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

AMBASSADOR MARC BAAS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: November 9, 2005
Copyright 2015 ADST

[Note: This interview was not edited by Ambassador Bass.]

Q: When and where were you born?

BAAS: I was born on June 23, 1948 in Grand Rapids Michigan.

Q: Baas sounds Dutch.

BAAS: I am 100 percent Dutch. My mother's name was Rylersdam.

Q: Of course, they have a very large Dutch community in Michigan.

BAAS: That's true. We have a city called Holland, we have a city called Zeeland. When I was growing up on the east side of Grand Rapids it was pretty much Dutch and the west side was pretty much Polish.

Q: I remember when I came into the Foreign Service my first job was with the refugee relief program. I found we were giving refugee status to the Dutch. I tried to figure out what was this about? Apparently, the ranking Republican on the immigration committee was a woman from the Dutch area of Michigan.

BAAS: A woman? What year was that?

Q: This would be about 1956. We were declaring refugees if there had been a bombing and you had to move from one side of the street to the other side of the street, you know, the most specious arguments. Can you tell me about what you know about your father's side of the family? You know, growing up, where they come from?

BAAS: My father's side of the family came to the United States about 1890, and they came from the Zeeland in the southern part of the Netherlands around the city of Middleburg. My father's grandfather, so it was my great grandfather who came. My grandfather ended up working as a master craftsman, a master carpenter in furniture factories in Grand Rapids which is what Grand Rapids is known for, and he lived in the center of Grand Rapids. My father was born there and went to school there and stayed there after the war.

Q: What was the motivation for the Dutch to come to the United States?

BAAS: I think it was mainly economic at this time. I don't know exactly what was going on in 1890 in the Netherlands, but I'm sure there were, there were probably more farmers than any thing else in the Netherlands and one bad harvest I think was enough to get them going.

Q: Your grandfather was a master carpenter. How about your father?

BAAS: My father worked in a furniture factory in what I would call middle management, called American Seating Company where they made chairs and stadium seating and stuff like that. He was in a variety of things; purchasing was the thing I remember most, but basically in middle management jobs.

Q: His educational background? Did he go to college?

BAAS: He did. He spent two years at what is now Grand Rapids Junior College, I think it was called something different at the time. Then he went to Hope College in Holland, Michigan, where he graduated, I think, in 1943.

Q: And on your mother's side?

BAAS: My mother was born in Chandler, Minnesota which is a farming community on the southwestern side of Minnesota. Her father, Cornelius Rylersdam, came to the United States twice actually. He came originally, I think around 1890, through Annapolis and worked as a farmer on the Eastern Shore. I'm not sure, I think maybe kind of like an indentured servant; they didn't call it that. He must've been paying off his passage and then he went back after three or four years to his hometown of Vilnius which is near Utrecht in the Netherlands, in Holland, and married my grandmother who was a school teacher in Vilnius. They then came back and they went through Annapolis again, and ended up eventually in southwestern Minnesota where they had a farm. My mother was born on that farm which is still in my family, it belongs now to one of my cousins. My mother left the farm to go to high school and junior college in Orange City, Iowa and then she went to Hope College for her last two years in Holland, Michigan where she met my father.

Q: Was your mother sort of a stay at home mother or was she working?

BAAS: Before she got married, she was a teacher, then a WAVE during the war working in fact, at McLean Gardens, working at the Navy Annex across from American University, around Ward Circle. She was doing, I think, code cracking and that kind of stuff. After the war my father and mother got married and moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan where my mother was a stay at home mom at that point with four kids. I'm the oldest. And then when my youngest sister was in junior high she went back to Michigan State and got a master's degree in education and then taught high school English for probably twenty years.

Q: Basically you grew up in Grand Rapids then?

BAAS: Absolutely. Eighteen years.

Q: What area of Grand Rapids?

BAAS: Southeastern part of Grand Rapids. As I said, the eastern side of the river was basically the Dutch part so I grew up around a place called Mulick Park and went to the Mulick Park Elementary School and Ridgeview Junior High and Ottawa Hills High School.

Q: What was it like growing up there?

BAAS: It was like any movie you have ever seen about the 50's in the Midwest of the United States. Grand Rapids is a very church-oriented place, a very outdoors-oriented place. It's a city of probably 250,000 when I was growing up and probably more or less that now. Although when we moved when I was about ten we moved about three blocks, we moved from one place that was pretty built up to another place that was not so built up. The whole suburbs were expanding at that time or I guess, they weren't really suburbs but the outer part of the city was expanding at that time. We did a lot of camping in the summer and that kind of thing, a lot of outdoor sort of stuff, but it was almost sheltered.

Q: Did you ride your bike everywhere?

BAAS: Oh, yes. We went outside to play kick the can or tag. We were always running around outside, down to the park to play softball or basketball or whatever. You know, there was none of this getting driven to play dates that people are doing now.

Q: What was your family religion, Dutch Reform?

BAAS: Well, the offshoot of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Church of America, was the church that my family went to. The one we actually went to was called Hope Reformed Church.

Q: Some of these Dutch churches are quite strict. How was this?

BAAS: Given the time and place, by definition it was strict but it was the least strict of that kind of reformed group of churches. In fact, it split off something called the Christian Reformed Church in the nineteen twenties, and I think it was over whether card playing was allowed or whether you could give the sacrament of communion to somebody who wasn't a member of your exact church. The reformed church was on the more liberal side of those two things. The Christian Reformed was the more conservative side.

Q: How about politics? Did your family follow any political spectrum?

BAAS: Grand Rapids is very Republican, I would say, and Michigan was basically one of those states, still, I think that was pretty much evenly divided. Detroit was the Democrat stronghold, and Grand Rapids and western Michigan or upstate was essentially Republican. My mother, however, coming from Minnesota, was a Democrat, although she didn't talk very much about it. I think she was, in her younger years, more diplomatic, shall we say. Later on she was much more obvious about her party affiliation. My father, I think, probably wasn't very strong anyway for either party, and he tended to voted for the person he liked and probably followed my mother's lead quite often.

Q: What about home life? Were subjects of the day talked around the dinner table?

BAAS: Very much, very much. I mean, we had a decent sort of local newspaper, The Grand Rapids Press, and not a lot of international news, but some national news, certainly. We discussed all that sort of thing. We got Time magazine, we got National Geographic, we got Atlantic, things like that. There were issues that were discussed often at the table, mainly I would say more local issues. The other thing growing up in the fifties in the United States, particularly in a place like Grand Rapids, it was very ethnic. It was ethnic in kind of an old sense. We were very conscious of being Dutch and when you said to someone where you from and if you were in Grand Rapids you weren't asking what street do you live on or what part of town, you were asking are you Polish or are you Dutch essentially? You'd hear the same jokes on one side of town told as Dutch jokes and on the other side of town told as Polish jokes. It wasn't politically incorrect to do that at the time.

Q: The kids, did you mix in school or was it pretty much of one ethnic stock?

BAAS: No, I said generally that one side of the city was Dutch and the other was Polish and so that tended to predominate in schools, but there were lots of exceptions. There were lots of other people; Germans and Greeks and Armenians and Scandinavians and other people mixed in the pot as well, not to mention African Americans. My school, certainly the elementary school was more Dutch than anything else, but by the time you got to high school the Dutch were probably the single largest group, although probably not the majority.

Q: One thing in Michigan is Detroit but manufacturing in Grand Rapids. What about unions? Was this a strong union place or not?

BAAS: Yes, it was a pretty strong union place. But this was more on the west side of the city because again, I'm speaking in real generalizations, but traditionally, the Dutch tended to be in management and the Polish part of the city tended to be the labor force. The union action was much more pronounced on the other side of the city. When I went to work in the summertime at American Seating I had to join the UAW (United Auto Workers), because it was somehow connected with the UAW.

Q: In your leisure time, what about reading? Were you much of a reader?

BAAS: Oh, yes, absolutely. I read a lot; we used to go to the library all the time and that's what we'd spend our time doing. We didn't have video games, and we didn't have television until I was probably ten or so and when we did it was constrained in the sense that we couldn't watch it after five o'clock or six o'clock. The rest of the time was reading, board games and that sort of thing.

Q: What sort of reading did you particularly like?

BAAS: I liked a lot of kind of woodsy sort of things. I remember one author and I read everything he wrote called Joseph Altsheler. I've never been able to find him again.

Q: Oh, I remember.

BAAS: I don't remember any of the titles; they were all green-backed, green-covered books about two inches, three inches thick and they were about the forest and exploring. They were great books

Q: I was interviewing Judge Silberman who was ambassador to Yugoslavia who is now on the Appeals Court. He was very interested in that and I was able to go to the Internet and find out about Altsheler. In a way this is a very good introduction to America to read these adventure stories of the wilderness and the Civil War.

BAAS: He had a blue covered series which I think was the Civil War. I also like James Fennimore Cooper and The Last of the Mohicans. I liked sports books. My father was a big reader on the Civil War so I read a lot of Bruce Catton, so I read a number of those books as well and, of course, the classics you know. My mother being an English teacher was always pushing the classics my way, and I read a lot of Dickens because I like Dickens, like that kind. Maybe that's the reason I ended up in the Foreign Service. Help the down-trodden folks and all that.

Q: How about in school? Let's take elementary school first. What grabbed you and what didn't grab you?

BAAS: I liked everything. I was a really good student, I was terrible in art, but I don't remember any strong dislikes; I just kind of liked everything, did everything. It was funny, children now, I don't remember doing nearly as much homework in elementary school as my kids seem to do, and whether that's just my faulty memory or the fact that we didn't do as much homework.

Q: As a matter fact, I recall vividly, we moved around, we lived in Annapolis for a while and we had homework. Then I went to California in the late thirties. There was a law against giving homework. It was crazy.

BAAS: These were real neighborhood elementary schools. I used to walk alone for lunch, you know, no one does now, of course. We just didn't have homework.

Q: Sports, were you much into sports?

BAAS: Yes. I loved basketball when I was in junior high. I'm not very tall, however, but I was about four feet six inches in junior high. I was really short but I was really coordinated. One summer I think between eighth and ninth grade, I grew six inches; it seemed like six inches over the summer and that was the end of my basketball career. Even though I was taller I was incredibly uncoordinated at that point and it took me a few years. Then in high school I got into wrestling and cross country. I was a runner and wrestled, and that's what I did in high school mainly.

Q: What about winter sports? Is this a big thing?

BAAS: Yes. Michigan was big for winter sports but they didn't have the built up ski things when I was growing up, so we were used to sledding and skiing on the hill right near my house, but that was all just with your buddies or brothers and sisters.

Q: In high school, how did you find the teachers there?

BAAS: Actually, I thought it was pretty good in both junior high and high school. I had some very good English teachers, particularly on the literature side of things. I think they were less strong, my English teachers, on grammar. I took Latin for two years so that took care of my English grammar more than I needed probably. Grand Rapids is fairly, it's Midwestern. I had a couple of teachers who were very much interested in international things. I remember I had one chemistry teacher giving us a long talk about aborigines in Australia. It was very interesting. I never quite figured out what it had to do with chemistry but it was incredibly interesting. I had another teacher, I think in eleventh grade, a course on government and international relations. So we had a lot of stuff on European history and diplomacy and so on.

Q: You entered high school about 1960 or so?

BAAS: No, later. I graduated in 1966 and we started high school in tenth grade so I must've gone in 1963.

Q: Was your family or you engaged in the 1960 elections? This is Nixon versus Kennedy.

BAAS: I very much remember both of them coming through Grand Rapids. I guess that's probably the first election I really remember. In elementary school all the kids were running around saying I like Ike and stuff like that. I also remember an election I think the last Eisenhower-Stevenson election. There was some poor kid, we had a mock election in school, and everyone in school of course voted for Eisenhower, except for one kid who also had the misfortune of wearing black socks, which nobody did at that time. Of course, he was immediately the black sock Democrat and immediately an outcast which was incredibly unfair, but that's the way kids are, I guess. But I remember in the '60 campaign both Nixon and Kennedy coming through Grand Rapids and Kennedy

coming through on a train. I remember my family went down to the crossing where he stopped and gave a speech. We saw him there. I don't have a clue as to what he said, but I remember seeing him, it was a big crowd and I remember seeing him. Nixon came through as well but we didn't go to see him which probably tells you something about my family.

Q: In high school were you the equivalent of majoring in anything?

BAAS: No. At the time I think we used to call it college prep. I was clearly going to college and I was taking all the advanced math courses and advanced this course and that course, such as they had them. They didn't have the advanced placement such as they do today, but it was just kind of a general college prep sort of course.

Q: How would you describe your relationship as the senior citizen among your siblings?

BAAS: It was boy, girl, boy, girl and so I have a sister two years younger than me, a brother four years younger than her, and another sister two years younger than my brother. We always teased my parents that they were obviously using some a sort of planning here to get a system that went boy, girl, boy, girl; two groups of two.

Q: How did you all get along?

BAAS: Pretty well, pretty well, we still do. You know, there were the usual childhood disagreements, but we got along very well. I always said to my siblings they were lucky I came along, lucky I was there because I made things a lot easier for them. As the first kid, I always had trouble being able to stay out on a date or just with a group of friends until 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock. I always had to have a discussion with my parents about how long I was going to stay out, whereas my sister just came along and, even though she was a girl, she stayed out until midnight with no problems, probably because I'd managed to do it without any big problems.

Q: Was there much dating or anything like that in high school?

BAAS: There was a lot of dating, yes. Movies were the main thing or in summertime the beach because we were only thirty miles away from Lake Michigan. Yes, there was a lot of dating, dances at school, that kind of thing.

Q: Where were you pointed for, for college?

BAAS: Between my junior and senior year of college I won a scholarship to go to Germany. The Volkswagen distributorship for Michigan, Indiana and Ohio was located in Grand Rapids, Michigan at the time. They ran a little competition in the thirteen high schools in the county, and then one boy and one girl were selected to go off for a summer in Wolfsburg, Germany, which is where the main Volkswagenwerk is. All you had to do was live with a family over there and their, in my case, son came to live with my family, and so in nine weeks you had one week together on each end, the first week together in

Germany and then my German brother left and went to live with my family. I came back at the end of the summer and he stayed a week before leaving and going back home. At that time I guess I had already been interested in the world, I had certainly been interested in government in a general way. When I was there I said to myself, "Boy, this is really great being overseas. I've got to find some sort of way to get a job working overseas." Well, the girl who was on the program from Rockville, Maryland named Sarah Ewing, I guess she and I were dating a little bit during the summer, she said to me, "Well, why don't you join the Foreign Service?" It turns out her father was in the Foreign Service and served in Burma and elsewhere and I said to her, "The Foreign Service? What's that? The Foreign Legion or what are you talking about?" I had zero idea what she was talking about. And she said, "Well, no, diplomats." Then I had some idea of what she was talking about. She basically said, "What you need to do is go to Georgetown School of Foreign Service and join the Foreign Service. Then you will have a job working for the government overseas."

All that sounded pretty good to me, so in my senior year in the fall when I got back to school and sat down with a high school counselor and said, "I've decided I had such a great time in Germany I'm going to become a diplomat and I'm going to go to Georgetown and the School of Foreign Service and that's what I'm going to do." She said, "Great, apply to Georgetown, it's a great school but also you should apply to American University, the School of International Service, because it's also good and it's up and coming and newer. So apply to both." So I applied to both. I also applied to the University of Michigan, as my kind of fail-safe fall back. I got accepted by both and ended up going to American School of International Service simply because they gave me twice as much money in scholarship. That was important. They gave me full tuition instead of half tuition and so that was an easy choice.

Q: You were there from when to when?

BAAS: From 1966 to 1970.

Q: You were there during Vietnam and civil rights and all. What was American University like at the time?

BAAS: I really don't know. That's a funny answer. For me, I was more than going to American University, I was in Washington, which was really cool. Grand Rapids is a nice city and I liked growing up there but Washington is Washington, and it's a big city and there's lots of stuff going on. American University, I would say, well, a funny story. When I finally decided on American University and said to my parents I was going to American my mother said, "Oh, thank goodness. We were so worried about you going to that Catholic school, Georgetown. Now that you are going to American, which was Methodist in origin, I said, "Well, Mom, I don't know how to tell you this, but the population of American University is something like 50% Jewish, so maybe Catholic might have been better from your point of view." It was basically 50%, I would say, most coming from New York, New Jersey.

Many people, including the Jewish population, but many others went home on the weekend so it was often empty on the weekend. I didn't go home on the weekend; I was too far away which was OK because I did my studying that I also had to do. But it was a good school. I learned a lot, it wasn't a party school but there was enough social life to keep any sane person busy. Because we were in Washington, everyone was really focused on what was going on nationally, if not internationally; internationally depended on your own sort of proclivities and what not. Certainly, everyone was focused on what was going on nationally.

Q: Did you major in any?

BAAS: Yes, I had a double major; I was in the School of International Service and the major I chose there was something called international business. I don't exactly understand why I chose that, I think because you had to pick one and that sort of did everything I wanted to do. I quickly figured out, or at least I think I've figured out, that international relations was kind of a soft subject and you needed to have something harder behind it, so my second major was in economics because I figured that would give me something more practical, the practical Dutch thing.

Q: Let's go back to high school. How much did the outer world intrude as far as the Cold War and knowledge of what was happening and all that?

BAAS: Everyone knew about the Cold War. I remember in elementary school and maybe even junior high doing those silly drills where you got under your desk in case there was a nuclear bomb; somehow your desk was going to protect you. I think everyone was very much aware of that and I think we tended to, Grand Rapids tended to, see the world in black and white or red and blue or similar terms. I think the rest of the world was sort of ignored, you didn't think much about it. Everything was seen through the prism of the Cold War. I ended up spending a lot of my years in Africa, and I don't remember ever hearing much about Africa beyond, sort of, National Geographic and that sort of thing.

Q: That's interesting because that was the era that Africa was opening up.

BAAS: Yes. No, I did hear about it and I'm exaggerating a little bit because G. Mennen Williams was the Governor of Michigan and then went on to become, I think, the first Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and so as a Michigander we sort of knew about him and what he was trying to do. Of course, and I am exaggerating. I mean all the countries were becoming independent in 1960, and we knew about that in some very broad-brushed way.

Q: Still going back to Michigan at the time, how much did the African-American, the black civil rights thing come up while you were there?

BAAS: I don't think it was really an issue. My high school was probably 15, 20 per cent black, something like that. I was on sports teams and therefore had lots of black friends. To be honest they were friends, they were school friends, they weren't people that we

hung around with after school except for during sports events or at dances at school or that kind of thing. There was kind of a black area of town and there was the rest of town. It was not strict, not enforced in any way but it was definitely segregated, it definitely existed. I think there was a general knowledge that the black community, as a rule, was worse off than the white community. I'm not sure, I think it was largely economic, but whether the economic problem was caused by a sort of a hidden racism or not was hard for me to see.

Q: Unions weren't overly responsive?

BAAS: No, the unions weren't.

Q: The unions weren't overly responsive.

BAAS: No. As in most of these cases, the unions were worried about their members and their members were the more recent immigrants and therefore they wanted to keep their jobs. They were a little anxious about letting in other people, I think.

Q: At American University did you find that American University drew much on the Washington community? I mean you've got all these people in power situations.

BAAS: Not that much, surprisingly. I mean, I think it was more we were in Washington so we're very conscious of what was going on in the Congress or at the White House or whatever in a newspaper sense, not in a behind the scenes sense. We talked a lot about that and worked that out. Maybe we would've done it if we were sitting out in California as well, but because we were in the School of International Service, we were supposed to be worrying about these sorts of issues anyway, but I think being in Washington made it more relevant to us. We were here, you could go down and go to the Capitol, go to the White House.

Q: Did you find yourself taking advantage on weekends of Washington?

BAAS: I was asked that question on my Foreign Service exam interestingly enough. I was working and so I spent a lot of time working and studying, but yes, indeed, I used to go down to the National Gallery a lot. I spent a lot of time down there and the mall generally. I used to just hang out there. I worked for my congressman who happened to be Gerald R. Ford and he was the minority leader from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Coming back to something you hinted at I got a job working for Gerald Ford. I needed the job to help pay for my school, for college, and I got the job with Ford largely because of Martin Luther King being assassinated. I'm sorry that that happened but it did have a positive benefit for me. I had applied for the job to be on his staff and I hadn't really heard back, and then King was assassinated and Washington started burning and Gerald Ford, I think, got lots of mail from all over the country as minority leader, much of it hate mail. It was like thank God they got the bastard, Commie bastard usually. All of a sudden he needed another pair of hands to go through the mail and so they hired me. I think there was a thirteen man staff and I was basically the thirteenth and a half member. I worked

halftime. I basically went through the mail to look for constituent mail. I remember we had like 20 huge mail bags of mail and after I finally got to the end of it I discovered an invitation for Ford from the Ambassador of Thailand to a reception or something that had taken place a month before. I basically made myself indispensable and managed to work there two and a half years.

Q: What was your impression of Jerry Ford?

BAAS: What a great guy. He represented his district very, very well. The thing that I liked about him most is that he was just a down to earth person. I was the thirteenth and a half member of his staff, I wasn't important at all, he saw me in the hall, however, walking about, he was on his way to a meeting or something important no doubt he would always stop and spend 30 seconds. Marc, how're you doing, how's school going, you doing OK on the job? Thanks for your help out here, we really appreciate it. Stuff he didn't have to do and maybe I was naive, I don't think so, maybe it wasn't as genuine as it seemed, but it really seemed genuine.

Q: Some people are genuine and others aren't. It comes across.

BAAS: Yes, he was definitely.

Q: With Nixon it was very obvious that he didn't have a natural feel for it.

BAAS: In fact, as a result of Ford, because the inauguration of 1969 after the 1968 election I was working for him, of course, and since he was the minority leader he had tickets and I got a ticket and went up there and just before the swearing in ceremony, Nixon came into the suite of offices, the minority leader's suite of offices, and I was able to shake, I don't remember much about it, except shaking Nixon's hand, and it was incredibly cold for the ceremony. I was suitably impressed and he was about to be President of the United States.

Q: With constituent mail you do pick up some things. What about Vietnam? How was that playing in his constituent mail?

BAAS: I think Vietnam wasn't a big issue, I think his constituent mail didn't go beyond the sort of nuts and bolts of my son is over there, I can't get mail to him or he's served and now he can't get his benefits or that kind of stuff. I think Grand Rapids was pretty, at this time anyway, pretty solidly behind the Vietnam effort. I think Ford's mail probably reflected that and as I recall he was pretty solidly behind what was going on. I don't know what he said privately, you know, to Nixon or anyone else, but I think that was clearly what it was.

The interesting thing about constituent mail, however, it was before word processing and we had kind of a tape machine. We'd type letters on the tape machine and a lot of what I did was read a letter and it would say gun control. I'm in favor, you know, of gun control, so there was a pro gun control tape I would take out and type in Dear Miss Smith and the

address and boom, off the form letter, which was essentially what it was, would go for pro gun control. It was easy if Ford was of the same view as the letter writer, and then it was a fairly easy letter that had already been written, and if it was opposed, there was a slightly different letter that was thank you very much for your views and I'll keep them in mind. It was interesting for me to see how, one has the impression sitting in Grand Rapids, Michigan or probably sitting in Arlington, Virginia that congressmen are there just waiting for your letter to come in and going to read it very carefully. Well, they don't. They don't have time, but they have staff. One of my jobs was to say today we had five letters that came in pro gun control and one that came in against it.

Q: Did this carryover to your later career in the Foreign Service where one of our tasks is to help Congress, the people in Congress respond to constituent demands about visas or protection and welfare or this sort of thing? Did you find it useful knowing how this worked?

BAAS: Yes, I think it was very useful because I obviously understood how important it was to the congressman. I mean that was the one thing that Ford was obviously attentive to and really concerned about, not that he wasn't attentive to other issues, but he was so focused on constituents and services and mail for the constituents. I think he must've said it or I certainly understood it, these were the voters, these were the people that were going to elect him and so they were the people that had put him there. He also liked to answer mail from people from Alabama or California, it didn't matter. He would send them answers as well, but the ones that we really spent more time on was the constituent, particularly if they had a problem. I remember long before I joined the Foreign Service calling up on behalf of Ford the Nigerian Desk at the State Department. I didn't have any idea what the Nigerian Desk at the State Department was, I guess I had a little idea, calling them up to ask some question on behalf of a constituent, I don't remember what it was, if he was trying to trade there, if he had some kind of visa problem or something. I don't think it was any of the scams that have been become so prevalent. That was the sort of thing we did. Then I got the answer, whatever it was, composed a letter and sent it off to this guy, wherever he was from Ionia County, Michigan and that was that.

Q: At American University did you gain a real taste of the State Department, the Foreign Service, what they were up to?

BAAS: Not really, I mean, we did all the reading you would expect that you would do at any school. Like things by Kissinger when he was a professor and all that kind of stuff. No, I guess I knew what the State Department was up to because I knew they were running foreign affairs, maybe that's an exaggeration, but were involved in foreign affairs. I'm sure I didn't know exactly how they did it and I don't recall having any contact with anyone from the State Department or anything like that. I would not have had a good feel for the clearance process or how the officers supported the Secretary or how the relationship was between the NSC (National Security Council) except for the kind of stuff in the newspaper when the NSC was fighting with the State Department, that kind of thing.

Q: Did you run across a real live Foreign Service Officer?

BAAS: Not that I can recall. I may have done, but not that I can recall.

Q: How about civil rights during this time of protests and all that. Did you get involved in any of this?

BAAS: Not directly, tangentially because, as I said, Martin Luther King's problems in Washington led to my getting my job but no, I really didn't. I was working twenty hours a week, I was going to school, I was studying really hard doing a double major, and so I didn't do very much in that regard. It wasn't really an issue in Washington either.

Q: What happened at American University during the Martin Luther King riots, the burning of parts of Washington? What did they do to you all?

BAAS: Nothing. I recall nothing about it except I was living in DC. Maybe there was sporadic contact down there, but I guess when I was driving to work I would drive by it and other people did the same, but you know American University is pretty isolated up there in upper northwest in Spring Valley, American University Park. It's pretty, pretty isolated. I didn't have a whole lot of connection, I think there were discussions about it, talks about it, it came up in class but nothing really touched us anymore than if the riots were going on in Watts.

Q: How about Vietnam?

BAAS: That was much more.

Q: This affected every male student at the time. In the first place, as you got into town where did you stand on this and what developed?

BAAS: Yes, I guess when I'm arrived at American University coming from Grand Rapids and probably, through most of my college career, I guess I would be classified as a supporter of what we were doing in Vietnam. I think I had some questions about it, certainly. I was certainly concerned about the number of people being killed and there was lots of activity at American University; lots of discussions, lots of the antiwar protests, lots of stuff of that nature, so I think that was very useful in terms of it. I went to a lot of that, mainly just listening, sort of again, presaging a Foreign Service career going to listen to people's opinions on various things and then not doing a report, but doing something in your own head about what you've heard. So there was a lot of that. I didn't, I was not involved in any actual protests or demonstrations myself. The only actual protest I was involved in at the university was one to stop a bridge going across the Potomac River at Three Sisters Island which succeeded. We stopped that sucker. We did get tear gassed once when I was at school. There was some demonstration out on Ward Circle and the police tear gassed it and the building where most of us were for some discussions. The air conditioning sucked in the tear gas and we all ended up getting tear gassed in the building which was kind of bizarre. By this time I was also in the National

Guard, the DC (District of Columbia) National Guard, for the very reason you hinted at earlier that the war affected all males. After the lottery, the first lottery was held and I came up with number 109, I could see that I was likely to get drafted so I quickly joined the DC National Guard. I was then in the interesting position of being involved in many of the Cambodian, anti-Cambodian incursion demonstrations on the other side -- the May Day attempt to close down Washington and all that -- the National Guard was out on the street trying to keep order. I hadn't been to basic training yet, so I was basically in an area where there was less going on. One time I was guarding a police station so that the police could be out doing stuff. It was interesting, because I'd see my friends on the other side of the line and after we were done I would go back and be with my friends and discuss what had happened from the two sides of the demonstration which was quite interesting. The most interesting one was probably the one trying to close down Washington in regard to Cambodia.

Q: This would be in May of 1970.

BAAS: Yes. The demonstrators were rounded up and put in the old Washington Coliseum over on M Street and Third, Northeast, as I recall. One woman was very tense. The demonstrators started chanting anti-war things, all of which, most of my unit knew since we were all college students or young lawyers and things like that, and by that point pretty much anti-war. The officers and the non-commissioned officers above us, however, were more generally, gung ho. I mean, they were doing this as a career and so at one point a sergeant said to me and another fellow, "All of these guys are really getting bad. Go get some ammunition from the trucks." We had ammunition in the trucks outside. We didn't have it in our weapons and so on. So this other guy and I talked and we said look, this is really stupid. I mean, we've got a group of people here on the floor of the coliseum and the last thing we need is ammunition. We agreed that he was going to go look for the ammunition and not find it, and I, in the meantime, would talk to the sergeant and see if I could get him focused on something else and not so focused on that and that succeeded. Amazingly, he never found the ammunition, and I managed to get the sergeant worried about something else and so who knows? We may have prevented some sort of catastrophe.

And then I remember also, interestingly enough, some of us got into some trouble because we were accused of fraternizing with the enemy. These were our friends out there and from our point of view, from my point of view, and certainly from the other people who were in the Guard, the best way to calm the situation down was to be as friendly and as open as you could, and not try to be confrontational. They were playing Frisbee on the floor of the coliseum and so every once in while the Frisbee would fly up in the stands and we would throw it back. We were talking to them and sharing peace signs and whatever. Some of our bosses, officers and non-commissioned officers thought this was fraternizing with the enemy and we shouldn't be doing this and suggested that we shouldn't. We again, I think, tended to ignore that.

Q: You graduated in what year?

BAAS: In 1970.

Q: What were you planning to do?

BAAS: I had already passed the Foreign Service exam. I took the Foreign Service exam in December of 1969 right here in Washington. I don't know if you're interested in this, but it was the hardest test I'd ever taken in my life. In fact, at one point, I wasn't going to take it. I wasn't going to take it when I was a junior, I thought I was going to go into business, and finally when I was a senior I said, oh I might as well take the exam anyway. Why not? What do I have to lose? It's free and only a Saturday. So I took the exam in the morning. There was a morning general written exam, which has changed now, and the afternoon was the written exam on your area of expertise which in my case was economics. I took the morning exam and I thought it was really hard. I was used to a tough test but I was used to doing fairly well on them, and I thought I had done really miserably on it. That Saturday was the first football game of the century or something, Texas which was number one was playing Arkansas which was number two and I thought maybe I'll just go watch the football game and bag the afternoon session. But I decided no, I would never sort of forgive myself and I ought to do it. So I did take the afternoon session and passed the test. I got a grade that came in the mail that was 78, and I thought that was pretty miserable. You know, I was used to getting eighties and nineties not seventies, and I thought well, gee, that was pretty awful. I really debated about whether or not to take the oral exam. Again I was in Washington, and I could take the oral exam in Washington, it wasn't that hard to do so I ended up doing it. Again, it was an interesting experience taking the oral exam because the first question somebody asked me on the test was the one you asked earlier. What did I do during the weekend in Washington? I said "Well, I used to go down to the National Gallery of Art and spend my time." Partly that was true, but partly it was a kind of gamesmanship. I figured that they would like to know I was well-rounded and had some culture, as well as Midwestern whatever we have. The examiner said to me at the time, what do you think of the Dali? And I said, trying to think, Dali, which Dali? And all of a sudden I remembered the Dali of the Last Supper. I said honestly that I knew that painting and it wasn't one of my favorite paintings because that wasn't sort of how I envisioned the Last Supper. The examiner said, "Oh, that's my favorite painting in the whole world." I thought, oh, I'm dead. I'm never going to pass.

Later on I was asked an economics question, some complicated thing about the relationship of the stock market and exchange rates and I don't know what exactly. I gave a pretty, what I thought, was a pretty learned and detailed answer, and I finished and the examiner said, "That was a very interesting answer. Thank you very much, but I think you got it exactly backwards." And I said, "You're right." I was sure I wasn't going to pass, but I passed and they called me in and said I'd passed and I said, "Well, why? How? How is that possible? I get his one question wrong and I didn't like his art." He said, "Oh, the art, that's not important. You knew what it was and, you know, everyone can have their views on art. On the economics question, we saw that you were able to think like an economist and reason as an economist, and you got it wrong because you know, there's more pressure up in this situation than if you were sitting at a desk writing

a report. If you had been sitting at a desk writing a report you wouldn't have gotten it wrong. What we wanted to see was the reasoning process." I said, "Well, that's very generous."

I was accepted into the Foreign Service and had been offered a place in the June A-100 course, I don't know if it's still called the A-100 course. This was 1970. I was unable to go to the June course because I had to go on active duty with the National Guard because I had been in the National Guard now for about a year and I had to go to my active duty training, my basic training. I had to go off and do four months at Fort Dix and so what happened was I graduated, I think it was the 31st of May, I got on a bus on the second of June to go up to Fort Dix, I did my four months, on October 2 I left Fort Dix and I think went to Michigan to see my family and ended up back here on October 15 when I raised my hand and was sworn in as a Foreign Service Officer. So I had a kind of a busy summer.

Q: Your National Guard, what the type of unit was it?

BAAS: It was an MP (military police) unit, DC (District of Columbia), army military police unit. I was a wire man, I was supposed to lay wires, climb telephone poles and do things like that.

Q: Did you keep up with the National Guard?

BAAS: Well, I had to. This is another interesting story. I had to, and my first assignment as a Foreign Service officer after A-100, partly because of the National Guard, was as a staff assistant for Jules Katz in the Economics Bureau. He was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for what is called ORF (Office of Resources and Food), so I was his staff assistant which was a really interesting job. That kept me in Washington and so every month I would go to the monthly meetings and in the summertime I had to go off for my two week training. We used to go to Fort A. P. Hill down in Virginia and that's when I took my vacation.

Then, however, after my two years there, after having taken French here at FSI (Foreign Service Institute), I was ready to go out for my first post overseas. I had a problem because I was still in the National Guard, so the question was what to do about that? I heard in my unit, there was a guy in my unit who was a son of an ambassador, some kind of ambassador, and he said there was a provision of the law that under the national health, welfare and safety provision you could leave the army if you're going to be doing something else. So I applied for a discharge from the National Guard arguing that I was in the State Department and I was going overseas with the Foreign Service and I would be promoting national safety and so on as a diplomat.

The people on the other end of my request asked not surprisingly, if my absence from the Foreign Service would adversely affect the national safety and health, and I had to answer honestly that obviously any one person's absence wouldn't cause a complete negative effect but at some point, you needed to have people, and so they turned me

down. At this point there was this other guy in my unit who was with USIA (United States Information Service) and he had applied under the same provision and he had been approved. His father was a congressman. I went to my old friend Gerald Ford who said, "What's this?" Gerald Ford filed an appeal, or I filed an appeal and he sort of put his cachet on it which basically said, you know, this guy got out and my constituent didn't get out on the same provision. They're both in the State Department; one State, one USIA. What's going on here?

Obviously, the people on the other end couldn't say this first guy got out because his father is a congressman, and Baas didn't get out because his father works for a furniture company, and so they let me out. It would've been difficult otherwise. I would have had to find a way to go to summer meetings in Germany or something like that. I could have done it but it certainly was a lot easier being out. That was the end of my National Guard career.

Q: The A-100 course, how did you find it?

BAAS: I actually liked it. I had a good time. We had a nice group of incoming people. I knew Washington and a lot of them didn't, so that was an advantage. It was an interesting course. It went very fast and I just remember thinking, boy, I'm getting paid for this. It's great.

Q: What was the configuration of your class?

BAAS: I think we were the first class that had people over age 31 in it. We only had a couple. We were one of the first classes anyway. We were mostly males, we were mostly white. I would guess there were probably six women. We had about 30 as I recall in the class. About 23 or so were State, the other seven or ten were USIA. I think we had six women, one of whom, Beth Jones, did very well for herself. We had one Hawaiian, so he was relatively a minority and we had a black woman and I think we had a black man as I recall as well, we may have had a Japanese guy too. It was pretty much what you would have expected for the time, with the exception of a couple of old people.

Q: These were in their thirties.

BAAS: These guys, yes, the guy was 31 or 32, that was a big innovation. I think I was actually the youngest guy in the class. I was just out of college. Most people were in their late twenties.

Q: Were you coned at the time?

BAAS: Yes, I was in the economic cone. I had come in as an economic cone officer.

Q: How comfortable were you with economics by this time?

BAAS: Very. I had studied it in school; I had the equivalent of a major in economics. Yes, I was comfortable with it. I wasn't a theoretical economist by any means. I was a practical economist and as it turned out that was about all you needed in the Foreign Service for most jobs.

Q: You worked as a staff assistant for Jules Katz, who was one of our preeminent operators in the Washington scene. Could you talk about him and how he was operating at the time?

BAAS: Yes, he was a great guy, and he was very nice to me as a staff assistant. He let me listen into a lot of his phone conversations and I would take notes. This was before I think you had to tell people someone was listening in, and then I would transcribe the notes, or at least the important parts, so that he had a record of what had happened. I think I saw all the material that came across his desk, with the exception of the intelligence briefings, which I didn't at the time really realize what they were. It was only later that I figured out what I hadn't been seeing.

His biggest concern at the time were commodities. This was before 1973. I was there for the 1973 oil crisis, but when I got there in 1972 his biggest concern was probably, coffee. He had lots of great contacts with the coffee importers up in New York and, of course, spent a lot of time dealing with Brazilians and Costa Ricans and Ecuadorians and so on to some degree as well, mostly the South Americans and Central Americans about coffee and the price of coffee. It was a big issue for inflation in the United States. He spent a lot of time dealing with those people, dealing with the Department of Commerce, dealing with the Department of Agriculture to some degree on basic commodity issues. Then in my last year, I was there for 14 months, and I would say somewhere in the middle point...

Q: From when to when?

BAAS: It was November of 1970 until the summer of 1972.

Q: Did you get in a feel for the politics of coffee?

BAAS: I don't know, I don't know if I would call it politics. It was political economics. I certainly got a lot of feel for the economics of it. It was certainly clear to me, the international politics were certainly clear to me, what was going on particularly with the Brazilians. There was talk about whether there was going to be a, well, there was the international coffee agreement, or whatever it was called, and how we related to that agreement as consumers and how we related to the Brazilians. In terms of domestic politics not so much. I think it was more a general feeling that no matter who was in the White House we didn't want to have expensive coffee. We wanted to have cheap coffee for the inflation rate and for the economic and political aspects of that.

Q: Did you get any feel for, I don't want to say political work, but the workings of the State Department, the Economic Bureau?

BAAS: Absolutely. One of the things, you probably know as a staff assistant that you run all over the building delivering papers and getting clearances. That was for me the most useful part of it, seeing how the Department operated. In some ways, being in a functional bureau, not in a geographical bureau, I didn't get maybe 100% of that but I got 80% of it. We had enough dealings with geographic bureaus from time to time on whatever issue, rubber with the Asians, and coffee with ARA (American Republic Affairs) and so on, oil with NEA (Near Eastern Affairs) and of course, then with the seventh floor as well, saying what had to go up or what didn't have to go up. And more importantly with Deane Hinton on the sixth floor, he was the assistant secretary, I think, for most of the time I was there and how that all worked out as well. So that was very useful, I think, and helpful when I was overseas as well.

Q: For a first tour you got under your belt two sort of aspects, the economic aspect and the how it works. I mean, it's really more the workings and analysis and also having worked with Jerry Ford this gave you a political side of things or a fair Hill side of things. Did you get any feel for the Brazilian desk? Did they come into your orbit?

BAAS: Yes, they did. It was always on coffee and sometimes on other issues. Sugar, I can't forget sugar. Sugar was a huge issue with the quotas, of course. We still had the quotas and dividing up the quotas was always a big issue. That was actually a very good introduction for the interface, I hate the word, between the domestic political scene and the international political scene because on sugar, you know, for a country like, I don't know, pick one, Madagascar whatever sugar they could send to us was worth huge amounts of money, and it was relatively little in terms of the overall market. But, of course, the sugar producers of Florida and Louisiana, not to mention North Dakota beet producers, were really concerned about every little kernel that came in, not kernel but cube, or something that came in. So that was really interesting, it was always right up to the last minute. We'd get diplomats coming in and calling and saying, please, please. We only need 50,000 tons, that's all we need. And then you'd get the opposite side from U.S. farmers and their Congress people saying you know do not increase, do not increase. Do not let more in. Cut back.

Q: You left there when?

BAAS: I guess it was April of 1972, and I went to FSI and took four months of French and then went overseas.

Q: Where did you go?

BAAS: I went to Tunisia almost by accident, not quite by accident. I wanted to go to Africa and at that point Tunisia was still in the African Bureau, and the two places open in Africa that seemed interesting to me were, maybe they were the only two open but probably not, were Abidjan and Tunis. I basically said, I looked at the post reports and talked to people, and did all the things you do and decided that both had pluses and both had minuses and I'd be happy in either post. I basically said to the personnel system, I guess it was the junior officer personnel system, I'm happy with either one, if you can

give me either one that's fine. If someone else really is dying to go to one or the other, give that to them and then I'll take what's left. I rather suspected, having done that, I would end up in Abidjan, but it turned out there was a woman who wanted to go to Ivory Coast and so I ended up in Tunis.

Q: Did you have a significant other at this point?

BAAS: I did not. I had a few girlfriends but nothing permanent at the time.

Q: That allowed you a lot more leeway. So you were in Tunis from when to when?

BAAS: From 1972 until 1974. The interesting thing was before I left I remember the desk officer, I think it was David Mack, said to me at the time, how lucky that you are going now to Tunis; Bourguiba is on his last legs, he will certainly die while you're there and it will be really interesting to see what happens when he dies. Well, you know, he lasted for what, another 30 years probably. I was retired before he died.

Q: I remember at one point in my career in the early sixties when INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) was supposed to predict who was going to replace Haile Selassie. People had been doing that since 1916. He had another decade and a half to go. Tito was another one.

BAAS: I remember in FSI one of the things we did was a program or a game on what happens after Tito? It was interesting because there were these three possibilities; one, the Soviets will come in and make it much more a part of the Soviet circle; two, it will somehow become even more independent and join the West; or three, it will break up. I think most people came up on three, it will break up. I thought of that 25 years later when it did.

Q: Going out to Tunisia, in 1972 to 1974, describe Tunisia as you saw it at the time.

BAAS: It was a very interesting place for me because first of all it was a wonderful place to live. It was Mediterranean; it had everything you would think of in a Mediterranean climate: oranges, olives, wine, beaches, and good restaurants. It was a very pleasant place to live. I had a house that overlooked the Mediterranean and had a cherry tree in the yard. The house was small but it was white with blue trim, a typical Tunisian looking thing. It was a wonderful place from the personal standpoint. In terms of the job it was interesting because I was an Africanist and Tunisia was in North Africa.

Q: Did you know you were an Africanist?

BAAS: Yes, I did. I knew I was. I didn't say that earlier. As part of my first major which was international business one had to choose a region of the world. I chose, almost sort of by process of elimination, Africa. The reason I did was I said, "Look, everyone I know, everyone knows something about Europe. You just learn about Europe kind of naturally. I know about Europe and that's OK. Asia, pretty much the same. You pick up a lot about

Asia and besides, there's Vietnam going on so I'll stay away from Asia. South America really didn't interest me. The Middle East seemed to have too many deserts. I decided well, between Africa and South America, fewer people are focused on Africa than on the other parts of the world. I had three courses in African issues at university. I was already in my mind an Africanist. I wasn't a very good one at that point, you know, I knew a little bit and that was it.

Anyway, it was interesting going to Tunisia because it was part of Africa, certainly on the continent. It was part of the African Bureau, but it was really not African nor part of the African Bureau. Even in the State Department it was a different kettle of fish. It was interesting in that regard to be on the African continent, to be in the northernmost country of the African continent, but to feel somehow that you still really weren't, you were somewhere else, you were in the Middle East, you were in the southern Mediterranean.

I remember Tunisia at the time being a country that was relatively friendly to the United States, and had an economy that was better than some in the area. The one thing that sticks with me and is still probably true, 50% of the population was under the age of fifteen, which to me was just incredible. How were they going to find jobs for these people? They were starting to modernize and industrialize, and various plants were being built on the coast. I remember going to one plant, a chemical plant, one time with the ambassador and the guy was so proud about this chemical plant and we pointed to the effluent that was going out into the ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, a quarter of a mile from one of the nicest beaches in Tunisia. We said, "Aren't you worried about this? Tourism is one of your big money earners. The guy said, "No," he said. "Fishing is very important. It will stay away from the beach and the fish will just grow big and strong."

It was a country in transition. They had Habib Bourguiba who had been there since 1956 who was supreme, who had led them to independence, who was losing it a bit, but still was anything but a democrat. He was an autocrat. He ruled the country pretty much like one. There was very little free speech in the manner that we think about it. There were often arrests by the Ministry of Interior and the police and so on. And then there was what you could almost call a European sixteenth century court cabal. There was all this intrigue and stuff going on in the court, for the lack of a better word, of Habib Bourguiba. This was a time when Ben Sallah, who was a leftist, was looking for power. Bourguiba did a union with Qadhafi and his Foreign Minister allegedly convinced him of that. We had a big issue in the embassy whether this union was a good thing or not. Not surprisingly, the general thought of the embassy was the farther away from Libya the better, and having a good supporter of the United States get in bed with Libya was probably not a good idea.

I actually wrote a dissent cable, I think it was before there was a dissent cable channel, but my ambassador and the political section chief were very supportive saying that I think we ought to at least consider the alternative. My point was that Tunisia had five, six million relatively capable, educated people. Qadhafi in Libya had what, maybe a million, probably less well educated, less Westernized anyway for sure, and then maybe, a union of the two, depending on how it was governed, would end up being in our favor. We

would end up having a better situation in Libya, not a worse situation in Tunisia. It broke up of its own accord eventually anyway.

Q: You were talking about what was the situation there.

BAAS: I think it was before the big urbanization of Tunisia. Tunis was a big city, but my impression is it's much bigger now and it's much more built up now than it was then. It's probably true in most places in the world. It still had that kind of small town, small country feel, but it had very much the feel of; we may be small but we are good, and you can count on us and we will do the right thing. Bourguiba was an interesting guy; he made a big deal at one point, about people wasting resources during Ramadan. Nobody worked, not because they were fasting but because they were partying after the fast, and they were all tired out the next day. He made a big deal of drinking orange juice on TV during the day and this raised a huge political mess.

I was there for the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and we had demonstrations in front of the embassy and the AID building which was right down the street. I remember a whole bunch of Tunisians came walking up and were going to start demonstrating outside the AID building and some helpful AID officer went out on the steps, and said, "No. The embassy is down there, another block to the left." And so they all marched down and demonstrated in front of the embassy. We gave our AID colleagues some grief for that afterwards.

One of the things I did, I was half in the political section and half in the economic section. There were two officers in each section, and I was sort of a half officer in each one. One of the things I had to do, a typical junior officer thing, was to go off to the University of Tunis or whatever it was called and listen to Yasser Arafat give a talk. I didn't speak Arabic, another interesting thing about being in Tunis. My language was French, but it was only a sort of second language at the place. Everyone spoke French, but mostly they spoke Arabic and I went off to hear Yasser Arafat. I didn't understand a word he said. One could see that this guy had charisma; this guy had something the students were grasping onto at this point.

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?

BAAS: The whole time I was there it was Talcott Seelye. Calhoun had been there just before. He left, I think, he left the day before I arrived.

Q: Talcott Seelye was an old Arab hand.

BAAS: Yes. His family grew up in Lebanon.

Q: What was your impression of how he operated?

BAAS: A very good ambassador; very open. This didn't affect me so much because I wasn't by any stretch of the imagination a Middle East expert. He was, and so that was

fine. He was the expert and he knew what to do, but he basically let the officers do what they had to do. He saw what he needed to see and made the connections he had to do and had the contacts he needed, as far as I could see, at the top levels that he needed. He was very open and very supportive. He was a good ambassador.

Q: Who was DCM (deputy chief of mission)?

BAAS: Art Tienken. I guess Jim Ralph was the first one I had and then he left, I guess, after the first year, and then I had Art Tienken.

Q: How did you find Tunisian society from your aspect? Could you penetrate, gather friends and that sort of thing?

BAAS: Yes and no. I mean, first of all I was a junior officer, I was really young, I was single. It was partly my fault. I was spending my time, my single time, doing single things. But also it was not an easy society to get into. Looking at how other officers did it was very difficult. I went to probably two or three dinners at Tunisian houses in my two year period, which were very nice, but it seemed to me that there was a little bit of an act going on. This was a show for the American diplomat, more than this is how we really live. Now maybe some of the political officers had better luck than I, but I honestly don't think so. I think it was a hard society to crack. That being said, I had lots of young people who I knew. In fact, I dated a couple of girls, one who was the daughter of the Mufti and I could only date her in the afternoon because she had to be home at 8 o'clock and all of that stuff. But it was fine, it was fine. That part of society I got to see and that was an interesting thing to see because we could talk a little bit. Tunisians, even young Tunisians, even when you're with them individually were very, very reticent about saying very much. They knew that even though Bourguiba was in some ways benign, he was still a dictator and you had to be careful about what you said and what might be reported back to the security services.

Q: Did you get any feel, you mentioned the daughter of a Mufti, about the role of religion there at the time?

BAAS: No, I really didn't. I think back on that now because it has become much more obvious in Arab societies than it was perhaps at the time. I was aware of the mosques and I was aware of the calls to prayer, I was aware there were muftis and imams and things like that, but how it affected, sort of the bottom parts of society I was much less aware, I think, than I wish I had been.

Q: Well, of course, the fundamentalist wave. It was a different world. What about the French? How would you describe the relationship with the French and how we saw it?

BAAS: Well, the French were obviously the old colonial power. Obviously, they thought of themselves as still the main power there. Generally, I think our interests were similar; this is going to be a continuing theme, no doubt, because I think generally in Africa, we and the French have similar interests. We also have commercial conflicts and we also see

that world slightly differently than each other. I have often thought the more we cooperated with the French in Francophone Africa, the better off we were, leaving commercial competition sort of aside. I think in Tunisia they had a very difficult row to hoe because they were so close. Many Tunisians were going to France to look for work and that was an issue. It was the beginning part of that sort of wave. They had only been independent for fifteen years and so there was still a lot of French economic interests around, running restaurants and businesses and wineries and olive plants, and stuff like that. I suspect, although I don't know, there was probably still some French influence in the military and what not.

Q: The French were no longer at the naval base, were they?

BAAS: I think they were still in Bizerte, I think they still were. Again, I'm not that familiar with that part of it. They got chucked out. There were certainly advisers if not troops. So it was a very difficult relationship for both the French and the Tunisians. I think probably we were happy to have them work that out themselves. My impression is our relationships with the French were pretty good in Tunisia and I knew a number of their more junior officers. And I know that our ambassador saw their ambassador all the time and probably at other levels of the embassy as well. I didn't have the feeling of conflict, although I did have the feeling of we were very much the junior partner in this thing. Maybe that was because I was a junior officer at this point. Maybe partner is not even the right word, maybe we were just the junior supplicant, I'm not sure we were partners.

Q: How was the 1973 Yom Kippur War seen generally in Tunisia?

BAAS: Well, I think, there was a difference between the people and the government. The government was probably one of the most supportive governments of Israel in the Arab world. It wasn't exactly supportive of Israel, but the most understanding of the Israeli position, but among the people though there clearly was excitement at Arab successes. Then when it turned around very quickly and went the other way I think there was consternation and also questions about how this could happen. Had there been some sort of nefarious Occidental plot to do in the Arabs or whatever. I think some of that existed in the government as well, but much more in the sort of man in the street kind of thing, as much as one could figure it out. And the way you figured it out mainly was by the demonstrations and things like that, signs.

Q: What about relations? Tunisia had two difficult neighbors, Libya on one side and Algeria on the other. Were we picking up anything or were you seeing anything about the relationship there?

BAAS: Algeria at the time I was there wasn't too bad. This was before the Algerian Civil War and Algeria was mostly regarded somewhat warily because it was a large country and Tunisia was relatively small. They got along, I would say, fairly well. There was the odd, you know border problem, not over territory but some car strays across or a goat or a conflict of clans across the border and so on. Down in the south particularly where the

biggest border is; that was where the Bedouin were and they would just wander wherever they wanted and no one worried too much about that.

The Libyans, I think, were much more of an issue. There was an issue of Libyan workers in Tunisia, which was a big one because the Libyans were always looking for jobs. They had lots of money, but they didn't have jobs in Libya because their oil industry was fairly capital intensive, not labor intensive. A lot of Libyans came to Tunisia for various reasons, both to look for jobs, but more often for just a holiday, to party. In Libya you couldn't drink, you couldn't, I guess you couldn't chase women so obviously, so these guys would drive across the border with their big wads of money and they would get red roaring drunk and chase women. You could drink in Tunisia. It was a more moderate Arab country. And then we would often see Libyan cars on the side of the road and accidents. We would always say, usually on Monday morning, "Well, there is an other accident caused by too much alcohol and not knowing how to drink."

I think the political relationship was more dicey. Qadhafi obviously, even at that time, had pretensions of playing a pan Arab role. The Tunisians again were worried that they were small and even though there weren't many Libyans they certainly had a lot more money than Tunis did. What would happen there, their border was unprotected is probably unfair, but it certainly wouldn't have been difficult to invade from Libya if you wanted to, and I think the army spent a lot of their time worrying about that frontier and what they would do about it. Fortunately, it never got that far.

Q: Did you get to travel around much?

BAAS: I did. I traveled all over Tunisia. In fact, this is where I learned the truth of the Foreign Service, which I hadn't realized until I actually went overseas, which was that Foreign Service Officers of whatever country know much more about the country they're serving in, have seen much more of the country they're serving in, than many of the government people they are working with, or indeed than they know of their own country back home. You are in Tunisia or anyplace where you think, well, I am here for a limited amount of time, two years, three years, I'd better take advantage of it to see what there is to see. I traveled all over the place, to the beaches in the south, to an island which has the synagogue in the middle, to Matmata with the cave dwellings, down to the Chott el Djerid. I went with the ambassador and we drove across the Chott el Djerid which is a big salt lake. All parts of the Tabarka up in the north where they have cork trees and on the Algerian border Bizerte in the north. Beautiful Roman ruins of course, in Tunisia. The coliseum in El Jem is the second biggest in the Roman world, only smaller than Rome.

In the other Roman ruins, I forget the name, there was one marvelous city that had baths and aqueducts and we would go often to see things. It was a fascinating place. I went out to the islands, the Dahlak Islands, off the coast sort of due east of Sfax, which was very interesting. So I did do a lot of traveling. I also took advantage of my stay there to take a trip to Eastern Europe which was interesting because this must have been in 1973, and I took my Volkswagen and put it on a car ferry and went to Trapani in Italy and then drove all through Italy and then met a girl friend in Rome and then we drove through eastern

Europe. I had to have an interview with the regional security officer before I left because this was still the Cold War and I had to tell him who I was traveling with and where I was going and what I was doing. I did and they were very happy I was traveling with another American citizen. The guy did suggest to me that I should leave my diplomatic passport at home and travel on my tourist passport. I did and that was fine, except when I got to the border of Romania and Hungary they wouldn't let me in Hungary. I didn't have a visa, there was no Hungarian embassy in Tunis and I had been told that I could get in without a visa by the trade office there. They were wrong. That was true for diplomatic passports but not true for a tourist passport. I sat on the border for a couple of hours trying to make myself understood while they were telephoning Budapest. I missed Hungary, they didn't let me in, and I ended up driving around Hungary and going to Czechoslovakia. That was a very interesting trip as well and that was one of the big advantages of being in Tunis. I took the ferry back to Marseilles and got back to Tunis.

Q: Did you get any feel for, you know, later you weren't in Africa. Did you get any feel for Africa itself?

BAAS: Well, a little bit. They were members of the OAU (Organization of African Unity) and there were OAU meetings and news in Tunis. In some ways it was safe news because there was very little political problem you could cause by reporting on what was going on in South Africa or something like that. African issues were covered fairly well in the paper, in the local press and, of course, you got the Herald Tribune as well so that covered a lot of African issues. There were African embassies, not a lot, but there were a few. The basic answer to your question is very little. There was some but it was not an African place. It was a Middle Eastern place and the whole focus was east and what was going on in Israel, Egypt, Sinai, all that stuff, not what was going on the south of the Sahara very much.

Q: This was of course, the height after the 1973 war.

BAAS: Sure. Maybe my observations wouldn't hold true ten years before or ten years after, but I rather suspect it still would, maybe less intense.

Q: You were a part time economic officer. What was the economy? What were you reporting on?

BAAS: The economy was phosphates, phosphates was the big thing that we were interested in in the United States so we spent a lot of time worrying about phosphates. Oil, they had a little bit, and that was of interest to us in 1973 particularly, not a lot but a little bit. There was talk and maybe there was even an existing pipeline from Algeria going across to Tunis to one of the ports in the south or maybe that was just a project, I can't remember. Back then the economy was very agricultural. It was wheat, it was oranges, that was of less interest directly to the United States, but it was of interest to us because if the wheat crop failed then there were issues of starvation and that sort of thing. We didn't have any of those kinds of problems fortunately. Their wheat crops were pretty decent while I was there.

Q: Did you get any feel for Tunisia and how it was progressing? You mentioned agriculture and here was Algeria which had been sort of the bread basket for France. It was a major agricultural producer and then they got the French out and socialized the whole place. My impression is it just went to hell in a hand basket. Did you get that feeling?

BAAS: About Algeria, yes, but about Tunisia, no. Tunisia, I think, quite the opposite. One had the impression that they were trying very hard to modernize, whatever that meant, and trying to find better ways to do agriculture, better ways to industrialize and so on. They were trying to keep their citizens home. As I said earlier, there had been a first wave of Tunisians going to, particularly France but going to Europe generally to look for employment. One of their big industries was tourism. We did a lot of work on the tourism industry and one of the things we did, I did a report on it, which was one of my better ones, we discovered how little of the tourism dollar actually stayed in Tunisia. It was often German companies coming down, building hotels, getting paid in German marks by German citizens who flew down in a German airplane, landed at the airport, went off to the hotel, sometimes never changed their money into Tunisian dinars but just kept it all in marks and paid at the end of the thing in marks. Most of this money ended up back in Germany. Some small proportion, maybe 10% stayed in Tunisia and then there were the ancillary benefits like employment which are not, you know, not to be scoffed at completely, but there was employment. But in a way it was sort of shocking how these beautiful hotels would be built to use these beautiful beaches and how little money actually stayed in Tunisia. The employment part of it though I think was important to the Tunisians, because they did have this huge amount of young people that needed to do something, so that was another area we looked at.

Q: You left there when?

BAAS: In 1974.

Q: And wither?

BAAS: I went to Gabon. Actually, I should mention something else. I met my wife in Tunisia. My wife was the daughter of the Spanish ambassador, and so I got to meet the Spanish ambassador, and I met her at the Fourth of July reception in 1973. She came along with her father because she heard there were some new Peace Corps guys in town and so we met then and got to know each other really in the following spring and during that summer and the following spring. I left in August and she was still there. Actually, she was in Madrid at that point going to school.

That reminds me I had a very interesting, you asked about Africa, one area where I did end up sort of by accident, but ended up finding out more information than a lot of people was Spanish Sahara. This was the time just before Spanish Sahara became independent and the whole issue of what was going on there with the freedom fighters and the Algerians and all that. I had a great source in my future father-in-law and so we had a lot

of discussions about what was happening in Spanish Sahara which I duly reported back to the political section chief. I'm not sure how useful it was but it was interesting. But it did have the African angle because of Mauritania and Morocco and how all that was working out and Senegal.

Q: Did you get married in Tunisia?

BAAS: I did, but in 1975. I was already in Gabon. We decided we were going to get married before I left and it took time and it still does. You had to ask for permission, or at least you had to inform the Department that you were going to marry a foreigner, and then they had to do an investigation and so on. My wife being a daughter of a Spanish diplomat had lived many places around the world, including Cuba, so she had spent five years in Cuba when she was seven to twelve, but still they had to go and try to figure out what she had done in Cuba and make sure she hadn't become a communist. So anyway, we had to wait for that and we ended up getting married in February. I flew back to Tunis and got married in Tunis at the Mairie de La Marsa which is a suburb of Tunis, and the rest is history.

Q: Was there a culture clash between you and a Spanish girl?

BAAS: Yes, I suppose a little bit but not really. She spoke absolutely perfect English, she had gone to an English school in Cuba and then when her father was ambassador in Panama she had gone to the American high school in Balboa in the Canal Zone and so she was a graduate of an American high school. She had studied some of the same things, and she knew more in some ways about American history than she did about Spanish history, because that's what she studied in school. Yes, I mean a little bit. But she knew the diplomatic life.

Q: This, of course, is the thing. Diplomats get much more attuned to each other.

BAAS: Yes, she knew what she was getting into. She knew what a career in the diplomatic service was like.

Q: OK, Gabon. You were in Gabon from when to when?

BAAS: From 1974 to 1976.

Q: What was Gabon like in the seventies?

BAAS: Oh, it was a wonderful place. It was the armpit of Africa, but it was a wonderful place. I actually went there because the personnel officer, Jim Mark, came through and said, "Where are you thinking of going for your next post?" and I said, "I don't know. I might go down to the real Africa." He said, "Well, we've got an economic officer job in Gabon where you can go to. It's an interesting country, blah blah blah." So I ended up asking for that and going there. It was a terrific place. Mainly it was a terrific place because we had a very small embassy. It was a small country, a population of maybe half

a million to a million. They would argue two million and we sort of did a lot of looking at this and figured it was close to half a million. We had four people, we had five people if you counted USIS (United States Information Service) in the embassy; ambassador, DCM, I was third, I was the economic officer, and I did consular affairs which was great. I got my consular box checked with fairly simple duty, not like some of our colleagues who have to deal with at all and I'm grateful for that. Then we had an admin officer and the USIS officer. It was very small, which meant I got to do a lot. I went and saw ministers, I called on the Minister of Finance, the minister of, you know, whatever, economic development. I knew President Bongo, and I had seen him taking notes with the ambassador. I ended up being chargé there for six weeks which we will talk about later in the summer of 1975. When Sao Tomé, off the coast, was becoming independent from Portugal we had the Sao Tomé liberation movement living in Libreville, their headquarters were in Libreville. The guy eventually became president of Sao Tomé.

One thing I didn't mention about Gabon, which is the most important probably, is it had an economy. They had an oil-based economy and that for me as an economic officer was incredibly interesting. They had oil, not much, two hundred thousand barrels a day or so. They were, probably with Ecuador, the two smallest members of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) but they were members of OPEC. They were players in that regard and because they had an economy there was a lot of American commercial interest involved. So I did a lot of commercial work which was really fun and useful. We sold, they were building. Gabon is covered with forest, huge amounts of rain forest, and they decided to build a railroad from Libreville into the interior so there was a big issue about where they were going to build it, there was a big issue about who was going to build it and there was a big issue about who was going to get the rolling stock. We got the contract for General Electric Engines and that was just terrific. Ambassador McKesson, who was my first ambassador there, did a wonderful job getting that and I was in support of him and it was terrific and difficult because the French A, wanted it and B, thought they deserved it.

Gabon was a weird place. There were half a million Gabonese, give or take, probably 50,000 in Libreville and there were probably 30 or 40,000 French business people. Many of them, probably the majority, lived in Libreville so Libreville had the look, this is simplistic, of Washington racially. It was a black city but there was a huge group of white folk running around as well, and it had all the implications of colonialism which Washington doesn't have.

It was interesting watching the French. You had French people there and they weren't just advisers to the minister of finance, they were that as well, but they were also bartenders, taxi drivers, and mechanics, partly because there weren't a whole lot of Gabonese to do those things. Most Gabonese were fairly wealthy because of the oil and because there were so few of them, but also partly because for a Frenchman it was much better to be a mechanic in Libreville than it was in Lille because he was in the tropics, he had beaches, he had servants, he had a nice house, he got two trips back to France a year, it was much better than living in Lille or any other French city. You had a lot of people doing this kind of work.

Q: What was the political situation?

BAAS: Albert-Bernard Bongo had been Vice President when the previous President had died and he had come to power that way. He had the advantage and disadvantage of not being of the majority Fang tribe. The Fang made up probably 50% or more of the population. He was from the south-east, from Batéké and may or may not have been born in the area which is now Congo Brazzaville. It didn't matter, he was Gabonese no matter where he was born. The advantage of being from a small tribe was that he didn't have large numbers of his own tribe that he could put into places of power and financial gain and so he had to kind of spread the wealth around the other groups. The disadvantage was that the Fang, of course, wanted the Fang in power and thought that they should have the presidency.

He was a very astute politician and the fact that he is still around today (died in 2009) I think is a demonstration. He's still there. He was very young when he became president, I want to say 31. When I was there he was still a bit I think uncertain, he wouldn't say that, certainly we were uncertain whether he could last or not. It seemed like he could and would, but there was still some people who didn't want to have him around. Oil was a big help to him because it spread resources around and it didn't take very much to allow people to build big houses and so on.

His relationship to the French was interesting. He changed his name to El Hadj Omar when they joined OPEC because he decided he wanted to become a Moslem. He gave a marvelous speech on TV saying he was not changing from a Christian to Moslem, he was simply adding this on. Basically, he said, "You can never be too sure, you need to cover all the bases and he still believed in Jesus Christ and all, that but now he also believed in Mohammed and everything in Islam. He'd done the Hadj as his name would imply, and I think it was fairly easy for him. He probably flew in on a private jet and flew out. The oil issue was a huge issue, I spent a lot of time worrying about oil. I spent a little bit of time worrying about other things, palm oil, and copper and iron and so on, and some significant time worrying about the commercial side of things and very little time worrying about consular affairs because we had a very good, not surprisingly, French FSN (Foreign Service National) and very few problems consular-wise in Gabon.

Q: How did the oil translate itself in Gabon? You know, you go to Nigeria, as I understand it, and almost all the oil money ends in Swiss banks. It doesn't in fact get out to the infrastructure.

BAAS: I think there was some of that in Gabon. We used to talk, they had a rule that every company had to have a Gabonese president. You got a lot of people, Europeans, who typically who would come down and establish a company and hire a Gabonese president and give him a Mercedes and he would drive around. The reason they were there was because of the oil. Either the oil directly or ancillarily, they were living off the oil one way or the other. The population was working and doing other things.

I think Bongo deserves some credit, he certainly gets criticized for spending more money than he perhaps needed to, but on the other hand, he did spread money out as well, he did build the trans-Gabonese railroad. The reason for building that railroad, and I was gone before it actually started running, the reason for building it was to get to the iron in the northeast and manganese, if I remember correctly, in the southeast. It was built like a Y with two parts of the Y joined and came to Libreville.

That happened because the railroad also connected the country together. There were no roads in Gabon when I was there. It was a big effort to get out to the interior and so this railroad, in fact, connected the interior and made it possible for people in the northeast to hop on the train, normal people, to come to Libreville or anywhere else along the line. Air Gabon was started as a French-run airline and flew all over the country and that cost money. You could criticize him and say it was a megalomaniac waste having Air Gabon. You didn't need Air Gabon you had Air Afrique. Maybe it was to have it fly to Paris or Saudi Arabia or somewhere, but certainly for the interior of the country it was a very, very useful thing because it was the only way to get around. The train was better because it was cheaper for the common person, but at least the plane helped to get around.

Gabon, of course, was where Schweitzer had his hospital all those years ago and that I think had a huge role and Bongo was always very supportive of that hospital. Gabon had the problems of most African countries, the educational system wasn't very good, the teachers weren't paid enough, the health system was certainly questionable, leaving the Schweitzer hospital out of it, and the people on top got the majority of the money.

The advantage which has always been true of Gabon, it's a very rich place agriculturally. It rains a lot, there are lots of rivers, I think it would be very hard to starve in Gabon, it's easy enough to catch fish from the river, it's easy enough to cook bananas or something like that or cassava or sweet potatoes. It's not may be the healthiest stuff, but it's pretty hard to starve there. I don't want to paint a picture of a country where everyone was starving and the top one per cent was living very well, that's not the case. The top 10 per cent were living very nicely, thank you very much, but there were enough jobs to go round, and the agriculture for the rest of the people. The agricultural part of things worked well.

We had trouble at the embassy finding Gabonese to hire as FSNs, partly because they didn't want to work for us because we didn't pay enough. They would go work for another company, and partly they weren't the most ambitious people in the world and partly because it was so easy, I think, to eat there. You didn't have to do very much to stay alive and there wasn't very much competition because the population was low. When I was there several times there were riots in the central market against Nigerians and Cameroonians and Congolese who were more aggressive, more economically astute, I'm not sure that's fair, capable anyway and, from the Gabonese point of view, had all the jobs. Well, they had all the jobs because they were good at them and the Gabonese who had jobs had Mercedes millionaire jobs. Bongo was not at all typical; Bongo was a hard worker, a very hard worker. He was well-compensated but he worked hard, I've got to give him that.

Q: When you were looking at oil and OPEC, was this a period of time when OPEC was sort of ruling the roost?

BAAS: Sure. This is in 1973. I was there in 1973, no I was there in 1974 to 1976, so I was there after the big oil price rise in 1973 and when OPEC was feeling its oats so to speak. We were very concerned about increasing production in Gabon and making sure that Gabon would be a moderate voice in OPEC. I think they were but they had no real weight at all, simply because they were so small, both in terms of size and in terms of oil production.

Q: How did you and your new wife find life there?

BAAS: There wasn't a lot to do, beautiful beaches, play tennis, go to the beach, some nice restaurants. It was fine. It was OK and we had a decent house and a Nigerian cook/houseboy and that was fine. The diplomatic community was small but there were enough things to do. We'd play bridge and things like that. We traveled a little bit. It was hard to travel, as I said. We did make it to Schweitzer's hospital and I made it a few other places but not many. We went out in the rain forest with friends and the embassy had a cabin across the estuary on a little spit of land, and so we would take the embassy emergency evacuation vehicle (boat) and go across the estuary on a Saturday or Sunday, a group of us. We had it because we needed it as an emergency evacuation point to get to, in fact, where our beach house was. In case of problems in Libreville that was the only way to go because you couldn't count on the airplane. You didn't know when they were going to come and so we could get there, at least out of the center of contention. Don't forget, there had been an attempted coup in Gabon in 1964 and the American ambassador had been implicated in that coup and so this was ten years later, but there were still memories of that. We were happy to have the emergency evacuation vehicle because it was a wonderful beach over there and you could have a barbecue and stuff like that. Of course, it rained incredibly in Gabon and one of the things I still remember with fondness, I guess, about Gabon; it was in the middle of the rain forest and in the middle of the rain belt and it really, really rained. The good news was it typically rained from two until four in the morning and most of the houses, and certainly ours had a tin roof. You would hear this rain at two in the morning. When you first get there it sounded like machine guns or something. You know, rat-a-tat-tat on your roof, but it was just the rainstorm. The good news about that was it didn't rain in the daytime. It was beautiful in the daytime; we would go to the beach. Once it rained, it was sunny and nice. The dry season was less desirable because it was cloudy and it just never rained. I remember Ambassador McKesson one time talking to some inspectors from Washington who were there at his residence looking out to the south, Libreville is just north of the equator, and saying, "See that red line that just goes across the hill? That's the equator." One inspector said, "Yes, I see it." Of course, there was no line. It was interesting, even though we were north of the equator our water acted like it was south of the equator. It goes clockwise or counterclockwise down the drain and in Libreville even though it was north of the equator it acted like south of the equator water which was interesting. The equator is just a line, it's not exactly the geographic determinant of what happens, apparently.

Q: When you were chargé, Gabon was on the Security Council. What does it mean when your country is on the Security Council?

BAAS: It becomes much more important to the United States, in a way, particularly in Africa where often the countries are somewhat less important than, shall we say France and Great Britain. There are fifteen votes on the Security Council and so one of those fifteen votes is very important, therefore there is a lot more activity and a lot more running around to the foreign office and so on. The last year I was there they were a member of the Security Council and that meant that the embassy, as I said we were very small, was very busy. The trouble we had with the Gabonese civil servants was tracking them down. We worked a very strange schedule because it was hot, right on the equator. Basically we worked the mornings and then two afternoons a week, long mornings from seven until, I don't know, one and a couple of afternoons a week. That worked very nicely normally, but when you're on the Security Council it was a problem trying to track them down. It meant for some long days. We would come in early and then go home and have lunch and then normally, go off to play tennis or something that, but some days you just had to get up and go down and sit in the Foreign Office until somebody came in. Of course, we had the advantage or disadvantage, depending on how you look at it, of being six hours ahead of Washington and New York, so often we could do things in the morning that would affect things that were going to happen in our afternoon which would affect what was going to happen in New York that day.

The problem also was we would often hear one thing from the Foreign Ministry and you were never certain whether the instructions or whatever were going to be transmitted to New York and/or Washington. Communications weren't so good, sometimes they just couldn't be bothered to do it and so we ended up having to double track everything which meant we did it in Libreville, or probably triple track. The African adviser at the United Nations tried to do it in New York and often the State Department would try to do it with the embassy here in Washington. They had the same problem finding the guys in the embassy and seeing that the instructions were transmitted. So it was a challenging thing. I can't remember issues, but I do remember that we had a couple of decent successes and we also had many areas where the Gabonese delegate in New York did what he thought was right, and may or may not have benefited from our wisdom.

Q: I have talked with people who have said, you know, sometimes we were raising issues such as on whaling in Chad which you know, Chad could care less about. What's a whale?

BAAS: I think that's true. I would object more on sort of general issues when the person was not on the Security Council. I think getting on the Security Council brings with it a certain responsibility to deal with global issues you don't normally deal with. Certainly President Bongo would have had no problem dealing with those issues. But the problem was his lower-down people and also the problem was the lower-down people often didn't dare do anything without the big man sort of checking off on it. One of our big problems was we often expected other countries to be as organized as us or not as disorganized or

something, because often we would get a circular cable from Washington that had gone to all fifteen Security Council members saying, you know there is a vote tomorrow on this issue. Sometimes, as you say, it was an issue that the country wasn't necessarily up to speed on because it wasn't an issue they followed in a regular manner. But if it was an issue that was very important, say something like the Middle East, a resolution on Israel or something, they sort of knew about those issues, but they weren't sort of following it minute by minute, day by day. We would come in at the very last minute and say this is a really important issue; you really need to vote yes or no on whatever the thing was. Their response, not surprisingly, was, " Well, if it's a really important issue, maybe you should have given us some time to consider the thing" and we would say, "Oh, no, we need to have something by tomorrow morning." Now, as you know you can do these things, I'm probably not being as diplomatic as I was then, but it was often frustrating for those of us in the field because we didn't get any time.

The other part of it is we often weren't up to date on these issues either. We were a small embassy, we had a lot to follow in Gabon and if it was some issue of China and Taiwan, yeah, we knew about it generally because we are smart people and we followed the news but again, it's not an issue that would come across our radar screen in terms of the cables and all that on a regular basis. General knowledge, not the specific knowledge that you might need. You know, that happens all the time and that's not a criticism so much as a statement of fact of a diplomat's life. You do the best with what you've got.

Q: Did you find that the Gabonese or basically Bongo was interested in following or at least responsive toward suggestions? Are they part of the Organization of African Unity? Were they voting as a block or were they pretty independent?

BAAS: No. Bongo, I think, was very much pro-West and pro-American. He had to be careful about OPEC credentials and so on oil perhaps he was less helpful than we might have liked. On other issues I think there was a tendency to try to do things that were good to the West. Bongo was no fool; he certainly looked out for his own interests as well. I think his interests given the amount of oil companies, Western oil companies, that were in his country and his hope for Western investment and so on were largely with the West.

Africa had this long tradition, and it still is there even though it's not so much in the holy writ anymore, that a country's internal problems were a country's internal problems and so you'd have much less likelihood that Cameroon, a neighbor of Gabon would be interfering in any way in Gabonese affairs than the United States would interfere in Canadian affairs, even though U.S. and Canada get along very well. That, I think, gave him a certain amount of security in terms of African issues. Sure, he listened to his African colleagues, he wanted to be a regional leader and a continental leader and if there was a big issue of importance to Africa, Angola or something like that, then he was much more likely to keep the African view in mind. For a lot of issues there wasn't an African position. On whaling, there just wasn't enough interest in the topic, but if you got something like apartheid in South Africa or civil war in Angola or those sorts of issues then, yes, there were African views and strong African views and sometimes even an African position.

I handled commercial affairs in Gabon and also consular. One time I remember I had an American fisherman, we had fishing fleets off the coast of Gabon chasing, I think tuna mostly, and a fisherman came in. Actually, he was flying a plane for the fishermen. He came in and stopped by the embassy and I had a chat with him about a variety of things but the interesting thing was he said, "You know, we're up there flying trying to spot the tuna and direct our ships to where they are." I said, "OK, that's fine, that sounds good." But he said, "We really have trouble with the Spanish." I said, "What do you mean you have problems with the Spanish?" He said, "Well, they are flying as well. They have their plane flying and are talking to each other but they're not speaking Spanish." I said, "Well, obviously most of the fishermen in Spain are Basque and are speaking Basque." He said "Well, it's not fair. They can't speak Basque, we can understand what they're saying in Spanish. You know, we were eavesdropping on the Spanish radio frequencies and then we can try to beat them to the spot they spotted tuna, but they're speaking in some language that nobody speaks." I said, "Well, what can I say?" That was pretty funny because my father-in-law was Basque. Anyway, that was an amusing little anecdote. It was one of those kinds of things that happen. You want to help the Americans, but there's not much you can do in those sorts of situations.

I was chargé in the summer of 1975 for about six weeks. What happened was both the ambassador and the DCM, for reasons I'm not exactly certain of, were leaving at the same time, and why they didn't make one of them stay longer I don't know, but they didn't or they couldn't, and the new ones weren't coming in, typically, until the end of the summer. That left me, the number three person, second tour officer, as chargé. I think Washington was understandably a little bit concerned about this guy who was a second tour officer. The previous ambassador, John McKesson, told them, don't worry, he's fine, he can handle it. It wouldn't have been a big problem at all except for the fact that the summer of 1975 was when all the Portuguese, former Portuguese, territories became independent. Gabon was responsible for Sao Tomé. We were the listening post or watching post for Sao Tomé, partly because we had the headquarters of the people's movement for the liberation of Sao Tomé, or whatever it was called. Their headquarters was in Libreville.

One of my responsibilities, in fact, had been to go down and see the guy who was running that office. I used to see him once a quarter or so. We didn't recognize them, but it was a matter of a low-level contact to keep sort of tabs on what they were doing. They weren't doing a whole lot. They were trying to foment revolution and so on, but it was pretty hard for them from the mainland to do something on the island, and basically they were just keeping their ear to the ground on what's happening. Anyway, they became independent, as all the Portuguese territories did in 1975, largely because of events in Portugal, much more than events in Africa. As a result, Congressman Diggs, who was then the head of the African sub-committee on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, decided he was going to come out and attend all of these independence ceremonies. He flew into Libreville as a congressional delegation, just him and his wife. His wife, Janet Hall Diggs, interestingly enough at the time, was a Foreign Service Officer and at the time happened to be the desk officer for Gabon. So here my desk officer flies in but I

know, and you can't blame her, that I'm not going to get any real help. A, she's not working and B, she's there as Mrs. Diggs, Mrs. Congressman, she's not out there as desk officer for Gabon. So I had the two of them fly in. Not only had the ambassador and DCM left, the admin officer was gone and the USIS guy was gone and so it was essentially me, my two secretaries, the communicator and the Marine. And that was it. I used to say afterwards, being chargé is not hard, I can handle being the chief, but it's pretty tough not having any Indians to order around. We were really down in terms of what we could do.

Well, Diggs was a big problem. He's a very prickly guy and he required a lot, and the post gave him a lot through the years, given his position. He wanted to stay in the residence I think because, it turned out later, he was having financial difficulties in the House of Diggs, which is a funeral home in Detroit. We didn't know that at the time. He didn't want to spend any money, clearly. He wanted to stay in the residence. We really recommended against that because Gabonese servants aren't terribly good when no one else is around to keep an eye on them, and I couldn't live in the residence since I was just the chargé and a chargé can't live in the residence, and so he wanted to go live there without any American besides him. So he did, to make a long story short, and the staff was predictably slow and so on and so forth, partly that was the fact that's the way they were, but partly I think Diggs was a very demanding guy.

I got a call, I don't know, at 6:00 in the morning on the radio or whatever saying we need chicken livers, I need chicken livers, I can't have my breakfast without chicken livers. Well, finding chicken livers in Gabon isn't all that easy and so I sent my driver out and he managed to track some chicken livers down somewhere. I mean this was the kind of thing we really didn't need and it was really hard. He was not very appreciative, I'm afraid, of the staff that worked hard for him, particularly the three people that I had. We had a meeting with President Bongo that I had arranged for and I was doing the translating because he didn't speak French. His wife spoke decent French but wasn't doing any of the translating. I'm not even sure she was there at that meeting. Yes, I think she was. So I'm doing the translating and he was very effusive in his praise and was talking very generally and after about ten or fifteen minutes the aide to Bongo who was there leaned over to me and said in a kind of a stage whisper, "Is this guy going to ever say anything?" I said, "Well, he's a congressman, what can I say?" and so it wasn't a very substantive conversation. I don't think it was very useful from the Gabonese point of view, or indeed from the point of view of the executive branch of the U.S. government. It was good from the point of view of Congressmen Diggs because he was able to say he met with Bongo and we exchanged views and so on. Then he and his wife flew off to Sao Tomé to be there at their independence. I couldn't go because I had to stay obviously in Libreville; I was the only show in town. The interesting thing was Pinto de Costa, who had been my contact through all the years, not all the years, but through several months anyway, was the first President of Sao Tomé and Principe. They were going over there to see him, and they flew over and did what they had to do over there and then came back and got an airplane for, I guess, Kinshasa. They were on their way to Angola.

That was not without events either. We got to the airport two hours early because I wanted to make sure that they got out of town on time, and we saw the Air Zaire plane taxiing down the runway and taking off. We went to the airport and discovered that that was their plane and it had left two hours early. When I had inquired as to why, they said, "Well, the pilot decided he wanted to leave and so he left." So then we had them for an extra 24 hours until we could find another way to get them out of town and on their way. There was another congresswoman with them, Candace, I want to say Wilson but that could be wrong. She was very nice, charming and not arrogant, and very normal.

Q: You said that Diggs' wife was an FSO (Foreign Service Officer). I would have thought that she would have understood the situation and would have been helpful.

BAAS: Yes, I think she did understand the situation. She wasn't unhelpful, but I think the problem was she had her own political problems with her husband and they ended up getting divorced some years later. I don't know what was going on, but my guess is there was something going on and she had her own issues, they had their own issues, and that was sort of playing itself out on the trip as well. There was a limit to what she could do anyway because she had to go along with her husband. I think she was helpful at the dinners and so on in terms of helping translate and things like that. We had her at one end of the table and me and my wife at the other. We spread ourselves around so we could sort of do the translations because we had very few English speakers in Gabon at that time, there are probably more now, and no one on the delegation spoke French except for Janet.

Q: You left Gabon when?

BAAS: I actually left Gabon in early 1976. I left several months early because my wife came down with leukemia and fortunately for us, the regional medical officer from Kinshasa was up in Libreville and basically took a look at her. We had gone to Cameroon for a regional economic officers' conference in Yaoundé, and she hadn't been well when we got back. We just thought it was the flu or something like that. He happened to be in town, and he took a look at her and said you'd better go up to Frankfurt. We medically evacuated and went up to Frankfurt and discovered that she had leukemia, so I flew her directly back to Washington and checked her into George Washington Hospital. I went back briefly at some point, I can't even remember when, I think it must of been in March or so and packed out and got everything ready and sort of said my goodbyes and came home. It wasn't a typical kind of departure; it was a very sudden departure. I was due out that summer anyway, the summer of 1976, and I think I had done my bidding because I recall most of my bidding was on Washington in any event. I was sort of expecting to go to Washington, at that time two overseas tours and then a Washington tour. I had had my two overseas and was expecting to go back to Washington.

Fortunately, when I showed up back in Washington early I went to one of my friends, one of the great ladies of the economics bureau, Frances Wilson, a wonderful person. People really liked her or disliked her and she was the same with other people, but I had gotten on her good side early when I was staff assistant for Jules Katz three or four years before.

She was tough but she was really good. We got along well. I went to see her and explained the situation and she did one of the most wonderful things anyone ever did for me in the Foreign Service. She said, "Don't worry; you're on the rolls of the economics bureau. Go take care of your wife, do what you have to do in the hospital, stay with her in the hospital, you'll get paid, don't worry about it and when you need a job, come talk to me, and we'll find something."

Sure enough, after I packed out and came home I had a job in the Economic Bureau working in the office of trade. I was the officer, I was in an office called GCP (General Commercial Policy), it no longer has that name, and I was the officer working on the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). I was the State Department officer working on GSP. That meant lots of interagency meetings, lots of work with USTR (US Trade Representative). We were at this point sort of putting the program together. It had just begun or was just authorized by the Congress, I guess, and we were putting it together, getting countries to do what they had to do to join up. The program basically was developing countries were able to get duty free treatment for a large number of products that developed countries would normally pay duties on. It was supposed to be an advantage for the developing countries, to encourage them to develop through trade as opposed to aid. It was very interesting. The developing countries all wanted textiles, and they all wanted sugar and things like that on the list but, of course, there were some political realities in the United States that had to be dealt with. In addition, we had lots of petitions from domestic producers of all sorts of things you wouldn't imagine.

Q: For example?

BAAS: One knows about sugar and one knows about textiles and rice but things like, I don't know, it may not be an actual case, but you a get a petition from a manufacturer of doors saying this low tariff on, zero tariff given to developing countries on doors, was hurting their business because Mexico had already, all of a sudden, developed a huge door production industry and was shipping them in large quantities. All sorts of weird, that's not fair, but products that you don't think of normally came up. Then we'd sit in, I was the State Department representative in this interagency group, and we'd sit there and hear the testimony. The foreign country, say Mexico, if I can just take my example, I don't know if it's a real example, would come in and say, "Oh no, we can't produce anymore. We need this, this is really beneficial for us, the company's saving money, it is employing 5000 people who otherwise would be coming across to Los Angeles." Then we would sit down and try to decide what made sense. There was also a similar process for putting products on the list. It was easy to get products like airplane engines on the list because no developing country made airplane engines, but it was impossible to get most textiles on the list. There was that middle range that was interesting, two thousand products.

Q: Where did the State Department fit in this? You know, you have the Defense Department, Treasury, the State Department, Agriculture, Commerce, I mean all these various agencies, what kind of role did we play?

BAAS: We were basically the free traders. We were in favor of free trade. We wanted basically to reduce as many of the tariffs as we could, and that was a very easy position to defend economically and fit in very well with our constituents because our constituents were the foreign countries. We argued that this was also beneficial to the United States, to the American consumer, our other constituents, because they were going to get cheaper doors, or cheaper whatever the product was, and so the more products we could put in to the system the better it was for the American consumer. This was a time, as you remember in the mid-seventies, when there was very high inflation, so anything to bring down inflation was obviously worthwhile and one way to do that was reduce tariffs on these items and at the same time increase development in the other countries.

Generally, the subcommittee of the interagency process broke down into several groups. State and Treasury were the leaders on reducing tariffs generally, although there were exceptions. We were often joined by Defense, although Defense didn't play a very active role. We always tried to get them there for the big votes. On the other side you'd have Commerce and Labor who were almost always opposed to reducing tariffs on industrial products. Agriculture played a middle role on industrial products because they often didn't have a constituent interest, but recognized they needed help on agricultural products from Labor and Commerce, so they tended to be in that group. It was kind of a three-three situation and USTR was trying to play the honest broker. USTR did do a fairly good job of playing honest broker, I must say. So often it was three to three and there was a lot of trading, and I used to say to my friends, after having done this process for a while, my goodness, after negotiating interagency with Commerce and Labor and Agriculture on these products, going off overseas to negotiate with foreigners is a piece of cake. It's not hard at all.

Q: It's very apparent that an awfully lot of diplomacy, the guts of the thing, is really done here in Washington.

BAAS: Sure, absolutely.

Q: Beyond the interagency process, a country has its fixed ideas and we have our fixed ideas, and they can be worked out or they can't be worked out, but it's fairly cut and dried. Then you have people coming in from all different angles here in Washington.

BAAS: One thing interesting about that from my point of view is that I got a couple of nice trips out of it. I went to Geneva once and I went to Paris maybe twice because the OECD was considering GSP programs generally and the Europeans had one and the Japanese I think had one. We were trying to sort of make them as similar as we could, in order to minimize the confusion for the developing countries. I also took a trip, interestingly enough, to Cameroon and Zaire because I could speak French and I went to talk to the local people about how they could benefit from the program and what they had to do to benefit. That was kind of fun since I had just been in Gabon so I got to go back to the region, actually. Those were worthwhile trips.

I did that job for, I guess, fifteen months, something like that, maybe a little short of two years, maybe fifteen to eighteen months and then I moved up to be deputy chief of the Office of General Commercial Policy. It was a division of the Office of Trade. I became deputy chief of that office. As I recall I still did GSP for a while, but I also had other people to supervise and so that was a good broadening sort of thing. We were just gearing up for the Tokyo Round of the World Trade agreement. Then it was GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.)

Q: There was a whole series of these various rounds. What you were doing was part of the early, well, not the early but mid-stage of trying to bring tariffs down.

BAAS: Yes. This was the Tokyo round of the GATT and it had been going on for a couple of years, and in fact, it was very similar to what we had been doing under GSP. Basically, we were trying to put together a tariff offer and that meant we had to talk to the U.S. producers of the product and find out what was sensitive and what wasn't sensitive and what was more sensitive and what was less sensitive, and we had to think about what the foreign countries might be interested in and try to come up with a package that would be appealing to the foreigners, so that we would get some useful things in return, but at the same time not do undue damage to U.S. industry. There was a whole exercise called tropical products, where we were trying to find products that were of interest to the tropical countries, who were all developing countries, and so they were looking at things like guava and textiles, certainly, which are, of course, a non-starter and other things like that that would be interesting to them. We worked very closely with ARA (American Regional Affairs) on those issues. Janine Slattery was in ARA and then came over and became at one point the director of the office of GSP.

Q: How did you find, speaking of ARA, the other geographic bureaus?

BAAS: They were basically very helpful and really on our side. They wanted us to exhibit backbone, which wasn't difficult for us to do, and really go to bat for the developing countries. They were interested, obviously, in Thailand or Costa Rica or Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, maybe not Saudi Arabia, having lower tariffs for their industrial products. They were very much on our side. We used them a lot because we would say, "Look we really need to find out what Pakistan is interested in." They would go informally often to the embassy and say what sort of products might Pakistan be interested in, or we would send out a circular cable to everyone and they would go informally and say this is really important, we can do some good work, we have interagency meetings coming up, let us know what your country is interested in. We were able to get some pretty good ammunition from the field and from the bureaus that we were able to use in the interagency processes. There were two parts: a) why it was important that we reduce tariffs on widgets, and b) what the foreign country was willing to do, how important it was to them, and what we could hope to get in return, that was the other part of it, not so much for GSP as for the general Tokyo Round.

We also needed to know from these countries what was it that Americans were trying to export there that was having difficulty getting in. The commercial section usually had a

pretty good idea what we had been trying to get in, airplanes for example, and they had huge tariffs, that were favoring who knows what, and so we had trouble doing that. We could then try to craft a package that would be, OK, we'll do something in this area which is of interest to you, if you will do something in that area of interest to us. It was a multilateral negotiation, but it's all these bilateral negotiations at the same time in a multilateral context. Of course, you had the most favored nation principle which means an offer we made to Pakistan we also were making to everybody. You have to find out what Pakistan is interested in, what they were the principle producer of and you'd make an offer to them and to maybe, you know, Bangladesh or somebody, or India who produces similar products like sisal, or something like that, or hemp, or something and you'd say OK, we can do this on that. You guys produce a lot of that. We'll cut the tariff, but in return we hope you will cut your tariff on processed agricultural products. It was interesting and you'd get into all of these different commodities.

Then for my sins, I guess, after a few months as deputy chief of GCP I was promoted, really to become division chief of the trade agreements division which is our sister division. It was called trade agreements, an old division which Christian Herter had once started and headed up. It was much bigger and it was before USTR and, of course, USTR has taken much of the function of the trade agreements division away. Basically, it was the office or division for developed country trade policy, and so we were the lead office at that point for the whole Tokyo Round. I got even more involved in what was going on in the Tokyo Round and my office and staff got more involved. In fact, I went over to Geneva for three weeks for the conclusion of the Tokyo Round. You mentioned Bob Strauss the last time I was here and I got to see Bob Strauss in action because he was USTR, and he was terrific. He did a really good job. We were all there to support him because this was an ongoing negotiation. You know, something would come up like country X; all of a sudden they can do what we want, but they need an extra ten per cent on oranges. Can we do anything on oranges? Then we had to be there to have sort of continuing interagency meetings. It was fun and it was a lot of work. We stayed up late and worked hard, but we got a lot done and it succeeded too, which was good.

Q: Did you find yourself running up against the continuing obstacle of insistence by France and Germany, and I think the UK too at that time on agricultural policy?

BAAS: Do you mean the refusal to do anything?

Q: Well, I mean they were going to keep their subsidies.

BAAS: Yes, sure. And Japan too, don't forget Japan. Japan was not so much about subsidy, but they were just deathly scared of losing the rice business, that California would wipe them out. That was very much an issue, a big issue. We are a very competitive agricultural producer and we wanted lower tariffs on agriculture. In a way this was a very difficult round, but it was focused on agriculture and it was easier on agriculture because a lot of the easy things had already been done on industrial products, so the stuff we were doing in industrial products was harder almost by definition, whereas agriculture had been kept to the side in all the other rounds and this was the first

round where agriculture was out there. It was sensitive, no doubt about it. Everyone was very concerned about it. On the other hand, there were a relatively large number of easy things that could be done, easy in quotation marks. They weren't easy, but we weren't at this stage talking about really cutting subsidies or putting sugar out there or putting rice out there.

The other thing that was done very usefully in the Tokyo Round were all these non-tariff measures. We ended up with some disciplines and some codes on subsidies and on other non-tariff measures and on government procurement and others. We tried to codify procedures, what a government should do in terms of its own government procurement. The Buy America Act, can the government buy America to the exclusion of other things or what are the provisions they have to adhere to, what rules do they have to follow in doing those sorts of things and to allow more openness, and reduce subsidies. Those were very contentious issues, almost more contentious, probably more so than the actual tariff issues, which are in a way easier for the public to understand. We didn't get as much as we wanted, one never does, but we did get all these codes in place for the non-tariff barriers which served as a foot in the door, as a beginning, to making these processes more transparent and getting some control over what was being done in those areas.

Q: Did you find, obviously, that Congress with their constituents were weighing in every time. Of all the people in this, who received the congressional complaints?

BAAS: Well, I think the lead on all of this was USTR. I think they were still called STR at that time, the Special Trade Representative, but they were the lead, and Bob Strauss was a master at dealing with the Congress anyway. They got a lot of congressionals, and other agencies also got them as you might expect, and so we ended up answering a lot of congressionals. A lot of them were easy to answer in a sense of, yes, we understand your concerns and they will be taken into account. Others were much more difficult and so we had to coordinate interagency-wise to make sure that we were all answering more or less the same. Not with the same text but with the same substance. USTR was the coordinator of that and that worked pretty well. We would sometimes talk about it in interagency meetings, and what our general position was going to be on sugar tariffs or whatever the issue might be.

Q: By the way, how was your wife doing?

BAAS: Oh, she's fine. Now she's fine. She ended up in remission and she was fine. We were living in Washington. She was getting out-patient treatment and all that. Yes, she's still alive so she did fine.

Q: The spirit of being in the Economic Bureau at the time when Frances Wilson was doing her selecting of people when she was Executive Director. I mean, it was very interesting. I sorry she wasn't around to interview.

BAAS: She would have some stories to tell.

Q: This was a time of rather high morale?

BAAS: I think it was very high morale. We had good assistant secretaries, Jules Katz, and Deane Hinton, and she got good people in the bureau. She took care of her people and everybody knew that. You worked hard and most people did a good job, after all we were Foreign Service Officers, we weren't stupid. If people did a good job, they got good onward assignments and they always knew they could come back to the Bureau afterwards and have a good job. She was good at promoting people, like in my case. I mean I was promoted, in the space of four years, twice. I'm not talking about rank, I'm talking about function. I started out as an Indian and went up to be deputy chief and then I became chief. That wasn't unique I don't think. Many people would get promoted from assistant director to director or from deputy chief to chief or from chief of a division to office director or something like that. When they had you identified as being a quality person, she worked very hard to keep you. That was good for morale, obviously.

Q: Well, you left there when?

BAAS: I left there in the summer of 1980. I originally wanted to go to Peru and I was going to be the resources guy I guess in Peru. I can't remember, an economic officer anyway, in Peru. I wanted to learn Spanish which was what I really wanted to do because my wife spoke Spanish, but unfortunately for me her English was absolutely perfect and I spoke French with her family, and so I had never really had to. I'd never been to a Spanish-speaking country, never had the requirement to really learn Spanish. I really wanted to, so I wanted to go to Peru. We were all set to go to Peru and then at the last minute, you could still do this, the person who was in the job to which I was assigned decided to extend for an extra year. You couldn't get away with that now I don't think, or at least with more difficulty. But he did and so that was in May or whenever and my assignment all of a sudden changed, or at least disappeared. I looked around and Bill Barraclough who had been the Deputy Assistant Secretary for trade during the end of the time I was there had gone off to Tokyo and was Minister Counselor for Economic Affairs at the embassy. One of the jobs that was open was the resources officer in Tokyo. I didn't know anything, particularly, about resources and didn't quite understand what a resources officer was doing in a country that had very few. Anyway, I knew Bill Barraclough well and it seemed like an interesting place and I was told I didn't have to learn Japanese to go there. That was really almost the only thing out there and so we jumped at it. I ended up going to Tokyo, it must of been June or July. We took, I don't know how much Japanese they gave us. It was like five weeks, I believe. They gave me five weeks of Japanese so that I could understand how difficult the language was and that's about all I learned. That's not fair; I learned to say hello and goodbye and to count and I understood a little bit about the structure of the language and probably picked up some stuff on the culture, which was useful and interesting. We went off to Japan. I was the resources officer in the economics department in a huge embassy. Mike Mansfield was the Ambassador. It turns out the resources officer in Japan was basically to report and work on Japan's use of resources, not surprisingly, since they were such a large consumer of resources, for instance, where were they getting their oil?

Q: We're talking about raw materials?

BAAS: We're talking about raw materials. Where were they getting their copper? Where was their iron coming from? Oil was the big issue, copper became an issue, iron was an issue for a little while. Copper became an issue because of Cuba, it had nothing to do with Japan really. That was very interesting. It was an exciting time to be in Japan. In the early '80s Japan was really taking off, really moving economically and the embassy was terrific. Mike Mansfield was a really good ambassador. People in the Foreign Service or the press sometimes complained about political ambassadors, but I certainly have never complained about political ambassadors generally. I think you get people who know what they're doing and are skilled in other areas and then come to diplomacy and they are fine. He certainly knew a lot about Japan, he certainly knew a lot about how the U.S. Congress worked, he certainly knew a lot about the U.S. government, and certainly had a distinguished career. He wasn't a used car salesman, that's for sure. He was also a smart enough man to leave to the professionals the job of running the embassy. The DCM and the Minister, the Economic Minister and the political section chief and other agency chiefs basically did the day-to-day stuff. Mansfield was very involved and very engaged and you could get him when you needed him and he kept out of your business when you didn't need him. I admired that and I learned a lot from that, I must say.

Q: I would think that the Japanese, their raw materials, they basically don't have any. They have such a huge economy, I mean this would almost be a top priority, getting the right stuff to come in. It had to be a very active field for you to watch.

BAAS: It was very active, and I had very good relationships with the people in the Foreign Ministry and in MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry) as I recall. I think it may have changed names subsequently. They were a real power and so we had a lot of discussions about the world oil market particularly, and so on. Fortunately, I had a good boss in Bill Barraclough as the minister, the economic counselor was Chuck Angevine, and he and I got there at exactly the same time and so they let me do a lot more. I didn't just do that. I did a lot of other stuff. Eventually, I can't remember when, I eventually became deputy economic counselor. Again, it was another internal promotion and it had one good side effect. We lived off the compound our first two years there because they were reconstructing the three buildings on the compound. Then we moved into the compound for our last two years and I got a really nice apartment, a three level apartment with plenty of room for entertaining because I was the deputy economic counselor and therefore had some entertainment responsibilities. It was really nice to have this slightly bigger apartment than I would have been allowed or authorized normally, given my rank and family size and so on. This is kind of a side bar, but I'm not a big compound person and I was really happy that those first two years we got to "live on the economy". We lived in what they call in Japan a mansion, which is basically an upscale apartment building. You learn a lot by living on the economy, even in a country as closed culturally as Japan is or as inward looking and as difficult to penetrate if you don't speak Japanese and you're not Japanese.

I remember one incident that told a lot. One night we were at home and one evening a guy knocked on the door. With his little bit of English and his Japanese and our small understanding of Japanese and the fact that we had seen him before, we figured out that he lived directly underneath us, in the apartment on the fifth floor. We were on the sixth floor. He apparently had locked himself out of the apartment. He wanted to go out on our balcony and use our fire escape which was in the floor of the balcony and drop down to his balcony and then get into his apartment. Naturally, we being normal people we said, sure, come on in and so he did. He went down and we put the fire escape back together. Interestingly enough, when he got to his balcony we heard a crash. He obviously didn't have a key for his locked window that led out to the balcony either so he had to break it. Anyway, we didn't think anything about it and went back to doing whatever we were doing and half an hour later there was another knock on the door and here's the same guy full of thanks with a bottle of French perfume for my wife and a bottle of very nice cognac or something for me. He said, "Please, take these." I said, "No, we can't, no we don't need to, it's not necessary. We did this for you because you were our neighbor and you would do the same thing for us I'm sure, if the positions were reversed and please, it's really not necessary." About three quarters of the way through the speech, a very typical American sort of speech, all of a sudden I said, wait a minute, I'm not in the United States, I'm in Japan. They do things differently in Japan and I'm probably offending him by not accepting these gifts. He needs to do this. You know, I have nothing against cognac and my wife has nothing against French perfume, so we accepted them with grace and again, that's the sort of thing that's kind of a trivial matter but you learn about a culture.

Another incident, we were out shopping one day and we walked up the street to some shops and were walking back home and I was carrying the packages. My wife was walking alongside, she was probably carrying something, but I had a large number of packages. A number of Japanese kind of looked at us and laughed. This was I think, apparently, not usual, it was probably unusual that we were walking and secondly, if we were walking it was incredibly unusual that the wife wasn't carrying the majority of the stuff. Again you learn, this is stuff you can read in a book, but it was much the same as the other incident.

Another thing along a similar line, we were in the sixth floor apartment and across the way from us the same building had a rooftop garden. It only went four floors on that side and a friend of ours, in fact, lived in that fourth floor apartment. On top was a rooftop garden. One time, it was a weekend I guess, there were some Japanese people on the rooftop garden taking advantage of it. I was cleaning up after lunch or dinner and I was washing dishes because that's what I did to help out around the house. I was washing dishes. These guys were just beside themselves. They looked at me and pointed and were just laughing. They couldn't believe that a man could possibly be washing dishes. That was another of those little amusing cultural things.

Q: How did you find the Japanese trade bureaucracy? You were basically trying to get information but I know that our people who had to deal with it particularly in those days always had a problem.

BAAS: It was tough. I didn't speak Japanese and so that was hard. I learned enough Japanese to ask directions and to get around and order in restaurants and stuff like that. Not speaking Japanese was a huge disadvantage. You are sort of a functional illiterate in a way because you are walking along the street and you see a poster on the wall of the building and you don't know if the poster says, you know, drink more milk or vote communist. I mean, you have no idea what it's about. You might be able to figure it out from a picture but maybe not. From my point of view, I had it easy on the resources side because we were basically on the same side. We were comparing notes about how we were going to deal with OPEC, how we were going to deal with the world copper market, how we were going to deal with iron, you know rubber, things like that. All of these issues, how we as a developed countries were going to deal with them. Not that we had exactly the same view, but we certainly weren't confrontational on it. We were generally on the same side.

I had other tasks in the section and eventually became the deputy economic counselor, where I ended up in what you were talking about. Trying to deal with the Japanese on automobiles, or something like that, was really, really hard. MITI was particularly hard, but the Japanese first of all they're very classy and very courteous people, generally. And they had these people that we used to call gaijin minders, gaijin being foreigner. They were sort of people who spoke English and, of course, a lot of people in the Foreign Ministry spoke English because they needed a language besides Japanese and a lot of them spoke very good English. Even in a ministry like MITI there would be a gaijin minder whose sort of job was to be friendly and smile and to make sure you understood what was going on. Sometimes these guys would be very useful and sometimes they would just get in the way. The problem was a) sometimes it was very difficult to penetrate and understand what was going on, and b) the issues were also very hard. Issues like automobiles were hard; they wanted more access to our market, obviously. We wanted to limit or control the access to our market, but we wanted more access to their market as well. Of course, then there were all sorts of problems that came up in our getting more access to the automobile market on their side.

Before I was assigned to Tokyo, I had been there once before when I was working in the trade agreements office. I went as part of an inter-agency team, because it was a developed country trade office. I didn't know I was going to end up in Tokyo for four years later at all, but we went and we had this very tough negotiation on automobiles. We wanted them to invest more in the parts business in the United States, not only in the automobile business, and to put factories here, not only export cars to the United States. We were looking out for labor as well, and we wanted them to open up their market to U.S. vehicles. Of course, they drive on the left side of the road and so that required all sorts of changes.

Anyway, it was an interesting and difficult negotiation, but when it was done we were invited by the head of the Japanese delegation, who was a guy from the Foreign Ministry named Ogura, to go to his house afterwards and have a drink. Again I learned something about Japanese culture. We had a woman in our delegation as well, Sue Schwab, who has

gone on to bigger and better things, so there were maybe four or five of us. We went to this fellow's house and it wasn't much of a house, it was a nice house but his wife -- he had been at university in the United States and he had met his wife there and so she spoke absolutely perfect English and had lived in the United States for some time. She met us at the door and was very effusive and very polite and made sure we had drinks and stuff and then she retired. We sat around and had a drink and talked about this that and the other thing, mostly about automobiles I suppose, and then we stayed for I don't know, 45 minutes, an hour or something, and it was time to go. We got up to say goodbye and she appeared again. It was only then that I realized she had been sitting behind the wall or behind the door sort of listening to us because she said something along the line it's a shame you have to leave so early because I was really interested in your discussion about the automobiles or whatever it was we were talking about. My jaw, at least figuratively, must have dropped. It was only then I realized that she was listening in and even though we were a group of Americans and had a woman in our delegation and even though she had been educated in the United States and spoke perfect English and was obviously very intelligent; still she felt constrained by her culture when she was in Japan to withdraw and to not participate. It was in a way sad. It was interesting as well.

Q: Did you get any feel for how the Japanese saw the United States during this 1980 to 1984 period?

BAAS: Yes, that was very much a part of our writ and what we were doing. I think generally, they looked at the United States as being a positive, I think. The relationship was pretty good, Nakasone, when he came in as Prime Minister, I think, was perceived by people in the United States as being kind of Western and a man we could deal with. I'm not sure that we sometimes didn't believe our own propaganda in that regard, and we weren't as wise as we might have been. I think generally the attitude was very good. There were commercial conflicts; they were deathly afraid we would push them to open up the agricultural market and those sorts of things came up. I think generally, the outlook toward the United States was very good.

I remember one person telling me what I think is very true. One needs to be cautious, you never know for sure about the Japanese, I guess that's the way to put it. The Japanese after the war changed overnight from being at war with us to being our best friends. I mean, it was like you snapped your fingers and there they were. This person was saying there's no reason to think that they couldn't change again, going back to being more militaristic, or being whatever. I think there's probably some truth to that. We see some of that today and I think there's sort of a rise in the Japanese nationalist party and so on. Hopefully, it won't become anything too serious.

It was extremely easy to work there because they were friendly and they wanted to go out of the way to be friendly. As I said earlier they are very courteous and polite people. You know, we used to get taken out to geisha houses. I don't know how the Foreign Ministry afforded all of these places, but there were wonderful meals. They had a lot of money, clearly.

Q: Well, this was it, you know. It was rather embarrassing in the way they can entertain us and when they came to the United States we couldn't do the same for them.

BAAS: Absolutely not. We tried very hard while we were there to do what we could. I had a very good contact, for example, in one of the trading houses and he worked on resources at the trading house. I used to take him out to a nice French restaurant when I could. Finally, we got friendly enough so I could invite him over to our house and later they invited us to their house, which was unusual. An anecdote about that is we have a very good dinner. It was just my wife and I and he and his wife. We had done this poached fish which we would serve for lunch and serve cold with mayonnaise and it was very good, they really liked it. The lunch had gone very, very well. We were friends by this time and so it was good. I could see he was a little bit uncomfortable as we're getting ready to move to desert. I said, "Is there something I can do? Is there some problem?" He said, "Well, I really kind of hate to ask because it's not polite, but." I said, "No, please ask." And he said, "Well, would it be OK if I ate the cheek meat and the eye of the fish?" The head was still there. He said, "That's really a delicacy and I really like it." I said, "Oh sure, please. We're not going to eat them. Please go ahead." Of course, we wanted to make him as comfortable, as happy as we could. Again, that's something I had never even thought about. It was very hard for him to ask even though we were friends.

Q: At least he understood that that wasn't a part of our eating habits.

BAAS: Exactly, exactly. Otherwise, I would have offered it to him if I had known it was a delicacy in Japan, I would have offered it to him half an hour before. Anyway it worked out very well and so there we were. We tried to do what we could on our end. Again, it was a difficult thing because Japanese often, as you probably know, went out in the evening with their office mates and that's when a lot of the work got done. Getting a group together to come to a dinner or a reception or so on was difficult. It was often better to do lunches or often better for it to be a smaller affair rather than a bigger affair, but if you worked at it you could manage.

Q: I had the same thing when I was in Korea for three years. The guys would go out to a gising bar like a geisha house or often just to a drinking place. Then they would do business. And there would be one guy sort of the designated, not necessarily driver, but the guy that made sure everybody got home all right.

BAAS: It was the same in Tokyo.

Q: It was very hard for us because that type of drinking doesn't appeal and it was hard for us to get into it.

BAAS: Yes. It was hard for us too. It was not so much that we wanted to go out drinking with them because they were doing office staff, but to get them away, to find time when they didn't have to do that and could come over for dinner or for a reception or something like that, that was very difficult. Now if there were delegations in town then it was easier. Then they had a delegation as well, and so then it was work to come to a

reception. We could have a reception, you know, when a delegation doing automobiles or a delegation doing agriculture or something came to town, we could usually put together something pretty well, pretty nice and that would work out fairly well.

The other thing about Japan, I don't know if it is the same in Korea, you're very much responsible for your actions and the shame part of doing something bad is a very strong inducement not to do something wrong. If you're drunk and if you've been drinking somehow society excuses you. You can get away with stuff you wouldn't dream of doing normally, like throwing up in public, which you know, to an American is something that is to be avoided, shall we say. We're certainly less culturally sensitive in most areas than the Japanese are. This was something that happened all the time.

Q: Was sort of the skunk at the wedding or wedding reception or something, automobiles? This was a time when the Japanese were beating our pants off.

BAAS: No. It wasn't a skunk at the wedding. It was an issue, we talked about it, we worked on it and we worked it hard, and I think we worked it well as things show now we have Japanese factories in the United States which are employing people. They are now basically American cars.

Q: I just recently bought a Toyota and 60% of it was made in the United States.

BAAS: Absolutely. The parts are made here, the value added, or a lot of the value added, is American. It may not be entirely good from General Motors' or Ford's point of view, but on the other hand, the vehicles were coming in one way or another. Better to have a vehicle being bought in the United States that's 60% made in the United States rather than 100% made in Toyota, in Japan. It was a tough issue and I think we worked it and we managed to keep it from spoiling the relationship.

To come back to Mansfield, he was very, very good about keeping his eye on the overall relationship. He would say repeatedly, if I heard him say it once, I heard him say it a thousand times, "It is the most important U.S. bilateral relationship, bar none" and he said it over and over. You can debate whether that's true, you could argue Canada, you could argue Great Britain, you could argue lots of things, but there certainly were lots of arguments in Ambassador Mansfield's favor as well. The economic connection being just one of them, the Pacific and China, what's happening there, China as a rising power being another one. He said it so much that the Japanese I think believed him, and they should believe him because I think there it was meant to be believed. He kept his eye on that and he would say, "Even though we're having trouble in textiles, even though we're having a problem on automobiles, or even though we have a disagreement on intellectual property, it doesn't matter. I mean, what really matters is that this is an important relationship. This relationship is too important to be harmed by those types of things. I think Mansfield was incredibly respected by the Japanese because he was first of all old, he was distinguished, and he looked the part. Japanese respect old folk more, certainly more than Americans do.

The other thing that always impressed me about Mansfield is many Japanese would call on him at the embassy. His door was open to most people and so he would see people, heads of banks, and heads of trade associations, and ministers from this ministry and that ministry. We at the embassy would be asked to support these meetings with papers and of course, by attendance. When it was an economic guy I often went up to and sat in on these meetings. He was very gracious. He would introduce everyone. The first thing he always said to the Japanese was, "Could I get you some coffee?" They of course, said yes. They expected then, what would happen normally in Japan was a young girl would come in and sort of come across the floor on her knees and give coffee to the assembled masses. That's not what happened in Ambassador Mansfield's office. What happened in his office was the ambassador himself and I, if I was the junior person there which happened often, would go into his little alcove off the office and he would brew some coffee or have it brewed already. He would pour it into the cups, he would bring it out with my help and we would offer it to the Japanese. This, symbolically, blew the Japanese away. They couldn't figure out how the most important ambassador in town, of the most important country in the world, how this distinguished, knowledgeable, terrific guy could manage to serve them coffee. They just couldn't understand how it could happen. I think it gave them a very important lesson about the United States and about what we were all about. I thought that was always one of the most symbolic and wonderful things he ever did.

The other amusing thing is that we had a huge embassy so you had to be duty officer from time to time, but it wasn't very often. It was maybe once every nine months or so, maybe once or twice a year you were duty officer. It wasn't that hard because they're a lot of other sections dealing with issues. It wasn't like the officer in Africa, where you might actually have to do something. In Japan the phones worked so you just basically had to call someone and tell them that an American had just been arrested, please go take care of it. We had this whole system, but the one rule the duty officer was given was there was a twelve hour time difference or thirteen hour time difference between Tokyo and Washington. The one rule was: do not wake up the ambassador unless it's the President or something like that. Even then I suspect you should have tried to convince the President that maybe this wasn't the best time of day to call. There was one exception to that and that's what I found amusing. The exception was if the call was coming from Montana, then you could put it through to the ambassador. The implication, I'm not sure if it was said or unsaid, was that Mike Mansfield knew everybody in Montana and if someone from Montana wanted to call him, that was fine. What they didn't want was a bunch of guys sitting in a bar in Detroit worrying about automobiles, getting on the phone and calling the embassy and wanting to speak to the ambassador. That was one that the duty officer could handle. But if it was somebody from Montana and he wanted to speak to the ambassador well, damn it, he could speak to the ambassador. It didn't matter what time it was.

Q: Did you get any feel for the change in Japanese society, particularly vis-a-vis the role of women? Again I go back to my Korean experience which was kind of a scary time. We benefited a great deal because we did not make Korean women who were our local employees retire as soon as they got married and things like this. We got graduates who

were from the top group of women's universities and really excellent local employees and it was a good place to work because we treated women more or less normally. I was wondering whether you saw any change.

BAAS: Absolutely. The same thing clearly existed in Japan and it was really hard for women to get jobs in their Foreign Service. That meant there was a huge pool of capable women who would be willing to come work in an embassy. There were a lot of FSNs who were women. The FSN I worked most closely with was not, he was a male but that was OK. We had lots of women FSNs as well. It was clearly changing at this time. We were seeing the beginnings of women working in trading houses and factories and so on, well, not factories so much, in offices in a different role than just the tea lady. We were seeing women getting into the foreign ministry, the Gaimusho. In fact, at one point I went and gave a talk in English to the A-100 class of the Japanese Foreign Ministry because they were trying to practice and work on their English and so I gave a talk on, I can't remember what, some economic issue or some such thing. There were three women in that incoming class and they were amongst the first ones coming in as officers at that level. There were a couple who had come in sort of at mid-level, who had managed somehow against all odds to advance. They were coming in and it was hard for them, I think, because of what we talked about earlier. Going out in the evening was somehow more difficult for the women than the men. And would that change the dynamic of what was going on among men? Well, of course it would. Maybe that dynamic needed to change anyway. Just because the woman didn't drink herself under the table didn't mean that she couldn't participate in what was going on out there. So we saw a lot of that going on.

My wife had an interesting view of this as well. She was an economist by training and she had her bachelor's in economics at this point. Following me around the world, of course, she didn't have much of a career. She would find work where she could in each place. She managed to get a job working for a trading house Itochu. C. Itoh as we call it in English. She was working on computers and helping to sell computers, initially, to the army bases. It was support, it wasn't really an economics job, it was more a computer job and support for the computers on the bases. That was a natural thing for her to do. They spoke English, obviously, on the U.S. bases and she could support the computers there. She got interesting insight into the way the Japanese looked at women because she had to go on a trip to Misawa up in the north. Her boss, a Japanese male, asked her to get written permission from her husband that she could make this trip. Well, my wife, you can imagine, looked at him and said, "I don't need written permission from my husband for anything, certainly not to take a trip connected with my business." He said, "Well, what if he doesn't, how is he going to manage at home?" She said, "Well, he can manage. If he has to go out to eat every night, he'll go out and eat every night, but he'll manage. He's a big boy, he can handle it." " But you can't leave him alone." " Yes, I can, don't worry. He's going to know I'm going." It was that kind of thing.

Another very interesting thing, once more about women. She decided she was going to ride a moped, a motor scooter to work rather than drive or take the bus or metro because it was easier and we had one, and again, this was a huge issue. What? You can't do that,

you'll get hurt. Why don't you take our buses or our metro or something like that? Or the trains? And then where are you going to park it? Of course, she just went down and parked it at a garage. It was no problem, there was plenty of room. Anyway, that was another one of those issues, and I don't think they would've said the same thing if it was a man.

The other interesting thing was when she had to go out to these bases they always expected that she would fly. We, on the other hand, took advantage of these trips that she had to take to get to know northern or southern Japan. I would take some time off and we would go together and we would drive. The people were simply appalled. They said you can't drive. How can you possibly drive, you know? You have to be there by Monday morning. Well, we'll leave on Friday night and will be there by Monday morning. Oh, but the traffic, blah blah blah, anyway. We drove and that was just shocking because of course, you should fly and so on. We found it a wonderful way to see Japan and we would drive up there. We would stay in minshuku which are sort of like pensions in France and stay with a family and they would serve us food. It was great. We got to see something of the country, including the traffic jams, including the poor quality of roads, including whatever. It was a way to actually learn about the place we were living.

Another time she was invited, her whole office was invited, to a big office retreat. They all went down to a peninsula a little bit south of Tokyo and stayed at a place. Again, people brought their spouses and so I went along. Again, it was amusing. All this concern about, you know, you Americans probably don't want to eat these exotic shellfish. No, no, we'll try them, it's OK, we'll try. Of course, Japanese like most of the people in Asia eat everything from the sea. Some of them, I must say, were better than others of the things that we were offered. It was one of those interesting experiences.

Q: I talked to a lady who went on trade negotiations with the Department of Commerce. She was saying that she found our Foreign Service nationals, the Japanese who work for us, during negotiations were absolutely invaluable. They were always slipping notes to her giving her a true picture of what was going on and all of that.

BAAS: Yes, I think that's right.

Q: It wasn't a matter of divided loyalties. They were working the American side. They also knew sort of nuances in negotiations and could explain this to her.

BAAS: They knew the culture, they knew the language. Japanese has some interesting things about it. For example, again I learned enough Japanese to be able to understand a lot. One thing I learned is that Japanese will start out, if you put a proposal forward, the first phrase out of the Japanese negotiator's mouth is going to be, "We agree. This is an excellent proposal." but then you've got to listen to the "ngah", they say the Japanese equivalent of, "but" and then they say, "We think it could be improved by getting rid of the first and second part of the proposal or gutting the fourth part of the proposal and just keeping the full kernel of the third element of the proposal." So the real meat of what is happening isn't this up front praise, the real meat is what comes afterwards. I'm sure that

my FSN, the one that I worked most closely with, I'm sure he had a lot to do with me understanding that. Partly, I think, I'm a curious guy and was paying attention to what was going on, but also I got that from him.

The other thing was there's a word in Japanese, which I forget, which means I agree, which is often translated as I agree. It doesn't really mean I agree; it means something along the lines of I hear what you're saying. I understand what you're saying. It often gets translated as I agree. I agree. We had problems particularly with American businessman who were sometimes fairly unsophisticated in terms of what was going on, coming in and assuming they were having a set of negotiations like they would have in Chicago or New York. Sitting down and saying OK, this is what we want to do and the guy would say, I agree. Then there that would be the "ngah", we need to slightly change this; we need to reduce the quantity of money you're getting by 50%. You get really into the substance of the problem. We always told them, in the economic section, when we saw them, and I know they did in the commercial section when they saw the American businessmen, we'd say, "Be careful. Things are not always what they seem. An agreement is not going to be obtained in the first five minutes of your visit here and when the Japanese say this word, I agree, it doesn't really mean that they agree."

Q: While you were there did President Reagan come over?

BAAS: Yes, Bush came once and Reagan came.

Q: This was Bush as Vice President.

BAAS: Bush was Vice President. We had Reagan at least twice. Interestingly enough, Jerry Ford came once, I guess as a former president, but I didn't see him, I was down south doing something on Cuban nickel. Bush I remember very fondly because he was really good and very easy to work with. Of course, the embassy was very big and the hotels work in Japan very well and it was relatively easy to do a congressional. To go back to Gabon for just a second, when we had visitors in Gabon it was sometimes a problem. When I first was there there were essentially very few hotels and they were mostly full. I once had a visiting businessman who I ended up having to put, for lack of a better place, to put him in a clinic because it had a free bed. So he ended up sleeping in the clinic and I asked him in the morning how it had been. He said it was fine, but they kept coming by trying to change my bedpan.

You know you didn't have the same sorts of problems in Japan, it just functioned very well. People could get around. It was pretty easy to deal with big delegations. When Reagan was there, interestingly enough, I guess it was just after that I left Tokyo on vacation and went to China as part of a tour that had been organized by my parents in the United States, and my wife and I hooked up with this tour and we flew to Beijing and we stayed in the very new Great Wall Hotel. We were about the first people in it and I can't remember if we were arriving or just as we were leaving, we crossed with Reagan anyway. He came just before us or just after us to the same hotel and so I saw him in Tokyo and then saw him a week later in Beijing as well when I saw his caravan of cars

go flying by. Those were obviously extremely important visits. It underlined what Ambassador Mansfield said continuously that this was the most important bilateral relationship, bar none. Having the President come, which as you know doesn't happen to very many countries around the world, was extremely important and very useful.

Q: In 1984 you left.

BAAS: Yes. We did an interesting thing I'll just mention because you can't do it anymore. We took a freighter back from Yokohama to Long Beach and the Department paid for that, and we had a nice twelve relaxing days with nothing to do on the freighter except read books and eat. The good news was we also had our car, our new Japanese car with American specs in the hold of the freighter and so when we got off in Long Beach, we waited two hours and our car eventually came off and we were able to drive across the United States and we actually spent some time out West which was a big advantage because you didn't have to go both ways. We ended up going, driving to Newport, Rhode Island because I had been assigned to the Naval War College for senior training. I was part of the student body there. There were about six to ten civilians and a number of foreign students as well. I remember a Korean was in my seminar group. I spent a year, there basically just studying, getting a master's degree; they had just started a master's degree program there. It was extremely interesting. We lived in Providence and my wife went to Brown and got her master's degree in economics at Brown and I commuted. My hours were little easier. I didn't have to run back and forth as much. It was a very interesting course that they had at the Naval War College. I really learned a lot. The first session was sort of on the relationship between history and diplomacy, between war and peace anyway. Diplomacy and war I guess would be a better way of putting it. And so we studied the history of wars starting I think, with the Peloponnesian War and then going up through, I guess we must've done Vietnam. I don't know if we went beyond that. We spent basically a week on each of these wars and we would read, I don't know, we were given four, five hundred pages to read. You would read as much on that issue as you wanted and we had to do a paper on each war. It was extremely challenging, but also extremely interesting. The whole point they were trying to teach was, as Clausewitz said, that war and diplomacy are the same thing by a different name and when does one end and the other start? We did get into air power as well, of course, and the role of sea power. It was extremely challenging and interesting course. I really enjoyed that.

The second session we had was on economics and it was on the budget process and it was interesting, but much more interesting I would think for the navy captains than it was for the civilians there. It was kind of an intellectual challenge for me, but not a very useful one in terms of my future. After that we had, I forget what the third session was on, I think it was electives and I did something on China. I know I did a paper on the Horn of Africa, interestingly enough since I ended up there later. I didn't know that I would. I did this paper and I went to a couple of electives and I sort of did a self study which worked out very well. It was an extremely interesting year. I really learned a lot. And it was nice we got a master's degree at the end of it.

Q: I was just interviewing Les Alexander who said he went to the Naval War College. He said he assumed it was going to be like the National War College, sort of a very pleasant, laid back year and he said that it was a hard year. I mean they graded and you could flunk out. As you did, he got a great deal out of it, but laid back was not the word.

BAAS: No, it wasn't laid back. Newport is a very nice place, of course, and there's a lot of nice things you can do. We did take advantage of some of that. Even though we lived in Providence, still Rhode Island is a pleasant place to live. It was hard work. I thought and probably less felt something similar; I mean I was the State Department representative there and I was the only guy that a lot of these people were ever going to meet from State. I couldn't let down the home team, so to speak, and so I was dang well going to do as well in these courses as they did. As it turned out I was the only civilian in my year, one of six people in the whole class who graduated with honors. That was partly because I found the work interesting and it was partly because I didn't want to let down the State Department and give us a bad name.

One other interesting thing that happened there was I have a beard and had a beard at the time and sometime the Navy officers had beards as well. Admiral Zumwalt put out one of his famous "Z-grams" and decided that there would be no more beards in the Navy. I wasn't aware of that, for whatever reason. I just know that one day I showed up to class and I was the only one with a beard. The other beards had all disappeared, they'd all been shaved off overnight because the admiral had spoken.

The other thing that I learned very quickly, which served me later at the Army War College, was time is somewhat different in the Navy under the military than it is in civilian life. I think the State Department is not too bad in terms of this, but if you've got a meeting at 9:00 you know that sort of means you should show up at 9:00 or maybe 9:05. In the military if you've got a meeting at 9:00 that basically means you show up five to nine. It's a different culture. It's a little bit like being a Foreign Service Officer and learning a different culture.

Q: Did you find, the Navy has a reputation of being, it's the wrong term, more insular than maybe the Army which is out sort of with civilians, camped in foreign countries and all of that? The Navy tends to be either at sea or in a building at the Pentagon or something.

BAAS: No. I didn't find it very insular at all. Of course, this was the crème de la crème, the best of the best at their War College. Quite the opposite. They were very interested in finding out more about the world and some of them had a great deal of knowledge. Often it was superficial, in the sense that they had been to Marseilles for a port call or something like that, and so they kind of knew a little bit about Marseilles or something like that, but some of the guys were very thoughtful and had done a lot of reading. In the first session we had on the relationship between policy and war there were some very, very good questions and good discussion and good thoughts coming out of these Navy fellows' heads because they had seen the war part of it much more than I had. I had seen the diplomacy part much more than they had. It lead to some very good exchanges about

when you should go, and as we often see in policy, you'll see the State Department guys were anxious to go to war, quicker to go to war than the military, who know what it means to see a body that has been shot.

Q: And also, I think too, there's a general feeling for a State Department person, well, you know, a war could be very effective because you know, diplomacy isn't always all that effective. The military person knows that war isn't that effective.

BAAS: It isn't always that effective and people get killed in the meantime. It's easy for us as diplomats, I think, who don't see wars firsthand in a way, it's easier for us to say we should go fight than it is for a military guy who saw his buddy get shot in a foxhole.

Q: And also I think their seeing how right now we're very heavily engaged in Iraq I guess, what was supposed to be a few weeks' excursion.

BAAS: Well, of course, that was because nobody considered what was going to happen once they got there.

Q: This was put together by a bunch of civilians. It turned out to be a can of worms. Well then in 1981, wither?

BAAS: In the summer of 1981 yes. No, 1985. In the summer of 1985 I went off to be DCM in Lomé, Togo. Fortunately, they looked for good assignments for people who had just finished senior training, and fortunately Lomé was open, and fortunately, the ambassador, Owen Roberts, chose me to go there. It was very interesting, actually. It was a slightly bigger post than Gabon, although arguably it should have been maybe smaller than Gabon. There was certainly less of an economy. We had, let me see, the ambassador, the DCM, we had a consular officer, an economic officer, and a couple of communicators, a USIS officer, and we had an AID officer, of course. We probably had a total of ten American employees there or so and then a bunch of contractors working with AID, that was the big thing, the aid program. We had the big aid program; we also had some military cooperation. Did we have a defense attaché, let me think. Must of had one, but I can't remember. Strange, I'm not sure we had a defense attaché or not. I think we didn't. I think he came over from Abidjan. We did have some military to military cooperation. One time, when I was chargé, a U.S. ship came in to Lomé for a visit and it was a little cruiser or something. I had the Mayor of Lomé there and the Minister of Defense with me and we all trooped up on board the ship and were treated with appropriate honors and stuff. Bam. There went the American national anthem and then came a song that I had never heard before in my life, and I feared that this was some previous Togolese national anthem, which in fact it turned out to be. I said to the ship's captain, "Please tell me that that was the ship's song or something like that." He said, "No, no. That's the Togolese national anthem." I said, "No, it's not." I turned to the fellow from the ministry of defense; I don't think I asked the minister and I said, "What was that?" He said, "That was the national anthem of the previous regime, the Olympio regime." I said, "Whoops." And then of course, I went around to make all the apologies. What had happened was the Pentagon, their library had not been updated, and the ship

had been given this tape to play as the Togolese national anthem and it was wrong. That's somewhat more serious than it would be in normal countries because the previous regime had been overthrown by the current regime and there was no love lost between partisans of one or the other. It was an insult. It was taken with OK understanding, with understanding by the Togolese, I would say.

Q: Talk a little about the situation in Togo, the government. What was going on at the time?

BAAS: The economy wasn't much. First of all, the government was headed by a guy named Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who just recently died. He was a sergeant in the army and had taken power in the coup, the first coup in Africa in 1962 which had occurred right outside the American Embassy. The house of the President, the first President Olympio was right next to the American Embassy and during this coup apparently Olympio had been hiding in his house and then when they came to his house he went over the wall into the American Embassy compound and hid in an old fort or something that was in back of our motor pool. Finally, apparently in the morning, we discovered he was in there. It's a little unclear; they either went in and pulled him out, which would've been a violation of all sorts of conventions or he came out of his own volition. He was standing right in front of the gate end of the street and across the street when I was there, was the USIS center. At the time, the USIS officer was living in the USIS center and was co-located in his work place. The story at the embassy was that that person saw what was going on early in the morning across from his house and Eyadéma and Olympio were arguing and talking. The officer then apparently went to his little kitchen to get his teapot or something because it was boiling, and when he came back Olympio was dead or dying; he had been shot, and Eyadéma and the rest of the folks had taken off. You know, they're always reports that Eyadéma had done the deed himself or he had had it done or whatever. I always thought we missed a terrific opportunity to know exactly what had happened, and in fact we did. Whether the person should have gone outside and tried to argue diplomatic immunity for Olympio or what not is an arguable point, but he certainly should have stayed at the window and at least been able to report what was going on and let his teapot whistle for however long it wanted to whistle. I always regretted that.

Anyway, Eyadéma was there, he had taken power in this coup in 1962. He had been an army sergeant and he was a northerner, as was the case in much of Africa, in Francophone Africa. The French had picked out a group, often a coastal group, to be the one to work with and that in fact is what happened in Togo with the Ewe who lived on the coast and had been the sort of administrators during the colonial period. The first president, Olympio was an Ewe. Eyadéma came from the north from Pya and he had risen through the army and I think, probably correctly had seen that the northerners were not getting any fair shakes at all. The army was the only thing that was really available to them at the time in order to advance. They couldn't participate or be in the government in any other way. That made some sense but, of course, it was a mistake from the southern point of view since it meant that all the armed force was in the hands of the northerners. They expected that they would be protected, because no coup would be allowed by the colonial power or by the tradition that there should be no coups or whatever. Clearly they

miscalculated, at least in many countries, at least in Togo. He used his forces to take over and not surprisingly, the government then became more northern-oriented. We had northern ministers; we had northern people in the bureaucracies, and so on. Actually, it was more balanced. The advantage the southerners had was that many of the educated people were southern, and they still maintained some roles in the bureaucracy and among the ministers, for lack of anyone better. Of course, there were northerners because there were some very capable guys. Eyadéma was very much a dictator, he ruled the country pretty much the way he wanted to rule. There had been an assassination attempt against him a few years previously which he had survived and he'd used that to add to his luster, an aura of invincibility and so on. He was not by any means an intellect, he was a pragmatic guy, and he wasn't stupid by any means either. He was certainly sort of street smart, he knew his way around and he knew how to govern, he was a good politician. He knew how to govern and as I say, he gave ministries to various groups in the country. Togo is a small country and probably only had a population of 5 million. People pretty much knew, I mean you can pretty much know, everybody in the country. He knew everyone who needed to be known.

Again, we had the usual regional issues going on. Chad was a big issue when I was there. I think Hissène Habré was leaving or was coming, I can't remember anymore. We had various Chadians coming through and Eyadéma saw himself as sort of a mediator with the Chadians and we got to see some of them and report on some of them.

Another thing we were worried about was the North Koreans in Africa at this point. We had a great minor success in Togo. We had North Korean and South Korean embassies and the North Koreans ended up having their wings severely clipped. I think the ambassador got sent home because they were smuggling to support themselves. They were smuggling beer off the beach right in front of the town of Lomé and I guess probably taking it over to Nigeria where they then sold it on the local market. And they got caught, gee, that was really too bad.

Chad was a big issue. The big regional issue for Togo, of course, was Nigeria because it was so close and so big and Nigerians were all over the place. Even though they were separated from Nigeria by Benin, still it was a big issue for them and they were concerned about that. Of course, Ghana was next door where the president was Jerry Rawlings, who was basically ethnically like the southerners in Togo, and so was always distrusted.

There was, in fact, when I was there and I happened to be chargé, there was an invasion in the summer, I guess it was 1986 from Ghana. The city of Lomé, the capital of Togo is right on the Ghanaian border and there was an invasion from Ghana into Lomé to try to overthrow the government. I was called in to see Eyadéma, whom I knew fairly well, and the French ambassador had just left and I went in. He basically told me what had happened and what was going on, that these tanks had come across the border and they had neutralized most of it and he had some French planes up in Pya, at the airport in Pya, who were going to fly over and so on. He had his planes up north and the French had offered their support and, of course, he also wanted U.S. support. He was really afraid, he

had heard there were tanks massed on the Ghanaian border and they were going to come across the border. There were no tanks yet, but people had come across and were shooting up the radio station and stuff like that. But his French military adviser was there, a general from Paris who had been assigned to be his advisor. Eyadéma said, "Look, what should I do? What do you think I should do now?" I said, "Well, look, Mr. President, I'm not a military man. I'm just a diplomat here. It seems to me if you've got these French planes up at Pya and you've got reports that there are Ghanaian tanks across the border, the first thing you could do is fly the planes over the border and see what's down there. Maybe you'll be able to see whether there are tanks down there or not, rather than send your army into Ghana and make this worse than it is." After saying the normal words about we didn't accept the invasion of one African country by another African country, he looked at his French general and said, "What do you think, general?" The general said, "Yes, it makes sense to me. We can do that." The general went to the telephone and called up north and ten minutes later we are still talking and I hear these jets go flying over because we're right on the border, go flying over. It turned out, when I got home, it really scared the heck out of my wife because we lived right near the border.

The office director for West African Affairs at the time was Ambassador Howard Walker who had just left Togo, after being ambassador there, and so he knew Togo fairly well. He also, unfortunately for me, had a daughter, who was a university student I believe, and was doing some sort of studying, not a Fulbright but something like a Fulbright in Togo and was living with an FSN family there. You could understand the man. This was his daughter. He was calling me every half an hour on the hour to find out how his daughter was and, of course, we discovered that his daughter had gone with this family to the eastern part of the country on the Benin border and I reported that. I kept having to tell him on the telephone, "Ambassador, she is not here. She is in whatever the town was on the east border. As you know that is 40 miles away from Ghana, nothing is going on there, she's fine, she's safe, we're going to leave her there because she's safer there than she would be here." Anyway, he finally got the message on that and again it's a small embassy and you're dealing with a government that wants to speak to the United States. You're dealing with making sure that all the Americans are OK, you're dealing with calls from people more important or less important, who want to know about their family and it was a very busy time. We managed to get through it and again we used it as a way to sort of, I think, to postpone democracy for a while.

Q: How was Owen Roberts as an ambassador? He and I came into the Foreign Service in the same A-100 class.

BAAS: He was a very good guy. I really liked him a lot. He was a terrific ambassador, he would listen to his DCM. He was one of these, I would say, old school ambassadors who would show his DCM what he was going to send out. Owen, as you know, could be excitable at times. He was really committed to things and he wanted to put everything right. He wanted to do everything he could. He was very much an activist. He saw this as a way to get things done. I can't remember what the issue was once. Washington had done something stupid, really stupid. They canceled an aid project or done something stupid. He was really mad. He wrote a cable back to Washington. It was a scorcher. To

his credit he came and he showed it to me. I said, "Listen, I don't think we ought to send this. I certainly don't think we ought to send it now. Why don't we wait on it, leave it overnight, and let's come back in the morning and take a look at it. We are six hours ahead and you can get it off in the morning if you still want to send it. Let's see what we think. Washington will have it tomorrow morning, as they would if we sent it now." He took my advice. We came in in the morning and looked at it again and he said, "No, you're right. I've calmed down now. This is not going to help us do whatever it is we want to do." We ended up writing a much more dispassionate cable which, as I recall, helped do whatever it was we wanted to do.

He was a great guy to work for, very friendly, we had a very good relationship with him and his wife. Remember, this was before computers were a big thing and so you still, I still, did drafts on yellow pieces of paper and typed them out and then he would go over them and then the secretary would do them. It was a different time. He was easy to work for, very easy to work for, and was very good about embassy morale, making sure that everyone felt part of the team. Of course, it was easy in that it was a small embassy, but he didn't have to do it and he did it. That was very much to his credit and it was really a pleasure working for him.

One other personnel kind of issue: our AID director at the time was a guy named Myron Golden. He was African-American and his wife was also African-American and her name was Dovey Golden. Again you find out a lot about things in the strangest ways. One time I was with some Togolese friends, I guess at a dinner or something like that. The guy next to me, I think he was from the Foreign Office, his name was Dovey. We were talking and I'm very interested in names. We're talking about names and why he was named Dovey. It turns out he was named Dovey because in Togolese, I guess southern Togolese, he was an Ewe I believe, and in the Ewean society, the first child after twins was always named Dovey. I went in the next morning and related this to Dovey Golden and she said, "Oh, that's unbelievable." She said, I'm the first child after twins and the tradition in my family was that the first kid after twins was named Dovey." I said "Well, what we've learned today is your family, obviously, came from this part of Africa when they were brought over to the United States as slaves and it's the same exact tradition."

I have often thought that one of the awful things about slavery, beyond the obvious, awful things about slavery, is that the African-Americans really don't know where they're from. They kind of vaguely know they're from Africa. I mean, I know I'm from the Netherlands, I know where my parents came from. Most African-Americans, unfortunately, don't. It's the rare case like Roots were you find out, for whatever reason, that the family came from Gambia, or in this case of Dovey Golden that she probably came from originally from the Slave Coast, not surprisingly in West Africa.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Togolese? Did you get together with the Togolese? Was it an easy society?

BAAS: The Togolese, I would say, Africans are generally very, very nice people. The Togolese are the nicest, the best of the Africans. Ghanaians are probably a close second. The Togolese are incredibly nice and open people. There was a lack of educated Togolese, and the ones that there were were very busy. The demands on their time were great. But there weren't too many that were important, so it wasn't that big a deal. I had the director of the Americas at the Foreign Office, and I had the guy that did international organization affairs, because Togo was a member of the Security Council. Those were my two main contacts in the Foreign Office. I basically did what I could to get them to dinners and stuff and they came.

Two comments on both of these guys to show something about society and how it was changing perhaps. One of these guys was a terrific guy, he had been an ambassador and he came over quite often and one time I invited him to come to a reception or something. He wasn't able to come. He called me, very apologetic that he couldn't come and I said, "Well, why not? I'm sorry you can't come, what's going on?" He said, "I have to go up to my home village and kill a chicken." I said, "Why?" He said, "I have to honor the spirit of my mother" or I can't remember the exact reason, but something like that. I said, "Ambassador, forgive me, but I was led to believe that you are a Catholic and you know, you're a practicing Catholic and a very good Catholic." "Oh, yes I am, but you know, traditions exist here and are part of my life too." He said, "I don't really believe it as a religion, like we did in the past, but it is part of my tradition and part of my culture and that's what I have to do." And so even though this area was well-known for voodoo it was probably an ancient voodoo rite of some kind and even though he was a Christian, it didn't matter. He was still Togolese, not surprisingly.

Another case we had was the guy who was the head of the international organizations part of the Foreign Ministry. He would come very often for dinner. In typical American fashion we would invite wives, of course, and in typical African fashion I think this made them somewhat uncomfortable and they never knew quite what to do with that invitation. So we would invite this fellow and his wife and we never knew who was going to show up. It turned out he had two wives. One of whom he had married when he was in school in Belgium and so she was a Belgian lady. And the other one he had married either before or after in Togo, a traditional village lady. It was interesting because, obviously, the seating was affected by this. If you showed up with two wives it was different than if you showed up with one wife. He never did show up with two, thank goodness, at my house. Where you seated his wife was dependent upon which one he showed up with. The one wife was fairly sophisticated, a Belgian lady, and the other one, not her fault but she was a relatively, I think she was an uneducated village woman, who spoke French fortunately. You could have a reasonable conversation about agriculture and children, but after that you were pretty much done. So several times when he was invited to the house and at the last minute he would show up with one or the other or none and you'd have to change the seating table accordingly. You'd sort of have two or three seating charts in mind so you could deal with this. He was a very good contact and worked very well with us.

We did the same thing, the sort of thing we had done in Gabon in terms of having double demarches made, both in New York and the capital to sort of get them to do the work and

to get them to vote on the issues the way we would like to have them to vote. But again it was one of those countries where, even more so I would say than Gabon, maybe because it was a different time, plus it was several years later and Eyadéma was very much the man. When you really had something important to do, you had to see Eyadéma. If it was a really big issue that meant the ambassador had to go call on Eyadéma, and that made it hard in a way to do.

Economically, the big thing that Togo had was phosphates. It was the one sort of mineral they had. Morocco has phosphates and Gabon has phosphates and Tunisia has phosphates and that's about it. That was one issue we dealt with a little bit, but it wasn't a front burner issue for Washington. We had the occasional businessman who was interested in it. The other things that they had were coffee and cocoa, but in much lesser amounts than Ghana, or the Ivory Coast. They were much more a follower in those areas and therefore our embassy was much more of a follower than an active participant. And they had hardwoods, some of which were interesting but in very small amounts.

What was interesting was, of course, the political dynamic in Togo between the northerners and the southerners. The southerners were used to being in power, the northerners were now in power. The southerners of course, wanted to get power back and avenge their dead president, Olympio. Thrown into that mixture you had the traditional chiefs, who were very much like the Ghanaian traditional chiefs running around with all this gold on their heads and wearing these crowns and stuff, and really not having very much power except for kind of moral and historic traditional power. How they related, particularly in the court system, was an interesting thing. We also had the push by the United States to bring more democracy and Eyadéma didn't have any real interest in doing that, afraid that the south would win. They might not have.

And then the basic ongoing problem with Ghana. When I was there, I was there for two years, and for the first three or four months the border with Ghana was open. We didn't go to Ghana because we were busy discovering Togo and figured we would do Ghana later on. Then, before and after the invasion, the border was closed because the tensions between the two countries were so high. Even though I lived within sight of Ghana, and saw it every day on my way to the office from my house, I never set foot in Ghana. Actually, I stuck my foot across the border, put my finger across the border just to say I had touched Ghana. I never got to Ghana which I really regret because it was right there. It's one of the few African countries I haven't been to.

Q: Did France play much of a role?

BAAS: Very much. The French ambassador certainly saw himself as the honorary consul, not the honorary consul, the pro consul. There were French people all over. I mentioned earlier the military adviser to the president was a French general and not just any old French general, this was a big general. The French trained the Togolese army, and the French I think, were the Togolese Navy, basically, and the French were certainly the Togolese Air Force, although these things were becoming more Togolese as we went along.

One of the other things I did, just to divert a minute, we had this program, the IMET (International Military Education and Training) program, a military training program. We tried to get guys from the Togolese military to go take the IMET program in the United States. We were successful. We sent two or three or four a year, however it was very hard. The Chief of Staff, who was a northern guy, was my contact on the IMET program. He was very, very hard to find, to pin down and to have a meeting with and decide, to check off and say yes, OK, these three guys can go. But we finally did get them to go and the problem we had was when they came back they were looked on with suspicion by the French because they had been to training in the American military, and therefore they may have been infected by something in the United States, and they certainly hadn't been to training in France. They were looked at with some suspicion and so in a way it was a very good program and it was a good thing we did it, but I'm not sure we benefited as much as we should have benefited from it because the French tended to shove these folks aside. Of course, once that became obvious to the Togolese, the best people didn't come because you know, they didn't want to be shunted aside, they weren't stupid.

The French very much thought Eyadéma should follow their ideas and basically do what they wanted him to do. That would not have been entirely bad from the United States' point of view. I think we would have been less patronizing about it or less arrogant about it, the French were both, if Eyadéma had done sort of what the French wanted it would've been OK for our general political interests in the country. I think letting the French take the lead was a very easy thing and the right thing for the United States to do. We simply didn't have the kind of interests in Togo that required us to be the first one. I think the ambassador worked very hard, both the ambassadors I had there, worked very hard to develop a relationship with the French ambassador that was mutually satisfactory. I worked at same time with the French DCM. Then when I was chargé I knew the French ambassador very well and was a guest at his house at dinner and so on. It was an ongoing, probably the most, well, the second most important contact in country after the President. It was still very much a country that was run almost like you might imagine Tammany Hall running New York City 100 plus years ago.

I once had an American woman come to see me. I guess I was serving as acting consul because the regular consul was gone. She came to see me and she said, you know, she was married to one of the ministers and she said, "My husband is beating me and what can I do?" I said, "Well, I can give you advice but there are limits to what we can do in this place. Your husband is a minister and not only that, a very powerful minister and you could leave." And she said, "Yes but I want to take the children and he won't let me take the children." I said, "Well, there's not a whole lot we can do. We can make a representation, but that will probably be counter-productive. If we go talk to the President, or indeed the minister, do you think he's going to listen to us and do what we want?" "Well, no." I said, "Well, if you want to go at it off the record, the best thing to do is find a time and walk across the border to Ghana and then you have some hope, take your kids and go across the border to Ghana and sneak across." Whether she did that or not, I don't know but sometimes you get into these situations. You couldn't help her. You knew her husband was the third most powerful person in the country and if he wanted to

beat her that was pretty awful, but there wasn't a lot that we were going to be able to do to help her out, unfortunately.

Another interesting story. We had the Peace Corps in Togo, which was good. Actually, we also had Peace Corps in Gabon, it started while I was in Gabon. The Peace Corps was a very good program, one of our best programs I think overseas. It probably doesn't get as much credit as it deserves. We had the Peace Corps in Togo and we used to go around and see the Peace Corps volunteers. They just brought so much to their villages and they were America for their villages. One time in Togo I remember I had a guy come up to me and say, "Oh, you are an American." I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you know John?" I said, "John? John who?" He said, "Well, I can't remember his last name but he's from Chicago." I said, "Well, no, I don't think so. Why should I?" "Well, he was a Peace Corps volunteer here three years ago and he was a great guy and everyone remembers him. You know, I just wondered if you knew him?" I said, "Well, the United States is a big place. Chicago probably has a million Johns in it." I couldn't resist the pun. That's the kind of impact that they had.

One time the Canadians also had some volunteers there. A Canadian corporal or whatever they called him was injured and had his leg practically severed. They did not have an embassy in Lomé. It turned out that I think it was the ambassador, their ambassador in Ghana or maybe it was their DCM, was there at the time this happened. She came to see me and said, "We've got this real problem and we've got to get this guy out of the country and evacuate him. The best way for us to do that is from Accra and I didn't bring any passports with me. I don't have any passport forms. I don't know what to do. I can't do anything here. He doesn't have any extra pages in his passport to get a visa to go into Ghana." I said, "Look, this is probably, I know, this is not what we're supposed to do, but I went into the embassy and I got some extra pages for an American passport, we stuck them in the Canadian passport, she went to the Ghanaian Embassy, got a visa for him to go to Ghana. He went off to Ghana. Six months later I got a really nice letter from the Foreign Ministry, or whatever it's called in Ottawa, saying thank you very much for taking your time to help this individual. He made it to Canada, he's doing well, he's alive, he's been saved, blah, blah, blah.

About the same time I got an incredibly nasty letter from the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs saying you're not supposed to put U.S. pages in foreign passports. Slapping my hand and saying that this was a terrible thing to do, and I wrote back a very polite letter saying I knew it was wrong when I did it, but it seemed like the only way to get this kid out of the country. It seemed like it's a friendly country, Canada. It's not like putting it in a Russian passport. The results had been what everyone would have hoped. I was sorry that I had broken the rules, but I had gone into it knowing I was breaking the rules. What choice did I have? That was the end of that. I'm sure the Assistant Secretary, whoever he or she was at the time, didn't write the letter. Some bureaucrat somewhere had been somehow offended that an embassy had taken our valuable blank pages and put them in a another country's passport.

Q: Well, talk about 1987.

BAAS: Yes, in 1987 I went to Zaire as DCM.

Q: How long were you there?

BAAS: For four years, so until 1991. I extended; it was a great post.

Q: How did you get the job?

BAAS: Bill Harrop was our incoming ambassador. He basically picked me. I was looking for another overseas DCM job, having been DCM in Togo. I guess he did what people do, I don't remember. I was in Togo so I don't remember actually interviewing with him, although we may have talked on the phone, we probably did, but I don't remember that. I think he just talked to some other people, probably Owen Roberts, who was my ambassador, my first ambassador in Togo and, I don't know, some people in the African Bureau. Anyway, he offered me the job. I also don't suppose there were huge lines of people trying to get to Zaire. There are certainly some who wanted to be DCM, no doubt about that but, again, it's not like it's Paris. Little do people know. He offered me the job and I accepted.

Q: Before we get to American relations with Zaire, what was the sort of the economic and political situation in Zaire when you got there in 1987?

BAAS: President Mobutu was very much into control. He was allegedly a creature of the Americans or the Belgians or both. He was very, very much in control and looked to the United States clearly for support. We were very active supporting UNITA in Angola and a lot of that assistance went through Zaire which of course, made Zaire more important to us.

Q: Could you explain that?

BAAS: Yes. UNITA, I forget what the letters stand for, but it was one of the three original liberation movements in Angola that all fought the Portuguese and then intermittently fought each other, but at this time after independence basically the MPLA group of liberation fighters had taken over the government. They were basically based in Rwanda and I think were largely mulatto, whereas the UNITA group, which I think in some ways represented the larger portion of the population, was based in the southwest and was not happy with how it had come out after independence, and so continued to fight the war in order to try to obtain power. This was also obviously colored by the Cold War. The MPLA was "socialist" or worse or better, take your pick. UNITA was "in favor of democracy " although often I think we believed our own propaganda as much as anything else. The Soviets were more less supporting the government of Angola.

Q: Cuba was involved?

BAAS: Cuba also had troops in there, of course. Cuba had sent troops at one point basically to help keep the MPLA government in power, asked by the Soviets no doubt. They must've paid most of their bills. So you had UNITA fighting them. There was also another little group, FLNA, which was based up near the Zairian border, near Kinshasa, the Kinshasan part of the Zairian border, but that had sort of faded out as time had gone on. It was basically UNITA against the government.

In fact, just parenthetically before I forget, we had an interesting situation in Angola. Cabinda being part of Angola, but separated from Angola by Zaire, also was where most of the Angolan oil was. We had a lot of American companies active in Cabinda pumping oil, all of which revenues went to the Angolan government. You had a situation of UNITA which was supported by the Americans wanting to stop this flow of oil and the flow of resources to the central government and attacking or planning attacks on Cabinda. So who was guarding the American oil companies in Cabinda but Cuban troops. So you had Cuban troops guarding American oil producers from attacks by an American supported liberation movement. I think it's a very typical kind of situation one gets into in many countries of the world, but it seems like more often in Africa than perhaps other parts of the world.

Q: OK, the rule of Mobutu. How was this, what was he doing in his country?

BAAS: People have very strong opinions on Mobutu. You will hear everything from: he was raping the country and stealing all the money and didn't do a thing for his country, to he was a savior of the country and held the place together and without Mobutu the place would have descended into chaos. The latter was the line he believed, of course. I basically think both are true. Clearly, Mobutu was a brilliant politician. He had a very disparate, large country, bigger than France, or as big as the United States east of the Mississippi, so that's a fairly good chunk of territory. In addition, it had rudimentary communications, a very good river system, roads almost nonexistent, or that at least had descended into disrepair ever since the Belgians left in 1960. Airlines were good, and the way to get around was on a lot of these airlines or rivers; phone communication was very minimal, even to call from one side the capital to the other side. In fact, the first time I ever ran into a cell phone was in Kinshasa, it was absolutely indispensable in early 1987, the early years of cell phones, and we had one that looked almost like a lunch box. It was the only way you could get a hold of people on the other side of town, short of calling up to Europe and calling back down, which was not really very easy either. There were, give or take, 400 different ethnic groups or tribes, or call them what you want, who spoke something like 200 or 300 different languages. There were three or four principle languages but still, you had all these little groups and so it wasn't an easy place to hold together. The Belgians had left it prostrate at the time of independence. I think there were something like five university graduates when the Congo became independent in 1960. He had to play off all these groups and keep himself in power, and so I think he was a brilliant politician.

Economically, it was a completely different story. He viewed, somewhat in the tradition of African chiefs, that the wealth of the country basically was his wealth and belonged to

him. He, as the chief, would dispense largess as he saw fit and willing. There was no concept like we have in the United States that somehow all this, all the wealth of the United States, belongs to the people of the United States in some kind of broad way. We have our own private sector which has its own issues with that as well.

When people say, you know, at the end when he died that he had a fortune of, pick your number, X billion dollars, I don't believe it. I don't think he did. He simply couldn't govern by keeping all of his money in bank accounts. What's probable is that he spent, he took, he used, stole is strong, he wouldn't have said he was stealing, he would have said, as I said, that he was entitled as a chief but anyway that he appropriated, shall we say, several billions of dollars, maybe five maybe ten, who knows? Most of this he spent. Some of it clearly on expensive wines and private planes and Mercedes and so on, but a lot of it to pay his security forces to do things, to buy Mercedes for ministers, things like that. To do things that a state would normally do, paying security forces, but which in the absence, if you want, of a Zairian state, or the ineffectiveness of the Zairian state, basically was all concentrated in Mobutu's hands. Of course, this gave him certain political power and made people beholden to him and dependent on him, which he obviously played for all the political worth that he could.

Q: What was happening by the time you got there to the wealth producing part, the copper mines and the other things that were going on?

BAAS: Well, copper, of course, was the big thing and that's another one of their problems because copper was in the southeast part of the country in what's called Shaba, with the capital at Lubumbashi, the old Elizabethville. There were diamonds in south-central part around Mbuji-Mayi, and then you had oil, between Angola and Cabinda there was a little bit of oil there which was also useful. And there were all kinds of other things: palm oil, wood, lots of agricultural products still being produced, even though not nearly as systematically as they had been under the Belgians, but you had things like rubber and you had things like palm nuts and all sorts of stuff.

Let's look at copper. I think the situation was basically that the copper industry was still perking along fairly well. Mobutu was smart enough to realize that this was a big moneymaker for the country and, therefore, for him. He put people in charge of it, well, he let a lot of Belgian and other foreign technicians be involved in running the place and the people he had in charge of it were, I think, able to pocket some things for themselves. They clearly knew that the patron had an eye on them from Kinshasa as well. I think it was functioning fairly well. We periodically visited the mines down there and they seemed to function in a very normal way. It was a big consumer of American products, everything from Caterpillar to machinery of a variety of kinds.

The diamond mines were an interesting case as well. Copper is copper and it's not so easy to steal; it's pretty big, it's bulky, it comes as an ore, you've got to refine it and all kinds of stuff. Diamonds are small little things and you can stick them in your pocket and take them with you. The company, I think, was called NIBA that ran the diamond production. They had a huge compound which was walled off and sealed off and would

be like, I don't know, the CIA or something like that; it had that kind of security. Even worse, in a way, because the workers would come in and they would be checked and then when they came out in the afternoon they were strip searched, they were checked everywhere, hidden body cavities, and whatnot to make sure they had not secreted any diamonds. Everything was accounted for by X number of different people and so it was very clear what was happening to the diamonds. There clearly was some slippage and some diamonds were going missing. It was almost inevitable. They made it so hard that the people who worked there, I think, basically, were pretty honest or were forced to be honest.

Of course, what you saw outside the immediate mine was you saw lots of independent operators. Just people like you and me, but a lot poorer, who were out there digging in the muck and making big caves and open pit diamond mines and looking for diamonds, and indeed they found diamonds. If you found one diamond, it was your life, you were set for life, in a way. Or you could have been. Of course, then there was the shady middleman, often Lebanese, who was involved in buying diamonds in the field and had ready cash and then would take them up to Kinshasa to sell them. Also there was a big problem down there as well. Lots of accidents. There was no OSHA around, a health and safety administration. There was nothing like that, so you had cave ins and people getting drowned and crushed and all that kind of thing. It was find diamonds or starve for many of them.

Again Mobutu got his share of the diamond mining, as he did for the oil as well, and the rest went to the Zairian state, which Mobutu could, of course also take if he wanted. There was a real functioning economy. What people have said for years about Zaire and probably still say about Congo, which succeeded Zaire, economically it had tremendous potential. If I heard the word potential once when I was in Zaire I must've heard it a million times, a thousand times anyway. People were always talking that way and it was true. It had tremendous potential. It just needed a reasonable government. It got a government from Mobutu that held the country together and provided more or less peace and security, as long as you stayed out of politics or at least stayed off the wrong side of politics. It didn't provide real economic opportunity and it didn't provide an economic system that had any chance of growing beyond where it was. That was really sad because one could have used these resources and developed all sorts of small industries, agriculture, agricultural processing, lots of stuff you could've done. Things like suppliers for the big mining companies and users of some of the stuff that the mining companies produced. You could've done a lot of stuff. The best they could do really, was some artisanal diamond mining, and the artisanal guys using malachite and ivory and making beautiful carvings and things like that. But nothing organized, or nothing really, that was going to lead to a cycle of economic growth.

Q: While you were there I think over the years they had Shaba One and Shaba Two and you had a series of other revolts. By the time you got out there was there anything sort of simmering out there in the bush?

BAAS: No, there was nothing. By the end there was. When I got there, basically you heard things. Interestingly enough, the one guy you heard about was Kabila, who ended up being president after Mobutu's death or just before Mobutu's death, but he was a clown. He was sitting out in Tanzania or something and really wasn't even a factor any more although he tried to maintain that he still was. I traveled all over the country and never, ever saw anything at all or felt in any kind of danger. Mobutu provided security. You gotta give him that. He provided security. In some ways the most dangerous part of the country, the times I felt most at threat, thank God being a diplomat it wasn't serious, but when you would run into Mobutu's security guys many of them were thugs. If they were, particularly away from the capital, they had options of shaking down people. You'd get stopped and people wanted to look at your papers. It was really just an excuse to hit you up for a fine of $10.00 equivalent or whatever. That wasn't a big deal for us, being diplomats we were able to avoid most of it. It was a big deal for the Zairian citizens who didn't have that much money.

Just to show you what kind of problem it was, at the embassy we had our own security force which was part of the presidential guard, (DSP) special presidential division. Part of that was given to the embassy to use and we used them for our own security and we used them when we had any problems. We would call them up and they would come out and talk to their colleagues and say basically leave the Americans alone because they're with us and we are with them and we're protecting them. When one of our staff or diplomats was being shaken down by a DSP or some other sorts of security guys, we just called up to the embassy and got our guys out there and they'd take care of it.

They also provided security for us at the embassy, beyond the Marines, which was extremely useful. We were still an embassy, we were on a main road, we didn't have anything like a one hundred foot setback, and if there was any demonstration it was always going to be against us whether the government condoned it or didn't condone it. It was often condoned by the government when they wanted to send us a message of some kind or another. Why did the DSP come to the embassy and agree to do this? The guys loved this duty because they got paid on time and they got meals. The problem with Mobutu's system was he would sometimes forget to pay his security forces and so there'd be a guy sitting out in the western part or the eastern part of the country and they hadn't been paid in several months. They were going to get paid eventually, but in the meantime they had a cash flow problem. They had to deal with that. That's the problem when you have one guy doing it, rather than a bureaucratic system. It depends on the guy remembering what he's doing and caring enough to send the money out to whomever.

Q: When you got there Bill Harrop was the ambassador?

BAAS: No, in fact, I got there before Bill. He and I were basically coming in the same summer. He also started in 1987, but obviously being an ambassador, he had to go through a confirmation process and so on. When I got there, Brandon Grove was still there and he'd been there I think three years, and he and I overlapped for a very short time, maybe ten days or something like that. Then he left and I was chargé for, I want to say, three months but it may have been four, I don't remember. I was chargé for a

significant period of time while Bill Harrop was getting confirmed. The usual, typical holdup that had nothing, well, had something to do with him, but not a great deal to do with him, more to do with the Senate taking its time to confirm him. I was chargé, and then we were together for basically three and a half years. He left just before I did in the summer of 1991, and Melissa Wells came in and was there for one week and then I took off to my next post.

Q: Talk about the embassy.

BAAS: We had a huge embassy in Zaire. It was certainly one of our biggest embassies in Africa. I think we had probably six hundred people when you count everybody, maybe not. We had a lot of people. It certainly wasn't as big as Cairo, but that wasn't really African Bureau. It was probably more or less the size of South Africa. Certainly at the end, South Africa was as big as us. We had a lot of regional people because it was secure. We had regional medical, regional communicators, regional Marines, regional this and that and the other things. Even though we had all of these people a lot of it was not focused on Zaire. We had people following what was going on in Angola because we didn't have an embassy, no, I guess we did have an embassy in Angola then, working with UNITA and so on.

A lot of the embassy was not focused on Zaire. That was a real management problem for me as DCM and, by extension, for the ambassador because we had people who were there who didn't feel part of the Zaire country team, and so it was a real effort to try to make them feel part of that. I spent a lot of time simply talking to people and making sure that everything was OK and people had housing, that people were comfortable, and things were going on and blah, blah, blah. I think we succeeded very well in that. Again, it was hard.

Zaire had one big advantage: it was a very pleasant place to live. In Kinshasa the housing was excellent, was large, some people had swimming pools, we had an American Club which had a pool and tennis courts and a small restaurant and bar kind of thing. Labor was cheap, so people had enough money to have a cook or a cleaning person or both. The climate was nice, it was hot, and people could go out on boats in the Zaire River and we had an evacuation boat, just as we did in Gabon when I was there, to help us get over to Brazzaville. Kinshasa and Brazzaville, as you undoubtedly know, are the two closest capital cities. So, as a result of having an evacuation point so nearby, we had a boat. There were islands in the middle of the river and you could go out there on Sunday. It was wonderful. There were places to drive to around Kinshasa that were interesting. You could fly all over the country and see all sorts of good things. People generally liked it there, once they were there. It was a comfortable life, good restaurants, wonderful restaurants, not cheap, but wonderful restaurants. You could get most food and you could get things from South Africa, so it was reasonably comfortable. Once people got there they liked it, and I think morale was pretty good, but one of our problems was attracting good people because they'd say, "Ah, Zaire. It's in the middle of Africa and Mobutu and blah, blah, blah." They weren't so anxious to come. That was another big an issue for us.

That was basically what the embassy looked like. We had all the usual suspects at the embassy.

Q: Over the years, I've heard that certain embassies had the reputation of being a "CIA embassy". At some embassies the CIA has a major role and at others it doesn't, and Zaire was probably first on the list if you ask people. How did you find that?

BAAS: Well, clearly we had CIA. The CIA clearly had been involved in the early years in helping Mobutu, whether they put him in power or not, helping him consolidate his power. When I was there they were much more active in dealing with UNITA and with what was going on in Angola, although clearly they were interested in what was going on in Zaire as well. Mobutu had, in a way, outgrown his interest in being tutored by anyone, and so, unfortunately from our point of view, the CIA's role with Mobutu and Zaire was much less than it probably had been in the past. They were very active doing Angolan things, which were of interest to us and of interest to the U.S. government, and to Zaire because it was a next door neighbor and certainly of interest to Mobutu.

How did I find it? It wasn't a problem. In the old days when Mac Godley was there, there are stories about him, and whoever the CIA person was at the time, there were stories about knock-down, drag-out battles about who was doing what to whom. We had nothing like that, nothing at all. The station chief was always extremely cooperative and we got along very well with him. We tried to be supportive of what they were doing, it's the U.S. government after all, and they tried to be supportive of what was going on in the broader Zaire. It worked very well.

Q: What about foreign influence? You were on the cusp of the, I mean you were there when the Soviet Union essentially fell apart.

BAAS: I have some interesting things to say about that. Let's get to that in a minute.

Q: I was thinking of the Belgians, the French and other countries and their role.

BAAS: The big three there without question were us, the French, and the Belgians, probably in that order. It varied from issue to issue and Mobutu, of course, tried to play us off one against the other, blamed his problems on one of us but not the others. We tried as much as we could, we certainly consulted, certainly talked all the time with the Belgians and the French to try to avoid that sort of thing, and to make sure we were all sort of singing from the same songbook, if not necessarily always from the same page. Those were the three main people.

The Belgians, obviously for historic reasons, had an awful lot of baggage. One thing that Mobutu said, he was a charming guy, and one thing that he said was just the funniest thing in the world. He was complaining about the Belgians to us one time, how they had done this and another thing and they were interfering in internal affairs or God knows what he was complaining about, and anyway at the end he said, the Belgian colonial period was a disaster and look what they have done to us. They still think we are a colony

and the only thing I can say is at least the colonial service was done in French, not in Flemish. Just imagine if we were all speaking Flemish, which is really funny, and to me being of Dutch origin it was even more humorous. The Belgians were there really for historic reasons and still had a large number of Belgian nationals there. Even with the various evacuations, through the various civil wars, a number of rebellions and what not, there were still huge numbers of Belgian citizens there. In fact, enough that they had two distinct school systems there in Kinshasa anyway; one for the French and one for the Flemish. They had separate language school systems, just like they presumably do in Belgium.

The French were there simply because Africa is more important to the French than probably any other part of the world. That's the one area where I have always said the French can feel like they're really a great power and certainly they are, but they are without doubt probably the most knowledgeable country taken as a whole about Africa. They have more people there and more interests there than any other country. Congo, Zaire being francophone it was a natural place for them. There were a lot of French cooperants who would come down and were working there. Of course, they had French colonies all around. There was Congo Brazzaville across the way and Gabon down the river and Chad up the river and so their interests in the area were tremendous. The Belgians and French also had varying roles in the military, varying roles with the mining companies and so on. They all had their fingers in different parts of the pie, which was good.

Q: Did you find you were working at cross purposes with the French on various things?

BAAS: No, no, very much not. I think we worked very closely with the French; we didn't agree with them all the time and they didn't agree with us all the time. Generally, we agreed that Mobutu was in power. There wasn't anyone else out there who seemed likely to replace him, or capable of running the government in any fashion approaching stability. Remember, this was before the end of the Cold War and we were very much interested in stability. It was our prime interest in Central Africa. We also agreed that more democracy was good. We should try to find more ways to get more democracy, whether that meant a freer press, whether that meant respect for human rights, whether that meant free and democratic elections. Well, it meant all those things, but you weren't going to do to those things in one day. We were all sort of pushing for those things and in fact, after 1989 it became much more intensified.

Even early on I remember one of the first things, this is not strictly speaking answering your question, but one of the first things that I did when I was there as chargé, the main opposition guy Étienne Tshisekedi who had been a former minister of Mobutu and had a falling out with him, and then had formed this opposition party and who lived in Kinshasa, he had been arrested by Mobutu for something, speaking out or something. He was being held in the central prison in Kinshasa and so we, as a government, were very concerned about it, what was happening to him. Was he alive? Was he being tortured? We communicated what was going on to Washington and I got an instruction back from Washington saying that I should seek permission to go see Tshisekedi in the prison. So I

did and I went to see the head of security, and I think I may have even seen Mobutu and presented my case and went to see some other people. Finally, we got permission so I could go see Tshisekedi in prison. So away I went to see him. I think actually by the time I went to see him Harrop had arrived. I don't think he had presented his letters and so I was still, strictly speaking, chargé. Bill was there as well. Off I went to see him in the prison. It was a typical African thing, at 10 o'clock at night when they wanted me to come and see him. We sat around in the dark prison and they brought him out. It was the first time I had ever met the man. I had only been in country for three or four months. He was, I must say, he was an amazing guy in the sense that he had courage. He sat in this prison surrounded by all these security people and stuff and he spoke his piece. Mobutu is a crook, Mobutu is raping the country, Mobutu is not democratic, he's a dictator, the Americans are keeping him in power, you and the Belgians and French are keeping him in power and this is terrible. Stop supporting him, let Zaire take care of things, and I will end up being the ruler and that will be much better for everybody and so on.

And, I admired his courage because there were all these security people standing around who clearly didn't believe what he was saying and had a stake in not believing him as well. Secondly, it was clear from what was said that he wasn't being tortured. He was being treated fine, which was really the purpose of my visit. The other purpose of my visit being to send a message to Mobutu and his cronies that we have an eye on things and we're not going to sit by and let this guy, or any opposition figure, be tortured or mistreated. Now, that being said, being in Zaire in prison is not a picnic, but he was being treated no worse than anybody, probably significantly better in a way because he had some money and so on.

Lastly, the other impression I had when I came away, the political counselor, Mike Cotter, who was very good, and went on to an even more distinguished career when he and I left, said, "Look it. This guy speaks a good game of democracy and elections and all that, but he's no different than Mobutu. One man, one vote, one time, elect me and then I'll be the next Mobutu and I'll rule. He's as megalomaniac as Mobutu, or as much into promoting himself as Mobutu was." Democracy was the horse he is riding, so that's what I took away from that.

I think the real point was we were interested in encouraging an opposition, encouraging dialogue. We were also interested in doing it in a way that obviously protected our position with Mobutu, and we were interested in making sure that Mobutu understood that these people did deserve some protection and couldn't simply be arrested because they said the government should change. It's one thing to say the government should change, it's another thing to say shoot the president. The problem that most Africans get themselves into, at least before the end of the Cold War and still to some degree today, is the only way to change power is to shoot the president or to have some kind of civil war or some kind of coup, and so that makes it very hard to promote human rights and to have a responsible opposition. The only way to get to office is to dispose of the president.

Q: Looking at one man, one vote, one time. You know, a strong man will succeed a strong man or something like this and you have all this corruption. Was there a problem in

reporting back to Washington about the corruption, basically the inability to promote a democracy as you have, a City On The Hill or what have you in Africa?

BAAS: I don't think it's impossible in Africa at all. I think it was probably impossible in Zaire at the time we were there. Clearly, and I think there are places in Africa which exist now and existed then where you can. South Africa, Botswana and others, many others. Certainly in Zaire the corruption was so pervasive and it was so necessary to life. Mobutu took diamonds and the copper, his ministers took some portion of the budget that was given by the state to do education and rather than education took care of themselves. The office directors took some portion of the budget that they were given to run the schools and the school teachers took some portion of the budget they were given. You know, all the way down, in every part of the government, and in some ways you can't blame them because that was the way they were going to live. Who's to say that you or I in the same position, if we had our families to feed, wouldn't have also had our hand in the till? One likes to hope not.

Q: The Washington Post once again they're showing the incredible corruption within the Congress.

BAAS: Yes, another Congressman with his hand in the till. Well, you shouldn't be holier than thou about these things and again we might have had to do the same thing. The problem is not so much the guy taking enough to feed his family; the problem is the guy taking millions to buy himself a house in France, et cetera, et cetera.

It was a real problem with our aid program. We had an extensive AID program there with lots of staff, lots of people. One of the reasons we had so many staff, so many people, was there were no real Zairian government agencies or even Zairian NGOs that one could have a great deal of confidence in. AID, correctly, is very protective of its dollars and wants to know that they are being spent to do what has to be done. That meant we had to go through either American contractors or some other foreign contractors to build roads or clinics, or run whatever it was we were getting done, which was more expensive but at least you ensured that the project got done. That just shows the corrosive effect of corruption. Because corruption existed in Zaire we couldn't go through Zairian companies, for the most part Zairian NGOs. If we could have gone through Zairian companies and Zairian NGOs, that would have put a lot more money into the Zairian economy. We put a lot of money into the Zairian economy anyway, but the multiplier effect was a lot less because if it was going to a French construction company some portion of the money ended up back in France, whereas if it was going to Zairians most of the money, if it was a non-corrupt Zairian, it would have stayed in Zaire. It was a constant struggle. There was no guarantee that the opposition was going to be any less corrupt. It had just been part and parcel of life in that part of the world forever. As I say, it is kind of an African village tradition that the chief has the money, he gives the money out to his kitchen cabinet or whatever you want to call it. They give money out to their supporters, who give money out to their supporters, but on a small village scale that's a big deal. Money wasn't even the medium of exchange, it was probably cattle or bananas

or who knows what. When you put that on a national scale like Zaire, it is just very difficult to do anything.

Q: You were talking about you were there when the Berlin Wall came down and basically the Soviet Union was still there when you left but it was within a year of becoming Russia and the rest of the states. How did this affect you?

BAAS: As I said, we were emphasizing, leaving aside Angola and everything that was going on with UNITA, leaving that aside, but in terms of Zaire itself, our first priority was clearly stability. Our second priority was democracy and improving the political process, and then somewhere in there, over arching all of them, were aid and economic assistance, trying to support both of those goals.

I would say that after the Berlin Wall fell we were doing these yearly goals and so on. Clearly, the promoting democracy goals moved up the ladder, and I would say became more or less coequal with stability. We were still interested in stability, we didn't want to see this country disintegrate and lots of people being killed in wars and displaced and stuff, but the promotion of democracy became of coequal importance, I would say, with stability. In fact, it was much harder for Mobutu. He couldn't say any more, like he had been saying since 1964, I'm the bulwark against communism. I am the only thing keeping this country from going the way of, say Ethiopia which at the time had Mengistu as president who was allegedly communist. I don't believe that he was but, OK. He could say keeping us from going the way of Angola, with Cuban troops there and all that kind of thing. That had been a very powerful message to the United States. We bought that. Maybe we shouldn't have, maybe we should have, but the point is we did, and the world was what the world was. Now he couldn't say that anymore. Now he could say I'm the only thing holding the country together. Après moi, le déluge. It was a harder case for him to make.

We could equally persuasively make the case that, indeed, the country was not going to stay together unless there was more democracy, unless the people had a bigger share in it, and witness Europe, witness the United States, countries that were real democracies, those were the ones that were the real stable countries of the world. The problem that he had, the problem we had, was how do we get from where we are now to something resembling a kind of Western democracy. That was a hurdle he could never jump over.

Secretary of State Baker came out on a visit and spent a couple of days and met with Mobutu. I wasn't there, Harrop was there. According to Harrop, and I'm sure it's true, he was really tough on Mobutu and basically told him, look, the Berlin Wall is down, communism is dead, it is time to get with the program, Mr. President. It is time to start opening up the system. Shortly thereafter there was an announcement.

First, all the opposition folks knew what Baker was going to say and they were really pleased with his visit and really happy about it. In fact, there had been a number of political parties that had sprung up in varying forms and varying strengths. Afterwards, shortly after Baker's visit, Mobutu announced there would be an opening and political

parties would be allowed and so on and so forth. I can't remember exactly if he mentioned elections, but the clear implication was that there would be elections sometime in the future. In Zaire, you may know, one of Mobutu's things was authenticity. He had changed his own name from Joseph-Desiré Mobutu to Mobutu Sese Seko, and everyone else was told to get rid of their Christian names and adopt African names. He said no one could wear suits and ties because suits and ties were Western and not authentic African, and so he then invented something called the "abacost" which was down with the suit. "Abacost", which also wasn't African at all, was basically a suit without a tie and with an ascot or something like that around the neck, the absolutely worst thing you can imagine to wear in a hot tropical place. Everyone had to wear the "abacost." That was sort of the national uniform.

Anyway, when the announcement was made that there would be parties, the thing I remember most, which is kind of bizarre, were people from the opposition, the UDPS and some of the young people, running around town, going out and buying material and making ties and putting ties on and running around town in ties. I like ties personally, but the thought occurred to me what if democracy meant that and everyone now had the right to own and wear a tie, which actually is not the most comfortable form of attire one can imagine. This was not going to be a very serious effort at democracy. If the best the opposition could do was run around and put on ties, we were in for a long battle. And of course, it was a long battle. Mobutu couldn't really commit himself to having elections, certainly not for president. The parties were having trouble organizing themselves, often organizing themselves more on regional grounds than on national grounds. Their goal was really to get rid of Mobutu, and they mostly didn't have any programs themselves of their own, beyond getting rid of Mobutu. There's nothing wrong with that, people do the same thing in Western democracies, but the tradition of democracy of course, wasn't there, at least not at the national level and therefore it was a great worry to us. There was some rioting in the streets, some pillaging. There was less law and order than there had been in the past. Again, that was not helpful to our efforts because it fed Mobutu's greatest fears, which were that if there wasn't an iron hand, if there wasn't a tough security situation, the place would fall apart. He'd loosen a little bit and there would be some rioting or pillaging or something like that and then his natural inclination was to tighten up.

We worked very closely, and Gerald Scott, who was my political counselor at the time worked very hard trying to get good contacts with the opposition. Actually, it wasn't hard to get good contacts with the opposition. They were delighted to see us, but it was hard to make sense of it and figure out who was important and who was just deciding they were forming a political party that probably consisted of him and his three cousins sitting in a room somewhere. We did a lot of work and a lot of reporting on what was going on in the opposition and how it was all relating to the government. We did a lot of work with the security services trying to see what their position was on the elections and so on, and we did a lot of work with Mobutu trying to encourage him to have elections. I believe, to this day, that if Mobutu had held elections for president in 1991 probably even as late as 1996 or 1997, he would have won. He was the only guy who had a national following, his name was well known, there were as many people who loved him as hated him. He

wouldn't have won with 98 percent of the vote if it had been a real fair election, but I think he would've easily won 60% of the vote. Or, at worst, he would have won a plurality because the only other thing that could have happened was that a Shaba would have voted for a Shaba, the rest would have voted for someone from their area, and the Far East would have voted for someone from there, and Mobutu was the only one with a real national following. He would have gotten some votes from everywhere and at least would have had a plurality. He could have won. We argued with him that it was his opportunity, and in fact, to be the father of his country, and to really leave something behind, a functioning democracy. He could go out with it as the capstone of his career, have an election, get himself elected for seven years like the French president if he wanted. You know, you had to be a little delicate how you said it, he probably wasn't going to live forever, but that would have been a terrific way to sort of go out.

Also, the other argument we made is it would've been an opportunity for some structure to be built up, some democratic structure, not just iron-fisted Mobutu. He would have had time to have a real prime minister and a functioning government, he would have been there to sort of arbitrate between them and decide what needed to be decided. In fact, there was a prime minister, there always had been a prime minister, and in this period the prime minister most of the time was Kango Ouédraogo, again that was his African name. He was the prime minister for a long time, and he had more authority than Mobutu, mainly because he was very good in economics and he was able to keep the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank basically away from Mobutu's door. Mobutu, I think, welcomed that. Kango used to go to Mobutu all the time, we need more money, we need to pay off our debts, we've got to do this or another thing, and Mobutu didn't like to hear that, but he'd give him some, but Kango was no hundred percent honest guy either. He'd take some of it and he'd send most of it off to the World Bank and IMF or whatever. He was more of a technocrat. He was very good at sort of running the economy. If they could've had a political Mobutu at the top elected by the people with somebody like Kango or some other technocrat running the government and technocrat ministers, not ministers quite as beholden to Mobutu as they were the time we were there, they might have been left with a better situation than we're now left with. We couldn't convince him of that, unfortunately. It wasn't for lack of trying.

Q: Was there an equivalent to a professional civil service?

BAAS: Yes, there was a professional civil service, and they were well educated, generally. There were functioning universities in Zaire and most of the people who came out of the university looked for a job either in the civil service or in the small private sector or with foreign concerns, which were probably the best they could get. I think as we mentioned the other day about Japan it was somewhat the same. The FSNs often were well-educated. They couldn't find jobs that paid as well or that had the same benefits anywhere else. The problem with the civil service was that their salaries were not great which was a problem, but a bigger problem was that they were rarely paid and often with six months arrears or something like that. So these guys had a hard time. All civil servants, without question, were doing something else as well. You know, their wives were out selling something. African women are the biggest strength of the continent.

They are wonderful, they sell, they farm, they raise children, and what not, but wives of bureaucrats would have a little business on the side, hairdressing or cooking or selling X, Y and Z on the streets or in the markets or whatever. Often the guys did too, the civil servants. I don't want to say guys, it wasn't exclusively men but pretty much. The civil servants themselves also had to do something else. Maybe they taught at university, maybe they tutored, maybe they gave guitar lessons. They had something going on that they had to do. They had a second job. They simply couldn't support themselves otherwise. The alternative was, or maybe it's an and/or situation, they also stole when they had a chance. When some of the budget came their way, some of it ended up in their pocket, that was the only thing they could do. There was a civil service, but it wasn't professional in the sense that you and I understand the term because these people again, had to survive and had to find their own way to survive.

One of the problems we had trying to understand Zaire from the economic side was the whole black economy. By that I mean the economy which wasn't on the books, the underground economy was huge, and we knew it was huge. Trying to get a handle on how big it was or what was going on or who was doing what, and what sort of GDP Zaire would have if the underground economy was included in the records and so on, was very, very hard to get any good handle on. It was clear that it was a big figure, and it may have even been bigger than the above ground economy, simply because people had to survive. This was the only way they could survive.

Q: Were you feeling pressure from the Black Caucus or from other elements within our political system?

BAAS: Feeling pressure in what regard? To democratize? Sure. I don't think it was so much that the embassy was feeling pressure, I think the U.S. government felt it was an important thing to do and clearly responsible members of the Black Caucus felt the same way. I think that it was the same with other congressmen and other people who were interested in Africa, Senator Simon, on the African subcommittee, Howard Volpe, who I think is still a congressman and people like that were often impatient, as they could be in their jobs, but very much interested in pushing us forward to do that.

It was clear I think the administration wanted that as well. They wanted to have more democracy in Zaire, but perhaps an understanding of what sort of things were existing on the ground, more understanding of other goals beyond the democratic goal. Nonetheless, I think we were all trying to do the same kind of thing. It was just a question of tactics, a question of speed and a question of what would work and wouldn't work. No, clearly, that was the embassy's focus in the last two years I was there.

We had one visit from a member of the Congressional Black Caucus when I was there, Gus Savage, who unfortunately lived up to his name. He came and he wanted to do this, do that. He sort of became an apologist for Mobutu as well. He was given a car by Mobutu and he sort of ignored the ambassador's vehicle. He went off in Mobutu's car and he wanted to do all this kind of stuff. We knew, as everyone in the State Department knows, it's always good if you can find constituents to meet congressmen. They're

interested in getting elected, and they like to see constituents so they can write to the person's family and say, "Well, I just saw old Joe out in Zaire." So we of course, cased the American community for constituents from the south side of Chicago, I believe that was where he was from, and we found a woman who was a Peace Corps Volunteer in a village not too far from Kinshasa. We brought her in and she was really excited. She wanted to meet a congressman and she knew about it. She was an African-American, as was Gus Savage, and she turned out to be a fairly attractive woman as well. He immediately wanted her to take him around and do this and do that and the other thing, and I think you know, it went well beyond. Well, she came into the embassy the next morning after we had a country briefing at the embassy and afterwards a group of people, including some of my younger officers, one of whom I'd told to keep an eye on him because we could sort of see what was going on. Congressman Savage had gone out to bars, he wanted to go to nightclubs and Zaire has terrific music, and in fact, the word in some parts of Africa the word for music is Zaire, so they went out drinking and dancing and stuff. He apparently made some suggestions to her in a forceful way that she didn't find attractive or appropriate. The next morning she came to see the ambassador and bless his heart, Bill Harrop called in Savage and basically said he had behaved in a completely inappropriate way and it was un-American to act like this toward a fellow government employee. Basically, he read him the riot act, which not every ambassador would have done, frankly. We were happy to see Gus Savage depart. The young lady was really afraid. She said afterwards that she was afraid Savage would have her family killed or something, or somehow disadvantage the south side of Chicago. She was really afraid as well. She was a young Peace Corps Volunteer, not as sophisticated as she might have been. I mean, it didn't help the U.S. government.

Q: It also became known to the newspaper.

BAAS: It was in the newspaper, yes. I think probably our PAO (Public Affairs Officer) may have leaked that and I hope he did. It got in the newspaper and Savage finally was shown the door by his voters, which is what should have happened long before. That's the unfortunate congressman we had. We had many more good ones. Well, we didn't get so many visits of congressmen in Zaire because it was a place that people didn't want to go to a lot. We did get probably one or two a year, and they were very useful. We got guys who were interested and wanted to know what was going on. That was good.

Q: Did the events in South Africa, the breakdown of apartheid, did that have any resonance in Zaire at all?

BAAS: Politically? Yes, I think it made the opposition bolder. But you know, it was a different case. Mobutu was Zairian. He was African. I would argue that the whites in South Africa were African as well, but there's a whole history there that was very different. That being said, Mobutu had some similarities with the apartheid government in the sense that he was the power and the majority of the people, as in the case of South Africa, didn't have access to the levers of power, didn't have access to the levers of the economy, didn't have access to free presses and all that kind of thing. There were some similarities, but it was very different in the sense that he was a Zairian, he was a black

Zairian. He was clearly, although the opposition did say from time to time that his mother was from the Central African Republic and he was probably born in the Central African Republic, and he shouldn't really be considered Zairian. That was just silly because his whole career had been there and so who cares.

Yes, it made the opposition a little bit bolder, it was an argument for, look democracy is working in South Africa, why can't it work here, that kind of thing. I think it had more of an impact perhaps on the economic side. All the copper, most of the copper from Zaire went out south through South Africa, from south eastern Zaire by rail through Zimbabwe and down to South Africa. The uncertainty around the time of the change had some effect on the economic situation in Zaire as to whether the train would continue. As I recall there was a time when the train stopped for a while for whatever reason. And you know, it turned out to be a short term problem, it wasn't a major problem at all. Imagine if there hadn't been a relatively peaceful transition in South Africa. Imagine what a civil war in South Africa would have been to Zaire. That would have been awful. In that sense they escaped a bullet.

Q: What about the Zairian military? What were we trying to do with the forces of law and order?

BAAS: We tried to work very closely with them. The army had a defense attaché there. It was another regional thing. He was a regional defense attaché and he had an airplane which he flew around to other parts of central Africa. We all used it to fly around Zaire which was very useful. His job was, of course, to help gear up and train up the military. We tried to do that, but it was very, very hard, partly because of Mobutu's method of governing. As I say, he kept all the resources to himself and he doled them out, not all, but a large portion of the resources himself, and he would dole them out as he saw fit. He would favor certain parts of the military over other parts. The FAZ, which was the armed forces of Zaire, sort of equivalent to our army, in fact had been gutted. It had lots and lots of people, but no training, no equipment, and limited salaries. Again, one of the things they did to survive; oil would be provided for the vehicles that they did have and people would steal the oil and put it in plastic liter jars and they would be sold by the side of the street. They were called "Qadhafis" by the Zairians because somehow Qadhafi, not surprisingly, in their minds had a connection with oil. That was how the sergeants survived. They stole gasoline from the motor pool. The FAZ was basically an empty shell, not very effective, as was seen later on when Kabila did, in fact, take power.

The stronger parts were at the various times , the Garde Civile (Civil Guard) loosely modeled on what Franco had up in Spain and more importantly there was the DSP, the special presidential division which was the bodyguards, security guys, they were the guys that mattered most of all. And then there were some airport police and stuff like that. We tried to work with them very hard. The French have a special program with the DSP which they did with them which was fine with us. We couldn't do everything. We had some programs with them as well. We tried to have programs with the Garde Civile but that didn't work out as well as it might have done, mainly because the head of the Garde Civile was not terribly interested.

One of the ways Mobutu governed was to have competition. He was too smart and too afraid to have one security service. It was much better to have three and have things divided up so everyone could keep track of everybody. So he had the DSP, which was basically the presidential guard but it was also security, he had the Garde Civile, the local police force, but which also did security and also did some military stuff. He had the army, which was basically gutted and an empty shell and had too many people. It still does some kind of local security things and was there to send out if he found some little group of ragtag rebels. Not to mention the Navy and Air Force. He had all these divisions. He had one director of security. He didn't have one CIA, you had two or three different agencies. Mobutu would say to one guy you do this and to another guy you do that and sometimes they were conflicting and it kept everybody guessing because you never knew. As a result, no real threat within that structure developed to him, and ministers were on sort of short leashes and never knew how long their tenure was going to last, which led to two things. One, loyalty; but also a desire to steal more quickly because you didn't know how long you were going to be in there.

It does speak to the corruption and how far down it went. When I was in Tokyo from 1980 to 1984, long before I went to Zaire, at the various receptions you're invited to in Japan, because the Japanese are very good at that, I came across a Zairian ambassador. I had done Africa, been in Africa and spoke French. He spoke very little English and no Japanese. We became friends simply because we talked together at the receptions, and he I think, welcomed having someone he could speak French to. It turned out he had arrived there and his predecessor had been told, instructed by Kinshasa to sell the embassy and sell the residence, maybe they were in same building, anyway, to sell them and then to buy land a little further out of town and build a new one. A lot of people, including the American Embassy, were doing this as prices increased in central Tokyo. You could make a lot of money by selling a parcel of land and do a lot with it.

His complaint however, was that his predecessor had done that but the money had disappeared. His predecessor, Kamitatu, had sold the property, clearly, he'd taken the six million or 10 million dollars, undoubtedly, he had given 10%, 20%, 50% to Mobutu and undoubtedly had kept the rest for himself. The poor new ambassador was sitting here with no embassy, no residence and bureaucrats in Kinshasa telling him, look, you have money, use the money from the old embassy. They knew, everybody knew, what had happened to the money. The point of the matter was from the bureaucrat's point of view the money was already accounted for. The money for the new embassy was to come from the old embassy which was sold; so it wasn't their problem. The new ambassador had no money. The only guys who were happy were presumably Mobutu and Kamitatu.

When I showed up in Zaire ten years later who would you imagine is the Minister of Finance? You're right, Kamitatu, the guy who had been the ambassador in Japan before I was there and who had sold the embassy and kept the money. I said, well, at least this guy knows how to do financial things anyway.

Q: Before we move on, were there any sort of incidents or events that stick out in your mind while you were there?

BAAS: Well, there were a lot of things. It was an incredibly active time. Let me talk a little bit about Nguza Karl-i-Bond who was the prime minister for a while when I was there and was the foreign minister. I guess he was prime minister just before we got there and he was foreign minister for most of the time we were there. He was a descendant of Tshombe who was one of the real powers of Shaba. Nguza alleged he was descended from the Royal family of Shaba and his wife was from the Royal family of western Zaire which is a traditional marriage relationship that existed. He was very westernized in the sense that he know how to deal with westerners and charming and all of that kind of stuff. Mobutu knew he was related to the Tshombe and the Royal family of Shaba and of course, Shaba was a threat to the government and there had been efforts in the past to take it off and there was always belief of plots. I believe there were plots of Belgians trying to bring it off and get back the copper mines that they had had before. Most of all that was bogus. Nguza had developed sort of a political role and political status when he had been prime minister and, as a result, was sacked as prime minister and was sent out to the political wilderness. I think he was in exile for a while then, in typical Mobutu fashion, after he had sort of been sent to the corner for a while he was brought back in and made foreign minister. He did a very good job as foreign minister. We could get to him, we could talk to him, and we could see him. His wife was a political power in her own right. She's a businesswoman, she's very smart, very bright, very pretty, and was also a political power from her part of the country. They were a formidable couple, one that one could easily imagine running the country.

I once had Nguza at my house for dinner when I was chargé. He came over and I knew that the one thing that he really liked was the beer that was made in Lubumbashi. Our military plane was down there doing something and I arranged for them to find a case of, several cases of Tembo, and so they brought them up and we had dinner and you know, had cocktails and stuff and it was time for dinner. I was saying something about the wine, we had twelve, fifteen people. I said something about the wine, but in honor of the Foreign Minister being here tonight we have a special wine for him but it is only for him and the staff brought up this bottle of chilled Tembo. He was just so excited. It was like the greatest thing you could ever have done for him. I reflected on that later. I had obviously become an Africanist because it was a very African thing to do. You find out what the interest is of the person, you somehow find a way to work the system using a DAO plane, which was fortunately going there anyway, to pick up something that will help you back here. You know, it worked, it helped.

That leads me to another thought. The biggest problem we had in Zaire was communication, getting a hold of the government. Everything was run by Mobutu, so therefore you almost had to get to Mobutu for anything really important. Mobutu spent most of his time in Gbadolite which was sort of the Versailles, a golden Versailles, built and carved out of the jungle at great expense. That was a two-hour plane ride and so if you needed to see Mobutu, or he needed to see you, that meant you had to fly up there and it took a whole day; you had to sit up there, you had to see him. The other area, place

we could sometimes see Mobutu was on his boat. When he was Kinshasa he had this boat called the Kamanyola, a famous battle that he had won in the past on the Zaire River. You could get on the boat with him and sail up the river for a while, and then you'd be called in to meet him. One time we went there, the whole country team with our wives, not the whole country team but four or five of the top country team, and had a wonderful dinner on this boat you know, great wine. We had wonderful meals up at Gbadolite. One time I was up in Gbadolite who should show up but Tongsun Park, the guy who was involved in a bunch of scandals.

Q: This was with Ricegate.

BAAS: Parkgate and all that.

Q: I know because I issued an oath to him when he was testifying with a young attorney from New York named Giuliani. It was one of those scandals.

BAAS: Yes. Well, Park was up there, it was after the scandals, he was up there trying to do some kind of business dealings. We were invited to lunch. We were up there to see Mobutu, and it turns out the ambassador sat at Mobutu's table. I ended up with Park and a couple of other disreputable-appearing Americans, but you've got to do what you've got to do. The occasion of the lunch was actually that seven people from his home region up in the north had just graduated from seminary, he was giving this big celebration lunch for these seven seminarians. He did it well.

We once had a congressional delegation go up to Gbadolite because that was the only place they could see him. Dan Burton was the head of it and there were four people on it. I can't remember exactly who the other ones were. They were appalled and depressed and shocked at Gbadolite, because here it is in the middle of the jungle with these fountains and gold urns and chandeliers and you know, fine wines being served at lunch and you couldn't imagine anything in France being any better. The food was wonderful. That was where some of the money was wasted. There again, it was wasted and it was spent and provided perhaps some benefits for some Zairians, but very few. It wasn't banked by Mobutu in the sense of existing somewhere in a bank account. Later in my career, when I ended up being Director of Central African Affairs, when Mobutu was dying we ended up spending a lot of time trying to figure out where and whether Mobutu had any money. I maintained and I think it was correct all along that he didn't have hidden bank accounts anywhere. No more than a million or two, you know, which would have been nice for you or me. You know, it wasn't the billion or billions of dollars that we're talking about in this case.

The other interesting issue we had I should probably say a little bit about. We had a consulate in Lubumbashi, which was, of course, fairly unique in Africa. There weren't a lot of consulates in Africa, South Africa had some. The rest of the continent didn't have them for understandable reasons. In Lubumbashi we did have a consulate and that was a very interesting thing, a very interesting window for us on Africa or on a very important part of Zaire. It was very good for us to be able to fly down there from Kinshasa and have

someone there to show us around and meet people. The Shabins were very proud of being Shabin. It was sometimes a delicate relationship between Shaba and the central government, as it was between other parts of the country. This gave us a better read on that one.

Toward the end of my stay there in 1991, in the spring of 1991, I guess, or February or something like that, there were riots downtown. It wasn't like the Martin Luther King riots here but people broke into some stores and pillaged. It was mainly because of democracy. It was mainly because of the opening for political movements. People wanting to move faster and then going into the streets and rioting. Of course, it had the opposite effect of encouraging Mobutu to crack down. One of the things that did work, we didn't really get elections going, at least not presidential elections, but there was a transitional parliament, there were some local elections and so on.

One of the things that did happen was newspapers. There were independent newspapers, often different papers would just appear, sometimes they would only last for a month or two and then they would disappear. In the meantime, they were real vehicles of democracy. There were people speaking their minds, usually carefully, but sometimes attacking the government, mostly not Mobutu but attacking the prime minister and thereby attacking the government or attacking ineffective ministers or just speaking generally for the need for more democracy and why if South Africa could have democracy, why couldn't Zaire?

One time the DSP, or maybe it was the Garde Civile, had busted up one of these places. Basically, they didn't like something the editor had written and so they came in wielding their sticks and broke up some of the machines and blah, blah, blah. This was one of those cases where you have to do what you have to do. I was the DCM. My ambassador, Bill Harrop, was off visiting the eastern part of the country, completely out of communication. I mean, I couldn't talk to him. It was the wrong time of day to talk to Washington. I just did what seemed to be right. I got in the ambassador's car which was in Kinshasa, put out the American flag and drove down to the newspaper headquarters and went in there to look at the damage and to see what was going on. Basically, to express my support, our support for, the U.S. government's support for the free press. That was, I think, noted. People knew that. Mobutu certainly knew about it. He didn't like it. I was then called in, I guess Harrop was called in later by the head of the DSP to say what is this, blah blah blah, interference in our affairs and so on. I said, no, we're going to support an independent press. We'd helped them buy some of the equipment. We wanted to see what had happened to the equipment that our taxpayer's dollars had purchased. We believe in an independent press, there's no surprise there. You have an independent press. You can't simply just close them because you don't like them. You've got to close them down legally. There are courts, there are ways to do that beyond just beating them over the head. So that was known, and I think that was a useful thing to have done. Little things like that mattered.

And again, when I left June 21 of 1991, it was clear that the security situation was going downhill. The government was opening up a little bit, which encouraged people to get

people active politically, but not opening up enough that they could really get active politically, which encouraged them to go out in the streets and riot, which encouraged the government to tighten up, which encouraged the police, which encouraged the people to riot. It was kind of a vicious circle that was leading to no good result. Immediately after I left, I think it was in September of '91, there was a huge riot and we ended up having to evacuate the embassy, most of them across to Brazzaville. Fortunately, I know for a fact that our evacuation plan was up to date and in good shape because we'd seen this coming and so people got out in fairly good shape. That was not a nice entry or nice way for Melissa Wells to start her tour. I'm not sure that everyone went, but certainly we had a significant drawdown. That was kind of the way I left. It was sort of interesting because I went to Ethiopia where I was...

Q: What about in the east? You had Rwanda and Burundi. Things were happening there and also on the Zairian side. Were we able to keep track or was that sort of beyond our radar?

BAAS: Oh, it was definitely on our radar. We were very much interested in what was going on in the east. You've got to keep in mind, this was before, this was 1987 to 1991 so this was before the massacres in Rwanda itself. They had happened in the past and we knew they were possible in the future. We were very conscious of, particularly Rwanda and Burundi. They were also former Belgian Colonies. The Zairians felt some sort of an attachment to them as a result of the shared colonial experience. They were very anxious about what was going on there.

Uganda, at the time, I think this was the time, if I remember correctly, this was the time when Museveni rose to power. Uganda was a big issue as well. They shared a border with Zaire. Mobutu was very concerned that any of these conflicts there might spill over into Zaire which indeed happened. When Rwanda did blow up in 1994 all those guys spilled over into eastern Zaire. When I was Director of Central African Affairs later, my main concern was dealing with the east of Zaire and what they were doing vis-à-vis Rwanda and so on and so forth. Not my main concern, but certainly one of my two main concerns. The other one was the transition in Kinshasa. We'll come to that later.

But at this time the east was fairly calm. Mobutu still had enough military power, had enough physical power, I mean, he was sick but he wasn't weak. He had enough stored up capital, people were afraid of him or whatever, that the east was not a problem. The Rwandan problem and the Burundian problem were still essentially in those countries. It hadn't spilled over. I took a number of trips out the east to see the gorillas, to look at our AID project, to see what was going on.

Q: Gorillas as in gor?

BAAS: As in the silver-back mountain gorillas. Yes, apes, large apes. To see what was going on in Bukavu and the other parts of Kivu and so on. The one part I didn't go to, the only city I didn't go to in Zaire, surprisingly was Kisangani, which before was Stanleyville, right on the bend in the river as Naipaul says in his book. I did go

subsequently when I was in Central African Affairs so I've been there, but I didn't go to that part when I was there. I did go to the east a number of times because there was a lot of economic activity in the east. I had one very good friend who was Zairian, originally a Tutsi from Rwanda. The Tutsis had been thrown out, massacred and thrown out in 1959. His family had settled in eastern Zaire and he was a very active businessman. One of the few private Zairian businessmen that were around you could talk to who wasn't sort of directly connected to the government by being a minister or something. People like him who were very good sources of information for what was going on in the east. It was a very rich area economically; coffee, minerals of a variety of kinds, not the big deposits like in Shaba but still minerals, lots of agricultural stuff, a very, very potentially wealthy area.

Q: Was there anything going on with Sudan? Sudan had this north-south conflict. Did that have any ...?

BAAS: Sure, that was going on, but that was a long way away from Kinshasa. We followed it simply because we followed issues that were going on. No, that didn't really resonate at all. It was just so far away. Zaire shares a border with a little bit of southern Sudan. It was not only far from Kinshasa, it was far from Khartoum as well.

Q: OK. Then in 199,1 you're off to Ethiopia.

BAAS: In fact, I was named chief of mission in Ethiopia. We didn't have an ambassador. We had a chargé d'affaires de missi, as they say in French, someone who is permanently there, not for the interim. So I was chief of mission, but, the advantage or disadvantage was, I wasn't ambassador. The advantage was I didn't have to get confirmed, I could go directly. In fact, they wanted me to go directly. I did go directly, directly from Kinshasa. I flew down to Nairobi and then headed up to Ethiopia. Bob Houdek, who was my predecessor, had left a week or so before or two days before, and Jody Thomas was the DCM and chargé. They wanted me to get there directly because they had just had a change of government in Ethiopia. The government had just changed in May. Earlier on, when I was still in Kinshasa I had gone back to Washington for a chiefs of mission conference or something to talk to people about going to Ethiopia. I was invited to a meeting in Hank Cohen's office, he was the Assistant Secretary for African affairs and he met with the Foreign Minister of the EPRDF, which was the liberation movement of Ethiopia, a guy named Meles Zenawi. It was very interesting to meet him and I said to him sort of jocularly as we were leaving, "Well, you know, I'm going to be going to Addis Ababa around the end of June. I hope that shortly after I arrive I will be able to welcome you to Addis Ababa." He laughed and said yes he hoped to be there very soon. Well, they beat me there. They beat me there by a month, arriving there the end of May and I arrived at the end of June.

Q: When did you arrive in Addis?

BAAS: I arrived in Addis June 22, 1991.

Q: And you were there until when?

BAAS: For three years so just after July 4 of 1994.

Q: What was the situation in Ethiopia at the time? When we say Ethiopia we are including Eritrea?

BAAS: For the moment we are including Eritrea for sure, yes. What had happened was at the end of May that year, 1991, the rebel groups had been opposing the rule of Mengistu who had been in power for probably seventeen years or so, after overthrowing Haile Selassie. They succeeded in basically capturing the country and he fled to Zimbabwe, where I think he still is until this day. It had been a long struggle for them and, in fact, had gone on a long time. There were two or three or four, depending on how you count it, different groups. The main group, the longest serving group was the Eritrean People's Liberation Front which was basically fighting for the independence of Eritrea. Then there was TPLF, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, Tigray being the northern part of Ethiopia and speaking the same language, Tigrean, as the Eritreans. So the difference is sort of like English and American; same words with a different accent. They were the main Ethiopian group, if you want. They had been trained and helped by the EPLF early on in the struggle, but subsequently had grown very much and had based themselves on peasants and allegedly had an Albanian sort of format. All these guys were "communist" having been to university in the sixties and seventies, but they weren't really communists, no more than you or I are communists. The TPLF had now grown away from its fascination with Albania. But they still had a very strong streak of being able to go it alone and do it on their own. I think that was probably what their attachment to Albania was, more than any economic or political system.

There was also a variety of other groups, but they were less powerful. The OLF, the Oromo Liberation Front; the Oromo are southerners in Ethiopia. They are more African in a sense. The Tigreans, the Amhara, and the Eritreans are from the highlands basically, and are more of a mixture, actually they're Semitic. Their language in fact, is related to Semitic language and they're Arabic and European and African and everything, all mixed up together throughout the centuries. The Oromo are much more African and for someone who has spent his whole career in Africa they looked to me much more African and felt much more African. On the other hand, they were still Ethiopian. They had often been mistreated by the highlanders throughout history and so they were also fighting for liberation.

Q: Gallas?

BAAS: Yes, Gallas is the old name for Oromos, which is now pejorative and you don't use it. I think in the old days the rulers referred to them as Gallas in a very negative way. The last group, the fourth group that was fighting was the Amhara People's Liberation Front. That was delicate in the sense that the governments, the previous governments, had basically been Amhara-based. Haile Selassie wasn't 100% Amhara. It was basically an Amhara government and Mengistu, although he wasn't 100% Amhara, or maybe he was

but his wife wasn't, was also an Amhara government. So the Amhara Liberation Front in some way was fighting against themselves, at least in ethnic terms, although they were based, as all these groups were, based on peasants as opposed to cities. That was probably the distinction that one could make.

Clearly in Eritrea, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front was the only real group that mattered. Ethiopia was the Tigrean People's Liberation Front and it was a first among equals, not even equals. It was clearly the leading faction. I would say those two were fairly equal, the Eritrean and the Tigrean groups. There clearly was some tension and some desire on both of their parts to be the lead dog, as it has been shown by subsequent events with the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia and so on. So that was the situation when I arrived.

Q: Was there anything going on in the Ogaden?

BAAS: Not really. Yes, I should have mentioned that. There was a Somali People's Liberation Front as well, but they weren't doing a great deal. The Somali part of Ethiopia is very similar, not surprisingly, to Somalia. People were much more concerned about the local politics of their clan and by what was going on in Somalia, than they were in what was going on in Addis Ababa. To say there wasn't activity would be wrong, but to say there was very much that mattered for the change of power would be stretching it.

Q: Was there a government to which you were accredited?

BAAS: No.

Q: What was the situation?

BAAS: The change took place on May 28, and I got there just short of four weeks later, so three and a half weeks later on the 27th. Bob Houdek, who had been our chargé before me, left one day before I arrived, and so I flew directly from Kinshasa via Kenya. My wife stayed and flew off to Spain to see her family because Ethiopia was still on a drawdown situation even though the war was over.

Q: Drawdown meaning?

BAAS: The embassy was at reduced levels, essential personnel only, dependents were out of the country. Even though the situation had clearly changed because the war was over, the bureaucracy had not yet produced the necessary papers to get that drawdown situation reversed. So I flew in by myself and met Jody Thomas who was my DCM. There was a government. Basically, the government of conquest, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front was there. The head of that organization, Meles Zenawi, had sort of declared himself the ruler, and they were in the process of establishing a transitional government. The idea was that that would lead to elections in two or three years.

That was really the focus, well there were two focuses, when I got there. One was security. There were a lot of arms in this country. The Soviets had poured in shipload after shipload, planeload after planeload, billions of dollars probably of arms. Most of what the Tigrean and Eritrean groups used as weapons were Soviet weapons that they captured from the Ethiopian army. They basically captured their weapons, they didn't have to go out and buy them so much. There were a lot of weapons. The Ethiopian army of Mengistu had basically disintegrated, so you had all these guys, some of them fairly trained, most of them who had done nothing in their life but be soldiers, who were wandering about the country trying to find their way back to their city or trying to figure out how they were going to get to their town, or their village, more likely, not knowing what they were going to do for food, hadn't been paid for X amount of time, and it was a humanitarian crisis at one level. So we had a humanitarian crisis and we had the security issue of trying to sort of ensure that the country was stable and secure. There was still lots of firing going on at night, and there was a curfew from dusk to dawn. It was still a dangerous place.

Then the third part of it was the future, trying to form a transitional government that would represent all parts of the society, trying to draft a new constitution or a new document that would reflect the country as a whole, and then looking forward toward elections. Of course, as any new diplomat in a place, particularly if you're the head of mission, one of your main tasks is to get to know the guys who are in power. Usually your embassy's there, usually your embassy has a clue as to who those people are. To be honest we didn't have much of a clue beyond Meles Zenawi and Seyoum Mesfin who was the Foreign Minister, named Foreign Minister, who I met in Hank Cohen's office in Washington in April before going out. Beyond those guys, who were the face of the movement, we had no idea who the power was.

Q: To put it in context, this was 1991. The Soviet Union was in its last year. It was no longer the Cold War between the Soviets and the United States for influence. All that was over.

BAAS: No, that was over and the Soviets had no interest and the Tigreans were not at all interested in talking to the Soviets anymore. They had been fighting them in a way and so the Soviets were gone. The Cubans hadn't been there or certainly hadn't been there recently and basically, no, there was nobody there. It was us.

The other thing that was difficult is the situation had changed, so we thought we could work with the Tigreans, the people who had taken power. Hank Cohen had received indications from them, and then later on in London, when they were trying to negotiate a peaceful transfer, which didn't happen, but they were willing to work with us. Actually, they had no choice. They could have gone it alone like Albania, but they figured out that that wasn't going to work. The Soviets weren't there any more, the Russians weren't there anymore, they weren't interested anymore and it really was, they weren't going to go to Italy with all the former colonial issues. Even though Ethiopians are very proud of never having been a colony or having been colonized, they did have an occupation of five years. The only player in town really was the United States. Under Mengistu, the

embassy was very small. We were basically showing the flag, we were basically trying to keep an eye on what was going on in Ethiopia, keep an eye on what Mengistu was up to and how the war was going, and dealing with humanitarian issues like famine and so on.

Q: What was the drought situation because that's a perpetual thing.

BAAS: Yes. Drought was not an issue at this point. It had been an issue several years before and became an issue several years later. Drought was not really an issue. It is perpetual, but there are gradations of perpetuity, and this was not a serious issue. The bigger humanitarian issue was all these guys from the army and their families wandering around looking for food and where to go.

Anyway, our post correctly had been a very small post in Addis Ababa, which was very different than what had it been under Haile Selassie, of course, when it had been a big regional post and so on. It was clear to everyone that the post was going to get bigger, because we were going to have a different relationship with the new government, because Ethiopia was the head of the then OAU (Organization of African Unity) so it had a regional aspect to it, and because Ethiopia is such a large country, 60 million people, and the third or fourth largest country geographically in Africa. It's a big country. So it was clear the post was going to get bigger and that was another issue that we had to worry about. With all these other things going on, when can we grow the post? We had to grow it initially to do our job. The first thing I wanted to do was to get a defense attaché in there because these guys were a military organization. We managed to do that very quickly. That was good. We needed another political officer, we needed another economic officer, we needed lots of stuff. How to grow when the situation was unsteady or uncertain was a challenge. So that was the situation when we got there.

One of the first things we were able to do was lift the drawdown status. It took a while to get that through Washington. Clearly, the situation was relatively stable, although there was still firing at nighttime. You can't grow a post until you've got the drawdown taken away. We got all of our regular people back and some of the families started coming back, mostly they came back at the end of the summer. The wives and so forth had gone to be with kids in school and so they all came back, most of them came back, by September. That was one big thing.

Then I think the thing I spent most my time on in that first six months there was the humanitarian issue. We had a very, very good AID director, Bill Pearson, who had been there awhile, knew the place and he had made contact and then through him I made contact with the people who were basically running the humanitarian situation. But many of them were holdovers from the previous regime. They weren't political, or if they were they were sort of forgiven for a little while. There was an overlaying level of new guys who had just come in and who had been running food aid because the Tigreans had been running food aid for their own people behind the lines or on their side of the lines. They all had some ideas and some experience and that was helpful. But also, of course, it's a different situation running anything as a fighting guerrilla army than it is as a government, which has to be more all inclusive, and concerned with everybody.

One of the things that I'm proud that we did, it's not a surprising thing, is we got together with the main donor countries and formed a group. It was the United States, myself, the British Ambassador James Grays, the Germans, the French, and the UN. We were five people who got together and tried to plan how we were going to run the relief effort. Later on it became a group to sort of think about the political transition as well. Initially, it was really security and relief.

I remember going up north to Mekelle, which is the center of Tigray, the capital of Tigray, sort of the home region of the winners. I went up there with Bill Pearson and we went to one very large relief camp up there. It was very, very sad. It was difficult. There were all these people. It was muddy, there were tents. Food was coming in but all these people were around and how do you maintain security amongst all these people, some of whom were fighting you just a little while ago. How to get them food? How can the donors best help? It was a very difficult situation, and as I say security was, in fact, a big issue up there.

The other issue was how do we get them out of camps? We can't sort of leave these people in camps because they just become like Palestinians living on the West Bank forever, and that doesn't do anybody any good. How do we get these guys out of camps and how do we get them moved back to their home villages or wherever they want to go? We, the donor community, talked about various packages that we could give and how we could do it and this was all negotiated. We didn't want to give them cash because if you give them cash they're just going to go out and spend it and waste it on wine, women, and song or whatever. There was an idea of giving them seeds, giving them an ox, giving them farming implements and that kind of thing. Some of these worked, some of it didn't work. It took us a year or so, but finally people started drifting back to their places some with benefits, some without benefits. That's the way these things typically go. That was a huge issue in the first year.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about transportation? I was thinking of sort of a big plateau with lots of equivalents to huge gullies or something and no roads. How does one get this stuff?

BAAS: Actually, they had roads. The sort of main roads were pretty good, thanks to the Italians who built some very nice roads. They're great road builders. You're right, the highland area is indeed a highland and about 2,800 meters, and so that's about 8,000 feet or something like that. It is basically a plateau with river valleys running through it. So you'd go down and back up and you know, the roads were not bad but it took a long time to drive there. You weren't whipping along at 70 miles an hour, that's for sure; more like 30 or 40. Things could be transported, including people. A lot of these refugees would identify that they were going to go to X region of the country and so a whole bunch of them would be loaded up in a bus or a truck, typically a truck, a two and a half ton army truck, and put in the back and away they would go. They'd be given rations for the trip and some rations for the first month and that would be that.

The problem was that a lot of these people drifted into the cities, and so that led to insecurity because they were looking for jobs in the cities. There are no jobs in the cities. For at least the first six to twelve months, certainly for the first couple of months there was fire fighting every night, guns going off, and for the first year or so I would say sporadically there were problems. Security was an issue. We had a grenade thrown over the compound wall. Fortunately it was a dud; it landed on one of our communicators which was much too near the wall. That kind of stuff was going on.

Q: Was there a clan situation the way we had in Somalia?

BAAS: No, it was more a national situation. The Tigreans had basically won. Ethiopia has lots of ethnic groups, but there are four main areas; they call them nations. King Menelik was really an imperialist and, when Africa was being divided up by the Europeans, Menelik got his way for a free Ethiopia. So you have the two main groups, I would say, not in population but in power through the years are the Amharas who have generally been in power and the Tigreans who are not far away from them, and who from time to time would have an emperor or something like that and have sort of been around the center of power. The biggest, in population terms, are the Oromo, the former Galla, who had never really had political power in the past because they were always the downtrodden Africans. The Somali, who again were on the fringes, normally didn't play a huge role nationally. Then there were lots of other people, the Benishangul and different people on the fringes; probably if you added them up there were twelve or thirteen.

Q: This didn't translate itself into the mess of Somalia?

BAAS: No. Not at all. There was lots of competition between the big three. The Somalis again were competing among themselves, but between the Amhara and Tigrean, initially. The Amhara believing that they had the right to rule and should be the ones to rule and these Tigreans were simply usurpers and country bumpkins and peasants and really didn't have any right to rule. The Tigreans are also less numerous than the Amhara, so there's another issue. The Oromo thought that they had the most population of any single ethnic group and therefore they should finally be given their due. The big problem with the argument of the Amhara and the Oromo was that it was essentially the Tigreans who won the war. As we all know, power comes from the barrel of a gun, someone famously said. Karl Marx, wasn't it?

Q: It was Mao.

BAAS: It was Mao? OK. The point is they had won and so in the initial going they had the right to rule. We were pushing them very hard to be all inclusive and not just to try to run the country as 14%, or whatever they were of the population, but rather to try to include other people. They understood this and that's why they pointed to the Amhara colleagues, or their Amhara allies if you want. The problem was, as I said earlier, that was not the same group that had been ruling for a long time. That group was not going to get anywhere near power, if the Tigreans had anything to do with it, because they had

been fighting. But unfortunately for them and unfortunately for us in the embassy, that group was incredibly sophisticated. They were very, very well educated, very capable and they knew what levers to push. In Addis Ababa they knew what to do to cause trouble. Many of them had immigrated to the United States because under Mengistu there was the red terror and there was white terror and people had been killed. Many of them had left because they didn't want their kids to be pressed into the army of Mengistu. But these guys in the United States were also very capable and often had money and so they knew what levers to push here with Congress, with the administration and so on.

Q: Some immigrant groups have centers. Do they have a center?

BAAS: There is an Ethiopian center. I'm not sure what the situation was then. I'm pretty sure there was one then too. They also had the restaurants down in Adams Morgan. Get in any cab and you can talk to any Ethiopian or Eritrean you want in Washington, DC.

The other issue that was very big on my plate at the time was Eritrea. Eritrea had been fighting for independence and they had won. They, along with the TPLF, maintained the polite fiction that they were still part of Ethiopia. Both Meles Zenawi, the head of TPLF and Isaias Afwerki, the head of the Eritrean group, both knew that Eritrea was going to be become independent, we knew that Eritrea was going to become independent, but until there was a referendum that was observed by the UN and so on, Eritrea was still part of Ethiopia. That worked very well in a way for us because we, of course, didn't have a consulate up in Asmara although many years before we had a consulate there. We still had a consulate building up there. To try to open up an embassy up there or whatever would've been very difficult at this time. We in Addis Ababa were also responsible for Eritrea. That meant that I spent a lot of my time flying up to Asmara to meet with Isaias, or meeting with him and his lieutenants in Addis when they came there. I probably went to Asmara 25 times in my first year there, simply because there was work to do up there and we needed to talk to them and that was really the only way to do so.

What happened fairly quickly was a transitional conference was called, a provisional government conference. What that basically did was elect, not surprisingly, Meles Zenawi as president of the transitional government. He then set up his government with ministers. Meles was very smart. He put people that he really trusted in key positions like Minister of Defense, Minister of Foreign Affairs, head of security and so on, but he then tried to be very inclusive and so you found positions like the Minister of Interior, as I recall, was an Amhara, or maybe he was an Oromo, I forget which, but then the number two was a trusted Tigrean. Other ministers like education and health and so on, though important ministries, but not important for his immediate survival, were given out to people from other ethnic groups. There was a fair sharing of the responsibilities. I think it was very smart because it gave people the feeling that they were going to be able to participate in the new government, something that didn't often happen in the past.

The Transitional Conference or whatever it was called, the National Conference, opened with great fanfare. Hank Cohen was out there and I think we had some members of the Black Caucus who came out as well. Don Payne and probably a couple of others but I

can't remember. It opened with great fanfare and it had been very carefully constructed by the TPLF as well. The biggest single group was the Oromo, as they should be in terms of population, and then the other groups were there. The one thing I noted very quickly was that if you took the TPLF membership and the OLF membership, you had one more than a majority. My immediate assessment was that what the TPLF had in mind was ruling with the Oromos, not ruling with the Amharas so much who had ruled in the past, but ruling with the Oromos if necessary. I think they wanted to rule in as broad a coalition as they could, but if that didn't work out they thought they could rule with the Oromos. The Oromos had the population, the TPLF had the guns and the more capable people probably. There were capable Oromos too, but they were not more than the TPLF. Clearly, again the TPLF, as the winner, was at worst first among equals and certainly the main power.

The Conference was very interesting and very acrimonious. There were representatives from the exile community, there were representatives from the royalist party, representatives from everybody; there were southern people, all groups and all ethnic groups were represented. Basically, it was set up on an ethnic basis so you had various Guragian, Benishangul and so on all sending their people to this Conference. The task of the Conference, after electing the government, was basically to come up with a process for the transition and that they did. There was a piece of paper adopted which basically set up what was going to happen in the next two years. Elections were promised for two years hence. A constitution would be written. The transitional government would be in control in the meantime.

There were several big issues. One of the big issues was Eritrea, and the way they dealt with that was very controversial. Probably the most controversial thing in the whole national conference was how to deal with the ethnic or nationalities issues. The way Haile Selassie had dealt with it, basically, was just to say everyone is an Ethiopian and it doesn't matter what you are, you are an Ethiopian. The way Meles and the TPLF and indeed, the National Conference decided to deal with it, was by in a sense promoting diversity or celebrating diversity. They said look, everyone is an Ethiopian but you are also something else, everyone is also something else; you're Tigrean, you're Benishangul, you're a Somali, you're an Amhara, you're an Eritrean, whatever. Every group will have the right to run their own local affairs, education, language, all that sort of thing. There were times in the past in Ethiopia when it was illegal to speak any language beyond Amharic. It certainly wasn't possible to get educated in any language beyond Amharic. You can educate your kids in your own language, you can run local government and all that sort of thing. Every ethnic group will have the right to secede if they want to.

This was immensely controversial. People said, whoa, if you give them the right to secede and everyone secedes that means that Ethiopia doesn't exist anymore. Meles and others, certainly with Meles in the lead, argued that by giving them the right to secede you diffused this as an issue and if everyone basically wants to stay in Ethiopia they have no reason to go out and form a little country, if they can get what they need in Ethiopia. If they can get local autonomy and be part of a big powerful regional or central government

then they probably will stay. If you tell them they can't go, then they're going to try to go. Now that they have the right to go, then you have a good shot, probably better than 50% of keeping them in.

Q: During this whole process were you actually playing any role over there? The liberation of these non governmental agencies that I know hit Eastern Europe and the "stans."

BAAS: Let's finish up on this one point. The beauty of this system beyond the hope they would keep Ethiopia together, was it gave the Eritreans a legal way to separate. Everyone knew that this was going to lead to Eritrea separating and that they would hold a referendum in two years and they would certainly vote for independence. Eritrea then would leave. At least it put a legal document in place and made a legal way that they could do this, without having to fight their way free or anything like that.

Yes, we were very much involved. I spent a lot of time at the Transitional Conference talking to people and so on. In fact, I should mention in this regard, one of the great successes of United States government at this time was the Fourth of July party of 1991. This was what, five weeks after the government had changed. Nobody knew anybody. It was very hard to come up with a guest list, although we basically invited anyone we could get our hands on to come. It's a bad time of the year in Ethiopia, in the sense that it is the rainy season and it's cold. We had to construct tents and put them on platforms and we were doing this without our spouses; I was doing it in particular, without my spouse. But we put together this tremendous reception and everybody came. Five or six times at the reception I heard people saying, Ethiopians saying to Ethiopians, "Oh, I've never met you but I know who you are." Or something of that nature. They knew each other by name but they had never met before. We had various ministers who didn't really know each other sitting there talking to each other. It was a terrific event. It was sort of the highlight of the season, not socially so much, but politically. That was basically what we were doing at the Transitional Conference. We were there, we were talking to people, we were meeting people, we were trying to gauge their weight, and what was going on. We were certainly making our concerns known that it had to be a process leading to democracy, that the transitional government and process should be all inclusive, that everybody should have a shot at power and so on.

We didn't know the winners either. We were also trying to get to know the Trigreans and find that out what they were up to. Were they really serious now that they'd won? Were they really serious about what they had been telling Hank Cohen and others beforehand or were they going to renege and go back and become Albania? It was pretty clear that they were serious from the get go. To come back to your point about NGOs. Certainly there were some NGOs involved in keeping an eye on the National Conference, but not really. Most of them were busy working in the field trying to get relief supplies. You have to remember when all this was going on the National Conference which was very important, I think it was the first week of July that we had it, so it was like a week after I got there. At the same time people were trying to get relief out to starving families and starving soldiers and so on or ex-soldiers. So that was going on. We were really, really

busy. The NGOs, fortunately for us, they were there and they were, the ones who had been thrown out for a variety of reasons, coming back. They were focusing on rehabilitation, recovery, the humanitarian piece of the matter.

We had some visits; as I think I mentioned. Don Payne was out there. Very early on we had a visit from Tony Hall who was head of the hunger committee and a very funny story. He got off the plane in Addis Ababa and I met him at the plane and he looked around and he said, "It's green. How come it's not brown?" He, like many people, and not criticizing him at all, expected it to be like it was in 1975, a huge famine and in 1985 when they had another one. He expected pictures of children with distended bellies and brown countryside everywhere. Well, Addis Ababa gets lots of rain and Ethiopia gets lots of rain, not always just in the right place. It happened to be the rainy season when he arrived and so it was pretty lush and green but there hadn't been much of a harvest before.

There were a couple of reasons that Ethiopia faced the problems that they faced in terms of famine. One was they had lots of different climate zones and so almost certainly there is going to be too little rain somewhere, which also meant that generally there was enough rain many other places. Then they had a government which wasn't interested in the free market, shall we say, and the government of Mengistu was very controlling, controlling from the center and wouldn't let people move about. What would normally happen if you don't have rain in your region, you would buy food from another region or workers would go from their own region to another region and get seasonal work and earn something to feed their families. Under the Mengistu government that wasn't allowed, so the situation was made much worse because people couldn't cope and so they starved. Then you throw on top of that the war. People weren't paying much attention to what was going on in agriculture because they were worried about their own survival and people were being pulled into the army so they weren't harvesting their crops and tilling their fields and so on. You put all those things together and you have the recipe for a situation. We did have a situation; again it was mostly the ex-soldiers but there were other family members and so on that needed to be dealt with as well. Anyway, so that was going on, the political situation was going on and Tony Hall came.

Q: Tony Hall was?

BAAS: Tony Hall was a Congressman from Ohio and the head of the Special Committee on Hunger. He had always been very interested in hunger, and he was very helpful to us afterwards because he was able to mobilize some resources on the Hill for Ethiopia. Senator Simon came out along with Senator Robb and they made a visit. That was very useful. They got to see the President. Jimmy Carter came out with Habitat to Humanity. The Carter Center had some activities on river blindness and so on which he wanted to talk to President Meles about. He was not very helpful to me, frankly. I still think this was one of the more unpleasant things that happened to me. It was really very silly on his part. He wanted to go see the President and I suggested that I would come along to and he said, "No, that wouldn't be a very good idea." He wanted to go by himself with his wife Rosalynn, and I said, "Well, Mr. President, obviously you can do that but I don't think

it's a good idea because there are going to be things to follow up on after you're gone and I would be happy to do that for you and make sure that whatever you have agreed, stays agreed." In addition, I said, "Look, I'm just new here and I'm working on my relationship with President Meles and the more I get to see him and see how he functions the better it is for the United States." "He said, "Well, I'm sorry. You were appointed here by President Bush." I said, "You know, yes, that's because President Bush is President and I'm a career guy. It has nothing to do with my political views. I'm not a political guy, I'm a career guy."

I found that sort of mean-spirited and unfortunate, and quite in contrast to what I think is his general way of acting. It made my life more difficult, frankly, and yes indeed, not surprisingly, a month later there was some issue that came up about what they had agreed. President Carter was in Atlanta saying one thing and the government in Addis was saying another thing. I didn't have any ability, although he gave me a good briefing afterwards, but I couldn't say yes, I saw this happen, or I saw that happen in the meeting. Anyway, the visitors were generally very helpful to us because we got more resources. NGOs brought in resources. NGOs were coming back, they wanted to know what they could do to help, some of them hadn't been away, and it was very vibrant, exciting, I don't know how to say it. We were really busy and working very hard. We were doing good stuff.

Q: What was the state of the Tigreans. I know Haile Selassie had made quite an effort to educate Amharas and sent them abroad mostly everywhere including the Soviet Union. Were the Tigreans, had they been able to and the Eritreans to get this?

BAAS: Yes, the Amharas were sort of favored in this regard. Again, this was before my time but there clearly were well-educated Eritreans and well educated Tigreans. Particularly the Tigreans who were always on the fringes of power and were sometimes in power, so they were part of the ruling elite. That's not to make them out to be something that they weren't. They were part of the ruling elite. They just weren't the first row, they were the second and third row of the ruling elite, generally. There were exceptions. Yes, a lot of them were very well educated. The Eritreans were generally well educated; the Italians had left a fairly decent school system and also a tradition of getting educated and stuff like that. There were certainly educated Eritreans as well.

To take one example, Meles Zenawi, under a different name, had been a student at Addis Ababa University. He was one of the best students and was going to become a doctor. In his first year he left and went off to join the newly formed Tigrean People's Liberation Front and spent the rest of the time in the bush. Later on, a year or two later, he encouraged people in his movement, in his government, to go to university and take extension courses. They took courses through the Free University of London which apparently allows you to take courses by extension. They would take their courses and take their tests and everything and they all, as a result, got degrees, because Meles had never gotten a degree from Addis Ababa University. Not only did Meles get his degree, I was told in confidence, by the British ambassador, that of all the people that took the

course worldwide, he had made the top marks, not only in his own group of ten, but everyone worldwide. I mean this was a smart guy.

That being said, there were guys who got promoted into the government who were not educated or who didn't have training. It wasn't their fault; like Meles they had gone out and fought for what they thought was right. It did cause trouble in terms of trying to administer departments, trying to solve fairly complex problems. Some of these guys just didn't work out because they just weren't up to the task. I don't want to leave the impression that everyone was super-educated because they weren't.

Q: We'd had a policy almost sort of the West has had a policy regarding Africa. Don't let it start splitting up because once you start doing that, there's no end to it. Did Eritrea raise any problems with us, the fact that it wanted independence?

BAAS: No, not really. That certainly was our policy and for very good reasons. You'd hate to see Zaire as twenty different countries. Eritrea was generally considered to be an exception. Eritrea had in the past been "independent", depending on who you talk to. If you read the history of Ethiopia, arguably, the King of Axum was the first main kingdom there and arguably it was more Eritrean than Ethiopian, although the two words didn't really exist really at the time. Anyway, it was based up on the Eritrean-Ethiopian border. So it was kind of a special case. It had been a separate colony under Italy, had its own separate identity and for us it really wasn't an issue because the OAU had decided it was OK with them. We said, OK, if the OAU, which has written in its charter that you shouldn't be splitting up countries, can accept it then we certainly can accept it. Frankly, to not accept it would have meant war and neither country needed war and neither country was really in an economic position to go to war.

Q: Let's go back to our stand which was opposed by other countries, including France, on Biafra in Nigeria. We took a firm stand. I was just wondering.

BAAS: It wasn't an issue there at all. Just along that line, clearly, there was an understanding between Isaias, the head of Eritrea and Meles, the head of Ethiopia that Eritrea would become independent in two years. They had the right to become independent. They must have decided that, you know, years or months before they succeeded in throwing Mengistu out. Clearly, that's where it was going. I'm sure it was a non-negotiable point for Isaias. We're going to help you Tigreans, we're going to help the OLF, we're going to help the other people fight against Mengistu because he's our enemy too. If we all win, that's fine, but you have to realize no matter what happens we're not staying in Ethiopia.

Q: On your trips to Asmara during this time were you talking about setting up an embassy? I mean in other words, was that on your agenda and their agenda?

BAAS: Well, they clearly wanted us to have a permanent office up there and we did finally, as I recall, establish a small aid office at the end of maybe the second year. Eventually, just before independence, we established a consulate and then that became an

embassy when they became independent, two years after the war had ended. That was certainly an issue they had but it wasn't one of the major issues that we had. I should say, just to be clear, the atmosphere in Asmara and the atmosphere in Addis Ababa were completely different. Probably 99% of the Eritreans were happy, they had won the war and were going to become independent. In Addis or in Ethiopia there were many Ethiopians who were not happy with the situation, for political reasons because they had been important in the previous government, or whatever. In Eritrea there hadn't been a previous government, there had been an Ethiopian government so it wasn't an issue. Everyone was happy, the euphoria of having won was there.

In Asmara, I remember the first time we were up there, I was waiting to meet Isaias. I was sitting in my hotel thinking I would be picked up, I guess we were going to have dinner at the hotel and who comes walking through the door all by himself but Isaias, the President of Eritrea. He says, "Hey, how're you doing?" He sits down and we talk and later on, after dinner, I went out and was walking around the town and people were walking up and down the main street sort of in the Italian paseo kind of context. Pretty soon here is Isaias and I see him in a bar drinking with a bunch of guys. I'm sure there were security people around, but no noticeable security people. People were just coming up and talking to him. He clearly didn't feel that there was a threat, didn't feel that he was threatened at all. That simply couldn't have happened in Addis Ababa, not because Meles was any less brave or anything like that. Addis Ababa had lots of people in it who thought they should be ruling, who thought that the bad guys had won, who thought that Mengistu should be ruling, who thought that Amhara should be ruling, who thought lots of different things. That simply couldn't happen there. One time, in a different context, Meles said to me that he often felt like a bird in a gilded cage. Here he was the President of this beautiful, wonderful country but he couldn't go anywhere, he was stuck. For security reasons he had to be very cautious in his movements.

Q: Was there a nostalgia for Mengistu? He comes across as a brut.

BAAS: No. I don't think there was any nostalgia for Mengistu. People were happy to be done with him. People though, who had served in his army or had important positions under him, sure, they probably wished he were still there. I think it was more Amhara should be ruling. There were certainly people that were nostalgic for Haile Selassie. There were some, I don't think a very important part. I think the biggest break was among city, urban Amharas who thought, that they, however defined, Haile Selassie, Mengistu or they themselves, or some other person like themselves, should be running the country. That was just how it was done in Ethiopia, that was the way it had always been done and it should be done that way now. It shouldn't be Tigreans, it shouldn't be Oromos, it shouldn't be Benishangul. It shouldn't be democracy, necessarily. It should be Amharas running the country.

Q: And Addis Ababa was the center of Amharism?

BAAS: Yes. It's in the center of Amhara country. The Amhara region and the other center of Amhara agitation, if you want, was Washington. There are so many Amharas here, and they also were making those same points to Congress and to the administration.

Q: Was the church at all a factor?

BAAS: Yes. The church is a very important part traditionally and religiously and culturally in Ethiopia. It's not generally known. Everyone knows about the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and it's basically similar to the Egyptian Coptic Church and often erroneously called Coptic, and obviously has much in common with the Greek Orthodox Church. Probably only about 50% of the Ethiopians are Christian, or I should say orthodox, probably something like 40 to 50% are Moslem, and mostly in the low-lying, outlying areas, not in the highlands typically, and then the balance, whatever that balance is, is Catholic and Protestant.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is interesting in the sense that they were cut off from the rest of the world for centuries. They developed their own way of doing things. There also was a very large Ethiopian Jewish community, Falashas as they were known, outsiders. There are lots of theories and lots of debate about how they actually got there. How they got there was probably less interesting than the fact that they were there. The debates are all very romantic and the stories all very romantic and exciting. They were there and they were also cut off from Israel and from mainstream Jewish thinking, and so both groups, almost in concert, followed the Old Testament very carefully, so the Jewish Falashas were Talmudic Ethiopians. They followed the Talmud. They didn't know about rabbinical pronouncements that had occurred subsequently, so they followed the basic rule.

The Ethiopian Christians or the Orthodox Christians didn't know about various synods that had occurred and what had happened in Christendom. They basically followed the Bible. What you have or what you had, I'm speaking of the Orthodox now but it was probably the same amongst the Jewish community, the Orthodox followed the Old Testament, they didn't eat pork, they didn't eat shellfish, they didn't do all that stuff that Jews don't do. They also fasted, I don't know, someone did the calculations, like 250 days a year. To them fasting wasn't going without food. Fasting was going without meat, going without dairy products, basically eating vegetables. They did that every Wednesday and Friday and every Saint's Day and there seemed to be a Saint's Day every time you looked around. It was amazing and so it was very interesting historically and culturally how they had maintained this or why they had maintained this. It made it very difficult to entertain Ethiopians because you had to make two meals, because you never knew if someone was fasting. Of course, women were more prevalent in the fasting group than men, but you never knew and so you had a couple of menus. Just one of those little things we had to put up with overseas, but which makes being overseas interesting in fact.

To come back to the church, it had had a very strong role traditionally. The Archbishop of Alexandria had named the head of the Ethiopian church, but then Haile Selassie at

some point, I forget when, had sort of appropriated that role for himself and so he named the Abune, the patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. When the change came and Mengistu left and Meles and the TPLF took power, the EPLF became the EPRDF, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front or something, because they were then all inclusive and they had their Tigrean, Amhara and Oromo sections. When Meles came it was necessary to change the Abune, the old one left and a Tigrean was named in his place, Abune Paulos. He played a very important cultural role, not such an important religious role. Most of the people in the TPLF, I would say, many of them were agnostic or atheist. Intellectually, they had been raised as communists and so that was sort of anti-Christian right there. Most of them, I think, were not practicing Christians, some were, but what they were was Ethiopians. The Church pervades the culture of Ethiopia and so therefore they knew that the Church was an important part, particularly since they fancied themselves, I think correctly, as the champion of the peasants and the peasant farmer. Probably 80% of Ethiopia somehow could be called peasant farmer. They thought that was their power base and correctly, I believe. Clearly, not surprisingly, the Church was strongest amongst the peasant farmers, not the people with money. People in a worse situation typically have been attracted to religion, and since that was their political base, they were very cautious and respectful of the Church and its prerogatives. There was none of the thing, at least I don't think there was, of the things in England, in Great Britain, you know, centuries ago when the Church controlled so much of the land and received so much of the income. There was some of that, there were a number of monasteries, but what they controlled was relatively small and not really a big issue in terms of the economy. Certainly, in terms of the culture, in terms of stability, to govern politically, the Church had a big role.

Q: You mentioned the Falashas. In our oral history, people have talked about smuggling Falashas into Sudan and Israel. Was there much return?

BAAS: None, none as far as I know, and in fact, the bulk of them had gone already. They had gone about six months before, when the last big group had gone. Bob Houdek was very much involved in that. I think it was six months before the change. However, there was still a large number of Falashas, or people who claimed to be Falashas, in the country. One other thing that we had to be concerned with was making sure these people were able to go if they wanted to go. That was fine. Meles told me, he said I'm happy to have anyone who's Jewish and wants to go to Israel. Go there, go. That's fine. But they have to be really Jewish. Everyone in the north including myself, he said, could probably claim some Jewish ancestor and therefore claim that they are Jewish. I can't just have the northern part of the country depopulated and I don't think Israel wants 30 million people either. They have to be real Jews. If they are real Jews then they can go. A process was set up through the Israeli Embassy and through some Jewish NGOs, where people came down from the Gondar region, where the alleged Falashas were, came to the embassy and then were sort of examined and checked out for religious bona fides. Then if they had that, they were given an exit permit give to go to Israel. Exit permits were issued, it was like one hundred a month, I forget the number but I think it was like a hundred a month. It was steady, not too fast. Again, they didn't have the image of huge numbers of people leaving, like they had under Mengistu.

Q: And then the Israelis had to absorb them too.

BAAS: The Israelis had to absorb them and that was an issue. Any group of immigrants is a problem. As I understand it, the Ethiopians were not a huge problem in Israel, partly because they have a very martial background and many of them in fact, joined the army and I think did very well in the Israeli army. On the other hand, they had real problems. Many of them weren't literate because they were real peasant farmers we're talking about. They certainly didn't read or speak Hebrew. Israel was an incredibly advanced place for them and, as I mentioned before, they'd been cut off from the trends of Judaism for hundreds, a thousand years or more and many of them weren't sophisticated. For example, a married couple, married by a rabbi up in Ethiopia, might not be considered married when they went to Israel because the ceremony wasn't kosher, to come up with a bad pun. It wasn't according to the current form, and so there were all kinds of cases we saw or heard about, it wasn't a concern of mine, thank God, from Israel where people were having trouble.

But to answer your question, no, there was no return that we were aware of at all, quite the opposite. People were trying to get out, and I think, to be honest, some of it was for these real religious reasons, but I think the vast majority of it was for economic reasons. We were in a poor part of Ethiopia, we had just finished a war, we don't know what the new government is going to do, Israel is a very modern country and they will take us and it must be better. Probably there were some political reasons too, we are Amhara and we don't trust these Tigreans and maybe we'll be better off in Israel.

Q: You mentioned the Amharas were clever and being able to cause problems. They were not being excluded but marginalized more.

BAAS: I would say no, the Amharas were not being excluded at all. It was just a different group of Amharas. The peasant farmers were part of it, not the urban elite. It was the urban elite who didn't like that.

Q: How were they reacting? Was this a, I mean for example, were you finding an exodus to...?

BAAS: Most of them were already gone. There were some of them trying to come back. They had to be very careful though, because there were some really awful things that happened in Ethiopia under Mengistu, the red terror where Mengistu went around and basically killed a bunch of people and then the white terror which was a sort of revenge or counter-action. There were lots of people who had been involved in these things, whether because they really believed it and thought it was a good idea, or because they had no choice and if they didn't kill they would have been killed themselves. There were some people who had blood on their hands and therefore if they came back to Ethiopia they could perhaps be arrested and at least be asked to justify their actions. Ethiopians aren't generally known for their mercy. It's an eye for an eye kind of Old Testament way of looking at things. They had to be careful about coming back. There wasn't much

outflow although there certainly was some. Most of them had already flown out or had gone out, had been living in the States or elsewhere for many years.

They did, as I think you were hinting at in your question, present problems for the embassy, frankly, because, as I said earlier, these guys would know who to call. So we'd get a call from the State Department or a cable from the State Department saying we just heard from Congressman X, who just heard from one of his constituents, who just heard from the Ethiopian community in Washington, that there's been a massacre in Gondar. This really happened, this is an actual case. I don't remember if it was a congressman or someone at the State Department directly. It doesn't matter, we got a message that the Ethiopian community is saying there is a massacre in Gondar. Why haven't you reported on it, why haven't you told us anything about it? What's going on? Well, biting my tongue, to avoid sending off a cable I would regret later, we went off and checked out what had happened in Gondar. We knew there hadn't been a massacre because we would have known if there had been a massacre. There hadn't been a massacre. It turned out what had happened in this instance was there had been a break in of some sort and two people had been shot by police forces, who were doing what they were supposed to do. Now whether they should have shot the people or whether they used too much force or too little force, I don't know. There had been some kind of criminal act and two people had been shot. The police were the rulers and the people shot were Amharas and this had turned out to be a massacre. So you know that just wasted time and caused difficulty, but that's life.

Q: How did you feel you were supported while you were there during two administrations? Bush I with Secretary Baker and then Clinton. Any change?

BAAS: No, not really. I think there was general agreement, politically in Washington about our policy toward Ethiopia. The policy generally was, as I said, humanitarian, let's help them. Economically, let's help them develop, that is, let's throw some money at this problem. I don't mean to say that. Let's put some resources here because this is a country that's very big and a very key player in Africa, certainly in East Africa. We have a tradition of having a good relationship with Ethiopia. Yes, it was Haile Selassie but we still have that tradition. Let's really put some resources here. Let's work on stability in the area and let's push them toward democracy, an all-inclusive democracy. In a way, Ethiopia was the darling of the political community in Washington and that was great.

One of the results of that there was a push to get an ambassador in Ethiopia and, fortunately for me, President Bush nominated me to be ambassador. I flew back after a year and went before Senator Simon, who had seen me out in Ethiopia, and did my testimony and then flew back and was subsequently confirmed and sworn in, in fact, in Ethiopia. I didn't have the big extravaganza on the State Department eighth floor as most of the ambassadors do. That was good because that was a very important symbol of how our relationship was changing, plus the fact that the embassy was growing was very good because that was another symbol. I think it was pretty seamless in terms of the change from one to the other. There wasn't really a difference. When Clinton came in and his people came in, they agreed Ethiopia was an important place. We should still continue to

put in an effort there and put resources there and continue to grow the embassy and we did.

Q: Were you getting any reflection of the quagmire that we had in Somalia about this time?

BAAS: Yes. Somalia impacted on us directly. Initially, it was an Ethiopian concern. Of course, we were also concerned. You're there, you want to follow what the government that you are accredited to is concerned with. But it was an Ethiopian concern because there are a large number of Somalis who are Ethiopians, they have a huge border with Somalia which is undefined in many places, and they have a history of war. The war, the Ogaden War, whenever that was, twenty years ago, and there was a lot of economic activity, i.e., smuggling, going on from one country to the other. There was a lot for them to worry about. There was also Islamic fundamentalism, which was sort of showing its head now. They were worried about that spilling over the border and coming into Ethiopian Somalia region, and what implications that would have for them. Initially, it was that kind of thing. Ethiopia tried very hard, and I think successfully in some ways, to play a regional role in bringing people together and to bring factions together, conferences and meetings and so on.

In one of these meetings I met Aidid who was there. He was staying in one of the hotels and I had to go by and see him because I had something to tell him from Washington. I saw him and told him and reported back. He was meeting with Meles all the time and so on. One time afterwards Meles ruefully said to me, you know, we had him here and we should have just stuck him on an island somewhere in the middle of Lake Tama and then we would have avoided all these problems.

Well, then the problem started, or came to a head, in Somalia, when the U.S. troops went in there to deliver food and many of those flights stopped in Addis Ababa. Addis had a great advantage in that it was on the way. It was a friendly government, a friendly country with a friendly government that wanted to be helpful. It had the disadvantage that it was at 2,800 meters and there was a limit to how much fuel you could have at that altitude. We did have a group of the Air Force folks come out and set up at the airport. We had E-5s coming through, or whatever they're called, C-5s coming through filled with food going there. The Air Force Chief of Staff came through and met with Meles and thanked him for his support and met with me. We were very much supporting that activity and again, we were also supporting the political side because they were trying to get together and come up with some political solution. I was there, of course, when they went after Aidid and the helicopter was shot down and it was a great tragedy.

I also had at that time Bob Oakley, who was named as a Special Representative for Somalia. He spent a lot of time with us in Addis Ababa because that's where the focus was, working with Meles and working with others on that.

One other sidelight I should mention in regard to the Somalia operation. Isaias became ill. I got on the phone and called Washington. We called the Air Force and I called the State

Department and the Defense Department and we were working the phones. Everyone was extremely cooperative and on very short notice we found a plane that was on its way, empty I guess, back from Somalia, having delivered whatever it had delivered. It was able then to stop in Eritrea, pick up Isaias and his retinue and then fly them into Tel Aviv. And that all happened at literally three o'clock in the morning and he ended up in Tel Aviv. I think he was in Israel several weeks, maybe months. He did, in fact, recover from his malaria attack, or whatever it had been, and so that was one of those little sidelights. One of the good things that happened, I guess, one of the things that was positive that probably wouldn't have been possible if we hadn't been actively ferrying food into Somalia.

Q: The whole Somali effort to help them collapsed. Did that reflect on you all?

BAAS: No, I think the Ethiopians understood why it collapsed. They probably thought we were chickens, and you know, thirteen guys or eighteen guys or however many it was get shot and that's a tragedy, but that doesn't necessarily mean you should put your tail between your legs and run. Remember, these guys were military. They had been a liberation front, they had been fighting in the bush against much greater odds than the United States faced in Somalia for thirteen, fifteen years, and so to see the mighty United States take off because a helicopter got shot down, I think, was instructive for them. It certainly didn't affect my relationship with them at all. But I think it did affect the way they looked at the United States.

One of the nicest things about being in Ethiopia at this time was the role the embassy got to play, that I got to play. I probably saw the President at least once a week. I mean, as you know from your career that doesn't usually happen. I saw ministers when I needed to see them and I saw the President more often, if I needed to see him, and we talked about everything. He wanted my opinion, he wanted the United States' opinion, on what he ought to do about this problem or that problem. I always tried to be honest with him and give him what I thought he should do. He didn't always do what we wanted him to do, he's a smart guy, he didn't need someone to pull his strings, but he certainly took our information on board and made his own decisions as appropriate. That's just a thing that doesn't happen typically in a career. It was really a marvelous thing to have that kind of opportunity and have that kind of input.

At the same time, AID was very active and we were doing lots of projects and signing lots of things of that nature and so the United States was often on the radio and on the TV and so on. One time I remember I was in Harar which is way down in the southeastern part of the country, as far away as you can get, and very much a Moslem town. I was walking through the town with my driver and a couple of other people and in the market a guy came up to me and said, "Oh, Ambassador Baas." "Well, yes, but how did you know?" "Well," he said, "I see you on TV." I said to myself, well, our weight is even more than I thought. That was the good news. The bad news was everyone wanted to see us and everyone had a project that we could certainly do, if only they were just given a little bit of money then they would take care of the problem.

The other thing was I was able to use the visibility that we had, I think effectively, to push human rights. A couple of times I went public and had press conferences, always after talking to the government first about various things. One time I remember it was about the run up to the elections, I talked every chance I got to the government, which was often, about making the playing field level and giving the opposition a chance and so on. I can't remember what the issue was but some guy had been arrested. I gave a press conference on our general view and I basically said, this is what the government has done, this is what the opposition has done, both could do better. They both could find a way to make this function better. The opposition has to treat the government with respect and understand that someone has to govern and their job is to try to run the best election they can. The government has to give the opposition a chance and they don't always do that. Here's one now.

I got into some trouble with the rank and file, I was told later by the President, the rank and file of his movement. They all thought, get rid of this guy. He's attacking us, saying we're not keeping the playing field level, he's taking the side of the opposition. I said to the President, "Look, if that's what you think, fine. I'll be happy to go home. It doesn't matter to me, but you're wrong. I'm trying to be honest and you have to consider these issues." Obviously, I finished out my tour. It was a very powerful position we had.

The other thing I kept trying to say to the Ethiopians and the Eritreans and indeed, the Somalis subsequently, was look, you're only in the limelight for a limited amount of time. Right now Ethiopia and Eritrea, and then later Somalia, have the world's attention and people are trying to do something here. You have to really benefit from this, you have to take advantage of this and do something worthwhile because it's going to go away. You have to use that now to build something for the future, because soon there is going to be another problem in Bosnia or in Indonesia or in Bolivia, it doesn't matter where, but there's going to be a problem somewhere else. The spotlight of world attention is going to shift somewhere else and so you have to take advantage of this six months, one year, two years that you have the world's attention. I think the Ethiopians and Eritreans did a fairly good job of that. The Ethiopians better, the Eritreans not so bad, and the Somalis did a terrible job of taking advantage of that spotlight. The Ethiopians and Eritreans subsequently gave back much of the good will that they obtained when they went to war over the border between the two countries. That was long after I was gone, but it was a stupid war.

Q: It soured the whole thing.

BAAS: Yes. It didn't make a lot of sense. It was important, sort of emotionally and so forth, but I don't think it was really about land, I think it was about the political relationship between the two.

Q: Did it ever come up or was it ever a thought in anybody's mind to do anything militarily, you know we had Kagnew Station for 20 or 30 years. Our whole policy toward Ethiopia centered on this one communication center. Were you ever talking about doing anything, stockpiling stuff or something? Did the problems of the Sudan, the north south

conflict, did that reflect down there? Let's talk about the, you might say, the end game. Were you there when Eritrea was made independent? And then what about life in Addis Ababa, you know, family, contacts with the Ethiopians?

Q: Again, you were in Ethiopia from when to when?

BAAS: 1991 to 1994. I was actually chargé and chief of mission for the first year and ambassador for the last two.

Q: We want to talk about the end game, how things were playing out because it has resonance in what is happening today.

BAAS: OK. There are three things to mention. Sudan first, if it is OK with you, and then there's Ethiopia, their elections, and then there's the referendum in Eritrea on Eritrean independence. I think those three are probably worth talking about. And then you also wanted to do something on life, the quality of life.

Let's start with Sudan. Obviously, if you look at the map Sudan is an incredibly important neighbor for Ethiopia. It's huge. It's been in varying degrees of instability for many years and also had a fairly aggressive "Islamic" government with el-Turabi as the spiritual or intellectual genius behind it. I think Sudan was very worrisome to the Ethiopian government. They still saw themselves as they were, as a new transitional -- at least in the initial stages – government, and they had just finished a huge war with Mengistu. The country's army was pretty small at that point. It was basically the remainder of the rebel army, such as it was. The Ethiopian army had disbanded and was all over the country, and that was an issue to deal with. You had food, security issues and so on. The saw themselves as fairly weak, weaker than they probably would be at any other time. Therefore a country which was relatively strong, although certainly not strong, like Sudan, having it as a neighbor with a huge border and which potentially had an ideology which was in variance with their ideology was an issue. Their population is about half Orthodox, half Moslem. Even most of the Moslems in Ethiopia were less ideological than perhaps the Sudanese government was. So they were worried, and also adding to that was that the fringes of Ethiopia were even less stable than the center. The central highlands were the most stable, the most understood part of Ethiopia by the government. The fringes had always been, traditionally throughout Ethiopia's history, and this government was no different, parts that were harder to understand and harder to control.

Another aspect to it is that many Ethiopians had been evacuated, Jews and others had been evacuated via Sudan at various times. Many of the Tigreans, who formed the basis, the core of the new government, had spent lots of time in Sudan when they were rebels. Sudan had supported them, and had let them live there, and they had been able to use Sudan sort of as a training ground, as a free area, as a non-combatants area. And that was very useful to them. The Ethiopians, the Tigreans particularly, thought that they had some knowledge of Sudanese politics. They had been working it a long time, they knew all the players, and so they were very active, I think that's probably the wrong word. They

weren't very active at all, I would say, in trying to resolve the conflict between north and south, but they were very active in trying to develop a very close relationship with Sudan. I think, as such, to try to keep Sudan from mucking around in Ethiopian affairs.

Q: When you say developing close relations with Sudan, I think of Sudan as being two countries.

BAAS: Well, I meant the government of Sudan. They certainly were more comfortable with the government because most of their activity in the north was where the northern part of Sudan abuts, and therefore they had more contact with those folks and they needed the government's permission to be in Khartoum, to be in Sudan. On the other hand, they certainly knew John Garang, and they certainly knew the southern Sudanese as well. And, I think fancied themselves as potentially capable of doing a mediation or bringing together the two. They had so much on their plate and there were other people, other actors in Sudan, that never did anything in any sort of meaningful way while I was there. I think there were some contacts and talks, and we certainly talked to them a lot about Sudan and about the problems and they were very interested in that. Mostly they were very concerned about potential Sudanese aggression. This goes for Eritrea as well. Eritrea which was not yet independent until 1993, but even those first two years when they were nominally independent and were basically running their own country, they were very concerned about the Sudanese as well.

I remember, this is a little off color, but perhaps an amusing anecdote. I was up there one time, as I said earlier I went up probably 25 times a year to Eritrea just to meet with people and keep an eye on things up there. I was up there one time and the head of intelligence of Eritrea came up to me at some point and said, "Boy, have I got some information for you. We've been tailing the Sudanese ambassador, because they had an ambassador in Eritrea, and his number two and they're homosexuals. And so, come on, let's use it, let's get them. Let's do something to them." And I said, "Listen, I mean I don't care what their sexual interests are, if you really want to know the truth. I'm really not interested in that." I politely shoved it off. But a couple of things; one, they were watching them very carefully, apparently, very closely, and two, they would have liked to have done something to discombobulate the Sudanese operations, whatever they were, in Eritrea. I don't think it was probably any different in Ethiopia. The Ethiopians were probably a little bit more graceful or diplomatic or something.

One thing that was interesting is that the Sudanese ambassador who had been their head of intelligence, was basically asked for by President Meles. He basically told El Bashir that I want this guy as ambassador and they sent him, which is obviously something the United States would never do. I think probably would never do. We probably have done it in the past. Certainly, we put great store by choosing our own ambassadors and having someone who is close, but not too close, or having clientitis before he even got there.

Q: Looking at a map I see that Ethiopia has got a long border with essentially, all of Sudan and a lot of it is down in the south. What I understand is there is more a Negroid, Christian type thing. Was there spillover? What was happening there?

BAAS: No, there wasn't much spillover. From the government's point of view the south was less important. I mean, it was important, but it wasn't the center of Ethiopian traditional governance and power. The highlands were the most important area. If you go straight south from Addis Ababa you get into the whole Oromo area and that was important because that was a huge part of the population, a major part, the biggest single ethnic group. When you go off towards the border then you get into the Benishangul and Gambela people and all sorts of little ethnic groups, who were interesting and were important, but were so small that they really didn't much matter in the early days. They tried to keep them active and involved in the central government, but I don't think they wasted a whole lot of time on them. I think that was probably a logical decision on their part.

Now the north however, that's where the contact mainly was. But one thing I should have mentioned right away was the Nile. The Blue Nile starts near Lake Tana. It actually does start at Lake Tana in Ethiopia, and then goes to Khartoum where it joins with the White Nile and forms the Nile which ends up in Cairo. What many people don't realize because everyone thinks of the Nile as being a straight north south river, is that 70% of the water that ends up in Cairo in the Nile River comes from Ethiopia and Eritrea from the highlands. There's another river to the north which doesn't show on that map which also joins up with the Nile to the north of Khartoum.

The Blue Nile was a big issue for the Sudanese, an even bigger issue for the Egyptians. And since Sudan and Egypt have a long history -- I should mention now that the Egyptians were absolutely psychotic, I'm not sure what the word is, they were paranoid that the Ethiopians would dam the Nile River and therefore mess up their agriculture on the Nile. Apparently, back in the eleventh or thirteenth century, there was some brave Ethiopian king who got mad at the Egyptians for some real or imagined slight and said he was going to dam the river and stop the water from going to Egypt. He didn't have the technology to be able to do it and I guess he might have put some rocks in the river or something like that. This is a major river. The Blue Nile Falls is one of the most impressive falls you ever want to see in your life. The Egyptians have not forgotten that empty threat and it still resonates today. Literally, they become apoplectic whenever the Ethiopians talked about it.

The Ethiopians had some basic water issues. Famine is a big problem in Ethiopia. One of the problems is not so much lack of rain, but lack of steady rain. Rains come heavy at one time and not at all. With a few simple dams, micro dams, you could save some water when it rains and then use it during the dry times. The Nile is a big river and you can imagine putting a turbine in there, using it for electricity. It wouldn't really cost any water and all. The Ethiopians at one point were thinking of doing that and maybe still are. Plus there's the water runoff. There's a huge erosion problem because it's highlands and huge rains come and wash the top soil away and that complicates agricultural life. The Ethiopians had some real water-related issues to deal with. It was very difficult for them to deal with them at all, because the Egyptian just went sort of crazy.

An amusing issue is the mother of President Meles lived in Sudan. She had been a refugee and had gone to Sudan. She lived in northern Sudan and she lived there for a year or two, even after he had come to power. She was there the whole time, I think, the "revolution" was going on, the liberation movement was going on. I suspect he wasn't unique. We just knew about that because that was the President's mother but other people in the sort of ruling elite probably had family members who are still there.

Q: Were you there when Mubarak came to Ethiopia and there was an assassination attempt?

BAAS: That was after I left. I had forgotten about that. It was like six months or a year after I left.

Q: What about Kenya? Anything out of that?

BAAS: No. Kenya was strange, it was kind of far away in a sense. It's not far away. The south was so far away from Addis Ababa, and it was the last part that was added to what was, in fact, the Ethiopian empire and mainly settled by nomadic tribesmen and people like that. I think on the border area you found people who were similar. The north, as I understand it, the north of Kenya, is fairly sparsely settled as is the southern part on the border of Ethiopia. I think there was a lot of nomadic back and forth there, and there was a periodic border issue of my cows or your cows my goats or your goats or whatever, but nothing major. The other kind of issue with Kenya, two others were very marginal. Ethiopian Airlines and to some degree Kenyan Airlines were in competition for a lot of travel in that area, in that part of the country. Ethiopian Airlines had clearly won that, at least during the time I was there, I'm not sure what has happened since. They were clearly the better airline.

And the other thing was Nairobi and Addis Ababa were the two great cities of the eastern part of Africa and so there was some competition in terms of international organizations or conferences being held, or even tourism which clearly Kenya is much better known for and does much better at. But Ethiopia thought that they had some things to offer there and could siphon off some of those tourist dollars. They tried and I suppose they did probably. Whether there was a siphoning off or rather additional, I don't know. No, I think the relations with Kenya were pretty good.

One other thing that we should probably talk about was Djibouti. Djibouti, the former French colony right on the coast, was much more interesting and much more of a concern to the Ethiopians, mainly because of the Afars. The Afars in Ethiopia and in Eritrea or the southern part of Eritrea, and then they're up in the Awash Valley on the Djiboutian border in Ethiopia. The railroad goes from Addis Ababa to Djibouti. The railroad, built by the French, was an interesting thing for them to have and in the old days a lot of their contact with the outside world went through Djibouti. Things would go down on the train to the port of Djibouti and be off loaded and away they would go to wherever. So that was a real lifeline for them, and since it went through the Ogaden it also went through an

area that was somewhat more unsettled than the rest of the country, with all sorts of clan activities going on.

In fact, it's amusing, I think it was the Indonesian ambassador who showed up in Ethiopia, and I went to make a courtesy call or he came to make a courtesy call on me, I can't remember which, and we were chatting, how did he get there. It turns out he'd landed in Djibouti and taken the train up, which I thought was great. It turns out that on the way up some bandits had come up along and shot at the train. They had not succeeded in stopping the train but they had shot up the train in any event. He said, you know, it was pretty exciting until he arrived at his residence, and unpacked his stuff which had been on the train as well. It seems that in the crates that his things had been in took bullets and he said he had suits, like six or seven of them, each with one bullet hole right through the folded part of his suit, in one side and out the back. I said, "Great. You can wear them and tell some great stories back home about how you survived for your country." There were security problems down there and around Dire Dawa where the main rail head was. Another little interesting tidbit is that French remained the language of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway because it was essentially built by the French and Djibouti was French and still speaks French. The whole Afar issue was a big issue.

Q: What sort of tribe were they?

BAAS: The Afars are a very warlike tribe. Allegedly, for an Afar to be a man he has to cut off the testicles of a rival. One hopes they don't do that quite as much as they perhaps used to in the past. But the point is the same, they're very like warlike and have very beautiful women, but no one dares look at them because you might lose your testicles. They live in a very sparse area, it's where Lucy was found, the famous skeleton of the early humanoid. Tim White and Donald Johanson from Cal Berkeley; they were out there too. That was kind of fun. The skeleton was found in the Afar area. It was very desolate. The Afars are herders basically. They're nomads and they herd and the Awash River is one of those rivers that never makes it to the ocean, it dries up before it gets to the ocean or to any place. It doesn't really exit anywhere. It goes into the desert and stops. It's a very low land area. The Awash have a very strong ethnic pride and ethnic sensitivity and identity. They have a sultan who they consider their ruler, and I got to know him a little bit although it was tough talking to him. There are parts of them in Eritrea and parts of them in Ethiopia and parts of them in Djibouti. So that made the relationship with Djibouti interesting. And then the fact that the railroad was in Djibouti also made it very interesting.

Q: Was Djibouti independent at the time?

BAAS: Oh, yes. It had been independent since the late seventies, I think. There was a French port there, a couple of French naval bases there, both for marines, the French equivalent of marines, and I guess the foreign legion had had a base there. And then when the Gulf War started up, Djibouti became even more important. You had all sorts of things going on. That was an important relationship, but it wasn't one that was very difficult for them to handle. They were always afraid that Djibouti might close down the

port to them and that they considered important. It became even more important when Eritrea became independent. And, the question of the Ayesha region also became important.

Q: Well, talk about their foreign relations. Did foreign relation issues, is this something you observed and for some reason or other did you as the American chargé or ambassador get involved?

BAAS: Oh, very much. In fact, I probably saw President Meles after my first six months there when I was finding my way, but after that, once we got to know each other, I probably saw him at least once a week, which is incredible. That doesn't happen in very many countries at all. Mostly he had messages to deliver to me and sometimes I had messages to deliver to him. A lot of it was things like how do we run elections, what do we do, what's the best thing to do, what do we do about press, but a lot of it was about foreign relations. Meles is very intelligent, an extremely smart guy. It wasn't that he didn't have ideas of his own; quite the contrary, he did. He was just bouncing them off me and, through me, the United States government and trying to get our opinion. What should we do to about this, what should we do about the situation in Somalia? What if we have a conference here on Somalia? Would that be a good thing to bring the various clans together? Should I go talk to John Garang? Is there something that can be done there? And then a lot of time was spent on internal Ethiopian politics which we'll come to in a minute. But there was a very, I think, useful and productive exchange.

Just so I don't forget it, I should probably mention the single most embarrassing meeting I had with him -- or embarrassing is not the word -- the most difficult meeting was when the Rwanda massacre started, since we're talking about foreign affairs issues. About that time, I was instructed by Washington to go in and make a formal demarche to the Ethiopians on getting more U.N. peacekeepers into Bosnia. Bosnia was also going on at that time and more blue helmets were needed. Ethiopia was on the Security Council, I believe, and therefore we wanted to make sure that they supported this. I was instructed to go in and seek their support for more. So I made the demarche and it was all very nice and Meles said, "Yes, we understand that and that makes good sense, but there's one thing I don't understand here. You're asking for more blue helmets in Bosnia at the same time the blue helmets are leaving Rwanda, even though millions of people or hundreds of thousands of people or tens of thousands of people are being massacred in Rwanda. So, am I to conclude that the United States government thinks that white Bosnians are more important than black Rwandans?" That's a very hard question to answer. Absolutely. He was right. He was absolutely right. That was the message we were sending, that white Bosnians, Europeans, were more important than Africans in Rwanda. Obviously, as a diplomat one doesn't answer yes, you're right, Mr. President. One does the best one can and says, "Well, the situation is what it is and we are trying to do what we can, and it is possible to work in Rwanda too. But it was incredible, because I agreed with him one hundred per cent. That just shows a) how involved he was in foreign affairs, and b) how sharp he was and how he could make connections between things that weren't entirely connected.

Q: I guess we should turn to internal politics, both what was happening and your role in this.

BAAS: I talked a little bit, I think, about the Transitional Conference and the transitional government that was set up. There were a couple of parts. One was trying to put together elections so that there would be a new parliament, a new government, and not just a transitional government. Very much related to that was the whole issue of the relationships between the various ethnic groups. Would parties be ethnically based, would they be national parties, how would elections be held in the various ethnic regions, national regions as they would call them, how would this all run? They were coming from hundreds and hundreds of years of either monarchy or dictatorship or whatever where any elections they had, and they had precious few, were directed from the center, were controlled from the center, and the people in the hinterland had very little to say about it. Not surprisingly, the people who had never participated or were being asked to participate wanted to know how this was all going to work out.

The third issue, before I go on, is sort of how the elections were organized. What was going to happen to the Ethiopian exiles? People who wanted to come back who had been in bad odor at some time in the past, either with the transitional government or the previous government or with the previous, previous government -- Haile Selassie's government, Mengistu's government or the current government who had left the country -- were they going to be allowed to come back and participate and how and under what terms were they going to be allowed to participate? That was another issue.

Since that's an easier answer, let me deal with that one. The government basically said every Ethiopian is welcome back to participate in the elections. However, if you've committed crimes in the past you have to realize that you are, of course, subject to arrest. There's where the rub came in, what's a crime? Not surprisingly, some of the opposition folk thought well, if I'm opposition and maybe some of things that I'm less than proud of that I did in the past will turn out to be crimes, whereas someone else who has just been keeping his head down and not participating in the political process wouldn't even be noticed. That was a real issue for the people in the opposition, and it came down to what you did. If you had committed murder I think you wouldn't have wanted to go back. If you were a member of a political party that didn't do anything bad you were probably going to be OK. In between, if you stole or if you were in the police and beat people, all those kinds of issues came up too. The problem was people really didn't know. We had lots of cases of people coming back and being arrested. Then their family asked what was going on, that sort of thing, those were issues we had to deal with.

But the political process itself was very interesting on a couple of levels. First of all, the Ethiopians are a very legalistic people and they understand form and they understand process. So they created an election commission which was to run the elections, basically to do the run up to the elections and put it all together. That worked very well. There were some glitches. The international community tried to support them in a variety of ways. AID and the embassy, sort of combined, because AID is part of the embassy and the State Department combined put together a democracy project and worked with them.

I was always consulting with my German and Dutch and British and European Union colleagues and with the election commission. We had meetings with the election commission.

Q: That's quite an apparatus.

BAAS: We had a huge apparatus.

Q: The OSCE, I was a monitor in Bosnia and running these elections all over Eastern Europe. So you had a lot of expertise with the Carter Institute?

BAAS: The Carter Center came, IRI, the Republican thing and NDI, which is the Democratic thing, they all sent out experts and we had a lot of help. The Dutch and the Swedes sent out other people. There were people who were willing to help and to give money and so there was a lot of good stuff going on. As a result, the elections ended up coming off fairly well. The big problem again was with the ethnic groups, how the ethnic groups were going to react. That's what I think we should talk about a little bit now.

There were a couple of things. First of all, there had been these liberation movements that were formed in the main ethnic groups. There was OLF, the Oromo Liberation Front, and they were a significant force, even though their successes on the battlefield against Mengistu seemed to be less than some of the others. There were a couple of Somali groups. Typically Somalis could never have one group, they had two or three. There were, of course, the Tigrean and the Amhara groups. The transitional government, particularly the TPLF, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, which became the EPRDF the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic something or other, they wanted to implant themselves in all areas of the country, which made a lot of sense politically from their point of view. They started establishing people's groups, so we had the Oromos People's Organization, the OPO, and then you had the Benishangul People's Organization and then you had the Somali People's Organization, all these things are called people's organizations, sort of showing their formation as good communists. They thought that everything should be called people's organization. That was a fine idea, but...

Let's just take the Oromo because that's the one that became the most important since it was the largest single ethnic group in the country, population-wise. The OPO or the OPDO, I guess, and the one that was sort of the new one formed by the transitional government was looked on with some suspicion, to put it very, very mildly by the OLF. They said all of these guys are sending government guys down here to compete with us in our territory. They're going to undercut us in our own political stronghold, which is absolutely correct. Of course, that's what they were trying to do. To their credit, to Meles' credit particularly, the TPRF had worked very, very hard the first two years to get along with the OLF, to try to bring in the OLF. I think I said earlier, in the context of the Transitional Convention, the votes were set up and the membership was set up so that when you added them together the TPLF and the OLF had one vote more than a majority. My analysis of that, at the time, was that the TPLF wanted to work with the OLF to rule the country. They didn't trust the Amharas because the Amharas had ruled it for such a

long time and the Amharas were going to be difficult, but they wanted to work with the OLF, who they saw as downtrodden peasants much like themselves, to run the country.

Unfortunately, I think for Ethiopia, the OLF didn't want to go along with that. The OLF, very quickly in negotiations, did not want to come up with a real government structure that included both of them. The OLF, I think, realized correctly that they would have been the junior partner, even though they would've had a majority of the population. The TPLF again, correctly, said, "Look it. We won the war. It was our guys fighting that won the war so, of course, we're going to be to your senior partner." My own view is that, if they had come together, even though the OLF would have been the junior partner, over time, maybe it would've been ten years, over time the OLF would have become the preponderant force simply because they had the majority population. So there was a lot of discussion between the TPLF and the OLF and a lot of low level conflict between them at this time. I spent a lot of time up in Eritrea with the Eritreans trying to negotiate between the two of them, bringing the leadership together in Eritrea, the head of the OLF and usually the Foreign minister or someone else from the TPLF side, and then President Isaias of Eritrea spent a lot of his own time sitting and mediating between these guys, how the elections would go, what would happen, how they could join the government and, to make a long story short, even though he spent a lot of time and, I think, increased understanding, it failed. The OLF finally decided they didn't want to cooperate with the TPLF. They wanted to go into the elections as an independent organization and wanted to stay out of the transitional government. I think that was unfortunate for Ethiopia.

As a result of that, the TPLF started forming these ethnic groups under their umbrella. That's when they formed the EPRDF that became the umbrella organization. The TPLF, their former group, was one of the groups under that, there was an Amhara one, there was an Oromo one, and there was a Benishangul one. That was setting themselves up to compete on the political field. They basically said to the OLF, look, we wanted to get you in. You didn't want to come in. Whose fault that was, more the Tigrean or the Oromo side, probably would depend on which side you are on, but we tried to get you in, we made a good faith effort, you didn't want to cooperate with us so, of course, we're going to compete with you politically. That's what politics is. If you want to send a group up to compete in Tigray, please, go ahead, form an Oromo Tigrean group, that's fine.

As is often the case with incumbents, the words often sound better than the actual situation on the field or on the ground, and I think this is particularly true in a country that has very little democratic history. It's even true in the United States. The incumbents have an advantage clearly, even with our 200 years of experience, but it's particularly true in a country that doesn't have anything and where peasants are much more susceptible to friendly persuasion or to believing that if they don't vote for candidate X, government fertilizer won't show up and they'll starve. And so those sorts of threats, whether or not they are made, are certainly much more persuasive. So I think the opposition clearly had a hard row to hoe. What this led to eventually was the OLF basically pulled out of the election process. The OLF said they were going to start fighting again. They basically declared war on the transitional government. That was

obviously very bad from the point of view of the United States and very bad from the point of view of the Ethiopians generally, including the Oromos.

What happened then was I think probably the most interesting thing, and probably the thing of which I'm most proud of in my time there. I ended up negotiating, or mediating really, between the TPLF, in the presence of the Defense Minister, but most often the Army Chief of Staff, basically the number two at the defense ministry, on the one hand and the head of the OLF and his main military leader on the OLF side, in my house. They came to the residence, sat at my dining room table, we had coffee, we had chocolate chip cookies. I guess we probably met over a period of a month or two, I really forget, but I'd say maybe ten times. We were discussing how to prevent a civil war. It was kind of low level conflict. There was fighting going on, not fixed units fighting, so more like guerilla kind of stuff. It was attack a police box here, attack a police car there, that kind of thing. But it had the real potential for a downward spiral into civil war.

We talked and we talked about how we could stop it, and we finally succeeded in getting the OLF to agree to go in and to take their armed forces and put them into camps, which would be jointly guarded by OLF and TPLF people with a joint commission and international observers as well. I can't remember who it was, the Swedes, or somebody, came down to help out with that eventually. It was really hard to do and it was a really great thing that we did, because it prevented a civil war. Then we had a problem, and it shows you how sometimes you have to be creative in diplomacy, even if Washington's not always happy with that. We had a problem: how do we get the OLF army from where they were into the camps? How do we get over that problem when they were marching toward the camp, how do we prove to everybody involved that they were coming peacefully? They didn't want to disarm and just march into the camps because then what if they get all got slaughtered? The other side, the TPLF, didn't want them to march into the camps with their weapons, because what if they got there and they started firing at everybody? So how do we get over that? Once the agreement had been to get them into the camps, how do we make everybody comfortable with the fact that they were going into the camps.

Well, I think we decided there were going to be six camps and we decided we would send out some international volunteers to be with the OLF folks when they went into the camps. I asked my embassy staff, I said, OK, is there anybody here who would like to do this? It's safe or I wouldn't ask you to do it, but potentially, it could be dangerous. We don't know exactly what's going to happen, these guys could start fighting. I don't think they have any interest in killing Americans. It could be dangerous. I had like ten volunteers, and I had to choose six. The communicator went, an AID officer went, I think they were all men, and to a person they said it was the single best thing they had done in their career. They really felt fulfilled that they had done this, because it was successful. It gave someone with the OLF forces, who had a radio, who was in communication with us and with the TPLF, the ability to tell what was going on and to say what they were doing and they were coming peacefully and so on. It was the confidence builder necessary to get both sides to agree. As I said to my DCM the time, these guys are masters, both sides are masters at trying to slice the salami just a little bit thinner. You think you've made

that last slice, and they want to make one more little thin slice. It's never decided until it's decided and after negotiating with these guys, having to deal with, the Russians or the Department of Defense or something like that would be easy. But Washington wasn't happy about that because, sure, I did put people in potential danger. But you know, they were volunteers and it was necessary to get it done, and that's what we did, and no one got hurt.

Q: What about the role of Washington during this? The Assistant Secretary for African Affairs was whom?

BAAS: I guess it was Jeff Davidow at that point. I think Hank Cohen had left. I was in communication with them all the time.

Q: Except for this thing you were ....?

BAAS: And even on this I think I informed them what I was doing, I'm not sure I asked permission. Yes, you have to keep Washington informed obviously, and so they knew what we were doing. They knew I was spending a lot of time negotiating between these two people, these two sides, and they were obviously very supportive and very congratulatory afterwards when we got the agreement for having prevented a civil war. Again, as I said to my colleagues at the embassy, look, this is the kind of thing that diplomats do all the time, and for which we get very little credit. Nobody in the media or in Washington, beyond the kind of little African group, or certainly not in St. Louis, is aware when a civil war has been prevented. Everyone knows when a civil war has started and when you have ended a civil war that already began. The guys who, they deserve a lot of credit, the guys who ended the civil war in Yugoslavia and all that kind of stuff. They did the Dayton Accords and all that. They deserved a lot of credit. Everyone knows about that. No one knows about the one that that didn't get started because there was never a headline there. But, Washington certainly knew and, as I said, they sent us a very nice congratulatory telegram saying good job and all that.

Q: During all these political developments, was it assumed or maybe it had already happened that Eritrea wasn't going to be part of the equation?

BAAS: It was assumed certainly, by President Meles and President Isaias that Eritrea was going to become independent. That was part of their deal, I think, from the very beginning. What I think they both were very wise about, particularly Isaias, they wanted to follow the exact letter of the law of the UN resolution, or whatever it was, and that basically was that there should be a referendum. I think that back in 1960 there had been a UN resolution that said what Eritrea could do to determine whether it wanted to be independent, which Haile Selassie had simply ignored and just brought in Eritrea more closely. They followed that ancient UN resolution and, so exactly two years after they had thrown out Mengistu, they had a referendum up in Eritrea.

I and ten members of my staff went up there to observe it. We went out to different parts of Eritrea which is relatively easy to do because it's a fairly small place. It wasn't just the

U.S.; it was an international operation. We had Swedes and English or British and Germans. So we did it together and we all went out and about. It was actually very easy because there was no difficulty with this in Eritrea. The Eritreans probably voted 99.9% in favor of independence, and if the country had more of a democratic tradition, maybe it would have been 10% who voted against it. But there was no question in my mind, the 10% who might have voted against it either didn't vote or voted yes, because they knew it was going to win and why cause themselves problems with the government, since they weren't sure how much respect they were going to have for rule of law. Clearly, a majority of people favored it.

I went about Asmara, the capital, looking at various voting places and everywhere I went they recognized me and recognized the car and the flag, and we got lots of thumbs up and stuff like that. In the evening I saw Isaias and I said, "I don't know, Mr. President. You'd better be careful because I seem to be pretty popular up here. I may have to come up here to Eritrea and run against you in an election." He laughed and he said, "I'm not worried about that." Nor should he have been. It was a very successful referendum and it passed virtually unanimously.

Q: Because of later developments, was there a border problem at the time?

BAAS: I'll come to that in just a second. I just want to say the situation was somewhat different in Ethiopia about Eritrean independence. The government, and therefore the people with the guns, supported it. They had no problem with it at all and, as I said earlier, the transitional document that came out of the conference basically said that any ethnic group had the right to leave. I think Meles had adopted that as a fail safe mechanism so that people didn't feel like they had to leave, because they had the right to leave and didn't have to revolt to do that. I think he did it in a very intelligent way, because he knew the Eritreans were going. That being said, there were lots of people, particularly Amharas, and particularly those who had some connection with Haile Selassie, who thought the departure of Eritrea was going to be a disaster. Unfortunately for them and perhaps for the government the only way to resist it was with a war, by arms. Certainly neither Eritrea nor Ethiopia needed a war at that point or indeed later. The Ethiopians, Meles anyway, wasn't prepared to invade Eritrea simply to keep it a part of Ethiopia. If they wanted to be independent, then that was fine.

I sort of developed a theory that Eritrea would clearly become independent and I thought the relationships between the countries would remain closer than it was or than it turned out to be in fact. Eventually, 10, 20 or 30 years down the road the Eritreans might find it useful to rejoin Ethiopia, as an independent equal partner. It was clear to me, whether or not that happened, there was no way to stop the independence of Eritrea. Indeed, there was no desire or need to stop the independence of Eritrea. It went against the OAU strictures against breaking off, but it was considered a special case and didn't cause any real trouble in that regard. So after the referendum was held, a month or two later, they had the formal independence ceremony at the end of May and I went up for that. By this time we had a consulate up there, and I was there for the flag coming down, the Ethiopian flag went down at midnight and the new one went up.

The flag is an interesting story. There was a big issue about what the flag was going to look like. They knew the colors that it was going to be, but then the issue was they wanted, Isaias wanted, the olive branch from the UN to be part of the flag, because Eritrea considers it was basically created by the resolution of the UN in the sixties that said Eritrea could hold a referendum and then become free. They wanted that as part of the flag. The issue was what color was it going to be? The first draft of the flag had it being green, not surprisingly, which is the color of an olive leaf anyway, but at the last minute it turned out to be yellow. Isaias decided it was going to be yellow. It was funny, we were sitting, a group of us including Isaias, and he said, "Well, I don't know. We have to think about the color of this that and the other thing" and he said, "I don't know, I'll decide. I think I'll decide in half an hour." I didn't know what the decision was until I woke up in the morning and saw flags flying that had yellow, not green. What they had done, quite typically, is Isaias had decided at 10:00 pm or whenever, and then had the flags made up so in the morning the flag could go up. So that went fairly smoothly and I thought, honestly, that although the relationship would be difficult, because Isaias is a prickly guy, and Meles certainly didn't let himself be pushed around, he's certainly a tough guy, but I thought the relationship would be a fairly good one.

I probably said earlier, the Eritrean language and Tigrean are very close. They are British English and American English. There are a few words where the accent is a little different, but basically they speak the same language. Communication was not a problem; they felt very close to each other. There were even all these rumors going around that Isaias and Meles were somehow related, which I don't believe they were. It shows you how close the places were. In fact, they had a lot of interest in making each other work.

With Eritrea, one of the best reasons, the only non-emotional reason that I heard in Ethiopia for not letting Eritrea leave, was ports. The main Ethiopian port is Assab, which is in southern or southeastern Eritrea just before you get to Djibouti, and to quote Gertrude Stein, there is no there there at Assab. There is nothing there but this port, it's just desert and this port. But that was important for Ethiopia because that was a way for them to get their stuff out and there was always the fear that, what if they didn't have access to that port? It turned out, when they had the border war a couple of years later, they lost access to the port. Where do you go? Do you go to Djibouti, Djibouti's port is somewhat limited, or Berbera up in Somaliland, as it is called now in Northern Somalia, or Mogadishu and other ports down in the southern part of Somalia?

Q: Massawa?

BAAS: Massawa is in Eritrea. But that's a much less interesting port for central Ethiopia. If you look at Addis Ababa it's much closer, if you head straight toward Yemen, it's much closer going that way than up through Asmara and then down to Massawa. Northern Ethiopia sent stuff out of Massawa, that was its natural port, or maybe even Sudan sometimes. None of these other ports had the capacity, or more importantly the infrastructure, leading to the port like Assab had. Djibouti had the railroad. At Assab, the roads were pretty good because it was basically a dry area and so you had sort of dry dirt

roads that stayed passable year round because trucks went back and forth all the time. That was a real issue and it became a huge issue.

I thought these guys would cooperate. They both had an interest in cooperating. Eritrea was the access to the sea for Ethiopia. They had a long history together. Eritrea needed Ethiopia's population, if they were going to build some sort of small industries. Eritrea had the idea of building small, light industries and then supplying Ethiopia. That makes a lot of sense. They could be kind of like Israel is, could be vis-à-vis the Arab country behind it, a country of what three million people and a huge country of 60 million people or 70 million now. That's a huge market. They could be the transshipment point for stuff coming in, for goods from the outside, they could be a banking entrepôt like Singapore, there was a lot of stuff they could've done that would have made them useful to Ethiopia and brought them income and would have been mutually beneficial.

Then of course, they went and changed the money. They had all had used the Ethiopian birr. Eritrea decided they wanted to change to the nakfa, which is a famous battle, and have their own currency, but it was going to be equal to the birr. They wanted to keep the exchange rate one to one. Well, after I left, inevitably, that stopped being the case and so then you had two different currencies which led to economic problems. Basically, I think the war up there was not economic at all; it was mostly a political war. Who was going to be the big brother? I think I said earlier that Eritrea always saw themselves as the big brother to Ethiopia. Ethiopia resented that, because they said we are 65 million and you are three million, so who's big to whom? I think it was more I'm tougher than you, no, I'm tougher than you. It was really silly because too many people died, and neither country needed that. But that was after I left.

Q: What happened? Did you just lose part of your territory? Was there an American ambassador put in place or how did that work out?

BAAS: At some point, and I forget when this was, but I think it may have been just about the time of the referendum, we opened a consulate up there. One of the issues I had been dealing with was the old consulate building. Did that still belong to us? It was an issue of Kagnew Station. What was going to happen to that and it was a real wreck. Basically, that belonged to the Eritreans at that point. We needed to get the old consulate building back, and we managed to negotiate that. We had people from FBO out to look at it and to make sure it was still suitable and that something could be done to put it back into shape. And so all that was done and we came to an agreement with the Eritreans that we would get the consulate back. At that point we sent up a very small staff; a consul and an admin officer, and basically it was just one guy. We continued to support them. As I recall it was about six months before independence we sent them up there. Then we started having normal conversations with the government on a daily basis, because before when I went up there I was only up there once a month. I'd stay for two days and it's not a very good way to have a discussion. Once independence came that became an embassy and the consul became a chargé and eventually we came up with an ambassador; Bob Houdek was our first ambassador there. It just went about its business. In a way it didn't really affect me, because Houdek came in when I had about six or maybe nine months to go. I

had plenty to do in Ethiopia anyway. Certainly, the first two years I was there, Eritrea was part of our portfolio and kept us very busy. It was very interesting, it was very fun. It was a good thing.

Q: How did you find the diplomatic corps? When I think of Ethiopia I think of countries such as the Swedes and all. A lot of countries had quite a stake in Ethiopia, more than other parts of Africa. How did the diplomatic corps fit in?

BAAS: We had a very large diplomatic corps in Ethiopia, which was good and bad. The reason we had a large diplomatic corps was because Addis Ababa was the headquarters of the OAU, the Organization of African Unity, which is now the African Union. The OAU was and is headquartered there and as a result most of the 50 African countries, not all, had embassies there, simply because African countries are mostly poor and they don't have embassies all over Africa, usually only in their neighbors. Addis Ababa was a good place to send someone because at the OAU they talked about regional issues that were important to everybody, and it was also a place where if you were, shall we say, a Botswana and you had obviously had no reason to send an ambassador to Mali and vice versa, the Malians and Batswana could meet in Addis Ababa and talk about whatever issue they might want to talk about, Air Afrique or some issue that might come up. That was a way to have bilateral relations with countries that you normally wouldn't have strong bilateral relations with. We had most of the African embassies and because of the size and importance of Ethiopia, we had more international embassies than many countries in Africa.

I worked very, very hard on the diplomatic circuit, particularly with the Western Europeans to develop a group that was supportive initially of the humanitarian effort to help the displaced soldiers and then subsequently, to deal with the political process. We had a group of probably twenty, but there were really five that mattered. Certainly the United States was the most important and obviously, I kind of ran the group and was the main contact with President Meles and would often report back to the group on what was going on. The British ambassador, James Glaze was extremely helpful and very, very good and very important. Of course, the British have some history in Ethiopia. The German ambassador, the Swedish ambassador and then the head of the European Union. The five of us, particularly the four bilateral ambassadors if you want to call them that, were really key to this whole political process and trying to get a political process going forward. We would meet very often as a donors' group with the OLF and with the President and with other opposition groups to lend our good offices and our prestige to the whole electoral process, to let the opposition know that we were watching, that we were there, and that we were going to say something if things happened. I shouldn't have forgotten the Dutch, the Dutch were extremely important as well. Even though they were kind of half a step down, they were important to what was going on because they had money and they had an interest in the whole democratic process.

Q: You didn't mention the French?

BAAS: The French were there. I happen to be a francophone and I really like the French, but in Ethiopia they were little more stand-offish. It wasn't a francophone country and they were happy to have us take the lead. They certainly wanted to keep tabs on what was going on, they were very active in the bigger group.

Q: They weren't in the smaller group?

BAAS: They weren't in the small group.

Q: They weren't in opposition or trying to?

BAAS: Not at all, not at all. I had very good relations with the French embassy, as did other diplomats, and we kept them very much in the loop. We had this larger group of twenty or so. The Russians were there. The Russians had a somewhat checkered past having supported Mengistu, but that was the Soviets and they were the Russians and they tried to play that as being somehow different. There was one other one that just occurred to me.

Q: Chinese?

BAAS: Yes, but they weren't very active. The Egyptians were very interested in this sort of bigger group, and then you had, you know, some Africans, like the South Africans.

Q: The Canadians? The Swedes?

BAAS: The Swedes were very active, as I said, and in one of the core groups that we had. The World Bank was active as well, and we had a lot of people involved in this group. We tried to add our prestige to the electoral process that was going on, and I think that's why we got the OLF to say they would come in from the field to take part in the electoral process. In the event they never did. They finally decided not to run and the people who had gone to the camps sort of drifted away back into the countryside. The good news from our point of view was that their threat as a fighting force was finished; they were no longer a fighting force. That was probably good news from the government's point of view. It was certainly bad news from the OLF's point of view. So there was peace. The bad news was that the OLF didn't participate in the electoral process, and therefore I think they made democracy more difficult to obtain in Ethiopia. We told them, the whole group told the leader of the OLF you've got to participate in this. We have experience in Africa, we know Ethiopia, we know what's happening here, we understand that you may not win, but that's all right. If you don't win in the first election you'll be in the government, you'll be involved and the opposition. Maybe you will win the second election or the third election. This is important for Ethiopia to have a credible election, to have a credible opposition. But you can get out there and participate. If there are problems in the election, we'll see them, we'll address them, we'll address them with the government, we'll use our aid in such ways as to help you. We're not trying to just help them. We want to aid the process. He didn't want to take that and his view was basically, my supporters wouldn't understand. If I lose, then I'm finished as a leader. I said, well, if

you don't run for election you're not going to win and this is absurd. Look at Richard Nixon. He lost and he ended up becoming President. But it's a different culture and we couldn't convince them of that, and that was very sad to me. Who knows what the real reason was? I suspect that was the real reason. They basically declined to participate and that was extremely unfortunate.

Q: By the time you left in your last few months Eritrea was independent?

BAAS: It was for the last year.

Q: What was happening, I mean essentially the majority of the population weren't represented. How did you feel about the political stability of the country?

BAAS: In some ways I would call Meles a benign dictator. He was clearly in control. He clearly had the hammer and could use it if he needed to. I don't think he did very often. I don't think he wanted to. On the other hand, he was clearly trying to find a formula, trying to find a way to bring everybody in. And, don't forget, we said earlier one thing that the transitional document did was it allowed the local nations to have autonomy, so, as long as they were part of Ethiopia and sort of respected the central government, they had the right to elect their own local governments, to have education in their own local language, to decide on their own local taxes and local projects and so on. So they had, in theory, much more local autonomy than they did previously. This was a great concern, particularly to the Amharas who identified with Haile Selassie, especially as they were worried that if you took away the centralizing force of the government then Ethiopia would split up and become twelve different nations. Meles' argument was if they have the right to leave they're going to see it's more useful to stay part of the whole, if they're able to take care of their local issues locally, there's no reason for them to be independent. They can be part of a bigger Ethiopia which has a certain amount of prestige and standing in the world, much more than Oromia would or Somali Ogaden or Tigray or something else would. So there was a basic sort of philosophical debate going on. Every ethnic group had a certain amount of new power at the local level which they didn't have before. Of course, they were working through this and there were difficulties with police and how that was all going to work out. Nobody was really sure, but at least on paper and, certainly some in practice, new power and new control locally.

In addition, it was a transitional period. The process we were trying to set up of elections leading to a parliament, a parliamentary government, was one that, at least on paper again and in theory, would lead to participation by everybody. If in fact, there is a parliamentary system, that means that you elect from your local area your representative and yes, sure, you may not be part of the majority party but still you've got some power and ability to push interests, issues that are of interest to your constituents. That was the theory. When they did have the election after I left, predictably the parties aligned with the TPLF won the majority of the votes. There were opposition members who got elected. It wasn't, from what I understand, it wasn't as fair and free as we would have liked. On the other hand, it wasn't completely unfair either.

The thing that I kept saying to everybody in Washington, in Addis Ababa, anyone who would listen is we can't expect the first election to be perfect. This is not going to happen. We don't have perfect elections in the United States. Kennedy in Chicago, and we didn't know about this one at the time, but Florida and Bush. We don't have perfect elections. No election is perfect. Democracies just aren't perfect. We're going to expect that the election in Ethiopia is going to be perfect? It's going to be much less perfect than ours. We have to try to work on the different areas, work to make it as good as we can. Understanding that it's not going be perfect, it will be 20% or 30% of what it should be. Let's try to get opposition access to the media, let's try to let opposition parties hold meetings, let's try to find ways to fund opposition parties and government parties, let's try to find simple ways to identify parties so illiterate peasants know what they're voting for, let's try to educate the peasants on what elections mean and what they don't mean, let's try to make the press freer, let's try to make the judiciary follow the law, and not be dependent on the whims of whoever happens to be in power at the time, let's work on getting a process, getting a system, getting a structure of democracy. Let's have an election. Let's understand it's not going to be perfect. Let's find out where the big, egregious mistakes were, beat the government about the head and shoulders about those mistakes, and let's help them improve for the next election. If the first election is 20% good maybe the third election will be 30, maybe the fourth election will be 50, and maybe by the time we have ten elections it will be 80% good. That's not all bad. The election didn't do as much as it could've done, but it was still an important thing to have done, absolutely.

Q: Looking at this and your efforts and all, one of the charges often made against the United States by certain countries is that we are driven by trade. Were there any American economic interests in Ethiopia?

BAAS: Well, it's interesting because I came out of the economic cone and so my background was economics. I had worked in economic sections my whole career so you would think I would have done more but I didn't. A little bit, sure, we had businessmen come through, and we were as helpful as we could be to them. It was almost the opposite problem. I was racking my brains trying to figure out how I could get American businessmen interested in Ethiopia, because there was a huge work force, relatively capable. This is a dangerous thing to say and we never really did this, but Ethiopia has a textile industry and they could've been like the Dominican Republic or China and made shirts for the United States' market. I never got so far as to promote that, but there was a lot of stuff they could do with that labor force.

One project that we did have was a sugar mill. It came out of a company from Louisiana. They came out there and they wanted to build a sugar mill and they did. They have some sugar cane in Ethiopia and they built a sugar mill and I went to Meles a couple of times to make sure the contract was honored and so we were helping American businessmen. I wish there had been more than the sugar company, but it was the early days. People weren't sure. There was no law. There was no code or courts; that was the biggest problem. People weren't sure what the rules were and what would happen to their investment if there was a dispute. Of course, you can write that into contracts,

international arbitration and so on, but if the government has no track record then you just don't know if they're going to ignore it or whatever. Look what's happening in Chad now with the pipeline and the World Bank. Chad has just torn up the agreement with the World Bank. What's to prevent any government from doing that?

It was the opposite problem, how to attract to American interests. Again, it goes back to democracy. How do we develop a system within Ethiopia that would give investors confidence and to actually put some money in? One area where we also had some success, on a much smaller scale, was attracting Ethiopian émigrés back. There were a lot, particularly Tigreans, not surprisingly because they were the guys who were in power, who came back from the United States, who had degrees, who had training. I remember one guy, he had a degree in water management from somewhere in the United States and he had worked with a water utility in some big city in the United States. He went back to Ethiopia and was working in Tigray trying to develop water systems for Mekelle, the main city of Tigray. That's good, that's great kind of stuff. It didn't bring any money to the United States, but it was certainly good for Ethiopia.

Q: Did you see any core development? We're talking about 1991 to 1994. The computer is beginning to come of age, the internet is beginning to come on the scene. I know there are some very bright people, because I have seen them elsewhere from Ethiopia, mostly from Amhara. Did you see any of this developing? Sort of the communications revolution?

BAAS: No, not really. We had a couple of people visit who wanted to do some work in the telecommunications area. It was a little early because when I was at the embassy we didn't even have e-mail with Washington at that point. It came in just as I was leaving.

Q: Things have moved so rapidly, it was basically still early in the day.

BAAS: Yes, we were still doing most of our communications with Washington, obviously the traditional ones, the immediate ones were still telephonic.

Q: One more thing on the internal side, did you see developing banditry or warlordism?

BAAS: No, not all. As a matter of fact that was one the great successes of the transitional government. Certainly when it came in, given the aftermath of the war, there was a lot of banditry and warlordism. There was a curfew. When I first got there we had a curfew of I guess it was nine o'clock. We had this habit, my driver would drive me to a dinner or something that I had and then in order to stay at the dinner -- maybe it was ten o'clock, the curfew -- so in order to stay at the dinner until 9:30 I would let my driver go. Otherwise, he would have to drive us back and then he couldn't get home after the dinner. I let my driver go and I would just drive the limousine back to the embassy. He would get to the embassy in the morning and it was all fine. Also this was good because I didn't know how to get to places, but I could find my way back to the embassy. One night we did this and we were driving home, at say a quarter of ten and so we're fifteen minutes, well before curfew, and we were about half a mile from the embassy going up

the long road toward the embassy, and all of a sudden this firing breaks out. There are guns going off, the police are shooting. My wife is sitting next to me and I said, "Get down, get down." And she says, "What do you mean, it's not curfew. They can't do this. It's not curfew. They're not supposed to be doing this." I said, "I don't care. Get down." "This is a bullet proof thing." So I'm ducking down and driving and we went through it. It turns out that what had happened was that there was a mass of people there at a church praying, because it was some religious day or other, and the police just decided it was fifteen minutes before curfew and they wanted to let everyone know they had to get going. So they fired their guns in the air. I think they could've found a better way to do it. Certainly, the first month or two we were there you could hear firing in the streets and the curfew was on.

We didn't have too much trouble in the embassy. One night about a year after we had been there, the summer of '92 or '93, someone threw a grenade over the wall of the embassy, and it landed on the roof of the house of the communicator, a woman, and fortunately it didn't go off. It was a dud of some kind. We didn't have a one hundred foot setback. People walked by our building and threw things over our wall. Subsequently, one of our AID officers was shot at. He was driving a car, he looks very much like me with a beard and the same kind of size and so on and I'm sure that they thought it was me. He did the right things. He saw the car coming in his mirror and thought it was strange they were following him. He saw them pull up and he ducked and they missed, thank goodness. It was not a safe place, but it certainly wasn't banditry and warlordism. In the early years the problem was there were a lot of guns and nobody had jobs. After a year or two those things started to change, certainly the guns were all collected and put away, locked up, and people started finding jobs and getting back to their home villages.

We traveled all over the Ethiopia with never, ever any real fear. I was a little worried when I went to the Somali area, because that was where it was worst and, of course, you had the whole thing going on in Somalia that was spilling over in the Ogaden. But never in any other part of the country did I feel afraid.

Q: That brings us to the subject of life there. How did you find life for you and for the embassy staff and all?

BAAS: Life in Ethiopia was really pretty good. First of all it's a very nice climate at 2,800 meters, about 8,000 feet, and once you get used to the altitude it's a very comfortable climate. The only time it is really cold is in July and August because it's the rainy season and that's why you have a fireplace. It's very comforting to be sitting by the fireplace in August with a fire going knowing that people are sweltering in Washington. The climate was wonderful, the people are extremely friendly, very nice generally, like Americans, and the food is good. Some people don't like the national dish of Ethiopia, injera and doro wat. Fortunately, for Americans anyway, the second national dish of Ethiopia is basically pasta. The Italians were there for a little bit of time, certainly, in Eritrea. So when you are traveling you can always find some edible, usually not very good, pasta. But there were good restaurants in Addis, good food of all kinds in Addis, and the housing was excellent, we had really good housing.

The one problem I would say for Americans was that because there were so many poor people and, even more than poor people, there were desperate people because they didn't have jobs, they had just gotten out of the army, and they didn't know what to do. We had some problems with break-ins. I said to everybody, look, we have made our houses secure and they're safe and you have guards and barbed wire and everything, and the reason we're doing that is because we want people to go next door, not to your house. And so everyone be smart, be cool and be aware of what's going on around you. Don't judge these people. Who's to say that you or I, if we were in the same position and the only thing we could do to feed our family was to go steal someone's television, wouldn't do it? I don't know that I wouldn't, maybe I would, I probably would. We can't be judgmental about the Ethiopians, but we do have to protect ourselves. So that was one issue. I don't think we had any robberies in the time that I was there. That was certainly one thing we had to worry about.

The other good thing about Ethiopia is there were things to see. In much of Africa you can't see the history so much because it's kind of dissolved into the jungle. Palaces weren't made out of stone, typically they were made out of wood or something and the wood has rotted. In Ethiopia you can still see the history. Also thanks to the five years the Italians were there, there were good roads. You could actually travel about and get around the country. You have the Blue Nile Falls that you can get to, you had the castles in Gondar, you had the sunken churches of the thirteenth century in Lalibela, which was harder to get to, which is really one of the unique things in the world. These churches were dug down into the ground as opposed to being constructed from stone up from the ground. Imagine in the thirteenth century what an economic surplus they must've had, what faith they must've had, to dig a church down into the rock and hollow out the rock and make a church down in there, marvelous things. You had lots of festivals and so on that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had. It was a pleasant place to be.

From my point of view it was a wonderful place to be because Ethiopians were friendly, the Ethiopian government was just finding its way. They didn't know how or what to do. They didn't realize they didn't have to come to the American ambassador's every time you invited them if they didn't want to. So they came a lot, which was really great. I could get ministers there, I had Meles over for dinner one time, just privately, but ministers would come regularly and Ethiopians of all walks would come.

I think I probably mentioned earlier but our first Fourth of July ceremony, which occurred six weeks after the Mengistu government fell, basically was the meeting ground for lots of these people, some who had come back from exile, some who had been fighting, and some who had been hiding in town and hadn't been around. They all met there. That's what we tried to do at social events, get people from different groups together so they would meet.

The difficult, interesting thing about Ethiopia, the Orthodox Church follows lots of Old Testament practices because they were cut off from mainstream Christianity for so long. Same thing with Ethiopian Jews who were cut off from Judaism for such a long time.

They basically follow the Torah in terms of eating and so Ethiopian Christians don't eat pork and don't mix milk and meat and all those things that Jews don't do. In addition, they have all kinds of fasting days. Every Wednesday and every Friday is a fasting day and they have other days all through the year, Saints Days. It's something like 200 days a year when they're fasting. Fortunately, fasting doesn't mean not eating; fasting means essentially only eating vegetables, which made it interesting when we entertained because we never knew who was going to be fasting. First of all, we never knew it was a fasting day, but we never knew who was going to be fasting and who wasn't going to be fasting. My cook, who was an Ethiopian, she always made an extra menu of fasting dishes. It was usually the women, the wives would come along and then we would find out they were fasting. They would get a special meal, it was just one of those little cultural things.

The other interesting cultural thing that was similar was that since Jews don't eat webbed-footed birds, Jews don't eat ducks apparently, or at least Ethiopians don't eat ducks. Orthodox Ethiopians don't eat web-footed things. And so the first Thanksgiving we had we invited a bunch of Ethiopians, as we have always done at posts, and have them see what an American Thanksgiving is like. Out comes the big old turkey and everyone kind of looks around and says, well. I get up to give my little talk about what Thanksgiving is and I said I want everyone to know this is a turkey. This is an American turkey, it is not a duck and turkeys, which you don't grow here, are very much like chickens. They have three claws so it is OK, you can to eat it.

It was a very great place to be. It was a wonderful place to be. My three children are Ethiopian, we adopted three children in Ethiopia which I think says a couple of things. One, how the war had kind of devastated the country and how many children there were needing adoption, and two, how much we loved the country to adopt kids from there. Now, of course, AIDS was just starting up when I was there. I don't know, AIDS seems to follow me. It was big in Zaire when I was there and it was just starting up in Ethiopia, and that's a big problem for them.

They have a tremendous future and tremendous possibilities if they don't blow it.

Q: What about, you mentioned the fasting and all this, did you to find that the Orthodox Church was a political force or not?

BAAS: It certainly had been a political force in the past. Haile Selassie, I think, managed to lessen it a little bit. I think he got to the point where he promoted it, chose the abune, the bishop essentially, whereas before it had always been the church in Alexandria that had done that, the Patriarch in Alexandria. Under Mengistu, of course he was a communist allegedly, and so therefore wasn't religious and presumably ignored the church. I wasn't there for that. Under Meles and his party, clearly the church was not a formal political player. So many Ethiopians, particularly in the highlands, were Orthodox and particularly the peasants who Meles saw as his natural political force were good Orthodox that he had to take the church into account. It was clearly a political player, even though it was different than it had been in the past. One thing they did was they appointed a new abune, a bishop or patriarch, and not surprisingly he was a Tigrean, the

previous one had been Amhara, I believe, and so that I think made the cooperation with the church somewhat easier.

The Orthodox Church is a pretty conservative church as these things go and I talked to Abune Paulos several times because they were an important player. One time I went to see him and we had been having some reports of churches, Protestant churches, Catholic churches and mosques being burned or otherwise attacked by Orthodox Christians. So I went and did my best kind of ecumenical Christian thing about love thy neighbor and shouldn't we all get along and how could this be going on and so on. His answer I thought was one for the ages because he said, "Oh, I agree with you to 100%." He said, "It's very important. We don't care if there are Protestants here, we don't care if there are Catholics, and we don't care if there are Jews or Moslems, that's fine. Everyone should get along. Everyone believes what they want to believe." This was really great and that's fine and I'm thinking to myself, well that was easy. Well, I should have known. Then he said, "If they try to steal my sheep I can't let them do it." And so basically, what he was saying was as long as you don't try to convert Orthodox people you're OK. He basically said, yes, we're doing that stuff.

Q: You know, I spent four years in Greece back in the 70's. I think Article Two of the Greek Constitution is that you shall not proselytize the Greek Orthodox. The Orthodox Church can really dig in its heels.

BAAS: Haile Selassie clearly said the same. One of my early memories of Ethiopia was when I was a kid and at my home church back in Michigan, a missionary came from Ethiopia, an American, who had been out in Ethiopia and I remember her saying, "You know, we can try to convert Moslems, we can try to convert pagans which basically I think were Oromos at the time, but we can't touch the Orthodox." It struck me as being an entirely reasonable thing. If you're a Christian and if you believe that Christianity is an important thing, it seems much more intelligent to go after non-Christians than people who are Christians of a different stripe.

Another interesting thing about our time there is that as a result, the missionary community in Ethiopia, with a lot of Americans involved, is all in the Oromo area. It's all Protestant missionaries from the United States and so in this whole political process leading up to the elections with the Oromos I'd be getting stuff from these Americans out in the hinterland basically saying, "Oh, the Oromos are downtrodden people" and basically taking the Oromo side, and I think honestly. They were just looking at it from their own narrow point of view.

These people do a lot of good things. A person who actually went to Hope College with my parents had been a year behind them and my parents knew he was there and he was a missionary out in western Ethiopia. He had a hospital, a wonderful hospital. They had built a new wing or a new hospital, I don't recall which, and they wanted me to come out for the dedication. So I said, "Sure, of course I will." So I flew out to the western part of the country in a small little plane and I have been to a lot of small airports in Africa, but this was the absolute strangest landing strip I'd ever been on in my life. It was grass, it

looked like it was about two hundred meters long, it was probably a little longer than that. We came in over a huge gulch, a huge river valley, a sharp descending cliff, landed going uphill and if we didn't stop in time we were going to run into the wall of the mountain. We came in and landed and it was fine and I went to the ceremony. Then when you took off you just turned the plane around and you went downhill and out over the gulch. If something happened well, then it just became a glider and glided to the bottom of the gulch, I guess. It was pretty small. There were marvelous things these missionaries did out there. This was the only hospital for God knows how many miles and people came there and were treated, and they didn't have the most modern equipment but not the oldest equipment either. It was good equipment and dedicated people and they treated everybody who had often come a long way. It didn't matter what their religion was or what their philosophy was.

Not like the missionaries Ambassador Harrop ran into in Zaire. When he went out to the eastern part of the country on a trip he ran into a group of American missionaries out there. It turned out that they had established an electricity generator, had a generator for bringing electricity to the town, at which not surprisingly, the ambassador said, "That's marvelous. That's a really good idea." Then he discovered that, in fact, they were only hooking up people who converted. He explained to them that that was probably not a very wise thing for them to do.

Q: The Chinese used to be known as rice Christians. You would go to church to get rice.

BAAS: Just like I said about the people in Ethiopia to my staff, if you were an unemployed soldier and needed to feed your family, maybe you'd be a thief too. Maybe you would become a Buddhist, it didn't matter.

Q: In 1994 you left Ethiopia after a fascinating time and a very productive time. Then wither?

BAAS: I came back to Washington and I was the director of Central African Affairs for the next two years from 1994 to 1996.

Q: You came back when to Washington?

BAAS: When I left in Ethiopia in 1994 I actually didn't go to Washington. I went to the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. I spent two years there. I was the Deputy Commandant for international affairs. Basically, they have a Commandant who is a brigadier general, then they have a military Vice Commandant or Deputy Commandant who basically does the military stuff and they like to have someone coming off an ambassadorial post who is a Foreign Service Officer and is the Deputy Commandant for International Affairs.

It was a very interesting time. They had about 35 foreign students from 35 different countries there and naturally, my position was interested in those folks. Plus I also sort of kept an eye on the civilians, probably ten civilians including two, I think, from the State

Department the years I was there. Then you just become sort of part of the regular administration of the War College, take part in seminars, you are a resource for people and the students there. The students are largely army colonels, new colonels, colonels or light colonels, who have been successful in their military careers. They have done it for twenty years or eighteen years and they are now at a stage in their career where they're going to become either generals or advisors to generals so they have to sort of broaden their expertise and their thought processes from following orders and charging the hill or engaging in an effective tank battle or whatever to somewhat broader geopolitical issues which involve foreign policy. They're going to end up on the line at the Pentagon or something and they're going to have to worry about what our foreign policy is with the Middle East or with China or whatever area you want to take, and that requires a little broadening of their focus and a little broadening of their thought process. Foreign affairs, as you know, has more gray in it than military matters usually do, or at least military matters at the levels that these guys were giving their orders; it was simpler for them, they just followed orders and did it. Now they were getting to the point where they had to think about what they were doing and had to provide advice on policy and our military status or stance in respect to that policy. So it was very interesting and after a very intense three years in Ethiopia it was a nice time to dial it back a notch and sort of reflect and contemplate and talk to people about academic concerns.

There were some real issues. While I was there, the top team as they called it, we basically set the policy of the Army War College, and naturally, one thing that's sort of difficult about being there is everyone wants you to be the expert on anything foreign policy wise. Even if it's an issue of, I don't know, a dispute between Paraguay and Uruguay, they'd look to you to have the answer. I knew about as much about Paraguay and Uruguay as probably any man on the street, maybe a little bit more, but not any particular knowledge on Paraguay and Uruguay or lots of places in the world. I knew how to find the answers and a lot of the problems have general responses that we've learned long ago as diplomats.

It was an interesting time to be there because the army was coming to grips with how to deal with peacekeeping. They had been forced to do some peacekeeping in places, they had the failure of Somalia, and how to deal with the new war if you want, or the new threats to the country and how the army should be structured and how troops should be trained to deal with that. There was a Peacekeeping Institute at the Army War College in Carlisle which had conferences and war games and so on to try to deal with a lot of these problems; I was a resource for that.

Q: I have interviewed a Foreign Service officer who was there.

BAAS: Dave Bennett? He was on the staff for a while. Dan Simpson was my immediate predecessor and subsequent to me it was Marshall McCauly.

Q: Did you find that the army really didn't want to get into this peacekeeping stuff?

BAAS: Yes and no. There were people in the Army who did, and people in the army who saw they were going to have to and it's like any other organization. I think the focus clearly shifted in the two years I was there, not because of anything I did, but simply because times were changing and people realized that. I think at the beginning most people would have said we'd rather not do this. In fact, at the end most people might have said we'd rather not do this too. It didn't stop there. They said, that's the way the world is going and we've got to be relevant and have a role to play. We need to decide what that role can be.

One thing not to forget is, of course, the rivalry between the various branches of the armed forces. A lot of what the army was thinking was what role does the army have? Is it only marines who are going to be brought in by air force planes or by navy ships and dropped off to do this, or does the army have a role? The army, which is the largest of the services and traditionally is the one that takes and occupies territory, it was kind of a watershed and a complete change in their thinking. Of course, they always say, and I think are correct to say, we need to keep thinking about fighting a war in North Korea or fighting a land war wherever that may be. We can't lose that capability, but we have to add additional capability to deal with the special situations that we're facing around the world.

Q: I would think you would be picking up almost discomfort, particularly from the armored side of the military. In a way it was like the submarines in the navy. You are not going to have big armored columns working through a peacekeeping thing.

BAAS: I think that was clearly a sub text. That was why the army insisted, and I think correctly so, that we also had to be ready to fight a major land war somewhere. That's what you have your armor for. The stuff that's more likely to happen, barring major land wars, and let's hope we don't have one, is going to be more of a peacekeeping, nation-building variety. Nation-building used to be anathema to military guys. They said, we don't to do nation-building. That's what AID does or something.

Q: When the Bush Administration came in they were, the Bush Two Administration, they were saying we don't do nation building. This was a bad word.

BAAS: The trouble is it's like making sausage. It's a messy job and it's not easy to see results very quickly, whereas if you fight a war it is pretty easy to see, well, we won in Iraq because Saddam Hussein is out of power, but now they're in the messier part and it's a little harder to say we're making progress or we're not making progress. We probably are, but still you keep seeing people getting killed and no obvious gain you can point at.

Q: Well, you were there from when to when now?

BAAS: 1994 to 1996.

Q: You were there when we inserted ourselves in a big way into Bosnia, weren't you?

BAAS: I think that started afterwards. I'm not sure, it could be, I just forget. We were not focused so much on existing conflicts as we were planning for future things. I mean in the seminars they talked about what was going on in the world, obviously.

Q: Was there much talk about China as being a potential problem?

BAAS: Sure, that was one of the ones people mentioned as the potential for a land war. You could never be sure. Everyone was sort of hopeful that changes in China would lead to less likelihood of war, but on the other hand, with the Soviet Union ceasing to exist then does China fill that gap? Yes, it was clearly an issue of discussion in many of the seminars.

Q: Did you get people in from the State Department who talked about the Koreas?

BAAS: Yes. There were a lot of people who came up from Washington, generally, including State. It was easier to get people from Defense because they saw themselves as having more of a stake. We particularly got people up from Washington from the State Department to play in the war games. We would have a two or three day war game, and it was kind of a traditional war game. The second year particularly we threw in terrorist kinds of things and so changed the war game in that way. Then we'd get people to come up and play, you know, you'd get a desk officer for Korea to come up and play the president of South Korea or something. That was kind of fun and they liked it. I think it was probably good for what they were doing as well. The nice thing about Carlyle from my point of view was you were out of Washington, but only two hours away so it was easy enough to come down to Washington and see people and to get things done.

With the international students we took one trip a year to Latin America. In about a week we saw Southern Command and then we went to Brazil and one year we went to Argentina, another year we went to Venezuela, I guess. That was interesting because of course, we had some Latin American students there, and they were very interested to show people around their continent. The most interesting part was the students from the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia. We had Slovenians and Croatians, which you wouldn't have had originally, and we had someone from Tajikistan and had a Russian and that was kind of interesting. The other thing I found amusing as a Foreign Service guy was the Pakistani and the Indian officers who at home probably wouldn't be caught dead talking to each other. In both years it was interesting, they both kind of discovered after a very short time that culturally and so on they had much more in common with each other than they did with anyone else who was there, and so they ended up being buddies. The food isn't that different and their outlook on life isn't that different and it was kind of interesting how these things work.

We also took a trip down to Washington and went around and saw how the Congress works, and the White House and went by the State Department. We did a trip each year to New York City. We also met with the mayor to find out a little bit about the Federal government and how our Federal structure works. This was all of great interest. And then we took a military trip out to Fort Hood and Edwards Air Force Base and whatever the

name of the testing ground there, the National Testing Ground, which is out there where they have their live, large scale war games. Obviously, the military officers from Germany and Japan and Canada were probably more familiar with it, but those from Venezuela and Russia and elsewhere found it extremely interesting how we did that.

Q: The army has had this oral history program. Did you have any feel for their oral history?

BAAS: Well, I knew it was there. They also publish a very good magazine called Parameters which was done right there and which I was often consulted about. A lot of people on the staff, a lot of army officers on the staff, would come and ask me about foreign policy aspects of what they were doing. I didn't get very involved in the oral history, but I knew it was there and you'd see some old retired colonels come in and sit down and chat with people.

Actually, one thing I should say. One of the interesting things of my being there and when I first got there I said to the Commandant, this is really no different than me going to a new country, a new person in a new country, because there is a whole different culture here. The army culture is completely different from the State Department culture. I discovered very quickly that when they say a meeting is going to start at nine o'clock you don't show up at nine, or 9:02, you show up at eight fifty eight, two minutes early. It was very disconcerting when people came along, at least initially, when people came to pay courtesy calls on me, new members of the staff and so on, and I'd be ready for a nine o'clock appointment, and I'm finishing up my coffee and seeing what the morning traffic was and whatever, and then I realize that there is a guy who's been waiting outside for ten minutes. It's just kind of a different culture.

The other thing that was interesting, I was surprised at what a generally positive view the military had of U.S. embassies and diplomats overseas. A number of these people had been in situations where they had to coordinate with embassies and we spent a whole couple weeks in seminars talking about emergency evacuations and what do you do, how do you coordinate with the country team. In fact, I gave a lecture every year on, a couple of lectures every year, on the country team and what it was and how it operated and how it interfaces with the CINCs and how it interfaced with an evacuation force and things like that. But generally there was a very positive view of the embassy. My bottom line was, we're all in the U.S. government and all trying to do things in the foreign policy area, we're all trying to advance U.S. foreign policy and there're two different aspects of it; there's the military and the State Department, the diplomacy. Of course, Clausewitz is a big hero up there. He's studied a lot. Policy is just warfare by another means, diplomacy is just warfare by another means. War is just diplomacy by another means, I guess is what it was.

The other thing that was interesting was the military in seminars, most often it was the military officers, who were arguing in many circumstance against using military force. It was the civilians and people like me, who are the civilian faculty members, who are arguing that perhaps military force was useful. And when you think about it, it makes

sense because these military guys have seen what the use of force does to their own force structure, to their own friends, to their own units, and we in diplomacy although we sort of intellectually understand that in war people get shot and people get killed, it's more we are an arm's length away. So it's easier for us to say well, I think we should use force in such and such. The military are concerned about making sure a) that force is the last option and b) that there is a way out. That was a reflection of the Powell Doctrine which was obviously very current of this time. It was very interesting, because going in, I would have said, well, of course the military wants to fight wars. That's how you get promoted, that's how you become famous. By and large that wasn't the case.

Q: This is a theme that comes back again and again in these oral histories. It's the civilians who usually theoretically think in terms of military force, whereas the military thinks of diplomatic means. Of course, I think there's probably an over-estimation about, gee, you can solve this with words and we know, we've tried words and often it doesn't work and so what the hell? These other guys, you can do it with force.

BAAS: Sure. We as diplomats sit there, we've talked over the problem a long time and we figure well, a little threat of force or something might cause the people we are negotiating with to look at this slightly different, or maybe the use of force will do the same. Well, as you say, often it doesn't. On the other hand, the military says, well, just talk about it some more. Sometimes, as we all know, you can't find a solution and unless the solution is we're not fighting and that's a satisfactory solution which in some cases it is, but in other cases you need a country to actually move from position A to position B, to stop them doing something, and maybe they won't do it without force. It's hard. That's the President's job. He's supposed to decide between those two views.

Q: Did you get at all pulled into the Ethiopian-Eritrean war?

BAAS: No. I guess it started my last year there. No, not really. I talked to some people about it, because I had just been there, but again, it was one of those things that people discussed because it was a current event, but it wasn't an issue that we were being asked to resolve. It was just an issue to sort of contemplate.

Q: I understand, correct me if I'm wrong, Susan Rice was out there quite a bit. Did you get any feel for her work there?

BAAS: I didn't have much contact with her at that point. I had more contact with her when I went to Washington, and she was my boss, essentially. Yes, I think she worked very hard on Ethiopia as she did on many issues, I mean, she was a very hard worker. I think she and Gail Smith worked closely together on Eritrea. Gail knew a lot about Ethiopia and Eritrea having been out there. Gail was at the NSC, the Africa head for a while. I think sometimes, and this is an easy criticism to make, there was a little naiveté about how easy it would be to get something done. Both Isaias and Meles are very stubborn individuals, both have their own internal political calculi that they need to make. Getting any Ethiopian to agree with another Ethiopian on an issue of dispute, even if it's about a goat or whose grandfather insulted whose grandfather 50 years ago, is not easy

under the best of circumstances, and so imagine if there is a war or a potential war and getting them to back down and say oh, we were wrong. I think the solution that was finally arrived at of getting the international community involved and having an international body take a look at the delineation of the border was the right one, and even though I'm sure diplomats obtained the approval of both sides that the final results of this commission would be respected, in any event they weren't. One or both sides had problems, I haven't followed it closely enough to know, which kilometer people were mad about and who's right and who's wrong, but I was absolutely not surprised that there was a problem.

Q: After these two years in Carlisle where did you go?

BAAS: Then I came back to Washington and I spent two years as the director for Central African Affairs.

Q: This would be 1996 to 1998. Central Africa Affairs consists of what?

BAAS: There are ten countries as I recall in Central Africa, and it was, starting from the north you had the Central African Republic, Chad, you had Zaire, as it was then known, and the Congo across the river, you had Gabon, Cameroon, Sao Tomé and Principe, Equatorial Guinea and then out in the east Rwanda and Burundi, largely because with Congo they were the three Belgian colonies and it seemed sensible to group them in their own space. You could have argued that they should have been in East Africa but they weren't, they were in Central Africa.

Q: What was your prime focus during that time?

BAAS: Rwanda and Burundi were always important. They had just had genocide two years before in Rwanda, although nobody was calling it that. There was the whole issue of Interahamwe, the former Rwandan army, who had left Rwanda when the new government took over. The problem was they had all moved into Eastern Congo and were still a threat to Rwanda, and some of the same ethnic cleansing was evident yet again in Burundi. So Rwanda and Burundi continued to be an important issue throughout my time there. It spilled over, however, into probably what was the largest issue and that was the Congo or Zaire. Mobutu was clearly nearing his last days as President of Zaire. He was sick, it was clear he was dying, but nobody knew of course when he was going to die. At some point, and I don't remember the date, at some point the Rwandans supported Kabila out in the east and he rose up against Mobutu. He had been out there for 30 years as a minor warlord. He hadn't really done much, but finally as the situation on the border with Rwanda became very confused and eventually everyone went back into Rwanda, he started going the other way and it turned out the FAZ, the Zairian armed forces, les Forces Armées Zairois, was a shell and was not able to do much. He moved very quickly, helped by the Rwandans, from east to west across the country. Our focus was very much trying to prevent the implosion of Zaire, trying to find a peaceful resolution to the problem, and trying to convince Mobutu that maybe a negotiated transitional government would be a better way to go than simply losing power.

We had a couple major external negotiators involved. Bill Richardson was one of them, who I had met first in Gabon many years ago, when he was a Congressman from New Mexico. He and I and a bunch of other people went out and flew about the continent talking to a variety of people about the issue. We saw Mugabe, we saw Museveni, we saw Mandela, we saw Dos Santos in Angola, and we saw, of course, Mobutu. Eventually, after some effort we arranged to have a South African ice cutter come up to Pointe Noire in Cameroon and take on Mobutu and Kabila and hopefully lead to a negotiation. The reason we ended up on an ice cutter is because neither of them wanted to meet the each other on African soil.

Q: But an ice cutter?

BAAS: It was a ship, just a ship. It happened to be an ice cutter. South Africa had an ice cutter they didn't need at the time, because of global warming or whatever, and it was available. It's rather amusing that it was an ice cutter in Central Africa. The reason we ended up trying to get something done on a ship was because neither side wanted to come together, neither wanted to go to each other's area, and neither one really wanted to leave their base. There was great distrust between Mobutu and Kabila. So we figured if we got on a neutral ship, neutral to them, sailing in international waters, maybe this would work out.

Well, in the event Mobutu got on board. When Mobutu came through Pointe Noire, and although I had known Mobutu for a long time, it was still remarkable to see him at the airport in Pointe Noire and all the Congo, a different Congo, not his Congo, the Congo with its capital in Brazzaville, was out there just really cheering and obviously respecting this guy as someone who was a big man, and respected as a big man for all of his warts and faults. He got on the boat and we were sailing out to sea and Kabila was supposed to come, fly out by helicopter once we were in international waters, but at the last moment he bailed out and that was unfortunate.

One amusing thing is we were running around the boat talking, Mandela was on board, we were talking to the South Africans and trying to prepare things for when Kabila showed up. Bill Richardson was there, and finally we got word from the captain of the boat, who I guess heard on the radio that Kabila wasn't coming. Richardson told the Foreign Minister of South Africa that this was the case and then Richardson went off to go meet with someone else and I was still there. The Foreign Minister looked at me and said, "Well, would you tell Mandela?" I said "Shouldn't you do that, Mr. Foreign Minister?" He said, "Well, I'd feel better if you did it, hear it coming from an American." OK.

This was like three o'clock in the morning, so I went into Mandela's room and, after knocking, I think I got him out of bed. He came out and I told him what had happened and what we knew and he said, "Oh, that's awful. What should we do now?" I said, "Obviously, from the political point of view, in terms of trying to put together something between Kabila and Mobutu, we're going to have to go back to square one. I think for the

moment what we ought to do is probably turn the boat around because we're still sailing out away from the African continent toward international waters. Let's go back to Pointe Noire and reconvene in the morning." He said, "Oh, yes. That's a good idea. I think we should do that." He gave orders and the boat turned around and we ended up back in Pointe Noire. That was a big issue.

We saw Mobutu a couple of times, we saw Kabila a couple of times, once in Lubumbashi after he captured Lubumbashi, down in the southeast. All of our efforts to come up with some sort of transitional government, as a way station to a new election and a new government without Mobutu, simply failed. As I said earlier when we were talking about Zaire, I personally think that up until this point Mobutu could have had an election and could have been elected as president in a fair and free election in Zaire. But at this point, no. I think part of the problem was that Mobutu, either he saw that he was losing and wanted to go down sort of in style, on his horse, to the bitter end, or stretch it out as long as he could, or he didn't believe he could actually lose, he didn't believe that Kabila would be able to capture Kinshasa. From Kabila's point of view he was winning, he had captured virtually 90% of the country with very little effort on his part. He had the help of the Rwandans behind him, who were trying to solve their problem of the Interahamwe. They thought Mobutu was supporting the Interahamwe. There was no real reason for Kabila to negotiate.

The one thing we did succeed at was when it fell, Kinshasa fell relatively quietly. There was no massive assault, there was no loss of life, or huge loss of life. It was a relatively benign affair because the generals to whom our embassy, Dan Simpson was ambassador, and others had been talking, and who we had been talking to by phone, accepted the inevitable and basically decided not to fight. General Mahélé was the leader of that group and he was subsequently killed by some of the diehard troops of Mobutu. He actually did a terrific service to his countrymen.

Then Kabila took over and, of course, then it was a matter of talking to Kabila and trying to figure out what our policy was going to be towards him and could we get him directed in the right way. He started out OK, but he clearly didn't have the gravitas or the kind of political acumen that Mobutu did. I personally think he just wasn't up to the task of running the country. He could sort of maintain order in Kinshasa and some other parts around the country, but he really wasn't up to the task of running a country. Well, after I left, eventually he was assassinated and now his son is in power. As I say, that took a lot of time. There were a lot of meetings in Washington about what to do about the refugees, about the war, how to stop the war, plotting where the war was, again, mixed in with Rwanda and the Interahamwe out.

Q: The Interahamwe were who?

BAAS: The Interahamwe were the group that was supporting the previous genocidal government in Rwanda, military and security folks who had left Rwanda when the Tutsi liberation force came in. They had all left and gone to eastern Zaire, and they were using eastern Zaire as a base for attacks on Rwanda, which was why Rwanda was helping

Kabila get rid of Mobutu, because they thought Mobutu was helping the Interahamwe against the Tutsis. So it was sort of like the First World War and Sarajevo, but it was all sort of connected together there. The Interahamwe were some bad guys. These were guys that had killed a lot of people.

Eventually, I guess this was after Mobutu had fallen, or at least had lost Kinshasa, then the Interahamwe went back into -- or not the Interahamwe, but Rwandan people who were there. They had had all these Rwandan people as hostages and you may remember the pictures on TV of a million people going back from eastern Zaire, back home to Rwanda. The Rwandans were very concerned about that because they didn't know how many of these people were legitimate, were real Rwandans, and not criminals in any sense of the word. They were afraid there would be Interahamwe interspersed with them who would come back and would want no good for the existing government. And then there was this issue of, what do you do with a million people? Rwanda is overpopulated anyway but when these people left I would imagine their farms were taken over by somebody else, and where do they go and what to they do? So that was a huge humanitarian problem. Those were two big issues.

Q: Talk a bit about Bill Richardson. He's right now the governor of New Mexico? He's considered a potential Presidential candidate and a major figure, but talk about him on the ground. He was sort of an odd duck in that he kept being involved in dealing with North Korea as a congressman. On the ground, how did you see him?

BAAS: He was very good. I think his strength was he's a very friendly guy. People know that right away, including foreigners who don't speak his language. He's a smart guy, he's a good negotiator, he's got a good sense of humor, he's a hard-worker and I think he was a good sort of choice for a lot of these jobs. He's not, obviously he's a Democrat, so he's not beholden to the Republicans, but even as a Democrat he's a minority, he's Hispanic. He has his independence, his own views, and so I think he was a good choice. It didn't work out. He's a smart guy. He knew he didn't know about a lot about Zaire so he asked me and he asked other people along on the trip, what do you think we ought to do? He would listen and sort of do what we had to do. I think he was very good mainly because of his personality. People just felt he was trying hard. He could joke with Kabila and joke with Mobutu and that was good.

Q: On a personal level, what do you think of Kabila?

BAAS: As I said earlier, I thought very little of him. I thought he was a buffoon and I didn't think he had the gravitas or the training or the political acumen to hold Zaire together, and he didn't, to keep his job.

Q: Was it apparent that Mobutu was failing, as far as his physical abilities?

BAAS: Yes, I think he was failing physically, but I don't think he was failing mentally. He was as sharp as ever. He hadn't seen me in ten years, and he still remembered who I was when I showed up there and that's good. How many people did he meet in his

career? He was still very, very sharp. He had prostate cancer and that was clearly causing him some problems. The word on the street was that he didn't want to have an operation, until it was too late, because once you have the prostate cancer operation there's no more sex. So the word on the street in Kinshasa was that's why he waited too long. I don't know whether that's true or not. He was still there mentally. He was not prepared to accept that after, whatever it was, 25 years, somehow the Zairian people wouldn't stand up and defend him. He truly believed, and with some reason, that he had been a wonderful President for Zaire. He didn't recognize that there was a very good argument that could be made he'd been a terrible President for Zaire. Probably the truth is somewhere in between. He had done some things that were very good, like provide stability and hold the country together. He had done some things that were very bad, like steal and not allow the economy to develop and not allow democracy and so on, not so much torturing and murders as in many other countries. His record is mixed. One of the arguments that I used with him, when I was there with Richardson, was look you can truly be the father of your country now. You've held this country together, you've created something called Zaire, which really didn't exist before. You have ruled it effectively for a long time, you are coming to the end of your life and if you have elections, and if you have good elections you can bequeath democracy to your country. All you need to do is agree to step aside for a transitional government, and then we can have elections and you will have been the godfather creating democracy. I said, that's not all bad. Your reputation will be much different with that as your final note. It didn't persuade him, either because of the lack of cogent arguments on my part, or because he wasn't persuadable.

Q: What was the role of Mandela? Did you have a chance to do much?

BAAS: We had a couple of meetings down in South Africa, and I think Mandela sent people including the current President, Mbeki to see Kabila and to talk to him. He had his diplomats working the issue. He really didn't have, and this is not a jab at him at all, he didn't have any ideas and he was listening to us, which was fine. His role, I think, was to be this sort of elder statesman of Africa and to use his real gravitas to get these guys together. He was unsuccessful as well. He didn't do nearly as much as we did, not surprisingly. We had a lot bigger resources and indeed, more interests, but he certainly was active behind the scenes and was prepared to play the kind of overarching architect role, to bless whatever agreement they came to on the South African ship; the meeting that never occurred.

Q: The CIA has always had a very heavy hand within Zaire, at least had had. At this point were they having any influence or talking to you or were they a factor at all?

BAAS: Yes, sure. They were very interested in what was going on in Zaire, and they were part of the interagency process back in Washington. But I would say they had more information in some aspects, particularly with respect to what was happening on the ground during the war, thanks to satellites and so on. In terms of the policy decisions that were being made, they were just one of the interagency process. The war was over in

Angola, and their interest in Zaire was perhaps less than it had been before, and the CIA had changed from what it was before too.

We had ten countries and there are some other ones that deserve some mention anyway. This is not necessarily in chronological order. In Chad, toward the end of my time there, so that would be in 1998, the big issue with Chad was the oil pipeline through Cameroon. Would the World Bank finance this? Would President Déby of Chad respect the commitments? We negotiated with Chad and Cameroon, actually the World Bank negotiated, and we were encouraging from our position and supportive of a deal to build the pipeline, to finance the pipeline. In return, Déby and Chad would agree to a portion of the proceeds from the oilfield going to a bank account in London where it would be saved up and used for Chadians in the future. Another portion of it would go for broadly defined social issues like building schools, health and so on, another part to pay government salaries, and finally, a part that he could use on his own. The whole attempt, to put it very bluntly, was how to prevent Déby or anyone else in Chad from stealing the money. The problem in Chad was the oil was in the southern part of Chad and the ruling elite was from the north. It was typical in much of Africa that the colonialists, in this case the French, had used the southerners to run the country and the northerners were largely forgotten. Then the northerners went to the army after independence and eventually the army took over. It was more involved than that in Chad, because there were several different people until we got to where we are today. Nonetheless, the general pattern existed. Now they had oil in the south. The southerners probably resented the fact they were no longer in power and, particularly, were very anxious that their oil, as they saw it, would go to benefit the north, or be stolen by northerners and wouldn't benefit the south at all. There was also a fund, I think as I recall, a certain portion of the fund was going to go to help the southerners to build schools. All this was negotiated and finally the pipeline was agreed; it was quite a big thing. Now, of course, it's back in the news again because Déby has decided he's going to abrogate the agreement because he doesn't like the strictures that had been placed on him. He wants more money because he has to deal with refugees from Darfur. You know, Presidents always have an excuse. It's unfortunate, if that in fact happens, and I think the World Bank has taken a very tough line with him, and that's very good.

Then we had the Central African Republic, where through the first year I was there, basically there was a revolution. We were without an embassy for a long time. Ambassador Jordan was there. The president was being attacked by part of his gendarmes and it was chaos. The whole issue was, do we keep the post open or do we close it? For a while we kept it open because we thought that there was some work they could do, talking particularly to the President and trying to modify what he was doing. Ultimately, we made the call, and it was at my recommendation to close down the embassy and to withdraw our staff. Essentially, the reason I recommended that was the Ambassador and the DCM were on the floor of the embassy hiding. I wasn't there and they probably had no choice, but if that was what they had to do then there was no point in having an embassy there. I don't know if this was the correct thing to do or not. They were there and they're in the embassy just hiding and again, it seemed to me if there was no way they could go out and deal with people, then you ought to close the embassy and we did.

That was a very sad thing to do, but we got them out. Well, eventually we ended up going back in again after the situation had resolved itself, but that was later on.

Congo Brazzaville also had a coup attempt and, in fact, we evacuated our embassy in Congo Brazzaville across the river to Kinshasa, which was incredible because Kinshasa had this war going on but still we were able to evacuate people to Kinshasa. Ambassador Hooks who was in Brazzaville stayed in Kinshasa for a while and tried to run Brazzaville out of Kinshasa. That worked fairly well and that was another issue we had to deal with.

Equatorial Guinea had oil and also had American oil companies involved there and they also had huge human rights issues. Twice I guess I went out to see President Obiang Nguema and urged him to be more liberal in human rights, with very little success. He had oil and they are now producing oil, and he's probably now salting away a lot of that money. One interesting thing about Equatorial Guinea, the two main tribes in Equatorial Guinea are the "bubi" and the "fangs".

Gabon was pretty stable. They were trying to be helpful in most everything that was going on.

Sao Tomé and Principe, very small, had elections coming on and had a split in the government, but it was off the coast and mostly didn't affect us. It affected us a little bit because we had a VOA transmitter there, just a few technicians on the ground, not a journalist on the ground, but we had a VOA transmitter, which was responsible for a lot of the stuff that got broadcast to Eastern Europe and to much of Africa, and so we were very interested in making sure that that survived whatever happened. It was pretty clear that no one had a beef against the VOA. In fact, it was one of the biggest employers in Sao Tomé, so that was OK.

Cameroon had some problems between north and south. It was relatively quiet and sort of the star of the show.

That pretty much sums up Central Africa. It was an incredibly busy time. As I said, I felt like I was just going from one crisis to another crisis, from one country to another country, but it a very interesting time to be in AF/C.

Q: Your boss was Susan Rice. I wonder if you could talk about what was her background and how did she operate?

BAAS: Susan is a very intelligent, very ambitious, and very sharp individual. She had been at the NSC for a while as the Africa head, and then she came over as the head of AF. You know, she was a politician, she had been chosen by the Clinton Administration and she was a political appointee and that was fine. That's how it operates. She knew Africa, that's one thing you have to say. She hadn't ever lived in Africa, as far as I know, but she had certainly been there. She never lived there which people criticized her for. I don't find that very persuasive. At least, she knew something about the continent, she had studied it, she understood it and she was very bright. The one thing I fault her for, I don't

think she listened to the professional staff as much as she could have done. She was very sure of herself and she was often right. I think there were some things that might have been done better if the staff would have been listened to a little bit more. But she was good.

Q: Then 1998, wither?

BAAS: I went over to where I had begun 30 years before, to the Economics Bureau. I became the director of agricultural affairs, agricultural trade policy in the Economics Bureau. I had a chance to go out to Africa, if I wanted, as an ambassador again, but I really turned down the opportunity because I had young children and we were settled comfortably in Washington. They were good in school and I knew I was going to be retiring in a few years. I had already done what I consider the best. I had done Ethiopia which was a terrific embassy and a terrific job as ambassador, and being ambassador in Chad or something just didn't appeal to me. Without the children I might have done it, but with the children that was the thing that determined it.

I ended up being three years in the Bureau of Economic Affairs as the Director of the Office of Agricultural Trade Policy and that was an office that was interesting. We got involved in a lot of agricultural issues. As you know, agriculture is one of the U.S.'s biggest exports. We were very concerned about foreign countries' policies and what they were doing. It was also the office that handles food aid and during this time we were sending a lot of food aid out to a variety of places, including the Congo and Ethiopia, places I had served in. We were the State Department representative on the interagency food aid committee, which is chaired by an Undersecretary of Agriculture, and I would go those meetings and we would discuss how we would give food aid and under what terms and so on.

Then we also got very much involved in genetically-modified organisms, which was just coming to the forefront at this point. Of course, this was a big issue with the European community, about how we dealt with GMOs and whether crops that had GMOs were allowed into Europe. It was a new technology here, and U.S. farmers were asking about it as well. Does it make sense to do this, and Monsanto and other companies were involved. We had one or two, I guess, instances when genetically modified corn got into non-genetically modified corn, so we had the whole issue of purity of our exports, and this was a great concern to the Japanese and to others. The White House took over and created a task force, although we dealt with that problem as well.

There was also the run up to what is now called the Doha Round, so there was lots of consideration of how agriculture was going to be dealt with in a new trade round. That was the early days of when I was there for that. We didn't do quite as much of that as I'm sure they're doing right now.

Q: What was the general feeling about this genetically-modified food?

BAAS: I think there was a lot of ignorance about it. People didn't really know, is it the same or is it not the same? How will it affect me or people? My own view, after having read a number of studies and articles, is that in terms of eating it, there's no real difference, it doesn't taste any different. Genetically modified corn looks like and acts like regular corn. There doesn't seem to be any evidence of any health impact. Now, maybe something will show up 40 years on, you never know for sure, but all the scientists think that that would be sort of an unlikely thing.

The bigger danger is more environmental. Seeds blow around, and indeed, you can easily have this corn or any other grain can, not contaminate, but insert itself into crops that don't have it. You have an unknown out there, but that's the way it always is. Countries, like Mexico, which is the home of corn originally, were very concerned about their varieties of corn being infected or changed or compromised somehow. I think that's a real concern. The other thing about corn which is the main product when I was there, corn and soybeans, corn particularly is mainly fed to pigs, to cattle, to animals. And so again, we eat the meat and we're one step removed from the process as well, which seems to me to be a safety belt. People are either for it or against it mostly for sort of psychological and very, I don't want to say shallow, but not real reasons. It's feelings.

The French put great stock in food and say the food process is central to their life, much more than it is in the United States. They say we eat very quickly and try to get done as fast as one can, but you can't go tampering with the quality of our food, tampering with our culture as you are really getting to the center of what we are. And so it was a very emotional reaction, whereas I think in the United States the reaction tended to be more scientific, there's no evidence and so on. We had to, I think, recognize the emotional reaction that pushed some other parts of the world. Japan wanted soybeans that were pure and they got them because they paid for them. They paid a price for them, so our farmers went out of their way to make sure.

Of course, this is a very complicated problem too, because how do we transport corn to the market? We put it in silos in farms, and then it goes from grain silos to a railway and onto grain cars on a train, and goes down to somewhere like New Orleans, and it's loaded off the train cars into a holding area and then it goes down a chute into a ship and away it goes. If at any stage along that process you have one of those things: train, car, a boat, a pipe or an elevator that has had GMO corn in it, it's almost certain that the non-GMO corn is going to show some traces of the GMO corn. There are kernels left in the boats, there are kernels left in the train cars that get mixed in. Keeping it separate is very, very hard. You've got to have a whole separate transportation system to take care of it. So that is a huge issue in terms of keeping food pure. It was a hard problem for us, particularly with the Europeans.

We spent a lot of time, in USTR-led delegations, talking to the Europeans about letting our Roundup-ready corn into the European Union. I just saw in the paper a week or two ago that some is now going in and somehow that European Union was angry at Greece for having even more extreme rules than the European Union apparently did, and not

letting in European Union approved GMO food. I think it was cotton, although it may have been corn. That was a big issue.

One other issue, mad cow disease, came up and that was another one that was very hard because the Europeans are able to follow their cows and they know where everything has been. We had never had mad cow disease in the United States at that point, of course we've had a few cases now, and beef is, of course, a huge export from the United States. And there was a big issue about labeling and how do we identify our beef as being free of mad cow disease and so on. Again, that was another issue we were interested in. We believed more in science and the Europeans, perhaps understandably, since they had people dying of it, were much more wary of what was going to happen.

Q: Did you find, were these various genetic modifications and mad cow disease, did these cause real problems in our diplomacy with various states?

BAAS: No, because I think basically, they were far enough down the chain that they didn't really bother the important issues very much. These are important issues too, I don't mean to say that they weren't, but they didn't bother the issues of war and peace and things like that. Sure, they had an effect, but I don't think it was a very major one. We tried to deal with it, through technical channels, and tried to keep it from spoiling the bilateral relationship with France or with Britain.

Q: I can catch the French news, half an hour of it on TV. I watch this from time to time. It's also attacking McDonald's which was using completely French-raised food.

BAAS: And employing French people and having a menu which is different from McDonald's here, acceptable presumably to the French.

Q: And very popular. But it was cultural. It seemed to be an offshoot of anti-Americanism, a certain amount of complicity with the intellectual anti-Americanism in France.

BAAS: I think that's right. It's anti-Americanism, anti-globalization, anti-scientific progress, anti-change in a way, because our old life is going away. Well, of course, our old life is going away. We're not living like our grandparents lived and our grandchildren won't live like we live. That's the way life is. Someone on the agricultural side said at one point, what we need to do is put a big wall around Europe and not let any food in or out and just call it a theme park, with old traditions and nothing changing. You see it a lot in France, but I don't think it's a typical French attitude.

I argued all the time with my European colleagues, look, let us send our genetically modified food. Why don't you let us send our beef which has used hormones, had hormones in it. You know, this beef was raised using hormones and let's see if the European consumer, the French housewife will buy it or not. Some will, some won't. And what they are afraid of is price, we kill them on price, and they know, despite everything they say, how much the French housewife or the European consumer values

quality. They know that if the price of American steak is one third the price of French steak, then a lot of consumers are going to go for the cheaper cut, at least they're going to try it. They're going to find, well it's to my taste, or it's not to my taste. But they're going to try it and a lot of people are going to buy it. There is some very, very good meat there. Our meat is very good too. My point was, let's just let the consumer have a shot. We'll put a label saying this is raised using growth hormone, we have to find the right words. Of course, the European idea is to use the skull and crossbones, or something similar.

Which reminds me of another issue that we had, which we negotiated very often with the Europeans, and that was wine. There was a little wine group and we talked a lot about, essentially, what is wine? There were a lot of issues involved and again, the Europeans were very, very interested in protecting their wine industry. They wanted more access to the United States, which they already have but they didn't want, to take the most obvious example, California champagne coming on the market. Champagne has to be from Champagne. Bordeaux has to be from Bordeaux. You can see the point there. They also resisted things that said, prepared with the same methods used by champagne and they were very concerned about the way people made wine in the United States. Was it in oak barrels for X amount of time in order to be called a certain kind of wine? Was it in stainless steel barrels? If it's not going to kill you, our argument was let the good consumer decide. If there's some taste advantage to having it in oak barrels, then people will buy that, and indeed vineyards will provide that. But if there isn't really much of a difference, you can do it in stainless steel and produce a less expensive wine. Again, let the consumer decide.

There was a huge issue about practices, how we do it, and what makes wine wine. At the most extreme, they said oh, we trust you. We know the American wine industry has good wine practices, but what about the Chinese? What if the Chinese take some grain alcohol and throw in some grape juice and shake it up and call it wine. What are we going to do? Again, my view would be, they shouldn't call it wine because it isn't wine, but even if they do call it wine let the consumer decide. If you have one drink of that you're going to spit it out and realize that's probably not what you want to be drinking for wine anyway. If you want to go out and get drunk that's a good thing to do.

Q: Then in 1998 you?

BAAS: In 2001 I came over here and took the retirement course and then in September I retired.

Q: What did you do after retirement, what have you been doing?

BAAS: I have three small children and I have been spending a lot of time doing homework, helping with homework, taking kids to the bus and preparing lunches and stuff like that. When I retired I said to myself, I know I'm going to take a cut in pay, because while our pension is really good, it's not 100% of your salary, so maybe the money will be a little tight, but at least I'll have all this free time and I can do all this stuff I want to do. I made a decision not to go and look for a job.

And during soccer season we have to organize the teams and get people registered and make sure everyone makes it to the games. I coach two teams. I coached a basketball team for a while, chaperone at field trips. Things I do that are kind of fun, I try to go downtown once or twice a month and go to the Mall and the art galleries particularly, something I really enjoy, just to recharge my batteries and get away from things. Reading, I finally have had some time to do some reading and read some of those books that I was lugging around the world with me year after year. So, it's been good. We try to give back a little bit to the community, and help our kids get through school.

Q: Do you get involved with the Ethiopian community? There's a fairly large one.

BAAS: There's a large community. I often meet and talk to them a lot. I'm usually invited to the national day at the embassy and I talk to the ambassador from Ethiopia once in awhile. Again, you have a dichotomy. I probably don't agree very much with most of the Ethiopian community here in the Washington area, because most come from the Haile Selassie - Mengistu era. They look at it through Amhara eyes, while I tend to look at it, I hope, in a more balanced fashion and although the current government is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, they at least are trying to do the right thing. I think all Ethiopians should try to help them do that. The embassy, as you might expect, has a more pro-governmental view. I'm probably somewhere in between. I don't really have common ground with either. I have a common ground in having a great love for Ethiopia.

Q: OK, well Marc, I want to thank you very much.

BAAS: My pleasure.

End of interview