

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

ROBERT M. PERITO

*Interviewed by: Tom Dunnigan
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Q: Today I will be interviewing Robert M. Perito, a Foreign Service Officer who had 30 years in the Service. I will be doing this on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Bob, suppose we begin by your telling me something of your background and how you became interested in the field of foreign affairs.

PERITO: I was born in Denver, Colorado, on June 27, 1942. I attended the University of Denver. When I arrived at the University, my intention was to be a drama major. When I opened the course catalog, I discovered the University had an International Relations Department that looked interesting. I started taking international relations courses and ended up majoring in international relations. At the time, the director of the International Relations program was Joseph Korbel, the father of future Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. The daughter of an assistant dean of the University also studied International Relations at DU, Condoleezza Rice.

After graduating from the University of Denver, I received a fellowship to the Columbia University School of International Affairs. I spent a year studying Africa and Development Economics. In the early '60's, African countries were becoming independent and economic development was a hot issue. After a year in New York, I decided I needed field experience. I left Columbia and joined the Peace Corps. I went to Nigeria where I spent two years as an Assistant Rural Development Officer for the Ministry of Rural Development in the eastern region of the country.

Q: Did you have any contact with the embassy there or with Foreign Service people?

PERITO: Some. Being a Peace Corps volunteer meant living in a house with no running water. Visiting the regional capital of Enugu, where there was a U.S. Consulate, offered the possibility of getting invited over to a Foreign Service Office's house for a hot meal and maybe a shower.

Serving as a Rural Development Officer for two years was a great job. At the age of twenty-three, I was in charge of the development program for a province. I was part of the Nigerian civil service. I had Nigerian superiors and Nigerian subordinates. I ran a development program that introduced a new type of hybrid oil palm tree that villages planted to increase the production of palm oil. The program also introduced new farming techniques and built roads and bridges. At the end of my tour, I had projects in 20 villages, including a chicken farm and a bridge, some very exciting stuff. In the end,

however, I went out with the evacuation of Americans organized by the Consulate in Enugu as the Biafran war began in the north. Tragically, the good work that the Peace Corps did in Nigeria was lost. Peace Corps volunteers were subsequently banned from the country and have never gone back.

Q: They have never gone back to Nigeria?

PERITO: No. Some former Volunteers would like the Peace Corps program reinstated, but the situation is too dangerous to have Americans spread out around the country in schools and small towns. When I was there in the 1960's, Nigeria was called "the showcase of democracy in Africa." It was very safe. It was a peaceful country with a promising future. Unfortunately, history has not been very kind.

Q: You were certainly one of the pioneers in the Peace Corps in the early '60's, because that's when it was founded. What caused you then to take the Foreign Service exam, and where did you take it?

PERITO: I took the written part of the Foreign Service exam when I was at Columbia. When I was in Nigeria, I was informed that I had passed the written test and was invited to take the oral exam. For the only time in history, the State Department conducted a "worldwide search for talent" sending a team of examiners to give the oral exam to candidates around the world. I received an invitation to take the test at the U.S. embassy in Lagos. I lived upcountry and could not pass up an opportunity to travel to the capital. I found a book on European history and hitchhiked to Lagos where I rented a hotel room in was really a bar and brothel. I read the book and waited for my appointment at the embassy to take the test. Fortunately for me, the examiners were having a tremendous time. They had just returned from the beach. I was wearing a coat and tie that had been hanging on my wall in Onitsha for a year and a half.

They gave me the oral test. I walked out convinced I had failed. However, I was invited back and told I had passed the exam and was accepted on the spot. They asked me to pose with them for a photograph. To make it look like we were in Africa, they collected some African statues and put them on the table beside us. The photograph appeared in the State Department magazine under the heading "Worldwide Search for Talent," showing me, the examiners and the African statues.

Q: "And in darkest Africa we found Bob Perito."

PERITO: That's right. I've always believed that my entry into the Foreign Service resulted from the fact that these guys were having such a good time they could not fail anyone.

Q: Then you came into the Department in '67 and went through the A100 training course. Did you get any other training besides the A100, or just that course?

PERITO: After being evacuated from Nigeria, I landed in Europe. The summer of 1967

was a very interesting time. The evacuation from Nigeria coincided with the evacuation of Americans and Europeans from the Middle East at the start of the Six-Day War. Europe was full of evacuees. There were planeloads of children arriving with no adults; it was chaotic. On the flight from Lagos to Frankfurt, I sat between an Austrian woman and a German woman who had two-year-olds. They spent the whole night of the flight crawling back and forth across me. I spent a week in Europe and ended up in Washington for the A100 course.

Most of the men in the course were either former Peace Corps Volunteers or former soldiers who had served in Vietnam. We formed into two groups and went looking for housing. A group of ex-Volunteers rented two apartments in what was then called Arlington Towers. The apartment complex was on the Virginia side of the Potomac overlooking Washington. On the day of the Martin Luther King riots, we stood on the roof and watched the city burn.

During the A100 class, the remaining Peace Corps Volunteers in Nigeria were evacuated. My future wife, Patricia, came out on an Italian cattle boat. When she arrived back in the U.S. we decided to get married in September, 1967. After the wedding on Saturday in Massachusetts, we drove straight back to Washington and my wife entered the Foreign Service Wives Course at FSI just two days after we were married. When she made that fact known to the other wives, she received a standing ovation. At the end of the A100 class, I received an assignment to the U.S. Embassy in Taipei.

Q: Uh-huh, I know who gave it to you, too.

PERITO: Right, you did – Taipei via French language training. At the time, I had never heard of Taipei; I had never heard of Taiwan. In fact, if you remember, newly graduated FSOs would bring atlases to the graduation ceremony where they received their first assignments. I raced back to my chair, grabbed the atlas, and looked up Taiwan, which I had known by its old name, Formosa. I called my mother that night to tell her about my assignment. I knew she had never heard of Taipei or Taiwan or Formosa so I said, “Mom, I’ve been assigned to China.” Her response was “Oh, my God!” I went through the consular training program and was facing four months of French.

Q: Oh, French, for Taipei.

PERITO: French for Taipei. I called the language people at FSI and explained that they don’t speak French in Taiwan. They speak Chinese. I have always believed my Foreign Service career began with a typo. I had asked for Tunisia via French language training; I got Taiwan via French language training. I think somebody made a mistake.

Q: You know, I believe it.

PERITO: I asked if they could do something about the French. They decided to do something they’d never done before. FSI gave a six-month course in Chinese. Previously, FSOs had to learn a “world” language - Chinese wasn’t a world language – before they

could study a “hard” language, Chinese, Japanese, or Arabic. They changed the rules and created a six-month Chinese course which would teach students to speak basic Chinese, but not to read. There were a number of students in the course. My wife was allowed to take the course. She was a very good language student. She quickly left me in the slow class and moved into the advanced class. The Chinese teachers at FSI had been doing this for years. The instructor in charge of the program had taught at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing prior to the communist takeover. After about two months of struggling with me, one of the instructors said, “Why are you so stupid? Why aren’t you smart like your wife?” I passed the proficiency test after six months and went off to my assignment in Taiwan.

Q: Where you were a consular officer.

PERITO: I was a consular officer in the embassy in Taipei at a time when there were 5,000 Chinese students every year coming to the United States on student visas. Every summer we had this massive visa load. Thousands of kids lined up in front of the embassy to be processed. The Taiwan government’s own statistics were that 97 percent of the students that went to the United States changed status and stayed in the United States. I wondered why we bothered to go through the interviews to determine whether these people were intending immigrants. They were. It was almost 100 percent.

Q: I was a visa officer in Hong Kong before that, so I know exactly. Did you have fraud problems, too, as we had?

PERITO: We had massive immigration fraud. I was also the U.S. citizen welfare and whereabouts officer. In terms of collecting war stories, being the welfare and whereabouts officer in Taiwan was marvelous. It was during the Vietnam War. The United States put back into service mothballed freighters that had been sitting idle since the end of World War II. They found anybody who ever had a merchant seaman’s card and put them on these vessels. In many cases, the ships made a one way trip and were junked when they got to Vietnam. There was so much money to be made hauling cargo for the war. The people that served on these ships were just an extraordinary collection of lost souls...

Q: Unpleasant people, right.

PERITO: ...very unpleasant people. I was the shipping and seamen officer. My job was to find these guys when they jumped ship and repatriate them. My chronic problem was guys who would sign on in California, ride the boat as far as Taiwan, and then decide they wanted to return home for one reason or other. They would all claim to be sick. I came up with a perfect solution for this problem. We had a wonderful Seventh Day Adventist hospital in Taipei staffed with American doctors and European nurses. The hospital had a very strict Seventh Day Adventist program: no coffee, no alcohol, and vegetarian food. I would send these ‘sick’ merchant seamen to the Seventh Day Adventist hospital. Initially they would think, ‘Oh, great, an American hospital. This is going to be terrific’; but within days they were totally cured and begging to get back to their ship.

They just couldn't stand it.

Q: You mentioned the Vietnam War. I wonder what impact that had, because we had some troops, did we not, air crews and so forth, in Taiwan at that time?

PERITO: The U.S. air base was in Taichung in the center part of the island. The US Air Force would fly cargo from Taichung's Chongquong air base to bases in Vietnam. Taiwan was a major R&R point. We got tens of thousands of American troops from Vietnam. Taiwan was a favorite R&R destination. These soldiers would arrive on charter flights in Taipei. To get on the plane in Vietnam, they had to show they had \$500.00 in cash. They would spend five days and four nights, or five nights and four days - I forget what it was - in the city. They'd walk off the plane and there would be a group of young women waiting for them. They would pair up as they came off the aircraft. Many guys just gave their money to the girl. The girls were fantastic. Almost never was there a problem. The girls would take the soldier and look after him, supply all his needs for five days. This resulted in a lot of marriages.

Q: Yes, I'm sure it did.

PERITO: In order to get married, you had to re-enlist. Guys would go back to Vietnam. They would re-up for another year in combat in order to get another R&R so they could come back and marry the girl that they had met. These were all bar girls. The question I was most often asked by Chinese in Taiwan was, "Why do Americans like to marry prostitutes?" We had all these guys coming back. There were guys writing letters and then trying to find the girls when they returned. There was a letter writing industry that grew up. There were several young women who could read and write in English. They went into the business of writing letters for these girls.

Q: Writing love letters.

PERITO: They wrote love letters to soldiers in Vietnam for bar girls. There were a number of cases where guys wrote to the embassy asking "Can you find Lulu?" I'll just give one funny case - there was a guy from Cedar City, Utah. When I was 10 years old, my family took a trip to California and our car broke down in Cedar City, Utah. It took several days to repair the car because Cedar City, Utah is a tiny little town and the mechanic had to send away for the parts. This soldier came to Taiwan on R&R, did another tour in Vietnam, came back and married a girl out of a bar on his way back to the States. When he got home, he told his parents what he'd done. The first letter we got was from his parents - total outrage: "How could you—the U.S. Embassy-- let this happen? Our boy was raised to be a good Christian, and you let him marry this floozy." The second letter from the parents arrived a couple weeks later. "We have spoken to our son. He has convinced us that he's doing God's work. The girl he married is really pure at heart. We want her to come immediately to the United States because we want to welcome her into our family. We want you to issue the visa right now." Of course, we had some trouble finding this young woman. When she did show up to apply for her visa, she was wearing a spangled dress and heavy makeup. I remember thinking that she was

going to make quite an impression in Cedar City, Utah. As we were processing the visa, we got a third letter from the parents who were outraged that we were preventing their son's wife from joining their family. How dare we take so long?

Q: Headache after headache. Now, you were out there when Secretary Rogers came and Vice President Agnew. Did they cause you any problems?

PERITO: No, I was actually in language school. After I did my two years in the embassy, I got the opportunity to do another year of Chinese language training. I left Taipei and moved to Taichung where the State Department School of Chinese Language and Area Studies was located. I was in language training when Agnew came. He met Chiang Kai-shek at a resort in the mountains of Taiwan called Sun Moon Lake. There was a big lodge there where Chiang retreated in the summer. All the FSOs were pulled out of language training and sent to Sun Moon Lake to support the visit. Agnew flew there on a U.S. Army helicopter. That was my first experience with getting bathed in prop wash. We stood at the landing site with the helicopter blowing dust and dirt in our faces.

Agnew met first with the Vice President of Taiwan. The Embassy had arranged a room in the lodge for the meeting. They had set up a bar with every type of alcoholic drink you can imagine. They assumed that the Vice Presidents would have a drink together. When the meeting started, Agnew turned to his counterpart and said, "What would you like?" The fellow said, "I'd like a cup of tea." Nobody had thought about tea. Here we were in China, and there was no tea. "Oh, God, get tea."

Q: How did you find the Taichung course? Was it worthwhile?

PERITO: There were a couple of things that happened. I was in language school at the time that Richard Nixon announced he was going to China. There was a very negative reaction from Chinese government on Taiwan and a violent anti-American campaign on the island. There were several bomb blasts. The Bank of America building in Taipei was bombed. The USIA library in Kaohsiung was bombed and there were several casualties. There was a terrorist threat against Americans and we had undercover police officers at the Language School. We had police officers outside the gates of our houses. It was a time of constant tension because you never knew whether you were going to be a target. Many Americans believed it was the Taiwan intelligence service that was responsible. During the time I was in school, the embassy in Taipei was not staffed to deal with the new political situation. On three occasions, I was called back to the embassy to work in the political section. I had been in Taipei for two years and I had contacts in the Taiwan Independence Movement. The Department was interested in opposition to the Chiang Kai-shek government. I worked in the Embassy's political section and exploited my contacts with Taiwanese. .

Q: The Taiwanese government could not have been too happy to see this American officer doing this.

PERITO: The government of the Republic of China was not excited about the embassy

having contact with the Taiwanese opposition.

Q: Was your wife able to attend the courses with you in Taichung?

PERITO: No. When we were in Taipei, we had our first child, a little boy, so she did not take classes. Other wives did, but she didn't. Part of that, I think, was the fear that something might happen. Getting pulled out of language training was disruptive. The course was supposed to be for a year and a half. At the end of the first year, I was told that "needs of the Service" required that I go immediately to Hong Kong.

Q: Where they speak Cantonese.

PERITO: ...where they speak Cantonese. This was my first negative experience with the State Department personnel system. I had just come back from spending time at the Embassy in Taipei. Every time I was called to Taipei, I was told, "Don't worry about it, because we'll add time onto your training program, and you'll receive the full course." I came back from Taipei and they said, "Sorry, You have three or four weeks to pass your proficiencies. You have to go to Hong Kong."

Q: So you were not amused by that transfer.

PERITO: No, I wasn't. The teachers went into crash mode. I was given a passing mark and shipped off to Hong Kong. We arrived in 1970 at the end of the Cultural Revolution in China. The Consulate had not been informed that I was coming. The person I replaced did not leave for another month and was not happy to have we share his office. No arrangements had been made for housing. We were placed in a hotel with a very active two year old child for six weeks. It was very un pleasant experience.

Q: And you were a political officer in Hong Kong.

PERITO: Yes, but I had an odd job. Hong Kong was our major China-watching post. The political section was made up of extraordinarily good officers who were reporting on events in China. That is where everyone who left the language school in Taichung wanted to work.

Q: And the Consul General was...?

PERITO: The Consul General was David Osborne for most of the time. He was an outstanding guy, Chinese language officer, really first rate. David Dean was the DPO, another outstanding guy who had been in Taipei when I was there. The post had excellent leadership. I wasn't assigned to the political section. I was assigned to the Hong Kong Section, which had two officers and a boss named Dwight Scarborough. Dwight was on his last tour. He retired in Hong Kong, got a local job and made lots of money. Dwight believed that the Consulate General in Hong Kong should not be devoted to watching China, but should be devoted to watching Hong Kong and promoting U.S. commercial relations with Hong Kong. Dwight was out every day on the golf course or having lunch

or going to dinner parties with wealthy businessmen. I was the Hong Kong political officer, which was a challenge because Hong Kong had no politics. It was a British Crown Colony. I was told by the deputy principal officer, Mr. Dean, that the appropriate reporting vehicle for the Hong Kong political officer was the page-and-a-half airgram...

Q: Which was fast fading away.

PERITO: ... reporting on Hong Kong was not worth sending back to the Department by telegram. I should send in page-and-a-half airgrams about political events in Hong Kong. Fortunately for me, there was the Diaoyutai movement. The Diaoyutai were a group of small islands off the coast of China that were claimed by Japan, Mainland China and Taiwan. I reported on demonstrations in Hong Kong by nationalistic Chinese students claiming that these pieces of rock belonged to China and not Japan. There also were several anti-Vietnam War demonstrations staged by Americans. One Sunday, I was on the inside of the Consulate General crouching down behind a barrier next to the Marine guards and the Hong Kong police riot squad looking out through the windows of the consulate at the protestors on the lawn. The protestors included my wife, the wives of half the officers in the Consulate and other Americans who were our friends. Nothing happened, but my wife never let me forget that episode.

Q: Now, what was the effect in Hong Kong of President Nixon's visit to China? You were there in Hong Kong at the time, I think.

PERITO: It was electrifying. We watched every minute on television. We were amazed that it had occurred. One of our classmates in language school, Charles Freeman, was brought along as an interpreter, although he didn't interpret for Nixon. He was probably the only American who spoke fluent Chinese in the U.S. delegation. Almost immediately one of the officers on the consulate staff was chosen to go to Beijing to help open the U.S. Liaison Office. His transfer enabled me to leave the Hong Kong political officer's job and move to the China section where I became the China Commercial Officer. This was a breakthrough because U.S.-China commercial relations were very hot. I went from being the least known guy on the consulate staff to being a high-profile officer who was invited to diplomatic receptions and Chamber of Commerce dinners and who was interviewed by the press. In 1973 I got the opportunity to go to China to attend the Canton Trade Fair, one of the first Americans to cross the border. When I applied for a visa to return to China for the next Canton Trade Fair, the Chinese decided to teach the US a lesson by not issuing visas to Consulate staff. This was viewed by the press as an indicator of the state of U.S.-China relations. The fact that I was turned down for a Chinese visa to attend the Trade Fair was reported in *Newsweek*.

Q: Oh-ho, in other words they didn't want anybody who had been in Hong Kong to go to China.

PERITO: Right. They were trying to force us to open the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing, which we subsequently did, and then to increase the number of Americans assigned there. A year after the Liaison Office opened, the Department decided to add one more staff

member. They need a commercial officer to deal with the rapidly growing number of American businessmen visiting China and I got the job.

Q: You were then assigned to Beijing in '74?

PERITO: Right. We got to Beijing during a political campaign which probably could have turned into the second Cultural Revolution. There were large character posters all over the city. On the surface, it was a campaign to criticize an Italian film maker named Antonioni who had made a film about China which was critical. It was also an anti-foreigners movement. There were a number of instances where foreigners were stoned and beaten by Chinese crowds. The theme of the campaign was that foreigners looked down on China and, therefore, the Chinese needed to be vigilant. It was dangerous to have a camera. It was dangerous to do anything which looked like you were condescending toward Chinese. The first year we were in China was very dicey. In the long run, we learned through intelligence sources that it was a campaign by the Gang of Four, Madam Mao and her cronies, against Zhou Enlai, the premier, and it was extraordinarily serious.

Q: Exciting time to be there then.

PERITO: We were among the first Americans to return to China. We got there when David Bruce was still the chief of mission. It was an amazing experience to be around David Bruce and Evangeline Bruce. My quintessential story of David Bruce is, he had just returned from Europe. I asked him when we were walking together down the hall to a staff meeting, "How are things in Europe?" His response was, "Jean Monnet is very depressed."

Q: When you're David Bruce, you can talk like that.

PERITO: That's right. Another time we went in to talk to him about landing rights for Pan American World Airways in China. His opening remark was, "I remember we had a Pan Am board meeting one day and this young fellow named Jeeb Halaby came in and said, 'We're going to fly the Atlantic.'" He started everything with a story about his being present at the creation.

Q: Were the Chinese greatly interested in trade with us at that time?

PERITO: Chinese exports to the United States exploded, but the Chinese were very careful about what they bought from us. The issue was whether the US would extend Most Favored Nation tariff treatment for Chinese exports. Every time we met with the Chinese, the first thing they'd say is, "China must have MFN"

Three months after we got to Beijing, George H.W. Bush arrived and became the US envoy to China. He and Barbara completely changed the way the Chief of the Liaison Office operated. The Bruces were very gracious, but they were very private people. The Bushes on the day they arrived opened the residence and gave a big party for the staff.

They were wonderful about including everyone. We were very isolated. Beijing was still a long way away. There was no way to fly directly into Beijing. If you wanted to reach Beijing, you had to fly to Hong Kong, take a train to Guangzhou, stay overnight, and then take a plane the next morning, or you had to come in via Karachi, Pakistan, or by air or train via Moscow. There was no direct flight between Japan and Beijing and wouldn't be for another two years. Getting out of China took two-days as well.

There were very few foreigners in Beijing. The Chinese clamped down on foreign diplomats. We lived in segregated compounds kept away from the Chinese people by guards at the gate. This was allegedly for our protection, but really it was the traditional way the Chinese dealt with foreigners. They've always fenced them in, made them very comfortable, but made it clear that they weren't to have anything to do with the locals. It was a very isolated existence. Having the Bushes there was wonderful because they were open and friendly. George Bush invited famous people to visit them. Because China was the hot place to visit, they had an incredible stream of VIP's come through the residence. Ambassador Bush invited several members of the staff every evening for cocktails at the residence. You'd never know who was going to be there. One night that I was invited it was Steve Allen. Another time, it was the head of Stroh Brewery; another time it was the CEO of Coca Cola; another time it was Dylan Ripley, the head of the Smithsonian Institute. There were endless Congressional delegations and Bush, a former Congressman, did a great job of handling CODELS. .

Q: Now, in 1975 Henry Kissinger came there. Did you have anything to do with his visit?

PERITO: We all did. It was a small staff; there were only about 20 of us. Everybody worked on every visit. Gerald Ford's visit to China in 1975 was the most memorable. Having the President there, having Kissinger there, having George Bush as the envoy, that was pretty high powered.

Q: You were in the big leagues at that time.

PERITO: I was the deputy in a two-man commercial unit, but I was involved in everything. Several things happened during President Ford's visit. All the major TV networks decided to interview a family at the Liaison Office about living in China. My family was the "NBC family" and another officer and his family was the "CBS family" and there was the "ABC family." We were interviewed for the Today Show by Barbara Walters. NBC wanted to interview us having breakfast. The NBC camera crew and Barbara Walters arrived at our apartment, which was a third-floor walk-up, at seven o'clock in the morning. The day before the interview we met with the producers. They agreed there topics that we would not be asked about. We wouldn't talk about our maid, we wouldn't talk about U.S.-China relations, etc.

When the camera crew arrived in our living room, they were complaining because they had to walk up three flights of stairs with their equipment. They were also upset because the Chinese had isolated the U.S. press in a hotel out of town and wouldn't let them leave the hotel unless they were escorted. In response to their complaints, I said "You have to

understand that dealing with the Chinese bureaucracy is like being nibbled to death by a duck.” Barbara Walters turned to me and said, “What was that?” I said, “Please, don’t use that.” Barbara disappeared into the bathroom to put on her makeup. My wife and I sat down on the couch with Barbara. They turned on the cameras. Barbara Walters began the interview by saying, “Bob, when we were chatting earlier, you said that living in China was like being nibbled to death by a duck.”

That was the way it started, and it got worse. She asked me, “Bob, what’s wrong with U.S.-China relations? What should Secretary Kissinger be doing better?” and on and on. Barbara Walters liked my wife, who was charming and came through beautifully in the interview. She asked my wife about our children and about going shopping in Beijing. Later NBC filmed my wife shopping in Beijing stores, and they filmed our children playing. My daughter was five years old and she was going to a Chinese kindergarten which was located, funny enough, on Sesame Street in Beijing.

The interview was shown on the Today Show in the week following Ford’s visit. We had six minutes on the Today Show, which was extraordinary. An NBC representative quipped that if everyone in the world was annihilated, that would get three minutes max. We had six minutes, which was really quite something. When we saw the final version of the interview, we were shocked by the editing. They included the stuff about being nibbled to death by a duck but they deleted other parts. Barbara Walters asked my wife, “What do you do in China?” My wife talked about her interest in Chinese culture and about setting up a school for children in the diplomatic community. In the edited version, my wife replies “Well, I go shopping,” and they showed her walking around the shops. She was upset. After the interview ran we were afraid the State Department would immediately transfer us back to Washington.

Fortunately for us, the NBC editors had done the same thing to their interview with George and Barbara Bush. In Barbara Bush’s response to the question, “What will you bring back from China?” they deleted her remarks about her memories of places and people and left in her remark that “I will bring back this vase and this rug.” A few days after the interview was shown, we received a very lovely handwritten note from Barbara Bush saying, “Listen, I just want to commiserate with you. They did the same thing to me and George in our interview, and we know how you feel. So don’t worry about it,” which was very gracious of her.

Q: Back to other things, while you were there, what were China’s relations with other countries, say with the Soviet Union?

PERITO: It was very tense with the Soviet Union. That was the time of the breakdown in relations between the Soviets and the Chinese. It was a time when the U.S. had much better relations with Moscow and Beijing than they had with each other. That was the major goal for U.S. policy at the time.

Q: And what about China’s relations with Japan?

PERITO: That relationship was also strained. The Chinese never got over World War II. Although there was a large Japanese diplomatic mission in Beijing staffed by extraordinarily good officers, the Chinese made it clear that they preferred dealing with Americans over the Japanese. The Japanese were investing millions of dollars in the Chinese economy, but Japan was second choice politically to the United States.

Q: Anything about the two Koreas?

PERITO: No, it was too early for that. The only thing I remember about Korea was that although Beijing was a pretty dreary place and fairly rough living, European diplomats who were stationed in North Korea came to Beijing for R&R. I thought things in North Korea must really be awful.

Q: Were you still there when Zhou Enlai died?

PERITO: Yes. There was a major demonstration. It was the first Tiananmen Square riot. It never reached the importance of the Tiananmen massacre that occurred several years later. There was a monument in the middle of Tiananmen Square and ordinary people, students and workers, began to place flowers and memorials at the base of the monument to pay tribute to Zhou Enlai. The pile of flowers and the crowds grew over several days. One morning my wife and a friend of hers had been shopping downtown and they came back to the Liaison Office to report that there was something going on in Tiananmen Square and at the Great Hall of People. They said we should go down and take a look because it did not look good.

We piled in our cars and went down; there was a full-dress riot brewing. By afternoon some cars had been overturned and set on fire and some buildings on the periphery had been taken over. The crowd grew and we did a lot of reporting. After dark, the authorities issued an ultimatum to the people who were in the square to leave or they would be arrested. Most people left. The police arrested and beat up the people that remained. By the next morning, it was all over. In China verdicts rendered on political events. The official verdict on the people that participated in the Tiananmen riot in April 1975 was that they were counter revolutionaries. I felt proud to be in the group of counter revolutionaries because I was there.

Q: In 1976 you were transferred back to Washington to the State Department, where you became a senior watch officer in the Operations Center. Was this something you welcomed or not?

PERITO: No, this was something I knew nothing about. This was really a very difficult assignment. By that time I had been away from the United States for more than nine years. I had been in the Peace Corps in Nigeria. My wife and I were in the United States for eight months. We spent three years in Taiwan, three years in Hong Kong and a little over two years in Beijing. I was an FSO 4 at that time--currently that would be an FSO 2--but I had never served in the Department. I was assigned to the Operations Center as a senior watch officer. During the hours when the Department is closed, the senior watch

officer is the senior officer on duty in the Department. The expectation was that the senior watch officer would know the Department cold. He would know who everyone was, what all the offices did, how the place worked, who to go to and what to do. I had never served in the State Department, so I had an enormous learning curve. I didn't know how to use the telephone. I knew the Secretary of State, but I did not know the other members of the senior staff. I had no idea what P and M and AF and EA and all the initials stood for. I had no idea how the Department was structured, what staff assistants did and so on. I'd been a visa officer, a commercial officer, and I'd done a lot of political reporting abroad. All of a sudden there I was - klunk!

I had a really difficult time learning the job. I also had a difficult time with the shift schedule. The Operation Center staff worked rotating shifts: you worked two days, two swings, two midnights, and then you were off for three days. The first day off, you were coming off a midnight shift and so you slept all day. Studies show that the rotating shift system is the most disruptive way to do shift work. It destroys the body. It meant that you almost never had a day off on a weekend, because your days off rotated. Every time you served through a full series of shift changes, the next three days were your "weekend." I was there for a year and a half. Now no one serves for more than a year. That was much too long. During the time I was on the watch, we lost our friends because people got tired of asking, "Can you come over on Saturday night," only to be told, "Bob's working on Saturday night. What about next Thursday?" It disrupted our family. I was not home at night. I was sleeping days. I was disoriented half the time. It was a very bad period. Life on the watch resulted in divorces. It was tough.

Q: Let's hope they've changed that schedule now. I don't know.

PERITO: The best way is have people work a week of days, a week of swings and then a week of midnights. That is how they do it in the White House and at CIA.

Q: Did Secretary Kissinger have much to do with the Operations Center? Did he pay any attention to it?

PERITO: No, not a lot. He visited once or twice. I have a picture taken with him when I was the watch officer. Our contact with the Secretary was through his two staff assistants.

Q: Now, you were there during the 1976 election campaign. Did the Operations Center get involved at all in briefing candidate Carter or anyone else?

PERITO: No, not briefing candidates. What made that period exciting was a number of airline hijackings by the Palestine Liberation Organization. There was any number of watches that were devoted to tracking aircraft as they were moved from one place to another ending up in the Middle East. There was also a major tragedy that occurred in the Canary Islands when two fully loaded 747's crashed into each other and burned killing everybody on both airplanes. That night was among the worst. There were many things that struck me about the watch but one of them was how much time was spent chasing ghosts. As an example, the night of the aircraft accident in the Canary Islands, a U.S.

military medical team based in Germany was flying to the Canary Islands to provide assistance. The U.S. military aircraft carrying the team went off the radar and disappeared in the middle of the night. We spent four hours trying to find this aircraft. People got increasingly excited that we had lost the plane and had another tragedy. As it turned out, the plane landed in Spain at a U.S. military base to spend the night and everybody involved was sound asleep, but it took several hours to find this out.

Q: After the election did the Operations Center do any briefing of Secretary Vance?

PERITO: No, that wasn't the Operations Center's function. The people we briefed were the oncoming team. Occasionally we would brief the Deputy Secretary or the Under Secretary if there was something critical that needed immediate attention. Most of the people that we talked to during the night were at the Deputy Assistant Secretary or the Assistant Secretary level.

Q: Now, you moved from the Operations Center to Soviet Union Affairs in the Department. Is that something you had requested, or how did that come about?

PERITO: The office of Soviet Union Affairs was huge; it had four constituent offices. There was the Office of Multilateral Affairs, which dealt with Soviet international relations; the Cultural Affairs Office; the Internal Political Affairs Office; and an Economic Office, plus the front office. The Office of Soviet Union Affairs was bigger than most bureaus in the State Department at the time. I was in the Office of Multilateral Affairs. It was an outstanding office. The office director, Gary Matthews, went on to be ambassador to Malta. Avis Bohlen, the officer who did arms control, was the daughter of Chip Bohlen and the future ambassador to Bulgaria. Kent Brown went on to be ambassador to several countries in Eastern Europe; Mark Paris became Assistant Secretary for NEA and an ambassador.

I got the job through Sherrod McCall who was the Deputy in the Office of Soviet Union Affairs. Sherrod had been in the Consulate General in Hong Kong and was a China specialist. He said he was tired of being the only person on the Soviet Desk who knew anything about China. A Department inspection during the Kissinger era determined that the Soviet Desk did not need a Sino-Soviet officer so they cut the position. Sherrod had led the fight to restore the position. I got the job. I was supposed to work on Sino-Soviet affairs.

On my third day in the office, Sherrod asked if I knew anything about Africa. I explained about my time in the Peace Corps and my studies at Columbia. He said, "Great. Write me a paper about why the Soviet Union is intervening in the Somalia-Ethiopian war." I said, "Okay. I don't know anything about Somalia or Ethiopia but I'll write you a paper. In my career, I learned that Foreign Service Officers are fearless. Other government officials are not. When I was at Commerce, people would say, "But I don't know anything about that," or "That's not in my job description." Foreign Service Officers never say that; they say, "Of course. I don't know anything about the subject, but I'll write you a paper." Over time, I became an expert on the Ethiopia-Somalia war.

Then we did the Chinese invasion of Vietnam. We did Soviet military assistance to various wars in southern Africa. I became the Soviet Third World officer. This was right after the Vietnam War. The United States was in terrible shape. The Soviet Union had unlimited quantities of military assistance and the advisors to provide it. They were knocking our socks off all over the Third World. We were on the defensive. When we tried to provide military assistance to countries that were on our side, we were taking tanks away from National Guard armories in Kansas.

Immediately after the debate in Congress on the Panama Canal Treaty, the first SALT Agreement was signed. The Department decided that it needed to educate the American people about a major treaty agreement so when it came before the Senate for ratification people would know what was at stake. The Department organized a cadre of Foreign Service Officers they called "SALT Sellers." The SALT Sellers were trained to give public speeches about the SALT Agreement. They were sent across the country to talk to Americans about the Agreement.

Q: Anybody who would listen to them.

PERITO: I was selected for that program and it was terrific. I got a course in public speaking. I received huge briefing books on topics like throw weight, multiple warheads and the details of the treaty. I spent the next two years traveling. There were various levels of SALT Sellers. There were senior officers who got to do the big cities and the network TV shows. There were more junior officers like me who were sent to places like Boulder, Colorado; Buffalo, New York; and, Memphis, Tennessee. Every one of those visits was fun. You'd be met at the airport by a public relations person. You'd do a luncheon speech at the Chamber of Commerce; you'd do television interviews at the local TV stations; you'd do radio interviews; and, you'd meet the editorial board or owner of the local newspaper. There would be a dinner speech in the evening. You'd either repeat the schedule the next day or move on to the next town. There always was a nice article in the local newspaper and a photograph under the headline: 'Soviet Expert Comes to Bowling Green.' It was exciting; it got me to places I never would have gone otherwise.

Q: Exactly, and it got you out of Washington for a while .to see what people were thinking and what they were interested in.

PERITO: What people were interested in - just one comment - my impression was that people were really delighted that someone from Washington came to talk to them. They were very interested in what we had to say. It took them out of their day-to-day concerns and gave them something bigger to think about, U.S.-Soviet relations and nuclear war. But after having thought it over, they could not see any relationship between what we were talking about and their lives. The topic was interesting, but not very relevant.

If you remember the effort to ratify the SALT Treaty did not end well. As the Senate began to debate the agreement, a Soviet brigade was discovered in Cuba, which had been

there since the Cuban Missile Crisis. The intelligence services of the United States had simply overlooked it. Once the brigade was discovered, I became involved in a series of adventures to document the presence of those forces. I was sent to talk to people who had served in the Kennedy Administration about their memories. I wrote papers based on these conversations and our research. We found files that had been lost for years, some of them in old safes that were stored in the file room of the Office of Soviet Union Affairs. I also found information related to this aspect of the Cuban Missile Crisis in the archives of U.S. mission to the UN in New York.

I discovered that Soviet troops had been sent to Cuba to protect the Soviet missiles. Under the U.S.-Soviet agreement to remove the missiles, there was an understanding that the Soviet troops would depart as well. There was a drawdown of troops that went on over time. After a while, however, it appears the U.S. stopped counting the number of troops that were leaving and stopped paying attention. On the Soviet side, it appeared they thought there was a tacit understanding that the brigade would remain behind. In the end, the U.S. simply forgot about it. When we looked at the intelligence archives, there were hundreds of intelligence reports based on interviews with Soviet soldiers that had served in Cuba. According to these reports, Cuba was a great post, a much sought after assignment. There were beautiful girls, great souvenirs, and soldiers were paid extra. Anyway, the Soviet brigade in Cuba and the invasion of Afghanistan killed the SALT Treaty. It never was ratified.

Q: What was the effect in Russia of the Chinese invasion of Vietnam? Did they take that seriously?

PERITO: The Soviets took it seriously, but it was over quickly. The Chinese were very clever. The first Chinese acknowledgement of the invasion was an announcement that Chinese military were withdrawing. The whole incursion at its deepest point was only 13 miles. Actually, the Chinese took an enormous beating. They suffered huge casualties.

I was on the Soviet Desk in the European Bureau; I was invited to a meeting in the East Asia Bureau held in the EA Bureau conference room. A group of very senior officers was seated around the conference table smoking their pipes, stroking their beards and looking very wise, saying to each other with absolute certainty that the Chinese were bluffing and would never invade Vietnam. As this meeting was going on, we learned later, Chinese troops were pouring across the Vietnam border.

Q: Did you have any relations with the Soviet Embassy in your job?

PERITO: Yes. We had the usual diplomatic exchanges with the Soviets. They came over and we talked to them; we went to their Embassy and attended their receptions. There were two things that were memorable. The U.S. tested intercontinental range ballistic missiles over a test range across the Pacific. As a confidence-building measure, there was an agreement with the Soviets that every time we tested missiles we would inform them in advance. One of my jobs was to call a designated officer in the Soviet Embassy and read him a statement about the launch. The wording of the statement had been agreed; it

was the same every time...

Q: Boilerplate language.

PERITO: ...boilerplate language. It was written on a three-by-five card. My role was to call this guy and say, "Ivan, we're going to launch," and then I would read the statement on the card. In response, he would read a similar prepared statement to me. Then we would say, "Thank you very much," and hang up. More than half the time, the tests were cancelled or postponed because of weather or a technical glitch. So we repeated these exchanges again and again.

The director of Multilateral Office of the Soviet Desk had a great sense of humor. During the crisis over the Soviet brigade in Cuba, he had a map of Cuba in his office that was mounted on a board that you could stick pins into. Every time an officer from the Soviet Embassy came to visit him, he would put out the map and stick different-colored pins into it. During the meetings, it was never mentioned, but it was always in full view. We joked that every time an officer from the Soviet Embassy saw the map he would report that the pins had moved, and would speculate what we were up to.

Q: Well, you were in the Office of Soviet Union Affairs when the Soviets moved into Afghanistan?

PERITO: Right, it happened over Christmas week. I was the Soviet Third World officer and I'd been working on the Afghan problem. The buildup to the invasion had been quite extensive. I remember reading in a CIA report a comment that the goal of every Afghan man was to die with a rifle in his hand in a *jihad* fighting the infidels. It struck me at that time that it was going to be a long conflict. At the time, the CIA was claiming that the Soviets would win the war in six weeks but, of course, that's not what happened. The Soviets invaded in the middle of December, the tanks got stuck in the snow, and the rest is history. I spent a considerable amount of time working on that conflict.

Q: Did the Department have to furnish recommendations to the White House?

PERITO: Yes, The Department recommended that we retaliate against the Soviet Union. The staff of the Soviet Desk was called back from Christmas vacation. The decision was made to scrap the whole relationship and to break every one of the agreements that we had with the Soviets. This was heartrending for people on the Soviet Desk because they had worked on improving U.S.-Soviet relations their whole careers. They had negotiated the commercial agreement, the cultural agreement, the consular agreement, and the grain deals. The Kissinger policy for the Soviets was to create a web of relations that would provide a safety net for the relationship. When things went wrong, the relationship would bounce back because people would say, "Well, we can't do this because it would impact the grain agreement," or "We have the cultural agreement to protect," or "We have the science agreement to protect." People from various constituencies would argue in favor of restoring the relationship without letting things get out of hand. It did not work this time.

The U.S. broke all the agreements. It happened on a Saturday. There were working groups all over the Department putting together what became annexes to an action memo to the Secretary with recommendations to the President. The memo recommended that all the bilateral agreements be scrapped. Gary Matthews, who was the office director, had the amazing ability to type documents in final without making a mistake. In those days, we had electric typewriters. Gary sat in his office all day in front of his electric typewriter. He had typed the cover memo and then he would add a description of the annexes. People would come in and they would give him the annex; he would fill in a couple of paragraphs in the cover memo and put the document together. By the end of the day there was a huge stack paper. This massive document went to the Secretary, who signed it. For a long time afterward, the Soviet Desk had almost nothing to do.

Q: How long did this last?

PERITO: It lasted to the end of my tour; I had about six months to go. By the time I left the Desk, the war was really getting started in Afghanistan and the relationship with the Soviets was at low ebb.

Q: Yeah, that would have been the low point, probably, of your tour, the Afghan problem. Well, in 1980 then you were given a Congressional fellowship and you moved up to the Hill, another interesting shift, and went to work for Senator Percy and Congressman Prichard. Was this something you had asked for, one of the fellowships?

PERITO: I applied for an American Political Science Association Fellowship to work on the Hill. It was highly competitive, and there were about 90 people who applied. They selected four people, so it was prestigious to be chosen. It was a nine-month program. It began with a short course on Congress at Johns Hopkins SAIS in Washington. Fellows then had to find their own jobs on the Hill. I was the only person who was invited by an office to come to work. Senator Percy's staff invited me to join them.

Q: Well, Bob, with your background in China and Russian, I should think you'd be a hot commodity.

PERITO: Senator Percy's office wanted someone with a China background to temporarily replace a staff member who was going on maternity leave. I was brought in. This was a few days before the election in 1990. At the time, Percy was a back-bencher when the Democrats controlled the Senate. The day after the Republicans won control of the Senate, Percy was a candidate for chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. There was a question, however, as to whether Senator Helms, who had seniority, would take the chairmanship of the Foreign Relations Committee or whether he would take the Agriculture Committee. We were sitting in Percy's office waiting for Helms to call Percy to reveal his choice. We were gathered around Percy's desk when the phone rang. Percy picked up the phone, and you could hear Helms shout through the receiver, "Mr. Chairman!" He had made his decision. Helms took Agriculture, and Chuck Percy got the Chairmanship of the Foreign Relations Committee. The whole staff of the Foreign

Relations Committee was Democrat but the Republicans were now in the majority. The Republicans fired the whole staff.

I was working on Percy's personal staff and was asked to help with the first order of business before the committee, the hearing for Al Haig as Secretary of State. We sat in one room preparing for the Al Haig hearing. In the next room, Percy's chief of staff was firing all the Democrat staff members. I remember watching these wonderfully bright, engaging, successful people walk into the room, be told they were fired and walk out looking totally dazed. The nomination hearing for Haig went on for more than a week. It was an extravaganza with batteries of television cameras and confrontational speeches. The major issue was whether U.S. foreign policy had been too cautious under President Carter.

Q: Well, it went back to Nixon and Watergate, too, didn't it?

PERITO: The hearing covered Al Haig's role in the Nixon Whitehouse and Watergate. There was the issue of whether Carter had allowed us to be walked on during the Iran hostage crisis. In one very famous encounter, Haig was challenged by a Democratic Senator. He looked at the man and said, "Frankly, Senator, there are things in this world that are worth fighting and dying for." We had a closed-door hearing where the Senators interviewed Haig about his financial arrangements with the company he was working for. He was giving up \$4,000,000 in annual income and benefits to take the job of Secretary of State. He got committee approval and the hearings moved on the Deputy Secretary of State nominee Judge Clark.

Q: Oh, his deputy.

PERITO: Judge Clark was a friend of President Reagan's from California. He had no foreign affairs background and reportedly was selected to be the Deputy Secretary of State to keep an eye on Al Haig. Clark literally had never been outside the United States except for a weekend trip to Tijuana. Senators asked him questions; he could not answer any of them. We went through the entire morning with Clark saying, "Gee, I don't know," and "I really can't say." The Republicans tried serving up softballs, but he couldn't hit those either. Finally Percy said, "It's time for lunch. We'll break, and we'll come back in the afternoon."

On the dais, Senators sit at the desk and staff members sit in chairs against the wall behind their Senator, the Republican staff on one side and the Democrats on the other. I sat at the center behind Percy. At the break, the Democrat staff walked over and stood in front of the Republican staff. They said, "Look, we're going to make you guys a deal. We're going to get a map. If Clark can name the big countries - not the little countries but the big countries like Russia and China - we'll confirm him." It was very funny.

As we left the hearing room, I was walking with Percy and going down the corridor we ran into Senator John Glenn. Speaking to Percy about Clark, Glenn said, "He's the goddamn dumbest man I ever saw." Percy replied, "I told him to study. I told him, but he

wouldn't listen." Anyway, Judge Clark was confirmed, went on to serve as deputy Secretary of State and National Security Advisor and did very well.

Q: Well, those were exciting days. Now, Senator Percy got in trouble, didn't he, over the Middle East situation? Were you still with him then?

PERITO: Percy got in trouble over comments he made about the Palestinian state. That really seemed to have more to do with Senator Helms trying to manipulate things in a way that left Percy dependent upon Helms. It came to head in a floor debate. Senator Percy had absolute confidence in his staff. Percy was being attacked on the floor by Senators who said he was selling out Israel. Percy started from his office for the Senate to defend himself on the floor. He was caught halfway there by one of the youngest women on the staff, who told him, "Don't go. Come back." He turned around and went back to the office. There was a staff meeting where it was decided that Republican senators who were Jewish, led by Jacob Javits, would go to the floor and defend him. Jacob Javits went on the floor and made a speech about "my friend Chuck Percy and what he's done for Israel." The debate was over.

Q: This is Tom Dunnigan speaking on August 6th, 2002. Today I am continuing my interview with Bob Perito. Bob, the last time we talked you were telling me about your period as a Congressional fellow and your service with Senator Percy and Congressman Prichard. Perhaps you could tell me a little more about Senator Percy's difficulties with the Middle Eastern problem.

PERITO: As I recall, the Helms staff leaked a State Department report which showed that in a private meeting in Israel Percy said he was in favor of a Palestinian state. In retrospect he was farsighted because that's the U.S. government position right now, but at the time it was an anathema to the pro-Israeli lobby. After anointing Percy as the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Helms' staff leaked the telegram and Percy was attacked on the Senate floor. He was defended by Senator Jacob Javits and other Jewish leaders, and afterwards he was publicly embraced on the floor by Helms. This indicated that he was back in everybody's good graces, but it meant he was really dependent upon Helms from that point forward. Helms made the point with Percy and his staff that he had to be very careful with the conservatives in the Republican Party because they would go to any extreme to rein him in. In the end, Percy ran for reelection and was defeated, continuing a string of defeats for Senators who agreed to take the chairmanship of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. At the time Percy took the chairmanship, he told the staff that this had been the kiss of death for Senator Frank Church and others. He was very afraid that it would also be the end of his political career; that somebody would run against him, campaign on local issues and claim that Percy was more interested in foreign policy than he was in looking after his constituents in Illinois. That's exactly what happened.

After I did my half year with Percy, I moved to the House to work for a Congressman named Joel Prichard, a Republican from Seattle. That was a totally different situation. Although they were both Republicans, the Republicans were the minority in the House.

When you're in the minority in the House, you have none of the perks of office. Prichard was going through a divorce, which meant he had even less. Most of the time, he slept in his office, in the back seat of his car or in an apartment he shared with another Congressman. Wherever Senator Percy went there were television cameras and an entourage tailing him. The first thing I tried after joining Prichard's office was to call a press conference, but no one came. Fortunately, Prichard was one of those people in Congress who almost never made a speech on the floor; never had his name attached to a piece of legislation, but had tremendous influence because he never tried to grab the limelight. He spent a lot of time in the gym. He was the sort of representative that other members would check with before they voted. He was sort of seen by his peers as someone who could be counted on to give them honest advice. He had enormous influence but it was all quiet influence.

One day Prichard decided there was a need to change votes on a piece of legislation. He got on the phone and called 30 members and changed 30 votes in about 30 minutes. His influence was extraordinary. When Prichard ran for the House the first time, he made a campaign promise that he would serve only 12 years. When 12 years were up, he left Congress, although he could have won the next election. He received at least 75 percent of the vote in six elections. He went back to the state of Washington, ran for lieutenant governor, served several terms, and then died of cancer while still a relatively young man.

At the end of my Congressional Fellowship, I went back to the State Department. My goal was to follow in the footsteps of a friend of mine who followed his time as a congressional fellow with a job as the Special Assistant to the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. When I was still on the Soviet Desk, I had gone to this guy and asked how he had gotten his job. He explained the process, but said the chances against getting both a congressional fellowship and the job of special assistant to the under secretary were astronomical. In fact, however, that's exactly what happened. I ended up in one of the beautifully paneled offices on the seventh floor.

Walter Stoessel was the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, a truly amazing, gifted diplomat who had been in the Foreign Service since the Roosevelt Administration. He started as a local hire clerk in one of the consulate generals in Canada; eventually he passed the test and became a Foreign Service Officer. He'd been ambassador to Germany, to the Soviet Union, and to Poland. He had an extraordinary Foreign Service career. Before joining the Foreign Service-- something that he was proud of-- he had a successful screen test in Hollywood. He was an extremely handsome man and looked like the ambassador from central casting. His wife was stunning. She had been a model; she was still photographed for fashion magazines. They were a Washington power couple.

Stoessel was Under Secretary for six months before he was promoted to Deputy Secretary. He was the first career officer to ever serve in the position of Deputy Secretary of State. His primary focus was on the Middle East and Asia.

Q: That's curious, because his whole background had been Europe.

PERITO: That's right, his background had been the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but those issues were taken by other senior Department officials and no one was watching Asia and the Middle East. My perspective may be slanted because those were the areas that I worked on, but Stoessel did visit China and the Middle East.

Q: Did you travel with him?

PERITO: At the start there were four Special Assistants. When he became Deputy Secretary, he took only two of us, Gary Matthews and me. At the beginning of the Reagan Administration, there was a feeling on the part of Richard Burt, Bud MacFarlane, and Paul Wolfowitz that the United States needed to redress its reputation for being unwilling to use military force in the aftermath of the Iran Hostage Crisis. They wanted the U.S. to take military action against Libya. The three men stuck together on policy issues and argued from the same perspective. After a time, they were referred to collectively as MacBurtowitz by junior staff in the Department.

Q: And they're all strong personalities.

PERITO: They're strong personalities. I remember one meeting where they came to see Stoessel and to explain what they had in mind. They argued that we should provoke Libya into a military confrontation. We should point the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean at the Libyan coast and sail into Libyan waters until we provoked a response. Stoessel was shocked; I was stunned, but in fact that's what happened. A few weeks later I was jarred out of a sound sleep by a late night phone call from the Operations Center saying that U.S. Navy jets were engaged in a dogfight with Libyan fighters. This was the first of several incidents. The U.S. never lost an aircraft; the Libyans lost several. The Libyans would rally fighters, come out to challenge our aircraft, but veer off before they had any contact. There was always one aircraft, however, that would engage. As soon as it locked on with its radar, our jets would fire. Our equipment was so much better that the Libyan planes would disappear instantaneously. We made the point that we were willing to use military force to protect our interests.

There was one episode where Stoessel's role in Middle East Diplomacy was really notable. It was just prior to the Falkland Islands war. The British ambassador came to see Stoessel about an incident in the Falkland Islands-- Stoessel and I had never heard of the Falklands--in which some Argentine military personnel had come ashore on one of the islands. There were several islands and most were uninhabited. It was wintertime and the British were uncertain what the Argentines were doing. The ambassador asked if the U.S. would pass a message to the Argentine government requesting their military personnel check in with the British government office on the main island. We agreed to pass the message. I went back to my office. I remember picking up the phone and telling someone, "Ha ha I've got the next crisis for you. Have you ever heard of the Falkland Islands?" I couldn't believe this was serious, but it was.

Jean Kirkpatrick was our ambassador to the UN in New York; she had very close

relations with the Argentines. A few days later Jean made a speech in the Security Council in which she defended the Argentine position. She also invited Stoessel to a dinner that she was giving in honor of the Argentine ambassador. We talked about the invitation; Stoessel felt uncomfortable and turned the invitation down. As that dinner party was going on in Washington, the Argentine army went ashore in the Falkland Islands. The Argentines believed that if there were no British casualties, the British wouldn't retaliate. The British resisted and Argentines took casualties, but didn't fire on the British. There were few British troops on the island and the Argentines overwhelmed them. They disarmed the British forces, packed them up, and sent them home. The Argentines were in control of the Falklands.

Q: But they hadn't met Mrs. Thatcher.

PERITO: Mrs. Thatcher wasn't going to accept an Argentine takeover of the Falklands. As the British armada sailed toward Argentina, Secretary Haig engaged in shuttle diplomacy flying between London and Buenos Aires trying to avert war. At this point, the Department received an urgent message from Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin demanding that Secretary Haig immediately come to Israel. Begin said the Egyptians were violating the Middle East Peace Agreement by moving troops into the Sinai and preparing to attack Israel. Middle East peace was in jeopardy; the upcoming scheduled handover of the Sinai was not going to happen. Begin demanded that Secretary Haig come immediately to Israel to deal with the crisis. A message went back saying in effect, "Sorry, but Al Haig's trying to prevent war between England and Argentina at the moment and is too busy to come and prevent war between Israel and Egypt," Begin persisted, cables kept coming, and finally it was decided that Walter Stoessel should go to the Middle East.

Stoessel had never been involved in Middle East diplomacy, but he took the assignment. We left from Andrews Air Force Base, flying on one of the special aircraft in the Air Force One fleet. I am told that there was a television news report showing Stoessel and me in our trench coats with the collars up walking alone to board the aircraft. In fact the traveling party included only Stoessel and his wife, Gary Matthews and me and a couple of experts from the NEA Bureau. We spent two weeks negotiating; the first week getting the Israelis out of the Sinai, the second week negotiating an agreement to demarcate the border and resolving a dispute over Taba, a resort town on the Gulf.

The first week was spent talking to the Israelis in the morning, meeting with Menachem Begin, getting on the airplane at noon with a group of Israeli diplomats, flying to Cairo and spending the afternoon in Cairo negotiating with the Egyptians, who were wonderfully gracious, and then flying back in the evening, going to bed at two or three in the morning in Jerusalem, then getting up and repeating the day. During that week a number of things became clear. First, the Egyptians weren't violating the agreement. Ariel Sharon, the Defense Minister, attempted to manipulate the crisis to his own advantage by claiming the Egyptians were in violation. The Egyptians were terrified they were going to be attacked by Israel. Second, there was a crisis. The Israelis had left one of the settlements in the Sinai intact. They had withdrawn the settlers, but the buildings had

been immediately occupied by young people, mostly college students, some Americans, and Israeli extremists who were threatening to commit mass suicide rather than let the Sinai return to Egypt. Third, there was a hot shooting war going on between Israel and the Palestinians, who controlled southern Lebanon. There were constant rocket attacks and firing on the border; the Israelis were bombing all the way to Beirut.

During that week, a couple of things happened. Immediately after our arrival- this was Stoessel's idea – we visited the Holocaust Museum. Stoessel, with his background in Poland, was intimately familiar with what had happened to the Jews in Eastern Europe. Stoessel knew Begin was Polish and that it was important to signal Begin that we understood that part of his history. Our visit was on the day commemorating the holocaust in Israel, and there was television news coverage of our visit to the museum.

It was a highly emotional time. The people occupying the settlements in Sinai were threatening to kill themselves, claiming it was the holocaust all over again. We met with Begin midweek. We had a conversation in which he appeared to make a major concession. Then he began to talk about his nephew, a 19-year-old Israeli army lieutenant who was killed the previous day in Lebanon. As Begin talked about his nephew he began to cry. He broke down and sobbed. When he regained his composure, Stoessel ended the meeting thinking that he had the concession in hand. We flew to Egypt to explain it to the Egyptians, who were very enthused. The next morning we saw Begin. Stoessel recapped the previous day conversation noting the concession. Begin said he couldn't remember having said that, and so we went back to square one. Neither Stoessel nor anyone on our team could figure out whether Begin had forgotten for political reasons or whether he had been so overcome with the emotion of the moment that he lost track of the conversation. Anyway - fast forward to the end of the tape - Stoessel convinced both parties that an agreement was possible and achieved it.

During the week, we went to Tel Aviv to meet with Sharon. He began the meeting by saying, "I want to congratulate you gentlemen on your excellent aircraft!" Sharon snapped his fingers and two military officers appeared with poster-size pictures of F16 fighters, which were state of the art at that point, in camouflage paint with Israeli markings. He said, "I want to congratulate you gentlemen because today your fighters with our pilots shot down several Syrian airplanes and carried out bombing raids over Beirut," Stoessel replied, "Yes, Mr. Minister, but according to our reports your bombs hit a school bus full of schoolchildren." Sharon waved that remark aside and said, "Yes, but we should celebrate. Let's drink some champagne," Stoessel said, "No, thank you." The callousness of Sharon's behavior surprised us.

Also during the first week, an article appeared in *Newsweek* saying that Alexander Haig had delayed the start of the Falkland Islands shuttle because he didn't like the plane that he was offered. He waited in Washington for ten hours until he got a better airplane. The article said Walter Stoessel got the plane Haig rejected. The Air Force crew of our plane read the article and was incensed. They adopted us because we had accepted them when Haig turned them down. They became the Stoessel team; they called other plane the Haig team.

During the week a ham radio operator in North Carolina picked up a transmission from the State Department to Al Haig's aircraft as it flew along the coast of the United States on its way to Argentina. The message, according to this press report, was from Larry Eagleburger, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs and number three in the Department. According to the report, Eagleburger told Haig that it was a mistake to send Stoessel to the Middle East, that Stoessel was too soft, that he would get stomped on by the Israelis. Eagleburger argued that he should be sent instead because he could stand up to the Israelis. I went into Stoessel's bedroom at the Counsel General's residence and gave him the report. Stoessel was notorious for never showing emotion, particularly anger. Stoessel read the *Washington Post* report about how Larry Eagleburger had tried to derail his mission, looked at me and went, "Hmm," and that was it.

The second week in Israel was spent in shuttle diplomacy working out the arrangements for drawing the boundary in the Sinai between Israel and Egypt and deciding who got the resort town of Taba, which at that point consisted of a couple of Israeli hotels. At the end of the week, we got agreement on the boundary demarcation, the only Middle East agreement signed after the historic agreement between Anwar Sadat and Begin.

When we boarded our aircraft at the end of the mission, the crew had put up a sign. It was like a scoreboard and it said, "Stoessel 2, Haig 0," and then there was a line at the bottom that read, "Larry Eagleburger, Eat your heart out." We received an Egyptian invitation to visit the Valley of the Kings on our way back to Washington. We flew to Cairo, picked up the Egyptian negotiators that we had worked with, flew to the Valley of the Kings on our U.S. Air Force aircraft, and were given a deluxe tour of the Valley of the Kings, an extraordinary experience. We flew back to Cairo and dropped off the Egyptians. After the plane took off, we were invited to the cockpit where we watched as the plane flew over the Pyramids at about 200 feet, an amazing sight.

Q: Was there tension between Haig and the White House that you could discern in your position there?

PERITO: There was tension, which resulted in Haig's resignation. I accompanied Stoessel when he represented the U.S. at the annual ASEAN and ANZUS conferences because Haig did not want to go. Again we were given a USAF special aircraft and left for Singapore via the Philippines. We had an extraordinary experience in the Philippines. We called on President Marcos and met Imelda, were wined and dined, and stayed in a gorgeous house. When we arrived at the airport, we learned that our aircraft had broken down. Efforts to make repairs which took several hours failed. We then tried to get all of the members of our delegations on commercial flights including Ambassador and Mrs. Stoessel. The airplane carrying the Stoessels taxied to the end of the runway and then turned around and came back; it also had mechanical problems.

When the problems with our plane started, President Marcos sent word that he would provide an aircraft to take us to Singapore. The political optics were terrible and Stoessel declined the offer. After Stoessel's commercial flight was cancelled, we reluctantly

decided against everybody's better judgment, particularly Stoessel's, that we would accept President Marcos' offer. After waiting another half hour, a new Philippine Airlines 727 taxied up that was completely empty except for the crew. They put us on board, wined us and dined us, and flew us to Singapore. The U.S. delegation to the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Conference arrived courtesy of President Marcos. The next day a Philippine diplomat called on us and presented a list of things that the Philippine government wanted, noting in the beginning of the diplomatic note that the Philippine government had been honored to provide transport for the U.S. delegation to the ASEAN conference. The list included about 50 different trade and economic concessions.

Q: So honored, here's the bill.

PERITO: We all laughed and, of course, did nothing. I think the Air Force paid the Philippine government for the cost of flying the plane. After Singapore, we attended the ANZUS conference in Australia, stopped in New Zealand and flew to Pago Pago in American Samoa, the setting for the Broadway show 'South Pacific.' We stopped there overnight and then were supposed to go to Hawaii and then home. Stoessel stayed at the governor's mansion in Pago Pago. I stayed in a motel down the road. The next morning about five o'clock someone pounded on my door. I opened the door, and there standing in a torrential rain storm was the Secretariat representative on the trip. He said, "Get up. Al Haig is trying to call Stoessel and he can't get through to the governor's mansion. We've got to go up there and get Stoessel to call State." When we arrived at the mansion, the governor was in the kitchen in his pajamas. He said Stoessel was in the bedroom.

I walked into the bedroom. Stoessel was in bed talking on the phone. I'll never forget the conversation. I only heard Stoessel's part, which went "Al? What do you mean, Al? Come on, don't kid around, Al? What do you mean you're resigning, Al? Don't do it, Al? Al? What's going on there?" The conversation went on like that for a few more minutes. Then Stoessel said, "All right, if that's what you're going to do." He hung up the phone, looked at me and said, "Wake everybody up. We're going home. Al Haig just resigned."

I went downstairs, woke up the air crew, which had planned to spend the day at the beach, and explained that Haig had resigned, Stoessel was Acting Secretary of State and we had to return to Washington. We stopped in Hawaii only long enough to refuel and talk to the CINC-PAC commander who had no additional information about what was happening in Washington. We landed at Andrews Air Force Base at night, it was raining, the place was deserted, and ours was the only aircraft. We were met by a State Department van and a car for Stoessel. There was no one to greet us; no news; we had no idea what was happening. It felt like there had been a coup. We got in the car, and Stoessel said, "Let's go to the Department and find out what's happening." We did. Al Haig had turned in his resignation.

Q: And Haig and Stoessel had gotten along well.

PERITO: Yes, But Haig didn't leave. His resignation was accepted by the President, but no replacement was named and Haig continued to come to the office and function as the

Secretary of State. This was a very critical period. A full scale Israeli attack on the Palestinians in Lebanon had reached Beirut. The Israeli army had encircled the city, trapped the Palestinians inside and were threatening to annihilate them, including Yasser Arafat. The U.S. embassy in Beirut was shelled continuously. Ambassador Philip Habib was in Beirut as the U.S. negotiator.

Officially Stoessel was the Acting Secretary of State, but Al Haig was still there and still making decisions. We were involved in trying to figure out how to save the Palestinians from being annihilated by the Israelis. On the July Fourth holiday, Haig went on vacation to Wintergreen. The Department was closed, but Stoessel and I were in the office. Phil Habib was on the phone calling Stoessel from the ambassador's residence in Beirut to tell him about the latest twists in the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. You could hear the shells exploding around the building. Habib stopped every so often to say, "I can't talk. I've got to get down. The shelling too heavy." Stoessel was on the phone with Habib. I was sitting across the room on another telephone with Haig's assistant who was standing beside a tennis court at Wintergreen where Haig was playing tennis. Between artillery bursts, Habib would talk with Stoessel who would give me the message. I would speak to Haig's assistant who would wait until Haig finished his serve to pass along the message. The assistant would give me Haig's reply; I would tell Stoessel who would tell Habib. The conversation went on in this manner for 45 minutes. As it turned out, this exchange was one of Haig's last acts as Secretary of State. George Shultz had been announced. Stoessel asked Shultz to tell Haig his time as Secretary was over. Haig did not come back to the Department after his vacation.

Q: What was the effect around your office of Shultz replacing Haig?

PERITO: It was termination. Shultz came in. Shultz didn't know Stoessel. Shultz knew Ken Dam, whom he had worked with before. I don't think there was ever any doubt in George Shultz' mind when he accepted the position of Secretary of State that he was going to bring in Ken Dam to be his Deputy. There was a period of three or four weeks between Al Haig's leaving and Shultz taking over the office. Stoessel was the Secretary of State *ad interim*. He had already been the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and the first career officer to be Deputy Secretary. He became the first career officer to become Secretary of State *ad interim*. He had 41 years in the Foreign Service, plus he was not well. He never spoke about it, but even then Stoessel was regularly seeing his doctor and getting skin tests. He had leukemia. Many people believe he had leukemia because during his time as ambassador in Moscow the Soviets used a technique that involved bouncing x-rays off the embassy windows to read our conversations. Stoessel never endorsed that view.

Q: So he retired after this.

PERITO: Yes. Gary Matthews got another job before Stoessel left the Department. I stayed until Stoessel's last day, helping to arrange his departure. After Ken Dam arrived, Stoessel moved to an unoccupied office. I was his only staff. We went through an awful period. Here was the grand old man of the American Foreign Service. He was retiring

and my role was to make certain he left with dignity. There was a farewell ceremony on the Eight Floor. President Reagan came. Stoessel received every award the State Department had to give. Even Larry Eagleburger came, made a flowery speech and gave him a big kiss on the cheek. It was really quite something. One of the last things Stoessel did was to ask Ken Dam if I could stay on as a member of his staff until I received a new assignment. Dam agreed that I could be one of his aides until I found another job. After Stoessel left, I came in the next day and reported to Dam's chief of staff, a fellow Foreign Service Officer and a A-100 classmate.

PERITO: I don't know whether this was it was Dam's idea, but the first thing his chief of staff said was, "We really need your office. You're going to have to move." There was a closet-size space where the messenger sat, and he said, "Well, you can sit in there." Then he said, "Since you've been doing this work for so long and you have all this experience, we're not going to give you any assigned duties, but the new staff members who need advice can come and talk to you." The next day I found myself sitting in this closet with no assigned duties and no one talked to me.

Q: And your job description?

PERITO: To look for another job and get out of there as fast as I could. I went through a horrible period. It was the end of the assignment cycle. All the jobs in the Department had been filled. There was no chance of getting anything; I sat there for a month. Nobody talked to me. It was awful. In time, I was offered several jobs, one of which was the Director of the Office of China Affairs at the Commerce Department. At that point, I thought maybe it was best to get out of the Department, so I went to Commerce. Just at that time, Secretary Shultz went to China. The Chinese told Shultz that the litmus test for the U.S.-Chinese relationship was the U.S. policy on technology transfer licensing. If the United States didn't liberalize its policy on technology licensing, the process of normalizing relations between the U.S. and China would go no further.

I became the Commerce Department's director for China, Hong Kong and all of Southeast Asia with a staff of 15 or 16 people. It was a big operation compared to what I would have done at the State Department at that point in my career. My staff had recently been relocated into a part of the Commerce Department that was scheduled for remodeling. When I got there they were literally sitting on the floor without office furniture. The first thing I did was to get the Commerce Department to do the remodeling and build us new offices. They did this right away, so I was a hero to my troops. I arrived and they got new offices and new office equipment.

The Secretary of Commerce, Malcolm Baldrige was personally interested in resolving the problem of technology transfer to China. My immediate boss, Gene Lawson, was a personal friend of the Secretary and a China expert. Lawson and I were in Baldrige's office all the time. I had never met the Secretary of State at that point, but I saw the Secretary of Commerce sometimes twice a day. Baldrige decided to visit China; Lawson and I were put in charge of planning the trip. We went to China. The trip was very successful.

Baldrige wanted to liberalize U.S. export controls on technology transfers to China. The Chinese wanted to buy from the United States. U.S. export controls were preventing American business from selling to China. The rationale was national security. American business was losing billions of dollars worth of business; conservatives argued that any technology sold to China would be used in their defense industry. Baldrige felt that the level of our controls was overly restrictive and we could liberalize without endangering national security. By this time, Judge Clark had become National Security advisor. Baldrige asked Clark to get White House approval to tell the Chinese that we would agreed in principle to liberalize our export controls with the details on specific products and services to be worked out later.

When we arrived in Beijing there was still no U.S. government decision to liberalize export controls. When we reached the guest house where Nixon had stayed, there was a call from Judge Clark for the Secretary. Judge Clark said in effect, "Okay, you can tell them that we will liberalize," and Baldrige said, "What does that mean?" and the Judge said, "You don't understand what is going on here. Just tell them we will liberalize." Baldrige said, "I need details," and Clark said, "There are no details. Just tell them that we're going to liberalize." Clark had gotten the NSC to agree in principle. Over the next year, the Commerce Department fought Defense, State and CIA on what liberalization would mean.

Commerce waged this fight in a very clever way. Rather than fight on the grounds of what was best for U.S.-China relations, Commerce brought together a group of engineers that determined the state of the art, what we were able under existing regulations to sell to the Soviet Union, and what were we able under existing regulations to sell to China. The Commerce Department engineers were able to demonstrate that, if the state of the art was valued at 100, what we were able to sell to the Soviet Union was valued at 25 and what we were able to sell to China was valued at 10. There was an enormous cushion. Even if we raised the level for China to the same level that we were willing to sell to the Soviets, there would be a marked increase in what we could export. Commerce went on to prove that the levels for the Soviet Union were also ridiculous. That the Soviets were so far behind the state of the art in the most critical areas of technology that we could safely move from 25 to 50 or 60. The technology was developing so fast that by the time the Chinese or the Soviets bought something, got it installed and learned to use it, we'd be at 150 or 200.

The Commerce Department engineers won the argument, but the licensing officers in the Defense Department and the CIA were still opposed to changing the regulations. They argued that China had secret, modern, state-of-the-art defense industries. They claimed if we could only go through Chinese electronics factories we would discover, by going through a locked door, a sort of James Bond world of advanced labs and equipment. To answer this argument, I was authorized to lead a group of technology licensing officers from Defense, State and the CIA to China where we spent three weeks touring Chinese electronics factories.

We decided which factories to visit. After the first day, the Chinese were willing to open

any door we knocked on. The quintessential experience was the first factory. When we arrived, the Chinese made us put on white jumpsuits and go through an airlock. This was a computer chip factory and it was supposed to be airtight and dust free. After putting on the white jumpsuits, we were allowed-- one by one to walk--- through the airlock. The members of my delegation looked at me with wonderfully smug expressions, 'See, we told you.' After we got through the airlock and removed the jumpsuits, we began our tour of the factory. We had walked about 10 feet, when one of the delegation members noticed that all the windows were open and there was dust everywhere.

Q: Some airlock.

PERITO: As we proceeded through the factory, we discovered puddles of water on the floor because the roof leaked. As the commercial officer at the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing, I had visited more than 35 Chinese factories. Officers in the political section couldn't travel, but I was a commercial officer looking for export-import opportunities. I had been in all kinds of factories, textiles, automotive parts, and electronics. I had a good idea what Chinese industry looked like; it looked like the United States in the 1920's or earlier. We went into electronics factories; the roofs leaked and the windows were broken. We asked the Chinese technicians about the failure rate on computer chips. It was something like 90 percent; they threw away almost everything they made because it did not work. But even after what they had seen, the delegation members refused to say they had been wrong. However, it became much harder for them to maintain those arguments. In the end, we liberalized and American companies sold a lot more technology. When the Soviet Union collapsed, we discovered that Soviet industry was hopelessly outdated, and Chinese industry was as well.

Q: How long were you at Commerce?

PERITO: A little over a year. It was that one brief shining moment when Commerce had the lead in U.S. relations with China. There was another funny story. The other issue in U.S.-China relations was grain sales. Baldrige asked me to write a paper on U.S. grain sales to China which described the benefits to American farmers and the U.S. economy. Commerce supported U.S. agricultural exports to China, but there was opposition from other parts of the government. Baldrige stamped 'draft' on the paper and circulated it to his cabinet colleagues before a cabinet meeting on the subject. Baldrige went off to the meeting at the White House; we all held our breath. When Baldrige returned to the Department, we rushed up to his office to find out what happened. He said, "Well, the vote was 11 to two against continuing grain sales to China, but the two votes were me and the President, so we won."

Q: Well, when this assignment ended, you moved into the human rights field and went to Geneva in '83.

PERITO: When I returned to the State Department, I was required to take an overseas assignment. I went to see the personnel officer in the International Organizations Bureau because I wanted to go to Europe. I thought my family would like one nice tour in the

Foreign Service; my kids were in junior high and high school and this seemed to make sense. The personnel officer asked I was interested in going to Geneva. He said, "We have a job in the U.S. mission to the UN in Geneva. It's the deputy director of the political section and it's really a great job." There were 100 applicants for this job, I bid on the job and I got it.

When I arrived in Geneva with my family, I discovered the job had been falsely advertised. It wasn't the deputy position. There really was no political section in the mission. There was a group of officers in the political section; each officer was a liaison officer to a different UN special agency. My job was following human rights. The guy in the next office was following international labor issues. There was no crossover; we never had staff meetings. Political section officers arrived in the morning, checked in and looked at the cables, and then went off to their respective agencies for the day to attend meetings. I almost never saw my co-workers. As the liaison officer to UN Human Rights Commission, my job most resembled the type of work that political officers would do in an embassy. However, the UN Human Rights Commission only met once a year for six weeks. During that time, I was very busy. The rest of the year I spent looking for things to do.

I covered the Afghanistan peace talks which were going on in Geneva during that time. I got very involved with refugee matters, because there were major refugee conferences all the time. But basically it was a wasted couple of years. The Reagan Administration had a very negative attitude toward the UN. The Mission was led by a political appointee, Ambassador Jerry Carman. Carman had owned an auto parts store in New Hampshire. He'd been the chairman of the New Hampshire State Republican Party. During the New Hampshire primary he had backed Reagan. When Reagan became President, Jerry Carman came to Washington and was put in charge of GAO, which was a disaster. He was relieved of that position, and his wife wanted to go overseas. Carman said he didn't want to be an ambassador and hated being outside the United States. He said he felt that all his life he'd never done anything really nice for his wife and this was his chance. He took the job not knowing anything about Geneva. Carman was a cigar-smoking, back-room political operative. He was a deal maker. Geneva was the last of the classic diplomatic posts. It was filled with elegant men in pinstripe suits that spoke French and loved cocktail receptions. There was a wonderful social life. If you wanted to be a diplomat in the 19th century tradition of diplomacy with banquets and cocktails and dancing and speeches and negotiations that was the place. Carman hated it.

Carmen spent two years remodeling the inside of the building, creating offices, moving people around and having those offices destroyed or rebuilt on other floors. After two years of this, Hank Cohen, who was in personnel at that point, visited Geneva and warned me that my Foreign Service career was in jeopardy. Under the Foreign Service Act of 1980, FSO's had to 'open their windows' to be considered for promotion. If they were not promoted within seven years, they were 'selected out,' dismissed from the Foreign Service. I was an FSO-1 when the Act passed and the information came out about 'opening windows'. I was the Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary of State. I had just been promoted after waiting for five years. I thought that if I can't get promoted in

seven years, I ought to quit. I immediately opened my window; then the Department stopped promoting anyone.

When Hank Cohen came through Geneva, I had not been promoted for five and a half years and the clock was running. Hank said, "If you stay here another year, you will not get promoted because you're not doing the kind of work that the promotion boards require. You've got to get out of here." So I immediately applied to be transferred. There were several ramifications. The first one was that Ambassador Carman found out that I was trying to leave. He called me up to his office and said, "What are you doing, deserting ship?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You want to get out of here, right?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I want to get out of here too. You and me, we think alike," From that time forward he was as nice to me as he could possibly be. He came out to the airport to see off my wife and family when they left early. He came to the airport to see me off as well. He identified me as a kindred spirit who wanted to get out of there.

When I applied to leave Geneva and to get a new assignment, the request had to be approved by a committee in Washington composed of an equal number of FSOs at my rank and more senior officers. The vote in the committee split. The FSO's at my rank voted against me; the senior officers voted for me. The personnel process was deadlocked. Then Ambassador Carman, who was not aware of my situation, decided to save money by downgrading the rank of every job in the political section, thinking (erroneously) that he could force all of us to take a cut in salary. My job was reduced from the rank of FSO-1 to the rank of FSO-3. I immediately sent a message to personnel saying, "I'm now in an FSO-3 job. I can't possibly compete for promotion into the Senior Foreign Service" They sent me back a cable saying, "Yes, that makes eminent sense. You can leave."

Q: Did you have any input into the Department's annual survey of human rights?

PERITO: No. That was a U.S. government report. I worked on issues considered by the UN Commission on Human Rights. Richard Shifter was the U.S. ambassador to the Commission for several years. He was very serious and a force in the Commission. However, Shifter took a very dim view of the Foreign Service. One time we were sitting together during a Commission session when it came time for a vote. I had the voting instructions cable from the Department before me, and the cable said, "Vote yes." But from the wording of the resolution, after amendments, it was obvious that in order to fill the instructions we should vote no. Shifter turned to me and said, "This situation shows the superiority of political appointees over career officers. If I was a career officer like you, I would have to slavishly follow my instructions and vote on the wrong side of this issue. Since I'm a political appointee, I will vote the correct position and violate my instructions," which he did.

Q: Did the Communist countries take part in the Human Rights Commission?

PERITO: The Soviets were major participants. There was an annual Soviet-sponsored resolution concerning Leonard Peltier, a Native American activist who was in prison for

killing two FBI agents as they lay wounded on a road. Every year the Soviets introduced a resolution calling for Peltier's release on grounds that he was a political prisoner and was being denied religious freedom. Speaking before the Commission, the Soviet representative claimed the U.S. had denied Peltier items that he needed for religious purposes. He read a long list of items that had been denied, including sage, a peace pipe and a tomahawk. After the speech, I asked my Soviet colleague, "Do you know what a tomahawk is?" He said, "No, what's a tomahawk?" I said, "It's an ax. It's a weapon." I got very good at dealing with the Soviets. In meetings, the Soviets would take positions and then stonewall; we would take positions and then stonewall. I got very good at refusing to give any ground and my Soviet colleagues would do the same. It was an awful time.

Q: Now that you've gotten the permission of the Department to transfer, what happened?

PERITO: I was on the floor of the UN Human Rights Commission during a meeting when I received a telephone call. Somebody motioned to me to come out and I went to one of the telephones in the delegate's lounge. It was Martin Wenick who I'd worked with on the Soviet Desk. Marty said he had just been named the Director of the Office of Eastern European and Yugoslav Affairs and needed a deputy. He asked if I wanted the job. I knew nothing about Eastern Europe, but I accepted the job because I desperately needed to leave Geneva. I hung up the phone and thought, "My career is over." At the time, Eastern Europe was the deadest part of the Department. It was the depth of the Cold War; the Soviets controlled everything. Nothing was going on.

Q: What were your responsibilities in the new job?

PERITO: The office had two tiers and two deputies. There was a deputy for the northern tier, which was Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and there was a deputy for the southern tier which had Yugoslavia. I was the northern tier deputy and the senior deputy. I got the office to pay for a trip to Poland before I came home. I arrived in Warsaw at the end of a crackdown on the Solidarity Movement by General Jaruzelski's government which resulted in the arrest of nearly all of its leadership. I met with a former university professor named Stemalahofsky who had been fired from his job, but not arrested. The only place that was safe for us to meet was in the basement of a small Catholic church. I met with another Solidarity member who was their spokesman. We met at the writers club. He talked about harassment by the secret police. Afterwards, we were walking on the street, and the embassy officer who was with us said, "We're going to have a dinner party on Tuesday. If you're free, please come." The fellow started to laugh because we had been talking about how it was likely he would be arrested the next day.

Based on my experience in Warsaw, I thought this was going to be my last year in the Foreign Service. When I reported for duty, however, I was told that a secret emissary from the Polish government had arrived the day before to say that Jaruzelski was interested in talks. That was the beginning of the end of communism in Poland. In a year we went from a standing start to a total rejuvenation of the relationship with Poland, including a visit to Warsaw by Vice President Bush. We developed the DECALOG, a

ten-point program for improving U.S.-Polish relations. We did this despite strong resistance from the NSC and from conservatives in the State Department including Richard Shifter. The effort was led by Tom Simon, who was the DAS and a really gifted officer. Marty Wenick, the country director, cheered us along. I worked very closely with Tom Simon. After we got agreement from the Poles on the 10 points, we proceeded to do them all. They were things like renegotiate the cultural agreement, renegotiate the science agreement, hold a trade fair, have Bush visit Poland and his counterpart visit Washington.

Q: This was the first crumbling of the Iron Curtain, wasn't it? It started in Poland.

PERITO: That's right. And on the basis of that achievement I got promoted into the Senior Foreign Service. In fact, another interesting thing happened. The Polish Consulate General in Chicago represented the Communist government. The Polish community in Chicago was full of Solidarity sympathizers. There was a real problem between the Polish community, the Chicago Police Department (which had many ethnic Polish officers) and the Polish Consulate General. Polish diplomats were getting harassed and their cars were getting ticketed and towed. The Polish government did what the Soviet government did when we picked on their embassy in Washington. They started picking on our embassy in Warsaw, only they were a lot more brutal and they had free rein. Some of our embassy officers were slapped around, tires were slashed, cars were destroyed; the Poles made it clear that unless we did something about Chicago it was going to get worse for our people.

I was deputized to go out to Chicago to bring peace between the Chicago Consulate General and the Polish-American community. I met with the mayor's office, with the police, and the Polish-American community. At the end of a week, we reached an agreement. The Chicago police agreed to back off and provide more protection and support for the Consulate General. The Polish Consul General agreed not to park its cars illegally. The Polish community agreed not to throw eggs at Polish diplomats and to moderate their demonstrations.

Q: You never thought as a Foreign Service Officer you'd be making peace between two American groups, did you?

PERITO: On my last day in Chicago, I paid a farewell call on the Polish Consul General. The Poles had a beautiful building on the shores of Lake Michigan. There was an air show scheduled for the next day over Lake Michigan. When we arrived, the Blue Angels were practicing over the lake, there were six U.S. Navy fighter Aircraft in the air. We were shown into the Consul General's living room, very elaborate, lush, with velvet everywhere. We sat down and he brought out coffee and cognac. I was explaining the terms of the agreement we had achieved. At the point where I was talking about the Chicago police providing increased security for the consulate, the Blue Angels flew over the building at treetop level. You couldn't speak or hear because the noise was so loud and rattled everything. When the noise cleared, I looked across at the consul general and I said with a straight face, "And we've arranged to have the United States Air Force fly continual fighter cover over this building to make sure nothing goes wrong." It took the

Consul General a few seconds, before he caught on to the joke and laughed.

Q: That was an interesting problem. Did you have many difficulties with Hungary or Czechoslovakia at the time?

PERITO: Yes, Czechoslovakia was controlled by throwbacks that were more Soviet than the Soviets. At a time when there was a general thaw going on in Eastern Europe, the Czechs, we discovered to our absolute horror, were training their air force to shoot down U.S. helicopters that were patrolling on the German side of their border. We tried to do the same thing that we did with Poland by proposing a 10-point program for improving relations with the Czechs. Marty Wenick had been the DCM in Czechoslovakia and was really very interested in getting Czechoslovakia to reform. Unfortunately, the Reagan Administration sent out a political appointee as ambassador. This man had been the head of the Central European office of the Sister Cities program. He was Czech-American. . He had no diplomatic experience. He arrived there and he told the Czechs that the State Department didn't understand the President's foreign policy for Czechoslovakia but he did. Our policy toward Czechoslovakia at that point was very hard line because the Czechs were not giving ground and, in fact, they were very threatening. The ambassador told them to disregard any thing coming from Washington. The truth was President Reagan really loved them. After a long struggle, we finally managed to get him recalled.

Hungary really took off. The Hungarians were far and away the most liberal of the Eastern Europeans. We did some amazing things with Hungary at that time and established a number of joint programs. I visited Hungary and spent a lot of time with their ambassador in Washington. A couple of things happened during that period. There was a Marine sergeant in the embassy in Moscow, Sergeant Lonetree. He was compromised. He got into a relationship with a Russian woman employed at the embassy who was working for the KGB. Probably to protect her, Lonetree agreed to allow Soviet agents to come into the embassy; they were given free run of the place when he was on duty. When it was discovered, he was court-martialed. There was a huge outcry from Congress to get rid of all Foreign Service Nationals in Eastern Europe. All the Foreign Service Nationals in Eastern Europe were fired, which was really a travesty because many of these people, particularly the ones in Poland, were opponents of the Communist government, and many of them were Solidarity members. They had paid a terrible price to continue to work for us. People took real risks to work for the U.S. They were all kicked out unceremoniously.

The Department launched a campaign to recruit Americans to take those positions. This was disastrous because we couldn't find Americans who wanted to do that work. The ones that we could find we didn't want. We ended up with a bunch of kids, mainly college students who wanted to take six months to polish their language skills. Hungary was particularly difficult. The Marine House was in the embassy building and the embassy building was falling apart. It literally was held up by structural supports. A Marine brought his Hungarian girlfriend into his room. He was showing off by playing Russian roulette with his service revolver and killed himself. Then the outrage was even louder.

About a year and a half into that assignment, Marty Wenick retired unexpectedly. It was decided that I should replace him as the acting head of EEY.

Q: EEY, Eastern European Yugoslav Affairs.

PERITO: On my first day as the office director the phone rang as I stepped into the office. I picked up the phone, and a voice said, "How would you like to come to the White House and be the Deputy Executive Secretary of the National Security Council?" I said, "I'd like that very much. When would I start?" The voice said, "How about this afternoon?" I said, "I've just become the Acting Director of EEY. I don't think I can get there this afternoon. It's going to take me a few days before I can leave here." They said, "Okay, next Monday." I had a staff meeting planned and I was going to explain that Marty had gone and I was in charge until they found another office director. But what I told them instead was, "I'm the Acting Director. I'm going to be here for five days and then I'm gone. I'm going to the White House." People were stunned. I was stunned, but that's what happened.

Q: How did the Assistant Secretary of EUR take this?

PERITO: I don't know. There was a long tradition of Foreign Service Officers being seconded to the NSC staff. The person who had been the Deputy Executive Secretary for a long time was an FSO and was a living legend revered by all. He had to leave and so they needed somebody. This was right at the end of the Iran Contra episode. I was invited to come over to the White House that day. They took me around and showed me my office, which was in the West Wing. The National Security Advisor and his deputy had been in that suite of offices, which was on the ground floor adjacent to the situation room. There were two beautiful but rather small offices. Bud McFarland and Admiral Vance had been there previously. They said, "This is going to be your office. Don't let it bother you that the last two men that sat in this office are now in jail." They took me over to the OEOB and showed me the Ollie North shredder. Then they introduced me to the FBI, who took a very long statement. I discovered that in the aftermath of the Iran Contra scandal, they had changed all of the regulations and the way the place operated so that could never happen again.

I was at the NSC working for Colin Powell and Ambassador John Negroponte, both of whom were extraordinary. My boss was Paul Johnson, the Executive Secretary, who was a Washington lawyer. He had been part of the commission that had come in to clean up the NSC's involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal. Previously the Deputy Executive Secretary played a really influential role and got to do a lot of things. Paul decided that the Deputy Executive Secretary should proofread for all the reports that came from the NSC staff. Paul's view was that I should handle the routine work generated by the 400 members of the NSC staff. I spent a lot of time in my office grinding away, but over time I also got to do some interesting things. The day would begin at 7:30am with Colin Powell's staff meeting. Just being in that meeting every day was a tremendous experience. It was wonderful to watch Powell, who was an extraordinary public servant. I also got to work on the briefing books for the Reagan-Gorbachev Summits. The

Executive Secretariat staff ended up redrafting and editing the talking points for the President. I received the President's daily CIA briefing package and read everything that went to the President from the NSC staff. I was on the National Alert List-- I was the fourth person called by the White House Situation Room in a crisis alert. I had one of the first cell phones and a pager. Even when I was at the Western White House in California or on vacation the Situation Room would call.

On three occasions, I went to the Western White House, which was in Santa Barbara, California. The President had a ranch in the mountains above Santa Barbara. Reagan spent nearly a year of his presidency on vacation. He was extraordinary in that regard. He would go to California and go up to the mountains to the ranch by himself with Nancy and the Secret Service. The staff would stay in Santa Barbara at this wonderful beachfront hotel. Because Reagan would be in California for a month at a time, we created teams. My boss and Colin were a team and John Negroponete and I were a team. We would take turns representing the NSC. In Santa Barbara we were treated as part of the White House staff and attended the White House staff meetings. It was very interesting listening to discussion of domestic politics and the presidential campaign. It was terrific.

During the election campaign, Colin Powell required that someone from the NSC leadership team accompany the president aboard Air Force One. In the fall, Reagan began campaigning on behalf of Vice President Bush and there were campaign trips several times a week. Colin Powell and John Negroponete couldn't be away; after awhile Paul Johnson got tired, so I became the person who went on the campaign trips. I made about eight or nine trips on Air Force One with the President to campaign stops around the United States. Watching Reagan campaign was a delight. There was nobody better. He would tell jokes; he would greet people, and people would love it. I received the President's daily CIA briefing package and the advance people were so good. By the time the President walked on stage, you'd look in the audience and there were women crying. They'd become so emotional. Reagan had a number of Russian jokes--he would talk about his summit conversations with Gorbachev and then he'd tell a Russian joke.

Reagan hated to be alone. He really liked people. As soon as the plane took off, the President would come into the forward section of the aircraft and join the senior staff. He would stand in the aisle for whole flight and talk, tell stories and joke with the staff. He was warm and friendly and just terrific. I have pictures of the President's birthday celebration on the airplane. It was really a memorable experience.

Q: Did they then revamp the NSC staff at that time?

PERITO: Bush won the election. We assumed it would be a friendly takeover because the Vice President became President. I had worked for Bush in China and he remembered me. On one occasion, there was an aircraft hijacking. Bush often roamed the building, and he showed up at my office. I looked up and there was the Vice President standing at my door, and he said, "Bob, what's going on with the plane?" I said, "Let's go find out." We went down and chatted with the staff in the situation room. It was said that if George Bush liked you he hit you. If you got punched on the arm by George Bush, it was a sign.

When I would pass Bush in the White House, I almost always got a friendly tap.

Bush won and Brent Scowcroft became the new National Security Advisor. In the final days of the Reagan Administration a memo came out that said, "All White House staff must have all of their belongings out of their offices by five o'clock on Friday. Anything left behind will be confiscated and destroyed." This hit the West Wing staff, like a bomb. All these people thought they were going to be there right through the transition. The last Friday afternoon was hysterical. People were bringing their cars into the driveway by the door of the West Wing, and out went potted palms, law books, and memorabilia by the bushel load. The only exception, as it turned out, was me. Because I was a Foreign Service Officer and because I was staying through the transition I was allowed to keep my office intact. I put up big signs: "Carry through. Do not touch."

Then we were told there would be no access to the White House over the weekend before the inauguration on Monday. You needed special badges to enter the building, regular badges wouldn't work. I was given a set of credentials because someone on the NSC had to have access. I thought about staying home, but then I thought this was my one chance to see what happens in the White House during a presidential transition. I went into the West Wing and roamed around. An enormous crew of workman had taken the furniture out of all the offices, all the draperies down, everything even the carpets. They had redone everything: repainted, re-carpeted, new draperies, new furniture. Every trace of the Reagan Administration had disappeared, and within hours after the President's swearing in there were beautiful photographs of the Bush inauguration on the walls. It was an extraordinary makeover. I attended the inauguration and saw the President sworn in. My boss had left so I became the Acting Executive Secretary of the National Security Council. About 60 percent of the NSC staff returned to work after the inauguration.

Q: This is Thomas Dunnigan speaking on Tuesday, August 13th, 2002. Today I will be continuing my discussion with Bob Perito, a retired Foreign Service Officer. Bob, we stopped with a discussion last time of your service on the National Security Council under President Reagan, as I understand. How did the advice from the State Department, from Secretary Shultz, coincide with that which the NSC gave the President, or were they the same?

PERITO: There was close coordination at the end of the Reagan Administration. Colin Powell, George Shultz and the Secretary of Defense had very good relations. They talked by telephone every morning and often consulted during the day.

Q: Now, looking back, has the National Security Council grown too large for the role it's intended to play, or has it just mushroomed into another Washington bureaucracy?

PERITO: The National Security Council really reflects the will of the President and the National Security Advisor. At the end of the Reagan Administration, the National Security Council staff was huge. When we did a head count, we discovered there were over 400 people on the payroll. Nobody had any idea it was that large. When General Scowcroft came in with President Bush, his first act was to cut the staff way back. In the

beginning of the Bush Administration, the NSC staff had a very low profile, and that seems to be the case in the current Bush Administration. Condoleezza Rice has done a very good job of trying not to overshadow the State Department or Defense Department. She's been an advisor to the President rather than a formulator or spokesperson for foreign policy. Having watched the NSC over various presidencies, what seems to happen is that the size of the staff grows over time in response to events. As crisis occur where the White House believes it didn't get the information or support it needed, they add to the NSC staff so that there's somebody they can consult rather than relying on information coming through the State Department filter or the Defense Department filter or the CIA filter. It's inevitable that over time the NSC staff expands.

Q: Any other thoughts on your time at the NSC before we move on to another subject?

PERITO: I was struck at the end by the way we handled presidential documents. At the end of an administration, all the documents that are associated with the presidency are boxed up and sent off to the presidential library. The incoming NSC staff starts with empty offices and empty file drawers and that's extremely difficult. At the end of the Reagan Administration, the NSC staff prepared huge briefing books which we made available to the incoming team. Unfortunately, the transition took so long that, by the time Scowcroft named new NSC staff members, the briefing books were dated. I doubt if anybody even remembered they were there.

Q: How long did you personally stay on after the election of President Bush?

PERITO: I stayed at the White House until late spring. During the first week of the administration, I was the Acting Executive Secretary of the National Security Council staff. I was dealing with Bob Gates, who was the Deputy National Security Advisor. I had never met General Scowcroft, who was my boss. At the end of the first week, we had a staff meeting. According to the tradition at that time, for NSC staff meetings, the National Security Advisor sat at the top of the table; the Executive Secretary sat at the bottom of the table, and the staff sat around the table. General Scowcroft said he intended to change the staff and everybody there had better start looking for a job. It came as a shock to the staff since they thought that this was a friendly takeover and they were going to stay through. At the end of that meeting, I walked up to General Scowcroft and said, "My name is Bob Perito, and I'm the Executive Secretary. I just want to introduce myself." He said, "I know who you are." I said, "Is there anything you want me to do?" He said, "Just keep doing what you're doing. If I want a change, I'll tell you." So that's the way we ran. I would talk to Bob Gates and Gates would talk to Scowcroft. We went on like that for about six weeks through the trips that President Bush made to Canada and China. We did the staff support. Apparently it was fine with the General.

Q: Did you go to China with him?

PERITO: No, I didn't go. I stayed behind. At the end of my time in the White House, General Scowcroft did two things which I'm very grateful for. One, he arranged for me to go to the Oval Office and meet the President. I have great photographs of me in the Oval

Office standing in front of the fireplace chatting with the President with General Scowcroft standing off to the side. Scowcroft also arranged a really nice farewell breakfast; about 150 people paid 25 dollars a head to come and say goodbye, so that was really heartwarming. I received a plaque commemorating my NSC service.

Q: Now, tell me how your new job came about in Southern Africa Affairs.

PERITO: Through the assignment process; I had a number of possibilities. I had known Hank Cohen, who was the Assistant Secretary, before, and Southern Africa, of course, was the plum of the Africa Bureau assignments, so when it came available I took it.

Q: Did you go visit the area?

PERITO: Before I took the job. This was during Namibia's transition to independence. There was a joint commission composed of the U.S., the Soviet Union, Cuba, South Africa and Angola that was responsible for overseeing the transition. The joint commission had been established under the Namibia peace agreement that Chet Crocker negotiated. The commission met periodically and there was one scheduled just before I took the job, so I went out with the U.S. delegation. The meeting was held in a town, or what had been a town, on the Angola side of the Namibian border. We flew up from the capital of Namibia on a small airplane to a landing strip near the border in South Africa. We drove across the border through a UN checkpoint into what used to be a very pretty Portuguese-style town which had been fought over several times. There was a series of buildings with holes in the walls and no roofs. The meeting started in the afternoon. The Angolans had set up a tent for each delegation. The negotiations ran all day and into the evening. At dusk it began to get very cold, and somebody suggested we have a fire. Martti Ahtisaari, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary for Namibia and the future president of Finland, and Ambassador Jeff Davidow walked out into the darkness to find some wood to get a fire going. They built a big bonfire and we all gathered around to keep warm.

Periodically throughout the evening, Cuban soldiers would appear out of the darkness with armfuls of firewood to keep the fire going. It suddenly occurred to me that we were a U.S. government delegation on Angola soil, a country which we didn't recognize, surrounded by Cuban soldiers, another country we did not recognize. We were protected on one side by Cuban soldiers and on the other side by Malaysian UN troops and four or five Pakistani and Swedish UN police officers who were unarmed. Who were the Cubans protecting us from? It had to be UNITA, which was the organization the U.S. supported in the Angolan conflict.

We were completely isolated. We had no communications. We found out later the Cubans had a telephone land line in their tent that ran all the way to Havana. We sat into the night with the fire blazing, with the negotiations going nowhere, and with the South Africans sitting in their tent playing cards and getting increasingly drunk. Finally at about two in the morning, it was decided that the negotiations were over, so everybody gathered in the main tent. The South Africans by that time were totally drunk, and the Angolans

were not much better. The respective delegation leaders said that it was too late to continue and that we were all committed to getting together again soon. We broke up and drove back to the airport and got on our tiny plane. I was sitting next to the pilot. There was room for six people on this aircraft; it was a one-engine plane. The pilot had been awake as long as we had, probably 15 or 16 hours. I decided that I would stay awake to keep the pilot awake. As we went down the runway, a gazelle ran across in front of the plane, which lifted off right over top of the animal. I thought I've got to stay awake because everybody else on the plane immediately went to sleep. I sat there watching the pilot, and the next thing I knew the plane was landing. That was my introduction to southern African diplomacy.

Q: Oh my heavens! What about human rights there? Was that one of the crosses you had to bear?

PERITO: After I took over as Director of the Office of Southern African Affairs, Nelson Mandela was released from prison, a huge event. Right after that Hank Cohen and I went to South Africa to meet F.W. de Klerk who had been selected by the Nationalist Party to become prime minister. He was a back-bencher in the parliament that nobody knew anything about. Of course, it was de Klerk that ended apartheid and changed the course of South African history. Although he was a political unknown, he was the Nationalist Party candidate and because they controlled parliament it was clear he would be elected. We were the first Americans to meet with de Klerk. In the course of the conversation, we asked if he'd ever been to the United States. He got this big smile on his face and he said, "Yes, I was an IV grantee." If anyone ever doubted the benefit of the IV visitors program that USIA ran, this is the classic example of its value. We'd read the CIA bio and there was no mention of his U.S. visit. De Klerk had been, at a very early point in his career, the shadow agriculture minister. He had been given an IV grant to go to the United States and had spent a month in the mid-west visiting farms. He'd had a wonderful experience, he'd met wonderful American people, and he had this rosy glow about the United States that no one knew about.

It had never mattered before, but when it counted, when we went in and said, "Mr. Future Prime Minister, we're going to need to work with you," There was a man who had a soft spot in his heart for America. It was tremendously fortuitous, and who knows how it changed his thinking. He changed the course of South African history. From Pretoria, we went to Zambia to meet the leadership of the ANC.

Q: That's the African National Congress.

PERITO: They were in exile in Zambia. We had dinner with the ANC leadership including their 'foreign minister,' Thabo Mbeki. Thabo was one of the most naturally gifted diplomats I've ever met. During the time I was Director of Southern African Affairs we became good friends. On that visit we arranged for the ANC to send a representative to Washington. Thabo said, "We're sending a woman who has been in Europe. She was with another ANC representative and that person was assassinated by the South African intelligence service. This woman has been through a really rough time.

We'd like you to take care of her." At that point the relationship between the ANC and the United States government was officially strained. We were supporting the South African government; they were rebels. When the ANC representative arrived in Washington, I made a point to invite her to the State Department. I introduced her to women on our staff who volunteered to take her shopping and help her get settled.

Q: Was she going to be a resident here?

PERITO: She was going to live here. She had rented a place in Georgetown, but she had no official status. It wasn't as if we could ask the State Department to do things officially, but unofficially we tried to be as helpful as possible. Before she moved into her apartment, I had Diplomatic Security look the place over and make suggestions on security. We went out of the way to be nice to her. The payoff came when an NGO in Washington gave a coming-out party for her. They invited me, probably against their better judgment. When I walked into the house where the party was being held the place literally went quiet. You could hear people thinking--the State Department, here comes the enemy. The ANC representative was standing in the center of the room surrounded by admirers. When she saw me, she smile, came over and gave me a hug. The other guests were stunned at the sight of the ANC representative hugging someone from the State Department. Apparently she also sent positive reports about her treatment to Thabo Mbeki which didn't hurt us at all.

Q: Did you get any complaints from the South African embassy about our treatment of her?

PERITO: No, not really. My problems with the South African Embassy came later during the Angola peace talks. The Portuguese were the mediators and almost all the sessions took place in Lisbon. The parties to the negotiations were UNITA and the government of Angola. United States government was the advisor to UNITA; the Soviets advised the Angolans. The South Africans weren't included, which made them extraordinarily nervous. South Africa had long standing relations with UNITA. The South African controlled UNITA's supply lines. At various times during the Angola conflict, South African troops had fought alongside UNITA forces inside Angola. In fact, the South African army at one point almost captured the capital of Luanda; they got to the gates of the city and then were driven back. UNITA's leader Jonas Savimbi spent a lot of time in Pretoria, and there were South African agents in his headquarters. The South Africans had a huge stake in Angola and they didn't like being excluded from the peace talks. At one point they threatened to destroy the talks unless we allowed them to participate, something the Angolan government and the Soviets would never accept.

Hank Cohen, who was Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, is a very interesting guy with a great sense of humor. He made a deal with the South African embassy that he would give them a special briefing after every round of the negotiations if they would drop their request to join the talks. To make it seem like the South Africans were receiving special treatment, Hank brought them to the Department after hours. They came up to his office - nobody around, closed doors - and he made it sound like we were

giving them inside information. After a time, Hank asked me to provide the briefings and the South African Embassy designated an officer on their side. In fact, it was all for show. We provided the same information that we provided in briefings for other embassies and the press, but it worked. In fact, it worked too well. Years later when I was the Director of the Office of China Affairs, I received a visit from the FBI. They asked me questions about my time as Director for Southern African Affairs and my relations with the South African Embassy. Finally I said, "What is this?" They explained that the South African Embassy had listed me as an intelligence source. The embassy officers had taken the bait, and probably for their own reasons, had made the information they received sound more important than it was. I told the FBI my story and at first they looked doubtful. Finally I told them to talk to Hank Cohen who was still at the Department. They came back later and said, "Okay, Secretary Cohen has explained this. Your stories are the same. Forget it. Go back to work."

Q: the reports must have looked very good in Pretoria, you know, that a secret source in the State Department was giving them information.

PERITO: The important thing in terms of the negotiations was that the South Africans stayed on the sideline and the negotiations succeeded in ending the war.

Q: How large was your staff in South Africa?

PERITO: We were responsible for 12 countries. It was a large office. As the office director, I did things that normally would only be done by a deputy assistant secretary. I led delegations; I negotiated agreements; I represented the United States. Later I was told my tenure was regarded as a model. Two or three years later when the bureau reorganized, they began using former ambassadors as office directors. They realized that an office director could be very effective, particularly if you had an activist with authority to do things.

In addition to Angola, the main thing I did was the Mozambique negotiations. We could talk more about Angola, but the Mozambique talks were particularly interesting. The negotiations began in the following way. There was an Italian Catholic organization called the Community of Sant'Egidio which was resident in Rome. This organization had formed a relationship with the Mozambique government and with the RENAMO rebels and had opened a dialog. The RENAMO insurgency in Mozambique was particularly brutal. They would go into villages and destroy everything, kill indiscriminately, rape, and force people into bondage. RENAMO had been created by the white Rhodesian government during the Rhodesian war to put pressure on the Mozambique government which was aiding the Rhodesian rebels. When the Rhodesian government was defeated, the South African intelligence service kept RENAMO alive. Once de Klerk became Prime Minister and South Africa began its transition to majority rule, the South Africans pulled the plug on RENAMO assistance.

When I became the office director, the CIA believed RENAMO was led by someone named Afonso Dhlakama, but no one in the intelligence community was certain he

existed since no American official had ever met him. Our goal in responding to the first contact from Sant'Egidio was to see if we could meet Dhlakama. Hank and I met with Sant'Egidio in Rome. We worked out of the U.S. embassy at the Vatican. Our introduction to Sant'Egidio was over a marvelous lunch served by local women at the cathedral. There were about two dozen people. Everyone spoke at once. They told us that "We have access and we know all the people. We can bring them to Rome, but we don't know what we're doing. We're not diplomats and we need your help." There was an Italian official involved who was a former diplomat and current member of the European parliament. Behind him the Italian foreign ministry was being careful to keep out of sight. And behind all of this – the bishop of the cathedral where Sant'Egidio operated was the Pope. Behind the scenes there were a lot of important people in the Italian government and the Catholic Church involved, but they were out of sight. We were in the front ranks.

The first step was to meet Dhlakama. The Kenyans had gotten Dhlakama out of Mozambique and into Nairobi. I was sent to Nairobi, where we were told he was in hiding. I showed up with another FSO who spoke Portuguese. We went to the Kenyan foreign ministry and explained that we wanted to meet Dhlakama. They claimed to know nothing about him and he certainly was not in Nairobi. We wasted a day getting nowhere with the Kenyans. Finally about three o'clock in the afternoon, I said, "Okay, this is going nowhere. I'm going to back to my hotel. I'm leaving tomorrow. Thank you for your cooperation."

Q: Or lack thereof.

PERITO: We walked out, went back to the hotel, walked into the hotel room, and the phone rang. It was the Kenyan foreign ministry representative who said, "There'll be a car in front of your hotel in ten minutes." We drove through Nairobi to a rough looking part of town and parked in front of a shabby motel. There was a guy standing on the steps that looked like security. He took us through the motel to the back and up a couple of flights of stairs. We came around the corner and there was a soldier standing in front of a door with an automatic weapon. We walked to the door and our escort pushed it open. Inside the room were three men who looked like middle-aged, middle-class Nigerian businessmen. The man in the middle was about 40 years old. He wore glasses, a dark suit and a black tie. It was Dhlakama. He was hardly the image of a rebel leader responsible for the deaths of about 250,000 people.

The other people left, leaving me with Dhlakama, and the FSO who served as the interpreter. In the Angola negotiations, we had reached a turning point when Hank Cohen presented a set of principles as a basis for negotiation. We thought maybe this might work in Mozambique. We drafted seven principles, a set of bullet points, which fit on one piece of paper translated into Portuguese. My instructions were to see if Dhlakama was interested in talking to the Mozambique government on the basis of those seven points. We had a brief conversation and then I handed Dhlakama the piece of paper. He took the piece of paper and looked at the statement of principles. He looked at me and said, "Well, let me tell you what I think of your principles," and he threw the paper back at me. We discovered later that he could not read.

Q: Not quite accepting it.

PERITO: No, not accepting it at all. This was not a very positive first meeting, but he did agree to continue the dialog. Dhlakama accepted Sant'Egidio's invitation to visit Rome and eventually RENAMO agreed to peace talks with the government. When Dhlakama went to Rome, Sant'Egidio discovered that he and the rest of his leadership team were ill. They had been living in the bush with no access to medical care. The Italians took them to a hospital and got them well. Next, the Italians discovered that Dhlakama and his associates were illiterate and had no formal education. He had never heard of World War II. He had no concept of world geography. He knew about Italy, Portugal, the Soviet Union and the United States, but had no idea where they were located. The Italians said he was very interested in guns. He was very curious about the kind of weapons the Italian police carried.

When the peace negotiations convened, the fact that the RENAMO delegation was uneducated was a tremendous problem. Beyond memorizing a few slogans like 'freedom of religion,' 'free and fair elections,' 'democracy,' and 'anti-Communism,' they had no real understanding what the words meant, no political framework, and no idea what they wanted from the negotiations. This was their first time out of the bush and they were terrified. This was unlike the Angolan peace talks. The Angola government had spent eight years negotiating independence for Namibia; the UNITA delegation was led by a graduate from the University of Arizona. Even then we had to give the UNITA delegation a crash course in how to conduct a diplomatic negotiation. The RENAMO delegation required a great deal of handholding and reassurance from Sant'Egidio. They were afraid they would be taken advantage of because they didn't understand. The talks went on for a long time and eventually were successful.

We made several visits to Rome. One time the negotiations began at twilight and were held in the cathedral, which was built in 1100 A.D. You couldn't drive into the area. You had to get out of your car and walk through winding cobblestone streets. We came into the square in front of the cathedral as the sun was setting. The square was empty except for one man standing in the middle wearing a trench coat with the collar up. His name was Antonio and he was the translator/confidant/go-between. When we entered the cathedral, there was incense burning and they were saying mass. We went down narrow, winding corridors and then got to a door. The door burst open and there was the RENAMO delegation. It was constant drama. We were followed all the time, but we never figured out who it was. We would go into restaurants and immediately the tables around us would fill up with people who didn't eat but tried to listen to our conversation. People would follow us, and then if you turned around fast, they would gasp and sit down or run away. It was comical, not threatening.

Q: Were you heading the delegation, or did we send Hank Cohen on that?

PERITO: I was the day-to-day delegation leader, particularly with the Angolan talks. Hank would participate periodically, because he had other responsibilities. When we

reached a point in the negotiations where we were deadlocked, Hank would fly in - he's a marvelous negotiator --and he resolved the deadlock. Then he would leave and we would grind away, taking care of as much of the detail as possible until we reached another impasse. When Hank came and took over the talks everyone got very serious. It was an approach that worked effectively.

Q: Which were the more difficult talks?

PERITO: The Angola talks were more difficult because the Angolans were more sophisticated. The amazing thing was that everybody expected Angola to be the great success and Mozambique to be a failure from the start. As it turned out, it was exactly the opposite. The Angola peace process failed and the country returned to civil war. The Mozambique negotiations were successful and the peace agreement has held. I think the Mozambicans were watching what happened in Angola and decided they didn't want that to happen to them.

Let me talk for just a minute about the Angola talks. The Angola talks were very professionally handled by the United States. We began as advisors to UNITA; we ended up as advisors to everybody. By the time the talks got to the final stages, the Soviets had opted out. The Soviet Union was crumbling and the Soviet delegation members were concerned about whether their families had enough to eat. The Soviet foreign ministry had no foreign exchange so the Soviet delegation would fly on Aeroflot to Madrid. The Soviet embassy in Madrid would drive them to the Portuguese border. The Soviet embassy in Lisbon would send a car out to pick them up. While in Lisbon, they were dependent on the Portuguese government to pay their hotel bills and buy them food. They spent their time watching CNN trying to figure out what was going on at home.

At the end of the negotiations, the delegations were sequestered in a school compound in Lisbon and told they could not leave until the agreement was concluded. After a few days, the U.S. delegation began drafting position papers on the remaining issues and giving them to both the government delegation and UNITA. We would meet with UNITA and say, "This is what we think ought to happen. These are the advantages for you, and these are the downsides." Then we would meet with the Angolan government and say the same thing. We'd wait a few days and both sides would present our position. It worked famously.

Q: So basically it was the two Angolan sides and the United States?

PERITO: That's right. The Portuguese were sponsoring the talks, which were very important for domestic political reasons in Portugal. Angola and the other former overseas colonies were still extraordinarily important in Portugal. There was a tremendous amount of interest in the Portuguese press in the talks. There were constituencies within Portugal supporting both sides. Hosting and mediating the talks was politically important to the Portuguese and they were very generous with their support. They were very wary, however, of being criticized if the talks failed. In the end we got an agreement. Secretary Baker came to Lisbon to sign the agreement. I flew on the

Secretary's aircraft with Hank Cohen. The Soviet foreign minister and the Secretary General of the UN also attended. The heads of the negotiating teams for Angola, UNITA, the USSR and me were given seats of honor. The signing ceremony was covered by CNN in the United States for about 60 seconds, but in Europe the whole event which lasted for several hours was broadcast live.

Q: No South African there?

PERITO: No, the South Africans were content to stay on the sidelines. The peace agreement worked for two years, and there was a free and fair election. The Angolan government won; Jonas Savimbi lost. A few days later Savimbi restarted the war.

Q: Bob, let me ask you somewhat about the domestic side of your operation. Did you have much to do with Congress in that job?

PERITO: We did because of the sanctions against South Africa. Legally, the sanctions also applied to Namibia because Namibia was part of South Africa. When Namibia became independent, the sanction laws were still on the books and it was very difficult to get them repealed. We discovered that across the country many state and local governments had adopted sanctions against South Africa. We had a program which ran for a year that involved me writing letters to state governors, city mayors and county councils urging them to change their laws to exempt Namibia, which was then an independent country. The Namibian government needed all the help it could get. Companies that would want to establish businesses or sell or buy from Namibia couldn't because they were restrained. Banks wouldn't take deposits. People who tried to do business in Namibia found their bank accounts frozen.

Q: It was a frustrating situation. What about your relations with the Black Caucus? Did they pose you any difficulties?

PERITO: We had problems trying to convince them that by engaging with the South African government we were going to accomplish what they wanted. They wanted us to break diplomatic relations and apply more sanctions. Our policy was called constructive engagement. We had trouble explaining our policy to Congress. With the political left, we had problems explaining why we needed to deal with the South African government. With the political right, we had problems trying to explain why we weren't embracing Chief Buthelezi, who was the darling of many Republicans. .

Q: The Zulu.

PERITO: Yes, the leader of the Zulus, and the leader of Inkatha Freedom Party. At the time, there was a civil war going on in Natal province between supporters of Inkatha and the ANC, which continued through independence. It was very brutal with lots of people killed on both sides. Hank Cohen and I went to visit Buthelezi's capital and spent an afternoon with him. He read us a very long speech and then fed us lunch. He also gave us copies of his book and Inkatha Party neck ties. A few months later, Hank Cohen was

testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Senator Jessie Helms asked him why the U.S. was not supporting Buthelezi? Cohen replied, "Chief Buthelezi is a friend of mine. He gave me this necktie." There was a big laugh, and Helms did not repeat the question.

Q: And what was the situation in Zimbabwe? Was Mugabe in charge then?

PERITO: Yeah, Mugabe was in charge. We were forced to recall the U.S. ambassador to Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean press charged that we had withdrawn the ambassador because of his close relations with Mugabe. Our ambassador was a political appointee and he may have planted that idea with the local media. Jeff Davidow and I went to Zimbabwe to explain our decision to the embassy staff and to Mugabe. When we met President Mugabe there were only four people in the room, Mugabe, Jeff, me, and a young woman from the foreign ministry who was a note taker. After Jeff explained the reasons for the ambassador's recall, he delivered the Department's standard talking points against Zimbabwe's plan to buy Mig-23 jet fighters from the Soviet Union. We thought it was a bad idea because Zimbabwe was spending foreign exchange it didn't have for aircraft it could not use because the country had no enemies.

It quickly became apparent, however, that Mugabe really wanted to buy the planes. Mugabe was sitting across from us holding a plate full of peanuts in one hand and gesturing with the other. As the conversation went on, Mugabe began picking up the peanuts one by one and firing them from the level of the plate into his mouth. The peanuts traveled about a foot and a half; he never missed. As Jeff continued his presentation, Mugabe became more agitated and more red faced and the peanuts began to fly faster and faster. He was throwing peanuts into his mouth at a machine-gun rate and arguing with Jeff that he was not going to accept our position. Finally he became so exasperated that he said, "We're warriors, and warriors must have a spear, and not having a spear," he said, "is just like being a woman!" Immediately, it dawned on him that the only other person in the room from his country was a young woman. He looked at her and she had turned beet red. She was so embarrassed. He turned back to Jeff and he said, "Well, well, well, you know what I mean." He never bought the airplanes.

Q: In '91 you were moved within the Department back to something that made a lot of sense, the Director of Chinese Affairs, actually where you started. How did this come about?

PERITO: I don't really know. I'd been out of Chinese Affairs for a long time. I think it came about because the Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs remembered me from the old days. A lot of the people who were in Chinese Affairs at that time had never heard of me. I found out later that they had to look up my bio because I had been away from Chinese Affairs for so long. The big issue of the day was whether to take away Most Favored Nation (MFN) treatment for Chinese exports to the United States. President Bush was committed to maintaining MFN for China. The Democrats in the Congress were committed to making the President pay politically for that position. We had three rounds of the MFN debate in Congress during my tenure. We spent the entire

spring each year testifying before hostile congressional committees about why it was in our interest to maintain MFN for China. We would appear before various committees in both the House and the Senate. Each year the Democratic controlled Congress would pass a resolution calling for China to lose MFN and President Bush would veto it. I was told later by Democrats in both the House and the Senate that it was a political exercise and essentially a free vote. Members of Congress would posture knowing that the President would use his veto. I learned this when President Clinton was elected because then the Democrats were also in control of Congress and their votes really mattered. Congress really had to decide whether to take MFN away from China and bear the consequences.

During the MFN debate each year we worked with business groups, farm associations and the other constituencies that were in favor of MFN for China. These groups identified every American factory that manufactured anything that was exported to China. They would contact the workers of that factory, and get them to write to their representatives in Congress to remind them that “There’s a factory and 500 people in your district and we export everything we make to China. If you put us out of business, we’ll remember.”

I spent a lot of time on the Hill testifying before Congress or going up with more senior officials who testified. I was in that wonderful position where you would go up with someone who delivered the testimony, which you and your staff wrote, and who answered questions using the talking points you prepared. Then when there was an unexpected question, they would turn around and say, “I’d like to introduce the China office director. He’ll answer that question.”

The second issue at the time was Chinese prison labor. There was a machine tool factory in Michigan that discovered it was being undersold in the U.S. market by machine tools made in China. The American company learned that the Chinese machine tools were being manufactured in a prison in China. Harry Wu, a Fellow at the Hudson Institute at Stanford University, had been in a Chinese prison at one point in his life. He went back to China to investigate the charge that China was exporting goods made by prison labor to the United States. Wu posed as an overseas Chinese businessman. He visited Chinese prisons and carried a movie camera hidden in a bag. He photographed Chinese prison managers telling him that they could export items made in prisons for very low prices because they didn’t have to pay the prisoners for their work. Wu also visited Hong Kong where he filmed a meeting with businessmen who said, “We can sell you this for nothing, because the prisoners make it and, if they don’t work they are beaten.” Wu was interviewed on the television program 60 Minutes. Congress was enraged; labor unions grabbed the issue. Everyone demanded the State Department do something. It was decided that the U.S. should negotiate an agreement with China that would stop the export of goods made with prison labor to the U.S. and that would allow U.S. Customs agents to inspect Chinese prisons to verify the agreement. This was a tall order, particularly since we quickly discovered that the U.S. prison system manufactures and exports machine tools. In fact, the office furniture in the State Department was manufactured by prison labor.

Q: That I didn’t know.

PERITO: We found a video produced by the U.S. Bureau of Prisons. In the film's opening segment, a group of American prison workers standing beside a machine tool boast that the U.S. will export the machine to Japan. We also learned that experts consider prison factories, which teach prisoners a trade and pay them a small wage, a good thing. Prisoners are grateful for the productive activity; when released they are better able to find jobs and less likely to return to crime. This mattered little. I was part of a delegation that went to Beijing to negotiate the agreement. Before we left, I attended a meeting between the Assistant Secretary of State for Asian Affairs and the Chinese ambassador to Washington. When the Chinese ambassador heard what we had in mind, he looked at me and said sarcastically, "Have a good trip, but you're not going to get anywhere."

We went, we negotiated and in the end we got an agreement, and the Chinese did permit U.S. Customs agents to visit their prisons. I testified twice before Congress on the prison labor issue. The first time was before an extraordinarily hostile Democratic committee chairman in the House and six or seven television cameras. They began by showing the footage from 60 Minutes and then they asked questions. I did pretty well, but the poor guy from the Customs Bureau was annihilated. By the second hearing, the issue had lost its appeal because we had the agreement and the Chinese were cooperating.

The last time we did MFN, President Clinton had been elected and Winston Lord, who had been a leading critic of MFN for China, became the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs. I went from being on one team to being on the other. It was clear that the U.S. couldn't really take MFN away from China - the Clinton Administration didn't want to do that. We needed to cut a deal with the Congress and then sell that deal to the Chinese. The plan was to get China to accept conditions so Clinton could say, "I'm approving MFN but only because the Chinese have agreed to take certain steps to respect human rights. I'm not George H.W. Bush."

The first thing we did was to meet with Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell in his private office in the dome of the Capitol building, a beautiful private office with a window looking down the mall as the sun was setting over the Lincoln Memorial. We sat around a small circular table, Winston Lord, Senator George Mitchell and Representative Nancy Pelosi, who'd been our nemesis in the House. I had testified several times before Mitchell on behalf of MFN for China which he strongly opposed. Winston and I sat down; Mitchell looked across the table at me and said, "Don't I know you." I said, "No." Then I went from being a leader of the opposition to being part of the team. It was very strange. It was one of the few times in my Foreign Service career where US partisan politics was present, and I went from one side to the other. We agreed on a plan. Nancy Pelosi started calling me Bob, and, for a very brief time, we were on a first-name basis. We worked out a deal with Congress and MFN for China went through.

Q: What about Tiananmen? Did that cause a lot of problems while you were there?

PERITO: Tiananmen happened just before I took over, so my time as China director was

overshadowed by the Tiananmen massacre. There were many students who had escaped from China in the United States. These people were extraordinary. They immediately understood our political system and used it to their advantage. They ended up at Princeton University, they got Ph.D.s, they spent their summers interning for important members of the Senate, they supported the Democratic Party, and they could walk into the White House anytime. Several of them spoke at the Democratic National Convention. They gave us fits because most of them wanted the US to take radical action against the Chinese government and they opposed MFN for China. They were extraordinarily shrewd.

When we started dealing with problem of the smuggling of Chinese into the US, we called these people and said, “This is not a situation where Chinese are trying to migrate to the United States illegally. This is a situation where criminals are charging \$30,000.00 to \$40,000.00 a person to bring people to the United States. In the process many of these people are being tortured and killed and enduring enormous suffering and the hands of criminal gangs. We asked these veterans of Tiananmen to use their communication networks, through the Internet, to warn their contemporaries in China that this was something to be avoided. They put out the message; there is no way of knowing what effect it had.

Q: But they did do it? What about the problem of Taiwan? How did that affect you?

PERITO: We had the routine demarches on both sides. The issue of the US selling military weapons to Taiwan came up as it does every year. The Chinese would come in and deliver their demarches. This was a standard part of the US-China relationship. During my tenure as Director of Chinese Affairs there was an understanding between the China experts in the State Department and the American affairs experts in the Chinese foreign ministry that they had a responsibility to manage the relationship so it stayed on a positive course. For both the US and China, the cast of characters stayed roughly the same over the years. This was particularly true for the Chinese foreign ministry where junior officers in American affairs were steadily promoted over the years after we reestablished diplomatic relations.

Q: But always in American affairs?

PERITO: Yes. On the US side there was a lot of continuity as well. The basic corps of Chinese language officers knew each other, some of us for 20 years. We also knew our counterparts on the other side. These weren't exactly friendships, because that wasn't allowed by the system, but there were close associations. I had a great working relationship with my counterpart, the Director of the American Affairs Desk in the Chinese foreign ministry. We would sit down, and I would say, “These are my problems. I've got Congress and I've got problems with special interest groups and I need your help.” He would say, “I've got to tell you my problems. I've got the party secretary and various hardliners and I need your help.” Then we look at ways to manage the situation in order to keep the US –China relationship from going off course. The conversations that we had throughout that period were enormously frank.

Q: And probably very useful, too?

PERITO: Extraordinarily useful. We would tell each other very honestly about the pressures we were under, what we needed as opposed to what we wanted, and we would look for ways to make the relationship work. In the process, we developed a tacit understanding with the senior representatives in the Chinese embassy about how we would handle the inevitable problems in US- Relations. The idea was to never let the problems become personal. The Chinese embassy officials would come in to deliver demarches, particularly on Taiwan, with their game face on. They would sit down, pull out their talking points, and they would read, "The People's Republic of China resolutely denounces the government of the United States," and on and on. Then I would reply, reading my talking points about how we resolutely disagreed with everything they said.. We would get to the end and then I would ask, "Are we finished?" They would say, "Yes, we're finished." Then we would sit back and say, "How's the wife? How are the kids? Would you like to go to a football game on Saturday?" There were personal relationships, and we on both sides made certain that the personal relationships were preserved. That was hard because sometimes they got really mad at us and sometimes we got really mad at them.

Q: How about the problem of Chinese missile sales? Did that impede on you?

PERITO: It was enormous, the whole business with Pakistan. It forced us under U.S. law to continue to impose sanctions, something that we didn't want to do and something that the foreign ministry probably didn't want either, but the foreign ministry didn't control the issue. They were up against the Communist Party, other ministries, and the military. When we were unable to give the foreign ministry enough to show that they were managing the relationship, they lost control, and so did we. There were times when the State Department couldn't control what other parts of our government was doing or what the Congress was doing or what various private groups were doing. So the relationship listed from side to side.

Q: That was certainly an exciting tour, but after a couple years you had to move on.

PERITO: I won some awards in the process. For the work that I did as the leader of the Angola peace talks I won a Superior Honor Award, and a Presidential Meritorious Service Award.

Q: Well, I congratulate you on those, Bob. Not many of us get those things. Well, then you went on to INL, which stands for...?

PERITO: The International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau.

Q: That's how I met you again after many years, hearing you speak about police matters. Was this something you requested, or were you moved by the Department?

PERITO: This was my last tour in the Foreign Service, and it began in a very strange way. I was the Director of China Affairs. We had been successful at managing this terribly difficult relationship. On my next to last day as China Director, I received the Presidential Meritorious Service Award. It was given in a ceremony on the eighth floor of the State Department by Secretary Warren Christopher. There were about twenty recipients from all parts of the government. It was one of those situations where you are there with your family in that wonderful room on the eighth floor with all of the antiques, everybody's dressed up and everything is sparkling. The Secretary made a speech in which he said, "You people are the best and brightest and the *crème de la crème* of government service, and we're so proud of you." Then we each got our award and our photograph taken with the Secretary.

I went back to my office with my award, but I had only two days left and I didn't have an onward assignment. I was both one of the best and the brightest and I had no prospect of an assignment. I had applied for a lot of jobs, and I kept getting told, "Well, we have to have a minority person," "We have to have a woman." I was really at loose ends. I had no onward assignment, but I had my award.

Q: But you couldn't eat that.

PERITO: I'd recently been promoted, twice in three years, and so I was at the second rung of the Senior Foreign Service. I was a success and out of work. I went home and I sat on my patio for a week, and then the phone started ringing.

The Coast Guard had intercepted two Taiwanese freighters loaded with Chinese migrants off the coast of California. About two months before, the Coast Guard had intercepted a similar Taiwanese boat with hundreds of Chinese migrants aboard. I chaired a White House working group which repatriated the migrants to China with the assistance to the US military. The message in all the phone calls was the same, "We want you to come to the State Department and do something about this." I said, "I can't do anything about it. I don't have a job." Then a rusting freighter called the *Golden Moon* ran aground in New York Harbor and 300 Chinese migrants jumped overboard and swam to shore. About 30 people drowned, the rest were rescued by local people who came to help and the local police. Some were arrested; many were hospitalized and some escaped. We had a major problem on both coasts, and the phone started ringing twice as often. Again the message was "You need to do something about this. Nobody else knows about this situation. You dealt with it before." Yet I did not have a job and I felt I could not just go into the Department and deal with the problem.

Yet, that is exactly what happened. The Refugee Bureau, which had been assigned action, organized a meeting of concerned offices at the Department that I chaired. The only dissenting voice in the meeting was Sally Brandel, who was a special assistant to the Counselor of the Department. Sally looked at me and said, "Who the hell are you? Under whose authority are you doing this?" I dodged the question, but after the meeting we went to see Sally and explained that we were trying to deal with a problem that was unusual for the Department. After our meeting Sally was very helpful and eventually she became

my deputy. That was the start of a long and extremely productive association, but our relationship had a difficult start. After talking with Sally my colleagues from the Refugee Bureau and I met with Bob Gelbard who was the Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) in the Latin American Bureau but he had been identified as the new Assistant Secretary for the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau. I explained that we had a crisis with Chinese alien smuggling involving both our coasts. The Coast Guard was holding hundreds of migrants aboard unsafe ships at sea. We had to find a way to quickly repatriate them to China. I thought that INL was the best place in the Department to deal with the problem. However, I had no job and no authority; I was not working for anyone.”

Although Gelbard had not yet been nominated for his new position, he said I should sit in the DAS office in INL and deal with the problem. That was my assignment; the Deputy Assistant Secretary’s office was vacant, so I moved in. INL had a Coast Guard liaison officer on staff; we became a team. Tim Worth, the new Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs offered his support. We created an interagency task force that included the Coast Guard and DOD that I chaired. We had an interagency meeting in one of the conference rooms in the Department. Tim Worth was there to introduce me. Worth said, “Whatever Perito wants, he gets. Understood?” and the generals, admirals, and the CIA nodded yes and off we went.

The task force went to work. We took care of the boats that had been intercepted and we repatriated the people on board to China. The Coast Guard caught about 15 boats over the next two years and we safely repatriated over 12,000 Chinese. The task force became a formal NSC interagency working group that I co-chaired with a representative from the Immigration Service. It became a very big deal from a very humble beginning. I operated as the DAS in INL for a while because appointments were slow and it took a long time for Ambassador Gelbard to get confirmed. Secretary of State Warren Christopher wanted INL to get involved with countering organized crime. He wanted to have an office in INL that dealt with all types of international organized crime not just narcotics trafficking. The words ‘law enforcement’ were added to the name of the bureau.

Gelbard asked me to head the new office. Sally Brandel and I wrote a concept paper that was accepted. The office was called International Criminal Justice, staffed by a core group of FSO’s and Department civil servants with the remainder of the staff provided by federal law enforcement agencies. Staff from other agencies would not be liaison officers both would functional as State Department personnel while they were on this assignment. Under the theory, the FBI agents assigned to the office would temporarily be working for State. In fact, it didn’t work that way. The law enforcement agents were never able to shed their agency identity; they continued to think of themselves as liaison officers.

The office was created. I became the director. We had a terrible time trying to find office space in the Department. We were in closets; we were in storage rooms. Finally we were given a huge, newly remodeled office with a staff that grew rapidly to 18 people, including agents from the FBI, Immigration, Customs, Coast Guard, and Secret Service. We became the core office in the Bureau. We not only did alien smuggling, we ended up

creating a counter-crime police assistance program which grew from \$5,000,000 in the first year to \$35,000,000 to \$40,000,000.

Q: Is that how you got involved in Kosovo?

PERITO: Then Somalia happened. After the 'Blackhawk down' incident in Mogadishu in 1993, the next day Secretary Christopher called in Gelbard and explained that President Clinton was going to announce that US troops would be out of Somalia in six months. In the interim, Clinton would say that the US would stand up a Somalia police force to take their place. The Secretary told Gelbard that he was responsible for standing up the Somali National Police. Gelbard came directly to my office and "Bob, you are going to stand up the Somali National Police. Call ICITAP and get them over here this morning." I had never heard of ICITAP, the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program at the Department of Justice. Gelbard knew about ICITAP from his previous job because ICITAP had created new police forces in Panama and El Salvador.

ICITAP came over; we went to work and six months later we had created a police assistance program for Somalia, an amazing story in itself. In the process, we got the Defense Department to donate \$20,000,000.00 worth of surplus military equipment to arm and equip the Somali police. Unfortunately, it took so long to get around the legal restrictions on training foreign police that by the time the program began operating in Somalia in February 1994, US troops were almost gone. ICITAP established an effective training program using American contractors and UN police officers as instructors. We began standing up the Somali National Police, but by April the conflict had re-ignited. The new US ambassador to Somalia came to see me. He said, "Look, I'm going to tell Mohamed Farah Aideed, the main Somali warlord, that the United States is serious. If he doesn't stop the fighting and join the peace process, then we're going to pull out. To prove we are serious. I'm going to pull out the ICITAP program. It's the only thing that's working, and if we pull that out, Aideed will know we're serious." I asked that he not withdraw the program because we were beginning to make a difference, but that is exactly what he did. By the end of June the ICITAP trainers and the rest of the Americans were out of Somalia.

Almost as soon as Somalia was over, we got a call to come to the Pentagon for the first meetings to plan Haiti. These meetings were held in the office of General Wesley Clark at the Pentagon. Most of the people attending those meetings were Somalia veterans. It was like old home week. The military told the State Department right off, "We're not going into Haiti unless you tell us that there's going to be a local police force ready to take the hand-off. There's not going to be any mission creep this time. We're not going to have a repeat of Blackhawk down.

The problem was that Haiti had never had a civilian police force. Haiti had a corrupt and brutal military that had seized power in coup. The whole summer was spent trying to conceptualize how we're going to deal with the police problem. There's a history to the planning of Haiti that people have written books about. I give lectures about it in the course I teach at George Mason University. In short, we came up with a plan for an

international police force that would monitor former Haitian soldiers who would serve as temporary police until a new police academy was established and a new national police force was trained. ICITAP would create the academy, and train the new police. Over time the international police would phase out and the Haitian police would take over. And, that's exactly what happened. Within the first year we trained 5,500 new police officers, an amazing achievement, starting from scratch. At one time we had 3,000 police cadets in two academies—one in the US and one in Haiti--and 500 instructors.

Q: I've never heard of that. It hadn't gotten much publicity.

PERITO: It was a great achievement. The police graduated and did a very respectable job. We also started a program to recover cars that had been stolen from the US and shipped to Central America. The National Insurance Crime Bureau, NICB, came to see me. They said, "We are having a terrible problem with stolen cars being exported out of the United States. We're losing millions of dollars a year. We don't how large the problem is because the Customs Bureau doesn't track exports from the United States. There's no way that we can tell how many cars are being smuggled."

Q: Was that mainly in Mexico and Canada?

PERITO: In the beginning they thought the major problem was Latin America, but they discovered that cars were going to Europe and Asia as well. They said, "We need your help. We can't get cooperation from the countries in Latin America because governments are corrupt, police are corrupt, and it's actually really good business for the people there. The laws don't work in most countries. Anybody can produce a fraudulent bill of sale and the car is theirs." We organized a task force at the State Department, which I chaired, and came up with a program. The program had several parts. Part one part was an agreement. We got a lawyer from the Legal Bureau who drafted an agreement under which foreign governments would agree to allow the NICB to identify stolen vehicles by their Vehicle Identification Numbers. The foreign authorities would agree to seize these vehicles and send them back to the United States. In return for their cooperation, foreign law enforcement agencies would get not only the undying gratitude of the United States but also an FBI stolen vehicle police training program. We gave \$1,000,000 to the FBI to create a training program. We also offered to have our legal experts assist foreign governments in updating their stolen vehicles laws.

We discovered that Central American countries also had a major problem with stolen vehicles. Cars were stolen in Nicaragua and shipped to Honduras, for example. We told Central American governments that our long-term goal was a regional network of understandings, agreements, and laws so countries could work together. We were going to have regional conferences; we promised to help countries deal with their neighbors. We went to every country in Central America and negotiated an agreement. After I left the job, the State Department also negotiated agreements with many countries in Europe. The FBI did the training. The NICB recovered millions of dollars worth of stolen autos. We got a lot of publicity, reports in *Newsweek*, *Time* and CNN.

Q: You don't hear as much about stolen cars anymore.

PERITO: It was a big deal at the time, and the program was really successful. I got private industry, the National Insurance Crime Bureau, and the American insurance industry to team with State Department, the FBI and the Department of Justice, and we solved the problem. I spoke at the National Insurance Crime Bureau convention in Chicago. My office in INL did a series of useful things. We created police assistance programs in Haiti and Somalia. We stopped Chinese alien smuggling. We created the anti-car smuggling regime. We also created the first Nigerian crime task force bringing together all the elements of the U.S. government that worked on Nigerian organized crime. We created the current foreign police assistance program which now distributes millions of dollars annually. I received State Department Superior Honor Awards for my work on Chinese alien smuggling and the stolen car project.

Q: Did this get you into Kosovo?

PERITO: No. I retired from the Department in 1995. I went to the Justice Department, where I worked for six years, and that's when I did Bosnia and Kosovo, but that's another story.

Q: And you went to a new career then. How do you find your background fits into the Institute for Peace, where you now are?

PERITO: I'm writing a book about the role of constabulary forces in peace operations. The work that I did creating police forces in Haiti and Somalia is basic to what I'm doing now. While I was at ICITAP, I worked on Bosnia and Kosovo and traveled there often so those experiences also contribute directly to my current work. But my start in being an expert on police in peace operations begins with the role I played in organizing the first international police force in Haiti, the first in which the United States participated. My current professional life began with my final State Department assignment.

Q: Well, Bob, you've had certainly one of the more exciting Foreign Service careers, in some ways adventurous, but multifaceted. What are your thoughts of the Foreign Service now as you look back, when you came in 30 years ago and as you look at it now? Would you recommend to young people that they enter it, or how do you feel?

PERITO: I have very mixed feelings about it. I think that the Foreign Service is the world's best job. I can't think of a more exciting job than being a Foreign Service Officer. At the same time, the Department of State is a very difficult employer. I am not the only person that feels this way. Any number of studies have found that the State Department was poorly managed and failed to support its employees. I also found it very difficult to work for an organization that was viewed by Congress as expendable and that constantly had its budget cut.

Q: Do you think it's viewed as much when Secretary Powell was there?

PERITO: Secretary Powell has improved the Department's relations with Congress to some extent. I worked for Secretary Powell on the NSC staff. He's an extraordinary person, a terrific public servant, and I have the greatest respect for him. If anybody could change attitudes toward the State Department, it's him. The Department of Defense and the military enjoy a lot of esteem on the Hill. Powell was a general; his ability to change attitudes comes from his reputation as a military officer not because of time at the Department. This isn't the situation in other countries where being a member of the diplomatic corps is very prestigious. The Department does very little to counter its negative public image. It has no public constituency.

Q: Well, We keep trying, but it's like pushing a boulder uphill. You haven't mentioned Kosovo, and I'll mention it again. You went out there with your police hat on?

PERITO: Kosovo is a long story. The State Department came to ICITAP in 1998 and explained that the situation in Kosovo was deteriorating. Ambassador Holbrook had negotiated an agreement with Yugoslav President Milosevic - this was October 1998 - that allowed the OSCE to send 2,000 unarmed observers to monitor a ceasefire. Some 500 of these observers would be police officers. The Department wanted to use this opportunity to create a training program in Kosovo for ethnic Albanians. They would not be police officers but they would perform police services. We started to design a non-police police service for Kosovo. In the end, after the NATO bombing campaign, the police from Yugoslavia were withdrawn, and the assignment changed to creating a new police force for Kosovo. We teamed with OSCE. We opened a police school in Kosovo that's now a state-of-the-art academy. It has 200 international instructors. At any given time there are 1,000 students on campus. Within three years we trained a 5,000 member, multi-ethnic police force. It's the only multi-ethnic institution in Kosovo. It has ethnic Serb and Albanian members that train together, live together, and serve together. It's an extraordinary achievement that the United States can be proud of.

Q: Congratulations. That is an achievement.

PERITO: It was truly amazing. Some really terrific people from the Department of Justice turned a bombed-out, shell of a building into a police academy in the middle of a Kosovo winter, with no heat or electricity, e-coli bacteria in the drinking water, and on and on. But they did it.

Q: Well, Bob, I want to thank you for the time you've given me. This is Tom Dunnigan ending an interview with Robert Perito on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

End of interview