the job be abolished." He said, "Abolish the job." So the job was abolished.

Carol Laise, who was Ellsworth Bunker's wife, Director General of the Foreign Service, was actually beside herself. The Bunkers were really good friends of mine. I would say they adopted me almost when I was in Vietnam. She was just frightfully upset. So was Jim Lowenstein who was the deputy assistant secretary who helped me get this job in Paris. So they called me in and said, "would you stay in Ecuador longer?" I said, "No, I have done my two years. I want to go somewhere else."

So they got me a job as consul general in Izmir, Turkey. I thought that was pretty good. I was going to be somebody's-- an ambassador's assistant, instead I am being given a post of my own. It was getting better. Then Mr. Macomber, the ambassador took the time to complain to the department. He said, "Hey you are sending this guy of Greek origin to Turkey, to Izmir. God, what is that, what are you guys trying to do to me?" He was worried. "Even though his name doesn't sound Greek, I know he is of Greek origin." Then the department calls me up wringing their hands saying "Oh god are you going to file a grievance against us if we change your assignment yet again?" How would you like to go to Thessaloniki as Consul General in Greece? I said to myself, this keeps getting better. Sure, I will go to Thessaloniki.

*Q: You were in Thessaloniki from when to when?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I went back and did the same drill again even though I knew kitchen Greek, from my parents and all. They didn't teach me Greek when I was a kid. I knew it because of my grandmother occasionally and stuff like that. I actually went back to Washington in the summer of '75 and I studied Greek for about two or three months.

And came out here, wherever FSI was in Rosslyn. I had a private teacher for two or three months. I went to Thessaloniki, I got there October of '75.

*Q: Just for the record here I want to point out Izmir is also Smyrna and Smyrna is where the great exodus from Anatolia...*

NEGROPONTE: You don't have to tell me, because my family came from Chios.

*Q: No, but I want to point it out for somebody looking.*

NEGROPONTE: I understand. I want to tell those who are looking at the record too, that not only was it Smyrna, but Smyrna was opposite Chios and Chios is the island where my father's family comes from. It is where the Turks carried out a massacre in 1822 which is what caused my family to leave Chios. My ancestors left Chios. In fact they hanged one Negroponte in the village square in Chios.

My family went to Russia from there, which is what began our diaspora. Russia, Switzerland, England, I was born in England and then came here. Yes, Smyrna, Izmir, Chios all mean something to me. I was perfectly relaxed about going to Izmir. I feel very strongly that your national origin shouldn't matter in these things. I was perfectly happy to go to Turkey. Mr. Macomber had his reservations. I don't think today it would make a bit of difference. I don't think a Greek American would bat an eye or flinch at all about this prospect of serving in Turkey. I don't think it is relevant. I had a wonderful story, and maybe he told it to you. Ed Perkins. Have you interviewed Ed?

*Q: I started to and then he disappeared.*

NEGROPONTE: He is back. You should find him. Because he is a wonderful. A black African American in the Foreign Service.

*Q: Director General of the Foreign Service.*

NEGROPONTE: Reagan really did something that was quite extraordinary. He appointed Ed Perkins ambassador to South Africa during the time of apartheid. Imagine going as a black American to a country that has a conscious policy of discriminating against blacks. And an interesting touch, and Ed tells this story with great emotion.

Reagan's touch was he invited him into the library downstairs in the map room of the White House. Reagan was in his riding jodhpurs. It was Saturday and Shultz brought Ed in to meet him. After the interview Reagan personally escorted him to the door and asked him, "Will my appointing you to this job cause you problems with the African American community?" I thought that showed extraordinary sensitivity on the part of Ronald Reagan. Reagan was genuinely worried for Ed.

Ed told him, “Mr. President I signed up for the Foreign Service, and my attitude from the beginning was where the president and secretary want me to go, if you want me to go there, that is what I will do.” It was a very touching story.

*Q: Absolutely.*

*Today is 12 July 2012 with John Negroponte. John we are off to Thessaloniki, the city of the sea or something?*

NEGROPONTE: Thessaloniki was Alexander the Great’s mother.

*Q: Really? I thought her name was Olympia or something.*

NEGROPONTE: No, she was Alexander the Great’s mother. Alexander was born in a town called Pella, which is a number of miles west of Thessaloniki. As you know he was Alexander of Macedon. That is why the Greeks get very excited when other countries call themselves Macedonian, when Alexander the Great was born in what is today Greek territory. Just to bring you right up to date here.

*Q: Ok you were there from when to when?*

NEGROPONTE: I was there from October of ’75 to June of 1977. I did not have a full tour there. I got an appointment in the Carter administration.

*Q: What was the situation in Greece when you got there and the role of Thessaloniki?*

NEGROPONTE: Greece had just emerged from a period of dictatorship by the Greek colonels. It was in a democratic phase. It was actually a very optimistic time in Greek history. The colonels had been overthrown the year before I got there because of the mess they made in Cyprus, you remember. Constantine Karamanlis was the prime minister of Greece. He was a great prime minister. He was probably the greatest political figure that Greece has had in the post war era. So there was democracy. He had a vision of bringing Greece into Europe. So the stars were aligned very nicely for Greece at the time. The U.S. Greece relationship was OK. It was strong.

*Q: Can you describe the responsibilities of the consul general in Thessaloniki?*

NEGROPONTE: Consulate general was a little bit like a listening post. It was not different in some respects from the job I had in Vietnam when I was the acting consul in Hue a couple of times up by the demilitarized zone. Thessaloniki is nestled up in there in Northern Greece near the border of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. We were only a couple of hours from Bulgaria. These were all of course communist countries at the time. So it was a listening post, a reporting post. There was a deputy consul general. He did mostly economic and political reporting. Though I did a lot of it myself. Then there was a vice consul who did a lot of consular work. We could not issue immigrant visas, but we did all the rest, the array of consular work on visitor visas. It was sort of an almost full service

consulate post with minimal staff. I would say our number one priority was political reporting. Two thirds of the Greek army was stationed in northern Greece.

*Q: The third division was up there wasn't it?*

NEGROPONTE: I can't recall if it was the third or the second, but it was the real weight of the Greek army was in northern Greece.

*Q: Keeping an eye on our ally.*

NEGROPONTE: On our own Turkish ally but also on the communists, so that was an important relationship which I nurtured. We had nuclear weapons in Greece at that time. We had tactical nuclear weapons. I visited some of the sites, quite interesting. There was modest commercial interest. There was an annual Thessaloniki fair. I don't know if that continues but that was a fun event that people liked to come to from around the region and the world every September. There was the big Thessaloniki fair. I got the ambassador to come up, things like that. Then there was the tobacco industry.

*Q: Did you include Larissa?*

NEGROPONTE: You know I don't remember exactly where my- I think we had Larissa- I can't remember exactly how far my consular district went. I remember going to Kavala. I went to areas inhabited by Turkish minorities. There were a couple of big Turkish populations there. There was Alexandropolis all the way up by the border. Kavala was a big town. Kavala which is a big tobacco center and lovely place. Then there was Mount Athos which was of no particular political consequence but which is a fabulous group of 20 Greek orthodox monasteries. I spent quite a bit of time there. I went three different times.

*Q: I went on a trip to a resort run by a Father Manardis out of Athens. We went on a Kaykie and stopped and stayed there.*

NEGROPONTE: I wrote kind of the definitive piece on Mount Athos. I had time to do that kind of stuff. I think it would have been a very nice piece for a photo or guide or something. Because I am Greek Orthodox I think had more access than others would have. So I went to Karyes which is the capital of Mount Athos and met with all the senior monks. They got very excited when they learned that I was Greek Orthodox. That meant they let you in on some more of the rituals than they otherwise would. In reality, it meant you got to get up earlier in the morning like about 3:30 to go and pray.

*Q: Then you got to eat lentils.*

NEGROPONTE: Lentils, olives. Some of the scenes were positively eerie. At 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning at one of these refectories in a monastery there is practically no light, these tiny little candles. You can't talk. All you can hear is one monk standing up at the head with a lectern reading the scriptures while the rest of us were having breakfast. I



always thought it was an intriguing place from the point of view of an outdoorsman. The nicest part was hiking from one monastery to the next. But there are 20 of them on this promontory, and they are each several miles apart from each other. Sometimes even five to seven miles apart and you can get some really nice hikes.

*Q: I recall going up to one place and it was evening and we got up. The door within the door opened up and a little monk with beard and all holding a lantern, could have been out of the middle ages.*

NEGROPONTE: You were just showing up at the front door, and they let you in.

*Q: He looked at us and said, "Any of you guys from Chicago?"*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, you meet foreign monks, or Greek Americans. Anyway, it was a pretty eventless time. There was no governmental change. The New Democracy Party was in charge. Papandreou senior, or the middle Papandreou Andreas, the one who has died. He was running the PASOK (Socialist), the party at that time. But the socialists were not strong in my time. He came up and spoke once or twice and tried to arouse a crowd in Thessaloniki but didn't have much success.

The big thing that happened now that I think about it in Thessaloniki during my time was that Richard Welch, the station chief, was assassinated in Athens on Christmas Eve of 1975, literally a month and a half after I arrived. It was the November 17 group. That put the fear of God into everybody. Claire George was the deputy station chief who later became head of operations over at the CIA. I got to be pretty good friends with him. Welch who I had barely met, was assassinated Christmas eve. I had been away on holiday in Switzerland. I think I mentioned a couple of times my parents had a place in Switzerland to go skiing. I was away for the Christmas holiday with my family.

When I came back, my driver Kyriako met me at the Thessaloniki airport. I noticed there was a black car behind me with four guys with dark coats. I said, "Who is that?" Kyriako answered that it was, "The Boys." It was the Greek police, who then accompanied me wherever I went for the remainder of my tour because of this assassination. I never served abroad again without protection, without security.

*Q: Well, if somebody looking at this the first time, could you describe why this November 17 group assassinated the station chief and was a potential threat to you and all?*

NEGROPONTE: We never felt in Thessaloniki that the threat was particularly palpable. It was just part of a general policy to provide us with protection. I think we knew precious little about the November group then, and I am not sure we have ever known very much about it. It was anti-American, anti-NATO. It was very violent. When it did act it picked people out and assassinated them, maybe a dozen or so people over a period of 20 or 30 years. I mean it is not hundreds. It is more in the tens than it is in the hundreds.

*Q: I mean, these are very specifically picked people.*

NEGROPONTE: Correct. They killed the British military attaché, and they killed Richard Welch and several others. We never really knew that much about it. Fast forward when I was ambassador to the UN and visited Greece on business and then visited my brother on Patmos on the islands, because I was ambassador to the UN, Ambassador Miller insisted that I have a very heavy security, even moved armored cars to Patmos and stuff like that, which I thought was a little bit more than I would have done.

They had the port authority people with orange outboards circulating around the port looking. We all sort of chuckled to ourselves. Then it turned out the head of this November 17, and finally he was caught just a few years ago came from the island that was in eyesight of my brother's house in Patmos. It was the most ironic thing. I mean you could see Lipsi, it is called. This guy he was kind of a disaffected mathematician who ran the November 17 group. He got captured. I don't know where he is now.

*Q: How was the Turkish minority treated? I mean you had Turks up there. It was quite an issue obviously on Cyprus. I was wondering.*

NEGROPONTE: Well, there must have been about 50,000 of them in northern Greece. One of the things we did, my deputy went there once a year, maybe twice basically to show interest on the part of the United States. It was a way of showing interest in the human rights treatment of these people. The Greeks liked to showcase the treatment of these people. They thought they were treating them reasonably well. They let them have their mosques and let them have their language and didn't interfere with all of that. Greeks would argue or tell you they treated the Turkish minority better than the Turks had treated them in Turkey. It wasn't a major issue; it was just something we kept an eye on.

*Q: What was your impression of the leadership of the Greek Orthodox Church? I left there in '70 to '74.*

NEGROPONTE: You were there just before I got there.

*Q: And it was high colonel time.*

NEGROPONTE: Who replaced you as consul general then?

*Q: I don't remember.*

NEGROPONTE: Ed Brennan was the consul general in Thessaloniki at the time, and I replaced him.

*Q: I was wondering it seemed like the Orthodox Church, the bishops up there didn't like men and women swimming in the same lake at one point.*

NEGROPONTE: I mean it is an old fashioned church and of course on Mt. Athos no women are allowed. I have always been struck with the difference between the Eastern and Western Christian churches. I guess probably the person who has written most about that is Sam Huntington actually in his book "The Clash of Civilizations." Then and now I have been struck by the fact that you have these national orthodox churches and you have this close affinity between the church hierarchy and the government. The government doesn't do anything without having an orthodox priest there to bless whatever it is that is happening. But I didn't get the sense of a particularly proactive. I got the sense of a fairly laid back, almost complacent clergy.

*Q: Well for one thing they had pretty good control. They didn't allow conversions. They didn't allow people to come in and proselytize.*

NEGROPONTE: I think they used their position of privilege vis-à-vis the government to protect the faith. I think the Greek church sees itself as sort of an embodiment of Greek nationhood. Even the Greeks in Greece who are not particularly pious, they are able to acknowledge that because of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Greek language and some of the Greek practices were preserved during 400 years of Ottoman rule. It was the church that really preserved the language. At least that is my understanding.

*Q: I noticed the Greek orthodox whom I had been associated with in the Foreign Service and doing these interviews and all, a significant number tended to have Greek orthodox wives.*

NEGROPONTE: Well the Greek orthodox in the U.S. are probably more devout than the Greeks in Greece. Again one of the reasons was the parents, the immigrants here sent their children to Greek classes and Sunday school, and it wasn't only to learn the religion, but it was to learn the language. So that very often if you are not particularly devout or particularly active in the Greek Orthodox Church, there are Greek Americans who will look at you and say you are not really a Greek American. There is a little bit of an attitude; I remember when I first met Paul Sarbanes, a fellow Greek American.

*Q: The senator from Maryland.*

NEGROPONTE: Right. I remember when he first met me he knew that I was Greek American. The first question he asked me was, "What church did you go to in New York?" For him that was part of the definition of being Greek American. I must confess I didn't go.

*Q: Did you find the Cyprus issue sort of bubbled up all the time?*

NEGROPONTE: You know, frankly I don't recall that as being particularly an acute question. At the time. I think the Cyprus issue at that point in time is basically credited with having enabled the demise of the colonels. That is what people were really focused on.

*Q: And we cut off arms sales to them.*

NEGROPONTE: The second thing was it was a rallying point for the Greek American community against Turkey. We had cut off certain kinds of military assistance to Turkey. At that time the Cyprus issue was still a factor that I would say generated a supportive attitude in the United States towards Greece, and promoted a sort of antagonism towards Turkey, which is slowly, as you know, all but worn off if it exists today at all. You are now almost 40 years later.

*Q: Did you find the Greek American community visitors a pain in the neck or a bit of a problem for you?*

NEGROPONTE: No, not really. Don't forget Thessaloniki is a bit off the beaten path. We didn't get many high level visitors. We did get some. I don't know if you remember Earl Butz, the Secretary of Agriculture. He came. We had Senator Mathias. I was commenting on that to his son who I know here in town who came with him on that trip when Senator Mathias came through. Relatively speaking we had very few people. Of course don't forget I guess the Greeks must have had some hesitation about the U.S. After all they associated us with the colonels in their mind.

*Q: We were pretty close.*

NEGROPONTE: We didn't do enough to hold them in check. Then, of course, we were unable to prevent the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, which the Greeks kind of blame us and the Brits for.

*Q: Of course, actually the Greeks instigated the damn thing.*

NEGROPONTE: The intelligentsia understood that. That Archbishop Makarios and others had provoked a lot of this. But let's not forget that at that time there was still a certain amount of migration from Greece to the United States. The memories of the civil war and the very positive role the United States had played in saving the Truman doctrine and those things. They were still fresh in people's memory. You had a lot of people who had known our government officials during the civil war, including the CIA.

*Q: There was General Van Fleet, and basically our military aid program.*

NEGROPONTE: Look, I always felt America was very popular in Greece. If you will, the silent majority viewed the United States very positively. But you had this really vocal minority, and I mean they were vocal, who hated NATO and who annually on November 17, would demonstrate in front of the consulate. The Consulate was on a pretty narrow street right there on the waterfront. They would pack in thousands of people and angrily march past the consulate. I mean there would times I would stand out on the balcony and these people would angrily wave their fists at me. But that is this vocal minority I think that still exists in Greece. There is an extremist fringe in Greece on both ends of the spectrum.

*Q: When I was in Belgrade my wife and I came down to Thessaloniki. We wanted to go to Thassos.*

NEGROPONTE: The Big Island. They discovered oil there.

*Q: We came in kind of late and so we had a real problem trying to find a hotel somewhere. Finally we got some place call the Black Cat or something. We may have been the only married couple to overnight in that particular hotel.*

NEGROPONTE: And this was on Thassos Island?

*Q: No, in Thessaloniki.*

NEGROPONTE: Okay. Thassos is very beautiful. Now the other thing that happened then and is a point of reference for today is Bulgarians never came down. They couldn't get out of their country. We could go up. We were sort of an R&R post for people serving in the Balkans. Our embassy in Sofia, people came down all the time, if only to buy fresh vegetables. You couldn't get anything fresh in Bulgaria.

*Q: You know it is remarkable, it is a lush country.*

NEGROPONTE: It is.

*Q: They produce beautiful fruit and sold it all I guess to Russia.*

NEGROPONTE: I don't know what happened to it, or it got smuggled out or whatever. But Thessaloniki had beautiful markets, so people came down to do that. You had busloads of Yugoslavs coming in every weekend. I recall these people coming in, and they looked pretty well dressed, and they obviously had money to spend. I sometimes asked myself whether they thought they were better off then than they are now. I mean economically. These people came from Skopje.

*Q: Did you get any of that backlash that we are still getting today about Macedonia and the name Macedonian, the so called Macedonian language? Was that an issue?*

NEGROPONTE: It has been an issue for years. Maybe not as acute as it is today, and of course my tour there predated the breakup of Yugoslavia, but there were various Macedonian nationalist movements at the turn of the previous century.

*Q: Yeah, really nasty, this was the number of initials, but it was considered the most vicious assassination group running around in the Atticus era.*

NEGROPONTE: But again, the main thing was political reporting. It was a positive period in Greek American relationships. Things were on the uptick. The highest level visitor who came out, and I think President Ford sent him out to show interest was Clark

Clifford. I remember Jack Kubisch who was our ambassador, invited us down for a dinner that he gave for Clark Clifford. But that was a gesture to show respect for, an interest in Greece. But it was you know after all the Ford administration was in itself kind of an interim administration. The last year I was there it was an election campaign back home, so Washington wasn't able to give Greece that much attention.

*Q: Did you find this yourself, your Greek roots being stirred or not?*

NEGROPONTE: Well yeah. I mean I took Greek lessons every day. I had one hour a day reading the newspapers. Certainly the Thessaloniki community welcomed the fact that a Greek American was in the post. The sort of typical reaction was well we have one of ours running the consulate general. Which as you know has its advantages and disadvantages.

*Q: Very much so.*

NEGROPONTE: There are expectations that you might be able to do favors for them and stuff that you can't do.

*Q: Was there much of a power elite within Thessaloniki?*

NEGROPONTE: It was commercial. As I mentioned it was tobacco based. That was a big industry. There was some industry around the port. There was a company that used to be called Ethyl that was based there. And some industry, heavy industry in the immediate Thessaloniki area.

*Q: Did the Navy put in there?*

NEGROPONTE: You know, I am not sure. I don't think I remember. I just don't remember a U.S. Navy ship coming through. Certainly it would be no problem with that, but I just can't remember. A beautiful harbor by the way, at Thessaloniki. You know Thessaloniki became more important in the Balkan wars again with the breakup of Yugoslavia. It was kind of an entry point.

*Q: The transit became a challenge because of the Macedonian situation.*

NEGROPONTE: But Thessaloniki was also fairly critical during WWI.

*Q: The gardeners of Salonika. There was a Salonika front.*

NEGROPONTE: I have some portrait paintings that were done during that period. WWI, a couple of interesting paintings and it shows images of foreign soldiers of every nationality parading through Thessaloniki. It is pretty interesting. Ataturk was born there by the way.

*Q: I didn't realize that.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, his house is a museum.

*Q: Well then after that you left a little bit early didn't you?*

NEGROPONTE: I left early for a couple of reasons. I got married.

*Q: Had you been married before?*

NEGROPONTE: No. I got married in December of '76.

*Q: What was the background of your wife?*

NEGROPONTE: I married a foreigner. She was British. She was a niece of the British Ambassador to Saigon, so I actually met her initially in Saigon back in 1967. I didn't see her for a number of years. Then we met up again in the summer of '76 in August and we got married in December. She was a graduate of the London School of Economics and had done the British Peace Corps or VSO work in Uganda. She was working at the time we were married for the Conservative party in their research office or something like that. Her father at that time was the head of the British Steel Corporation, Charles Villers of British Steel So we got married in England. So we were anxious to go back home. She had never lived in the States. Carter won the election, so my buddies back in Washington sort of wanted to get me out of exile. Don't forget how we got here to Thessaloniki.

*Q: I was going to say, did you feel that you were on the Secretary of State's black list?*

NEGROPONTE: I was.

*Q: I find this just incredible.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah I was in exile. I guess the consolation is that in Foreign Service terms, I was given a perfectly good job.

*Q: It wasn't a lock shot or something.*

NEGROPONTE: No. I got a promotion during the time I was in Thessaloniki. I became a senior officer while I was in Thessaloniki. Then Bob Brewster, enter again Bob Brewster who had been ambassador in Ecuador and was now the senior deputy assistant secretary of this newly formed Bureau of Oceans and Environmental and Scientific Affairs. He was working for a very nice lady, a former Congresswoman from Hawaii called Patsy Mink. Roz Ridgeway, Rozanne Ridgeway was leaving the position of being Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Fisheries with the rank of ambassador. Bob Brewster told Patsy Mink, I have just the man for you. He handled the fishing crisis with Ecuador and he can be your deputy for fisheries.

I got called back to Washington for an interview. I met Patsy Mink, and the department put my name up for that job. It was a presidential appointment in the sense that it was the deputy assistant secretary with the rank of ambassador because of the fishing constituency in the United States wanted to have clout. They wanted to demonstrate the importance of fisheries negotiations. The ambassadorial title helped in that regard, and it had been an ambassadorial appointment for 20 or 30 years.

*Q: Well when you think about it, Daniel Webster and Benjamin Franklin and everybody in our State Department through our history got involved with fishing negotiations.*

NEGROPONTE: It was a very opportune moment for a number of reasons. It actually created a link between me and oceans policy and law of the sea that lasts to this day. I was just testifying on behalf of the law of the sea the other day before Senator Kerry. It was very propitious when it was right at the time in '77 when Warren Magnusson had pushed through the Magnusson Act, which extended our resource jurisdiction out to 200 miles. So we had to renegotiate all of our fishing arrangements throughout the world.

You may remember in those days our coastal waters were so abundant in fish and our interest in catching those fish on a commercial scale was quite small. So we were licensing or letting foreign fishermen, Russians, Poles, all these big factory ships come in close to Cape Cod and all these different places and harvest our fish. Actually one of the things that created political pressure to expand to 200 miles was the fact that these countries had started to over-fish these stocks, herring etc.

So we had to renegotiate now that we had gone out to 200 mile jurisdiction, we had to renegotiate our arrangements with all these countries. They were called governing international fisheries agreements, GIFAs. We invent wonderful acronyms. Roz had already negotiated a whole bunch of them. But there still were other ones to negotiate. That is what I came back to

*Q: What was your impression of Patsy Mink?*

NEGROPONTE: She was a very nice lady, highly intelligent, but a little bit like congress people that I have known before and since in the sense that sometimes they don't appreciate how different the executive and legislative branches are. So I don't think she ever got into the swing of it. She was reported in her job as assistant secretary to the Undersecretary for Security Assistance T, in the department, Lucy Wilson Benson. The two didn't get along. So, Patsy ended up leaving after about a year in the job. So she didn't stay in that position very long. Then Tom Pickering came to run the bureau.

*Q: Did you find a lineup of all the various countries willing to negotiate?*

NEGROPONTE: Well they had no choice really. Since we extended our jurisdiction out to 200, if they wanted to be able to fish, they had to come to terms with us. Our leverage was huge. The more challenging negotiations ended up being about fisheries that took



place beyond 200 miles, or in other countries' exclusive economic zones. Sometimes we are the demander, right. We want access.

The biggest negotiation I had which never really prospered was about tuna. I think I mentioned yesterday that tuna is a highly migratory species. It spawns in the middle of the ocean and these tuna fleets go chasing after tuna wherever it occurs. So with an extension of jurisdiction out to 200 miles, most countries did not recognize this little distinction we made, "oh you don't have jurisdiction over tuna because it is a highly migratory species," which was a self-serving definition. They said, "No it is ours just like all other fish are."

We had a huge negotiation to try and do a treaty about access to the tuna fisheries in the entire eastern tropical Pacific from Mexico all the way down to Chile. It was a big multilateral negotiation, but we simply couldn't, the negotiation never succeeded because we were trying to divvy up the catch between the distant water fisherman and the coastal states. We were always asking for too large of a share of the catch. But I put in a huge amount of effort into that and ended up spending a lot of time in Mexico, in Costa Rica and Panama.

Our key negotiations were with Mexico. They were driving the coastal states' position. I got to deal with some very interesting people. The late Jorge Castaneda Sr. who was foreign minister for a while. He was at that time the chief law of the sea negotiator. He was Elliot Richardson's counterpart when Elliot had that portfolio. His son subsequently became Vincente Fox's foreign minister and still writes. Jorge Castaneda the son teaches at Princeton or someplace. So it was a beginning for me of an acquaintance with some very important Mexican officials.

*Q: What about Canada?*

NEGROPONTE: That was the other big thing.

*Q: I was thinking that is one with historic...*

NEGROPONTE: We had a lot of negotiations with Canada, and we had a lot of differences. We had differences of various kinds. We had maritime boundaries. We had a dispute over the jurisdiction over the Gulf of Maine. In the Gulf, when you go out to 200 miles, there are overlapping claims. We had issues out on the west coast as well. There we had disputes over salmon because when you have these shared rivers like the Fraser River and others, how do you divvy up the stock? How do you agree on management and conservation measures?

President Carter decided on the Maine issue, the Georges Bank as it is called, to pick a special negotiator. That was Lloyd Cutler, who later became White House counsel. So Lloyd was our special envoy for that and I basically, in my job as deputy assistant secretary, supported him in that work. But I did quite a bit with him, and he delegated a number of negotiations to me.

*Q: Well on this was there a strong technical side or was it just a matter of nations mind and personalities that drove the negotiations?*

NEGROPONTE: Well there were two areas where there were technical knowledge made a difference. You can't negotiate a fisheries agreement without knowing the biology of a fish. You have to learn it. I mean making an agreement about salmon is completely different from making an agreement about tuna. There is just no way around it. You have got to know where these fish spawn, where they migrate to.

I had a huge negotiation about Alaskan salmon. They were emigrating out into the Pacific Ocean and then these Japanese mother ships, big factory ships were scooping them up right in the middle of their migratory cycle so the stocks were getting depleted. Not that many were coming back again to their native river to spawn. Our strategy was to push the Japanese mother ships further and further west so they would impinge less and less on these stocks.

We had gotten an agreement some 20 years earlier to get the Japanese to agree that they wouldn't fish east of 180 degrees longitude. But that turned out not to be enough. So I managed to push the line ten degrees further west, a so-called abstention line. But to be able to do those things you would have fishery scientists to point out to you "look, it is usually about July, right about now, these salmon come out to their extreme western point in their migratory pattern before turning around and going back to Bristol Bay Alaska. There is no doubt who owns that salmon. They come from the river in Alaska where they were born. And they always go back to that same river as you know. Salmon never go back to another river. They always go back to the river in which they were born."

So it was just unfair for the Japanese to be clobbering these stocks up there and depriving the population of Alaska of the benefits. I managed to get these negotiations and get the Japanese to move further west because we had a lot of leverage. The leverage was that at the same time they wanted access to our costal stocks that I was talking about earlier. So implicit in this negotiation was the threat that if you don't cooperate on conservation of salmon your allocation to catch our costal stocks would go down.

So they settled. It was a boon to the Alaskan salmon industry. You can still eat fresh Alaskan salmon because of that negotiation. I became a bit of a hero to the Alaskan fishing community because I had driven such a hard bargain. It is kind of interesting. The other technical thing you need when you are negotiating maritime boundaries, it involves a lot of work with the geographer's office.

*Q: I was going to say the headlands and all.*

NEGROPONTE: They are big partners in this with their sextants and drawing charts and drawing baselines and deciding where you draw your baselines.

*Q: Did you find their base lines were baselines? Each country...*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, you have a rock out there and you say, “I am going to draw my line from there.” The other country says “no, you can’t do that. There are no inhabitants; there is no nothing.” That is the kind of thing people argue about. Our claims in the Georges Bank overlapped as a result. We would say, “that lighthouse there, we put it there in 1850. There used to be a colony of people in such and such a place, so we are justified in drawing a line from there.” Well Lloyd and the Canadians negotiated some kind of a deal, but ultimately we couldn’t sell it internally so we ended up sending it to arbitration. But we made the effort to settle it by negotiation. It was then sent to international arbitration. The international court of justice eventually handed down a ruling.

*Q: Where did the fishermen in America show how was their clout manifested?*

NEGROPONTE: Like farmers, fishermen are a very vocal constituency. They have political influence well beyond their numbers. They had congressional advocates who were very strong. Ted Stevens, I mean I have worked hand in glove with him on fisheries.

*Q: He was the senator from Alaska.*

NEGROPONTE: So on this whole issue I was telling about earlier the Japanese salmon fishing, he practically, I mean he was the person I consulted with in the Senate. I didn’t go to anyone on the foreign relations committee. I went to Ted. He was on the Senate Commerce Committee who oversaw fisheries questions. Gerry Studds from Massachusetts. People like him, very strong. I forget which fishing area he represented. Very strong. The people from Florida because we had issues with some of the Caribbean countries. Spiny lobster for example, and jurisdiction over things like that. There are a lot of amusing issues. Texas. You wouldn’t think of Texas as a big fisheries state, but they have huge shrimp production.

*Q: Vietnamese Americans, were they involved at that time?*

NEGROPONTE: Not yet. Barely.

*Q: That was coming later.*

NEGROPONTE: But yes there were some very vocal congress people. Louisiana’s John Groh was very strong on this. So we had I would say a couple of dozen congressmen and senators who took a very strong interest in fisheries. It was my first real exposure to congressional testimony. Californians, quite a few Californians, the whole tuna industry which was still then, which as you know now is depleted, decimated, moved out to the western Pacific. They are in Samoa and places like that. But at that time the tuna fleet and the tuna canneries were all in San Diego. We negotiated a lot in San Diego.

*Q: I interviewed Roz Ridgeway and she said, “No matter what happened I kept getting called back into fish.”*

NEGROPONTE: She had the same thing because she was the Ecuador desk officer. Then she went into that job. I succeeded her later. We worked on very much the same problems. "Tuna boat Roz," as Senator Pell called her. Well Pell was from a fishing state. He was from Rhode Island. He had a couple of fishermen whom he trusted a lot. What he asked of me was to please spend time with them. Please attend to my constituents.

*Q: And he was a sailor in the Coast Guard.*

NEGROPONTE: That is right.

*Q: Well did you find you got fairly good support from the various American embassies?*

NEGROPONTE: We got good support from the embassies that understood these issues. There were a couple of posts where we had fisheries attachés, like in Mexico and Canada. We had fisheries attachés. By the way there was a very big development, I mean big in our little world there at the time. It was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty.

One of the hidden little secrets of our bureau was we basically administered the Antarctic. Our bureau was the one to whom the responsibilities under the Antarctic Treaty were delegated. You know Antarctica is a jurisdiction-less place. The only rules that are set about Antarctica that we recognize anyway are ones that are done through the Antarctic convention and then the regulations that derive from that. So we had a big involvement in Antarctica. We wrote the regulations governing American activities in Antarctica.

We had the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and we hosted it in Washington in 1978. That happened on my watch. We even negotiated a big Antarctic fisheries treaty. It was called The Convention on Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CAMELAR). It set some environmental and other guidelines for conservation and other management of Antarctic krill, which are the tiny little shrimp-like animals that are the basic feedstock for whales and various marine mammals. So I got to go to Antarctica in my time working at the OES bureau.

*Q: What about whales?*

NEGROPONTE: That was a big issue, a huge issue. The issue was the International Whaling Convention and whether we would ban totally the fishing of whales or not. There was the usual lineup of countries, those that advocated to continue to allow some whaling. We were always conflicted. We had our environmental movement pushing very hard to completely ban whaling. We had the Eskimos in Alaska demanding an allocation for a native catch because they wished to preserve their native culture and be allowed to kill a limited number of Bowhead whales. We had big fights about that internally. Somebody in NOAA, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which was one of the organizations I dealt with on a daily basis, said we have to send Warren Christopher up to Alaska to negotiate with the Eskimos. He was then the deputy secretary

of state. I didn't think the deputy secretary was going to go to Point Barrow, Alaska to negotiate with the Eskimos. But that would give you an example of how strongly people felt about these issues.

*Q: No, I mean you were in the middle of a real cockfight.*

NEGROPONTE: It was very interesting, and I did that for 2 ½ years. Senator Warren Magnuson had held me up at the beginning for confirmation of my ambassadorship. I was in the job because it was an executive appointment to be deputy. But I didn't get the ambassadorial title for about six months.

*Q: Why was that?*

NEGROPONTE: He was mad. I walked into see him when I first interviewed. He was in a wheelchair. And he didn't even invite me to sit down. I just stood there like a schoolboy in front of him. He said, "What do you know about fish?"

I said, "Well I have been in Ecuador where we had the tuna dispute, but I don't know much about fish themselves. But I know quite a bit about fisheries policy." I related my Ecuador experience to him.

He said, "Ah, you know, Kissinger promised me he would put somebody who knew something about fish in the law of the sea and now we have got Elliot Richardson." He was all grouching about that. "You don't know anything about fish." He lit up his cigar and looked at me and said, "Well it was nice meeting you anyway." So I turned around and left.

So that was in about July in '77 and I don't think I got confirmed as ambassador title until about October. He held out. He stipulated various conditions, that I agreed to do the job for so many years and so and so, and such and such. We ended up getting along just fine. He was cranky but he was very respected. I respected him quite a bit, and enjoyed working with his staff. I didn't see him very much. But 2 ½ years went by. That was '77 to '79.

Barely 2 ½ years, and Bob Oakley had been deputy assistant secretary for East Asia under Dick Holbrooke. Holbrooke had been my roommate in Saigon. We talked about that earlier about forming the delegation to the Paris talks. He said, "Gee, I would really like to get you to be my deputy for Southeast Asia." So I felt a bit badly vis-à-vis my promise to Magnuson because he had asked that I stay for four years. I was signed up, but I pulled that out and took this new job.

Magnuson at that point was very chagrined that I was leaving. He said, "Oh why can't I keep the guy?" because he had gotten used to me. So I felt a bit badly, but I had an exciting opportunity and going back to Southeast Asia after all the work I had done on Vietnam and stuff. It was a very exciting time in Southeast Asia.

*Q: This was dealing with Southeast Asia from when to when?*

NEGROPONTE: So I go back to the East Asia and Pacific bureau from Oceans and Environmental Science at the end of December, 1979. So basically on New Year's Day I started my new job, New Year's, 1980 as the DAS, the deputy assistant secretary for Southeast Asia. I remember it was New Years because I launched from England. I had gone and spent Christmas with my in-laws. On January first I took a flight from London to Thailand. I started out by taking a tour of the Parish.

*Q: Did you have a particular part of Asia?*

NEGROPONTE: I covered what is today the ASEAN group of countries. It was then ASEAN plus Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma. Now those countries have all joined ASEAN. I had that patch really, what is today's ASEAN. It is about ten countries. I did that job from January 1980 until I went to Honduras in late 1981. So I did it for almost two years, about a year and a half.

The main areas of interest at the time were the boat people and the refugee crises. There had been the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia about a year earlier, so there were a lot of refugees in Thailand and on the Thai-Cambodian border. There was the issue of getting refugees in from Southeast Asia into the United States. That was the era when we were fighting to get a regular allocation of refugee numbers. So that was a big issue. Holbrooke had me up there on the Hill battling away.

We got to a point where we were actually succeeding in getting an allocation of 12,000 refugee numbers a month for people from Southeast Asia. It was huge. We were getting 144,000 refugees a year admitted to the United States. Holbrooke, you know how determined Dick was. He told you, "You go up there. If you come back with less than 144,000 I don't know what I am going to do to you." He was a very determined fellow. So we worked on that.

*Q: Well let's take that. How do you work in that? We ask for a number?*

NEGROPONTE: Well there was a whole refugee apparatus that was created in the Department. The response to the outflow of boat people, which began before I got there, was to create a special office, S/R. There was a fellow called Victor Palmieri and his deputy was Frank Loy. Frank Loy ended up being a figure in the Department for quite a while after. People like Shep Lowman, whom I brought....

*Q: Shep Lowman was in the refugee business from the beginning. I ran across him when I was in Yugoslavia back in the early 60's.*

NEGROPONTE: There we go. So with all those people we formed these offices. We got a lot of funding from Congress to resettle these people. As you know, every refugee admission actually in those days, I don't know if it is still true, had a pretty high price tag to it. It wasn't only that you paid the International Organization for Migration to get these

people from wherever they were to the United States, but then HHS got money to help resettle these people and fund their initial residence with a sponsoring family and covering certain kinds of expenses, to facilitate settlement in America.

So my main job at that time was mainly working with the Congressional committees. It was Senator Kennedy's committee. It was one of the subcommittees of the judiciary because they handled all of the immigration issues. I don't remember who was on the house side.

Another big issues was the Philippines. Marcos was president. It was getting worse. Well there were two things. One was battling to get the resources to have to compensate them for our access to the bases. Just like the 144,000, I was fighting to get whatever it was, \$400 million a year as payment for the bases, and I went to see people like Lee Hamilton. Nobody liked it because they had a distaste for Marcos, but at the same time they understood the strategic interest we had in access to the Philippines. So I worked hard on that. The other thing was that we were very concerned about Aquino, who was the leading oppositionist in the country. Dick and others picked up that his life might be in danger.

*Q: He was at Harvard at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: No, he was in the Philippines. We got him into Harvard. That was one of our projects. Not me personally but Dick working with others got him a fellowship at Harvard. One of my tasks at that time was to go visit Ninoy at Harvard. We had a delightful conversation. I visited him, met his wife too, Cory. They were living in an apartment in Cambridge. I mentioned that a few weeks ago. We launched a Philippine society and I am the co-chairman. The now president Aquino, the son, Noynoy, I probably met him there because he was a young man living with his parents or maybe he was at school that day. But yes, we got him into Harvard to protect him. I went and visited all of these countries except Vietnam and Cambodia. We didn't have relations with Vietnam yet. The relationship with Vietnam was still antagonistic.

*Q: While you were there, what about the sort of difficult area of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and let's say Burma too. Did we see any opportunity or hope there?*

NEGROPONTE: Well at that particular time we couldn't go to Vietnam. That was off limits. We didn't have any relations. We had occasional meetings with the Vietnamese UN delegation in New York about residual issues, POW-MIA, which was a very big issue. In the U.S. there was a whole POW-MIA movement. They would have vigils in front of the White House keeping that issue alive. We were always complaining to the Vietnamese about the inadequacy of the accounting. There was a big incident during my time on that job where some Chinese mortician in Vietnam revealed that the Vietnamese had deliberately failed to account for some 400 MIA's. They had obfuscated the issues and it was a scandal.

We could go to Laos. We still had relations with Laos. We had a chargé in Laos. I went there and visited Laos during that time. There wasn't much going on in Laos.

Cambodia was absolutely denied territory because that was when Pol Pot was running the country. The Cambodian issue we were dealing with was this mass of people who left the center of the country and were not in organized UN camps but milling around on the Cambodian side of the border between Thailand and Cambodia. I went there with Mort Abramowitz several times. It was a pretty hairy situation.

*Q: People were drifting over both sides?*

NEGROPONTE: That's right. The Thais were doing a pretty good job actually trying to care for some of these people, but they were reluctant to take half a million Cambodians entirely into their country. They preferred to allow a little bit of ambiguity. It was a time where we had pretty good relations with Thailand.

Burma, Burma was ok then. I visited Burma. Pat Byrne was ambassador then. We had relations at the ambassadorial level. I called on the foreign minister. I remember it was a quaint place. It was a little bit like as you know a time warp. It is like visiting Havana, Cuba. You see 1947 Chevrolets driving around. Everything is like here but three decades back. But obviously a wealthy country. The Burmese are a nice, engaging people. The difficulties that they have today sound to me not much different from what they had then. They have these different ethnic groups and they never have been really able to sort out the differences between them peacefully. That is a big political issue.

*Q: Today it is on the front burner more or less.*

NEGROPONTE: Then the other big issue was narcotics. There was narcotics trafficking from remote areas in China and up in that golden triangle, China, Thailand, and Burma. I didn't spend much time working on Burma but you could go there. It was not a denied area at that time.

*Q: China, that was Holbrooke's area before.*

NEGROPONTE: It was Mike Armacost's. Mike was Holbrooke's deputy for Northeast Asia. Although I did go on a CODEL to China. I went with Jonathan Bingham of New York who led a big CODEL to China. Charlie Vanik of Jackson Vanik fame. Various others. There was a big group of people, with about 13 congressmen. We went to Shanghai and Beijing. We met with the prime minister or a deputy prime minister. I don't remember which. I got a chance and I was really struck because I had gone with Henry in 1972, and here we are 1980, eight years later. In '72 when I went with Henry they showed us a revolutionary opera to introduce us to Chinese culture.

*Q: The East is Red or something like that.*



NEGROPONTE: It was one of these things about uncovering hidden class enemies in a village. And they found a Taiwanese spy. The funny part about it, they were all clapping and we were all clapping. It is all really anti-American propaganda. Zhou Enlai was able to show that these Americans are even clapping for revolutionary opera.

In '80 when I went they showed us a Western concert. They had a pianist and a violinist dressed in Western clothing playing Chopin or Brahms, I forget what. But it was to me very symptomatic of what had happened in those intervening eight years. It was the beginning of the process of modernization. Of course I didn't know as much about it as I do now. Of course 1980 is two years after the big reform effort in China was launched with Deng Xiaoping.

*Q: Were we monitoring at all, or at least observing, the education of so many people in the Chinese leadership cadre are coming to the United States going to the top schools?*

NEGROPONTE: You know, I don't recall how much of that had already happened. It certainly must have started by then. How much of that had happened by then I certainly don't recall, but we had established relations. Leonard Woodcock was the ambassador, and I remember visiting with him. The fellow from the United Auto Workers. He was a very nice gentleman. I believe he may have been our first ambassador, as opposed to being just head of the office.

*Q: Yeah it gets a little tricky there.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, because we established relations with China just before I joined the Bureau.

*Q: All during this time you moved over to the East Asia Bureau, were you keeping contact with Congress? I am talking as a working Foreign Service Officer? Can you sort of keep up relations with a few friends? Because it is so important to...*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, and there was definitely a constituency in Congress that really cared about East Asia. Right at the moment I can remember more the House members rather than the Senators who really cared. But certainly Lee Hamilton cared, and probably Steve Solarz cared more than anybody else. He was chairman of the East Asia subcommittee. Senator John Glenn cared a lot.

What was interesting, Dick had a very nice tradition that he actually got the congress people to go along with which was about once every several weeks he would invite one of them for coffee and donuts at our senior staff meeting of East Asia Pacific region and so we would meet at 8:00 in the morning and we would have John Glenn there having coffee and donuts with us and talking to all the office directors and deputy assistant secretaries. You know Dick. He was extremely effective in political relationships. When Diana and I gave a dinner party for Dick at the end of the Carter administration I remember that John Glenn attended.

*Q: How did you find working for him?*

NEGROPONTE: I enjoyed it a great deal. First of all he was a genuine personal friend. Secondly we had known each other since literally the first couple of days I got to Saigon in May of '64. We had been roommates for almost a year in Saigon. Dick was extremely demanding. He was the most demanding boss I have ever known in the Service in the sense that he was absolutely adamant about getting what he wanted. Well, he wasn't to the point of having some kind of psychological aberration but he was not going to give up on something until he felt he had exhausted every possibility. I had to work very hard with this guy and for this guy.

Sometimes it created a little bit of tension, but I would say people who worked with Dick and for Dick really liked him a lot. He had a great team in Mike. Nick Platt was over on the NSC at the time. It was a nice team. He called it the East Asia informal group and had a once a week meeting. All the deputies, plus the NSC guy, plus the guy from DOD. I mean Dick acted like an inter-agency coordinator. He had someone from the CIA, Bill Graver his name was. He was a leader.

*Q: Did you get involved in Pacific issues, islands?*

NEGROPONTE: Not until I became Assistant Secretary for Oceans, Environment and Science. Then I did. I negotiated a major agreement with the South Pacific countries.

*Q: What about Singapore?*

NEGROPONTE: They were sort of thought leaders even then. They had a great Permanent Secretary in the Foreign Office, the ranking career person. He was called S.R. Nathan who later became ambassador here, and ultimately just retired as president of Singapore. He is in his 80's now. They were great fun to go and see. We consulted a lot about what to do about Cambodia.

When I asked Bob Oakley, he was my predecessor as the deputy assistant secretary for South Asia, "What advice do you have for me in this job?" He said, "Just one word of advice on Southeast Asia particularly about Cambodia, what to do about that and Vietnam and what to do about that situation: follow the ASEAN lead." It was good advice. Obviously the U.S. has to play a leadership role and we have issues of our own, but I think his basic advice was good. So that was the era, that mid to late 1970's, was the era when the initial significant collaboration of the ASEAN group of countries was initiated. I would credit people like Bob Oakley and Secretary Vance himself.

*Q: With Cambodia, how did we view...? I mean, this Pol Pot regime was as horrid as they come.*

NEGROPONTE: That was a very uncomfortable situation because we recognized Pol Pot's seat at the United Nations even though he was a murderer. We did it because we

didn't want to acknowledge the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and they had installed their own puppet. So we recognized the DK, the Democratic Kampuchea as it was called.

The Australians decided to change their position. They were very uncomfortable recognizing the DK, and they were going to derecognize the DK. Dick said, "Get on an airplane and go to Canberra and talk them out of it." While I was in the air they changed their position. When I landed in Canberra Steve Lyne, I don't know if you remember Steve Lyne, he was the chargé. He met me and said, "Sorry to tell you this John, but the Australians have formally derecognized the DK because they knew you were coming and they didn't want to be talked out of it."

But it was a very uncomfortable situation. It had no practical significance. We didn't give any help to the DK or anything like that. The irony of it now is the guy who the Vietnamese installed, Hu Sen, back then is the prime minister of Cambodia today. We deal with him. In fact, I met him when I was deputy secretary.

*Q: Do we have any tentative contact with the Vietnamese?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, at these somewhat stilted occasional talks we had that I mentioned in New York with their delegation head. But mainly to talk about these legacy issues, POW-MIA. The Vietnamese attitude to some extent was understandable, but they hadn't done enough on POW-MIA. They said, "Whenever you bring this up we know you don't want to improve the relationship; you just want to use the issue to beat us over the head." That was an understandable reaction.

*Q: Well I would have thought the Carter administration was reaching out looking for solutions.*

NEGROPONTE: Dick wanted to push normalization but Brzezinski didn't want to, and Dick and Brzezinski did not get along.

*Q: Knowing the personalities of the two and the outlook of the two.*

NEGROPONTE: That's right. And I think Brzezinski also gave priority to the relationship with China at that time. If you remember there had been a little altercation between China and Vietnam just before I got to the bureau.

*Q: A little war.*

NEGROPONTE: That's right. So Vietnam was not priority at that point.

*Q: Were we seeing that whole area that you had ASEAN as a potential investment source? Were they beginning to...*

NEGROPONTE: Well they hadn't yet become the tigers, the so-called Southeast Asian tigers. There was definitely, when you went to Singapore and Malaysia and even to

Thailand, you saw significant prosperity developing. Miles ahead of Vietnam. That was brewing at that time. I didn't mention, but we had a pretty good relationship with Indonesia in this period. Suharto was the person, and we had pretty good relations with them, and there were some pretty significant energy investments in Indonesia. I think it was being viewed, Southeast Asia, while it had some legacies, some conflicted issues there with Cambodia and the legacy of Vietnam, there were also some economic opportunities. But not as fully developed as they became in the 80's and 90's. The early part of the 90's was good economically.

*Q: What about, I guess it wasn't in your bailiwick, but South Korea?*

NEGROPONTE: Well it wasn't in my bailiwick, but I spent a lot of time on it just like everybody else. When the balloon went up, you may remember the riots and Chun Doo-hwan cracking down. The country almost collapsed. It was an uprising. It was in the spring of 1980. They had us preoccupied, they took up a huge amount of time in the bureau. With Dick and Bill Gleysteen in Seoul, the office director, I am trying to remember his name. It think it was Stan Rich. It was a huge issue, because the Korean government was teetering on the brink several times.

*Q: This was after the assassination of Park.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah. I guess a year later or so, but there was an incident. I am not the person to talk about this in any expert kind of way, but I just remember the country was rocked by these demonstrations. We were caught in this real dilemma of, on one hand we want democracy and human rights, but on the other hand the stability of South Korea was also a vital interest. Ultimately the situation calmed down.

I did go to Korea once, in fact with this same CODEL. Bingham went to Korea first and then he went to China. I got to meet Kim Dae Jung who was in sort of house arrest at the time. We followed Korea very well. We had an excellent team. Bill Clark, I don't know if you knew Bill. He was political counselor.

*Q: I left there in '79 and I was consul general there. But I left before him.*

NEGROPONTE: But did you leave, Park had been assassinated.

*Q: No, he was assassinated after I ended up in Naples. I remember that.*

NEGROPONTE: When did you leave Seoul?

*Q: I left in July.*

NEGROPONTE: It must have been in the later half. Because by the time I got there in '80 it was not Park. I met Park with General Haig when we went with Haig in '72 to sell the Vietnam agreement. Haig took me along because I knew every sentence in the damn agreement.

We got off the plane and went to the Blue House and went up to his office. He was sitting there in a big Asian chair like that with an arm on each side just looking straight ahead. Haig was over to the other side and briefed him for an hour on the Vietnam agreement. Of course the Koreans had a great interest in this. They had two divisions there. Park never said a word.

Then when Haig finished he looked at Haig and he said, "I suppose if the Americans want to get out of Vietnam, they will get out of Vietnam." That was all he said. "You have decided to go. What am I going to say?" It was very interesting. He listened steely faced. I am sure he was not impressed with what we were doing, but he said "you're going to get out, you are going to get out."

*Q: How about Japan? Did you have anything to do with them?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, we worked closely with them on Southeast Asia and they have always been a big factor on providing development assistance. Probably even more in those days with respect to Cambodia and refugee assistance. I can't remember whether Madame Ogata, whether she was in charge of the refugees or not. But we worked closely with, we consulted very closely with the Japanese on Asia policy issues, so I must have gone there several times just to consult with my counterpart who dealt with Southeast Asia.

*Q: Were you after decisions? Or did you get any feel for the Japanese form of either negotiation or dealing with things?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I got more experience in that from my fisheries negotiations. But it was more a question of genuine consultation. You would go. You would go for a day. You would go through an agenda of different countries in the region and have a couple of good meals. That was it. I must have done that several times. So for me good relations with Japan have always been an article of faith, and having come in going all the way back to my service in Vietnam when I got to know the Japanese embassy guys there. I made some pretty good long-term friendships. I was always impressed by how much the Japanese were interested in our point of view, and how meticulous they were in trying to learn what we were doing. I know they followed our lead and everything else, but they were quite good to consult with.

*Q: How stood things with Thailand while you were dealing with this area?*

NEGROPONTE: Well there was this fellow Prem who was prime minister at the time, a military guy. There was some political turmoil in Thailand at the time. There was one coup at least, or attempted coup, issues surrounding civil, military relations.

*Q: The China Sea, was that an issue at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: Not yet. Not significantly so.

*Q: The Philippines, I can think of, you were there during Marcos' whole time weren't you?*

NEGROPONTE: As Deputy Assistant Secretary. Marcos was there the entire time. I went out, I stayed on as Deputy Assistant Secretary into the Reagan administration. I was not replaced right away, I stayed on to that early fall. So when Marcos was inaugurated for his third term of office, in June of '81, I accompanied Vice President Bush to the inaugural. Actually I went there about a week earlier with Secretary Haig because we had the annual meeting with the ASEAN countries in Manila that year. Oh, in June of '81 I spent quite a bit of time in the Philippines. Bush came out and I was there waiting for him.

That was when President Reagan called me up. You know, President Reagan used to call his candidates to be ambassadors personally. I had been waiting for the call. I knew I was in line to become ambassador to Honduras. The White House called our home. Diana knew that I was expecting a call, and "he is in the Philippines," she said. The White House operator said, "Oh well then the President will call him later." She said, "Oh, please call him now." She couldn't stand the tension.

So anyway, they tracked me down in the Philippines and the President had experience waking people up in the middle of the night and all of that. So he tracked me down in the Philippine secretary of commerce's office. I went to call on the Philippine secretary of commerce and five minutes later the Secretary of Commerce's secretary comes into the office. "Mr. Negroponte, President Reagan is calling you." So I thought, boy this guy is going to be really impressed. I never got a call from a president in my life.

So I went out and I took the call. He said, "I hope you are awake out there. I don't know what time it is out there." He was a very courteous gentleman as you know, and asked me to be ambassador to Honduras. That is when that happened. But Bush came out to this third inauguration of Marcos with a very interesting and amusing delegation. He had Claire Booth Luce.

*Q: Was she still around?*

NEGROPONTE: She was. Van Cliburn, the pianist, and Efrem Zimbalist. Bush stayed at the Malacañang guest house. I am not sure that was a very good idea, but he did. I didn't think it was that good an idea for Nixon and Kissinger to stay in the Kremlin back in '72. But anyway this is when we had a toast and a luncheon with Marcos where Mr. Bush made the statement, "We love your commitment to democracy." He was referring to ASEAN. If you looked at the text he was referring to ASEAN. Obviously giving the statement in the middle of the Philippines. So he got excoriated for that for months on end afterwards cartoons and everything else.

It was kind of interesting to me because I had spent quite a bit of time in the embassy preparing for the Vice President's arrival, and had written up several versions of a toast.

None of which said, “we love your commitment to Democracy.” Mr. Bush, like many politicians, just put aside the prepared text and winged it.

So anyway, we went through the inaugural proceedings. There was a typhoon coming and I remember he got inaugurated and then there was a big dinner in Malacañang. I think Mr. Bush by that time, as you recall, the Bushes are not very patient people. They are always in a hurry to move on to the next thing. We got reports that a typhoon might be coming the next day, so suddenly we got the order right in the middle of the dinner that we are packing up and leaving tonight. We piled on to Air Force Two and went back to Washington, via Honolulu.

*Q: Did Imelda Marcos intrude on your scene at all?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yes, absolutely. She sang for us. I think that was one of the things that inspired the Vice President to want to go home. She is a singer. She could never resist grabbing the microphone and singing a song for all of us.

*Q: Oh boy.*

NEGROPONTE: She was an entertainer.

*Q: How did Vice President Bush strike you?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I knew him because I met him in '72 to brief him on the Vietnam peace agreement. He was head of the Republican National Committee then and Kissinger had sent him over to me as part of my responsibility at the NSC. So I knew him from then and I knew his brother, Bucky. William Bush, who goes by Bucky, was my classmate at Yale. He is a younger brother. So the Bush family was somewhat of a known quantity to me I liked him. I had a very good personal relationship with him. I liked him enormously. Guess what I liked the most about him from a professional point of view was how seriously he took diplomacy. He was a real diplomat.

*Q: This is, I mean, he comes across in all of his dealings as someone who really knew what he wanted and had done his homework?*

NEGROPONTE: And he realized the personal diplomacy was so important. You could see that in him. We had a couple of bilaterals while he was out there with Lee Kwan Yu and others. I admired the way he handled himself. He became a factor when I went to Honduras in my next assignment.

*Q: Well then let's take you to Honduras.*

NEGROPONTE: When Reagan was elected I was very much in line to become an ambassador. I was one of the up and coming deputy assistant secretaries, right. So the D Committee, the famous D Committee which I later on had the pleasure of chairing when I was deputy secretary recommended me to the White House with the Secretary's

agreement to be ambassador to Thailand. That was my first choice. That job was coming open and Mort Abramowitz was leaving. I was recommended by the department as the professional foreign service's candidate for that job. John Gunther Dean got to know Mike Deaver and over the transom got his name put forward as the candidate for Thailand instead of me. A career officer, who didn't particularly care to play by the department's rules, basically got chosen effectively like a political appointee. So then I got called by Joan Clark, who was the director general: "Don't worry, we will take care of you." So then it took a few months. I ended up being appointed ambassador to Honduras.

*Q: Did you run across John Gunther Dean when you were in Saigon?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh, I met him in Paris. He was the East Asia man at the embassy in Paris. I used to ride in sometimes to work. I lived for a while, I had an apartment in Paris not far from where he lived. He handled Asia in the political section. Then went to Cords in Vietnam and then to Cambodia as ambassador. So he went to Thailand. So there was nothing of particular interest in Asia left. I knew Tom Enders from the time he had been Chargé in Cambodia along with Kissinger and stuff like that back during the war. Tom became Assistant Secretary for Latin America. He and I had a number of conversations. We talked about this place or that place. Finally Honduras came up.

*Q: Had you sought Honduras?*

NEGROPONTE: No, I really didn't. I had sought Thailand and even thought I was going to go to Thailand, but then these events that I described intervened. Then Latin America seemed the best alternative. Tom mentioned various places, but we finally got to talking seriously about Honduras. Unbeknownst to me, they were already thinking at the time about supporting the Contras and using basically Honduras as a rear area for our interests both in El Salvador and in Nicaragua. As a platform if you will, which is how it developed and which is why Tom felt that maybe somebody with my kind of background would be suited for that kind of work. It wasn't going to be just any old sleepy Central American embassy.

*Q: When you were selected for this, what was the date?*

NEGROPONTE: Well Reagan called me that June. Reagan called sometimes in June, late June. The nomination got processed over the summer, and I had my hearing mid to late September. I got confirmed and I went to Honduras, and I arrived in early November 1981.

*Q: You had been in the State Department in Washington when the Reagan administration came in.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly, and I worked for them on Southeast Asia for those months.



*Q: Had you been hearing peripherally or not about sort of-- this is one place where a new administration came in where there was almost blood in the corridors in Latin America particularly in Central America.*

NEGROPONTE: Blood in the corridors in what sense?

*Q: It was almost a hostile takeover. I mean there were people who were told to get out of their desks right away and that sort of thing. It was not for Latin America, particularly Central America from what I gather it was not a traditional nice departure.*

NEGROPONTE: Well some people may say that because these attitudes are shaped by whether or not you agree with the policy, as I have learned. Our Latin American policy is a place where there are a lot of bodies buried if you will. A lot of careers have run into great difficulty including my own, because views on Latin America, certain aspects of our policy in Latin America over the years have been so polarized. They really are, and it has been, we can get into that when we talk about Honduras, but I didn't particularly sense it.

I knew Tom. Tom was a very highly regarded guy. I can't remember where he was just prior. I think he may have been ambassador to Canada. He was certainly ambassador to Canada during part of the Carter Administration. He was very smart. He was a troubleshooter. Tom was you remember, he was in Cambodia. He was head of the economic....

*Q: He was Assistant Secretary for Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs (1974-1975).*

NEGROPONTE: He was in EB at the time of the oil embargo in '74. He helped create the IEA [International Energy Agency] which was a brilliant diplomatic stroke. But Tom was sort of a tough, not overly gregarious social person. I don't know if you knew him personally but he was a bit aloof. But a very smart guy. He comes from a very brilliant family. One of his uncles was a Nobel Prize winning Chemist. Tom came from a very brilliant family.

*Q: He made quite a name for himself. I always regret that he died so early.*

NEGROPONTE: The big issue when I came in was of course, there were two [issues]. There was Nicaragua, which had just fallen to the Sandinistas, and there was El Salvador. I had been able to watch some of what we did in Nicaragua as the fisheries negotiator because I went to Costa Rica and places like that quite often. There was a point at which Marvin Weissman, our ambassador to Costa Rica, was actually up on the border helping the Cubans funnel weapons to the Sandinistas. That is the kind of stuff Carter was doing.

To me it was the overthrow of Diem all over again. We want these things so badly we can taste them. We want to overthrow Diem. We want to overthrow the Shah. We want to overthrow Somoza. Don't stand there, do something. These people are so reprehensible. Well guess what? The next crowd wasn't any better, and probably worse.

So we had the Sandinistas now developing this relationship with Cuba, starting to get weapons from the Cubans and so forth. So that was the problem there and they were funneling those weapons to El Salvador. Carter had cut off, under Ambassador Bob White, military assistance to El Salvador for a couple of years for this and that reason, mostly having to do with human rights. I am sure some of it was with some justification. But by January of '81 before he left office he realized that maybe it hadn't been such a good idea and he reversed himself and signed an executive order to permit the resumption of military assistance to El Salvador. So when I got to Honduras in November of '81...

*Q: Did you have any idea what you were going to be doing specifically other than doing the normal relationship thing?*

NEGROPONTE: As I was preparing to go to Honduras, let me just think. Here is the situation: you have this emerging communist government in Nicaragua. You have the supply of military equipment being infiltrated either through Honduran territory or across the Gulf of Fonseca into El Salvador and actually a couple of these shipments had been captured, and we had made a big fuss about that. You had El Salvador's civil war starting to sort of heat up and get more intense. Honduras as you can see, strategically situated in between. Looking at this map, you can see how they are situated in between the two countries. In addition to that, in Honduras there was this group of Nicaraguan exiles called the "Contras." But at that time very small in number: several hundred, led by some, trained by some Argentine officer. I think he was basically a freelance operation.

*Q: Was there any relation to the Somoza national guard?*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, a number of them were former national guardsmen, including this fellow Bermudez who was sort of their leader. There was a decision taken while I was going down to Honduras in which Tom Enders did not want me to be briefed on. This was my first ambassadorship. I didn't really understand my prerogatives as well as I came to understand them later on. I wanted to go out to the CIA and get briefed on their thinking on the Contras and this and that. They sort of balked at it until I was confirmed. Then Tom waved me off also. He said, "Why don't you wait until you get down there?"

So my vision of what I was going to be doing down there was not that clear, although it was obvious we were going to have a support role vis-à-vis El Salvador because there was a limitation on how many American military could go to El Salvador. So the only other place you could go if you were going to provide some support to them was from bordering Honduras. And there was this contra activity percolating, along with the possibility that the U.S. government might provide some assistance.

The most immediate thing, and I did have my work cut out for me when I got there, was that Honduras was going to have elections, their first elections in nine years for president, on 26 November. So the timing of my arrival was really very good, because I got to know the candidates before the election took place. You know how advantageous it can be to know a president elect before he actually becomes president.

So I got to know Dr. Suazo quite well. I had several meetings with him before the election took place. That turned out to be very useful in terms of the personal relationship I was able to develop with him and his immediate entourage. He is a very nice unpretentious country doctor and an old pol. He had been a politician all his life. A politician and a village country doctor. So the elections were carried out smoothly.

We had some American Congressmen to come down and observe it. Sam Gejdenson from Connecticut. Jim Jeffords came down from Vermont. So we had a certain amount of interests from the United States. Then the inauguration of the new president took place in January of that year. Jesse Helms led the inauguration delegation, which was a very brilliant move on the part of Tom Enders.

*Q: Was Jesse Helms much of a major figure? I mean later he was a major figure.*

NEGROPONTE: He oversaw my hearing. I think he was chairman of the Latin America subcommittee. He conducted my hearing, and he actually held me up for a while.

*Q: Do you know why?*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah I was a Holbrooke holdover, that is why. Then he sent his people around to meet me and got to know me a little bit.

*Q: Did you run across his assistants?*

NEGROPONTE: John Carbaugh.

*Q: John Carbaugh and also Debra somebody.*

NEGROPONTE: Debra DeMoss. Well she ended up marrying a Honduran. She is married to a Honduran now. The Honduran she married was related to one of the presidential candidates who lost. The conservative candidate. A liberal candidate won. They don't call them conservatives, they call them nationalists. It was the nationalists and the liberals.

*Q: Liberals and conservatives, the titles often can be almost the reverse.*

NEGROPONTE: No, these are the 19<sup>th</sup> century nomenclature that continued through. Honduras has had traditional party labels for 150 years. It is liberals and nationalists. The liberals tend to be more liberal, and the nationalists tend to be more conservative. Dr. Suazo was a liberal, but he was a hard-nosed liberal, a Truman-esque liberal. He had no use for the communists whatever. In fact he hated them.

He had a parakeet in a cage in his home in the village of La Paz, which was about an hour from Tegucigalpa, the capital. He had this parakeet locked up in a cage. Every now and then he would go and poke him like that just to get the parakeet a little bit agitated. He

said, "Do you know what I call this parakeet?" I said, "No, what?" He said, "Ortega." This was how he vented his frustration at Daniel Ortega.

Anyway Suazo got inaugurated, but before he did there was his predecessor was a guy called Policarpo Paz Garcia. He was a general and had been the interim president of Honduras for the previous couple of years. Actually when I presented my credentials, General Policarpo Paz Garcia presented me with my first test. He said, "Oh Ambassador, I don't know if we can hold these elections." Where have we heard this stuff before? It goes on all the time. That was what happened with Poly. I said, "Why, Mr. President?" "Well it is insecure. We don't know whether we can maintain order." I said, "Mr. President, you have got to have these elections." I came down fairly hard about this. Support for Honduras depends on it. Everybody up there is praising Honduras for going back to democracy after nine years of military rule.

Anyway he probed me and he found out that there wasn't any flexibility on that score. The elections came off without a single hitch. In the month of January before Dr. Suazo was inaugurated, Dewey Clarridge, the head of operations for Latin America in the CIA, came down. I made one or more significant errors in my career. Dewey said, "Look, I have been asked to talk about this finding, the CIA finding with the President. I think it is better if you don't come." (This was the finding to support the Contras.) Now over my dead body would that ever happen to me again, but it was my first time. I was not sufficiently experienced to say, "Sorry Dewey, if we meet with the president it is my meeting, and you are just along." Then you will explain whatever it is.

But I didn't. I let Dewey meet with Policarpo Paz Garcia alone. That is when he informed Policarpo that Washington had made a decision under a covert action finding which had been passed and signed by the President in November which I had not been told about officially. That we would support the Contras. The Contras would get official American support. That was the beginning of the full-fledged U.S. government effort to support the contras.

*Q: Did Ollie North cross your path?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yes, constantly. Not at this point, later on.

*Q: How did you feel about those that you were talking to, or maybe those you didn't talk to about Latin America? Did you feel the Contras were a good thing or not?*

NEGROPONTE: Well first of all, the President had decided to do it. So that is number one. The issue that I don't think was fully addressed at the beginning was why are we doing this? What is the purpose? I mean fundamentally you could have one of two purposes. You could first have the purpose of overthrowing the Sandinista government, or you could use them to bring pressure to bear on the Sandinista government to achieve a negotiated outcome of some kind. Right? I mean it is a pretty classic situation. We really didn't have that internal debate as best as I could tell. I mean frankly I think what

they were hoping was that they could overthrow the government but meanwhile it was generating pressure. It was putting the Sandinistas off balance, which is probably right.

*Q: It was a 'don't stand there; do something'?*

NEGROPONTE: Well and also in fairness to Reagan, he never wanted to send American troops down. I think he saw covert action as an alternative to sending American troops. I think Tip O'Neill was very unfair to Reagan on that. I remember several times Tip O'Neill publicly would say, "Reagan, he wants to send American troops, he won't be happy until he can send American troops down there to fight in Nicaragua and El Salvador." I didn't think Reagan ever for a moment, and I had a chance as deputy national security advisor to discuss this with him. He really didn't want to do that. So we had this covert action thing.

We had a very, as you know, proactive director of the CIA, Bill Casey who had cabinet rank. The head of the CIA was a cabinet post under Reagan. At the beginning Ollie and company weren't that involved. Ollie was on the National Security Council staff. He had a hand in all of this because I think he was in the intelligence directorate of the NSC. But he wasn't that involved at that point, although he made his occasional visit down there.

But what happened then was that in November of that year, November of '82, Newsweek did a big exposé of our support for the contras and what we were doing, until then, for an eleven month period, there had been no public revelation of what we were doing with the contras. The publicity, in turn, generated a backlash from the congress which eventually, I am forgetting my dates here but at some point thereafter caused a congressman named Boland to pass the Boland Amendment which prohibited the use of U. S. funds for the military support to the contras.

That is when Ollie and others got involved in trying to circumvent the Boland Amendment. So Ollie was one of my frequent visitors. He was a frequent flier to Honduras.

*Q: Who was your DCM at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: Shep Lowman. Well, Bill Walker for a while, who eventually went to El Salvador as ambassador. At the time he went to El Salvador as DCM, but I brought Shep down because of his knowledge of refugee questions. We had refugees from every Central American country in Honduras. We had them from Guatemala, Salvador, and Nicaragua. There must have been 150,000 refugees in Honduras. But this contra story was really not what kept me busy every day. My station kept growing and growing. These guys ended up with an army. The contras ended up being 20,000-30,000 people at its peak. But they ran that.

I had confidence in my station chief. He was somebody I have known since, and he is a good friend, Vincent Shields. He was my station chief in Mexico later on serendipitously.

He had been in Laos running special guerilla units during the Vietnam War. He was a real expert in insurgency.

But my job was more, I had a real fear that Honduras was exposed militarily to Nicaragua and it was vulnerable to an attack from Nicaragua. Especially given the fact that we were putting them up to supporting the contras. So I focused a lot on trying to get more military and economic assistance for Honduras, training their army.

Then the Department sent around sometime in '82 a circular to a handful of posts in Latin America, saying we have got these military construction funds. Are any of the posts interested in using such funds to help improve airports in their countries? In exchange for which we would get military access. I jumped on that and we negotiated with Richard Haas and others, Richard was working in PM, a military access agreement with the government of Honduras in exchange for \$30,000,000 worth of airport improvements in an airport called Palmerola Airport. We inaugurated the refurbished airfield with a C-5A transport.

*Q: At the time it was the military's biggest plane.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah. And we ultimately assigned 600-700 people there on TDY because it was an access agreement, not a base. People would always go there for 179 days at a time. You know the trick. You go less than half a year and it doesn't count as being a permanent assignment. The interesting thing about it is to this very day we have American troops spending six months at a time down in Palmerola Airfield, and it is one of our best military facilities in Central America.

*Q: Were we also using the National Guard to work on roads and things like this?*

NEGROPONTE: Then we began a program, we had a very energetic commander. First of all it was Wally Nutting, but he wasn't there very long. He was at SOUTHCOM. He was replaced by General Paul Gorman, who I had known because he had been a member of the Paris Peace delegation and was a Vietnam vet. Paul is one of the most dynamic and creative people you would ever want to meet. He started generating a whole program of exercises. We would have National Guard exercises with Texas National Guard, everybody. They would do things just like you say. They would build a temporary airfield as an engineering exercise. Things like that, so we carried out some improvements that were of some benefit to the Honduran economy. More importantly it was a show of strength to send the signal to Nicaragua that we were very supportive of Honduras, and that they shouldn't mess with Honduras.

Meanwhile at that Palmerola Airfield, we put a whole bunch of assets that were supportive of our efforts in El Salvador, surveillance aircraft, stuff like that. I think Tom Enders was influenced by his experience in Cambodia. We had been limited to 200-300 people in Cambodia. He agreed with Congress on some limitation to the number of American military we could station there, but he had something like 50. So all of those people we needed to support activities in El Salvador were based at Palmerola Airfield.

*Q: They would fly in, and probably others came in.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, in and out, in and out. We also had a lot of surveillance aircraft there doing whatever, various kinds of intelligence and surveillance operations. So Honduras became a bit of a cockpit for Central American security efforts.

*Q: By this time had Ronald Reagan began to publicize what was happening in Central America as being practically on the doorstep of Brownsville, Texas? I mean or was it still sort of off the political radar?*

NEGROPONTE: That is a very good question, because I have always felt that Reagan didn't do enough early enough to articulate to the American people why it is we thought Central America was important. He didn't speak. I think he ended up speaking to a joint session of Congress, or in his State of the Union Address. In '83 he finally laid it all out. But geez, I got there in '81. We went through all of '82 and part of '83 before we really laid out what we were trying to accomplish there. By then we had the Boland Amendment on our hands. We were a little bit stymied by that.

Then there was, you mentioned the hostile takeover. There was real division in the State Department about whether we were doing the right thing. There were those who felt we shouldn't be supporting Contras and we should be finding a negotiated solution. There was a lot of that, and the White House and the State Department were really not on the same page. Plus you had this totally off the books effort run by Ollie North and others, God knows who, and the Saudis, to re-supply the contras without any U.S. government involvement whatsoever. So it was a very confused situation. It is a very hard thing to be an ambassador when you have a divided Washington like that.

*Q: What were the Sandinistas doing and how did you view their actions?*

NEGROPONTE: What they were doing was, they were building up this army of a couple of hundred thousand people, which was way beyond any legitimate need they had. They were continuing to funnel supplies to El Salvador and they also sent a couple of preliminary invasion forces into Honduras. It turned out to be small beer, but they had an aggressive sort of...

*Q: They were not benign.*

NEGROPONTE: No, they were not benign. They displayed some aggressive behavior towards Honduras. So we built up this military relationship. We got economic aid up to very high levels in Honduras. I was just really trying to fortify the bilateral relationship, that was my real focus. So we got up to \$250-\$300 million a year, which was a lot of money in those days in assistance. Then you may recall when the Boland Amendment was passed, and when we were sort of in a state of confusion in the United States about what to do about Central America. Enter Henry Kissinger, and the Kissinger Commission was formed with a big group of prominent American citizens. They went to all the

countries of Central America and they wrote a report. The upshot of which was to recommend significant increases in economic assistance to Central America and a massive scholarship program. Which the Congress adopted and for several years did quite a bit of good in Central America. But to me it was an extraordinary assignment. It was busy as hell. Because of the military exercises and the contras and the controversy in Washington we just had endless Congressional delegations, endless.

*Q: It was too close. You could get down there.*

NEGROPONTE: You could get there in four hours. And I discovered that the way it works is they can leave on a Friday night, and show up around 9:00-10:00 at night and ruin your weekend, and go home Sunday evening. I basically wrote off most weekends. I knew I would have Washington visitors from either the executive or legislative branch or both.

*Q: A couple of questions and then we will move on about developments. Could you talk next time about the Honduran Army and your relations with them and their effectiveness? Also were you hit by-- I don't know if you would call it the Sandilistas or the glitterati of the left in American politics and culture and all that which was having a lot of effect-- and the various Maryknoll Sisters and that whole group. We will talk about that.*

NEGROPONTE: Sure.

*Q: Today is 23 July 2012 with John Negroponte. John, we have got you coming to Honduras. You were explaining some of the various forces that were playing, political forces and the forces in Honduras too.*

NEGROPONTE: Had I just arrived in Honduras?

*Q: You had just arrived.*

NEGROPONTE: So I arrived about November 6, just in time for the Marine Ball.

*Q: Oh yes.*

NEGROPONTE: Yes sir. Just in time for the Marine Ball. I was there for 3 ½ years. I left in May of '85. The most critical part about the timing of my arrival in Honduras is I arrived three weeks before the first democratic election in Honduras in nine years. There had been nine years of military rule. Thanks to the evolution of political forces in Honduras and the pressures really, and I have got to give the full credit to the Carter Administration for...

*Q: It was Jack Binns wasn't it?*

NEGROPONTE: It was Binns, but it was Carter's policies generally, because Binns was only there one year.



*Q: Carter was really....*

NEGROPONTE: ...very strong on human rights. It had the desired effect in Honduras. It had the not so desired effect in Nicaragua as far as I am concerned. It brought the Sandinistas to power, but it had the desired effect in Honduras where the military relinquished rule. But not without some difficulty. That was my first immediate challenge. I arrived there and barely a day or two in Honduras... there is this president of Honduras called Policarpo Paz Garcia. Policarpo Paz Garcia was known to be concerned about relinquishing power, and I had been warned that he was going to give me various arguments about why the elections on November, I think it was 26, couldn't be carried out.

*Q: I have to point out that in a lot of countries elections are postponed. In the United States we don't postpone them.*

NEGROPONTE: Well and it is also an argument that is frequently used by the authoritarians who confront giving up power. So he was telling me, I got in and I was presenting my credentials to Policarpo Paz Garcia, and he started right out of the box. I figured he was testing me right from the beginning.

He said, "Oh Ambassador, there are forces at work which might cause insecurity and I don't know whether we can carry these things off safely at all."

I told him, "If you think the new United States ambassador has come here to condone postponing those elections Mr. President, you have got another thing coming. We think you should go through with this, and this is your chance to play a positive role in Honduran history."

Anyway he didn't pursue the point much, but at least he got the signal that the new United States ambassador supported the political agenda that had been laid out for Honduras. It was an important message to send.

*Q: It was a very important message, particularly from going from Carter, who had very liberal credentials, to Reagan, who had very conservative credentials.*

NEGROPONTE: And who had people around him who were publicly questioning our human rights agenda, Jeane Kirkpatrick and various others. So I think he was testing us to see if we were in favor. Actually, to the credit of the department and of President Reagan we pursued a very strong democratic agenda throughout Central America during that period, in El Salvador also. Anyway the elections were pulled off without a hitch. There were no problems whatsoever.

*Q: Did we have observers?*

NEGROPONTE: We had a couple of congressmen came down. We had Congressman Sam Gejdenson from Connecticut, and we had Jim Jeffords, Congressman from Vermont. He eventually became a senator, and then he switched parties.

*Q: Isn't he a socialist?*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, but he started I think as a Republican and switched to the Democratic side. He is the one who altered the majority in the Senate in 2001 by switching parties. He was there, and there must have been some NGO observers and such, but the thing went off well.

President Roberto Suazo Cordoba was elected. I had met him. He is a country doctor and sort of a career politician. He had been President of their constituent assembly that drafted their constitution. We had a luncheon meeting together, a couple of meetings before the election. I have always felt if you are going to be an ambassador to a country, and they are around the time of an election it is a tremendous advantage to get there before the election takes place, because you establish a relationship with the future leader of the country when they are not the leader yet. And they are more interested in establishing a good and supportive relationship with you. I thought the fact that I had a chance to meet a couple of times with Dr. Suazo before he became president ended up strengthening our relationship.

*Q: How did you, with the support of your staff at the embassy, evaluate the military junta that was running the country before and its willingness to step away from power?*

NEGROPONTE: Well Latin America has had sort of Dictadura dictatorships and Dictablandas, right. Which are the soft dictatorships. I mean Honduras was more of a Dictablanda. They were a pretty mild mannered bunch, the military. Policarpo Paz was a mild mannered figure. I think they were supportive of this and I think they also understood it was what was needed in order to get help from the United States. They saw trouble coming. They saw Nicaragua in communist hands building up their military, they saw the Salvadoran guerillas using their territory with impunity coming from Nicaragua to be re-supplied through Honduran territory to El Salvador. So they knew that geostrategically they needed our help in this very uncertain situation.

Honduras was completely surrounded by trouble. They had the Sandinistas who had taken over Nicaragua. They had El Salvador with a raging civil war and Guatemala also. They had refugees from all three of those countries. There were 150,000 refugees, and Honduras is not a big country. It was four million people or something like that.

*Q: Were the Cubans messing around?*

NEGROPONTE: Not yet, no, but they were in Nicaragua, and they were definitely there. As you can see they aren't far away, and the Cubans had their sights on Honduras, but not until after El Salvador. I am sure that their game plan was to get control of El Salvador first and then the rest of Central America. Meanwhile back in Washington, President

Reagan approved a finding, a covert action finding on Nicaragua. I think he approved it on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November.

*Q: Did you have any input on it?*

NEGROPONTE: Zip. Zero. The first mistake as an ambassador. You know when you are first an ambassador you learn a lot of things. Usually by the mistakes you make. I was cut out of the covert action planning, in the first instance by Tom Enders, the Assistant Secretary of State who told me when I wanted to go over to the CIA to get briefed before coming down to Honduras, Tom called me up and said, "Well, wait until you get down there. Don't go over there now."

So I was so out of it, which is not the way it should be with an ambassador, which I never let happen to me again in my subsequent ambassadorships, I guarantee you. I mean, an ambassador should be in charge of that stuff.

*Q: Well did you have any feel for, was somebody evaluating you and saying you are problematic or too soft or might not improve or might cause trouble?*

NEGROPONTE: No, I think it had just more to do with the secretiveness of the whole proposition. No, I was considered a rather hardline fellow. I don't think there was any worry about my political credentials. I think Jack Binns was the one who got curtailed by Tom. Jack was only there one year, because Tom wanted someone who had more experience in these kinds of conflictive situations. I had been working on Southeast Asia, the situation in Cambodia, Thailand. Very similar, broad brush, it was very similar and of course I had served in Vietnam. So no, I don't think they had any lack of confidence in me. They were just very secretive. And it gets worse.

Dr. Suazo gets inaugurated in late January of 1982. A nice delegation comes down led by of all people, I think one of his last foreign trips because he didn't travel abroad much after that, led by Senator Jesse Helms. I think that was Tom Enders trying to send a signal sort of appealing to the right wing of the party and to the conservatives. Helms had great concern that if the liberals, which is the party that won in Honduras, that if they won, they might have some left leaning tendencies, which turned out not to be true at all.

Dr. Suazo, as I said this very plainspoken sort of Truman-esque country doctor, was very tough on the communists. I mean just in his own personal ideology and own personal beliefs. He happened also to be extremely religious. He was a born again charismatic Christian. He didn't foist it on others but he personally-- I will come back to a story about Suazo later. No, I will tell it to you now. Suazo was so religious that when we finally went to Washington sometime later, I can't remember when, it was his official working visit to Washington, maybe in '83. I was asking him if he would come out to a dinner with the Secretary of the Treasury and a couple of other cabinet level officials. He told me, "Mr. Ambassador, at nighttime I prefer to go back to my hotel and read my Bible." It didn't matter that he was on a state visit. That is what he was going to do.

*Q: Had the communists in one form or another been messing around in Honduras before?*

NEGROPONTE: They had made some unsuccessful attempts. During the period I was there they tried a couple of things. If I could finish on the contras and then I will come to the communists. So what I was going to say about the inauguration at the time just before the inauguration, Dewey Clarridge, the head of Latin American operations at the CIA came down to Honduras, and again this was my second mistake. He met with the outgoing president Policarpo Paz Garcia, a week or so before he turned over power and set up, got Paz Garcia to agree to the establishment of our support for the contra program against Nicaragua.

*Q: Without telling you what...*

NEGROPONTE: He told me he was going to have the meeting with Policarpo Paz but the preference was that I not be in on the meeting. That was my second mistake. I agreed to that too. I am not saying I would have been against that. I am just saying I wasn't in on the meeting. So the administration basically used the outgoing Honduran military government to establish Honduran government agreement to and support for the contra program, which was really not that hard to accomplish because the Honduran military had already been dabbling with them in some of the Nicaraguan refugee camps down on the border. So that was sort of the origins of our support for the contra program. They had some support from the Argentine military for a couple of years beforehand.

Then you asked me about the communists in Honduras. There are a couple of different elements of communist activity in Honduras. First there was the local home grown communist activity in Honduras, very limited. Honduras was a very traditional political scene. They had the liberals and the nationalists. Sort of like the reds and the blues, very traditional Latin American politics, stuff you saw all through the 19<sup>th</sup> century through many Latin American countries, the reds and the blues I always call them. That sort of was what was going on in Honduras. It goes on to this day. Power alternates between those two parties. In fact there were very few other parties and they tended to be very small.

So the communists did not have much overt activity. But there was some radical activity fomented by the Salvadoran the Farabundo Marti. The FMLN. They operated in Honduras. The border was very porous. Honduran security authorities were not good at controlling it. It is a very mountainous region there between the two countries. And I would say the Salvadoran left was able to move in and out of Honduras with impunity. They used it as an R&R area. They used it to fundraise. Now how did they fundraise? Kidnappings. I mean they kidnapped the president of the largest bank in Honduras, Paul Vanelli, an Italian Honduran businessman and held him for several months until he paid two or three million dollars to get released. There was quite a bit of that kind of stuff going on. So there was that kind the Farabundo FMLN activity going on with the Salvadorans. You know Salvadorans and Hondurans are very close to each other

ethnically and in appearance. They have the greatest affinity of any two countries in Central America in terms of the ethnicity of their people.

*Q: When you say ethnicity...*

NEGROPONTE: The way they look.

*Q: I mean why would that...*

NEGROPONTE: They are the same kind of Mestizos. There are hardly any actual 100% pure bred Indians like you would find in Guatemala. In Guatemala you can go to areas where you would find these villages that are just totally native, in Mexico even. Totally native Indian population. Honduras, Salvador, very much a mixture between the Spaniards and whoever came in the immigrant elements and the local society. So it is a combination of Mayan and Hispanic blood.

Then the second communist element was there were some attempts by the Nicaraguans to meddle in Honduras. But they were kind of half-baked. They tried an invasion one time, and it was interdicted. They mounted a small invasion force of mercenaries, including an American priest called Father Carney who had been expelled from Honduras some time before. He was with this group. It was a hundred or so. They thought that by marching into Honduras in this communist uprising of theirs that the people would just rally to them and everybody would join. They drank the Kool Aid and they thought that Honduras was just so repressive that the people would rise up the minute this catalyst was launched. They failed miserably, and in fact Father Carney died of exposure and starvation in the middle of the jungle during that time.

*Q: Was there, you talked about the idea during that time that the Hondurans were oppressive. I never got the feeling there was very much repression in...*

NEGROPONTE: Well you know if you read the narrative today there are some people looking back who think of Honduras as having had human rights violations and death squads and so forth because that is part of the narrative that... You know we have a very polarized society when it comes to looking at Latin America. That is the narrative the left wants you to believe.

But in actual fact Honduras had a free press. They had a labor movement that was supported and advised by the AFL-CIO. AFELD which was the international arm of the AFL-CIO, they had offices in Honduras. The banana workers were well paid. They had housing, benefits so forth. Well, reasonably well paid. Their lives were pretty well looked after. There had been land reform. Coffee plantations were owned by independent coffee growers, 45,000 of them. So I always liked to say about Honduras, it wasn't a rich country but everybody was equally poor. There weren't the great discrepancies in wealth. I suspect the discrepancies have grown as they have everywhere in the world in recent years. But at that time I would say they were a reasonably democratic place by any global standard.

So in any event the really big thing was the contra program was built up over this time until at one point I guess at their peak by the end of '82 or some time in '83 they must have had 20,000 to 30,000 armed people. We were supporting them through these camps along the Honduran and Nicaraguan border. But at the end of '82, until then the program had been kept pretty secret. But then it was exposed.

*Q: It would be almost impossible to keep it a secret.*

NEGROPONTE: Well we did a pretty good job of it for quite a while actually, but somebody spilled the beans, and in November of '82 Newsweek came out with a big cover story on the contra program.

*Q: There must have been at some point where you got involved didn't you?*

NEGROPONTE: First of all, I was supportive of what we were doing, but I did not direct. I never had anything to do with the day-to-day operations. My station chief and I were pretty good friends. He had been in Laos. I hadn't worked with him then. We had some similarities of background since we had both served in Southeast Asia. But in terms of day-to-day activity I didn't do much. I was supportive though.

I met the contra leadership maybe two or three times during the time I was in Honduras. The three or four top leaders, this fellow named Adolfo Calero who just died recently and Enrique Bermudez, who was a military guy. He had been national guard leader in Nicaragua in the older days. Three or four of them came up to the residence for breakfast a couple of times. But in the Newsweek story that revealed the program they had me in a little side box with "Our Man in Tegucigalpa." They said that I was meeting with the contras every day. They said I was basically the director of operations for the whole thing. It was a totally silly article.

But a sort of a legend built up that was very hard to shake at the time that I was sort of running the thing. Tom Harkin, Senator Harkin on the floor of the senate many years later told the Senate that he had met me in a contra camp; I had never been to a contra camp. So I finally went to see him when I was being confirmed as Ambassador to the UN. I just wanted to call on him and say, "Senator I would really love to set the record straight. You told the Senate that you had met me at a contra camp. So I looked back at the records as to when you went to Honduras. I looked at my diaries and I noticed I was in Washington on the dates you went to Honduras in 1984. We never met in Honduras, and I have never in my life, not once been to a contra camp." He didn't retract what he said. He just said, "Well you look like a nice guy to me." It was a pretty feeble reply.

*Q: But you know, this persists, because I look on I don't know if we later use this but Wikipedia.*

NEGROPONTE: Oh my god. If you read Wikipedia, you would have thought that the only thing I had ever done was Honduras.

*Q: Honduras and you were involved with death squads. The whole thing. Was this just a story that went along with the intelligence build up?*

NEGROPONTE: This goes to my earlier point. I think it is the competing narratives about what happened in Latin America generally but also what happened in Central America specifically. I think what it is, obviously there is some truth to the legend of each side. I mean obviously you don't make up a legend up out of whole cloth. I think the basis for example about the narrative of death squads and all of that would be El Salvador, which clearly had that problem.

The Salvadoran civil war, 75,000 people got killed. Many of them by these death squads. Ultimately they came to grips with the problem but not until after a huge amount of suffering. Honduras had some abuses of power by their police forces, and some deaths that might have occurred as a result of these excesses, but you are talking about tens of incidents, not tens of thousands as you are in the case of El Salvador.

Nowadays if you look around the world in developing countries where there are these kinds of disorders, you can go to the slums of Rio De Janeiro and find a lot of that sort of thing going on, and nobody thinks of Brazil as a country run by death squads, but believe me, there are death squads in the slums of Rio De Janeiro. So these things can happen, but in relative terms and compared to what was going on in the neighboring countries it wasn't really happening in Honduras. This battalion 316, which is what you read about in Wikipedia, while I was in Honduras I never heard a single reference to Battalion 316. I still to this day am not sure what the heck it is they were talking about.

*Q: This brings up a question I was wondering about. I love the term the Sandilistas, the Americans who espoused the leftist cause in Latin America and particularly in Nicaragua and have sort of left their, and including part of the glitterati, movie stars and everything.*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yeah, we had Bianca Jagger on down.

*Q: Well I was wondering did this transfer over to Honduras or were these concentrated elsewhere?*

NEGROPONTE: I think they were concentrated elsewhere, but we got some of the spillover. Bianca Jagger was one example. She came down early in my tenure because of concerns over treatment of Salvadoran refugees. They were along the Salvadoran-Honduras border and were mostly families of Salvadoran guerillas. She was concerned about their treatment.

Warren Beatty showed up one time. Just out of the blue, called my office and asked for an appointment. I invited him for lunch. We had a very nice discussion on the embassy terrace. I kind of admired Beatty for that. He said, "I kind of came down just to find out what is really going on." I thought that was admirable. He has always been a bit more thoughtful than the other actors.

*Q: Paul Newman and all that.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, so we got some of that but not many of them.

*Q: What about the Maryknolls?*

NEGROPONTE: Well there you go. I think there are a couple of things at work here. There was the human rights effort from the Carter years, which included getting rid of Somoza. There was that momentum and those political forces that would just suborn getting rid of an oppressive dictator. There was the liberation theology, which is indigenous to Latin America, the leftist parts of the church which were not particularly well rooted in Honduras. There weren't that many liberation theologians in Honduras, but there were in other parts of Central America. Then there were the Maryknolls who I think were the sisters who were killed in El Salvador later on.

*Q: I believe they were.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, during the uprising towards the end of the Salvadoran Civil War where the three nuns who got killed, which was sort of ultimately the straw that broke the camel's back in El Salvador and caused us to basically insist on the dissolution of the Salvadoran army. That is much later. Those forces were not that active in Honduras. Honduras was in most respects a political backwater, so therefore more traditional.

So we have got the contras built up and meanwhile we have got the part that I cared about and worked on a lot more which was support of the Honduran government. My worry was the Sandinista buildup. They had declared their intent to build up their army substantially with help from Cuba and Eastern Bloc. They had Eastern European advisors there, East Germans and so on. So my focus was to try to get more aid for Honduras both military and civilian.

We had a fair amount of success in doing that, in building up the levels of assistance in Honduras. But as I said, in November of '82 the revelation of the program led to what became known as the Boland Amendment. You might recall that term. Eddie Boland of Massachusetts who got an amendment through the Congress saying it would be illegal to transfer any funds or weapons to the Nicaraguan counter revolutionaries. I think that came into effect about 1983 sometime. It put a damper on our support for the Contras.

*Q: Did you get involved in this at all in saying let's support this?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, I advocated it and I was also for trying to reverse the Boland Amendment. In fact we had a couple of efforts in the Congress, I think in 1984, to get the Boland Amendment reversed or modified so that we would be able to resume military assistance to the Contras. Because what happened was that they fell back and lost ground in Nicaragua, after initially having penetrated quite deeply into the country.



So we tried to get that legislation reversed, but unsuccessfully. So what had happened was these Contras who had penetrated quite deeply into Nicaragua at the height of our support, once we cut off the official funding and what we ended up doing, we were managing refugee camps. I mean, not only were there families from Honduras but now all the fighters were in Honduras as well. It became a serious problem both as a burden on Honduras and ourselves and a question of morale of these fighters.

*Q: I would think that by supporting these fighters that this would be an interesting target for this new Nicaraguan army that was being built.*

NEGROPONTE: You are right, and that is one of the dangers and one of the reasons I wanted more military assistance for Honduras to be able to deal with any military action from the Nicaraguan army and bolster their defenses. Honduras actually had some, not many, but some military strengths. Mostly they had a reputation for having a good air force. A good, small air force. They actually, eventually after I left, got some new aircraft for that air force.

*Q: Where did the Honduran-- traditionally the army is the great equalizer in Latin America where people come from low or middle class and move up.*

NEGROPONTE: True, and Honduras is one of them. People came up through the rank and file. They had a very consensus way of operating. They had what they called the supreme military council of about 30 colonels and generals, mostly colonels. They didn't have that many generals. They decided everything. They were the decision body.

They did have during the time I was there, during the first three years I was there, well during the first 2 ½ years, not the last year, a general called Gustavo Alvarez Martinez who had been the head of their police force, and who had been trained in Argentina. He was the exception to the rule. He had been trained during the Argentine dictatorship in Argentina. He was not a consensus type leader. He was more of a hierarchically oriented person and quite authoritarian in his approach to things. But that ended up being his undoing. The other Honduran officers finally threw him out in about March of '84 while I was there. It was quite an interesting occurrence.

*Q: You mentioned the Argentine connection, and Argentina at that time still had pretty nasty things.*

NEGROPONTE: The Falklands War occurred during the time we were there. It put a real damper on our relationship with Alvarez. He was very unhappy that the Brits beat the Argentines. Those were very tense times. In our own household, my wife is English and we were following, in those days you didn't have CNN, everything was on short wave radio. Listening every night and wondering if some big British battleship was going to get sunk or something.

Anyway, they finally prevailed and that sort of momentarily dampened my relationship with the Honduran military hierarchy. But they got over it. Even the Argentine

ambassador in Honduras, I remember him coming to me after the Falklands thing ended. He said, "Well, the moral of this story is you should never got into a war with a nuclear power." This is one way of looking at it.

*Q: The Argentines had been, just their military really crossed the border and was way out of control, and that means death squads and the disappearances all over.*

NEGROPONTE: I would say the fact that we took over the contra program, right, number one, and number two that Argentina took such a licking in this Falklands situation, Falklands/Malvinas, I think that basically put an end to any influence Argentina might have had in Honduras. We were the country they looked to for guidance, influence and material support. In any event, I mentioned to you that the Contra program was suspended because of the Boland Amendment. But then enter Ollie North.

*Q: Was he anything but a name to you at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh no, I knew Ollie. He would come down fairly frequently because he was one of the National Security Council people working on intelligence matters and counter terrorism and so forth. Ollie as you know, he was a marine colonel, active duty colonel. He and I think Bill Casey, the head of the CIA at the time, engineered this totally around the system. They went completely around the system and around the law and got Saudi and other countries to provide support to the contras.

So the Contra movement at some time, (I would have to go back over all the material to pin point the dates. I am not even sure I could because I wasn't involved) sometime during that period of the Boland Amendment, they started getting this outside support. I was never clued into that. In fact the record shows in the subsequent investigations and everything, it shows they deliberately cut me out. They didn't want me to know about it. One of the reasons was I was an advocate for openly going to the Congress and asking them to reinstate support. I didn't feel we should circumvent the law because I felt that would ruin the chances of ever getting any renewed congressional support. But in any case, the Contras got this support from the Saudis and others, and that is what led to the whole Iran-Contra scandal, which erupted well after I left Honduras.

*Q: Well when you first arrived and the Contras were first beginning their operations. How did you feel things were going in Nicaragua? Were you getting reports, the equivalent of battlefield reports?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I would not call them battlefield reports in the sense of detailed day to day activity, but we were getting reports of the Contras penetrating more and more deeply into Nicaragua. They were actually on a bit of a roll. Then you may recall the other thing that came up was a plan by the Contras to mine the harbors of Nicaragua. The chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence was Daniel Moynihan of New York. When he found out about that, he hit the roof and he revealed it. That caused a huge public outcry. So I would say that may have been one of the factors that led to the Boland Amendment.

In any event, even with the renewed support from the Saudis and whatever external support they were able to get outside the United States law or in contravention of United States law they never got back to the effectiveness they had achieved when they had our explicit support under a CIA covert action. The Contras remained a factor but they were a localized factor. They ended up being a factor in controlling significant chunks of Nicaragua that are near the Honduras border but they never again represented a nationwide kind of a threat to Managua. Don't forget we had a southern front as well run by Eden Pastora, who wasn't as amenable to support from us. He was a former Sandinista leader who defected. Then he went to Costa Rica and ran a small sort of counter revolutionary front on that end.

*Q: What was the influence of events in El Salvador while you were in Honduras?*

NEGROPONTE: Substantial. I mentioned to you activity by the Salvadoran guerillas in their carrying out operations inside of Tegucigalpa and elsewhere. One time in 1982 they seized, Salvadoran guerillas captured the meeting place that the San Pedro Sula chamber of commerce was holding a meeting. They held 106 people hostage for a week. They did it because a Salvadoran front commander who actually interestingly had the name Montenegro had been captured by the Honduran military a few weeks earlier. To save Montenegro they captured the San Pedro Sula chamber of commerce.

Several days after they captured it, they issued a list of all the prisoners, political prisoners, they wanted released in Honduras. Of course buried in that list was the name of Montenegro. The hostage takers did not know that Montenegro had already been returned to the Salvadoran government. In the end, we wore the hostage takers down to the point where they accepted a safe-conduct to Havana in exchange for releasing all the hostages. They, of course, did not get Montenegro. The papal nuncio helped us negotiate this deal. I had wanted to hold out for the surrender of the hostage takers; but President Suazo's patience had run out and he wanted to get the hostages free and the whole issue off the front pages.

*Q: Ok, you are an ambassador and you get this. How do you manage it?*

NEGROPONTE: Somebody in charge of the Delta Force came down from Fort Bragg.

*Q: This is an elite commando unit.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly, and we helped advise them about how to get information on what was going on in that chamber where they were holding all these people. You would be amazed in a hostage crisis how much you can learn about what is going on inside after a few days. They want food, they want water; they want supplies. You make sure that various methods of intelligence collection go in with those supplies. By the end of the crisis I think we knew pretty much where everybody was inside that hall and everything else. If somebody wanted to conduct a commando operation it might have been reasonably successful, but Dr. Suazo was the president and he didn't want to be

responsible for the possible death of 20-30 top businessmen from San Pedro Sula. He did not do what Putin might have done. You think of what Putin has done. I find it just the height of stupidity really. You have to give in. You have to show a concern for human life.

*Q: Fujimori conducted a successful operation in Peru against....*

NEGROPONTE: That is right, but successful in the sense of what? Did any of the hostages get killed? I mean to me that has got to be the measure. If a hostage gets killed then you have got to say to yourself, was it worth it? In any case, we had several of those kinds of crises. There was another way in which Salvador and the communists and all of that affected our lives in Honduras. Tom Enders who is experienced in Cambodia where we had limited our numerical presence of our military in Cambodia to 200-300 people.

*Q: They kept flying in and flying out.*

NEGROPONTE: And all that. He agreed with Congress taking a chapter from his Cambodia book. He agreed, wrongly in my mind, but he agreed to it, to a limit of 50 permanently assigned military in El Salvador. So what did we do, we used this Palmerola Air Base which I had negotiated. I have to get back to that because that is one of the last things I worked on that is still persists to this day. But we used this air base in Honduras from which to stage a lot of U.S. military activity. So we had 600-700 U. S. military. We had reconnaissance aircraft. We had basically, Palmerola Air Base, which is about an hour's drive from Tegucigalpa, became like a major rear area of support for our effort in El Salvador. Now how did that happen? Tom sent a circular in about '82 to about five posts in Latin America.

*Q: This is a circular, an instruction.*

NEGROPONTE: Instructions to us to Colombia, to Jamaica, to two or three other countries saying the military construction budget has got some funds for use in Latin America: "Which of you believe that your host country military might be interested in access to those funds which would be used to improve airfields in exchange for which support they would give us access for our military to use those places?"

Well most of my colleagues were a bit more cautious in their reaction to that message than myself, and I raised my hand. I said, we could use that. Again my reasoning being again I wasn't thinking so much of the threat from El Salvador, I was thinking of Nicaragua. I figured if we had a little military activity in Honduras, the communists would think twice about attacking the country, which is probably correct reasoning. So they sent down Richard Hass who was the fellow working in the Pol-Mil bureau and a Les Brown who was the deputy head of that bureau and they came down for a couple of months of negotiation.

Lo and behold, in 1982 we successfully concluded a base access agreement with Honduras whereby Palmerola Airfield, about an hour from Tegucigalpa, maybe equally

important, maybe about 15 minutes from the President of Honduras' home village. I mean it was an airfield that already existed. We pumped about \$20 million, which in those days was a lot of money, and built this airstrip and taxiway and everything else. So when it was finally inaugurated six or ten months later, a C-5A, the biggest aircraft in the United States Air Force inventory was able to land there.

That was an important development in the political military history of our relationship with Honduras because to this very day there are five or six hundred U.S. military on TDY at Palmerola Air Base (it has now got a different name), who do things like counter narcotics surveillance and so on. So it has turned out to be kind of an all-purpose facility; particularly with the loss of our bases in Panama, it turned out to be not such a bad deal.

*Q: Let's look at sort of the internal situation in Honduras. First of all what was the role of the church while you were there?*

NEGROPONTE: The church in Honduras was not comparable to the church in some other countries I have served like the Philippines. The church was not very active politically. The country is certainly devoutly Catholic. There are some Protestants there. Some evangelical Protestant movement, probably getting stronger today than it was before. The country was by and large Catholic. But I would say the church played a fairly low profile role politically. Nor were they particularly vocal on the issue of family planning and birth control. The Philippines is probably the one where the church has been the most outspoken in my direct experience.

Where the church did play a fairly significant role was the Vatican. The Vatican had a very effective nuncio, who of course was the dean of our diplomatic corps. In Latin America the Nuncio is always the dean. Mr. Montezumalo, Monsignor or Archbishop Montezumalo was the mediator in a number of these different situations we were talking about. I remember there was an aircraft that was captured, again by these Salvadorans. It was taken over in Tegucigalpa airport. People were coming back from the holidays at bay islands, mostly scuba divers because Honduras is a big scuba diving destination. They were held for several days and Montezumalo played a mediation role. So he was quite proactive.

*Q: Was he of Indian origin?*

NEGROPONTE: Montezumalo? No he was Italian.

*Q: I was thinking Montezuma.*

NEGROPONTE: Not Montezuma, no. Montezumalo was Italian. Very Italian. I think he comes from a rather prominent Italian family. So they were active.

*Q: Did you find relations with the nuncio a good source of information? I am not talking about secret information. I am talking about political information sort of one ambassador to another.*

NEGROPONTE: Well he was certainly somebody to be in touch with. Certainly one of the ambassadors one had to stay in touch with. No question about it.

I don't think anybody was as well positioned as we were. We had so much more coverage than any other embassy. We had so many more people. We had literally hundreds of people in Honduras. We had Peace Corps volunteers throughout. Things were never so dangerous that we didn't keep the Peace Corps there. We had AID workers and a large embassy staff. And a large station, as I mentioned to you.

Other countries mostly kept embassies of half a dozen people. Even the bigger countries like the Brits or the French, they didn't have that much presence. The Mexicans, they were hardly there. None of the other countries had a significant presence.

*Q: Interesting, later you were ambassador to Mexico. Did the Mexicans, when I talk to people I don't get much of a feel for Mexican interest.*

NEGROPONTE: That was the period when Mitterrand was president and his wife had a lot of influence. She was, as you may recall, a friend of Regis Debray.

*Q: Yeah, the minister of culture.*

NEGROPONTE: Right. So between the French and the Mexicans, the French and the Mexicans were quite supportive of the guerillas in this initial part of the 1980's. I think they evolved. Don't forget, the Mexicans played a key role in overthrowing Somoza. They were very facilitative. That kind of leftist romance if you will lasted for a few years. By the time I got to Mexico in '89 the romance had worn off. But they went through a period in the mid-80's where they were quite sympathetic. So they complicated our diplomacy.

*Q: Were the Soviets doing anything in Honduras?*

NEGROPONTE: No. They had no representation whatsoever. The Soviet hand was not visible, nor the Chinese hand, none of these other countries. As I said, in Nicaragua the Cubans and Eastern Europeans played a role. Now in retrospect, don't forget the Soviets were having an internal debate about whether to continue to support wars of national liberation. Of course, Gorbachev when he went to Cuba, I think it was in '86, I think he warned them that he didn't think it was a very good idea to keep doing that. I think by the late 80's he had basically discouraged them from that activity. So I think there was more resistance to supporting wars of national liberation developing in the communist world itself in the mid to late 80's.

In the end all of that combined, of course, finally, with the end of the Cold War. I know I am getting ahead of us here, but it is important to recall. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakup of the Soviet empire, that is what ultimately made peace in Central America possible. It didn't really happen until all those events occurred. So it was an area

of Cold War competition. Maybe we should have realized the downfall of communism was inevitable, but that wasn't obvious at all at the time.

*Q: I don't think to anyone.*

NEGROPONTE: No I don't think it was.

*Q: We were all projecting straight lines.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly, so you can judge those events in terms of the Cold War ending a few years later. Which therefore then may make it seem silly to have expended all that effort. Yet on the other hand, what if this thing was destined to continue for another 50 or 100 years? If that were true, then it makes sense to try and draw a line in Central America. After all that is getting very close to home. So that is the rationale for what we did.

*Q: Did events, were we looking at southern Mexico as an unstable place?*

NEGROPONTE: Well there was concern. I think there was concern in the sense that if El Salvador falls, and there was a time when it looked like the Salvadoran military might crumble completely.

In fact you asked me about the relationship to El Salvador. Another thing we did was to set up a regional military training center for Salvadoran troops in Honduras, which we did in 1983, which was very controversial in Honduras because as you know, Honduras and Salvador have had some conflicts of their own not so much earlier. In 1969 they had the so called "soccer war" that happened after a big soccer match between the two countries. Then we would set up a regional military training center for Salvadoran troops on Honduran soil, which is what we did.

I negotiated that with the Honduran military but I think we underestimated the negative public reaction in Honduras to that. There was a real uproar. But I think the training we did carry out for the next six months or a year with the various Salvadoran battalions was a lifesaver for the Salvadorans who were about to go under. But let's say that they had collapsed. As you know, Guatemala had its civil war going on too. But if those had all gone the way of Nicaragua, it is conceivable that Chiapas and southern Mexico, which has a lot of the same ethnic groups, could have been the next.

*Q: It is a tender area.*

NEGROPONTE: It is not impossible. It is not what happened but it is not inconceivable.

*Q: How did you find the media in public diplomacy? Was it an important influence in Honduras or not?*

NEGROPONTE: Of course the most devastating thing that happened to us was the leak of the Contra activity. The way that happened I think really undercut that program. I can't blame the media for finding out; I blame us for not keeping it secret.

*Q: But I was thinking of the Honduran media.*

NEGROPONTE: Oh the media. We had a very good relation. They had a press that was not so different from ours. The different political persuasion. There was a conservative paper. There were some very liberal ones, two or three. There were about four major newspapers that covered the political spectrum. I think all of them shared an admiration and respect for the United States. This is a fairly pro American country in terms of attitudes.

*Q: Did any of the young people go to the States for higher education?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, within the limits of their resources. Again it is not that rich of a country. But there was a long tradition of linkages with Louisiana, particularly with New Orleans and also with Mobile, Alabama because of the banana trade.

*Q: I was going to say those are banana ports.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah the banana trade, so that is a factor. Today there are a lot more Hondurans in the U.S. When I was in Honduras there might have been 50,000 to 60,000, that is all. Now I mean there are hundreds of thousands of Hondurans in the United States. But, the president of the country had not studied in the States. He studied medicine in Guatemala I think. He didn't speak English, but this chief of staff, what they called the minister of the presidency, he was probably my most important contact, went to LSU.

*Q: Louisiana State University.*

NEGROPONTE: Louisiana State and was married to a Louisianan, a nice lady, Mary Flakes. He became president himself and is the godfather of one of my children. Probably the most important thing about Honduras for me was I adopted five Honduran children.

*Q: Five?*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah.

*Q: Good God!*

NEGROPONTE: How did that happen? Right, that is what my wife asks me. We adopted two while we were there. We adopted all these children in infancy when they were less than a year old. We adopted two while we were there, and then we went back several times until I had to forbid my wife from going back to Honduras. We ultimately adopted five. The eldest today is 30. She was born in 1982. The youngest is 19 and born in 1993.



So we have strong ties that way. The oldest is the goddaughter of Carlos Flores, who was the minister of the presidency and a number of years later became president of the country. So that shows that somebody could be elected as president of the country being educated at LSU and having an absolutely American wife, blond, blue-eyed Gringa. He is half Palestinian. Carlos Flores Facussé which is a Christian Palestinian name. It was one of my first insights as to what happened, some of the migratory patterns, after the breakup of the Ottoman empire. There were a lot of Palestinian Christians in Honduras.

*Q: What was the name they were called?*

NEGROPONTE: They were called “Turcos.” They were called Turks because they came at the time of the breakup of the Ottoman empire. You find this everywhere you go in the world, you find these settlements. They came between 1905 and 1907; it must have been a period of tremendous turmoil in the Ottoman Empire because that is when these people came, their ancestors came. Quite a large number of them came to Honduras, and they were all sort of merchants, middle class people. They set up stores and they eventually evolved really into the business elite of Honduras.

*Q: Was there any tie to Islam and Islamic fundamentalism?*

NEGROPONTE: Zero that I am aware. It would be interesting to see if there is any today, but I never ran into that at all.

*Q: I wouldn't think there would be.*

NEGROPONTE: No, and these Palestinians were all Christians. There was a little bit of resentment of Turcos. I mean I think maybe in the army it would have been hard for somebody with a Palestinian name to really rise to the top of the ranks, but not impossible.

*Q: How did you find being an ambassador, you and your wife finding this role as ambassador? I am thinking more socially.*

NEGROPONTE: I think we had too much fun, notwithstanding all the difficulties. I think we really enjoyed it. Honduras was sort of where quite a bit of the action was at that particular time. One of my metrics is always whether Washington pays attention to you and people come to visit your post. You hate to be in a post where nobody ever comes from Washington because that is sort of a measure of how important they think the country is. We did not suffer from that problem at all. In fact the whole congress seemed to come through there. They all wanted to go to Nicaragua, and then they wanted to come to Honduras and then go to El Salvador. They came through all the time. We had that. We had a presidential visit. President Reagan came.

*Q: How did that go?*

NEGROPONTE: That was really interesting. That was December of '82. It came as a result of this Newsweek leak because Bill Clark who was the national security advisor was so upset by that story. He said, "John, we will make it up to you," because it really caused us a lot of problems down in Honduras. He said, "If the president comes to the region I will guarantee you will have a presidential meeting."

It went very well. We met down in San Pedro Sula because Tegucigalpa's airport can't accommodate a Boeing 707. San Pedro's can.

Originally Tom Enders asked me to go in and ask the President if he would be willing to come to Costa Rica to meet with President Reagan so that Reagan could come to one place and all the Central American presidents could meet with him. Dr. Suazo told me right then and there, "I am not going somewhere else to meet with the president of the United States. If he wants to meet with me in Central America, he is very welcome in Honduras."

I said, "Do you mind if I make a phone call, Mr. President?" I went to his desk and one thing that really worked in Honduras you called 1-2-3 and you got the presidential communications where they connected me right away with Mr. Enders. I said, "Tom, we have got a little problem here." So he went back to the drawing boards and I got a call a few days later saying, OK, he will come to Honduras. So he came down.

We had President Efraín Ríos Montt also, from Guatemala, came down to meet with President Reagan in San Pedro. But the meetings were separated. They were discrete meetings. They had a good several hours together. It was a fine meeting, good photo opportunity and not a bad substantive discussion.

You know a presidential meeting is important for all the visual signals it sends. Ronald Reagan was visiting Honduras. It was a big deal. I still have the photo. You know how they have those in the White House corridors of the different recent photos, the nice ones about the size of these maps. I have one of Reagan greeting Suazo just after getting off of Air Force One, with me watching.

*Q: Did you get many visitors from Yale giving you hell because you were not following the academic line?*

NEGROPONTE: No, I got that from some of the groups that visited. We got some groups that were very opposed to what we were doing there who had come. I mean, I remember receiving a group of clergymen from the West Coast somewhere and had them to lunch. When they said grace, they asked the good Lord to have mercy on this poor misguided ambassador who is carrying out the wrong policies.

*Q: Tony Quainton described when he was ambassador to Nicaragua, I think they were Maryknoll sisters or something they said, "Let's all clasp hands and pray." There he is in a circle and they are praying basically against his president.*

NEGROPONTE: Now here is an important visit we had thought, and I forgot to mention it earlier. The Contra program was banned by the Congress and we were having difficulties with the American public on this whole Central America thing. The President asked Henry Kissinger to lead a commission. It was called the Kissinger commission. They came down in that period. That was quite an important visit. We had a lot of people come. I think Jack Kemp, all kinds of people, labor leaders, all sorts. The Kissinger commission ended up recommending 3,000-4,000 scholarships for people in Central America. Because it was recommended by the Kissinger Commission, Congress funded it and the administration funded it. That was a good thing.

*Q: Our visitor/student exchange programs are extremely important.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, and pay a lot of dividends. Anyway, when my term ended in Honduras, which was March of '85, no May of '85. In fact I left in time to make my 25<sup>th</sup> reunion at Yale.

You mentioned Yale. The situation was the following. The Contra program was sort of suspended. It wasn't clear where that was going. The government was stable with elections coming up that fall, presidential general elections. That was all on track. General Alvarez Martinez had been ousted a year earlier so they were back under their sort of consensual military leadership. Our programs in El Salvador were starting to show some positive results. The situation in El Salvador was stabilizing. But the outcome we referred to, the subsequent outcomes were by no means yet clear. I leave in May of '85; we still don't know where all of this is headed.

*Q: Did you feel that when you left you were under fire by the left or the Democrats?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I was a little bit under fire. But life has its funny twists and turns. I was under fire also from inside parts of the department. There were people who wanted me out of Honduras. I think they felt I was maybe more enthusiastic about the policy than I should have been. I think they felt I had violated Mr. Talleyrand's dictum. "Above all no zeal." I think the feeling was, I was 40 some years old. I wasn't some aging diplomat. I probably would have been a little different now than I was back then. More energy. So there were some people back there that wanted me out.

In fact, they ended up maneuvering it so that someone was named to replace me. I got called by Mike Armacost who was the undersecretary for political affairs. "Hey John, we think it is time for you to go. What do you want to do?" I knew that the person who was running the Bureau of Oceans, Environment and Science was not doing very well in the eyes of the administration. Mr. Shultz and he didn't get along very well. I had been in that Bureau for 2 ½ years back in the late 70's. What about making me Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans, Environmental and Scientific Affairs? Mike had never thought of it. He said, "Wow that is a great idea." So the next thing I knew I was sent the paperwork to apply for the job of Assistant Secretary of State.

I was happy as a clam. I really liked that work, Law of the Sea, oceans. We have talked about it. So I was not only leaving Central America, and by the way I had gone up for my hearings already. I had my hearings in May. I had Ted Stevens introduce me because I had negotiated the salmon agreements for him back in the 70's.

*Q: Ted Stevens, the senator from Alaska.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly and he testified on my behalf and so did John McCain. There was a group of senators that I was on very good terms with. They had all come though Central America in the past three years. So I was already confirmed for the job, not confirmed. I had already had my hearing and had been voted out of committee. My name was before the full Senate when I left Honduras. Jesse Helms then held the nomination up but along with 20 or 30 other nominations. It turned out what he wanted was he wanted us to get some job for Mr. Malone, the guy I was replacing, because he liked Mr. Malone. I ended up being confirmed in the position I am going to say in July. So that is probably a good place to stop.

*Q: I was thinking, do you have a minute?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh I have a minute, but that was sort of the turning point. I guess I went to my class reunion and then I actually went to OES and got started even though I hadn't been confirmed. I started on sort of an acting basis.

*Q: So while you were in Honduras they may have been trying to consolidate their democracy. Were there any public diplomacy programs being run that the embassy focused on promoting democracy or was AID running any good government?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, AID did have some governance programs. I would say they were more like at the village level, how to encourage that kind of behavior. I would say our public diplomacy efforts weren't particularly systematic, but we were definitely out there encouraging them.

They did, by the way during the time I was there not only have the presidential election I referred to, they had mid-term elections after two years for mayors. I can't remember whether their Congress, I can't remember whether it is elected for four year terms or two year terms. It is a very active place politically. Politics is not Honduras' problem. They have a lot of other problems, but politics, have you been to Honduras?

*Q: No.*

NEGROPONTE: I mean they love that stuff. They love political rallies, they talk endlessly. Part of the problem is to get the right response. Like in many third world or less developed countries there are a lot of conspiracy theories out here. If you don't understand events, the best theory usually is the CIA did it. Anything that can't be explained immediately they lay at our doorstep.

No, their political culture in a sense was pretty well advanced. Where they were deficient was more in the rule of law and good civil procedures. They revised their penal code while I was there, but their prisons were a mess. The administration of justice really left a lot to be desired. There was an American who was married to someone from a very prominent family in Honduras. He had killed some people who were invading his property. "Invasions," I mean that is fairly classic in Latin America, people who feel this land they are cultivating belongs to them and doesn't belong to the Hacendado or whoever it is that owns the Finca or whatever.

So he was trying to chase some people off property he thought was his, squatters on it and he killed several people. I had developed a practice of visiting, usually around Christmas time, visiting Americans who were in jail in Honduras. I did it in my subsequent posts too. I thought it was a good practice. I would recommend it to any ambassador.

*Q: It is very seldom done.*

NEGROPONTE: Very seldom done but not a bad idea. And it shows concern for Americans who are physically in jail. I visited Leo Mills, who was in jail awaiting a trial. I don't know if he ever got tried, but he was in jail for a number of months. He had a suite, a comfortable bed. He was talking to people on the phone. He was one of the only people who had a telephone. Cell phones hardly existed in those days, but he had some kind of portable phone he could use. So it was hardly, and meanwhile I am sure there were a bunch of poor Honduran prisoners who were living absolutely terribly in those prisons.

Honduras is not better off than it was in 1985. This is the real sad truth. Part of it is that the population has almost doubled in those 30 years. They have not really held that population explosion in check at all. They are always playing catch up. There has been some development of assembly plants, particularly on the north coast near San Pedro Sula, where there are industrial parks. But they just can't keep up with this population growth. So no wonder you see them coming north.

In fact, Mexico's problems today have a lot to do with all of Central America. It is not so much the Mexicans crossing into the United States undocumented; it is the Central Americans coming through Mexico to get into the United States. So I feel sad for Honduras.

And then they have these gangs. That did not exist in my time. Today Honduras has got an estimated 13,000 people who are members of gangs. Twice the size of the Honduran army that I was dealing with. How do you control that? So the rule of law and all that, today I think is the most serious problem that faces Central America. I believe that it is most serious in Honduras and Guatemala. The reason I don't say it is as bad in El Salvador is I think they have a little better grip on their governance, maybe because of the civil war they went through that somehow the Salvadorans get it better than the Hondurans or the Guatemalans.

*Q: OK. Today is 8 July 2013, with John Negroponte. John, you took an awful lot of heat and you kept taking heat for your time in Honduras. What about, and mainly over how heavily one human rights. Looking back on this, how do you feel about the situation?*

NEGROPONTE: About the same as I did then, which is we had an agenda to promote democracy. I got there three weeks before presidential elections. The first presidential elections in nine years. A civilian government was ushered in, and for seven consecutive presidential elections -- to this very day! -- there have been, like clockwork, orderly democratic transitions, with one slight interruption with this coup, but they got it back on track. That was much later. That is 25 years after I am gone.

But we helped restore democratic rule, and I feel I was instrumental in that. We worked on the human rights political agenda. But you know Honduras was surrounded by trouble. There was a revolution in El Salvador. The Sandinistas had taken over Nicaragua and Guatemala was in turmoil. There were refugees from all of those countries. In Honduras there is something like 150,000 to 200,000 refugees.

*Q: Which speaks to the relative situation.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly. They weren't fleeing Honduras; they were fleeing to Honduras. But unfortunately the heat comes from something else. Latin America policy in the United States, particularly in that era, and I think maybe a little less so today, was always very polarized and very politicized. There was this sort of on the one side you had some of the liberation theology if you will, and on the other side you had the conservative reaction to that. It was very hard to steer a middle path without catching a lot of flak. That was point one.

Point two, Washington itself was very much divided about what to do about Latin America. The White House and the State Department weren't always on the same page. So that was a little bit difficult to navigate. So I got along pretty well with both the White House and the State Department. But as I say there was some divisiveness there, but those divisions in the body politic in general, you remember the atmosphere, just made it a bit controversial to be an ambassador down there. I was one of the few who actually got an embassy again after having served in Central America. The graveyards are full of American ambassadors who didn't get another assignment after Central America.

Another thing that was controversial was the Contra program, and Honduras was the base area. We supported the Contras from the Embassy in Tegucigalpa. I had a station a mile long. It was huge. They supported these contras in Nicaragua. Then Congress banned, forbade support to the Contras so that stopped. But Ollie North and others found a way around all of that and illicitly found some support for the Contras, so the controversy continued.

So finally, in the middle of 1985, I left there. But I felt that during the time I was there we, number one, helped the transition to democracy and number two, and this was my

real priority in Honduras, was to fortify that government enough so it could withstand the pressures from the neighboring countries. So we substantially increased the assistance program in Honduras, including military assistance, so that they could deal with whatever contingencies arose as a result of the instability in the neighboring countries.

*Q: What about the Honduran military? Because the military has always been sort of, within the Latin American context, that is where the not sort of privileged classes can rise, or at least some of their members can rise to position. They sort of develop a sort of ethos of their own. How did you find this?*

NEGROPONTE: Well the Honduran military was kind of interesting. I think as you suggest these were people from all walks of life and all social classes. In that sense it was a democratic institution. They had their own culture, their own networking system.

The tendency in the Honduran military, and they were known for this, was to operate by consensus. They had a council of colonels. There aren't many generals in Honduras. There are 30 or so colonels and they met and decided all the issues that affect the Honduran military. And to a large extent, once the Sandinistas had taken over in neighboring Nicaragua and the civil war had broken out in El Salvador, they were deciding national security issues. They had to decide some very serious questions about how to cope with refugees, what to do about guerillas from El Salvador who were seeking safe haven in Honduras.

There were some threatening situations, but there was a particular individual that came along who was out of the classic Honduran mold. His name was Gustavo Alvarez Martinez. What distinguished him from the others, he had been head of the Honduran police force. When I got there they named him chief of staff of the armed forces and promoted him to general; I think he was the only general in the Honduran army. He had been trained, as distinct from everybody else, he had been trained in Argentina during the time of the Argentine dictatorship. So he believed a little bit more in what the Latins would call La Mano Dura, the heavy hand. Alvarez was controversial; his human rights performance left something to be desired. He took that job over in 1982, but he only lasted two years. He was ousted during my time. In fact he was ousted about a year before I left Honduras.

*Q: Did we have any hand in that?*

NEGROPONTE: No, in fact we were taken by surprise. No, he irritated his own peers because they felt he had gotten too big for his britches. They thought he got arrogant. Actually the coup was hatched very much on the spur of the moment. The head of the air force (the Hondurans have a very good air force. They distinguished themselves in those days by having a pretty good air force. Small but highly skilled), Walter Lopez was the head of it.

What happened was Alvarez, who was arrogant, went down to San Pedro Sula, the commercial capital of the country, and asked where the commander of the base was. The

commander of the base wasn't there. The lieutenant, it was a Saturday said, "He has gone to the football game, the soccer game." That is what a good Latin does on a Saturday, was watch the soccer match in San Pedro. Alvarez was very irritated that he wasn't met with full honors as the commander in chief was due. Then when he came back to the air base the next day or that night, again he was greeted by the lieutenant on duty and asked where is the commander of the base. He said, "He isn't here. He is taking the weekend off."

So Alvarez on the spot fired Walter Lopez, the head of the Air Force, for not having been properly attended when he went to San Pedro. In 48-72 hours, Walter Lopez got together with a group of equally disgruntled other military officers, including a couple of high ranking well placed colonels in the army, they overthrew him. When Alvarez flew back from somewhere, they just met him at the airport and sent him off to Costa Rica in the executive jet of the Honduran military.

At that point Washington was mad at me for not having anticipated this. So sometimes you get criticized either way. I was criticized for being too close to Alvarez. This time I was criticized for not having anticipated this development. But I know, these stories were told to me after the fact. I know his overthrow was hatched on very short notice. Alvarez got ousted and Walter Lopez did, I think, improve the human rights situation. Things got more or less back on track.

But I left Honduras feeling good about my assignment there. it was not an easy assignment Three and a half years building up their defenses, keeping them more or less on track toward democracy which continued, but still leaving an awful lot to be done. It was a very poor country.

*Q: Did the Sandinistas serve as more a menace or more as a dangerous example?*

NEGROPONTE: I think the country was politically strong enough at the time, I am talking about Honduras, that it wasn't going to be undermined politically by what had happened in Nicaragua or what was happening in El Salvador. In part because Alvarez really had a handle on the subversive side of things. Hondurans took care. They were good at that part. They scarfed up a lot of Salvadoran comandantes and guerillas who used to use Honduras as R&R. They would take R&R right down in the middle of downtown Tegucigalpa.

We actually rounded up one time some good intelligence. We captured a guy going to a local fast food shop. He said to one of his other buddies in some communication, "I will meet you at such and such a place on Saturday at 1:00." Sure enough he was picked up by Honduran security types.

But what was a threat to Honduras, they felt at the time, was the buildup of the Sandinista armed forces, which was totally disproportionate to the needs of the country and to any local requirements. I mean, they built up an army of tens of thousands. These were people being trained by East Germans and getting supplies forwarded to them by Cuba. So they were a threat. They felt threatened by that and they felt threatened by the uncertainty in



El Salvador. There were refugees from El Salvador in camps along the border. They were mostly wives and children of guerillas. So it was sort of a war atmosphere.

*Q: Were we ready to do something if the Nicaraguans launched an attack on Honduras do you think?*

NEGROPONTE: You know it never came quite to that discussion. But we increased the military assistance. We eventually sold them some F-5 aircraft and gave them some retaliatory capability. We had negotiated early in my tenure, about 1982, to get with Richard Haas, by the way, who was working in PM then, a military access agreement to their airfields. Not unlike the access agreements we have in the Middle East with Oman and places like that.

So in exchange for us providing some monies to improve the three different airfields in Honduras, we got access to use them for our purposes. We ended up stationing about six or seven hundred troops in Honduras in an air base about an hour from Tegucigalpa. But not permanently. They were not called bases, it was just an access agreement. So we would send people for 179 day tours. You know the story. If it is less than 180 days you are not permanently assigned, so we just had people rotating in and out of there every 179 days.

*Q: What were they doing?*

NEGROPONTE: Well we had logistics. A lot more sort of a rear area for El Salvador. Tom Enders (who was the assistant secretary for much of my time there), drawing on his Cambodian experience, agreed with Congress to a limitation of only 50 U.S. military could be in El Salvador at any given time. So a lot of those things. We did in Cambodia, were you in Saigon?

*Q: Yeah.*

NEGROPONTE: Remember in Cambodia, we kept it to 200 or 300 U.S. military personnel I think. So Tom took the same idea and applied it to El Salvador. They agreed at 50, but what it meant was we got all the additional people at Palmerola Air Base. We had these six or seven hundred military personnel, some of whom were flying various reconnaissance planes. Because you had to reconnoiter El Salvador. So there must have been a couple of dozen aircraft, that kind of thing. And re-fueling. Sometimes we had big cargo planes coming in, all sorts of activity to the limit you could conduct with about 600 people there. Then we had exercises over and above that. We had occasional exercises and those too were intended as a signal to Nicaragua.

*Q: I mean the fact that we had combat type planes.*

NEGROPONTE: I don't think Nicaragua was going to mess with Honduras.

*Q: It wasn't that hard.*

NEGROPONTE: They didn't want to give us an excuse to do.

*Q: Was Cuba a problem?*

NEGROPONTE: Not directly. There were some Hondurans who had been to Cuba and been trained in Cuba, very few. When the new civilian government came into power in November of '81, I remember we had a very interesting report that two top colonels of the Honduran army had been invited to Cuba to meet Fidel Castro. I think he made a ploy. He tried to win them over. I mean there is a leftist tradition in Honduras. It is a minority, but it is there.

So they were playing on that hoping to gain influence, but they didn't succeed in part because of Alvarez and in part because the civilian president they elected Dr. Suazo, the country doctor, turned out to be a little like Harry Truman. Nobody knew what kind of mettle he had, and he turned out to be a plain speaking kind of tough guy, and he had no use for communists whatsoever. But he was a liberal democrat.

*Q: Well Honduras, what is the composition of Indian versus...*

NEGROPONTE: Oh it is completely Mestizo. Meaning a mixed. If there are any Indian tribes, they are tiny. Down in the south on the Nicaraguan border you would find some Miskito Indians. Actually that was one of our big crises, was when the Nicaraguans conducted a military campaign against the Miskito Indians right up along the Caribbean coast in Northern Nicaragua. It borders on Honduras. Several times the Miskito Indians fled, maybe 15,000 to 20,000 fled into Honduras from Nicaragua during that fighting.

Actually my wife for a while became the sort of the acting head of an outfit called the World Relief Organization because their director left and they had nobody to run it, so they asked her to run it. She spent quite a bit of time down in La Mosquitia, helping these people out. There are very few pure Indians in Honduras. And the El Salvador ethnic makeup is about the same Hondurans and Salvadorans are more or less if not rothers, they are cousins ethnically, very much the same make up.

*Q: What about the Washington side of things? Did you go up much?*

NEGROPONTE: I went up but not much. I had so much to do down there. I was busy. We were really busy. Everybody wanted to go through. We had all of Congress come through there because they all wanted to inspect the Contra program. They would go to Nicaragua and then to Honduras and go to El Salvador. They would do the little, you could do it on a weekend. You leave on a Friday afternoon. I mean they ruined all our weekends.

One of the things reflecting back especially having responsibilities until very recently, I realized how much less communication we had back then. Sure we wrote telegrams, we wrote a zillion telegrams. I wrote them myself. In those days you did more of that stuff. I

had a chron file that was thick like that. But secure telecommunications, the secure telephone worked terribly. It always broke down. You got into this little booth that you didn't want to be in anyway so that acoustically you couldn't be overheard. I hated that. That didn't work.

I went up once every six months maybe, once every four months at the most. Honduras is not that far from Washington. I went to the White House occasionally, and to State of course. But Washington was divided. There were a lot of divisions especially after the Boland Amendment was passed, which was a law that said it was forbidden to provide any kind of assistance to the Contras. Washington was in a very divided state about how to deal with that situation.

*Q: Why would something like that pass?*

NEGROPONTE: Well because they thought, here is what happened. It was a covert program like all these things. But it didn't stay covert very long. Actually when you think about it, it stayed covert longer than they stay today. It was covert for about a year. They started it and they passed the finding in November of '81. The cover wasn't really blown on it at all until November of '82.

So that generated a lot of controversy, and then the Contras started to get some momentum and started doing pretty well. They were up to a force of about 10,000 or 15,000 soldiers. Then I think Mr. Casey, who was running the CIA, and his people made a mistake. They went a step too far. They hatched a plot to start mining the ports of Nicaragua. That irked Senator Patrick Moynihan. I think he may have been the chair of the Senate intelligence committee. He blew his stack.

Then you remember Tip O'Neill. There wasn't that much love lost between Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan. They put the worst possible construction on this and ended up passing a law saying we aren't going to have it. I remember Tip O'Neill saying, "Mr. Reagan won't be happy until he has American troops in fighting in Central America."

The irony of that is Reagan supported the Contra program for exactly the opposite reason. He did not want to send American troops. I became his deputy national security advisor shortly thereafter. I remember him saying that repeatedly of how he abhorred the idea of large scale U.S. involvement in Latin America. He went to school in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when there was a lot of American intervention in that part of the world. He remembered it unfavorably.

*Q: Get the marines out of Nicaragua was a major theme in high school debates.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly. You remember it all. So that was another reason for controversy. I left. They wanted me out in the end. There were competing forces in Washington. There was a group that wanted me out and there was a group that wanted me to stay. I had already done three and a half years, which was plenty. So I was happy to go.

Then this fellow called Jim Malone resigned from being Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans, Environment and Science.

*Q: He was very controversial.*

NEGROPONTE: He himself was very controversial, and he resigned in December of the previous year, in '84. I had been the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Fisheries and we talked about that earlier. I called Mike Armacost, he was the undersecretary of state and said, "Hey Mike, you are going to have difficulty figuring out what to do with me. How about making me Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Environmental Science?"

He said, "Hey that is a great idea." So he went to Shultz, and Shultz was delighted because it meant there was the right wing and conservative elements in Washington were concerned that the State Department was punishing me for having carried out the administration's policy. So when they offered me this job, and I accepted with delight because I really like that kind of work and was very interested in oceans, environment and science, it solved the problem for Shultz and it solved the problem for me.

*Q: Did you find you came back to Negroponte haters within the political thing?*

NEGROPONTE: Not anymore, no because what happened was once my next assignment was resolved and they replaced me with somebody else, I actually had my hearings while I was still ambassador to Honduras. I came up for my hearings. I actually got heard, voted out of committee, all before May 30, 1985, which is when I left Honduras. So basically people said, well he is gone now. He is not involved in Central America any more, that is fine. So I went off, and they thought I was going off to some kind of backwater job, and I felt I was going to a terrific job. I was going to be an assistant secretary in a subject area that I really liked.

*Q: I was looking at something not too long ago and seeing all the fuss about James Malone. What was the problem with him?*

NEGROPONTE: You know I can't recall all the details. He was a protégé of Jesse Helms. On some issues he took a very ideological positions, at least from the point of view of the State Department. Let's just say the State Department was slightly left of center in political view. And Malone and the building did not get along.

Then Jesse held us all up. I was appointed to this job, had my hearing, was on the floor and we were all held up for about a month. There were 50 or more appointments held up. That is why you remember it. Helms was holding up 50 or so State Department appointments, 40-50. It turned out the reason he was holding them up was because of Malone. He wanted Malone to get another job. Mr. Shultz offered Malone the ambassadorship to Belize. Mr. Malone declined.

Anyway the problem finally passed. I was already reading into the job. In fact I was at the bureau and reading in and everything else. I didn't get actually confirmed until July of 1985.

*Q: When you arrived there, in the first place how did you find office morale? I mean having been under Malone how did he run the place and what sort of bureau did you find?*

NEGROPONTE: I wasn't there when Malone was there. He had some good people, who I continued to work with afterwards. Luckily it was a very diverse bureau that deals with lots of subjects. There is no way an assistant secretary could run everything. What I did find was they were happy to have someone back who had previously been in the bureau, because I had been the DAS for fisheries for two and a half years back in the 70's.

Then they were very happy when I brought on a principal deputy who was a star in the economic bureau, a fellow called Richard Smith. Dick actually has written a book about negotiating environmental agreements. Environmental and Scientific Diplomacy, all about our time together. So we brought in Dick, and I brought in a fellow called Pete De Vos who regrettably has died. Pete later went to be ambassador to Liberia. Richard Benedick was my deputy for environmental affairs and he is the man who wrote Ozone Diplomacy. He was our negotiator for the Montreal Protocol.

*Q: One of the things that is interesting about that bureau is it had some of the top people. I mean you have obviously gone on.*

NEGROPONTE: I was deputy when Tom Pickering had it.

*Q: Tom Pickering was there, Roz Ridgeway, I don't know if she was the head of it or not.*

NEGROPONTE: No she handled fisheries. I took her place as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Fisheries.

*Q: There was a saying when the going gets tough they throw Roz into the fish.*

NEGROPONTE: She was great.

*Q: I mean these were, that was not an inconspicuous bureau, which it well could have been.*

NEGROPONTE: I think that when career people were running the bureau, it had a real impact in Washington because we knew how to work the system. Sometimes the people they got from the outside tended to be either ideological or they were scientists who really didn't know how to work the policy within the government.

*Q: There was a woman from Washington, Dixie somebody.*

NEGROPONTE: Oh Dixie Lee Ray. She was the first assistant secretary under Henry Kissinger. She was the one who brought her dog to the office.

*Q: I was going to say, somehow a dog popped into my mind.*

NEGROPONTE: She brought her dog to the office. But here is the thing about OES. It was exciting. We had a huge portfolio because we had oceans, we had environment, we had science. We also had nuclear nonproliferation. In those days the nuclear non-proliferation function was in our bureau.

*Q: Not ACDA?*

NEGROPONTE: Well ACDA is still had a role, but in the department we were the ones who handled it, working with Ambassador Richard T. Kennedy who was the special ambassador at large for nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear energy affairs. We had some excellent people there.

I recall being involved in 13 different major negotiations in that bureau in the 2 ½ years. I was involved in the bureau from soup to nuts. It was acid rain from Canada. The space station we negotiated. Dick Smith and I engineered European and Canadian and Russian participation in the space station project. But foremost among our accomplishments was that Richard Benedick negotiated the Montreal Protocol for the protection of the stratospheric ozone layer.

*Q: That has been held up as...*

NEGROPONTE: That is the only global greenhouse gas agreement that has ever been reached, that was 26 years ago. Dick was ferocious in his pursuit of that agreement. There were lots of obstacles in Washington. We had Don Hodel, who was secretary of the interior, who was totally against it. There was a famous Herblock cartoon about Don Hodel because he said in a press conference that he didn't think we should have an ozone treaty and correspondents asked what should we do then? "People should buy more sunblock." Really! Herblock had a fabulous cartoon on that later on. We negotiated Antarctic agreements, Antarctic fishing agreements and so on. It was really fascinating. The Convention on Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CAMELAR).

*Q: To put this in context this was before sort of the Republicans took the...*

NEGROPONTE: This is in Reagan's administration.

*Q: This was before it had become a political issue about global warming and all, which has gotten sort of imbedded.*

NEGROPONTE: It was incipient. I will tell you why I remember it as being incipient. We were also in charge of a task force when Chernobyl happened.

*Q: This was the implosion of...*

NEGROPONTE: Of the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, Ukraine. Then part of the Soviet Union of course. I remember making speeches after on nuclear power in the post Chernobyl era and making some references to the fact that nuclear energy can be helpful in mitigating global warming. So we were conscious of it. I also remember had I stayed longer, my time at OES was interrupted because Colin Powell had invited me to be his deputy over at the National Security Council. But had I stayed longer, the next initiative I was going to push for after the Montreal Protocol was a global forestry convention because the destruction of forests, particularly tropical forests was one of the major contributors to climate change.

*Q: Brazil is one of the main...*

NEGROPONTE: Well there are three major sources of tropical forests. Brazil, Indonesia and DRC Congo. Those were the big countries. It was a very interesting bureau. We had a lot of bilateral science agreements.

*Q: Well let's talk about something. I think this is often an under reported activity in American diplomacy. You were there from when to when?*

NEGROPONTE: I was there from July of 1985, that is when I was confirmed. To November, 1987.

*Q: Ronald Reagan was president; George Shultz was secretary of state. What were your issues, and let's talk about each one, I mean your major issues?*

NEGROPONTE: Well starting with environment first. The major issues in the environment were acid rain with Canada, which was a big negotiation because there were sulfuric acid emissions from power plants in the Ohio Valley were causing dieback to trees in New England and Canada.

*Q: Due to prevailing winds.*

NEGROPONTE: The winds carried over to Canada and New England, killing the trees. It was a huge issue. The Canadians wanted us to shut down those power plants or stop using coal or put in scrubbers and flues that could filter out some of the sulfur. That was one big issue. We had an ongoing dialog with the Canadians about this issue. Which ultimately was not solved by negotiations. It was ultimately, quite a bit after I left, was solved by domestic legislation in the U.S. putting restrictions on these coal burning power plants in the Ohio Valley. So that was issue number one.

Issue number two, which was resolved by negotiation, was these chlorofluorocarbons which were brought under control by the Montreal Protocol to protect the stratospheric ozone layer.

*Q: What was the problem as it was seen in your time about the ozone layer?*

NEGROPONTE: Well the problem was that these CFC's (chlorofluorocarbons) which emit from air conditioning, refrigerants and refrigerators hurt the ozone layer, destroy it. The first real signal we had was with the so-called Antarctic hole. NOAA and NASA identified a gap in the Ozone layer that was opening up in the Antarctic region. Then they did some scientific research, and there was a very famous Mexican scientist, Mario Molina, and an American, Frank Rowland. Together they successfully conducted an experiment demonstrating that these CFCs destroyed the ozone layer. So the science became indisputable. These guys got a Nobel Prize for this.

*Q: I imagine though, there must have been an awful lot of pooh-poohing of this by the refrigeration people.*

NEGROPONTE: No, actually they came on board. The chemical industry came on board a little bit faster than official Washington. The science advisor to the president didn't accept it. He really didn't believe it. We really had the cards stacked against us. The science advisor didn't believe it. Don Hodel was against it, and some of the ideologues were against it because you know, you negotiate an international agreement you are going to have the UN running our lives again right? You can't have that.

But we made league, we being State, with the EPA. There was a very fine gentleman called Lee Thomas. Together we went to these conferences that had already started. It was a UN conference on the subject of protecting the stratosphere, the ozone layer, and we generated quite a bit of debate in this town. Then a very important step: we sent teams of scientists from NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and NASA and we sent them to talk to officials in other countries. The key ones were Japan, Russia and the European Union.

*Q: The Soviet Union.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, the Soviet Union in those days, right. We had to convince them of the science, and we succeeded. Our strategy was a two-pronged thing of conducting negotiations and convincing the foreigners that the science was valid. We succeeded in doing that. And finally we had a huge interagency powwow with these different forces arrayed against each other, but we had the strong support of Secretary Shultz and his deputy, John Whitehead.

*Q: Tell us who John Whitehead was.*

NEGROPONTE: He was the deputy secretary of state. By that time I was sort of reporting to him as the assistant secretary for oceans environment and science. John and the secretary helped me win this interagency debate. We sent Richard Benedick to sign the protocol in 1987. I forget which month he signed the protocol in Montreal. It has since gone into effect and it has been a great success.



*Q: For somebody looking at this because now this is no longer an issue, what was the issue of the ozone layer? What was the problem?*

NEGROPONTE: If it gets destroyed or damaged and reduced in thickness. I mean I can't give you the scientific, but the ozone layer acts as a filter of ultra violet solar rays. Therefore if it gets severely damaged or disappears, it exposes the earth to a lot more solar radiation that is apparently bad for you, and in fact could have a seriously damaging effect not only on human life but other life on earth as well.

*Q: Were there any problems with negotiations in Montreal?*

NEGROPONTE: Benedick handled those beautifully, and by the way a footnote here, he wrote a book about it called Ozone Diplomacy, which is pretty well written. But no, basically not. The key problem was convincing the other countries of the science, but I think once everybody was on board, this turned out to be a science based international agreement.

*Q: Did you have, as so often happens, a group of scientists who were trying to say this doesn't exist?*

NEGROPONTE: I don't really remember that, except the only thing I do remember was the president's own science advisor was kind of a laggard. He dragged his feet. Bill Graham his name was. He was sort of ideological. I didn't really understand where he was coming from. I mean, a lot of other scientists I talked to believed the science. NASA, NOAA, the Department of Energy, which had excellent scientists. So that was environment.

Then there was oceans, and we were really there with the various fisheries issues. There are always ongoing negotiations with fisheries of various kinds, about tuna fishing rights. Probably the biggest negotiations we had with regard to fishing was with the South Pacific because what had happened, and this is very important to our relationship. These 15 small South Pacific nations, you know, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, all these island countries. Our tuna fleets had basically been expelled from the eastern tropical Pacific.

That is what happened when I was the DAS, because these countries extended their jurisdiction out to 200 miles. They didn't want American tuna boats fishing with impunity in their 200 mile zones. The tuna fishermen didn't want to pay license costs or anything else to fish within those 200 miles because they believed they had a right to fish for these fish because they were a highly migratory species, and therefore not subject to coastal state jurisdiction. In any event access became very difficult all along the Eastern Pacific from Mexico down to Chile. So the big tuna fleets moved to the western Pacific, which is where they are to this very day. They went to Western Samoa. They took the canneries with them out there. So they had to get some kind of access to these southern Pacific countries. Everybody was beating their brains out trying to figure out what to do.

This is when I came back from Honduras. I went to Gaston Sigur, who was the assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific. After having a meeting with the industry. I went to California to have a meeting with the industry in San Diego. That is where they had their offices. I told Gaston, "if you can find \$15,000,000 a year I think I can solve this problem for you." We would use that money to pay for the tuna fleets to each pay those different island republics an annual license fee to fish in those waters. That was the basic deal.

Gaston eventually, well Gaston's initial reaction was, "Well we have got to find the money somewhere." We eventually did and we put together this deal. It took us a year or so to negotiate it, maybe a little longer, whereby in exchange for a certain fee every year to each of these countries, our tuna fleet could fish in their claimed jurisdictional waters for tuna. We had a very dramatic signing ceremony out in Papua New Guinea. That agreement exists to this day. I went and signed the agreement on behalf of the U.S.

*Q: Those countries, I went to the Federated States of Micronesia.*

NEGROPONTE: They are part of it too.

*Q: You know there is nothing there. I mean...*

NEGROPONTE: Fishing, tourism, diving to look for old wrecks. That is it.

*Q: What about people like the Chinese, but the Japanese and South Koreans? They are not the most friendly groups.*

NEGROPONTE: Right, and they are kind of predatory when it comes to fishing. They all are. That is a bit of a problem. Taiwan too was a big fishing power down there. Anyway we worked out our relationships. Quite recently I met somebody who was working on these issues. Apparently the basic deal still exists, but maybe the license cost has gone up.

But it was a big move in terms of both helping save the U.S. tuna fleet. which was in dire straits, on the one hand and resolving a problem that was a real irritant to the relationship. Because these countries faced domestic criticism too. "You mean you are going to let these Americans fish here without paying anything?" and so on and so forth. So it was a big issue. The other issue in fisheries was Antarctica. We were always engaged in various kinds of negotiations for the Arctic and Antarctic. Including issues concerning protecting the Antarctic environment. So that was environment and the oceans.

*Q: What about the Daniel Webster and others were salmon fishing off Canada, both ends of that?*

NEGROPONTE: That is a perennial issue. I worked on it more in the 1970's when I was DAS for fisheries because we had a major agreement that I accomplished with the Japanese where I persuaded them to stop fishing. Well first of all I persuaded them to move their high seas salmon fisheries ten degrees further west. Because what they were

doing was intercepting Bristol Bay Sockeye Salmon. They were going out into the Pacific during their life cycle. They would get out to the Pacific Ocean and the Japanese were just sitting there waiting to poach on them. Of course that just depleted the stock that could return back to procreate again and so forth. So we got them to move about ten degrees west.

Eventually that had the effect of making their high seas fishery uneconomic and they shut it down. So, Ted Stevens whom I worked with very closely, senator from Alaska, was absolutely thrilled. He has always felt that bureau did a lot of good for Alaska. We also had some issues of managing the salmon stocks on the Frazier River. It is covered by a convention but there are always issues on the border of Canada and the Continental United States. There are some issues on the Atlantic as well, but most of them have now been channeled into existing bilateral agreements that manage these stocks.

*Q: What about ocean mining, had that died away?*

NEGROPONTE: Well deep-sea bed mining kind of went away at that time because there was not much interest in these manganese nodules. If you want to go fast forward to when I was Deputy Secretary of State after the law of the sea treaty had been re-negotiated, the chapter on mining which happened in the 80's.

But by the time I was deputy secretary in 2007 and 2008, I was the administration witness at a renewed attempt to ratify the Law of the Sea Treaty. I went up there with various other agency deputies, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We didn't succeed in pushing the treaty through. Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Panetta, who in private life had been a big supporter of the Law of the Sea Treaty, they didn't succeed either. We still haven't gotten the darn thing through. The reason I mention it is there is a little interest now in deep sea mining. Lockheed Corporation and various others. You might see them deploy the technology if we have the treaty ratified.

*Q: But it was pretty much we had the technology and nobody else did?*

NEGROPONTE: If we don't ratify the treaty and the exploitation becomes really interesting, the American companies will go and do it under somebody else's flag. We have other reasons for needing to ratify the Law of the Sea Treaty.

*Q: Did you get involved in sort of both the Canadian but particularly the Mexican water flow and all that?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yeah, we had big issues with Mexico. Well, water, you mean the water of the Rio Grande? That is covered by conventions. It didn't take that much of our time; there is a boundary water commission that has some very specific responsibilities for that.

But what I did get involved in was, for example, the great concern that the Tijuana sewage, raw sewage that was going out into the ocean and then coming back onto the

beaches in San Diego. Congressman Duncan Hunter and others were up in arms about what are we going to do to prevent this blight that was destroying tourism in Southern California? I went out to see. I visited the Tijuana sewage plant. It was one of the more interesting experiences in my life.

*Q: What was it like?*

NEGROPONTE: It was pretty smelly. I walked through the whole thing. I looked at the measures they had in place to control the spill and flow of that stuff into the ocean and everything else. I mean they needed a new sewage treatment plant. I went to look at some of the damage being done on the U.S. side. That one ultimately involved working with the World Bank and working with the international financial institutions to get the funding in place so the plant could be built quickly. We negotiated an arrangement whereby the plant would be built on the U.S. side. It turned out to be a better place to build it for some reason and to deal with the sewage. Anyway it has been done and the problem has been solved. That is the kind of problem that came up.

*Q: Oh God yes. Were we doing anything coming out of our watersheds and all that was causing problems for other countries?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I am just not very versed in it because I didn't really deal with it directly myself. The one thing is if the Colorado River runs low or we have droughts or whatever and California farmers take a lot of that water. If it isn't regulated properly Mexico ends up at the short end of the stick. They have had, after my time, issues along those lines. I have just not been involved in it.

*Q: What about your moving to the nuclear side? What was going on? You mentioned Chernobyl.*

NEGROPONTE: Chernobyl was a big issue. Richard Kennedy handled most of it, Ambassador Richard Kennedy. But these were non-proliferation talks we had with different countries. Probably the biggest single issue of the time because this is now the 1980's, was keeping tabs on those countries that might develop a nuclear weapon. Pakistan and India hadn't done that yet but we knew that Pakistan was working on it. So one of the constant sources of debate was what to do about it. This is a conundrum that continues even to today and unfortunately these countries have gone even further in developing nuclear capabilities. Of course India conducted a test. Those are the kinds of issues we followed.

We followed issues on the promotion of peaceful uses of nuclear energy, power, particularly nuclear energy. That was an issue we worked on. In terms of division of labor on the nuclear issues, I had on staff a lot of nuclear physicists and nuclear scientists, experts in this field. But since Ambassador Kennedy was there just down the hall from me and he handled the major issues I took a back seat to him on that. Although I did go to the Board of Governors Meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency with him. I was on the delegation of one of these nuclear NPT [Non-Proliferation Treaty] review

conferences. This was Ken Adelman, who was then the head of ACDA. I went with him in 1985. You know they review the NPT every five years. Nothing particularly astonishing happened there.

*Q: How many, depending on the science side, did you have a real friend in George Shultz? I mean his time running Bechtel.*

NEGROPONTE: Tremendous. And he took a personal interest. We had an interesting arrangement. I asked him for 15 minutes a month. That is all I asked him for. "Guarantee me 15 minutes a month Mr. Secretary. That is all I want." So I would go and cram into a little piece of paper as much as I could say and as fast as I could say it. Every month I usually went through ten or fifteen items bang, bang on oceans, environment, science, 1, 2, 3. That took me about ten minutes and it left about five minutes for discussion. He loved it. He was very supportive of whatever we were doing.

By the way, I forgot to mention a very important one on science. Right at the beginning I got to the bureau in the summer of '85. The mischievous Mr. Frank Wisner, who was Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Africa bureau, had whispered into John Whitehead's ear that he wanted me to do a project on HIV/AIDS because nobody knew anything about HIV/AIDS in those days. He gave me the assignment. Whitehead called me in and said "I want you to put together a group here to write a paper on the foreign policy implications of HIV/AIDS." The first ever.

*Q: This was very early.*

NEGROPONTE: Chas Freeman was in my group. Anthony Fauci who is still head of the NIH, Institute for Allergies and Infectious diseases was a member. We had the head of the Medical Division at State. We had a very interesting group. We wrote this paper. Dick Benedick wrote it. I have been looking for it ever since and can't find it. But anyway it was a very interesting paper. It went into visa issues. It went into regional issues. We basically concluded this was an issue which most concerned Africa to start with. We also, at that time we took a policy stand on whether people who were HIV positive should be admitted into the Foreign Service.

*Q: What was the stand?*

NEGROPONTE: We were against it. We followed the recommendation of the Medical Division. They didn't want to have that problem. I mean nowadays I don't think that would be sustainable.

*Q: Today it is more or less controlled.*

NEGROPONTE: It can be controlled.

*Q: But in those days it could not be and was basically a death sentence.*

NEGROPONTE: We had some very interesting scientific discussions. So that was a very interesting scientific issue that we had.

*Q: Did you get involved at all in birth control?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yes, we had a population office that reported to us but the issue was kind of dormant because the Mexico City conference took place just about the time I was taking over.

*Q: This was a big one in China some years later, but this was really in the Reagan administration.*

NEGROPONTE: Right, and we had a provision in the law that forbade assistance to countries that...

*Q: I don't remember if we were allowed to go. Did we go to the Mexico City conference?*

NEGROPONTE: You know, I don't remember. Benedick handled it. It also happened before I got there. It was not a very active portfolio by the time I got there. Certainly not something I spent a lot of time on.

*Q: Well what caused you to leave there?*

NEGROPONTE: I went to Pakistan on a trip in November of '87, Pakistan and India. I forgot to mention that. We had tremendous bilateral science agreement with India, which was financed by surplus rupees from the PL 480 program. We had millions of dollars to carry out joint scientific projects with India. So I went to that in November in '87 or maybe late October, and then I went to Pakistan. Arnie Raphel was ambassador there and I met with President Zia. I met with some of their scientists. Then I was coming home.

*Q: Did you meet Kahn by the way, the father of the Pakistani nuclear bomb?*

NEGROPONTE: No, but I did visit the Indian nuclear facility. It is in Bombay. It is called the Bhabha Atomic Research Center. I went in the civilian door. Somebody jokingly told me if you went around to the back door you would have found the military program.

I was coming home and when I got home, I called Lilly Wiggins, my secretary. It was November 10 or 11, Veteran's Day. I remember it was a snowy holiday. The day before, General Powell had called me five or six times. We didn't have cell phones in those days. He had just been made National Security Advisor. Frank Carlucci had left that position to go over to DOD to replace Mr. Weinberger. Weinberger resigned because his wife was very ill. Carlucci went over to DOD and Colin got promoted to be the advisor and he was calling to ask me to be his deputy.

It was a surprise to me. I didn't know anything about it. I remember Lilly telling me "something must be happening, you got a lot of calls from the White House." So I went over there on a snowy November 11, and sat down and talked to Powell and we agreed I would be his deputy. First I had to go meet Howard Baker. Howard Baker was the chief of staff. Ten days later, before the end of November I was in my new job over at the White House.

*Q: This is again Ronald Reagan.*

NEGROPONTE: So it was interrupted, and again I was somewhat disappointed, because I would have enjoyed continuing at State.

*Q: What was the role of the National Security Council at this particular time under Ronald Reagan?*

NEGROPONTE: Well probably not too different than the role it has played over the years. It was a coordinating body, and honest broker between the agencies. It had the chair of the principals committee and there was a deputies' committee. They called it something different. It was called the policy review group or something. The Policy Review Group is what I chaired. But basically was like the principals committee and the deputies committee of today. They existed. They vetted various issues for presentation to the president.

The role of the NSC advisor, the way Colin carried it out, was I'd say minimally intrusive and not trying to direct the agencies in any way, not Kissingerian, let's put it that way. Certainly not like the NSC of today, which is very intrusive. The NSC under George W. Bush and as far as I can tell under Mr. Obama as well, certainly I know from the Bush administration, they became micromanagers. We tried not to do that. Both of us having had substantial departmental and operational experience of our own, and knew that operators liked to operate, and they didn't like to be told by smart 25 year olds what to do.

*Q: A grade removed from the operation.*

NEGROPONTE: But Colin was a good coordinator and probably the biggest service he performed was as you may recall, the White House had been very divided for six years. It had Judge Clark in the State Department; you had Bud McFarlane; you had Poindexter, Jeane Kirkpatrick playing a role over there. There was a lot of divisiveness in Reagan's national security team.

I would say the last two years were the most harmonious. Carlucci and Powell. When Weinberger left and Colin moved up, the first thing he did was he instituted a 7:00 A.M. meeting with himself, Shultz and Carlucci. They met in Colin's office to discuss the order of the day. They just spent 15 minutes together. It was an invaluable 15 minutes that assured basic coordination of the basic elements of our national security establishment.

*Q: When you arrived what sort of piece of the action did you have?*

NEGROPONTE: Well as I said, I was chairman of the deputies committee. I think it was called the policy review group. So virtually any issue that was being prepared for NSC consideration normally went through my hands and went through this committee.

If you asked me which were the most significant issues I dealt with I would say, well there was the Iran-Iraq war then going on. A lot of stuff to do with the Persian Gulf and what policies we should adopt and carry out. There was a lot going on in Central America still; the Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador issues hadn't gone away. Then we had this nasty little problem down in Panama when Manuel Noriega became the dictator of the country. In the middle of the time I was at the NSC he got indicted for drug trafficking and racketeering by Rudy Giuliani, who was the southern New York District U.S. Attorney. So we had all of the complications of the Panamanian situation. That probably consumed more of my time than any other.

*Q: What about the Iran-Iraq war?*

NEGROPONTE: We had issues there. They were important. Interestingly we were supporting Iraq, as you know. I can recall discussing such matters as sharing intelligence with Iraq. Our committee approving that activity. I can remember approving commodity credit corporation loans for Iraq so that it could buy surplus U.S. food. But basically we were, without being too openly visible, we were supporting Iraq.

*Q: Did you find that we tried to portray Saddam Hussein as not too bad a guy or not?*

NEGROPONTE: I honestly don't recall that. I think it was more not wanting Iran to become a hegemon in the Middle East. I think that was more of the situation. We didn't want to see the army of Iraq get routed. But I don't recall doing much in the way of advocating. In fact, I don't recall doing any advocating on behalf of Saddam per se. I don't remember whether we spent a lot of time discussing his human rights record, which was also very bad already.

*Q: Well, these things are always very difficult.*

NEGROPONTE: This was a straight kind of national security national interest kind of thing. We were there when they shot down that airliner. That was a terrible weekend.

*Q: This is when the John Paul Jones.*

NEGROPONTE: The Vincennes. Shot down an Iranian airline. Colin was away that weekend, and I remember being in the situation room with an NSC meeting organized that Sunday night. I spoke by phone with President Reagan earlier that morning about the shoot down.



But the biggest battles I was involved in was about what to do about Panama. George Shultz wanted to send in the marines and get rid of the guy, get rid of Noriega. It was fascinating. I think we met about a dozen times. Shultz wanted to send in the marines and Carlucci and Admiral Crowe were saying we haven't exhausted our diplomatic options. It was the classic reversal of what you would have thought, but actually not so a typical with State wanting to use the military and the military usually very reluctant at the outset.

*Q: As a matter of fact, I have talked to many people who have participated in War games at the National War College, and it is usually the State representatives who are ready to use the bomb where the military would say hell no.*

NEGROPONTE: They are quicker to want to pull the trigger. So that was the situation. I remember Crowe and Carlucci every time saying we haven't exhausted our diplomatic options and Shultz wanting to go in. When Ronald Reagan was confronted by conflicting advice, and he watched this debate between Shultz and Carlucci about what to do with Panama, he would just fold his hands and say, "I guess we didn't decide." In a way he was right to not do anything in the face of such conflicting advice.

So we ended the Reagan administration not having resolved the problem of Panama. Then, you remember barely a year later George Herbert Walker Bush sent armed forces into Panama to remove Noriega.

*Q: It is interesting to note this is very much a subject of what to do. I mean the situation was at such a level there was a very definite possibility while you were there that we could have sent troops.*

NEGROPONTE: Well I don't think so and this is where as I told you earlier, where Ronald Reagan comes in. Ronald Reagan had no appetite for using American forces for things like that, and whenever we talked about that, and it was specifically in the context of Panama, he would say, "Look we would just be the big bad brother again, the big bad country to the North sending our troops in and throwing our weight around, I would rather not do this."

So he was pretty emphatic; so then we imposed economic sanctions and brought in the foreign assets control regulations, the Trading with the Enemy Act. We implemented the sanctions under the international economic emergency procedures. We did all that, but we never got to the point of-- I don't think there was ever any serious thought during Reagan's remaining months in office of sending troops.

The other thing was Shultz did take the negotiations seriously and we did open a dialogue with Noriega. But then George Bush got cold feet because he was running for president and James Baker, who was running his campaign, came to us and said, "Look, we don't want to expose George Bush to being accused of negotiating with a narco trafficking head of government." So you know there was pressure from his side against negotiations. So we just left it. We were still dead in the water. It was the most frustrating issue I ever had to work on when I was with NSC. But it wasn't the only issue.

*Q: Well what about this is Gorbachev?*

NEGROPONTE: Fantastic. It was the intermediate ballistic missile treaty that was signed, the IMF Treaty in the summer of '88. I remember prepping Mr. Reagan. Colin and I met with the president every day for half an hour to give him his national security briefing. Thirty minutes, 9:30 to 10:00 every morning like clockwork. He didn't get an intelligence briefing separately. We gave him his intelligence folder, and if there was something we wanted to call to his attention we did, otherwise we just left him his folder and briefed him on the other diplomatic and national security issues of the day. But I can remember he was a very good student, a good reader.

When he was preparing for his summit with Gorbachev, both in, I guess the end of November, December of '87 when I just came on board, but then when he went to Russia in the summer of '88, he read Perestroika. He did his homework.

I remember one time when Colin wasn't in town, I attended a luncheon he had with about ten or fifteen Soviet scholars and they had lunch. He went right around the table and each one gave him their views on what kind of Soviet Union he was going to find and what Gorbachev was going to be like. He liked Gorbachev. He liked Gorby a lot. I mean this was a man who had evolved from the "evil empire," and then he had his meeting in Geneva in 1985. Then it became "Mr. Gorbachev is my friend." He really felt that way. I remember him talking to me and General Powell, "I wonder if he believes in God?" Colin said, "Well why don't you ask him?"

*Q: Was there unease with you and your staff with this friendship between Gorbachev and Reagan?*

NEGROPONTE: Not for me, no, I thought Mr. Reagan had his senses about him. I think he saw an opportunity for making progress in defusing U.S.-Soviet tensions. You know we didn't fully appreciate how close the Soviet Union was to collapse. We didn't foresee it.

I can remember an NSC meeting that was very interesting when Shultz told the president: John Whitehead, the Deputy Secretary, has just taken a fascinating trip to Eastern Europe. "Mr. President, you should hear about the changes going on in Eastern Europe." John came and briefed the whole NSC. I was deputy NSC advisor, so I attended those meetings. He was talking about the dramatic changes and how we were on the cusp of something really big happening. But you could see he wasn't getting traction with the principal NSC members. He had with Shultz but not with the others. I think it took the next administration to discover that.

It is partly by reading history that you discover how looking back it is easier to see. Clearly the watershed speech was Gorbachev's speech to the United Nations in December of 1988, that is literally a month and a half before Reagan leaves office, where he says he

is going to withdraw several hundred thousand troops from Eastern Europe. That was the beginning of the end. But that is very much at the end of the administration.

I can tell you that I certainly didn't think that the Cold War was going to end a year or two from the time I was there. The other big issue we dealt with was Afghanistan. We did reach an agreement with the Soviets on that, that we would stop re-supplying arms to the rebels, but that they would get out.

*Q: Were we asking ourselves why did the Soviets get so involved in Afghanistan? Did we have a rationale for that?*

NEGROPONTE: I don't know. I mean that is ten years almost after the fact when they withdraw. But we were most certainly asking ourselves will they get out? I was the skeptic. I was the Cold War trained diplomat. I said, "Colin, do you really want to do this? To go through with this agreement? Do you really trust the Soviets to get out?"

His answer to me was, "If you have had as many beers as I have had with top ranking Soviet admirals and generals, you would know they are dying to get out of Afghanistan. They can't wait to get out of Afghanistan." So he had a feel for the Soviet military that I didn't, for which I respect him a great deal.

*Q: Well this was his background.*

NEGROPONTE: He knew these guys. He had been commanding a division defending the Fulda Gap. A smart man.

*Q: And of course Admiral Crowe had developed pretty good relations.*

NEGROPONTE: Oh he had. His counterpart, the Soviet defense minister, came over while I was there and he took him all around the country. Things were changing. We were on the edge of change. It hasn't burst through yet. It burst through with the Bush administration.

*Q: Things can change but I would say the bureaucracy is probably the last to change.*

NEGROPONTE: That's right.

*Q: They don't have the same contacts.*

NEGROPONTE: Clearly they don't have the same perspective, which is understandable. Mr. Bush got elected in November of 1988. He is a good personal friend of mine. I have known Mr. Bush all the way back to 1972, when he was head of the Republican National committee and I briefed him on the Vietnam Peace Agreement. I knew his brother Bucky. His name was William Bush. He was my classmate at Yale. So I knew him from a couple of different angles. I was at Bucky's wedding back in 1958. We were personally close

because he visited me in Honduras. He had sat in when we briefed the president every day.

When he was on the campaign in '88 he missed a lot of those briefings. But we saw him, whenever he was in Washington, we saw him on a daily basis. He asked me what I wanted to do. I said, I want to go out in the field again. I have been back home for four years. I am a Foreign Service Officer. He said, "Let me know what you want through Colin and Jimmy Baker," who was then going to become Secretary of State.

I talked to Colin and said, "Maybe I should give him a list of three places or something." Colin said, "don't give him a list. Tell him where you want to go. You have got the president's ear; tell him where you want to go." So I told Colin, and Colin brokered it for me. I said I would like to be Ambassador to Mexico. A big country, I have Latin American experience. And it is the most important Latin American country for us. And a fascinating assignment.

He went to the President and later on I went over to see Secretary Baker. Both President-elect Bush and Mr. Baker indicated to me that it was going to happen. Then I didn't hear anything until January or so, until after the inauguration. Whereupon he comes out with this incredible announcement.

The first announcement he makes is Tom Pickering is going to be ambassador to the U.N. I think he made that earlier before the inauguration. But then he named me and Armacost, me to Mexico and Armacost to Tokyo. Ray Seitz to England. The vice president, when he was still vice president he told me, I was seeing him because I was bringing in foreign visitors to see him and so forth, he said he wanted to send a positive signal to the Foreign Service. He certainly did.

*Q: Oh very definitely.*

NEGROPONTE: He gave a lot of us good jobs.

*Q: Well also Bush I has an excellent reputation with the Foreign Service.*

NEGROPONTE: He is qualified.

*Q: Actually Nixon did too.*

NEGROPONTE: Same reason, although Bush even more because he had been ambassador to the UN and envoy to China. Fabulous experience.

*Q: But sort of knowing the drill.*

NEGROPONTE: Sure did. Good guy. So it worked out. But I didn't stay in the NSC any more. When Inauguration Day comes the packers come and pack my boxes up, and me

and Colin leave because Brent Scowcroft and Bob Gates were coming in. Bob Gates replaces me.

*Q: How did this work? Because I am told that within parts of the State Department it wasn't really that friendly a take over from one administration to another.*

NEGROPONTE: You mean that particular one?

*Q: Yeah.*

NEGROPONTE: Look I don't know, I just went to Mexico so I don't know. Here is what happened. It was not unfriendly, but was I think disappointing to some of the Reaganauts. These guys had been in for eight years. I for all practical purposes was a Reaganaut. By then, I mean having had three jobs in the Reagan administration. Four even, because I was still deputy assistant secretary for East Asia at the beginning. Then Honduras, then OES, and then Deputy NSC.

There were a lot of Reaganites who thought that because Bush had been elected that they would get to stay or that they would be found jobs. Bush said, "Look a new president has got to make his mark." How else can he do it? He has got to put his own people in. There is a new team. So he did a lot of changes, but I don't remember it hurting the career service.

*Q: It was a change.*

NEGROPONTE: That is the point. You are absolutely right on that. I heard him talk about it himself. He said, "I know there are people, and I hear him say that. People are going to be disappointed, but after all I had to make my mark and this was the time to make it." So anyway I got nominated in early February or so.

January 20, Brent Scowcroft and Robert Gates move into the White House.

*Q: You had not yet been named.*

NEGROPONTE: I had not been named. But I knew it was coming. I had actually been to Carlos Salinas de Gortari's inauguration on the first of December. With malice of forethought I asked Powell to let me go on the delegation knowing that I was hoping to go to Mexico as ambassador. George Shultz, who led the delegation, didn't know that was in store for me but I knew. So I ended up going to Salinas' inauguration which was useful for me. Which was December 1, 1988, because Mexican presidents are always inaugurated on December 1.

*Q: Had you been to Mexico before?*

NEGROPONTE: I had. Of course I had served in Latin America, in Ecuador and Honduras. I traveled to Mexico numerous times as far back as 1956 when I was in high

school. I had an uncle, my father's sister was married to a Belgian diplomat who was ambassador to Mexico in 1956.

*Q: When you were again in particularly Honduras and all, did Mexico play any particular role and the semi colossus to the north?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes it did play a role because you may remember it was the time of the French socialism and Mme. Mitterrand. It was before French socialism had moderated, and they actually tried to play the role of a counterweight to us. Remember Mrs. Mitterrand was fascinated by Regis Debray. So there was some leftist tendencies over there that kind of worked against our interests. But they moderated. Mitterrand moderated; the socialist regime in France moderated. But they had also been working in Mexico. I guess that is why you were asking me about did Mexico play a role. They along with France tried to play a role of counterweight to us. They helped the Sandinistas come to power. No question about it. When Somoza was overthrown the Mexicans were right there helping the Sandinistas.

*Q: We were getting quite a bit of pressure from, let's say, the intellectuals in Western Europe.*

NEGROPONTE: Well they had the same kind of thing. It is another phenomenon in Mexico. Mexico was never one to let the leftists be strong in their own country. But as long as the leftist didn't bother them there, they were happy to be helpful to them elsewhere. Something a little bit akin to maybe the behavior of the Saudis vis-à-vis radical Islam. They paid them to stay away. They were very helpful to the left in Central America.

*Q: Well we got to it, but did you come away with any impressions of what we were doing right and wrong with Mexico at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: Before I got down there?

*Q: Yeah.*

NEGROPONTE: We had, yes I did have some impressions, because Reagan's first ambassador to Mexico was John Gavin, the actor who was half Mexican. His mother was from Mexico. Gavin was a highly intelligent guy, spoke beautiful Spanish. And he was a good actor. He was a friend of Reagan's. He was married to a lovely lady who was a television actress.

The thing about John Gavin was, and I think it is in part because he was half Mexican, he kind of felt that he had a right to comment publicly on just about anything that was happening in Mexico. So his ambassadorship had periods of real confrontation with the Mexicans, the press and the Mexican authorities, because he was a bit too outspoken. A very intelligent man, very accomplished gentleman, but he got off a little bit on the wrong foot with the Mexican media and the Mexican government.

And then in the middle of his term of duty a DEA agent, Enrique Camarena, got murdered in Guadalajara. The Drug Enforcement Agency agent Enrique Camarena. He was called Kiki Camarena. He was seized by local authorities and drug traffickers and everybody else. He got himself into it, all right. So Camarena got killed and that caused a huge tension in the U.S.-Mexico relationship. He was killed by drug traffickers, but there seems to have been complicity of the state officials, the local state officials.

*Q: Like so often when you get into Mexican things, as soon as you get into criminality again and again I have seen...*

NEGROPONTE: There is complicity, again and again, and there seems to have been in this case by the authorities of the State of Jalisco, which is where Guadalajara is located. There was a big earthquake in Mexico at that time, September of '85. So that was a real setback. So after his first term in office Reagan chose another ambassador, a more moderate low profile individual. A man called Charles Pilliod, who had been the CEO of the Goodyear tire company. He was an entirely different kind of ambassador.

*Q: Who relieved Gavin.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah. I knew Gavin.

*Q: People who served under him commented on what they called the temple dogs, some young people who sort of screened him from the rest of the embassy and things went rather downhill within the embassy.*

NEGROPONTE: Well that is two times removed for me because I took over from Pilliod and I wasn't in Mexico to observe that. It is conceivable that he would have someone like that. It is a big embassy. More than 1,500 people. Maybe 1,700 people throughout the country if you count the embassy plus ten consulates. Mexico is a very important; plus you have seven or eight consular agencies. This is a serious diplomatic post.

*Q: Plus there are connections with every cabinet, every local town practically, state.*

NEGROPONTE: My country team meetings had 33 people coming to them every time we had one. I had them frequently to keep track of what was going on. So there had been some troubles in the relationship and then Jesse Helms had held some hearings early in the Reagan administration, which were very antagonistic to Mexico.

*Q: Why would this be, because he seemed to be on the side of rather nasty Latin American countries?*

NEGROPONTE: I think it was the drugs. It was that plus there had been an analyst, Constantine Menges, who has since died. He was the NIO for Latin America. He wrote articles with titles like, "Mexico, the Iran Next Door." So there was a bias against Mexico in the early 80's. Pilliod succeeded in dampening that down.

Luckily, enter Ronald Reagan. Reagan established a good personal relationship with the president of Mexico, Miguel de la Madrid, a very good personal relationship. So that was positive. Very positive and I think that over time that helped mitigate some of these other problems. So Pilliod stayed in the Reagan administration.

Now I was nominated in early February or so, the intent to nominate me was announced. Immediately there was an uproar. An interventionist is coming. He pushed around Honduras. How can we take a guy like that? There was a real crescendo of resistance to my nomination. It is not clear that we will get agreement from the government of Mexico to my appointment.

*Q: Where was this coming from within Mexico?*

NEGROPONTE: The left. Parts of the foreign ministry.

*Q: You mention the foreign ministry. Here you might say people I have talked to who have served in Mexico point out that the foreign ministry is sort of a plaything of the left where most of the other ministries do business. The foreign ministry has traditionally given us a rough time.*

NEGROPONTE: I can say that can be the case. As often as not. I mean the relationship between the United States and Mexico is a complicated, psychologically complicated for obvious reasons historically. But they took this reaction, but in the end diplomatically the Mexicans are very correct. They didn't cross any lines or push you too far despite this howl of protest that I was coming down.

Bush then wrote a personal note to Salinas. "I want you to know that Mr. Negroponte is my personal choice for this job." He was very supportive of my nomination. George Bush was one to very much write personal notes, as anyone who worked in his vicinity knows. I am sure that influenced Mr. Salinas. So eventually I got my hearing. By the time they processed my papers and this and that I finally got my hearing and got there the end of June of 1989.

*Q: How did the hearings go? Because sometimes these hearings put a potential ambassador in a very bad spot.*

NEGROPONTE: Well they didn't go too well. I had my hearing in April. I remember I was skiing in Aspen, Colorado. The very end of the season, I had taken a week off to be with my kids during their spring break.

I got a call from the Department saying they want you for a hearing next Tuesday. This was a Friday or Saturday. I went back early from this holiday to go to the hearing. It was going just swimmingly until the last couple of minutes when a news wire came across, an AP wire quoting Ollie North. There was a news story to the effect that we had offered quid pro quo to the Hondurans in exchange for their continued support of the contras



after we were no longer able legally to support the contras. In a way it was an accusation that we were laundering money through Honduras to the contras.

Mr. Dodd. Senator Chris Dodd of Connecticut, read this news story out to me. He asked, "Is this true?" I said, "No sir." He said, "Well I am afraid we are going to have to look into this." It did take a couple of months to sort that out with the committee and I finally got confirmed in June. They wanted to look at all my files and did we really give a quid pro quo? We had not. Walter Pincus wrote a big story about it. We disproved it.

We had to get restricted telegrams declassified because what they were really after was some proof that George Herbert Walker Bush offered the quid pro quo to the Contras when he came down as vice president for a meeting with the president of Honduras that I attended. Luckily I had one of the best note takers on my team was with us and wrote a 26 paragraph NODIS (no distribution) telegram which I got the Department's permission to declassify. It lay bare everything that happened in the conversation and there was no scintilla of evidence that there had been a quid pro quo, but as usual these things take a little while to clear up. Anyhow I did get down there just before the Fourth of July in 1989.

*Q: OK, July of 1989, how would you classify Mexican American relations?*

NEGROPONTE: Improved from the earlier years of the Reagan administration. Essentially good and as they had been pretty much with a few exceptions been in modern times since Franklin Roosevelt. There are not many periods in recent Mexican history that you could point to with serious problems. There was some irritation during the time of Jimmy Carter and Lopez Portillo, because you remember he went down there and said he had gotten Montezuma's revenge at the State dinner and the Mexicans didn't like that at all. They were pretty good. Some of the usual sensitivities. You have to learn.

I knew from my experience and intuitively that with Mexico it was important that if you had critical comments or observations to make about Mexico, you would never make them publicly. Really you had to always on the surface keep things as serene and friendly as possible. If there were issues you really wanted to press hard, that were difficult or controversial, those always had to be done by quiet diplomacy whether it had to do with human rights or narcotics trafficking or anything else. I think I ended up demonstrating to the Mexicans that I really believed that. That was my modus operandi. By the time I left they were very appreciative.

*Q: You had this tremendous network of contacts in Mexico plus all these other contacts that were in the bordering states. Our states had their contacts with their bordering states. Did you find this was sort of a monster that one could get a handle on?*

NEGROPONTE: You could. I think you could get a handle on it because I think most people would agree that the embassy was sort of the cockpit of the relationship so that people almost invariably when they came to Mexico they wanted to meet the embassy. They wanted to meet the ambassador.

We for our part, and my wife was a big help to me in that regard. We had a very substantial entertainment budget and we hosted just about every delegation that came down there. We gave them a breakfast or a lunch or a dinner, whatever was appropriate. We used our convening ability and our ability to offer the residence as a platform for these people to advance their interests and have the kinds of meetings they want to have. We were entertaining constantly. Not a day went by where we weren't hosting at least one or more functions. Sometimes in large numbers, delegations of mayors, the Chamber of Commerce from some town, governors from each of the four border states as you mentioned. They all came across.

*Q: And of course these things were terribly important as you mentioned.*

NEGROPONTE: I think they were indispensable.

*Q: It translated into all sorts of political action, particularly if they went badly.*

NEGROPONTE: And some very good things came out of all of this. In the end some of the ideas about having a free trade agreement and promoting interest in that. I think this kind of activity helped a great deal.

*Q: Let's talk about a thing that has almost gnawed away in our relationship with Mexico on both sides and that is drugs. I mean the Mexicans say well you are the market, and we are saying you are the supplier or at least the transit point or whatever it is.*

NEGROPONTE: We will talk about that in one second, but let me just say there really are sort of about three main categories of issues in the U.S. Mexican relationship. One is trade. Movement back and forth across the border. The other is illicit trade or the dark side of globalization, foremost among them being the drug issue, the narcotics issue. Lastly is the ethnic, and the fact that at that time maybe there were 20 million Mexican Americans living in the United States. Today it is maybe 30-35 million. It is rising rapidly maybe even more.

So there is the ethnic-cultural ties. The linguistic. Then there is the drugs and there is trade. Well on narcotics, first of all we had this real thorn in our side of the issue, the murder of agent Camarena, which was still an issue of contention between us.

*Q: Is there any background that you can give of why this happened?*

NEGROPONTE: Well it was these traffickers who grabbed him because they knew he was on their trail and they wanted to find out who he knew and what he knew. That was basically what it boiled down to. They killed him under torture, and even more reprehensible still there was a doctor called Alvarez Machain, a Guadalajara doctor who had the job of keeping the guy alive and conscious while they were trying to extract more information from him. That becomes relevant in something like this. So drugs are a tough issue.

Salinas comes to power. He comes in December of '88. It is a new government. He replaces President De la Madrid. They send some people from their attorney general's office to the embassy. We still have DEA agents down there. We have mechanisms for communication and so forth. It was by no means ideal, but Jim Baker came in and we decided that one thing we would do would be to revive what was called the bi-national commission, which was a sort of an annual meeting of all the relevant cabinet agencies including the justice department and the DEA and the FBI.

In fact very early after my arrival, it was July, a month later we had the first meeting of the bi national commission. So we had the head of the FBI, the head of the DEA. We had the attorney general, Thornburgh, they were all there. We set up follow-up mechanisms. I set up sort of a bilateral consultation mechanism with the Mexican government. We even started working on sharing intelligence. I created what was called a northern border response force.

The gist of it was, two or three DEA intelligence officers who were in the embassy who would get information about illicit flights coming up from Venezuela or Colombia, landing in Mexico, offloading the cocaine and taking it up over land to our border. We would pass information on these flights. Sometimes the Mexicans would intercept them, sometimes they wouldn't. With a certain degree of frequency they would get to the airport about ten minutes after the trucks had pulled out of the airport hauling away the cargo, but we caught some of the cocaine in that process.

But then something very bad happened in, I want to say it was 1990, but I can't recall the date for sure. But the Justice Department, the DEA office in Los Angeles, unbeknownst to main Justice, at least so Justice says, the DEA office hired a bounty hunter to go down and snatch Dr. Alvarez Machain, bring him to the States and try him before a court on the grounds that he had tortured Kiki Camarena. They got away with it. They came in. they snatched Dr. Alvarez; they flew him back to the States. They brought him before a court in Los Angeles.

You can imagine Mexico was in an uproar. An absolute uproar. In fact I want to say it was 1989. It wasn't that long after. They were in a total uproar. I think it was '89 because Vice President Dan Quayle comes down to visit and we go for a meeting with President Salinas, and we have a meeting for about an hour. Then I said, "we now have a press conference, Mr. Vice President," because after an hour we are supposed to meet the press at the stake out at the presidential palace.

Salinas says, "No there is one other thing I want to raise with you." And for the next hour we talked about the Alvarez Machain case. Salinas said, "Because you did this I am going to expel the DEA from Mexico." So the Vice President and Salinas started debating back and forth. The conversation was going very badly. I finally interrupted. I was so impassioned by this whole issue. I interrupted both of them, the Vice President of the United States and the President of Mexico.

“You know, if this conversation keeps going this way we are going to completely destroy the U.S.-Mexico relationship. We have got to get it back on a more constructive track.” Salinas sort of mumbled, “Oh you can give your vice president any advice you want.” The next thing you know we are out in front of the stake out and everybody is asking Quayle questions about Alvarez Machain which he is handling to the best of his ability. That whole issue cast a pall over the relationship for many months; in fact for several years, but it was very acute. It was an acute phase at first and then it fell off to a low-grade fever.

*Q: Well what happened? He was returned wasn't he?*

NEGROPONTE: What happened about two years later, I am still there. Well, two things happened. First of all the fact of bringing him before an American court got taken to the U.S. Supreme Court on the grounds that the argument of the defendants was that he had been improperly brought before an American court. The Supreme Court rejected that argument, citing precedents in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when many cases had gotten to the Supreme Court that had originated with some kind of bounty hunting activity. So they weren't about to turn over precedents from the previous century. Very often Canadian bounty hunters, bounty hunters into Canada.

So that got the Mexicans really upset. Even more upset. How can the Supreme Court make such a decision? That precipitated large demonstrations in front of the American embassy. Then another year later or so, the case itself is dismissed for lack of sufficient evidence. This was stunning. So Alvarez Machain is released and sent back to Mexico scot-free and of course a bit of a national hero. We have egg all over our faces because of all the trouble we went to sequester this guy and bring him to court and everything else with a supposed bounty hunting activity that we had nothing to do with. So it was a problem. The whole time I was there it was a problem. But I managed it; we managed it.

There was one incident after the Supreme Court decision. I got called in to the Foreign Ministry by the Undersecretary, Andres Rosenthal, who was a good friend of mine. Andres said, “We are going to ask that you suspend the activities of the DEA.” He resurrected the Salinas request of a couple of years earlier, which they had not followed through on. He said we are going to request that you suspend the DEA activities because of the Supreme Court ruling. He handed me a diplomatic note to that effect.

I gave him the note back and said, “I don't know if it would do more harm to U.S.-Mexico relations by accepting this note or by returning it to you, but my instinct tells me I will do more harm if I accept it, so here. You can have it back. I won't accept it.” I never heard about it again.

*Q: This brings to a point for somebody studying diplomacy, how can you refuse a note?*

NEGROPONTE: I did it. Well, I will tell you what. It came out of a previous chapter in my life in Honduras when I accepted a note once where the government complained about the behavior of the assistant secretary of state. They complained about Tony

Motley. I don't know if you have ever interviewed him but Anthony Motley, he was the assistant secretary after Tom Enders.

They sent a note complaining very bitterly about some language he used, because he was a rather salty fellow and treatment they felt he had given them when the foreign minister went to see him in Washington. I took the note knowing that this was not a note that Washington would particularly enjoy receiving I just put it in the pouch. In other words, I accepted the note and I sent it forward, but in the most anodyne way possible. I buried it in the diplomatic pouch, no cable, no nothing. In fact, it really never saw the light of day, the copy I sent never saw the light of day.

Their ambassador in Washington handed a copy of the note to George Shultz one day saying, "I am not sure you have seen this, Mr. Secretary." It earned me the extreme annoyance of the Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, who subsequently said to me, "Why did you ever accept the note?" I don't think the fact that I accepted the note had anything to do with the fact that Shultz saw it, but in any case, the notion of not accepting a note if you don't think anything good will come of it was pretty firmly planted in my head. I pulled it off that time in Mexico. I think you can do that. It is like refusing to receive a communication.

*Q: We have an example of, I forgot the issue and where or what it was, but an officer being given a note and told "I want you to make sure this is delivered to X country." He goes to the foreign ministry and they shut the door on him. So being between and rock and a hard place he took the note and shoved it under the door and ran away.*

NEGROPONTE: So anyway, all by the way of saying that was a constant irritant, but we managed, we kept it in the box if you will. In other words, it did not interfere with the parallel development of a free trade agreement.

This was NAFTA, the NAFTA negotiations. So that happens and it starts very early on. I mean I get there in '89 and in January of 1990 Carlos Salinas goes to DAVOS, the World Economic Forum and he hears how all these Eastern European countries are going to be real competitors for global investment. Things they are going to do, all these newly liberated Eastern European countries.

So Salinas concludes that Mexico is going to have to do something to be much more competitive in this new more competitive global environment to attract the savings of the world to invest in their country. In March of 1990 I go to Washington with a message from President Salinas' chief of staff for the White House saying, "Are you willing to contemplate free trade negotiations?"

*Q: To put it in context we had very shortly before formalized free trade with Canada.*

NEGROPONTE: We had done it in the time I was in the White House with Colin Powell. We signed the agreement January first of '88 or '89, I forget which it was. That had been

formalized. That is when Reagan told me I didn't have to brief him on the importance of free trade because he remembered the Smoot-Hawley Tariff.

*Q: Which basically served to cause the great depression.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly. So Reagan understood the value of free trade. Then coming back to the Mexico thing, I went with Baker to see the President. I have a photograph of this meeting in the Oval Office. There is the president, Baker, myself and Don Johnson who was the NSC guy for Mexico. We had a one-hour conversation on whether or not to do a free trade agreement with Mexico. At the end of that hour the president said yes. In fact he didn't say much at all. He just listened to what we had to say and in the end he assented.

So we then began the roll out of that. Salinas came to Washington in June of '90 for an official working visit. There, all we had in a press statement was that the two presidents agreed to "explore the possibility of a free trade agreement." That led to a series of steps and a year later, '91 the negotiations began. It was negotiated by Carla Hills and her team.

To make a long story short, Canada joined the talks in the summer of '91 and we signed it in November of '92. The Canadians didn't want to be left out. They realized we were going to start bilaterally, but they realized if we had one agreement with Canada and another with Mexico, we would be sort of in the cockpit and they wanted to be sure it was three-way so we couldn't play one off against the other. Brian Mulroney went to Kennebunkport in the summer of '91, I think in August, and made a case to George Bush that Canada should be part of this negotiation. The Mexicans were relaxed about it. They were willing for it to be three-way from the beginning. Mr. Baker had a certain reluctance to do that, but once the Canadians made an issue of it, we all agreed.

So three way talks began in 1991 and concluded in November of '92. Unfortunately from my perspective, Mr. Bush lost the '92 election and so we weren't able to submit the agreement to Congress right away, because Mr. Clinton wanted to add protocols to the free trade agreement concerning labor and environment. So these environmental and labor protocols were negotiated from early 1993 until the end of August. In fact, I left the weekend after we finished the last side agreement with the Mexicans. I can say that I was in on both the take off and the landing of those negotiations.

*Q: Well on the protocols and all, these could have been very contentious issues I think on environment and on labor. How were they?*

NEGROPONTE: Well they were kind of hortatory in nature, and made reference to the importance of these issues, but I don't think, I would have to refresh my memory on the actual texts, but they were not highly prescriptive documents. They were more just to factor in environmental and labor questions.

I think Bill Clinton is a real free trader. He had a real international economic education. Georgetown, et cetera. In fact, I left Mexico on Labor Day weekend of 1993 and I went to the Philippines within a month and a half. But in November of 1993 we submitted the NAFTA to Congress and Clinton was an ardent advocate for the free trade agreement. You remember also the debate between Ross Perot and Al Gore all on the subject of the free trade agreement with Mexico.

*Q: The Sucking.*

NEGROPONTE: Right, the giant sucking sound but Al Gore really defended it brilliantly. I mean in some respects even though the NAFTA was George Bush's idea, Bill Clinton and Al Gore did a tremendous job in defending it. So for that I will forgive them for insisting on these two protocols that slowed the process down.

*Q: What did you see as the proposal to have a free trade agreement with Mexico? That brought up the free trade thing and it sounds fine, but what did you see in being the blessings for America in this?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, I mean first of all Mexico had more duties than we did on industrial products and stuff like that, since for us free trade in goods is something we have had for a long time. Our average tariff is much lower than their average tariff. So if you are both headed toward zero they are going to give up more than we do.

Secondly there were a lot of opportunities for our agricultural production particularly in grains and things like that, processed foods. The proof of the pudding is in the eating and trade between the two countries has quadrupled since the signing of the NAFTA.

The other thing is the investment opportunities. They opened up their whole banking system to foreign ownership. They did things in terms of liberalizing services that would have been unimaginable without a free trade agreement. This is a country that hadn't even joined GATT until 1985. So when you think of where they come from, from the time of de la Madrid in 1985 to the signing of this trade agreement in 1992, they came a hell of a long way. As a result we also secured membership for them in the OECD group of countries. There was a lot done. I think it got them closer to Canada because in a way via this three-way negotiation Canada and Mexico got to know each other a lot better. This led to significant growth in business between Canada and Mexico.

*Q: I was wondering was there a discernable change in, let's say, hemispheric politics when Canada was moved out of Europe and into North America.*

NEGROPONTE: That is all part of the same notion, isn't it? Because now when you talk about North America, people really do mean Canada, Mexico, and the United States. So the whole North American concept took some real life when we negotiated the NAFTA. So to me it is a seminal achievement. I mean, I wasn't the negotiator, but I still think it the most important achievement of my career was what we got done in Mexico with respect to the free trade agreement. While I wasn't the negotiator I did play a very strong

role in advocating it to Washington and in helping our negotiators and in working with the Mexicans when we had very controversial issues.

*Q: Who were the negotiators?*

NEGROPONTE: Carla Hills and Jules Katz. Jules Katz who had been head of EB [the Economic Bureau] for years and then became Carla Hills' deputy in the Bush administration.

*Q: Did they consult with you on matters?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yes. And they consulted with State and they had State people on their delegation. Free trade agreements are negotiated by chapters 1-10 or 1-12, so you have a different negotiator for each chapter. There were a couple of State guys in there. The USTR guys, we knew very well. They were down all the time. They were meeting constantly for a year and a half. It was a big negotiation. The two sides got to know each other well. Then the ratification process was a very interesting exercise because we succeeded in mobilizing the business community on each side to advocate for the agreement. That was really a very positive exercise.

*Q: I would have thought the agreement such as this there would have been on both sides business or something that would have been protected that will be no longer protected.*

NEGROPONTE: That is right and on both sides you got resistance. You got resistance from Mexico, certainly from subsistence farmers. They were being flooded by cheap American imports. You got resistance from small business people who were worried they couldn't compete with the bigger companies of the world. In the States you had resistance from some of the agricultural interests, tomato growers, fruits and vegetables. One industry that really did get quite a bit of protection was sugar, because they have kind of a special treatment as you know. The sugar lobby.

*Q: Oh god, Louisiana.*

NEGROPONTE: Louisiana, Florida, the sugar lobby. But an agreement that opens up 90% of each other's economies is a good thing. But there was resistance on both sides and there was a lot of political will on both sides to get it done.

*Q: Speaking of politics, let's continue with the drug business. Was there any change in, were we able to make a dent in the drug trade?*

NEGROPONTE: I would say only a slight dent. We made some dent but not really consequential. I mean I can remember one year we seized something like 40-50 tons of cocaine, but still lots was getting through. You have got to understand there is something very different about the drug trade then and the drug trade now. The drug trade then was controlled by Colombians in Mexico. The Mexicans in Mexico who were helping were employed by the Colombians. Then, I think these Mexican criminals said to themselves



hey we can do this ourselves. And they threw the Colombians out and they took over and established their own cartels.

So what you have seen in the last 15 years is the establishment of these different cartels usually named after the border town where they operated from, The Tijuana cartel, the Juarez cartel etc. The Gulf cartel. But these are now Mexican criminal groups. It has gotten worse. Certainly the levels of violence and brutality have gotten much higher than when I was ambassador.

*Q: The figures of deaths and all was just astounding. I mean it sounds like Iraq.*

NEGROPONTE: Sometimes it does. I know it wasn't happening on that scale when I was there.

*Q: What about criminality in American tourism? This must have caused you a lot of problems.*

NEGROPONTE: Yes. Some. I mean there were some protection issues and there were some crimes, robberies, highway robberies and things like that. But it wasn't really too bad. Having said that I think one of the real pities, if Mexico had really good law enforcement, they could then have a whole new tourist industry, because no one, no one in the U.S. wants to drive to Mexico as a tourist because they fear for their safety. But if driving to Mexico were not dangerous, could you imagine the implications for Americans who happen to already be driving to Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, etc., California. They would just drive on down. They could drive all over the place. By not maintaining proper law and order the Mexicans deprive themselves of the full benefits of the economic relationship in a sense.

*Q: Was this a subject you could raise with Mexican American rotary club?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, you could but people would just shrug. They would say well that is above my pay grade. What am I going to do about it? I mean they don't like it any better than you or I do but how do you get rid of it?

*Q: What about immigration, legal immigration?*

NEGROPONTE: By the way when I got there we were still implementing the last immigration reforms (1986-87 reforms), so we were actually letting in a lot of people who had been legalized from the last time, the amnesty, remember? Also there were special provisions for allowing more agricultural workers in. So yeah it was huge. I have served at the two largest visa immigrant posts in the world, and presided over them both. I went from one to the other. Mexico and then the Philippines. We were giving immigration visas to something like 100,000 Mexicans a year. A lot of them were people who had been in the states and had just come back to get their immigration visas. You know the law and how it works.

But we also had half a million visitors a year. Sometimes we had a snake line around the embassy two miles long. And a lot of Mexicans really do want to come to the States just to shop and visit, not to jump ship or illegally migrate. We had a lot of activity on the border. There were virtually a million legitimate border crossings every day, people who had border-crossing cards. All that happens. I think one of the longer-term trends that is unfortunate is that we have so hardened the border that in the old days if you were in El Paso and you had a friend in Juarez, you could go have lunch with them. Either he visits you or you visit him, whatever, but that becomes very hard to do because of processing times at the border. There isn't that same sense of fraternity that we used to have. It is a pity.

*Q: How would you say you as the ambassador viewed the consulates and how did you deal with them?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I cared about them a lot and I visited all of them constantly. I visited every state in Mexico. My wife and I took trips constantly. I went to all of them. Matamoras, Tijuana, Merida, Monterrey, Manzanillo, Juarez, Mazatlán, Guadalajara, Hermosillo. They were important. I encouraged the junior officers to try to broaden themselves and do their consular work but try also to learn a bit about consular history. I encouraged the principal officers to give them at least some non-consular work, a reportorial assignment or issue to follow so they could get interested in some other aspects of life in Mexico. I had a very good consul general. You must have known Jon Edensword.

*Q: I just know the name. Well, of course, consular work is very big business.*

NEGROPONTE: In Mexico it was huge.

*Q: Well let's talk about the political situation PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), PAN (National Action Party) and all that sort of stuff.*

NEGROPONTE: It was just starting to loosen up but not much. Salinas won in 1988 in his election. The conventional wisdom was then that he in fact won, but he won by inflated numbers. In other words he had inflated his majority by three or four percent. The computer broke down and we didn't get the results for several days. I wasn't there. This was before July of '88. Retrospectively some people are saying he may not have won at all. He may not have gotten the majority. Be that as it may, he was the President when I got there.

Put it this way, when I first got there, I invited some oppositionists to the embassy for breakfast or lunch or dinner, I would get queries from the foreign ministry saying oh by the way, the next time you have a breakfast like that would you please send the guest list over to us for approval. Which we, of course, did not do. I would do nothing of the sort. I remember even one time I invited Dick Gephardt to meet Cuauhtémoc Cardenas, who lost the election in '88 to Salinas. The PRI organized a demonstration outside the embassy residence for our benefit. They were pretty neuralgic.

By the time I left I felt things had calmed down. The PAN had a pretty strong showing in some states. When I got there they had won an election in Baja California, which I think was the first victory they had ever at the governor level. I would make my rounds and meet oppositionists and have meals and stuff like that, it was okay. But it was not clear when I was there that by the year 2000, the PRI would lose a national election. I didn't know when that would happen. It was not clear when it would happen or if it would happen. To me it looked like the PRI were still trying to stay in power perpetually.

*Q: Well how did you view some of these leaders, the dinosaurs there? Did you sense this was an aging group a little bit like the Soviet Union?*

NEGROPONTE: Well it was a mixed picture, because don't forget Salinas at the same time he was a product of the PRI political monopoly, he was trying to break down the economic ossification of the country. He wanted to integrate Mexico into the global economy so in that sense he was a real reformer. He really understood modern economics. These guys were really influenced by Milton Friedman. These people really believed in free trade and free economy, a free this and free that. They were all intellectually accomplished. They were all PhDs from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, MIT, Chicago. Every single cabinet member who had an economic responsibility whether it was trade, finance, central bank, all had PhDs from the United States. Salinas included. He had a PhD in political economy from Harvard.

On the economic labor union side, Fidel Velasquez was the head of the Mexican labor federation. He had been Sam Gompers' control officer in 1919 or something like that when he was a young labor leader. He was still alive when I was in Mexico. He was about 88 or 89 years old. He was on his way out and died shortly thereafter.

Salinas took on the oil workers union. He took them on just to send a message that he wasn't going to brook any interference from them. So I mean it was a mixed picture. Some of the old structures are still in power but some are not.

*Q: But were the elements of the PRI taking sort of a reflexive anti-American stance?*

NEGROPONTE: That part changed with the NAFTA negotiations. Plus, don't forget Bush is a Texan. Baker was a Texan. Mosbacher was a Texan. All these cabinet members of his in the Bush administration, they put a lot of emphasis on the relationship with Mexico. They had a state visit to the United States, Salinas did. Bush made a state visit to Mexico. He made a big visit to Mexico in 1990. So I mean they did not feel any lack of affection on the part of the United States and I think they reciprocated that.

So even though we had this really big irritant with the drugs, the basic trust of the relationship was positive because of the effort that George Bush and Jim Baker put into it. And Bob Zoellick by the way, Bob Zoellick was the Undersecretary for Economic Affairs, and he played a big role in that too. And Bernie Aronson, who was Assistant Secretary for Latin America and a very capable and intelligent guy. So it was a good time

in the relationship. And don't forget the Cold War ended. The end of the Cold War makes a difference.

*Q: OK, let's talk about the Cuban relationship. Cuba has always had been an outlet as it has been to a certain extent for Canada. A place to show that you are not...*

NEGROPONTE: That is right, and the Mexicans used to do that.

*Q: You are subject to the United States but look at Cuba. The Canadians do this too, or have. How was it being played?*

NEGROPONTE: They played it in earlier years. They were pretty cozy with the Cubans. Cuba itself was in a bit of a jam at that time because the Cold War had ended. There was a time in 1990 or so before the Salvadoran peace agreement, that Salinas and the presidents of Colombia and Venezuela met with Castro, I think on a Colombian Island. I forget which island it was. They had a meeting with Castro and they asked "Are you still providing weapons to the Salvadoran rebels?" The issue was Central America. Castro said, "I don't dare." It must have been a meeting in 1991 because by the end of the year Gorbachev was gone. He said, "I don't dare because Gorbachev will be mad with me," because Gorbachev had announced earlier in the year they were going to stop supporting wars of national liberation and everything. So for Castro, the aid from the Soviet Union was so important he didn't want to jeopardize it by siphoning some of it off to the Salvadoran rebels. So I think the relationship with the Cubans changed somewhat. The Cubans were in a weakened position, more desperate for foreign economic assistance and less adamant in pushing their political agenda. That was my sense of it.

*Q: Well, from your position, were we able to use the Mexicans as a surrogate to deal with the Cubans about trying to get closer to them or anything like that?*

NEGROPONTE: Never did. I think we would have used other channels more likely than that, either our own American channels or the interest section or some prominent American. I think we would have not been likely to look to the Mexicans to play that rule, but I would say they had moved in terms of their own ideological orientation to a somewhat more world view, consistent with the idea of integrating your economy with global trade and more consistent with the idea of getting closer to the United States because a lot of that is implied by negotiating a free trade agreement.

The other point, because the Cold War then ended at the end of 1990, and the wall collapsed; the Soviet Union collapsed. I forget when it collapsed.

*Q: Well at least by '92.*

NEGROPONTE: Then it ended in '91. So I mean all of that happens and what happens in the beginning of 1992? The Salvadorans, I can't remember if it was the beginning of '92 or '93 but the Salvadorans signed a peace agreement in '92. I mean a number of things happened in Central America that suggest that really the idea that the tectonic ideological

plates are moving because the Sandinistas lose that election in the Spring of 1990 and Violetta Chamorro wins the election, so that is a non-communist outcome.

Finally the Salvadoran civil war is settled. And it is settled in Mexico. The treaty is signed in the castle of Chapultepec in Mexico City. Jim Baker comes down for it. A very moving ceremony with the FMLN leaders and President Cristiani of El Salvador embracing each other to end this decade long civil conflict. So the international atmosphere is becoming more conducive to a positive U.S.-Mexico relationship.

*Q: Was Mexico having southern border problems with migration?*

NEGROPONTE: Not unlike what we have. To this day they have this issue of a border that is a little difficult to control and lots of Central Americans coming up through there to find their way to the United States. They come up the Pacific side through Guatemala and across. I suppose you could come through Belize as well but it is a little harder. There is a lot of jungle there. The Pacific coast.

*Q: Was there a Zapatista movement at all?*

NEGROPONTE: I went to the place where the Zapatistas, the town they took over a year after I left. But I went there before in the prior year and there was no sign of anything. I took a trip through Chiapas.

*Q: That is the place where they keep having problems.*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, and it is the part on the border with Guatemala and all. There was talk of these little renegades and comandante whatever his name was. I have forgotten his name, but it was all fairly small scale and certainly when this rebellion occurred, which was after I left, it was a surprise to me. I didn't see any sign of it. No sign that would suggest to me there would be a force that would be capable of taking over this fairly significant town, San Cristobal.

*Q: You obviously had the normal military attaché on assignment and all. What were your military attachés telling you and your own experience about the Mexican military service, capabilities where they are from and ideology and so on?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I had good military attachés. Including a general officer, although General Powell downgraded the position. They took away the star so it became a colonel again after this guy got replaced. I think now they have restored the one star status. Now the military in Mexico is the product of the agreement they reached after the revolution where you had different classes. They had labor and capital etc. Then you had the military and the military was treated like a class apart and given a special status, I think basically to keep them on the reservation and to coopt them. And the Mexican political process has pretty well coopted the military.

But the main issue that I discussed with them is whether or not they should be involved in the war on drugs. I used to have discussions with the minister of defense who was an old timer. He had been in the military for 50 years. He said, "Ambassador, I don't want these guys involved in the war on drugs." Except they could send out 25,000 troops once a year with their machetes to chop down marijuana poppies. "But besides that, that kind of eradication program, I do not want my military involved in narcotics because they are going to get corrupted." They are going to become part of the problem instead of part of the solution. So while I was there anyway the military never really got involved in a large scale. That happened after I left. I always viewed the idea of military involvement in the drug war with a little bit of skepticism.

*Q: Was labor a part and parcel for PRI or was the labor movement a power unto itself?*

NEGROPONTE: My recollection is it certainly was a big PRI labor confederation but there were other labor unions as well. But frankly I don't remember labor being that consequential a force. And certainly our auto, we had all the big auto companies invested in Mexico, they all succeeded in manufacturing automobiles. Mexican workers are considered extremely good. Mexican labor is good, by the way.

*Q: Did you see NAFTA bringing about the development of a bigger and stronger labor force or not?*

NEGROPONTE: I saw it more in general terms of bringing around a stronger economy and raising the living standards of Mexicans, which it has done.

*Q: How about the wealthy? Sometimes in Latin America these are people who live almost separate lives in closed haciendas and helicoptering thither and yon. Was there much of that?*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah. I mean there is probably even more now. I mean there is social inequality in Mexico, no question about it, and it is probably not gotten better. But what has happened is you have a growing middle class. There are things about Mexico today that you wouldn't have expected to find 20 or 30 years ago, like the level of knowledge of English just about anywhere is really quite impressive, and the knowledge and awareness of the United States. I think the standard of living has improved substantially. That is not to say there is this wealthy class that is sort of a class apart that had been true for quite a while.

*Q: Did you have the problem I noted in other places, where you can have a class like that and if you are not careful they can almost absorb the embassy officers particularly?*

NEGROPONTE: I understand what you are driving at and it is a danger but I think we dealt so much on an institutional level with things. We worked so much with Chamber of Commerce, large delegations there wasn't enough time to just get absorbed by lots of individual Mexican entrepreneurs. Although we did get to know a few. They had their own organization and a group of the cream, the top organization of entrepreneurs, which

are full of the kind of people you are describing. Very often occupying hereditary positions. Their grandfathers and fathers before them had run the same business. But that was all going to open up a bit with NAFTA.

*Q: How did you find corruption in the operation of Mexico? One always hears about corruption at the police level and all.*

NEGROPONTE: I find corruption as a general observation in the course of my career it is one thing to say and think there is corruption and it is another to really be able to prove it. Very often people just kind of repeat hearsay and rumors. Oh, so and so is corrupt. Everybody knows. But you know, we don't necessarily know. So, I thought that was a bit of an issue.

I think the part that does irritate Americans when there is this petty corruption when you have to pay a petty bribe to avoid a parking ticket or pay a bribe to get your passport or driver's license, that sort of thing. There was quite a bit of that. I want to think it is going to get better as the level of education rises. I think education is the key for a lot of these things. And there are some demographic developments in Mexico that make a lot of these things give hope one of which was you know most mothers today are not having six, seven, eight children. They are having two or three. So they are better able to provide for the higher standard of education.

When Ronald Reagan came to visit after he was ex-president, He came twice when he was ex-president. Each time to give a speech. The first time I was driving around with him in Mexico City and he said, "Gee, look at all the cars here. Look at all those American cars." I felt like saying to him, "Well what did you expect to see, Mr. President?" We went up to the sixth floor of President de la Madrid's apartment in Mexico City in sort of a nice neighborhood. "Oh gee this looks just like Hollywood," he said. I think he was expecting to see abject poverty. Well there is poverty in Mexico but it is not abject. Mexico City is quite a city. It is an international town.

*Q: Living in the city, did you find the smog a problem?*

NEGROPONTE: There was for a couple of my kids, yes. One actually got asthma. I don't know whether he got it from the smog there or it is just his natural condition. But we had certain rules and protocols we followed for the school kids there in Mexico City. We kept them indoors during certain times of day, in certain times of the year or during smog alerts. The situation got much better. They got a new mayor who got elected about the middle of my time there and he got much better at eliminating the particulate matter in the air and then they moved to unleaded gas. But they just started transitioning to that. So today you go to Mexico City, the air is much cleaner. You can now see the volcanoes more often than not where before it was just like a miraculous apparition if you saw the volcano.

DOE helped me a lot, and my experience running OES was helpful. I got Admiral Watkins when he was Secretary of Energy to give us \$10 million to do an atmospheric

study of Mexico City. We set up measuring stations in different parts of the city to analyze the air and the air pollution in Mexico City, which was a very useful thing to do. From that, we made a mathematical model of Mexico City's atmosphere

*Q: Was Mexico opening up to China and elsewhere more?*

NEGROPONTE: Not then. Not yet. The focus was on us. Once they got the agreement with us and got it ratified, in subsequent years then they started negotiating free trade agreements with many parts of the world.

*Q: Also were they becoming part of the Pacific Rim?*

NEGROPONTE: That happened sort of a decade or so later. I mean it happens. They are now. They are very much a part of the Pacific Rim. There is this TPP, Trans-Pacific Partnership and everything. They are in that. But that didn't happen for about a decade.

*Q: How about the role of women?*

NEGROPONTE: Role of women. There are prominent academics, Mexican business women. There have been successive Mexican foreign ministers and some governors. I would say that what you find is some, but certainly not proportionate, representation of women in the body politic. But you will find that in just about every walk of professional life you will find some. There is certainly no discrimination against woman. Nowadays they are all getting their education like everybody else in the world; so sooner or later it will become more and more equal as time go on.

*Q: Did the American university system play a significant role would you say?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, the Fulbright program was instrumental. Half the cabinet were Fulbright grantees of one kind or another. I mean Salinas' cabinet had, as I said, PhDs from literally a dozen or so schools from within the United States. So the American educational influence was huge, particularly at the university and postgraduate level, very strong. The business community liked doing business with the U.S., but they also liked education in the United States. They like vacationing there too. I mean Vail, Colorado, has a small Mexican community. If you want to go find some high net worth Mexican individuals, stand in the ski lift line at Vail, Colorado.

*Q: Today is 9 July 2013 with John Negroponte. John, why did you get the Philippine assignment and when was it?*

NEGROPONTE: I ended my assignment in Mexico in September, 1993. It was Labor Day weekend. The previous June I was called by the Department to ask me if I was interested in going to the Philippines as ambassador. You ask why I got it. Initially they had named my successor in Mexico, Jim Jones, who was a former Congressman from Oklahoma, who was a very successful ambassador. He was instrumental in getting the



NAFTA ratified. They named him back in winter or spring. They didn't offer me any assignment. This of course was a new administration, Clinton etc.

Initially they told me they didn't have anything for me. But then in June, and I can't remember the exact date, the New York Times wrote a blistering editorial criticizing the administration for having 50 ambassadorial vacancies and saying this was just unacceptable. The New York Times got on its high horse. Lo and behold, two days later I got called and asked if I wanted to go to the Philippines to be ambassador. So they obviously were scrambling thereafter to fill these jobs.

*Q: Did you have any idea? Was this just poor management or what?*

NEGROPONTE: No, just the start of a new administration process, which is always slow and messy. You always hear these complaints that it is the worst ever, and it is not. Standing up a new administration just takes time.

*Q: They just dig out the same editorial.*

NEGROPONTE: I mean the FBI and the people who do the security clearances, they are very busy these first six months. They are overwhelmed. They called me; they asked. I had served in Southeast Asia. I had been a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asia. There was a real logic to my going there. I said, yes, and was happy to do it. When I told my father about it, his reaction was to say, "It isn't even an insult."

*Q: John the question I didn't ask before when you were ambassador to Mexico. I have served in Greece and I have served in Yugoslavia and Georgia. Émigré groups come to the United States and become citizens and turn into rather powerful lobbies. Don't mess with the Greek lobby in the states where it is parallel. Probably the group that has the largest number of its former citizens is Mexico.*

NEGROPONTE: Correct.

*Q: But did you have any feeling for this? Did they use the political clout or was this not an issue?*

NEGROPONTE: It was mobilizing. Probably not as much as it is today, but it was mobilizing. There were various, but they were more, they didn't act like émigré groups. There is a slight difference here because they joined forces with the other Latino groups. There was one umbrella group called La Raza. The president of that group brought a whole delegation. We got Mexican American groups, and of course on the border there are a lot of Hispanic congressmen. The Hispanic caucus is made up mostly of, not exclusively, but mostly of border congressmen or people from LA. We had a lot of contact with the Hispanic American community.

*Q: Did you find them...*

NEGROPONTE: Politically they were a mixture of people from all different perspectives. There were small and medium sized business delegations too. The commerce department mobilized some of those. Or delegations that came along with governors of different states or mayors from Florida or Texas. They very often brought people from small or medium businesses who were Hispanic and who wanted help in finding counterparts to do business with; so they were in to the business end.

*Q: Ok, and did you have any pre-formed ideas about the Philippines? This was after Marcos.*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yes, Marcos is gone. Cory Aquino had been president. She was Marcos' successor after the people power revolution. When I was nominated, Fidel Ramos had just become president. He was a West Point graduate and a Korean War veteran. He was a classmate of General Haig. I mean this was a very Americanized, American trained Filipino leader. I had known him when he was head of the Philippine constabulary. That man knew every police station in the Philippines. That was part of his political success. He traveled the length and breadth of the country. He loved his people. He loved his work force. He had great inter personal skills. He is the best president they had in recent memory.

Now Cory Aquino's son has become president. Between Ramos and Noynoy Aquino there were a lot of problems with President Estrada, a movie actor. He was Ramos' vice president when I was there. Ramos was president the entire time I was in the Philippines.

*Q: When you went out there were there any outstanding problems that you felt?*

NEGROPONTE: Well it is an interesting period, because it is the first time in 400 years that there have been no foreign troops on Philippine soil. Because the base negotiations had failed to pass the Philippine Senate. They didn't ratify the base agreement. So our last ship had weighed anchor out of Subic Bay in November of 1992. We got to port in October of '93, a year after the last bases had been shut down. So this is life without bases, which had been a central element of the relationship for 50 years.

*Q It must have been in a way a certain relief.*

NEGROPONTE: Well it gave me an opportunity to try to redefine the relationship, which we did. We built it on commerce, of which there was quite a bit. We built it on the history of the relationship, including WWII. You talk about diasporas. The other largest immigrant group to the United States in recent years has been Filipinos, right.

*Q: Where are they concentrated?*

NEGROPONTE: In the States? West Coast. But they are all over the United States, because a lot of them are medical workers. People from every walk of life. It started out on the West Coast because of San Diego. A lot of them had been enlisted people in the Navy and they retired in that area. San Francisco, Los Angeles, strong Philippine

concentration on the West Coast, very strong. But because of the medical profession, the nursing and the doctors, they were pretty much all over the country. When I was ambassador I would go to graduations of nursing schools where they would graduate 3000 people in one fell swoop and hundreds of them went to the United States in their first year. Hundreds.

*Q: One of the sort of success stories of this group is they really are meeting a need.*

NEGROPONTE: Well Asian Americans really are a success in the United States, as you know. The Indians, Chinese, Koreans and Filipinos. If you look at the sociological data about who is doing well in terms of economic accomplishment, their standard of living is much higher than other immigrant groups, like the Latinos. They tend to be better educated. Anyway that was a feature of the relationship. They are part of the ASEAN group of countries and ASEAN itself is intrinsically important to U. S. foreign policy. The ASEAN group of countries.

*Q: Well the Philippines I would have thought were somewhat on the outside of ASEAN.*

NEGROPONTE: Well the original five included the Philippines. They were Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. Those were the core five when ASEAN was formed. So they have always been in it. They were on the outside in only one sense, that they were the only ones, well Thailand also was an ally. So Thailand and Philippines had an alliance relationship, which made them different from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Interestingly when the bases agreement failed to pass the Philippine senate, some of the other countries actually developed a little bit more of a military relationship with us. Singapore for example, became...

*Q: Another Subic Bay.*

NEGROPONTE: It wasn't quite a Subic Bay but it was a repair facility, and sort of a way station. You know these are sort of descendants of the old coaling stations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about a series of points in the Pacific that a Naval power like us can use to position ourselves off China, I mean Admiral Mahon is alive and well. We basically are carrying out his strategy today, every bit as much as we were before.

It was regrettable to lose those bases, but I don't think the average Filipino, any more than the average Panamanian wanted us out. Later on I worked on the Panamanian situation. There always was going to be an element of their body politic that wasn't going to be happy unless they definitively expelled us from the country. They might invite us back later, but they wanted to be able to say we don't need the Americans. Even so that was a minority, it was a minority that blocked the passage of the bases agreement. I mean 80% of the Filipino people would have been happy to have us stay. It cost hundreds of thousands of jobs. It lost income for them, and it caused a certain amount of irritation.

*Q: What were you feeling then? The fact we were no longer an employer.*

NEGROPONTE: Well it was too soon after the fact to make an issue of it. I think there is a fundamental goodwill in the Philippines towards the United States, and a fundamental understanding of U.S. culture.

We had a lot of legacy issues in the Philippines like what to do about Filipino veterans of WWII who fought side by side with us and who are still trying to recoup benefits they felt were their due. One of the things that happened after WWII was the U.S. reneged on some promises of veterans benefits for various Filipinos who fought side by side with us; so for the next decades there were efforts to recoup those benefits. Some restitution has been made now. But back at the end of the war there was something called rescission that was implemented which denied a lot of the benefits to a lot of the people who fought with us. Like the guerillas. Part of it was the question of trying to identify who was a bona fide soldier, a bona fide claimant and who wasn't. We had a lot of veterans' issues.

And then probably what was the most interesting thing we did while I was there, was it was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII. I got there in October of '93, so October of '94 was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Leyte Gulf landing when MacArthur started his return, and then of course he fought his way up the entire Philippine peninsula. Fidel Ramos decided we would celebrate all of these liberations. We had 15 or 20 liberation ceremonies all the way until the signing of the armistice with the Japanese forces there, the surrender in Baggio, which took place at the Ambassador's summer residence in September. September 3, 1945, ergo 1995. So I was there for all of that. I accompanied Ramos in just about all of these re-enactments. They re-enacted the battles and of course the Japanese always lost. So the Japanese ambassador lost his enthusiasm for coming along on these trip after one or two of them He said, I don't think I want to do this. I am tired of apologizing. But it was a very big deal.

We got Secretary of Defense Perry to come out for the Leyte Gulf landing, the re-enactment. The Filipinos made a huge deal out of it. They hired a Hollywood movie actor to play the role of MacArthur. We had a joint landing with the U.S. Navy and the Philippine Navy vessels and the actor was brought in on an LST and the gangplank went down and instead of marching onto the beach he fell into the water. He fell in, which wasn't exactly the script. So Bobby Romulo, Carlos P. Romulo's son, who was then the foreign minister, (Of course Carlos P. Romulo had walked ashore with MacArthur in 1944.) he said, well that is the way it happened. The first time MacArthur fell in the water. They always think of MacArthur as a big actor himself. He came back and re-enacted it. At least according to Romulo.

We had a lot of celebrations. Dick Cheney came out in his private capacity but he had been Secretary of Defense under George Bush when Cory Aquino refused to receive him, which was probably a low point in the U.S.-Philippine relationship.

*Q: Why did she refuse?*

NEGROPONTE: Because she didn't want to be pressured on the bases agreement. So there were some fences to be mended, but Ramos did go to the United States. He went

there early in my tenure, very early in my tenure and had a working visit with President Clinton. Senator Gloria Macapagal Arroyo came with us, who later became president. A relatively unsuccessful president. She had been a classmate of President Clinton at Georgetown. So there was some good feeling there, I am trying to think of the date. It would have been 1994.

In November 1994 in the mid-term elections when the Democrats lost control of the congress you remember, that very same week, that Friday or Saturday, President and Mrs. Clinton came for a State visit to the Philippines. It was beautiful and we did all the historic things. Frank Wisner and I talked about this. I said, "What is the import to the U.S.-Philippine relationship?" I don't know if you would call this a U.S. interest, but he said, "You know what it is? It is history. It really is history."

So we took the President to Corregidor where MacArthur had holed up for several months after the Japanese had conquered the rest of the Philippines We took him to see that. They built a very good sound and light show out there. President Clinton went to see it. Then we took him to a beautiful ceremony at the American cemetery. One of the American military cemeteries is in Manila. We have 17,000 troops buried there with a really wonderful view of the city.

The only problem with it, was the White House advance people rejected my advice that we have that meeting in the evening just before the President left for his next stop so that it would be cooler. They insisted on a mid-day ceremony. It would be a hundred degrees. But they said, "Oh, no. We need the mid-day lighting. It is more telegenic." So they made us all sit out there for about an hour and a half, because you know how Clinton is congenitally late for everything. The poor people sat out there for about an hour and a half in this hot Philippine sunshine waiting for the President to show up. But then he gave a wonderful speech. Anyway, a lot about history.

Oh, and then we had very important state luncheon. I had been told by White House protocol, "Don't you dare let them invite the president to play the saxophone. We are tired of him taking these trips and then the only picture that comes out when he is making a state visit is him playing the saxophone. It doesn't look serious enough. We just can't have it. So, Ambassador, it is your neck if he is invited to play the saxophone." So I warned the Filipinos. But you can't control everything.

We got to the state luncheon in Malacañang Palace, which of course used to be the American Governor General's residence. They all sit down to lunch. Mrs. Ramos, known as "Ming" Ramos is a pianist, a really good pianist and a member of something called the Executive Band, which was a group of very elite Filipinos who all played very good music. The group included the former foreign minister, Raul Manglapus. He played clarinet.

Mrs. Ramos, who was sitting right next to President Clinton, says, "Won't you join us because we are going to perform for all the guests after lunch." What was the president going to say? Sure he would. I remember Stephanopoulos glaring at me and others.

President Clinton didn't even have his own mouthpiece because he hadn't expected to play. They got him on stage. The first piece he played was not really up to par. But he warmed up and then he played a beautiful solo rendition of Summertime. It was really nice. Everybody loved it and our Protocol people got over it.

*Q: Well you live with these things. Well tell me...*

NEGROPONTE: So I think I am telling you there were no primordial interests at stake during my time.

*Q: It was really because we have been through some very....*

NEGROPONTE: It was a pretty routine assignment.

*Q: We had been through some very rocky times because getting rid of Marcos and all of that, and his general rule and the killing of...*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, martial law. I think what you are also saying is they have gone through some very turbulent times. This is a period of relative stability. There was an important development that was probably the most consequential while I was there. In January of 1995 my station chief came to see me and says, "Ambassador, I have been ordered to cut the station in half by the end of the fiscal year." This is "right sizing." Remember Al Gore's downsizing and right sizing. This is the "peace dividend."

Within days I get a call saying there has been a very weird incident occurred near the embassy. Two guys playing with some chemicals set their apartment on fire. The fire department responded, and they caught these people, at least one of them, and they found these laptops. When they started searching the laptops they unearthed a plot to kill the Pope. It was called the Bojinka plot. You may recall this. It was to kill the Pope. It was to blow up several airliners over the Pacific and several other things. One of the guys involved was Ramzi Yousef, who had been involved in blowing up the World Trade Center the first time. The first attempt against the World Trade Center in 1992 or 1993. These were bin Laden's people essentially. This was one of the early manifestations of bin Laden.

So the FBI came out, the NYPD. We had a whole counter terrorist team out there. I will never forget the irony of the fact that this incident occurred within days after my station chief received instructions to reduce the size of his station, which was probably not the best time to do that. It turned out that bin Laden had been involved and may have had one Filipino wife. He had also been involved in funding some of the mosques in the southern Philippines fomenting radicalism.

*Q: Well before you arrived there and this became apparent were we concerned about terrorism, international or local?*

NEGROPONTE: There had been terrorism in the Philippines. In fact, we had an officer killed, a military officer. He was one of the officers in our JUSMAG Advisory group.

*Q: Military assistance group.*

NEGROPONTE: But I think he had been killed by the New People's Army. That is the communists in the Philippines. They still existed and there were kind of remnants of them roaming around in remote countryside. The Islamic issue was more confined to Mindanao and parts of Mindanao.

*Q: That is the old Moro.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly. There were autonomy movements going on. Groups called the NMLF and the MILF, but they confined their activities pretty much to the region down there. It hadn't spread. It was more a localized thing. There were problems down in Zamboanga; there were tensions between the Catholics, Muslims down in the city of Zamboanga, but up in Luzon which is where Manila is and most of Visayas region there really wasn't much problem. It was really Mindanao. A lot of people would say well look this is something that has been going on for 300-400 years in one form or another. Certainly one of the issues confronting the government was negotiating some sort of autonomy arrangement with the Muslims in Mindanao and there was some successful outreach by Ramos with the Islamist forces in the country. That continues as an issue today.

*Q: Were there sort of no-go areas?*

NEGROPONTE: A few down in Mindanao. We were a little bit careful. Mostly we went pretty much everywhere. We had no restrictions, serious restrictions on travel. It was an accompanied tour. People brought their families. We had Peace Corps just about everywhere in the country, just about. We went down to Mindanao a lot. I always thought one of the fun parts of being an ambassador is to travel around the country as much as you can. We did that as much as we possibly could. Then we had the summer residence. We had an absolute full-fledged ambassadorial residence in Baguio, on a compound of many acres. A great place to walk around and to get relief from Manila's heat. Baguio is in the mountains.

*Q: What had it been?*

NEGROPONTE: The Philippines got their independence in stages, and in 1935 as a way station, a stepping-stone to independence, we gave them the right to elect their own president. They got basically self-rule but without control of their foreign policy and national security. So they elected a president of their own. So the American governor general moved out of his mansion in Baguio and in Manila and they built separate residences for whom they then called the American High Commissioner. So the High Commissioner had a house in Baguio and in Manila. The high commissioner's place in Manila was the embassy office. I don't know if you have seen the office.

*Q: I have never been there.*

NEGROPONTE: Well it is an office building, but the top couple of floors was the residence.

*Q: Were there any sort of items left over from our military like golf clubs and places like that, golf courses?*

NEGROPONTE: You mean like facilities we had? No, all that went back to the Filipinos. I don't know if you recall this but the reason the negotiations really floundered was the fact that Mount Pinatubo erupted and all of a sudden. I mean there were two facilities we were interested in. Subic on the one hand, which was the naval one, and of course Clark Airfield, which was the Air Force facility. The airfield got totally submerged in lava. They call it lahar, from the eruption of mount Pinatubo.

So when I was there Clark was utterly useless and covered in lahar. The roads were all covered. To get there was a real struggle driving. Towards the end of my tour they had cleared the airstrip and removed five to seven feet of volcanic material. They started some initial efforts to develop it economically, but that has only begun to bear fruit recently. Now Clark is being seriously developed as an industrial park and commercial hub. There are even international commercial flights operating out of Clark.

*Q: What about Subic Bay?*

NEGROPONTE: I attended the inauguration of Federal Express when it came in and established a hub there. Fred Smith was the CEO and the spiritual heirs of the Flying Tigers. A Malaysian casino operator came down and made the old officer's club a casino. I mean then they took some of the old barracks and made them hotels. They began that. Some construction, some this and some that. It developed in fits and starts. Later Fed-ex pulled out because China became more interesting.

But now Clark and Subic, I would say are vindicating the ending of the base agreement in the sense that they now generate more jobs for Filipinos than our bases did. There is now more employment there, and actually the Philippines has become quite a competitive economy. And if you look at what is going on today, they are on kind of an economic high. Their stock market is doing well.

*Q: In the time you were there, how stood things? So much of the electronic, digital growth which was all brand new back in the world was moving to Southeast Asia. How did the Philippines deal with that?*

NEGROPONTE: Not much. Not really compared to Malaysia and Singapore. I think Malaysia was very much into that. Flat screen TVs and things like that. Filipinos weren't in on that, although they eventually did, they got into electronics, and that kind of thing but later.



We also had real energy problems in the Philippines. Ramos thankfully was an engineer, a civil engineer. He got a masters by the way; in addition to his West Point bachelor's degree, which was an engineering degree, he had a masters in engineering from the University of Illinois. He was a very competent person. We had these rolling brownouts when I first got there, and Ramos actually took some emergency measures to solve that pretty well.

*Q: How did they generate electricity?*

NEGROPONTE: Well they would use fuel oil even. They would use oil. But I can't remember all the different sources. They had some hydro if I remember correctly. For these emergency measures they brought in some barges. You know Enron. Then Enron built a plant. The Philippines was the place where we had a very ill-fated Westinghouse nuclear power plant that never got started. It ended up being a huge white elephant, where the plant was never opened. But they spent a couple of billion dollars. I mean there have been a lot of bad energy practices in the Philippines. They discovered oil while I was there and produce a certain amount of oil and gas offshore.

*Q: How stood relations of the Philippines with other countries like Australia, Indonesia, and China?*

NEGROPONTE: Marcos had been very clever in the way he had managed relations with other countries. There seems to be a tradition of the Filipinos being pretty good at their diplomacy. I would say they had good relations with ASEAN and cultivated China. Don't forget, they have a lot of ethnic Chinese in their country.

They had developed very good relations in the Middle East because of the Muslim population in Mindanao. They had good relations with Qadhafi because they felt that good relations with the Middle East could help them control their situation down in the southern part of their own country. And of course they had hundreds of thousands if not millions of Filipinos working in the Persian Gulf.

One of the things I remember was President Ramos at Christmas time, when all the Filipinos come home from the Middle East and from all these overseas worker jobs to visit their families. He would go to the airport and greet people coming back. He would go to the airport and meet people coming back from Dubai or from Jeddah or whatever, because there were so many Filipinos working outside the country. In Hong Kong.

*Q: We were talking about off mic about the Middle East countries having lots of oil, but all the construction work and all is Pakistani, Filipino, South Korean.*

NEGROPONTE: Correct, and I think it is still true. For these people, it is both an opportunity and a hardship because it means a lot of these families are separated. It is not the happiest of lives for a lot of these people because they go off to make money and send it home to their families. At the same time, these are the only employment opportunities.

The Filipinos, a large percentage of their foreign exchange reserves come from remittances. They really depend a lot on that to this very day.

*Q: Were you seeing the results of people with money, often diplomats, hiring Filipino servants and all and then particularly with young women, mistreating them.*

NEGROPONTE: That was the allegation against certain people from the Arab countries. Occasionally there were some rather notorious cases that got publicity. Our human rights reports sometimes highlighted these issues, human rights reports about other countries. I can't remember specific cases, but I certainly remember reading cases like that.

*Q: Were human rights an issue at all in the Philippines?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes. Abuses of authority by police. There were some gruesome murders and things like that that went unsolved. Bad prison conditions, and so forth. There were some serious violations. I forget what the term was for these summary killings that they were often accused of carrying out.

But on the other hand, I think the Filipinos got credit for good democratic institutions, particularly their totally free legislature, senate and house and a very free press. The classic complaint being perhaps it is too free, but certainly there was no censorship that I am aware of. I don't remember any instance of censorship. They were totally free.

*Q: Public diplomacy. How did the media treat America and you and your embassy?*

NEGROPONTE: Well basically there was one issue that was slightly neuralgic. That is they were always alert to any notion that we might be trying to get the bases back, or that we were trying to re-instate a military relationship similar to what had gone on previously. So if we had for example, military exercises, they would watch those very carefully.

I proposed at one point at the request of our military some kind of a logistics agreement with them. It got killed by bad publicity. Ah that is no logistics agreement; they must want to go and re-create the earlier bases. It had to await my successor, Tom Hubbard, who was able to negotiate something called a visiting forces agreement. Because we had to get some immunities for our troops if we are going to come and exercise in the Philippines. We lost that by not having the bases agreement. But Tom succeeded in getting that.

*Q: I would have thought that the Philippines would have felt somewhat vulnerable. I mean, you have got the mainland giant of China making island claims.*

NEGROPONTE: They did, and they occupied Mischief Reef it was called, about the middle of my time there. That turned out to be a big incident between China and the Philippines. You see that is much more accentuated today.

China has done, I am leaping forward here since I worked on these issues later on as well, China kind of drove Southeast Asia back into our arms by its behavior in the last four or five years, with its exaggerated behavior vis-à-vis its claims in the South China Sea. They have revived the Southeast Asian countries' interest in a relationship with the United States, including a security relationship. I don't think there is anybody in the Philippines today who wants to see us get out of Southeast Asia. So but that wasn't quite as evident between 1993 and 1996, when I was there.

*Q: Did we have small teams of training military? You know, counter guerilla type?*

NEGROPONTE: Not yet. We had some MAG, Military Assistance Group activity. There was some training and there was an annual exercise and some equipment sales, but not on a large scale. And the Filipino military were poor as church mice. They were operating with antiquated equipment and no budget for this new equipment. I think the situation may have gotten a bit better now. Then they were not in very good shape.

*Q: How about the Japanese? Were they doing very much investing there, or were they dirtying their copybook from during WWII?*

NEGROPONTE: The Japanese had a lot of investment there. They gave a large amount of foreign assistance. They were in reasonably good odor notwithstanding. In fact, I think the Japanese have gone and blotted their copybook more in subsequent years. There has been a resurgence of Japanese nationalism. You know, the visits to the Yasukuni shrine and all those visits that have happened in the past decade. The issue of comfort women got revived somewhat during that time. Look, they managed the relationship, and the Japanese used to come through Southeast Asia. The new prime ministers used to make a point of visiting Southeast Asia first. I would say during the time I was there, there were reasonably good relations with Japan.

*Q: The Japanese have really done a number on the old city Manila.*

NEGROPONTE: I was absolutely horrified. When we re-enacted the liberation of Manila, I just couldn't believe what had happened. They killed 100,000 people in Manila in February of 1945. I met a lady, we had some ceremonies and some exhibits with USIS [U.S. Information Service] at the cultural center. I met a lady at our cultural center who had lost all 27 members of her family in Manila during that month. The only reason she survived, she succeeded in hiding somewhere in her family's house. They didn't discover her.

*Q: Yeah. The Japanese obviously ran amok.*

NEGROPONTE: She said she had nightmares. She had nightmares every night since. They ran amok. It was the Japanese marines that ran amok.

*Q: Very much a repeat of what had happened in Nanking. It was a tragic story.*

NEGROPONTE: MacArthur wanted Manila to be an open city. He did not want to fight over Manila, but the Japanese refused. That was very sad.

*Q: How did you find your embassy? I mean staffing and such.*

NEGROPONTE: Well, it was huge. It was almost as big as the embassy in Mexico because it had the legacy of earlier times. You had VOA operations. A lot of regional offices. Peace Corps as I mentioned. Then we had a consulate in Cebu although that was about to be closed. A large Military Assistance Group and so forth. There was law enforcement. Secret Service, FBI, all of them had contingents there. It was a convenient regional office. Also we had another ambassador there who was an executive director to the Asian Development Bank. He was representative to the Asian Development Bank, which is headquartered in Manila. So it was kind of a regional hub, Manila. It made it pretty big. I would say at least 1,500 people there at the U.S. Mission.

*Q: Well I was wondering if there is anything in the Philippines when we pulled our forces out, had this made the Philippines a little more peripheral to the action in Southeast Asia?*

NEGROPONTE: I don't know. It may have made them a little more focused on their relationship with ASEAN. Earlier they were able to say "well, we may be members of ASEAN but we have the support of the bilateral relationship with the U.S." I think as a consequence of our leaving they became more interested in their relationships with each other. This was a real high point. You may recall it. They were talking about the Asian Tigers in that period. All these countries were booming in that period, '93-'94. It wasn't until '97, when I was already out of there, that things, the Asian financial crisis deteriorated. In my time they were on a roll.

*Q: How about Indonesia? In a way the islands are sort of intertwined. How stood things at that time? Were there any problems with Indonesia or not?*

NEGROPONTE: With us or with the Philippines, I am not aware there were any significant problems. The issues came up in '97. '97 was the watershed year, and of course I was already gone from the Philippines. That is when the Asian financial crisis set in.

*Q: And Japan sort of imploded.*

NEGROPONTE: It spread. It starts in Thailand and spreads to Indonesia. Then Southeast Asia kind of gets eclipsed and falls off everybody's screen for about five or ten years. Except that after 9/11 we became interested in the elements of the radical Muslim situation in southern Mindanao and actually after 9/11, maybe in 2002, we sent troops down to the Philippines. I think about a battalion of troops.

*Q: How important was the Catholic Church?*

NEGROPONTE: Hyper important. It is an incredibly devout country. And the Cardinal's name was Cardinal Sin. He would welcome you and say, "Welcome to the house of Sin." You went to his home for dinner or lunch, which my wife and I did from time to time, that is what he would always say. Tremendous influence. Cory Aquino was very devout. She never wanted to get crosswise with the cardinal.

Ramos was not a Catholic, he was a Methodist. He was really of a different Christian persuasion, so he wasn't as beholden to the Catholic church. But the church is very important. It prevented for example family planning and birth control policies. It was a real stumbling block to a number of social policies, unlike the Mexican church. It is interesting. Here are these two both very devout countries, but the Mexican church really didn't try to prevent family planning. So they were strong that way.

The Pope came. Every ambassadorship I have had except Iraq the Pope came. The pope came to Honduras, Mexico and the Philippines. His visit to the Philippines rocked that country. There must have been five million people at one of the masses he gave down there in the central square in Manila. As far as the eye could see in the central square in Manila. Fascinating. (This was the visit during which the Bojinka plotters had planned to kill the Pope.)

*Q: On the other side of the spectrum, was Imelda Marcos a figure at all?*

NEGROPONTE: Well of course she had been discredited. She and her husband had been to trial, although she was acquitted in New York. She was not much of a factor then. She was on her way to a comeback because their families all, they are back full swing now. They have a son, one is in the legislature, the other is the governor of a province. Imelda was elected a couple of times to Congress. She wasn't during the time I was there. She was still a bit controversial. I tried to avoid her. I ran into her a couple of times but I tried to avoid any situation where I might be photographed with Imelda. I succeeded and never got photographed with her.

*Q: Her parties were phenomenal apparently.*

NEGROPONTE: She is back in a position of influence.

*Q: You really had to know families to be an ambassador and wield power in the country.*

NEGROPONTE: Well yes. You don't have to know them personally but you have to know the influence of these landed people. The political and social system that most resembles it is Pakistan to me. The landed families in Pakistan have retained great influence in that country.

*Q: They own villages.*

NEGROPONTE: For hundreds of years. The Filipinos are somewhat similar, and they have managed to translate that land ownership into political influence. So you will see a

lot of family influence in politics and sometimes you would see it pass from one generation to the next. That is just the way it is. You sort of worry about it. Is there really any competition? Is there any new injection of blood? But I think there is. The more education people get, the more opportunity there is, the better the chance there is of change.

But the social structure certainly remained an issue. A monopoly of influence in the hands of a fairly concentrated number of wealthy people. I mean including the presidential families. The Aquinos were huge. The Aquinos were from the aristocracy. The gentry if you will. The Cojuangcos. That is where Cory Aquino is from the Cojuangco family, a very rich family.

*Q: Was Cory Aquino a presence while you were there?*

NEGROPONTE: She was a former president but she certainly was noted for her philanthropic activities. I saw her from time to time. She was involved in philanthropy. But she didn't try to intrude in the political process. She played a reserved role. She was basically a transition figure.

*Q: What about women in Philippine society?*

NEGROPONTE: Well you had two women presidents.

*Q: Yeah, but I was going to say...*

NEGROPONTE: No problem in the Philippines. In that sense the Philippines is a very democratic country and a role model for others where they can't get elected to Congress. They are in all walks of life and without any exceptions as far as I can tell, business, accounting, CEOs of big accounting firms and two presidents out of the last four presidents at one period of time.

*Q: What about, I speak as a former consular officer. You were in Mexico City, which is a huge visa place. Of course there was an escape valve with people being able to go across illegally into the States, but in the Philippines you had to have a visa.*

NEGROPONTE: You couldn't swim across the Pacific.

*Q: Were you able to put up a barrier between you and the visa business?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh I did, yes. Both of my consuls general were not able to and I had to remove them both. One of them we tried to prosecute, because we unearthed a prostitute ring that he was helping in cahoots with a Thai general. They were Thai women who would come to the Philippines, come to the embassy. He would issue them visas and then they went to the States. The State Department failed to make the case in court. They lost it for insufficient evidence.

I never was so mad in my life. I called him into my office and said, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself.” He looked a time and said, “I think I am going to have a nervous breakdown.” I said, “Well, go ahead.” I can’t tell you how angry I was with him. Anyway he went back to the States and left the service. He retired. But State Department security failed to gather sufficient evidence to get a conviction. It was pathetic. There was this ring for everybody to see. We had female witnesses. We had a Thai general. We couldn’t make the case.

The next guy, his replacement, came from El Paso. He had two lawyers come out from El Paso and install themselves in a hotel opposite the consulate. They would take payment of three or four thousand dollars each or ten thousand dollars or whatever from these Filipinos. They would then signal their names the consul general and he would personally handle those cases to make sure that they got visas. So we caught those guys. Because we could never prove that money was passing from the two lawyers to the consul general, we couldn’t make a prosecution, but there was enough basis to remove the consul general from post.

So finally the third time around I got a consul general I could trust. Don’t get me going on this one. Well you already have got me going. You know it was one of the disappointments in my life. I always thought that if a person makes it into the Foreign Service, passes the exam, wants to be a diplomat, they have got to be honest. It showed to me that was not necessarily the correct assumption.

*Q: I was consul general in Korea, which is another big visa mill. I used to worry and really be concerned about the officers working for me because of this.*

NEGROPONTE: Look, I had 19 junior officers there. I ate in the cafeteria maybe two out of five days a week. I mean, I didn’t always go running out to lunches and stuff. I would go and have my sandwich, and we had a collective table. I would always sit there and the visa officers would come in. They would all start talking about their cases and this and that. I thought it was very helpful to them to have the ambassador there. I told them, “Look I have been a vice consul, a consul, a consul general. I know this business.” We would sit around talking. We would BS. I didn’t try to influence what they did or anything but just try to help them put their experiences in perspective because they get wrought up about those cases. They also get wrought up about refusing so many people. Because you say “no” a lot in places like that.

*Q: I used to say in Korea, “Look, you make your best judgment, follow the law and do it.” But then they would get in mostly people, extremely good citizens. They really do.*

NEGROPONTE: Of course. It is an impossible task to tell, sometimes I think we just give too many visitor visas out when you think about it. If you have a 50% acceptance rate in a place like Manila, I have got to tell you, there are more than half the people in that line waiting to get a visa who plan to stay in the U.S. once they get here. You are not going to tell me that that many are going to come back. Very few do. Look at, over this 11 million we have now whose status has to be addressed. Many, a large proportion of

those people have overstayed visitors' visas. They didn't cross through a tunnel under the U.S.-Mexican border.

*Q: I sometimes have the feeling that I am responsible for a significant portion of Gary, Indiana, of Serbs who went up to visit uncles or something like that in Gary.*

NEGROPONTE: Where was this?

*Q: I was in Belgrade.*

NEGROPONTE: What years?

*Q: I was there '62-'67.*

NEGROPONTE: So what other questions about the Philippines?

*Q: Was fishing a problem in that area at all?*

NEGROPONTE: I did a little less than three years in the Philippines, By August of '96 I left. The department asked me to take a job as a special assignment in the Western Hemisphere bureau. I guess it was still called the America Republics Affairs bureau, on what to do about Panama. Specifically to see if we could get access to our bases in Panama for our military, after we relinquished the Canal, in the post Canal situation. There was a lot of pressure in the administration to find a way to keep some of our military there in Panama notwithstanding we were going to turn the Canal back.

It was a bit of a suicide mission or a fool's errand. I took it because they weren't really offering me anything else and I was starting to think about retiring. I figured I was just going to move laterally henceforth. It was still a Democrat administration and I was sort of identified with Republicans even though I was not particularly partisan. But my career had tended to prosper more in the times of Republicans, just as events would have it. So I took on this assignment from September of '96 to September of '97. Those negotiations with the Panamanians, I came up with the draft agreement. I discussed it with my Panamanian counterpart. I went down several times and met with the President of Panama.

But to me there was a certain irony because I was just coming out of the Philippines and the situations were very analogous. They had just gotten rid of us. And here we were already asking to come back in. What makes you think that a country that has had Americans there for 100 years is going to, as a first gesture when they get the Canal say, "Oh, we wish your military would stay"? I mean they themselves needed to go through this cleansing period or their cooling off period. The U.S. military presence is not around. So Jesse Helms was pounding on this. We were trying to please Jesse Helms.

*Q: What about our military? What did they think?*



NEGROPONTE: Wesley Clark thought we could do it. He was the commander of SOUTHCOM. I believe he misjudged the situation. I don't believe he was correct in his assessment. I think I was proven correct. Anyway I took the negotiations as far as I could. I developed a draft agreement. I actually got them to consider it seriously. As I left, they were sort of considering it, but once I left it did not prosper.

Somebody took over for me, Ted McNamara, and the talks continued a little longer. Meanwhile because of my Greek origins, somebody had gotten the idea that maybe I ought to be the ambassador to Greece. This was sometime in the spring or summer in '97. I woke up one day and read the Al Kamen column.

*Q: He writes on federal.*

NEGROPONTE: Al Kamen is the most authoritative source in Washington on federal appointments. His column said I was going to Greece as ambassador. I had sort of had my eye on going to South Korea and had been given some encouragement to believe that would happen. So I called Jim Steinberg, who was then the Deputy National Security Advisor. He said, "Yeah, we are thinking of beefing up our team in the Eastern Mediterranean." He gave me some spiel.

Then I went to see Strobe Talbot who was the deputy secretary. I said, "So you want me to go to Greece?" He said, "Yeah, we really would like you to go to Greece." When I read the Al Kamen column it was the first I had heard about it. Strobe said, "You mean nobody called you from the D Committee to ask if you wanted to go?" So I was really a bit annoyed because no one from the D committee had called me.

And being of Greek origin, my late father (he had died a year earlier) he always said, "If they offer you Greece, don't take it." His reasoning had always been "Look, if they do that, you don't know whether they are doing it because they value your service or just because you are a useful token. If they think you are a good diplomat, there are 185 other countries they could send you to." I always thought his reasoning was pretty good, and besides I had been consul general in Thessaloniki. So I already knew what it was like with the Greeks feeling "oh, we have got one of our own people in the embassy." All that stuff. "He will fix our visa." And besides, that would really have been a lateral move, having been ambassador to Mexico and the Philippines.

I said, "Well maybe I ought to start thinking about other things." So I announced right there within two or three days after the Al Kamen column and after meeting with Strobe Talbot, who then realized and understood that I hadn't been consulted, I announced that I was planning to retire in September, which I did.

*Q: So you retired when?*

NEGROPONTE: Like around Labor Day, 1997.

*Q: So obviously this is like a continuing segment. What happened then.*

NEGROPONTE: I had already lined up a job that summer. I had written to various CEO's that I had known in various corporations. All you need is one job. I got offered a job by Terry McGraw, the CEO of the McGraw-Hill Companies. He asked me to be one of his executive vice presidents. He gave it a fancy name. Executive Vice President for Global Markets. I basically oversaw the international activities of the McGraw-Hill companies. I started that in September. I left State and I went to work immediately for the McGraw-Hill Companies. I did that for four years.

*Q: All right, let's talk about McGraw Hill. In the first place, what type of publishing were they involved in?*

NEGROPONTE: McGraw Hill has three parts. One part you are not probably conscious of is they own Standard and Poor's the ratings company, the financial information firm; that is one of the divisions of McGraw Hill. So that is all about financial information.

Then they own a magazine publishing business whose signature publication was Business Week. But they owned other things like Architectural Record, Engineering Record, a lot of professional magazines.

Then they had a book publishing division that involved education and professional books. They were out of the regular trade books. They were into education and professional publishing. They were particularly big in textbooks. Everybody in high school has had expensive McGraw Hill books. That was their bread and butter in the educational division.

*Q: What did you feel you were bringing to this job?*

NEGROPONTE: Service in six or seven different countries of the world, knowledge of the Asia, Europe and Latin America. A lot of foreign experience in governmental relations and things like that. Terry McGraw, at the time the CEO, was just at a point where he was trying to expand the percentage of their foreign business. Eighty percent of their revenues were domestic and about 20% was foreign. He wanted to jack up that latter part; so I was part of his plan to expand their foreign business.

*Q: OK, textbooks, an American textbook is an American textbook.*

NEGROPONTE: Your expansion in foreign business was going to be principally in financial information and Standard and Poor's. As the other countries developed different financial instruments and the bond market and stock markets in Europe and elsewhere were growing, you needed the same kind of tools you use in American. Credit ratings, assessments, sovereign ratings, etc.

Standard and Poor's grew like gang busters in Europe during the time I was there. That was probably the biggest single area of growth, having started from a very low base some 10 years earlier. The 1980's was the first time Standard and Poor's had opened an office

abroad, I think in London in '84, something like that. 15-20 years later they had offices scattered around Europe; they had offices in South Korea, Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore etc.

They also owned other kinds of interesting publications. You may have heard of an outfit called Platts. Platts is a publication about oil pricing. Platts usually serves as the reference price for oil. You sign a contract, you say per the price of oil as of the close of business on X date per Platts. They did a lot of reporting on the oil industry, and there were a lot of other publications that were important as well. Anyway I did that for four years.

*Q: As you saw what were sort of the challenges for you?*

NEGROPONTE: I wanted to open new markets. I wanted to get them interested in China, for example.

*Q: I was thinking China would be ripe for it.*

NEGROPONTE: I had some incipient success but it was still I would say very much in the planning phase. They had a joint venture in India with the Tata Group. Anyone who wants to do business in India seems to have to go to the Tata family. There was McGraw-Hill Tata. I was on the board of that local publishing company. So we did publish textbooks in India jointly with the Tata group.

I was on the board of their Canada company, McGraw-Hill Ryerson in Canada, and did textbooks there. I used to visit Mexico a lot because they had a big publishing operation in Mexico. We were trying to expand into other parts of Latin America as well. But my own ambition, the one I focused on the most, and I think I got some good talk going inside the company but not much action, was in getting them more interested in China.

*Q: How did they see China in those days as a commercial target?*

NEGROPONTE: Well it was still a place that was very much exporting goods to the United States, but there was some effort to publish magazines in Chinese like Business Week and such. There was a Chinese translation of Business Week. I mean everybody saw it as the same old question with China, A question of timing. Everybody saw it was going to become a huge market, but when was the right time to actually make your big effort? When was your opportunity? But I went to China a number of different times for McGraw-Hill. I went on a couple of business delegations also, just to take the temperature out there. We had a good business in Japan.

*Q: Were you beginning to feel the Japan bubble bursting or not?*

NEGROPONTE: I can't recall, but it was the time of the Asian financial crisis, which impacted more Southeast Asia as I remember.

*Q: Yeah, it started down in Indonesia, and Thailand.*

NEGROPONTE: I got to Latin America a lot. Mexico, particularly Mexico, because of the book publishing business and Standard and Poor's too. They had an office. They still do.

*Q: Was there sort of a Spanish market for textbooks in Latin America or was it a country specific market for these texts?*

NEGROPONTE: My recollection was it was pretty much country specific. Although the competition, one of the main sources of competition were Spanish publishing companies. There are Spanish publishers, Madrid and elsewhere, and they were definitely part of the competition.

I enjoyed my time at McGraw Hill. I believe I was somewhat helpful to Terry. I would go to the World Economic Forum every year and attend those meetings for him. I was kind of like an eyes and ears for him internationally and kind of a spokesperson for McGraw-Hill Companies. But I don't think it was the most challenging job I ever had, and I am not sure honestly how much good I did. I don't think I did them any harm, but I don't know how much good I did them.

*Q: I was wondering did you find sometimes it is very difficult for Foreign Service people to make the transition to the business world? Because you know, the bottom line we don't worry about that particularly. How did you find this?*

NEGROPONTE: I find that my work at McClarty Associates more compatible with my life experience and I feel much more comfortable in that position than I felt at the McGraw Hill Companies. So I guess I would say you have to find the right niche. That isn't always that easy to find.

What makes McClarty Associates such a natural is almost the entire focus of our work is international government relations. We use our past experience in advocating U.S. positions to governments; that same experience is immediately translatable to the kinds of clients we get. We get clients who want us to approach foreign governments saying "look, you are treating company X product in a discriminatory way. You are giving more favorable treatment to the French company, which is its competitor. You are charging a 20% duty on our client's products and you are only charging a 5% duty on company X products. So what are you going to do about that and how can we help you reach the right decision here?" So that kind of work makes sense to a Foreign Service Officer. It is like being in the foreign commercial service or an ambassador who is advocating for American companies.

So I have found the work at McClarty Associates very compatible with what I did before, very similar except it is exclusively focused on commercial issues. Whereas at McGraw Hill it was a little bit more of a stretch. I am not saying I was like a fish out of water. But I did think the issue you raise about how easy it is and how automatically our Foreign

Service experience can become useful to American corporations, there is an adjustment process there.

One of the things I would advocate to anybody thinking about their future after the Foreign Service, if they want to go to business activity of some kind, is to get some kind of a financial or accounting degree. To me it seemed clear the people who had the MBAs, I mean the MBA is the coin of the realm, and some better understanding of financial issues is probably not bad, unless you are going to go work in government relations. I mean, McGraw-Hill could have said, "John, we want you to be the government relations rep down in Washington." I could have done that, follow the congressional activity in the publications industry, stuff like that. That wasn't my job. I was supposed to be helping business.

*Q: In the publishing field did you find that there were a lot of restrictions on trade in publishing? This would seem to be a fairly benign type of work, not like sugar or something like that.*

NEGROPONTE: Not that I am aware of. There were some things that had to do with maybe sharing of financial information across borders in Europe and privacy concerns about the different ways people handle financial information. But no, that was not big. The regulatory issues I don't remember

*Q: I have always felt that with Standard and Poor's type business when you are trying to predict the way the market is going they put up these three rather artificial barriers. You are not supposed to use insider information, yet these are people who profit by inside information. The restrictions of it, are you going to pretend you haven't heard?*

NEGROPONTE: Look, the core business of S&P and McGraw Hill, by the way the company has split up. The publishing part, they have divested most of their magazines, and they have split the financial information part from the book publishing. They are going to be two separate companies. The core business of Standard and Poor's was doing credit ratings on bonds. That is the main thing they do. In other words, is this bond a AAA or a AAA- or BB? In other words, how credit worthy are they. They were criticized for not having properly evaluated some of these mortgage backed securities during the 2007-2008 crisis. But that was their core business. The reason they make money is in order to issue a bond you have to have a credit rating. The market requires it. You usually have to get two. So they had sort of a built in captive client list because there are only a handful of these so called recognized credit agencies. There was Moody's, Standard and Poor's, Fitch, there about five of them It was a pretty good business. It still is.

*Q: Did you feel any pressure from others? Like, "we have got to get that AAA rating"?*

NEGROPONTE: I never interfered in ratings. I never tried to. Even if people asked me about it. We respected it just like intelligence analysis. You just respected what they did. They are very proud of their profession. They guy who was president of Standard and

Poor's, he called himself President of Standard and Poor's and Chief Rating Officer. They were very proud of their objectivity. I believe they were very sincere.

*Q: Did they have a pretty good training program or a way of moving up through the ranks?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes they did. People had really good general educations too. The guy who ran the international part had an MA in international affairs. It was a very interesting field. They do sovereign ratings too. They rate the credit of countries. It is really interesting work.

*Q: And also very vital work.*

NEGROPONTE: Well yes. If you have got an investment, I mean the big line, the big bright line in the sand is if you have an investment grade rating or not. If you have a below investment grade you are going to pay a hell of a lot more interest for your loans than if you have an investment grade rating. That is the big threshold that countries want to cross. It is important.

*Q: Did you find yourself playing any role in that because you were a judge of governments?*

NEGROPONTE: Only tangentially sometimes. They might ask my view on situation X or Y in a particular country. I didn't get involved in the rating process. Maybe conversationally something would come up because I knew all these people. Anyway not much happened at McGraw-Hill. I spent four years doing that. I commuted from Washington to New York every week. George W. Bush got elected in 2000 by a rather tortuous, agonizing process that we all know about.

*Q: I always think it was so ironic. We have always had these big election day sort of parties and all to demonstrate how well the American system works. Then the election of 2000 comes along. Six weeks or more before we knew the result.*

NEGROPONTE: Thirty-seven days is what Mr. Bush's father told me. "They were not the happiest 37 days of my life," he said. I had indicated to Secretary designate Powell, I had gone down to see him after the election was decided. After all, he had been my boss, I had been his deputy in the White House. I said, "Colin, I would be pleased to rejoin the government in some capacity if you have anything where you think I might help you." That was, when did they decide this election, December some time. I didn't hear anything for weeks.

So I sent him a note after the President got inaugurated in January and said, "What gives?" I haven't had an offer, anything in mind where you might be able to use me. Then I am taking the Acela home, the train home one day in January. He calls me on my cell-phone, "How would you like to be ambassador to the United Nations?" I mean, it was great. I accepted with alacrity. I guess I said I have to go home and talk to my wife

first or something. I called him back the next day. Then he said, “OK, now we have got to take you down to meet the President before we formalize this. I had a 20 minute meeting with George W. Who I had really only met once before in my life, with his father. That would have been either in later January or early February, 2001.

*Q: Well they played around with the UN ambassador sometimes a member of the cabinet sometimes not. Where stood it when you were offered it?*

NEGROPONTE: Well the rule has tended to be with Democrats, it is a member of the Cabinet; with Republicans it is not. If you go back to Henry Cabot Lodge, I think he may have been a member of the Cabinet. He was Eisenhower’s UN ambassador for eight years. Subsequent to that it is usually the Democrats who make the UN Perm Rep a member of the Cabinet as is the case now. But it was not with me; it was not with Tom Pickering. It was not with Vernon Walters, so on and so forth.

I had my 20-minute interview with the President. He then said he’d like me to be his ambassador to the UN. I said, “I accept and would be honored.” The intention to nominate is announced a couple or three weeks later. Then comes this letter from 26 members of the Senate. I forget how many, a lot of them going all the way back to the Honduras experience and saying “Have you, Mr. President, read the Inspector General’s report of the CIA and their activities in Honduras in the 1980’s.” Therein began. I finally got confirmed on September 14, a six or seven month delay in my confirmation.

*Q: From whence came this? I mean was this a political thing? Was this based on anything? Obviously there was a report but you had gone through the Senate confirmation subsequently.*

NEGROPONTE: I had gone through OES, Mexico, and the Philippines. I had been through three subsequent confirmations.

*Q: And these are major things, so what are you going to believe? So why all of the sudden?*

NEGROPONTE: Because in the intervening time, the CIA inspector general had done an inspection of their activities in Honduras in the 1980’s and they found various activities that they questioned. I mean I wasn’t accused of any specific abuse or anything. It was suggested that I was in charge while some bad things were happening. But the way the report had been redacted, was such that every intelligence officer’s name that was in the inspector’s report, every other person from every other agency whose name was mentioned was redacted out, blackened out, and guess whose only name was left un-redacted in this report that was released to the public and released to the Congress but yours truly.

To me, and we can be candid here, the only reason for that was to off load any of the criticism to someone else. I mean the report was about CIA activities in Honduras. The implication of the report was, “well it was the permissive atmosphere of this terrible

ambassador who allowed all of these things to happen. None of it would have happened if he hadn't had that kind of attitude."

*Q: Are they talking about the CIA not accepting its responsibilities?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I am telling you that is how it happened. So it took me, we went back over the whole thing again with two of Chris Dodd's staffers. It was Chris Dodd's staff, a lady called Janice O'Connell.

*Q: She was the one married to...*

NEGROPONTE: I don't know who she is married to, but Janice O'Connell and another guy, Doherty, but they held my feet to the fire for several months. My whole chron file, my famous chron file from Honduras, which I still had. We went over all the intelligence reports. Lo and behold, near the end, after several months of scrutiny, I went up to the Agency a number of times and unearthed a number of reports on which this inspection was based. We found 13 reports that were apparently the nub of these human rights violations that occurred in Honduras. We found that virtually all of them had taken place before I even got to Honduras. It was on the basis of these intelligence reports that they were trying to hang me. They were offenses that occurred in August in September in 1981 and I got to Honduras in November 6, 1981.

When Janice O'Connell saw that she blanched. She was absolutely furious at the CIA for having misled her into believing that I was the one who was responsible for these reported human rights violations, even indirectly.

*Q: Had they felt that the report was sort of obscured when they were talking about the dates?*

NEGROPONTE: I don't know what happened. The suggestion was they had intelligence reports that provided the basis for accusing me of sweeping human rights violations under the rug and the bulk of them that they were referring to were activities that occurred before I even got there.

Anyway at that point, Janice pulled the plug on this Congressional inquiry and Chris Dodd called us, called Powell and said he would give me a hearing. They had been refusing to give me a hearing until then. They would give it to me on September 12. Well of course September 11 comes, 9/11 and so I was there in a murder board getting ready for my hearing the next day.

*Q: Explain for somebody reading this what a murder board is.*

NEGROPONTE: That was one of these drills where we rehearse for the hearing asking ourselves all the tough questions. I had 15-20 people in the room from the International Organizations Bureau. Bill Wood, the acting assistant secretary comes in and says these



incidents have occurred. So we broke up and I left the State Department building. The hearing the next day was cancelled. You can't have a hearing the day after 9/11.

They said, "my goodness, maybe we really do have to have an ambassador to the United Nations. Holbrooke has been out of there since January, for nine months." So they scheduled my hearing for the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, to give you a sense of how quickly the Congress can act when it wants to, I was confirmed by the Senate by that Friday night. 9/11 was on a Tuesday. My hearing was on a Thursday and that Friday night I was confirmed unanimously by voice vote of the United States Senate. I went through.

The committee didn't approve me unanimously. I had a four hour hearing. Mr. Biden presided. Four or five hours. You could hear a pin drop in the rest of the Congress. I think we were one of the few activities that were going on that day. I had my wife and three of my children there. They went over everything. Then Biden dismissed me from the hearing room. He said, "The witness is dismissed and we will go right to the business meeting. Right here and now. The audience can stay." I am the only one who went out of the room.

About 15 minutes later my daughter came out, "Congratulations Dad, 14-3." Apparently, he told the other senators, "You have been trying to find something on this guy for six months and you have not found a God damned thing. Now we are going to put this thing to a vote and get him confirmed." So Joe Biden is my friend.

*Q: Do you have any idea who voted against you?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yes. I know who voted against me. One of them was this poor Senator from Wisconsin, a nice guy who got killed in a plane crash. I think his buddy Senator Feinberg and one other, maybe Barbara Boxer, I am not sure. Anyway there were three against me. By that Friday night I was confirmed. It was sort of an omnibus, there were a couple of hundred names who got confirmed that Friday night.

So by Monday, you couldn't go to New York any more by plane, National Airport was closed. My security detail had showed up. I had resigned from McGraw-Hill. McGraw-Hill had very kindly kept me on their payroll so I was able to support my family until I got confirmed. That Sunday night my wife and I drove up to New York, and I moved into the apartment there in the Waldorf Astoria.

*Q: When 9/11 happened, what was your impression? You are in the State Department, how were people reacting at that point?*

NEGROPONTE: You know my own reaction, I think it was fairly matter of fact. I was so absorbed, maybe absorbed is the wrong word. I was so occupied getting ready for my new job. I knew how busy it was going to be. It was going to be very busy at the beginning because there was a lot going on at the U.N. Related to 9/11. So I was just very focused on that. I think people took it in stride. We had our work cut out for us. I had a good deputy up there.

*Q: Who was that?*

NEGROPONTE: Jim Cunningham, who is now ambassador in Afghanistan. He was a fabulous deputy and he was over extended. I kept him pretty much until the last six months of my tenure when I brought in Anne Patterson, who I had known. She had been junior officer in Quito when I was political officer. So I got her to come. She was in the department. She agreed to be my deputy.

*Q: She is in Egypt now isn't she?*

NEGROPONTE: She is ambassador to Egypt. She has had a series of incredible jobs. Salvador, Colombia, Pakistan, and now Egypt. So yeah I jumped into that. So from September of 2001 until the end of June 2004 I was U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

*Q: John, you went to the United Nations when?*

NEGROPONTE: September 17, 2001. Six days after 9/11 was my first day on the job.

*Q: What was sort of the atmosphere at that time?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh, the city was dead as a doornail. You couldn't get in by plane from Washington. We drove up from DC on that Sunday night. The Waldorf Astoria, which is where the permanent representative's apartment is on the 42<sup>nd</sup> floor, you could hear a pin drop there. The Waldorf was practically unoccupied. It was a very somber atmosphere indeed.

But I found a very eager U.S. mission. They were happy to have their new leader there. I think they were appreciative of the leadership. There was a lot of work to be done. The General Assembly debate had been postponed. There was a lot of work related to 9/11, the most important of which we set about immediately was a resolution that we tabled at the Security Council literally my second day there, on the issue of terrorist financing and measures that member states could take to impede and otherwise prevent financing of international terrorism. So we took about a week to negotiate that resolution.

*Q: Had there been somebody within Treasury or State who had been putting this together over a period of time really?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes. I don't know how long, but certainly we had a very well prepared position and Treasury had a major hand in it. It was pretty much their work and they sent us effectively a detailed annex that would be appended to this resolution which would stipulate these various measures that member states were encouraged to take in order to prevent terrorist financing.

France was the president of the Security Council that month of September, 2001, and we developed a very good relationship with Jean-Davide Levitte who was the French representative there, and he helped us usher through this resolution which we got passed within a week's time. It was passed unanimously. There was a lot of very positive sentiment toward the United States at that time, a great desire of various countries to be supportive.

*Q: Had any UN facilities been destroyed in the destruction of the two towers?*

NEGROPONTE: Not that I am aware of. The U.N. itself had been pretty much unscathed. There were various federal facilities that had been damaged in one way or another. In fact we had a number of federal officials camping out in one of our conference areas because of the damage that had been done down at the tip of Manhattan. So some federal offices had been hurt.

*Q: Were you aware at that time we were looking at Iraq as being an instigator of this, or involved in anyway?*

NEGROPONTE: Well interesting that you should ask that question because while it wasn't evident right then and there, it was evident within about four weeks' time because we all knew that sooner or later the U.S. was going to take some kind of retaliatory action against Afghanistan and against the Taliban for what they had done. It was not a question of if but when.

On October 6, 2001 when we retaliated against Afghanistan, I got an instruction from the Department. It was a Sunday. It was a flash instruction that said that I should advise the Security Council that we were retaliating against Afghanistan under article 51 of the UN Charter, that is, in self-defense. But that I also should in addition to asking for an urgent session of the council, which we held that evening, I should also seek out the Iraqi permanent representative.

My instructions in regard to the Iraqi permanent representative to the UN, my talking points were basically, and I am paraphrasing here, but it was basically if you even so much as think of taking advantage of the situation created by our being preoccupied by Afghanistan, we will blast you to smithereens. Sort of the tenor of the instructions and so clearly we already had Iraq on the mind and were associating them with this 9/11 event. Although I am not aware and I haven't seen any evidence to the fact that we really were. So yes, Iraq figured in this fairly early on in the game, mainly when we went into Afghanistan.

*Q: How did you find your team at the United Nations?*

NEGROPONTE: I had a very good deputy, Jim Cunningham, who had been Dick Holbrooke's deputy when Dick was ambassador. He had then stayed on and had been chargé d'affaires for nine or ten months, so he was very experienced. He was there during 9/11. He worked very closely with the UN during that time, when they passed a number

of resolutions supporting the United States. He developed a very good relationship with Kofi Annan, the Secretary General, so I had an excellent deputy.

I had other very fine officers as well, Cameron Hume whom you may know. He had been our ambassador to Algeria and later on was ambassador to South Africa and Indonesia. He was one of the members of the team. I also set about recruiting some of my own. I brought Patrick Kennedy up to be my deputy for management.

*Q: What is there about Patrick Kennedy? Every time you turn around he is always involved in management somewhere. This has been going on for years.*

NEGROPONTE: Well, I recruited Pat to come over and be my deputy for management. I also eventually recruited Rich Williamson to be my deputy for the Security Council. Rich Williamson who had been the head of IO in the Reagan Administration. So we put together a pretty good team. I was really happy about it. Sichan Siv, a Cambodian American, became my deputy for the Economic and Social Council. We had an element of diversity there. He was Cambodian. He had escaped from Cambodia during the Cambodian holocaust.

*Q: Looking around at that time, were there any problems with our relationship with any of the other countries or were things moving pretty well, say with Russia or China?*

NEGROPONTE: I would say there was pretty good solidarity within the permanent five of the Security Council. The key is the UN Security Council and of course the main job as far as I am concerned of the Perm Rep is to effectively manage our relationships in the Security Council, so that we produce resolutions that serve our interest. Of course, the best relations were with the French and the British. The P-3 as we called them. But I would say the relations between the permanent five were quite good post 9/11. I mean everybody was trying to be supportive of the United States. There weren't any particular clouds on the horizon then. We didn't have any particular difficulties.

*Q: Well did you feel back in Washington, we were trying to build up a case against Iraq?*

NEGROPONTE: Not yet. There was a lot of preparation vis-à-vis in our military and elsewhere in retrospect as it turned out against Iraq. The preparation vis-à-vis Iraq I think got underway in earnest in the following year in 2002. Particularly in the summer of '02.

*Q: Did you feel at this time the power of the neo cons and that group of Vice President Dick Cheney?*

NEGROPONTE: I was somewhat insulated from that. You had asked me earlier about the Cabinet versus the non-Cabinet status of the Perm Rep. I was not a member of the Cabinet. I didn't attend NSC meetings. I really viewed my job as holding the fort in New York. There was plenty to do.

So I was insulated from that and also for another reason. General Powell liked to give his instructions to me. He didn't like others to do that. I must have spoken with General Powell every single working day of the week on what was going on in New York. So we had a very direct relationship and I got my instructions from the Secretary of State. He spared me some of the stuff that was going on in the interagency process with the NSC and so forth.

In that sense, I didn't feel the influence that you are talking about. Fast forwarding to 2002, as the war preparations began and we are getting ready to go to war in the spring and summer of 2002, I think it is then that Secretary Powell persuades the President that before doing anything further we should go for another resolution at the Security Council.

*Q: The first resolution was almost right after?*

NEGROPONTE: No, I mean go for a resolution not the first resolution. President Bush comes to New York in September of 2002. We are now in 2002, a year after 9/11 at the general debate, the opening of the General Assembly. He gives a speech basically talking about the gathering threat of Iraq, and he called on the UN to pass a resolution essentially reviving and restoring the inspection regime vis-à-vis Iraq's WMD. So he calls for these resolutions.

*Q: Were you in contact with the Iraqi representative there?*

NEGROPONTE: Hardly ever. I mean I went and delivered that message I told you about in October of 2001, which left him a little bit perplexed. He in turn just revealed the demarche to the Russian Perm Rep, Sergei Lavrov. Lavrov told the Washington Post about how the Iraqi Perm Rep had been threatened by the American Ambassador. But I had very few dealings with him. I knew him. He was a perfectly sympathetic guy. He was a PhD in French Literature or something. He was a loyal member of the Saddam regime and had been there for a number of years. I didn't have much contact with him.

*Q: How about the Iranians? Did we have anything to do with them at all?*

NEGROPONTE: We had some, but not much because they avoided contact with us. There were a couple of times during my tenure, one time an earthquake, and I went and called on their representative to offer humanitarian assistance, and said that we were prepared to send a delegation with assistance and so forth. They were very skittish about contact with us. A very nice man there I think, but, his name was Mr. Zarif. But he was very skittish about contact, which I think is quite characteristic about Iranians. They are very afraid of being accused by the ayatollahs of being soft on the west. He was leery of contact.

*Q: Sort of the lead up to the war, did it sort of preclude all the other activities you were involved in?*

NEGROPONTE: Well that was a lot going on at the U.N. First of all most of the peace keeping missions are in Africa. Sierra Leone was a basket case at the time. We voted a peacekeeping mission for Sierra Leone, which ultimately turned out to be quite successful. There were other countries, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Later on Liberia, where the UN peacekeepers really played a positive role in saving the situation. There were peacekeepers in Ethiopia monitoring the dividing line between Ethiopia and Eritrea. So I mean peace keeping, especially in Africa, was very much part of the work of the Security Council.

I would say almost daily fare, and also the situation in the Middle East the situation in Lebanon. Don't forget it is when the Intifada started. So we had a lot of issues related to the Intifada that happened. We had issues related to the International Criminal Court that came up. So it was a very busy portfolio. There was never a dull moment at the UN.

The other thing, separate from the run up to the Iraq war and the resolution that Bush called for in September of 2002, the UN was effectively running Iraq. The Oil-for-Food program was a huge machinery, whereby we took all the oil revenues of Iraq. I don't know if you remember but after the first Gulf War we just stopped Iraqi oil exports. They just couldn't have any, and any of the revenue. There were a lot of complaints about how there was humanitarian suffering, children were malnourished. We had to do something to be able to deal with the situation so we created Oil-for-Food program. Which meant that Iraq was allowed to export its oil but the revenue all went to the Federal Reserve in New York into an escrow account. Then the money was spent to buy humanitarian supplies for Iraq. Food, clothing, other humanitarian goods and so forth.

We kept expanding the list of things that could be bought with Oil-for-Food money, so in the end the UN was basically administering a whole export and import program for Iraq. The Iraq program was the biggest single activity for the United Nations during the time I was there, really quite amazing.

*Q: How was it being run?*

NEGROPONTE: They had an office. They created the Office of Iraq affairs that was being run by this fellow named Benon Sevan, who was a Cypriot national although I think he was originally of Armenian origin. He is the one who ended up being accused of corruption in the Oil-for-Food program, after Paul Volker did an investigation of Oil-for-Food and everything else. So that was going on. It is a very multi-faceted job. In the General Assembly as well, all the debates going on in the General Assembly, you spend all your time trying to defend Israel from attacks from the left, right, and center.

*Q: One of the things that would cause no matter what period of time, considerable problems was basically kids throwing rocks at Israeli police.*

NEGROPONTE: Well and then the Israelis over react or reacted strongly to a couple of situations and that caused a big U.N. investigation. It was an incident in the Palestinian

territories called Jenin, there was a whole big investigation about that. So there was always something going on.

Having said all of that, Iraq dominated the agenda. In the fall of '02 we negotiated the re-instatement of a WMD inspection regime for Iraq. That was resolution 1441. It was a seminal resolution which I worked on for weeks, and so did Secretary Powell. He personally negotiated much of the language. Even to the point where he was walking his daughter down the aisle at her wedding and he was getting calls from Dominique de Villepin, the foreign minister of France about language in paragraph X, Y, and Z. I mean it was really quite something. That resolution got passed in November or December of 2002. The first obligation under the resolution was for Iraq to produce a full complete and accurate accounting of all its WMD history up to that present.

When you look up resolution 1441 you will see: Iraq is in material breach of its WMD obligations. That was the language, "material breach." So they had to demonstrate through their report that they had taken steps to be out of material breach and be in compliance. So they put this report together in a month's period.

*Q: WMD is weapons of mass destruction.*

NEGROPONTE: Weapons of mass destruction, they had 30 days to produce it. So the Iraqis did produce it, and Washington was very eager to get it because they were basically going to examine that account with a fine-tooth comb. From that they were going to judge whether Iraq really was guilty of continued violation of its WMD obligations. I forget how the resolution started. I will remember it, but it starts out by saying "Iraq is in violation of its WMD obligations" and it had to get out from under that by proving its innocence. It was declared guilty in that resolution 1441.

*Q: What material was being breached?*

NEGROPONTE: That they had not fully observed all of their requirements to get rid of WMD, to fully account for the materials that they had, all the WMD type materials whether it was chemical, biological, or nuclear. That the whole series of issues, the kinds of things that the IAEA would want to know that you have done in order to satisfy itself that you don't have a WMD program. So they prepared this report, but basically what they did was just to slap together a bunch of documents. Some of them were old reports that they had submitted way back when and it was really a hodge-podge.

*Q: Did you feel this was, well maybe not a fake, but taking up the sweepings and really there wasn't much substance there. How did you feel about it them being in breach?*

NEGROPONTE: I think that Iraq was technically in breach, and I think we suspected then, in fact I remember looking at the intelligence assessments. There was a suspicion that they had kept open parts of their WMD program, that they were still pursuing chemical and biological capabilities. I can't recall what we felt about their nuclear. I

know that when I would ask the intelligence community these questions they were pretty satisfied that Iraq was continuing with part of their WMD program.

So that was out there. But when they submitted the report, when they came in, we had a little bit of a tiff getting hold of the report because we wanted to see that report before anybody else got to tamper with it. So I had a weekend of jawboning with the president of the Security Council. I guess it was November of 2002. I guess it was the Colombian delegate, to try to get the report first before it went to everyone else or to the secretariat. We got it and we had a CIA helicopter waiting in New York to carry the thing to Washington. They copied it in Washington and then we brought the report back and gave it to the president of the Security Council.

So we were on top of that report the minute it got to the States. We analyzed it and decided it was really a worthless report. I think there were a lot of people in Washington right then and there who felt in light of this crummy report that Iraq was guilty as charged. I mean these are the same people who were ready to pronounce them guilty even before the report right? But I think that was the prevailing mood in Washington. So I think from then on preparations for war with Iraq were entered upon in earnest.

We got the inspectors out there meanwhile, run by Hans Blix who had been head of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Swedish Foreign Ministry. We had a really high level inspector.

*Q: Well what were your feelings and your staff? Did you feel we were talking about a real casus belli?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I had mixed feelings. First of all, I felt we sort of had Iraq in a box no matter what. I mean even with the Oil-for-Food program we had them in a box. We were getting all their oil revenues. We could control them. We could do whatever we wanted with those revenues. They couldn't get their hands on them except that we approved the purchases they wanted. They were in a relatively weakened state.

On the other hand as Hans Blix once told me during all this process he said, "John, I can't figure out why they acted so guilty." I mean they really did. I have never read Saddam's interview. He had extensive interviews with an FBI agent at one point where I think he suggested that he wanted the rest of the Middle East to think he had WMDs as a sort of a deterrent against other countries. He was faking it on purpose. And it is possible.

*Q: It is possible, but you know but when you look at the ultimate results.*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, it screwed him; no question about it. He came out on the short end of the stick. I think he may have been faking it deliberately. A form of ambiguity of political ambiguity that he was using in self-defense. In any event, say start January of 2003, we are rolling as far as getting ready for war is concerned.



Then a whole series of debates started in the Security Council. We are instructed to try and get a second resolution to take action against Iraq because they are in material breach. They continue to be in material breach because of the lousy report they submitted. Now go get a second resolution to say they continue to be in material breach and say we are authorized to use all necessary means to bring that situation to an end.

The reason we go for a second resolution, this is ironic, is because Tony Blair insists on it. The reason he insists on it he says is his attorney general told him he could not go to war in Iraq without a second resolution. He would be violating British law or the British constitution. We would get that argument from Blair. We got it from Sir Jeremy Greenstock, who is a wonderful permanent representative. In fact, all the countries had excellent representation. They really did. Greenstock was really one of the best. Irony of ironies the French were telling us, Jean LeVitte and others, "Don't go for a second resolution. If you have to do something, it is easier for us if you don't have a second resolution. You just say you acted under the first." The irony is when we didn't get the second resolution, the British came along with us anyway into Iraq. In other words, the argument about the attorney general may not have been as important as they made it sound at the time.

What happened was we had a prolonged debate during January and February. In one of those months, it was February when the French presided over the Security Council, and at one point in the process, after endless debates, President Chirac said if we submitted a resolution for a vote that France would veto if necessary. Now prior to that, a huge effort was mounted diplomatically both in New York and at all the capitals of the 15 members to persuade them to vote with us. So we really made a huge effort to line up support with countries like Cameroon and Guinea and you name it, Mexico. It was a huge diplomatic effort.

We met with mixed success. If we ever put it to vote, I don't know how many votes we could have gotten. Would we have gotten nine, even if there hadn't been a veto, I am not sure? Certainly the Russians and the Chinese at the very least would have abstained. Even if they had abstained, would we have gotten the nine votes needed to pass. It is not clear, but we really made a major effort. There were a lot of intense diplomacy at the level of the Secretary and even the President with leaders from the other countries. Vincente Fox was so disturbed by this situation because he didn't want to do anything to alienate the United States, which was the most important bilateral relationship they had, but he didn't want to vote for the resolution. So he just went into the hospital then to have a long overdue surgery on his back. He just wasn't available during the critical time during the debate. Then he had a Perm Rep in New York and a foreign minister in Mexico City who didn't agree with each other. So we would get one thing from the foreign minister and another thing from the Perm Rep in New York. We had a lot of situations like that. It was a very convulsive time.

And then in the critical last month we had the Perm Rep from Guinea was the Security Council President and he was brand new because they had withdrawn the previous guy to go back to be foreign minister in his country. He is foreign minister in his country now,

Francois Fall. He left his successor who was brand new, and he didn't know how to handle it. During that time is when Secretary Powell came up to give the briefing to the Security Council on Iraq WMD.

*Q: I was watching it sitting in the...*

NEGROPONTE: I was against it. I was against doing it at the Security Council. I told them you should do that at a press conference or at a congressional hearing. Don't do this at the Security Council, you are going to turn that into a circus. Frankly, that is exactly what we did. We changed the whole procedure of the Security Council. We put up props and screens and stuff that you never do in the Security Council. We were projecting. We had a slide show.

I mean, but Mr. Powell was very faithful. He did what he was asked to do, and he did it well. The night before he went over the material once again. He had gone over it dozens of times before. He had been out to the CIA. This has been related in many accounts, to double-check the information. He had scrubbed it down to what he felt was absolutely confirmable and all that. He wanted George Tenet there with me so that George could validate and sort of be guarantor of the information that he was putting out there. So he was sitting with me right behind Powell. I mean I thought it was a bit unseemly myself, but we did it. It turns out that it wasn't the lack of decorum that was the problem. It was the fact that the information wasn't correct.

*Q: Well was anybody at the time sort of on your team questioning this?*

NEGROPONTE: No. We questioned some elements of it. There was a big issue a few months before about the uranium from Niger and whether the Iraqis had obtained that. Our former ambassador to Niger had been involved in that.

*Q: Yeah, this was Joe Wilson.*

NEGROPONTE: That's it.

*Q: I have interviewed Joe.*

NEGROPONTE: So there was that issue. There was also an issue of some aluminum tubes that turned out to be artillery pieces, Italian artillery pieces. I got briefed by a CIA briefer every day when I was ambassador to the UN. She said that these tubes had been tooled in a way that could only be fine tooled with a level of fineness that suggests they were surely for some nefarious purpose like WMD. It turned out that it was just a standard Italian artillery piece. If we showed it to any Italian artillery officer he would have been able to identify it to you right off the bat.

By the way, when I was DNI (Director of National Intelligence), fast forward a few years, I went and visited the lab, the U.S. government lab that identified this as WMD. I went

and saw them. They are in Charlottesville. It is called NGIC, the National Ground Intelligence Center. Yeah how did that happen? You tell me.

*Q: I can't help feeling, I am probably showing a prejudice, but Cheney, the Vice President, going to the CIA and sort of what I gather was, "Give me a positive report on what was the mass destruction."*

NEGROPONTE: But they don't have to listen to him. I don't think that, I think it was a comedy of errors myself. So I think there was pressure from Mr. Cheney and his staff, and he took a particularly intense interest in intelligence matters. He is a voracious reader, He would read all this stuff. When I was DNI, I found that he had always read about three times as much as anybody else in terms of intelligence reports. He would ask for background information. He was a voracious consumer of intelligence.

There was this idée fixe and I don't believe it was Cheney, I believe it was Paul Wolfowitz, that the Iraqis were involved in terrorism right and had WMD and they kind of carried the day, in terms of the debate here in this town.

*Q: There were things like you can take a remotely controlled Piper Cub and fly it to New York filled with explosive. I mean there were all sorts of crazy things.*

NEGROPONTE: But that doesn't excuse the bad tradecraft that led them to conclude that these aluminum tubes were part of a WMD thing or that Curveball, this German source who told us that they had WMD and that we didn't validate him. And we even had information within the CIA which said that the guy had failed a polygraph test, and yet we didn't bring that information to bear on the analytical conclusion we had drawn. So whatever the pressure, there were also serious mistakes in tradecraft. That is what I would say.

*Q: In other words people wanted to come to a conclusion in a manner of all the sophisticated equipment we had and all was subsumed by the desire...*

NEGROPONTE: Well it isn't only there. But the desire to go in and do something in Iraq. But there is also another thing, it is pre-conceived notions. Iraq had previously had WMD. They had used them against the Kurds and stuff like that. And Saddam was a certifiably bad guy. So, of course they have got WMD. It was the attitude. What do you think, are you going to tell me they don't have them? I think there was almost a predisposition to declare them guilty beforehand.

*Q: OK but you are part of the apparatus, the support apparatus. Not just you, but there are others. This is going on.*

NEGROPONTE: Well I had my view. I even expressed it in a veiled way publicly. I am asked publicly do you think we should rush into war, and things like that. I said, "My inclination is to err on the side of caution." I think that is pretty explicit for the president's ambassador to the UN. I mean how many people go out and say that. That is what I said.

I said it publicly. Nobody called me on it in Washington. But I think it was pretty clear that I had my doubts about going into Iraq militarily.

I was really disappointed because I thought we ought to give the inspection process a chance. If you pass a resolution in November, do you start getting ready to go to war in January, or do you give Hans Blix and all these other people a little bit of a chance to make the inspection regime work? We worked our butts off to get that resolution. It was really tough. We got 15 votes for it.

*Q: What was happening inspection wise?*

NEGROPONTE: Hans Blix had conducted some inspections. I mean they had gone out several times and didn't find anything. Then they had a Greek inspector, Demetrios Pericos, and he was sent there. Then the big issue became, when we knew the war was approaching, I started worrying oh my god we are going to go invade Iraq and we are going to have inspectors out there and they are going to get killed. So, finally I got permission to tell Kofi Annan and the UN you had better get your guys out of there. It happened just in time.

*Q: What about the German foreign minister? At what point was he saying if this boils down to I don't believe you?" He said this to Powell wasn't it?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes. I don't remember. Certainly the more vocal foreign minister without question was Dominique de Villepin. I mean that very same month where they presided over the council they said to Powell, "Look we would like to have a meeting this month over international terrorism."

I went back to them and said, "You are not serious. If we have a meeting on international terrorism in this present atmosphere it will inevitably become a Security Council debate on Iraq. There can be no way otherwise." They said, "Oh no, we promise."

Well when we got there Powell accepted that because he is a nice guy and polite. We ended up having all of the foreign ministers there, and of course it was all about Iraq. Not only was it all about Iraq, halfway through the meeting Mr. de Villepin goes out to the stakeout. You know where that is. It is where the press is. Well we are still in there in the meeting room, all these foreign ministers, and he holds a 45-minute press conference lambasting the United States for getting ready to go to war. He double-crossed Powell. He really did in more ways than one. He changed the subject, and then he didn't even attend his own meeting and left us all sitting there.

Then we went to meet with Kofi Annan and the same sort of thing continued. Then we had lunch with Kofi Annan afterwards. So these were very turbulent times. The German foreign minister was not as vocal as his Perm Rep. The Perm Rep was a fellow called Gunter Pleuger. Gunter Pleuger, a representative of an allied country, took it upon himself to try to organize the ten elected members of the Council against the United States. So every time we would try to organize anything and we were looking for Gunter, he was

meeting with the other elected members to try and oppose our initiative. So we had our issues with various members at the time, but France, it was really France's decision to announce that it would veto that unraveled the project.

*Q: Did the French have better knowledge or interpretation, or was this just the French being the French?*

NEGROPONTE: No, I think we have got to give credit to all these actors, they didn't want us to do this. I think they were sincere in that I don't think they wanted us to attack Iraq. They made that a point.

*Q: Well when you look back on it.*

NEGROPONTE: I mean you have got to be fair to them. They may have frustrated what we wanted to accomplish, but that doesn't mean they were wrong. It is a pity for it to come to that. We shouldn't allow it to come to the point where you have two NATO allies opposing what you are trying to do. France and Germany. That is not a good outcome in diplomacy. I mean I could understand it if China and Russia were giving a hard time, but it wasn't China and Russia who were giving us the hard time. It was our allies.

*Q: I have asked this before but do you feel that France and Germany really saw something that we weren't seeing?*

NEGROPONTE: No, I think these were countries particularly Germany but France also, they are less inclined. I think they have less affinity or less liking for a policeman type role. I don't think they, I think the use of force in these circumstances is a little bit more of anathema to them. Although the French if they want to act in some specific situation, they did in the Ivory Coast, and they did in the time I was there, but they did on a small scale. They sent a Battalion in or something. But they would intervene. They intervened in an number of these situations. I would say they actually intervened effectively.

You asked me what else we did. I remember going on a U.N. Security Council mission to the Great Lakes region to look at the Congo. The Democratic Republic of Congo. We had a magnificent trip, all 15 of us. We went to South Africa, Angola, Congo, Eastern Congo, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda. In Uganda they had the headquarters of this EU unit which was commanded by Frenchmen. They are very competent, the French military, very competent. They give a fantastic power point briefing in fluent English. I was really surprised how France has changed. I don't think 50 years ago you would have found French officers speaking fluent English. A mighty impressive group.

Anyway, back to Iraq. We ultimately, middle of March 2003, we go into Iraq and the new phase begins.

*Q: Going into Iraq were you getting anything from our military colleagues, American or otherwise, about how this is going to play out?*

NEGROPONTE: Not yet. The only colleagues who told me, gave me some inkling of how it would play out, I used to meet with the different regional blocs at the UN, and one of them was the Arab group of countries, the 22 Arab countries. I would meet them every now and again, have breakfast or lunch with them. The wisest and most prescient commentary was from the Egyptian ambassador. He always told me, “they will throw flowers in front of you. They will welcome you with open arms. It will be fantastic when you get there. They will absolutely love you there, and that will last for exactly one month. After that they will turn against you and they will get disillusioned.”

And that is more or less what happened. Within the first month we got there, set up shop, we met very little resistance where ever we went. The revolutionary guard and others who had faded into the woodwork and disappeared out of Baghdad and the army that got dissolved, they regrouped as kind of this insurgent force, which Jerry Bremer was characterizing as bitter enders and all of that, but they weren't just bitter enders. They were an organized resistance to us being there. It started to cause serious problems.

*Q: In all the talk about this and talking to people, did they ever talk about Sunni-Shia?*

NEGROPONTE: Not really yet. But this was not a big issue as yet. It really didn't become so until during or after the occupations. What happened initially was we sent General Garner to run the reconstruction effort, and then they morphed into sending Jerry Bremer there eventually to become the head of the coalition provisional authority i.e. occupation. That is a real watershed in the situation in Iraq.

In May of 2003 you had two real efforts. You had Bremer getting ready to go out there, but you have Zalmay Khalilzad (have you interviewed him at all? You really ought to talk to him), who was ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq and to the U.N. He is terrific. He was trying to work on or set up a new Iraqi government so that we could turn power right over to the Iraqis. We ended up abandoning that effort. It aborted and we ended up designating Bremer the head of the coalition provisional authority, i.e. the occupation. Jerry ran the occupation from May 2003, to the end of June 2004.

Very interesting, then during those ensuing months the Security Council gets very interested again in Iraq. In other words the French and the Germans may have balked and the Chinese and Russians may have had their second thoughts about what we did and all, but they didn't want to be left out of the business of influencing what was happening in Iraq. So they rejoined the debate again and then started working with us on new resolutions about Iraq. So we negotiated a whole new series of resolutions governing the occupation of Iraq. It was very interesting. It is all spelt out in UN resolutions how we were to run everything. And we were passing these resolutions 15-0. So it is very interesting.

So, once again the UN reverted back to its role of playing a very important part in the administration of Iraq. Including, a key point, legitimating the presence of the Multinational Forces in Iraq. It was given a mandate and it was approved for one year at a time. It legitimated this occupation force. The price they exacted from us was to admit to

the word occupation which some of our people didn't want to accept. So I managed to get it in a way that it only appeared once in the resolution, but it is there.

*Q: So once again we are going in where we are watching these mass lootings at all. Is that affecting us?*

NEGROPONTE: Well that happened at the very beginning. It didn't, I mean I forget when it ended, but it was in March and April. It got things off to a very bad start. I mean it did not augur well for the occupation. It led for calls to keep larger numbers of forces there and so forth.

But the next real watershed event was in August of '03 the UN headquarters in Iraq were blown up. They killed someone who was really very important. Sérgio Vieira de Mello, who was the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General in Iraq. He got killed. That was a huge loss because the Special Representative of the Secretary General is a key position. If you are going to have big U.N. representation in a country, the personal representative of the Secretary General like a good ambassador. If you have a good ambassador there, you are going to advance your interests. Everybody trusted Sergio and liked him, a bit like Lakhdar Brahimi in Afghanistan. A very respected guy. His death was a real setback.

It was also the first time we realized we had a serious Al Qaeda problem, because that was done by Al Qaeda. The head of Al Qaeda in Iraq was Abu Mosab al-Zarqawi. He isn't even Iraqi, he is Jordanian who had been living in Iraq for a number of years and is a fanatic violent Islamic extremist. He is the one who started to build up Al Qaeda in Iraq and Jordan.

*Q: Al Qaeda, in retrospect, had not been a significant factor in Iraq prior to 9/11 had it?*

NEGROPONTE: I don't think so. I don't think so. Zarqawi had these tendencies, but he didn't live in Baghdad very much. He lived in Kurdistan for a while. But he was Jordanian and he certainly didn't have many followers in Iraq. But he started getting them once we had the occupation and once that whole war started and it became a kind of inter tangled intertwining of the Saddamists and the Revolutionary Guard and the insurgents and Al Qaeda all got into sort of a mish-mash. But basically Al Qaeda ended up taking that over and becoming the epitome of the resistance.

So, Jerry ran the country from May until June of the next year. He set in motion some political steps. He appointed a governing council, which was a group of Iraqis to advise him on running the country, and then he handed off power to a transitional government. It was either called interim or transitional. I forget which came first. There was an interim and then transitional or transitional and then interim. In any case, he handed off to them on June 30, 2004. I negotiated the last resolution at the UN before that. I effectively was writing my own instructions. Resolution 1546, which I negotiated in June of 2004, which governed the next phase, the transitional phase, the interim phase. The phase that begins with the return of the exercise of sovereignty to the Iraqis.

I had, in February or March, had volunteered to the President and to Powell to go to Iraq as ambassador. So I knew I was going to Iraq. I had already had my hearings. I was confirmed. I was just waiting to go. I got sworn in at the end of June of that year. I thought I was going to take over the first of July because the mandate for the occupation ended June 30. So I went to Jordan a day or two earlier just to be able to adjust to the jet lag, because I knew I would be busy when I got there. Someone tapped me on the shoulder. I was swimming in the ambassador's swimming pool there one morning in Amman, June 28 or 29.

Jerry Bremen had decided to hand over authority a couple of days earlier. They are worried that if they handed it over on a predictable date there might be some terrorist incidents. So he is leaving today and is coming in at noon. So I packed up quickly and went out to the airport. They dropped him off and I took the airplane he had been dropped off in and went in to Iraq and started my tenure as ambassador.

*Q: Well now during this time as you were Ambassador to the U.N. the Iraqi occupation was going on. Did you have much contact with Washington? I am trying to figure out whether these were people who felt confident they knew what they were doing or whether it was getting out of and/or what.*

NEGROPONTE: Well the action was mostly in Iraq. Bremer was really put in charge. But we were in touch both with Washington and with Baghdad because the UN had such a central role in all of this, in legitimating what was being done and still running the Oil-for-Food program. Don't forget, we are still getting all of these oil revenues that are going into the Federal Reserve and are under a UN resolution. I mean the U.N. controls this stuff. Although not with 1546, the last resolution ends up turning control of that money back to the Iraqis. But there were many delegations that came from Baghdad including various Iraqis, people from the ministries and everything else. Officials from AID who came up from Washington. Even before the invasion we had people coming up from Washington trying to anticipate if we went to war would there be various kinds of humanitarian disasters. I would say during the period of conflict there was quite a fluid movement of people and information between Washington, New York and Baghdad. We had a pretty good sense of what was going on.

*Q: How did you feel when you heard the two very controversial pronouncements of Bremer? One was all Ba'ath parties are out, and two the demobilization of the Iraqi army?*

NEGROPONTE: I am not sure I reflected on that very much at the time it was happening. I mean between the two, I mean both of them were ill advised I think, certainly in retrospect. As between the two, I think my concern would have been more the dissolving of the army. I don't see how you can maintain security. What are you going to do? So that creates a real security problem. But you know that is something I think Wolfowitz must have inspired that. It is ideological to ban Ba'athists at every level. These were real serious mistakes.



*Q: Did you find, or get much consultation or discussion with the Saudi ambassador?*

NEGROPONTE: In New York? Yes. But I would say the only one who consistently made real input was the Egyptian ambassador. He followed these things very closely. He later became foreign minister, Ahmed Aboul Gheit. He was very good. The others were engaged somewhat, but I would say the one who was the most keenly interested was the Egyptian ambassador. And the Jordanian because he was related to the king too. He was a prince. He went back there again. He came from New York to Washington and back to New York.

So we talked a lot with the Jordanians They are very mindful of what was happening in Iraq and had a real stake in what happens in this neighboring country. After all they are right next to Al Anbar province of the hardline Sunni populations of Iraq. Actually the Jordanians even had a hospital in Fallujah, in the Sunni heartland. But this is all excellent preparation for being ambassador to Iraq as you can imagine. You get to meet all the actors coming through. I met the foreign minister. I met with everybody. You work on the resolutions and you get to know the actors in Washington and in the UN.

*Q: How about the roles of the, well first the Russians when you were there at the UN?*

NEGROPONTE: Well the Perm Rep was Sergey Lavrov who subsequently became foreign minister. Of course he is very competent, very professional. He knows the UN procedures perfectly. The Russians are always excellent on procedure. They love to out procedure us; they are quite good at that. He was good. You could do business with Lavrov, we could get stuff done. We worked with him a lot and worked well with him.

*Q: How about the Chinese?*

NEGROPONTE: Progressively more open and open minded and more willing to not just talk from a script and say what they think. I think the Chinese diplomatic service is very much in rapid evolution. I had two successive counterparts and I thought them both very engaging and both very friendly to the United States, very interested in good relations with us. But the Chinese then and I think to this day, but certainly then, didn't care to take a leadership role at the U.N. They took a back seat to others.

*Q: Although it wasn't part of the Iraqi equation, did India or Pakistan get involved?*

NEGROPONTE: Well Pakistan was a member of the Security Council during the time of the, I can't remember whether they were there during the Iraq debate or if they had gone off the Council, but they were certainly on the Council during my time there. They were always active. They have an active diplomacy. India and Pakistan issues per se were not a factor while I was there. Well we are on the verge of going to Iraq right.

*Q: We will pick this up in August if you going to Iraq and we will talk about how that came about. Great.*

NEGROPONTE: I think that is good.

*Q: Today is 13 August 2013 with John Negroponte. John, we were just about finished with your U.N. experience. Before we move to the next thing, within your delegation was there any disillusionment with our involvement in Iraq or were they all with the team? I mean I am just trying to figure out. Privately not necessarily...*

NEGROPONTE: Right. It was a very professional group. No matter how things went there was going to be a lot of work to do. As I told you earlier, I felt we should have given the inspection process more time. I thought we were too hurried, too rushed to go to battle. The problem was we had made these extensive preparations and we had our troops out there in a holding pattern.

The summer was coming, and I think Mr. Rumsfeld and the military were saying if we are going to act, we ought to act soon. So there was a great deal of military pressure to move. I would have liked to have seen more time given, dedicated to the inspection process which had only been in place for several months. Be that as it may, there was no griping in the delegation. Everybody was very occupied. We had a lot of issues to deal with. For example there was a working assumption that we were going to go to war. So there were a lot of issues that had to be dealt with.

*Q: I have talked with many people who say, you know, "let's stop talking about this. We are going to war and we know it and that is it."*

NEGROPONTE: It was sort of a working assumption, so for example, there was work to do about that in New York. We had AID officials and others, refugee officials coming up to consult with the United Nations about contingency plans. What were we going to do for example, if there was a huge population of internally displaced people?

*Q: That was one of our great fears.*

NEGROPONTE: It was one of our great fears. It turned out to be somewhat exaggerated, but I am citing it as an illustration of the fact that there was somewhat of a businesslike atmosphere with people planning for various contingencies.

The other point that we discussed earlier, the U.N. sort of owned Iraq from the time the first Gulf War ended. The U.N. received all the oil revenues that went into an escrow account in the Federal Reserve. They managed the Oil-for-Food program. They decided what Iraq could and couldn't buy with its foreign exchange. The U.N. had a very predominant position with respect to the administration of Iraq. That was true before the invasion, and actually as we also discussed the U.N. resolutions that we negotiated after the invasion that defined the occupation regime were also based on U.N. Security Council resolutions. The U.N., whatever happened, was going to be plenty busy with Iraq and was.

*Q: So I mean there wasn't a feeling that the weapons of mass destruction were not proved and that sort of thing?*

NEGROPONTE: We weren't there yet, that sort of thing. People believed we might still find them. After the invasion a major effort was undertaken to find them and as you know ultimately without any success. In the meanwhile, just to give you another example, the U.N. wanted to play a role in the post invasion situation in Iraq, so Kofi Annan appointed his best special representative, Sérgio Vieira de Mello who was sort of demigod in the legend and history of the United Nations. He was a superb special representative. He had a number of previous challenging assignments like in East Timor and places like that. He did a magnificent job. He was a wonderful fellow. I had breakfast with him one time when he was back in New York, which turned out to be a couple of weeks before he was killed. Because that was a real turning point in Iraq, was that August 19, 2003, bombing of the UN hotel in Baghdad which killed Sérgio Vieira de Mello. I think it was a major setback for the international effort in Iraq.

*Q: Were you in the United Nations at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: I was. So in fact what I am talking about August 19, 2003, I am still the permanent representative.

*Q: How did that hit the United Nations?*

NEGROPONTE: We were stunned. Colin Powell was visiting us that day. I can't remember what was on the agenda of the Security Council. The Secretary was visiting us, and I remember going out to meet him at La Guardia Airport and then bringing him in. It was then that the news was coming in that the U.N. mission had been bombed and Sérgio, well he died, he didn't get killed right away. He was alive at first. There was a rescuer trying to save him. He was trapped in the debris. But it was stunning and it was a shock. Kofi Annan had several of his closest staffers and advisors who had gone out to be with Sérgio. For example, Kofi had a chief of protocol, a lady. I remember presenting my credentials, and she was the one to escort me through the process, an Egyptian lady. She was very capable. She got killed. A number of very fine people. Well of course they were all fine people, but it was a devastating blow for the United Nations. It really traumatized the Secretary General, and understandably so.

*Q: Did the UN diminish its role then?*

NEGROPONTE: As a result? Yes. I think so. I think first of all they had no appetite to go rushing back in. They, first of all, they had to get secure facilities. The only one they had was not secure enough. There had been assumptions about how we had this invasion and we removed Saddam and therefore the place must be OK. The Americans suffered a bit for that illusion also. So they had to rethink the whole issue of their presence there. So it was substantially diminished.

It took a while before they re-assigned another person out there. I would say as a result their role in advising the coalition and advising the occupation and running civil matters in Iraq was diminished. Although when I got there we definitely used the U.N. Especially their experts. I drew on their expertise for the organization of the Iraqi elections, for example.

*Q: You had the OSCE [Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe], which had been running elections quite a bit.*

NEGROPONTE: Well we didn't use them. We used a combination of ourselves, the U.N. We had a U.N. advisor called Carlos Valenzuela, a very capable gentleman from Colombia. We used IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) which is a U.S. based NGO that helps other countries organize elections. So we had a good team, plus I really had the pick of the litter when it comes to political officers to come out from the States to help me. I had one retired senior officer who oversaw the election work we did with a team of younger officers.

*Q: This came after you went out there. How did this job come about?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I volunteered for it. I indicated to Secretary Powell early in the year, 2003, that when he came to the transition from occupation to an embassy I would be interested in volunteering. Basically that is what happened.

The president called me down one time in the winter. I think it was February, and we had a conversation about Iraq. I told him about my interest in going. He was interested in my going. He had only one question. Mr. Bush liked to give you like little tests but they were always brief. The quiz that day was, "Do you believe democracy is possible in Iraq?" Actually my answer was not quite as categorical as I think the president interpreted it to be, but I said, "Well it is not beyond the wit of man." He said, "You gave the right answer." I don't know how you interpret the answer. I guess I am saying it is possible but it might be difficult. In other words it is not a "slam-dunk." But it is not impossible either.

*Q: This is for posterity. Using the term "slam-dunk," which became sort of a catch word for a very easy thing. It is a basketball term, which had been used about Iraq before.*

NEGROPONTE: It was used about Iraq's intelligence proving they had WMD was going to be a slam-dunk. That is what Mr. Tenet said. So I told him that, and he said, "You know we are going to go with it." So I actually was all primed. I went through the process. I was nominated, had my hearings and all of that happened before the coalition provisional authority ended. In other words, I was confirmed for the job in June. I got there on June 30.

*Q: Did you have any problems getting confirmed?*

NEGROPONTE: Zero, none. I have had problems, many problems in the past. I have spent a total of almost a year and a half of my career waiting for confirmation. Well, with

nine confirmations that is not totally surprising. But in contrast to my U.N. confirmation, where I waited about six months, this one took no time at all. I think they wanted to confirm me before I changed my mind. They were very friendly. They were all courteous. I think one or two people may have voted against me, but it was an overwhelming vote, 93 to 2 or something like that. I think there were one or two votes in principle. People who were against our Iraq policy. It was not against me personally.

The important thing, when I started preparing for that job, we were taking over for the Pentagon, right? They had been running the occupation. Secretary Powell was very keen and Marc Grossman, his political undersecretary, were very keen that we do this right. They said, "John, you are going to get whatever you want, so bring together the best possible team. The only thing is we want you to know who we think should be your deputy." Somebody I did not know and that was Jim Jeffery who was ambassador to Albania at the time. Have you ever interviewed Jim?

*Q: No, I haven't, where is he?*

NEGROPONTE: He is retired. He is in Washington at the Middle East Institute. I will give you an E-mail for him. Anyway, we can get to that after. Anyway Jim Jeffery was ambassador to Albania at the time. He is a Vietnam vet. He was an army officer, gung ho, a real soldier diplomat.

I interviewed him right away. He was in Albania. He came to see me and I interviewed him. We had a long interview, and I said, "Great, really good." Then he left me and he forgot I hadn't really told him whether he would get the job or not. I said, "Yeah, Jeffery, just go down to the Director General's office and they will fix it all up."

So, I got Ron Neumann, who is now chairman of the American Academy of Diplomacy. He came from Bahrain. His deputy was Robert Ford. Ron I recruited to be the political military counselor. Robert Ford, very much in the news now as our ambassador to Syria who is been rumored to be the next ambassador to Egypt. A superb Arabist. He was Ron's deputy in Bahrain. He agreed to be political counselor.

I got another ambassador, Steve Browning, to be the admin counselor. We had four or five ambassadors. I had Anne Derse, who has subsequently been our ambassador to Azerbaijan and Lithuania. She had been my econ counselor in Manila. A really brilliant econ counselor. She agreed to come out to be the econ counselor, which was a very brave move of hers because she has four kids. She had a big family. It was a two-fer with her because her husband came, Hank Hendrickson, a retired officer, came as a WAE and was a political advisor. So I had a really crackerjack team.

I got Bill Taylor, who subsequently became ambassador to Ukraine, to be the head of my relief and reconstruction effort. He is a West Pointer who came over to the Foreign Service. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Armitage put him in charge of assistance to the former Soviet states, the CIS group of countries.

So anyway we were all primed for action. It was supposed to happen July 1, the transition from CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority] to the new government. Which was going to be an interim government. I said, "I need to adjust to jet lag and everything. I better arrive in good shape," so I went to Jordan a couple of days early.

Luckily I did because I was actually swimming in the ambassador's swimming pool there in Amman when a guy taps me on the shoulder about 8:00 in the morning when I am doing my laps, and said, "hey Ambassador. They decided to transfer power 24 hours earlier for security reasons so the event would be unpredictable and all of that, so they are recommending that you go 24 hours earlier." So luckily I decided to come out there early. At 2:00 that afternoon I flew back into Baghdad in the same aircraft that Jerry Bremer had come out in earlier that day.

*Q: Could you talk just a bit about your evaluation and maybe those you were dealing with of the situation and sort of the time of Jerry Bremer?*

NEGROPONTE: Obviously I didn't know that much directly because I hadn't been there. There were a couple of things I was asked to look into. One was we had this \$17 billion relief and reconstruction program. With Bill Taylor, my new ambassador for reconstruction, Secretary Powell had given us a remit to evaluate over the next four to six weeks and come back with any recommendations we had with regard to adjustments in the program.

I had a couple of ideas in that regard because I had noticed we were spending practically nothing to build up the capacity of the Iraqi armed forces. In fact, when I got to Iraq there was only one battalion in the Iraqi army. They had disappeared in the woodwork and there was nothing left. So had the police force. That was one thing, the whole question of the security picture, because there was a feeling you see, and this already bothered me before I got out there. We are talking about reconstruction, but that might have not been the right term because reconstruction implies that you have already got peace. What in fact was happening was a burgeoning insurgency.

You remember Jerry called them bitter enders and everything. They turned out not to be just bitter enders, they turned out to be full blown guerilla warfare. That was probably the most important single issue. There were some issues about behavior at the embassy. There had been some very negative press reporting about sex scandals and horsing around and inappropriate behaviors and so forth. Those cables and e-mails that I traded with Secretary Powell, the title was Peyton Place. So anyway I had a remit to try to clean up the behaviors. We did it.

*Q: How does one, OK, you are going out to Peyton Place. I can understand because I served in Saigon. What did you do?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I think it is a leadership issue. You have to get the word out that is not right. Not to forget that you are representing the United States and what you do is a reflection; when you work for the government it is not only a reflection on yourself

personally but on our government as a whole and so on. Obviously there are limits to what you can accomplish. I think certainly the reports of that kind of activity and the blatant instances of rowdy behavior and drunken brawls late at night, I don't know how many there were during the CPA. Maybe the situation about that was exaggerated too, but whatever the case, those kinds of behaviors subsided. Certainly it was not a big problem during my tenure.

*Q: Did you send anybody back for getting out of line?*

NEGROPONTE: No. I mean, I have done that in my career in ambassadorships, but I don't recall having to do that while I was in Iraq. I don't think they doubted who was in charge. Jim Jeffrey was a big help in that regard. He was a fabulous leader and a fantastic role model. He was out there kicking the tires. Every morning at 6:00 he was out there with his helmet and flak jacket checking all the sentry points, making sure the place was secure. He had wonderful discipline. He had a cheerful energetic approach to his job. It was just marvelous.

*Q: What were you getting from all of your people there about the Iraqi situation?*

NEGROPONTE: The big problem, well first of all we are not in a reconstruction phase. We are still in a war, and if anything the war is getting worse. A good illustration of that was that in the military command the MNFI, Multi National Force Iraq, commanded by General Casey, who became my soul mate, a four star army general, very fine general. We shared office space right next to each other.

There was an Australian General in that command, General Molan. His name was Jim Molan. He was kind of like an emergency response man. All he did for weeks on end when I first met him was every morning he directed a small team of people to go out and repair the electric towers that had been blown up and torn out the night before. He was just constantly repairing infrastructure that the insurgents and tribes and disaffected people of all sorts were tearing down and destroying. We could never get the electricity distribution up and the electricity production up because of the constant sabotage, tearing down the electric lines, bombing the pipelines. You name it, we had it. So that was one thing.

The second I mentioned to you already. There was one Iraqi battalion. It was mostly Kurds. It was basically a Peshmerga battalion in disguise, but it was part of the Iraqi army. So we conducted this major review under my supervision but the direct leadership for the effort was Ambassador Taylor's. After six weeks we came back and made our recommendation to Washington. Obviously to reprogram funds you have to get Washington approval. We basically recommended to Washington reprogramming of several billion, I mean it was like three billion dollars of these reconstruction funds to building the army and the police force, because the Pentagon at that moment had not made provision for funding that. We needed it urgently. I am carrying this lesson in my mind, don't forget that we started Vietnamization too late. Westy didn't care about Vietnamization. Well neither did the military commanders prior to George Casey.

*Q: What is the problem? Was it too hard to train them?*

NEGROPONTE: No we do this every time. “Oh it is not going to be necessary because this is a slam dunk. This is a cake walk. This is a piece of cake. We are not going to need to make all that investment. We are just going to knock out Saddam and everything else will take care of itself.” That is the mentality. And it repeats itself with almost clocklike regularity. Iraq, Afghanistan. We didn’t develop the Afghan army for five or six years. Well I think I helped nip that one in the bud. I consider that one of my three most consequential accomplishments in Iraq was the re-programming of those funds and getting the question of building up those Iraqi capabilities on the correct path.

*Q: All right, you are building up an army.*

NEGROPONTE: And a police force.

*Q: Well, let’s take the army first.*

NEGROPONTE: Guess who was in charge of that? A young General by the name of David Petraeus.

*Q: What about the Sunnis and Shias?*

NEGROPONTE: Well you see, that is part two of the story. When I got there it hadn’t reached a level of sectarian tension that it later reached in 2006. I am getting there in the middle of 2004. The really bad period in terms of Sunni-Shia tensions is 2005-2006.

*Q: You were working on the military first. Was there a calculation made with the army at that time? Because before it had been a Shia officered army.*

NEGROPONTE: No, it had been a Sunni officered army with Shia soldiers. But it was fairly non-sectarian. Saddam was not particularly sectarian. This was not an Islamist oriented government. The Sunni Shia issues, which have always been below if not on the surface in Iraq (I mean, you can go back in their history and it has been an issue since time immemorial), Saddam kept the lid on it, but they also gave great priority to the Sunnis. They had the more prestigious, generally the most prestigious positions in Iraqi society.

So the new CPA was very conscious of these differences. Some Iraqis would argue with you that they may have been too conscious deliberately picking so and so because they were Sunni and someone else because they were Shia and someone else because there was a Kurd. So there were some who feel that America may have exacerbated these differences. I am not so sure. It might have just happened. I think it was more the natural outcropping of having taken the dictatorial lid off the pot and all these tensions just came to light again.



But even when we helped form the government, the new interim government, which was the job of the U.N. representative there at the time, Brahimi, one of the best people the U.N. has ever used, and Bob Blackwill, who was the White House man on Iraq, they were definitely looking for a Shia prime minister.

They recruited Ayad Allawi to be the prime minister. So he was inaugurated as Prime Minister when I arrived in Iraq. He is an interesting guy because he is a nominal Shia but he is a former Baathist. He had been a Ba'athist until he had a falling out with Saddam. In fact Saddam tried to assassinate him. He sent somebody to kill him in London about ten or fifteen years earlier. He barely survived the attack. Allawi is a Shia but he is not sectarian. He is not a devout Shia, so he was prime minister, but then there was a Kurdish interim president. Then there was a Sunni president of the national assembly, so you could see the ethnic and religious divisions reflected political choices that were made.

By the way, that particular tradition has continued to this day. Mr. Talabani, although he is very sick, is still president. He is a Kurd. Mr. Maliki, who is a Shia, is the prime minister (that is the most powerful position), and the president of the national assembly is Sunni. So that configuration had endured. But what was getting worse when I got there, this is where Sunni extremism comes in, is when Al Qaeda was starting to get a grip in western Iraq.

So this is Sunni extremism in its most virulent form, and it was being directed by this absolutely devilish guy called Abu Musab al Zarqawi. Zarqawi interestingly was Jordanian, not Iraqi, but he is from that part of the world. He is from the Levant. He had been running this extremist group before it was called Al Qaeda in Iraq. I forget the name of it. But then he started to get real traction. This guy was kind of a mad man, but very energetic and very effective. He basically in spring and summer of 2003-2004, basically Al Qaeda got control of this very important town west of Baghdad called Fallujah.

The issue of Fallujah probably became the single most important security issue confronting us at the time because this was a town of about 400,000 people. They were setting up Sharia courts and starting to have executions of people after Sharia trials. They had bomb factories. They had townhouses full of garages. They were all taking these old second-hand cars, loading them up with bombs and then sent in like the car bomb, suicide car bombs even, to Baghdad. So it was an absolutely impossible situation that had to be resolved, which by the end of 2004 we did.

*Q: How?*

NEGROPONTE: We sent in the Marines. It took us awhile to prepare for it. Our elections were going on in November of that year. I am not saying that President Bush didn't want the invasion of Fallujah to happen before the elections but I have been around him long enough and in Vietnam and elsewhere to know presidents tend to avoid rocking the boat just before a presidential election. But shortly after the election we went in.

I am sure the military will tell you we needed that time to prepare the battlefield. That may be true because there were other distractions that were going on. There were some Shia uprisings as well. A rather noted, infamous Shia radical called Muqtada al-Sadr was himself stirring up trouble in two different places. In June when I got there, June-July, he was stirring it up in Najaf, which is sort of a holy capital, one of the holy capitals of Islam. It is the capital of Shia Islam. He had that town in rebellion. We had to bring that situation under control, which we did in the summer of 2004 in August.

*Q: What was motivating him? I mean was it anti-Americanism, seizure of power?*

NEGROPONTE: He was a maverick. The Al Sadr family is one of the most famous religious families in Iraq. He was like the black sheep of the family unlike his relatives, some of whom were very notable clerics, very respected theologians. He was considered the unqualified black sheep who sort of somehow appropriated a clerical garb. I think they thought of him as uneducated. He was just a rebellious guy. So he had two seats of power. One was Najaf, and that rebellion was quashed, and we killed a lot of his people because they were not experienced fighters. They just basically walked to their death, and ultimately we restored control, government control in Najaf.

*Q: Were you able to talk to him at all?*

NEGROPONTE: I don't think we ever did. There might have been some who talked to him in the early part of the occupation.

*Q: But you never...*

NEGROPONTE: Personally? No. Then he controlled a place called Sadr City, which is on the eastern reaches of Baghdad. It was a slum area which they controlled, and there were some tough battles there. Those took place, if I remember correctly, around September. So we really weren't ready to go into Fallujah until November anyway. So 2004 was a year for security for sure, both building up Iraqi capabilities and restoring security against these different rebellious groups. Considerable success was achieved.

*Q: Let's talk a bit about this early period, your relations and embassy relations with the military. How did this work out?*

NEGROPONTE: Well that was where I felt that my Vietnam experience really helped me. I had watched Ellsworth Bunker, Cabot Lodge and Maxwell Taylor work with their counterparts. I was determined to make that part work. I had very good relations with Paul Gorman when he was commander of SOUTHCOM and I was ambassador to Honduras. So I felt that one of the qualifications I had for that job was that I had quite a bit on the ground pol-mil experience. Not pol-mil in the department, pol-mil in the field. I would call it real pol-mil.

Casey and I actually started our job before we got to Iraq. We met a number of times before coming out during the month of June of 2004. When we got to Baghdad I brought

out a guy called Robert Earle. He is a retired USIS officer, one of the brainiest USIS ever produced. I put him in charge of my planning team and Casey had his planning team. In fact, Earle wrote a book about his Iraq experience. Casey had put his planning chief in charge on their side. They sat down for three or four weeks and they came up with a mission plan, joint military and civilian. I mean we were mindful and respectful of our chains of command. We knew we had different ones. We also knew that we had to make it work on the ground and in the field. We did our best to do that. We jointly signed this campaign plan.

*Q: Did you have a problem with, I don't know how best to describe it, but the ideologues coming out of Washington, the true believers? You know there were a lot of political operators involved in this operation early on. Or had they been pretty well burned out?*

NEGROPONTE: Well most of them really-- basically what happened, whoever was in the CPA, whether they were young Republicans or ideologues or volunteers. There were a lot of those kinds of people, and who worked very hard when they first got there. These CPA they were all sleeping in the office and working 24 hours a day. They were probably working a bit too much.

I said, "Don't work until 10:00 at night. Get your exercise and your rest for cripes sake. Pace yourselves. This war isn't going to end tomorrow. It is still going to be here when you leave. So act accordingly." So we tried to introduce a little bit healthier lifestyle into the place. Then we increased the number of Foreign Service Officers involved. We beefed up the Foreign Service capability.

I restored the practice of sending diplomatic cables. Under CPA the number of cables being sent out of Baghdad had slowed to a trickle. They still were used but there was too much going on by E-mail and telephone, etc. I wasn't being a stick-in-the mud about it. I wasn't being some sort of old fashioned early 20<sup>th</sup> century person but I said, "Look, when you are writing up stuff that is useful and important for the archives and for our analysis of what is going on, we have this magnificent cable system that also distributes things to where they should go. If you write a cable with the proper tags and everything else, it is going to get to the CIA analysts and the DIA analysts and everybody who needs to be analyzing this stuff." We increased the cable reporting a lot.

*Q: One thing, correct me if I am wrong, the E-mail and telephone, this is sort of immediate reactions and all that. There is not much thought behind it.*

NEGROPONTE: Well it also tends to be point to point you select your recipients on the other hand, whereas the cable system to some extent depending on the tags you put on it predetermines that. You put a PTER for terrorism tag on your cable and it will get to the standard readership. The people in Washington who should be reading cables about terrorism for example.

*Q: What about the Secretary of Defense and the Vice President and all who played such a major role in getting us into Iraq? Were they and their staffs...*

NEGROPONTE: Well Secretary Powell was very possessive of the embassy in Baghdad. Basically during the time I was ambassador to the UN and I was ambassador to Iraq I spoke by phone with Colin Powell just about every working day. He called me, "What is going on?" I would give him two or three or five minutes. Some days I would say, "Not much." He would say, "Okay, fine, I have got to go." But he was interested and he wanted me to feel I reported to him. When I had something really sensitive to write for Washington I limited the distribution. I set up a special channel for my cables to Secretary Powell, my analysis.

*Q: Did you have your own communications?*

NEGROPONTE: No, I used the embassy set up.

*Q: Sometimes the military being so overwhelming can or the CIA...*

NEGROPONTE: No, we had regular State Department communicators I am almost positive. I set up a channel called NODIS Arrow. When I had some analytic piece or some piece of commentary that I really wanted him to see first, then he could decide to distribute it, I put it in that channel. He liked that.

So I think Jerry wasn't clear in some respects to whom Jerry was reporting to. Rumsfeld often says, "He didn't report to me." Well he did. He belonged to the Pentagon. The Pentagon was paying his salary. I think Jerry in the end had gotten himself into a position where he felt he was reporting directly to the White House. But if you are reporting to the White House you are not necessarily reporting to anybody at all, because there isn't a whole system set up to run that. Are you reporting to Bob Blackwill?

*Q: How did you find that?*

NEGROPONTE: So Powell re-institutionalized things. We became a normal embassy again. Blackwill didn't like that particularly. I got along with Blackwill.

*Q: He is a difficult person.*

NEGROPONTE: He is a difficult person. I think he himself would acknowledge that. But he was frustrated. He called me a few time to find out certain things. I said, "Bob, I report to Colin Powell." That was my attitude. You know the rules for an ambassador. If the NSC adviser himself or herself calls you up about a matter, the protocol is you treat that as if it was a request from the president, and you comply and you give the information that you are asked.

But if it gets down into the NSC staff, I wasn't going to start taking instruction from the NSC staff. I have been in the NSC myself twice. I never gave anybody instructions. So Bob was a bit frustrated that way. I think we ended up being able to work it out. Colin is a

reasonable guy. But he believes in chain-of-command, after all he is a military officer. He is the Secretary of State and I report to the president through him. That is the deal, right?

*Q: How about let's take the south?*

NEGROPONTE: So I never saw Mr. Rumsfeld never came out I believe while I was there. Nor did the vice president ever come out while I was there. Colin came out a couple of times.

*Q: That is interesting they didn't come out.*

NEGROPONTE: Not to my recollection in that part of 2004.

*Q: What about the south? The British had the Basra area. How did that work out as a coalition?*

NEGROPONTE: I think it worked out okay. It is certainly not the same thing as commanding the whole show yourself, and the Brits had some attitudes towards Basra that I think they had a higher level of tolerance for shall we say dissident control of Basra city itself. They never really asserted full control over Basra. They controlled the air base and Basra itself was kind of disputed territory. It wasn't until Maliki two or three years later decided to go in there and clean the place up.

*Q: He really did.*

NEGROPONTE: He did and he did it himself.

*Q: Yeah I have heard accounts say this is really something.*

NEGROPONTE: So I thought the Brits were too tolerant. They didn't want to take a lot of casualties. I think they and maybe rightly they saw the real fight as the fight against Al Qaeda against Shia radicals and so forth. There may be a point to that.

*Q: What were you getting from your intelligence sources and others about what was Al Qaeda after, and what was its organization like?*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, well the organization got stronger and stronger. I learned something about that when I became DNI (Director of National Intelligence). They were gaining momentum and this Fallujah business, that is what was so disturbing. A town of 400,000 in Western Iraq. They were able to conduct various types of crimes staging them out of Fallujah. It was still incipient relative to what it became a little bit later, but don't forget once we had gone in there and the army had been dissolved and Saddam's revolutionary guard had disappeared into the woodwork. Some of the former Saddamist officers are committed to fighting against the occupation, it became easier for Al Qaeda to regroup.

So you had that, the domestic recruitment, a lot of Iraqi former army people, disaffected Sunnis who didn't like seeing the Shia in a sense. Then Iraq became a bit like the Spanish Civil War. You started getting foreign fighters. We got this little trail of fighters coming in. They would fly from Jeddah or where ever to Damascus and then in Damascus they would get off and infiltrate down to Iraq, across the Syria border.

So there was a real flow of foreign fighters from all over the Middle East. You had guys with names like Al Libi and Al this and that. They were from North Africa. Masri was Egyptian, right, Al Masri. Libyans, Al Suri, so and so from Syria and from as far away as Mauritania and maybe even some from South Asia. Some. Like some of these Lashkar-e types. These people who had conducted terrorist activities inside the, even India. The most extreme these were the Kashmiris, the most extreme Kashmiris. Some of them came.

*Q: How did Al Qaeda fit within the Iraqi context of it?*

NEGROPONTE: Well they are a group that pretends to create a caliphate. Iraq is their flagship product at that particular moment if you will. So they represent that threat. Secondly they are a point of reference with the Sunni community. Hey you, Shia in Baghdad, if you don't treat us well, look at what we can become. Right? So it creates a very complex dynamic within the Iraqi body politic. So even if Al Qaeda is not part of the body politic, it influences attitudes.

*Q: Again I don't know the Iraqi mentality. Say Fallujah. They are beginning to have their Sharia trials and executions.*

NEGROPONTE: Fallujah is a Sunni town.

*Q: But you know having the Al Qaeda form of justice and all is pretty nasty. I would think this wouldn't fit with any civilized society.*

NEGROPONTE: It didn't, and what happened was they continued to control it until we moved in. But a lot of people those people who could escape, a couple hundred thousand people left Fallujah and two or three hundred thousand became refugees in Baghdad. In between Fallujah and Baghdad you find a lot of people finding temporary resettlement. Baghdad is a big city. It could absorb lots of people if people would go stay with relatives. So basically Fallujah became sort of a shadow of its former self. But still firmly in the grip of Al Qaeda.

*Q: Were we trying to behead Al Qaeda?*

NEGROPONTE: Well we were doing two things. We were trying to restore order in Fallujah and were preparing to do that which we finally did in November. And the other thing is we were trying like the devil to catch Zarqawi. We had a couple of near misses. We almost caught him a couple of times. In the end he didn't get captured, he didn't get killed until 2006.

*Q: What about the Kurds? What was their attitude and what was our...*

NEGROPONTE: Ah the Kurds. The Kurds, a really interesting situation there. First of all because as you know because of the results of the first gulf war and the setting up of a no fly zone, Kurdistan sort of had a head start in establishing some semblance of a democratic government. So they were already enjoying a degree of autonomy.

With the invasion, which they absolutely welcomed, their influence I think, grew because not only did they have an autonomous Kurdistan from which they could conduct their lives, but they also enjoyed a certain position of political influence in Baghdad itself. So, for examples, we already mentioned the president of the country, Jalal Talabani, is a Kurd. Allawi's deputy prime minister was a Kurd called Barham Salih. Barham Salih basically became the go to person for the coalition in terms of getting anything done in the civilian area. You had a civilian problem that required the attention of one of the civilian ministries, you went and saw Barham. He was very efficient. A Ph.D. from Manchester University. I think a Ph.D. in math. Very closely related to the Talabani family and did a wonderful job. He still has a high position. He is now back in Kurdistan. He has had a stint as prime minister of Kurdistan. He is still very much in the mix and still has a future in Iraqi politics.

So the Kurds were influential. Actually one of the Kurds in the assembly chaired the constitution drafting commission, a fellow called Fouad Massoum. So they were important players, I would say disproportionate to their numbers. They were a factor of balance between the Sunnis and Shia because they controlled a number of consequential agencies and occupied a pivotal number of seats in the legislature.

*Q: When you are trying to set up an army, are the Kurds sort of taken out of that because they have got their own?*

NEGROPONTE: Not entirely, in fact the chief of staff of the army was then and still is now a Kurd. It is almost like a ceremonial position but he is Kurdish. So yeah there are Kurds who fight in the south too. But they also have their own army, the Peshmerga. At times Peshmerga have been deployed southwards to help out with various types of security missions and have played a very helpful role.

So what about Kurdish independence, what were they hoping? I think the basic philosophy of the political class in Kurdistan both families, because in Kurdistan there are basically two major political families, the Barzanis and Talabanis. I think they both felt for the foreseeable future their fate was tied to that of Iraq. The best strategy was to maximize autonomy but also seek to have political influence in Baghdad. I believe that remains their policy.

*Q: What about the overlap into Iran and Turkey?*

NEGROPONTE: Well they have friendly relations and they follow obviously what is going on in the surrounding areas because obviously after all the Kurds are one ethnic group. They know what is going on in Syria. If you want to find out what is going on in Syria or Iran or Turkey, ask a well-informed Kurd. They are going to know. They are going to know something anyway. But they had sort of unique issues with those neighboring countries, Turkey, Syria, Iran.

Turkey is probably the most complex because Turkey has a lot of Kurds. Turkey has 20% of its population is Kurdish, maybe 15 million. Almost three times as many Kurds in Turkey as there are in Iraqi Kurdistan. Of course they have this violent movement called the PKK and some of its leaders were seeking sanctuary in the Iraqi mountains. So often the Turks would seek to retaliate against the PKK by attacking into Iraqi Kurdistan, to not much effect for anyone.

The Iraqi Kurds, the Barzanis and Talabanis, it was particularly Barzani they had no use for the PKK, for the violent Kurds from Turkey. But they really felt it was incumbent on the Turks to come to a better accommodation with their own Kurdish minority. I mean let them speak their own language. Let them have Kurdish schools for their children in kindergarten. The typical kinds of issues that ethnic minorities ask for in any society. Mexican Indians ask for the same thing. It is just natural. I think the situation in the intervening years has gotten better for Turkey. Like they have let them have some TV broadcasts now; they didn't even used to do that. The number of Kurds in Istanbul is huge. There are like 5 million Kurds, 4 million.

The Iraqi Kurds had some relationships in Iran, but I don't think they were very extensive. I don't know what has happened now. The situation in Syria, the relations now with the Syrian Kurds is distant. The Iraqi Kurds do not, they don't want to get anybody mad. Saddam treated the Iraqi Kurds very badly when he got mad. Even though they had their own Peshmerga and everything else against a determined external adversary whether it is Turkey or Iran or Iraq or maybe some kind of combination of the two, they would have a problem. I think they would lose. So what they tell you is their goal is eventual independence, but meanwhile they are just doing the best they can under the current circumstances.

*Q: Did you have officers who were maybe assigned or lived in the Kurdish area or not?*

NEGROPONTE: We did. We didn't have a consulate in Erbil at the time. We do now. In my time it was set up as an embassy branch office in Mosul, which is right on the cusp. The river that divides the Arab area from the Kurdish area. To the north and west is Kurdish; to the south and east is, you know I get the Tigris and the Euphrates mixed up. I think it is the Tigris. Right. The Tigris River divides most. So on the western side of the Tigris you had more Sunni communities, and on the eastern side you had the Kurds. So we had an office there right near the airport, which I inaugurated. I set up four of these branch offices.

*Q: How did they work?*



NEGROPONTE: Like a consulate sort of. Maybe they weren't that different. I set one up in Mosul. I raised the flag on each of them. One in Hillah, that is Shia country. One in Kirkuk, which is just explosive country. As you know that is another fault line between Kurds and Arabs. I set one up in Basra. Both of these I went around and visited my parish. We had principal officers there. That is what they were called, principal officers. They weren't called consuls general.

*Q: Well, given what continues to happen there was it dangerous to have these rather exposed offices.*

NEGROPONTE: Well they traveled in convoy. Don't forget, this was a period when we still had substantial military forces. They tended to do things in tandem with the military. Even when they went out on their own they still went in convoy and they even had military escorts. Because at that time that was one of my big negotiations before going out to Iraq. I got Mr. Powell and Mr. Rumsfeld to sign an agreement that the U.S. military would provide security for the American mission free of charge. They wouldn't bill us. That was a big issue. You could imagine if State Department Security would have had to foot the bill for all these Humvees and pay for the national guardsmen and so forth, who were providing us with security.

*Q: How did your officers work out in the country?*

NEGROPONTE: Well as I said, in most cases they went with some kind of security escort. Now some parts of the country were safer than others. None were entirely safe. It was a dangerous environment. I lost people during the time I was there. One of them I lost, an education advisor very early in my tenure when there was still a bit of the old mentality, oh I can go downtown without taking any precautions. This young man left one Sunday to go downtown to visit a contact in a soft car, no armor, all alone, just him. He was ambushed right in the middle of the city. He got killed. It was tragic.

*Q: You know in Saigon I drove all over the place.*

NEGROPONTE: I always tell people the biggest differences between Iraq and Vietnam was that as an unarmed civilian in Vietnam, and I visited practically every province in the country in South Vietnam for almost four years, 3 ½ years and I never in any of the province capitals or in the city of Saigon felt in any particular danger. No question about it, it was different if you went out into the countryside. It was a war for control of the countryside, so if you went out to the boonies and you were in some remote rice paddy, then depending on the area of the country you were running a risk. But not in the city.

Iraq and this whole war on terror and this Middle Eastern situation is much more a fight for control of the cities and many times the minute you walk outside of your house you are in danger. You are probably in danger inside your house to, but at least you can lock yourself in. But it was dangerous. One guy luckily, he was wearing his flak vest that day. He got hit by a bullet just as he walked right outside the entrance of the embassy. Another

guy got hit by shrapnel. It wasn't a bullet, it was shrapnel from an incoming mortar round. Within days of when I got there a rocket slammed right through the communications section. Luckily the communicators were down having a cup of coffee at that moment.

*Q: What about young men 21-22 years old, Iraqis. What do they do? Is there work? This was always one of the...*

NEGROPONTE: Well this was one of the hugest disappointments. Here we had this 17 billion dollar reconstruction program. Iraq had a record in the past of having pretty good employment. Before the Gulf War in the 70's and 80's when it was producing a lot of oil, they had thousands of foreign workers. In fact I remember a Filipino legislator, Joe de Venecia, who had run a contracting business in Iraq and who had thousands of Filipinos out there working for the Iraqi oil industry and whatever else. The CPA, I remember the admiral who was running the reconstruction program. He told me before I went out there, I can't remember his last name. He said, "You know, in another year, Ambassador, once we have started dispensing this money, the Iraqis are going to run out of workers. There is going to be such full employment."

Well that turned out to be a colossal error of judgment. It turned out that we were unable to provide those jobs and we spent practically all of our money trying to provide security for these projects. I mean you took any bill for what we were doing and you could be certain that a minimum of 25% and sometimes much higher was being spent just to secure the project. So there was a lot of wheel spinning and great difficulty in providing employment. My view was the big thing was to get security going and then see if we could get some of the basics of the Iraqi economy going things like increasing oil production and increasing oil exports, and increasing electricity production. It took a long time. I mean it is better now than it was but it took many years.

*Q: I have read reports that so much that really during the Saddam time very little investment went into the electric grid.*

NEGROPONTE: That is right. There was a tremendous lack of infrastructure. He built a lot of palaces. Beautiful palaces, by the way.

*Q: What happened to them?*

NEGROPONTE: They all ended up being occupied by the CPA. My God, there must have been a couple of dozen of them that ended up being occupied by the CPA or the embassy eventually when we came in. Then different units, different divisions would come in. The palace in Tikrit was taken over by whatever U.S. division was there at the time.

*Q: Well what was this, palace-o-mania?*

NEGROPONTE: There was a bit of that, yeah. I just want to be sure. There was a lot of that. People just interested in building. Saddam was just interested in building monuments to himself. He had huge monuments everywhere. He was a jerk. In addition to being a brutal dictator, he was an idiot. So he didn't do anything. He did virtually nothing worthwhile for his people, unfortunately. Here is an example of neglect. This is the land of two rivers, right, Mesopotamia is what it means. The land between two rivers. Mesa potamos, good Greek word. They totally neglected the irrigation system they had built that once was absolutely fabulous.

*Q: I mean at one time they had all these tunnels.*

NEGROPONTE: And the date groves and all that, which were all destroyed.

*Q: Actually that had happened prior to the war hadn't it?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, also when he was trying to suppress the Shia down in the south.

*Q: He drained the swamps.*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, all that kind of thing. So I mean no agriculture. And there was no agriculture in the reconstruction budget, to my dismay.

*Q: I wondered when that would happen because I remember an economist who wrote a book in the 50's about countries taking off, and Iraq was singled out as one of the ones that was really on its way. Literate population.*

NEGROPONTE: Well it was very hard at the time, and you ask how we worked. It was hard to work. I even had to fly a helicopter, a small Blackwater helicopter. They protected me. They provided a protection helicopter just to get to the oil ministry or to the finance ministry. We went one time on the ground by road to the finance ministry with Anne Derse the economic counselor. It was just such a hassle. The security was extreme. Our Humvees would ram any traffic that got in its way. We pushed people around. It was very hard. I think that improved over time but we really threw our weight around too much. Of course it also depended on the unit that was protecting you. Some were more experienced than others. That particular unit had just arrived.

A very sad situation occurred when the unit that had been providing protection to the embassy had three or four people from the Minnesota National Guard killed. We had a service on the compound. One of them was from a town where some friends of mine lived, and they all knew each other. There were some real tragedies that occurred. When these boys (they were mostly boys, some girls) providing security for our mission, when they lost friends like that it really affected them. You would have thought that kind of duty wouldn't be that risky but it was.

The other thing was all these Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) were the big thing. Now the protection of our soldiers improved over time. When I got there the big issue

was whether the Humvees were armored. They weren't at first. Then they "up armored" them. Then we got very creative. We built some new vehicles that were much less susceptible to IEDs, Strykers and MRAPs (Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected). The MRAP is the big thing. It looks a bit like Noah's Ark. So it has a shape that tends to deflect the explosion better. I have ridden around in MRAPs. I can't remember whether they were ones that had been deployed in Iraq or I rode in them afterwards, but MRAP is a big thing. It saved a lot of lives.

But we were bedeviled by IEDs, bedeviled. And the number of casualties that go with it was so sad, and as you know, our medicine has gotten a lot better so we were able to save a number of people who had lost all of their limbs, but that in itself was a tragic situation. These people who have lost their limbs but who have otherwise survived and of course these are very courageous Americans. People who have lost their limbs but who are walking around with prosthetic devices but who otherwise survive, running around even.

And also great progress in saving people from serious brain injuries. They had brain surgeons there in the field hospital literally 300 yards from our embassy compound. They could do brain surgery right there in this small field hospital. It was magnificent. They were really emphatic about wearing your helmet. Wear your helmet because you are going to get hit and if you get hit in the head you will have a terrible brain injury as a minimum. I mean we take care of our troops now in amazing ways. It was wonderful to see.

*Q: What about the various foreign contingents? We talked about the British, but what about some of the others?*

NEGROPONTE: Well the Brits were there. Of course they were big in Basra and they had a deputy commander up in Baghdad who was right there, a key member of the George Casey's staff. We had a big Polish contingent that was down by Babylon, Hillah. They were sitting on the ruins of Babylon, a big Polish unit. There were some others. There was an Italian unit.

I mean Casey had these occasional Saturday commanders' meetings from time to time. I remember it was like going to the United Nations. Officers from everywhere. Georgians, Scandinavians, Danes, I want to say Norwegians but I can't remember for sure. Italians, we mentioned up to a certain time, Spaniards. Koreans came to Kurdistan. They locked themselves up in their compound and stayed there for a couple of years. They didn't behave the way that Koreans did when they were in Phu Yen Province in Vietnam and they patrolled a lot and fought very hard.

But all that started to wither and the long-term commitment basically came down to the Brits in the end. The others all, they didn't withdraw during my time but they were all set to withdraw. They weren't going to stay indefinitely.

*Q: You must have been deluged with visitors and Congressmen.*

NEGROPONTE: We were. That also reminded me of Vietnam. You had everybody coming there almost all the time. You had a CODEL (Congressional Delegation) coming almost every day. Certainly at least once or twice a week. Bremer had set down some very tough rules. He wouldn't let CODELs spend the night because he didn't want to be distracted by the care and feeding of CODELs.

*Q: Did you keep that?*

NEGROPONTE: We continued it. We became a little more accommodating with the passage of time but I don't think we ever changed that rule. So they could fly in from Kuwait. They would leave early in the morning. They would leave Kuwait whenever 6:00 or 5:00 in the morning and get to Baghdad by 7:00. You would have a very full day. You would take them around, meet leaders, this and that. And then go to the embassy and have a briefing.

They would also make field trips. They would go visit different parts of Iraq, but anyway they certainly got a full view. Visitor care and feeding was definitely 20-30% of the job. But I think that goes with the territory and it goes with keeping a constituency for what we are doing back home. So I found it very useful. I would always gather them in our embassy conference room or I would give them a lunch in the cafeteria.

I didn't use the residence. I had a house. I think it belonged to Saddam's son-in-law or something. I didn't staff it up. We just had some contractors come in everyday. The same sort of Turkish contractors who cleaned out the palace and stuff like that. They would come and clean my house every day. Wreck my laundry every day. They would take it with them and I would get back shredded shirts the next week. So I kept Brooks Brothers busy with these wash and dry shirts. But we had a lot of visitors, and the press.

*Q: I want to talk about the press, but before that, did you find some of the visitors coming to protest? I remember in Vietnam...*

NEGROPONTE: Very hard for protesters to get there. So no, we really didn't have that. We had official visitors. We hardly ever had a private visitor. Occasionally one had the guts to make their way there. There were some commercial firms like from Jordan, Air Jordan. Don't forget, things have changed a lot now. There was more civilian air traffic and stuff like that. Iraqi Airways didn't operate; it was in dispute. All the planes in the fleet had flown the coop and were being held by countries like Kuwait in exchange for war reparations. So there was no functional Iraqi civilian air travel.

The Kurdish part of Iraq started building two international airports. An airfield in Sulaymaniyah. Interestingly we talked about Kurdistan and Turkey earlier. The Turks, even though they had these security problems with Kurdistan, they were the big investors in Kurdistan. There were these construction companies, these modern Turkish construction companies, that were building the airport in Sulaymaniyah to the point where there now are international flights that come into both of those. That is, you can go to Erbil with one stop from here today. You can go to Dulles airport, fly to Frankfurt or to

Vienna and then take a flight to Kurdistan. But in my time it was hard to visit unless you came under official auspices.

*Q: What was your impression and maybe episodes with the press?*

NEGROPONTE: They were good. Like always these media were sending the A-team to Iraq, both broadcast and print. I am trying to remember his name, John Burns was the head of the New York Times bureau then, Who was helping him. Dexter Filkins, I don't know if he won a Pulitzer Prize or not, but just an extraordinary reporter. I think he wrote The Forever War. So these newspapers and media were sending the best.

*Q: They were obviously going after you, but what could you get from them? They were coming at things from a different perspective.*

NEGROPONTE: It was easier in Vietnam because the press got around more. I think they had the same difficulty that our civilian workers had. Iraq was on sort of a lockdown situation. There was a New York Times stringer who wrote a book called The Red Zone. He fell in love with an Iraqi I think, or another correspondent, and he went and reported out of Basra as a stringer. He wrote a very good book. This book on the Red Zone was very good.

He got killed. I mean, he just started to assume that he was safe and everything else. He was down in Basra and got assassinated. It was just very hard to work unless you were embedded with U.S. forces. Maybe up in Kurdistan it was safe but certainly not in the rest of the country.

*Q: One of the things in my experience which was before yours but when you were with the military, and if you say "Gee we ought to take this city," Fallujah or something, there is a sort of "Can Do, Sir." In other words often a commitment to do something which may be either....*

NEGROPONTE: It was very carefully planned. George Casey was a very careful officer. I think so were the marine forces out there. I think it was General John Sattler who commanded the forces. This was planned very carefully. There was no precipitous rushing to judgment. They knew how tough it was, because we had a lot of intelligence. We knew what the hell was going on.

*Q: Where did you get your intelligence?*

NEGROPONTE: Well like in any war, at the beginning you don't know that much and then once you have been fighting it for a while you know a helluva lot. Your situational awareness improves. It reminds me of an L-19 pilot I knew in Vietnam called Ken Lape, who once told me he was flying reconnaissance over Phu Yen province every day. He would fly over the whole province.

He said, “When I first got here I couldn’t figure out anything. By the end of my tour I knew whether a tree had moved.” It is just a question of familiarity. After a while you get to know things, you get to observe better. We brought in a lot of intelligence assets. We brought the NSA out there. We had drones, we had you name it, satellites. After a while you can develop your own human sources. Let’s say the intelligence community was very well represented in Iraq.

*Q: With the enemy including Al Qaeda, but also the various Iraqi forces, were they pretty well hooked into cell phones and that sort of thing?*

NEGROPONTE: Probably too hooked into cell phones and not hooked enough into everything else. There is a tendency for everybody to run around directing things with cell phones that is probably not ideal. But it was at the beginning for lack of anything better. It is hard to appreciate how dependent the Iraqi government was on us at the beginning. I mean Prime Minister Allawi didn’t even have an airplane. We gave him one. I got it transferred to Iraqi control. We trained their pilots. He had a C-130 that permitted him to go around the country.

But we were starting from scratch there. Now it is a going concern. When you think about it we went in; we invaded. The army was dissolved. The infrastructure was in a huge state of disrepair. That was 2003. Now it is 2013 and our forces aren’t there. Mr. al-Maliki is running the country, so if you look at the trajectory given the dissolution of the Iraqi army and the looting and destruction that occurred in 2003, things aren’t too bad right now.

*Q: How about the Al Sadr community in Baghdad?*

NEGROPONTE: Sadr City.

*Q: Sadr City. Could anything be done about it?*

NEGROPONTE: Well we went there. I visited there with the commander who patrolled that part of Baghdad. We tried to have some assistance from one of the community development programs. They got a little better over time. You know at one point Muqtada moved back to Iran. He stayed there a number of months. I think when he left things got a bit better in Sadr City. To my understanding, Sadr City is now back pretty fully under government control. But it was contested during my time.

*Q: What about agriculture? Were you doing anything on that?*

NEGROPONTE: Just a start. We got some money, \$100 million, to at least do some surveys and stuff like that, but not able to make a significant dent in that. I haven’t looked at the situation recently but it is certainly something worth looking at, at least some modicum of agricultural activity. I mean Iraq is never going to become the agricultural nation it used to be. I am sure it could do more than it is doing. I would start by looking at

their irrigation systems and see what can be done. When I arrived in Baghdad in 2004, I found that CPA had not allocated any reconstruction funds for agriculture. I changed that.

*Q: What about schools?*

NEGROPONTE: Well again the situation was fairly dire, but people did go to school. The universities were operating. They had lost a lot of professionals. One of the real problems early on was that so many middle and upper middle class people fled Iraq. So you had doctors and teachers and people who had advanced degrees leaving if they could and going to neighboring Jordan or leaving for some other part of the world. There was a pretty big Iraqi Diaspora.

*Q: Yeah, many of the doctors here in the Washington area...*

NEGROPONTE: Medical doctors. You go to Scandinavia, there are for some reason a lot of Iraqis who went to Sweden, Denmark and places like that. Sweden in particular, so there was a brain drain as a result of this. Hopefully that is starting to rebalance itself. I remember going to the law school, one of the first law schools in the Middle East. The first law school in the Ottoman Empire outside of Istanbul and about to celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was in terrible shape.

*Q: How about women in education?*

NEGROPONTE: Well there were women in positions of responsibility. It had been a secular state, so there was that at least. But with Shiaism more on the rise, I guess you saw women who covered themselves more completely. But, my sense when I was in Iraq was not that it was rushing headlong into becoming some kind of very Islamist state. I haven't been back for a few years, so I don't know what it is like now. But women were viewed with, I mean it is not Afghanistan. It doesn't suffer the same problems as Afghanistan. It had come from a secular tradition.

*Q: With our intelligence and our military and all, and also the embassy political side, you must have been keeping a pretty close eye on Iran.*

NEGROPONTE: Well we were interested in what was going on in Iran. Of course you have Iranians coming in to Iraq, a lot for pilgrimages to Najaf. There is a certain amount of Iran watching going on. We were more interested in following what the Iranians were trying to do in Iraq through the IRGC. They were training and equipping some of the more extremist, violent extremist elements, who were manufacturing IEDs, for example. The best IED makers were trained by Hezbollah thanks to the Iranian revolutionary guard movement. It is all one piece. They are linked. Hezbollah and Lebanon and the IRGC and then they would help these extremists in Iraq. Some of them, shall we say, the worst apples in the barrel were definitely Iranian inspired. They denied it but they were doing it.



*Q: Syria, you mentioned Syria as being the back door for recruiting. How stood Syria at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: Well Syria had been with the coalition during the first Gulf War. They had voted for resolution 1441, but unfortunately they allowed foreign fighters to come through Syria into Iraq. They would fly from Saudi Arabia to Damascus, and then they would get off and infiltrate into Iraq. One of the problems was that if you are from the Arab world you don't need a visa to get into Damascus. We were trying to persuade the Syrians to require visas of Arabs to exercise some control, but we didn't have much success.

Then our relationship with Syria started to deteriorate. It was pretty good right after 9/11. We had some intelligence cooperation. A modicum of decent relations, but they started to sever in part because of this foreign fighter issue that they never would do anything about. So that is where they all came from. A few from Algeria or whatever. You go to Saudi Arabia and then you would fly from Saudi Arabia to Syria.

*Q: I think-- relations with the United States, was John McCain a fairly constant factor there?*

NEGROPONTE: Yeah, I think I missed John. He came out but I think I was back in the states or traveling. I missed him. We had a lot of senators come out. There was a lot of good will towards Iraq. I brought, my time is now June 30 of '04 to about March 15 or March 18 of '05. During that time there was, I would say, unqualified support for Iraq from the Congress. I took Allawi back for a visit to Washington in September of '04 and he spoke to a joint session of Congress so he got the treatment, the good treatment, you know standing ovations and people jumping up any time he said anything, applauding him. He was very well received in the Congress. So I don't think we had any problems with John McCain.

The other thing, we talked about the reprogramming the reconstruction program. We talked about restoring order, which was a big issue. Issue number 3 was organizing elections for national assembly which took place January 30, 2005. The preparations for that were definitely a major preoccupation of the embassy working with the United Nations and with the Iraqi government.

*Q: Well now with this, what role did we play? I mean did we have a...*

NEGROPONTE: I would call it, we were like a director of a movie. We weren't actors on the stage, but we played a very important supporting role in mobilizing and encouraging the Iraqis in the form of their political process. The Iraqis had an election commission with which we had a very good relationship. The U.N., I mentioned Mr. Valenzuela, and the IFES, which did a lot of training, which is the NGO. I forget what those initials stand for, but between those actors we got the election organized.

There was some doubt whether there was enough security in the country to conduct the election. It turned out that in Al Anbar and in the Sunni areas we weren't able to set up polling places in some of them, but in most parts of the country we were able to set up polling places. You remember everybody walking with the ink stained thumb. Now here is the important point about that. I don't think the elections would have been as successful as they were had it not been for a master stroke by General Casey. When he actually carried it out I questioned it, but it turned out to be absolutely right.

He decreed that for two or three days before the election and for two or three days after there would be no vehicular traffic in Iraq. He was dealing with the issue of car bombs and the fear that car bombs might be used against polling places. So basically the 48 hours before and the 48 hours after we had no vehicular traffic in Iraq except for official vehicles. The result was there were enough polling places so that people could walk to them.

I took a helicopter the morning of the election. I woke up with great trepidation. I asked myself, "what is going to happen today?" The first thing I heard was a loud boom, and then another boom. I heard about five or six booms. Well apparently those were all the booms that occurred that day. There were about seven or eight of them in the morning, explosions, bombs here or there, and then after that it was peaceful. The country was essentially peaceful for the entire day of the election.

I got in my Blackwater helicopter about 11:00 in the morning and flew all over Baghdad, all the different streets, and it was really an impressive sight to see the people going to vote. The women in their robes. The men and the turnout, the word got out. Cell phones really made a difference. At the beginning hardly anybody went to the polls but as the word got out that it was safe, then people started calling each other, so we had a very good voter turnout. I felt that was a real feather in our cap that we helped get that election organized and got Iraq back on the path towards democracy. So it was great. I wasn't there much longer because after the January 30 elections I got called by the White House, by Andrew Card who was the President's chief of staff. Andy Card asked me if I wanted to be the first Director of National Intelligence. I told him I didn't know much about that. I hadn't followed the debate much leading towards the legislation. I would have to think about it. If he would give me 24 hours, please, and I would call him back. Of course, I intended to say yes, but I at least wanted to call my wife so that she wasn't too surprised.

I did download the law from the internet, which I wasn't too familiar with, the Intelligence Reform Act. I looked at it. I called her. Of course she was very eager for me to come back home to Washington so she said, "Take it." She just wanted me to come home. So, anyway, I called Andy Card back and told him I would be pleased to accept. I went back in February or March, in February, I guess, on a consultation trip, met with the President. He took me out to the press corps and announced that I would be the first Director of National Intelligence.

*Q: OK, today is 14 August 2013, with John Negroponte. John, before we leave Iraq, in the first place you were basically a proconsul weren't you?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, I try very hard not to be a proconsul, and I am very old fashioned about that. I am very traditionalist. I bent over backwards to not be overbearing, and I tried my best and used all the diplomatic experience I could draw on to try to help the government in making their decisions. We were coming off a period where we were the occupying power under international law. I did not want us to continue being the occupying or colonial power. So I really did bend over backwards. I tried to stay out of the news. I tried to avoid projecting the impression that I was the leader of Iraq. I think I succeeded. In case you can't tell I feel quite strongly about this subject.

*Q: Well okay, who was the head of government with whom you dealt?*

NEGROPONTE: Ayad Allawi. He was the secular Shia that I was telling you about yesterday. Ayad Allawi had been a Ba'ath party member, interestingly, until he had a falling out with Saddam. He was exiled. He went and lived in London. Saddam sent a hired murderer to try and kill him. He came into his London apartment and tried to kill him with an axe. Allawi who is quite a strong guy resisted successfully and got the guy out of there somehow. Then he ended up collapsing and fainting and they found him in a pool of blood a number of hours later. He miraculously survived, but he still had some remaining signs of injuries from that murder attempt.

*Q: Let's talk about your sort of interrelationship. How did you find his dealing with, was there an Iraqi approach or Shia approach?*

NEGROPONTE: Well it was very difficult for them. As I mentioned they didn't have the wherewithal to run their own government. They didn't have a plane. They couldn't get anywhere. There was no air force to speak of. Barely an army. So we were really at the very beginnings of helping this government get back on its feet. They had a Cabinet. They had regular Cabinet meetings. Probably the most important single thing, was once the occupation was over, they gained full control of the revenues from the oil exports.

You may recall, since the time of the defeat of Saddam in 1990, the Iraqi government had not controlled its own oil revenues. The oil revenues went directly to an account and were held in escrow in the Federal Reserve Bank in New York. But now they controlled their money. That was the big change, and that is what enabled them finally to get on their feet.

*Q: Were we taking a portion of that money to pay back our expenses?*

NEGROPONTE: No we weren't. Not like the first Gulf War, although we did use some of the monies by mutual agreement to help pay for some of the civil affairs projects that our military were carrying out. But they were civil affairs projects for the benefit of the Iraqi people with Iraqi money but there was an American military input. I think some of our military didn't always understand that they were spending Iraqi money. They thought it was ours.

*Q: Could you talk for just a minute for people who don't understand sort of the administration of things? How would a day of yours go?*

NEGROPONTE: Well here is an interesting thing about Iraq. People worked so hard and this was true about the CPA and when I ran the embassy. There was nothing else to do. I was the only person who lived in a house. Everybody else lived in a trailer, usually two to a trailer. These hot tin contraptions out in the middle of the Iraqi sun. The day I arrived in Iraq I think it was 130 degrees. So life was not exactly a bed of roses.

The day started off with various briefings. I had a CIA intelligence briefer who briefed me every day. She happened to have been my assistant in New York. She was from the CIA and she came out to Iraq to brief me. I have seen her since. She is still in the agency. So I would have my intelligence briefing. My senior staff like Jim Jeffrey would go to the military briefing. General Casey would have an all hands on deck kind of morning report you know. Half an hour or so of what is going on in the whole country militarily. So you spend the first hour or so getting oriented on what is going on.

Then I would start, I am a great believer and I did it in Iraq just like I did it everywhere else, although it was harder to do in Iraq, paying calls on people. Going and visiting them. I always tell my officers, my trainees, "Your job as a diplomat is to make new friends for the United States every day." I would go and call on the ministers. I would call on the agency heads. I would call on the private sector, such as it was, and there wasn't much then. There were some banks. There were about 20 Iraqi banks that were in existence and they were just sort of being re-floated if you will.

Foreign visitors, CODELs like we talked about yesterday. On a typical day you could have a business luncheon in the embassy compound with the congressional delegation where we would give them a briefing. Or you would meet with the press, the press corps. We would bring them in fairly frequently to give them a briefing on what was going on. It was very hard because of security to just freely go downtown and have lunch in a restaurant. But I would go into the Red Zone and I would visit certain people there.

I would visit the head of one of the political parties that was one of the Islamist parties was in the Red Zone and I would go and see them. The foreign ministry was in the Red Zone, just on the edge of the Green Zone. I would go and visit there.

Then I would take field trips. I mean Iraq is a big country. I am ambassador to the whole country. The military put a couple of Black Hawk helicopters of my disposal. So I mentioned to you yesterday, I opened the four branch offices of the embassy. I would always tie that in with a visit to that locale, maybe spend the night in one of those places and make a two-day visit out of it. I visited the length and breadth of the country.

I am sure I visited most Iraqi provinces. I am a great believer in that. People tend to remember when an American ambassador has visited their province. They don't like to think of the ambassador as just being stuck there in the capital hobnobbing with all these city slickers. They like it when they go out to the boonies. I visited some of the more

hotly contested areas. I went to the Marine encampments near Fallujah and Ramadi before they re-asserted control. I went to Fallujah when it was finally recaptured by the U.S. forces. I remember giving a press conference practically on a pile of rubble, with my flak jacket and my helmet.

As for the sense of time in Iraq, it felt like every day was a week. I think almost anybody who served in Iraq will tell you that. They were absolutely exhausted. I remember the first time I came back to the States in September of '04. I had been there since the end of June. My family was staying in New York. They had moved out of the Waldorf Astoria because they couldn't live there anymore because I was no longer the Perm Rep, so we moved to a little apartment on 68<sup>th</sup> Street.

I came home on a Friday and I slept pretty much through until Sunday. My wife said she had never seen me sleep so much in the entire time of our marriage. So somehow the stress and the weather and the nature of the situation was psychologically and physically very taxing. But I always went home every night. I shut the office early, my own office. I never stayed beyond 7:00 at night, which you know for the Foreign Service is not that late. I would have a decent meal and then I would get on the treadmill for an hour and then watch the news and go to bed.

*Q: Do you think this stress on the job had an effect on the decisions you and others were making?*

NEGROPONTE: I think we were all a pretty experienced bunch that had been used to handling that kind of stuff. Jim Jeffrey as I mentioned, was a Vietnam Vet. He had fought in Vietnam 40 years earlier. So had Ron Neumann who is currently the president of the American Academy of Diplomacy. He was a Vietnam Vet. All of us had been in conflict situations as diplomats. A number of them in the former Yugoslavia, some elsewhere. So we could handle it.

*Q: You had mentioned this traveling around the country. How important in your estimation was tribalism? You know there is always the Sunni and the Shia but there was so much talk about the tribal leaders. How did you find this?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I tried not to encourage tribalism. I mean it is not our modern concept of democracy and representative government. As Ryan Crocker always used to say, identity politics is sort of a curse whether it is your tribe or your religion or your race. Unfortunately people fall into that pattern of thinking. It became a problem for Iraq. Then of course sometimes for short-term expediency people exploited tribalism for our protection. You may remember in Vietnam, where we both served, the Hmong tribespeople were used as guards and that was a sort of tribalism. And the Montagnards were people who were very close to the French and subsequently to the Americans because they could be trusted, right?

*Q: I remember in Saigon you would see these Hmongs who were rather distinctive standing outside certain houses and you knew that was a CIA house because there were Hmongs there.*

NEGROPONTE: That is right. So you had a little bit of that same mentality in Iraq particularly in the west when they had the Awakening, when they started using some of these Sunni tribes people to fight against Al Qaeda, instead of using national forces. The overriding political objective in Iraq was to help create national institutions, right? Not Sunni institutions or Shia or tribal institutions.

To me the most important thing was to create a national army that could really be viewed as a national institution. Now you are really swimming upstream in Iraq when you try and do that. You are swimming more upstream when your military people or your intelligence people in Western Iraq come to you and say we have got to use these tribals to fight against Al Qaeda.

So I always viewed that with a wary eye, but they did end up using tribes. They were called the Friends of Iraq and various things. There were these movements that we funded. And the Brits of course had used tribes historically. They would always come to me and say we have got to use the tribes more. I find that, I held my nose and accepted it, let's put it that way, but I find it a short-term expediency and somewhat contrary to the broader objective of creating national institutions.

*Q: Well I often heard stories of people from the military or one of these reconstruction groups going in and giving money to tribal leaders. It seems to me that tribal leaders....*

NEGROPONTE: You do a certain amount of that, again it is protection money. We had to do that to protect pipelines. There were pipelines coming down from the north to power plants and so on that were being blown up all the time. I mentioned to you yesterday about the electric towers that were being torn down. Once you figure out the local tribal situation and everything else, you can eventually figure out whom to pay off to protect those installations. I hope you have got enough money because, the minute you run out, those things are going to start being blown up again. So that is the reason why over time you have to have effective national institutions.

But we got better at protecting these installations between us and the Iraqis. And there are lots of tribes by the way. And they are cross border. The President of Iraq at the time, Ghazi al-Yawar, was a member of the Shammar tribe. Well the Shammar tribe goes all the way from Saudi Arabia across Iraq and up into Syria. I mean the Shammar tribesmen know each other. I think the whole purpose of the Westphalian State was to get out of tribalism, not to go back into it.

*Q: When I was in Saudi Arabia I read this book by Thesiger, The Marsh Arabs. It was very interesting. Then Saddam drained the Marshes. How stood things in the marshes at the time?*

NEGROPONTE: Well that is where the agriculture was completely depleted. I am not sure there are the human rights problems anymore that there used to be; but the whole basis of that economy had been destroyed. There was nothing being done at the time to try and revive it.

*Q: Before we leave, one last question. How stood matters, I can't remember the timing, but with Iraqi prisons at your time?*

NEGROPONTE: Well there were some very difficult problems because a lot of people were being detained. It is a little bit like Guantanamo squared. It is like the Guantanamo situation throughout the country of Iraq, particularly in Abu Ghraib, where they were holding a lot of people who had records of insurgency. They had been arrested and they found gunpowder marks on their hands and they knew they were dealing with explosives and so forth.

But what was really difficult was the prisons were overcrowded. Number two, the judicial system. We worked a lot on helping them improve their judicial system. We had a lot of U.S. attorneys and retired U.S. attorneys who were helping them administer and helping them create a better judicial system. There was a central criminal court that was fairly active, but it couldn't begin to handle the workload. What had stopped was the mistreatment of prisoners, the systematic and shocking mistreatment that we discovered in Abu Ghraib.

*Q: That was before your time.*

NEGROPONTE: That was before my time. That was terrible. Probably the most harmful public relations disaster of the entire war as far as I was concerned.

*Q: There must have been a great deal of emphasis on telling the troops not to take their cell phones that had cameras all over and take pictures.*

NEGROPONTE: I don't know about that. I think that is a first amendment issue. I think we are more sensitive to people's rights these days. You know the Marine Corps is pretty disciplined. I am not aware that they were all busy taking pictures of Fallujah as they were liberating the place.

But I have seen some movies of Iraq that are quite interesting. I saw a movie by a New England National Guard unit. I think they may have been from New Hampshire or Massachusetts. They documented their entire time in Iraq with video. This was a unit that maintained security and moved supplies up and down some of the main arteries of Iraq. It was a really interesting movie. These guys were making sarcastic comments about working for Halliburton. They had the poop trucks they were moving around. It was actually quite an amusing movie. It was very iconoclastic. It follows them all the way from their arrival to when they get back home. Not designed to enamor you to the war effort. I called it to the attention of the chairman of the JCS. I don't know if he watched it or not. He would have been horrified.

*Q: Was a major occupation keeping supply lines open?*

NEGROPONTE: Well yes, because I think we became pretty good at it. That is where these IEDs came in, improvised explosive devices. They planted them here, there and everywhere. A lot of supplies came up from Kuwait. We all ate at military dining facilities. We ate there. We couldn't go down in the red zone for our meals so we ate at the military food. They brought in everything, the vegetables, the tomatoes, the lettuce, all that stuff came all the way from Kuwait on refrigerated trucks.

In fact, I would invite myself to dinner at Barham Salih's, he was the vice prime minister, about once a week just to get my fresh vegetables. I would tell him, "Barham, I haven't had my veggies for a while." He would say, "come on down." He was the vice premier I told you about. He was entertaining. Literally he entertained a lot, and you could go to his house any evening and you would just find the most interesting cross section of Iraqis and Kurds and everyone else. I would go down there once or twice a week and have stuffed peppers and all the Middle Eastern cuisine. They had gone down into the red zone and gotten all that stuff. Fresh fruit.

*Q: How did you feel they were dealing with women at the time? Were women pretty well integrated?*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, that is not a problem in Iraq, I mean, compared to Afghanistan.

*Q: Well did Al Qaeda try to change that?*

NEGROPONTE: Well of course it did, and the country was becoming more Islamist. More women were veiling themselves. But it never got to the point that Afghanistan was. Now I have not been back there for a couple of years so I won't be able to tell you, I haven't been back for four or five years.

*Q: But there were girls going to school/*

NEGROPONTE: Girls went to school. There were women doctors and ministers and women diplomats. Actually at the time the ambassador to Washington was a woman.

*Q: How about women in the Foreign Service, our Foreign Service?*

NEGROPONTE: Our Foreign Service, we had plenty of them. Our economic counselor was a woman. I mean it was mostly whether they were willing to volunteer. We never got to the point because we made such an energetic recruitment effort. We never had forced assignments, never during my time as ambassador, nor when I was deputy secretary of state.

*Q: There had been a rumor or a story going around that the Foreign Service wasn't carrying its weight and all at some point. I think people I talked to said it was generated*



*really by the military. You know if things weren't working the Foreign Service isn't carrying its weight.*

NEGROPONTE: Well that is a different story. It comes from a very fundamental misunderstanding by a number of our military about what nation building, regime modification, and assistance to countries is all about. I think what they tended not to do was make the distinction between the role of the military and the situation and the role of civilians.

If your military mission is to remove Saddam Hussein and defeat the Iraqi army, that is a relatively well defined objective and with the strength of the United States and the proper organization and the proper plan you are going to be able to do that. You don't doubt that; I don't doubt that; none of us doubt that. You will be able to get him; you will be able to destroy their military capability and you are going to be able to say mission accomplished. Then the ensuing period involves helping them rebuild their national institutions, rebuild destroyed infrastructure, organize politically and socially again to operate a functioning society.

In most countries that is the work of generations, not days or weeks. It is not going to get done from yesterday to today or from night to morning. So, I think they had exaggerated expectations. "We did our military part; why can't you fix their agriculture? Why don't we just get people from the Department of Agriculture?" I mean even General Casey would sometimes say to me "Look, if their post office isn't working, let's get people from the post office department, and if the health ministry isn't working let's get people from our Department of Health and Human Services. Let's get our education people."

That is not a workable conception of how to operate abroad. The key talent operating abroad, and this is a deep-seated conviction of mine based on years of having worked in these areas, the key talent you want in these kinds of development situations is people who know how to get things done abroad. Who understand this isn't Fourth and Main Street in some town in the United States, but it is some country that doesn't have the rule of law, doesn't have political culture, and that you are basically practically flying blind.

The only way you are going to get stuff done is if you have savvy people with experience working in these environments to get stuff done in. I would submit to you, if you ask me what kind of person has the best suited profile for doing that kind of work, I would say is a former Peace Corps volunteer. Somebody who has been parachuted into a village in some third world country, spent the first year scratching their head saying gee these people don't know what they are doing, and the second year saying here is the way I can help them. Those are the kind of people you need. They need language; they need empathy, and they can't just ask the local people, "Why can't you do it my way?"

This is all a long way of saying, sometimes I listen to the military and they do fabulous work, and they assumed a lot of these civil affairs functions, particularly in the initial stages and they did fantastic work, but they sometimes were either impatient or didn't

understand the longer-term difficulties that really were involved. You just can't rebuild their country overnight. Jeepers, we found that out in spades in Iraq.

I mean there are some problems that are still there. I mean the simplest things we couldn't figure out at the beginning. We couldn't figure out for months, in fact the entire time I was there do you know all transactions were done in cash. They would fly cash in plane loads from the New York Federal Reserve in New York to Baghdad Airport, and then they would convert it into local currency. Troops, Iraqi troops would leave their units on pay day to bring cash to their families wherever they were in the country, because there was no effective way of transferring money in the country.

This is something which in theory, if you ask my brother the computer expert he said, "Gee you should be able to fix that in about 60 days." Well, no you can't. I am sorry. You have to establish a whole set up to do it. The problem persisted for years.

*Q: Was the computer becoming a real instrument within Iraq while you were there?*

NEGROPONTE: Well no, not quite. Yeah it was slowly. I am sure today it is fairly well established. I could say the phone was first, cell phones, commanders giving orders on cell phones, things like that. Definitely the cell phone first and then the computers following. Of course the cell phone is a computer.

*Q: You are working in a different era than I was. What about ease of communication and all? Did you find a looking over your shoulder emphasis? E-mail or suggestions and these sorts of things?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh yes, we had what we called the 9000 mile long screwdriver from Washington that was helping us do everything. They really "helped" us. We tolerated it. I thought they were a pain, a huge pain. Obviously you have to follow instructions and you report to the Secretary of State if you are going to be a disciplined officer. But within that framework, I thought some of the minions were really impossible. The NSC in particular. The NSC had gotten much too big for its britches and had no real appreciation for what a nuisance it was.

*Q: And you are an old hand.*

NEGROPONTE: I have been in the NSC twice so I knew, and they just didn't know how to exercise restraint. So you got these sort of whipper-snappers who were like 25 or 30 years old. They would demand this and demand that. They would call up and say we want you to be in a video teleconference at X, Y, and Z hours. So I set a little rule for myself. If it is a video conference for the President or the Secretary of State, obviously I will go. But otherwise I wouldn't. I let my deputies and alternates struggle with that one. I knew it was an imposition on them, but I wanted to free myself to do the job.

The value I could add was by being out there, and seeing people. Let's not forget over time George Bush brought into the White House, he is a modern wartime president, right.

So he now has the technology to direct the war effort from the White House. Now all presidents direct war. The more you read history, and especially as wars go on, leaders direct them more and more as the war progresses.

He got to the point where we could have a weekly NSC meeting which I would attend from a Baghdad teleconference, and he would have everybody there. He would have all the NSC members who were in Washington. You would have the combatant commander in Baghdad. You would have the American ambassador. You would have the NATO commander because NATO is now involved. You would have maybe CENTCOM, the Central Command commander, and they would be up on the screen along with all of us. You would have some very complex meetings. All being run out of the situation room.

So the staff, he developed a corresponding staff and put General Lute in charge of it. Doug Lute has been in charge of that for a long time. I think he was in charge of both Afghanistan and Iraq. I forget when he assumed that job. Sometimes you get a lot of suggestions about how to do this, that, or the other thing.

I remember one of them. We were coming up to the elections, the January elections. I told them all, "Look, these elections are going to happen. We have got it under control here, boss. There are some problems with security in Al Anbar and there will be some localities where polling places will not be open." They started telling me, "Why can't people vote by mail?" I tried not to laugh. Well the mail system wasn't working in Iraq. "Well maybe they can vote by internet." We were working with pieces of paper and X's and things like that and ink stained fingers. And you want to ratchet that up to voting by internet and with a postal system that hasn't worked for about ten years.

So we would get a lot of helpful suggestions from Washington. They drove me crazy. Then they would call up constantly, every day sometimes. Some of these people were friends of mine. I have told them since how annoying it was. They would say, "Look, you only produced 5000 megawatts of electricity yesterday and that is what you were producing 2 months ago."

I responded, "Yeah and that is probably what we will be producing six months from now. We just can't get the production up the way you want us to." The things that went wrong, Murphy's law was totally alive and well in Iraq.

We had a 250 megawatt reactor from General Electric, the biggest generator that we had imported into the country and we brought it by the wrong route. It was supposed to go to Kirkuk and instead of going by route X we went by route Y and we reached a point where the bridge wasn't strong enough to take the generator so we had to bring it back and it took another four or five months to get it on another route that could reach Kirkuk. So that kind of problem.

A lot of money was wasted and it took time, but you know what? That is just the nature of war. It is the fog of war, the nature of war, and you know things are a mess until they are not, and it takes time. It is just a question of how quickly you can move out of that

situation. Of course Iraq doesn't face those kinds of problems today. It is much better off. They have a 10% growth rate per year now.

*Q: Well this is very important to get the feeling of every day and all, and I think we are moving in to a new era. I practically start when we were still using quill pens and clipper ships to have communications.*

NEGROPONTE: Well we had a little bit of both. We had the equivalent of clipper ships. It is the bulk cash that is coming from the Federal Reserve and the difficulty of arranging voting and all of that. The modern part is, we had this whole parallel military communications system.

We all had cell phones issued to us on arrival. We never could figure out how to account for our calls. We so we were all allowed to make unlimited telephone calls. So, one master account for everybody in the country. We had a perfectly functioning internet. No problem with internet. We had cables. As I told you, I revived the cable system and used it a lot. It had been used before but not to the extent we used it. We had multiple means of communication, plus people coming in and out of the country just about every day. We had multiple agencies that had huge communications capabilities. Us, the military, the Intel community, a lot of capability.

*Q: It brings up a role, how did you find, I mean this later became your job, but how was the Intel community working? You have people in the State Department getting what amounts to intelligence information. CIA up to their neck in it, the military.*

NEGROPONTE: One advantage to being in a near lockdown situation in a place like Iraq is that you can have a staff meeting every day, and I did. I mean you should have seen the size of those staff meetings. There were 40-50 people there. Maybe more. We had all of them. We had Petraeus who was running the military training at the time. We had the station chief. We had other intelligence agencies. AID counselor. You name it, reconstruction people. So we were able to coordinate what we were doing every day, and compare. In addition to the fact that integration of intelligence has become progressively better in recent years, which we can talk about that when we talk about the DNI job.

*Q: Was there much of a consular operation going on there?*

NEGROPONTE: Not much. We had a consul general and a consulate. Originally we set it up in a public space hoping we could be more accessible to the Iraqi public; but it became very difficult to, it was still too difficult to take visa applications. Actually most Iraqis who were applying for visas other than official visas, had to go to Amman to get their visas. That is probably not the case today, but initially visa processing in Iraq was too difficult. You might remember also that was still a time when we were being particularly difficult with Arab named individuals.

*Q: After 9/11.*

NEGROPONTE: Right. Post 9/11. The clearance process would be endless. We would nominate people to be Fulbright recipients and scholarships. So that meant we had to get them their visas. It was not always easy. I think the only visas we could issue in county were official, diplomatic visas and stuff like that, official delegations.

*Q: To give people a feeling for technology, were drones a factor when you were there?*

NEGROPONTE: When I was there at that particular time, I don't recall drones being a factor in 2004-2005. Later on yes. I think a year later is when, '06 I want to say. That is when they killed Zarqawi. They were using drones. There may have been drones in country, but I just don't remember them being a big factor. Hell, we had special operations forces there under General McChrystal and his predecessors. They had a special base north of Baghdad and developed tremendous capabilities. Not when I was there but subsequently, when I was DNI.

*Q: Well let's talk about this. You said Andrew Card contacted you.*

NEGROPONTE: I think it was in January. It may have been the beginning of February. Andy Card, the President's chief of staff, called me up and asked me whether I would like to be Director of National Intelligence. After reflecting on it for 24 hours I said yes.

*Q: What had, to give somebody listening to this later, what had inspired this new job of this intelligence thing they were...*

NEGROPONTE: So the Directorate of National Intelligence (DNI) was created by a law that was passed in 2004, and it created a new Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Cabinet level, not a Cabinet position, but a Cabinet level position, compensated at the Cabinet level. It was to oversee the intelligence community and basically to assume what in the old days we would call the community management functions of the director of the CIA.

The director of the CIA was double hatted. He was director of the CIA and he was director of central intelligence. That second role as community manager, the director of the CIA was responsible for preparing the community wide budget and certain community functions that brought together all the different intelligence agencies. Also the National Intelligence Council was part of that and was chopped over to the DNI, which was the group that was responsible for national intelligence estimates. I had all the NIOs, the National Intelligence Officers who were part of the National Intelligence Council. They became part of the DNI under the law. So did various ancillary offices like, well one that became pretty important, The National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC). There was also a center for counter intelligence. That was also part of my group of organizations. It was about 1500 people all together. When I was asked to do this and came back to have my hearings and all of that, it didn't exist yet.

*Q: What had inspired it?*

NEGROPONTE: What had inspired it? Well, it starts with 9/11 and the perceived intelligence pressures then. There was pressure from the 9/11 families in particular to create a new intelligence organization. That did not get traction in and of itself. The President really didn't want to change things because, after all, his father had been head of the CIA. He didn't want to change it. But then the second factor came along which was the so-called WMD fiasco, when this source called Curveball, told us there were WMD in Iraq.

*Q: What does that stand for?*

NEGROPONTE: Weapons of mass destruction. We discovered in 2004 and it became public that this had been a fabrication. Curveball had fabricated this information and we had fallen for it. You remember Colin Powell giving his briefing at the United Nations. I was there for it, sitting right behind him with George Tenet. Giving all this information saying there were WMD in Iraq. It turned out not to be true. Powell made that briefing in good faith. He will never forgive himself for that briefing. It is a source of deep embarrassment for him, deep annoyance in the way he was misled and his whole reputation was put on the line.

*Q: Well looking at that sort of the Curveball thing, what had been the problem? I mean, why had this risen to such a credibility level?*

NEGROPONTE: I think, well if you read the WMD commission report, they created a commission in the wake of this fiasco to study the implications of all of this and make recommendations. It did its work while the legislation was being considered. They will tell you it was the culture. People wanted to believe this stuff. They wanted to believe that Saddam had WMD. Also don't forget the experience with Saddam in 1990 was we found that there were WMD there when we went in the first time in the First Gulf War. He had a chemical weapons program and stuff when we discovered this material.

I think there was a predisposition to believe that Saddam was guilty. So whenever the slightest piece of information came in that lent itself to that interpretation we didn't check our assumptions well enough. There wasn't enough internal analysis done.

And, in the case of Curveball, that was just plain poor tradecraft on the part of the people who were doing that work. But it is the Curveball incident and this whole WMD in Iraq business, not 9/11 that really precipitated the pressure for intelligence reform. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. Senator Lieberman of Connecticut and Susan Collins of Maine were the two who took in hand, they led the Government Operations Committee of the Senate, who shepherded this legislation through Congress. It was not, I think it is important to point out, it was not an Intel committee that did it. I don't think the intelligence committees were enamored with this change.

*Q: I would have thought you would have realized this was not going to be a popular job. I mean you were...*

NEGROPONTE: It wasn't bad. I enjoyed it. We can talk about the job, but I found it very interesting, a very valuable experience. I enjoyed it. The big thing about it was I got to see the President every day. I figure when you join the Foreign Service when you are 21 years old and somebody tells you 45 years later you are going to be briefing the President for 30 minutes every day on what is going on in the world. Would you take it? Tell me? I saw him every day, he got briefed.

He really cared about intelligence. He had a wonderful disposition. He was a really interesting guy. I briefed him every morning from 8:00 to 8:30. Early on I developed a pretty steady routine, once I got through confirmation and all. I assumed my job in April. Having started out in a little cubbyhole in the old EOB we were moved with Mike Hayden, my deputy. We brought over the former head of the NSA to be my deputy. He got a fourth star. He was happy about that.

Then I created this team of deputies. I had four deputies. Mike was my principal deputy. We moved into the new executive office building. We had offices there, about eight or nine months until we moved across the river to Bolling Air Force Base. They were building a new building. We got the office they had been planning for the DIA director; we were given that. A couple of floors in that building. Including the director's office. I mean he still had his old office. We eventually moved into there.

*Q: Coming back and getting ready for the hearings and all this. Sort of what was the atmosphere? And people saying "Oh God, you are going to screw us up."*

NEGROPONTE: Well they had passed the law. It wasn't me who passed the law. I hadn't even heard of the law until I was asked to take the job because I was too busy to follow that whole debate while I was in Washington. It passed while I was busy trying to take care of Fallujah and Sadr City and Najaf and elections and everything else, right. Administering a big assistance program. I hadn't really followed it. But they passed it and I think they were quite friendly. The Senate was controlled by the Republicans at the time. Pat Roberts of Kansas was the chairman and he was a congenial and very helpful person. He helped me get through. No one particularly tried to block the appointment. Just like Iraq, my confirmation went through quite smoothly. I had about the same number of votes, 93,94, 95 people who voted me through. There is always one or two who had their own reason.

As an aside, some of the overseers of the Intel community were people who happened to be good friends of mine. John Warner of Virginia, for example. He had been on the Intel Committee forever. He was ex-officio as chairman of the Armed Services Committee. Ted Stevens of Alaska had been involved in Intel. He was a close friend of mine. Pete Domenici. These were very senior senators all of whom, if you hang around this town long enough, you get to know them. Jay Rockefeller was on the committee. They were very sympathetic and very friendly to me. That doesn't mean they agreed with everything, but they were supportive.

If there were issues in the Congress it was in the House. Particularly a person I had gotten to know but had never really worked with that closely was Duncan Hunter from San Diego. He was very worried that the DNI was going to try to take a lot of people away from the CIA and emasculate the CIA. So he had all kinds of provisions he wanted to get. He was trying to get commitments that we wouldn't reprogram people and personnel through the agencies towards the DNI above a certain level without congressional notification beforehand.

And in the House, Peter Hoekstra from the state of Michigan. He was the Chair of the House Intelligence Committee. I mean in the end I found relations particularly with the House Intelligence Committee difficult because they wanted to play a stronger role in the management of the agencies than I felt was justified. I think that is just a natural tendency. It is inherent between the executive and the legislative branch. I had particularly strong differences of my view with Mr. Hoekstra, the Republican from Michigan, who I think really wanted to be the DNI himself. He wanted to really have an operational role. In 2006 the Republicans lost control of the House and the new chairman of the committee was a more congenial. I got along personally with Mr. Hoekstra very well. I consider him a good friend, but we just did have this difference of view on how to run things which sometimes got a bit tense. But all behind closed doors.

That is one of the advantages of Intel work. It is all behind closed doors. I had a real shouting match with a guy called Duke Cunningham one time who accused me of being some kind of namby-pamby guy. He said, "I don't know what I think about having a flake like you, who has been in the U.N. and who used to be chairman of the French-American Foundation. What kind of guy are we getting as the head of our Intel committee anyway?"

I literally called him a jerk in front of the entire Committee. I got so mad at him, I said, "You know I didn't volunteer to go to Iraq and spend a year of my life out there and dodge bullets to come back here and be treated to that kind of language." He resigned in disgrace from the Congress a while later because of some scandal.

*Q: He later was convicted of something.*

NEGROPONTE: It was some kind of scandal.

*Q: He was from San Diego.*

NEGROPONTE: It couldn't happen to a nicer guy. Boy, but I really let him have it. I think the rest of the committee was embarrassed.

*Q: Well there is a certain time.*

NEGROPONTE: I lost my cool with Duke Cunningham like I had never done before.



*Q: I mean all of a sudden you pull out the bloody flag. You had Vietnam and Honduras and Iraq.*

NEGROPONTE: That is what I told him: “What are you talking about?” But it is not a good idea to lose your cool.

*Q: It is not a good idea.*

NEGROPONTE: You should not make a regular practice of it, in any event.

*Q: OK, you got this job. So what is the job?*

NEGROPONTE: All right, what is the job? Here is the job. First of all you are the coordinator of the intelligence community and you are looked to as sort of community spokesperson. You try to integrate it and make better information sharing. More integration of real-time information for your customers. There is that part. So I created a small group of, it is supposedly 17 agencies, right?

*Q: 17 agencies?*

NEGROPONTE: Of the entire intelligence community. But a lot of those are small. There is Army Intelligence, Navy Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence. Even INR was considered a member of the intelligence community. But when you come down to it there are about six main agencies. NSA, CIA, DIA, NGA, the National Geospatial Agency. the NRO (the National Reconnaissance office), and the FBI. One of the main points of the reform was to get the FBI to be more intelligence minded. Not just focused on making legal cases.

*Q: Would you explain the difference between making cases and intelligence?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I mean the FBI, the bread and butter of the FBI is investigating crime with a view to possible prosecution. That has been their bread and butter over the years. One of the recommendations of the WMD commission, which was chaired by Senator Chuck Robb and by Judge Laurence Lieberman, who had been an ambassador in the Nixon/Ford administration, was to create more of a culture that you don't only collect information for use in court but you also devote more effort to analysis particularly with respect to terrorism cases.

So he recommended, this was really Judge Lieberman who felt strongly about this, that the FBI create a national security division. And they did that. That helped modify the culture. To put it a different way, if in the old days the FBI were looking to recruit an intelligence analyst, sometimes they would promote a secretary to become an intelligence analyst. That kind of thing. But I think they got to the point later on where they started to realize that being an analyst is a profession. It is not only about law enforcement, federal law enforcement is under section 1811 of the U.S. code. They call themselves 1811

officers. Anybody who can carry a federal badge. So it is not only about being an 1811, it is also about having these other capabilities. The FBI got more into that as time went on.

*Q: I want to point out here for someone looking at this, the CIA is precluded by law from doing its work in the United States. So that leaves it pretty much to the FBI.*

NEGROPONTE: And to the Homeland Security Department.

*Q: But prior to that police forces and your prime group was the FBI, and the FBI wasn't really looking at the United States as security threats, they were looking at people who committed crimes.*

NEGROPONTE: And even when they investigated terrorism it was more with a view to prosecuting certain individuals. Now there are some exceptions to that; in certain field offices had become quite versed you know, even back pre-9/11. Particularly the New York field office was quite knowledgeable about international terrorism. They had taken that on, and also the NYPD was quite good and developed some special knowledge because of the World Trade Center situation and the first attempt to burn the place down back in the early 1990's.

So there was this community that we sort of brought together every week. My day started usually very early. I would be up the night before and would get the first draft of the president's daily brief. I had a secure fax at home and I would get the information at home. I would get up early in the morning, read the newspapers and listen to maybe an hour of the radio broadcast. Then go in at 6:30. I had a small office in the White House in the old EOB where I would meet the briefer. They usually were CIA personnel. The President's Daily Brief (PDB) staff worked from CIA headquarters but they had been seconded to the DNI. As part of the reform, the DNI was given the whole briefing apparatus. I would meet the briefer and we would go over the briefing in detail, from 6:30 to 7:30.

Then at 8:00 in the morning we would go and brief the President. The President, the Vice President, the National Security advisor and the Chief of Staff. Those four. The intelligence briefer and myself, they would brief the President every morning, Monday through Saturday for half an hour.

*Q: What were your briefs? I mean obviously there had to be sort of subjects or something.*

NEGROPONTE: Well the President's Daily Brief (PDB) which I have been familiar with for quite a while. Ronald Reagan did not get a separate intelligence briefing. When I was the deputy national security advisor under Colin Powell, we had our half hour meeting with the President every day at a civilized time, 9:30 until 10:00 because the President didn't come to the office until 9:00 usually. He came in at nine sharp, Reagan did and he left at five sharp. He was like the man in the grey flannel suit. Very methodical.

Anyway, we gave him his intelligence briefing. We would mention a couple of the highlights, then we would just give him the book. He could read it during the course of the day. The PDB, which hasn't really changed that much in its basic format over the years, is a bit like a slick magazine. A small magazine. It is usually eight or ten articles in it. I would say it is divided equally between some spot reports, narrative analysis backing them up, and then some more in depth articles, what we would call a deep dive.

So you would have spot reports, analysis and then some more in depth articles, two or three pages long each, but it would come out to be a magazine of 10 to 15 pages. Mr. Bush liked the briefer to narrate it and then ask questions. Different presidents do it different ways. I have heard that Mr. Obama may not take that much of an oral briefing. He may just take the book and read it. That is what Reagan did. George Herbert Walker Bush the former, he was a CIA guy. He was used to being briefed and he liked that. He liked having the interaction. That was what his son liked too, George W. He would like the briefer to come in and say "The first article, Mr. President, is about Iran and its nuclear program. Here are the highlights of it and here is what they were saying."

Then they would get into a discussion, sometimes even an argument. Which was quite interesting because by then Mr. Bush had been President for four years when I took the job, so nothing was particularly new to him. He was very well versed in all the subjects. So we actually got some really very substantive discussions. So that is what we would do. He loved meeting the analysts. Sometimes, if they did a deep dive on a particular subject (I remember Iran because we had several deep dives on Iran), a couple of the analysts would come over from the intelligence community. Maybe one from DIA and one from the CIA, maybe one from NSA sometimes.

We would have a long discussion, maybe 15 minutes or something, about what was going on in Iran. I remember this officer from Russia came and we had a very good discussion about Russia. So he would take that stuff and he would do it every day of the week except Sunday. When he traveled the briefer from the intelligence community would come with him. He would get electronic versions of the PDB. So that is the way I started my day.

*Q: Who put together this PDB?*

NEGROPONTE: There is this so called PDB staff. The president's daily briefing staff which is composed of-- they are all DNI personnel now. But they would get contributions, they would have people seconded to them from INR, from the FBI. Even the NSA. Now, I don't know what the makeup is right at this moment but the PDB staff then was like a dozen people. They would work every night putting this stuff together, every afternoon. Now sometimes they would squirrel away material for future use when these articles were long time in making, maybe several weeks. But other material gets put together really quick. You get a crisis erupting in country X at 4:00 in the afternoon, the next morning the president has reason to expect some information.

That is not his only source of information, let's not forget. He gets the PDB, he has separate access to the State Department cable traffic. You have the Situation Room sifting all this material for him. Feeding reports up to the National Security Advisor. Bush would meet his NSC advisor before he met us in the morning. So he would have a meeting with Mr. Hadley probably around 7:00 in the morning. He did not have far to travel to get to work and he liked to come early.

*Q: Well the briefing was part of it, but wasn't the main thrust of your work to get everybody on board in sharing information?*

NEGROPONTE: That was a significant part of it. Another part of it was advocating for the intelligence community budget. Some of it was arbitrating the intelligence community budget. Without getting into very highly classified material, I think I could say that for example one of the concerns is how you apportion the budget. I would say roughly speaking the intelligence community is about 10% of the Pentagon budget; let's say, \$50 billion a year. But there is a competition for that budget between NSA, NGA, CIA and how much emphasis do you want to put on human intelligence, and how much on technical intelligence. So there is the usual free for all in terms of this.

Another thing is how to reduce waste and redundant programs. We had a couple of big technical programs, particularly in the areas of satellite reconnaissance that needed fixing. We had to cancel one which was a very high budget item and generates a certain amount of controversy. Any time you go after a big program like that you start hearing from the industry through their congress people. So there was that.

There was also the effort where the president wanted to rebuild our human intelligence capabilities and we worked very hard on that. See the old DNI and the whole post 9/11 period came in the wake of the downsizing of the national security community that occurred in the 1990's. You remember Al Gore and the right sizing programs. Well I was ambassador in the Philippines in 1995 when my station chief walked in and said, "Mr. Ambassador I have just been told to cut the station in half by the end of the fiscal year."

Irony of ironies a week later we unearthed in Manila the Bojinka plot. You might not remember the Bojinka plot but it was a plot to kill the Pope when he visited the Philippines and to blow up ten U.S. airliners flying over the Pacific. Guess who was planning that? Minions and associates of Osama bin Laden. It wasn't called Al Qaeda then, but it was the precursor. There was a guy called Ramzi Yousef who had been involved in it. He escaped the Philippines. He made it to Pakistan and then he was extradited to the United States. I think he is still serving time. Here we unearth this Al Qaeda related plot days after my station chief says we are going to cut the intelligence capabilities and the agency capability in the Philippines. Well we weren't able to repair that kind of stuff until post-9/11 and so forth.

So we worked on issues like that. There was never a shortage of activity. Testifying. A lot of testimony. We presented the annual intelligence assessment. I presented an annual unclassified intelligence assessment to Congress.

*Q: Well at some point were you getting the FBI into the room with everybody else? That was the main thrust wasn't it?*

NEGROPONTE: That was one of them, not the main one. But it was certainly one of them. That is when we worked with this five or six major agency group. But yes, during my time they created the National Security Division of the FBI. We created a national non-proliferation center. I brought Ambassador Ken Brill, a very brilliant career Foreign Service Officer, to run that center.

*Q: I started to interview him and he has gotten re employed.*

NEGROPONTE: So, I brought Ken in. He had been ambassador to the IAEA at one point and also to Cyprus. Very capable guy. We created the National Counter Proliferation Center (NCPC).

*Q: What did that do?*

NEGROPONTE: Well one of the recommendations of the Robb-Silverman report was to create mission managers for the intelligence community which would be focal points for all analysis related to a particular country or subject. This was a little bit to avoid the problem that was perceived about Iraq that there might have been information squirreled away in different agencies and not shared centrally so we could analyze it properly.

So we created these mission managers for certain issues, so that everything relevant to that issue would make it to this mission manager who was then able to help define intelligence requirements and provide the requisite analysis. So one of the first mission manager positions I created was for Iran because of our concern about their nuclear capability. The second was for North Korea, the DPRK. A third one we created the mission manager for non-proliferation which was also the center. So Ken Brill was the mission manager for non-proliferation. The head of the National Counter Terrorism Center was also our mission manager for counter terrorism. So we created those positions. Somebody said why don't you create one for China. Well it is just too big an issue. I was worried about cannibalizing the existing agencies if I created too many of these mission managers. So I thought the right balance was to identify a handful of issues that had mission managers. Well selected. I made a couple of mistakes. I created one for Cuba that didn't work out.

*Q: What went wrong with Cuba?*

NEGROPONTE: I picked the wrong person. He didn't work out.

*Q: Well what would you do with, I mean one of the most capable foreign intelligence operations are the Israelis but they also have a bone to pick.*

NEGROPONTE: You just mentioned a very important point. I tried to avoid-- I am a real operator. That was my core experience in the State Department. I also really respect, from my experience in the NSC and elsewhere, the operational prerogatives of others. So I did not want to play CIA or be a guy who was running agents or supervising the DO or anything like that. I just didn't think that was right. Nor did I want to have anything to do with foreign operations as far as the operational side was concerned.

But there were selected international intelligence relationships that I thought were sufficiently important that I had to at least have an awareness and have a relationship. There were several. One was with the Brits. I had a very good relationship with them. I went there from time to time. And another, and I also confess to having enjoyed it a great deal, I always thought they were a lot of fun to deal with were the Israelis.

So I became very good friends with and had a good relationship with the head of the Mossad, a fellow called Meyer Dagan, who is retired now but he is still very active. The other fellow was the head of Israeli Military Intelligence, Amos Yadlin, who had been one of the pilots who had bombed the Iraqi reactor back in 1981. So he was an interesting fellow. I spent a lot of time with those guys. A lot. I went over there and visited. They came here to visit. They visited other counterparts too. We talked mostly about Iran and what was going on. That was very interesting.

But I let the day-to-day foreign intelligence relationships reside with the CIA. Somebody raised the issue early in my tenure, who should be the DNI representative abroad. I just said simply, automatically double-hat the CIA station chiefs as my rep in those countries. I wasn't trying to create a separate chain of command out there. It turned out to be a wise decision.

One of my successors actually got himself into considerable difficulty by trying to create separate DNI representative positions abroad. Admiral Blair tried, and the CIA balked. And worse yet, the matter was referred to the NSC advisor and he ruled in favor of the CIA. What is worse than to be a Cabinet level Director Of National Intelligence, have a fight with a putatively subordinate agency and lose the fight in the White House. That is not good. Besides, I had no interest.

I went to Japan on Intel. Had some good relationships there, Ambassador Schieffer. Tom Schieffer, the brother of Bob Schieffer the NBC newsman. The Japanese at the time were thinking about creating a national security council and trying to improve their intelligence sharing. They had very bad, they had a lot of stovepipes and were trying to figure out how to better integrate their Intel. I spent a lot of time with Mr. Abe, who is now prime minister. He was at the time the national security advisor of Mr. Koizumi. I went and saw Koizumi and we talked a lot about Intel. Things they could do to improve their national security system. They are still working on it. They haven't got there yet. With Prime Minister Abe they have probably got a better chance than anybody. They don't have an official secrets act. They don't have good sharing. Their HUMINT is lodged in the Foreign Office. Which is where we almost started back in 1945. Kennan and policy

planning was supposed to have a role in human intelligence and covert operations. I went to Iraq as DNI, obviously, and got to see what was going on out there.

*Q: How about, did you ever go to China or Russia?*

NEGROPONTE: As DNI, I avoided that deliberately. I have successors who have had relationships. I didn't go to China as DNI. I certainly did not go to Russia but I met with the head of the FSB, the successor of the KGB, Mr. Patrushev, who is very close to Putin. I met him here in Washington.

I had a parade of visitors come though all the time. You have two kinds of visitors when you are DNI. You have visitors from the counterpart intelligence agencies, which is sort of understandable. Then you have people from autocratic and authoritarian emerging third world regimes who think the Director of National Intelligence must be the second most powerful person in the country, because that is the way it is in their country. So, I got a lot of those kinds of visitors. It was interesting. I am afraid I disappointed them.

*Q: You could tell by the dissidents' side.*

NEGROPONTE: It is a fun job. You have the best view in town at Bolling Air Force Base. It looks out over where Lindbergh landed when he came to Washington one time. You can see the hangars, at the end of this vista, you can see the hangars that were at the end of the runway. There is no runway now. From my office you could see 180-degree view. You could see the Washington Monument and the Washington Cathedral. It is quite breathtaking.

*Q: I looked the other way when I interviewed Jim LaRocco at the National Defense University located in the Coast Guard headquarters.*

NEGROPONTE: Near Fort McNair.

*Q: He had an office that overlooks the river. Well, I would think putting something together like this, you must have spent an awful lot of time not on intelligence but on bureaucracies.*

NEGROPONTE: I tried to avoid that. I certainly spent a lot of time on it, but there were a lot of substantive issues going on. I had been in it because I was interested in foreign policy and national security. Just to give you one example the whole time that I was there Iraq was a huge issue.

*Q: Yeah, because the war...*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly. We were going through the sectarian violence of 2006 and 2007. We were trying to figure out what was happening in Iraq. Was the place going to fall into civil war or was it in a civil war? These were burning issues and the DNI had a valuable contribution to make.

There were also constant Principals Committee meetings and National Security Council meetings. And the DNI was very often the lead-off speaker. You were the person who set the conversation up or you had one of your briefers with you who set it up by saying “here is the latest on what was happening since the last time we met.” So we were busy as hell.

On bureaucracy: well yeah, well you know I don’t have that much patience with bureaucracy and besides, how much organizing of people can you do. They knew what to do and they were sharing information. Actually, technology was our friend. Technology has helped us integrate information in amazing ways. In fact we know now that from subsequent events maybe we were sharing too much with too many people and we weren’t applying enough of the principle of “need to know.” So there is this balance to make sure the information is properly integrated to be sure you have all the relevant pieces of information. But you don’t want to go and share it with Edward Snowden or Corporal Manning.

*Q: We are talking about two leakers of information that have dominated the news this year.*

NEGROPONTE: Yes. Leaking hundreds of thousands of classified documents. I mean, it is totally shocking what has happened. So I think one point we need to make here, we have to ask ourselves a question: was this reform a success? Was it necessary and should we try to turn the clock back and go back to the way it was? Here is my answer to that question, because I think this is really important.

This reform happened because of the background we discussed. 9/11 and the straw that broke the camel’s back was the WMD fiasco. So the reform became inevitable and Mr. Bush decided not to try to block it especially since it was taking place, the legislation was being debated in a presidential election year. Well you know what that means. It is harder to fight things that have strong political impetus in an election year. So that is what happened.

So then the question becomes: is it working or does it need to be changed? My view on this is that it is not the greatest thing since sliced bread; it is not what I would have done if I had the Tabula Rasa to work from. In fact, the legislation was the product of a lot of compromises. There were people who were trying to resist the DNI from having too much authority. There were others who were trying to make the DNI more powerful than he ended up being. But it is what we have got and I think that turning back the clock and re-opening that legislation would open a Pandora’s box. I don’t think it would be constructive.

What I think you can say about the DNI job is the intelligence community does need a manager just like a baseball team needs a manager. For the CIA director do to it doesn’t work because the CIA has too many operational responsibilities, especially if the CIA (in addition to the collection of information and analysis of information) is also going to



have covert operations and paramilitary type activities, which are not inherently intelligence type activities but happen to have ended up in the CIA. There is nothing that says that running a group of paramilitary fighters in Afghanistan or in Iraq is inherently an intelligence activity, but it is the way we have decided to organize. As long as that is the case, the guy who is or the lady who is the director of the CIA is going to be too darn busy doing all of that stuff. Pardon me, I have got an army to run, and pardon me, I have got this and that covert action to do.

So it is good to have somebody who has a little bit more ability to stand back, be a referee between the agencies, massage the budget and be the president's principal, and the law says this, the DNI is the president's principal intelligence advisor. I think that is useful. Now I, in addition to that, I would just add because it was my inclination and proclivity, I considered myself also the analyst in chief. I enjoyed that part and took that responsibility to heart and had the wherewithal to do it. I was responsible for the PDB, and I was responsible for the National Intelligence Council. So I had some reason to feel that I was the analyst in chief by overseeing this large analytic community. Overseeing the large analytic community is not an operational responsibility like running a bunch of stations abroad and running a bunch of paramilitary operators where ever they happen to be operating.

So, I think the reform can be made to work. I regret having left DNI so early, but what happened was Bob Zoellick was appointed head of the World Bank. He had been Condi Rice's deputy. So she was desperate, well not desperate but anxious to get a replacement. He left sometime in the spring or early summer of 2006. Condi talked to me about maybe coming over there. I had unfinished work. I had just been in the DNI job for a little more than a year. Well then the situation dragged on and she talked to other people about becoming deputy. Anyway the issue continued unresolved. I was asked again and I said to the president, and I said to Condi, after all I saw them practically every day, I said, "Look under our system the President decides. I will serve wherever you want me to serve. I will stay as DNI. I had a preference for doing that, or I will come back to State. It would be a great honor to be the Deputy Secretary of State."

I thought the issue was over. I thought I wasn't going to move by the end of 2006. On New Year's Eve I am walking on the beach of Naples, Florida, getting ready to watch the fireworks, and I get a phone call from Steve Hadley, whose in-laws happen to have a house just 20 miles north of Naples. He calls me and says the President has decided he wants me to be Deputy Secretary of State. I guess it must have been a New Year's resolution. It occurred to me the President must have resolved, or Condi must have resolved, we are going to solve this problem. So I was asked and effectively told because I was willing to be told, you are going to be the next Deputy Secretary of State.

*Q: Well John, this is a good place to talk about Deputy Secretary of State Number two.*

NEGROPONTE: I am asked in the beginning, New Years of 2006, the dates are in the book, somewhere on the record, but I guess I became Deputy Secretary in early February of 2007.

*Q: Looking at this and putting on your analytical hat, how well did you feel the government was served by the flow of intelligence? I mean we got a hell of a lot of stuff.*

NEGROPONTE: That is a great question. You are right to ask that. We have, and I told this to the intelligence community and the classes of officers when I went to training courses to see people and stuff. I would say, "Look, we have an intelligence capability second to none. We have tremendous technical resources. We have great human resources, the community is well led, and we have a lot of experience doing this stuff. Our analysts are terrific. You have got to be proud of the quality of analysts you meet throughout the entire government. Well educated, a lot of PhDs who were scholars in the field they were following." I mean it is pretty darned impressive. So, I say second to none.

The difficulty with intelligence is that in the national dialogue and the public debate it tends to always be judged by the perceived failures. You miss one thing-- I mean, America asks for a 100% success rate. They don't want to see any problems. We have to have a 100% success rate with preventing terrorist acts. So if all of a sudden somebody tries to blow up a bomb in Times Square all of a sudden everybody is out chattering about this being an intelligence failure. Or the brothers from Chechnya who were involved in the bombing of the Boston Marathon, did we do enough to prevent that? I have studied this issue quite a bit and I have actually taught a bit about it.

Here is the difficulty. We all know that hindsight is 20-20 vision. If any event occurs, any incident, if you study it in retrospect, you are going to be able to connect the dots. That is the nature of things. You take Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor is actually the definitive study. Roberta Wohlstetter wrote the definitive study on surprise and signals and noise. The difficulty is distinguishing the noise, the signals from the noise. It is not always easy to do. So again my only point is the American public and the American Congress could be very hard on the American intelligence community judging when a particular incident occurs. They choose to attribute it to an "intelligence failure."

But I think we are better prepared than we were prior to 9/11. I think we nipped more darned incidents in the bud. One of the problems is that you can't necessarily divulge those publicly. Although there have been some big successes that have been public. Like there was this plot to bomb a bunch of airliners flying from Manchester, England. They were going to fly from Manchester to the United States.

*Q: Well you mentioned the plot to Kill the Pope and bomb airliners in the Philippines.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly. But that was way back in the 1990's. There are a lot of successes, and I think we are generally better defended, but intelligence is only a tool. It is not a panacea. It is just a tool in our arsenal. It is also not a substitute for good policies. You may not have information that airliner X is going to be attacked and maybe you should have had it, but that is not an excuse for not having locks on the door leading to the cockpit. 9/11 wouldn't have happened if there had been locks on the doors of the

cockpits, for example. So you can't always put all the blame on intel. It is just one element of the situation.

*Q: One of the things, this is strictly from the Foreign Service point of view. You have seen it, and I have seen it. Maybe the CIA will come up with something and from one of their covert sources stamped top secret and all. At the same time, a Foreign Service Officer reading the local newspaper picks up the same item and reports it. The item that has top secret on it gains a lot more credence than the open source reporting.*

NEGROPONTE: Right. Well sometimes they are not any different one from the other and the secret thing is just what we knew anyway. Sometimes it is actually validation of something you think you know. Maybe the public information doesn't have the same sourcing. This is an issue. This is what I would say, to put it in a more positive way. I think one of the fundamental building blocks, if not *the* building block for analysis of foreign situations is the State Department. Without our diplomatic traffic, it would be very hard for these analysts in the intelligence community to do their work. The insights provided by the Foreign Service through overt intelligence collection, not clandestine intelligence collection. After all, Foreign Service Officers are intelligence collectors.

People always say, "why would they make an ambassador head of DNI?" Well you know, we happen to be intelligence collectors. All my life I was a political reporting officer. I have a callus on my finger from all the cables I used to write with a pencil and yellow legal pad. Thousands of words. So we are overt intelligence collectors. I would say the Foreign Service and our 300 diplomatic and consular posts around the world are the baseline for foreign political analysis.

Then the others, whether the CIA or other intelligence agencies, add to that picture more in particularly specialized areas where we are not particularly strong, like the nature of weaponry or whatever is additive, and gives nuance and texture. But more often than not, State Department reporting is the base line.

*Q: Well one of the interesting things is, and please correct me if I am off on this, is in our world situation, the predictions of INR, the Intelligence and Research of the State Department, often is (you might say) more on target than from other agencies.*

NEGROPONTE: Not necessarily. No, I wouldn't agree with that. I certainly wouldn't agree with it as a general proposition. I can tell you what the great strengths of INR are in compared to some of the agencies. I don't think they have enough people or resources. INR is not a big organization. I think it is a total of about 300 people. The intelligence community had about 100,000 people. A lot of them are technicians.

But INR's great strength and, even during the downsizing and everything else, it tends to keep analysts on the same subject matter for long periods of time. So very often the analyst at INR that you will meet on subject X will have been working on that for 15 or 20 years. The rest of the intelligence community had lost a bit of that practice. They are going back to it now. At least they were as I was leaving. We had lost a lot of people

through attrition and right sizing. So, there were a lot of analysts on important subjects that had only three or four or five years' experience in the subject matter. I thought that was less true of INR. They had more dwell time over their targets if you will.

*Q: OK, well this is probably a good place to stop.*

NEGROPONTE: I think so.

*Q: OK, today is 15 August 2013. It is the Ferragosto which is the big summer day holiday in Italy, when Italy shuts down.*

NEGROPONTE: It is also (as my wife reminded me, good Catholic that she is), it is a day of holy obligation for Catholics. I am not a Catholic.

*Q: We had gotten to State.*

NEGROPONTE: We had gotten to the President telling me he wanted me to be Deputy Secretary of State.

*Q: Well this type of change over at one point it was called assistant secretary?*

NEGROPONTE: Undersecretary. When I joined the service there was not a deputy secretary. There was one I think and maybe two undersecretaries. In the old days there was one undersecretary. People like Dean Acheson and Sumner Wells. But by the time I got there in 1960, I think there was an undersecretary for political and one for economic affairs, and eventually one for management. There was no deputy secretary. That job wasn't created until the time of maybe Henry Kissinger or Jimmy Carter, back around there.

*Q: How did they resolve who was in charge when the Secretary was out of town, when they had these undersecretaries?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh there was one who was senior. But now we have reached the point I was the unique deputy secretary, so I was the alter ego during my entire tenure of Miss Rice. But subsequently Mrs. Clinton appointed a second deputy so now there are two deputy secretaries of state, which I don't agree with.

We have just proliferated the high ranking jobs in my lifetime. It is probably one of the less fortunate developments in the Department. We have now got six or seven undersecretaries. We have got two deputy secretaries. Before you know it we are going to have two secretaries of state. There is going to be a secretary for outside and a secretary for inside or something. There are just too many presidential appointees in the Department and it has compounded the difficulty of proper management and effective execution.

What has happened is every significant interest in our society has managed to find a mirror image reflection of itself in the Department of State. So we now have human rights and labor and so on and so forth. I was in on the creation of the Bureau of Oceans Environment and Science, which arose from political pressure.

Dante Fascell, years back, Congressman Dante Fascell insisted on the creation of a communications bureau. Actually that idea was before its time because then the Department abandoned the project. Mr. Fascell died and we downgraded the communications position back to a deputy assistant secretary, which is where it is at now. But actually communications, telecommunications and information technology of course have become unusually important in our lives. So that may have been an example of one that might have been justified to continue. Anyway I became the deputy secretary in February of 2007.

*Q: Whom did you replace?*

NEGROPONTE: I replaced Robert Zoellick who had not been there for seven or eight months. He had gone off to run the World Bank.

*Q: The job was completely empty.*

NEGROPONTE: Completely empty. Nicolas Burns was the undersecretary for political affairs. He sort of fulfilled that role as being the second ranking officer in the Department. He was swamped because he had his own responsibilities, plus being the alter ego of the Secretary is quite a challenge. I took it on.

*Q: I think I asked you before. How did your confirmation go?*

NEGROPONTE: Confirmation was, again, relatively easy. My last three confirmations, Iraq, DNI and Deputy Secretary of State were all basically smooth. The votes were in the 90s. It may have even been a unanimous vote this time, a voice vote. I can't recall for sure, but I encountered no difficulty in getting confirmed.

I had told Steve when he called me, I really appreciate the President asking me to do the job, personally asking me which he did. And I would really welcome him being at my swearing in. Lo and behold the President did that. I really had a very interesting and very nice swearing in. Once I was confirmed I got sworn in quickly in Miss Rice's office by Miss Rice. But then we had the formal ceremony on the eighth floor in the Ben Franklin Room. The President came. It was a very nice event.

A week or two before, I had sworn in an entering Foreign Service class, the 132<sup>nd</sup> entering class of the Foreign Service. There was about 100 of them. I had sworn them in, and then I invited them to my swearing in. We all took note of the fact they were there, and the President kind of nudged Miss Rice during the ceremony and whispered, "Why don't I ever meet people like that? Why don't I ever see these people?"

Lo and behold, later on we arranged for the entire class to go and visit with the President in the White House. I told them they never had it so good. I don't know many A-100 courses that during their training had the opportunity to meet the President of the United States. They went and spent an hour with him. It apparently was really nice.

I still run into the officers. I was in Juarez, Mexico, last week on a visit in my capacity as Chairman of the Council of the Americas. One of the consulate officers stepped up and said, "By the way I was in the 132<sup>nd</sup> A-100 class and I remember you swearing us in and meeting the President." So people still talk about it.

*Q: Of course. Did you find you were one of the first or maybe the first legitimate Foreign Service Officer to hold the position?*

NEGROPONTE: I was at that time one of three. The first one was. What was his name. He was our ambassador in Moscow. Silver hair. Gosh. He had been ambassador to Moscow, ambassador to...

*Q: Well let's see. Stoessel?*

NEGROPONTE: Walter Stoessel. Walt Stoessel, and then Larry Eagleburger. Then myself. And now Bill Burns as we speak. So I was the third.

*Q: It seems like a good development to have, as in any organization, which you might say professional next to the principal.*

NEGROPONTE: I think it is a good idea.

*Q: We are talking about bureaucratically speaking and all.*

NEGROPONTE: It is a good message to the service too. I took my Foreign Service responsibilities very seriously. I met every single intern. We were taking about one class a month at that time or one every couple of months. The intake was very high, and the classes were big. They were 100 people plus sometimes. I went and spoke to every single class. I swore them in when I could, or when the secretary wasn't available to do it. I met the junior officers. Whenever I traveled abroad I would always meet with the junior officers. They were numerous. We have a lot more young officers in the field doing consular work or rotational assignments. I took that part of my responsibilities very seriously, just as I took my responsibility as chairman of the D committee, which recommends officers for ambassadorial appointments to the Secretary.

*Q: I want to come to that, but first can we talk about your relationship with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. How did you find that?*

NEGROPONTE: Well first of all it was very good. I liked and admired Miss Rice a lot. She is a very warm hearted and decent and considerate person. She is extremely efficient. She is one of the most efficient people I have ever met in my life. She could start her day

at 4:30 in the morning on the treadmill, got her exercise for an hour. And then she would breeze through her day and then by 7:00 or 8:00 at night she was going out to a dinner. She still looked refreshed and fit and healthy.

She was able to take the stress and strain of her job. She rarely stumbled and never wasted time. I was amazed how much she could pack into her schedule. Personally, we got along just fine. It was a friendly, personable relationship. I don't think we ever had a tense word between us in the almost two years I worked in that job. It was a delight to work for her.

*Q: What were you able to observe of her relationship with the President?*

NEGROPONTE: I knew it to be very good. I had seen it for the previous two years, I had been Director of National Intelligence, so I saw them whenever they met or whenever I was in the Oval Office and she was there also. Or I saw them interact at the National Security Council meetings. I think Condoleezza Rice's influence was in the ascendancy during her tenure as Secretary of State. And Vice President Cheney's, I think, was proportionally diminished. I think the President listened to her more than he listened to him in the second term.

*Q: Well in a way were you seeing this sort of descendance of Cheney? Due to things not turning out the way they had been predicted.*

NEGROPONTE: That may be a matter of conjecture on my part. But it would be informed conjecture. It would still be speculation. I think the President felt that his first team, the early team had gotten him into a bit of a mess. I don't think he felt it was the wrong thing to do. He is not the kind of guy to look back. He makes decisions and he moves on. In that way he was a little bit like Harry Truman. He didn't lose a lot of sleep over these decisions. He made them. He knew they were important. I think he began to understand more about his job. He was more of his own man the second term.

I think definitely Mr. Rumsfeld's influence and the Vice President's influence were in decline. I sense the Vice President was struggling with more health issues in his second term. I thought he looked less physically able to me in the second term than he did the first term, so maybe that was a factor, but Condi was really on the uptick, and pretty much had a clear field with Mr. Powell no longer there.

She moved over from a position of confidence with the President and took over the Department of State. She left her own person, Steve Hadley, the person who had been her deputy, as National Security Advisor. I think Condi sort of became the first among equals between the three top members of the President's national security team; that is to say, herself, the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Advisor. Shortly after, Mr. Gates became the Secretary of Defense. There was a more compatible team there.

*Q: Well, let's look at your job. I would assume that one of your main jobs was making sure the State Department ran well.*

NEGROPONTE: Well my job was defined or described at the chief operating officer, so I had a mandate to pretty much make sure the Department ran well. So here are some of the issues that had to do with running the Department that I was involved in. One was staffing the embassies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Because they were a huge drain on our personnel system. We had as a major objective not to have directed assignments. We wanted everybody to go as a volunteer. So I spent a lot of time jawboning and twisting arms if you will of senior officers to go and do a stint in Iraq or Afghanistan. They all knew it when they came to see me.

The senior officers who came to see me knew I was chairman of the D committee. They would tell me they felt they were ready for an ambassadorial job. I said, OK, but you know how you are going to get one more easily. It is by volunteering to go to Baghdad or Kabul. I persuaded a lot of them to do that and then we delivered. A lot of senior officers who volunteered to go to Iraq or Afghanistan got ambassadorships afterwards.

*Q: You had already been in charge of one of those, but were you concerned that Baghdad and Kabul, the people who had been there worked very hard in conditions and all, but they couldn't really get out and around. There were so bloody many people there.*

NEGROPONTE: Well we still needed people though; we still needed to staff the jobs. I took up kind of a manager's or an admin officer's point of view of this kind of thing. I said, "Look, here are the slots we have got to fill and I have got to find people to do it." We are going to ask the people to do that and then we are going to take their willingness to go there and their service in those extreme hardship posts into account when we consider people for ambassadorships. There was almost a direct correlation. It was one of the factors that helped us avoid having directed assignments. That was one of the issues. We had another, just to give you an example of the kind of thing we worked on. The Secretary had a staff meeting two or three times a week. She met with all of the assistant secretary level people. She missed those meetings a lot while she was traveling. So I held the fort and very often chaired those meetings.

We had a big consular issue where there was a time we had a backlog of a million or two passports. I remember a Senator walking out of a hearing one day and saying, "What is our government come to when we can't even issue our people passports?" I talked to Pat Kennedy about this. I said, "You know I have watched this movie before too often. If we can't perform on this someone is going to try to take that passport function away from us." So it was the summertime, it was the summer of '07. I just asked that all summer interns in the Department of State that summer work in reviewing passport applications. We created a kind of gigantic emergency task force. In about 45 days we liquidated the backlog.

Pat resisted a little bit at first because you know, if you don't have a backlog, then people won't pay extra to get an expedited issuance. That had become a bit of a source of revenue for us. My feeling was "look, it is more important that we serve the public absolutely." We have solved that problem. It has not become an issue again. I was



responsible for many of the budget reviews that we went through with each of the bureaus in the department and in AID before we presented the overall 150 Account budget to Secretary Rice. The budget process was always a bit time consuming but very interesting and important.

*Q: Budgets. Did you find that security both security in embassies and all around it became almost all consuming or not?*

NEGROPONTE: Well that certainly became after 9/11 and with the construction of these new rather almost impregnable buildings, architecture became a pretty significant factor. You are right. Our security budget I think reached something like a level of \$2 billion a year. It was huge, and we had a big incident during my time.

The Blackwater episode in Iraq, where a convoy being protected by Blackwater ended up killing about a dozen people at a crossroads in Baghdad in what seemed to be (and turned out to be) an unjustified use of force. We quickly formed a small committee. We invited former Ambassador Stapleton Roy and former NATO commander General George Joulwan back to run this little committee together with Pat Kennedy. The three of them went out to Baghdad for three weeks to review the situation and make some recommendations. It was the beginning of the end of our relationship with this security company called Blackwater. But it raised the whole issue that we had post-9/11 that the U. S. government was using so many contractors and so few of its own in-house capability.

*Q: What was the reason for this?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, when you dig into this the reasons are diverse. One of the reasons was in the 1990's we had the downsizing and right sizing. A lot of these national security functions had atrophied. So it was hard to replace these capabilities rapidly. One of the ways of doing it was to ramp up your contractor levels. It can be a very cost efficient way of doing business.

I had a bit of a problem with SY itself. The man who was in charge of SY, I guess we call it DS now, but when this Blackwater thing occurred he left. He resigned from the service. He had not been to Baghdad for a couple of years, which I found very surprising for someone who was running diplomatic security at that time. I also discovered, it was something I had been aware of before but I became even more acutely aware of as deputy secretary, that we had more people serving in the field offices in the United States than we had in Iraq and Afghanistan on the diplomatic security side. I think that is shameful. Frankly it continues.

*Q: These people were running basically rather routine security clearances.*

NEGROPONTE: Well investigations and they provide security for foreign visitors, dignitary protection, but I frankly think that DS has lost its bearings a little bit. It has

gotten too wrapped up in its stateside responsibilities and not enough in its field responsibilities. That persisted despite the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

You have to look at Benghazi. I wonder how many senior security people we had in Libya when all those incidents occurred. There is some sort of disconnect there between the importance of the jobs and the places we are willing to send diplomatic security officers. Anyway, we brought somebody else in to try to fix it. We eventually dropped our contract with Blackwater. We deployed more State Department security guys out there so that at least every security detail had, if anybody was providing protection to one of our principals, the ambassador or the DCM or whatever, had a State Department Diplomatic Security officer as a part of their detail. That kind of thing took time.

As I said, the Secretary traveled a lot so I ended up back at the NSC meetings and the Oval Office frequently. When the President had visitors from foreign countries, he invited me to attend. For me that was a very comfortable role because I knew the President well and I enjoyed it. What could be more fun than spending St Patrick's Day in the Oval Office with the President and the Prime Minister of Ireland?

*Q: Obviously a meeting of considerable significance.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly. Very important stuff. In fact I was rushing to the meeting and I had forgotten to wear a green tie that morning. I was running down the corridor of the seventh floor and I saw some junior officer wearing a nice green tie and I commandeered it from him. I promised to give it back but I said I absolutely had to have a green tie. I said, "I will give you a battlefield promotion!"

So I did that and then I had a portfolio of issues that I followed. Some of them were pretty time consuming and important. One was the political relationship with China. Bob Zoellick had conducted this so-called high level political dialogue with China and I was in charge of that. We called it the strategic political dialogue and I dealt regularly with my Chinese counterpart. He was the vice foreign minister of China. He was called Dai Bing Guo. But then lo and behold, Dai Bing Guo got promoted to becoming the State Counselor for Foreign Policy, which is the highest ranking job in that field. It was sort of like becoming the NSC advisor. But he said he wanted to continue the dialog with me, and that he was going to continue to be responsible for it. So about every six months we got together. Sometimes in China, sometimes in the States. We went over the entire U.S.-China political agenda. That was very interesting.

*Q: One of the things that always had disturbed me in dealing with China is for internal political reasons. It is so easy to push almost the xenophobic button in China and almost get the whole country enraged over spy planes or what have you and this doesn't add anything. It is obviously, it doesn't help relations.*

NEGROPONTE: Some of that has even been compounded by the fact of the Internet and the fact that communications are now so prolific and instantaneous. So now you have these Netizens, citizens who use the Internet, and so that is a problem.

But I think our dialogue was very serious. We shared a common view of the importance of the relationship and how we tried to make it work. Bob Zoellick had coined this phrase that we wanted China to be “responsible stake holders.” You couldn’t be just a free rider. You couldn’t just export billions of dollars of products to the rest of the world, pocket the profits and then just devil take the hindmost and everything else just leave it in disregard. So we talked to the Chinese about the situation in the Korean peninsula, the whole question of North Korea’s nuclear intentions. We had talks about Iran, a lot of talks about Iran. We talked about various humanitarian situations in Africa, particularly about Darfur. China decided to send a construction battalion to the Darfur, which was a good thing. They of course had their perennial issues that they always insisted on talking about, Taiwan. Endless hours of discussion about Taiwan.

*Q: I just wonder, when you have one of those issues it is kind of like Berlin for us at one point. You kind of wonder what people are talking about because they have to be repeating themselves.*

NEGROPONTE: They do. But that was I think part of the point. This repetitiveness of the point is just to remind you not to ever dare to think otherwise.

I went to China to meet Dai a couple of times and on one of the trips I went to his home province. We had our meeting in his home province in the middle of winter. It was a year when China had a lot of snowstorms. In fact we got stuck there for an extra day. We couldn’t de-ice. I had a Navy aircraft and it couldn’t get the wings de-iced. The Navy commander flying the plane didn’t want to risk taking off. Other planes were taking off but he didn’t want to try to leave, so we spent an extra night there.

Anyway, I remember that previous night. We had a formal dinner. He said after dinner we must have another important consultation. Of course, he takes me to this small room and there about two or three people on each side of him. What was it, another hour on Taiwan. They believe in nothing if not emphasis. And Tibet they cared a lot. They always were worried about, they liked George Bush and liked what he did. George Bush did a lot to deepen relations with China. He had very good relations with China.

But it drove them absolutely crazy to see him being photographed with the Dalai Lama, but it happened. Mr. Bush said, “Well that is the way I feel about it. It is going to happen more.” I remember going to Congress with him when the Dalai Lama got the Congressional Medal of Honor. There is Speaker Pelosi, the Dalai Lama and Mr. Bush holding hands with the Dalai Lama. The Chinese must have not liked that photograph at all. The China part was important.

And then probably the toughest part of my portfolio was Pakistan. I sort of had the lead on the political part off the U.S.-Pakistan relationships. That was tough. I went there several times. We had an excellent ambassador there, Ambassador Anne Paterson, who is now our ambassador to Egypt, whom I had known as a junior officer. In fact in the D Committee I may have recommended that she be the ambassador. I can’t recall what the

timing was there. I had known her as a junior officer way back in Ecuador when I was political counselor. I must have gone to Pakistan a half dozen times.

*Q: What was the problem in Pakistan?*

NEGROPONTE: There were many problems in Pakistan. Some of them are just inherent in the political situation in that country, the problem of civil, military relations. The fact that the foreign policy and the national security policy is run entirely by their military. Then there are problems relating to Afghanistan and the fact that the Pakistanis play a very complicated game of supporting elements of the insurgency in Afghanistan as part of their effort to prevent India from getting too much influence in Afghanistan. It is a very complex, but it was all viewed as part of their defense in depth against India.

I think what really made it quite difficult is that helping the Taliban, this is all done by the Pakistani intelligence service, by helping the Taliban in Afghanistan some of the problems of the Taliban and Taliban violence started to spread not only in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, but spilt over into the settled areas. You started getting terrorist violence in places like Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad. So a sort of Pandora's box got opened. I think they began to realize they may have created a real problem for themselves.

Then there was this problem of the Kashmiri extremist group called Lashkar-e-Taiba (LT). We persuaded them finally after many demarches to pull back LT from Kashmir and to stop causing violence inside of Kashmir. I think one of the tradeoffs they reached with LT was OK, we may not let you operate in Kashmir but they didn't restrict them from migrating as far as Iraq. We even found some LT working with Al Qaeda in Iraq. They are an LT type group. Then a group related to the LT in 2008 towards the end of the administration around Thanksgiving carried out a brazen attack in Bombay, in Mumbai, killing more than 100 people.

*Q: Including some Americans.*

NEGROPONTE: It was staged from Pakistan. It was a brazen attack. I got thrown into the breach there and went out to Pakistan I went out to Delhi to talk to my Indian counterpart to try to encourage a bit more information sharing between the two countries.

*Q: All right, you get Pakistan. Pakistan plays a very important communications role and all with our efforts in Afghanistan. But Pakistan is seen by many to be very close to a rogue state.*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, on the other hand we arrested and captured or killed more Arab Al Qaeda in Pakistan than anywhere else. These people who were operating on the frontier. They call it the frontier territories. We killed more Arabs up there. Pakistan also provides us the logistic route through Karachi and then overland through Pakistan into Afghanistan, vital supplies for our military in Afghanistan. So they also played an

important role in supporting our war effort. It was what I would call it an ambiguous relationship.

*Q: What sort of reaction, was it a dual reaction between you might say the civilian political powers and the Pakistan intelligence service? When you went to deal, did you find your brain in very different sets of negotiations?*

NEGROPONTE: Well the real dealings on national security had to be with the military. Most of the time I was deputy secretary, the president was Musharraf. Musharraf was president until March of 2008. So of the first year I dealt with President Musharraf.

*Q: I think he was of the military.*

NEGROPONTE: He was of the military but he was a reasonable military officer. When I was there he was conducting back channel negotiations with India working on some kind of accommodation with India. He made quite a bit of progress. But then several things happened to the Musharraf dictatorship. One of them was Benazir Bhutto returned from exile, and then Nawaz Sharif, who is now prime minister. Benazir, I think in considerable disregard for her own personal safety, organized a couple of rallies in different places to celebrate her return to Pakistan. A lot of people were warning her please be careful not to do this. She ended up being murdered at a large political rally. So that was a great tragedy.

That led to pressures on President Musharraf to take off his uniform prior to the elections that were taking place in early 2008. His party lost the elections and he stepped down from power. I think it was around March of 2008. Mr. Zardari, the widower of Benazir Bhutto, became president.

*Q: That family had a very bad reputation for corruption.*

NEGROPONTE: Yes they do,

*Q: Maybe they all do, I don't know.*

NEGROPONTE: I don't know whether Mrs. Bhutto was corrupt or not. There is a lot of corruption in Pakistan. There is a lot of social inequality. There are more divisions than just civilian and military.

The other division is between the people who came from India and the people who were there or had already lived in Pakistan as a territory for generations. People came from India were called Muhajirs. They tended to be more in the urban areas. They did not own land because they couldn't get access to land. The landed aristocracy was Mrs. Bhutto and her family. The Muhajir was Musharraf. Musharraf was born in what is to day India and came over. So there are some real social cleavages and social divergences that are quite important in Pakistan.

Anyway, it is one of those relationships you just try and manage. It is not easy to point in a clear-cut direction. You try and manage it. You know it is intrinsically important because they have almost 200 million people. They have nuclear weapons.

We worked with them on that issue too, on the safety of their nuclear weapons. Even though they wouldn't necessarily tell us everything about their nuclear program, we had some relationships over the safety of their weapons. Of course they neighbored Afghanistan, where we were engaged in a shooting war. So, we had a real stake in trying to reach some kind of meeting of the minds on how to control the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan so that the Afghan Taliban could not just move back and forth with impunity, which I am afraid for the most part they did. I mean their leadership lives in and around Quetta, Pakistan. Of course, at that time we did not know that bin Laden was living in Pakistan.

*Q: What about India? During the time you were there how were relations with them?*

NEGROPONTE: Well India was part of this very interesting foreign policy of President Bush. He focused a lot on the emerging powers. China, India, Brazil. He cultivated those leaders. He saw, he understood and believed and correctly understood in my opinion, that global order consists in a way of us and our allies right, maybe the OECD type countries, and then the emerging world. Set aside for a moment the rouge states and the failing states. But in terms of the organized world, it is either us and our allies or the emerging powers. So if you are going to have a stable world order you have really got to focus a fair amount on these emerging countries and how are you going to have a meeting of the minds with them?

In true Bush style, he believed the first step was to cultivate the personal relationships. So he did that in spades with China both with Jiang Zemin and then with Hu Jintao. Then he did it in Brazil with Lula. He also reached out to India, although that was a little bit more institutional. He got to know the prime minister of India, but Condi put a lot of emphasis on India. In fact I think she may have published an article during the administration about the rising importance of India.

Of course it is true, and the reason India was so important apart from the obvious fact that it has got 1.2 billion people is that with the end of the Cold War India had more freedom of action. They sort of broke out of this Soviet orbit that they had been in during the Cold War. The end of the Cold War gave India options that it did not feel it had before. So they in the 1990's instituted an economic reform policy and so forth. That is when Indian business and high-tech and industry started to develop in a big way. Then we launched this initiative to improve relations with India.

It was Nick Burns who negotiated this very important agreement with India to share nuclear energy technology. This was a big breakthrough because India of course was not going to be a member of the non-proliferation treaty. It was not a "sanctioned" nuclear power, and yet as we all know it has nuclear weapons. But notwithstanding that fact, the Bush administration pushed for a nuclear energy cooperation agreement. We pushed it

through. We negotiated it. We got the international community to accept it. We got it accepted at the IAEA, and we got it through the Congress. It was very difficult, and in fact it was one of the most exciting negotiations I was involved in during my time there.

I got called up by John Rood, who was the acting undersecretary for political and military matters. You know T bureau at State? He was in Vienna. It was midnight over there. He said, "Look, the Chinese and some other delegations are balking at our plan which we have got to get approved by the IAEA the governing body." I can remember working with Steve Hadley who was the national security advisor. We drafted it up in very short order. I mean, in half an hour or something, a letter for the President to send to Hu Jintao to solicit his support, because the delegates were about to break up and we would not be able to collect them together again for weeks or even months.

So we got the president to sign the letter and we sent it over there. We sent it to China and everything else, and as a result we were able to work our will in the early hours of that morning in Austria. I think one of the interesting things when you are Deputy Secretary of State is you may not be responsible for the bulk of the negotiation but there are times when you can play a role in intervening in a situation. So that is just one example of the kind of opportunity that would arise from time to time.

*Q: Was there ever talk of India being a counterweight to China?*

NEGROPONTE: Some people do that, and some countries do that. I personally discouraged that kind of thinking. The Japanese think that way.

*Q: Well they have to.*

NEGROPONTE: They say, let's have four way talks between us and Australia and the U.S. and India. Well gee, tell me who that is directed at. I always felt we should avoid trying to be provocative to China, because that would just piss them off. To me it was just an indication that we had to worry more about the architecture for peace and the architecture for maintaining security in the Far East, which as you know was just nowhere near as developed as the Atlantic architecture, right? But that discussion continues and will continue I am sure, but it was one of the issues: what should the architecture for security be in the East Asian and Pacific countries?

*Q: Or it was the China seas and the various islands down there building up?*

NEGROPONTE: It was. It was building up but it was not as acute as it is now. It seems to have been accentuated in the last several years. But the dispute was there in the Philippines and in Vietnam. There have already been some incidents and shootings. Blood had been spilled over that question.

But we also collaborated with China in one of the very active items on the portfolio at the time. It was Ambassador Chris Hill who handled it principally. That was the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the so-called six party talks which included

us and North and South Korea and China and Japan and Russia. Chris participated in those very well. We did make some modest accomplishments. We got the North Koreans to destroy their nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. What Chris affectionately called the CNN moment where we had a reactor being blown up in front of all the international cameras. That problem still continues. It is one where we seem to make two steps forward and sometimes one if not two steps back.

*Q: Well how did you find the South Koreans as a participant in these discussions and in other matters?*

NEGROPONTE: There was a before and an after. There were two different presidents. The first president was Roh Moo-hyun, but the second one was called Lee Myung-bak and he was a business man. His thinking was more compatible with ours.

But Roh, this I remember from DNI, didn't believe there was a North Korea threat. I went to visit South Korea as DNI. I remember meeting my intelligence counterpart. He didn't think there was a serious threat from North Korea either. Then I went to see the president and he asked, "What threat?" That was the tenor, that is what shaped the whole discussion. Then I remember going to visit the head of military intelligence in Seoul after that. He said, "Welcome to the government department that believes there is threat." So I would say during Roh's time things in Korea on the question of a nuclear threat were a bit confused.

Lee Myung-bak had a clearer idea of what it is we were dealing with. I mean, I enjoyed dealing with the South Koreans. I think the Koreans themselves are conflicted about how to deal with this. They are conflicted about the issue of reunification. So one moment they are worried that if they reunify, they are going to have to absorb this poor country and are going to be flooded by refugees. It is going to be an unmanageable situation. We don't want to repeat the experience of East Germany with West Germany etc.

Then on the other hand, if you start giving them advice about dealing with North Korea they say, "Don't tell us how to deal with North Korea. That is part of our country." So I think they need a clearer idea in their own mind of what the stages are that are needed to achieve reunification. It has obviously got to be a staged process. There are concerns about their ability to absorb North Korea and whether foreign troops are going to be allowed to be stationed there.

What China is worried about is if we reunify the Koreas, they don't want American troops on their border. We would have to make provisions to not have troops on their border. So there are a lot of issues there. We have always danced around the re-unification issue. And yet my own view is if we could reach a common view on reunification between the parties that the rest would be easier including the denuclearization. If you are eventually going to become part of the other country then maybe nuclear weapons aren't as important.



Anyway we never got that far I am afraid. The important thing to highlight from the point of being deputy secretary of state at that time it was an area of collaboration with the People's Republic of China. That was really the important point at that particular moment.

*Q: Were you getting the feeling and also this comes from intelligence, your intelligence but that there really was a new China was emerging?*

NEGROPONTE: Oh, and how. I had been there of course with Dr. Kissinger in 1972, so I had seen them all running around in their Mao tunics and riding bicycles and no automobiles, and whatever. A couple of hundred dollars a year per capita income, drab housing. Fast forward 40 years and there they are with skyscrapers more than 100 stories high in downtown Shanghai. Chinese tourists everywhere you go on the periphery, Hong Kong and elsewhere. Lots of money and feeling their oats. So yeah you could really see China on the go, no question about it.

*Q: We will come back to different countries but it is just raises the question. What at this particular period, what was the role, or did you see the role of the Internet and this whole ability to communicate rather easily?*

NEGROPONTE: Well it was moving fast, not as fast as it is moving as of late and cyber security wasn't quiet the security issue it is today. But we were getting there. That was during my time as DNI that we set up the cyber command and all of that. So the Internet, I would say it was becoming important. We were just starting to experiment with various forms of non-conventional communications with people tweeting and all that kind of thing, Facebook and so on and so forth. Towards the end of my tenure people were experimenting with that kind of thing.

I feel I should mention a few other parts of the world that I did work in. The president had me join him two years running on his meeting with the leaders of Canada and Mexico. He had a security and prosperity partnership with Canada and Mexico. Just sort of a NAFTA organization or a NAFTA legacy if you will. The first year we met at this nice resort near Montreal called Montebello. The largest log cabin structure, it is a beautiful hotel, in Canada, in North America. The second year we met in New Orleans. President Bush hosted it in New Orleans. Those are usually two-day conferences.

They were important to me personally because I had been so involved in the U.S. Mexico relationship and the North American Free Trade Agreement, and also they were important because it was at that first meeting in Montebello where we announced that so-called Mérida Initiative where we decided to beef up our security assistance to Mexico to combat narcotrafficking. So I was in on the ground floor in this renewed effort to support Mexico in the war on drugs.

I continue to believe that our relationships with Mexico and Canada are hugely important and are sometimes taken for granted, unfortunately. So I was always pleased when the President showed interest. He used to tell me when we were meeting with President

Calderón of Mexico, he said, “Ponte, this is what we would have been doing more of if it hadn’t been for 9/11.”

*Q: Let’s take Canada first. What were the major issues with Canada?*

NEGROPONTE: You know at that particular time I can’t recall whether we had any real irritants with Canada. One of the irritants for them was they were deeply involved in the conflict in Afghanistan. They had deployed significant numbers of troops. I guess I would say one of the biggest issues for them was they took an enormous number of casualties relative to the size of their force. They took very high casualties in Afghanistan. When you talk to them privately they were a little bit disillusioned by the performance of the other NATO countries in Afghanistan. They didn’t feel that the others were taking the war seriously and fighting as hard.

*Q: One hears reports of the Germans sort of sitting off, you know.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly, that really upset them. So that was an issue, but frankly I didn’t sense, now that you mention it, that we had quite as many irritants in the relationship as we had in earlier years when I was running the Bureau of Oceans, Environment and Science. The Northwest Passage was then an issue. Fisheries. Acid Rain.

*Q: Fishing water, the whole thing.*

NEGROPONTE: I think things were better.

*Q: Maybe the NAFTA was...*

NEGROPONTE: I will tell you one issue that bothered them was the “Thickening” of the border. They were upset that because of 9/11 we had made it harder to cross the border. For example the requirement that Americans now use passports, which happened after 9/11, where previously you could just get back into the country with just a driver’s license. So anything that had an effect of slowing down either the speed of the crossings or the volume of the traffic bothered Canada. The ambassador, a very fine gentleman, David Wilson, used to frequently express concern about the “Thickening” of the border.

*Q: I think all of us who go to Canada from time to time can say that the wait at the border is longer and is a pain in the neck.*

NEGROPONTE: And then young people and all that stuff. We used to waive the identification requirement for people under a certain age. All those things became a bit more complicated after 9/11. So we had to work on those. That concerned them. There was NATO, there was the border. I am sure there were other issues but the overall relationship was good. The political compatibility between Bush and Harper, both conservatives, made a difference.

*Q: Let's turn to Mexico. I mean in the first place this was a period where there was practically a civil war, an outright war with drug gangs.*

NEGROPONTE: Right, thousands of people being killed. A terrible situation. Trade continued to be at a fairly high level, although we went through the beginnings of the economic crisis towards the end of the Bush administration. But probably the most important issue on the agenda was, well there were two things.

First of all, we had excellent cooperation with Mexico on security in general in terms of tracking terrorists, suspicious people, foreigners who try to come through the United States using Mexican soil, using Mexico as a kind of conduit. We had very good cooperation with them on those kinds of issues. But the real problem was the havoc that was being created by these drug wars down there, and they basically were drug cartels themselves fighting for control of the drug routes.

The big difference in the last decade, in that decade of 2000-2010 compared to say when I was ambassador in Mexico now almost 20 years ago, is that in my time when I got there in 1989, the cartels and the drug traffic were controlled by Colombians. The Mexicans were just sort of the auxiliaries if you will. Mexican criminals, I guess, must have reached the conclusion, "Hey we can do this ourselves. Why should we let some Colombians make all the money?" So Mexican cartels emerged and they tended to grow out of each city. The Tijuana cartel, the Juarez cartel and so forth. They started fighting with each other and they fought like hell, and they are still fighting.

*Q: Is there much we can do about that?*

NEGROPONTE: Well we did. We have a lot more intelligence sharing than we used to do. We gave material assistance, some several hundred million, I think it was about \$400 million a year. Very interestingly, and this made a big difference, the Mexicans now, and this has been true for about ten years, are willing to extradite narcotraffickers of Mexican nationality to the United States. They didn't used to be willing to extradite their own nationals to our country. So, if you have a real important criminal who is wanted in the United States and you don't want to go through the fracas and turbulence that might be generated by arresting the guy and prosecuting him in Mexico, because you know how these traffickers are. They can really shake the place up. Send them to the States. He gets prosecuted up here. It kind of removes some of the pressure. So there was that.

But I would say we maintained a good relationship with Mexico. The president had a very good ambassador there, Antonio Garza, who was there for the entire eight years. He was a personal friend of the President. He was from Texas. He had a role in Texas politics. Antonio Garza had real access to President Bush. He would stay at the White House when he would come to Washington, things like that. So I think that the relationship was in pretty good hands. So that was one Latin relationship that was important to President Bush.

But he cared about his relationship with other Latin countries. He spoke some Spanish. He had a very good relationship with Mr. Uribe, the President of Colombia. Plan Colombia had really begun to take hold. That had been instituted by President Clinton. Uribe really did a lot to restore order in that country.

We had a major rescue operation that occurred during the time I was deputy secretary that was conducted by the Colombian military, but we provided intelligence support to them. That was managed through our ambassador, Bill Brownfield. The rescue of Senator Betancourt and the three American hostages, contractors. That was a very smooth and skilled operation. Bill Brownfield was right in the middle of that. I watched that one very carefully.

Another major thing that happened during the time I was Deputy was the Israeli bombing of the nuclear reactor that was being built with the help of North Koreans in Syria. The Israelis took it out during the time I was Deputy Secretary.

*Q: You kind of wonder at the Syrian judgment. Particularly in that area. They knew the Israelis could get there at any point practically.*

NEGROPONTE: In that sense it differs substantially from the situation in Iran which we also followed very closely both when I was DNI and then as Deputy Secretary. Iran is very complex, it is farther advanced and they are farther away from Israel. Syria is an easy target for the Israelis. What was really fascinating about this was the Israelis kept it completely secret. They never wanted to confirm that they had done this.

*Q: The Syrians didn't either.*

NEGROPONTE: But an even more fascinating part was the first thing the Syrians did after it happened was to tell everybody to shut up and they immediately bulldozed the entire site. They tried to remove or cover up any trace that there had ever been work on a reactor in the country at all.

But this situation was actually kind of long and protracted. It all happened in secret. We first discovered the existence of this reactor at least six months before the Israeli bombing. We had a number of very hush-hush meetings about the whole thing. It was very fascinating. I remember going home a couple of times at night and telling my wife I am living through an experience right now that I don't think science fiction could come up with anything quite so incredible. Because it really was in the way it was handled. The remote area, the North Koreans, the success in keeping it quiet.

*Q: Were the Pakistanis involved in this?*

NEGROPONTE: No they weren't. I don't know where the original, technology might have come from I honestly forget. I am pretty sure it came through North Korea. I have forgotten. The key point was the Israelis took it out. If the Israelis did that to Iran, Iran would make a huge hullabaloo it would be a major international incident. The Syrians

were so embarrassed by it that all they wanted to think of was covering it up. Fascinating. That was an important development during that time.

*Q: On Latin America, where stood Cuba? Had it reached the point where it is now from our perspective a minor irritant or what?*

NEGROPONTE: Well there was not much attention paid to Cuba. There was one exercise. Castro got sick while I was DNI. There was some speculation including probably one of the biggest mistakes I made as DNI was to publicly say that I thought Castro would die in six months because Intel doctors said that he had something called Crohn's Disease. This was fatal. Here we are just about eight years later and he is still alive. We had pictures of him on the roof of his clinic looking half dead.

So when Castro got very sick that sort of caused a little bit of inter-agency planning that we conducted under the chairmanship of a group at the State Department. Carlos Gutierrez who was Secretary of Commerce and Cuban American had a part in it. At one point even Jeb Bush dropped by at one or two of the meetings. So there was a little bit of contingency planning. But it never happened. I mean the change that we thought might be imminent was not imminent. So we went back to status quo ante.

*Q: Was [Hugo] Chavez an irritant at this point?*

NEGROPONTE: Chavez was always an irritant.

*Q: He was the president of Venezuela.*

NEGROPONTE: George Bush handled it brilliantly. Mr. Bush never rose to the bait. Chavez was constantly insulting him. Mr. Bush completely ignored him and refused even to mention his name, which I think must have exasperated Mr. Chavez to no end. So we just sort of ignored him. But we did a major accomplishment during the Bush administration was to get the Central American Free Trade Agreement approved by Congress. The so-called CAFTA. That was a big deal, very positive. We successfully concluded the negotiation of a free trade agreement with Colombia and Panama. Also with South Korea.

*Q: Did we go to Chile or not?*

NEGROPONTE: You know we had already had one. It had already gone though. But we got them in Panama and Peru and South Korea, but regrettably were not able to get them ratified during the Bush administration. But to the subsequent administration's credit, Mr. Obama's credit, they have gotten those three agreements though, which is excellent news.

There were a couple of other, Brazil as I said, the president really had a very good relationship with Mr. Lula.

*Q: There would seem to be a certain incompatibility because Lula came out of the left.*

NEGROPONTE: They got along on a personal level and I think were able to make that the centerpiece of the relationship.

I went to Africa twice. We had an excellent African assistant secretary, Assistant Secretary for Africa called Jendayi Frazier. She had been on the NSC before. She was a protégée of Condi Rice. She had a Ph.D. from Stanford. African American lady, very smart. She came with me to two different Africa trips. Each time we went to about four or five different countries. One time we took a major trip to the Sudan and its neighbors, Chad, Libya, all the actors who were involved in Sudan one way or another. We met with President Bashir, the President of Sudan. We visited the refugee camps in Darfur. Sudan is a country where we have one of the largest humanitarian programs the U.S. has anywhere in the world, feeding people in these camps. It was very interesting.

*Q: What was your reaction to the president of the Sudan, Bashir?*

NEGROPONTE: He was very antagonistic towards us. I think he had some pretty negative experiences with the United States. I walked into the meeting and the first thing he said to me was, "I hope our meeting is better than the last American I met with," which I didn't think was a very good start to a meeting. But we never got much done. We have them on a terrorism list from the days when bin Laden lived in Sudan.

*Q: We bombed part of it.*

NEGROPONTE: We have sanctions on Sudan six ways to Sunday. So it is a little bit difficult to disentangle ourselves and to disentangle the situation as long as Bashir is in power. There is a real problem between the Arabs in Sudan and the black Africans. That is manifested in part by the situation in Darfur. I mean, there were two different political things going on in Sudan. One was the Darfur situation and what to do about the mistreatment of those populations by the Northern Sudanese.

The other situation was the split between north and south Sudan and the fact that under this comprehensive peace agreement, CPA it was called, negotiated by my predecessor Bob Zoellick, there was a provision in there for a referendum on whether or not the south wanted to have independence. There was a provision for that after a couple of years' time. It didn't happen during the Bush period; it happened after. At that time we were still hoping to hold the country together. The thrust of our interest was to promote reconciliation, enough reconciliation between north and south that the south didn't want to become independent.

In the end it turned out to be an unsuccessful effort and the next administration, the Obama administration, sort of came flat out for independence for South Sudan. So that was a big change in policy on our part. I had some involvement in the Sudan situation. The other major thing I did was I accompanied the president on a couple of his major trips to the G-8 meetings in Germany, Heiligendamm Germany, and then Sapporo up in northern Hokkaido. So 2007 and 2008 I went to both of those sets of meetings.

*Q: G-8 means...*

NEGROPONTE: The Group of eight industrial countries who end up meeting on just about every subject under the sun, and they usually have people who are not members of the G-8 come and participate.

*Q: Well there is all the formality and all of this but what can all these people do, these representatives? Do they settle anything? Is it talk or what?*

NEGROPONTE: Well, I think it is something short of the general debate at the UN in the sense that you don't have as many countries. It is a small enough group and sometimes you have a dozen or so other countries that come for bilateral meetings with us or meetings with the G-8 as a whole. I think one year we had a group of African countries come there. Another time I think the meeting was about, I can't even remember the issue, maybe on sustainability or something like that. They always have a theme and it is an opportunity for these industrial countries to meet together.

What made the first G-8 meeting interesting in 2007 actually was that Mr. Bush also went to Poland, Italy, Albania, and I think it was Bulgaria afterwards. I accompanied him on that part of the trip. That was very interesting. We met the new Pope, Pope Benedict.

The Italian president, the president's car stalled on the way back from the Vatican to the embassy. I remember we were going down a road in Rome with crowds on each side. There was a moment of panic there when we thought we would be stuck with a crowd enveloping the car, but luckily the Secret Service driver got the car started again. We kept on going. We had a nice meeting with the Pope. I was invited to join that; which I appreciated. The President liked diplomacy. He was like his father in that regard. He wasn't as smooth as his father, or as sophisticated in his...

*Q: He had a reputation that lasts for Africa, giving aid to Africa.*

NEGROPONTE: He cared a lot about Africa and we talked about that a lot. I never went to Africa with him, but I certainly talked with him about Africa. In the end he said, "Look, Negroponte, in Africa we saved lives. That is the most important thing." He was very proud of PEPFAR and the programs to fight against AIDS and Malaria in Africa. He was super proud of that. He cared a lot about it. That was very important to him. I think we doubled the levels of foreign aid to Africa during his tenure, in addition to the malaria and AIDS program.

In fact I was involved with some of that early on when I was ambassador to the U.N. We had a meeting in Monterrey, Mexico, on financing and development. Mr. Bush came to that meeting, it was a U.N. meeting, and so did Secretary Powell. He asked me and Secretary Powell, asked me and Al Larson, to work on the preparations for that conference. Larson called me up about a week before the conference, and said, "Guess what? The President is going to announce a doubling of our overseas assistance at the

Monterrey conference.” That was a big development. So I think Mr. Bush sometimes is underrated for things he accomplished because many things are overshadowed by the Iraq experience. Maybe it will all be more in perspective as time goes on.

*Q: Well in all of this talk we really haven't talked about Russia. Russia used to be on the front burner and now...*

NEGROPONTE: Right. I sat in on his at the G-8 meeting in Hokkaido up there in Northern Japan.

*Q: Sapporo.*

NEGROPONTE: Yes, Sapporo, in both meetings, both in the G-8 and in the meeting in Heiligendamm, Germany. I sat in on the meetings with President Putin. I think he was just managing that. After 2005, I remember this because I remember briefing the president as Director of Intelligence. When Putin went to the point of appointing governors again. Remember there was a point when they were elected and then he went to appointing them to re-assert central government control over the provincial political process, I think people kind of started to lose faith or hope in sort of the liberalizing or modernizing potential of Mr. Putin. Then he went to assert control over the oil resources of the country and so forth. Re-nationalizing companies that had been privatized, I remember he did that too. So I think that by the end he had a cool relationship with Mr. Putin. It was not as frosty as the relationship is right now. But it wasn't particularly good either.

*Q: Well one of the things, if we balance countries off, about importance and all. I keep thinking of Russia once the sort of threat to the West was gone. It doesn't produce anything.*

NEGROPONTE: Well and we don't have much of a relationship at all. Our trade. I just had lunch with the Russian ambassador earlier this week. We had less than \$50 billion in trade with Russia, which is a drop in the bucket. His point and it was sort of his plaint, is there are just not that many practical issues that keep us together. Russia's trade with Europe is over \$500 billion a year. Europe imports all that Russian gas and everything, and Russia imports a lot of European machinery. So even if relations become tense there is a lot of other substantive glue that can hold things together. The U.S. and Russia don't have that.

You mention Russia, and I should have remembered this. Right towards the end of the administration, it is August. I remember EUR called me up and said, You have got to call Mr. Saakashvili of Georgia and ask him to be careful not to provoke the Russians to attack, because he has been sending forces forward and he had some special operators stirring up a little trouble in the Russian controlled areas. So I called Mr. Saakashvili. Two weeks later the Russians invaded Georgia. That cast a pall over the relationship as the administration ended. We sort of ended on the note of the invasion of Georgia.



Because that happened in August and the administration leaves office five months later. So that was a problem.

*Q: Did we see problems with our relationship with Brazil? And positive things?*

NEGROPONTE: Well we had an agreement. Nick Burns went down there and negotiated a framework cooperation agreement with Brazil. So we did reach an agreement. Relations with Brazil were mostly positive, even the issues that were challenging. Like the fact that there are some trade issues and some protectionist issues we had problems with Brazil on, but we tried to put everything in a positive light.

We tried to find areas of collaboration. For example non-conventional fuels, alternative fuels, ethanol and things like that. We agreed on cooperation to help certain Portuguese speaking African countries. We really tried to make the most out of the little there was. It was not a relationship with much substance. If you compare our relationship with Brazil with our relationship with Mexico, I mean Mexico represents ten times as much trade as we had with Brazil. Part of it is just geography. We did what we could.

*Q: You say we ignored Chavez and Venezuela. But was he able to irritate us?*

NEGROPONTE: Well he has got these issues. He had this Bolivarian alliance that he cultivated with Bolivia, Nicaragua, etc. Ecuador. I went to Ecuador and met the new leader there. That relationship has gone pretty much south since Wikileaks. They expelled our ambassador. President Bush really focused on the countries with which we have free trade agreements, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Mexico, Central America. He saw all those people; he would meet with them.

*Q: How were they working? What were we sort of—economically, how were these free trade agreements working?*

NEGROPONTE: Well Colombia and Panama hadn't yet gone into force. But I think they are working very well now. The trade relations with the countries we had, Mexico is a major success story. Trade had quadrupled with Mexico in the last 20 years. The relationship with Central American countries hadn't developed as much as it might have. The president received the president of Panama. I remember being in the office when he did that. He cared about U.S.-Latin America relations. He really did, and devoted as much time as he could, again bearing in mind the main concerns still, the war on terror and 9/11 had inevitably shaped our foreign policy. By the way, I forgot to even mention-- I mean Iraq, goodness that consumed a lot of time for all of us because we were negotiating a status of forces agreement. Ryan Crocker, our ambassador, had the lead on that out in Baghdad, but we had to follow what was going on.

*Q: Did we ever get anything?*

NEGROPONTE: You know I told Ryan when we finally got the agreement, which was sort of a lot of words in it. I said, "You know the thing about yours, you call it status of

forces and Henry called the agreement with the Vietnamese the Agreement To End the War and Restore Peace to Vietnam.” Both of these are misnomers. Both of these agreements are simply withdrawal agreements. We ought to just simply face up to it. That is what they were. They were arrangements to get out of there.

We didn’t get to keep a residual force in Iraq. They wouldn’t give it to us, and Maliki didn’t want that political complication. He wanted to be able to say, just like the Filipinos when they didn’t want to extend the life of our bases in the Philippines, and the Panamanians didn’t want to let us keep troops in Panama after we withdrew from the Canal. These people wanted to be able to say that the Americans, that foreign forces were out of there once and for all. So that is what we accomplished with that Status of Forces Agreement. But we were able to keep forces there until the end of 2011.

Mr. Bush, what he wanted and he got, was to insure that we were able to stay beyond the beginning of a new administration because he was afraid that if he didn’t have such an agreement with the Iraqis, that if Mrs. Clinton or Mr. Obama was elected because the Iraq war was so unpopular that they might withdraw right away, right then and there, January of 2009. So what he feels he accomplished by this agreement was to buy a continued presence of the United States through 2011, which is exactly what happened.

*Q: Did we look around and the unpopularity of our troops, how about in South Korea? This is one of the few places where we have troops. I think they are essential.*

NEGROPONTE: I do too.

*Q: I served there twice. So I can see where I remember the election when Carter came in and they were talking about withdrawing.*

NEGROPONTE: That was a huge mistake on the part of Jimmy Carter and we managed to walk that one back luckily. But I mean to me it proves that if you are going to embark on these exercises, ultimately if they are going to be successful in the long term you need some kind of continuing presence, and you need some kind of an alliance relationship. You can’t have anything short of an alliance. You don’t fool anybody with that. We are going to give you a strategic partnership agreement. Yeah, but if it isn’t an alliance that says if you get attacked I am coming to help you, and if you don’t have troops there as an earnest of your commitment, well you can always wriggle out.

It seems to me that our most successful relationships in these kinds of situations have been where we have made that long-term commitment. I am not advocating that we make it in other parts of the world, but let’s not kid ourselves that any agreement short of that is going to give you the kind of durability that you are looking for because it won’t.

*Q: Places where we don’t have any particular commitment, how stood we during the time you were there in Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand?*

NEGROPONTE: The Southeast Asian, the ASEAN countries. A little bit down because what happened in that period was that as much as they might have liked Mr. Bush, Condi did not attend the annual ASEAN foreign ministers meeting the last couple of times. I represented her in Manila in 2009. She may have gone in 2008, and I went in 2007. Anyway in one of the two years I represented her. That they didn't like. The President, we hadn't yet signed the East Asia summit treaty. This East Asia treaty that we have now signed that links us up with all the other East Asian countries. In a sort of an agreement that permits us to attend this "East Asian Summit."

President Obama has ratcheted up the level of engagement with South East Asia. He goes and he meets every year with the ASEAN leaders. Bush tries and then in the end couldn't because of scheduling issues or something like that. So he disappointed them. So on matters of form Mr. Bush was perhaps not as accommodating to the Southeast Asians. Again, because of other preoccupations. The other thing that happened is that China has helped us by becoming more aggressive and more assertive in the South China Sea. These countries have suddenly become more interested in U. S. relations.

*Q: Beginning to move around just to be near us.*

NEGROPONTE: Absolutely. We have got, we already had it but we had a good relationship. Bush did have a good relationship with the Philippines. We had troops in the Philippines down in Mindanao. You may recall that post-9/11, which was kind of a breakthrough situation. We had this kind of supply depot kind of military installation that we had access to in Singapore. I would say things started to improve vis-à-vis Southeast Asia, but they started getting much better faster in the Obama administration. Then Indonesia got a new leader, this fellow Yudhoyono. That was a very positive development. That was a very positive development when he came to power.

*Q: One of the things we are talking about here is the United States, and here you are sitting at the hub of power and we are involved anywhere. I can't think of any other country that isn't as positioned. The thing is sometimes we are, sometimes it has been said and I think with justice, the indispensable country. The one country that realizes "gee there is a problem here and somebody has got to do something about it" and we are the country that probably can.*

NEGROPONTE: That is right. We do that. I think people still look to us to do that even if they think in relative terms that we may not be quite as strong as we used to be. But we are still strong. We still have the largest military in the world by far. Huge military budget. Huge military. We have got 20% of the world's GDP so we are a consequential country and we remain that. I happened to be visiting Hong Kong at the time when the Lehman Brothers went Bankrupt. I think it was September, 2007.

*Q: This was the beginning of the recession.*

NEGROPONTE: The beginning of the financial crisis. People were very worried about that. But no, we are the indispensable nation. Leslie Gelb has written a good book about

it. It is called Power Rules, and the term he uses is indispensable nation. But you know, Mr. Bush managed the many different preoccupations I thought well, and he handled it. Don't forget we had this major financial crisis towards the end of the administration. There was a grave situation.

*Q: Well you are giving a picture, again we are talking about foreign relations, of George W. Bush that is not, you might say, the prevalent one among the chattering class. The basic liberal media types and all. Why do you think there is this discrepancy between what you saw and what they see?*

NEGROPONTE: Iraq and the doctrine of preemption. I think that colored everything. We responded to the events of 9/11 in ways, certain of our responses to 9/11 turned out to be very controversial, especially our going into Iraq. I don't think people questioned our going into Afghanistan. Going into Iraq and justifying according to this sort of doctrine of preemption sort of carried over into this reputation of President Bush thereafter. Even if he himself modified his own views and put more emphasis on diplomacy and he became more attuned to other countries' ways of thinking about things. That, I think, has always, and Iraq response has overshadowed up until now how people think about George W. Bush. It could change. It seems to be shifting.

*Q: Like Harry Truman. I mean, Korea used to be Truman's war.*

NEGROPONTE: By the way a couple of other things I did, I went back to Vietnam for the first time as Deputy Secretary. I went there in 2008. I went to both Hanoi and Saigon. I had never been to Hanoi. I met the prime minister, visited Saigon, and spent a couple of days. I went to Cambodia, which I hadn't been back to since the war. I went to Angkor Wat, which has been beautifully restored, met the leadership in Phnom Penh. So for me that was a very interesting experience to go back to Vietnam. I found that very interesting. I found it a little less emotional for me than I thought it might be. I sort of took it in stride.

I had a very amusing press conference in Hanoi as I left. I always as deputy secretary would meet with the press at some point during my visit. So I had a press conference at the Hanoi airport. The first question I got from a Vietnamese journalist was, "Mr. Ambassador, if China attacked one of the American oil platforms operating in Vietnamese claimed waters, what would the United States military response be?" So I tried to dance around that as best I could, but I was impressed by the forthrightness of the Vietnamese. I think the one thing that is very different from 50 years earlier, and it is now 50 years since I first went to Vietnam, that they are much more open about their historic differences with China. The communists back during the cold war would downplay that aspect. They don't downplay that anymore.

*Q: Did you get from your ambassador or others a feeling that as an ideology communism is not really much of a driving force?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I got that from others I met. Some of the Japanese observers of China would tell me look at the Chinese government, they can't count on communism for their legitimacy anymore so that is why the economic progress, 10% growth rates are so important to them. Because that is what is going to validate the regimes. I certainly heard that comment made about China.

Vietnam there are quite a few complaints about corruption and mismanagement. I would say their record is mixed. They have grown a lot but they could do more. I mean you may think Vietnam is impressive but then you go visit Malaysia or Singapore and see what has really happened. I mean Vietnam is nothing compared to what the other Southeast...

*Q: How about Thailand?*

NEGROPONTE: You know I never got to Thailand in that job. I think they had some internal issues at the time I can't recall. But I just never got there.

*Q: Let's move back to Washington. The D committee. What were your experiences?*

NEGROPONTE: Well I was chairman of it. Of course we met from time to time. Usually I guess we must have met once a year but maybe it was twice, I just can't quite recall, to make recommendations to the Secretary. It was certainly at least once a year, to the Secretary who in turn would make recommendations to the White House with regard to which career officers the President would select for those posts the White House was going to make available for career officers. Our word was usually final. We rarely got reversed.

We had a committee that consisted of various undersecretaries and the Director General of the Foreign Service. It was a very interesting opportunity to review the candidacies of these very capable career people. My focus was in part as I said earlier was to try and reward people who had served in Iraq in Afghanistan. We tried not to stretch the idea too far. I didn't want to do anything unreasonable. But if somebody seemed to be otherwise well qualified, and happened to have served in Iraq or Afghanistan we tried to maximize their opportunity.

I also tried to get more other agency ambassadors, you know foreign commercial service, foreign agriculture service, because I found that others in the Department didn't really make that effort. I thought it was important to do that so we found a very capable Foreign Agricultural Service officer who seemed to be very well qualified.

*Q: Who was that?*

NEGROPONTE: He had a South Asian name, if I remember correctly. I think he went to Bangladesh. But he did a good job. We were always on the lookout for somebody from the Foreign Commercial Service. That is important. We have got several of these different services, foreign agriculture, foreign commerce. Of course we don't have a separate public affairs agency anymore. No USIS.

*Q: Did you find the demise of the information service, USIS was a mistake or not?*

NEGROPONTE: I don't think it is a mistake. I think it is good to have a separate cone if you will, a separate specialty on public diplomacy. I think that is fine. I think we need more experience in the area of public diplomacy, how to explain things publicly, and how to do them in a succinct and convincing way for the American people and for foreigners. Those are important skills.

Where I had difficulty and where I think the administration had a difficulty, was I am not sure until the last guy, Jim Glassman, we really through those eight years were comfortable with the people the President selected to be the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy. I mean, Karen Hughes was very close to the President and a very fine lady. There was another lady that worked in advertising. But Jim Glassman, who had been the editor of US News and World Report and now has a role in running the Bush library and the Bush Foundation down in Dallas, he was terrific. The trouble is Congress held him up for a year and eight months. So he only got to do it for about a year. He was absolutely first rate. I wish we had had Jim Glassman from the beginning. He really understood public diplomacy. He understood polemics; he understood how we have to go out there and fight in the marketplace of ideas and all that. But with real intellectual experience in that arena and real practical experience. So, I wish Jim had that job earlier. It was difficult just slotting that, finding the right people to do that.

Oh the other Foreign Service we have is AID. We did send a number of senior AID officials as ambassadors, maybe three or four. So that was the work of the D committee I tried to encourage the selection of women. I was attuned to the minorities. Again I found that the chair had to do that because I found the bureaus would advocate. The bureaus were not members of the D committee. Whenever we were considering candidates for a particular country we would ask the regional assistant secretary to come and brief them on the particular country, just five or ten minutes before we actually decided.

I was really conscious of rewarding people who had taken the trouble to study a hard language. I can remember a couple of specific examples where somebody who spoke Haitian Creole and we selected that individual to be ambassador to Haiti. Somebody who had studied Cambodian Khmer. I mean, the person is a candidate and there are several others, but we took the trouble of training this person in Khmer, and she has done a good job here, there, and everywhere; why not pick her to be ambassador to Cambodia?

So those were some of the contributions I feel I made to the D committee. I thought it was an important function. I felt we served the Secretary very well. Maybe once or twice after, out of 50 or 75 cases she said, maybe instead of X person would you please consider Y. That is the Secretary's prerogative. But it happened very, very rarely.

*Q: What were your relations with Congress?*

NEGROPONTE: Pretty frequent and friendly and important obviously. I would go up and brief on various issues. I would testify. I was the administration witness in trying to get the Law of the Sea ratified, the umpteenth effort to get that done.

*Q: I was going to say...*

NEGROPONTE: And we failed again. We didn't succeed then.

*Q: What is the problem?*

NEGROPONTE: There are a couple of conservative senators and a couple of conservative think tanks, specifically the Heritage Foundation. The Heritage uses the issue for fundraising. Opposing the Law of the Sea is to keep the black helicopters and the U.N. devil from taking over. Keeping our lives from being run by the U.N.

I went up with Gordon England, excellent guy. He was deputy secretary of defense. We had a terrific relationship. England and I formed a little bi-weekly meeting where we went over the entire agenda of issues that were between the Department of State and the Department of Defense. Always cleared up some of the underbrush. He and I testified, and the vice chairman of the JCS, the whole military was in favor. You had us in favor, you had the oil industry in favor, you had everybody in favor. The only people who were against it were these ideologues.

Then they got support from one or two senators Jim DeMint was against it, and he has gone on to become president of the Heritage Foundation. A gentleman called Vitter from Louisiana who is opposed even though his state is an oil producing state and of all industries that benefit from the Law of the Sea it is the oil industry. Because it is not only keeping the lanes of communication open, it delimits the outer continental shelf, which goes beyond 200 miles in some instances off our coast. The only way you can get recognition of the delimitation of the continental shelf beyond 200 miles is through this Law of the Sea Commission, which is part of the treaty. So if you are Shell or Exxon and you want to explore a tract 250 miles from the coast of Alaska that is on our shelf out there, a big company like Shell or Exxon is not going to do it if it does not have the imprimatur of the continental shelf commission, because they will be afraid of liability issues or some other country saying you can't do that. It belongs to us, or it is no man's land. But they are too big or too serious to operate in that climate of legal uncertainty.

Yet we didn't succeed. It was a big effort though, and I worked very closely with our legal advisor, John Bellinger, who had been the White House NSC legal advisor under Condi. It was a worthwhile effort. Mr. Panetta, Mrs. Clinton, and the Chairman of the JCS went up and did the whole thing again in front of Mr. Kerry about a year ago. They haven't gotten it through either. We will eventually get it I suppose. It is just amazing 20 years after signature that we still haven't ratified the Law of the Sea Treaty.

*Q: Well are there any other areas you think we should cover?*

NEGROPONTE: I think we have covered pretty much the far corners. There was Africa, Asia, Latin America, we have done them all.

I guess the last I remember going to a five way meeting of the Arctic Council in Ilulissat, Greenland, in 2008 representing the secretary. Sergey Lavrov was there, the foreign minister of Russia. The foreign minister of Norway and the foreign Minister of Denmark and the natural resources minister of Canada also attended. We discussed the various Arctic issues, many of which had to do with navigation of the Arctic seaways. What is happening is the ice is melting earlier and earlier every year. Soon it is going to be a clear shot from Murmansk or some other Russian port, right to the Sea of Japan. You are able to go along the northern coast of Russia and get all the way to the Pacific. It is hard to visualize. You can see it here. See what happens. The Arctic Ocean, you see what happens.

*Q: I was looking at the Arctic Ocean and the few real islands and the rest is ice.*

NEGROPONTE: Exactly. So you will be able to go from these places in Murmansk. You go over here and go through the Chukchi Sea by the U.S. and down around. Before you know it, you are in Japan. You really shorten the route tremendously. Lavrov showed up with a delegation of Russian ship owners. You could tell what he was concerned about.

I was pleased to see that Mrs. Clinton represented us herself at several of the subsequent meetings of the Arctic council. That all played into my background of Oceans, Environment and Science (OES) and so forth. I enjoyed that trip to Greenland. I had experience negotiating with Denmark about salmon fishing in Greenland previously. It is very interesting how all of your cumulative experience in the Foreign Service ends up somehow contributing to the next stage of your career. I have always found that. I found it a very enriching thing about Foreign Service life, how much one learns over the years.

*Q: The thing is, we move around. The job moves around, the issues change but they don't change.*

NEGROPONTE: They don't change that much. You are right. It is like Mexico. Mexico has basically been about law enforcement and trade. Those have been the two big issues in various forms over the years. I found that really, I served in nine posts abroad, and I served in four geographic regions, Latin American, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. I have served in the White House and State Department and as Director of National Intelligence. I have also worked in three different agencies, although basically I have always thought of myself as a State Department person.

*Q: I would like to talk to you about what you are up to now.*

NEGROPONTE: Sure. Well I retired on January 20, 2009, the day that President Obama was inaugurated. In fact, I went to the Canadian embassy on Pennsylvania Avenue to watch the inauguration from the roof of the Canadian embassy.



The following day I joined McLarty Associates, January 21. It is a strategic consulting firm. We advise American companies and others, multinational companies, on business issues they may have abroad. Market entry strategies, government relations and so on. We have clients from various Fortune 500 companies, and we mostly help them in emerging markets, places like Brazil, Mexico, Russia, and China. We have a number of former ambassadors like myself. Ambassador Richard Burt, who used to be ambassador to Germany. Tom Hubbard who was ambassador to Korea and so forth. Lee Feinstein who was an Obama appointee to Poland. Jim Keith who was ambassador in Malaysia. I call this my day job.

Then I am also on the faculty at Yale University. I am a lecturer and a research fellow at Yale, a card-carrying member of the faculty. I carry a pretty big teaching load, given that I only go up there one day a week. I go up Sunday nights and come back Monday nights during the academic year. I teach two different seminars both in the fall and in the spring. This fall I am going to teach a course for the first time on intelligence.

Then, I also co-teach a year-long seminar on grand strategy, which is a signature course at Yale. Very popular. It is viewed as a real leadership course. It gets a lot of people who are interested in going on into government service after graduating from Yale. It was founded by John Gaddis, the great diplomatic historian, and Paul Kennedy. Also, Charles Hill, himself a retired Foreign Service Officer. They are the three core members of this faculty of this grand strategy seminar. They are basically the people who hired me. This seminar is endowed by Nick Brady and a fellow called Charles Johnson. I am actually the Brady-Johnson fellow up there.

I enjoy my teaching at Yale enormously. I also teach a seminar called current issues in U.S. diplomacy and national security. I have already got about 80 people who have taken that course from me in the past four years. We have a reunion every year of people who have graduated from Yale and took that course of mine and have since moved into jobs in Washington, mostly intelligence. The reunion gets bigger by the year, of course.

*Q: Do you find when you are in a seminar of this nature there is a different cast to maybe the questions that wouldn't have been asked in an earlier period or not? I mean is it a different breed of cat coming out of the universities at this point?*

NEGROPONTE: I am not sure the questions are that different. I think the first thing I would say is I am very impressed by the quality of the students and the degree of their preparation. The rapidity with which they can work, the capacity to do the readings. We really loaded them up. They are really good.

But I think the core interests remain the same. They tend to have had a little more foreign experience than we did in our time. We used to have the so-called Junior Year Abroad but not many students did it. Now, students go abroad for a semester or summer project or spring break. But many more students do it. They tend to pack more in, more diverse experiences into a smaller period of time.

*Q: My grandson at NYU had a semester at Shanghai.*

NEGROPONTE: There you go. So it will be a semester instead of a year. Then they will have a summer project. In the Grand Strategy course it is really interesting. The course starts in the spring semester in January and they do all the classic readings then. You start with Thucydides and then go through the Romans and then Machiavelli and Clausewitz and so forth.

Then in the fall semester you have the more modern thinkers and the simulations we do. We have the students present policy memos. A team of three or four. These are simulations where they are briefing the National Security Council.

In the summer there is some funding available to pay for summer projects. I had a student who spent the summer doing a paper on the grand strategy of Qatar. He spent time out there and did a paper on what their foreign and national security policy is. They go to different places they go all over the world. A lot of them go to China. A lot of interest in China by the way. 10% of the entering class at Yale will take Chinese. A lot of interest in that. Quite a bit of interest in the Middle East. It will be interesting to see if that persists. A lot of them studying Arabic.

Another interesting thing, there are quite a few students who are veterans. Of course you would have had that experience if you had graduated 50 years ago. Yeah, you would have had veterans in your classes right?

*Q: What?*

NEGROPONTE: Veterans, WWII veterans in your classes.

*Q: Oh God, yeah.*

NEGROPONTE: Well we have that too, because we have Iraq veterans.

*Q: They really make it....*

NEGROPONTE: That helps. They are all on the GI bill and they are very good and they help to inject a dose of reality into things. So I enjoy teaching them. A lot of them want to go into government service, intelligence, diplomacy and other areas.

*Q: Well of course with the NGO possibilities, if you come out of a first class educational institution you stand a much better chance.*

NEGROPONTE: Right. So those are a couple of things I am doing. Then I chair a couple of NGO's, as a matter of fact. I chair the Council of the Americas, which is an outfit founded by David Rockefeller back in the 60's which is a premier NGO for relations in the hemisphere. It is called the Council of the Americas and the Americas Society. It is under one board and under one chair. And I chair an outfit called the Intelligence and

National Security Alliance (INSA) which brings together companies and individuals interested in intelligence. I am on the board of the Asia Society. I don't get bored.

*Q: Are you concerned or is there a reason to be concerned with the proliferation of intelligence agents, private corporations doing intelligence?*

NEGROPONTE: Well there are some of these risk assessments and risk management firms. I am not too concerned. There are some good ones. There are probably some less good ones. The private sector needs some help in the area of both security and intelligence. No, I am not too concerned. Quality is always an issue. How do you make sure and it is like these security companies like Blackwater and all, and they get stretched too thin. They sacrifice quality for quantity or try to make too fast a buck. So quality control is always an issue.

*Q: Yes, I know that in Vietnam we used to run into that too.*

NEGROPONTE: It is not for lack of talented people, it is lack for the proper organizational.

*Q: So maybe this is a good place to stop. I want to thank you.*

*End of interview*